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The Collective Practices of Amateur Self-Imag(in)ing
and Personal Website Production 1996 to 2001

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Abstract

girl.is.a.four.letter.word—The Collective Practices Of Amateur Self-Imag(in)ing and Personal Website Production 1996 to 2001

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Scholarship on the practices of young gender-marginalized people online is a burgeoning theme within internet studies and feminist media studies. Within historical scholarship of the internet, young women's practices have been critically neglected. In feminist art history, feminist practices with emerging technology are abundant but young women making art on and with the web is not. Given the aforementioned gaps, this dissertation aims to expand the interdisciplinary fields of internet studies, feminist media studies, and feminist art history through a genealogy of a conjunctural moment of the world wide web. The thesis title presents the breadth of this project: the erased and forgotten web-based work, specifically the self-imagining practices, of young women who used proto-social media forms in the process, creation, and circulation of production between 1996 and 2001. Demanding a synthesis of critical skills operating within the fields mentioned above, it aims to do so through a phenomenological and affect theory analysis of self-images that appeared on personal websites. It argues that these self-imagi(ni)ng practices serve as (a) tactical methods in reaction to patriarchal regimes of power and s/censorship, (b) a means of engendering the sociality of trauma as a productive orientation, and (c) communicative nodes that through wit(h)nessing reshape a feminist intimate public into a new genre of friendship predicated on the aesthetics and forms of circulation of the work. Most internet analysis misses the aforementioned politically engaged feminist history and its influence on how we use and conceptualize the web today. The project's objective is to provide a philosophical genealogy of the web, demanding a more politically feminist espousal of it, both in theory and practice.

Dedication

To all of the dolorous youth that made personal websites in the 1990s.

To my participants: Aarti Rana, Alyssa Boxhill, Anne Schipper, Auriea Harvey, Carolina Erickson, Christin Light, Helena Kvarnström, Katharine Tillman, Marlaina Read, Roxanne Carter, Tamika Pinkney, Treva Lewis, and Terry Palka, I cannot and do not want to imagine the life I would have had without encountering your personal websites, I proffer this to you.

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INTRODUCTION

Preamble

The screeching of a modem. The sign of new potential. A yet undisturbed ground for my teenage self to escape from the depressing realities of loathing myself, my life, and everything around me. Or at least everything I knew so far, which was not much. We did not have money to do activities like skiing, watching cable TV, or traveling to Florida like the other inner-city families. These circumstances drove me to use my imagination. The computer afforded me many opportunities as a child and it became my immediate focus—as did Photoshop 1.0 and a scanner my mom bought for another failed venture like most of her immigrant friends hoping to make something of herself in the “free world.” One of the things I did was scan images and maps, print them out and charge my classmates a quarter to a dollar for a colour printout. I do not know why they could not simply photocopy them, but new technologies have a way of seducing us. I did get in trouble from a teacher for copyright infringement, which led me to start a makeshift hacker group. I also wrote about the excitement of computers in a monthly newsletter I started as part of *The Landing Library*, a library I created out of all the books of my house. My development with and alongside technology, particularly as a tool that has the potential of new forms of articulation, has yet to cease.

By 1996, I was already addicted to computers and to my parents’ 9600b modem, tying up my mom’s fax line as clients received a busy signal when trying to send her documents. I had sexual encounters in AOL chat rooms, posted to music-based listserv’s, cycled through numerous emails, and added websites to search engine directories before web-crawling was the standard. In 1996, I also made my first website. It was about the Canadian indie music scene and was created inside the Geocities.com content management system (CMS). Two years later, I noticed an “About Me” link on a Hole fan-site maintained by Mikelanne Northrup (now Anne Schipper).¹ I clicked on Anne’s personal website link and saw a website that I will never forget, *girl.is.a.four.letter.word*. It had a black background with 10pt pink and white text—a mix of

¹ Anne and I exchanged emails, letters, and zines during that time (1998-2001) but lost contact until 2018.

photos, text, diary entries, homages to feminist artists, a photo essay dedication with stills from the lesbian cult film *High Art* (1998), and links to queer feminist bands that I had only heard of peripherally. I recognized this as a space of everyday feminism I could also be part of, and as a site of articulating the unease with my peer group, my family, and the sexual and identity politics of popular discourse at the time.

Many gender-marginalized people who were active during the historical period of my research, 1996 to 2001, have over the years been ruminating (via email, forums, LiveJournal) on how to archive that history, and analyzing what had happened and inserting it into the web history milieu. Countless conversations and ideas were left behind. Someone had to do it—I had to do it. Particularly as involved as I was: I was never one of the “it” girls like some of my subjects, which, I think, helps the research as I was always an observer trying to figure out how it all worked.

Anne’s website that I mentioned above, *girl.is.a.four.letter.word*, became the title of the dissertation from the beginning because it captures the time period and its affective traces—that to be written in as a girl is something obscene, something that cannot be named. I use the word “amateur” because of internet maker and thinker Olia Lialina's (2010; Lialina & Espenschied, 2009) conceptualization of that time period in response to Kantian aesthetic derision by men involved in the formation of the early web, and because of its etymological root as someone who has passion and joy towards an activity without any professional or official training, and not as someone unskilled (a common shorthand). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and its etymological root, “amateur” comes from Italian *amatore*, from Latin *amator* (lover) and from *amare* (to love). The women in my study began and continued making work out of a reciprocal love. The time period of 1996 to 2001 frames the project because it begins less than three years after images were able to be viewed inline on browsers and ends right before the internet boom of Web 2.0.

Contribution

Aarti's cogitation on the time period of my research indicates the need for my contribution:

You always hear about early internet—like Mark Zuckerberg. To me that is such an inane story because all the dudes that started these

companies, they saw that they could capitalize. The internet we are talking about is pre-capitalized internet. These people saw ways they could capitalize on streamlining things that people were already doing, doing them informally, and they were constructing from scratch certain things, like the idea of the webrings coming out of badges, or even being hosted coming out of a desire to make a community, and later on LJ [LiveJournal] that came out of journal entries on websites. It's the users and the organic changes and the organic things they were making along the way, like the splash page . . . was it a title page like a book? Why does anyone need this? For a period of time that was all websites.

Part of the reason I'm flippant about reading things about the internet then [is] because it doesn't capture the lived experience of making things as you went along. The times I felt most akin to that experience is the days of hot rod cars, the time of radio kits. Times when technology was in the hands of young people and it was pretty easy. The amount of investment needed was small; you need an email address, or a credit card if you were going to host. You needed to know some basic code, like 25 pieces of code, and you could make something. Entry was low, and you needed people who wanted to connect with each other and form a culture. So, when I hear about the internet and people coming up with ways to monetize it, that is not the interesting story—the interesting story is akin to [the] printing press moment, like anything can happen. Until it started to be systematic. And having watched that progression with the internet, I get to see how wild it is to be part of that period in history but also how that changed my navigation of the world around me. So, I always want things to have that kind of magic . . . and work within [those] constraints and try to widen them to see what can happen.

My dissertation presents “the lived experience of making things as you went along” of a group of young women between 1996 and 2001. This experience is lacking within narratives

about the history of the internet and other fields that focus on feminist production: internet studies, feminist media studies, art history, and cultural studies. Feminist media scholar Mary Celeste Kearney (2013) noted that most studies of girls' web development focus on "identity and community rather than aesthetics or skill development" (p. 254). This oversight is likely because posting images online during that time required more skill and extra equipment. Kearney's participants (web makers who were also zine makers and distributors in the early 2000s) noted being mindful of their viewers and their modem's connection speed when sharing images. Early on, with dial-up connections, images took a long time to load and thus many websites either had no images, thumbnail-size images, or disclaimers on the splash page: "[please wait for images to load]" (Kearney, 2013, pp. 274-275). My addition to the scholarship is a focus on aesthetics and image production as starting points to think about identity, community, and belonging. I revise and realize a rigorous theorization of online feminist work that used proto-social media forms in the process, creation, and circulation of production. This contribution is vital because these practices are all but erased from the history of the internet and are in a continual process of disintegrating as personal and unofficial archives are wont to do: a movement I describe in the final chapter. Early everyday use of the web is currently a history being written by a selection of scholars and artists unaware of the practices detailed in this dissertation. I provide a comprehensive detailing and analysis of these web practices dependent on self-imaging. By doing so, my intellectual contribution is the theoretical connections I make between three bodies of knowledge I draw on with my empirical evidence.

The three main bodies of knowledge I draw from are histories of feminist cyberculture, feminist phenomenology, and affect theory. They provide me with a set of interlocutors that span every chapter and allow this dissertation's focus on imaging practices to come to fruition. Many thinkers scaffold my thinking: from histories of feminist cyberculture, I invoke Wendy Chun, Theresa Senft, and Susana Paasonen, as each provides empirical and theoretical arguments from a feminist point of view on women's positions and creative practices as they are understood in relation to the emergence of the world wide web (WWW) in the 1990s. In detailing this lived experience, I turn to feminist post-structuralist and queer considerations on the phenomenological tradition through Sara Ahmed's sustained focus on queering orientation, Elizabeth Grosz and Anne Balsamo's focus on the body and body-ing as its inflected by

technologies, and Amelia Jones's desires to rethink and free the artist's body from its cis-white-ableist history. With such a central focus on the body, I have recourse in affect theory as, according to Spinoza, affect activates a body(ing) because it is not in a body or prompted by an object, but in the encounter/relation. The circulatory encounter of the making, the per-site, and the image shapes my participants and their feelings. In this way, Ann Cvetkovich helps me articulate the main theme of the self-imaging practices: the interconnectedness of trauma with other affects and materials. Lauren Berlant's focus on the resonances of materials and collective public feelings in how they shape personal understandings of living provide me with an ineliminable through line for both the empirical data collection and its subsequent theorization.

These epistemological boundaries act as clarifying gestures for the reader, as I open up their modes of thought to engage with each other, to activate the history of the conjunctural moment of these self-imaging practices in ways not yet chronicled by others. Collectively, all of the aforementioned scholars and those welcomed in my dissertation teach me and my work how to see and how to be and have my work seen, in a similar way that the intimate public I invoke did too.

Central Concepts

I adopt several concepts from various fields—including the three bodies of knowledge I mention above—that provide me the freedom to engage in my arguments. They adapt as they move around the dissertation, shifting their orientation. These are not large shifts. They are ways of clarifying my multi-pronged theoretical and methodological analysis. As such, the following is a prelude to the terms which will be further sculpted through the dissertation's chapters as needed.

Why do we make images? “To produce and hold open that interval, (the holder of tension between symbolic and affective registers), at once being structure and touching on what lies beyond the logos” (Pollock, 2013, p. 63). Pollock recognized image making as a way to dismantle or at least live in a space not completely encumbered with phallogocentric ideology. Making sense of living within systemic s/censorship is at the heart of their self-imaging practices. I call the images pictures and images interchangeably, throughout the dissertation, based on Douglas Crimp's (1979) definition of image. In general, I refer to this practice as an “imagining”

practice because it is multimodal, comprising photography, photomontage, digital manipulation, and text.

Self-imagining is one part of the self-imag(in)ing concept I foreground in my title. I make use of parentheses within *imaging* and *imagining* to evoke a doubling and a singularity of both actions. The young women—akin to but mostly unaware of body art—were at once recursively imaging the self and imagining the self. As my empirical data demonstrates, self-imaging is not the same as self-portraiture, even if it appears it can be. When the young women of the intimate public included their bodies in images they made, the images did not automatically become self-portraits. The images in the dissertation all show parts of, but do not depict, the women. That is to say, when my subjects appear as image-objects for their own lens, they are not meant to be featured as the “I” of the image. Specifically, the self-images are always made in relationship to other self-images; they respond to the other images available within this public by way of their aesthetic and circulatory choices. The author’s body is an exploration of a self within that intimate public, not a representation of that self as an individual. The self-image allows a space of collective self-imagining to emerge out of in-real-life (IRL) s/censorship.

Sensorship is a term I coined in 2014 in relation to the self-imaging practices of women on Instagram as a way to provoke the notion of a censoring of the senses. Sensing is a method of perception. Sequestering modes of perception is an ideological strategy to deny someone their sovereignty and their way to be in the world: “Censorship constitutes a removal of objectionable content, while sensorship is a removal of the experience of the senses” (Olszanowski, 2014, p. 94). To retrieve life, the young women entered into an intimate public which they hoped would provide them with modes of perceiving themselves in the world. They quickly figured out the way to flourish is to make things. Figuring out how to live life is the undergirding thread in all of Lauren Berlant’s work, including her concept of the intimate public.

Entering into the intimate public of grrrl-dominated personal single-authored websites (per-sites)² on the world wide web (WWW) came from the need to live out a life (of value and freedom, as Chapter 5 demonstrates) that the subjects of my study were uncertain of, but one

² Throughout the dissertation, I use per-site when I refer to personal websites of participants in the intimate public of my research, and website when I refer to websites in general.

that they desired. Entering into the intimate public of per-site production means enacting the way the “ability to endure may be intimately bound with the need to engage a larger public,” not as a drive for power but as the desire to inhabit “a material world in which that feeling can actually be lived” (Berlant, 2008, p. 3). The women and non-binary participants in my study made images to share them as a way to engage in a larger public. The intimate public is a loosely based group Berlant referred to as “consumers” that come together with a shared worldview. “Politics rest on the possibility of a shared world,” Haraway (1991, p. 4) writes. The women in my study began to consume a similar media on the internet, and each found their way to the per-site and had a desire to inhabit the environment of the per-site, to then populate a landscape of these per-sites as a way to provoke their abilities to endure, which was evident in the central theme of the practices of my subjects: trauma. Wendy Harcourt, in one of the first anthologies to take into account global practices, *Women@Internet: creating new cultures in Cyberspace* (1999), stressed that “the freedom to create” is more salient than the freedom of expression, as creation specifies a flourishing access to build and to move beyond the world traditionally available to women (p.xiv). As Foucauldian genealogy allows, the dissertation will show that over time the women’s togetherness and alienation also contradict the concept. What gets constituted in the intimate public is a community that emerges through practices that come into relation with others (Agamben, 1993). The young women enter into an intimate public which they co-construct and reorient into a friendship network buttressed through witnessing.

Wit(h)nessing originates from Bracha L. Ettinger's aesthetic wit(h)nessing as a way to explain the move of 20th- and early 21st-century art from a realm of fantasy to a realm of trauma (as noted by our exponential access to others' catastrophes) (Ettinger, 2002; Pollock, 2010). I use wit(h)nessing as a way to argue for the sociality of trauma and as a methodology, both of the practices of the women in my study and my own practice of doing this work. The entire dissertation is charged by and is a form of witnessing. The term is exclusively taken up with a parenthesis around the “h” and to similar ends that Ettinger and Pollock described. I use wit(h)nessing in parentheses when I want to emphasize the interconnectedness of being witness to and being with. I remove the parentheses when I want to front-load the “with” of witnessing, and more so when I reorient the term to mean a mode of perception as a consequence of a sustained being with something noticed (e.g., an image) and in turn responding with making

another image. This exchange of affective resonances of per-site makers created a space for a set of aesthetic and discursive practices to emerge.

The concept of friendship emerges as the intimate public becomes more bound by its context and set of wit(h)nessing practices. For the dissertation, I frame the ethical modes of wit(h)nessing as an orientation, a Spinozan joyful affirmation, as friendship for him is the ethical ideal (Spinoza & Curley, 1994). “Ethics is . . . the discourse about forces, desires, and values that act as empowering modes of being,” Rosi Braidotti (2006, p. 236) wrote in response to the flattening of ethics and morality qua Kant. The formation of friendship among the participants promised an ethical collective power of desires and values outside of heteronormative and individualist neoliberal confines. Specifically, the dynamics and tensions of belonging, responding, and perceiving within the constant updating of per-sites with self-images is what made this form of friendship unique: not quite a community, subculture, kinship, or friendship in its traditional understanding.³ That is, these new forms of sociality served as foundations for attachments to settle between and across the hundreds of self-images on the per-sites.

No straightforward critical positioning of our (social) location was available to us, as young women making per-sites, and about us, by scholars, creating “a fragmented set of possibilities that can be articulated into a momentary politics of time and place” (Probyn, 1990, p. 187). The politics of location and the parameters we take on and work within or attempt to break free of is what Joan Borsa (1990) also called “the notion of structural difference.” By 1999, the social location of users intersected with how and why and what ways individuals get online. Getting online was always marred with censorship. State involvement and surveillance was “undoubtedly part of the politics of the future,” Harcourt (p. 65) predicted in 1999. The per-sites, then, only offer a discursive safe space, as they are all subject to regulation; I detail how they were regulated in Chapter 3. Regulation depends on the social location of users. The location also, in turn, influences power relations and their position; in other words, the public domain has always been and continues to be dominated by white ableist phallogocentric values. Harcourt argued that the web’s potential for women is built on the already arduous work of

³ Traditional modes of friendship are based on banal affairs of private preferences: leisure, common interests, “hanging out,” or upholding the nuclear family as a the highest value, as evident in the phrase “we are just friends” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 93).

women gathering and consciousness raising in other IRL circumstances (1999, p. 64).

Thesis & Foundational Questions

This research project is about a set of practices that emerge from and form their own space of practice through isolated young women in their homes dispersed around the world.⁴ What is the nature of the practice? It is a practice of friendship, of intimacy, of making, and of wit(h)nessing. The participants were part of something not yet defined, and their primary connection was through the emergent media form of self-imaging on per-sites online.

A note on the use of gendered language: gender identity is an intricately shifting orientation. Language to make sense of these shifts is also constantly evolving. While my subjects identified as young women during the historical time period I detail here, some no longer do, and as such I refer to them as young women of the time period of 1996 to 2001 collectively, and with their appropriate pronoun when referring to them directly or as part of the collective in present time. Christin, who is non-binary, wrote to me, “I don't think you could capture that time reflectively without using ‘young women.’ It would be like rewriting history because we didn't have the language to really talk about it then beyond like androgynous / butch / femme / etc.”

The dissertation, a historical recovery project, is a genealogy of a conjunctural moment of the WWW. It analyzes the self-imaging practices of young women that used proto-social media forms in the process, creation, and circulation of production between 1996 and 2001. It argues that these self-imagi(ni)ng practices serve as (a) tactical methods in reaction to patriarchal regimes of power and s/censorship, (b) a means of engendering the sociality of trauma as a productive orientation, and (c) communicative nodes that through wit(h)nessing reshape a feminist intimate public into a friendship network predicated on the aesthetics and forms of circulation of the work.

⁴ Henri Lefebvre (1974) is credited with introducing the idea that space is socially produced. The intimate public co-produces space. See Ndengeyingoma (2015) and her examination, through a Canadian-based case study of young women, of a trend of the early 2000s that “has been observed where young immigrant women tend to seek friendships within online environments” (pp.109-110).

- Early everyday use of the web is currently a history being written by a selection of scholars and artists unaware of the practices detailed in this dissertation. What can we learn about internet culture of 1996 to 2001 from the tensions of the dispersed practices and ethics of circulation? In other words, how does WWW sociality unfurl?
- Noting the urgency of traditional forms of relation not working IRL, how did these young women, from various class, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds engage in self-imaging practices online and create their own per-sites in a time when no such models existed? What did they make?
- If, in my study, the intimate public is a network of connections constituted through a set of aesthetic and self-imaging practices and friendship is a set of ethical relations predicated on constantly making work to be circulated and wit(h)nessed, then at what point do the intimate public and the form of friendship I outline cleave?
- What can research about young women online in this historical period teach us about gender-marginalized people's relationship to emergent technologies and the ways in which they—in the foregrounding and re-centering of their subjectivities—co-constructed communities through practices of making?

Each query coalesces trains of thought that I have identified in the rooms of my own perception of the time period. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991) reminded us that, “inevitably, a work is always a form of tangible closure. But closures need not close off; they can be doors opening onto other closures and functioning as on-going passages to an elsewhere (-within-here)” (p.15). This kind of persistent deferral of the now is part of my methodology: to stay attuned to that historical moment and its sequestered nature. It is a way of activating a history of a conjunctural moment while sitting at a desk, opening documents, and typing the past into the present.

The Rooms

“To find someone somehow like us is to account for our desire, to give it a place from which to imagine and image a writing self: absorbed, drudging, puzzled; at a desk, not before a

mirror” (Miller, 1986, p. 109).

The dissertation is made up of an introduction and conclusion—which serve as doors—and five chapters, and begin and end with a room. As such, the dissertation begins and ends with a desk that positions the computer across from us. I invoke Virginia Woolf and Sara Ahmed, who gave us a room of our own and recaptured the desk from phenomenology, only to queer its use. The first three sections set up the final fourth and fifth sections which provide the breadth of my original contribution and connect my thesis statement. Chapter 1—A Room of Our Own aims to historicize and analyze the conditions of self-imaging practices from 1996 to 2001 by laying out the ambit of the internet landscape women entered and subsequently made into their own intimate public. It details the participants. It historicizes the formation of this public as continuing the work of riot grrrl and zine culture. It provides an introductory framing of the theory and methodology of the entire dissertation. Chapter 2—The Self-Imagining of Self-Imaging situates the project within art history, feminist media studies, and visual culture studies. Through a feminist phenomenological and art historical method, it provides a detailed description and analysis of the kinds of images being produced and the way they circulated online and how that circulation affected their style, aesthetic, and content. The chapter describes what self-images do—how they work in relation to the style, content, and form of these women’s websites—what they can tell us about feminist subjectivity, and how they can expand the field of photography, visual culture, and related identity politics without falling back into reductive ideas of representation by presenting the ways women perform in relation to a lens/screen. By doing so, it nuances the differences between self-imaging and self-portraiture and answers why culture deems feminist self-imaging simultaneously dangerous and frivolous. Chapter 3—Sexualities, S/Censorships and Intersections focuses on the circulation of sexualities as inscribed on bodies by modes and structures of power, both systematic and systemic. Four modes of censorship provide structure to understand how power is enacted and influences the practices of the young women. It provides a history of the conditions of censorship—a censoring of the senses—of the young women’s experience online. To substantiate my findings, I present a timeline of US-based regulations and laws of sexuality on the internet in the historical time period (1996-2001). Chapter 4—The Practice of Wit(h)nessing: Trauma and Aesthetics of Latency explores the sociality of trauma as it is enacted through writing in and on the body

discursively and aesthetically. To this end, through an intersectional analysis, in this chapter I unpack the stylizing of one's life and articulation of traumatic events to be accepted into the intimate public defined in Chapter 1. I ask: what is socially accepted trauma and who has the right to articulate trauma and how? It argues that self-imaging was a practice of wit(h)nessing and reciprocal spectatorship. Chapter 5—The Pleasurable Is Political: Joyful Affinities and Intimate Friends examines the conditions of access to the pleasure of production and circulation of self-imaging. In part indebted to Sara Ahmed and Jeremy Bentham, I conceptualize pleasure as an experience of orientation. The breadth of the chapter focuses on the formation of friendship as a mode of connection between the young women, with its ethical and aesthetic dimensions as flourishing within their practices. This chapter explores the politics of pleasure within the intimate public I outline from various perspectives, acceding to Berlant's (2012) observation that "there is nothing more alienating than having your pleasures disputed by someone with a theory" (p. 5). Certainly, as this dissertation demonstrates, young women have endured and continue to endure alienation, including from themselves. I hope I will not alienate my subjects or my readers, as I promise not to dispute their pleasures but rather critically affirm them in Chapter 6—Conclusion: Feminist Archiving the Early Amateur Web. In Chapter 6, I focus on additional modes of connection and communication that scaffolded the image making: guestbooks and webrings. These two forms segue into connections of my work to contemporary research on archiving the 1990s web. To end, the precocity of web archives as willful feminist subjects that make this dissertation possible are repositioned with their doors open.

CHAPTER 1 — A ROOM OF OUR OWN

Introduction

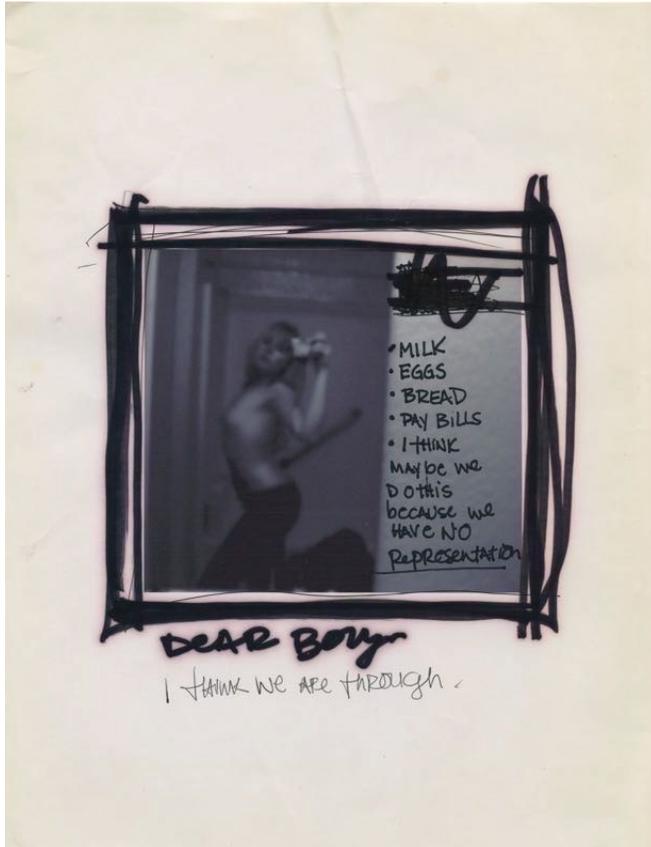


Figure 1. Helena Kvarnström. *Dear Boy* (1997). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital Photo with Marker. Courtesy of Helena Kvarnström.

“I think maybe we do this because we have no representation” reads as a moment of self-reflection that refers to a specific yet assumed subject position as well as a complicit address to the photographer’s (Helena’s) audience, both of whom implicitly understand what “this” is. Moving down the photo, we are confronted with a peroration in large letters: “dear boy, I think we are through.” The finality of this statement suggests three things: First, the boy is disallowed inclusion in the first “we” while also being distanced from the context of image capture. Second, the unfocused image is both a potential for more and better “representation” and an insistence that these representations remain occluded for some viewers (i.e., boys) and acutely visible for

others: “we.” The “we” references other young women who self-image as a response to their invisibility in visual culture. Third, it is implicitly the very act of presenting oneself to the camera that is taken to be the activity from which some viewers are distanced and others are included: the boy cannot see self-imaging as more than narcissism, and misses its tactical role in Helena’s conceptual re-articulation of subjugation. Helena described the note as follows: “It was a note to my boyfriend when I was 19, after we had a fight about artistic practices, more specifically about whether I could take my clothes off whenever I wanted to or not, so I put it on my website.” Though Helena is focused on her relation to a romantic partner, her nuanced use of rhetorical statements, image focus, and the very act of posting the image online (which generates the potential for a diverse female viewership) creates a shifting addressee and connects these quarrels to a lack—within that era’s visual culture—of varied representations of women’s bodies. The aforementioned parallels the subjects’ work in my study and is shaped through the act of self-imaging—which, I argue, differs from self-portraiture—an act that undergirds the entire dissertation (Banes, 1993, p. 224).

This image establishes the dissertation—how young women, the “we” from Helena’s “I think maybe we do this because we have no representation”—as a response to a culture that marginalized their experience—about how they created rooms of their own through self-imag(in)ing to enter into and forge an intimate public and subsequently a new type of friendship network. This collective personal space bourgeoned through a confluence of wit(h)nessing orientations. The “rhetoric of the pose”⁵—a learned alignment of our bodies dependent on performance and visibility—in Helena’s work, which is activated by image, text, and the communicative context of the internet, works to subvert her always-already objectification by the gaze of a male viewer (Berger, 1973), a viewer outside the “we.” In addition to this rhetoric

⁵ “The rhetoric of the pose is both visual and performative. Although it is activated on an instinctual level—as one scans another’s pose for signs of aggression, fear, authority or compatibility—it can also be indicative of a particular time, class or culture. Studied closely, a pose reveals confidence or insecurity, self-awareness or self-doubt, desire, joy or pain. Posing is a skill aided by visual technology. Young children begin to hone this skill as parents record images for family photo albums and video projects. We look at these documents for clues about our identities and we compare our captured images to those of our parents, celebrities and other role models. By mimicking those we want to align ourselves with, we train our bodies to inhabit certain poses. We try them on like costumes until consciously or otherwise we find the ones that fit” (Cote & Jensen, 2007).

of the posed body, Helena uses self-images to produce a relation between the body as *subject of* the image and the viewer as *subject to* the image online. We are *subject to* the image because of the paradox of the “we” as direct address, as a distancing peroration, depending on our own self-identification as *subjects of* in relation to the author, or as those who are not *subject to* a lack of representation as understood by the image author.

The collage image of Figure 1 is exemplary of the type of conceptual art practice young women of approximately 13 to 20 were engaging in online during the specific historical period, 1996 to 2001.⁶ Starting with this image, I activate a conjunctural moment—I embark on a historical recovery project. The web provided new languages, programming languages that can be used by humans to write source code—the code of website making—and with it a new literacy (Herbst, 2009, p. 135).⁷ Code literacy is powerful because by writing it you are shaping the world formed by it and as such also presenting new linguistic possibilities. Writers of code in the early days of the web were seen as “masters of technology” (Herbst, 2009, p. 145)⁸—a signifier with which the young women in my study did not identify. On the other hand, the creation of a website did provide a form of power and ability to take up space online, especially in a world that occluded the value of a young girl's potential. Using Virginia Woolf's call for women needing a room of their own, I analyze the ways young women created “a room of one's own” online,⁹ a precarious intimate public ready at any moment to be “exposed” and subsequently censored and shamed by virtue of operating as a women's space. The room I refer to is the per-site that operated with a metaphorical and somewhat coded locked door. In other words, the per-sites were public but were shared with a select group of people, and often not with those in the author's IRL milieu.¹⁰ As long as the users were dispersed around the world IRL, they were also WWW. This new “room” presented opportunities unavailable in the offline

⁶ I do not know if Helena was aware, but *Sassy* (1989-1996), a USA-based magazine that our generation grew up with, had a column called “dear boy.”

⁷ See <http://www.linfo.org/index.html>.

⁸ Code was learned in various ways, often through viewing other websites' source code or through tutorials such as *Lissa Explains it All*, a tutorial made by a Florida-based woman of the same generation born in 1986.

⁹ Websites were called home pages in the early web days (Hawisher, 2000).

¹⁰ The selection of those invited to the rooms will be discussed later.

every day and functioned discursively as separate from IRL.

IRL/WWW Split

Youth internet scholar Susannah Stern (2005, p. 283) did not see any distinction between IRL and WWW practices and argued that girls use websites to say what they could have said otherwise, and the "distinct difference" is the potential of a large audience. Her ten subjects all spoke about the importance of communication, not of the medium, and more specifically of being heard (similarly to my subjects and likely to anyone engaging in any form of output). Thus, on first glance, her argument makes sense. Later in the piece she reinforced her point by which the young women say things "in the very ways they might have said [them] before," which leaves me to think she does not believe the medium is the message or consider the interface of the web. While self-determination and self-expression of identity building can and do happen IRL through associations, orientations, conversations, and positioning one's identity through a particular medium, the relationship between the self and the audience within the intimate public of young website makers I outline is significantly different. Indeed, that is one of my key arguments of the thesis which I justify throughout all the chapters.

Along with Anita Harris (2012), who argued that website building articulated "new meanings of participation" (p. 212) all my subjects mentioned the discursive and tangible split between their IRL and WWW life and even refer to them separately: in Figure 2, for example, Jackie wrote of "real life and net life." Participants wanted to find an alternate space to articulate their identities and life experiences, and thus their participation in that space changed what the web meant for and to them—it became a space to articulate those very needs of identity and life experience (Stern, 2005). Gender, youth, and media culture scholar Mary Celeste Kearney's (2013, pp. 249-252) wide-reaching analysis demonstrates that all the studies pointing to a lack of involvement and participation by young women in computers only take into account curricular involvement. Kearney therefore took an in-depth look at extracurricular involvement in getting online and young women's website making in their own homes, which paints a

different picture.¹¹ More specifically, curricular involvement would hardly show any data of the community I am studying because the participants of my study, except Roxanne, began their web journeys outside of school and kept them out of school as much as possible or else learned of the consequences that follow when a young woman wants to be the object and subject of her own narrative. Anne told me she was expelled from high school when officials saw a printout of a zine she made that she in part was distributing to others she met online. Marlaina, like others, had to take and scan photos at off-periods, and Helena, Marlaina, and Auriea noted how their teachers and classes were inimical to online imaging practices.

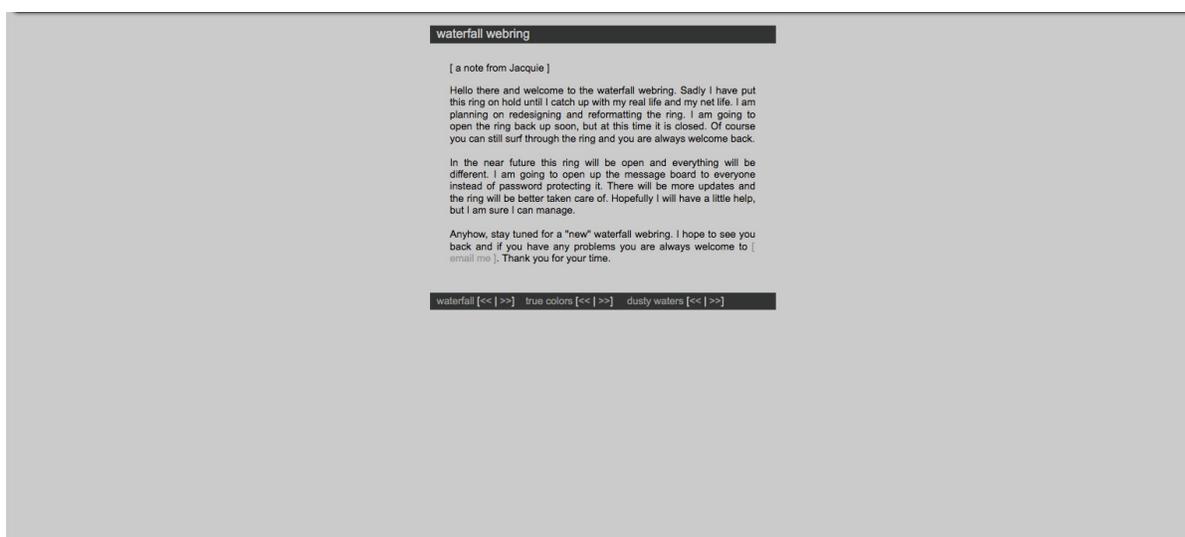


Figure 2. Jacquie. “Waterfall Webring” Splash page. *Waterfall is closed for Repairs*. Screen capture as it appeared on 9 Oct 1999. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/19991009032311/http://www.jacquiesworld.com/waterfall>. Accessed 11 July 2019.

Scholars who claim that the online and offline worlds are inseparable and "inextricably intertwined" (Blair, Gajjala, & Tulley, 2009 p.xi) fail to account for the censorship of those marginalized IRL. This group of women discursively experienced offline and online as different and separate and thus acted according to this bracketing. Marlaina said, “I didn't show it [the website] to any of my friends, really. I didn't really want them to see it in a way. They didn't

¹¹ The concept of “teenage girl bedroom culture” originates in McRobbie & Garber (1991) “Girls and Subcultures.” For more on the role of private space in youth cultures and teenage girl bedroom culture, see Hodkinson & Lincoln (2008), Lincoln (2014, 2018), Steeves and Bailey (2015), Kearney (2007).

deserve to see that side of me. I presented a side to them that was so different than how I was; it was so incongruent.” Unlike the offline space bound to familiar regulatory and disciplining powers (Foucault, 1990), this burgeoning space offered new and distinct signs of expression formed through a textual and visual online milieu. Helena specified, “It [the web] felt supportive and safe and in the real world it was like you should not be talking about this [e.g., rape], this is inappropriate.” It was these affordances that made the internet function as a utopia. By suggesting the internet as a utopia, I follow my subjects’ conceptualization, which was akin to the larger cultural imaginary upheld by its users, including cyberfeminism and feminist cyberculture at the time (Steeves, 2015; Marwick, 2010; O'Brien, 1996; Consalvo, 2018). That is to say, the young women argued for the web as a space to show their “true selves.” However, they made the space into a utopian showcase by doing exactly that: sharing vulnerable subjectivities that they could not IRL.¹² The “true/authentic self,” as I argue in Chapters 4 and 5, also operated within a particular network of subjectivity that was enabled by those who accrued the cultural capital (to have their matters matter). I will explore how certain people accrued the necessary cultural capital and how it did and did not mirror IRL.

A Room of Our Own

In a 2014 blog post, Katharine recounted the burgeoning of the intimate public, also using a first-person plural “us” like the “we” above. In her post below, “we,” “us,” and “ours” appear as pronouns, and not once “I.” This grammar points to the optimism of making do, and the dynamics of these empathetic relations: a foregrounding of togetherness and wit(h)nessing in which “we” existed for each other as a result of each other:

For us, the web began as a secret place where our parents and teachers and the small-town characters we went to high school with couldn’t find us. It was a place where we could create art, write about our inner lives with no holds barred, find understanding and companionship and love from girls who got us. It was a place where we, who thought of ourselves

¹² See Takayoshi (1999) for a detailing of young women getting online to create spaces for themselves.

as outsiders and nerds in our physical communities, could discover (for the first time) other girls our own age whose art and writing and world-views stirred and resonated with us, and actually talk to them, sometimes leading to deep, enduring friendships. There was all this paranoia back then about people going online to create false identities; but the way we saw it, it was the offline identity that was false; the web was the place where we were safe enough to show our true selves. Maybe: for the older generation, before ours, none of the stuff happening on the web was/is really real. For us, as teens, it was *hyperreal*, more immersive in many ways than the world we belonged to off the web.

Unintentionally, Katharine paraphrased Jean Baudrillard's (1994) theories of the hyperreal: the more real than real, the truer than true.¹³ She also pointed to the relationship of autonomy and belonging to citizenship like Berlant has done in her many books.

Following the introduction, this chapter is divided into five sections that provide answers to my stakes of inquiry about the way online culture operated between 1996 and 2001 and how the women in my study negotiated their participation in it: (a) a description of the participants; (b) the English-speaking media landscape of the 1990s; (c) the formation of the community, which I call the intimate public via riot grrrl and zine culture; (d) the triangulation of methods used in the dissertation; and (e) a conceptual and theoretical overview.

Description of Participants

This project's genesis was a research paper for an art history class with Amelia Jones in 2013 at McGill University. When Jones expressed enthusiasm for the research, I turned it into a paper for the 2014 College Art Association (CAA) conference, and in revising it I realized the need to redress the omissions within this work regarding the fields of art history and internet studies. Initially, I reached out to my subjects Helena Kvarnström and Marlaina Read because

¹³ See Gilmore's (1994) "Chapter 2: Technologies of Autobiography: Figuring(out)Identity: Representing 'Realism'" for a consideration of discourses and practices that "construct truth and identity" (pp. 65-66).

(a) they are both practicing artists, (b) they have been extensively involved within the intimate public I expound on here, and (c) I had stayed in touch with them off and on since that time period, and the 1996 to 2001 period was a regular topic of discussion between us. They shared some of their archives with me and we conducted an initial Skype interview. Since then we have had several follow-up interviews and discussions online and in person. When emailing other people to participate in the project it was helpful to have both Marlaina and Helena initially on board. Marlaina and Helena were popular young innovators and everyone I contacted knew of Helena's work, giving credibility to the project.¹⁴

First, I made a list of women, non-binary and trans people whose work I was familiar with and/or others the participants thought should be interviewed because of their wide-reaching role in the community. To narrow the scope, the research participants had to fit into the following criteria of being (a) women, non-binary or trans during the historical time period and (b) innovators and early adopters of per-sites. Thousands of young women were making per-sites during this time period; however, not all were as involved as the participants I chose.¹⁵ As the early majority of the web and early adopters of per-sites, their stake in the past includes an ownership of that particular history.¹⁶ Therefore, further criteria included that they must (c)

¹⁴ Marlaina's extensive per-site list during 1996 to 2001:

- <http://www.angelfire.com/de/prosc>
- <http://www.angelfire.com/id/prosc>
- <http://www.eccentrica.org/dahlia>
- <http://www.narcissistic.org/steppenwolf>
- <http://www.altern.org/whitepoppy>
- <http://www.altern.org/redpoppy>
- <http://www.altern.org/caustic>
- <http://www.lab.eccentrica.org/alice>
- <http://www.stark.lhabia.com>
- <http://www.bleach.org/caustic>

¹⁵ For example, the Internet Girl*Goddesses of the late 1990's Livejournal.com (<https://oldschoolers.livejournal.com/profile>) community was a group of people who participated in website making in the 1990s. This group stayed active until Facebook became the ubiquitous choice for community formation online.

¹⁶ "The early majority adopt new ideas just before the average member of a social system. The early majority interact frequently with their peers, but seldom hold leadership positions The early majority may deliberate for some time before completely adopting a new idea (Rogers, 1983, p. 249).

have produced at least two or more websites between 1996 and 2001 and (d) currently be artists, writers, or technology or creative practitioners in some capacity. I chose the latter because participants currently working within a creative capacity will have a heightened relationship to the creative output of their past (which did become evident in my interviews). Finally; (e) the participant's work also had to be prolific enough to analyze and had to have had an impact on me.¹⁷

Over the next five years, I found and interviewed eleven early adopters who maintained websites between 1996 and 2001: Aarti Rana (Toronto, CA), born in India, came to Canada in the late 1980s when she was seven. In 1996 her parents bought a computer and the internet came in tandem. She remembers watching her older sister profusely use the internet, chat rooms, and Internet Relay Chat (IRC). IRC was Aarti's first internet entryway and how she made friends with whom she still keeps in touch. She told me her thinking about the relationship between bodies and the web directly influenced her path to become a doctor. Alyssa Boxhill (Frederick via New York, USA) is a queer white designer and classically trained musician in Portland, USA. African-American Auriea Harvey (Rome, Italy and Ghent, Belgium via Indiana, USA) became obsessed with making art on computers as a child and now, in Italy, runs an award-winning computer game design company, *Tale of Tales*, with her husband, who she met online. The oldest of the participants in my study by a decade plus, she first went online in 1995 at 24. Carolina Erickson (Maryland, USA via Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic) is a non-binary tech developer in the USA who started making per-sites while still in the Dominican Republic. Christin Light (Saint Paul, Minnesota via River Falls, USA) is a white non-binary musician and artist from the Northwest USA whose dad introduced them to computers and programming as a child. Helena Kvarnström (Hamilton, CA via Chicago, USA and London, UK) is a Swedish photographer and writer currently living in Hamilton who spent her formative years in Chicago. Her photographs have been exhibited internationally and she has published one book.

¹⁷ Two interlocutors for this project, Griselda Pollock (2007) and Amelia Jones (2012, 2006), self-reflexively both revealed, as part of their analyses, that they often discuss work whose punctum affected them in deep ways. The punctum is powerful because it introduces a theory of feeling photography that amounts to queering photography's ideological function that values the system of power Foucault, and others write against. The punctum provides a way towards feelings that have not been standardized by traditional viewing practices (Brown, 2014, p. 5).

Katharine Tillman (Austin via San Diego via New York and Statesboro, USA) is a white writer and professor of experimental psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, USA. Marlaina Read (various via Sydney, AU) is an Australian settler artist and PhD candidate focused on women's labour and ecological sense of self in the anthropocene. Anne Northrup (now Anne Schipper) (Florida via Fulton, USA) made feminist zines as a young girl, which led to her being expelled her from school and now plays in a riot grrrl band and lives in Florida. Roxanne Carter (various California, USA) was born in the USA and started online journaling in the mid-90s and has published two novels and various poetry and creative writing while completing her PhD in comparative literature. African-American Tamika Pinkney (Columbus, USA) is an artist who assembles ball-jointed dolls as a hobby. I also talked to other users in casual settings on- and offline including Treva Lewis from Oregon, USA and Terry Palka from Edmonton, Canada who feature in the dissertation.

Seven of the eleven participants are white. Two are African-American, one is Latina, and one is Indian. Two are non-binary and nine are cis women. All are in their 30s except Auriea Harvey who is in her 40s. All initially got online between 1993 and 1997, when they were between 10 and 18. I did not ask about income status.

According to Everett M. Rogers (1983, p. 22) in *The Diffusion of Innovation* there are five adopter categories: (a) innovators, (b) early adopters, (c) early majority, (d) late majority, and (e) laggards. Within this framework, the participants are the early majority of internet users, and innovators of per-sites. No per-sites like theirs existed before theirs. I include the definition of early adopter in full for us to gain a clearer context. Early adopters have

the greatest degree of opinion leadership in most social systems.

Potential adopters look to early adopters for advice and information about the innovation. The early adopter is considered by many as “the individual to check with” before using a new idea. The early adopter is respected by [their] peers, and is the embodiment of successful and discrete use of new ideas. And the early adopter knows that to continue to earn this esteem of colleagues and to maintain a central position in the communication structure of the system, [they] must make judicious innovation decisions. (Rogers, 1983, pp. 248-249)

As the dissertation outlines in subsequent chapters, these individuals were often respected by other young people making per-sites, and their ideas were often copied because they were new and original. As mimesis was a defining feature within the intimate public, to fit in one had to make a website similar but not quite like some of the more popular women. Helena, Alyssa, and Auriea, like other early adopters, also created message boards on their websites which positioned them centrally in the communicative structure of the community.

Including the participants' location at the time they were making the websites reflects the coalescing of the influence of their location as well as their location online (among personal websites and music chat rooms). All of the participants are connected to each other by way of at least one other participant. Most of the participants know of each other; some maintained a kinship during the historical moment of 1996 to 2001; some have stayed friends to varying degrees.¹⁸ During 1996 to 2001, I knew a majority of the participants in my study to varying degrees, and a smaller portion I knew of and was put in touch with through others. All women who were unfamiliar with me and my work denied my request to be part of this history except Aarti; however, she was familiar with some of the other participants and had previously been featured in Alyssa's unfinished web documentary about web grrrls in 1999. I contacted Alyssa to participate in my project and also received all the original mini DV tapes of her interviews and her presentation of the work in return for digitizing them, which I have done. While only peripherally, I also discuss the work of other women who were either unavailable or could not participate in the study, such as queer disabled artist Terry Palka, who got online in January 1998. Although I do not think this is a complete historiography, I do think this sample is fairly representative of the practices of the time.¹⁹ Reigh, who ran the popular hosting domain

¹⁸ For example, Christin attended Helena's wedding even though they had only been friends online up until that point. Further, Helena was part of the same group show with Katharine in 2004 in Richmond, Virginia. As a consequence, they finally met after nearly a decade long friendship online. They both told me, "you would think it's weird but it wasn't."

¹⁹ Kearney (2013, p. 290) noted that her in-depth analysis of twelve young female distro owners online during a time period similar to mine is a small sample and as such cannot be made general. Yet, many parallels exist between her participants' process of production of websites and understanding of the web and mine. This similarity encourages my argument that, although my research is not wholly representative of a subculture, it is aligned with other feminist independent websites of English-speaking women of the time period.

prettie.com, on which several of my subjects hosted websites, insisted by email that she does not remember anything of the historical time period. Another subject told me that this response is possibly because (a) Reigh does not know me, and (b) that time period was filled with drug use coupled with central themes of trauma and violence—issues that were foregrounded on the websites. The implication is that participating in the project would be like revisiting and making public therapy sessions with and for a stranger twenty years later. David Lowenthal, in *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985, p. 33), explained the risks of revisiting the past as it re-implicates the one remembering in the events not as “past” but as part of “a long continuum,” which is not always desirable. The aforementioned risks are why friendship as method, which I detail later in this chapter, shows its strength and corroborates that the participants who have revealed vulnerable information for this project do so because of our long-standing friendship, even with much time and distance between us. The work of the participants is a selection of the corpus I am creating, whose intimate origins will unfold with/in each chapter.

The Media Landscape of the Web from 1996 to 2001

As the public use of the internet became more widespread in the 1990s, young women recognized its potential as a technology that they could participate in and help form.²⁰ The “amateur web”²¹ period from 1996 to 2001 is of interest because it begins one year after images were able to be viewed in-line on browsers and ends right before the internet boom of social networking and blogging platforms that homogenized the web (Lovink, 2009). These latter include LiveJournal (launched April 1999, but it became popular at the end of 2000 with its invite-only system), Blogger (launched August 1999) and MySpace (launched 2003). Pioneering internet historian and practitioner Olia Lialina (2007) argued that “there was a pre-existing environment; a structural, visual and acoustic culture you could play around with, a culture you could break,” and a “world of options and one of the options was to be different” (n.p.). The options could be transfigured in a way popular post-2001 web could not because of its reliance

²⁰ As of 2001, of the 73% of youth aged 12 to 17 who used the internet in the United States, one quarter maintained a home page (what per-sites were called then) (Lenhart, Rainie, Lewis, & Project, 2001).

²¹ I use the term amateur along with Olia Lialina (2010, 2007), who called that time period the amateur web.

on CMS's and other platforms that had locked code structures. The "WWW of today [2007] is a developed and highly regulated space" (Liliana, 2007). Valentin Lacambre, founder of altern.org, a popular web-hosting service during this time, explained that even though his domain had incurred several lawsuits, which finally led to a closure of his hosting without any archives, he understood the radical and political potential of the internet and he wanted to make space for that. "Of course i [sic] know better my users, participating to the writing of the internet software, got me into trouble :)" He proudly lists some of the users he is referring to: "VNS matrix and new york open access, Ovidie pornslut and other autonomous escorts, women hacking computers but not knowing they were feminists, gender free software groups like 'grep Grlll' teaching the french free software community how to work with geek womens" (personal communication, January 16, 2017). There were no CMS's like we know now, and "getting into trouble" was part of the early majority's orientation. Websites could be fully customized as long as you could code them yourself. All of the participants self-coded their per-sites and tended to their layouts on a regular basis to account for the shifting idea of tone. Like Kearney (2013, pp. 265-266) pointed out in her study, expressions of "tone" are significant in that they are able to orient the content, the author, and their viewer into a similar world view—that is, invite them to participate in the intimate public. Many of the participants spoke to the meticulous and obsessive desire to tend to their "homes" (and their layout) through aesthetic and architectural changes: the placement of the images, symbols for links, different colours and fonts. These decisions also included the most important immediate door to the "home"—the splash page (See Figures 3, 4, 6–9). These young women built the very web platforms they used to distribute their work: it is not simply that there were no templates that made the uploading and distribution of images readily accessible; the development of a culture of online content sharing of any form was contemporaneous with the construction of the platforms used for such practices. These young women were, at once, producing content, laying the ground for its distribution, and organizing the communities that came about through these practices of image production and dissemination—creating rooms of their own. This approach echoes the way women turn to emergent media forms to experiment with their sensoried subject position, like other body artists did in the 1960s and 1970s, and later in the 1980s with video art. Lisa Gitelman, in *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (2006), argued that women transform

media through use. This transformation occurs in space over time. Geographer Doreen Massey (2005) asserted that “space and place emerge through active material processes” (p. 119). In other words, the young women’s web and image practices—a sequence of repetitive and stylized events—constructed a place on the web for their practices to flourish.²²

One of my inquiries continues the exploration of “Weavers of Webs: A Portrait of Young Women on the Net” by Kaplan & Farrell (1994), and Kearney's study of late 1990s and early 2000s online distro websites²³ to ask in what ways teenagers socialized as women engaged in self-imaging practices online and created their own per-sites in a time when no such models existed. None of the studies I found focus on images in-depth, and specifically not self-images. My research question, and this chapter, is a response to internet theorists like Geert Lovink (2009) and others who write the history of the internet wholesale as the history of themselves. A point Aarti evinces below:

I was always a technical person. In some ways, it [the internet] was a cool idea for young women who maybe aren’t always given entry into video game world, which was already something that existed and I thought was really neat and I never had a chance to be part of. My male cousins always played games and I wasn’t allowed to start playing with them. They always took over, and of course when they let me play I was really bad at it, because I didn’t have practice and access.

Practice (tinkering) and access are two key factors in hobby bonding (e.g., coding, electronic music, skateboarding, and any other traditionally male-dominated arenas) (Kearney, 2013, p. 247). Women are always-already supposed to be good at something, because if they are not, then they are too pretty or too feminine to be doing it, or they are doing it for the “wrong”

²² See Leslie Regan Shade (2001) for gender’s role in the social construction of the internet, and Elspeth Probyn (1990) on the intertwined relationship between an event and its place and the way they both transform and re-create each other.

²³ Online distro websites operate similarly to zine distros: small-scale distribution platforms that catalog with contact and purchase information, and briefly describe various zines that are part of the named network, such as the Pander Zine Distro.

reasons—arbitrary reasons that sexism has perpetuated.²⁴ But it is a Catch-22 because if women have no access to practice the activity they will not be good at it, and if they are not good at it, then they will be judged as not being able to perform as well as men (who have most likely had access to practice). Further, their performance will be judged on their physical appearance; young men are never judged in this way: a dichotomy that precludes girls from participation (Frost & Campling, 2001). As some of my subjects and scholars have chronicled (de Laat, 2008; Harcourt, 1999; Paasonen, 2005), the web was, in some ways, an open field for young women to practice it. Aarti declared, “I get to be alone with this technical thing and I can play as much as I want with it.” In her first forays into using the computer, Marlaina noted the heightened potential of its mode of transmission and circulation: “It meant that what I was writing was very important because it was in the computer. Like it was a secret, or it could be something someone would find later.”

Buying Time

In 1993, the Mosaic web browser was released to the public for free and internet use surged (Moschovitis, Poole, Schuyler, & Senft, 1999, p. 171). Mosaic was the first browser written and supported by a team of full-time programmers which was reliable and easy enough for novices to install and subsequently access inline images rather than by having to click a link for them to open in a new browser window, one of the principal developments in accessibility (Cockburn & Jones, 1996, pp. 106-108). By mid-1994 there were 2,738 websites, and more than 10,000 by the end of that year, according to a study by MIT researcher Matthew Gray.²⁵ During the mid-1990s, one bought time, not space. Internet connections were billed by the minute on dial-up. Getting online meant a series of steps. The general ones, corroborated by my subjects, were the following: You either had a computer at home, at school, or a family member’s house. At a family home, there was either a separate phone line to connect to the dial-up internet or you used the main phone line, which would mean the phone line was then “busy” (no call waiting existed for the internet) or if someone picked up the phone and held on long enough it would

²⁴ See my arguments concerning women’s participation in electronic dance music (Olszanowski, 2012).

²⁵ See <https://blog.smamarketing.net/the-history-of-website-design-25-years-of-building-the-web>

disconnect the internet user. In North America, you could get on the WWW if you had an internet service provider (ISP) such as CompuServe, Prodigy, or AOL. Those ISPs would also have access to USENET newsgroups, "worldwide distributed discussion systems available on computers" ("Usenet," n.d.). In 1993, AOL (America Online) also started sending out 3.5 hard disks, which later turned into CD-ROMs, to what seemed like every address in Canada and the USA for a specific number of free dial-up minutes to use (if you had a modem) (Siegler, n.d.).²⁶ AOL provided a dial-up service, email, instant messaging, a web portal that included chat rooms, news, weather, and so on. After acquiring Netscape in 1999, AOL became a web browser.

Auriea explained her introduction to the internet:

In 1994 my boyfriend told me there's this thing it's called The World Wide Web. I was like "WHAT IS THAT?" Then he said, "I'll show you." There used to be Netscape and Netcom. [using Hollywood film trailer voice] In the beginning [/end voice] he explained to me the basic principle of the web. He showed me "the other stuff," but this was special. Together we looked up how HTML works. Back then it was all about sharing information.

I asked what prompted her so quickly to check hypertext markup language (HTML). Auriea responded, "That was total curiosity. I was just like: How is this miracle possible? It was the first thing I asked, and he was like, 'I don't know.' . . . We started looking up everything." Browsers like Netscape had built in "composers" (a peripheral web-based application to make a webpage) that allowed users to make individual pages and type in HTML code on each page and then save it as an individual .html file to then upload using a file transfer protocol (FTP) to a web host the users were subscribed to. This collection of pages that would be hyperlinked in various ways composed a website.

In the early days, there were several options to connect to other websites: join an open

²⁶ Yet according to the International Data Corporation (IDC) only 0.4% of the global population was using the internet in December 1995, compared to 20 years later, 46.4%, compared to June 2019, when 58.8% of the global population was using it.

webring, ask to join or be asked to join a moderated closed webring, manually enter your website on various search engines in specific categories, leave messages on the guestbooks of other websites, provide links on your own page to websites you enjoyed, promote your website in various chat rooms, or be hosted on a private domain and thus be part of a domain's micro-community.

The per-site had a few conventions: There was usually a landing/splash page with an image or a text, a "best viewed on" disclaimer which specified which browser and browser size was preferable, sometimes even a font specification, and a last-updated date. This date was a way to inform the viewer, especially the repeat viewer, whether to enter or not depending on if they had visited this version of the website (See Figure 3, 6–9).

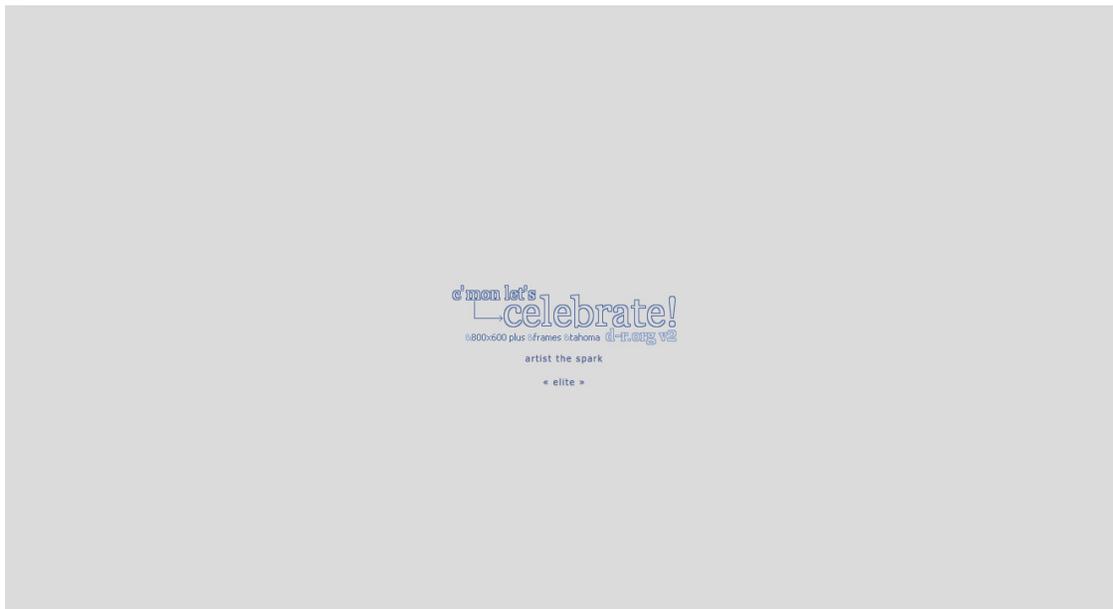


Figure 3. Bobbi. "December-Rain.org" Splash page. *{december-rain.org}. {celebration}. {splash}*. Screen capture as it appeared on 27 September 2001. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20010927194328/http://december-rain.org/> Accessed 6 June 2017.

Sometimes top menu links would appear horizontally or vertically on the right or left side of the page. Eventually drop-down menus became popular as a minimalist aesthetic. The most common pages were: about me, images, words/journal, music (either a top 10 or images of artists one liked at the time or had seen in concert), links, and the guestbook. The guestbook functioned

as a lifeline, one of the ways the per-websites were social networks before the term existed.²⁷ While this format is not dissimilar to other websites, the substantive focus on the “I” and “I”-based work, as in figuring out who and how “I” exist through image, text, and form, differentiates these websites from others. However, the “I” operated to underpin the “we,” a series of affective relations activated through a collective wit(h)nessing.

Marlaina explained the content of her first website on the free domain server *angelfire.com*:

The page I made first was on *angelfire*. The name was named after a goth club in Adelaide, *prosc*. There was a picture of Poppy Z Brite. There was a collection, a music list, of CDs and tapes I had. There was some pretty bad poetry because at the time I was deeply into two IRC groups, *#poetry* and *#darkpoetry*. There were two pictures I took with a digital camera. My high school at the time got a digital camera in the art room; it was chunky. I took some self-portraits with that. I wasn't wearing any clothes.

Marlaina went on to tell me that while self-portraits were never her foremost interest, she continued to make them because that was the social currency at the time and the way to participate in online life, which she found to be of utmost importance.

Different than the relevance of the WWW/IRL split for my subjects, the participatory and formative practices in which women engaged in the 1990s were dependent on then-experimental forms of technologically mediated sociability that hinged on the WWW/IRL split, but did not operate within the reductive binary of “online/offline life” that denigrates online experiences as somehow less real and less important (implicitly positing an asocial user). Before the existence of social media, there was more room to experiment with the creation of online content because there were fewer norms governing the way in which an online identity is shaped. The online world promised refuge from “the public gaze and its disciplining effects” (Harcourt,

²⁷ “We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (boyd & Ellison, 2007).

1999, p. 67), but the safety was only discursive since the websites were still prone to regulations and social disciplining, as they were publicly available even if not widely circulated. Katz and Wynn, in their 1990s in-depth study of the internet, noted that many personal website authors appeared to assume to operate within a more private world than that in which they actually found themselves. They also wondered how aware the authors were of the potential of a diverse audience and how that mediated their self-presentation through the content. They continued: "The pages are not so much personally private but located at an intermediate level of privacy, the sheltered environment of a peer group or work group. The problem is that anyone can access these pages. That is a fact of their existence" (Wynn & Katz, 1997).

However, in the 1990s, one could sequester one's online activities more than is possible today. Most of the subjects did not share their websites with their friends IRL, and when they did, Marlaina told me, "it was a huge mistake." More common was people IRL finding a website and exposing the participant and their work with derision. Hence, removing work and switching domains was a common practice. This meant that those who were not as fastidious at saving or keeping work lost their archives many times over.²⁸ Marlaina reminded me of a Uniform Resource Locator (URL), scartissue.lhabia.com, I had on Carolina's server, between 1998 and 1999, which I had forgotten. None of it is archived on The Wayback Machine "an initiative of the Internet Archive, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, building a digital library of Internet sites and other cultural artifacts in digital form" (<https://web.archive.org/>). Because redirecting viewers to a new website on the old website was not possible, users had to find ways to share their new URLs. Email was not common and one could not send out a mass email with a new URL as that would assume others within the public wanted the new URL since friendships were not as fully defined. So, one left comments on guestbooks with some note about a new URL, but one that wasn't too obvious in case those IRL were following. The work was fraught with in/visibility²⁹ and the participants continued because, for the first time, young women (like the ones producing

²⁸ Brügger reminds us that "although web archives were established in the mid-1990s, self-archiving was the most widespread way of accessing the old web for study" an inchoate practice that has expanded slowly "as the number of web archives started to grow and more user-friendly forms of access were established" (Brügger, 2018, p. 71).

²⁹ For example, I had a domain named overexposed.net for many years until I did not have money to renew it, and when I tried to buy it back in 2004, it cost 1000USD.

the content that I examine here) had the opportunity to create and share their work as part of a community. Helena spoke about this set of circumstances:

I wanted to show people what I made . . . to introduce ideas and talk about them. The community I had found online was profoundly significant for me and very encouraging. I felt the pictures were part of an ongoing exchange of ideas about art and feminism and our own histories and it was quite exciting to share in that environment. At the time the internet felt very small—it was something we created rather than someone that already existed before us—it was still very anonymous, so in some ways it was a low-risk way of displaying profoundly personal information.

The display of profoundly personal information on the web grew out of a larger media landscape that influenced these participants: putting things online served to open up an intersubjective communicative platform. Complicating these new lines of communication were issues of personal finance and social position that influenced the development of the internet and the content shared through it. Yet financial capital also means access to be part of history. Carolina, currently a software developer at Catalyte, has particular insider insight into the world of the internet and how internet history is currently framed. They told me,

A lot of the history seems to be framed on how people made their living online and the monetization of websites. People that are remembered are the ones who were able to make money out of their online presence. No one really talks about hosting sites like *altern.org* or fiction collective sites like *The Fray* [which is still online]. Blogger is remembered as a platform for making money and not the opportunity it gave people to host their own journals.

Carolina pointed to a larger issue of women, non-binary and trans people's labour often being undervalued and not written into history. Claire Evans (2018) devoted her comprehensive book *Broad Band: The Untold Story of Women Who Made the Internet* to this issue. In the next section, I delineate the history and formation of young women's practices online and their

contributions to web culture.

Formation of the Intimate Public via Riot Grrrl and Zine Culture

Earlier, I included Katharine's explanation of how the "web began as a secret place where our parents and teachers and the small-town characters we went to high school with couldn't find us and [it was] more immersive in many ways than the world we belonged to off the web." Following this statement, I lay out the 1990s web landscape the participants entered, became wholly immersed in, and subsequently made into their own intimate public, in order "to be part of a community that could do creative things together," as Carolina put it. In one of the only accounts of time period, "Expressions of Identity Online: Prominent Features and Gender Differences in Adolescents' World Wide Web Home Pages," Susannah Stern (2005) detailed the formation of identity within adolescent website production. She outlined the way in which the per-site was a private and safe yet public space. While thorough in her presentation of the website production of adolescent girls, including a content analysis of 233 websites, no image discussion is present, nor any first-hand accounts of what that time period was like, which my work provides.³⁰ Marlaina recounted the penchant she developed to being online:

I spent my entire high school years when I wasn't at school on the internet. It was crazy. I would say it's an addiction. I would be at friends' houses and go home and go on the internet, it wasn't particularly thrilling but so exciting and new.

One summer afternoon in 1997 shortly after my parents finally upgraded their computer and gave me theirs to have in my own room, my friends decided to stage an intervention and attempted to physically remove me from my home to get off my computer. My partner threatened to break up with me if I did not see some sun, but I was relentless. They never broke up with me, but they could never compete with the utopian novelty of the internet living inside my bedroom. Even the most mundane things like reading about bands I did not like was

³⁰ Yet 70% of her participants were males, a significant difference than my research on per-site makers of which it was almost exclusively young women and is corroborated by such groups like *Internet Girl*Goddesses of the late 1990's* (<https://oldschoolers.livejournal.com/>).

“exciting and new” and made me feel like I was part of an exclusively shared common historical experience thus, as Katharine reminded us earlier, “immersive in many ways than the world we belonged to off the web.”

