

TDR



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

BROWN UNIVERSITY

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

SHANGHAI THEATRE ACADEMY

Iran's New Theatre

Touange Yeghiazarian

Iconoclasm Dictionary

Michael Taussig

Adolescent Drag

Anna Watkins Fisher

Africa's World Cup

Daniel Larbam

Popular Punjabi Theatre

Claire Pannett

So You Think You Can Dance

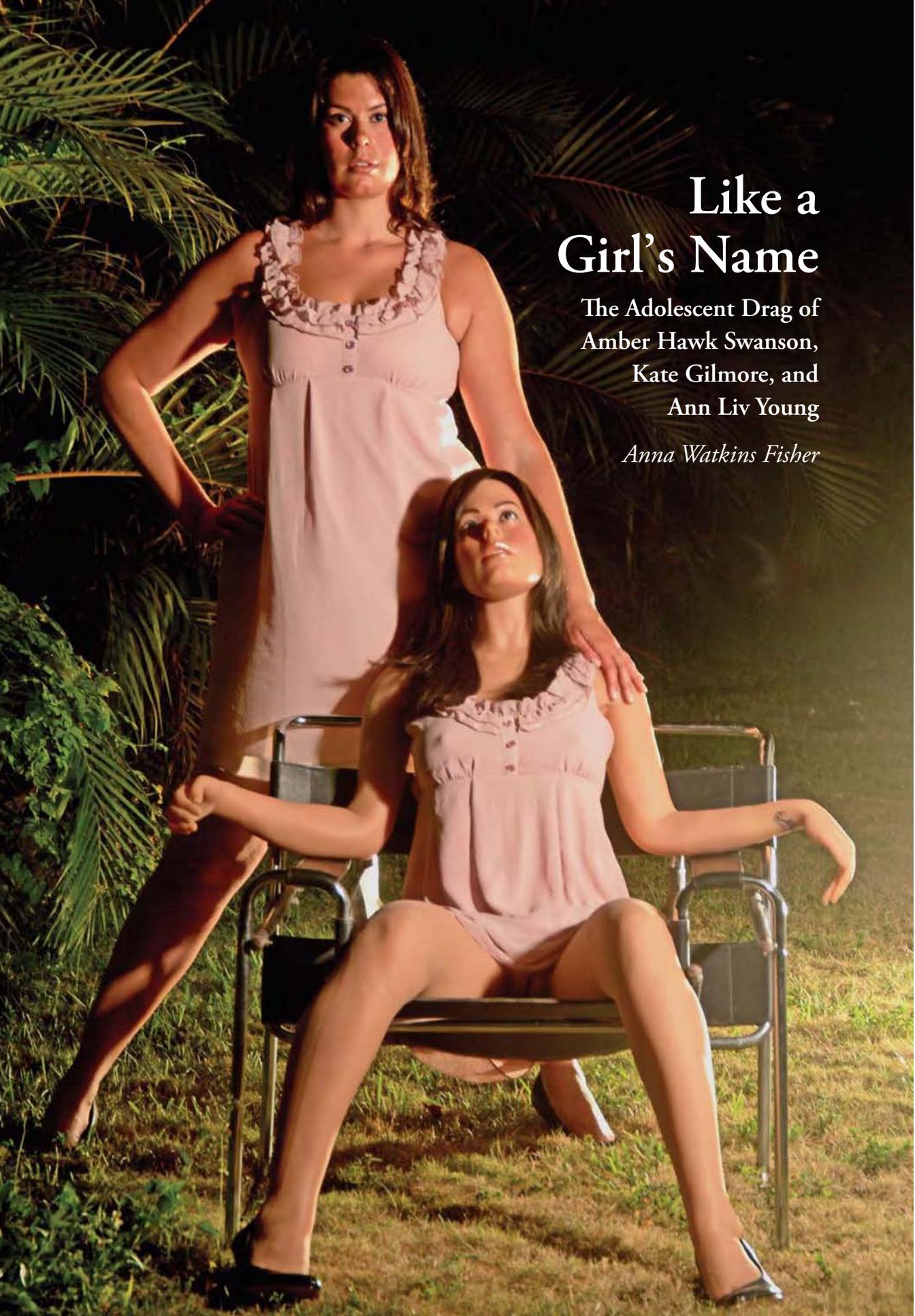
Kate Elwit

Chimps with Masks

Charles W. Hyatt

Creationist Museum

Jill Stevenson



Like a Girl's Name

The Adolescent Drag of
Amber Hawk Swanson,
Kate Gilmore, and
Ann Liv Young

Anna Watkins Fisher

Vulgarity and Unicorns

Any day of the week, you might happen upon choreographer-cum-performance artist Ann Liv Young's labyrinthine personal website to encounter something like the following, which appeared in the Spring of 2009: "march 12th/7PM/bring your girls along and let's do a girls night. It's a girl's night out. tickets are \$15 per person. we'll do facials, nails, a little cooking and some masturbation techniques! (of course we do not discriminate against men or trans.)" Careless spelling errors, cursing, unicorns, dogs, and raw, naked exhibitionism greet you when you land in Young's kitschified fairytale universe, along with the voice of what sounds like a demented witch screaming through your speakers, "Mwahahahaaa!! Welcome to my website. I am Ann Liv Young, demon master!!!" Her homepage features collaged scrapbook cutout images of evil trees, a fairy princess castle, and Young in a bikini staring down the camera with her young child playing beside her (fig. 2). Further in, you find a selection of buttons on a background of ornamental doilies, lavender doodles, and amateur drawings done in Microsoft Windows Paint, inviting you to click on: "DVDs," "Dance company," "Copyright," "Performances," "Animals," "Raps," and "Contact Us" (fig. 3). Animals? Raps? Almost none of the links work (AnnLivYoung.com 2009).¹

Young's appeal to all her "girls" satirizes third-wave feminism's slogan of "girl power" with the same humor as her ironic juvenilizing misspellings. Young's feigned fervor for "girl stuff" (facials, nails, cooking, masturbation) lampoons the commercial production and exploitation of a privileged representation of femininity ("\$15 per person") in her own comically DIY attempt to do so herself. Young hyperbolizes and degrades the adolescent figure that Western culture mandates as a permanent performance for all women, while it figures the girl as unattainable ideal: as endlessly reproducible desire and infinitely viable commercial subject, as that which is constantly renewed and yet entirely replaceable.