Lauren Berlant (2008) postulated that “what makes a public sphere intimate is an expectation that the consumers of its particular stuff already share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from broadly common historical experience” (p. viii). Its circulatory structures are organized by significant amount of first-person narrative. It is a produced space within which its participants can exchange ideas about their ways of being in the world and also discipline those ways of being within that shared worldview. As I detail in Chapter 4, my subjects speak to the kinds of traumas that had cultural capital on the WWW and how other traumas did not. Consequently, some participants of the intimate public, during 1996 to 2001, were unable to share traumatic events (through text or self-imaging) because they did not have a language with which to discuss them because it was not available in these spaces, and if they did have a language there was a possibility that others would not take note of it depending on what trauma was foregrounded at the moment. This contradictory characteristic of the intimate www sphere, was enacted by the bilingual nature of the web (code and English) with which to speak of experience. This sphere was not inherently political like Nancy Fraser’s (1990) counter-publics, or queer performative publics like Michael Warner’s (2002).³¹ It engages in aspects of each, and is political by virtue of existing and enabling a landscape for questioning the hegemonic sensoring structures within these young women’s everyday lives. Katharine explains: “I know teenagers today can also turn to the web . . . and potentially reach a much larger audience of kindred spirits than we ever could (see: Tavi).³² But, unlike them, we didn’t grow up knowing such a thing was possible—it became possible, right in front of our eyes.”³³

³¹ For an argument against the internet as a public sphere, see Jodi Dean (2003).

³² Tavi Gevinson gained distinction from being a 13-year-old blogger turned teenage fashion icon, writer, actor, and magazine and book editor (Keller, 2015). However, in November 2018, even she could not keep going and her magazine *Rookie* folded. It was unable to be a financially sustainable as an independent magazine that refused corporate buyout or investors. See <https://www.rookiemag.com/2018/11/editors-letter-86/>

³³ Indeed, girls between 12 and 17 were the fastest growing group of internet users in the early 2000s (Herbst, 2009, p. 139).

Nothing was written then—not fully grasping the broader implications their work would have in the history of the web they were writing history. Like Terri Senft in *Cam Girls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks* (2008), I do think there is saliency in recognizing the production of a counter-space, if in a slightly different vein than Senft centred (as a way to politically rally and organize against specific modalities of exclusion). These websites were products of their authors' exclusion from larger discourses. The women in my study, like the “cam girls” in Senft's, were enacting a public that had come “into being only in relation to texts and their circulation” (Warner, 2002, p. 50). It is through the feminist aesthetic and a mode of online performance that they were able to find like-minded people with whom to share and make sense of their articulations.

Riot Grrrl

I historicize the formation of this public as continuing the work of riot grrrl and zine culture.³⁴ Both are forms of participatory media. The ethos of riot grrrl, much like that of the feminist body artists of the 1960s and 1970s, foregrounded a do-it-yourself (DIY) and do-it-with-others (DIWO) self-representative mode of artistic expression as a reply to the insidious othering of women's subjectivity (Grant & Waxman, 2011, p. 8). Much of the art that influenced those working in online communities was art lauded by riot grrrl bands like Bikini Kill, who brought the 1970s feminist slogan “the personal is political” to a younger generation with access to English-language music culture. Riot grrrl, much like the early per-site, focused on sexual and gendered violence and was not able to capture the significance of white supremacy. Web and sex theorist Susana Paasonen (2012) has linked riot grrrl culture with early website making, like I do; however, she noted that teenage girls' websites “have become defined against sexualized online imaginaries” and have often taken a maximalist aesthetic influence from the first grrrl zine online: “cartoon-like figures, colourful graphics and retro-style fonts” (p. 212). This aesthetic and politics bears little resemblance to those in my study. The politics of aesthetics are

³⁴ Similarly to my connection between zine and web creation, Kearney pointed out in her chapter “Cybergurls” in *Girls Make Media* (2013) a correlation between online distro owners and web creation. Online distro owners are usually young women who use the web as a place to distribute various independently made media such as zines and buttons.

foregrounded in one of the most cited pieces on riot grrrl history, Mimi Thi Nguyen's "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival" (2012). She proposed an alternate genealogy of riot grrrl that foregrounds the anxiety surrounding race within historical accounts that miss the complexity of who benefited from riot grrrl. As such, I argue in subsequent chapters that the affordances of online culture in 1996 to 2001 mimicked a liberal notion of self-actualization that depended on DIY and the pursuit of a "real/authentic self" that failed to account for the structural, systemic, and institutional barriers of citizenship. Aarti corroborated this perspective:

I didn't identify with riot grrrl stuff. It's partly an immigrant thing: you never do something that might give you a sense of entitlement. You are always self-effacing, so if someone is rude to my parents, not even because they're racists, but some rude waiter, my parents would let it go. You don't step into roles that have to put yourself out there like the riot grrrl stuff. What I felt more comfortable to do is speaking to that from the art/text perspective. Because I didn't have to be explicit about what I was talking about or thinking. . . . I think it's legal standing. . . . This idea that I am more precarious than someone who is of this world more, and has a history here. They have legitimacy, ultimately; [what are] the ways you say that someone is more legitimate? At some point, I started writing about women's hair and that was really about race, but that didn't start until I was 18 and went to university. All of the time period you are describing was before I had a sense of myself in terms that wouldn't let me be self-affirming.

Riot grrrl did not have a language with which to speak of the immigrant experience. As the main rhetoric of the time, it inadvertently swallowed the other. I parallel this lack and act of subsuming with the production practices of my subjects. Nguyen's arguments about the whiteness of riot grrrl and "subcultural cool" echo in the way women of color online either were not racialized (thus, seen as white), or had their racial identity unacknowledged. Carolina, while a fan of riot grrrl, agreed. The per-site community, while emerging from riot grrrl, was not a direct descendant, and because of the unexplored paths of per-site creation, innovators like Aarti

were able to produce work. Aware of her position, Aarti had to navigate and figure out how to produce work on her own terms in ways that did not jeopardize her sovereignty, which meant, for example, that photos she made were more conceptual and did not foreground her body and her race in explicit ways like those of white women. Zines were more likely to discuss issues of race and other forms of trauma not as easily imaged in that time period.³⁵ Zines' connection to blogs is well documented (Tkach & Hank, 2014), but less so to early websites, which I provide below.

Zines

Another key element of the riot grrrl movement, zine culture, directly influenced the form and content of early per-sites made by gender-marginalized people (Comstock, 2001; Nguyen, 2012, p. 177), even by those who did not participate in zine culture, because of zine culture's totalizing discursive aesthetic that permeated early websites (Leonard, 1998). This influence became even more evident to me when viewing zines in the Riot Grrrl Collection at the New York University Fales Library & Special Collections in 2014 and in 2015 and during my two-week Barnard Zine Library residency in 2015. At Barnard, I reviewed and categorized 98 zines.³⁶ Zines are cheaply and independently produced print publications, circulated by mail and through local meet-ups, that often take the form of a collage of thoughts, ideas, and images attempting to subvert the traditional capitalist economy, and often deal with issues around subjectivity, trauma, compulsory heterosexuality, and various isms, using a highly political and personal tone (Leonard, 1998; Piepmeier, 2009, p. 65). Yet, zines did not start out with these feminist ideals; they grew out of the need for them when zine culture and fandom was populated by and involved men. However, their lineage is not in male-dominated media but more in informal communicative material that was circulated in the feminist first and second waves, and

³⁵ Nguyen (2012) also heavily participated in this historical period, although her contributions were texts and zines.

³⁶ To organize my data, I made five categories: 1990s zines focused on the web, other zines of interest to dissertation themes, zines related to women in dissertation, chapbooks only available at Barnard, Canadian Zines. I divided up the information found as follows: author; title; issue; year; call number; library; description; location (of zine); and Magda notes.

even earlier, such as at women's clubs and in newspaper ads (Fee, 2017; Piepmeier, 2009, p. 24). The sharing of zines was prevalent among the subjects of my study, and at one point, some even included links to each other's per-sites in their zines. In the 1990s, I initially found several of the subjects of my study through Anne's zine *kill yr boyfriend #1* (1997). Christin told me, "I mostly just made my own zines to entertain myself, my sister and my friends. . . . I worked on some [zines] after that but only completed ones for radical mental health organizing. I moved a lot of the creative content online but did journaling too." Zines were either sent for trade for other zines or mixtapes, the cost of postage, or for one to five dollars. Five dollars was usually the price of an anthology and less for a personal zine (per-zine). Zines also often came with personalized ephemera: letters, collages, small objects, mixtapes, cut-out images or articles from magazines like *Sassy*, *Bitch*, *Seventeen*, *YM*, *Spin* and *Rolling Stone*. Zines and their aesthetic set the stage for per-sites. Many of the users who had per-sites also engaged in zine making. And when the internet became more popular, zine distros also moved online (Kearney, 2013). The per-site used some zine conventions, especially in its emphasis on finding like-minded people that lived in geographically disparate locations. The zine world created community through trading zines—you would amass a circle of zinesters and trade with them and review their zines in your zine so that others could find out about them too. Zines formed an intersubjective micro-economy in which young women were able relate to one another across the world and share their imagining. Like a zine, the per-site was never intended as a stand-alone object, and from the beginning it acted as part of a public. The collective was maintained through linking each other's per-sites (foregrounding the relationality between the young women) and keeping a guestbook in which visitors could comment and leave their website URLs.³⁷

Pleasure is another theme that connects per-sites to zine culture. Piepmeier (2009) noted that "pleasure is a key component of the zine medium" (pp. 80-81), as justified by zine makers who do not make zines for economic mobility, generally take a long time to produce them, and so on. Its ludic potential drives zine makers: a feeling foregrounded in the production and circulation. Piepmeier went on to say that pleasure is actually "registered in the artifact itself," a proposition I partially disagree with and expand on using affect theory in Chapter 5. However,

³⁷ I highlight the ongoing exchanges through guestbooks and webring in Chapter 6.

she has noted that many zine makers value the embodiment of zine making as superior to the screen and online forms of communication that they believe are disembodied.³⁸ She even argued that “zines bring their creators and readers away from the digital world and into their own flesh” (2009, p. 81), which is simultaneously true and false. Phenomenologically, the image making of per-site creators was full of sensations despite its being theoretically out of the body because of supposed disembodied space of 0s and 1s. As my subjects have demonstrated, the digital world, unlike IRL, allowed us to be in our own flesh, with our own flesh. We sat, we looked, we thought, we took pictures, we engaged multi-sensorially in our space of practice.

Making Space

Space is not a container for the body, and the body is not “in” space; bodies, rather, become the spaces they inhabit (this extends to objects too, e.g., the way we type with the qwerty keyboard, which was designed for typewriters and not computers.). Bodies become part of space, and through their movement the surface of spaces take shape. Lefebvre (1974) has claimed that “activity in space is restricted by that space” (p. 143). Space, in a way, decides what can happen, but this decision is marked by the way that space is constructed—a co-constructed network. Space shapes actions, so then actions are a question of how we inhabit space. For example, the way desks are set up shapes how people will move and where they will sit. A person moves a certain way on the WWW streets because of its infrastructure. However, these movements and orientations are not always paradigmatic. Because of the ability of young women to, not only make websites, but code them as they wanted, they were able to enter in areas not made for them, and in turn shape the WWW by these actions. Drawing on Ahmed (2008), I argue that to inhabit and orient oneself towards a space that is not normally sanctioned or built for oneself takes a lot of courage and a lot of work, but by doing so the reproduction of that space is modified. That is to say, if you inhabit a space not meant for your body, you are putting a chink in the performance that makes that space what it is, as spaces and bodies are shaped through a relational performance of their identity. The young women’s production of per-sites unsettled the mainstream masculine reproduction of the web and allowed lines to

³⁸ An erroneous but common perception of the time (Balsamo, 1996; Brophy, 2010).

emerge, new impressions, even new bodies. These new lines act as desire lines: lines that have been made by marginalized bodies that are not supposed to be in a particular space, but enter and stay, and over time, make new impressions and new spaces.³⁹ These new spaces provided access for other young women to build their own homes.

(Not) The Master's Tools: Building Homes

Website building demonstrates the desire for new ways of inhabiting, participating, and being perceived in the larger sphere.⁴⁰ Roxanne told me,

It seemed like everyone I met had their own website. It was like having a calling card. Now people have Facebook, which is pretty fabricated, but back in the Wild West of the Internet you could make your own thing, it was self-created. You could identify however you wanted by creating webpages.

With these practices, these young women were able to use their imaged body as part of an ongoing exchange of ideas about art and feminism and their own histories. They wanted to insert information into the online milieu through their complex body/gaze that foregrounded self-images as art, as demonstrated in Figure 1. It was not solely making art, it was learning the ways of (making) online culture. This echoes the *Women's Building Collective* started in California in 1971, the first women-run community space in the USA. The women in the collective, besides having an art practice, were learning how to curate, write press releases, build

³⁹This is what the Situationists, a collective mostly based in Paris, disillusioned with capitalism and the new industrial world, were trying to do. Sadie Plant, an influence on the women of my research, also wrote a biography of them, *The Most Radical Gesture* (2014).

⁴⁰“Weavers of Webs: A Portrait of Young Women on the Net” (Kaplan & Farrell, 1994), a seemingly popular article from 1994 with 68 citations on Google Scholar (accessed 17 September 2018), is linked by only one article that had anything to do with image making or photography.

walls, write invoices, deal with city officials, and also navigate the collective artistic terrain.⁴¹

The Women's Building Collective provided not a room of one's own but of our own. As the Building became "home," the community was also "family"—a situation that was at once comforting and threatening. Leaders—though there weren't supposed to be any—encouraged ego-expanding ambition along with community, and the two were not always compatible. (Lippard, 2011, p. 2)

Like in the *Women's Building Collective*, these new technologies (e.g., the WWW) brought with them their own complex ideological terrain, and by making use of them, these women (re)produced hierarchies of (aesthetic) distinction. This element introduces the issue of access and economic capital, both of which are inseparable from the resources needed to engage in an image-making practice, and create and maintain a per-site.

Who had the most popular website with the most sophisticated and original images? Often, it was users who were already privileged in economic, racial, and cultural ways. Helena worked to enrich the content of these per-sites and to contribute to these networks, but also participated in the perpetuation of aesthetic tendencies that contributed to exclusionary server space politics particular to the artistic practices of the late 1990s. Helena's father was a Swedish expatriate surgeon who moved to the USA to pursue the capitalist dream obscured by Swedish socialism. It was also her father's gift of a digital camera with a swivel lens in which one could see oneself that prompted Helena to experiment with self-portraiture as a young teenager. Aarti was also gifted a digital camera from an uncle at 14. Roxanne won an essay competition that granted her enough money to purchase a computer. Roxanne recalled the way economics were tied into creating community: "It's an economy thing. Someone is paying for it, and you're [the

⁴¹ For example, camgirls' sites are about display and the gaze and about women "as users of technology, builders of communities, and, crucially, as communicators. Women webcam operators are a significant part of the camgirl audience and are encouraged in their practice by other operators [...] Treating the work of women webcam operators and other online producers as a significant form of cultural production is important as part of acknowledging the vital role that women play in technological aspects of culture. From this point of view, women's webcams 'offer a setting in which to emphasize women's employment of the Internet and a means to rethink other aspects of their cultural representation'" (Attwood, 2011, p. 208).

hostee] sharing your bounty with others, which is nice. . . . I never understood how people had that or how they paid? Parents? Because we were teenagers.” Early in the proliferation of the internet, web hosting was expensive and cumbersome to administrator. You also needed a computer and, at minimum, a 56K dial up connection. In 1996, a two-year domain name registration through Network Solutions was \$100. Prior to that it was free (P. H. Lewis, 1996). In the USA and Canada, hosting was about \$25-\$100/month depending on bandwidth. For perspective, in 2018, it costs about \$15CAD per year to have a domain name and about \$100/year for hosting, which in 1996 was the equivalent of \$9.65 and \$64.50 respectively. Because the majority of this particular community were minors, dependence on familial financial support was a key factor for access. Helena told me her parents did not give her money for hosting specifically; her income was supplemented by them. She went on: “When you bought a domain you realized that it could be a community. It was fun to host people and to want to be part of your domain. But I didn’t host many people. I remember it being expensive.” Most users had websites hosted on free domain hosting services such as geocities.com, tripod.com, altern.org, eccentrica.org. However, some, like Helena, who had financial backing and support from their families, bought access to server space. These young women became self-appointed leaders of micro-communities because they could administer access to the subdomains that they hosted on their server. In turn, they became influential in terms of content and aesthetics because they would limit access to this server space based on their personal aesthetic preferences and their interest in networking with specific members of the online community. For example, Carolina maintained lhabia.com, and contacted me and invited me to join their group of sub-hosted domains. This was nothing short of “making it,” because being asked to be part of a personal domain rather than a domain service meant that your work had been noticed and valued by an influential member of the community.⁴² Users hosted on a subdomain (such as Muted.com, Eccentrica.org, Carolina's lhabia.com, and Alyssa’s Sidereal.org) gained distinction, and the users who hosted them were the arbiters of the aesthetic trends that (dis)qualified others for inclusion. Roxanne recalled the various subdomains and their versions of “subcultural cool:”

⁴² In light of this competitive milieu, much drama occurred in regard to aesthetics, and plagiarizing content, including types of images, tones, framing, colors, the figure ground of images in context to text on the website, as at the time we willfully hand coded our own per-sites.

The girls on Narcissistic[.org.], they were fierce or something. . . . If you were under someone's subdomain . . . like the people on prettie[.com] were artsy crazy people and like on Helena's [myredself] site were hardcore feminist theorist type people and Narcissistic . . . I think they were into feminism but their whole thing was being cruel.

Alongside disentangling the political economy of the practices, access to equipment and the (safe) space of production are two important aspects of these practices. Auriea discussed her early forays: although she was initially fascinated by computers, she rejected them shortly after. “I was in Indiana. I was poor and I was Black. I knew zero Black people who had a computer. At a certain point people started [on] Atari, but it was white kids and we went over to their house and played Nintendo.” This changed when, many years later, a computer lab at Parsons (NYC), her university, needed people to work there. Because general knowledge of the web was limited, and despite her basic skills, she saw an opportunity for herself that not many poor Black women would have had because of access and societal biases. Even then, she saw very few people use computers besides her mom who had access because of her job. “If I had seen someone cool doing it, literally, I think that's all it would have taken, if I had seen other cool kids or adults I admire[d]. . .” Her statement speaks to the need for role models in fields that are mainly dominated by white men. Aarti told me,

my understanding of the world being a cool place was from books, but I didn't see it anywhere around me. The internet was a venue into that world, so I talked to people who had been in love, travelled, who had a mother poet, or ran away from home. And that only happened in books! I was sheltered as an immigrant. The internet made the world of books alive. The internet was a connection to all these people that used to only exist in books.

Participation allowed these users the ability to orient in ways IRL made seem impossible. Women are mostly rewarded for participation that is “consumption-focused and on display” (Harris, 2012, p. 214); while online consumption was in its infancy, the latter was already prominent by 1996—but on display how, with what, and for whom? I explore these questions

in Chapter 3. Analog cameras were still the common form of photo-taking device, and printing photos was expensive. To upload them to the internet one had to have access to a scanner and a computer to store the images without them being found. My high school in a suburb of Toronto had a computer lab with scanners, and I took risks bringing in nude photos of myself underage to scan and upload online to my per-site. I did that because several of the other users I looked up to also shared semi/nude photos of themselves online (like Roxanne and Helena, for example). During the late 1990s, webcams started becoming popular and were taken up by a few of my subjects because of ease of use and security. These young women were not simply consumers, or even prosumers—they made things, they produced websites because within their peer circle that was what was expected. In order to participate (in this burgeoning attention economy) you had to have a per-site, which you updated both in aesthetic tone and content on a regular basis, or else you would be forgotten—"to be is to be updated" (Chun, 2016, p. 73). Often the updates would be personal and signed by the per-site author (see Figure 2 and 11). This evoked a sense of intimacy and direct address. The website hinged on an implicated viewer. If a participant in this intimate public, for whatever reason, had trouble reinventing their tone, a disclaimer would also be put up, like seen in Anne's (Figure 4) splash page below. This updating of a website was a performance. You had to upkeep the stylization of your identity to stay in that identity. In the next section, I describe my methodology and the methods used in the dissertation and how they have helped me arrive at these findings.

I am still alive, version 1.0.0 cocktease.coming soon.

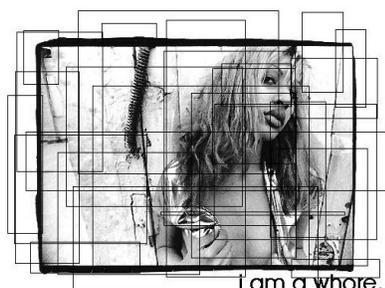


Figure 4. Anne Schipper. <http://punkrockgrl.tripod.com> Splash page. *Girl.is.a.four.letter.word*. Screen capture as it appeared on 12 November 1999. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20141209181858/http://punkrockgrl.tripod.com>. Accessed 8 October 2019.

Framing the Work: Methods

This dissertation is a feminist genealogy of the web. Although it is also a history of that time, a genealogy allows us to “defamiliarize the very assumed order of things.” As such it is a “historical methodology” and a “powerful intervention into the present” without assuming itself as an origin story (Eichhorn, 2013, pp. 7-8). This approach allows me the freedom not to contextualize this work as a precursor to the contemporary moment, because if I were to do so, my writing of this history would be significantly altered. As it stands, it is a form of wit(h)nessing: I activate objects of the past to figure out how to perceive them and how to be with them, and present ways that others can also perceive them, as the objects of my inquiry needed their viewers to become interlocutors. Phenomenologically, it is important for me to observe and sustain my analysis on the direct event as much as possible, even if the dissertation—and my thinking with images—is, as Aarti says, “a study in memory.” As such, it is also an activation of a conjunctural moment rather than a kind of unearthing of the past “as it really was” (Benjamin, 2007, p. 255). Memory work is a practice of self-reflexively activating a past, not towards a definite truth, but as a way to establish collective connections between the objects of inquiry (Kuhn, 2007; Kuhn & McAllister, 2006; H. Fraser & Michell, 2015).⁴³ The methodological frame of the dissertation comprises feminist ethnography alongside memory work⁴⁴ and wit(h)nessing, and from these I triangulate methods: friendship, qualitative semi-structured and open interviews, and visual culture analysis that foregrounds thinking with and from—rather than only of—the images. I will provide a brief overview of each method here and detail them more in context of their respective chapters.

The feminist aesthetics, in part pulled from riot grrrl/zine culture and feminist self-imaging and self-portraiture (Cindy Sherman, Francesca Woodman, Hannah Wilke and others brought up in Chapter 2), allow me to read the per-site as both a practice and material object

⁴³ Sometimes called collective memory or collective biography in feminist milieus. See Susanne Gannon (2001) for an analysis of the debates surrounding the terminology.

⁴⁴ “Memory work, a mode of inquiry embodying certain methodological assumptions, may be defined as: an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory. . . . Memory work is a conscious and purposeful staging of memory” (Kuhn, 2007).

because the website is the medium of the work and the home of the subjects. Didi-Huberman (2008) argued that we cannot sever images from their phenomenology, from their specificity, and from “their very substance” (p. 33)—this is part of what Roland Barthes (1981) called feeling photography. Using a feminist phenomenological framework, in subsequent chapters I argue that the images cannot be severed from “their very substance”—the substance is also their location: they are digitized files taken specifically for and circulated among per-sites. I do so by providing a contextual and close reading of a selection of these images. Roland Barthes and Anette Kuhn have demonstrated how relevant memory work can be through a study of ordinary photography.⁴⁵ Kuhn (2007) argued that thinking with familial and personal images can tell us a lot about how culture produces us and our memories and how our memories produce us.⁴⁶ I use Kuhn’s ways of reading images to begin each chapter and go into more detail about the methodology in Chapter 2.⁴⁷ While Kuhn’s framework is a workshop method for owners of photographs (not necessarily the photo takers) to practice with their own future images, it is useful for my work, both for the images I have and for my interviewees. I argue that the images serve both as “freeze frames” of what was happening during the time and as responses and reactions to it through the language of now. As much as I could, I thought with the images together with the participants. In this way, there is a two-way dialogic interaction between subject and researcher, following Denzin’s (2001) reflexive interviewing theories and Carol A.B. Warren’s (2002) qualitative interviewing, which position interview participants as “meaning makers not as conduits for a research retrieving information” (p. 83) and continues my feminist ethos of involving and making a room of our own for my subjects. For example, many of my subjects tell me that their participation has led them to rediscover their work and find art they had forgotten they made. Helena has restored several of her chapbooks and images and has made a website selling her work, which was a direct result of our conversations. For one of our interviews over Skype, Helena went through a stack of photographs she had and discussed them,

⁴⁵ See also Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* (2014).

⁴⁶ The images in this dissertation straddle the signification of “ordinary photography” and “personal photography,” but also “art objects,” at the time and most definitely in retrospect; an examination I detail in Chapter 2.

⁴⁷ Kuhn’s picture analysis (2002, p. 8) is included as Appendix C.

and then I asked her questions based on what she said and what we saw in the images about 20 years after they were first circulated. This method is somewhat like that of photo voice, in which interview questions about a past or about traumatic issues emerge from photographs (MacEntee, Labacher, & Murray, 2011; Wang, 1999). Although I did not want to speak on behalf of the images, sometimes I would point out things the participants themselves did not think about the images, and that would also generate more analysis. I felt comfortable doing this with participants who are my friends because of the trust built up between us. This trust allowed me to ask some of my participants for feedback on parts of analysis or other information throughout the process.

I am able to add to this history by way of ethnography because I, too, was part of that room, and come back to visit on a regular basis, like the participants in this study. Being forthright about friendship ties is of utmost importance to my work (McNamara, 2009).⁴⁸ Friendship as method is a type of feminist method that entails an earnest willingness to create friendships with one's subjects, because how can you build community and trust if not through friendship? A transition to friendship can occur and, in fact, should not be obscured (and definitely not in the presentation of the research); it can help create a "collaborative approach to the research which engages both the interviewer/researcher and the respondent in a joint enterprise" (Oakley, 1988, p. 44). The trust and confidence necessary for relationship building is thorny, as being critical can be seen as a betrayal of the established trust. When addressing this problem through "friendship as method" (Tillmann-Healy, 2003), I have attempted an ethics, a system in which both parties (the researcher and the subject) engage in a dialogue about their desires in relation to the project and an understanding of what scholarly research can unravel, including critiques and shortcomings of the subjects' experiences. This structure is foregrounded in my fieldwork to emphasize "the diverse and the particular" in order to eschew essentialism or any sweeping generalizations about the women's work (Thornton, 1996, p. 177). Indeed, all the participants have told me that they recognize my academic research as a continuation of the community building that these online practices emphasized. It is not only that I have become aware of this body of work through my practice and that I have built the

⁴⁸ See Anne Oakley (1988; 2015) for responses to traditionally detached research techniques.

trust necessary for the photo sharing that occurred through it. In addition, knowing or knowing of the subjects for nearly twenty years⁴⁹ and reinvigorating the friendships over the course of the last six years of the project allows me to approach their intimate and vulnerable work—often focused on sexual violence, abuse, and mental illness—in a way that is sensitive to the complex relations of age, gender, identity, digital creativity, and online content sharing that are at the heart of their practice.⁵⁰ Treva (personal communication, August 14, 2014) told me, “My personal sites and those of the young women I found comprised a vital aspect of my life back then, particularly in terms of living with depression and being a rape survivor. It gave me a very real lifeline I never would have had prior to the internet.” It is only through our friendship that this research can come to fruition, whereas reaching out to women who I knew of but who are not familiar with my work has been much more difficult. What Oakley and Tillman-Healy did not point out is the labour of care work that entails friendship as a method. As feminists are keenly aware, backstage support and care ethics take time and resources. Tending to many different people, not simply as subjects of a study but as multi-faceted people, is a particular form of response/ability: emotional labour that must be navigated with care throughout the process. It is not like I conduct one interview, thank the participant and collate my data in a linear way without further connection. The care also takes into account my position as a researcher. I am never outside my location, and that influences the approach with my subjects and the final research output (Probyn, 1990, p. 189). I am exploring and thinking through the “contradictions in our experience” as detailed in Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s *Bridge Called My Back* ([1981]/2015), a key text for some of the subjects of my study. An ongoing exchange, including

⁴⁹ See Anne Oakley (2015) for the importance of acknowledging time and memory as something that is still missing in feminist social research.

⁵⁰ For example, I started a closed LiveJournal Lives Facebook group in early 2017, which within six days reached over 3,000 members, and within two weeks was at over 6,000. This group was created to have a space to discuss that time period of the internet. Although LiveJournal comes after my dissertation’s timeline, LiveJournal featured prominently in many of my subjects’ lives, such that the Facebook group became a platform to discuss websites and related ephemera pre-LiveJournal. One of the most popular threads was the “looking for [name] user” thread where people wanted to reconnect with users (some not even knowing their real names). This large Facebook group led me to start a smaller Facebook group that loosely paralleled some of the subjects of my study (four of the 11). We then moved to a closed social platform, Slack, which also became a platform in which I asynchronously did follow-up interviews with Christin, Helena, Marlaina, and Katharine.

collaborations, has been happening with the women since 2013, and as such this is also, in part, an ethnography.

Collaborations often emerge out of a (need for a) shared experience. Qualitative interview scholar Norman K. Denzin (2001) argued that "interviews transform information into shared experience" (p. 24). I think of contemporary and performative interview techniques not simply as a way to gather more data but as the ways in which I am transformed by the experience and the work itself is transformed. For example, Marlaina remembered an old per-site of mine that I had forgotten and reminded me of how many of us cycled through multiple websites to circumvent prying eyes; and Tamika reminded me that women of colour felt safe because they could become anyone they imagined within our social circle (even if, indeed, that "anyone" was encumbered by cultural norms as I point out in Chapter 4). But the subjects' (like Tamika's) ways of performing being closed and distant says as much as Marlaina's vulnerability and openness to me. Both enact cultural meanings in their performances. The length of time between interviews and analysis also helps me gather an arrangement of meanings as intertextual to other interviews and literature I have amassed for the project. To wit, I started a Slack group because I wanted a collective space that, in part, would allow discussions of the 1996 to 2001 period in a contemporary context.

I used the chapter "Elicitation Techniques for Interviewing" (Johnson & Weller, 2001) to help guide my interview structure before and during the interviews. I used a taxonomic approach, asking questions that served to create relationships between topics and allowed the interviewee and the interviewer to delve deeper; this is how many conversations flow. Because my interviews were semi-structured for the most part, I could move the participants through topics I think are relevant to my project but also specifically to them, and although I did have sets of questions, I moved beyond them if necessary, depending on what was discussed. For a dialogic encounter, I needed to first attempt a "mastery of local terminology," a vernacular that provided me with enough knowledge to approach the subject but also to create a sense of trust between us, so that I was not using language that was inappropriate to their subject position and their history (Johnson & Weller, 2001, pp. 499-501). I amassed participants over a five-year period. I had an initial list that then grew and changed over time and after subsequent interviews. After compiling an initial list of possible participants, I emailed the women with an explanation

of the project and names of other participants that I knew or with whom I thought they would be familiar. I would explain the process if they said yes. If they said yes from there, I would set up a time to meet and determine the mode of the interview—Skype, G-Chat, phone, in person, email—and send along the questionnaire as it related to them with the release form, so if the participants wanted to they could prepare themselves. If they said no, depending on what their reasons were, I would politely try to convince them and make clear the process or try to emphasize the flexibility in time commitment. I was not always successful. During the process of setting up an interview time and after the interview, the subjects would send me Wayback Machine URL's and extant images they have been able to source from their own archives. Sometimes this would take years, depending how and where the files were stored. The methodology of reading images is detailed in Chapter 2. Spending hours throughout the project on the Wayback Machine, I also looked for per-sites and images through links of the per-sites I received from my participants and from my own archives.⁵¹ I took screenshots and full HTML saves of pages and compiled them all in folders. Alyssa Boxhill sent me her original DV tapes of the interviews she did for her BFA documentary on the 1990s web in exchange for having me digitize them and send the recordings back. Although I conducted many interviews, I talked to many more people about my research project in informal settings, on- and offline, throughout the time of writing as well as before the project started, which not only informed the work but provided an impetus to keep going.

I transcribed the interviews in full using Transcriba software. I then made notes on the general themes that came up and made comments in Track Changes surrounding certain statements. I looked for key words, connections, and contradictions in each subject's interview as well as across the different interviews. I highlighted parts that I knew immediately I would reference in the dissertation, coding them by chapter. I referred back to the interviews frequently while choosing more quotes throughout the process of writing individual chapters. I have all the recorded interview files on a locked drive and backed up on another drive. I have the transcriptions and participant files on the locked drive and on SYNC.com (a secure Canadian-

⁵¹ For an incredibly detailed analysis of various methodological uses of the Wayback Machine, see Brügger's *The Archived Web: Doing History in the Digital Age* (2018).

based server) alongside copies of drafts of the dissertation, digital files of the literature used, Wayback Machine data, and any other material that will possibly be used for the project.

How I Developed the Questions

My point of access for these ideas are encounters—conversations and interviews that took place online and in person—and materials—personal and web archives. The familiarity is a relevant access point because it allowed me to find their work online and to tailor the questions based on participants' practices. The initial base interview questions to Helena and Marlaina did not change considerably as I went on to interview others. Each questionnaire (Appendix A) has a similar framework of five themes with base questions that move from a more factual and straightforward theme to a more complex and affective theme. This way the participant would have already been ruminating on their online experience and also have a sense of me and my engagement with the topic to then be possibly more vulnerable with my questions. Within the base questions, each theme also had concomitant questions based on the participant's identity, practice, previous work's content, and anything else relevant that I knew. The base questions focused on (a) initial forays into computers and getting online, such as where and when the participants first experienced a computer, for example in the home or at school, and the ways in which they "surfed" online; (b) the creation and circulation of their websites, including how they initially encountered the per-site, how they connected to others by way of forums and guestbooks, and their movements between domains and the signification of being hosted; (c) the kinds of activities that they were doing "offline" and how those connected if at all to online activities, and if their online lives prompted them to make things specifically for the web and what that process entailed; (d) gender/race/health dynamics as explored by questions asking about the homogeneity of the community and its reproduction of inclusionary and exclusionary politics; I also asked about the ways in which forms of identity were discussed and presented and how these were inflected by trauma and depression, two common affective resonances among young women online; and, finally, the most germinal theme of (e) image making on the web—specifically, several questions from different perspectives concerning the participants' process and circulation of self-imaging. In conjunction, I also asked about how the per-site and the per-sites of others shaped the participants' sexuality and if and how their sexuality shaped

their website, and how being part of an intimate public forged by young girls for young girls affected their modes of perception. Twice I had to end the first interview before all the questions were asked, but other times I was able to ask everything and even have time for questions that arose during the interview or for banter off the record. I also asked participants if they would be willing to answer any more questions via a real-time or asynchronous method at a later date. I then created a second questionnaire that included components of the first questionnaire if the subject and I had not gotten to it and follow-up questions from what they had shared with me in the first interview. I had follow-up interviews, sometimes even two or three more, with most of the participants. With four of the participants, I have been having ongoing conversations in person or securely online over email, Slack, or end-to-end encrypted Signal messenger service.

Another method I used—an enabled epistemological constraint—was trying to incorporate work written in the time period of 1996 to 2001, or work that specifically deals with that time period. I did this as a way to position myself back within that time frame. It is one thing to write a history; it is another thing to write of a conjunctural moment while still in the moment. I am not doing the latter, but I did live the history and can attempt orientations to be in that space as much as I can, including the following question that began each interview: “Do you see a discrepancy between how you experienced the internet and how its history is being written now?”

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

The 1990s began with a shadow of a femicide willed onto young women attempting to master a field dominated by men—the École Polytechnique massacre at Université de Montréal on December 6, 1989. Women were, once again, reminded that they can never be certain which doors are theirs to use and which will leave them used up. Where can they go? Surf the information superhighway? The 1990s were a booming time for the internet. It was taking shape. Young people were taking shape. Being alternative was the mainstream. CERN introduced the WWW to the world in 1991. The Gulf War started the same year, followed by the genocide in Bosnia in 1992, the same year as the Rodney King trials. Lorena Bobbitt's story came to light a year later. In 1997, Lilith Fair started when feminism became mainstream and riot grrrls were given another purpose—fight the transphobic essentialist whiteness of feminism. The powerful

potential of women was on trial again with the Clinton–Lewinsky scandal in 1998. And in 1999, the potential of per-sites as modes of circulation of teenage depression and misogynist tendencies came to an apex in with the Columbine school shooting.⁵² The dot-com bubble burst the next year, establishing the internet's next wave, and the year that closes the time from of my research.

These influences were part of the politics of non-location (Borsa, 1990)—the women in my study lived all over the world but their orientations led them to a home that had a structure <html> but no rooms <body> of their own. They formed their rooms as they formed themselves—an unprecedented way of becoming intimate. Matters of identity were being foregrounded, and young women were getting online to explore it all. To explore these modes I have focused on a subsection of women's self-imaging practices through a confluence of lenses that have not yet been explored. The dissertation brings together internet scholarship, feminist theory, phenomenology, and queer affect theory with visual culture studies and an art historical framework. Although this may seem like a profusion of fields, they all connect in their epistemological examinations of seeing. That is to say, the dissertation is at its core about mapping orientations—taking the time to see, seeing, being seen, learning how to see and be seen. I draw on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's framework of perception and Sara Ahmed's willful feminism to fold wit(h)nessing into my conceptual framework.

My research displays similarity to media work by Kearney and her work on girls who make media, specifically zines and websites, and to Amelia Jones and her work on feminist self-imaging that is also rooted in phenomenology. My intervention into both of these fields is by connecting the two and enriching their vocabulary on how images are made and circulated by young women for young women. A popular zinester, and author of *Out Of The Vortex*, Sara argues ““only by controlling the medium do we control the message. . . . For this reason zines are extraordinarily unique and powerful political tools”” (Leonard, 1998, p. 106). In a similar way, when the subjects of my study use their bodies as the medium, then they control the message—a message that they otherwise have had no access to making or receiving.

Theresa Senft's (2008) ethnography on cam girls used a feminist method of data collection and analysis, as does my project. This method is ethical, engaged, and also considers

⁵² One of the murderers, Eric Harris, began using his AOL website as a way to plan the killings in 1995.

friendship's role in the creation of space online by women and for women in the 1990s. Her book was one of the earliest interlocutors for this dissertation, as it was the first work of its kind to take a comprehensive and rigorous look into young women making and maintaining images. It specifically did so by doing close readings of the webcam practices that were at the time dismissed as nothing more than narcissistic and superficial. Amelia Jones's work on self-imaging and body art also reacted to the same pejoratives with which women who center themselves in their art work have been condemned. It supplements existing media scholarship on young women's web practices (Bortree, 2005; Herbst, 2009; Stern, 2005; Takayoshi, 1999).

This introduction is an overview of the literature that I will detail in each corresponding chapter as it relates to each theme. I organized the writing this way for a more cohesive narrative flow. Supplementing my method by looking at works that were also published around the time frame in question, my conceptual frameworks may at times feel outdated, but they provide a context for the way participation on the web was seen. Examples of such works include Marion Leonard's historicization of riot grrrl culture from analog to internet media in the anthology *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures* (1998, pp. 102-119). Another work, the edited collection *Webbing Cyberfeminist Practice* (2009), made reference to a lot of work from the late 1990s and early 2000s and was a collective response to Faith Wielding's 1999 question, "Where is the feminism in cyberfeminism?" It also used the older language of cyberfeminism and Information Age and began with the idea of "forming virtual kinships": a virtual that was a stand-in for on the web, not a Deleuzian virtual. These concepts, by the mid to late 2000s, began to fall out of use but very much shaped the discourse.

I did not include literature on participative media culture partly because it often addresses Web 2.0, known as the "'participative web'—the apparent evolution of the socially networked, participative and user-generated capacities of the second-generation world wide web" (Wallace, 2014, p. 68)—and my time period is still Web 1.0. Although I do see the work of my subjects being at its core participative since I argue per-site production is an act of sociality, it does not fit within that time frame. This discrepancy becomes evident with the relational process of self-imaging, and wit(h)nessing—a means of being with—Bracha L. Ettinger's neologism I re-activate towards a more feminist phenomenological means. In the next chapter, I turn to a phenomenological reading of images and bodies to examine the self-imaging

practices of the women within the intimate public extending the work of Amelia Jones, Roland Barthes, Annette Kuhn, and Griselda Pollock.

CHAPTER 2 — THE SELF-IMAGINING OF SELF-IMAGING

If we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story. We shall tire of the same ones, and leave our desires unexpressed, unrealized. Asleep again, unsatisfied, we shall fall back upon the words of men - who, for their part, have 'known' for a long time. But not our body. Seduced, attracted, fascinated, ecstatic with our becoming, we shall remain paralyzed.

—Luce Irigaray (1985, p. 214)

Introduction



Figure 5. Roxanne Carter. *Untitled* (1997). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital photograph with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of Roxanne Carter.

Three women in exchange appear in a photograph in front of us. They are donned in the same nondescript black tank top, providing the viewer with a repetitive subject. Each woman appears to have a different reaction to the same thing. Each woman is (part of) the same woman in an image thematically similar to girlhood photographer Anna Gaskell's work, produced in the mid- to late 1990s as well. However, Gaskell staged performances of adolescence and childhood of other girls, while Roxanne staged her own body. Moving across the women, from left to right is a continuum of carefree ease to confused discomfort. The first woman enacts the dominant codes of femininity—she is directly in the light, her glossy eyes look up, and she is upcasting the ends of her long dark hair with the tips of her fingers. Next to her, and closer to the viewer, positioned slightly in front of the first, is a woman in a dark-haired bob, covering

the sides of her face with her hands, as if playing peekaboo, yet revealing herself and her cleavage, gazing directly at the camera. What follows is another incarnation of the woman, this time with low-key lighting, a blonde bob, and an incredulous look, sitting away from the two others. Facing the other two women, her shadowed eyes squint, her mouth is open, and she is gasping.⁵³ She is gasping at their performance while pursuing her own performative self. This image is the many self-imagined selves of Roxanne Carter in the form of a photomontage. It leads me to ask, how do young women's self-images *imagine*? What conditions were set in place during 1996 to 2001 to image their imaginations and how did, both, the conditions and image makers, unfold within these practices?

My starting point for this chapter is what self-images *do*—how they work in relation to the style, content, and form of my subject's per-sites; what they can tell us about feminist subjectivity; and how they can expand the field of photography, visual culture, and related identity politics without falling back into reductive ideas of representation. As such, I want to see how viewers can know with and through an image—an aesthetic wit(h)nessing.

I look to scholarship on women's art that foregrounds the author's body to develop a historical context. Specifically, I read the images created by my participants in a phenomenological and partly psychoanalytic fashion with a feminist lens, using Amelia Jones (1998; 2002; 2006; 2012; Warr & Jones, 2011), Roland Barthes (1977; 1977b; 1981; Olin, 2002), Annette Kuhn (1988; 1994a; 1994b; 2002; 2007), and Griselda Pollock (2004; 2009; 2010; 2012; 2013) as my interlocutors. I also situate the work within the thought of art historian and artist Gen Doy (2005), whose self-imaging thesis I critique and expand.

My first claim is that these images serve as nodes within the production and expansion of an intimate public, turned friendship, of the 1990s web. I do so by reading the images within the historical and social context in which they were made and circulated both IRL and WWW. In doing so, I add to the history of web-based artistic practice and the canon of feminist body art by adding a contextualized account of amateur online feminist conceptual photography to both. I name these practices amateur in response to its usually pejorative meaning.⁵⁴ In part, I

⁵³ See Chapter 4 for more detail on the performative gasp.

⁵⁴ See Paasonen (2005, pp. 93-98) on the positioning of amateur versus expert online.

also follow Olia Lialina's conceptualization of the 1990s web as the "amateur web," as explained in Chapter 1. The practices function within neo-liberalism and late capitalism but without any worthwhile financial gain.⁵⁵ They are about "intimate contact, not contract" (Lury, 1998, p. 81). They are also performative in that they "take place through an enactment of the artist's body" (Jones, 1998).

My second claim is to nuance the differences between self-imaging and self-portraiture. I argue that because a young woman includes herself or her body in an image she took/made does not automatically make that a self-portrait. Marlaina told me, "None of the self-portraits are me really." And while they feature her as an image-object they are not meant to feature her as the "I" of the image. This example illustrates that all self-portraits are self-images but not all self-images are self-portraits. Why do we call them self-portraits and not body-portraits? Why do I insist on self-imaging and not body-imaging, considering the genre of "body art" and its connections to my argument about self-imaging? Body art uses the body as a medium and for its communicative potential. Would all other art then be "self-art"? Self-imaging does the use the body for its communicative potential but not as a medium. The medium is photography. More conceptually, I stand with Theresa Senft (1996), who argued, "feminists are in a bind, finding that it is nearly impossible to write the truth of a feminine body when we are all in violent disagreement about what a 'body' truly is" (p. 11). While investigating whether anyone else had made this argument, I found that art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau (2017) made the distinction between self-portraiture and self-representation, "in that all self-portraits are self-representations but not all self-representations are portraits" (p. 180), aligned with my self-imaging distinction. Self-representations are not genre-fied as self-portraiture, a classically art historical genre implying "a prior existence of an individual person, whose subjectivity, psychology, and indeed biography [are] bound up with its rendering" (Solomon-Godeau, 2017,

⁵⁵ Because of the taboo against monetization, it was viewed as highly suspect and "uncool" to have any ads on your per-site. This taboo was another reason young women wanted to be hosted outside of domains like Tripod.com or Geocities.com, which started to embed ads within each page towards the end of the 1990s for free users. For example, I would never have ads on my per-sites but had ads on my websites about music to make a few dollars a month. However, after the dot-com bubble burst, in 2001 and beyond, some of the women were trying to figure out how to also monetize their efforts. Some of them started selling prints of some of their photos. It is unclear who bought them and if any were sold, as I did not ask this of my subjects. I did, however, in 2002, buy a 5 x 7 print of Helena's.

p. 180). Digital rendering provides an opportunity for this distinction because of its temporality and networked potential. Three years after the first digital camera was available, on April 22, 1993, Mosaic 1.0 was launched and multimedia content including images were able to be displayed inline rather than as links on a page. Text and images could now be formatted alongside each other. Later that year, Mosaic became available for home use on Windows and Mac operating systems and transformed not only the web but its audience. Gary Wolfe describes the euphoria of a visual internet that inspired active participation in the October 1994 (n.p.) issue of *WIRED* magazine:

With Mosaic [the first browser with a GUI], the online world appears to be a vast, interconnected universe of information. You can enter at any point and begin to wander. . . . The complex methods of extracting information from the net are hidden from sight. Almost every person who uses it feels the impulse to add some content of [their] own.

The audience was now able to image their imaginations without the same temporal barriers that analog photography and filmmaking had. The practices of my subjects were positioned at this juncture within the new media photography lineage. Not only does digital manipulation allow a destabilization of the singular subjectivity, but the placement and circulation of the images online renders them outside of classical self-portraiture. Yet, simultaneously, the young women's subjectivity (and position) is bound up with the images' temporal rendering, precisely because it is also the process of the self-image that in turn influences and affects subjectivity. This cyclical loop of identity informs and is informed by the technological processes of self-imaging practice—taking the photo, editing it, uploading it on a website, updating the copy of the website to specify the new photo has been added and when. Yet, the photo captions themselves hardly ever have date stamps like traditional photography captions. The newest photos were assumed to be dated the same as the "last-updated" date listed on the website, which changed very frequently. See the following screenshots of Roxanne's splash pages, such that early on (Figures 6-9) she would specify which pictures from the "a dark adapted eye" section on her per-site were added and when.



Figure 6. Roxanne Carter. <http://kore.lhabia.com> Splash page. *human voices wake us and we drown*. Screen capture as it appeared on 2 September 2000. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20000902202747/http://kore.lhabia.com/> Accessed 6 June 2017.



Figure 7. Roxanne Carter. <http://kore.lhabia.com> Splash page. *human voices wake us and we drown*. Screen capture as it appeared on 4 December 2000. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20001204205500/http://kore.lhabia.com/> Accessed 6 June 2017.



Figure 8. Roxanne Carter. <http://kore.lhabia.com> Splash page. *human voices wake us and we drown*. Screen capture as it appeared on 1 March 2001. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20010301213438/http://kore.lhabia.com/> Accessed 6 June 2017.

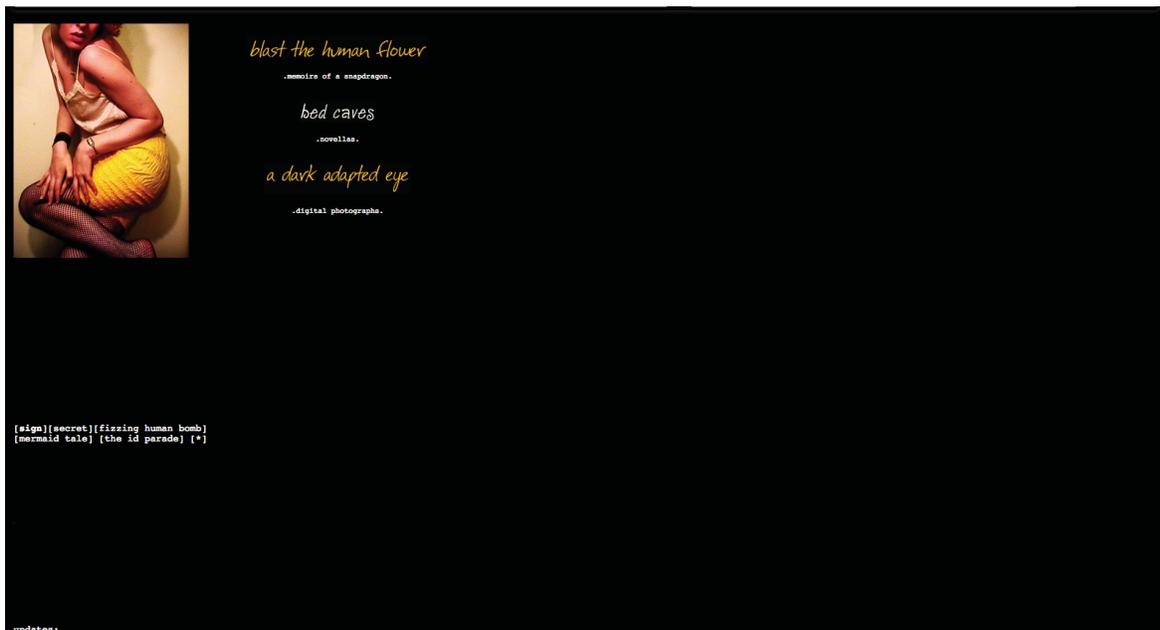


Figure 9. Roxanne Carter. <http://kore.lhabia.com> Splash page. *human voices wake us and we drown*. Screen capture as it appeared on 16 August 2001. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20010923223834/http://kore.lhabia.com/> Accessed 6 June 2017.

The chapter is comprised of six sections following the Introduction: Methods and Data Collection, in which I detail my feminist methodology of working with a fragmented archive;

The Artist's Body (of Work), in which I explore the body as a concept and an image and nuance the difference between self-portraiture and self-imaging; The Young Girl Imagines: The Practice of Self-Imaging, which uses phenomenology to present the embodied nature of an ostensibly disembodied practice; Characteristics of Self-Imaging Online 1996 to 2001, which details the formal characteristics of repetition, mimicry/reproduction, obscuration, fragmentation, and the concomitant circulatory framework; and the Influence of Visual Culture, which delineates the aesthetics and techniques of the Eurocentric 1990s and its consequent artists, musicians, and writers that would have circulated around my subjects' lives. In the conclusion, I explore lineage, with ambivalence regarding positioning these young women's practices within a canon.

Methods and Data Collection

I follow an overarching visual culture and art history analysis that is influenced by my communication and gender studies background. To read images, I use and extend Amelia Jones's (1998; 2002; 2006) phenomenological and post-structuralist encounter with images; Gillian Rose's questionnaire from *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (2001) for my questions in my semi-structured interviews with the subjects. (Appendix B); and Annette Kuhn's *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (2002, p. 8, 2007) feminist post-structuralist memory work (Appendix C) because (a) the images of this project straddle art and personal photography and (b) the analytical basis for these images is a kind of memory work.

Memory work as a method was established by German feminist socialists, as such, it is resolutely collective (Fraser & Michell, 2015; Onyx & Small, 2001). The method was first published in Frigga Haug's *Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory* (1986) in German in 1983 and translated into English three years later. "The underlying theory is that subjectively significant events, events which are remembered, and the way they are subsequently constructed, play an important part in the construction of self" (Crawford, 1992, p. 37). As argued by Shotter (1984), it is through memory that "past specificatory activities are linked to current specifiability—which makes for intentionality, and gives a 'directionality' to activities" (p. 208), an orienting of the self towards the intimate public. To reflect on the images and what they did during that historical time period (and in some ways, continue to do), I look at the

images' historical, social, and cultural context of the 1990s web,⁵⁶ eschewing claims of a historical trajectory and its apparent impact on today's selfie culture.⁵⁷

Annette Kuhn's post-structuralist and feminist methodologies in *Women's Pictures* (1994b) are also undergirded by memory. They allow me to read the image as a text, including its form and its socio-cultural context, to get at the (way) meaning (is) produced by the object and by its circulation. Kuhn (1994b) argued, in a Barthesian sense, that "a feminine text has no fixed formal characteristics because it is a relationship. It becomes a feminine text in the moment of its reading" (p. 13), at a moment of its witnessing. In other words, it is an audience that provides meaning to formal characteristics, which means different audiences will provide different meanings for the same formal elements based on how they understand the relationship between those elements. This theory of spectatorship, is why, in part, many scholars and artists have not been interested in this time period. They do not have the language with which to give intelligible and sanctioned meaning to the work, and neither did the young women making it. As such, historicizing and situating these young women's work in conversation with other feminist artists, but not subsumed to, is valuable despite their ostensibly sequestered nature. I do so, in part, to provide a way for them to be recognized, because of the immediate reaction to the work as being amateur and worthless from those unfamiliar and unwilling to engage with the practices. A similar plight continually faces Francesca Woodman, in which critics push their way to claim that Woodman's mythology and desirability is *only* because of her youthful suicide. Writer Ariana Reines (2013) astutely pointed out that "there is something creepily avuncular and overheated about the culture industry 'cumming' all over what it either never honestly bothered to nourish or insisted on taking only exactly the way it wanted to" (n.p.).

Witnessing and phenomenology as methods of lived experience and perception allow me to nourish the encounter between the image author, the image, and the image spectator with sustained attention. These young women did not produce the images for the sake of them being

⁵⁶ See Walter Benjamin *Illuminations* (1969/2007) for an explanation of how the practice of photography is a social text within which meaning is constantly challenged and destabilized especially "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" (pp. 217-252).

⁵⁷ See Olszanowski (2014) for a detailed analysis of the practices of female body artists and their tactics of circumventing censorship in a more contemporary context.

images. They did so as ways of forging relationships between their own (multiple and interrelated) selves and other young women (see Figure 5). As my subjects demonstrate and share the meanings of their image making, it becomes evident that sociality unfurled through their emergent practices. Embracing analytic contradictions, I acknowledge intentionality like art history does, yet I am skeptical of it, as post-structuralist studies are. The recognition of potential intent is one technique to examine how dominant, oppositional, and negotiated readings get produced (Hall, 2006). Intent allows the possibility to read the young women's contradictory subject positions within their hybrid and fragmented (self) identities—a kind of self-analysis de rigueur of that time period. Although *Women's Pictures* (1994b) specifically addresses cinema, it is useful to me, and it is of no surprise that shortly after its writing Kuhn's (1994a; 2007; 2006) work turned to photography. Indeed, my formal reading of the images also loosely follows Kuhn's 2002 book, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, in which she outlines a series of questions to think about images of the past in the present.

My findings are a result of reading the images as texts in an intertextual space and reading *with* them about that intertextual space of the 1990s and how it is remembered. Marlaina reminds me: "All the women wanted to talk *through the images* [emphasis added]." In this way, using memory, visual culture, and witnessing as methods, I look at the images as performative documents, which perform an aesthetic and ethic of that time period (Cover, 2014) because "photography is above all a signifying practice that generates, rather than transmits, meaning" (Twigg, 1992, p. 306). The images generated forms of meaning to form a "we," like Helena's image (Figure 1) points to: the intimate public of per-site makers.

Estelle Jelinek, in the first feminist anthology of autobiography criticism, "claimed that because women's lives are characterized by fragmentation, interruption and discontinuity, so too are their autobiographies" (Gilmore, 1994 p. x). I, too, hope to generate meaning through the pictures I present, materials that are themselves fragmented and interrupted by discontinuities of online archiving. One of the difficulties of this chapter is its lack of visual evidence online or in personal archives. The Wayback Machine on the Internet Archive is a spotty recollection of the past, with images that have mostly turned into images of broken boxes or into neon ads for products that no one understands. The Wayback Machine caching mechanism does not work well for images, mainly because they take up a significant amount of

bandwidth and data. JavaScript is hard to archive because it is never stand-alone. It needs a linking mechanism to run, a code that has become obsolete over time. Pages that have no links to them are also harder to archive (which is why trackbacks are so important). Text is also easier to interpolate across devices since it can be part of the source code and not a separate file linked by code. As stated on the Internet Archives's FAQ: "As a general rule of thumb, simple html is the easiest to archive." Further, as a way to avoid being found, savvy users wanting more privacy and control over their websites would include a robots.txt file in their top-level domain directory so that it could not be accessed by internet spiders/crawlers and thus never end up on a search engine or any kind of online directory, including The Wayback Machine. Some hosting domains, like *eccentrica.org*, also did this and subsequently all their hosts were never indexed on the web. For the images to show up on The Wayback Machine, the Internet Archive has to store them on its servers. If the Internet Archive did not when it crawled the webpage, then unless the original image file is still on that initial server, the images will not show up on a cached archived webpage.

Throughout the process of composing the dissertation, I have pressed the respondents to find the images and archives (or visit old homes to do so) and was able to receive some. However, this loss is especially evident in Aarti's and Carolina's cases: I have no visual material of theirs in time for the completion of this dissertation. Personal archives also suffer from lack of space and from moving data around between computers and hard drives.⁵⁸ Several of the respondents told me they had archived their per-sites and the concomitant data on hard disks or CDs that were stored somewhere they did not remember, or in boxes at their parents' or exes' homes. Those homes are often nowhere near where they live now. Often, after moving too many times, they could not keep the material anymore at all. The "data" took too much "bandwidth." Christin told me, "No, I don't have them anymore. I got kicked out at 18 and moved around a lot so have limited stuff from back then." Some young women were not keen on archiving any of their web practices and deleted or threw out material as a way to rid themselves of that time

⁵⁸ See Lyman and Kahle (1998), directors of the Internet Archive, about how concerns of digital preservation and archiving were viewed in the mid-1990s. See Christine Borgman's *Scholarship in the digital age: Information, infrastructure, and the Internet* (2010) on the idiosyncrasy of personal digital archives and Trevor Owens's *The theory and craft of digital preservation* (2018) and Matt Kirschenbaum (2003) on digital reproduction and preservation.

period, similar to deleting per-sites, a common practice of “starting fresh” for a variety of reasons outlined in Chapter 1.

With these two archival forms, I tried to assemble a coherent yet resolutely fragmented dissertation and by doing so I have constructed my own corpus of these sets of practices. The images included in the project are a small selection from my corpus from the Wayback Machine (from my subjects’ old per-sites or other per-sites that reposted their images) and the web, and from the participant’s personal archives. A few of my subjects, and others I spoke with who were not part of my main corpus, also had images and texts, especially the zines of others in the project I have been able to draw upon.

While desiring a “complete” archive, I knew that such a thing was not possible and would also make for a completely different project. Peggy Phelan’s (1993) performative writing theories assuage me that what has disappeared and what lives in the memories of those who bore witness to it (who witnessed it) are both productive forces in telling this story. In the next section, art historians, including Amelia Jones and Griselda Pollock, help me with a language of close reading the images to formally distinguish them within the narrative of sociality I am shaping.

The Artist's Body (of Work)

One of the tactics of self-imaging is its way of foregrounding the body as a communicative medium that displaces the gaze and particularizes the body. In other words, it emphasizes the specificity of the body and its affects, rather than claiming any possible homogeneity. Bodies are heterogeneous, complicated, processual, contradictory, and constitutive of leaky distinctions from which we perceive the world (Grosz, 1994, pp. 141-142; Haraway, 1991, pp. 134-135; Munster, 2006, p. 4). We perceive (with) our bodies not only externally (through skin), but also internally via bodily sensations: “One is not simply a body, one does one’s body” (Butler, 2009, p. 358).⁵⁹

Discussions of embodiment often see the body as a signifier for corporeality and

⁵⁹ For an exploration of affect and the body as collective, see Manning’s *Always more than one: The collectivity of a life* (2010).

immanence, and as a body of thought brought on by feminism to challenge the ubiquitous Cartesian dualisms that marginalize women. Moving beyond Cartesianism, post-structuralist feminist Elizabeth Grosz (1994) argued that “being a body is something we must *live* [emphasis added]” (p. xiii) and that both traditional philosophy and feminism have missed the mark on conceptualizing the body.⁶⁰ She argued, in the historical time period of my project, that the capital “B” Body in philosophy is male, and the lowercase “b” body in feminism is female. However, she did not think they were in opposition or even binaries, as was popular to think in the 1990s. Self-proclaimed “fast feminist” shannon bell (1994) wrote that “the human body is simultaneously a biophysical given and a cultural construct” (p. 12). The feminist body is usually focused around its subjectivity, and the social production on/within the body.⁶¹ Donna Haraway (1991) critiqued this feminist social constructionism because, as necessary as it is for an alternate perspective, to lose the body and biological accounts of sex is to “lose too much,” reducing the body to a “blank page for social inscriptions” (p. 197). These theorizations present a lack of agency for the body. If we negate biology completely, we end up in a “hyper-real space of simulations” (Haraway, 1991, p. 184). Working within digital media, a field that is often reductively characterized as a “hyper-real space of simulations,” in her book *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics* (2006), Anna Munster (p. 108) reinstated the importance of the body in new media through theorizing the production of a *new type* of embodiment. Munster, through examples, illustrated the divergent and convergent relations that new media generate as a way towards novel sensory engagement with the world via our bodies and technology. “Technology is a means of communication and connection with other bodies” (Balsamo, 1996, p. 155). One can be affected by a “body” that is not coherently represented as a body, but presented through an abstraction of code and data (Munster, 2006, pp. 179-180): a “techno-body” according to Anne Balsamo (1996, p. 155). My research would never classify as the kind of new media work Munster presented, but the link to the re-

⁶⁰ See Ta-Nehisi Coates (2017) for an explanation of how black bodies live in fear of not living while being alive in the USA.

⁶¹ Segal (2008, p. 386) helped explicate Butler’s revised thinking about performativity and the social production of the body. In Butler’s most recent arguments in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015) she discussed the body in its plural rather than singular form in public space rather than intimate space, a distinction I do not find useful.

articulated engagement with bodies that are ostensibly absent and proliferate within a visual economy supports thinking about the strength of the affective relations the community had, which were mediated through a network and a screen.⁶² Yet, when I write “our bodies,” am I supposing a kind of ownership that the self has of the body, and then am I not rewriting the Cartesian self/body split? Language plays tricks, winds us back into the hegemonic. When Grosz argued for a “lived body,” a body liveness, this is what my subjects were doing. By taking images, they were acknowledging the body as “something 'we' must live”; “we” (Like Helena’s “we”) make live the performance. The liveness is reproduced in the repetitive and frequent circulation of the images of bodies among the participants on their per-sites, forming an intimate public.

Elizabeth Grosz (1994), thinking with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, pointed out, “If bodies are objects or things, they are like no others, for they are the centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency” (p. xi).⁶³ Why then is the lineage of disdain for the body so long and strong? Not only does the body matter, but its “matter” (flesh) perceives the world in very specific ways.⁶⁴ As such, Judith Butler (1993) also asked, “Which bodies come to matter?—and why?” Women's bodies matter within their reproductive functions as bearers of the state and in my context as receivers of the gaze. The disdain for women taking photos of themselves and their bodies has been radically different than the valorization of great (male) photographers taking photos of women. It is a misrecognized solipsism and a threat to the social order in which women are not the ones to take pleasure in their own (often sexual and desirable) self-representation (Jones, 1998, p. 173). Taking pleasure in one's self-representation is what Amelia Jones (2006) has called a “strategy of self imagining” (p. 31), which I consider a tactic (de

⁶² These young women’s practices were producing modes of understanding about the web and technologies, in a time not enough information about the “embodied aspects of new information technologies” existed, according to Anne Balsamo (1996).

⁶³ Henri Bergson places the body as an object—a set of relations—at the centre of action because unlike everything else in the world (to us), the body is not *just* an image; we know it “from within by affections” and not solely through perception. As such, the body *is* the centre of action (Bergson, 1988, p. 1-5, 12, 299-300) [emphasis added].

⁶⁴ See interview with Karen Barad in which she discussed her affinity to desire over sexuality following Deleuze and Guattari (Dolphijn & Tuin, 2012, pp. 48-70).

Certeau, 1984). According to Jones, in the self-portrait,⁶⁵ the artist (subject/maker) actively performs as the object of desire (2006, p. 55), and in turn complicates the male gaze of the passive body to be examined and consumed (Jones, 1998, p. 176), a f(r)iction expanded on in Chapter 5.⁶⁶

The Sociality of Sharing Self-Images

My arguments are frictions situated within the criticism of the unyielding dismissal of women taking their own image rather than being a prop for a man's work (Lippard, 2011, p. 253). Terry Palka wrote on her diversify.nu webpage in 2001, "i like body art and i resent it when people think i do it just to ward off attention to my back. i have a back problem." The self-imaging practices of the young women undermine the claim of self-imaging as frivolous and narcissistic and simultaneously dangerous, especially in relation to celebrated men like Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman, and Dennis Oppenheim (Jones, 1998; 2012). I expand systemic and structural barriers of art history and criticism by presenting the social practice of the self-image through these questions: How do young people socialized as girls come to take pictures, and what is the process of doing so, despite criticisms? What does it mean for young women to share their selves online through image-based media? How does it trans/form them into witnesses? Which young women had access to self-image and to imagine themselves?

Starting from phenomenological and feminist conceptualizations of the body borrowed from Grosz, Haraway, and Merleau-Ponty above supports an understanding of the way in which my subjects approached identity politics and sexuality—detailed more in Chapters 3 through 5—through self-imaging. The tactic of self-imaging as "something we must *live*" [emphasis added] (remember Grosz's definition of a body) is used as part of a specific kind of "radical narcissism" that interrogates the concept of narcissism as a wholesale catch-all for the

⁶⁵ When I use the term self-portrait, I either do so because the writer has, or I intentionally want to differentiate it from self-imaging.

⁶⁶ Surprisingly, these questions are not adopted in Gen Doy's *Picturing the Self: Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture* (2005), who manages to write an entire book on feminist self-portraiture without citing Amelia Jones and instead spends a significant portion attempting to erroneously reread Descartes towards feminist means.

condition of female subjectivity (Jones, 1998, p. 178).⁶⁷ A woman who performs her (often nude) body for a collective of other women rejects the hegemonic pejoratives towards women's work. The practice exemplifies that the personal is political and pleasurable. It interrogates the fetishization of female nudes in a language that does not adhere to feminist absolutes of anti- or pro- porn rhetoric. By circulating and responding to each other's self-imaginings, the participants were extending Adrienne Rich's *thinking through the body* like Sara Ahmed has done, and in turn *thinking through other bodies* (Paasonen, 2005, p. 185). Marlaina told me, "I thought if I take photos similar to them [other young women], they will think I am like them and we will have a kinship and we are the same type of person."

I activate my subject's self-imagined bodies in relation to other photographically rendered bodies, such as the self-portraiture of other established artists my subjects mention, as a way to demonstrate how they were *thinking through other bodies*. Specifically, Francesca Woodman's phantasmic self-portraits (1972-1980), Ana Mendieta's *earth-body* sculptures (1972-1985) that blend the self/body with the environment/body, Hannah Wilke's *SOS — Starification* (1974) series, and Cindy Sherman's fictions in *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980). Sherman, one of the— if not the—most popular self-imaging photographers, is both the subject and object of these fictions, deflecting the gaze of desire away from her body towards reproduction itself, forcing the viewers to acknowledge their own visual habituation. The self-image is a dialogue of relationality, an active performer as object of desire. Further, this role of maker and object of the work collapses the objective and subjective, and produces a leak between them. These participant's work has created this same collapse and leakage, and moreover, they have worked to explore the dynamic affective exchange created at the intersection of teenage community building and conceptual artistic practices. After all, Lefebvre (1974) argued that the body is the means by which we produce social space. Marlaina explained how bodies produced social space with aesthetic choices. In order to participate one had to engage in mimicry, thereby creating a new genre of online photography:

A lot of the self-portraiture/self-imagining I did at the beginning were

⁶⁷ "Narcissism? . . . It's one of my finest qualities!" Claude Cahun exclaims in a letter describing her self-imaging practice (Latimer, 2005, p. 93).

experimental ways of trying to see if talking this way—even though it's not talking, it's a visual language—made sense to me. And whether I can talk that kind of language to other people. I think the [images] I felt were most like me were more of the manipulations that were quite angry, rather than the ones I looked “pretty.” Those I did for attention or because they looked similar to other people's photos.

Katharine shared a similar sentiment:

I thought she [Helena] was so cool and I wanted to be part of that world with her, and several other people. To some extent I was mimicking what I saw, which is what a lot of people were doing. Like you said, this medium didn't exist so the only examples you had were those other people.

Marlaina recounted that the photographic narratives of self-imaging were the predominant language in this milieu and thus felt the need to participate. Yet, she continued,

making these images for me, especially the earlier ones, was really artificial. . . . It [wasn't] something that I was compelled to do [or] that I felt that was really going to help me highlight or explore a part of my persona, it felt like part of the shared language we all had, so to be a part of that, I had to participate in that way.

She contradicted the hegemonic reading of self-imaging as an inward exploratory process (i.e., solipsistic). The young women were teaching each other how to see differently.

By inserting the body into the frame, the artist unleashes a new language, a newly found language online that now becomes the possessive “our” “we” have to foster—a grammar Luce Irigaray (1985) insisted on in the quotation that began this chapter. “We” cannot signify ourselves using phallogentric language or else we fall back into phallogentric domination. One way to find our body's language is to reorient our ways of seeing and turn into an image

ourselves rather than have someone else do it for us.⁶⁸ In this way, the image allows that, phenomenologically, the body—image-object and image-author—is a form of reflection, as a way to expound the relationship of the self and the other.

The participants were able to use their bodies as part of an ongoing exchange of ideas about art and feminism and their own histories. They wanted to insert information into the online milieu through their body/gaze that foregrounded images of selfhood as art. Helena explained that the way to meet other people online was to make per-sites with content that interested you and with content that responded to other people's work on their per-sites. In this way, dialogic encounters—often regarding intimate themes—were formed and turned into affinity friendships.⁶⁹

Helena:

This was the only way to meet people, so it wasn't just that you enjoyed making stuff, this is how you reached other people and how you met other people like you, or that you wanted to be like, that you had some kind of connection with. That was amazing to me as someone who had been very isolated in a lot of ways and moved around all the time. The internet wasn't location specific. You could have a stable social world even as you move countries or cities. It's always gonna be there.

Helena's recognition of the contradictory politics of the internet's (non)-location are highlighted in her conceptualization of the internet being omnipresent, a remark that misses that the general ontology of the internet. It is a network that will exist, but many of the per-sites are not "always gonna be there," as companies and hosts shut down, or alternatively, as our own online needs shift. The internet as a stable world is a productive signifier, one that perhaps is not the same for the people who declined to participate. Their refusal points to their desire to not see, especially given the traumatic and intimate content of the per-sites Chapter 4 focuses

⁶⁸ Although the subjects of my research did resist these linguistic details, bodies of colour and disabled bodies were never as foregrounded in the imaging despite participating, even as a minority, in the milieu in that time.

⁶⁹ This concept is detailed extensively in Chapter 5.

on. As pointed out in Chapters 1 and 3, the consequences of these practices precluded some individuals from imaging their imagining.

Access to Image a Body

Drawing on Grosz and Haraway, I conceptualize a gendered body with definable differences that then dis/allow certain significations. That is to say, certain bodies are signified in particular socio-cultural ways, often tied up with -isms (ableism, fatphobia, racism, etc.). The means of the web (Chun, 2012) and photography present the ways in which white women were comfortable using their bodies in self-imaging that women of colour were not. Gail E. Hawisher (2000) examined the interplay between race and online images—one of the few pieces of literature on the topic from the time period—describing the ways in which women academics used the headshot as a point to express their identities. What stands out is a peripheral argument: the way she noticed, through the practice of taking photographs, the embedded racism in visual technologies. Her African American students did not like the photos taken of them and often asked for re-takes, but the re-takes would yield the same results—flattened and aged features. This is because “most processes of photographic reproduction have been 'optimized' for European faces” (p. 549). The kinds of contrast that compose dark faces are unable to be fully rendered by computer screens that exhibit a range of more pinks and reds.⁷⁰

Ideological construction—through social and technological means—constituted the community even if the participants did not want it to and in turn influenced points of access to self-image. Helena—thin, white, and able-bodied—was able to use her body in a neutral way, and benefited from a position of privilege because hers was not a body that was a priori marked with attributes like being brown, disabled, or fat. Helena remarked on her body and her access to self-representation:

I was a skinny girl with no boobs, I don't look very womanly, so maybe it

⁷⁰ “In the digital era, the LDK series was developed by Phillips. The cameras explicitly handled skin tone variation with two chips — one for processing darker tones and another for processing lighter tones. The Oprah Winfrey show used the LDK series for filming because there was an awareness of the need to better expose darker skin.” See <https://hackernoon.com/algorithms-arent-racist-your-skin-is-just-too-dark-4ed31a7304b8> and <https://www.vox.com/2015/9/18/9348821/photography-race-bias>

was easier for me to do those things than people who had a more developed body or something—because the pics are seen differently . . . even though the exact same thing by someone with a different type of body would have been regarded differently.

By demarcating the body, I do not mean to sever it from the “I,” as a stand-alone, or worse, as separate from the mind. The bracketing serves an aesthetic and analytic purpose to elucidate what these self-images do and how these young women formed an intimate public with their bodies as image-objects. Marlaina explained how her imagining was always curtailed by the image of her body and the visual codes it enacted in the broader public:

I've always felt fat and overweight and not quite pretty. So, whenever I did imagery that my body was a part of, I always felt like my body was automatically an Other body, it was a fat body, or it was a boring body.

The fat body is often thought of a body in a transition, a before body. It is always-already an Othered body, a body that does not belong because it needs to change. Before "the fatosphere" (fat blog and online communities) existed, Black queer aesthetics scholar Majida Kargbo (2013, p. 162) argued, in the early days of the web (the days of my study), most fat communities were textual. This may also have been a reason that Marlaina felt her body was an outsider, or a “boring body.” For all the promotion of acceptance, the participants were still operating within a hegemonic body ideal, an ideal that was upheld by shame. The shame is immersed in the way Marlaina explained her body as boring:

A body that is not attractive. A body that can't move gracefully. A body that felt awkward, or if I was doing a pose, it didn't feel natural to me. My body was too plain. I was doing dress up. I was angry at myself, so a lot of those images, I took them because they were really unflattering and I felt that's how my body deserved to be seen. There were times I tried to take photos when I was pretty or coy but they are the most inauthentic. I always resented—and it's easy to talk about this stuff now—a lot of the other girls who I thought were conventionally attractive, and would take what I consider boring photos, but everyone

loved them because they were pretty. And I would be like, “If I was pretty this would be so easy, so I’m gonna make myself look ugly and disgusting but not too fat and not too abject.”

This contradictory struggle is the opposite of ideological assumptions of hegemonic neutral bodies, bodies that operate within media-centric beauty standards. But pitting them against each other in my analysis is jejune and closes down the potential of their practices. I prefer a reparative reading. As my subjects saw it, the web did provide a space for them to exist, and all the while practices online were wrapped up in convoluted sets of power dynamics and aesthetic hierarchies.

Marlaina confessed,

I took some photos when I dressed up like Roxanne; I posed like her and that created quite a stir. I was like "guess who I am?" and I think someone saw the source [code], and I used her name as the picture [file] name. I don't think I was ever friends with her after that. At the time I really hated her. I hated her photos. I felt that was a competition and I felt at the bottom of the rung. I was jealous. I was depressed and a mess.

Yet, Marlaina also helped others self-accept and be able to present their non-neutral bodies. She was extending how significant and political self-imaging can be. Being seen as a neutral subject is a privilege that allowed Helena to begin and continue her imaging practice. Although during the time she was creating per-sites, she felt defensive towards critique, now she acknowledges that her “neutral body” was accessible to an audience because it reproduced some of the more coherent stylizations of femininity. She told me that her childhood bullying made her disconnect from her body and in turn from the image of herself in the frame of the photos she was taking; this perspective was one of the entryways for me to consider that what can seem like self-portraiture is not, and is instead a practice of self-imaging.

Self-Imaging and Self-Portraiture

The difference between self-imaging and self-portraiture will become evident throughout

the dissertation. I begin to tease out the difference with a 1999 article, “Reflections on Self-Portraiture in Photography,” by writer and photographer Ina Loewenberg. She defined a self-portrait as “an artist's presentation of self” (1999, p. 399). A self-portrait is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a portrait that an artist produces of themselves,” and by the New Oxford American Dictionary as “a portrait of an artist produced or created by that artist.” Already in this simple distinction, an image using one’s self is not always a self-portrait.

Helena remarked,

By the time I got to 17, people were like “you’re so pretty.” I was so disconnected from my body by then, that it was like, whatever. I can take this picture and the idea behind it is very personal and very autobiographical, but the picture is not a picture of me, you know? It was very easy to be a neutral subject, as if I was taking a pic of someone else. It didn't matter it was me in some ways.

The salience of her statement is in her insistence that “the picture is not a picture of me,” which echoes Marlaina saying, “it [her body in the picture] wasn't really me,” and Aarti: “It was never about a picture of myself.” The similitude of their explanations brings me to argue that the self-image is not a self-portrait, if the self-portrait is “a portrait that an artist produces of themselves.”

Art historian Lucy Lippard (2011) asserted otherwise: “When women use their own bodies in their art work, they are using their selves: a significant psychological factor converts these bodies or faces from object to subject” (p. 253). Although my subjects argued it was not themselves in the pictures, we cannot deny it is indexically them in the frame—they mean something else by “the self.” By suggesting it was never about them possibly means it was a reconfiguration of the self as singular and a re-identification of who they were supposed to be. They reoriented the body in relation to the Other towards a collective exploration of identity. They created a practice of wit(h)nessing.

Aarti describes this process in detail:

It was never about a picture of myself, it was a picture of this otherworldly person that I was. All these websites were Alice in

Wonderland tunnels we were all on the other end of. At least for me, I do think in many ways the internet did not at all [recognize] my racialized self. There was no sense of me being a person of colour on the internet. . . . I think it's kind of too bad, because it's a formative time as a young person to recognize oneself racially, and in terms of socio-economic status and those forces of marginalization that are at play for young women. Instead it was more about this . . . sense of magic, and appearing to be magical to other people. That was what was very important. *This idea that the image of myself that I would put out there was kind of this creature as opposed to a person.* [emphasis added]

An image for Aarti meant a possibility of excess at the expense of the foreclosure of other parts of herself (her race). Yet, it was not something she fully understood at the time. Aarti's fantasy of the internet as a magical place corresponds with its early visions and potentials that Auriea, the earliest adopter in my study, also remarked upon with similar vernacular.⁷¹ She wrote to me that the form of connection was through the image but also for the image, as if the image was the nexus.

Magda:

Is that how you started the webcam? You wanted another form of connection?

Auriea:

Yeah, another form of connection. Another form of projection into, very much into not *onto* [emphasis added], this space that I loved—the web. Suddenly I am pushing myself, I am in your computer. That was, to me, really important, for the image, not for myself, you know?

The image, then, becomes a site of incongruent measures of femininity, race, and subjectivity: what is available in mass media portrayals of people socialized as women and their

⁷¹ See *Broad band: the untold story of the women who made the Internet* (Evans, 2018) for the most comprehensive look at the internet as it unfolded for women in North America.

identity versus the portrayals of their own bodies and how those measure in value. The value of the image to the author, to the community, and to the larger public that may or may not deem it acceptable is unstable and oscillates. Here, the body becomes work, a body of work. The images (of the self) are looked and re-looked at by the author in the way they are staged on the per-site, which changes over time with the constant tending of the aesthetics of the per-site by the author. The body moves, both in style and form, around its home (page), orienting itself depending on the desires of its author and the public. My subjects were performing themselves as and through images online (see the image layout changes in Figures 6–9).

The body taken up within these discourses was like the political and feminist hypertexts Caitlin Fisher found in her research. She argued that feminists' early forays into digital creation on the internet were connected to the 1960s and 1970s yet existed as if the period had never happened (Fisher, 2008, p. 148). The imagery, while in part influenced by riot grrrl, was also very much still about the body wholesale, as consciousness-raising women of the 1960s and 1970s were. While Fisher has looked critically at the texts' naïveté, she reads them reparatively to present the way these ostensibly naive pathways in amateur artwork can generate new ways for feminism within 1990s online contexts.⁷² The young girl imagining online is one way to expand feminist ideas about imaging and the body and, in turn, elaborates on the history of image-based practices and collective witnessing on the web. The inquiries of this section will be answered through an exploration of the self-imaging practice in what follows.

The Young Woman Imagines: The Practice of Self-Imaging

The questions of identification, self-definition, the modes or the very possibility of envisaging oneself as subject— . . . are fundamental questions for feminism. (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 130)

In some ways, a self-imaging practice is the praxis of phenomenology. Phenomenology

⁷² See Judy Malloy's (2003) digital literature work and Jessica Pressman's (2013) history of women's early digital production; both argue for similar ideas around the potential of hypertext and WWW fragmentation to produce new ways of iterative and generative reading.

“emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2). Phenomenology, in short, is the study of lived experience. As Merleau-Ponty ratiocinated: one cannot stand back from one’s body and its experience to reflect on it because one has access to knowledge of one’s body only by living it. The body is, as Grosz argued, “something we must live.” The self-imaging—a way of living their bodies—the participants practiced (that is, the repeated and habitual actions) were ways to have “access to knowledge of their body.” Katharine indicated that “one of the main motivations, honestly, was just to see what my body would look like.” Specifically, Katharine pointed to the series of herself in a cloche hat (an ode to *Unbearable Lightness of Being*) with a cat mimicking her poses—or perhaps the other way around—alongside a backdrop of fashion magazine cut-out collages she made in her home at 17.





Figure 10a. Katharine Tillman. 1999. *Untitled, td1.jpg* (1999). Image from folder /erendira-photography. Digital Photograph. Courtesy of Katharine Tillman.

Figure 10b. Katharine Tillman. 1999. *Untitled, td2.jpg* (1999). Image from folder /erendira-photography. Digital Photograph. Courtesy of Katharine Tillman.

Figure 10c. Katharine Tillman. *Untitled, td3.jpg* (1999). Image from folder /erendira-photography. Digital Photograph. Courtesy of Katharine Tillman.

The young woman self-defines by (a) identifying herself within the images of the other participants in their shared intimate public, and (b) through mimicry and repetition: transformative processes that shape these women's image and imagining practice.

In 2005, as part of her “Bio” on her per-site, Roxanne wrote out much more eloquently (<https://web.archive.org/web/20050225104035/http://persephassa.com/frolic.html>) what I am trying to explain above:

I am interested in self-analyses in writing, as well as in images. In my photos, I attempt to accomplish two things: first, the use of photographs as documents of a spatial time or circumstance, sometimes evidenced in a feeling projected by an image. Secondly, I am interested in photographs as self-representation, both as myself and as another, in my case another meaning other women whose lives I investigate through the medium of the biography. I am fascinated by the subduction/seduction the reader goes through in the process of reading a book (*I am Zelda Fitzgerald*, *I am Luisa Casati* because I empathize with them, and sometimes I forget my own sense of self in favor of their ghost). Therefore, part of my work is to assume these personas in photographs and in writing and reinterpret them in a way that fits my vision of myself as having been transformed by having known them—not through imitation, but perhaps substitution, transgression, transubstantiation, re-imagining, re-imagining.

Self-imaging functions as a form of self-imagining: an identification that contends with the relationship these participants had to their bodies. In *The Technologies of Gender* (1987), Teresa de Lauretis cited psychoanalysts Laplanche and Pontalis in their definition of identification as “not simply one psychical mechanism among others, but the operation itself whereby the human subject is constituted” (p. 130). She went on to stress that if this was the case then “it must be all the more important, theoretically and politically, for women who have never before represented ourselves as subjects, and whose images and subjectivities—until very recently, if at all—have not been ours to shape, to portray, or to create.” Women must portray and create (ourselves and) our imaginations to become subjects. It is as subjects they can then be in the world. For the women and non-binary participants in my study, they were doing just that—becoming subjects. The self-image allowed them the possibility to self-determine and generate a space that collectively created/imagined new forms of community, such as the

feminist film festivals in the USA in the 1970s (De Lauretis, 1987, pp. 135-136). In this way, a kind of woman's spectatorship, traditionally "delineated as a mark of her excess," formed (Doane, 1987, p. 1). These forms of community addressed the spectator as a woman, a radical act if you imagine the spectator was de facto defined as a man. Both in the feminist world overtaken by the male gaze, and in my project—the larger world of the web—spectatorship is dominated by cis-het male users. I extend this to mean all gender-marginalized people. Indeed, throughout history, young women and girls were created as desiring objects through rapist and pedophilic male gazes, which is a compelling argument in Catherine Grant's uneasy "Through the Looking-Glass with Heart-Shaped Sunglasses: Alice and Lolita" chapter in the *Girls! Girls! Girls! In Contemporary Art* anthology (2011) she edited. My subjects were acutely aware of the power of the gaze and as such tacitly learned that the aforementioned forms of community hinged on the spectator to transform into a wit(h)ness. The per-sites needed participants of the intimate public to be *with* the images and respond to them. It was in this relationship of witnessing—being with—that the per-sites were able to exist. Before we can turn into a wit(h)ness we need to be able to see and interpret the visual codes presented to us and then sustain our attention for as long as needed. Techniques of photography orient what and how we see.

Grant continued in her essay:

While Barthes insists on the mechanical objectivity of photographs, seeing them as a "message without a code," he also admits that in practice it is almost impossible to separate the literal denotative meaning of the image from its cultural connotations. . . . The viewer's ability to comprehend photographic narratives depends largely on the photographer's ability to translate the concept of voice into visual terms. Photographers have some standard techniques for doing so. (2011, p. 48)

I am fascinated with how often Francesca Woodman is referred to as a self-portraiture artist despite the fact that she often used her friends, especially girls that looked similar to her, as stand-ins for her. Her technique complicates the idea of what self-imaging is and does. The self-image is a fantasy, but it is not in opposition to reality. The self-image—which can be made

into an image-object—manages and extends towards the fantasy, and provides a coherence to the real. “The image-object is a kind of appearance (of the subject) in the widest sense” (Toru, 2009, p. 21). Edmund Husserl (1980) pronounced the “image object is fictive but not illusory” (p. 490). The image-object is performative: It is performing a self, performing a concept. It is also a concept-body. I define the concept-body as a conceptual image that uses and foregrounds the body for its intent. In this way, Woodman's photographs that featured her friends as her illustrate the fantasy element of a self, that the self is a performance, a fiction, but not an illusion. Marlaina corroborated that for her, self-imaging was a way to also be a concept-body, a language with which to understand the world:

Self-portraits or self-imaging and exploring things that way was a language that everyone had and could understand. So for me, it's artifice. It was a language I didn't really understand. A lot of stuff I would do would be quite influenced by other people's pictures and would either be reactions to, even months later, to stuff people had done, where I would test out or use some of those ideas using my body, but it never quite worked out. It felt unnatural to pose my body in certain ways, so even some of those ways I am sort of slightly contorting my body, it wasn't really me, and it was very performative.

Yet Marlaina went on to produce hundreds of self-images. As these acts felt “unnatural” to her, she deemed them as artifice, as she employed both creative skill and a kind of imitation. This exemplifies her general online life at the time—remarkably performative. Of course, self-imaging *is* performative! The reality and fantasy of its function seemingly did not connect for Marlaina at the time. If she was able to make sense of her body through self-imaging like some of the others, would she then have had a different explanation? Artifice can act as a technical skill in imitation. Katharine also spoke of *artifice* in relation to her photos of that time and the ways in which she accessed her body. Like Marlaina, she used the concept in retrospect: “I wouldn’t have understood or known of the concept at the time.” Yet, in another interview two years later, Katharine wrote of the external pressures that impacted her amateur practice: “I remember my mom, who was criticizing me about something, telling me that there is a difference

between ART and ARTIFICE, and it was the hugest personal condemnation, not that she even knew that much about my online world.”

The female self-image as frivolous is an ideological myth we acquire from an early age. Helena revealed the difference between IRL and WWW:

I came to art school [in 1994] and I told everybody about my sexual assault. I was in this constant purging [stage], I expected people to take it as seriously as they did on the internet, and in reality, they were like you need to stop talking about this. I found that very alienating, and online people were like, this happened to me too! And so, you make work about it.

The intimate public gave rise to these images and fostered their relationality. The wit(h)nessing allowed a leap between empathy and relation—“this happened to me too”—in the expression of affect and trauma through the creation of a per-site. “You make work about it” is the cleave between the intimate public and the formation of the affinity friendship among the participants of this historical time period. Marlaina tells me: “I was nurtured in this [web] space and the self-imaging was completely accepted.” The web at this historical juncture, as Claire L. Evans pointed out in *Broad Band: The Untold Story of the Women Who Made the Internet* (2018), provided a space in which young women could “take seriously” work that was otherwise unable to be made or derided IRL. Helena told me that her classmates did not understand or appreciate what she was trying to do: “That was really hard, because it was mostly men; they didn't get it and online it was all women, so it was a big difference.” While the community was mostly young women, it did not follow that all young women understood or were supportive, as seen with many of the trolling hosting wars between *plastique.org* and *prettie.com*.⁷³ The more exclusive tone can be viewed on this *plastique.org* splash page (Figure 11) from 1998 or the structure and signposts of its message board (Figure 12).

⁷³ According to my subjects and auxiliary conversations, two of the most known domains that hosted dozens of per-sites.

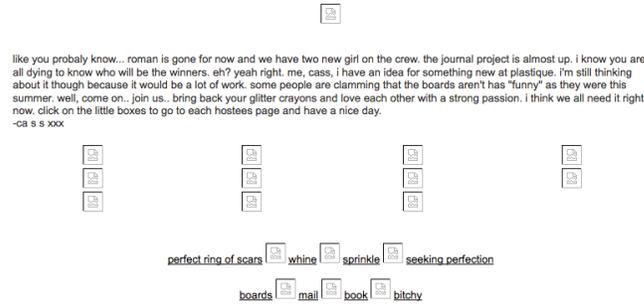


Figure 11. “plastique.org” Splash page. *pee el ae ess tee ie cue ue ee*. Screen capture as it appeared on 11 November 1998. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/19981111184459/http://www.plastique.org/> Accessed 6 June 2017.

plastique board			
EDIT PROFILE : REGISTER : Prefs : INFO			
Forum	Posts	Last	Moderator
DOMAINS It wouldn't be a UBB without the DOMAIN category, would it? Discuss, bash, love, praise, sexually molest them here.	2024	02-12-99	Kirsti
WEB WORLD All that webpage related jibberish! What's your favorite places on the web? Announce your page, hold reviews, or bash the pages you think suck! What wholesome fun for the entire family!	914	02-08-99	shae
CURRENT EVENTS What's going on in the "real" world? Music, Bill Clinton, movies, naked munchkins painted blue, news, television, alien abduction by orange, shaven monkeys, etcetera.	68	01-27-99	cynergy
HELP ME! This is where to seek all the help regarding HTML, graphics, CGI - whatever it is you need help with web-related.	219	01-31-99	Tickle Me Casey
ADVICE Not sure which layout/graphics to use on your next page? Have a personal problem you cannot solve? Seek answers here, or give advice to others. (Created for those who especially love to meddle in other's lives, or those who can never help themselves.)	120	01-25-99	Kirsti
BORED MINDLESS (The original 'bored' UBB category! Don't you just love to eat blue crayons? Would you like to caress my chicken, Fred? Did you see that horned man that is sleeping outside your window? Why is the sky blue? Will you touch the UBB administrator?)	466	01-31-99	shae
PUBLIC SERVICE Do you have some kind of spiffy talent? Can you create awesome graphics, or install CGI? Want to offer your services to others? Post offers for graphics, web, CGI skills here, if you're willing to help out your fello domains. (Please, don't post if you want money. That sucks.)	11	01-24-99	cynergy
THE TOOLS Ah, the tools of the trade: graphics programs, fonts, editors, whatever! Talk about them here, recommend your favorites, ask questions about others, or just damn trade warez. What's *YOUR* favorite font?	41	01-27-99	none

PREFS : CONTACT : PLASTIQUE MAIN

Figure 12. “plastique.org” Message board. *plastique board*. Screen capture as it appeared on 25 February 1999. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/19990225145825/http://plastique.org/cgi-bin/Ultimate.cgi> Accessed 1 February 2020.

Marlaina told me that when she went to art school she stopped taking images of her body and with her body because it was not seen as erudite and because no one was doing it. Helena bemoaned a similar sentiment to Alyssa during an interview for Alyssa’s unfinished web

documentary in 1999 and to me in 2013. They came from a world that took self-imaging seriously. Yet Roxanne, who went to school for writing, kept up her self-imaging practice because in her degree autobiography and fiction were encouraged, and since her photographic work was not centred in her studies it was able to be central to her everyday practice without disciplinary boundaries and rules. Rather than spending too much time outlining the oppressive strategies by the art world and its discourse, in the breadth of this chapter I want to nourish these practices and acknowledge their complex landscape that endured in spite of all.⁷⁴

The imaging process had three main parts: production, circulation, and reception. Chapter 4 argues that the circulatory structures reinforced trauma aesthetics, and Chapter 5 delineates the pleasures of connectivity and updating both in transmission and reception. The process of self-imagining was more involved and cumbersome than in today's (2020) context. Everything was being learned in situ and there were few people and per-sites with which to troubleshoot. These young women were determined to circulate themselves online.

Marlaina described the first photos she took in high school:

Marlaina:

They had to be taken at school because they wouldn't let me take the camera home. I remember the teachers room.

Magda:

Were you nervous you were going to get caught?

Marlaina:

Definitely. It couldn't be a space people were in, and it would have been at lunch time.

The process was a performance. Whereas some self-portraits are staged, directed, and performed by the author and then someone else presses the shutter, this was not the case here. The participants either used webcams, shutter releases, or an auto timer. Pragmatically, they

⁷⁴ See Lippard's (1976) description that the "worst sources of discrimination and tragic feeling of inferiority are the art schools and college art departments." While she wrote this in the 1970s, that lineage has not disappeared.

took this approach because it is easier to access one's own body to perform for an image, and requires a different/easier negotiation (although not always!), as "the artist is uniquely available and amenable as a subject" (Loewenberg, 1999, p. 400).

The rise of the digital still camera corresponded with the rise of the image-based web. Taking images and sharing them online was new and untrained in the 1990s, as I explained in Chapter 1, and was in part responsible for the formation of an intimate public and an orientation of the self towards the collective self. As noted earlier, the Mosaic web browser allowed in-line images starting in 1993. Over time, with faster modem speeds, one could have more and more images and more and more complex HTML and JavaScript for arrangement and presentation. Viewing source code was the way to learn web design (Kearney, 2013, pp. 258-259), which resulted in a remix-copy culture. Auriea told me that sharing code was a way of initiating friendship: "You would email just to say hi. 'Hi I'm in nyc, where are you? I saw your site and'—you would view source on other people's sites—'can you send me the code?'" Roxanne agreed: "At the beginning you would look at other people's webpages to get ideas . . . look at how people design things, even teenage girls who were into sharing codes or helping you how to make text flash, little things like that." Others concealed it. Some were copied frequently enough and felt enough of a sense of ownership that they would have scripts embedded in their HTML to hide their source code. Everyone knew that as time went on, one could not just have stand-alone pretty pictures on a white background, and what was considered pretty changed over time. Marlaina explained one of her per-sites: It "was that very simple Arial in that 9-point font (laughs). 8 you can't read, and 10 is shouting, 9 is small but perfect." Housing the images was an art, and some participants had a guest list.

Helena disclosed,

I remember stealing people's website designs was a big issue. I remember being kinda mad about that sometimes, yeah. Now it seems stupid, but at the time that was a really really important thing. If you spent so much time on something, it's . . . you hand code everything, and that is your internet identity, and if someone takes part of that, sometimes it was annoying, but sometimes it felt really horrible.

The first successful and usable consumer camera was the 1995 Casio QV-10 because of its LCD screen, despite its 240 x 320 resolution. By 1999, two megapixel (1600 x 1200) cameras started becoming available (Nakamura, 2006). However, very few of the subjects in my study had digital cameras. Some acquired webcams. In 1994, Connectix released the very first commercial webcam, the QuickCam, which sold for \$99USD and was available for Macintosh. A year later a PC version arrived, opening up its market. Early on, the self-imaging process consisted of developing prints, scanning them, saving them onto a computer, uploading them through a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) server to an external webhost online, and then usually deleting for space or security reasons and, if not, then saved onto a hard disk.

In the following section, I provide a fine-grained analysis of the images to get a more in-depth sense of the process and its role in the co-creation of the intimate public.

Characteristics of Self-Imaging Online 1996 to 2001



Figure 13. Katharine Tillman. *therobe7-2.jpg* (2000). Image from “robe” series. Digital Photograph. Courtesy of Katharine Tillman.

Figure 14. Terry Palka. *Untitled* (~1997-1999). Image from “selfnude” series. Digital photograph with digital post-production alterations. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20020414160900/http://diversify.nu/p/selfnude/021402-03.jpg> Accessed 2 February 2020.

The participants of the intimate public simultaneously reproduced the essentialist bodies of the body artists of the 1960s and 1970s and worked within the cyberfeminism framework of the digitized, fragmented body. The works demonstrate an understanding of the hypermediation of visual culture via their own mediation, even with the limited experiences of adolescence. They were not making “art” in its traditional form but experimenting with aesthetics of identity and sociality through visual and technological means. The self-imaging of the women of this time period was mostly narrative-based, dabbling in the conceptualism of staged situations and performances.⁷⁵

Several key features emerged during this time:⁷⁶ The focal point was the reciprocity between perception and witnessing qua visibility and invisibility. In their formal aesthetics, the images used mimicry/reproduction, repetition, obscuration, and fragmentation. I will do my best to parse out these techniques, but they were often enmeshed in the practices, making it difficult to separate as evidence, as will be illustrated below. In the architectural organization context, the images relied on the placement, presentation, and style of the thumbnail and/or image on each page and the cutlines/paratext. Titles and captions, in content and style, added a layer of meaning and signification.

Highlighting the rhetoric of the pose—in/visibility—that characterized this intimate public is Katharine and Terry in Figures 13 and 14. Both women face toward the camera enacting movements of concealment. Katharine is sitting on a chair covered with fabric rope attached to the chair and to the door. The viewer can only see her face through the mirror as she looks at herself. Figure 13 is one of many of the series that feature Katharine’s body in various stages of in/visibility. In Figure 14, Terry’s torso, neck, and head are covered with a brown fabric rope to signify a bandage. The series, among the hundreds of images that Terry posted online, deals with her scoliosis (and perhaps other traumas not visible to the unknown

⁷⁵ “Staging provides an ideal opportunity to explore gender roles and power relationships” (Soutter, 2011, p. 62).

⁷⁶ Humour was also not a part of the practices of my subjects. That is not to say that it was not present in other practices at the time, but my archival searches did not produce any results of that style, even if Paasonen (2005) mentions it is a common theme she found among per-sites, but with an unclear methodology or figures I am uncertain of the data.

viewer). Her face is obscured, like in many of the other images, but her fragmented self/body is on display. The black backdrop also forecloses any suggestion of location and place. Terry is everywhere and nowhere when her image-body circulates online. Her shoulders and bones are highlighted by the strong shadows and there is a soft glow to her skin. Katharine's image is tinted in a sepia tone. Terry's image is also in sepia, with a body facing up, cut off on the top below her collarbone and bottom with her thighs. In the centre of her body, she is clutching the fabric rope tied around her upper body across her uterus. Her legs are crossed and it is possible she is either standing up or laying flat and the image is taken from up above. The light falls on the middle of her torso, accentuating her curved bony rib cage and small breasts. A shadow masks her genital area and if a viewer would be unfamiliar that this is Terry, it is purposefully difficult to discern the gender. Her tight grip on the fabric demonstrates control (of the body?), a willful restraint rather than a submission. In one way, she is keeping the body together, maintained, in order, a body that with its scoliosis feels excessive or in excess of the "normal hegemonic healthy body" (Bordo, 2003). However, given the historical context, the image is most likely a response to the contradictory, unattainable, and white supremacist beauty ideals that young women are supposed to have—thin but not too thin, tanned but not too dark, small breasted but not too small, and so on.⁷⁷ Young women learn what and how they need to hide in order to be on display, like Terry does in Figure 20.⁷⁸

Jennifer Dalton's (2000) establishing words, "any photographer working with self-portraiture today is necessarily working in the long shadow cast by Cindy Sherman" (p. 47), in her 2000 article align very much with the mimicry and reproduction at play within this intimate public. The mimicry functioned stylistically, aesthetically, and discursively as an emulation of canonical feminist artists, riot grrrls, and other participants in the online community. It also

⁷⁷ Terry's online presence had a significant lasting effect on the public and as such I was able to find many of her images saved on other people's public personal image-hosting pages. I was also able to find Terry through the LiveJournal Lives Facebook group I created. After several back and forth email exchanges she declined to participate but let me use her images in the dissertation.

⁷⁸ Women must hide to be revealed— "secrecy is wrapped up in the cultural construction of femininity. . . . Dynamics of hiddenness and mystery are scripted into the drama of 'woman'", Rebecca Schneider writes in *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997, p. 88). The drama she refers to is the performativity of gender roles in everyday life within capitalism.

operated as a response to the cultural context, such as in Helena's (Figure 1) and Roxanne's (Figure 5) reproduction of written texts into visual forms. By mimicking the work of these established feminist artists and each other, they were in fact opening up the gaps between identity and image and the performativity of gender. Performing the (multiple, present/absent) self is an enduring theme for Helena, as seen in Figures 16 and 17, her black and white series, in which a postmodern process of quotation indebted to Judith Butler's work on gender and Cindy Sherman's series from the 1980s (including the *Untitled Film Stills*) is unambiguous. Helena said, "I read so much feminist theory at the time that so many of the pictures I took were 'let's see if I can turn this [theory] into a picture.' So that's how that happened [with the gender performativity images] at the time." Indeed, Helena has told me that *Untitled-122*, 1983 (Figure 15)—where Sherman is clenching her fists in a boxy suit and only one of her eyes is visible, glaring, through a big platinum blonde wig—was a key image for the development of her understanding of gender performativity.



Figure 15. Cindy Sherman. *Untitled #122* (1983). Chromogenic color print. 89.5 × 54 cm. Retrieved from: <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/cindy-sherman-untitled-number-122> Accessed 14 December 2019. Reproduced with Fair Dealing.



Figure 16. Helena Kvarnström. *Untitled* (2001). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital Photograph. Courtesy of Helena Kvarnström.

Figure 17. Helena Kvarnström. *Untitled* (2001). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital Photograph. Courtesy of Helena Kvarnström.

Helena's black and white photos (Figures 16 and 17) have minimal mise-en-scène to give no indication of a place. Helena is wearing a men's white button-down shirt, and holding her body in a typically masculine way, legs spread and shoulders hunched. The significance of Helena's black and white photos, in which she assertively stares at the camera and subsequently at the viewer, is not in its mimicry of Sherman (although that is part of it), which is typical of countless works produced according to the aesthetic strategies sanctioned by the art school system. Rather, its significance lies in the fact that it was produced for the sake of not solely a conceptual statement about the status of gender, but the maintenance and enrichment of an online community in which, as she explained, "an ongoing exchange of ideas about art and feminism

and our own histories” was nurtured, an intimate public of these young women.⁷⁹ The self-imaging acts as a self-imagining, as part of a broader community of other young women trying to make sense of their subjectivities. At first glance, including the aforementioned images, the work of my subjects could be construed as mimicking⁸⁰ the work of successful women and non-binary artists using self-imaging tactics. Much like the work of Claude Cahun, Cindy Sherman, Ana Mendieta, Hannah Wilke, and Francesca Woodman, some of the photos posted online can be classified as self-portraits (often paired with text describing sexual violence) that can be read as reactions to representations of the female body in popular visual culture (Lister, 2013, pp. 12-13). However, the private, intimate context in which the work was distributed (that is, within online networks composed of other young women who were markedly sequestered in comparison to those engaging with today’s social media platforms) would seem to complicate a paradigmatic comparison. Although I argue that the work of Woodman is essential for understanding my subjects’ work, I also insist that these latter works must be situated within the context of internet culture from 1996 to 2001, as described in Chapter 1 and in the next section, to appreciate how the tactics of self-imaging borrowed from Woodman et al. functioned in early online communities comprising young women creating their own per-sites.⁸¹

Obscuration often worked in tandem with other stylistic choices in the images. In works from the untitled *Rhode Island series* (Figure 18), Woodman uses found materials, her pose, and framing to obscure her face and body while proffering herself to her surroundings.

⁷⁹ I write “these young women” or similarly “people socialized as girls” because I am ambivalent about naming/defining a movement after it finished with a name which never belonged to them in the first place. While there are informal names for the community like “internet oldskoolers” by the community, the movement was never instrumentalized. It was this lack of definition that also made it what it is. In some ways, it is unsurprising that we could not and did not name the movement because our lives as young women are often “at odds with representation of it [life]” and the implicit question of “so what?” is a kind of internalized censorship we have tacitly learned over time, which tells us who we are and what we do is not important (Probyn, 1990, pp. 179-180).

⁸⁰ Peggy Phelan (1993) writes, following Lacan, “the imitative reproduction of the self-image always involves a detour through the eye of the other” (p. 36). Similarly, “we recognize ourselves in a portrait by imitating what we imagine the other sees” (Johnson, 2013, p. 81).

⁸¹ Kuhn in *Power of the Image* (1994a) details how images “always have a specific use value in the particular time and place of their consumption [...] Meanings do not reside in images, then: they are circulated between representation, spectator and social formation” (p. 6).

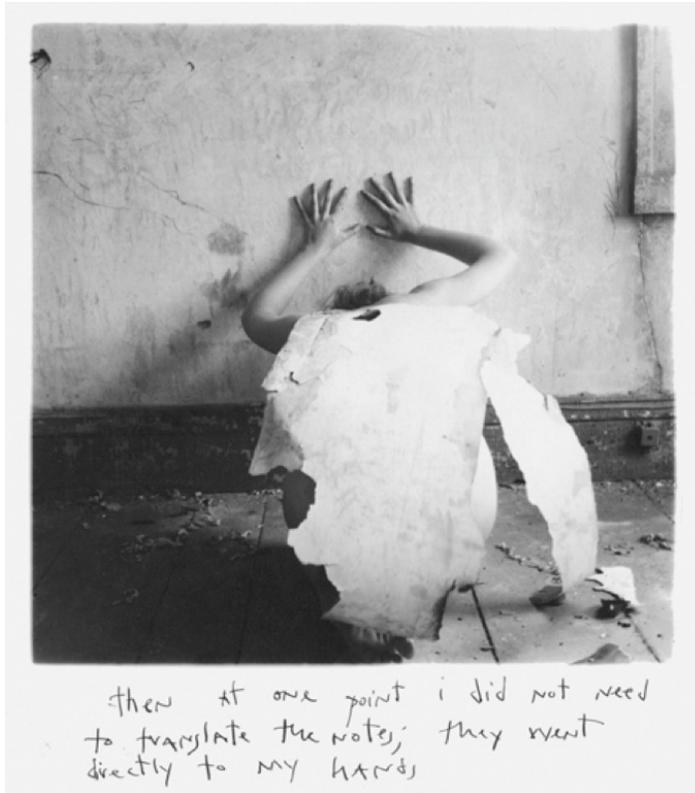


Figure 18. Francesca Woodman. *Then at one point I did not need to translate the notes; they went directly to my hands, Providence Rhode Island (1976)*. Gelatin silver estate print. 20.3 x 25.4 cm. Retrieved from <https://www.victoria-miro.com/exhibitions/413/works/49a7a8180de8ec/> Accessed 13 December 2019. Reproduced with Fair Dealing.

Though Woodman's obscured body may have some relation to the experience of violent acts (or of subjective experiences of mental strife) that efface and complicate a sense of self, Helena explicitly mentioned that she was raped at age 15, as was seen on her websites that preceded myredself.org and that were subsequently removed from the Wayback Machine. Both Figures 17 and 18 were featured on per-sites along with Helena's testimonials. However, regardless of Woodman's and Helena's (non)experiences, this aesthetic of the obscured body is combined with an incessant repetition of the act of self-imaging. Whereas Woodman kept much of her work in personal collections until they were posthumously published in catalogues and art exhibitions, Helena's images were taken, digitally modified, and posted online soon after and for many years following a series of violent events. Her example indicates: on one hand, the serial photographic practice of the intimate public of per-site makers, is concomitant with the creation of an online platform, which puts the personal into dialogue with a complex set of

online interlocutors and that also serves as a location where these images can be displayed in a safe space apart from the potential retribution or misunderstanding of individuals in their immediate, real-world surroundings. On the other, the images can be downloaded and re-appropriated—lots of unintended and disempowering readings, and uses can occur as well, exemplified, among other things, by the trolling dealt with by some of the more popular participants of the community, such as Helena and Roxanne.

Regarding Helena's use of an aesthetics of obscurity and phantom violence, the web uniquely served as platform both for the archiving of serial imagery and for the establishment of a network of young women who could access, view, and comment on these images through a culture of reciprocal witnessing (e.g., making images in direct response to others' images) and guestbook entries. Aesthetics of obscurity are those that offer an unintelligibility, a kind of privacy, and in/visibility in their presentation of the self. As an aesthetic—comparable to how teenagers' identities can feel impenetrable to themselves—it is also a self-preservation tactic. Obscurity is presented as covering limbs and digital manipulation to remove the self, as seen in Terry's Figures 14 and 19. The aesthetics also point to a visualizing of unintelligibility (of trauma and violence) of the historical time period of the project, which I explain in Chapter 4.



Figure 19. Terry Palka. *Untitled* (2001). Image from “selfnude” series. Digital photograph with digital post-production alterations. As it appeared on 25 October 2001. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/2/http://diversify.nu/p/selfnude> Accessed 7 June 2017.

Helena said, “There is something fascinating and disgusting at the same time at the inside of the body and the body becoming dismembered in some way. So that's what I was trying to do with that, make representations of that.”⁸² In Figure 41 (explained in Chapter 4), Helena covers her body with tears and blotches that obscure her image. In her work in the late 1970s, Francesca Woodman developed a similar aesthetic of an obscured body put in relation to an outside gaze that can be seen as a relation both to a viewer and to a phantom of death or violence. Aarti’s emblematic self-image of her green visage was much discussed during the time period it was posted, especially as self-imaging was predominantly an activity of white users at the time.

⁸² Pushing the boundaries of a body was also referred to discursively and conceptually. i.e, prettie.com, one of the most famous hosting websites had a list-serv called *disfigurine*.

Aarti discussed this image:

I remember I started using Photoshop—one of the things I did with one image of myself was to turn my skin green. That was my favorite picture of myself. I had super short pixie hair. This kid with silver rimmed glasses and a plaid shirt and green skin. That is so Freudian! One time on the street someone said, “I remember you from the internet, like your pic, and you had green skin,” it was definitely from that series.

Magda:

When you did it green, could you tell in the image that you were not white?

Aarti:

You could tell because my features. But that was so interesting—suddenly the person on the screen actually had an ethnicity, an alien ethnicity because it was so bright green. This person is an alien!

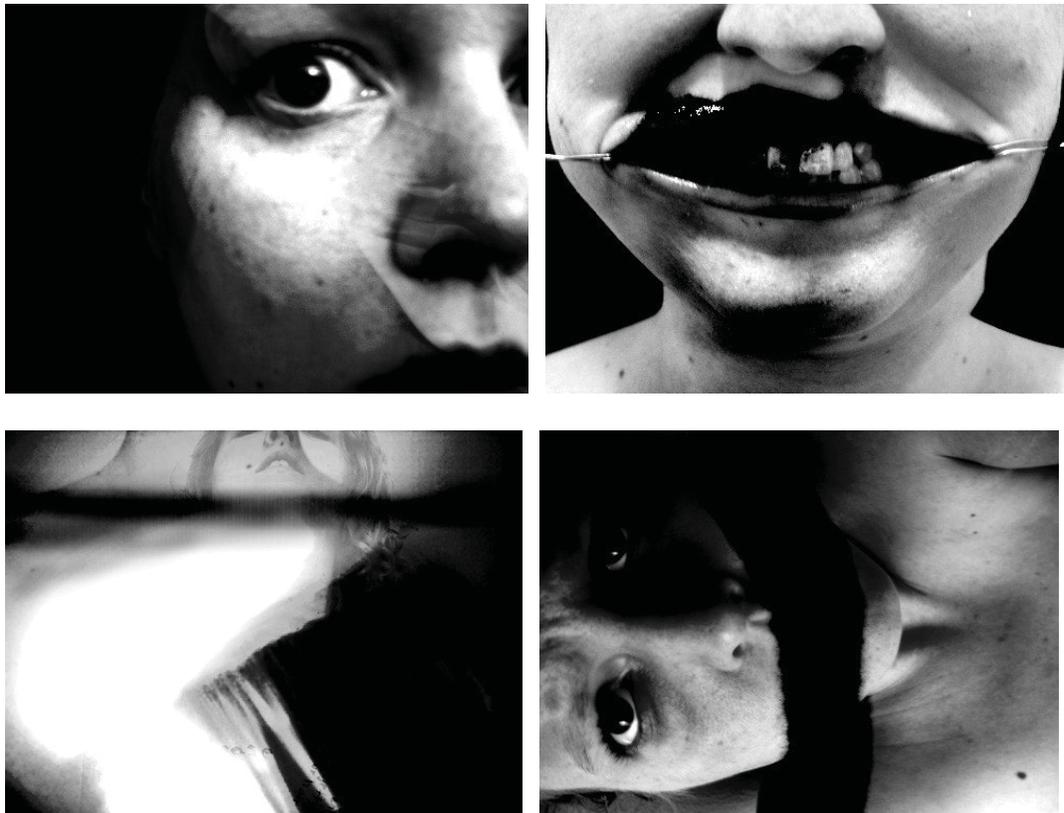


Figure 20. Marlaina Read. *Lessons in Cinema* (~1997-1999). Images from an unspecified web page. Webcam photographs with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of Marlaina Read.

The subjects of my study both highlighted their bodies in images and obscured and fragmented their faces, either through framing, makeup, using body parts or materials to cover up, or editing the image in a post-production program, as seen in Figure 20. Figure 20 is also a small selection of the hundreds of self-images Marlaina posted online, which she said "were not me really." The ostensibly limitless web, unlike a book or a gallery space, provided an opportunity for ocular excess: repetition. (See Figures 24 and 25 in how images would be presented.) Repetition was also an aesthetic choice, as seen in Roxanne's image (Figure 5). It provides the feminist artist with a disruptive excess. This opens up the gap between young woman as image, as object, as commodity, as universal symbol (Johnson, 2013, p. 110) and in turn unveils the multiplicity of the self. This is also possibly why several of the subjects of my study told me that even if the pictures they took had them in the frame it was never about them. The selves, as featured in Figure 5, foreground the heterogeneous specificities of experiences of people socialized as girls, and how they are sometimes lived simultaneously in their contradiction—a theme repeated in Figures 22 and 23.



Figure 21. Christin Light. *Untitled* (~1998). Image from an unspecified web page. Webcam photograph with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of Christin Light.

Another webcam picture is Christin's image (Figure 21) that corresponds to images popular at the time. It is an overexposed self-portrait that cuts across their eyes and obscures their nose. They are looking down and leaning against their right hand. Coloured streaks saturated in post-production form a top layer to the image. The salience in this image is not in

its artful mastery but in what it does: it captures a feeling—a teenage ennui. The feeling is captured to make witnesses, to welcome others who also straddle the confusing, listless, and ambivalent time of wanting to be seen but also wanting to hide; of feeling lazy but also wanting to make things; of being a sad girl/vulnerable girl.⁸³ The vulnerable girl can perform beauty and abjection simultaneously; that is, some of my subject's work highlighted their performance of femininity and the pleasure in being seen. Helena revealed to me that while she explored abjection in her work, she did feel pleasure from being told she looked beautiful. Some of Katharine's (Figures 10a-c and 31) and Roxanne's (Figures 22 and 23) work also deployed aesthetics of the vulnerable sad girl. Roxanne's orientations in Figures 22 and 23 position her body as a child—on a bed with a teddy bear tucked into her underarm, in the bath crouching—and as an adult—lying on the bed, she looks at us knowingly, lifting up one leg in a peep-toe heel, in the bath, naked Roxanne poses like a statue with her partially revealed body towards us but her face looking away from the camera. The signposts of the two images are indicative of some of her other work that maintains an interplay between child- and adulthood. She, like Katharine, may not be political, but their work is enmeshed in a politics of feminine girlhood and subjecthood.

⁸³ A concept I outline in Chapter 4.



Figure 22. Roxanne Carter. *Untitled* (~1997-1999). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital photograph with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of Roxanne Carter.

Figure 23. Roxanne Carter. *from violence of lust remote* (quoting a poet, harriet monroe) (~1997-1999). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital photograph with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of Roxanne Carter.

The contextual and architectural arrangement and organization of the images is another characteristic frame. Although it is more difficult for me to present because nearly all traces of webpage layouts with images are gone, I do want to point out that the arrangement was part of self-imaging, especially since it was all coded by hand.⁸⁴ Although I have touched on this mode of production at various points throughout the chapter, it needs to be emphasized in its own right. The participants amassed a tacit knowledge on spectatorship and engagement, which they enacted through their regular updates in content and aesthetic. The formal elements of the per-site that surrounded the images include the placement of thumbnails, images, captions,

⁸⁴ Chun's "On Software, or the Persistence of Visual Knowledge" (2005) examines the gendered and entangled production between software and programs, which I read, in part, as an encounter of pleasure.

cutlines/paratext, colour schemes, links, and font variations. For example, at one point when a more minimal aesthetic became popular as a response to the busier free-hosted sites, tiny circles as “thumbnails” (a viewer would click on the circle and the image would appear) appeared on many pages.⁸⁵

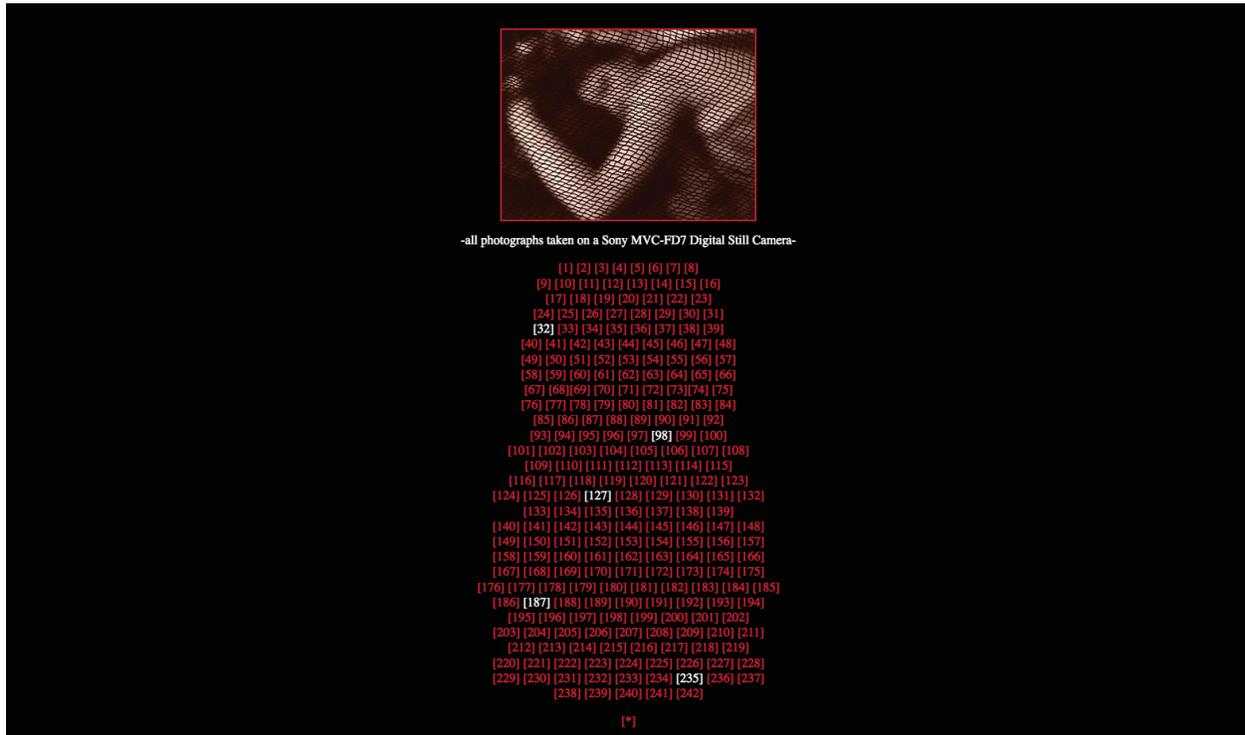


Figure 24. Roxanne Carter. <http://kore.lhabia.com/amaranthine> Gallery. *a dark adapted eye*. Screen capture as it appeared on 4 February 2001. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20010204011100/http://kore.lhabia.com:80/amaranthine.html> Accessed 4 February 2020.

⁸⁵ In May 1997 Geocities added ads to the pages and in June 1998 added a permanent watermark.



Figure 25. Terry Palka. <http://diversify.nu/photo.html> gallery. *diversify.nu ...camera in hand*. Screen capture as it appeared on 3 August 2001. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20010803144715/http://diversify.nu/photo/photo.html> Accessed 2 February 2020.

For example, some per-sites adhered to a more gallery-setting white background, and some used black backgrounds with numbers or symbols as links to images, as seen in the vast number of images in the screenshot from Roxanne in February 2001 (Figure 24) and Terry from August 2001 (Figure 25)—a kind of gridded multiplicity. During this time, Flash was only beginning, HTML5 did not exist, and most websites were written in code from scratch by the women in Notepad-like software. Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) were introduced in 1997 to provide more robust and complex stylization and organization of content, but they were not used until a few years later as they were not compliant with most web browsers (Kearney, 2013, p. 273). JavaScript became popular, with pop-up windows serving as vignettes to main narratives. Sometimes each photo would be its own pop-up, but that was cumbersome to

program and to view. There was no multi-tab feature on browsers until 2003.⁸⁶ It was also common to specify what camera/equipment was used: For example, Roxanne (Figure 24) used the Nikon Coolpix 300 or Sony Mavica MVC-FD7. The webpage layout was a kind of DIY gallery space where the users were both the curators and artists. This was specifically evident in hosting per-sites that also presented their hostees on a front page. I did not include the written content outside image captions and page titles as it is outside the purview of the thesis, but that also had its own set of complex and evolving parameters.

In the next section, I provide historical context for the 1990s and its relationship to the work and the community my subjects co-produced at the time.

The Influence of Visual Culture

This section was initially going to be a survey of feminist self-portraiture to provide a context of the literature I am working with as well as the genre itself and its relationship to the images discussed in the research. However, the difficulty lies in where to start from and what should be bracketed in and out. Do I include a history of performative self-portraits like art historian Amelia Jones describes in *Self/Image* (2006), or do I give context for all self-portraiture to showcase how men's forays into this art form were never interpreted as frivolous, with disdain, and as something to be censored? Do I start and end with photographic self-imaging, and as such include a brief history of photography? Do I include Joan Semmel's 1974 painting *Me Without Mirrors* as an exploration of the self/body? Adrian Piper is not classified as a self-portraiture artist despite her placing herself in the frame of many of her artworks, and having work titled *Self Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features*. Is she not considered a self-portraiture artist because it is more obvious to the audience that she is in the photo but becomes a concept-body? Instead, to understand these practices, I propose a context of aesthetics of the Eurocentric 1990s that would have circulated around my subjects' lives and in turn influenced their burgeoning genre. I do this to put my subject's works in conversation with other artists to demonstrate their importance in our thinking about feminist art. This act comes with its

⁸⁶ While InternetWorks created a multi-tab feature in 1994, which was then incorporated into AOL, the feature did not become popular until 2003 with Mozilla and Safari browsers.

tensions and ambivalence. I do not do this as a way to take Eurocentric aesthetics as a de facto standard. I recognize their specificity and dominance of visual culture (Jones, 2012). This dominance is evident in the way the sense of self within the practices, as collective as it was, enacted a very North American ideology of celebrity (Senft, 2008).

Body art is the predominant movement that circulates as an inspiration for the intimate public. Body art within the Euro-centric context is art that is enacted with and through the body and presents that enactment in the work. It began in the 1960s with artists voraciously inserting themselves in the frame in order to *be*. Between the 1970s and 1980s, body art split into performance art and photographic self-portraiture, in which the artist exaggerated the commodification of self rather than ignoring or critiquing it (Warr & Jones, 2011, p. 22). However, in the exaggerations of subjecthood framed by commodity culture, it is no less true that a critique is present. Yet these photographic explorations were fringe, as it was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that photography became "a dominant form in the art world" (Soutter, 2011, p. 60).⁸⁷

The 1980s brought about photographic self-portraiture as a genre, but the performative self-imaging began earlier with Claude Cahun, Eleanor Antin, Yayoi Kusama, Lucas Samaras, and others. Photographer and "trans ancestor" (Fink & Miller, 2013, p. 620) Claude Cahun (Figure 26) had a practice of performative self-portraits in the 1930s that dealt with a fractured self and the complexity of gender and sexuality, long before any sort of postmodern feminism did. With their lover Marcel Moore, they composed collective performative self-portraits, in which the subject-object relation was queered and interwoven through the use of in/visibility, reflection as repetition, obscuration, and fragmentation. Cahun's images make them paradoxically very visible yet in disguise, often with a minimal *mise-en-scène* and any gendered characteristics (like body parts) (Jenzen, 2013; Latimer, 2005). With these aesthetic choices, Cahun and Moore's images enacted and hinged on modes of witnessing, by each other and by those entering the encounter of viewing them: a practice of self-imaging.

⁸⁷ See Carol Squires's *Over Exposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (1999) on the historical account of photography's lineage as a lesser and lowbrow art.



Figure 26. Claude Cahun, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)* (1928). Gelatin silver print. 9.2 × 6.7 cm. Retrieved from: <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/claude-cahun-untitled-self-portrait> Accessed 2 December 2019. Reproduced with Fair Dealing.

Although seemingly unaware of what was happening in the art world, other than Francesca Woodman's and Cindy Sherman's work, whose bodies are present in a way that reinforces their absence and erases the referent (Warr & Jones, 2011, p. 36), the subjects of my study paralleled what Italian art historian Lea Vergine (2007) called the "love of romance of the self" (p. 7). It reorients the self and multiplies it, making it both more and less visible. Vergine attested that this function produces and is produced by art actions. These include photographic sequences and performances and "[make] way for a return to the art object. But this return is one in which the body is obsessively referenced—as fragmented, splintered and/or staged via elaborate video transfers and/or disruptive installations" (Warr & Jones, 2011, p. 22). Indeed, this post-structuralist reading of being a body as "shattered, technologically mediated and otherwise resolutely incomplete" is connected with the theoretical suppositions happening within academia, such as the burgeoning postmodernism movement in the 1980s (Warr & Jones, 2011, p. 22). The post-structuralist technological bodies described above also connect with my subjects' overwhelming response that they were not in the frame, or that the frame was never meant as a way to insert their "me." They (their bodies) do, however, enact the gendered and feminine encounter Amelia Jones suggested began in the 1980s with self-portraiture as "always already a picture" (Warr & Jones, 2011, p. 37).

Self-Referential Intimate Public

The intimate public's shared world view as “always-already a picture,” and the open potential of the web, prompted immediate image making. Helena discussed the fervour and naïveté of the practice:

Partway through [being online], I was just starting art school, I didn't have a lot of knowledge about art. I think most of us didn't. Our understanding of art was completely outside the traditional art world. So then you got these influences like the obvious things, Woodman or Sherman, but aside from that your biggest influence is a 17-year-old in Idaho or whatever. In a way that is really amazing.

Unlike traditional art circles, in which professional artists are lauded and revered more than amateurs, these practices were securely referential.⁸⁸ Young women online then were also more sequestered than today's tuned-in teenagers who have access to and are groomed to make money (Gillin, 2009; Marwick, 2013; Postigo, 2014), and become micro-celebrities (a concept that began with the proliferation of online image-personas in the late 1990s) (Senft, 2008). Helena continued, “I wonder what would have happened if we were all a little older and maybe being able to make more sophisticated critiques and art. But at the same time, the earnestness and the passion and the confessional quality would have been impossible.” While a hypothetical “what if” is common within the ruminations on the early web, Helena recognized that it was precisely the naïveté and sequestered nature of the participants that functioned as the means to create the very work I am discussing here. The work's referential nature was produced by the limited access the participants had to art and knowledge through the web and zines. My subjects tell me that their local peers simply did not have the same fervency towards the web and/or art, and since most of them did not live in metropolitan cities there was little potential to be exposed to non-traditional art. Auriea and Helena are the only two participants that told me that they had

⁸⁸ Unlike within the intimate public of my subjects that adhere more to the etymological definition, the amateur is often read as a way to raise up the Western cultural ideal of the professional, of the serious artist, the expert.

been to a gallery in high school. The context of the practices as demonstrated above was not local; much of the education and access was online and each other. None of my participants' parents or siblings were involved in creative or artistic fields to expose them to more in situ movements. This context, however, does not mean their practices were completely sequestered, as the feminist art of the 1990s presents links between them.

Feminist Art of the 1990s

The 1990s were all about the essentialized body, according to feminist critic Mira Schor (2009)—a “rerun of the 1970s,” maintained Lucy Lippard (1995, p. 248), writing in the midst of the 1990s herself. I would argue, given the work I present in the dissertation, that the 1990s were a rerun of the 1970s only if one did not look outside institutional confines. Intersectional identity politics, do-it-with-others movements, and the web nourished amateur practices (Grant & Waxman, 2011; Tamblyn, 1991; Dyhouse, 2013; Taylor, 2015). The web is seemingly outside of Lippard's purview, given her scant acknowledgement of it throughout the years. Different bodies were accorded recognition and affordances they were never given before, at least not in the art world, with some exceptions. The 1990s were also all about the incorporeal self. These two seemingly contradictory ideas (the incorporeal yet essentialized body) within the media landscape spilled over to the practices of the young women. The legacy of the Cartesian subject, separated in mind and body as it is interpolated by visual image culture, and those (us) in it had shifted by the 1990s, but still prevailed (Doy, 2005). We were at once resolutely our bodies and resolutely in excess of them. Feminist art was performance of latent Cartesianism that critiqued it while enacting it, likely because Descartes also recognized the contradictory relations of the body to thought that the legacy of Cartesianism obfuscated (Munster, 2006, pp. 15-16). As a result of these two threads, the imagery was enacting not so much the supposed essentialism of the 1970s, but rather a female experience that was “heavily mediated by representation and the discursively constructed roles that women had been trained to adopt” (Davis, 2017, p. 41). In 2016, art critic Karen Archey (2016) described the 1990s as an era of and for the feminist body, an astute observation despite her flippant and condescending tone:

Women wielded as a sword what young girls were taught was our most

powerful weapon and prized possession—our bodies. Through smears of menstrual blood, undaunted public nudity and romanticizations of mental illness (however misguided), girl power used the body to desacralize its status as a societal treasure. From musician Kathleen Hanna to artists Tracey Emin and Pipilotti Rist, women were slut-shamed and labelled narcissistic for bravely navigating this paradox.

The stylistic elements of the 1990s were very much rooted in identity politics and (breaking) representation. For example, a feminist artist-run centre, Studio XX, founded in 1996 in Montreal, was at the heart of this conjunctural moment,⁸⁹ alongside other Montreal galleries that emphasized feminist photographic works, such as La Centrale and Vox, and emerging new technology work, like Oboro in Montreal. These centres curated work that explored a conceptual cyborg politics, of "a body containing both organic and technological components" (Senft, 1996, p. 12) that provides feminists with "two powerful new tools for affinity politics: hypothetical communities and prosthetic identities" (Senft, 1996, p. 16). In 1994, two curators noticed an affinity in feminist artists—the use of raunchy, sexy, unfeminine humour.⁹⁰ "Marcia Tucker organized a two-part *Bad Girls* exhibition at the New Museum in New York, and Marcia Tanner curated *Bad Girls West* at the Wight Art Gallery in Los Angeles, as a 'sister exhibition' to Tucker's" (Reilly, p. 32). Combined, they were one of the most influential exhibitions on third wave feminists in North America. Both focused on artists using humour as a tactical method (in style and content) to engage audiences on feminist issues (a shift from the work I present in my dissertation). Some of the artists included were the following: The Guerilla Girls, who have been active since 1985, use various multi-media tactics foregrounding slogans to critique commodity culture and misogyny in the art world. While her humour was more nuanced, lesbian Chicana feminist photographer Laura Aguilar's (often nude) self-portraiture and her unyielding body in the frame also had a lasting influence on the aesthetic of self-imaging.