In the self-conscious performance of adolescence, the once paternalistic and demeaning appellation "girl" has increasingly become a recognizable queer resignification of compulsory constructions of "womanliness" presented in the mainstream media and certain strands of feminism. Young is one of a number of female contemporary artists in their 20s and 30s whose intermedial performance practices propose the aesthetic of adolescence as a coded response to the question of feminism's continued relevance for the "daughters" of the second wave.² This survey of three such artists—Amber Hawk Swanson, Kate Gilmore, and Ann Liv

1. During my interview with the artist, Young claimed her website's inaccessibility to be an aesthetic choice: "People actually say 'I can't find where the button is' but it would be really easy for me to make a little button that says 'Click here'" (Young 2010).

2. Earlier contemporary art progenitors of this move toward the performance of adolescence might include artists such as Tracey Emin, Elke Krystufek, and Chris Kraus, as well as male artists like Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, who have been associated with boyish adolescent aesthetic practices. Over the past decade, female artists who take adolescence as the subject of their portraiture have become extremely visible in the field of contemporary art: see for example, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Rineke Dijkstra, Miwa Yanagi, Tomoko Sawada, Julia Fullerton-Batten, Nikki S. Lee, Sue de Beer, Anna Gaskell, Justine Kurland, Katy Grannan, Sarah Jones, and Laurel Nakadate.

Figure 1. Amber Hawk Swanson poses with Amber Doll in To Have and To Hold and To Violate (2006–2008). (Courtesy of Amber Hawk Swanson)

Anna Watkins Fisher is a PhD student in the Department of Modern Culture and Media at Brown University. She has published in Women & Performance, Le Texte Étranger, Artforum, and e-flux's Art&Education, and contributed to In the Limelight and Under the Microscope: Forms and Functions of Female Celebrity (Continuum, 2011). Her dissertation, "Feminist Impositions: Performing Parasites in Contemporary Art and Media," proposes parasitism as a critical paradigm for rethinking contemporary feminism through digital and performance art. annawfisher@gmail.com



Figure 2. “Mwahababaaa!!” the homepage of Ann Liv Young’s website beckons. *annlivyoung.com*, 2011. (Courtesy of Ann Liv Young)