⁸⁹ It was founded by four women: Kim Sawchuck (Professor, Concordia University), Patricia Kearns (filmmaker), Kathy Kennedy (sound artist), and Sheryl Hamilton (Canada Research Professor, Carleton University). Retrieved from: <https://studioxx.org/en/about/mandate-history/>

⁹⁰ See shannon bell's *Fast Feminism* (2010) for a 1990s feminism enmeshed in a political and pornographic performative.

Artists like Anna Gaskell—who started out with self-portraits before moving onto photographing staged stories about girlhood—imaged a more fairytale subjectivity, producing "narrative photography" of magic and girlhood such as the *Wonder* series from 1996, Figure 28 (Reilly, 2018).⁹¹ Gaskell's similitude to Roxanne Carter's work is seen in Figure 27: an oblique shot of a dressed up young woman whose face the viewer only partially sees hinting at a sense of loss.



Figure 27. Roxanne Carter. *Desert.jpg* (~1997-1999). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital photograph with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of Roxanne Carter.



Figure 28. Anna Gaskell. *Untitled #5 (wonder)* (1996-1996). Chromogenic print. 122.1 × 102.2 cm.

⁹¹ For more on 1990s narrative photography as a genre, see Soutter's (2011) chapter "Dial 'P' For Panties: Narrative Photography in the 1990s."

Retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20131203062803/http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/1406> Accessed 8 December 2017. Reproduced with Fair Dealing.

Connected Mirrors: WWW and IRL Context



Figure 29. Courtney Love. Hole's *Violet* music video screenshot (no date). Retrieved from https://66.media.tumblr.com/797a4922cd787b2bc1425359cd0a3916/tumblr_mqyqhxpJO1rugng01_500.gif. Accessed 1 October 2019. Reproduced with Fair Dealing.

Many of my subjects were either directly or indirectly responding to the 1990s US-centric visual culture at the time. Direct influences can be seen in the vintage pixie aesthetic of Courtney Love: kinderwhore dresses, knee socks, and patent-leather Mary Janes, which were the sartorial choices of some of my subjects. In Figure 29, Love, with her dark lipstick, screams, “I’m the one with no soul,” reminding us that women are stuck in Kantian immanence. Music and its aesthetic was the most overwhelming influence on all the participants next to writers. Their work paid homage to music videos and magazine editorials of musicians such as April 1992 *Sassy*’s Kurt & Courtney cover; it mimicked the overexposed editing of Tori Amos’s music video for “Silent All These Years”⁹² as seen in Christin’s image (Figure 21). The riot grrrl movement, including Bikini Kill and Kathleen Hanna, Hole, L7, Bratmobile and hip-hop emcees and rappers like Lil’ Kim, Salt-N-Pepa, and En Vogue, were role models with their lyrics against misogyny and resolute need for independence and power.

Websites such as Gurl.com (that since 1996 has evolved into a “lifestyle” website), and

⁹² The official song of the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, where Amos worked as a spokesperson.

Wired (monthly print/online), and Nerve.com⁹³ were popular. *Nerve* was a short-lived paper magazine turned web portal with columns about sex in all its forms and images that to young audiences were not seen anywhere else online. Helena published a photo series with them. The loved and hated Natasha Merritt also contributed to Nerve.com and published *Digital Diaries* (2000) through Taschen, the first book of digital self/imaging photographs. Surprisingly, the subjects of my study, other than Auriea, were not tuned into net.art and other digital art communities such as Rhizome, burgeoning at the time.⁹⁴ Roxanne only later encountered these art forms, in the 2000s, after meeting her husband, Braxton Soderman, who studied at Cal Arts. Subsequently less sequestered, she expanded her hypertext novellas to a larger audience and became more integrated within that community throughout graduate school.

My subjects were also responding to and reacting against the cool, popular girl aesthetic from visual media such as *Clueless*, Aerosmith videos, MTV's *Real World* and the 1993 Calvin Klein ads that had immediate backlash for their amateur underage porn aesthetic of mostly white models in a wood-panelled basement posing for the viewer, revealing underwear and bras underneath their jeans.⁹⁵ These made Kate Moss's emaciated "heroin chic" a viable cultural image. While the aesthetics both reproduced and were in contrast to these main codes (see Figures 19 and 27), the imaging practice was different than the visual culture around them because of (a) the sociality of the network (the practices of circulation), and (b) the way friendship operated among them (the ethics of circulation). That is, the way the participants enacted ethics of circulation and its tensions differentiated them. To become a participant, one had to demonstrate one's trustworthiness such that no violation of the circulatory structures of

⁹³ Nerve.com launched in 1997 as a digital publication about erotics. <https://nerve.atavist.com/nerve-turns-18>

⁹⁴ An exploration of my historical time period was part of the 2015 exhibition *What Happened to Internet Art?* in the form of an online panel discussion of 1990s net-art over Google Hangouts with artist and curator Mark Tribe, who started Rhizome in 1996, and Mendi & Keith Obadike, who do intermedia installations online and music. Although informative, the three speakers reclaim the space they, as net.artists, took up in the first place. No nuancing of net.art was present. The practices I outline were made because of and for the web, so why have they been never considered internet art? See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KK1C4YHKl50&feature=youtu.be>

⁹⁵ "Though the Justice Department eventually found no evidence of wrongdoing (the models were all eighteen or over), sales of CK Jeans rose from 113 million dollars in 1994 to 462 million dollars in 1995, proving not only that sex sells but underage sex sells even better" (Grant & Waxman, 2011, p. 25).

the images (such as sharing them with people that the image author might be connected to IRL) could occur. Yet the paradoxes of this ethical engagement are evident in how it assumed and reproduced a feeling of privacy, even if the per-sites were publicly precarious, and thus potentially found by anyone. Indeed, they often were, as Chapter 3 demonstrates. The tensions were also evident in not so much the mimicry or contrast of visual culture, but the ostensible mimicry of each other's work down to details like how the aesthetic modes I explained in the previous section were enacted. It is unclear, both from my analysis and from the interviews I conducted, when the self-imaging was thought to be plagiarism and when it was a response to another image, a practice I mention undergirds the community. It seems like there was an implicit understanding between the participants in the modes of reception that unfurled that one had to learn.

Different media distribution systems like moving images and creative writing provided two modes of reception—identification and idealization—for the young women in my study. TV shows like *Blossom* and *Roseanne* tackled complex girl issues like poverty, body image, and sexuality. *My So-Called Life* (1994-1995) resonated and repeated itself in references on websites and web rings. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the cult series, premiered on March 10, 1997, the same year as the animated TV show about the misanthropic *Daria* debuted. Others included *Moesha*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *Sister Sister*. Also prevalent were films that focused on trauma and drug use like *Foxfire* (1996) and *Trainspotting* (1994); young women in love such as *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), cult classic *Bound* (1996), the award-winning *Show Me Love* (1998), and the emblematic *High Art* (1998)—a Nan Goldin-esque love triangle film about a shy young woman falling in love with a free-spirited lesbian photographer that captured her vulnerability with her camera; young adult outsiders portrayed in *Dazed & Confused* (1993), *Reality Bites* (1994), *Kids* (1995), *Hackers* (1995), *Empire Records* (1995), and *The Craft* (1996), which featured sartorial styles of misandry that many young women emulated. *Tank Girl*, the 1988 comic adapted into a tiresome but cult classic of the same name, was released in 1995. *Sassy* magazine disbanded in 1994, but many of us are old enough to have read a few issues and appreciate the way it treated its audience as multi-faceted people and not as cis-het consumers wanting to impress their boyfriends with an emaciated physique. It celebrated multiethnic and sexually complex girlhood. After *Sassy* was bought out and shut down, *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*

started in 1996 as a black and white zine by Andi Zeisler and Lisa Jervis, both ex-interns at *Sassy*. Their zine later grew into a large publication with over 50,000 circulation at its peak, reaching young women like those in my study (Jesella & Meltzer, 2007). The spirit came from creating and not consuming, which is what media was telling young girls to do at an alarming rate in the 1990s. It also gave young girls, especially ones sequestered in suburbs and small towns (who could order a copy for a few dollars), a framework of media literacy with which to understand things like racism, fatphobia, or transphobia.

Although writers who received the most citation—in writing and conceptually in image—within the intimate public I outline are the original “sad girls” Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, and Virginia Woolf, a backdrop of divisive 1990s literature is apparent. This literature includes Elizabeth Wurtzel's living memoir about sex and drug addiction. For all its critiques, Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* (1998) gave a language with which to publicly present and discuss bodies in a more accessible way than Annie Sprinkle, for instance, who some of my subjects mention as an influence only later on. *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence* (1998) by Inga Muscio allowed young women to reclaim the word. And most of all, feminist cyberculture was the set of practices within which my subjects emerged. Sadie Plant's accessible *Zeros + ones: digital women + the new technoculture* was published in 1997. It had succinct, seductively titled chapters (e.g., *ada*, *holes*, *secrets*, and *scattered brains*, etc.) of two to six pages and in form looked intriguing enough to teenagers and those who did not have the capacity to read theoretical texts dealing with similar ideas. What teenager who got online would not be disarmed by the book's preamble—a utopian vision of living that mirrored what we imagined the web could be for us: a way to live, as Aarti said, as creatures, unable to be instrumentalized and optimized.

Those were the days, when we were all at sea. It seems like yesterday to me. Species, sex, race, class: in those days none of this meant anything at all. No parents, no children, just ourselves, strings of inseparable sisters, warm and wet, indistinguishable one from the other, gloriously indiscriminate, promiscuous and fused. No generations. No future, no past. An endless geographic plane of micromeshing pulsing quanta, limitless webs of interacting blendings, leakings, mergings, weaving

through ourselves, running rings around each other, heedless, needless, aimless, careless, thoughtless, amok. (Plant, 1998, p. 3)

Conclusion

In 1987, Lucy R. Lippard wrote that feminist art was "neither a style nor a movement but instead a value system, a revolutionary strategy, a way of life" (Parker, 1992). Lippard (2017) and I still believe in this definition in 2017. Art became a way for and of personal revision for the subjects in my study—the feminism in their art was “a way of life.” In Grosz's words, it was something "they must live" to image their imaginations. Could my subjects' work be read as anachronistic? Yes, but that would miss its tactical salience in performing a collective subjecthood and their resolute desire to create images as modes of witnessing: ways to reach and be reached by others. Amelia Jones (2011) called this an “empathically embodied selfhood” (p. 42), which stands in opposition to the idea of the lone artist genius—a masculinist figure. The collective subjecthood emerges in what Amelia Jones, following Walter Benjamin, defined as the production of “mass.” In this mass, participants also shift what participation means and does and, in so doing, allow the emergence of openness to otherness that can promote an ethical engagement rather than a closing of one’s self. In other words, an intimate public is formed. We embody this public through the stylizations of our bodies, ourselves online. If bodies have always been “the site through which identities are both self-conceived and interpreted” (Jones, 1998, p. 214), then it is no surprise that young women would enact their feelings and explorations through and with their bodies as central points. As such, this chapter activates a conjunctural moment with (a) close readings of works that disrupt the body in the electronic image through formal distortions, as a way to approach identity politics, and, (b) the ways in which young women embody their multiple selves towards a goal of feminist collectivity.

The intimate public's circulatory mechanisms in the era I discuss were similar to early 1900s lesbian visual self-representation in Europe and North America (Latimer, 2005). The work “was limited largely to noncommercial artwork undertaken and distributed informally, from hand to hand, within lesbian subcultures: snapshots made with amateur cameras, private lesbian paintings and photographs by well-known artists and self-taught amateurs” (Cvetkovich, 2014). Cvetkovich (2014) went on to say that what is left behind, what is in the archives, from the first

60 years of the 20th century are not institutionalized artworks but personal documents and ephemera: “private or collective expressions of regard and *friendship*” [emphasis added], similar to the work I discuss here (p. 291). The works existed outside of dominant modes of production and circulation, which can be said of most marginalized practices and communities I have considered such as zines, underground film festivals, and so on. I situate the practices of my subjects within this framework.

I do not attempt to position the practices in any linear way within the history of feminist art. The nature of the practices occludes such an approach, in any case. Art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau argued for caution when inserting artists into lineages they did not attend to or should not belong, or to which they would not have wanted to belong. Why do we do this? Is this not a sort of masculinist writing of history—to categorize and thus to “genre-ficate” (Solomon-Godeau, 2017), which is, again, a form of disciplining the potentials of art making and thus occluding the possibilities in the art itself?⁹⁶ For example, in a chapter of the same book, Solomon-Godeau outlined the problematics of trying to fit Francesca Woodman into a canon, and position her within art genres and influences that only superficially make sense and thus repudiate her difference, which is “what establishes her historical importance.” She concluded that Woodman's critics ultimately place her in a masculinist lineage as a kind of “source-mongering” (Solomon-Godeau, 2017, p. 182). Solomon-Godeau then asked if we would be better suited to approach Woodman—and this can be applied to any artist—rather than within a lineage of influence(d), with a kind of cross-dialogic diffractive analysis? This re-articulation of “source-mongering” is analogous to Karen Barad’s (2014) process philosophy and feminist thinking, so that when we think about Woodman in relation to and alongside Mendieta and Cahun, for example, we are shifting the methods of historiography. We are trying to witness a moment that was giving rise to particular ways of imaging femininity and gender difference. The chapter has historicized my group of subjects within this mode of analysis.

In this chapter I expanded on Amelia Jones’s analyses of self-imaging, self-portraiture, and subjectivity and also fleshed out her theories in how they were enacted by a feminist web-

⁹⁶ The “genre”—as a style of object—I argue against, drawing on Solomon-Godeau, varies from Lauren Berlant’s (2011) use of “genre” within affect theory that situates forms of life and our desires within the post-war context.

based imaging movement outside her purview. While Jones set up a framework of performative self-portraiture and held onto the term, her definition of the self-portrait is more suited to a concept she herself used (but not directly in relation to photographs) and I have adopted—self-imaging. My inquiry focused on how the encounters of the self-image demonstrated what self-images do—how they work in relation to the style, content, and form of my subject’s per-sites, and the contradictory always-in-process feminist subjectivity that the images are a result of and also shape. The images expand the field of identity politics without falling back into reductive ideas of representation by being situated on per-sites that are always in process and function as modes of self-determination as a result of the young girl imagining. These were amateur practices, as they mimicked each other and more established artists, and broke the distinction between high and low art. For the subjects of my study, they were it. They, indeed, operated within aesthetic hierarchies and reproduced power dynamics while also breaking uncharted paths, creating desire lines on the web. They became witnesses to each other's sharing (of) bodies across time and space, with themselves and for themselves. In turn, the self-imaging was a practice of wit(h)nessing. The images acted as witnesses (in their mimicry they pointed to an acknowledgment of seeing the other) literally positioned beside others on the per-site. They were creating a new photographic landscape, for which they are given no credit.⁹⁷ Solomon-Godeau, in her introduction to *Photography at the Dock* (1991), argued that "the history of photography is not the history of remarkable men, much less a succession of remarkable pictures, but the history of photographic uses" (p. xxiv). My contribution to scholarship with this research has always been about the *use* of photography and photographs towards various means—formal, conceptual, and social.

Carolina told me that although they loved the idea and outcome, they were ambivalent regarding their own imaging: "One of my last designs for lhabia.com, which I never uploaded online, I took pieces of images of women that looked like me and pieced them together with other images that were significant. The image at the end didn't resemble a woman, but a map of curves and skin and art." How do we come to resemble who we are (supposed to be)? The

⁹⁷ In fact, even in my persistent deferral, it seems more and more impossible not to make claims that these young women’s practices are precursors to today’s self-imaging world.

ludic web provided an opportunity for young people to image their answers.

Finally, this chapter has made no claims to a history of self-imaging but an extensive and deliberately particular study of a set of practices I believe to be missing from most literature on feminist cyberculture and on feminist art history discourses of the 1990s.⁹⁸ The 1990s receives another treatment in the following chapter, in which I look at modes of power, the power of pictures, what we want from them, and how forms of s/censorship influence our interconnected embodied relation.

⁹⁸ See Hawthorne's *Cyborgs, virtual bodies and organic bodies: Theoretical feminist responses* (1999), Laurel's "Interface agents: Metaphors with character" (1997), Laurel & Mountford's "The art of human-computer interface design" (1990), and Murray's (2017) *Hamlet on the holodeck: The future of narrative in cyberspace* for more intersectional and experimental modes of doing feminist cyberculture.

CHAPTER 3 — SEXUALITIES, S/CENSORSHIPS AND INTERSECTIONS

Censorship breaks your integrity; it's sinister because the work is endangered and embedded in a falsification of motive.

—Carolee Schneemann (1991, p. 34)

Introduction: Defining Censorship and Sensorship



Figure 30. Marlaina Read. *I am Sex* (1997). Image from an unspecified web page. Webcam with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of Marlaina Read.

“I am sex.” A proclamation in a pixelated white font stands on its side in a digitally manipulated vertical diptych (Figure 30). Above it is the only other clearly discernible symbol: a computer warning sign—a yellow triangle with an exclamation mark. Behind the mark there is an indiscernible image, a close-up. It is mostly shadowed with black. Below is another image, tinted magenta, of a face that reveals the nose in the middle but is cut off on either side before the viewer can recognize the face. The mouth is open. Gasping. The surface of the skin is merged with text of computer errors implying cyborg-like horror, abjection, and the monstrous. Is the image sex? Is the face in the image sex? Is Marlaina Read sex? Not a sexual being or an image of sex, but *ontologically* sex? Or is it a warning that, yes, young women can be “sex.”

To situate my concerns three terms appear throughout the dissertation: censorship,

sensorship, and s/censorship. Censorship, in brief, constitutes a removal of objectionable content, whereas sensorship is a removal of the experience of the senses (Olszanowski, 2014):⁹⁹ an occlusion of existential and feminist phenomenology that emerged, for me, out of the everyday practices of women imagining. While each concept materializes as a result of the other, I separate them for analytical purposes or when I reference a particular scholar's usage. When I want to refer to both as a whole I use s/censorship.

This chapter explicates the relationship between internet s/censorship and young women's self-imaging art practices between 1996 and 2001. It does so by providing a historical context of censorship and the intersectional conditions of sensorship young women experience and are transformed by online. In other words, how "the organization of power in a given society is better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other" (Bilge & Collins, 2016, pp. 1-2). It must be noted that zines and riot grrrl, precursors to this time period (as explained in Chapter 1), also proliferated as responses to s/censorship.¹⁰⁰ The context is scaffolded by my phenomenological framework, more specifically an existential phenomenology, which "is philosophically grounded on the carnal, fleshy, objective foundations of subjective consciousness as it engages and is transformed by and in the world" (Sobchack, 2004, p. 2). To situate my subjects' access and intersectionally frame the ways in which they experienced both censorship and sensorship, in and by the world—the online sphere—my main interlocutors are as follows: Foucault, in the *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* and *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995); Judith Butler (1997) and her entanglement of power/censorship/agency; and Theresa de Lauretis (1987), who re-framed Butler and Foucault to argue that the intimate public is entangled with the forces that bring it together. I expand W. J. T. Mitchell's (2005) assertions of image censorship in *What Do Pictures Want?*

⁹⁹ This aligns with Linda Williams's argument that "the appeal to the censorship of pornography is an appeal to the censorship of diverse sexualities" (2004, p. 19).

¹⁰⁰ See the now-defunct Toronto-based Canadian periodical *Fireweed: A Feminist Quarterly of Writing, Politics, Art and Culture* special issue "revolution girl style" (1997).

and connect it to the “Censorship II” issue of *Art Journal* (1991),¹⁰¹ which presented the multiplicity of censorship as a war on feminist art. To directly situate it within internet theory, I use Wendy Chun’s (2006) analysis in *Control and Freedom* to see how the US-based internet at large—a highly contested space—and its concomitant web-building platforms defined sexuality and obscenity through their ever-changing policies (MacKinnon, 2012).¹⁰² My examples may seem disparate at times but they must be read as theoretical and methodological attachments that address my inquiries.

Feminist body artist Carolee Schneemann (1991) has noted that censorship is “flexible, motile, adaptive,” and in its process, “boundaries of prohibitions are shifted, redefined” (p.35). The boundaries of what is acceptable and what is obscene shift and the consequences of obscenity shift (Williams, 2004). Censorship is multi-faceted and takes many forms. Even the term *removal* I use above is polymorphous. The removal of the experience of the senses can be a removal of dignity; a removal of a work’s value; a removal of the potential to be a sensory and sensing body in societal, personal, and affective ways. If, as de Lauretis has argued, “the term *experience* [is] to designate the process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed” (1987, p. 18), then if censorship is a process that removes experience, it is a process that wants to thwart and manage subjectivity.

According to Annette Kuhn (1988, pp. 6-7), reading Foucault, censorship can be defined as an activity which participates in an apparatus, in a set of practices whose interrelations are imbued not so much with power *tout court* as with the “play” of power. Power, in this model, is a process, precisely a holding-in-play, a network of relations, constantly in tension, rather than a privilege that one might possess . . . this power is exercised rather than possessed.

¹⁰¹ Although it may seem dubious to rely so heavily on a text from 1990 at length, it aligns with my epistemological constraint of attempting to foreground 1990s literature on the topic. I have not found any other 1990s academic publication that so cogently dealt with the interrelatedness of censorship and feminist practices.

¹⁰² Whereas surveillance and censorship can and do overlap, I found that prioritizing s/censorship allows me a more feminist phenomenological trajectory towards my research questions. For a feminist and performative aspect of surveillance see McGrath (1996) and Twigg (1992).

Censorship is “a gender issue—as well as one of race and class and sexual preference,” feminist art critic Suzanne Lacy (1991) argued. De Lauretis began the unpacking of gender as the main marker of identity and as a form of sexual difference, to show that the subject is not constituted by gender but rather “en-gendered in the experience of race and class, as well as sexual relations” (1987, p. 2). My thesis, while supported by an assumption of gender norms as it is focused on *woman* as a category (albeit carefully and not cis-normatively), expands on the work already written about women, censorship of sexuality, and imaging by situating it within a conjunctural moment of the web’s history (Solomon-Godeau & Nochlin, 1991; Squiers, 1999). The way modes of identity intersect is not always legible and can lead to what Canadian-Jamaican dub poet and activist academic Lillian Allen has called “hidden censorship”: the lack of access of minoritized communities to funding structures and institutions (Sirove, 2019, p. 157). This “hidden censorship” becomes embedded in the social and institutional structures so deeply that it is incredibly difficult to demonstrate.¹⁰³ It can include gender-marginalized people being harassed on the web to suppress their content (Blair, Gajjala, & Tulley, 2009, p. 144). Censorship can take the form of public outrage. It can be a slow constraint. Expanding on the latter, Schneemann (1991) asked, “Is the critical neglect of my work a form of censorship?” (p. 35) Indeed, Minh-ha (1991) argued for “The Other Censorship,” which is not only the lack of discourse on women, but the systematic erasure of women of colour in the arts. The critical neglect of the practices outlined in this project in the dozens of articles and books I read on internet history, even the feminist ones I rely on here, is indeed censorship (Moschovitis, Poole, Schuyler, & Senft, 1999; Lovink, 2009; Nakamura, 2002; 2008; Alexander, 2002; Terranova, 2000). To reiterate the concluding words of Chapter 2, I read my subjects’ work through a critical lens as a way to put them into conversation with—but not subsume them into—a larger canon, as they have not yet been included in dominant web and art history discourses (Jones, 2002; 2003; 2006; Reckitt, 2012).

These external modes of removal and silencing, some direct and some through oversight, operate on a systemic level and informed my participants’ subjectivities. By these very accounts,

¹⁰³ Gagnon presents the negotiations that women of colour in the arts must continually perform to participate in and have access to a broader Canadian cultural context in her chapter “Building Blocks: Recent Anti-Racist Initiatives in the Arts” (1998).

young people socialized as girls learn what is and what is not acceptable by practicing self-censorship. The practices produce themselves as censored objects and produce modes of censorship through their subject matter: concerned with characteristics of *the sexual*.¹⁰⁴ In the following passage from Kuhn (1988), replace the word “films” with “self-imaging practices” to make clear one of my main arguments: “The sexual, however, does not so much already inhabit the content of these films as become produced in specific ways in the discourses and practices which surround them” (p. 10). Censorship produces the young women and their work. It produces the ways these participants talk about their practices and the way I—as an immigrant feminist artist and scholar—currently discuss them, too. Kuhn’s reading directly arises out of her aforementioned argument on the interrelation of power between discourse and practice. It serves as a guide for my own analytical enquiry in this chapter, which “extends itself to the institutions, institutional practices, powers and knowledges which organize *the sexual* [emphasis added] within and beyond these films [self-imaging practices], and which are involved in their construction as objects of censorship” (Kuhn, 1988, p. 10). Dominant modes of power depend on those they govern to follow and enact their strategies, and in this case, particularly defined bodies (female-assigned bodies) have to perform in particular ways to uphold the power that serves to dominate them. Female-assigned bodies must enact forms of censorship—of others, and also of themselves. They attempt to perform a sexuality that is a cis- and heteronormative performance of submission even though, as Butler (1993) argued, it is impossible. These performances are inflected by four modes of censorship: institutional, societal, community-based and internalized (self).

The four modes of censorship are positioned within 1990s internet laws and policies and regulations of art concerned with sexuality and desire of the same era. I use feminist cyberculture as a source of language to think through my findings alongside visual research methods and memory-as-method to remember my subjects’ relationship to and enactment of sexuality, power, and subjectivity during the 1996 to 2001 time period. Memory work hinges on questions which are based in affective remembering. Although I do not ask all of the following questions

¹⁰⁴ Like Kuhn does in *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality: 1909-1925* (1988). The book has been necessarily reissued in 2018 as part of a special key texts collection, *Routledge Revivals*.

outright, as they are so direct I thought they would not result in a sufficient response, they are implicit in the trajectory of the interviews (see Appendix A): What was your relationship to surveillance during that time? How were rules of expressions of sexuality circulated during that time? How are those rules inflected by one's subject position? How do and did these women define shame? Were there any incidents that led to a priori and a posteriori self-censoring? Almost all the participants removed one or more of their per-sites when they deemed "too risky" to keep online. Risks of overregulation and surveillance of young girls' sexualities included family schoolmates, partners, and so on, finding out—anyone who could potentially "out" their online reflections, which often dealt with vulnerabilities unknown to those aforementioned. To frame these questions, I use Wendy Chun's analysis to see how the internet and its concomitant web-building platforms defined sexuality and obscenity through their ever-changing and contradictory policies. In particular, the formative years of the WWW held many different standards and a significant amount of change happened during the historical time period I am researching.¹⁰⁵ While ostensibly disparate, Euro-American artists like Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke, and Adrian Piper, who engaged in a new feminist performative art practice in the 1960s, give breadth to this argument, because they too were making art which had no precedent; rules and regulations about their sensory forms of expression were burgeoning alongside them and as a result of their practices (Lacombe, 1994). These were also the women from whom my research subjects drew inspiration, and not the feminist net artists using images that have been written about like Lynn Hershman Leeson (1994), Faith Wilding, Linda Dement, and VNS Matrix.¹⁰⁶ If anything, as seen in the content on their per-sites my research subjects were much more inspired by accessible North American riot grrrl, queer music, and zine culture (Nguyen, 2012) as well as artists who championed the multiplicity of the gendered and sexed "I"

¹⁰⁵ See MacKinnon's *Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle For Internet Freedom* (2012) for a detailed history of the internet, power, control, and political censorship.

¹⁰⁶ Marlaina did take an undergraduate course with one of the members of VNS Matrix in Australia but spoke little of their influence in our multiple interviews, although the impact is visible in some of her cyborg aesthetic as seen in the first image in this chapter.

like Francesca Woodman, Ana Mendieta, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton,¹⁰⁷ whose censoring apogee was suicide and/or murder. These artists resonated with young women because of their unapologetic reactions to censorship, accessibility through circulation, and most of all, their performance of in/visibility: figuring out how to be and how to understand one's adolescent and traumatic body within the world of power relations as detailed in Chapters 2 and 4 (see Figure 31).

I introduced the chapter with a close reading of Marlaina Read's photomontage as an opening for my arguments on the circulation of sexualities as inscribed with and entangled within contemporary power dynamics. My chapter's main inquiry: how regulation/censorship on the web, coming of age online, and sexualities intertwine and intersect in the formation of self-imaging elaborates on my foundational questions concerned with the tensions of circulation, ethical spectatorship, and how the use of technology enables and hinders an intimate public to proliferate. It does so through the following five sections and a brief conclusion: *Being On/Scene: Power & Sex*, in which I explore the entanglement of power and sex with a historical perspective on censorship; *<body>*, in which I experiment, using HTML, the specificities of how the *<body>* is positioned and censored on the web and how it circulates on per-sites; *Censorship Operatives: Four Types*, in which I examine the history and conditions of censorship of young women's experiences online; *Internet Industry, Regulation and Law*, in which I contextualize the arguments and present a timeline of regulations and laws of sexuality on the web and in the historical time period (1996-2001); *Coming Of Age*, in which I explore how all of the above have intersected with coming of age for this intimate public; and the Conclusion.

Becoming On/Scene: Power and Sex

The knotty link between power, gender, and sex is one of the main attributes in the practices of my subjects. Judith Butler by way of Foucault has argued that power relations are

¹⁰⁷ Both Plath and Sexton have been eulogized as depressive poets who committed suicide and my subjects viewed them as such, but it is erroneous and unfair to suggest Plath was a poet only concerned with depression and darkness, when so much of her poetry was about the optimism of life. Those themes would not have resonated with the discourse of my historical time period. Additionally, Ted Hughes had changed not only the order but the content of Plath's poetry books so they would begin and end with poems of depression and sadness (Malcolm, 2010).

equated with sexuality, thus producing the body as sexual. For Foucault, sexuality “is the discursive product of [normalizing] institutional practices and apparatuses of power/knowledge” (De Lauretis, 2010, p. 44) inscribed on the body. These normalizing regimes produce the body, and are also produced by bodies. In turn, they provide an operative function for the body itself to resist the very regimes that oppress it (Butler, 1993, p. 89). The body is always in excess of its subjection. It is precisely the creation and circulation of images that is the resistant practice these young women engage in by using the technology that aims to oppress them; they use it against itself. By doing so, they interrogate acceptable modes of behaviour and expression through a tacit knowledge that is often undermined in scholarship—knowledge that is built through the experiences and experimentation of people socialized as girls (Dyhouse, 2013; Kearney, 2013).¹⁰⁸ Following Foucault’s thesis that sexuality is an apparatus of biopower, the work of project participants, emphasizing sexuality, is a direct response to the heteronormative biopower of their historical period. In Chapter 5, I argue that pleasure is a tactic against forms of biopower and a means to revalue intimate relations. Bio-power is the sum of the effects of power on a body and part of a biopolitics—politics “situated and exercised at the level of life” (Foucault, 1978, p. 137). Biopower manages a terrain to control the body, and produces the reason to control the body (De Lauretis, 2010, pp. 48-50). In this framework, the body is one that biopower can and must “invest, penetrate, regulate, control, discipline, manage, insert” into the capitalist economy of production without passing through consciousness and imagination (i.e., the subject). In short, biopower, and consequently capitalism, must frame the “body as an efficient machine” of utilitarian motility that comprises gestures (prescribed movements and exercises) towards reproducing itself as a disciplined body, a body that gives itself over to power to have as much value extracted from itself as possible (Foucault, 1995, pp. 152-167). The extraction of value can only occur from bodies that are disciplined and perform their subjection to endure the rewards as bodies within this system of

¹⁰⁸ However, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, I want to be careful not to simply and linearly read their images through theoretical frames. I read them alongside theoretical lenses, as cross-generational, dialogic, iterative encounters with theory and other artworks. This approach connects with Jones (1998), Johnson (2013), and Solomon-Godeau (2017) and their feminist analyses of art, and with Barad’s (2007; Taguchi, 2012) diffractive methodology.

late capitalism.¹⁰⁹ These participants, through foregrounding their imaginative explorations of sex, unsettle these capitalist needs. The gestures of self-imaging (production, circulation and wit(h)nessing) are not paradigmatic, and even more so, within capitalism, are an excess and unproductive energy that needs to be bridled through fear, law, and (phallogocentric moral) reason (Foucault, 1990, pp. 48-50).

As Clare Johnson (2013) pointed out, *women's time*, such as their bodily functions and the performance of femininity, is undervalued and seen as frivolous and wasteful.¹¹⁰ Rather than following a pejorative reading of wasteful, I read wasteful as an attempt to dis-function within contemporary biopolitics. I construe the act of self-imaging as women's time, which attempts to circumvent the mechanics of power by exposing sexual difference in a privately owned public sphere (the web). Self-imaging is the performance of femininity, of gender, of being a sexed body: an image-body that attempts to circumvent biopower. It does so at various levels of description/explanation that are linked to the first two modes of censorship I list: institutional, as it serves no economic purpose towards direct capitalist gains.¹¹¹ and societal, as it lacks value towards progressing the art world determined by a Kantian aesthetic.

The un/intended seduction of young women's self-imaging is erroneously derided as narcissistic, frivolous, and of no value (Johnson, 2013, pp. 93-95). The act cannot be narcissistic or have no value if it significantly affects another—this is the self-image problem Amelia Jones (2006) undid in her work: female-assigned artists that have been accused of demonstrating their own pleasures (Hannah Wilke, Tracey Emin, Carolee Schneemann) (Johnson, 2013).¹¹² Would Catherine McKinnon consider my subjects' works of their pleasures (e.g., Figures 31, 39 and 49) pornography? The answer is an aporia. In some ways, she would not, because the work—the “sexually explicit material”—made by young women for young women of young women does not subordinate young women and their power. On the other hand, her use of ideology that

¹⁰⁹ For a feminist reading of late capitalism's violence on modes of production and the erasure of difference through a displacement of class politics see *Ludic Feminism and After* (Ebert, 1996), especially the chapter “Cyborgs, Lust, and Labor: The Crisis of Ludic Socialist Feminism” (pp. 45-126).

¹¹⁰ I delineate women's time in relation to self-imaging and per-site production in Chapter 5.

¹¹¹ Such as selling prints, which came much later.

¹¹² Most probably because white, generally conventionally beautiful, women artists are the ones who receive the most attention; in other words, they are the least neglected and ignored.

implies the active potency of images would: For her, pornography is not merely a representation but an act of “violent degradation,” and pictures are “agents of violence” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 33). McKinnon also wrote, in essentialist and trans-exclusive language, that internalized misogyny exists for women who participate in pornography, in *the sexual*. As such, she would argue that internalized misogyny has seeped into these works too. Although I do not read my participant’s self-imaging as pornography, their work, in part, gets situated within porn discourse through obscenity laws and regulations.¹¹³

One of the ways young women—people socialized as girls—reacted to this ideological system of power relations was to resist compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). This kind of resistance is a dominant narrative of the images and texts of my participants’ per-sites. Highlighting homophobia and queerness is an extension of the way young women of that time period were rebelling against this ideological status quo offline—forming girl gangs, smearing walls in menstrual blood, making zines about “grrrl love,” and rejecting pop music (Bell, 2002; Piepmeier, 2009). The form and content of the images are dis-functions of discursive power. In this (web) space they had access to a shared language, a “rhetoric of the pose” that was (mostly) able to circumvent censorship, at least from the outsiders.¹¹⁴ The “rhetoric of the pose” gave rise to semi/nude bodies, paratext, and layered cyborg aesthetics as seen in Marlaina’s image (Figure 29) and as outlined in Chapter 2.

¹¹³ See *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire* (Bright, 1998) and *Feminine Look: Sexuation, Spectatorship, Subversion* (Friedlander, 2009).

¹¹⁴ See Chapter 4 for an unfolding and contradictory enactment of censorship among girls during this time, as it displayed and circulated through a visual language of trauma.



Figure 31. Katharine Tillman. *Untitled* (2001). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital photograph. Courtesy of Katharine Tillman.

Other images expressed aesthetics and codes of sexual femininity that questioned participation within the hegemonic system of power while reiterating it. In the frame of Katharine's self-image above (Figure 31) is a frail white teenage girl on a bed with her body turned to one side with her breasts pointing up, looking upwards with her hands clasped over her stomach. She is simultaneously revealed and washed out by the strong overexposed daylight coming from a window behind her. On either side of the window are posters—one is a woman drawn by Egon Schiele, which Katherine's body seems to mimic. On the right side is a band poster for Electrolane, and below it is a poster for a Studio 19 exhibition, which Katharine and Helena were both a part of and was also the site of their first IRL meeting. The Studio 19 poster would have no meaning to anyone outside the community but for those within it, it is a marker of a shared connection. We can also read this as a presentation of a young woman doing nothing. Since Katharine took this photo when she was 16 or 17, this photo under law of her country and the country that hosted the work (USA) would be deemed obscene, stripped of its value as an exploration of subjectivity and sexuality, and considered child pornography and censored. So, the work is also powerful—young women are powerful—and thus, in the eyes of the state, needs to be obfuscated.

These conditions of doing, or rather, not doing, become the conditions of the works' and

the artists' existence because, as Butler argued, we cannot *be* without *doing*. The work of these practices forms meaning because an object cannot get or give agency, just like, as Foucault argues, one cannot get or give power.¹¹⁵ The work becomes part of the power system and as such forms agency—what can/not be speakable gets highlighted within the landscape of feminist art. In a hilarious jocular and contradictory twist, “in Judith Butler’s terms, it is both the regulation that inevitably states what it does not want stated and the opposition to regulation that nevertheless censors what it wants to say” (Williams, 2004, pp. 4-5). The practices of women’s time, now “censored,” are able to circulate with renewed agency. The image’s power remains whether it is removed or not. Indeed, in some cases, the overt performance of censorship, such as black bars, removal, beeps, and so on, is what “draws attention to the very items it attempts to suppress, in fact placing those items into public discourse” (Sirove, 2019, p. 13). A larger audience has access to the work that then becomes part of a public, and those who identify with and finally see it, like the work of Woodman, forge affinities. These affinities form through markers of difference. For my subjects, forms of trauma also become entangled within these power structures, both in representation and in subjecthood, as I unpack in Chapters 4 and 5.

Imaging Being Obscene

In her *Porn Studies* anthology, Linda Williams (2004) wrote that, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, in Latin the accepted meaning of the term *obscene* is literally “off-stage,” (at a remove) or that which should be kept “out of public view.” My findings reveal that the word obscene is derived from the Latin *obscaenus*, which translates to ill-omened (attended by bad omens) or abominable (causing moral revulsion); so, something obscene is morally revolting and invites bad omens (think of the history of witches here). Our interrelated etymological findings provide a flourishing terrain of how women’s practices are encumbered. Williams (2004) came up with a kind of neologism that connects well with my own s/censorship:

If obscenity is the term given to those sexually explicit acts that once

¹¹⁵ See “New Femininities: Agency and/as Making Do” an aptly called section of essays in the *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* edited collection (Scharff & Gill, 2011 pp.203-264).

seemed unspeakable, and were thus permanently kept off-scene, on/scenity is the more conflicted term with which we can mark the tension between the speakable and the unspeakable which animates so many of our contemporary discourses of sexuality. . . . On/scenity is thus an ongoing negotiation that produces increased awareness of those once-obscene matters that now peek out at us from under every bush. (pp. 4-5)

On/scenity enables my argument concerning the focal position of in/visibility present in the practices—self-imaging necessitates refracted ways of seeing. Body artist Carolee Schneemann (1991; 2003), having been accused of obscenity throughout her career, must be fatigued from asking, how can an image of a woman that that very woman took of herself, an act of on/scenity, be “obscene,” but history showcases nude women as imaged by men to be great works of art? One of the answers is that much of the self-imaging practices have political and social effects, and that undermines the position of male artists. Images, especially ones of sex, according to W. J. T. Mitchell (2005), are acted upon as if they were sentient, as if they are not representations but can do things, like I mentioned earlier.¹¹⁶ While I agree, I find his convenient evidence lacking nuance. He described Catherine McKinnon’s arguments against pornography and how they hinge on the idea that images do not merely show sexual and abusive acts but *are* them. Thus, in Marlaina’s image (Figure 29) at the beginning of this chapter, she is not an image of sex, she “is” sex. Is situating yourself ontologically a mode of producing an encounter with power you do not have? In unedited documentary footage by Alyssa Boxhill, Helena recalled, using the very same language, when her website *nothingbutmeat*, for which she became known, was removed without warning: “I had obscene content or something, so Tripod kicked me off.”¹¹⁷ However, censorship did not stop her from continuing her practice focused on making a young woman’s sexuality legible. I am ambivalent about these arguments: In

¹¹⁶ Sirove (2019) also looked at how Canadian child pornography laws were updated in 1993 to “afford moving images a special power”—that is, the laws acted as if images *do* things, like people *do* things: a conflation of images “depicting harm” and “actual harm to people” (pp. 102-105).

¹¹⁷ The title of the website is the last line from a Tori Amos song, *Blood Roses*. It has nothing to do with the concept of “meatspace” which is the term for IRL when communicating online that proliferated in the early to mid-1990s. Helena’s practice is definitely more than meat.

Chapter 4 I demonstrate how even if images are representations, their effects and affects are no less real in their potential and consequence. In this case, I disagree that images of sex are negative wholesale in the ways the ideology has espoused, but I do not disagree with some of these regulatory claims about the ontology of images.

Representations treated like actions¹¹⁸ acquired nuance during the "sex wars"—also known as the North American censor wars—of the late 1970s to the 1990s. This term references a set of debates and repressive actions around sexuality, sexual images, and pornography in the general public and within feminism that had a lasting impact on current understandings of sexually explicit representations, because they were about representations and not about sex acts (Dubin, 1994, pp. 141-145; Hester, 2015; Sirove, 2019, p. 102). Feminists like Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon expounded that pornography not only leads to violence but is a form of violence. The two theorists were popular because they reinforced the moral codes of the government and ideological rule, and they were able to gather a new audience—feminists. As such, they became accessible to the media as feminine spokespeople even if they represented few. Because of their frontloading of trauma and sexual abuse, their arguments were able to stick. Their approach was dangerous, because younger impressionable women became at odds with their lived experience upon seeing Dworkin and MacKinnon. I, too, fell for their digestible reactionary feminism for a while until I read Helena's writing on porn and then noticed other young women's images that attempted to displace repressive ideology. Repressive ideology marked many events during the 1990s, and queer and feminist artists fought to displace it. The drawn-out *Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium* trials of the 1990s provide an analysis of the contradictory, ostensibly arbitrary, and oppressive (specifically homophobic) nature of obscenity laws and regulations. Justice Kenneth Smith deliberated for 13 months on a decision that managed both to uphold the regulations of obscenity and to prove the legitimacy of the Emporium within the queer and larger Canadian community (Cossman & Ryder, 1995). Legitimizing art is a double-edged sword. At times the distinction between the obscene and art can be employed as tactic to save work from censorship, yet it is that same distinction that can

¹¹⁸ That same year *Aperture*, a US-based photography magazine, devoted an issue to the theme "The Body in Question," providing an in-depth look at censorship, sexual repression, and artistic freedom.

also cause censorship. The mobilization is what Lacombe calls blue politics: a paradox, because the very artists reacting to regimes of censorship need to rely on those regimes to continue to make the work that those very regimes want to suppress. It is so because the distinction between art and obscenity is a malleable symbolic logic, one that operates in the ways I outline in this chapter (Lacombe, 1994, pp. 156-157).¹¹⁹

In the shadow of the sex wars, Joyce Fernandes (2015) has claimed that, unsurprisingly, because of the history of women being defined by their sexuality within a phallogentric system, some third wave feminists have removed themselves from discussions of sexuality, creating a sanitized feminism. She has lauded early feminist practices as being much freer with their focus on pleasurable bodily practices. However, in doing so, they reinforced gender norms and only focused on representations which, she critiqued, lacked a resolution for women's powerlessness. Fernandes's caveat echoes a common—but, in my and Amelia Jones's view, unproductive—critique of Hannah Wilke's (Jacobsen, 1991, p. 46) and Carolee Schneemann's self-imaging work (Jones, 1998) as reinforcing the essentialized feminine body that takes pleasure in the gaze. She bypassed the tensions of contemporary feminist artists that both *reinforce* gender norms and *interrogate* them through seeking out cyborg-bodies. To further develop the way censorship operated within this time period and in relation to feminist practices, in the next section, I turn to a discursive and material (structural?) experiment by evoking the per-site <body>.

<body>

Before the 17th century, sexuality was conducted in public and not marred by shame.¹²⁰ In the 17th century, through regulations and modes of power promoting moderation, it was “moved” inside, into the home (Foucault, 1978). The home is also historically the domain of women and, as such, supposed to be a place of dutiful heteronormative procreation. If we follow

¹¹⁹ For more narratives of feminist art's role in the sex wars see Davis (2017), Dyhouse (2013), Fernandes (2015), and A. Kroker & Kroker (1987).

¹²⁰ Foucault's take on sexuality and power is uniquely Catholic and thus not tied to a specific time or place. “Clearly, he was most in dialogue with the situation in France and in the French colonies, but the stretch of the Church goes far beyond those contexts” (A. Szymanski, personal communication, January 9, 2020).

this logic, and if sexuality is supposed to be practiced behind closed doors, then these doors, only by virtue of being closed (away from panoptic eyes), provided freedom for the young women in my research to explore sexuality. These closed doors allowed my subjects to open others' doors—doors to the WWW. These young women were acutely aware of the ways in which sexuality is an identity one carries and one does: an identity that is supposed to be kept off/scene. These young women were responding to the unyielding discourse of sexual repression that has its origins in the 19th century. The discourse of sex in the 19th century changed who can talk about sex and in which ways—this did not yet repress or censor sex, but re-affirmed the status of power of those defining the discourse.¹²¹ Foucault (1978) stressed that this discourse rewarded moderate behaviour, defined as rational and masculine. Women's bodies and children's bodies were then signified as excessive, as too “bodily” as a result of these moral and ethical regulations and subsequently censored. The unyielding censorship has been a fertile ground for feminist artists, who, in response, foreground the body in a multiplicity of ways (Solomon-Godeau & Nochlin, 1991). The self-imaging practices of my subjects follow this tradition and imagine the body as an unapologetic prurient force that serves to undermine and re-appropriate the ethical boundaries of the dominant heteronormative phallogocentric discourse.

If, as Anne Balsamo (1996) asserted, “the material body is a critical symbolic resource for cultural expression” (pp. 160-161), then these young women's censored bodies are a result of an organized system of gendered power and control. Following Grosz and Haraway, she went on: “Although the body can be studied as a discursive construction, its symbolic form is *always* constructed in interaction with real material bodies” (1996, p. 161). A key factor in presenting my case here is that the WWW image-body is both a discursive construction and resolutely embodied, and so are its authors. Butler argued that the “conception of the body [in Foucault] is not restricted to the human subject” (2004, p. 185) and as such I include the per-site semantic body here. In viewing the source of a website, the <body> between angle brackets follows the header tag that follows the <html> tag, which always follows the <!DOCTYPE> declaration, the very first thing in your HTML document. The <!DOCTYPE> declaration, however, is not

¹²¹ In Chapter 5, I provide an analysis of how Marlina moonlighted as Aaron, a teenage boy, to experience the dynamics of gendered power.

an HTML tag; it is an instruction to the web browser about what version of HTML the page is written in. It tells the browser what language to read. We are inside language and language is inside us. That is, without that tag, the browser, an extension of us, is unable to interpret the code and its signification. Without it, there is no website, no site of connection. Yet, for two years after the first internet browser, Mosaic, launched, there was no HTML `<body>`. `<html>` is the language used to make the `<body>` legible and must always be positioned before the `<body>`; everything that visually appears on the webpage is within the `<body>`, like skin that holds us in. The webmaster, as those who made websites used to be called, can add any text or image inside it. To write in code to make a language visual is to be a master of the web. A webmaster can use software to write the code. Katharine Hayles (1999) wrote of the ways in which software provides an entryway for material bodies to be present in new media works.¹²² If the wrong person has access to the server that houses the body, they can remove it. They can destroy a body. One of the reasons Christin has such a small archive of work left is because they used their parent's server space to host their per-site until their parents "found out about [their] website and were very upset and took it down." Because Christin worked on their per-site when their parents were asleep they did not consider such over-regulation. In its wake, Christin's home became a panopticon: "I had my internet monitored and restricted."

Butler draws on Foucault's attempts to elucidate the ways in which bodies and their censoring are intertwined: "the activity of a strategy, the activation of the sterility of the prison on and through, and in tension with, the materiality of the body" (2004, p. 192). It is the disjuncture between the institution (i.e., the prison) and the body—the passage between them is where agency can emerge. And this "moment" of activity, this incident, eludes a proper noun, so Foucault has called it many things, even "a site," which is, as Butler argues, a "spatial metaphor for a temporal process" (2004, p. 186). So, then, materiality is a "site." I belabour this point to understand the mechanisms for sensorship, but also to demonstrate the links and interchangeable words for concepts within divergent fields—the prison in the 19th century and the WWW in the late 20th and early 21st century. The web "site" also serves as a disjuncture between the institution (in this case the web) and the body (the user, the producer). The passage

¹²² See Nakamura (2002) on the hegemonic treatment of mediated and material bodies on the web.

between them is the internet, the network. The website, as mentioned in Chapter 1, serves as a home, but also as a body. It is also a temporal process, unlike a zine or book or photograph. Its ontology depends upon constant updates in content and form. So this “site/nexus” is a “way of redefining the body,” not just a way of thinking “about power” (Butler, 2004, p. 186).

The nexus/site “of the application of power undergoes a redirection, and in this sense, is a certain kind of undergoing” (2004, p. 186), which maps onto what happens online. Website access is a series of packet-switching, of redirections of Internet Protocol addresses (IPs) that then point to other IPs and the site appears and is able to be accessed.¹²³ But censorship can command that your IP address cannot access other IPs. This nexus is a site of power as a site of power regulation. Not everyone can access sites, and certain sites can be removed, paywalled, blocked, etc. A tension is always at play—the <body> of the website is always undergoing an active redirection. If the body is “precisely the site of transfer for power itself” (2004, p. 187) then the website, too, is a site of transfer of power, between the viewer, the producer, and the network. What conditions then imply that the content should be controlled, regulated, and managed (a euphemism for censored)?¹²⁴ That the body must reproduce power, or, rather, power must be reproduced by bodies. But “must” is the wrong word because, again, it assumes an exteriority to power as something that then becomes interior. This phrasing then negates Foucault’s thesis that power is multimodal and trans-directional. The body has to be productive; it is then that it becomes a useful force (under capitalism, etc.). Women’s self-imaging and journaling is not productive under the ideological paradigms of modern society; it is useless. But the body, like the per-site, is never static. Butler noted that the body is always undergoing a transvaluation—in other words, “the re-evaluation of all values,” a phrase borrowed from

¹²³ “In packet switching, messages are sent out via modem from one computer to a ‘switching node’ where they are then divided into workable units. The units are, in turn, transmitted to their destination and reassembled. Packet switching protocol requires a series of computer and telephone calculations, occurring in many different locations around the world, simultaneously. The effect of packet switching, what we call ‘The Internet,’ then, is really a series of *cooperative performance gestures* [emphasis added] from multiple computer and telephone systems” (Senft, 2008, p.14).

¹²⁴ See the Introduction of *eGirls, eCitizens* by Jane Bailey and Valerie Steeves (2015) for a discussion of how “we can move beyond responsabilization and better protect girls’ online privacy by troubling the dichotomies—offline vs. online, risks vs. benefits, vulnerability vs. agency—that too often structure debates about girls and technology” (p. 7).

Nietzsche: an affirmation of life's desire and passion rather than wholesale suffering. Nietzsche was reacting to the Christian dogma of suffering as the apogee of life and not the productive social orientation of trauma I argue for later in the dissertation (Butler, 2004, p. 187). The body of my subjects, like the body of a per-site, frames its own censorship. That is to say, the modes of value I referred to above reproduce forms of censorship and are produced by those very same modes, a circular juncture I explore in the next section.

Censorship Operatives: Four Types

I have so far outlined the ideological context from which censorship emerges for my research subjects. Through its flourishing, it fragments young women's bodies, narratives, and practices. It does so by being *influenced* by the work made and by *influencing* the work made (Olszanowski, 2014). Four interrelated levels of censorship occur within this milieu: (a) institutional, (b) societal, (c) community-based, and (d) internalized. Institutional censorship happens at the level of policy and law. Societal censorship happens at the level of public discourse. Community-based censorship happens at the interpersonal level between peers and those of the shared intimate public (and it is the most unrecognized). Internalized censorship happens at the level of the self and is also felt at the level of censorship. Deriving these levels from my 2014 article "Feminist Self-imaging and Instagram: Tactics of Circumventing Sensorship," I also argue that the participants' reactions to the censorship at each level with which they must negotiate provide a new conceptual framework that I term "sentio-aesthetics"¹²⁵—an aestheticization of the senses as responses to a censoring of the senses. They are partaking in what Christine Harold (2004) defined as a "layering and folding [of] the rhetorical field" (p. 209). Instead of negating dominant modes of communication, they augment them. By taking an oppositional stand, the immutable authority and power of the ostensibly opposed system is reinforced and, using feminism is crucial in arguing that these systems of power are actually more fluid and permeable than they purport to be. That is to say, we cannot deny the hegemonic power of the ideological system, but we can try to engage with/in it in

¹²⁵ I arrive at this term from *sentio*, a Latin verb that is in part defined as "to discern by the senses; to perceive the effects (esp. the ill effects) of anything" (Lewis and Short, 1879, n.p.).

relational ways in order to re-move and dismantle it. In addition, the discourse of opposition is similar in language to that of the oppressive system itself. Recognizing the polysemic ontology of censorship while playing with it is one way to acknowledge this paradox and destabilize its repressive power. Schneemann (1991, p. 28) reminded us that historically men were encouraged to take and subsume the sexuality of a woman that she herself could not. Young women's sexuality is useful when the young women cannot speak back, when they are an image. Yet, what happens when that image is able to speak back? Why are we afraid to be seduced by an image?¹²⁶ By a person that is only inviting a specific viewer (a witness) yet enacts the unspeakable display for an unknown other too? The people who exert the emotional and economic labour of representing desire in these practices are aware of the discomfort of the double-edged sword for male viewers (on one hand wanting desire and on the other deriding it) (Senft, 2008). One way to explain this conflict is by using W.T.J. Mitchell's conceptualization of images and what we make images do—we desire them and expect them to desire us. In other words, “images both ‘express’ desires that we already have, and teach us how to desire in the first place” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 68). To showcase the duality of spectatorship, Mitchell has used the example of David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), a film about people's obsession with images. His argument that “most pictures we value highly are . . . discreet about the libidinal fields they construct, the deadly kisses they invite” (Mitchell, 2005 p.xvii) is well-suited for feminist art that foregrounds sexuality and desire. The feminist images, like *Videodrome*'s, are not discreet about the libidinal fields they construct. In fact, they demonstrate in much more explicit fashion, like those in my study, not the power of images, which Mitchell says is untenable, but the power we give (to) images. If they need to be censored, it means they are activating something. The power that is given to images (by us) that foreground a woman's sexuality is evident when the practices are marked as obscene. But, as Foucault argued, power cannot be given, as that would assume possession. The images are not inherently obscene; it is at the discursive level they are signified through the conditions of censorship. Because when art is made by women, the adage of needing to separate the artist from their art does not apply. It

¹²⁶ See Barthes's *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1981) for a detailing of our relationship to images and their affective resonance.

only does when male art critics hypocritically squirm at the idea that the artist and the art are interconnected, especially when it could unsettle “great male artists” such as Jackson Pollock, Pablo Picasso, and other abusers.

Feminist art unsettles our experience of pictures, specifically that of viewers who do not want to be confronted with the tensions of their desires, which is exactly what would have led Helena’s boyfriend, as outlined in Chapter 1, to deride her for “taking her clothes off for the internet” and insist she remove her photos. It was her body and her images, yet he felt the authority to control her imaging and circulation. He was unable to see the value of the act beyond his relationship to it. Johnson (2013, p. 130) illuminated this perspective: “The power invested in seeing is dependent upon an understanding of the other as one who feels looked at.” No one simply knows they are looked at; they feel it, as I detail in a discussion in Chapter 5 about the pleasure of the gaze. But who does the image want to be looked at by? What conditions does an image need? The answers to these questions matter for the formation of the intimate public. Ostensibly, these images may have had a variety of viewers, but it was being contingent on a reciprocal spectatorship that maintained their position within the feminist exchange of the community of per-site makers in the mid- to late 1990s. They needed witnesses, as my conversation with Helena expounds.

Magda:

The community was special because we weren’t making pictures for the people that are going to say: “you’re beautiful.”

Helena:

The whole point is that it wasn't supposed to be taken that way. The idea of the male gaze. . . . It wasn't even a consideration in that community because so few men were present and most men were assumed to be women by most of us. So, it was operating completely outside of that. It was specifically created to talk to other women.



Figure 32. Auriea Harvey. *Untitled, e8z4_hirez.jpg, with Michael* (1996). Scan. Image from folder /godlove. Retrieved from: http://e8z.org/godlove/closer/pop/photos/e8z4_hirez.jpg Accessed 2 September 2017.

Censorship informs the way art is conceptualized (Sirove, 2019, p. 8). Earlier I presented some forms that censorship can take as it relates to photography and feminist art; here I define four types of censorship to frame the practices of my subjects. Once I provide an overview of these operatives, I will then detail how these intersect with internet regulations and laws of the time period and their consequences on the practices and formation of an intimate public of per-site makers. Examples of these modes are also present throughout the dissertation.

As unprecedented structures of surveillance are formed through internet technologies, they mark and are dependent on the following four types censorship to be reproduced and deployed.¹²⁷ These structures, through their dynamic formation, discipline encounters and movements. Yet, their need to be continually reproduced (performed) also demonstrates their fallibility (Balsamo, 1996, pp. 159-162). There is potential to play with and augment the structures, and my participants did so through various material and aesthetic tactics to circumvent s/censorship: tactics that had no precedent online and had to be learned in situ. These encounters are amorphous and contradictory: working against one mode of censorship can enact another, as I will demonstrate below.

¹²⁷ Rainie and Wellman detail surveillance, coveillance, and sousveillance in North American and Chinese contexts in their chapter “The ‘Veillance’ of Personal Information” (2012, pp. 235-243) in *Networked: The New Social Operating System*. See Burkell & Saginur (2015) for how young women in rural Canada consider surveillance to be an influence in their online performance of personal narratives.

1. Institutional Censorship

“In the early twentieth century, government censorship was generally accepted as a conventional part of civic life, whereas in later years its most overt and visible forms developed a reputation as outmoded and repressive” (Sirove, 2019, p. 19). For example, the Ontario Board of Censors changed their name to the Ontario Film Review Board, even if they maintained the same censoring regulations. In some ways, the internet in the 1990s also followed this model, from lax burgeoning regulation while those in power were trying to figure it out, to immediate draconian regulation, to a kind of dispersed regulation that came into being with social media (Olszanowski, 2014). The rhetorical shift guides how the public views censorship and how those censored respond to their censoring.

To begin, I want to focus on the institutional censorship surrounding my research subjects that comprises the interrelated education and art world systems. Carol Jacobsen (1991) vindicated that the art and academic world “have constituted a range of exclusionary and tokenizing practices” (p. 42) against women and people of colour. They did so, in part, with, what she called covert censorship: “ridicule, historical amnesia, . . . and exercise of biased criteria (such as academic notions of ‘quality’)” (p. 42). At their worst, the tokenizing practices are highlighted under the euphemism and optics of cultural diversity (Gagnon, 1998, pp. 119-121). These serve to enshroud censorship as “an indelible sign of the establishment’s all-out war on women’s freedom” and the establishment’s censoring devalues art with its willful visual illiteracy, as in, deriding any image of sexual desire or pleasure as “porn” to then deem it obscene (Jacobsen, 1991, pp. 42-44). Willful visual illiteracy also disregards art by those who do not fit into the hegemonic ideal of the “establishment” (in my case web history and art history scholarship). It not only refuses to acknowledge those people’s existence but forces them not to be able to have access to self-representation, the latter of which Suzanne Lacy—in her 1960s-1990s historical overview of the art world—decried as censorship and in part what fueled the politically charged feminist art of the 1970s in the US. In the same article, Lacy (1991) also detailed co-option as a type of censorship that the art world has refused to acknowledge. Feminists were making political art and were not given any time or space within the art world, but then something shifted, and by the 1980s, male artists with little to offer in the realm of

political and cultural analysis were not only named but touted as “political.” Her example is all too ubiquitous for any marginalized community (Minh-ha, 1991). Feminist artists had their undergirding force—politics—co-opted and used in a catchphrase that obfuscates all of its history.

Art School

The idea that college programs are often the first doors of censorship wholesale (Deepwell, 1995) was reinforced by technophobic discourse that permeated the academic landscape. In the 1990s, most university programs were unwilling to accept and acknowledge the legitimacy of using computers in art. For those of us making per-sites, whereas we felt the importance of what we were doing, we also assumed that it was not a serious activity (as in, frivolous, as in, of no value as it was a “women’s time”) because of external censorial discourses and therefore of little consequence. Auriea drew attention to her experience at Parsons in the 1990s, an art school in New York that positions itself as a leader in art and design.

Auriea:

Photo manipulation was not allowed. I did assignments in Photoshop, [it] got teachers pissed off, they didn’t understand drawing on a computer.

Magda:

What do you mean not allowed?

Auriea:

In 1991/1992, computers and art were not a thing. There was a period in the 1960s, and I learned all about it—computers used in the arts. Now, you see the video of Warhol using his Amiga and so on. I knew about that and my teachers didn’t.

Magda:

But there was video art at the time!

Auriea:

That also was controversial—using video or film. There was no dedicated installation art, or multimedia thing, at Parsons.

I printed stuff out from the computer to be more “normal.” I got in trouble putting strange things through colour printers. My teachers were totally against it—“this computer art thing: No!” I wasn't even programming it, or anything 3D. It was more like using Photoshop to make a drawing or something. That was very misunderstood at the time.

(Laughs)

Auriea's story demonstrates the ways that new technologies are often feared and misunderstood and in turn get silenced by institutions, again, as not being high art or serious enough to be taken up as a creative practice. Ergo, these significations permeate culture and also affect how those using these technologies feel. I certainly felt my computer use was not important outside of my own environment. Marlaina, upon entering art school, essentially stopped her self-imaging practice and took photos of her sister, other people, or landscapes, foregoing human bodies completely. She did this despite the deep and rigorous resonances of the practices happening online. She told me about the process:

You would critique an image of a person down to this minute detail of what that image meant—how is this person standing? does this person seem passive? are they trying to blend in with their surroundings and architecture? become part of a building, or the land? are they trying to tell a story about how women have been written about in stories? in the past?—it's not just a picture of a girl on a chair, there's more to it than that. When I went to art school, I thought we would discuss a lot of that in terms of our identity, but instead, it was seen as trivial, silly, vain and not high art.

Art school perpetuated the Kantian distinction between high and low art, with the latter being frivolous and having no value, because self-portraiture, unlike portraiture, was mainly a

woman's activity. Marlaina explained why self-imaging was not an appropriate and useful art practice in that context: "It wasn't as serious because it was almost exclusively something that women did." To image a concept using your own self and body was only of value to prop up the power relations that served the ideological functions of patriarchy. Self-imaging did not. Carolina understood that their work was dangerous: "I did not share my site with people at school; the content was too personal. I also went to a Catholic high school so doing that would mean I'd get expelled."

The barriers for my subjects to even consider accruing capital from the work were impervious and not at all within their culture of that era. None of my subjects mentioned ever attempting to make a living with these practices.¹²⁸ For artists that attempted this, they had to pass many roadblocks: Before any work may be exhibited and have an audience it must be submitted for classification with forms and fees, a form of "prior restraint." It costs time and money to be censored, which some artist-run centers or indie festivals or artists simply refuse to spend, but not everyone has that privilege (Sirove, 2019, p. 4). Lacy argued that support systems must be in place for women to be able to bypass institutional boundaries and markets. These support systems, like the intimate public of per-site makers, were being built by the people in my study, precisely as a way to exist outside the status quo. They may not have had the access to be in galleries like La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse or Studio XX in Montreal, but their per-sites became early digital galleries. The aesthetic and stylistic characteristics that traveled across each participant's work became their own curated theme that cycled through the practices, without concern about societal pressures.

2. Societal Censorship

I define societal censorship as an apparatus that permeates culture and is a result of that culture, specifically during 1996 to 2001.¹²⁹ Some North American context: In the 1970s, sexual

¹²⁸ Only many years later all my subjects became creative practitioners in some capacity, some even within the sphere of coding like Carolina or Christin, photography like Marlaina, or writing like Roxanne.

¹²⁹ See Marwick's "The Public Domain: Social Surveillance in Everyday Life" (2012) for an explanation of how social online surveillance differs from traditional social surveillance.

expression was booming. This was in part due to the US president's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, that in 1970, published a report stating that pornography has no discernible negative effects. This attitude shifted in the Reagan-Bush era, and in 1986 another report was published, arguing that pornography is incredibly harmful and incites sexual violence and abuse. Shortly after, these latter conclusions were dismissed by scholars, to little effect. The ideological apparatus reproduced itself enough that the general public discourse changed and new regulations were executed to destroy anything that could be deemed “porn” (Winks, Semans, & Winks, 2002, pp. 298-299). These regulations purportedly protected “women and children.”¹³⁰

The contempt for pornography (as also seen in the sex wars described earlier) provided an updated rhetoric of obscenity and feminist forms of anti-pornography. This rhetoric was related to the myriad expressions of sexuality young women were exploring online during this time, which were influenced in/directly by internet pornography. Images that were integral to the aesthetics my subjects produced (detailed in the previous chapter) were censored and derided in other contexts such as the art world, IRL, high school, university, and the larger web sphere.

Harassment and pejorative language—“flaming,” as it is signified online—is a form of censorship meant to silence women on the WWW (Herbst, 2009, p. 140). In a chapter called “Masters of the House: Literacy and the Claiming of Space on the Internet” (2009), Claudia Herbst outlined several high-profile 1990s harassment cases against women attempting to make space for themselves in larger forums and communities like Usenet. The take-away: Shut up or a man is coming after you to do it for you. What follows is often a response of self-protection—a self-censorship.

Because surveillance needs to be performed by someone, it is unstable and creates an uncertain climate in which publishers and producers of work that could be potentially flagged and censored become wary of what they distribute.¹³¹ The potency of criminal charges is especially true about anything to do with children and sexuality, meaning that children (and

¹³⁰ For an exploration of the tensions and debates of 1990s internet regulation, especially as centred on children, see Milligan’s “‘A Haven for Perverts, Criminals, and Goons’: Children and the Battle for and Against Canadian Internet Regulation, 1991-1999” (2015).

¹³¹ See Monika Kin Gagnon’s *Other Conundrums: Race, Culture, and Canadian Art* (2000).

their parents) have no access to a language with which nor a safe environment in which to explore their desires and bodily changes. In 1988, artist Alice Sims's children were taken into emergency protective custody because of *Water Babies*, an Arcadian series of photomontages of Sims's nude infant daughter superimposed with water lilies; ethical engagement was treated as a violent act because of the ideological and discursive way the power of images has been framed by law (Dubin, 1994, p. 138). That is to say, the power of images is contingent on how regulation can instill its values through its policing. Christin remarked on the religious visual culture they grew up with and its inability to imagine anything outside of cis- and heteronormative values, an imaging they found among the per-sites.

Providing adolescents with a more robust sexual narrative was the *Good Vibrations Guide to Sex: The Most Complete Sex Manual Ever Written* (Winks & Semans, 2002), first published in 1994 with several revised editions. The 2002 edition included a chapter on the "World Wide Web" and concluded with a chapter on "Censorship," including US regulations regarding obscenity and sodomy. The chapter points to the connection of censorship and sexuality and urges the reader to participate in the fight against censorship locally and nationally. Complete sex education includes information on how to orgasm and fist carefully and understanding how those personal acts are situated within a politically social context.

3. *Community-Based Censorship*

Community-based censorship, for my research, is based on how women willfully and unintentionally enact institutional and societal censorship within their relationships online. Tiya Miles detailed the rise and fall of *The Rag*, a Harvard feminist collective/journal that lasted two years, in "Lessons from a Young Feminist Collective" (Findlen, 2001); in hindsight, she was able to point out to the lack of awareness and historicity the membership accounted for when they formed. The self-reflexive recollection is the kind of lesson that some of my subjects also pointed to: a lack of awareness around silencing and censoring other people, especially already marginalized voices. Although the intimate public that is my object of inquiry was built on sharing ideas and feelings that were censored elsewhere, it also censored other women and precluded them from participation. It was also in part a reflection of its contemporary offline context, a context that was fraught with white supremacy, ableism, and classism. Aarti

discussed the lack of visibility for women of colour during this time IRL and WWW. In fact, she did not realize until university how her race and class intersected with her sexuality.

I didn't have role models or anyone I looked up to, or had my vision of the world, except in books, and occasionally on the internet. And on the internet, they [young women] were all trying to figure it out too. They have the same struggles, which a lot of it was about heteronormative stuff—what I want to be like in the world as a sexualized woman, who I want to be with in the world. I wasn't hip to the fact that my highly individual background [being an immigrant brown girl] was an undercurrent to what was happening.

Images oriented with Aarti's experience of being an immigrant woman of colour were likely not included in the community given that “part of community-building lies in a dual process of compromising and marginalizing” (Senft, 2008, p. 18), and while not calculated, the experience of whiteness prevailed and the more it prevailed the more a web user had to connect with that experience to participate in intimate public of per-site makers. The way that hosts of servers chose other participants also created hierarchies. Being asked to have your own per-site on a per-site that was a collection of per-sites was nothing short of making it and marked you with legitimacy, as opposed to being hosted on a free site. In some ways, these server per-sites operated like galleries, and once on there you were part of the group show. Alyssa and Carolina told me that they only realized this exclusionary logic in hindsight, because they were so sure of their intent to create less of the hierarchies they noticed were happening on other larger sites like *plastique.org* and *prettie.com* that they could not see past it. The participants of the community, thus, learned a rhetoric of mimicry and concealment as ways to be accepted.

4. Internalized (Self-)Censorship

Internalized censorship operates both as a self-censorship and as a censorship that has through exposure been internalized by the subjects of the intimate public. Internalized censorship affects the self and also how that self in turn censors others (often without realizing it). It points to the complicated dynamics of social norms. If you want to belong in a particular community, you

have to ascribe to their norms even if they do not fit in with some of your ways. This requirement becomes especially evident in how my subjects framed their lives. The details mattered less as truths and more as affective resonances of belonging that gave the participants avenues to share their stories through imaging. What emerges from these encounters is a sentio-aesthetics of trauma narratives I detail in Chapter 4. These encounters also demonstrate the intersectionality of censorship. Women of colour were not given a space to discuss race and were not able to forge their narratives with as much breadth within this milieu. White supremacy was reinforced as the majority of the participants were white and were not concerned with issues of race; the web, similarly to popular culture, was a utopia where they could *feel* free from their bodies. That is to say, as Chun pointed out, participants of colour were erroneously “free” from their difference. Aarti told me, “I never thought about race and the internet at that time. In many ways, the internet was a way for me to be white.” Carolina also pointed out they kept their race mostly hidden from view. While they said that it did not matter, they also suggested they felt they would be discriminated against if they revealed it.

The aforementioned four operatives guided the forms of the practices of my study participants. They reveal the ways in which art gets produced and circulated and what art does not and cannot burgeon. They demonstrate the interplay of competing knowledges and discourses, as well as the way censorship limits us and the way we limit it with the nuances of our work. These disciplinary sources contributed to a mostly indirect management of these young women’s practices yet provide a landscape in which a new art making can form on its sidelines (Sirove, 2019, p. 9); they also allow me to argue for a productive social orientation of censorship. Anne was removed from high school because of a zine about trauma and rape she used the school computer to print. The authority figures at the school were already concerned because she did not get along with boys and now she was using swear words. Frustrated, she told me, “They were less concerned with the content of the essay that I had been writing which was about molestation.” Yet it was also these encounters that propelled her to make more work like this and share it online, carefully, as surveillance was always on her mind.

How was the work going to survive these towers of censorship? In the end—as all my subjects emphatically noted—it was not censorship but the homogenization of the web that ended this movement.

Internet Industry, Regulation, and Law



Figure 33. Time Magazine Cover. *Cyber Porn* (3 July 1995). Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19950703,00.html>. Accessed 2 December 2019. Reproduced with Fair Dealing.

In this section, I turn to the history of regulation and law regarding visually mediated sexuality on the web within my historical time period, 1996 to 2001. In particular, I examine the way in which policy is centered around dismissing and shaming young women’s experiences of self. I name some of these practices “pornography” or “obscene” only in tandem with the ways in which the work is signified in law and as concepts I delineated earlier (Dean, 2001b). For example, Helena, when crossing the US-UK border one time, nearly had a drive confiscated with her images because it was deemed pornographic:

I was coming from England, and I had CDs [of my photography and other people’s work] because I was working on my thesis about sex work, and the guy took them and went back to his special room for about one hour while I stayed behind. Then he asked, "Do you have anything any more explicit?" Assuming I was a pornographer and trying

to intimate me by being a creep. Then he just let me go.

The encounter above is not unusual in its dependence on power dynamics, which demonstrates how regulations are meant to uphold a hegemonic morality. For the purposes of this chapter, I situate my research within Eurocentric and mostly US-centric censorship laws and regulations because most of my subjects used web servers that were based in the US, Canada, or Europe.¹³² Hosting and server space in these regions came with its own set of privileges and problems. It was easier to attain due to financial access but also due to a different set of censorship laws than were found elsewhere, such as in Asia or South America (Harcourt, 1999). Laws and regulations regarding the internet are also based on the First Amendment of “free speech.” How “speech” is defined, what is “free,” and who is free to decide and free to speak are all entangled with the US Supreme Court decision-making power of the limits of the “speakable” (Chun, 2006).¹³³

Discussions of sexuality, censorship, and the web usually start with the “Great Internet Sex Panic of 1995,” initiated by an erroneous presage: a July 1995 *Time* cover story fabricating an alleged paranoia (Milligan, 2015, pp. 245-246). The cover (Figure 33) comprised an underlit portrait of a white androgynous-looking child with their eyes and mouth gasping and their fingers about to touch a keyboard or just having touched it and pulling away. The lighting, the performative gasp, plus the black turtleneck (a rare sartorial choice for a child, creating an uncanny resemblance to Steve Jobs) makes the child look like a doll. The headline typeface makes use of shadow luminance: “CYBERPORN EXCLUSIVE: A new study shows how pervasive and wild it really is. Can we protect our kids—and free speech?” By 1995, most people in the United States and Canada had never seen internet pornography, although the article, based on a Carnegie Mellon undergraduate thesis by Marty Rimm (a student that had fabricated

¹³² For a feminist analysis of Canadian internet policy and access see Crow and Sawchuk’s *Some Canadian Feminists Intervene in the Datasphere* (1995).

¹³³ It is outside the purview of this dissertation to delineate what does and does not become a speech act. See Butler’s poststructuralist philosophy in *Excitable Speech* (1997) for such an account. Elsewhere see Andersen (2018, 2016) who explores and nuances the relationship between speech acts, language and performativity.

research many times in the past), argued otherwise.¹³⁴ Despite the falsity of its methods, its claims in part led to the 1996 Communication Decency Act (CDA), Title V of the vague Telecommunications Act of 1996, that “both deregulated the telecommunications industry—allegedly opening access for all citizens to the Internet—and regulated Internet content for the first time” (Chun, 2006, p. 77). Subsequently, the US government’s attempts to regulate pornography led to the “porn gold rush” of 1996-1997 (Chun, 2006, p. 80).

Pornography—from the beginning—was a beacon of internet capital: profitable and a staple of the dot-com boom. Chun’s compelling narrative about how pornography was taken up during this time in public media and by the government, as well as how it in turn was interpolated by the broader public, shifted pornography’s structure through these discursive and formal modes of spectatorship. The media discourse espoused that people control not only the desires of children and their own desires but manage any interests that could possibly align with an attraction to the “filth” and “obscenity” of internet pornography (Chun, 2006, pp. 87-88). Chun demonstrated how the internet reorients our gaze and determines how we view and understand internet pornography. The internet changes the ontology of a screen, as is evidenced by the *Times* cover's (Figure 33) rhetoric of the pose. The computer screen becomes a camera—what looks at us and exposes us.¹³⁵ I connect the encounter of the computer screen with Mitchell’s theorizations about images and the power we as viewers provide them, and in turn how the self-images of young women unsettle that because they look at us and at our desires.¹³⁶ The young women are watching our desires when they are supposed to be the objects of our desire. However, they can never fully be our objects of desire but rather representations and

¹³⁴ This type of journalism is indicative of the general paranoia of the internet focused on the dangers and risks, especially to young women, all the while obfuscating the kinds of systemic inequalities and violence young women face that would lead to such activity in the first place (Steeves, 2015, p. 3).

¹³⁵ For a phenomenological account of screens, see chapter “The Scene of the Screen Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic ‘Presence’” in Sobchack’s *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004) and Michelle White’s *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship* (2006).

¹³⁶ Men, hetero- and cis-normatively, have been conditioned to assume all pornographic or sexual material depicting women is aimed at them.

simulations of those in ways that make us, the viewers, suspend disbelief.¹³⁷ The power of images is none too obvious with pornography. “Pornographic images are dangerous because they usurp their referent, unless the issue is child pornography—then, the danger stems from their indexicality” (Chun, 2006, p. 123). Somehow a photograph’s ontology shifts by virtue of its signification as pornography. Images do things, and through their doing and not doing we can assess the culture that fails to stop the multiplicity of images of sex that needs to be unavailable under US regulations (Chun, 2005). In other words, “internet pornography calls into question visual knowledge” (Chun, 2006, p. 124). Chun detailed that “cyberporn,” as a media genre, transforms pornography because of its movement and dependence on multiple points of access. “Unlike other media, Internet porn sites allow users to sample readily between its numerous categories (which contain many of the same images)” (Chun, 2006, p. 106). Chun employed a terminology shift from cyberporn to database-pornography because the content in question is driven by an organized database structure in our consumption, unlike other media (Chun, 2006, p. 107). But these databases are also shifting and multiplicitous, a kind of exemplar of the multitudes of power as described by Foucault and later Deleuze who updated Foucault’s ideas on disciplinary societies to argue for societies of control as driven by capitalism. Proving Deleuze’s assertion, forms of organizing and managing regulation and power have usurped any open source potential that the early internet theorists lauded. The threat of legislation has had a profound impact on websites.¹³⁸ The owner of *altern.org*, a large alternative network in France, Valentin Lacambre, told me he was supportive and very aware that the content of the websites he hosted could get him in trouble (personal communication, January 16, 2017). However, as soon as the French courts considered a law that made web-hosting services responsible for their users’ content, he did not wait to see if the law would pass and removed all the websites on his server in June 2000 not wanting to risk any criminal charges (Chun, 2006, p. 120). While I eschew discussions of the contemporary moment, allow me to use it here. Since

¹³⁷ See film theory analysis on gendered suspension of disbelief, Blaetz (2007), Doane (1987), Kuhn (1985, 1994).

¹³⁸ See Weber’s (1997) “The X Files: For Those Who Scoff at Internet Commerce, Here’s a Hot Market: Raking in the Millions, Sex Sites Use Old-Fashioned Porn and Cutting-Edge Tech—Lessons for the Mainstream.”

the web's inception, more and more web platforms are changing their regulations to remove forms of nudity from their already disciplined spaces.¹³⁹ This act seems to regress the amount of feminist work done so far. One such example happened when I was first writing this chapter in 2015. Google and their blogging platform¹⁴⁰ Blogger¹⁴¹ announced on February 24, 2015 that no sexually explicit or nude videos or images would be allowed on the website as of March 24, 2015. I include the example to highlight its caveat: the service will allow nudity “if the content offers a substantial public benefit, for example in artistic, educational, documentary, or scientific contexts.” This caveat takes its cue from number 3 of the *Miller v. California*, 413 U. S. 15 (1973) case, a popular case evoked within discussions regarding art censorship (Miller, 1974, p. 582).¹⁴² Following this case, the US courts “ruled that all ideas having any social worth, be it controversial or hateful, must be protected by the First Amendment.” Yet as the 1990 “Censorship II” issue of *Art Journal* extends, the aforementioned statement does not align with the ways in which artistic institutions take on nudity and sexuality when it comes from a woman's hands. The struggle around what differentiates art from the obscene within law and culture includes many examples (Christa, 2005; Lacombe, 1994; Read, 2015). Why have men for centuries depicted underage (naked) women, women they have raped, violated, and so on, and been revered (Wolfthal, 1999)? Yet women, depicting their sexuality outside of the control of a man, are deemed frivolous and subject to obscenity law? The first famous camgirl and the oldest practicing one, AnaVoog, is known for her maximalist feminist performative body art online and for directly addressing modes of s/censorship in her work. One such encounter from 2001

¹³⁹ Now these implications are seen en masse with social media as *the* web. We are less and less reliant on code and web building like in the 1990s because users have much less access to back end programming. The architecture is algorithmic and closed.

¹⁴⁰ Blogger has also been blocked at times by different countries. Thus, if you have your work on a platform, it is then susceptible to large-scale infiltration, blocking, and even denial-of-service attack (DoS) attack.

¹⁴¹ <http://www.engadget.com/2015/02/24/google-bans-sexually-explicit-nudity-blogger/>

¹⁴² The Court ruled that material is legally obscene if: “(a) the average person, applying contemporary community standards would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; (b) the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and (c) the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” (Miller, 1974, p. 582).

is detailed in Senft (2008). AnaVoog received a comment in her webcam chat from one of her viewers to “bend over” and as a response made a triptych image and posted it on her personal LiveJournal page. The LiveJournal Abuse Team asked her to take it down because it was “frankly, vulgar.” Following the email from LiveJournal, she wrote a post sharing the email and insisted that her readers protest this censorship: “‘WOMEN’S BODIES/CYCLES SILENCED AGAIN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! NOMORE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!’ Given AnaVoog’s impassioned fan base, after about eighty posts, the LiveJournal Abuse Team conceded, and AnaVoog’s images were back online” (Senft, 2008, p. 88). AnaVoog’s example allows me to consider the way internet users negotiate and enact the notions of what constitutes public and private space.¹⁴³

Hannibal Travis, in *Cyberspace Law: Censorship and Regulation of the Internet* (2013) argued that cyberspace (the internet) is a “product of public-private censorship.” This public-private censorship, he argued, is a postmodern technique, probably because of its multilateral ways of monitoring and then restricting that which is most often not visible or obvious; it defies any grand narrative around what we assume regulation and control to mean. Early internet doyens insisted that the internet was too big, too mercurial, to ever succumb to pressures of state censorship (Travis, 2013, p. 2). Yet Lawrence Lessig (1997) was correct in noting that, “rather than regulating behaviour directly, government will regulate indirectly. Rather than making rules that apply to contain individuals directly, government will make rules that require a change in code” (p. 184), in other words, the architecture of the net. Lessig was, in part, responding to the Communications Decency Act (CDA), which prohibited the “knowing transition of obscene or indecent messages to any recipient under 18 years of age” and the “knowing, sending or displaying of patently offensive messages in a manner that is available to a person that is under 18 years of age” (Travis, 2011, pp. 3-4) which obviously refers to every website that can be accessed.¹⁴⁴ The Act’s reach included fining the sender, the system used, and the ISP. The CDA would forego a fine if a person in good faith could provide an explanation that their content could not be viewed by a minor—a clumsy caveat, seemingly only useful for those with clever lawyers. CDA, then, would have affected most of the participants in the intimate public of per-

¹⁴³ See <http://www.eff.org/> for ways of resisting surveillance and regulation online.

¹⁴⁴ *Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union*, 521 US 844 (1997) qtd in Travis (2011, pp. 3-4).

site makers using the internet during this time, given the content of their per-sites, which dealt with sexuality both in text and in image. Lessig (1996) continued by highlighting that, “in the well implemented system, there is no civil disobedience, (p. 1408)” meaning that when institutions structure lives in ways that make no choice possible or even evident, in order to participate in our own lives we have to follow the established order. Not doing so precludes us from living even the most ordinary life involving only the basic tasks of staying alive (Ahmed, 2010; 2017; Dean, 2001a). As such, the Supreme Court did not agree to the CDA’s unclear and vague mandate, along with the Child Online Protection Act (COPA), which was found to be too drastic regarding regular adult internet usage (Travis, 2013, p. 15).¹⁴⁵ This decision also reveals what images are and do within an ideological system: they are dangerous and as such inherently promote dangerous activity that can undermine social structures. Travis agreed with Lessig in that the shifts in regulation and management are creating users that are civilly obedient—a form of internalized self-censorship including “what users search for and read on the Internet” (Travis, 2013, p. 18). Although he outlined these two ways (regulation and management) in different sections, he did not make the link between them. He suggested that through the internet’s architecture, “backdoors,” and so on, one could possibly participate outside the panoptic gaze, but in order to participate in online culture a user must use their internet-enabled software appropriately (Travis, 2013, p. 18).¹⁴⁶ And so, these conditions enact the bind of living within an established order I mentioned before and the consequences of sovereignty Lauren Berlant staged in *Female Complaint* (2008).¹⁴⁷

The complexity of technology regulation and policy formation is outlined in the “Trust, But Verify” chapter of Rebecca MacKinnon’s book *Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide*

¹⁴⁵ See the Blue Ribbon Campaign and their fight against the CDA which has had lasting consequences on the way groups organize, and consider WWW censorship and “speech acts” (McMurdo, 1997).

¹⁴⁶ I am assuming he means activities such as using an iPhone without jailbreaking it or not posting images of menstruation on Instagram like I have (Read, 2015, n.p.).

¹⁴⁷ See Karen Ross’s chapter “Gender@Internet” in *Gendered Media* (2010) about the medium specificity and politics of (non)location of the internet as partial and continually changing—a networked ontology that allows it to be accessed from many different locations and create communities in ways that at that moment IRL was unable to provide. Ross highlighted the methodology of internet research as being more contingent because of the internet’s ostensible ephemerality and its kinetic temporality.

Struggle For Internet Freedom (2012) and serves as a backdrop for the 1996 *Women & Performance* special issue titled “Sexuality & Cyberspace” edited by Theresa Senft and Stacy Horn. In the edited collection, the first of its kind, feminist theorists took on the ways in which “cyberspace” operated without the common mid-1990s utopian feeling and how it nurtured cyborgs while deriding them. In the next section, I examine how the participants in my research contended with these contradictions.

Coming of Age

I remember in the early days of the internet, before porn as we understand it visually now, there was a lot of erotica. I remember reading a lot of it at 13/14, and loving it. And realizing that there was a world for women's pleasure . . . coming [in]to my own in terms of my sexuality a lot earlier than my peers and having to contend with that. In some ways, I knew so much and I couldn't enact it in the world for some time for obvious reasons. I wonder how many young women dabbled in internet sex related to IRC worlds. It's so mysterious for young women—how else do you learn about it especially if you have a family like mine? . . . That was really empowering, to be involved in something that now might have been unsafe, but at that time there wasn't this culture of predatory internet behaviour and we weren't aware of it. And I don't ever remember feeling that, but engaging in online sex . . . that was empowering.

In the quote above, Aarti explained how she had to contend with her sexuality—as an Indian immigrant to Canada—as it unraveled qua online performance and communication. Hilma Bilge (2012) succinctly argued that sexuality as “an axis of power both constituted and is constitutive of other axes of power and forms of dominance” (p. 255). Sexualities are never discrete, they work with and build on and are built upon by other markers of identity. And while I focus on sexuality in this chapter by way of the participants in my research, I do not do this as a way to dismiss the other axes of difference. It is imperative to note who was online during this

time and who felt they had access to explore and share within the intimate public that was continuously in process of formation. The risk of being sexual for a woman of colour is much different than it is for a white woman, as racialized subjects are always-already sexualized through the white supremacist gaze. Some forms of expression emerge more easily than others, as Helena demonstrated by reflecting on her inability to acknowledge her white privilege when she was younger:

What affected me . . . was when someone pointed out that people were looking at my pics because I was skinny and white and young, because I couldn't control that, that was who I was, plus I was 18. I was using my own body, so when Marlaina would bring it [my white able-bodied privilege] up I would get really defensive because I wanted to believe that that wasn't why the people were looking at the pictures. But clearly Marlaina was right and that was a big part of it. I realize now that at the time I didn't want it to be true.

The access to image for white women is corroborated by some of the people of colour in my study: their exposure of their bodies was nearly illegible. In her 1990s research on young women and their relationship to imaging technologies in Australia, Bloustien (1996) argued that despite the differences in their identity and social, economic, and personal backgrounds, “the discourse of femininity that confronted them [the young women] in the mass media and circulated around their worlds was the same, an ideal feminine Other against which they came to define and construct themselves, even when they were in some way contesting that image” (pp. 3-4). Over time, making images for the web became exponentially absorbed into (Eurocentric) everyday culture (de Laat, 2008; Lasén & Gómez-Cruz, 2009; van Dijck, 2008) as ubiquitous acts. However, making images specifically for a per-site was in its infancy during the historical time period of this project. Helena explained the confluence of coming of age, making a website, and

exposure to visual culture:¹⁴⁸

It all happened at the same time—when I was taking these pictures, making the website, first started having sex. Not that I was super comfortable with my body, but I was very neutral about my body in a lot of ways, and that definitely influenced the way I approached sex. It was like a feedback loop and they influenced each other. In some ways, it made me more confident. Not like “you’re so pretty” but the fact that those images could be seen as meaningful or powerful in some way did make me feel better, more positively about my body.

Expressions of sexuality grew in tandem with the online experience.¹⁴⁹ Helena’s experience points to the way the repressive IRL experience influenced her imaging online and the way the online sphere reinforced the importance of her explorations that IRL could not. Image making was the crucial way to orient one’s whole self online. More specifically, these young women’s sexuality grew in tandem with their online experience, as corroborated by Marlaina below. During one of our interviews in 2017, sitting in my kitchen whispering as my son was sleeping, Marlaina pulled up more images she had recently found and was taken aback in the way they were able to conjure up memories she thought she had forgotten: “A lot of the images I did that I thought were exploring sexuality happened at a time when I wasn’t having sex, I never had an orgasm. I lost my virginity in 1998.” Christin told me that they did not realize their way of thinking about sex and sexuality was normal—they identify as a demisexual—until they specifically saw others online making work that shared similar sentiments about desire. “I had

¹⁴⁸ The tumblr.com and personal website connection is outside the purview of my dissertation but is a productive link, given that it has been until recently the choice for youth to discuss and post about social justice issues, and especially combatting cis- and heteronormativity (Fink & Miller, 2013). Sexuality and censorship is an unyielding topic of discussion, specifically in the art world, where so much content is also cross-posted on IB-MSNs. Popular press is filled with stories on how censorship of social media is creating stronger and stronger forms of self-censorship (e.g., <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/the-spiral-of-silence-how-social-media-encourages-self-censorship-online-9693044.html>).

¹⁴⁹ In “TOP GIRLS? Young women and the post-feminist sexual contract”, Angela McRobbie (2007) explained the “new sexual contract,” a post-feminist argument that people socialized as girls, now, through consumer culture, have access to sexual capital previously never available to them.

friends in high school, but wanted understanding and resonance on other levels that I found through other websites in the mid- to late 90s and early 2000s especially.” Helena recounted the work of another woman in my study:

Katharine and her work gave us a picture of being young and having these desires and feelings that in the regular world were very shameful, or that no one talked about. And when you read it from her, you saw things about yourself that you didn’t even want to admit, but the way she wrote about it was just a totally different way of looking at girlhood and coming of age.

At the same time, Katharine revealed the circulation of influence I mention in Chapter 2: “I don’t think it would have necessarily occurred to me to put nude or semi-nude photos of myself on the internet if I hadn’t seen other women doing it as a means of self-expression.” The means to express a self is inflected by markers of identity. Carolina pointed to the way even writing about sexuality was inflected by the societal censorship of their country, the Dominican Republic.

I was very afraid of writing about sexuality. One of my very first crushes was another girl. So, I started writing about my relationships with boys and men. I wasn’t very sure about my reasoning, but it really helped me somehow to know myself that way. I grew up in a very conservative society that is as much of an island figuratively as it is literally. . . . [This] was something that I needed to do to stay sane.

Although Carolina’s reasoning behind writing about boys instead of girls may not have been clear to them at the time, it is evident now that they internalized societal censorship towards queer culture. Web technologies were creating the conditions to express alternative modes of sexuality and in turn promised an emancipation from rape culture, which they did and did not fulfill.¹⁵⁰ Almost all the participants spoke to this multiplicity of emancipation and sublimation:

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion of the formation of sexual knowledge, identity, and girlhood see Eszter Szucs’s *Sex Talk Online: Sexual Self-Construction in Adolescent Internet Spaces* (2013).

a process of attachment that formed the intimate public sphere. Marlaina shared the process:

When I made my websites, it would come from a place of absolute intimacy in the first instance, and you would start with absolute intimacy and move into more perfunctory relationships. I would feel like I was baring my secrets, the true side of me, even though what I did online was quite mediated.

The per-sites were spaces of intimate attachment, they removed the introductory exchange that is necessary for IRL situations. Marlaina's experience demonstrates the performance of self regardless of medium and context. More so, she demonstrates the IRL/WWW split in that the per-site allowed her "absolute intimacy." Because of the intimacy of the content of these per-sites and its inchoate nature, a multi-step process emerged to make, maintain, circulate, and move them if necessary. Moving websites to different domains or pointing them to different URLs happened when others would find the websites and threaten to publicly shame the women online (on forums) and/or in their offline communities. Hence, as much as my subjects wanted it to be, the WWW was not fully outside of normative regimes of power, control, and censorship. However, this exchange of power and control was not homogenous.

Race Relations Online

The concept of intersectionality as an analytical tool illustrates how young women, depending on status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on were censored in different ways at different times within web spaces. While Auriea and Tamika told me that the web for them did not perpetuate racism or any sort of censorship, Carolina and Aarti did. Carolina told me, "Revealing my race online meant I would suffer discrimination. I probably did reveal it early on, but as time went on I kept hiding more and more details of my ethnicity." They went on to write, "This is really a complex topic." I asked follow-up questions in a subsequent email interview, but they skipped over them, like Tamika did, which speaks to the difficulties of discussing race, or perhaps discussing race with me, a white woman. I cannot make claims about our lack of discussion regarding race because they did not share their reasons for not replying. Auriea's opinions regarding race and the web, which differ somewhat from the others', may be related

to the fact that Auriea is older than all my other subjects and started the per-site in her 20s, when she may have had more experience and perspective than the others. What she did note, however, is sexuality's potency within societal power dynamics, which is why much of her work during this time was undergirded by forms of desire and its potential rather than limitation (see Figure 32) and her 3D self-imaging work with Michaël Samyn (<http://kiss.entropy8zuper.org/the/wrongkiss/>).

Bilge and Collins pointed out that youth are often the ones who notice modes of inequality within the neo-liberal system first. They have a particular vantage point through which to experience it, especially as young people who, depending on their identity, see the institutional structures at work against them and their peers (Bilge & Collins, 2016, p. 117). That is to say, institutional structures (e.g., pornography laws and abstinence-only education) preclude their access to self-representation and self-determination. Aarti explained, "In many ways the internet did not address at all my racialized self. There was no sense of me being a person of colour on the internet." Why was Aarti's modus operandi of self-presentation online to not present herself, to be off-scene? I draw on her words to suggest that these encounters on the web may have been racialized self-sensorship. With work that is reminiscent of Lalla Essaydi's *Converging Territories* (2004) and *Les Femmes du Maroc* (2006), Aarti continued: "I remember trying to capture scenes with different fabrics, with light. This idea that the image of myself that I would put out there was kind of this creature as opposed to a person." Aarti was heavily influenced by Roxanne, who while seeming mercurial to Aarti and other worldly, very much put herself and her body on display within the hundreds of performative self-images.

The seduction of freeing oneself from one's body as if things like race, gender, or disability are only skin-deep, as if they are only visual, permeates internet culture—as though these categories immediately disappear, as though they are limitations to shed (O'Brien, 1996, pp. 55-57).¹⁵¹ In this way, the discourse reinforces that disability is a limitation, or that race is a limitation, and inadvertently exposes our ableist and racist society, yet the same discourse does not and would not make any claims that it is perpetuating anything but a utopia. In effect, it is

¹⁵¹ Chun, in *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (2006), in a section called "Othering Space" asked why we consider identity markers to be "limitations" (p. 64)? They are limitations only insofar as they become interpellated as our oppressions by *the Other*.

up to us to “get online and be free” as Chun (2006, p. 133) stated:

For those always already marked, the Internet supposedly relieves them of their problem, of their flesh that races, genders, ages, and handicaps them, of their body from which they usually cannot escape. Ineffaceable difference, rather than discrimination, engenders oppression, which the discriminated, rather than the discriminators, must alleviate.

Discussions of the freedom of race, gender, and ability in internet scholarship of the time was mostly from cis white males as Goggin, G., & McLelland, M. (2010) and Poletti & Rak (2014) evince, and not from scholars considering decolonial thinking. Even in the community I am writing on only particular forms of difference permeated, and racialized bodies were subsumed under whiteness. Aarti evinced, “I didn't write about being brown but I did write a lot about sexuality.”

Conclusion

“Under earlier twentieth-century censorship laws, a dirty picture and a birth-control pamphlet were both obscene, so that pornographers and radicals made good cellmates,” wrote cultural critic Sarah Nicole Prickett (2018, n.p.). It was not so much pornography and sexuality that was a problem, it was its dissemination to the “weak and innocent” readers (usually women and children) that could be seduced. In 19th-century England, for example, as long as pornography was consumed by men of elite status that were of high moral standing and could not be corrupted it was not a problem (Lacombe, 1994, p. 4). Law reform shapes pornography’s value and shapes the way it is seen and perceived, like the work studied for my research. Yet, defending the value of the work as “art, useful,” etc. is trying to fix it within ideology, and reinforcing its need to be valued within that sphere, to have an audience, to be remembered—a double bind that, mentioned previously, Lacombe (1994) calls a blue politics. The creation of these per-sites emerged as a product of censorship and operated as a space of resistance, that in turn produced its own regulation and modes of censorship. These re-merge as they interpolate forms of oppression and incidents of power that the participants form through their activities.

In this chapter I outlined the s/censored experience of a conjunctural moment in a history

of regulation and silencing. I did so to assist in reading the ways in which regulation works across and between the internet and the art world, and how these young women navigated these territories that imbued the structures with their ideologies as the structures were being formed online. Against this backdrop, I hoped to present a deeper understanding of how young women acted and reacted to forms of s/censorship by establishing conventions for sexual self-expression (Stern, 2002). As a result, I argue that the young women's self-imaging created (a) forms of organizing and managing regulation and biopower, (b) methods of sentio-aesthetics, and (c) an intimate public sphere of per-site makers reconstructing themselves as sexual beings outside of the regulative scope of social norms.¹⁵² In the next chapter I will elaborate on sensorship as a kind of ongoing trauma and how modes of sensorship influenced the work and the stylization of the intimate public, specifically in how imagery concerning trauma circulated.

¹⁵² This is not the same as the kind of second wave women's only art spaces that started in the 1960s in the US, which were part of consciousness raising but also directly attempting to break through institutional boundaries.

CHAPTER 4 — THE PRACTICE OF WIT(H)NESSING: TRAUMA AND AESTHETICS OF LATENCY

As a [g]ame for experiences of socially situated political violence, trauma forges overt connections between politics and emotion.

—Anne Cvetkovich (2003, p. 3)¹⁵³

Introduction

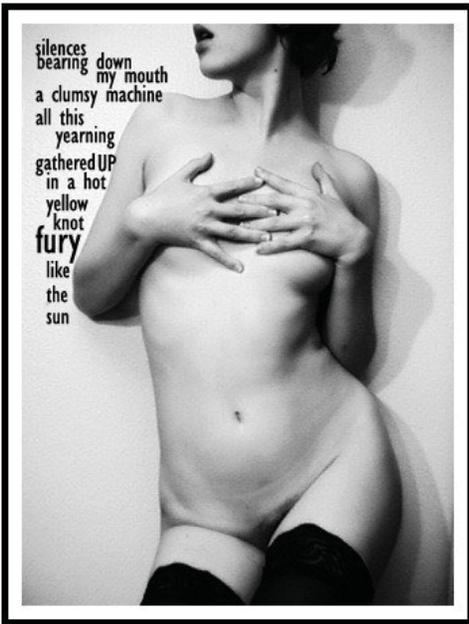


Figure 34. Roxanne Carter. *Untitled* (1997). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital photograph with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of Roxanne Carter.

Can an image act as a traumatic opening? In the frame of Figure 34—a self-image by Roxanne Carter—is a naked body leaning against a wall in a pose reminiscent of both Daphne of Apollo and Daphne and an Italian Renaissance torso statue with the black tights cutting off the legs at their peaks (Pollock, 2013, p. 49).¹⁵⁴ Roxanne’s hands press against her breasts. Her

¹⁵³ When writing out the quote, I made a mistake. “Game” was supposed to be “name” in the original quote. I have left this error because it is curious within the context of my dissertation—trauma as a game for experiences.

¹⁵⁴ In which Daphne’s legs are also partially covered like Roxanne’s; Daphne is covered by tree bark into which she is being metamorphosed (Pollock, 2013, p. 49).

legs are closed and reveal the top of her vulva. Her torso is leaning outwards towards her camera, towards herself. The only piece of clothing is the black thigh highs that are visible at the bottom of the frame. The top of the frame cuts her head right above her gaping mouth—gaspings like the sculpture of Daphne—which faces left towards the text. The rhetoric of the pose suggests a subject partially revealing herself to seduce a viewer. The camera is set slightly below the body, and we as viewers are looking up towards her mouth, which is cut off at the top. Without the con/text this is simply another black and white image of a woman in a clichéd feminine pose. The open mouth coupled with the text written by the author of the image, starting with “silences bearing down my mouth,” suggests a similar motivation to the establishing image of the dissertation, Figure 1 in Chapter 1, Helena’s image-text “maybe we do this because we have no representation.” The images are a making visible the cultural shaming and silencing of women’s self-expression with their bodies—they are traumatic openings.¹⁵⁵

The young woman in the photo has been silenced, and this act of self-imaging is a yearning for freedom—a reaction to oppression and sensorship. Self-reflexively calling her mouth a clumsy machine, Roxanne recognizes the complexity and the awkwardness of being a young white woman trying to make sense of her experience. The term “machine” also brings forth the history of bodies as machines, particularly women’s bodies as reproductive machines (Preciado, 2013; Raymond, 1994). Roxanne’s mouth is open, gasping, suggesting the potential of sound emanating from her body, a product of unwinding the yellow knot of fury that has been winding up inside her. Tori Amos, a role model for my subjects, with the courage to make the traumatic personal public, sang, “My scream got lost in a paper cup” on *Silent All These Years*, revealing the rape she endured. “Resonating within the body, the gasp is *a sound of subjectivity* as it registers a shocking, sudden, unexpectedly affecting encounter with something seen, felt or done to the body” (Pollock, 2013, p. 47). In the image, the viewer is not told who it is that is doing the silencing. It is a plural silence. Many silences. Silence as an institution. Silence as an ideology. Silence as death. Silence as a safeguard. Lucy Lippard calls the works in *Rape*, a traveling exhibition initiated by Stephanie Blackwood at Ohio State University dedicated to the memory of Ana Mendieta, the “true silent screams” (Lippard, 1995, pp. 243-245). The strategies

¹⁵⁵ Sophocles argued that “silence gives the proper grace to women” (Gere, 2004).

of silence(ing) can be undermined by the tactics of feminist bodies, such as Roxanne's, who know that "your silence will not protect you" (Lorde, 2007, p. 41). This approach is also present in a 1999 guestbook entry in which Marlaina responded to the question "within 10 words, what you think about society?" with "i have no mouth and i must scream" (Figure 35).

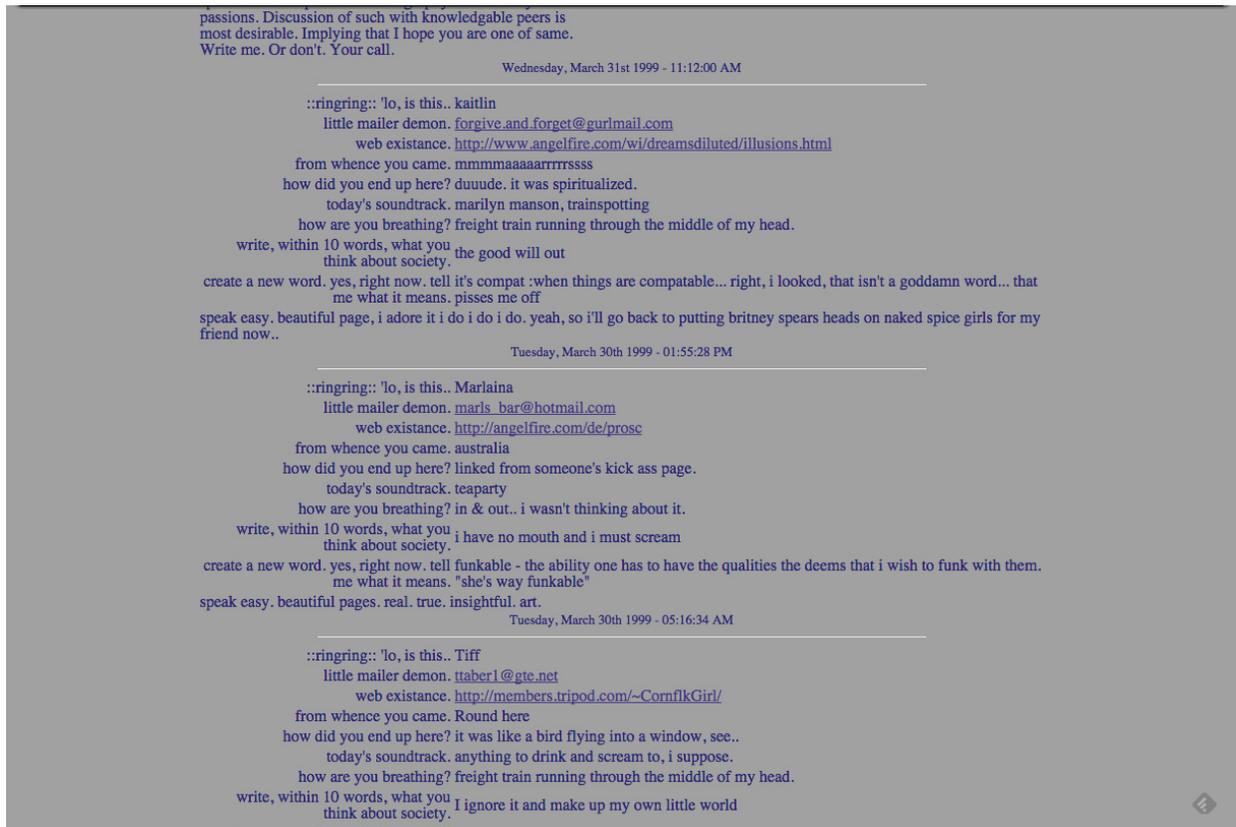


Figure 35. Shannon Doubleday. "http://sidereal.org/influx" Guestbook. *Fathomless*. Screen capture as it appeared March 1999. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20030801080957/http://books.dreambook.com/fathomless/skeptic.html>
 Accessed 2 December 2019.

Another tactic from this time period for being seen, heard, and perceived was writing on the body as a way of inscribing the body. This act served to perform identity in an attempt to circumvent the societal sensoring markers reinforced by others onto people socialized as young women. Replacing subjectivity with heterogeneous experience, the participants in my study

chose the body as the form and mode of that work (Johnson, 2013).¹⁵⁶ The poetic formation in Roxanne's image (Figure 34) also creates a body (of text) and breaks any dominant readings of her body. Instead, she provided a dialogue on young women's experience. Writing (figuratively and formally) the body is a way to perform the contradictory sense making of traumatic subjectivity and positionality in IRL and on the web—the current of this chapter. In response to what emerged from direct quotes from my subjects and a visual culture analysis of their per-sites, I argue that the aforementioned conceptualization of trauma—as an aesthetic, affect, concept, and event—is the underlying theme that emerged out of the practices.

Writing about trauma at first leads me to psychoanalysis and then reorients me to queer affect theory, undergirded by feminist phenomenological thought. My main interlocutors for this chapter are Anne Cvetkovich, Sara Ahmed, Griselda Pollock, Cathy Caruth, and Lauren Berlant. I also have to speak with and alongside the riot grrrls¹⁵⁷ who produced the zines I discussed in Chapter 1 and the influential writer Elizabeth Wurtzel who wrote *Prozac Nation* (1994), a New York Times bestseller ripped apart by the media—as most works by young women are. I situate my chapter's arguments within the canon of women's self-imaging practices that emphasize modes of corporeal inscription as ways of situating the body within trauma aesthetics—specifically Emma Amos's *Preparing for a Face Lift* (1981), Carrie Mae Weems's *Mirror Mirror* (1987), and various works by Jo Spence, Hannah Wilke, Adrian Piper, and Ana Mendieta, the latter of whom “wrote” violences on and with her body with works such as *Untitled (Self-Portrait with Blood)* (1973) and *Untitled (Body Tracks)* (1974).

My aim is to present the orientations and transformations of and to the young woman's body by means of her own mediatised articulation of trauma and its collective rendering—a wit(h)nessing. Reading with and through the images (Johnson, 2013; Pollock, 2013), this chapter builds on Chapter 1's demonstration of how the intimate public was formed by prepending the stylization of trauma, Chapter 2's theorizations of the ways in which young women use their

¹⁵⁶ This is indicative of body art, in which the body is both the canvas and the tool. Body art is a response to the disembodied art practices of modernism, and the art history and philosophy that argued for a disengaged, objective subject position as the only means for criticality.

¹⁵⁷ “In their musical and textual productions, riot grrrls not only launched an attack against capitalism and consumer culture, but also thematized feminist issues such as rape, assault, and the physical and psychological abuse of women” (Spiers, 2015, p. 2).

bodies to create their own narratives of resistance via the digital online image, and Chapter 3's analysis of the interwoven relationships between modes of censorship.

Sociality of Trauma

First, I extend and transpose Cvetkovich's (2012, pp. 6-7) argument on the sociality of depression to focus on the sociality of trauma: trauma as a practice with which to circulate and demonstrate one's own identity towards new attachments and socialities. To help, I use Lauren Berlant's (2011) idea of cruel optimism in tandem with reading the practice of self-imaging as reparative (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003). My reading attempts to nuance experience online and argues that the act of self-imaging forms new attachments not only to the past but to others engaging in similar acts. The repetitive self-imaging is a participatory mode extending towards the specific community of people detailed in this dissertation. The repetitive acts form new socialities as they are imbued with traumas and non-normative desires. In the following sections, I look at how they form and continue a collective choreography. Trauma (as a social bond) undergirds the web practices of my subjects and many young women of the time period and consequently is one of the main reasons that young women in the 1990s started making per-sites.

Second, I argue that the sociality of trauma is produced through wit(h)nessing—"a means of being with and remembering for the other through the artistic act and through an aesthetic encounter" (Ettinger, 2006)—which I invoke as an epistemological and theoretical signpost as well as a methodology of the dissertation project.¹⁵⁸ Wit(h)nessing describes positionality and explores how sociality unfurls, in four ways: (a) in the images themselves, (b) in the textural image interplay, (c) in the way the images are shared, and (d) in the things that

¹⁵⁸ "Ettinger creates a neologism by inserting the letter (h) into the word *witness*. Wit(h)ness now implies being *with* someone else. Ettinger does not, however, replace one word with another. She expands a word's conceptual range from the legal and testimonial meaning of bearing witness to the crime against the other, to *being with*, but not assimilated to, and to *being beside* the other in a gesture that is much more than mere ethical solidarity. There is risk; but there is also a sharing . . . Ettinger is proposing an aesthetic wit(h)nessing: a means of being with and remembering for the other through the artistic act and through an aesthetic encounter. Art becomes a keeper of historical memory for the injured other by creating the site for a novel trans-subjective and transhistorical process that is simultaneously witness and wit(h)ness" (Pollock, 2010, p. 831). For more on Ettinger's technique and technicity see Erin Manning's chapter, "Vertiginous Before the Light: the form of force" in *Art as Compassion: Bracha L. Ettinger* (2011).

can or want to be said, which is not the same for everyone. In the practice of witnessing, the spectator becomes an interlocutor.

Third, I want to find out the ways in which the *intra-generational transmission* of trauma is possible through the production and circulation of per-sites and images.¹⁵⁹ Images become co-producers of the affective dimensions of collective action and sociability—not as inherently having affects but rather as affective responses both from their producer and their witness.¹⁶⁰ Are such transmissions possible through the narratives thus imbued, both in the form and the content? More specifically, I explore the ways in which intersecting modes of trauma (violence, abuse, mental illness, and rape) functioned in the production and circulation of these images and the ways in which these images were assigned value based on their rhetoric of the traumatic, leading to a collective formation. How were the participants in these communities provided with a language with which to recognize and identify their traumas? My research asks this two-fold: As part of my interviews with my own visual analysis, I asked my subjects the following: What was happening in the process of making artworks that are marked by personal tragedy? And what was it like to view artworks marked by personal tragedy? In what ways are traumatic events relived through participation in a network that foregrounds issues like sexual violence? There are findings in my data that show a tension around trauma's role in the formation of an intimate public and its participatory structure. To this end, I questioned young women's desire, in the 1996 to 2001 time period, for traumatic events to occur to fit into a community of practice, and the aestheticization of their lives to be accepted. What was an acceptable trauma, what was *enough* pain or violence to have endured to create artworks with within this time period?¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ I employ the term *intra-generational*, the transmission between a generation, from age studies and trauma literature's concept of *intergenerational*, which is the transmission of an object, affect, etc. from a past to future generation.

¹⁶⁰ See Berlant (2012) on the vicissitudes of the subject-object relation and the way they give rise to desire.

¹⁶¹ "In their explorations of violence, feminist scholars have sought to distinguish between manifold forms of violence, sometimes pointing to how these forms of violence exist on a continuum while also contextualizing these diverse phenomena, analyzing their discursive and material origins and effects, and situating them in relation to processes of racialization and gendering" (Lokaneeta, 2016, n.p.).

I allow myself this jigsaw freedom by following Foucault's law of coherence¹⁶² and Anzaldúa's (2012) use of "mental nepantlism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways . . . as a movement away from set patterns and goals and towards a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes" (pp. 100-101). This whole perspective operates in a pluralistic mode and foregrounds ambiguity and contradiction as productive forces akin to Haraway's situated knowledges and trauma itself. Trauma is incoherent, partial, and fragmented. Trauma's affects are embodied: They move between the relational borders of the self, the skin, and the witness. I want my methods, theories, and object of inquiry to do the same and to reflect (upon) each other.

Imaging Trauma

How do we visualize trauma? If trauma is (by definition) unrepresentable, then art, as a practice of making sense and giving rise to ideas, becomes a kind of belated origin site of the trauma—an aesthetics of latency. Art reorients the traumatic effects *and* affects. Art, here, also acts as a social practice from which we can address the tensions of the conditions of its production, rather than an object in opposition to culturally legible representation (Pollock, 2012, pp. 4-6). How does the online body perform trauma? In what ways does the web make trauma intelligible and legible within the intimate public but not within the largest societal context? The rhetoric of the pose in the images of my subjects (the screen and their skin) functions as a disruption of feminine subjectivity at the level of the represented body but also *in* the body of the electronic image. In a way, the image screen is their skin screen because they enact through this screen and they perform with the screen the vicissitudes of feminine erotic traumatic reactive experience. Their bodies at once alienate certain viewers while seducing them, and invite certain viewers without

¹⁶² Although Foucault (1972) details our desire for mastering incoherency he also argues that contradictions can be productive and generate new pathways of thinking: "The history of ideas usually credits the discourse that it analyses with coherence. If it happens to notice an irregularity in the use of words, several incompatible propositions, a set of meanings that do not adjust to one another, concepts that cannot be systematized together, then it regards it as its duty to find, at a deeper level, a principle of cohesion that organizes the discourse and restores to it its hidden unity . . . to overcome these contradictions, and to find the point from which they will be able to be mastered" (p. 149).

seducing them.¹⁶³ As seen in Figure 38 and explained in depth later, Marlaina's webcam series (1998), with its elicitation "please take care," evokes this doubling. In this case, that which is written on the body is not a digital figurative text, as in Figure 34 by Roxanne, but a formal tactic with the skin as trauma screen.

If trauma is the "after-affect" of an event (Pollock, 2013), and these images are the "after" of the after-affect then are they a kind of "afterimage"? Subsequently, these afterimages are circulated and redirected online, which is another "after" in the temporal circuit. What does that do? Why do we look at these images and continue to do so? We look at them because we have been interpellated as wit(h)nesses, and as I noted earlier, because agency emerges within this temporal circuit. While these questions are seemingly disparate, I think phenomenologist Didi-Huberman can help answer them. In *Images in Spite of All* (2008, p. 84) he suggested that the remaining Holocaust Dachau photos act as openers of knowledge through a mediation which occurs at the moment of seeing. He wanted to *see to know* better (*salvoir*). The transmission of trauma becomes available to the viewer in the encounter between object and feeling. Didi-Huberman argued that when images, along with words and feelings, disappear, so does transmission itself. Transmission then is the intersubjective and affective spectatorial space between images and feelings; it is the relationship between the two. Is that why so many women, non-binary and trans people make visual art about violence, because they are trying to find mediators for their narratives? The narrative of the 1990s web is now recalled through visual documents, fragmented and mostly empty rectangles, of where images used to be (Figure 59). The thing is, Didi-Huberman privileged the spectatorship and transmission of trauma in the documented visual object. I, too, privilege it, but I do not treat the images only as documents because they functioned as artwork too.¹⁶⁴ While we observe the image, we can *quasi observe* what happened, because we look to the traces in the image, *to know* (it) better. In this case,

¹⁶³ See Christine Ross (2001) and Amelia Jones (2006, p. 218) writing about Pipilotti Rist. Rist focused on the importance of reciprocity between the screen, herself, and the viewer, and consequently make up the apparatus of spectatorship. This reciprocal attunement is seen in works such as *Mutaflor* (1996) or the *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* (2008) installation.

¹⁶⁴ While I am dealing with a time which has left behind few and fragmented traces, I am not comparing the trauma of the Holocaust to the trauma of my subjects. Rather, his theorization and methodology of reading a time through such spare imagery is a useful analytic.

through the structure of the circulation, we view the photos over and over again, photos of ourselves as subject-objects and as screen-images. The trauma's after-effects are repeated in the witnessing of the self-images, a witnessing that summons viewers to become interlocutors and make their own self-images.

Autobiography?

One of the ways that I hope to shape this project and this chapter in particular is alongside Leigh Gilmore (1994; 2015), who teased out autobiography, not so much its rules and genre focus but its insistence on writing in trauma in spite of the societal and literary unyielding silencing of the women's "I" (subject position) because of its lack of legibility within phallogocentric discourse (Gilmore, 2001, p. 24). Gilmore (2001) was also interested in "this coincidence of trauma and self-representation (p. 3)" within what she saw as the limits of autobiography.¹⁶⁵ I do not define what my subjects were doing as traditional autobiography just like I do not define their self-imaging practices as self-portraits, because autobiography is laden with juridical framing that could serve to create questions of legitimacy—did they lie?¹⁶⁶—rather than questions of legibility and sociality.¹⁶⁷

Trauma's centrality to the memoir/autobiography took shape (Gilmore, 2001, p. 2) concurrently with the rise of confessional culture (especially in North America). The latter has, in part, defined our media culture, starting in the 1990s, particularly because of political identity-based movements that have opened up space for marginalized populations to share their life stories in public (Gilmore, 2001, p. 16). While building the conceptual framework of this thesis I came across literature that highlighted the popularity of the trauma-memoir in the 1990s, including its zenith, Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation*. Helena explains its significance:

I wrote a paper about it [*Prozac Nation*] in high school. It certainly

¹⁶⁵ It is surprising that Gilmore never uses the term auto-fiction in her work even in 2001.

¹⁶⁶ This juncture is also the difference between witnessing as legal capital T truth testimony and witnessing as engaging ethically with recognizing the polysemic meaning of a lower-case t truth, explained earlier.

¹⁶⁷ The fiction-memoir genre, especially one that includes essays, is popular today with such authors as Durga Chew-Bose, Sheila Heti, Chris Krauss, Vivian Gornick, Sarah Manguso and Maggie Nelson.

opened up conversations about young women and mental health and many of the criticisms of the book reflect those that are deployed against young women in general, especially young, white, middle and upper middle-class women—that our problems are trivial, that our voicing of our concerns is whining, that examining ourselves is vanity, etc. That's mostly what I remember about it—that a particular kind of woman's mental illness was just seen as silly whining and navel gazing. Which is also what people thought about so much of the stuff people made in our community, of course.

I then probed Helena about the racial context of Wurtzel's writing and why the mainstream reviewers who denounced her work did so on grounds of vanity and solipsism rather than something more useful like a larger white supremacist context. Using her research on the subject, Helena explained Wurtzel's point of view reparatively:

I think one thing about *Prozac Nation* and women of colour is probably that white women have a long history of involvement in psychiatric care in a really different way than women of colour, especially Black women, have. While Wurtzel talking about taking Prozac was a big thing, it's kind of weird that it was in a way, because middle class/UMC [upper middle class] white women have kind of been notorious consumers of psychotropic medications since they were first developed. . . .—Black people are way more likely to be diagnosed with more severe conditions than white people even when they have the same symptoms. And the medical community as a whole has of course been used as an oppressive force in the Black community in a way that has no equal amongst white people. . . . So considering all that, I think race is an important factor in how women of different races would relate to or be interested in *Prozac Nation*, the concept of mental illness, and psychopharmacology in general.

If art is a practice that can usurp ideologically defined codes of trauma and its representation,

then how are the subjects of my study doing so? I note the tensions of these art practices with a reparative reading as I explore them in the context of how young white women's traumas circulate within the intimate public with much more force than those of others. Specifically, I look to the contradiction of legibility. Legibility exists on a continuum and is a process that is intersectionally inflected and dependent on the resources one has access to, to be able to respond to modes of s/censorship. I clarify this rather clunky argument through the follow six sections: Response/ability, in which I clarify the ethical engagement of my methodology; Defining Trauma, in which I explicate several meanings of trauma within phenomenology, feminist and affect theory to situate my arguments; Writing (on) the Body, in which I demonstrate corporeal inscription as a tactic of gender-marginalized people; Aesthetics of Trauma/tic Bodies, in which I extend Chapter 2's analysis to explore the visualization of trauma; Wit(h)nessing: The Sociality of Trauma, in which I clarify my use of witnessing as a practice of sociality among the participants; Legibility & Making Narratives, in which I question the stylization of memory as a means of legibility; and the Conclusion.

Response/ability: Methods

We are carrying, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, enormous traumatic weight, and aesthetic wit(h)nessing in art brings it to culture's surface. (Ettinger, 2006, p. 147)

The chapter's arguments emerge from a triangulation of methods I explained in Chapter 1—friendship as method, visual discourse analysis, and semi-structured interviews. Although these methods appear throughout the dissertation, this chapter in particular depends on their imbued ethics. Ardath Whynacht's (2018) process as part of her work, "'Marks on Bodies': Agential Cuts as Felt Experience," with female and gender non-conforming inmates, followed a friendship as method framework. It is akin to both the WWW of my historical time period and of the experience I have had with the participants detailing their past to me. As such, I include her explanation in full:

My collaborators have been made to feel as if their sensitivity and

expressions of emotion were constantly in/appropriate. Emotion is the territory of intra-subjectivity. The hypersensitivity of my collaborators brings shame and experiences of punishment and exclusion when they experience particular relational choreography and respond with outbursts of emotion. Emotional expression is the basis on which my collaborators have faced violence, exclusion, neglect, invalidation and dismissal. Emotion was our territory. It was the agential force that emerged intra-actively through our process. It was the space where our boundaries opened, closed, formed and re-formed as we held tight to/with/against each other in the process. (Whynacht, 2018, p. 20)

The intra-subjective territory is also the space of a Slack channel¹⁶⁸ shared between several other women and me, four of whom are in this study. It functions as a landscape of closely knit ties that on one hand bring us together and on the other hand serves to jeopardize my role as researcher, given that the project is ongoing and the space was created as a kind of makeshift returning to the space we shared in the 1990s.¹⁶⁹ Whynacht also discussed the ambivalence towards being emotional or showing emotional responses to her subjects. I wonder if being socialized as a woman has allowed for me to accept traumatic narratives of the life-course as “data.” When my subjects disclosed details of their rapes to me I continued as if these events were part of a series of their history (which, in some ways, they were). Their recounting, returning and reobjectifying become data because these events are within the range of ordinary experience for us. How do I console them? I want to be there for them without pity, and as such, tell their story. No, I do not want to *tell* their story. I am not a conduit because I am not a transmission vessel. This is writing in, writing beside; it is not fear—I become vulnerable with them, with my

¹⁶⁸ A cloud-based set of collaboration tools and services that is similar to IRC.

¹⁶⁹ I created the Slack channel as a space 11 of us per-site makers could reconnect. However, being too close to your subjects can create tensions that could alter the participants’ willingness to be part of a project about vulnerable parts of their lives. As such, I participate infrequently in the Slack channel, and when I do the participants are highly engaged and vulnerable with me throughout the process. See Owton & Allen-Collinson (2013), “Close But Not Too Close: Friendship as Method(ology) in Ethnographic Research Encounters.”

narratives—that is my consolation. It is not a selfish act, but a connector that weaves in and out. What is my response to violence I also have endured and have pretended has not marked me?

Whynacht explained how her subjects began writing with markers and pens on their bodies when they were younger. As a way to control trauma, they told her. As a way to intra-actively mark the relationships with those who devalued, obliterated, or harmed them. Writing on the body. An “intra-action.” A gesture *towards* response/ability, that in the case of my subjects operated within what Nguyen (2012) defined as an aesthetics of intimacy. I draw upon Nguyen’s framing the work of riot grrrls as operating within an aesthetics of intimacy—a way of being and doing—that presents itself as a political and artistic attempt at undermining neoliberalism through foregrounding (the representation of) love, care, and vulnerability. She cautioned that the aesthetics of intimacy’s “resistive properties . . . might also replicate its intrusive ones, and conceive of change narrowly as the adjustment of the individual subject—recalibrating her capacity for love or shame, for instance—to the structural determinations that constitute the historical present,” an operative that hinges on “the use of private feelings as a resource for collective production” (2012, p.174). The self-imaging practices from 1996 to 2001 were a collective production of feelings that, in part, also gave rise to a sad girl/sick woman, a concept that did not come into parlance until over a decade later: a praxis-based theory that foregrounds trauma as a social productive force and reframes what the personal as a means of public position and for public consumption signifies in the 21st century. Genderqueer Korean American Johanna Hedva’s (2016) sick woman figure arises out of a desire to render visible those who possess “traditionally anti-heroic qualities—namely illness, idleness, and inaction” and to present them as “capable of being the symbol of a grand Theory” (n.p.) In other words, this legible woman figure can induce response/ability without adhering to performative neoliberal values.¹⁷⁰ “Sick Woman Theory” (2016) as a project, method and theory is, in part, a continuation of Audrey Wollen’s “Sad Girl Theory” (2013), but, surprisingly not of the long-standing Latina/x Sad Girls, an underexplored identity of a “tough girl who has suffered extreme

¹⁷⁰ Hedva (2016) uses “the term ‘woman’ as the subject-position of this work is a strategic, all-encompassing embrace and dedication to the particular, rather than the universal. Though the identity of ‘woman’ has erased and excluded many (especially women of color and trans and genderfluid people), [she] choose[s] to use it because it still represents the un-cared for, the secondary, the oppressed, the non-, the un-, the less-than” (n.p.).

hardships” and occupies a productive depressive position in relation to the protocols of whiteness and its normativity, in Latina/x cultural formations and chola culture located in immigrant communities on the U.S. West Coast (Mooney, 2018, p. 181; Muñoz, 2006, p. 676).¹⁷¹

A tough girl with a range of externalized emotions is at odds with Wollen’s proposition.

Sad Girl Theory is the proposal that the sadness of girls should be witnessed and re-historicized as an act of resistance, of political protest. Basically, girls being sad has been categorized as this act of passivity, and therefore, discounted from the history of activism. I’m trying to open up the idea that protest doesn’t have to be external to the body; it doesn’t have to be a huge march in the streets, noise, violence, or rupture. There’s a long history of girls who have used their own anguish, their own suffering, as tools for resistance and political agency. Girls’ sadness isn’t quiet, weak, shameful, or dumb: It is active, autonomous, and articulate. It’s a way of fighting back. (Watson, 2015, n.p.)

Wollen's theory, although it curiously does not indicate the impact of the web, depends on it and is imbued with the web movement I discuss here. Her way of suggesting that using anguish for political agency without a wholesale resistant protest politics was very much the modus operandi for the participants in my study (even if following this time period, they opted to be more involved in protests "external to the body"). It makes sense that Wollen came up with the theory at the age of 21. As such, I am sympathetic in using it towards my subjects’ melancholic affinities, as these affinities became legitimate and legible emotions to respond to with more sadness (and also sometimes alongside anger, such as in Marlaina's work). Nguyen would certainly disagree and would see Wollen's ideas as reproducing the very dangers and elitism of the aesthetics of intimacy she saw in white riot grrrl culture. Nguyen gave the example of Whitney, who in her last issue of *Alien*, a zine she produced, called out the cultural capital that

¹⁷¹ For more on racial performativity see Muñoz (2006), “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position”; Sullivan (2006) *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*; and Daniels (2009), “Rethinking Cyberfeminism(s): Race, Gender, and Embodiment.”

accrues through this culture of oppression confession, a value that is based on Berlant's idea of sentimentality rather than a transformative political gesture. Nguyen cited Whitney's ripostes:

The perpetuation of craziness is disguised in art, if I were to tell you I was CURED (gasp!) you wouldn't read on . . . 🤮fuck you 🤮 if i were to say i cut myself & my daddy hit me to smithereens you'd ask me when is the next issue coming out. You are reading and I am writing THE COMMODITY OF CRAZINESS in punk.

Yet I wonder if the anger was also self-directed, as *Alien* very much fit within these aesthetics and commodified trauma. Asking these kinds of questions of my subjects required an intra-subjective linguistic maneuvering and patience on their part for me to explain the context, because I did not want them to think that I was devaluing their vulnerable work by critically engaging with it. The subjects understand cultural criticism within an art context; however, I appreciate and acknowledge that the work was made while they were teens for teens and not for a scholar analyzing it 25 years later! The trust built up with me over time helped ease the conversations over email or a messaging app before an official interview was conducted, and helped to ease my participants into the project and to hopefully recognize my response/ability to their stories and memories. The questions about trauma and the stylization of trauma as producing a specific subject were always reserved for last, or at least were asked when I felt a sense of openness from the subject. Sometimes the questions did not come until a second interview or a follow-up (if it was possible) when my subject had some time to rethink their past. The subjects I know the most and was able to spend the most time with (Helena and Marlaina) provided me with the most detailed answers.

Defining Trauma

“What does it mean if we admit that our culture is a factory for the production of so many walking wounded?” Elsbeth Brown (2014) asked in her essay “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma.” Cvetkovich (2012, p. 157) took on this admission when she argued that “trauma is not just in catastrophic events but in the fabric of everyday

life.”¹⁷² Twenty-eight years later, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) recognized that even witnessing or experiencing traumatic events indirectly potentially qualified a patient for “acute stress disorder,” a kind of trauma (Gilman & Logan, 2015).¹⁷³ Trauma is a multivalent concept, especially since the mid-1980s, when trauma studies began to emerge. In this section, through a feminist lens, I provide various defining features of trauma as an overarching concept in contemporary life including its ubiquity, its social potential, and how it circulated on the web between 1996 and 2001: “The gendered history of women is itself traumatic” (Pollock, 2013, pp. 46-47).

Trauma originally refers to an “injury inflicted on a body” which Freud re-articulated as a wound inflicted “upon the mind” (Caruth, 1996, p. 3).¹⁷⁴ The difference is that, according to Freud, a wound on the body is a singular event with after-effects, but a trauma of the mind only becomes a trauma through the cathected experience post-event. I wonder, however, whether there need be an event. What occurs within the felt after-effects—to create trauma—that hinges on an event? What if there is no event but the after-effects are produced through the narrativization of a story that only becomes an event through its repetition, in this case, by way of an intra-generational trauma in the photographic encounter. In the DSM-III, trauma was “an event outside the range of human experience,” yet so much of what women, non-binary and trans people experience is outside the range of a particular sovereign subject (i.e., a cis white able-bodied male) (Brown, 1995, pp. 100-101). Those encounters become their sensed every day that needs witnesses to be recognized and responded to as traumatic. This is especially true when some traumatic events may be known only between the survivor and the perpetrator, unlike larger traumas that get embedded and cathected through communities and movements (Brown, 1995, pp. 100-101).

Pollock (2013) argued that trauma should be considered not in terms of an event (which

¹⁷² See Cvetkovich’s previous work *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003), which led her to consider the banality of queer traumas.

¹⁷³ See Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) on spectatorship and large-scale traumatic events.