Young—advances a hermeneutic for reading the improvisational aesthetic of *adolescent drag*, a parasitical operation that redirects notions of kitsch and regression to critique the limited identificatory positions available to a generation of young women said to be the heirs of Western feminism: either that of the sanctimonious convert or the rebellious postfeminist, the good or the bad daughter. Their performance of adolescence is decidedly *not* a further proliferation of postfeminism, a form of antifeminism that has itself co-opted adolescent tropes these artists seek actively to reclaim.³ Adolescent drag is rather a younger generation of women artists’ tactical negotiation with their cultural inheritance from 1960s and ’70s feminist art and from second-wave feminism more broadly. Feminism—that is a particular conception of Western feminist theory—is regarded here as a radically contingent project of often diverse and contradictory efforts made to improve the social conditions of gendered subjects.⁴ It is nevertheless a project that has been mired in a certain set of normative conventions and stereotypes that have claimed to represent it in both mainstream and scholarly arenas. Theorists such as Elisabeth Badinter and Janet Halley have offered polemics arguing Western feminism’s exhaustion, while Saba Mahmood, Linda M.G. Zerilli, and Gayatri Spivak have critiqued the exclusions produced by its Western tradition.⁵

Few, however, have asked if an earnest and transparent identification with feminism is necessary, or even desirable, for the overall health of feminism as a political project. How does the very concept of performance serve to mediate historically positivistic strands within feminist theory that have proved challenging for a younger generation of would-be feminists? The aes-

3. Adolescent drag is a performance of “pre-feminism” offered in response to the threat of “postfeminism.” Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra have described postfeminism as a popular idiom “generated and primarily deployed outside the academy, [and therefore] lack[ing] the rigor we expect of scholarly work” (Genz and Brabon 2009:18). Adolescent drag trafficks in irony to neutralize the anticriticality of postfeminism.

4. While “Western feminism” is an admittedly inadequate designation, it provides the basis for this essay; I don’t profess to account for anything like global feminism or non-Western feminisms. While the deficiency of vocabularies for critically engaging “Western feminism” is a central concern of this essay, this is not a problem that adolescent drag resolves.

5. See Badinter (2006), Halley (2008), Spivak (1988), Zerilli (2005), and Saba Mahmood (2005), who offer diverse critiques of Western feminism, simply stated, as a majoritarian project.



Figure 3. The online menu served up on Ann Liv Young's doily-covered webpage. *annlivyoung.com*, 2011. (Courtesy of Ann Liv Young)

thetic of girlishness dragged by the artists has become a recognizable cultural distillation of womanhood. There is a current interest in this aesthetic across disciplines in contemporary art, as several recent exhibitions demonstrate: *Girl's Night Out* at the Orange County Museum of Art in Newport Beach, California, 14 September 2003 to 25 January 2004; *Heartbreaker* at the Mary Boone Gallery in New York from 2 November to 16 December 2006; and *Girlish Ways: The Next Generation of Female Artists* exhibit from 28 June to 6 July 2008 at the Bobby Fisher Memorial Building in Washington, DC. It appears ever more urgent to interrogate the relevance to feminist debates of the insistent reverberation of adolescence as a theme within the visual fields of contemporary art and performance. Swanson, Gilmore, and Young model the performance of adolescence as a prism through which they refract and redefine the project of contemporary feminism.

Notably all New York City-based, relatively commercially successful white artists, Swanson, Gilmore, and Young simultaneously luxuriate in and lampoon the aura of Western privilege and whiteness as they attend to the aesthetic of adolescent femininity and the perception of feminism at large. The adolescent figure is inextricable from the white, Western privilege that affords the time and space to be a child, the luxury that laboring or forgotten children are not afforded, the “development” withheld from racialized or colonized subjects.⁶ These artists seek to pervert such privilege, visualizing its excess and rendering its myopia comic. They “act out” an adolescent confrontation. Rather than *actually* being or behaving like adolescent girls, these artists appropriate and *stage* the adolescent as a serviceable figure for articulating a more loosely ordered and multifarious contemporary feminism, organized by tactical disidentifications with both the mother (and the previous generation of women performance artists), figured by second-wave feminism, and the daughter, figured by third-wave feminism. The strategic reappropriation of the adolescent exploits a double prejudice in the genre of feminist performance art, as the figure of the adolescent indexes failure within both the spheres of feminist

6. The kind of adolescent nostalgia I am describing here at the same time props up and critiques white supremacy and bourgeois privilege in the Western cultural imaginary. See Robin Bernstein's *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2011) for further reading on the construction of girlhood as a racial formation.

theory and performance art.⁷ The adolescent has represented a slippery, at times exasperating, subject for a critical feminist project historically oriented toward the fully mature political subject “woman,” as evidenced by bitter dividing lines cited in the “mother-daughter” conflict between second and third-wave feminism. The characteristic ambivalence and protean nature of the adolescent challenges historical political inclinations within feminism toward a certain unequivocal, transparency, and frontalism thought to be necessary for a communicable politics. These tendencies have at times manifested themselves in a dangerous universalism that has been rigorously critiqued by scholars of critical race, postcolonial, and queer studies, tendencies that have nonetheless often yielded a priggish and exclusionary image of feminism. These critiques of a prescriptive feminism have been further, if ironically, marshaled to accuse feminism of appearing like too much of a reified type, and especially, too much like a mother figure. Likewise, figuring performance art as adolescent has long been a critique used to disparage it as a nontraditional or experimental genre, adolescent as epithet for the kind of art perceived to be too crude, petulant, or awkward for inclusion in the museum.⁸ The adolescent refigures the internalization of this disparagement, this shame, as potential, an affect the artist Chris Kraus has explored extensively, writing of her own adolescent feelings of feminist and artistic inadequacy well beyond her teenage years: “Cause shame was what we always felt, me and all my girlfriends, for expecting sex to breed complicity. (‘Complicity is like a girl’s name’)” (1997:171).

The portrait of the adolescent developed here is one drawn rebelliously *between* the mother and the child, typified by the anachronistic bricolage that offers a hodgepodge of signifiers plucked from both children’s cultural and aesthetic references (fairytales, dress-up games) and mature associations (explicit nudity, pornography, cursing). In these artworks, the mature/immature developmental binary gets mapped onto the highbrow/lowbrow taste divide, as amateur aesthetics emerge as the condition of possibility for a queering of the adolescent figure that transverse and troubles such normative binaries. Adolescent drag is an appropriated form of primitivist mimicry that, in its manipulation of these binaries, borrows from a tradition of artists of color who have engaged the aesthetics of amateurism as a form of antiracist or postcolonial critique. As the identificatory possibilities of drag have become ever more elastic within performance discourse over the last decade,⁹ the adolescent is mobilized as a site of performance exemplary of what Elizabeth Freeman has called “temporal drag” (2000). While not explored at length in this essay, Brooklyn-based performance artist Neal Medlyn’s ardent dragging of Britney Spears and Miley Cyrus for his two-part performances *...Her’s a Queen* (2009) and *Brave*

7. *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter wrote in 2002, “Of the liberation movements for which the late 20th century will be remembered, few have been as disparaged as feminism, and that scorn extends to the women’s art movement. Even presumably well-intentioned art-worldlings seem incapable of talking about it without condescension, as if it were some indiscreet adolescent episode best forgotten” (Cotter 2002).

8. The equation of performance art to adolescence is one that continues to reveal itself in the public consciousness. During an episode of Bravo’s popular reality TV show *Work of Art* entitled “A Shock to the System” (season 1, episode 4), which premiered 30 June 2010, contestants were asked to create a shocking work of art. Upon judging a performance piece created by the performance artist Nao Bustamante, art critic Jerry Saltz declares with disgust: “This comes across as adolescent mixed with ‘shock your grandmother’ performance art.”

9. “Drag” has been a key term wielded within the broader campaign of lesbian and gay studies, and subsequently queer theory and increasingly performance studies, to unhinge identification from what some have perceived as its psychoanalytic orthodoxies and to understand it as a more fluid and transitive performative site for social contestation in staging and improvisation. See José Esteban Muñoz’s discussion of “terrorist drag” in *Disidentifications* (1999) and, more recently, punk’s utopian “stages” in Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia* (2009), David Román’s “archival drag” (2005), Elizabeth Freeman’s “temporal drag” (2000), and Rebecca Schneider’s recent writing on the cross-temporal “drag” of reenactment art in *Performing Remains* (2011) as attempts to move questions of identity into wider fields of cultural figuration that have been associated with post-identity politics. Here, opportunities for identity play have become increasingly marked by greater transitive ease and mobility of identificatory signifiers, from which the adolescent emerges as but one example among many.