¹⁷⁴ Ian Hacking in *Rewriting the Soul* (1995) argued that this new meaning came into parlance in the 1870s and 1880s in France, and Freud only brought into use “what had become current.”

we cannot know) but “in terms of *encounter with its traces* that assumes some knowledge of space and time, and makes a different kind of participating otherness” (p. 4). This participation is marked by latency (belatedness, in which the traumatic event always returns after it occurs because of the traces it leaves that then take on meaning—and that is when it becomes a trauma). A traumatic event is not trauma in the experiential moment, but becomes evident only through subsequent encounters, in representations and in relations—repetition connects these representations and relations as encounters of trauma. Drawing on scholars such as Didi-Huberman, Sontag, and Pollock, I argue that the images serve as a stylization of that latency. As trauma scholar Cathy Caruth (1995) delineated, “What is particularly striking in this singular experience is that its insistent reenactments of the past do not simply serve as testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred” (p. 151). The past becomes a more realized present in the images and in the way it is accessed by the spectators. As such, I ask: How can aesthetic practices bring about transformation, not just for the individual, but for a collective?

As evidenced in the work of my subjects, “trauma . . . has a social dimension, . . . trauma can create community, . . . trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies” (Erikson, 1995, pp. 185-186). Because trauma foregrounds itself in the performance of identity (how we come to know who we are and how we became that way), it makes sense that it would turn to “sociality” to find a commonality in difference. Trauma orients to others who can orient themselves in similar directions, even towards the most mundane things. Sociologist Kai T. Erikson (1995) argued that the community building through trauma is, obviously, not an easy relationship, like intimate publics created through brand culture or music taste subcultures, but it is nevertheless a strong one. They also stated that “estrangement becomes the basis for communality,” and all of my subjects pointed to a loneliness and isolation IRL that made them turn to the web (Erikson, 1995, p. 186). For example, Alyssa revealed, “I got outed in high school and I had a lot of bs [bullshit] to deal with other students. My parents didn't take it well. It was a rough environment at home.” Belonging also undergirded Carolina’s turn to the web:

I felt often out of place while I was growing up. At the same time, I suffered from what I came to find out *later in life* [my emphasis] was depression, and my classmates had a hard time understanding me so I

suffered a lot of teasing. So using the internet and expressing myself through my websites was kind of a natural thing to do.

Carolina, only “later in life,” that is, as a teenager, understood the feelings they were experiencing. The feelings were something, but they were not depression in the moment. They became depression belatedly through the language circulating on per-sites. Naming it provided Carolina the power with which to make legible their feelings, especially as a South American. The felt isolation transmuted into the production of per-sites because it was through their production that the participants could make themselves legible and self-determined. Self-determination is a practice imbued with tactical contradictions that Renegar and Sowers (2009) argued is one of the markers of agency as deployed by third wave feminists. Self-determination is the practice through which

[gender-marginalized people] can negotiate social constraints to make the best choices for that particular moment, recognizing the contingencies of their historical contexts and material worlds as limitations, but looking for ways to subvert those limitations if possible. In other words, they seek to identify possibilities for resistance, while living in a world that seeks to constrain resistance. (Renegar & Sowards, 2009, p. 9)

Going public with mental health and trauma is a form of resistance against the neo-liberal model that only favours the specific sovereign subject mentioned before. Many women, non-binary and trans people who discuss their mental health in public are imputed with the characteristics of hysteria, narcissism, being “too much”: imputations that are intersectionally contingent.¹⁷⁵ How we define trauma is how we will then define other people’s experiences, and if rape and sexual violence are such a part of the everyday for gender-marginalized people, then how can

¹⁷⁵ A condition diagnosed mostly in women as a result of 1870s studies done by Jean-Martin Charcot in France. Gilmore also delineated how *hysteria* produced particular gendered bodies versus *shell shock*, a term for a similar traumatic mechanism that was given to soldiers, which had a larger socio-political valence and did not stem from the individual, as hysteria was erroneously defined as doing (Gilmore, 2015).

they be taken seriously as an experience “outside the range of ordinary experience”?¹⁷⁶ How are gender-marginalized people not believed, still? “How casually we talk about it. It’s upsetting how assault/rape can become no big deal in ways because it is so prevalent. Fuck them [the assaulters],” Marlaina asserted when I mentioned to her I was reviewing per-site bios that discussed rape for the chapter. “They’ve [society] made it so normal, what [rape] is so horrific,” she continued. Rape has become spatially vast. I recognize how, in writing this dissertation, rape has become, both a bigger deal than I realized and subsumed into another theme in a network of themes.

The layered complexity of a trauma’s affective spatial force was detailed by trauma and cultural memory scholar Diana Taylor in *Trauma in the Archive* (2014). In one of the chapters she explained how she *witnessed* a commemoration site (a Villa Grimaldi replica) *with* a tour guide, a survivor of the genocide. Taylor was not there in the 1970s, but she was there for the tour, and was walking on the same soil, touching the same buildings, receiving a rehearsed narrative of how it was according to her guide—an indirect witnessing of an event. Her tour triggered a rumination in her on how trauma is transmitted as well as the need for witnessing; we (the spectators) need to be turned into witnesses for the trauma to be legible; when we wit(h)ness, the trauma is transmitted. In some ways witnesses are potentially subject to acute stress disorder¹⁷⁷ and, I argue, an intra-generational transmission. The subjects of my study were not in the same place as the others, but the transmission over the network was possible and felt. Like and unlike Taylor’s example, my subjects were there in relatively real time and were moving around the same space (WWW) even though their IRL spaces differed. However, Taylor’s example points to an indirect wit(h)nessing that solidifies my point. She could not have become a witness without visiting the site, just as my subjects could not have become witnesses without visiting the (per-) sites and the (per-)sites would not have functioned as sites without their visits. Taylor’s (2014) example above¹⁷⁸ demonstrates that in photographs (see especially Figures 40 and 45) the violence is able to be transferred in/to the object: “The punctum, or the

¹⁷⁶ See the definition of trauma in DSM-5 (Gilman & Logan, 2015).

¹⁷⁷ As mentioned earlier, PTSD can occur even from indirectly witnessing an event.

¹⁷⁸ Taylor took photographs of her tour and included them in her book as legible markers of the experience.

trigger, has to come from someplace in the viewer. Trauma lives in the body, not in the archive" (p. 247). Is it possible that young women's tacit knowledge would encourage them to draw out a potential punctum through aesthetics or content only legible to other per-site makers? Taylor's tour guide was making legible the atrocities that occurred, and what Taylor ended up doing as a result was making cohesive the ostensible incommensurability of trauma: Chile's events at Villa Grimaldi.

How Taylor described her encounter's resonances in relation to trauma and cultural history allows me to connect Ettinger's art historical lens to define and nuance the theory and methodology of wit(h)nessing. I put them together not only as a concept but as a feminist epistemological standpoint of what it means to have undergone trauma, and as a countenance to consider the ethical responsibility to relay these stories, which young women wrote on and of their bodies.

Writing (on) the Body

I will not be shamed again

Nor will I shame myself.

—Gloria E. Anzaldúa (2012, p. 109)

What conditions make young women write on their body? What does writing (on) the body do? Corporeal inscription is a writing on the body: a way to inscribe meaning/identity on ourselves towards the Other. Corporeal inscription as a way to externalize affects like trauma depends on a witnessing. Specifically, in this section, I look at how the young women of the historical time period wrote on their bodies in various ways to forge connections through those bodies. Several of my subjects, including myself, who engaged in a photographic practice wrote on their bodies, either in post-production editing or through chirography, and then took photos of the act. I read these gestures as feminist practices, as performative afterimages, and as ways to re-articulate the excesses of trauma.

Writing (on) the body is a tactical measure that demonstrates that the traumatized subject is not a victim waiting to be rescued, a trope of girlhood imbued with vulnerability as

helplessness. The externalization of the trauma through the building of a per-site and self-imaging is a form of self-determination. Self-imaging in this case can also be read as memoir or autobiography¹⁷⁹ even though it does not directly represent the entirety of the subject in the frame, since they are and are not the same as the subjects when taking the picture.¹⁸⁰ Autobiography qua confessional writing was emphasized in riot grrrl and zine culture, and subsequently on the per-sites of my subjects. They foregrounded their "most traumatic experiences, whether that [was] abuse, psychological instability or other mental health issues, self-harm or addiction" (Spiers, 2015, p. 6). One way they did this with text and image was incorporating an image of themselves or an identity they were performing (with their body) with text on that body. Yet, as confessional as the writing was,—as evidenced by my subjects' assertion in Chapter 2 that self-imaging did not function as self-portraiture, in other words, as autobiography—I am ambivalent to suggest their socially imbued self-imaging practices were also discursively confessional in the same way.

Inscribing the body can also occur in the form of self-harm/skin-cutting or self-injury/-mutilation (SM), an act that gained widespread attention in the early 1990s and continued to rise in incidence the early 2000s (Gabriel, 2014; Favazza, 1998; S. Ross & Heath, 2002). I include self-cutting as a form of corporeal inscription, although imagery of it was not as prevalent as writing about it. Tamika's bio below (Figure 36) foregrounds her rapes and her SM with lines such as

[Tamika] is supposedly "over" her rapes. though they haunt her still. who hasn't cut herself in a LONG time now, . . . isn't a whore, was NEVER a whore, and still doesn't understand why she called herself a whore.

Yet the contradiction of the haunting of the rapes that she is supposed to be "over" is telling. Of course they haunt her, because they are a trauma that bears to repeat itself. The word "supposedly" implies that she has either performed her resolve and transformation to another

¹⁷⁹ A more appropriate word would be auto-fiction, a genre that was only coming into fruition at the time. Auto-fiction is the post-structuralist idea that to write ourselves in, we use narratives.

¹⁸⁰ That is to say, the subject is either directing someone else to press the button, or using a self-timer or a self-release cable.

person, or that somehow she has learned that a woman, a feminist, has to “get over” her rapes. The quotation insists that getting over rape is an impossibility, which is demonstrated in the vast number of images the women in my study made about their traumas.



Figure 36. Tamika Pinkney. “thisyearsgirl” Biography page. *WHO I AM*. Screen capture as it appeared on 3 Dec 2000. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20030417181301/http://trashed.lhabia.com:80/thisyearsgirl.html> Accessed 2 September 2017.

The performative images were always a re-articulation of a trauma rather than the trauma itself. Yet they functioned as a pleasurable cathexis.¹⁸¹ One of my splash pages around 2000 had a photo scan—centered—of a close-up of my thighs, one on which I had lacerated “UGLY” into until it scarred. This scarred text was an emblem of pain and an externalization of it, by which the fury of my insides could be made legible. My skin became a screen-canvas. In this case, my skin acted both as canvas onto which I drew the word and as a screen that mediated my experience of the self to the Other, because posting a photo of it on my website was a necessity for witnessing. Sara Ahmed (2006) stated that skin is the border between the self and the Other—“skin connects as well as contains” (p. 54). How can that border be both a safety net and also

¹⁸¹ Cathexis represents a (re)investment of psychic energy, a redistributed energy towards another object (Freud, 1957).

pervious to the Other? Screens, in my case, connected as well as contained. One way to forge overt connections is to make them legible, write them down, write them onto us as lines of a collective poem we wish to build with the appropriate interlocutors. Seven of my subjects, among others who were not part of my main corpus, performed these bodily inscriptions.

Although there is a long tradition of body artists painting on or with their bodies (Jones, 1998; Lippard, 2011; Vergine, 2007)—Carolee Schneemann’s *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1963), *Up To and Including Her Limits* (1973-76), and Janine Antoni’s *Loving Care* (1993), including the paintings and drawings of Adrian Piper and Lynn Hershman Leeson who I mentioned above—I differentiate the two, as I am looking at what words do and how words perform trauma in photographic body practices, as that was the preferred artworking of the intimate public I discuss here.

The lineage of image-based artists I connect with those in my study demand a legibility of their trauma with words on bodies, either through or with a combination of signs, chirography, collage, and SM. They are: Gina Pane’s self-inflicted physical suffering; Catherine Opie’s scarifications; Jo Spence’s chirography, such as “MONSTER” scrawled along the top of her breasts or *Property of Jo Spence* (1982), which she wrote on her left breast as she awaited surgery (she would also hold signs in her photographs that functioned as both a speech act/a sound and captions that could not be turned off and on); Adrian Piper’s photographs altered with paint and crayons, (e.g., *Self-Portrait as Nice White Lady* (1995)), or her conceptual performances in Manhattan, the *Catalysis* series (1970-71), which included her walking through the streets of New York with a “WET PAINT” sign on her chest (Figure 44); Lynn Hershmann Leeson’s altered photographs that depict her alter-ego Roberta in self-portraits with “feeling” words written on her face such as *Identity Cyborg* (1999) and *Roberta's Construction Chart 2, Constructing Roberta Breitmore* (1975) (like Piper, she also made drawings and paintings with words and phrases and bodies); and Lalla Essaydi’s *Three Silences* series including *Silence of Thought #2* (2003), a self-image in response to the sensoring of Arab women (Figure 37). Using the traditional technique of henna to write autobiographical narratives of censored women on her body and on traditional fabrics, Essaydi demonstrated how ethnicity, history, and ideology connect to our identities (Rocca & Essaydi, 2014). The encounter opens up a collective space of

wit(h)nessing.¹⁸²



Figure 37. Leyla Essaydi. *Silence of Thought #2* (2003). Digital photograph with post-production alterations. 104.1 x 129.5 cm. Retrieved from <https://learn.ncartmuseum.org/artwork/silence-of-thought-2/> Accessed 29 November 2019. Reproduced with Fair Dealing.

In addition to feminist artists, the riot grrrl movement and its concomitant aesthetics (largely focused on reactions to violences against women) (Schilt, 2003) was a big influence in the creation of the artworks of my subjects. Perry (2015) detailed how the riot grrrl movement, in part, reclaimed language via body writings. A diptych of Kathleen Hanna¹⁸³ (Figure 38) from an unknown source includes a portrait of her donning a hand-written “SLUT” on her exposed belly and “INCEST!” on her collarbone—wit(h)nessing to Barbara Kruger’s photographic

¹⁸² For more literature on Essaydi’s feminist photographic practice of questioning women’s roles in society by combining traditional aesthetics and technological means see Denker (2004); Solomon, (2016); Waterhouse (2009).

¹⁸³ Hanna was raped twice, once by a stranger at 15, and by her best friend at 25 (<http://www.kathleenhanna.com/it-was-rape/>). She had also been abused by her father since she was young. Retrieved from: <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/why-kathleen-hanna-spoke-up-about-violent-alcoholic-dad-on-new-lp-20160706>

silkscreen on vinyl “YOUR BODY IS A BATTLEGROUND” (1989). Zines, essential to riot grrrl, foregrounded collage as an aesthetic and form, and in so doing, pieces of texts and/or words were often placed upon bodies.



Figure 38. Kathleen Hanna. *No Title* (date unknown). Image from an unspecified web page. Retrieved from <https://tropicsofmeta.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/bikinikillkathleenhannaslut.gif> Accessed 1 December 2019. Reproduced with Fair Dealing.

A chapter focusing on writing the body is undoubtedly framed by Hélène Cixous’s *Écriture féminine* (feminine writing).¹⁸⁴ According to Cixous, feminine writing is open, non-linear, and poetic. However, Cixous never fully defined *Écriture féminine* because she considered it an impossibility.¹⁸⁵ Once it is defined, it can be categorized and then reabsorbed into the dominant discourse—male-dominated reason—she was trying to untangle. It is a feminine mode of writing, and as such it “involves a radical transformation of literary genre. [It refuses] arbitrary order, beginnings or ends to narratives, attempts to imprison time in a linear

¹⁸⁴ It is worth noting that the French word *féminine* is not laden with the passive connotations of its English equivalent.

¹⁸⁵ Some feminist thinkers have taken up *Écriture féminine* towards photography (Backhaus & Murungi, 2009; Moore 2013) and called it *Photographie féminine*, a neologism coined by Panizza Allmark (2003) in her PhD dissertation. This term does not work in the context of my research. I do not take up this term, as she uses it exclusively as a way to reconceptualize travel and landscape photography through a feminist methodology that acknowledges that viewing photos is embodied and relies on more than sight. For Allmark (2003), *Photographie féminine* “represents a conceptual shift from the tourist destination as a place to see to a more interactive space relating to a feminine experience engaging the senses beyond sight” (p. 94).

structure, [and a] false division of parts” (Sellers, 1994, p. 446). This refusal is in order “to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project,” because “your body must be heard” (Cixous, 1976, p. 875). “Your body must be heard” is also an interpellation by Figure 34, the establishing image in the chapter, in which Roxanne is precluded from making a sound, a sound necessary for her survival. *Écriture féminine* arose in a time without an established feminist canon nor a diversity of material by people other than cis men.¹⁸⁶ To update Cixous, all marginalized people must write, keep writing, to—as Cixous (1991) urged—“break down the wall” (p. ix). To do so means to dare to throw off the constraints, inner and outer, which join together to “forbid one to write.” The participants in my research were subject to many interlocking multiple constraints and wrote their bodies in, in spite of all. Cixous (1976) demanded, “Women must write through their bodies” (p. 886) the very bodies that have endured and endure trauma, the very bodies that have been signified and marred by shame (Senft, 2012). Cixous discussed the shame she had felt around the feminist ideas she possessed and explained how she self-censored because there was no established community to validate her concerns.¹⁸⁷ The validation of subjectivities as important and relevant ways of analysis, and not as shameful attributes, was a defining feature of the intimate public of per-site makers I outline. Dobson (2015) argued, in the context of young women’s social media practices, for learning and respecting each other’s ways of doing especially if they sound different, strange, and uncanny. These pejoratives are the reason so many women and non-binary and trans people work in secret and why we need a room of our own, in a shared house. The per-sites that my subjects created were rooms of their own, and these rooms functioned as a space from which the creators could write from their bodies about their bodies, to write their traumas onto their bodies as tactical ways of resistance, resistance to being told who and how they should be and who and how they should react to the events they had survived and were surviving. While writing the body is one genre of aestheticizing trauma, there are other features that I analyze below while also engaging

¹⁸⁶ At the time of writing, work by women and work by non-binary and trans people continues to be marginalized, and encounters of harassment and violence online are exponentially rising (Dobson, 2015; Senft, 2012). Elsewhere, see Carrie Rentschler’s (2014; 2017) work for astute intersectional analyses of social media, gendered violence activism, and networked feminist witnessing.

¹⁸⁷ As seen in Chapter 3’s discussion of self-censorship.

with what it means to visualize trauma.

Aesthetics of Trauma/tic Bodies

In this section, I will present the aesthetic themes that emerged from 1996 to 2001 among my participants that demonstrate how a mediation and mediatization of trauma online made it legible. I do this through a visual culture analysis of a selection of their images. I begin with bodily inscriptions, as they were one of the predominant aesthetic features—within the themes I outlined in Chapter 2—of a particular visual vernacular at the time. Bodily inscription can be a way to present trauma and being sick. It is a mediation that returns back on itself; it rewrites the body and the memory from the self, unlike the way in which the traumatic event seeps into and out of the body ostensibly beyond any control of the self. Reminiscent of Jo Spence’s bodily inscriptions inviting ethical encounters is Marlaina’s triptych webcam series (Figure 39), in which she captured herself with interpellating phrases on her naked upper body against a background that blends with her flesh.¹⁸⁸ The texts, such as “please take care,” invite the viewer into a position of power, yet the rhetoric of the pose does not portray a victim. This disjuncture appears because (a) the camera shutter lag produces an image in which her eyes are both open and closed, and (b) there is no addressee in her statement. Is she asking us to please take care of her, or ourselves? “Please take care” is also emblematic of the figure being a dutiful Foucauldian subject enacting “self-care.” From left to right in Figure 39: (a) Marlaina is looking at the viewer but cuts off her eyes; (b) in a point of view shot, her chest and torso are spread open towards the camera; and (c) finally she fills her entire mouth with food in excess so that some of it overflows between her fingers.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ She has labeled these image files "perform3" and "scare" and "scare2." She was performing the abject self that typically scares and can also seduce a viewer.

¹⁸⁹ Inspired by Marlaina’s images, I too made a series of images with questions on my body. These functioned as a way of witnessing. I have noticed and have been affected by her; I forged a connection as a way of saying “hey, me too” but through the language of that intimate public content.



Figure 39. Marlaina Read. *Please Take Care* (1998). Image from an unspecified web page. Webcam. Courtesy of the Marlaina Read.

Can we take care of each other if we are not allowed to take care of ourselves? Johanna Hedva's "Sick Woman Theory" (2016) took to task the way we have been made into pathologized medicalized bodies. Instead, following Cvetkovich, she contended that our sickness has a history and is embedded in capitalism, because we need to be strong healthy bodies, that is, bodies that can labour, bodies that must work. If we are unable to work, or work efficiently, or work within the parameters to reproduce capitalism, then we are signified as "sick" (Holowka, 2018). Most, if not all, of the subjects of my study have experienced this. But attempting to achieve well-being (i.e., a healthy and appropriate body) is incommensurable with our contemporary context. All the things that can possibly make us healthy are constantly thwarted by capitalism so it can then sell us an antidote to whatever it is killing us with. In short, capitalism makes us sick (Cvetkovich, 2012; Gilmore, 2012). Given that we all live within this milieu, what if we rethought what being sick means as a productive aesthetic continuum of our subjecthood? Therefore, I ask: How is subjectivity performed and what does corporeal inscription do? How does the body perform in the articulations and expressions of subjectivity? Merleau-Ponty, as paraphrased by Grosz (1994), argued that our body "is the condition and context through which [we are] able to have a relation to objects with the world" (p. 86). This perspective posits an interrelation between the subject and the world—the body as I live it, experience it, and am shaped by my experience. This phenomenological frame sets up the mediation between the subject and the world, the body and the subject, the body and the world, and how young women aestheticize this balance via photographic practices. With a close reading of images by Helena and Terry I attempt to answer these questions.

Helena's work embodies a feminist aesthetic, salient to, though differing from, the

feminist body art of the 1960s and 1970s and the riot grrrl movement of the 1990s, which foregrounded misogynist violence through a repetition of and an attachment to that violence. The paratext around her images positions them as feminist art and in conversation with other feminist artists. That is to say, her images show the complex involvement of her body with the violence perpetrated against her. Across a corpus of hundreds of images of her body, Helena used a range of conceptual techniques to render violent events of rape, mental and physical abuse, and the subjective drama of mental illness that she had endured without explicit denotation, unlike, for example, Ana Mendieta and her direct rape scene which I return to later (Muñoz, 2011).

I argue that the sheer number of these images manifests a desire (rather than intent or will) for mastery over trauma that paves a route towards pleasure and survival. Helena sustained an attachment to these events through a repetition of them within her images and within her practice. This attachment is not intentional, such as in Jo Spence's cancer series, but rather a tacit orientation. Helena negated the singularity of the event by constructing a conceptual re-articulation of it. This repetition as a conceptual re-articulation, which supplants the violent event with its image, is composed by and prolonged through a series of acts: taking the image, uploading it to the computer, uploading it to the internet, adding it to her per-site through code, iteratively viewing it, and interacting with visitors to her webpage. The history of the image is also the history of the event, its context, and the self-cultivation of the photographer as image-object. To best expand on these ideas and to give space to this work, I turn to a fine-grained description of a selection of Helena's pictures.



Figure 40. Helena Kvarnström. *Untitled* (1997). Original scan of image from an unspecified web page. Photograph. Courtesy of Helena Kvarnström.

The black and white self-image of Helena above (Figure 40) has always produced a variety of interpretations. I seem to see it differently than anyone else. I see it as a violated fragmented disfigured body, a cyborg body with a torso that looks like a wooden mannequin and with the knees, one over the other, attached loosely, joining the top and bottom of the leg. It is uncanny because the shadow does not match up to the shape. Only recently someone else pointed out a more reasonable interpretation, which is that it is a woman's body tucked into her knees sitting on a floor behind a toilet cover. This new narrative was a "loss of innocence" of the relationship I have had to the image for the last 20 years. I wanted to hold onto my story and the narrative it represented and repeated because it provided me with a *salvoir*, a mastery over its position within the larger context of self-imaging. With its fragmented invisible body aesthetic, the image is a broken fragmented body overtaken by a shadow. It is no longer itself. It is obscured and out of the frame. It cannot be contained but wants to contain itself with the hunched fetal position.



Figure 41. Helena Kvarnström. *Untitled* (~1998-1999). Image from an unspecified web page, 1998-1999. Digital photograph with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of Helena Kvarnström.

The fragmented in/visible body aesthetic I detailed in Chapter 2 is also present in Figure 41, which simultaneously reveals and hides. It is a digital collage image that is composed of two (or more?) images. There is a body sitting in the middle of the frame with its black legs bent up and feet towards the foreground. To its right is a small shelf. It is indiscernible what is on it, if anything at all. This shelf suggests to the viewer that this is probably the subject's bedroom. On top of the body is a projected image of a face with large lips that take up almost the entirety of the left side of Helena's chest. The projected image also covers her face only to expose her lips and the top of her blonde hair. Below Helena's legs is a repeated pattern of what could be the projected image of the subject's torso. The aesthetic of this image is one of repetition in the position of the pieces in the frame, in/visibility, and 1970s feminist art, specifically Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas* series (1973-1978). The subject's body is open towards the viewer and is possibly naked, yet much of the body is obscured. The viewer can apprehend this ostensible dichotomy through lines that trace both the projected image-body and the in situ body. Both bodies are situated so that they are what Sara Ahmed called “not in line” (2006, p. 65). That is

to say, neither body is held in place by lines, because the lines disappear as clear demarcations. I am unable to tell at some points which parts are which image, so much so that there is potentially a third image providing layered texture to the picture, but I cannot be sure. In short, the subject's identity is “out of line” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 66). This image would have been part of a series shown one at a time (through clicking small circles or squares) on Helena's per-site. What is it about these web practices and the way we orient towards them both onscreen and with our bodies? “What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations that we have already taken,” Ahmed (2006, p. 55) noted, and it was through reorienting our selves by way of moving through the online world, the per-sites, and their aesthetics that more of what we wanted (support, community, trust, identification, self-determination) came within reach. By making use of Ahmed, I stress the potential of queer phenomenology to bring a new understanding of the traumatic WWW body.



Figure 42. Terry Palka. *Untitled* (1997). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital photograph with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of author.

Queer orientations, both in identity and in physicality, are a theme of Terry Palka's corpus of images I was able to find on various websites, forums, and the Wayback Machine. Figure 42 is a self-image that reveals and hides simultaneously. The post-production edits made

it sepia toned, a common aesthetic choice for Terry at the time. Her body is positioned and curved like a sculpture; the rhetoric of the pose accentuates her sigmoid back with bony shoulders digging out of her skin. Matching the sepia tone, the brown fabric wrap around her abdomen and chest moves up to cover most of her head and her face. A curl of hair and part of an ear is visible given the direction she is facing, away from the camera, away from her own gaze. In some images, Terry's face and body are partially hidden by ropes, fabric, and sheets. In others, she is directly facing the camera, acknowledging her scoliosis and surgeries as documents of her subjecthood. In Figure 43, Terry holds an x-ray with both hands that displays the rods she has in her back and its curve. She is standing naked with her body full of ribs and small breasts. "Here you are," she seems to be saying, as if wanting to prove to the viewer what she is enduring and what she lives with. She is addressing the viewer as well as herself. The "you" in "here you are" is always both. There are two Terrys, her body as scientific technology (the x-ray) and her body as presented in front of the camera (her camera). It is not a direct "here I am"; it is an encounter that forms by way of wit(h)nessing.

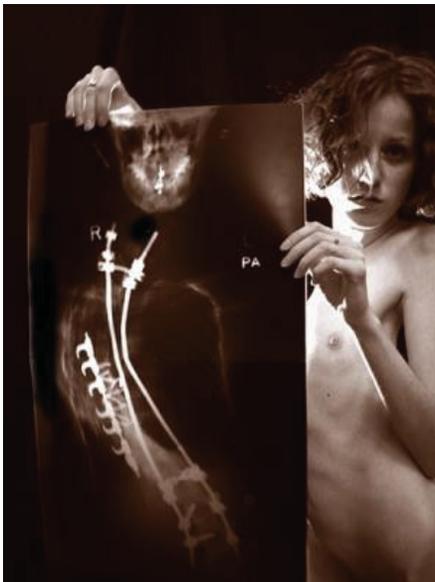


Figure 43. Terry Palka, *Untitled* (~1999). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital photographs with digital post-production alterations. Courtesy of author.

Being sick, in these cases, becomes an aesthetic subjectivity that demands self-representation. However, Helena's is much more conceptual, as is her "hidden disability" of

bipolar disorder and other mental health issues. Can a disability function as an organic trauma (Caruth, 1995)? The web provides multiple positions from which to engage with others, and each position orients us towards specific socialities. For example, a guestbook page is more like meeting up during a party (informal, low stakes), whereas an email is more like making plans to meet one-on-one in someone's home (more intimate, higher stakes).¹⁹⁰ The web's networked structure has a chance to shift us away from the "I" to the multiple; we exist in the intimate public only insofar as we are a link on someone else's page or we link someone else to ours. Pollock wrote that "renaissance theory argued that the drama of a theatre, the climax of the action, could be read from only one position" (Pollock, 2013, p. 53). Although this theory has been discounted, I wonder how the internet and the screen continue this tradition. During the time period in question, there were no cell phones with web access, and laptops were rare. Most web viewing was done on a computer screen that averaged 11 to 15 inches. Web spectatorship at the time was always in the same form but varied by location, which in turn often hinged on censorship: for example, in the library a user had to be careful of who was watching them look at images, whereas at home they could spend time with an image, at least, for my subjects, when parents were not around.¹⁹¹ This flips the script for art spectatorship. Traditionally, the public visits galleries between noon and 5 p.m. unless there is a vernissage. There are blocked and prescribed times to view art. There are prescribed protocols for viewing and interacting with art. The web restructures transmissions of affect in this shifting relation. What does it mean to experience these artworks of/from/beside/with trauma? To wit(h)ness them? It means to enter the social relations of trauma bonding, a claim I argue in the following section.

Wit(h)nessing: The Sociality of Trauma

I got a proposition goes something like this: Dare ya to do what you want

¹⁹⁰ See Nancy Baym (2012) on the nature of publicness online.

¹⁹¹ See Michele White's *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship* (2006) for one of the few comprehensive accounts of the medium specificity of the web and how it reshapes ways of seeing.

Dare ya to be who you will
 Dare ya to cry, cry out loud
 —Bikini Kill, “Double Dare Ya” (1991)

“Trauma can create community,” Kai Erikson (1995, p. 185) declared, and indeed, that is exactly what occurred with the subjects in my study when they “cr[ied] out loud.” It was their traumas that provided them a subject position with which to bond and served as a communicative node in the co-creation of a feminist intimate public. Their traumas motivated them to produce per-sites. Their traumas led them to take photos of their bodies. Their traumas were the themes of their webrings. The rise of the community also precludes others from participation, especially those who are unable to make legible the traumas on which the community hinges—the argument of the next section of this chapter.

Making an event legible provides it with a structure that allows it to *be* and to be able to be responded to. Making a per-site was never for oneself because it was always-already in order to be part of a network of other per-site makers. The intimate public I discuss here thrived on extending their presence with other public displays of connectivity: guestbooks, webrings, forums, links to other websites, and through hosting or being hosted on per-sites.¹⁹² Some per-site owners also made zines and had PO boxes listed alongside email links and chat program handles (AOL, IRC, MSN). Public spaces of communication can feel intimate and enclosed but also provide a landscape to both witness and be with. They provide an opening for an Other, for a spectator to become an interlocutor and a witness. Wit(h)nessing is a social way of making experience intelligible because it produces a witness that enters an ethical encounter to be with whatever they are seeing. What my subjects wanted was a witness to their experiences.

While images are the focus of the dissertation, in this case, I briefly present how the visual extends and depends on the written.¹⁹³ One of the ways I do this is following the methodological

¹⁹² I describe in the dissertation’s conclusion that the website guestbooks were a means of responsibility and a way to validate that what we were feeling was real, important, and moreover, part of us—but also (k)not.

¹⁹³ I am careful not to focus too much on writing components of per-site making since little attention has been given to images in studies of this early web, especially in the discussions of trauma, violence, and well-being—all which already exist as written and discursive structures.

essays in the anthology *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts* (Kuhn & McAllister, 2006) that “are concerned with how images operate in specific locations” (p. 2). All the essays pay close attention “to the settings in which the photographs were made and subsequently have been used—they consider how meanings in photographs may be shifted, challenged and renewed over time and for different purposes” (Kuhn & McAllister, 2006, p. 5). The essays aim to develop “innovative strategies for working with photographs” (p. 1). In each dissertation chapter, I merge various ways of reading images and analyzing them towards nuancing a specific temporally located situation: the WWW intimate public of the mid-1990s to early 2000s.

How is the web exactly the kind of place, in form, that necessities trauma art? At the time it was a different place, an escape, a place with/in which one could feel re-moved from one’s body—an orientation that is also a coping mechanism of trauma. We could re-invent our habits, even if the new ones—the WWW ones—were imbued with all of IRL; it did not feel that way. Spiers (2015), despite her oversights in historicizing of riot grrrl to web gurl (which I return to later), brought up a crucial point, which I noticed from memory and from my data collection and which Nguyen critiques—the value of trauma in community formation. Using Nguyen’s (2012) critical analysis of race’s position in zine culture, I note the surplus of value in the aesthetics of intimacy. Helena wanted engagement and she received it. And the more engagement she received the more valuable she became to the community and the more cultural capital she was able to accrue. In a 1999 interview with Alyssa, Helena recounted her epistolary exchanges with others centered on traumatic events that bourgeoned from the images she posted up on her website: “I’ve gotten girls writing me love letters but also writing about their traumas.” It was the connotative meanings and a possibility to summon a punctum of her intimate images alongside her texts that allowed others to feel vulnerable enough to trust in her ability to respond. She turned them into witnesses. They would share their stories of abuse with her and ask her advice. “One girl wrote me saying her mom was beating her up and hit her and needed help.” Alyssa, nine years later, provided a possible explanation of why this was:

Helena was baring herself on a level I had never seen before and I don't think many people had seen before. She was always considered an inspiration on that level. I had my own issues and shitty experiences but I never really had anything quite that raw. Her rawness was certainly

groundbreaking, especially in that context. It set the stage for so many other people doing much of the same thing.



Figure 44. Adrian Piper. *Catalysis III (performance documentation)* (1970). Two gelatin silver prints and text mounted on coloured paper. 21.6 x 27.9 cm. Retrieved from <https://canadianart.ca/reviews/adrian-piper-a-synthesis-of-intuitions-moma/> Accessed 2 December 2019. Reproduced with Fair Dealing.

The image-making practices of my subjects were very much influenced by the adage “the personal is political,” which insisted that “going public with your feelings can make a difference both to how you feel and to the state of the world” (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 161). This belief is demonstrated with the Bikini Kill lyrics that opened this section and Adrian Piper’s *Catalysis III* (1970): both auto-fictional and conceptual self-imaging extensions into the world that challenged their traumatic everyday: ideological visual culture’s white supremacy and misogyny (Figure 44). Often the “bio” section of a per-site took up this dictum and served as an entryway into a deeper knowledge of the per-site author but also as an access point to reach the author. Tamika’s bio (Figure 36), a long page in tiny black Courier font on a white background, reads less like a biography and more like “going public with your feelings”: a sequence of abuse and violence she has endured, detailing rapes starting with her father, then her uncle, then continuing until the time of writing (2000) with a boy named Brandon. Each section of the bio is focused on a period of time. The page starts with “*WHEN I WAS YOUNG*” and ends with “*NOW*” which is shortly after she dropped out of high school at 17. In the “*HIGH SCHOOL*” section

she wrote,

I started this webpage. It was pitiful but I loved it. It provided a release and introduced me to many things. Like, there are other people out there who were raped. I'm not alone anymore. I have friends online, support, comfort. I'm glad I started this webpage. It will always be in my life.

The above quote coupled with what Tamika wrote to me in 2018, included below, is indicative of the long-lasting impression of that time. It is also indicative of her as a vulnerable girl: "a girl within a politics of global neo-liberalism and a practice of postcolonial critique" (Gilmore & Marshall, 2010, p. 669).¹⁹⁴

I think back on it and I realized how much it [the intimate public] not just shaped me as a person but how much it helped me. I remember just how broken and lost I was and how a lot was happening that I couldn't cope with. Through making my website and creating with the others, I was able to heal because of all the inspiration and beautiful words swirling around. And, if I couldn't heal it myself, I had the strength to ask for it from others. That time in my life gave me a strength I know I wouldn't have had otherwise. I am glad to have had that and I hope people are still having it today, even though I imagine it's less intimate.

The reveal from Tamika, focused on "help" and "strength" as characteristics, demonstrates the sociability of trauma, its succour, and the interconnectedness of making per-sites rather than just consuming them. I emailed her back to ask if she could elaborate on "how broken and lost I was and how a lot was happening that I couldn't cope with" and explain what she meant by "intimate" but I never received a reply.¹⁹⁵ When I asked Tamika if she could describe the community of website makers during 1996 to 2001, she responded, "Passionate, alive, angry, sad, poetic to a fault and very beautiful." Her identification used the adjectives of a sad girl.

¹⁹⁴ See Greenfield's photography book *Girl Culture* (2002).

¹⁹⁵ Tamika's answers, while valid, are indicative of the format—an email questionnaire that I loosely use when Skyping or talking to subjects can fall flat because a relation between the speakers cannot happen in real time.

Externalizing these felt experiences in a narrative form (both textually and photographically) is a social act, as Tamika further corroborates, “My site let me scream out and work through those feelings and I probably wrote more than I do now when I feel a lot more stable.” Tori Amos, in a 1998 *Rolling Stone* article, said, “Isn’t it great, all this diary stuff?” (Daly, 1998) referring to female musicians like Bikini Kill externalizing issues usually reserved for private consumption like sexuality, rape, and violence. While collectively transformative, the personal as public with its aesthetics of intimacy also hinged on a legibility of trauma that precluded participation by those unable to orient towards its values.

Legibility & Making Narratives

I always had trouble distinguishing between what happened and what merely might have happened, but I remain unconvinced that the distinction, for my purposes, matters.

—Joan Didion (2008, p.134)

I have always loved the aforementioned quote, letting it follow me wherever I went. It made sense to have it start this section as a methodological scaffolding because here I argue, from a feminist standpoint, against capital T truth, against the privileging of a singular narrative of events and consequences (an impossibility). But now, having finished most of this chapter and *re-turning* to its point as I revise my arguments, I am not so sure. I am trying to provide an authentic narrative in that I know it is a partial perspective but one that takes time with the object of inquiry, unlike any other treatment of this time period I have seen except for Paasonen’s *Figures of Fantasy: Internet, Women, and Cyberdiscourse* (2005).

Depending on the reader's identification with and of my purpose (the exposition of an intimate public of per-site makers 1996 to 2001), the Didion justification either matters or not. I think it does, because like Gilmore (1994), I take “truth” and “lies” to be “constructs with histories” in “long worn-out modes of thinking” (p. ix). But I also know being able to think that is a form of privilege, and we do need truths, especially when so many gender-marginalized people are never believed and so many men lie about the violences they perpetuate, the very ones

that I have written about in the chapter.¹⁹⁶ How can I position myself at both of these ends of truth's function? In order to distinguish the discursive ways these two concepts play out online, I have parsed out their function within the visualization of trauma in the web practices of these women. Rather than a straightforward autobiography, the participants are doing an ethical autobiographics of their traumas, which are based on "an elaboration of the self by the self, a studious transformation, a slow and arduous transformation through a constant care for the truth" (Foucault, 1989). The care for truth among the participants and in their work functioned in a social and cultural context that provided value to the ethical autobiographical practice.

I distinguish between putting on narratives as a way to accrue cultural capital through trauma and putting on narratives as a way to make one's own traumas legible, even if they both stem from a similar place—to fit into a community that reveres oppression while simultaneously situating itself as wanting to combat oppression.¹⁹⁷

Magda:

Do you remember certain themes that would give you social and cultural capital? For instance, discussing rape is very foregrounded and if you haven't been raped in some ways you were not participating in a particular shared experience/worldview.

Marlaina:

Definitely the forms of intimate partner violence, the experience with sexism or gendered disparity in certain fields or jobs. There was a lot of people exploring that trauma through their bodies, or trying to heal from that trauma through this kind of imaging.

At that time, I hadn't really experienced that kind of thing, I had partners that had hit me, but I didn't really think about it as being

¹⁹⁶ See Gilmore's *Tainted Witness: Why We Doubt What Women Say About Their Lives* (2017).

¹⁹⁷ Janice Haaken, as discussed in Gilmore (1994), also argued that women's reporting of pain and violence is less about "lying" than "that they are seeking a way to express an as-yet-undefined sexual injury" and that we cannot (expect) literalization of the injuries. It is unfair because narrativizing sexual abuse "necessarily and appropriately combines fantasy with memory" (p. 26).

intimate partner violence, I had been sexually assaulted as a child and gone through all that with my sister...

Magda:

But you did!

Marlaina:

But I didn't equate being sexually abused as a child with being raped at the time. It was different than adult women talking about rape and a lot of the books that were out at the time. It was a different sort of experience, I was a child, I was about 5.

When I inquired about why it was different, reflecting also on my own inability at the time to equate the physical violence I endured with the sexual violence circulating, Marlaina clarified,

Maybe I didn't equate it in the sense of self-imagery because it was not something that I would ever want to explore through my body, or try and reclaim my body from this. It would feel revolting to me. It's something I would want to distance my body from.

Although Marlaina told me she was unable to directly make imagery about her incestuous assaults, she did write (on) her body in the work. Her body, according to her, was a mediator. Using her body in her photos was a way to respond to the affective resonances these large-scale traumatic events left upon her.¹⁹⁸ Some of Marlaina's abject images (Figure 45) were reactions to the televised imagery of wars happening at the time—a shared collective trauma.

I think a lot of the grotesque ones came out of the wars that were happening at the time. I found very affecting. That action or discourse . . . like the Iraqi/Kuwait war, and the Yugoslav/Bosnian war. And those were mediated through TV as a child so a lot of that imagery resonates

¹⁹⁸ See Rochelle Gold (2017) for a detailed look at how making things for the web can be reparative in its responses to political issues, including an analysis of a web-based game that one of my subjects, Aurica Harvey, made.

with me, still.

Mediated violence allowed Marlaina to express her own body's lived trauma as a result of violence. In conjunction, her body was also co-constructing itself as a traumatic subject within the intimate public, and these traumas were inevitably part of her work. I interpret her work as incorporating these traumas; however, Marlaina did not.



Figure 45. Marlaina Read. *once there was this girl a most beautiful girl and her eyes were clear as glass and her skin pale as dusk and her mouth, grin.jpg* (1997). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital Photo with post-production alterations. Courtesy of Marlaina Read.

The co-construction of community alongside trauma is part of Emily Spiers's (2015) focus in her history of riot grrrl, its lineage, propulsion into pop culture, and co-option by mainstream "grrrls" like Avril Lavigne.¹⁹⁹ I was excited to see that Spiers linked online culture

¹⁹⁹ Lavigne and other pop-punk girls such as Gwen Stefani were mostly derided by the subjects of my study. What made them more or less mainstream is unclear.

with riot grrrl zine production—a rarity—but I was thwarted. While a lot of her theorizations about the exalted position of trauma within riot grrrl translates into my research, she skipped ahead to major websites made to mimic online magazines that then branded themselves as feminist lifestyle portals and gave rise to the “web gurl,” a post-feminist identity tangential to riot grrrl culture. Spiers employed Anna Feigenbaum's 2007 neologism "web gurls," which never reached any parlance. A DuckDuckGo.com search for "web gurls" only points me to porn websites, portals, or social media accounts. On Google.ca the results are almost the same except two article citations of Feigenbaum that claimed the neologism.²⁰⁰ Given her historical framework, it is curious why Spiers skipped over sites that could be considered online per-zines, like the ones in my study. She must be familiar with them, as it was within this “web gurl” public that the concept of “web grrrls” was formed, an identity similar to but separate from these more mainstream users. Spiers's article did, however, present a key finding—the value of trauma and its commodification. To understand what that means, let me situate the argument:

Poletti and Rak (Poletti & Rak, 2014, p. 18) pointed out in the introduction to *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online* that "Marianne Hirsch's formulation of postmemory (2008) or Celia Lury's (1998) idea that photographs can act as a prosthetic memory are only two of many ways to understand how individuals make sense of memories that cannot be made into narrative" (p. 18). Christin explained the way the internet was a tool to make sense of her traumatic experiences and, in turn, a tool of survival.

I saw computers and the internet as an extension of myself helping me to do things I would not be able to do otherwise. But the internet in particular as a space to put the things I couldn't express in my everyday life or the parts of myself or even as a container for my pain.

Poletti and Rak (Poletti & Rak, 2014) argued that "technology provides a way to survive an event, or the loss of people one loves, which may be too much to bear without it" (p. 19). Repetitive self-imaging functions partly in this way, as a survival mechanism. Technology mediation orients us closer to and further from our trauma. What about traumas/memories

²⁰⁰ Searches done on duckduckgo.com, 5 July 2018.

cannot be narrativized? How do young women make sense of memories they do not know how to or do not know they can make coherent? What is an acceptable trauma? I argue that it is a trauma that enables a wit(h)ness. Traumas had to be made legible (able to elicit a witnessing) to be accepted within the intimate public I capture in my dissertation. The young women created narratives that simultaneously allowed them to express feelings about their traumas and position themselves as participants in the community. They were, in some ways, affective transmissions—narratives that wrote around and with events that made sense in the contexts within which they were distributed. For Anne, being part of the network superseded the objective truth details. In that WWW encounter, the specifics of was raping her mattered less than the ability to tell the story and to summon witnesses; the after-effects positioned her at the centre of the narrative. Anne divulged,

There is a part when you would read about these traumas that other girls were writing about it sometimes made yours feel less valid because it wasn't this or that. I never actually told anybody this before—when I did my website, I wrote a lot about rape. . . . The presumption was that I was raped, by . . . by . . . by a man . . . but it was my grandmother. I didn't want her to ever see that, or see me talking about it. If she saw the website she couldn't see the . . . evidence of me talking about what happened. And so, I changed the gender of the person who was doing that stuff to me, and that's not something I ever felt I could talk about. 1) I was scared she would see it, 2) it was not something anybody else was talking about. It was much easier for me to write about that a man was doing this to us, us as a collective group of people, as women, and how men do this to women; but my experience was different.

I remember Anne's stories. They were vignettes interspersed with images of stills from films or of young women and riot grrrls. At the time, I assumed some of the pictures were of her. However, she told me that none of the images were of her; because of her "poor" upbringing she did not have access to a camera or scanner. I also remember that Anne's accounts of rape were the most vivid. She gave a language to the experience and after-effects which I did not

know: She transmitted an intra-generational trauma and I became her witness. It was her stories that visualized the feminist potential I needed to participate in, in order to fit in. Except Anne's stories, like my visualizations, were imaginaries. While simultaneously feeling safe to share her experience and doing it to reach out to others, she also created a boundary of who could participate (other survivors of sexual violence). It was her accounts that made me think I would not fit in until I was raped, the very same accounts that were re-articulated because Anne herself did not think she would fit in unless she had been raped by a male figure. Anne's narrative removed her from the incest and same-sex experience and complicates the idea of mastery over trauma in the traditional sense. In some ways, can her gesture of changing her perpetrator's gender be read as a gesture towards a collective sociality, or is it possibly unravel the rigid vision we have of rape? Her role models, Tori Amos, Kathleen Hanna, etc., had all been raped by men (as far as she knew). As Nguyen (2012, p. 182) pointed out following Rey Chow, "the oppressed figure," in my case, the young woman who was raped, stood "in for some more true, more genuine knowledge, [and] the desire for intimacy with this other enacts an unrealized intersubjectivity in which a performance of address can nonetheless take place" (p. 182). The representation of a raped woman, for me, was the icon of a sad girl, the girl that was of value and had cultural capital. Through my desire for intimacy my own history with physical violence was subsumed. Physical violence was not a trauma that could be re-staged intentionally—even conceptually—through photographs, within my understanding of the Berlant-ian shared worldview of the intimate public.

Ana Mendieta's staging of anal rape became iconic through its performance photographs, in the after-effects of the event. *Untitled (Rape Scene)* is the photographic documentation of an action that Mendieta performed in her apartment while she was a student at the University of Iowa. It also acts as a performative afterimage. The action was a response to a grotesque and well-known rape and murder of a nursing student, Sara Ann Otten, by another student in March 1973.²⁰¹ I remember seeing this photograph online on a website about feminist art—it struck me. It felt real and necessary. It looked exactly how I imagined a scene post-rape would look like. It was real insofar as the feelings I had in response were real, as was

²⁰¹ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mendieta-untitled-rape-scene-t13355>.

the galvanization I felt about being a feminist and knowing that I needed to protect my body. Yet, in contradiction, this image also made me want to be raped. Young women in high school talking about being beat up by boyfriends regularly foregrounded my callowness: “Why doesn’t she just leave him? I would never stay. I’m stronger than that.” I was unequipped to understand the entanglement of emotions, expectations, and psychic trauma. And yet, while I derided my peers and their ostensible lack of power and control, I would chug a bottle of gin in hopes of passing out in the park to be raped—to be written over—so I could rewrite myself as a sad girl, so that I could also make work about rape and sexual violence and fit into the intimate public stylized by these young women. I thought that these experiences would turn me into a more accurate performer of my gender. How do we come to know/perceive (*sa/voir*) who we are (Harris, 2004)? Marlaina also reveals a similar contradiction to mine above,

There were other things like having an abortion or miscarriage and people explored this through their photos. That was something that I never experienced. . . . I did feel a little bit left out in a way. I knew I had experienced traumas but they weren't the ones I had talked about. I did write an online zine about mental illness about my mom. Abortion and miscarriage always seemed like something that happened to Americans, not my Australian friends.

The US-centricity that is palatable in this dissertation emerges from the US-centricity of the community. What US Americans did became the status quo, even within a community built on attempts to circumvent the IRL status quo. Marlaina continues:

When I was about 19, I made up that I was pregnant and that I had a miscarriage and I continued that lie for years. I think that was very much influenced what was happening online—people rallied around and wanted to support you and help you heal and I wanted to feel that from my friends. Who does that?

Who does that? According to theories on intimacy and the value of sentimentality, many people do that, including young women (Berlant, 2008; Nguyen, 2012). Marlaina recalled the desire to be seen, acknowledged, and responded to. In art making, genre brackets modes of stylization so

that the audience knows what and how to respond to what they are viewing—this encounter becomes an event of spectatorship. Poletti & Rak (2014) synthesized Berlant:

Berlant calls “genre” a way of making sense of a scene that involves a gradual process of recognizing its terms. Eventually, Berlant says, a scene can become an event. And that can take on a narrative shape, which can start to have resonances with other events in that genre.” (Poletti & Rak, 2014, p. 19)

The per-site makers were creating a genre through their narratives to give shape to their traumas, to the scenes of their lives, but also because they wanted to participate in this “genre” of cyber grrrls, that was predicated on trauma sharing.²⁰²

Conclusion

Who will record the history of tears?

(Barthes, 2002, p. 180)

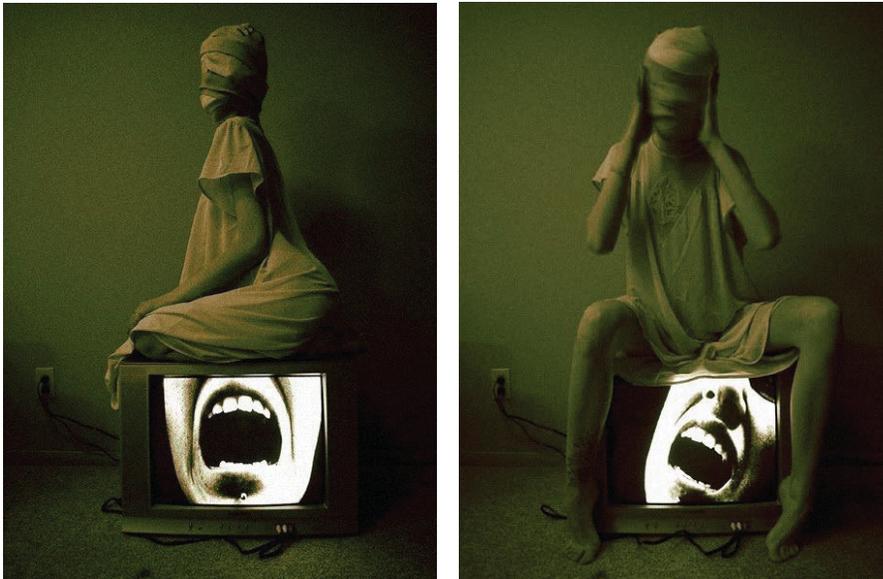


Figure 46. Terry Palka. *Untitled* (~1998-2000). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital photograph with post-production alterations. Courtesy of author.

²⁰² As it seems too dated, I only use the “cyber grrrls” concept as a shorthand because I do not give the intimate public of per-site makers a “genre” name.

Figure 47. Terry Palka. *Untitled* (~1998-2000). Image from an unspecified web page. Digital photograph with post-production alterations. Courtesy of author.

Cixous spoke of tongues like Anzaldúa did—a tongue as a serpent (1976). Imagine Medusa with many tongues on her head. The tongues all speak a language and those who refuse to acknowledge it are then turned to stone, a knotted tongue of fury. Medusa is a knot of fury, an opened mouth releasing the tongue (see Figures 34, 46, and 47). The tongue, then, is an object of a speech act and acts as an object of pleasure: in both cases, a political entity. The tongue rel/eases the trauma. Cixous beseeched us to write our bodies and use our tongues. By writing (on) our bodies, we are remaking ourselves. Eschewing a more traditional critique of self-imagining practices online in the 1990s, I presented a reparative reading of them using a feminist visual culture analysis lens scaffolded by affect theory and feminist phenomenology. Through a mode of wit(h)nessing, I have presented trauma as a way in which to circulate and demonstrate one’s own identity towards new attachments and socialities, making it one of the main reasons young women in the 1990s started making per-sites. The study of the transmission of trauma within audio-visual media has been taken up by several critics, including Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman, and Joshua Hirsch, but it is always predicated on an intergenerational transmission that moves from the past to the present. However, we know that trauma, like grief, is non-linear. It is my hope, first of all, to unfold the way some of these web practices have oriented themselves alongside and towards traumas. I have shown that the women of this time period were able to intra-generationally transmit traumas through forms of wit(h)nessing. Through this very witnessing, young women knew that to participate in these communities they had to enact an aesthetics of intimacy that hinged on particular traumas such as sexual violence. As a girl of that time period and the researcher today, I oriented towards these traumas to feel them, to witness them, and to sanguinely also endure them.²⁰³ They became part of me. The 1990s offered a hope of a language which I did not speak. The images as functions of trauma

²⁰³ “Trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies. In order to change, people need to become aware of their sensations and the way that their bodies interact with the world around them. Physical self-awareness is the first step in releasing the tyranny of the past” (Kolk, 2015).

allowed both the maker and the viewer to bear witness to their own self as part of a relation. It is *the relation* of the viewing subject with the image that is the transmitter of trauma. The viewing subject is both (a) the one in the frame taking the photo, and (b) the viewer who is influenced to take a similar photo addressing their particular orientations. As such, trauma is always experienced in the present and forms only in the after-effects of an experience.²⁰⁴ Nakamura (2002, p. 12) explained that what we see online are not images but afterimages—rearranged by our modes of viewing and our movement online; the syntagmatics of our screen/computer. Here the WWW provides an expanded reading of what Pollock defines as the “afterimage” by way of its position within internet culture. The after-effects in this case were the imaging practices alongside the production of per-sites these women engaged in. They demonstrate the messiness of the dynamic of intra-generational transmission which led to a new opening up of trauma. Trauma, in this case, functioned as a collective rebuilding of the self through the self-imaging practices. These practices were recentering the author of the image instead of the perpetrator, a surviving self that was obliterated/erased/dismantled through various forms of violence.²⁰⁵ The self-centeredness of the images, however, is not solipsistic. Because of their dependence on wit(h)nessing, the images function within an empathetic relation: “It didn’t end up being about you at all,” Auriea explained. The participants offered each other succour. Auriea explained,

You knew these people were interested. I know if I post this, so-and-so will have something to say about it, and we will talk about something. It didn't end up being about you at all. . . . Sometimes it got really serious. It was definitely issues around sexual violence, everything. So if you knew you were in this group of theirs and they were in a group of yours. . . . And you can be there for each other. And I feel like a lot of those people were totally there for me, and it was great.

²⁰⁴ See Leys & Goldman (2010), Neiger, Meyers, & Zandberg (2011), Stiles (2015), Woodhams (2004), and Zeidler (2013), who are all dedicated to the intersection of trauma, memory, and art making.

²⁰⁵ A practice that is powerful considering that so many histories about murdered and abused women highlight the perpetrator and not the woman. One such case is the story of Robert Pickton and his 49 victims (Cameron, 2010).

Auriea's recollection of the time period points to the intra-subjective space of the users within this public and how what begins as a narrative (through image or text) from a person transmits towards a collective and becomes part of a larger conversation (such as the image-text connoting a potential of violence in Figure 48). My phenomenological approach of witnessing to read images and engage with the formation of an intimate public corroborates this. I have presented the aforementioned images as examples of the kinds of circulated images that were popular among the participants in this online culture (such as Figures 46 and 47 and the silent scream). By comparing the images to other images of the intimate public, and to some of the artists that were either an influence on the subjects of my study or working within similar aesthetics of trauma such as Jo Spence, Leyla Essaydi, and Adrian Piper, I presented a more intertwined and comprehensive history of how traumas were aestheticized within the WWW community I am researching.



Figure 48. Esme Wang. “<http://cinematic.khunt.net/unappreciate.html>” *KNIFE/PROTECT*. Digital photographs with text. Screen capture as it appeared on 24 April 2001. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20010424092608/http://cinematic.khunt.net/unappreciate.html> Accessed 2 November 2018.

What conditions frame the web's functions of transmission of trauma and how does the web possibly preclude participation in enacting trauma? Katherine Hayles (2006 p. 141) evocatively argued that

trauma has structural affinities with code. Like code, it is linked with narrative without itself being narrative. Like code, it is somewhere other than on the linguistic surface, while having power to influence that surface. Like code, it is intimately related to somatic states below the level of consciousness. These similarities suggest that code can become a conduit through which to understand, represent, and intervene in trauma.

The participants in my study all coded their own per-sites, updated their code obsessively and viewed each other's code, three actions that provide the conditions of friendship online to bourgeois as demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 5. Otherwise, the historical literature on trauma and the web encompasses articles on protocols and health information and online communities as therapy groups forming pathographies (Branfoot & Oliver, 1999). Newer work details the promises of social media activism. When feminist journalist Laurie Penny (2013, p. 23) described the ability of women to participate in a public (e.g., the web) they always-already know is not a space for them, she linked it to "patriarchal surveillance, a daily feature of the lives of women and girls for centuries before the computer in every workplace" (p. 23). In some ways, this constant censored negotiation of one's body and its encounters can be read as a feminist trauma. The negotiations repeat and we become attuned to their closing down of our senses and

experience.²⁰⁶ It is exhausting. How can we orient our bodies to energize? To be believed?²⁰⁷ What can we do to with the skin we are in and the skin we visualize online? Phenomenology demonstrates that “objects and others have already left their impressions on its [this skin’s] surface” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 54). I attempt to answer this question in the following chapter.

²⁰⁶ Penny wrote about trauma that materializes within online culture as a result of online culture. She went online to escape a traumatizing public only to be traumatized and re-traumatized online. This experience may be compared to that of the home—the safest place for women but also the most dangerous—as statistically more women will die of violence in the home than outside (Takayoshi, 1999). What became a refuge also eventually ended up a place Penny needed to escape—an enactment of cruel optimism, which also happened to some of my subjects I detailed in Chapters 1 and 3.

²⁰⁷ According to the OED, “in the context of Ancient Greek thought, two related concepts were identified with regards to the concept of belief: *pistis* and *doxa*.” *Pistis* refers to “trust” and “confidence,” and *doxa* refers to “opinion” and “acceptance.” We wanted to be part of a community that practices *pistis*. Belief precludes empirical data, yet why are women’s words and women’s wounds not empirical? Chapter 3 demonstrates that in courts and society they are not (Gilmore, 2017). Is wanting trust and confidence in our feelings the same as wanting to be believed? If I am arguing that factual narrativization is not as important as the affective register that the young women were trying to enact then trust and confidence bourgeons within the intimate aesthetics I detail in the chapter.

CHAPTER 5 — THE PLEASURABLE IS POLITICAL: JOYFUL AFFINITIES AND INTIMATE FRIENDS

Introduction

There is nothing more alienating than having one's pleasures disputed by someone with a theory. —Lauren Berlant (2012, p. 5)

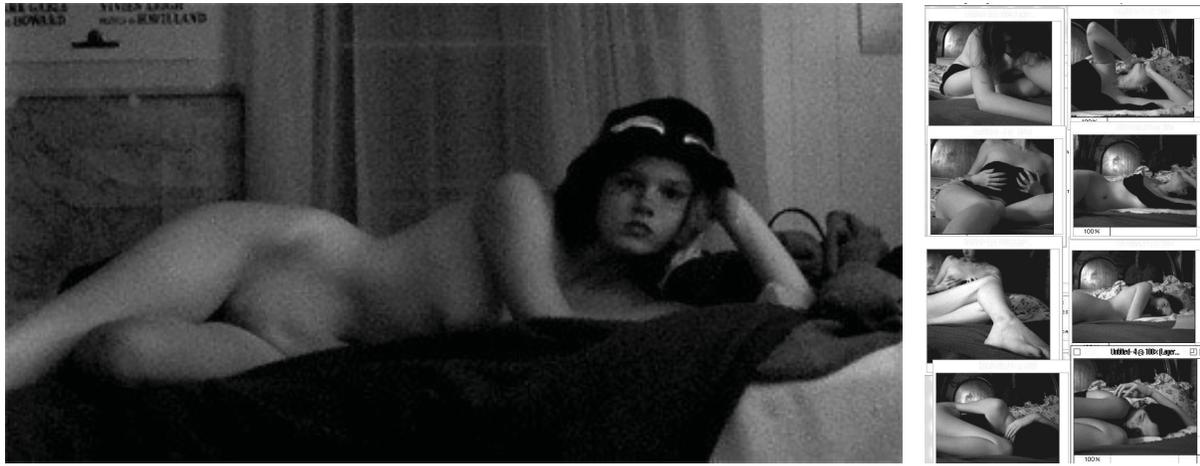


Figure 49. Katharine Tillman. *Untitled*, 1217n1.jpg (2001). Image from folder /erendira-photography. Webcam. Courtesy of Katharine Tillman.

Figure 50. Katharine Tillman. *Untitled* (2000). Images from folder /erendira-photography. Webcam. Courtesy of Katharine Tillman.

A nude white woman with a cloche hat is lying on her side, in a typical paint sitter pose, staring at the viewer. She is on a bed in a bedroom with crumpled-up sheets and a film poster behind her. This black and white photo (Figure 49) is part of a self-imaging series by Katharine Tillman. There seems to be no photographer present; if there is, Katharine looks unaffected by whoever is in the room. She looks at us, the viewers, with a recognition of us looking at her. Figure 50 is a collage of black and white (what appear to be) webcam shots of Katharine by Katharine in separate Adobe Photoshop windows. The set of poses, all hiding her face at different intervals, reveal an affective repetition. From the top left, the images start with her head lurched towards the knees covered by her hair and arms extended towards the front of the frame but not the viewer. In between are a series of gestures displaying a rhetoric of the pose: frustration, anxiety, melancholy, and general dis-ease. The body appears to be wounded or

anticipating wounds, because in each pose the woman is protecting her body in some way. This reading is complicated, however, when coupled with the top photo. Katharine's reproductions of femininity on one level do not invite the spectator into her world, but into the image of her world. The mediation alienates the generic spectator. Spectators familiar with the rhetorics of the pose described above are invited to share Katharine's world and her imaging it. Her looking at us, as she looks at the camera, is a wave to welcome us. The viewer knows this through the concomitant image text—the series page title is “hello.” The familiar spectator is welcomed and acknowledged—welcomed to participate in the intersubjective pleasure of the circulation of the image.²⁰⁸

Trauma to Pleasure

This chapter emerged from the vast amount of writing by my key interlocutors about trauma and affect but not so much about pleasure or the way that pleasure can be inflected by the traumatic, by depression, and so on (perhaps my orientation is askew?). While some scholars such as Pollock (2012), and Ross (2005) have written about this confluence, I extend their work to demonstrate that the connection opens up new socialities and subsequently new ways of art making and friendship forming among groups online.

We need to reform the way we think about embodied pleasure that trauma removes, recognizing that trauma can never fully supplant pleasure, because it is also pleasurable and its subject is never fully disavowed. Continuing from the previous chapter, using Cvetkovich's (2003) arguments about how pain and bad feelings open up new forms of sociality and serve as foundations for new forms of attachment through image making for the participants in my study, I now argue for the interconnectedness of trauma and pleasure and its opening outwards, a kind of “for-ness” (Ahmed, 2010). By doing so, my analysis tries to answer questions of subjectivization and the formation of an embodied self as a pleasurable political entity as it inhabits the space of the web during this historical time period. I read the practices of the participants, like Katharine's images (Figure 49 and 50), as pleasure activities and as responses

²⁰⁸ The images were positioned one after another vertically on a grey background on her per-site (erendira-photography/121701/121700.html).

to the denials of women's pleasures and their non-reproductive bodily functions. Why does the articulation of trauma maintain pain and not pleasure? There is pleasure in expression. I draw on Ahmed's polemic *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) to provide a nuancing of pleasure within my historical time period. In the face of trauma, when we are told to be happy, to smile, and to put our best foot forward, our orientations are predetermined by ideology. How can the web allow us to circumvent these conventions and this promise of happiness?

The pleasure in connecting to others (a kind of consciousness raising), specifically with other similar people was crucial in maintaining a self-imaging practice, a sentiment all the participants echoed (Harcourt, 2000). The communicative exchange provided new forms of seeing themselves and their bodies. It was an encounter that manifested sensed senses: a sense of control of their bodies, their sexualities, and their images. A control that was not individualistic but relational in orienting towards each other, an ability to rewrite themselves in the practice of wit(h)nessing. That is to say, the repetitive nature of updating a per-site with images and text, belonging to webrings, and responding to one another's work on guestbooks extended as an attachment to the feelings it provided. The participants enacted modes of girl culture,²⁰⁹ which meant lines blurred between friendships and relationships. While there is explicit sexuality in much of the work, I want to focus on the ambit of desire and pleasure as it was enacted by the formation of friendship by my subjects. I analyze pleasure, response-ability, and friendship from an affect theory and phenomenological framework rather than a Freudian or psychoanalytical one, even if psychoanalysis does prop up some of the interlocutors for the chapter. I draw upon Susana Paasonen, one of the few theorists who, in *Figures of Fantasy* (2005), has tackled gendered pleasure and desire within a 1990s online sphere of production that is not solely about dating platforms and forums or within net art discourse.²¹⁰ The book is a response to internet histories and theories written from a masculinist point of view that obscure

²⁰⁹ "Girl Culture" as a phenomenon emerged as a "feminist impulse to reclaim the undervalued artifacts of girlhood" as a means of reminding girls that they can be powerful and strong (Jesella & Meltzer, 2007, p. 57) and has since morphed into a more wide-reaching concept, for example, acquired by Wollen's (2013) Sad Girl Theory delineated in the previous chapter.