New Girl (2010) is a manifestation of the contemporary zeitgeist of adolescent drag (fig. 4).¹⁰ Dysfunction, self-fascination, experimentation, humiliation, and vulgarity are all marshaled in adolescent drag as costuming for bittersweet play-worlds that serve as the stage for trying on new relationships to one's gendered identity and for trying out new models of feminism that remain always *in rehearsal*.¹¹ The characteristic liminality of both adolescence and performance are conjoined in a single critical register. They allow the feminist project, and the generational "waves" that have represented it within popular and critical discourse, a generative free play. These works, and my analysis of them, strive not to recapitulate tired generational models, heteronormative family metaphors, and other modalities of reading that seek to pit women against each other, but instead are interested in how performed and ironic *activations of such models* might open up impasses within feminist theory.



Figure 4. Neal Medlyn poses in a publicity photo for his September 2010 debut of *Brave New Girl* at *The Chocolate Factory*, New York City. (Courtesy of Neal Medlyn)

These performance works exist both as live performance and in their afterlife as media documentation on the artists' personal websites, in the popular and art press, and as photographs and videos of live performances available in museums and online.¹² Swanson, Gilmore, and Young's performance practices are perhaps best described as intermedial, engaging as they do various forms of media simultaneously—video and photography, digital media, sculpture, painting, and installation—and in so doing, recalling intermedia and adolescence's shared status as *intermediate forms* organized by a logic of "between-ness."¹³ The artists' relationships to media are not

10. Part One of his performance, presented by the Dance Theater Workshop in October 2009, entailed the transition of Britney Spears from "destroyed icon to purity through a candy-drug induced forgetfulness" (Stonebraker 2010). Part Two, *Brave New Girl*, opened at the Chocolate Factory in October 2010.

11. In *Becoming*, Carol Mavor writes of the thrill to the adolescent as the lure of the open: "The fantasy of the child, pure tabula rasa, is ripe and ready for our own predetermined inscriptions: pink, blue, pants, skirt, dress-up, play [...] naughty or nice" (Mavor 1999:xxxii).

12. For further reading on the question of live performance's afterlife in media, see Rebecca Schneider's essay "Intermediality, Infelicity, and Scholarship on the Slip." Schneider describes intermediality as the "problem" of the slippage intrinsic to performance studies—of "slipping between and across media, playing with terminology that might belong, properly, to one medium more than another" (2006:253). This slip is useful for explicating Swanson, Gilmore, and Young's adolescent exploitation of the temporal slipperiness between media. Adolescent drag performs an undoing of the medial and temporal logics that say, as Schneider does in *Performing Remains*: "The then is *then*, the now is *now*, the dead are dead, lost: we cannot go back" (2011:49). Schneider refuses divisions that have long pitted performance against the archive and the live against mediation within performance studies (see for example Schechner 1985:50; and Phelan 1993:146).

13. Intermedia is a concept usually attributed to Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, who used it to describe the ineffable, often confusing, interdisciplinary activities between genres that became prevalent in the 1960s, during the same period that performance theory emerged as a discipline.

“unformed” (like the child’s) as Rosalind Krauss argued of intermediality¹⁴ but rather reflect a vigorous proliferation of forms that contribute to the aesthetic of adolescence as being one of overaccumulation produced from an interdisciplinary play across genres. The “kitsch effect” of their intermedial approach is amateur and baroque, as no one form is isolated, no one medium mastered to the point of anything approaching virtuosity.

Media functions in these works in much the same way that allegory does: as a stalling of movement. Allegory for Walter Benjamin is a mode of figuration that supposes discontinuity as opposed to the fallacious continuity offered by romantic symbolism (2003:160–63). If the value of allegory lies in its failure to express the idea it aims at, adolescence can be seen as an allegorical deferral of “succeeding” into womanhood and the endlessly looped mediation of performance ensures its failed progression. Adolescence here appears less as a developmental line of flight and more an awkward arrest, like an embarrassing snapshot or the shock of being caught unprepared—a queer hovering in (and out of) time that understands the adolescent in terms deeply informed by recent work in queer theory on queer temporality.¹⁵ These performance artists engage media that arrest or freeze the temporality of their adolescent performance in order to underscore their use of adolescence as queer, rather than capitulate to progressive developmental trajectories or otherwise heteronormative ways of being in relation to time. To be sure, my engagement with these performances extends from my understanding of the adolescent as an allegorical figure for a state of becoming that is profoundly queer.¹⁶ The adolescent plays with the potential to be found in performances of failure and uncertainty, operations that challenge the progressive narratives by which concepts of affirmation and liberation have historically been trafficked within identity politics, as a number of queer theorists have recently described.¹⁷ Indeed, awkwardness binds all of the sins of adolescence in its propensity for illu-