²¹⁰ In one of the other comprehensive philosophical and discursive analyses of the web of my time period, Wynn and Katz (1997) claimed, "The personal home page is a recent phenomenon of as yet unexplored impact".

WWW affects and embodied necessities. Although her critical study still focuses on scripts of romantic narration and heterosexual romantic love, it does so because romance was marketed as a central theme of female-oriented websites, like *salon.com*, in the 1990s (Paasonen, 2005, p. 146).²¹¹ I have found that in my research and from interviews with my subjects, romance is also sought but analogous to the kind of “girl love” intimacy that unsettles heteronormativity seen in literature and films of the time, such as *Show Me Love* and *Heavenly Creatures*, discussed in Chapter 2, and of the zine network I describe in Chapter 1.

Key Concerns

There are several key concerns that undergird the chapter. They crystallize within each section to provide entryways to my argument that thinking with and through pleasure and its contradictions is able to co-constitute political valences in the subjects of my study.

First, I present a kind of reciprocal witnessing in which one does not need critical distance from the work—or at least to appear critically distant from one’s work—for it to be political or feminist, an orientation that has sustained art history analysis (Johnson, 2013). Katharine and Roxanne, for example, were engaging in a type of reciprocal witnessing/spectatorship, an excess of what is deemed acceptable on all fronts—from the male gaze to the feminist art gaze. Katharine was working within normative codes of femininity and invited the male spectator, but she also invited spectators into a dissenting image, one that recognized its own commodification (Johnson, 2013, p. 92).

Second, what is evident in some of the images is the *jouissance* of seduction, at once bringing pleasure to the subject and the viewer and also bringing the frustration to be noticed without being seen. Katharine’s photos played on the feminine tropes of display and mystery of the body, with her long slender legs and her face urging the viewer. As detailed in Chapter 3, young women’s seductive powers are both terrifying and desirable to those being affected, especially those that are affected in ways they do not want to be or, perhaps, in ways they do

²¹¹ Paasonen made this claim based on the amount of romance scripts appearing in articles, self-help literature, guidebooks, and fiction media along with services such as *Match.com* that appeared during this time.

not think they should be. All of the women spoke to these responses and the circulation of affect within the encounters. Kosofsky-Sedgwick (2003), following Spinoza, pointed out that “affects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, activities, ambitions, and any number of other things, including other affects. Thus, one can be excited by anger, disgusted by shame, or surprised by joy” (p. 19).

Third, and returning to Chapter 4’s findings on the stylization of trauma towards belonging, Marlaina, who aligned herself with body artists such as Ana Mendieta, told me that white, slender, and non-disabled bodies have access to imaging pleasure. In other words, bodies inscribed in these ways correlate with cultural norms and can tell any story, whereas bodies that do not fit into this are always a priori read as whatever difference from the norm they are. Marlaina recounted her own experiences as being overweight and not pretty in normative ways, and the ways in which the excesses of her body always foreground an abject subjectivity. Some of her work from this time period explores ideas of the monstrous self and attempts to reconfigure her body marked by, among other things, an eating disorder, with nude poses that are de-formed. Hanafi (2000) wrote, “Monsters are ugly because they are de-formed, literally ‘out of shape,’ deviating from the beauty of standardized corporeal order” (p. 17). But to suggest this series is only Marlaina’s struggle with beauty is shortsighted and undercuts the work. It is that, but in simultaneously is a struggle with the conception of the body, the way bodies are shamed for their pleasures, and shamed into being regulated (Bordo, 2003). And as I have argued, the images are an address towards the intimate public Marlaina existed within. Marlaina told me, “My body was, as Julia Kristeva in the *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1983) notes, crossing boundaries and needed to be contained. It seemed that if it wasn't contained it would explode.” Taking images then was a way of (a) containing the body (inside the frame) and (b) exploding the body (as it now lived outside itself in a circulated image). How does this “deviation” of crossing boundaries on the WWW open up space for pleasure?

Definitions

To better situate the aforementioned concerns, I provide a multivalent definition of pleasure. I implement the concept of pleasure as a contradictory affect and verb emerging from friendship, creativity, and exploring the (collective) self, not as a commonly understood noun: a singular

act towards feeling good. Sara Ahmed in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) enumerated historical philosophical definitions of pleasure by Bentham, Descartes, and Spinoza, who all saw pleasure and pain on a continuum. Ahmed noted that Jeremy Bentham, known for his idea of the panopticon (a bent prison) and his utilitarianism, employed the definition she had turned towards because it was the queerest one, because of his focus on orientation even if circuitous (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 231-232).²¹² Ahmed noted that pleasures for Bentham revealed a kind of phenomenological social orientation. He denoted them as “interesting perceptions,” which “by the bent of a man's inclinations may be understood the propensity he has to expect pleasure and pain from certain objects, rather than from others” ([1789]: 2007, p. 49). I read the bend like the bend of Irigaray's *speculum*.²¹³

Thinking with pleasure and its operatives allows me to understand the propensity of my participants' practices and their driving forces. Pleasure is not in the making, or in the per-site or the image. It is in the way we and our feelings are shaped by the encounter of the making, the website and the image. If, according to Ahmed, feelings are “produced as effects of circulation” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 8), and I read pleasure as a feeling, then it is the movement of circulation (of the self-images) that makes pleasure possible.²¹⁴ The sociality of emotion also depends on movement, a move towards something. This view is more apt than framing emotion solely as interior and as something I as a person have, which then projects “outward towards objects and others” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 9).

Briefly outlining emotion brings me back to pleasure—pleasure as a kind of friction/surface maker in that it can make our bodies do things like have goosebumps or waves of knots in our stomach. In psychology, pleasure is considered an affect, one of the core dimensions of emotion. Could it be a feeling? In part, for the dissertation, indebted to Ahmed, I

²¹² Fittingly, in his will, Bentham insisted that his body be dissected, and then be completely reassembled to be preserved as an “auto-icon,”—a self-image—on display at University College, England (Hurwitz & Richardson, 1987).

²¹³ To be bent is to move against something, it also means to be queer: a bending of a “straight line” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 67). In Irigaray's feminist conception, the *speculum* bends ways of seeing: It acts as a reflector, providing a queer way of being able to look at one's own body.

²¹⁴ The sociality of emotion does not mean contagion, because contagion still presupposes that emotion is something one has, and then passes on to others.

conceptualize pleasure as a feminist experience of orientation.

Feminism has had a knotty, skeptical, and strained relationship with and to pleasure, as an affect, emotion and experience.²¹⁵ Many feminists have tried to deconstruct pleasure on the basis that it is a cis-hetero male fantasy over women, and in so doing have been suspicious of pleasure in feminist practices. Griselda Pollock, cognizant of these arguments, was not assuaged. There needs “to be pleasure to invite the viewer in” to the work (Pollock, 2012, p. 246). She followed Brecht’s definition of pleasure, which required a socially bound group (i.e., the intimate public) to involve “both entertainment and the pleasure of making new sense of the world” (Pollock, 2012, p. 244). Pollock demanded that feminist critical practice “create an entirely new kind of spectator as part and parcel of its representational strategies” and in doing so also take up the spectator outside its social boundaries to invite them in (Pollock, 2012, p. 246). No small feat, Pollock! I have been arguing that my subjects did just that: Their intimate public gave rise to modes of materially reciprocal spectatorship online, as in, a politics of perception.

Chapter Outline

The following sections work to refine what it is I mean by pleasure's affective circulation within the intimate public²¹⁶ and how that contributes to an understanding of how the pleasurable is political. My underlying hypothesis is that the organization of bodies that are of value and valued within the intimate public hinges on an experience of pleasure. To validate my claims, I

²¹⁵ I use the adjective “knotty” partially from Merleau-Ponty’s (2014) argument that “no one knows how [the connection of experiences] is accomplished better than we do, since we are this very *knot* [emphasis added] of relations” (p. lxxxv).

²¹⁶ The title of the chapter is an extension of the feminist dictum “The Personal is Political”, which Lauren Berlant (2012) argues “sought to reiterate the centrality of desire to life: the powerful forces of desublimated, freed, or rerouted desire were frequently imagined to have the power to topple unjust conventional intimacies and entire societies” (p. 47). The work I look at in this thesis sought to reiterate the centrality of desire to life, desire as a complex, contradictory and messy affect. The young women's images examined bodies that survived rape and violence, allowing others to orient towards modes of being outside of what they were told to be appropriate; I describe this later in the chapter. Judith Butler (2009) astutely points out that the “feminist claim that the personal is political suggests, in part, that subjective experience is not only structured by existing political arrangements, but effects and structures those arrangements in turn” (p. 357).

add to and expand on Chapter 4's suppositions, which I see as two parts of one whole: pleasure and trauma. It begins with an introduction that connects with the previous chapter on trauma's sociality with a meandering meaning and operative use of pleasure drawing on historical and contemporary frameworks; *The Politics of Pleasure* answers how my defining of pleasure as an affective productive orientation is able to co-constitute political valences in the subjects of my study; *Friendship, Kinship, and Ethics* looks at the Spinozian ethical dimension of friendship through Nick Montgomery and carla bergman's work in *Joyful Militancy* (2018), as well as at the analogous joint kinship/affinity of Donna Haraway and Chela Sandoval; *Getting Connected* discusses how we form attachments on the web and the ethics of friendship as ways of opening up (to) the world. To wit, it presents how the multi-step and risky act of taking and circulating photographs was a pleasurable act. *Pleasures of the Gaze* focuses on the ways in which an overlapping of perceptual consciousness between the participants in my study provided a space for desire to be looked at and to look at oneself and the Other; *Pleasures of Performance* nuances the role of authenticity on the web; and the concluding section reinforces the way collective attachments form and are formed out of the pleasure of self-imaging.

This chapter emerges out of the previous four chapters' arguments and empirical data, and as such is my most comprehensive original contribution to the field. I have arrived at this final chapter through the way these women *did* their bodies (the act of self-imaging), not despite but as a result of sensorships needing to forge new socialities through trauma that ultimately gave rise to an intimate public. In turn, this intimate public, hinging on a pleasure politic, became a form of friendship. By delineating the body of my object of inquiry through phenomenological and feminist means, I can then describe how pleasure as an affect and a verb co-constituted the political and social contradictions of that very object of inquiry.

Politics of Pleasure

I arrive at this historical moment of 1996 to 2001 partly because of the joy it brought me even in its vacillation of friendship, acceptance, and alienation. Duschinsky and Wilson (2014) argued that movements struggled "to make effective and consistent claims on the world, particularly in relation to politics but also in terms of intimate relations" (p. 185). Joy, too, is an orientation. As we become attuned to each other, we look to build joy for and with others; the

potential of young women's motivations and desires is central here. Desire “both constructs and collapses distinctions between public and private: it reorganizes worlds. This is one reason why desire is so often represented as political: in bringing people into public or collective life, desire makes scenes where social conventions of power and value play themselves out in plots about obstacles to and opportunities for erotic fulfillment” (Berlant, 2012, p. 23). Desire, as enacted by self-imaging, reorganized the web and made new practices possible.

How is re-defining pleasure as an affective productive orientation able to co-constitute political valences in the subjects of my study? It is precisely the ways in which my subjects took pleasure (back) that circumvented censorship. Shannon Bell began her book *fast feminisms* (2010) and her modes of analysis at “the clitoris”: “from a female position of power and pleasure, a position outside of in excess to the phallic or male-defined feminine” (p. 10). I also position these practices as ways in excess of their definability by larger discourses. In the *Cybercultures Reader* (2007), Barbara Kennedy affirmed that “the political still raises a problematic” (p. 339). Irigaray (1985) contended that “what is most strictly forbidden to women today is that they should attempt to express their own pleasure” (p. 77). While this argument was initially published in 1974 in French, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, a similar critique faced and still faces women and non-binary and trans people engaged in self-imaging. To express something forbidden is a political act, even if that expression is personal.

I came to the phrase “pleasurable is political” while working on my menstruation series (2005-2015) (Read, 2015) and thinking about (a) the pleasure it gives me to image my menstruation, and (b) the traditional ways menstruation is taken up by most cultures and thus how publication of a bodily function is a political gesture.²¹⁷ While further researching the phrase, I found two other uses. I turn to an analysis of these two orientations to examine whether pleasures can be a form of ethics within this intimate public. The first use is by one of my main interlocutors for this project, Theresa Senft, who employed the phrase in 2001 on a Livejournal blog entry:²¹⁸ “In essence, where second wavers argued ‘the personal is political’ third wavers are now arguing that ‘the pleasurable is political as well.’” Although I have found no other texts

²¹⁷ This series was also censored by Instagram in 2015.

²¹⁸ <https://tsenft.livejournal.com/67120.html>

that remark on this tendency of third wave feminism, specifically, zine culture very much foregrounded pleasures as political gestures challenging the ideologies that depended on disavowing them of their subjectivity. Senft (2008), returning to the argument but not the phrase, argued for the pleasurable as political in her previous work on camgirls, foundational research for my dissertation.

The second orientation of the phrase is Richard Pringle's chapter "Pleasurable Is Political: An Affective Analysis of Viewing the Olympics" from the edited collection *Sport and the Social Significance of Pleasure* (2015). While useful for thinking about the way myth props up an uncritical reaction to big sporting events like the Olympics, this chapter was primarily a theoretical review of affect and jouissance before detailing the contemporary historical costs of the Olympics themselves. In this way, he argued that pleasures are political insofar as they provide an obfuscation of critical engagement and in turn reproduce ideological power. To retain pleasure, the sports spectator disavows oppressive and dangerous affects. It is in this encounter that spectatorship becomes a political orientation. I argue that pleasure is always political, and not only at certain moments like the word "when" in Pringle's title assumes. Within my context, I argue, the opposite occurs. As such, it leaves me to widen my search for the pleasurable political.

adrienne maree brown's *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (2019) was published around the time I was finishing this chapter and seems to be in line with some of my arguments tying in pleasure, politics, and navigating one's position in one's environment on a micro and macro scale. The subjects of my study navigated and demonstrated the permeable boundaries between public, personal, and private spheres when negotiating depression, disabilities, and forms of violence. brown (2019) defined pleasure activism as "the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy" (p. 19). Power dynamics are not simply external elements affecting us. The very acts we engage in also give rise to power dynamics (even in the things that make us feel good) (brown, 2019, pp. 19-20). It is through understanding this entanglement, Spinoza argued, that pleasure can rise up in the encounter. It is exactly within this analytic I position the young women's pleasure. Spinoza (1994) asserted, "We judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it" (IIP9S). So that which makes us feel good

is not necessarily good but we signify it as good through our desiring. This enfolding is also the beginning of Lauren Berlant's (2011) cruel optimism: when what used to allow us to flourish eventually impedes our flourishing but we still persist in our attachment to it. The subjects of my study willed the community and the image making and it became “good.” The web also became “good” because the participants wanted it to be and because it allowed them to flourish. As such, the self-image making was a kind of contemplation.

Contemplation and understanding are states of joy for Spinoza. He wrote that when we understand The Passions (states traditionally seen as opposite to Reason), the comprehension transforms passions from affections that unidirectionally affect the body into active emotions that the body can also affect. Spinoza's concern is with what the body can do (Lloyd, 1996, p. 73). In some ways, I invoke Spinoza as a call to foreground the passions, and doing so allows us a deeper understanding of who we are and what we do—a mode of self-determination. Although Spinoza is certainly no feminist, his theorizations make space for a feminist and even intersectional analysis. brown (2019) writing as a Black queer woman is significant because Black women have seldom had the ability to announce and explore their pleasures in a way that does not do so at the margins of white experience (hooks, 1992, p. 22). Her work re-centers ethically engaged practices of desire for women, non-binary and trans people of colour.

The Collective Personal Is Political

The ethics of concern for the collective self is also a form of pleasure. Cvetkovich (1992) argued that the personal is the social and the collective. She exhorted against the pathologizing of womens' suffering that constructs and makes them individually responsible for their feelings rather than focusing on restructuring social relations. She extended this warning with an exploration of a “feminist politics of affect” within 19th century sentimentality because

if 19th century culture constructed the distinction between the personal and the political then the contemporary claim that the personal is political does not mean that the personal as it currently exists is political. Rather, the political agenda must consist in re-aligning the relations between the private and public spheres, or in transforming the

institutions that construct private life or personal experience as separate from public life. (Cvetkovich, 1992, p. 3)

Judith Butler (1997, pp. 361-362) recognized the responsibility of the personal political and that the personal is always-already political insofar as it is immediately expressed towards another, and has to be perceived by the other to be signified, as seen in Fanon's theory of interpellation (Ahmed, 2007) and my ideas of witnessing. The personal is a product of social relations, which are upheld by ideology and social structures. The personal is always-already political, as it performs (even if by transforming) the structures into which we are born. For Butler, phenomenology is a useful connection to feminist theory that positions gender as a series of repeated stylized acts that emerge through relations and are not an essence that comes from within, or emerge from the body. The personal is often constructed as *not* the political. Cvetkovich argued that any practices that want to depoliticize the personal are a symptom of the separation, not the cure. The cure already exists. It is the articulation of what already is—the impossibility of separating politics from who we are and what we do (the personal). In this way, I situate my subjects' practices as politically valent. Their politics were non-paradigmatic, as they were raised in a culture that starkly separated children and youth from political life and separated life from politics for the most part (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 101). In the next section, I look at how friendship is also political because it is a form of intimacy that forges an interdependent collective power—an ethics of desiring and being desired outside of heteronormative confines—against a neo-liberal individualist notion of friendship based on banal affairs of private preferences (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, pp. 82-93).

Friendship, Kinship, and Ethics

"What are we capable of here and now, together, at this time, in this place amidst the relations in which we are embedded?" (p. 91) bergman and Montgomery asked in *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times* (2017). This chapter, and specifically this and the next section, aim to answer this question by looking at how the formation of friendship allows for an ethical attunement of desiring and being desired outside of heteronormative confines. bergman and Montgomery, in a phenomenological fashion, have

considered what friendship can do rather than what it is. Drawing on Spinoza and Foucault, they also examined whether friendship could be revalued as a "radical, transformative form of kinship" (2017, p. 93). It is here I map out the emergence of an affinity friendship from the intimate public of per-site makers: a site for feminist purpose and politics.

What role do intimacy and desire play in friendship and in kinship? Ara Osterweil, in *Flesh Cinema* (2014), discussed the "critically troubled bonds of friendship" (Osterweil, 2014, p. 16) and queer kinship as a basis for "the radical reconstitution of corporeal representation and relationality in experimental cinema" (p.16). My context of online image making and per-site production was not as fraught as hers, specifically since my participants were almost all WWW. However, I prefer that coupling, unlike other sociological studies of that time (Adams, 1998; Takayoshi, 1999),²¹⁹ as my subjects' friendships were sustained through corporeal representation and relationality in photographic practice. Osterweil's discussion of films is commensurate to the intimate public of my project. The practices, like the films she cited, were "catalyzed by the difficulties of sustaining friendship" and all the concomitant tensions between those who agreed and disagreed about aesthetic differences, love, and desire, but also who was in and who was out (in my case, who was hosted on a girl-owned domain and who was hosted on a generic free web service). Whereas in some ways the young women wanted a space to burgeon outside of heteronormativity, they were still bound by their contexts. Indeed, "one and the same object can be the cause of many and contrary affects" (Spinoza, 1994, p.72, Part III, Prop. 17). One such affect is desire, which I uncouple from sexuality and interweave instead with friendship and its potential for freedom.

"Sometimes I wish that the world would have fewer stories about longing and more stories about actual desire. Desire to me is one of the most complicated subjects in the world. I don't think it can ever be exhausted," art critic Sarah Nicole Prickett (2018, n.p.) wrote. In the OED, longing is a synonym for desire. What Prickett employed, however, is a "for-ness" in her argument. She pointed to stories about the function of desire and its ways of becoming. Rather than the what or why, she asked about the how. Rather than stories that focus on not having

²¹⁹ In sociological terms, friendship online was called electronic friendship: a kind of non-proximate friendship of weak and strong ties (Adams, 1998; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2008).

and wanting, I look at how web technologies played a part in my participants' enactments of desire and how they understood themselves as desiring subjects within the intimate public they helped create. Desire is a political act in situations in which it is precluded, omitted, disavowed. Carolina said, "There's messages all around you telling you what the world really is and that you as your true self doesn't really belong unless you accommodate to an ideal gender, sexuality, and personality."

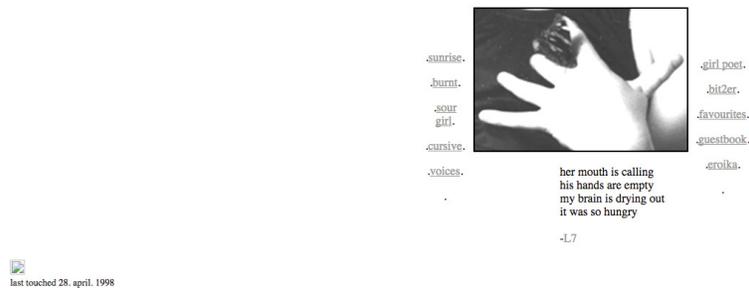


Figure 51. Christin Light. "http://www.pressenter.com/~light" splash page. *twice.bitten.never.kissed*. Screen capture as it appears on 10 February 1999. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://Web.archive.org/web/19990210110748/http://www.pressenter.com/~light/index.html> Accessed 29 January 2020.

Christin told me, "[My] upbringing precluded me from existing beyond being some man's object: God's, my father's, some future husband. I didn't really exist in my own right." Coupled with that history of sensorship, their splash page from 1998 (Figure 51) centering desire in various forms becomes political. "Last Touched" signals the common "last updated" text (see Figures 6 to 9)—both that the per-site was last touched by the author, and that the per-site's content is something to be touched. In the top middle of the page is an overexposed black and white webcam photo of Christin's hand holding an unknown object as they delicately rest their hand on their chest. The domain on which they were hosted is called "press enter." An excerpt from a song by hardcore riot grrrl band L7 underwrites the image: "her mouth is calling / his hands are empty / my brain is drying out / it was so hungry." The song, called "Must Have

More," is from a 1997 album also signaling a phenomenological presence by highlighting haptic and sonic sensing.

Tracing friendship as a concept within my study, I return to Spinoza. Friendship, for him, was the ethical ideal. Ethics, for Spinoza, were a way to build strengthening relationships. Marlaina touched on what friendship means to her in a zine she made that she also posted online. Friendship in this case is the potential of seeing the other in a way that representation fails her and “says nothing.”²²⁰ Marlaina positioned friendship as a potential of pre-signification, “one that [she] could never describe.” In some ways, self-imaging can also act as a mode that is not simply representative but relational, a way to (as she wrote in her zine) “-offset- . . . personality,” and as such render lines of affinity.

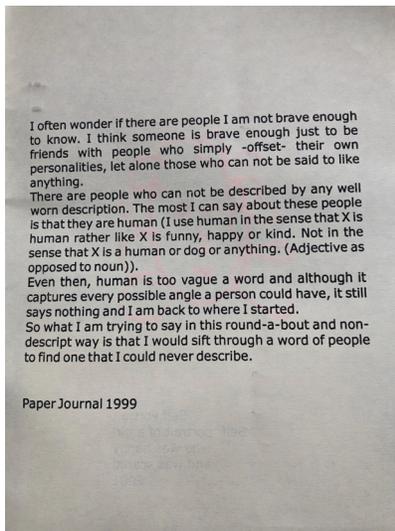


Figure 52. Marlaina Read. *Scream* (1999). Excerpt from self-authored zine. Scan courtesy of Marlaina Read.

Chicana feminist Chela Sandoval’s theory of “lines of affinity” originated from “self/other relationals and not from Edenic or Oedipal relations” and tried to call for love as a creative transformative form (Bell & Kennedy, 2007, p. 336). Lines of affinity are commensurate with the joint kinship Haraway foregrounded (1991, p. 154), which is not along blood lines but occurs “through attraction, combination and relation carved out of and in spite of difference”

220 See Pomeroy (1997), Ingold (2011), Grosz (2014), and Nigel Thrift (2007) on the limits of representation.

(Sandoval, 2000, pp.168-169). For Sandoval, joint kinship was what both feminist cyberculture and the mestiza consciousness rested on as well. Lines of affinity are those threads that allow the intimate public to proliferate. They, too, are a form of ethical engagement that Spinoza understood as friendship. As an analytical gesture, the concepts of friendship and joint kinship are analogous and useful to understand how this intimate public came to be and how many of the ties to that time period persisted. Christin told me that one of the most inspiring facets of their practice has been "forming deep bonds with some of the other people from back then. [I] marvel that [I] still keep in touch with some, and all that was over 20 years [ago]." If, as Sandoval noted, love can be understood "across lines of difference which intersect both in and out of the body" (Bell & Kennedy, 2007, p. 357), the participants' self-imaging, that is, the use of their bodies as points of intersection to demonstrate their commitment to affinity, alliance, and affection, is a form of love.

"Affinity is precisely not identity," Haraway wrote in "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" (2004, p. 97).

"Affects are not so much forms of signification or units of knowledge, as they are expressions of ideas or problems performed as a kind of involuntary and powerful learning and participation. . . . [They] highlight the question of the intimate impacts of forces in circulation" Stewart wrote in *Ordinary Affects* (2007, p. 40).

Both begin with "aff." According to the OED, "Aff" is from "ad-" towards, in relation to—an affinity is a relationship not bound by blood. Its origins specifically contrast it with blood relations (and incest) to mean relation by marriage. Ergo, feminist queer scholars moved from affinity to queer kinship as a way to highlight relations that do away with traditional intimacy. Affinities are forms of friendship. Lines of affinity, then, are also desire lines:²²¹ paths that are created by non-paradigmatic movement of bodies through space, from whence objects take shape through being oriented towards each other—this is a kind of sharing of space / co-habitation evidenced by the mimesis of per-sites the participants inhabit and into which they become habituated. Both are orientation devices enacted by the intimate public through technics

²²¹ This is often credited to Henri Bergson but nowhere did he specify this particular concept even if he did discuss adjacent ideas. Otherwise, like those who have used this concept, I have not been able to find out who the source of this phrase is.

and erotics.

By joining technics and erotics, Sandoval's reading of Haraway's joint kinship as "a new form of oppositional consciousness" is brought into being. Technics are "material and technical details, rules, machines and methods, and 'erotics' are the sensuous apprehension and expression of 'love'-as-affinity" (Bell & Kennedy, 2007, p. 259).²²² While the work I studied was often not explicitly anti-racist, anti-racist feminism was "at the heart" of many of the practices outlined in the dissertation. For example, in Anne's *sugarless* webring,²²³ she enumerated several criteria of "no's," including racists.²²⁴ This connective form was enacted by the subjects of my study as their practices (reshaping the tools of the WWW) were directed by their affinities both to others online and to the tools of the WWW. Haraway (2004) continued: "I believe that control over technics is the enabling practice for class, gender, and race supremacy. Realigning the join of technics and erotics must be at the heart of anti-racist feminist practice" (p. 112), and provides the scaffolding necessary for kinship and affinity to thrive.

How do we forge a kinship through images? Both as makers and viewers? Or, in this case, witnesses? In David Eng's aptly titled chapter "The Feeling of Photography, the Feeling of Kinship" in *Feeling Photography* (2010), he described an image of a grandmother and a wooden bird at an internment camp from the film *Matter and History*. Eng (2010) asserted that "historical analogy reveals a non-mimetic dimension of the photograph, a non-mimetic relationship between the image and its referent, between the grandmother and the wooden bird, and between the thing and its history precisely through the feeling of photography" (p. 337). This reading attunes to the liveness to the images, and not the arrest of time within them. It also points to a cleaving that is created through feeling: the way the young women considered the images to be not representations of the real world, or even of themselves despite indexically being in the frame. Instead, the consideration formed a kinship between the referent, the photograph, and the viewer; all three have affinities and differences. In the next section I

²²² In the *Haraway Reader* (2004, pp. 14-15), Haraway also spoke to Sandoval's post-colonial formulations of feminism—new at the time—and its importance.

²²³ <http://punkrockgrl.tripod.com/sugarless.html>

²²⁴ Today, this may seem like optical allyship, but given the intimate public context, I argue that it is not.

delineate how these forms of affinity translated online among my subjects.

Getting Connected

In this section, I map and analyze the pleasurable potential of connectedness online. The formation of community between early adopters that creates long-lasting friendships, or at least attachment, is notable.²²⁵ In what ways are the affective exchanges between early adopters different than exchanges between those who participate later? The subjects of my study continued making per-sites and producing work, in part, as ways of connection. The pleasure in belonging and being heard, being seen and seeing others, was an undercurrent in their online life. Specifically, the images functioned as ways of connection through and with bodies.

This section presents how attachments form through the practice of image making and its circulation online—in other words, how friendship bourgeons within this specific intimate public within the specific historical moment of 1996 to 2001. The multi-step and risky act of taking and circulating photographs was a pleasurable act. In spite of the risks detailed in Chapters 3 and 4, feedback was significant and intimate, and as such long-lasting connections between users were made during this time. Helena met her husband, Kevin, because he contacted her through her per-site and they met shortly after despite living on separate continents. Auriea told me she met her husband, Michael, on popular website Hell.com in 1999 and moved continents for him, too. They then began a shared website than turned into their life's work. Some of the women are godmothers to each other's children. Some are best friends. This dissertation would not exist without the trust I am given because of the long-standing history between me and some of these participants: an ethnography that hinges on friendship-as-method. While I am only very close with one of my subjects, I have been on a spectrum of closeness with all of them.

In exchanges between early and majority adopters new attachments are frequent and can

²²⁵ I have also found this to be true in my analysis of women who have experimental art practices on Instagram. All mentioned that their closest friends on Instagram are those who they met at the beginning of their use and some have been using the platform since its inception in 2010 (Olszanowski, 2015).

in turn create long-lasting friendships. Early adopters are also often a smaller and more homogenous group of people. Feminist law scholar Larissa Mann wrote to me that conditions that structure who adopts early are likely to be shared to some extent across the group (personal communication, May 20, 2019). Is there something about the structure or interface that produces a sort of “who joined first?” durational hierarchy between the young women building these per-sites? Perhaps it was this: “I remember that the most: the desire to reach other people beyond my physical circle. It was a prevalent attitude that we now take for granted,” Carolina told me. What is it about that time period and what was happening that is of such value to them (and to me studying image making and the web today)? Feminist anthropologist Florencia Marchetti told me, “I would think the support one finds within or gets from those other early experimenters plays a role, like you were not alone doing this 'crazy' thing, others were doing it, too” (personal communication, May 21, 2019). My data shows that support lends itself to a more intimate bond during a stage of experimentation. Florencia continued: “The support one gets when experimenting might indeed be felt more strongly because there might be a degree of vulnerability that could be appeased by the existence and support of other people feeling/doing similar kinds of exposures . . . like a solidarity network?” (personal communication, May 21, 2019). A solidarity network can also be another way of saying a consciousness-raising group, a second wave concept that foregrounds intimacy and belonging. While critiqued for its limitations, this concept continues to serve as an apposite model for marginalized communities. Consciousness raising emerges when groups of isolated people are able to open up with each other, often out of urgency when hegemonic forms of relations are not working. People are always inventing new forms of intimacy and belonging (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 98). In this case, my subjects felt trapped by IRL and the way that the nuclear family enclosure, central to the maintenance of biopower and patriarchy, functioned as a “container of intimacy” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 97) which in turn subjugated their orientation.

Paasonen (2005, pp. 149-150) described how in the early days (1996-2001) the web was seen as a refuge from the problems of IRL, and filling a hole of IRL, rather than an environment its users were living for. My subjects enacted, what I discuss earlier, “for-ness” towards the

internet; it was—while separate from—not in spite of IRL.²²⁶ Reiterating my arguments that the IRL/WWW split was present at the time, designer Whitney Arlene Crispell foregrounded the affective component of the early web: "In my experience, early adoption has allowed for more vulnerability because most people I know IRL are not on the platform. While not totally anonymous, there's a feeling of anonymity and freedom" (personal communication, May 20, 2019). The feeling of anonymity and freedom are enough to make users believe it is there. How did freedom feel? The feeling of anonymity alongside baring the most vulnerable parts of oneself seem somewhat at odds. Ultimately, the young women were getting online to connect in direct and time-consuming ways, which would eventually lead anonymity to disappear. The young women, like their images point to in Chapter 2, wanted both visibility and invisibility, terms that also map onto self-disclosure. Through empirical research, Nancy Baym, in *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (2010) (post-Facebook yet still referencing my time period), noted, "People often expect others to be less honest online" (p. 115) yet usually have more honest self-disclosure online than off, specifically because of the access to ostensible anonymity and its safety net—the complete opposite of what my sample group evoked to Alyssa in 1999 and to me between 2013 and 2019. The participants of the intimate public often expected others to be the most authentic and honest version of themselves online, while implicitly understanding the performative nature of identity as demonstrated by the nuancing of self-portraiture into a self-imaging practice. The intimate public marked itself by an ostensible safety net specifically because it was not anonymous, or at least did not hinge on a presumed anonymity.²²⁷

One of the early researchers of online friendship, sociologist Rebecca Adams (1998), indicated that, in 1998, electronic friendships, as she called them, with their intensity and possibility, complicate theories that privilege face-to-face interaction because of its predication on an embodied, sensual, and tactile relation. These are three characteristics that I argued earlier

²²⁶ This cleaving is especially evident in discourses around online romance and sexuality of the time (Paasonen, 2005, p. 151).

²²⁷ Wynn and Katz (1997), in "Hyperbole Over Cyberspace: Self-Presentation and Social Boundaries in Internet Home Pages and Discourse," argued the internet, even in the early to mid-1990s, was a panopticon, and anonymity was a social construct / an illusion, and people are micro-observed by websites all the time. One example used is the structure of the internet as it is predicated on the practice of packet switching, which serves as a tracing node.

to be present in online communication, which is a somewhat obvious theorization now, but even early critical cyberculture theories argued for the disembodied nature of the web. Adams noted that in her research on friendships among various disparate groups, respondents' long-distance friends tended to be emotionally closer and more long-term than their neighbours or those who lived close by (1998, p. 160). This finding parallels the intensity with which my subjects discussed their online "long-distance" friends as people who were privy to much that the IRL community was not. As Helena told Alyssa in 1999, "The group of girls, they go to my pages, I go to their pages, and we talk to each other. It's almost like all the weird girls in high school and they don't go to the same high school and need to find each other and hang out; but we do that online."

Structure of the System

The aforementioned acts of friendship were produced by the structural component of the web, although it is not a causal relationship. That is, how friendship was developed online in this public differs from offline encounters as well as from different historical WWW moments. Updating a per-site was a way to stay connected. The action of updating and the kind of referential content directed the participants from online interactions into friendship and collective imaginings. The per-site began as a kind of consciousness-raising endeavor (perhaps even by accident) and ended up orienting elsewhere—by not only questioning ideology and its structures but building new structures of being and feeling on the web. The per-site was a form of friendship. Forming friendships was predicated on interacting with each other's work, which meant writing astute and observant messages about each other's per-site style and content on guestbooks. All my subjects point to the importance of taking time with the work. You could not scroll past anything. There was no scrolling! You bore witness to each other's becoming and as a result the communicative exchange was made of several parts, a kind of woman's time I introduced in Chapter 3 and explicate in the next section. Women's time included the stylistic and aesthetic choices of the images such as mimicry and repetition outlined in Chapter 2. Treva, 1990s per-site maker, explained how the interaction required a back and forth of exchanges on guestbooks (personal communication, December 23, 2016):

You really had to go looking, and then you really had to spend time with

person's site, clicking through all their photos or poems or journals to get to know them and decide if you wanted to leave a message in their guestbook. Then you had to spend a few weeks writing in each other's guestbooks before you traded emails or AIM snicks. Forming a relationship required time and effort, and I think that added a lot of value to the internet as a community.

Treva reiterated the difference between seeing and perceiving (Facebook is a nod, a distanced yet affirming look; websites from the 1990s necessitated a mode of perception and reciprocity to go over and say hello in as compelling way as possible): “Making friends online at that point was a bit of work, and it was special. Facebook feels like continually nodding at each other from across the bar in an endless acknowledgment loop.”

The images functioned as ways of connection through bodies in the frame—for example, in knowing your body is like other bodies. In this case, the homogeneity of the early adopters works in favour of the predominant body—because other bodies’ movements showed participants how to desire, and how to be desired. But then other bodies are precluded from entering or otherwise organizing and stylizing to be made legible by others. The young women mirrored each other both to demonstrate connection and to be recognized as part of the intimate public. Their sequestered milieu meant they only had each other to be attuned to and with.

Women's (Pleasure) Time

Magdalena Olszanowski, Journal Entry, November 1998:

It's 3am and there's only about 3 hours left before the alarm clock wails, and since there's no chance of a break in the dial-up connection, I stay online because I still need to revise the colour codes of each background, but mostly it's the feeling of possibility that I've created by being a person on the web is much more seductive. I can't get up. I want my body to be uncomfortable so I can feel it while I'm online. I want others to see me online so late, so I write elaborate guestbook entries using my mom's Rogets Thesaurus, making sure of the time stamp, 3:02 EST. Not

everyone is EST, but I assume they calculate the time zone difference the way I do. I'm familiar with the distinctions of all the major cities. I know I'm behind PST and will see updates before I go to sleep, if I do.

Technology has the potential to intervene in the ways women are alienated from their own time (Youngs, 2001). My subjects made their own temporality. After all, back then, you bought access to time and had to negotiate your IRL and WWW time. What is the time of pleasure? Is there a *pleasure time*? Self-imaging artists like Hannah Wilke, Leyla Essaydi, and Carolee Schneemann used unvalued time (dressing up, wearing makeup, laying about) to play with their femininity and its cultural context, less disturbed by the fear of the male gaze than their critics, as also seen in Figures 37 and 49. They also questioned the fear of seductive pleasure and foregrounded its political potential. This pleasure is political and forms political attachments around s/censorship, power, and feminism. These three themes are on display within the milieu of my subjects.

I connect the concept of pleasure with the idea of traditionally feminine activities and with ways of subverting them. While not directly theorizing pleasure time as a concept, Clare Johnson, in *Femininity, Time and Feminist Art* (2013), asked for a rereading of Hanna Wilke and her *S.O.S. – Starification Object Series* (1974) project by arguing that repetition can be pleasurable and also serves to undermine the normative gestures of that act/time. Johnson argued against traditional art criticism when she argued that that one does not need critical distance from the work—or at least to *appear* critically distant from one's work—for it to be political or feminist. Wilke's lack of critical distance also presents a sort of compression of time for feminist artists. Being closer to the work, in the work, within the work, suggests a tightly wound temporality. Is the artist looking at themselves in the work of the work? Wilke had a pleasure of the gaze that seduces and distances. Johnson suggested that this promotes a different temporality and the way we can contemplate and signify time. I extend her thinking to add a

philosophy of time:²²⁸ a Bergsonian durational mechanism which feminist art concerned with femininity can do because it unsettles the rigidity of time with the way it is a wasteful (a.k.a. devalued) unproductive time to produce femininity-as-image (Johnson, 2013).²²⁹ The art and its wit(h)nessing as practiced by those in the intimate public foreground that femininity takes time, and also reclaim that time as of value—value it provides to the milieu, and not to the regulatory hegemonic value of biopower (beyond the imminence of the body and into detached intellectual endeavours) that censored this intimate public. Kuhn (2002, pp. 155-156) also came to an impasse with critical distancing and recognized that this brought her no closer to understanding images and their context. Demanding critical distance only does so much; Kuhn needed to acknowledge proximity which often gets mistaken for a valorisation or perhaps an erroneous nostalgia.

This misperception suggests that being close renders a person unable to think with something. Drawing on Bergson, it is proximity of perception that provides an understanding of how the circulation of cultural processes work, as transmitted through and with images. These affective temporal textures were present in the WWW encounter. The constant updating of the per-site was a way to foster attachments—the changing of the layout, the aesthetic, the content, the links to other per-sites. It felt good to belong. It felt pleasurable to have others notice your work and comment on it. It felt good to be asked to join a webring or to be hosted on a per-site server. While I have preferred to use research on girl culture that is contemporaneous with my time period, I cannot balk at Kanai's 2017 article, "Girlfriendship and Sameness:

²²⁸ Surprisingly, Johnson does not mention Julia Kristeva (1986, pp. 187-213), whose “women’s time”—tied to the maternal cycles—is a known feminist strategy even if less politically and social constructed than the readers who adopt the concept. For a contemporary rereading of “women’s time,” following Kristeva see Apter (2010). Elsewhere, Caitlin Fisher’s (2008, p. 145) interest in the way women’s time is both a second wave concept and a frame for early computer-based art, specifically hypertext, which she contrasts with linear time and geometric space – a masculine time-space. See also Emily Apter’s (2010) theorizations of “women’s time” following Kristeva.

²²⁹ If we are to think of feminine practices with Bergson (1988), who writes that the world is made up of objects/images, “of which all the parts act and react upon each other by movements” (p. 74) then we can also highlight how these very practices also re-articulate our thinking of the temporal dimension of perception. It is the present which allows us to act through our perceptions: while the past is that which acts no longer, it is also part of the present (and part of objects) insofar as it functions as memory (Bergson, 1988).

Affective Belonging in a Digital Intimate Public,” one of the few scholarly treatments using affect theory of girl friendship online that can help me map my arguments. Her main object of inquiry is a Tumblr blog called *what should we call me*. It is the musings of two girlfriends in a long-distance friendship. Kanai (2017) “suggest[ed] that belonging is effected by reworking the self to better fit into its culture of circulation” (p. 294). It is the intimate public she delineated, like I do, qua Berlant. This reworking is a way to foster attachments and in turn produces a commonality between users and viewers. Zones of attachment become political insofar as their aims are towards a translation of space. The women in my study were translating the web space (Pomeroy, 1997). The web allowed a freedom to participate actively in the process of composition of the world that IRL did not. Having access to a drawn-out length of time was a kind of freedom that operated within a teenage life cycle. This freedom to make a ludic yet structured time was enacted by a collective imagining.

Many of the participants discussed the time spent making their websites including the emotional labour regarding what to put up or not and how they learned through experiencing s/censorship. Kanai (2017) also found that “a disciplined timeliness is an important means of fostering a sense of continuous belonging” (p. 300). The urgency to build this new public meant continuous work. Like much contemporary web scholarship outside my purview presents, Kanai reiterated, “Keeping up this obligation requires *discipline*, planning and labor” (p. 301). In 1999, Aarti told Alyssa of her process and the time it took her to maintain her per-site. “About 30 min every 3 days updating because of school, but once the summer started, it was about 12 hours a day figuring it all out.” All the participants detailed their per-site and self-imaging process: spending hours and hours on it and the many versions. Aarti remarked upon one version of her website, nineteen years after telling Alyssa of the same one, as if every detail was tucked into her: “It was blue with frames.” Yet this disciplined time still maintained its ludic potential. Helena described how the purpose of production was twofold: It was pleasurable to make things and making things was the way to stay connected.

To stay active you had to keep making stuff. It wasn't like I haven't heard from Susan, I'll call her, no, you went to her website and see what's going on in her life. That's how you stayed relevant with this group of people. Aside from the pleasure of making something—it was the way to

keep your social life going online.

Intimate Friends

How did we come to know we were part of the intimate public? In Chapter 4, I named the ways in which depression can open up new forms of sociality and serve as foundations for new forms of attachments. To finish, in Chapter 6, I elucidate how these networked modes were transmitted through the hyperlinking structure of webrings and guestbooks using a shared rhetoric and a language of poetry and song lyrics, which created a temporary identification with traumatic issues and could only be understood by others who shared that language. While deeply invested in this practice, the participants became attuned to new attachments. These attachments offered the promise of being seen and perceived. As such, the image production became primary in the practice of wit(h)nessing. It is pleasurable to know that you are part of something that supports making your life better, to be given responsibilities to enact care (see Figure 38) despite participating in a tenuous network that was always on the verge of collapsing due to s/censorship. The per-sites were always-already existing with the makers' knowledge of their precarity. They were making spaces in the face of the risk that someone would find their per-sites and shame them to their offline communities. Treva (personal communication, August 21, 2014) explained the process:

Between guestbooks and webrings, and link lists, it was pretty easy to find other people you really connected with, but at the same time, you really did have to work for it. There were so many different sites and domains, there wasn't just one single directory full of standardized pages with everyone's photo on it.

The work offered a pleasure of recognition and togetherness, because it needed not just a viewer but a witness. It interpolated us into witnesses and asked of us to respond with our own experiences. If those experiences were convincing enough within the stylization of a person's identity and subjecthood then they too could interpolate others and be part of the network: "The pleasure of being immersed within a supportive sense of girlfriendship, then, may be more

powerful than articulating a solipsistic individuality" (Kanai, 2017, p. 301). The work was not created for a wide audience. It was created for other young women.

Even if the participants were living in different parts of the world, we not only felt proximate to each other (the web felt quite small and another person was just a click of a link away) but also proximate to the type of young women we were or were becoming as a way to engage in a shared world view. For example, participants had online girlfriends they never met IRL and others knew that some women “belonged” to other women. That is to say, participants were aware of the closeness between certain women and subsequently engaged in intimacy differently. When I asked my subjects about this awareness, they answered with, "You just knew." Hanna Nillson, now a new media performance artist and founder of a design studio in Sweden, and I shared this connection. I wrote her obsessively, letters of love and trauma. She would mail me back letters, pictures, mixtapes, zines, collages, and other ephemera I still have, with reassuring pleasurable and melodramatic language that mimicked Sad Girl Theory style as English was not her native tongue. The exchanges were imbued with the desire to be seen and the lack of perception (we perceived) from those IRL. Auriea outlined how the website was a point of access:

It [the per-site] was everything, literally, art in it of itself. Olia Lialina . . . had her site *my boyfriend came back from the war*. I wrote her "I love you" and we became friends and we are still friends today.

It [the per-site] was very social. It was my way of meeting people. People would email you and you would become friends. I have friends from 1995 just because of my website.

In some ways, the per-sites were part of a decentralized social network. Rather than one platform being a house with participants who all congregate in individual participants' rooms, each per-site was its own home and one would cycle through them based on one's own orientation on the web (perhaps through bookmarks, remembering the URL, or clicking a link on one's own per-site). You could email "I love you" to a stranger because you loved their website (an extension of them). Rather than meeting someone IRL and getting to know them through parallel orientations, online interactions were predicated on intimate details and such

“meetings” (emailing another person, or talking to them in private instead of on a guestbook or forum) did not require the same kind of introductory exchanges. “It was really small . . . up until 1998, you could feel like you knew everybody in a weird kind of way,” Auriea reminded me. Anastasia Widstrom,²³⁰ another popular user who engaged in self-imaging during this time period, who is now a wedding photographer in Minneapolis (I did not get a chance to interview her), also discussed the intimacy of the public milieu online and its impact on her involvement. She told Alyssa, in 1999, that once the web became larger and more populated, it “lost a part of the family feeling. So now I don’t want to work on my website as much as I did.”²³¹ The exclusivity of the intimate public influenced the labour of participation. Treva explained,

The early websites were more like running into the same people over and over at house shows. You have to know the house is a DIY venue, you have to be invited, you have to hear about the show through word of

²³⁰ She had the domains Overlap.org, Anabug.com, and others. Christin, Helena, and Katharine relayed how much they remember all her work (personal communication, September 18, 2019).

²³¹ This could also be related to the amount of intimate and personal information she shared. This is an excerpt from a forum post she posted in 2000 that demonstrates many of my arguments:

hi. my name is anastasia and this is my life.

in this journey i have been so many different selves. this year, this moment is the time to reclaim all of them. i take back my family self, my work self, my friends self. i reclaim molly.

here, for you, for me, are my scars. here are my vulnerabilities, my imperfections. you can embrace me or turn away. i am completely open and secure with any possibility. i am open and secure with my self.

i am here to ask forgiveness. i ask to be forgiven by you, by molly, by myself. i am here to ask her if she will be a part of me. please forgive me, molly, for all i've done to you.

molly is the bearer of the grief. she shoulders the pain of the rape, the abuse, the emotional slaughter. i, among others, have pressed into her a feeling of complete worthlessness. she is the person at my core who attempts suicide, cuts, hates herself. i ask for her forgiveness so that i can love her, claim her as a part of me.

there are so many parts of me that i have denied. levels of my conscious and unconscious that i have pushed away and refused to deal with. for so long i denied being raped. i denied my sexuality. i refused myself orgasms.

i am anastasia widstrom. i have been raped, abused, fucking emotionally slaughtered. and i am okay. i show you myself, in all my weird beauty. i am so beautiful. i am alive, i am here. i am content with who i am. . . . i stand here naked, waiting to sing. Retrieved from:

<https://www.bluelight.org/xf.staging/threads/tripping-words.22243/>

mouth, and somehow, you keep seeing the same people each time you go.

The right house parties can feel magical if you are surrounded by people that allow you to be vulnerable and be free. The right house parties allow for consensual hook ups and play and make you feel like you belong. "Like you have a gang," Alyssa told me. When I asked her to elaborate, hers was a pithy response: "belonging and legitimacy."

Magda:

Being hosted was sort of like "making it" on certain websites. They capitalized on being this space you can join and you needed to be a certain way and aesthetic to be part of it. I wanted to get off geocities or whatever free server I was on, and being hosted gives you a legitimacy even if it's not a full power and control.

Alyssa:

I had no desire to be part of those sites but I really wanted to be a part of "swanky." It was like an artist collective. . . . For me that was wow, these people are really talented and really good at what they do. . . . I really wish I could harness the technology to make things as beautiful as these things are.

The intimacy of the hosting practice became a marker of value of per-site production. Susana Paasonen, in *Figures of Fantasy: Women, Internet and Cyberdiscourse* (2005), argued that if "women and information networks are feminized allies" then should there not be a connection between feminine modes of language and programming language? To this, I say yes! There is! And to that, she replied no, that coding and computer language are experiences that are far apart and that they "hardly read as *Écriture féminine*." According to my findings, coding (something all the participants did) was precisely a way of both writing in a language that felt like *ours*, and performing of our subjecthood—the language the participants used both shaped them and shaped the intimate public. Christin highlighted code's potency in making a new language: "The power of human connection translated through binary. Something super powerful about that." In some ways, thinking with Ahmed's concept of skin, the HTML functioned as skin. It

transformed into an aesthetic and visual skin that held the content, including the images, of the per-site together. The code was the boundary between participants, but it was also something that, as a skin, made us brush up against one another. Sharing skin. It is surprising that Paasonen, given her extensive detailing of Irigaray, Braidotti, and Plant and the connection of weaving to the early web, would make such a distinction. Indeed, she continued on to say that it would be misleading to make connections between the haptic weaving and the visual internet. Unlike Sadie Plant, who focused on the sensuousness of computer use, for Paasonen that was lacking. In some ways, Paasonen was sensoring by not staying attuned to the web and its operatives. Was she not making any websites during this time because the process of making was completely an "enjoyment of openness and sensuality of language"? For the first time, young women were not bound by, or at least, they did not feel they were bound by, phallogentric language that served to diminish their value and ontology.²³²

The computer is a visual medium and that is where its potential lies—not with touch. That does not mean touch is precluded from its ontology. In part, the haptic and sensuous does come from the use (as we see in Figure 51), if only in that it galvanized the participants to do things. The things they did were not just visual—image making required their bodies, moving and shifting their body parts around in physical space and then on the screen. Sensuality, an affect, emerges from this type of use. Auriea disagreed with me yet recognized the inner contradiction in her process of exploring the WWW landscape:

It [the internet] wasn't like a retreat. My physical self was not in play.

Online was the space of the mind and of creativity and not the physical body.

I mean that, that my body was not important at that point, to me, at all. It was if I was out dancing. But if I'm home using the computer, what was important—*where am I gonna go?* [emphasis added]

²³² I am aware of the history of computers, the internet, and coding language as it is inflected by its masculinist history. The women of my study were working in a time where it was so new that that was less a consideration. The point is that it seemed like a language of "for-ness" a language that provided them opportunities that IRL did not.

To me, I had no background, I had no physical existence in a way. It just wasn't necessary and I was relieved. Then the other half of that is that I very much really cared about my physical presence. One of the things I did when I started making the big bucks in Virgin, I got a T1 line, I put a web live cam on myself.

Auriea explained, rather incongruously, the conditions that prompted her to fly to London to meet IRL one of the first people she met online:

I went through a phase I learned Japanese so I could talk to him. . . . It wasn't sexual at all. It was this total punk rocker boy . . . normally we wouldn't have much in common. Now . . . I look back on it, and think "that's weird" especially since I had a boyfriend. I was looking to move to London and looking for a job and he was the only person I knew, so ok. Now it doesn't seem as odd as it did back then.

I tell Auriea that I do not think it seems odd. Intense friendships were formed, especially as outlined previously, around trauma bonding. Yet, it could not have been so odd for her back then either. In fact, it seemed part of online life. Marlaina took a 1600 km bus ride to Sydney in 1997 at 16. She told her parents, "I'm going to meet some people I met on the internet," and they were fine with it, most likely not understanding what meeting someone on and from the web truly meant.

Pleasures of the Gaze

"It's ok to be looked at and to like it. It's not false consciousness," feminist digital media artist and scholar Caitlin Fisher assuaged me on a Montreal patio in 2018 (personal communication, July 2018) in response to my concerns about the contradictions of self-imaging within neo-liberal capitalism. In this section, I turn to the pleasures of the gaze and the desire to be looked at and to look at yourself and others. I argue against the context of feminism telling us to disavow pleasure that emerges from modes of ideological power. Pictures teach us how to see, teach us how to desire, and are a result of our desire. They show "what to look for, how to arrange and make sense of what we see" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 72). But, what is seeing? This is a

question to which Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2014 p. xvii) devoted his life, and in some ways I have too. For Merleau-Ponty, the ontological question of seeing was not one of vision (taken up by Descartes and Cartesianism as the primary sense) but one of perception—an embodied sense that make us beings-in-the-world.²³³ In this way, when I enter into a discussion of the pleasure of the gaze, I move from the gaze to looking to seeing to perceiving to wit(h)nessing. The slippage is not unintentional, nor I do use these terms interchangeably, but I do use them as part of a whole of perception. As such, this chapter describes the ways of entering pleasure, that is, the pleasures in having access to enact perception (both as subject and object) in ways unavailable IRL.

Orienting the Gaze and Reciprocal Spectatorship

The gaze for Foucault (1978) is one of the most powerful tools, more than material constraints and physical violence, as demonstrated in his concept *le savoir-pouvoir* (power-knowledge). The gaze dominates wholly. The gaze is power that we exhibit over others and over ourselves within a surveillance society. Chapter 3 presented the gaze within this framework. Moving from this model, I want to re-turn the gaze, that is, to see what happens when the gaze is rerouted and the bearers of the gaze become those normally observed and as a result engage in a self-reflexive reciprocal spectatorship as a way to re-draw boundaries of power and dominance.

Reciprocal spectatorship originates in drama and theatre discourse, as a pleasurable way audiences watch actors and the actors have to watch themselves through the reactions of the audience.²³⁴ I take up the concept to mean not a kind of sousveillance but an ethical encounter

²³³ “The common phrase ‘I think, therefore I am’ is woefully inadequate in cyberspace. Even ‘I speak, therefore I am’ is not enough. In cyberspace, the more appropriate phrase is ‘I am perceived, therefore I am’ (Markham, 1998, p. 249). While not a phenomenologist, Markham is both drawing upon phenomenology and paraphrasing Richard MacKinnon’s (1995) early work on Usenet.

²³⁴ Also taking up the concept, Siegfried Kracauer managed to provide at once a generative definition of spectatorship and one that closes the multiplicity of women’s relationships to pleasure. Harvey (1991) explained, “Kracauer’s interest in women as consumers of mass culture in the 1920s can be regarded as an early attempt to construct a theory of mutual and reciprocal spectatorship that embraces visual pleasure while holding that pleasure at a theoretical distance from perversions that objectify and vilify women” (p. 51).

of taking the time to view and respond to each other's work, similar to wit(h)nessing.²³⁵ In which directions do young women turn when they are looking? These orienting movements circulate pleasure. By the 1990s, young women very well knew that, as Berger (1973) aptly stated that "men act and women appear" and that visual pleasure is the domain of men, and not theirs. Sex as a visual trope was everywhere. It was reinforced by the saturated media landscape, from Calvin Klein waifs and Courtney Love's doll parts to Monika Lewinsky's testimonials against Bill Clinton going public in 1997.²³⁶ But appearing for men to act upon you is not the same thing as being seen, even if the former is also what you desire: "Desire emerges between the gap of demand and need" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 73). To follow Mitchell, then, in looking at, for example, Figures 49 and 50, I can start to see how images of this nude body are presenting it to me as a desirable and desiring body. Its rhetoric of the pose teaches me desire, and I arrange the elements of the work to make a whole feminist image that I read as desirable. I imagine myself as the image while wanting the image. An identification with the image was part of a 1990s reconstruction of visual pleasure responding to traditional Mulvey-esque attempts at feminism—concerned with how to represent women's bodies as sexual while refusing any potential male gaze and so stripping them of their sexuality—that while crucial in critiquing the hegemonic models even at the time produced no affirming consensus (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 129).²³⁷

Like avant-garde film and performance art about sexuality and desire, including Carolee Schneemann's work, that Ara Osterweil analyzed in *Flesh Cinema* (2014, p. 15), the practices I explore shatter the constructions of sexuality and the image with techniques that are not legible and do not serve the ideological visual culture. The images are not smooth or historically

²³⁵ See Rainie & Wellman (2012) on modes of surveillance online including sousveillance.

²³⁶ See Jodi Dean (1999) on the way ideological processes, specifically the Lewinsky-Clinton affair, become spectacles of public life qua our feelings that are entwined within our own contradictory desires for status within public life.

²³⁷ For a key critique of the gaze, see bell hooks's "The Oppositional Gaze" drawn from *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992). It is a response to Laura Mulvey's first version of her female gaze theory, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). In this essay, hooks explores cultural constructions of the gaze, and how for the most part it has been an ahistorical maneuver in film theory. Black women in film have not been the Other as objects of desire that Mulvey describes; ergo, the Other in the male gaze is not just a woman, but a white woman.

intentional, yet they are also not ephemeral or throwaway documentations of being-in-the-world. What are the pictures signaling?²³⁸ In the minimalist screen capture below, Hanna is asking for haptic and visual interaction: to be seen and to be felt. She needs someone to tell her that she looks all right and she kisses okay; she needs another to witness her body (to look at her) and to witness her body (to kiss her). The knowledge is not within her, but has to be made by another (as they click the epigram to the next page). “All right” and “okay” are ordinary terms, which point to a status quo, a life made possible (Ahmed, 2010). She wants to look all right to someone else, not beautiful or sexy or extraordinary, but all right.

oh, baby i just need somebody to say you look alright and you kiss ok

Figure 53. Hanna Nilsson. “eccentric.org/trying” splash page. *got a weeo*. Screen capture as it appears on 14 October 1999. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/19991014033244/http://www.eccentrica.org/trying/> Accessed 17 August 2019.

²³⁸ If we are to think about affect, and the way our own bodies respond to photographs, we can follow Brian Massumi who argued that image reception is embodied both in intensity (through surface of the skin) and in qualification (through depth via our breath) (Brown & Phu, 2014, p. 6). If our feeling of photos is detected on the skin (goosebumps and so on) then image reception is embodied; as such, young women are trying to also present how they receive images with their bodies. That is to say, they are performing a material and reciprocal spectatorship through their images. This is their response, their feeling of images, their feeling of the world; by materializing affect, they then create a feedback response loop in which other young women do similar things with their bodies and allow aesthetics and value systems to emerge as a result.

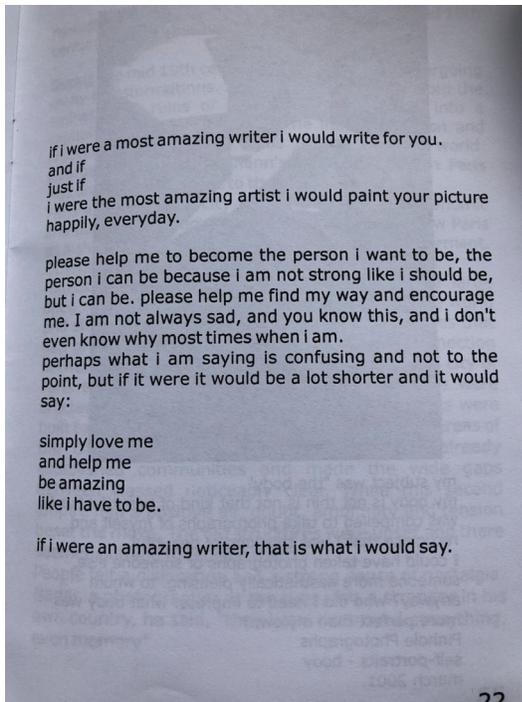


Figure 54. Marlaina Read. *Scream* (1999). Excerpt from self-authored zine. Scan courtesy of Marlaina Read.

In a zine of the same time period, Marlaina also implored another: "Simply love me and help me be amazing like I have to be." Both need to be perceived and interpellated by another in order to be of value: Hanna will "look all right," and Marlaina will be the person she "wants to be." The WWW provided Hanna a feeling of writing to no one and to everyone at once, a kind of pioneering freedom. Sex and gender scholar Feona Attwood (2011) argued that "the internet offers unprecedented freedom to create, distribute and access a much more diverse and interesting set of sexual representations and practices than have previously been available. It also provides a new context for the consumption of sexually explicit texts" (p. 207). Her optimism is a fair play given her breadth of critical writing about the web. There were many alternative modes of distribution, within experimental cinema and zine culture, that circumvented laws and regulations, but because they had already been in place or they required an inaccessible tool set for young women, they were not unprecedented like the web. In the early

WWW period of 1996 to 2001, gatekeepers were just forming and the “doors” were unlocked.²³⁹ There was not only a new context for consumption but a new ecology of relation to and of sexually explicit material online formed through production and community development as well.²⁴⁰ And we enjoyed it! Figure 55 is one such example: Marlaina curtseying for her webcam in a black and red dress she made herself with a red Playboy bunny big enough to cover her whole chest. There is an open door in the shadows to her left from which she could enter the space to be seen. Here sexual display is both personalized and politicized.



Figure 55. Marlaina Read. *Celluloid* (1997). Image from an unspecified web page. Webcam, homemade costume. Courtesy of Marlaina Read.

If the images, as argued in Chapter 2, must be read phenomenologically and in their context, then here too, I must read pleasure as a circulatory affect that depends upon not only the image but the cutlines (paratext) of the image. The cutlines of the images (the titles of the images or the titles of each webpage on the site) point to a desire and for-ness to make contact.

²³⁹ Feminist geography offers useful structures. See, for example, the 1996 dissertation “Gendered Places, Virtual Spaces: A Feminist Geography of Cyberspace” by Susan Pomeroy (1997), *The “space” of cyberspace: Body politics, frontiers and enclosures* by Harry Cleaver (2008), and the quintessential *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* by Janet H. Murray first published in 1997 and updated in 2017.

²⁴⁰ Like Kearney (2013, p. 258) noted in her in-depth study of online bistro web designers, most were also moderators or message board creators, taking on an active role in the development of this cyberculture.

One example is the webcam self-image, Figure 55, discursively combining two visual mediums (digital photo & film), with its clever title, “celluloid,” and Katharine’s series (Figure 50) placed in a subdirectory called “/hithere” with the subsequent pages in that directory titled “hello.html.” Yet, the connection is not straightforward because each per-site was coded from scratch with both technology- and user-oriented attributes (features or aspects of a website) that formally and qualitatively determine the flow of information and, as a result, orientation. Technology-oriented attributes are “the structural properties of a site such as hyperlink multimedia modalities,” and user-oriented attributes are “the qualitative experiences of users in relation to the structural properties of a site, for example navigability and demonstrability” (Huang, 2003, p. 426). Katharine’s series, of which I showed an example in Figure 50, consists of ten self-images, one on each page with a *next* link below them. She could have provided a *previous* link too but she did not. She did not give the viewer easy access to go back on the page and instead asked them to remove themselves from the experience of the page either by using the back button on the browser or by only going forward. Considering a reciprocal positionality, one of Katharine’s image indexes, from her *erendira* domain, is titled “object (to) me.” Katharine was textually playing with the ways young women’s desires have been objected to and how young women have not been given opportunities to be the bearers of looks, to look at, and to make objects of others.

After all, Barthes noted (1977), “you are the only one who can never see yourself except as an image” (p. 31). Your eyes see, but you can never see your eyes unless they are mediated by a viewing object. Katharine’s “object (to) me” is a way to express this aporia. Irigaray (1994) rejected this model, and instead proposed a speculum whose “curved surface reflects the female interior” (p.12). However, Barthes’s theorizations of looking do not separate inside and outside. Instead, the seeing enacts a phenomenological mobius strip with the internet as an orientation device. Christin reminisced,

I remember taking nude web cam photos in my dorm room and just feeling really confident as I was experimenting with my sexuality and art. Like I needed to see myself through another lens to really SEE myself and used the internet as the medium for that.

Christin's "see" has a double meaning here; because one cannot "see" one's body one's self, it is always through another, in this case, refracted through a technology. It is through an encounter with another we come into being; we become. In this way, the kind of kinship and friendship formed within the intimate public among these young women provided them with the performative ability to see themselves and to be seen in ways that IRL precluded.

The internet provided Christin with a possibility to orient in a way that would make them "really SEE" themselves. This assertion may seem to contradict my previous arguments that the self-imaging practices of this time period were not self-portraits because they were not about the "I" in the autobiographical way self-portraiture is assumed to be. However, the emphasis on "see" as a word to signify perception complicates a contradictory reading. Christin's self-imaging practice online emerged from a tacit knowledge of Barthes's claim—a way to learn perception and enact it. Christin did not just want to see themselves or look at themselves, they wanted to "really SEE." That is, they wanted the ability of perception, the ability impeded by IRL visual culture. As a non-binary queer person, an identity shamed and denied IRL, they needed to be interpellated by a particular other (like Hanna and Marlaina above) that the intimate public (which they refer to as the internet) provided. Christin explained,

As for seeing myself, I feel like growing up, I was always told who I was, how I would behave and what I would do. I eventually rebelled so hard against that, but I was so confused about who I was still. I think a part of creating sites and doing self-imaging was around discovering a clearer narrative about myself. Seeing myself in a different light or through a different lens.

To further explore my arguments about reciprocity in spectatorship and how these participants were teaching each other to see I turn to Jennifer Friedlander (2009) who pointed out that, traditionally, film and art theorists, including Griselda Pollock, have "predicated their approaches to feminist spectatorship on the rejection of pleasure and surprise" (p. 5). This has permitted a somewhat pessimistic view about subversive viewing practices. Friedlander assumed that pleasure is a type of subversion of spectatorship within feminist thought—perhaps it is within the interlocutors she has chosen. But I bring adrienne marre brown, Lauren Berlant, and

Sara Ahmed into conversation to enliven ideas of pleasurable spectatorship as well as a pleasurable making do, which subvert phallogentric—not feminist—spectatorship. Responding to Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* and Mary Ann Doane's ideas on feminine masquerade, Friedlander (2009) asked, "Can there be a subversive, feminist viewing practice that allows for pleasure?" (pp. 50-51). I laugh only because such a question seems absurd now, yet in the 1990s, feminism did seriously consider it. While Mulvey's theorizations have had lasting and vital effects, since 1977 she herself has written ripostes on her binary framework of the male viewer in control of and having power over his needs and the female observed appearing as and for his pleasure (Sassatelli, 2011). Barthes, too, moved from vision centrality to discuss feelings of a body that is not fully consumed by vision. We may never see our eyes but we feel them and we can feel ourselves, not just as cultural objects.

Amelia Jones, whose main motivation is to rewrite art history from an intersectional feminist point of view, as cited in Friedlander (2009, p. 51), pointed out that the refusal of pleasure is complicit in a masculinist project. Of course she would. She also rallied for a radical narcissism with Carolee Schneemann as her lead. Schneemann argued that a woman can be a fetish object when she is an image for the male gaze or from the male gaze, but when she uses her body and is maker of her image she contaminates the commandments of the art world milieu (Schneemann, 1991; 2003).²⁴¹ In Chapter 2 and 3, I suggested that women producing culture is dangerous and obscene precisely because it creates a subversive feminist viewing practice that not only allows but demands pleasure. Schneemann started shooting *Fuses* (1965) because she had to see for herself how to see, make seeing work, and unravel the processes of signification that marked her work, and inevitably her, as obscene. Like Christin, she needed to teach herself how to perceive and be perceived.

I wanted to see if the experience of what I saw would have any
correspondence to what I felt—the intimacy of the lovemaking. . . . And
I wanted to put into that materiality of film the energies of the body, so
that the film itself dissolves and recombines and is transparent and

²⁴¹ Being such an outsider was not a thrill for Schneemann, who wanted to be recognized by the art world and not be constantly shut down and ignored.

dense—as one feels during lovemaking. . . . It is different from any pornographic work that you've ever seen— that's why people are still looking at it! And there's no objectification or fetishization of the woman. (Schneemann, n.d., n.p.)

Being seen and perceived is part of the relational encounter with another. Why would young women not find pleasure in connecting if they got online to do just that? Witnessing requires looking and seeing, and witnessing requires looking, seeing, and perceiving. To be alongside another, you have to turn towards them. Ahmed argued that this turn is already there within us and it activates via perception and allows for new attachments to form.

The pleasure of the gaze is also found in its resistance, that is, “the pleasure of saying ‘no’; not to ‘unsophisticated’ enjoyment . . . but to the structures of power which asks us to consume them uncritically and in highly circumscribed ways” (Kuhn, 1994, p. 313). There is power in looking (away). hooks presented a compelling argument that the Black female gaze offers a critical space for an oppositional gaze towards mainstream images and cinema. The pleasure of saying no is a way of saying yes to another kind of looking. The young women's discursive and formal desire for visibility and invisibility as detailed in Chapter 2 is an aesthetic representation of that contrastive pleasure. Helena's distinct spectatorial framing in Figure 1 is simultaneously saying yes to a gaze and no to another, aware she will be seen by both. When Auriea live streamed a webcam of herself as one of the first things she did when she got a T1 line, though she also told me she was not interested in “plastering herself online,” she enacted the Black female gaze as an alternative to what is considered entertainment by a woman. She mostly did quotidian things on air with what Wilke called performative self-portraiture, and I conceptualize as performative self-imagining, towards a pleasure of imagination and reciprocal spectatorship. Auriea became animated:

This is how I met Joan of The Swans. She was in Jerusalem giving shows, and she came to my website and saw me sitting there and she sent me an email, “this is amazing, I’m in Jerusalem, and I see this beautiful Black woman sitting at her desk.” We talk about that how it was this magical connection. Knowing people were watching me. So for me it was

performance art.

Tamika also noted, "as a Black woman, and I think one of the few PoC, I felt it [my race] apt to include [on my per-site]."²⁴² Both Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon also have emphasized Black resistance to forms of white power: "The 'gaze' has been and is a site of resistance for colonized Black people globally. . . . One learns to look a certain way in order to resist" (hooks, 1992, p. 116). Black women, hooks (1994) said, do more than just resist; they "create alternative texts that are not solely reactions" (p. 317). There are multiple ways of looking, including criticism without resistance or reaction. In this way, I insert the self-imaging practices as alternative texts that sometimes were not reactions, as they lacked the explicit politics of activism, but provided an alternative spectatorship, and in some ways that was enough. hooks's analysis not only inspired thought about Black female spectatorship, but the perspective of races and subjectivities that are often not presented or analyzed. Feminist scholars Minh-ha and Anzaldúa have argued that this kind of thinking presents new forms of recognition of representation and performance. In the following section, I analyze the pleasure of and in performance in the creation of the self-images and their circulation. I do this by nuancing authenticity and identity.

Pleasure of Performance

Pleasure's ambiguity and contradiction enacted by and through the gaze also flourished by means of performance in the web from 1996 to 2001. After all, some of my subjects were taking off their clothes for the camera, and for the imagined and imaginary viewer. I situate the concept of performance as sociological via Irving Goffman and gendered, racialized, etc., via Judith Butler (2019), who wrote, "performance brings with it the chance to re-create community through various preparatory collaborations among objects, others, and technologies" (n.p.). I am not adopting wholeheartedly the perspective of performance theory. I am taking cues from performance and draw on the concept of performativity that is associated perhaps not only with a discipline but with the idea of the performative that is crucial throughout the dissertation:

²⁴² Tamika continued with an articulation of authenticity and its importance over anything else: "I didn't mind that it [race] wasn't spread throughout the sites; we spoke mostly from our own experiences at the time, something I miss now."

What do these things that are made do, and what do we do with them? I am taking concepts from theories rooted in the performative, even if these are often tied to a critique of representationalism and the search for meaning, which are part of my *modus operandi* (Andersen, 2018). Even if the work is performative, and somewhat commensurate with some of what the research has shown, it does not fit neatly into any framework I know. It is the most analogous to Hannah Wilke's concept of performatist self-portraiture, a term Wilke “used for photographic work with others of which she claimed authorship” (Grosenick & Riemschneider, 2002). It encompassed a collective imagining that required an Other to come to fruition (such as a person pressing the self-timer or an audience attaching pieces of gum to photographs Wilke took of her own body). I also extend Wilke's term to mean that the maker of the image was also the object of the image and had to engage in a simultaneous performance as the viewer and the viewed to capture the photo (Jones, 1998).²⁴³

Performance can also be powerful and power pleasurable. Paasonen noted that third wave feminism—within her purview—rejected waves of feminism and instead promoted a binary of power and victim feminism. Those riot grrrls screaming were powerful and in opposition to those that were not survivors, evincing, as I did in Chapter 4, that certain kinds of traumas and the representations of them had more cultural capital than others. Yet, they also gave rise to sad girls whose political potential was forms of quietude. It was a pleasure to become on the web, an exploration that was occluded IRL. Auriea explained that her WWW becoming allowed her to flourish in ways that she wanted. Simultaneously, she pointed out that it did not matter who she was IRL. Yet it did, or else why would she make the distinction? She stressed that she was not “even a Black woman” online; she could be liked because of things she made. In many contexts (as explained in Chapter 3), the enervating effects of racism on artists of colour preclude a mode of reception that forecloses anything but their identity in the engagement with their art and its concomitant display and circulation.

At AOIR 2018 in Montreal, in the Critical Race Internet Studies session, Tonia Sutherland stated, “Yes, I'm Black, but maybe sometimes I just want to write about platforms, not only about how Black people experience them.” In those early days on the web, Auriea could

²⁴³ For a further discussion of performative self-imaging see Jones (2002).

be what she wanted and what she carefully performed—user: womanonfire. As mentioned previously, setting up a webcam feed was contiguous with getting a T1 line in her apartment. While she was not "plastering images" (as she said) of herself online, she was practicing self-imaging with her web-based art so people could see her "brain." Her organ, of course, was not "her" brain, as she "is" her brain. What she seemed to be getting at is the limit of representation.

Similarly, the other subjects did not sense the intimate public as a result of representation and identity either. Foregrounded was the per-site and the work on it. Carolina also spoke to their work as a mode of trying to figure out their gender identity. Auriea explained further:

It really felt like you could have your whole life on the web. Your work, your play, your social life, your art . . . it was so beautiful. It's all here. It's all wrapped up in one package. It was this utopic and very freeing. Ok, because it didn't matter who I was. . . . People didn't necessarily know what I looked like. They saw my brain. It's not like I was plastering images of myself online. To the contrary. You were existing in the realm of ideas. They liked you because of something you made. I wasn't even a Black woman. I recently became a Black woman again. For years it wasn't the issue . . . a subtext. To me, most of all, it didn't matter. I can be cool because of what I make. Most of my friends didn't know what I looked like. People didn't use their real name. My handle was womanonfire. So people knew me as that.

The "one package" that Auriea meant is that a person could socially construct their WWW environment. All the while, the environment also "wrapped [us] up in one package," a package of data circulating all over the connected world. Auriea's life and oeuvre was very much centred on the sensual, the erotic, and the desiring, both in its content and in its form. After winning The SFMOMA Webby Artist award and \$30,000 in 2000 with her husband, they engaged in a "kissathon" (Figure 56) that was simultaneously in-situ and mediated for the audience (Kopytoff, 2000).²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ It was also the same year influential erotica print magazine of the time period turned online portal Nerve.com won in the Print/Zine category.



Figure 56. Douglas Zimmerman. *Auriea Harvey with Michaël Samyn engage in a Kissathon at the Webby Awards (2000)*. Retrieved from <http://e8z.org/godlove/closer/pop/index.php?dir=photos> Accessed 1 November 2017.

Pleasures are not always experienced as pleasurable in straightforward and paradigmatic ways (Berlant, 2008; Johnson, 2013, p. 84)—this is seen in feminist artist Hannah Wilke’s imaging of femininity throughout her life. Her works range from *P.S. 1, Hannah Wilke, so help me Hannah, Card* (1978), which questions the entanglement of beauty, violence, and spectatorship as constructs via her body on display, to *Intra-Venus* (1992–1993), a series expressing her ailing sensuous body documenting her breast cancer. Wilke, alongside other feminist self-imaging artists Tracy Emin and Carolee Schneemann who foreground desire have all been criticized for being too beautiful, too straight, too white, and too close to their work (as they almost exclusively turned their cameras on their own bodies) to have their work possess critical valence or be political (Johnson, 2013). The critique is also marred with misogynist overtones that, again, could not accept women being the objects to themselves, as Chapter 2 demonstrated: "For even in a world in the midst of radically re-imagining how kindred individual of all kinds might identify and interact with each other, the demands that desire makes on us can be perilous" (Osterweil, 2014, p. 9). Osterweil argued that despite the best intentions to be with and alongside others, human desires, especially sexual desires, can complicate our positions and promises. Desire both provokes and thwarts work. The commencing dissertation image (Figure 1), which Helena posted online in 1997, was a response

to her boyfriend's disapproving of her pleasures to see and perceive, yet it became emblematic of the intimate public that arose alongside it.

“Computer technologies occupy a contradictory discursive position where they represent both escape from the physical body and fulfilment of erotic desire” Claudia Springer (1999, p. 34) delineates in “The Pleasure of the Interface.” When the moment of 1996 to 2001 was contemporary, much discourse circulated around the shedding of the body and the possibility of life with the obsolete body (as though we “have” bodies in the possessive sense, which as a phenomenologist, I know to be erroneous). The participants of my study were invested in the body and the web’s possibility for their bodies (Vergine, 2007, p. 280). Many of those within the intimate public of per-site makers thought of themselves as cyborgs, as beyond their bodies but only insofar as that their bodies were marked by ideology and reacting against that was imperative.²⁴⁵ The participants in my study wanted to be seen as more than representation while wanting representation.

Ambiguous Authenticity

Authenticity, in the case of this study, like representation, works on a discursive and performative level, and emerges as a characteristic of friendship. Authenticity, according to theorist of subcultural studies Sara Thornton (1996), is "a cultural value anchored in concrete, historical practices of production and consumption" (p.17). Therefore, authenticity and being authentic online during the time period of 1996 to 2001 was discursively, aesthetically, and ethically specific. Authenticity, as marked by vulnerable presentations of traumas, was produced by the practices of production and witnessed through consumption of the per-sites in a performative feedback loop. The participants understood each other by way of their positions in the intimate public. Berlant (2012) explained, “‘Identity’ might be defined as the kind of singularity that an individual is said to have: paradoxically, identity is also the individual’s point of intersection with membership in particular populations or collectivities.” Although a developed discussion of authenticity on the web is outside the purview of this dissertation, it is

²⁴⁵ Fittingly, Munster (2006) reminds us that “the cyborg is the collective and personal self” like the participants’ self-images are (p. 25).

worth noting that an aesthetics of intimacy in zine culture, similar to the per-site community, also gave rise to an externalized process of the authentic self (Nguyen, 2012, pp. 177-178).

Alyssa indicated,

The internet was sort of a refuge from a social standpoint. I don't think I ever had any desire to cultivate some persona or alter ego when I was online. I thought I was more authentic with the people I interacted with online than the people I saw in person. I was much more shy in person. I was much more revealing online.

For Alyssa, authenticity was able to emerge within a milieu that seemingly made less demands on her performance as a social being. She highlighted that, from a social standpoint, the web was a refuge. In this way, IRL could not nurture her “authentic” self because of its performative demands (of heteronormativity, etc.). Yet, the web was not a refuge inasmuch as the intimate public the Alyssa was able to co-produce was a refuge. The intimate public was dominated by discussions of sexual exploration that took the form of repetitive self-imaging and concomitant wit(h)nessing. Authenticity, in this case, seems to point to a pleasure of performance.²⁴⁶ Alyssa enjoyed and felt deeply the person she was online, and therefore it could not have been a persona, something she considered fake or underpinned by a mode of power to control a situation towards a solipsistic goal. The web did not need to be authentic; it “feeling” authentic was enough. While she had no ostensible desire to cultivate a persona, drawing on Butler and Goffman, I argue she did anyway. I did not get a chance to ask her if she thought that her IRL self was inauthentic given the frame she set up, although I gather she would say no. The nuance of performance here hinges on the pleasurable as well as the intersection between the personal and the collective. How would shyness even translate on the web? Has anyone ever said, “Oh, she's shy on the web?” They are more likely comment on a person's level of engagement within a community.

246 A connection that has predominantly been made for the relationship between pornography and spectatorship on the WWW (Chun, 2006, pp. 102-104).

A Playground of Performance

While Alyssa, Auriea, and Carolina adamantly insisted they did not perform a persona online, several others discussed how performing online was a way to better understand themselves and a way to figure out their position in the world. The two sets of participants might be saying seemingly opposite things, but their purpose was the same. Their self-imaging work was in part self-presentation as a performative practice (Goffman) and a performance: a way that brought them into being together (Butler).

Aarti astutely observed that experimentation always begins with and is of the self and transforms into a “for-ness” towards the set of practices in which one is participating. In this case, the practices are those of the intimate public of per-site makers. There was no malicious intent in performing. It was enjoyable.

Aarti:

I'm sure in those early days I made up all kinds of things about myself. That was one of the wonderful parts about it—you can say you were younger or older, male and female, especially in the early chat rooms when you were experimenting with what that world was.

Magda:

I'm sure I embellished and was not, “Hi, I'm Magda, I'm 13 and I live in Mississauga [a suburb of Toronto].” But it's part of you, trying to figure yourself out.

Aarti:

And it is you! It's coming out of you and the experiences you've had. . . . I felt that the internet was a hypnogogic hallucination, you could enact these personas that would better articulate what you were feeling than the markers of your own life would, and there is something so freeing and so educational about that.

While all my subjects told me that they were “more themselves” than IRL, Marlaina disclosed that she made up two characters and their concomitant per-sites between 1997 and 1998. One

was a “normal” girl, the kind of girl she was not.²⁴⁷ The other was a character loosely based on a friend of hers, that she calls a “persona,” a mix of all the qualities participants of the intimate public at the time found fascinating:

I know there are people [including ones in the dissertation] that interacted with this persona and I don't know whether they remember and how impactful it was. I would write diary entries about his life and I created a whole website just for him. It was the perfect boy who all the girls wanted to interact with.

Specifically, Aaron shared interests with the intimate public, like Tori Amos and writing a journal and generally foregrounding his emotions in ways that the teenage boys around the participants were unable to do. Marlaina continued:

People sent me things in the post for him, like makeup and other treasury items. After I received a couple of those packages I thought it wasn't right so I stopped doing it.

The way a user stopped being part of a community then was to stop updating their per-site. Updating was the way to make visible the ties with others.

I [Aaron] became one of those people, “do you remember so and so, why aren't they updating?” I might have done an entry about [how] maybe my parents didn't want me to do this anymore or something . . . but I know if we went to enough guestbooks in the ring of people that existed I could find that Aaron.

Testing out identity, unpacking authenticity and power is possible through performativity. The practices I outline act as consequences of the idea that “radical feminism articulated the body and sexuality as terrains of power and knowledge” (Paasonen, 2005, p. 172). For example, Marlaina performed a character that was able to fit in as the

²⁴⁷ Marlaina told me that the “normal girl” “had a 'normal name' like Rachel or Caitlin and I stole some photos of a normal woman I found on some other page. She had curly long hair and wore floral dresses. I was fascinated with being someone else.” We did not discuss this girl at length as Aaron was the one Marlaina put effort into and wanted to explore with me.

underrepresented gender among the group yet who was a member of the hegemonic gender more broadly. Aaron was not Marlaina as much as he was her too. The performance of the body (self-imaging) was a way of producing space (Lefebvre, 1974) and co-creating a WWW intimate public by way of per-site production. In this way, the per-site also acted as a terrain of power and knowledge when in circulation with and among other per-sites. Christin's palpable excitement for expression was evident in the following:

I think the total act of having one [a website] was the best. I was carving out space for myself where none existed in the confines of growing up evangelical Christian. It was marking out a space that was mine where I could express myself and connect with others on similar wavelengths.

Conclusion

In the October 1994 issue of *Wired Magazine* internet critic Gary Wolfe (1994) declared, “Mosaic [web browser] is not the most direct way to find online information. Nor is it the most powerful. It is merely the most *pleasurable* [emphasis added] way, and in the 18 months since it was released, Mosaic has incited a rush of excitement and commercial energy unprecedented in the history of the Net” (n.p.). The rush of excitement of exploring a vast unknown landscape with ludic tendencies was the reason most people got online in those early web days of the 1990s. The breadth of this chapter focused on the way friendship emerged and was maintained within the intimate public of my study. Gilmore (2001, p. 32) asked, where do we look to the memories and the incoherence of pleasure? To make sense of the contradictions, I turn to Berlant (2012), who wrote “that the anxieties and instabilities of desire might be made to have socially transformative consequences, for good and ill” (p. 60). The forms of attachment created new ways of being on the web while also precluded participation. Despite it all, there was immense pleasure of performance as demonstrated in the production of the per-site (through form and

content)²⁴⁸ and, most of all, the self-images.

For me and my subjects the image making—with our bodies as orientation devices of the intimate public—anchored us to each other and ourselves.²⁴⁹ Our bodies' movements, in the frame, in front of us, among other images on our per-sites and among the images of others, rather than cleave, make us whole. It is this relation that sustains “both intimate and political bonds” (Berlant & Edelman, 2014, p. 69). What else does this relation give rise to? Wonder! Ahmed (2014) offers wonder as a state of feminist “for-ness” (p. 178). The young women were in a state of wonder—wondering what would happen and what could be done. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will deepen the links of the way an inchoate intimate public of wondering per-site makers transformed into friendship. I map out this encounter through a closer look at the way the participants' practices were amateur, that is, the intentionality of their practices was out of a love of making self-images to connect with others. As such, this insular desire precluded much of their work from being archived. I examine the piecemeal fragments left behind (like those in the dissertation) and explore what it means for the project and for the future of web studies.

²⁴⁸ Barbara F. Kennedy (2007) pointed out that the prioritization of identity and subjectivity within feminism has locked itself “into an ontology of stasis” and ossified representation (pp. 774-775). While I do agree theoretically, I think given my 1990s framework I have to account for how young women were understanding and exploring their identity often through modes of representation. I hope it is in the phenomenological way I present my research that fills a gap and does not reproduce those very static binaries Kennedy and others argue against.

²⁴⁹ Ahmed (2007) clarifies: “Orientations are about the directions we take that put some things and not others in our reach” (p. 152).

CONCLUSION — FEMINIST ARCHIVING THE EARLY AMATEUR WEB

Introduction

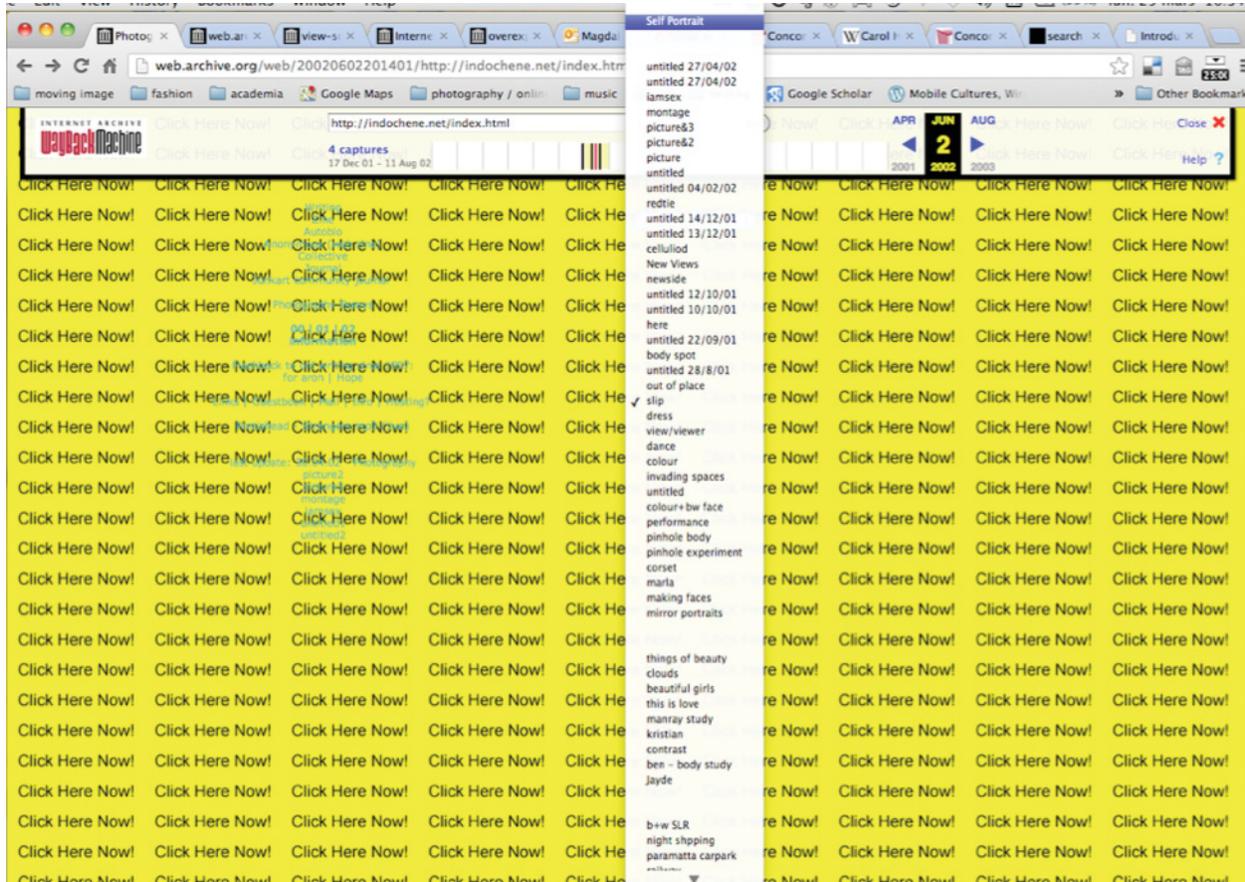


Figure 57. Marlaina Read. “Indochene.net” Splash page. *Photography*. Screen capture as it appeared on 2 June 2002. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20020602201401/http://indochene.net/index.html> Accessed 7 June 2018.

Note: This is screen shot is shortly after the time frame of my research, however, I include it in the Conclusion to consider what some archival material looks like today and to demonstrate how advertising has taken over defunct domains.

A per-site page with a bright yellow background with the phrase “Click Here Now!” repeatedly attempts to command the viewer. It is an ad where a background image used to be. There is an indiscernible list of light blue text in small Verdana font that reads as links to a page. Some of the legible headers say “journal,” “Picture2,” “autobio,” and “montage.” I click on “Photo....” and a long drop-down menu appears of image titles starting with “Self Portrait.” However, none of the images are available. The links lead to other pages with ads as

placeholders as appear in Figure 57 above. Images are rarely cached by the Wayback Machine, the most comprehensive but incomplete web archive to date. This cached website *indochene.net* (Figure 57) is one of Marlaina's per-sites and all that is left of it. Many of the per-sites of my subjects that have been archived look similar; through modes of s/censorship some have had all traces removed. For example, none of Aarti's images are available and little of Helena's work from the period before 2001 remains online because it was "too personal, too vulnerable," she said. Helena had asked the administrators of the Wayback Machine, as per their copyright protocols, to remove all the cached data of her most popular domain, *myredself.org*, and it is unrecoverable.²⁵⁰ She now regrets this decision, a sentiment that also evokes my own experience. I was swift to remove images from my per-site or change URLs, often without migrating all the data, when people from IRL found them. Certainly, no one outside of the intimate public made any suggestion to promulgate these sites. Alexander, Blank, and Hale (2017), in their analysis of web histories from The Internet Archive's data, have noted that "there is a clear bias toward prominent, well-known and highly-rated web pages. Smaller, less well-known and lower-rated web pages are less likely to be archived" (p. 59).²⁵¹ Web historian Niels Brügger (2018) also lamented web culture's ways of seeing. In internet research that took place in the 1990s, "not much attention was given to the fact that the web changed rapidly and that it should therefore be preserved and referred to in a stable form" (p. 71). Critiquing modes of preservation, net.artist and theorist Olia Lialina (2010) remarked, "Search engine rating mechanisms rank the old amateur pages so low they're almost invisible and institutions don't collect or promote them with the same passion as they pursue net art or web design" (n.p.). While frustrating, I cannot help but think that this resistance to preservation also signifies that time period with its mythology. The broken archive I make use of in my work resists its own re-creation.

When I began this project, despite feeling hindered by this fractured archive and its

²⁵⁰ Their terms of use state: "While we collect publicly available Internet documents, sometimes authors and publishers express a desire for their documents not to be included in the Collections (by tagging a file for robot exclusion or by contacting us or the original crawler group). If the author or publisher of some part of the Archive does not want his or her work in our Collections, then we may remove that portion of the Collections without notice" (<http://archive.org/about/terms.php>).

²⁵¹ For a detailed account of the Internet Archive and the Wayback Machine see Webster's chapter "Users, technologies, organisations: Towards a cultural history of world web archiving" (2017).

resistance, I set out to demonstrate new forms of sociality qua the self-image on per-sites in the mid 1990s to early 2000s. The traces that these women have left on one hand can be seen as inadequate for the task of documentation but, on the other, provide the ways in which artists outside the institution handle their work, specifically how they manage work circulated for and by the internet. This image and web archive, structurally and discursively, oriented me in the direction of feminist archiving, webrings, and guestbooks, and the concept of the amateur. The central concepts of each chapter crystallize within these final remarks: the amateur with their practices of self-imaging (Chapter 2) and pleasure (Chapter 5), guestbooks and webrings as modes of wit(h)nessing (Chapter 4), and the archive as it is inflected by s/censorship (Chapter 3). I want to turn to these three areas (the amateur, guestbooks and webrings, and the archive) to contextualize the sociality of the self-imaging practices of the intimate public and my research. Using the feminist phenomenological method that undergirds the project, I present the concepts as door handles rather than fully fleshed out arguments. These openings are supported by Griselda Pollock and Michel Foucault's arguments concerning genealogy and the rethinking of history. It is these openings that allow me to consider Brügger's 2018 book, *The Archived Web: Doing History in the Digital Age*, and be in conversation with the works and debates of web archives and access.

Foucault (1972) argued that the archive manages and controls our relationship with the past: "Standing before an image brings one into anachronical confrontation with the past, because past and present coexist and constantly reconfigure each other every time we look at the image," according to Georges Didi-Huberman, paraphrased in Zapperi's feminist perspectives on re-thinking art archives (2013, p. 28).²⁵² Despite my persistent deferrals to the now, in considering Didi-Huberman's proposition, my image-based object of inquiry is continually changing as is my consideration of the present. The act of seeing and, further, the act of perception, which I expand to be a mode of wit(h)nessing, have a structural relationship

²⁵² To redress Canadian digital media work already partially or wholly irretrievable, *Library and Archives Canada* has recently proposed a National Heritage Digitization Strategy, as part of a process of re-envisioning and reshaping what its archive will be like in 2022: a pivotal moment to help shape the past and move away from singular centralized archives and databases. Further, scholars such as Eichhorn (2013a; 2013b), Evering (2018), and Gumbs (2011) have noted the need for more multi-media feminist archives and collections.

with the “writing of history” (Hartog, 2007). What conditions of perception allow me to have written this dissertation? Indeed, the work is indebted to Donna Haraway (1991), as I aim to make sense of the images produced through a deliberately subjective and necessarily partial perspective that foregrounds difference and complements the existing scholarship on young women’s early online artistic content production.

I have tried my best to not reproduce and perpetuate “extractive and entitled tendencies” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 124) in the work. We as researchers cannot merely “add” the missing young women and their practices, or else we miss the point of feminist work, which is to question and shift the ideological boundaries that omitted some young women in the first place. To understand what a work is doing, I used a dual approach: (a) Practices must be “located as part of the social struggles between class, race, gender . . . with other sites of representation,” as in, the practices must be viewed through an intersectional lens; and (b) we must analyze “what any specific practice is doing, what meaning is being produced, and how and for whom” (Pollock, 2012, pp. 9-10).

The participants in my research, through recognition that the feminist (transgressive and pleasurable) body is a threat to the ideological order (Banes, 1993, pp. 220-221), deployed the tactics of feminist body art within the context of early per-sites and the communities of young women that emerged through the creation and visitation of these websites. Though it is clear that, for example, Helena’s work is related to a rich conceptual terrain opened up by the work of thinkers such as Balsamo, Grosz, Haraway, and Jones, it is also the case that aesthetics appropriated from feminist self-imaging photographers functioned to create a culture of distinction among early online content producers. The conceptual saliency of work by Cindy Sherman and Francesca Woodman, two of the many influences of my subjects, cannot simply be deployed to the same effect regardless of context and audience. The domain hosting politics of the early internet, and the preservation of early per-sites, should also be considered when approaching the content of Helena’s and my other subjects’ work. The images described in this dissertation enable a kind of open-ended potential and narrative that emphasizes ambiguity and multiple layers of sense making that occurred through amateur exploration: repetitive, serial imaging making, manipulating, and sharing. These practices not only reproduced the aesthetics of body art but also complicated the rhetoric of the pose borrowed from established artists by

instituting these rhetorics in relation to specific personal traumas and the intimate public of per-site makers.

Amateur Web Culture

The 1990s web was a ludic space; at least, the ways in which its participants were habituated to actions was constantly being challenged, and not necessarily purposefully, because everyone was trying to figure it out. It was a social medium experimentally produced on micro-levels—a kind of truly “user-generated” collective action, the work of amateurs. In the title of my dissertation, I designate the online self-imag(in)ing practices as “amateur” and only briefly explain this move in the Introduction’s preamble. As such, the concept bears elucidation here: “Amateur practices call publics to life,” wrote Olga Goriunova (2012, p. 107) in her chapter “Geeky Publics, Amateurs, and the Potency of Art.” That is to say, the amateur web engendered the intimate public of per-site makers by feeding on “raw auto-creativity, whereas the . . . professional works with cooked creativity, servicing the apparatuses” (Goriunova, 2012, p. 107). She noted that the amateur and professional do not exist as a dichotomy and one can be the other. The difference, as explained in the introduction, is the intentionality of the practice and its exploration of circumventing the neo-liberal model of work as defined by economic value. Although I do think Goriunova somewhat overdetermines the amateur in her chapter, it is poignantly positioned within her theorizations about the potential of art platforms to co-construct the aesthetics of networks while being products of the aesthetics of the community created by that very set of emergent practices, a definition borrowed from Agamben’s *The Coming Community* (1993).²⁵³ The amateur, the one that does it for love, is censored by way of critical neglect and derision. The amateur practices undermine the Kantian aesthetic tradition through experimentation and lack of insistence on value and prescribed norms; these characteristics are outlined in Chapter 2, and as Olia Lialina pointed out, were squarely unfit

²⁵³ For a similar reading of web communities and how they are “actively and on-goingly made” see Bell (2001, p. 188) and Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2008).

for consideration by male internet doyens who revered themselves as makers of taste.²⁵⁴ Their sentiments exemplify Bourdieu's (1984) notions that taste "functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place,' guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards . . . the practices which befit the occupants of that position" (p. 467).²⁵⁵ The amateur's sense of place is outside of social norms and conventions, and the aesthetics of the participants in my study oriented themselves towards each other as well as redefined their work in ways that precluded further institutional inquiry that would situate it where it did not belong.²⁵⁶ Resistance, according to cultural theorist Jodi Dean, is possible within ideological structures of communicative networks because of the labour of amateurs. Amateurs, in this case, often experiment and tinker with technology, sidestepping paradigmatic use and (often, unknowingly) transforming and reconfiguring it, as Chapter 1 details regarding the emergence of my subjects' practices. As such, they set the stage for popular widely known technological advancements (Dean, 2004, pp. 268-269). Dean did not make specific references and was writing before platforms like Tumblr existed, but it is clear that my choice to frame my work within the amateur, the Tumblr landscape—the choice for youth to discuss and post about social justice issues and cis- and heteronormativity (Fink & Miller, 2013)—are all very much indebted to feminist per-sites. Feminist per-sites that found each other through two obsolete modes of WWW connection: webrings and guestbooks.

Modes of Sociality—Making Rooms: Webrings + Guestbooks

²⁵⁴ The disparaging judgments of home pages were plenty, so much so that even the inventor of the web produced a hot take. Cited in Lialina and Espenschied (2009, p. 61) from an 1998 interview in W3J.com, Tim Berners-Lee remarked, using a classist trope gaudiness, "They may call it a home page, but it's more like the gnome in somebody's front yard than the home itself." See also Quan Haase and Wellman's "How Does the Internet affect Social Capital?" (2004).

²⁵⁵ See the blog post "Class and Web Design, Part 1: The Class Struggle" (Fahey, 2006, n.p.) on the interrelatedness of social and economic class and the valuation of aesthetics arising out of personal websites through a US-based lens.

²⁵⁶ I recognize that making this work towards an institutional value (a doctoral dissertation) at first might negate my reticence about academic trappings. However, given the institutional context of the project, I am not in a blind-sighted mirage but rather recognize that the output of a component of the research (i.e., the images and per-site screen shots) must be mindful of its own specificities, such as staying and being archived online.

Olia Lialina (2010, n.p.) wrote of a practice that has almost completely disappeared:

Ten years ago every website had a section of external links [webrings] because people felt it was their personal responsibility to configure the environment and build the infrastructure. The many-to-many principle showed itself in linking strategies as well. A site was not complete without links to other sites.

When theorizing contemporary public social networks, what can be learned about the precarity of these practices and their concomitant data (Hestres, 2013) from the communicative traces of the young women who built per-sites and from the way attachments were attuned to and formed?²⁵⁷ Queer scholar Jacquelyn Rhodes (2004), in her book about the history of women's writing, *Critical Agency: From Manifesto to Modem*, wrote that "a crucial component of women's Internet sites is their association with other sites through the use of hypertext links and membership in webrings" (p. 66). Nicholas C. Burbules (1998 p. 103) wrote that "it is important to acknowledge the rhetoricity of hypertext links, to look critically at the chain of identifications created through connecting one's site to another's." He argued that hypertext links are "associative relations that change, redefine, and enhance or restrict access to the information they comprise," which is also what webrings and guestbooks provided. They created a "temporary stability of identification"; one would identify based on the associations one's per-site would have with other per-sites (Rhodes, 2004, p. 67). It is this identification that I have aimed to expound in the previous chapters, specifically regarding difference, sociality, sexuality, pleasure, and trauma.

Associations of identity and belonging were explicitly made manifest through webrings, a large part of the internet infrastructure in the 1990s, that created conditions for an alternative layer of finding relevant data through human rather than algorithmic web crawling. These navigational networks, mostly hosted on the now defunct webring.org, were self-organized networks of websites, often with a theme, that through a pool of rings served to link and connect other website makers interested in that theme. There was usually a moderator, or several

²⁵⁷ Curiously, in the historical "Social Media" section of *The Archived Web*, Brügger discussed various ways of public connectivity, yet made no mention of webrings and guestbooks (2018, pp. 151-152).

moderators, called “Ring Masters,” who would pre-approve users and their websites to join or solicit users to participate. The most common type of webring was one that had a central location, and users who were part of it wrote a line of code into their HTML using JavaScript. Its interface appeared on the page, and the webring’s circulatory structure activated every time someone clicked to go to another website in the ring. A user did so through clicking on *previous page*, *next page*, or *random*. This navigation is presented in words or characters (see Figures 2 and 58 respectively). There were different ways of displaying the webrings one belonged to: at the bottom of the splash page, on each page, or on a dedicated page highlighting each webring (see Figure 58). The names of the webrings, such as *WHAT DOESN'T BEND* and *:she wont go down.:*, evoke the sad girl aesthetic I discussed in Chapter 4.

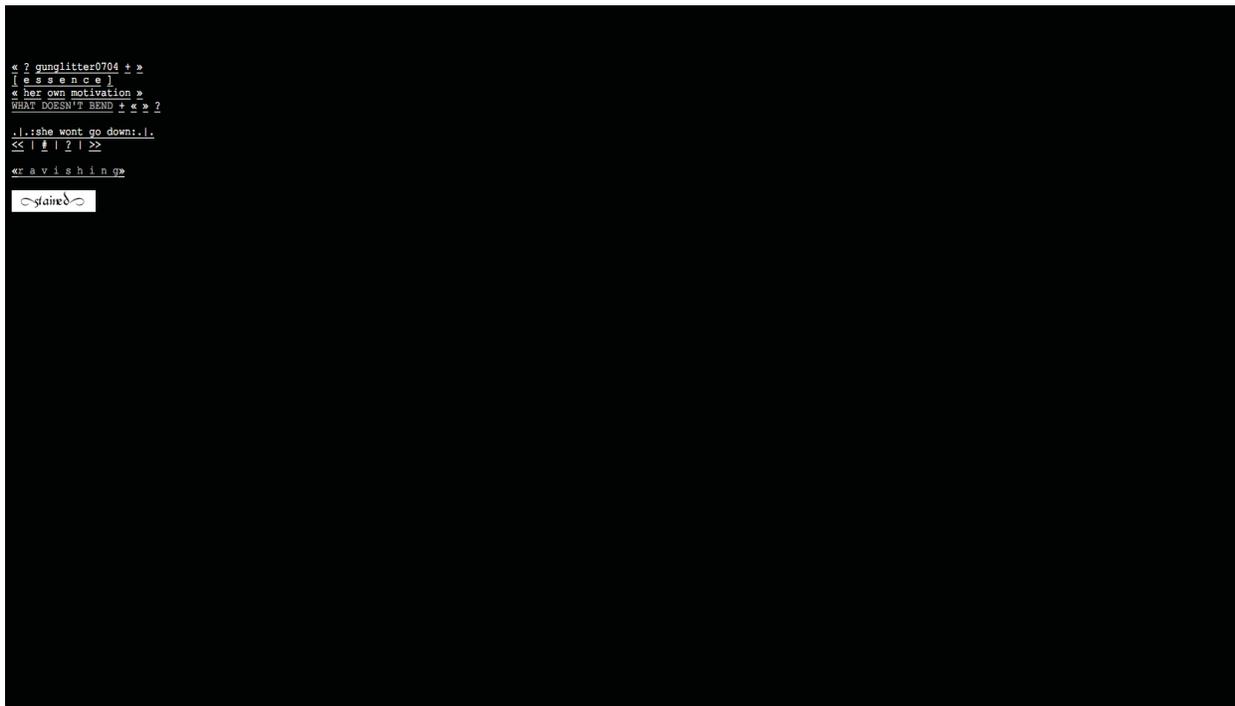


Figure 58. Tamika Pinkney. <http://trashed.lhabia.com/else/webrings.html> Webring page. *WEBRINGS=*. Screen capture as it appeared on 19 August 2001. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20010819111350/http://trashed.lhabia.com/else/webrings.html> Accessed 1 November 2019.

Some of the participants, like Anne, started their own webrings. As shown in Figure 59, the [*sugarless*] webring uses various avatars of women (punk rock singers, women in states of

despair—generally not traditionally beautiful; however, all white) that aesthetically indicate the kind of intimate public it wants to conjure. The webpage title is *oh, make me over*, a line from Hole’s *Celebrity Skin*. Anne not only provided an explanation of the webring, but also included another page—written in Arial Narrow size 1 to be barely legible—that introduced the code and then explained how to adapt it for one’s own per-site with the following proclamation:

kay sweeties, ive got the code for you. just pet yer site id where it says
id=3; instead of 3. and of course, put < and > where (and) are. and go
and pick a picture out and put the number where it says
sugarsless#.jpg". obviously. easy as that. im so flattered. xoxox.

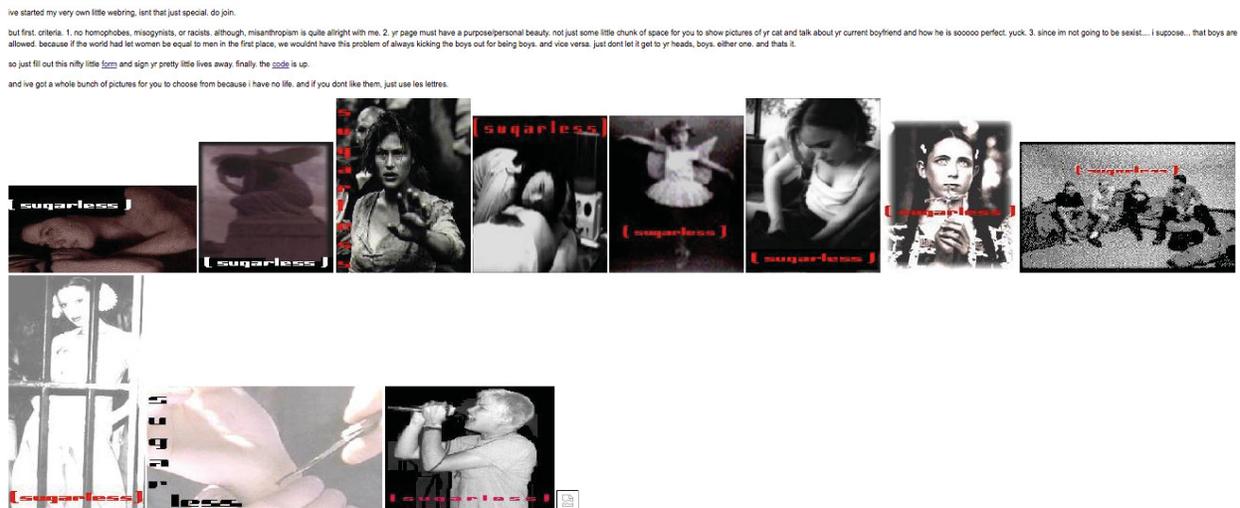


Figure 59. Anne Schipper. [sugarless] webring. *oh, make me over*. Screen capture as it appeared on 2 February 2020. Retrieved from <http://punkrockgrl.tripod.com/sugarless.html> Accessed 2 February 2020. *Note:* While this tripod site still exists on the web, the webring was started sometime in 1998 and has been discontinued for many years.

There was a hierarchy of webrings, some that were more exclusive than others, like the hosting domains I presented in Chapter 1. Through this explanation, it becomes evident how the intimate public of per-site makers emerged through the aesthetics of the self-image and became framed structurally through navigation systems like webrings. Alongside this search

system existed a related communicative node that is now also defunct: the guestbook.



Dreambook: to begin.

Sign my Dreambook!

& you..?:

mailer demon:

you are ill? (url):

your web existence: keeps me interested about as much as the wb. :)

when i think of the color blue, i think of

define your best form of communication: oral. :)

aim it that way (what's your online name?):

what animal would you describe yourself as?

communicate.

[[view Guestbook | to begin.](#)]

& you..?: shannon
 your little mailing demon: shannon429@hotmail.com
 you are ill? (url): <http://www.geocities.com/soho/coffeehouse/4349/>
 your web existence: is live & in color.
 communicate. whatever you have to say, i want to hear it.: i'd start your orange anytime.
 Sunday, November 8th 1998 - 02:10:37 PM

& you..?: wendy.
 your little mailing demon: wendybrd@grove.ufl.edu
 your web existence: is live & in color.
 communicate. whatever you have to say, i want to hear it.: hi there. thanks for inviting me. i needed something to take my mind off of my nonproductive thesis work. i now want to go rent dead poets' society again, and i love that you communicate about communication. it's such a strange, comforting subject.
 take care.
 wendy.
 Saturday, November 7th 1998 - 11:50:19 PM

& you..?: lindsay marie
 your little mailing demon: cocaine@plastique.org
 you are ill? (url): <http://www.plastique.org/vile>
 your web existence: two words: sexual healing.
 communicate. whatever you have to say, i want to hear it.: you know, this is really strange...coincidence sort of thing...i just ordered *public* about two weeks ago, just picked it up last night...and then i sail into your page to check it for sprinkle stuff and, lo and behold, there she is. im getting my hair cut like hers wednesday :)
 at any rate...it surprised me. i had trouble finding pages on her.
 onto other things...i like your page a lot. quite a lot, actually. and im too tired to say anything more eloquent [sorries much]
 Saturday, November 7th 1998 - 09:30:44 PM

& you..?: blue.
 your little mailing demon: blue
 your web existence: i know you're just starting out so this is the one i'm going to pick because i know you're stupid & have a rough time doing these mental tasks.
 communicate. whatever you have to say, i want to hear it.: testing.

Figure 60. Shannon Doubleday. "Fathomless" Guestbook sign page. *Be a dreamer*, from November 1998. Screen capture as it appeared 20 August 2003. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20030820060043/books.dreambook.com/fathomless/fathomless.sign.html>
 Accessed 1 November 2019.

Figure 61. Shannon Doubleday. "Fathomless" Guestbook view page. *Blue's dreambook*, from November 1998. Screen capture as it appeared 11 August 2003. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20030811094139/http://books.dreambook.com/fathomless/fathomless.htm>
 I Accessed 1 November 2019.

While webrings were mostly structural connectives, a guestbook's mode of connection

also operated on a discursive level. Guestbooks were public spaces built for visitors to leave their contact information and comments to the web-owner. Roxanne spoke to forums, chat rooms, and guestbooks as the main modes of communication during the time period (1996 to 2001). Guestbooks were one of the only ways to keep in touch with other people, because email was not common for the average user in that time. A user would make a comment in one person's guestbook, and then that person would reply in the other's guestbook. This public exchange also meant other people could read it and then respond or react to those comments, too. The guestbook was not simply a way to leave feedback and connect with the website, it also allowed visitors to have access to the interactions the website owner was accruing; it offered a way to survey who was part of their social network. Guestbooks became personalized and not simply repositories to leave a comment (see the change in questions over time in Shannon's guestbook, Figures 60 and 61). Users would also try to, if possible, use rudimentary HTML to stylize their comments. Stylizing comments reflected on their identity and willingness to try to circumvent the prescribed norm of simple text. The practice included paragraph aligning text right rather than standard left justification, turning text another colour or as small as possible, and so on. Writing a creative post on a popular per-site's guestbook and linking one's own per-site gave a user an audience. In Shannon's "fathomless" guestbook (Figure 35), one of her guestbook visitor questions is "how are you breathing?" as part of the questionnaire that included name, location, per-site url, email/ICQ/IRC handles and a big box to fill for comments (similar to how blog reply functions work). Like the per-sites themselves, guestbooks were dependent on the four censorship operatives outlined in Chapter 3 and the practice of wit(h)nessing. They asked for a relatively high user engagement and epistolary dialogue.

Guestbooks also made way for personal forums (Figure 12), another defunct attribute of that time period, which could be moderated by the owner and accessed only by a particular audience. Helena told me that forums were subject to invasion by trolls, often men or at least male-identified users that would relentlessly post abusive comments. This is a time before web trolling was an issue and recognized as a systemic problem. And if your personal space was

invaded what could you do? Without any tools, you closed shop. You got erased.²⁵⁸

A Feminist Web Archive

“Are digital archives feminist because the content is by women, or because the modes of production are feminist, or because the technologies themselves are feminist or used to feminist ends? Or is it all three?” Digital humanities scholar Jacqueline Wernimont (2013, n.p.) asked these questions in her argument that the digital archive may, in fact, be feminist. I take up her claim to amplify the current research on a subset of digital archives: web archives and archiving the web,²⁵⁹ specifically Niels Brügger’s (2008; 2009; 2011; 2013; 2018; Brügger & Schroeder, 2017) extensive critical material findings and suggestions on web archives and archiving. As scholarship on archiving the web burgeons, a crossroads becomes evident “because no established best practice exists yet” (Brügger, 2018, p. 147). This crossroads is characterized both by the historical omission of amateur and subaltern web practices, as explored earlier, and by technology and politics:²⁶⁰ Will the web archive of the future privilege algorithms to the exclusion of other practices, or can we argue for the benefit, for particular kinds of content, of using immersion and leveraging proprioception to create a different archival form? This argument situates the archive as philosophical, political, and aesthetic object created by artist-practitioner-scholars working through argued responses, grounded speculations, and

²⁵⁸ When I was initially writing the dissertation, I had bookmarked DreamBook links as reference. I mostly have saved “entire complete webpages” when possible but I did not do this for guestbooks. When I went back in 2015, I missed, by a few months, the option to save any original guestbook data before it was removed. I should have realized that they could not be online forever, considering the research I do. The closure note reads like a letter from a friend: “We made the difficult decision to retire DreamBook once and for all—our hosting of DreamBooks ended on January 12th, 2015. We do understand that many users have become attached to their DreamBooks so, as a courtesy, we've made archives of your DreamBooks available from the DreamBook management page. Those downloads will be available until March 31st, 2015” (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150205231141/http://dreambook.com/>).

²⁵⁹ While this section of the dissertation is in conversation with Brügger’s *The Archived Web*, because of its incredibly late landing at my door, it is noticeably absent in my introduction and methods.

²⁶⁰ Michele White (2015), Lisa Nakamura (2002; 2008), Nakamura & Chow-White (2012), Wendy Chun (2012), Radhika Gajjala (2001), Gajjala & Oh (2012) Gajjala, Rybas, & Altman (2008) Byrne (2008) and others also speak to this erasure.

exploratory relations. My call for future research responds to—and extends, to focus on the feminist animation of archives—Mary Kidd and Marie Lasca's (2018) request that all kinds of people be empowered to preserve information and data on their own terms, because it is not possible or in our best interest for “all current archival institutions to collect and preserve everything” (p. 207). One way to animate the archives is through archiveology: an interdisciplinary “practice of collecting images and compiling them in new and surprising ways”—in other words, producing frameworks to make work legible, accessible, and viewable (Russell, 2018, p. 38).²⁶¹ We are constantly perilously close to losing even the recent past, and stories like those of my participants are being erased by ideological and material “resistance and neglect” (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 10). My intervention is to “support forms of affective, erotic, and personal living that are public in the sense of accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity” (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p. 562). Could it be that these forms Berlant and Warner demanded are what the fragmented archives that resist us remaking them are waiting for?

Whereas any collection or archive is incomplete, the web archive's fragmentation is ontologically different. Web archives are always representations. In the case of the Internet Archive, because the web elements now live on *their* servers, they have been cached and then copied. They are no longer an original—in some ways, they are self-images. While a page retains its code, the hyperlinking structure that makes it part of the web is usually broken, especially if the hyperlinks use top level–domain shorthand. Yet, the web archive also interacts with and forms attachments to the current web because our investigations are predicated on online websites and internet access. Within these tangled and inconsistent encounters, although parts may be missing, original traces and sediments may appear and disappear—the web archive in some ways can be read as a Haraway-esque trickster (Haraway, 1991) and as a practice of liveness.²⁶² In Figure 62, the image is unavailable but the title is there, as well as its filename and

²⁶¹ See work on living digital archives by Mel Hogan (2013). She claimed that living digital archives composed of server space amassing data “disrupt the way we can understand ourselves over and through time” (p. 3).

²⁶² Like when you mistakenly close your Safari window and all the Wayback Machine links you have opened and found through a meandering path close and you try to restore windows and it crashes your computer.

placement and position on the per-site.²⁶³ As Brügger (2018) wrote, “The researcher studying the visible layer is, in fact, studying the hidden layer as made visible by the Wayback Machine—that is, the hidden layer is indirectly part of the analysis of the visible layer” (p.127). These layers correspond to the structure of the web and its impact on how the web is archived: two layers of text (what we see and the underlying code), fragments (within the HTML file and associated files) and is hyperlinked (either through its code or by a spidering retrieval system) (Brügger, 2018, p. 6).

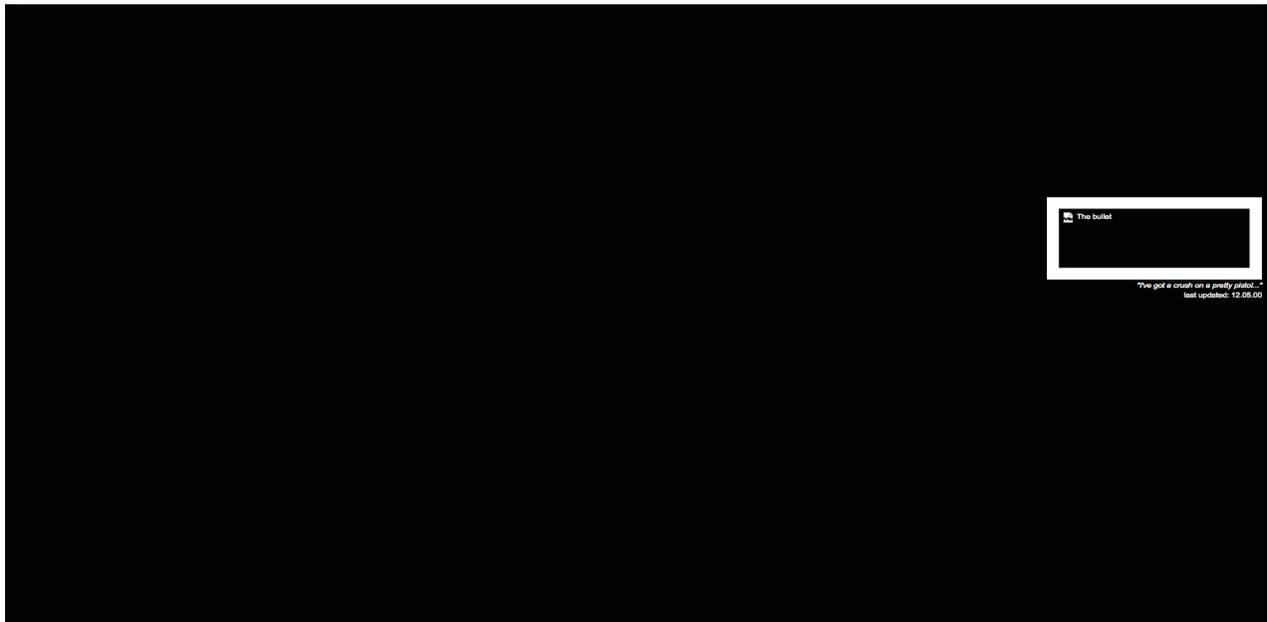


Figure 62. Tamika Pinkney. <http://trashed.lhabia.com/> Splash Page. *CONSTANT*. Screen capture as it appeared 6 December 2000. Retrieved from the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20001206205100/http://trashed.lhabia.com/> Accessed 2 February 2020.

The tangled and unpredictable encounters, especially between several versions of web elements of the same webpage and its elements when comparing web materials over several years, are a methodological obstacle for which Brügger (2018) suggested various modes of evaluating archived web data and concomitant versioning of that data (pp. 122-124, 144-147). A fruitful analytical future consideration—material and affective—is a presentation on how the

²⁶³ In “Web Pages as Pictures: An Automated View,” Brügger presented a case study on how the Internet Archive presents text from images, and that the images serve as placeholders, in some ways, to scaffold text (pp. 46-47).

images shifted in their content, style, placement, and circulation over time; it is also a way to demonstrate micro-changes and map differences to further situate and consider the politics of location within the corpus I have produced. This analysis of versioning also considers institutionalization's role in how the corpus is built and preserved.

One way to connect the paradigmatic structures of Brügger's work with feminist and affective structures is to think with Pollock (2007), who said that the archive is not "about mastery, classification, definition. It is about argued responses, grounded speculations, exploratory relations, that tell us new things about femininity, modernity and representation" (p. 11). Pollock wanted to create a space for "critical re-vision" and in doing so produced a feminist virtual museum, which is a space that gives rise to a feminist methodology (p. 11). This museum signals that feminist analysis is impossible within the dominant social and economic power relations that govern museums, and more specifically within the concept of museum. But Pollock did imagine a feminist museum when she argued that "archives matter" and that "what is included shapes forever what we think we were and hence what we might become" (p. 12). Her feminist method, outlined in *The Feminist Virtual Museum*—a space of rigorous conceptualization—allows my museum to become *real*. In doing so, the work of this dissertation responds to and clarifies the ways in which the aforementioned practices of public intimacy are often left out of web histories. To wit, it has provided novel insight into the conditions that allowed young women to make use of web and internet technologies to resist control and create spaces for them to exist (Couey, 2003).²⁶⁴ In short, these conditions were such that the users made a WWW room of their own.

Come in and tarry.

We promise to update soon.

²⁶⁴ See Milligan's *History in the Age of Abundance? How the Web is Transforming Historical Research* (2019) for a case study of how archiving the 1990s web carries its own implications and problems, specifically as related to the heterogeneous and abundant traces left behind, often without referents. Milligan has provided examples on how the Internet Archive and other institutions are, unsurprisingly, not enough to preserve this recent past. We need community-based archives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Contextual Interview Guide Sample

(Used for Marlaina Read Interview 1)

1. Introduction

- a. What is your name? What do you do now? How would you like me to identify you?

2. History with Computers & Internet

- a. What were your first forays with computers?
- b. What was the first computer you ever used? When? Where was it located? Was the computer you used a shared computer?
- c. Do you remember the first time you used the internet? How old were you and when was it? What was the process? E.g., If it was at home, did you parents have a special protocol of your household getting online, such as specific times to dial-in to the internet as to not tie up the telephone line? Tell me about it.
- d. What did you do online? Did you visit chat rooms? Websites? Email? AOL? When did you procure your first email?
- e. Do you see a discrepancy between how you experienced it and how the history of the internet is written about now?

3. Websites

- a. What prompted you to think about making a website?
 - i. When you were making your initial personal websites what themes emerged as you were creating and circulating your content?
 - ii. Can you describe the process? E.g. What programs did you use? Deciding what server to be hosted on, what to include (writing [poetry, essays, journal, short stories], images [yours or those of others], etc/), how to upload and circulate the website.
 - iii. Did you make things specifically for your website? Did you ever consider playing with the form of the internet and websites and code, or was your website merely a space to place your content?
 - iv. How did you find others who made websites? Did you share your website with friends in your high school, neighborhood, university?
- b. How precarious was it to have a website?
- c. Did you have a guestbook on your website?
- d. Were you part of any webring?
- e. What do you remember about finding other websites? Do you remember reading other people's guestbooks? Do you remember posting in guestbooks? What do you remember? Did you ever do so on other people's pages so your name/website could get noticed? The guestbook is a public space but much intimate exchanges were had.

- f. What domains did you use to host your website?
- g. When were you first asked to be hosted on any specific domains? What was the process and how did you feel about it? Did you ever host others on your domain? If yes, what was the process and what prompted you to do so?
- h. How do you think of your practice online during that historical period?
 - i. You are one of the few women that have archived (almost?) everything online, and it's still part of your web presence. Why?

4. Art Making 'Offline'

- a. What was the first type of art making you did?
- b. Which artists were you inspired by?
- c. When did you discover photography as an art practice? Do you remember taking your first photos? What equipment did you use? What was the process?
- d. How did you discover zines? Did you make zines? If yes, did you produce them before making a website or concurrently? Explain.
- e. Did you take photos and/or write creatively before your first website? Please elaborate.
- f. Did having a website prompt other artistic activities? Such as making zines, mixtapes, letters, gifts, etc.?
- g. Did you ever collaborate with other users in making websites/web zines, etc.? How did it work?
- h. Did your website and the websites of others influence your writing? Your website was always an homage to women writers.

5. Gender/Identity Dynamics

- a. Can you describe the community of website makers during 1996-2001?
- b. Was the discussion of identity important to the content produced?
- c. Was it mostly women that made websites similar to yours? If yes, why do you think that is. If no, do you remember the content of men or male-identified users?
- d. Were there any rules (explicit or implicit) that encouraged or restrained certain users from participating in the making of websites? Which are they?
- e. EXAMPLE -- One of the chapters in my project is dealing with trauma and the ways in which these young women, including yourself, attempted to represent it to know/transcend/share it (?). Trauma, argues, Griselda Pollock, should be considered not in terms of event (which we cannot know), but “in terms of *encounter with its traces* that assumes some know of space and time, and makes a different kind of participating otherness.” This participation is marked by latency (belatedness, in which the traumatic event always returns after it occurs because of the traces it leaves—and that's when it becomes a trauma). A traumatic event is not *trauma* in the experiential moment of the event, but becomes evident only subsequent encounters, in representations, in relations—when through repetition it connects as such. I suggest that your images serve as a stylization of that latency.
 - i. What do you think? Can you expand on this? I don't know exact details of

what you have gone through, as I remember bits and pieces of the email letter you used to send, and your journals from many years and so I don't want to suggest anything in err.

- f. Ann Cvetkovich argues that depression can still be productive. It can orient us towards specific socialities. Do you think that this is true for you in the time of making these websites?

6. Image Creation

- a. One of my motivations is to nuance the differences between self-imaging and self-portraiture. I argue that because a woman includes herself and/or her body in an image she took/made doesn't automatically make that a self-portrait. One of the tactics of self-imaging is its way of foregrounding the body as a communicative medium that displaces the gaze and particularizes the body. In other words, it emphasizes the specificity of the body and its affects. Since you are exhibited in many of your photos, do you have some thoughts on this?
- b. The significance of your images lies in the fact that they were produced not solely for the sake of a conceptual statement about the status of gender/ sexuality/ trauma/etc. but seemingly for the sake of the maintenance and enrichment of an online community in which, as Helena explains, "an ongoing exchange of ideas about art and feminism and our own histories" was nurtured. I argue that the self-imaging was a method to participate in a broader community of other women trying to make sense of their subjectivities. Does this resonate with you?
 - i. A lot of your early photos deal with abjection. Something we have discussed before, but I'd like to foreground it in some of your images... Such as the series where you wrote all over your body as you are eating naked.
- c. However, there is still pleasure of the gaze in your images. You are a resolute watcher/seer of the viewer. I am thinking of some of your black and white images in which you stress your mouth open.
 - i. What were some of the motivations for these photos? How do you think your website and the websites of other women shaped your sexuality? How did your sexuality shape your websites?
 - ii. Young women's sexuality is useful when they can't speak back, when they are an *image*. Why are we afraid to be seduced by an image? By a woman in control of our seduction?

7. Final thoughts

- a. Anything else you'd like to add to this interview?
- b. May I contact you for a follow up interview?

Appendix B

An excerpt from Gillian Rose's questionnaire from *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (2001) used for my own analysis when pertinent. I adopted and adapted some of these questions during my semi structured interviews with my subjects. They follow as:

Some questions about the production of an image

1. when was it made?
2. where was it made?
3. who made it?
4. was it made for someone else?
5. what technologies does its production depend on?
6. what were the social identities of the maker, the owner and the subject of the image?
7. what were the relations between the maker, the owner and the subject?
8. does the genre of the image address these identities and relations of its production?

Some questions about the image

9. what is being shown? what are the components of the image? how are they arranged?
10. is it one of series?
11. what relationships are established between the components of the image visually?
12. how has its technology affected the text?
13. what do the different components of an image signify?
14. what knowledges are being deployed?
15. whose knowledges are excluded from this representation?
16. does this image's particular look at its subject disempower its subject?
17. are the relations between the components of this image unstable?
18. is this a contradictory image?

Some questions about audiencing

19. who were the original audience(s) for this image?
20. how is it circulated?
21. how is it stored?
22. where is the spectator positioned in relation to the components of the image?
23. what relation does this produce between the image and its viewers?
24. is the image one of a series, and how do the preceding and subsequent images affect its meanings?
25. would the image have had a written text to guide its interpretation in its initial moment of display, for example, a caption or a catalogue entry?
26. have the technologies of circulation and display affected the audiences' interpretation of this image?
27. is more than one interpretation of the image possible?
28. how actively does a particular audience engage with the image?
29. is there any evidence that a particular audience produced a meaning for an image that differed from the meanings made at the site of its production or by the image itself?
30. how do different audiences interpret this image?

Appendix C

Questionnaire from Annette Khun's *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (2002). She developed it "to help memory-work practitioners separate out a photograph's various contexts" (p. 8). In connection to my memory work as method, I adopted and adapted some of these questions for my exploration and analysis of data. They follow as:

1. Consider the human subject(s) of the photograph. Start with a simple description, and then move into an account in which you take up the position of the subject. In this part of the exercise, it is helpful to use the third person ('she', rather than 'I', for instance). To bring out the feelings associated with the photograph, you may visualize yourself as the subject as she was at that moment, in the picture: this can be done in turn with all of the photograph's human subjects, if there is more than one, and even with animals and inanimate objects in the picture.
2. Consider the picture's context of production. Where, when, how, by whom and why was this photograph taken?
3. Consider the context in which an image of this sort of would have been made. What photographic technologies were used? What are the aesthetics of the image? Does it conform with certain photographic conventions?
4. Consider the photograph's currency in its context or contexts of reception. Who or what was the photograph made for? Who was it now, and where is it kept? Who saw it then, and who sees it now?