14. In her influential essay “Reinventing the Medium” (1999) Rosalind Krauss posits intermediality as a state in which art essentially becomes complicit with capital by an undoing or unforming of the autonomy of the medium (understood as a subtractive or disintegrative process). I, however, would contrast this rather dour view of intermediality (as an un-forming) with intermediality as a productive accumulation.

15. Adolescent drag builds on recent work in queer theory on rethinking normative standards for being in relation to temporal progression by asking how the adolescent might be mobilized as a form of feminist drag. This work invests in temporality as an identificatory category, along with race, sexuality, and gender (see for example Dinshaw [1999]; Halberstam [2005] and [2011]; Love [2007]; Freeman [2000]). Both Judith Halberstam’s and Elizabeth Freeman’s interventions ask how queering time might be used, not to leave feminism or other so-called “anachronisms” behind, but rather (as Freeman’s terminology of “temporal drag” suggests) to demand that feminism be picked up and pulled into a queer futurity.

16. The child has represented a divisive figure for theorists who have sought to frame a queer critical agenda. Both Lee Edelman and Kathryn Bond Stockton have argued that the child is a particularly charged figure for queer theory for the way that it has been activated as a political figure to deprive gays and lesbians of rights: to compare queers to the child stalled out of time or cast as developmentally stalled or to deny them other rights, such as the right to adopt children because they choose not to reproduce as heterosexuals. For Edelman, the child figure has represented the anti-queer figure *par excellence*, symbolizing in his book *No Future* the “self-evident” one-sidedness of reproductive futurism and absolute privilege of heteronormativity (2004:2). The potential queer use-value of the child is reconsidered by Stockton, who argues that the always already queer child provides a model for deflating or delaying the “vertical, forward-motion metaphor of growing up,” alternative mappings of becoming that register more broadly experimental, disturbing, and disruptive vernaculars of self-knowing (2009:11). José Esteban Muñoz has argued, counter to Edelman, that the queer’s so-called developmental stall offers in adolescent aesthetics its own utopian glimmers: “The celebration of an aesthetics of amateurism are reminiscent of punk rock’s aesthetics. The performances of amateurism [...] signal a refusal of mastery and an insistence on process and becoming” (2009:106).

17. Heather Love argues that the association of homosexual love with loss proposes a queer “turn backward” that refuses “frontal” logics of normative progress or success (Love 2007). Judith Halberstam proposes failure as an

minating the difficult, inappropriate, clumsy, and self-conscious political subject. The adolescent here embraces, lingers in, and insists on an awkward stance for feminism, as awkwardness¹⁸ is activated as the thing that disrupts teleological time, as that which “causes difficulty or inconvenience, is not smooth or graceful.”¹⁹

The stakes of “becoming a woman,” as Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote in *The Second Sex* (1949), are called into question by the figure of the adolescent. The progression toward womanhood is contested, as is emancipation as the guiding principle of feminist politics. In this critical-historical moment, concepts such as “liberation” and “revolution” appear increasingly inadequate for accounting for the fractured, intersectional, and relational experience of gender in postmodernity, especially as one’s ability to fully visualize, conceptualize, and somehow escape the field of social violence in global late capitalism is, at this point, pretty unthinkable.²⁰ Not yet recognized as tactics, these performances appear as excess that exceeds current expressions of second and third-wave feminism. Swanson, Gilmore, and Young embrace adolescence, as both a conceptual and aesthetic modality, to argue for a representation of a conception of feminism that can assimilate irony, awkwardness, and equivocality—indeed performance—for feminism’s own tactical gain.

The Artists

Amber Hawk Swanson

For Amber Hawk Swanson’s *The Feminism? Project* (2006), made while she was an MFA student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the artist asked women from her home state of Iowa—from fellow sorority sisters to her own mother—about their relationship to feminism. In a series of short videos, Swanson performs these responses as monologues, while engaged in highly charged sexual scenarios: giving a handjob to her boyfriend, being spanked by him, being penetrated by him, having her toenails painted by her father, being fondled by a woman, and finally penetrated by another woman.²¹ In the scene with her father, the “Lolita scene” *par*

oppositional tool of refusing to acquiesce to the capitalistic narratives of power and discipline: “As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed, failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities” (2011:88).

18. Performance theory certainly has its own adolescent awkwardness. In *Professing Performance*, Shannon Jackson playfully dramatizes the unavoidable “dinner table conversation” dreaded by all Performance Studies scholars, the conversation that stages the intellectual affect of *feeling just not quite understood*: “Per-form-a-tiv-ity...what does... that mean?” “At dinners, in deans’ offices, in department meetings, at academic conferences, in office hours, in rehearsals, such interactions testify to an awkward and emergent period in the study and practice of theatre and performance,” writes Jackson, “I happen to believe that it is necessary both to analyze the dispositions that produce that awkwardness as well as to embrace awkwardness as a condition of emergence” (Jackson 2004:1–2).
19. See “awkward” in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.
20. Whether it be Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation ([1971] 2001), Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony (2000), or Michel Foucault’s theory of discipline (1995), theorists concerned with questions of dominance have consistently articulated the very impossibility of isolating the mechanisms of power within the constantly shifting ideological grid of postmodern space and time. Fredric Jameson described this as a problem of “cognitive mapping,” or our inability to grasp our position within a global system of enormous complexity and what he describes as necessary for us to “regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as social confusion” (1991:54). If cognitive mapping proves impossible in the present world system, then Jameson’s intervention reveals the very stakes of *feminist* strategy in a moment when being a strategist (if a “strategist” is a leader capable of perceiving the whole field of action at once) is no longer possible.
21. Given the postulate that performance art typically engages “real bodies” as its medium, and typically the artist’s own body, the spectator of Swanson’s work may assume that the “boyfriend” and “father” in these videos to be Swanson’s own boyfriend and father. These could just be assumptions.



Figure 5. Still from Amber Hawk Swanson's video "Not a Feminist Way of Thinking, Daddy's Little Girl" from her *The Feminism? Project* series (2006). (Courtesy of Amber Hawk Swanson)

excellence,²² the artist props herself up on a ruffled bedspread in what appears to be a young girl's lavender bedroom (fig. 5). Wearing a matching pink sweatshirt and shorts, the artist poses in the foreground with a teddy bear perched behind her. In another, Swanson performs the perpetually pubescent ritual of applying depilatory cream on her eyebrows and upper lip in the bathroom mirror as she delivers a particularly naïve script with deadpan Valley-girl intonation:

I don't really spend a lot of time thinking about feminism because I view women and men as *equals* and *that's the definition, so...* I do think it is represented in me. I don't ever think of myself as *inferior* to a *man*. In fact, most of the time I find myself smarter or more well-rounded. But I don't know, I mean, men and women are equal and whether the guy next to me thinks so or *not*, this is *my life, so...* I mean I know a lot of women, and not necessarily *lesbians*, or people who are really *political*, spend a lot of their life fighting for it. I guess I just have *other things to do...* (Swanson 2006)

The confused content of Swanson's monologue underscores the narcissism of a fundamental lack of logic at work in one young woman's refusal of feminism. Feminism here is given as the very definition of its own cultural outmodedness, a claim that is nevertheless undone by its own tautology ("because men and women are equals and *that's the definition*"). Feminism is further cited as a project reducible to "lesbians" or "people who are really *political*," and thus one ancillary to the young woman for whom feminism constitutes more of a threat than "the guy next to [her]." In her Valley-girl delivery, Swanson capitalizes on the girl's failure to produce logical connectors, theatricalizing the adolescent quality of her discourse's suspended inarticulation ("I mean..." "I guess..." "*so...*"), a rhetoric that is stuck reproducing the same ideas over and

22. This image restages the scene from the opening credits of Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, in which the viewer discovers Lolita (played by Sue Lyon) lying down while Humbert Humbert (James Mason) paints her toenails.

over. The disruptive hiccup “this is *my life*” interrupts the young woman’s discussion of feminism, as if feminism, as opposed to the injustices it attends to, threatened the speaker’s ability to live without the intrusion of politics. Swanson brilliantly exposes this solipsistic fantasy (“I guess I just have *other things to do*”) as *political* in her own ironic restaging of it as art.

Swanson’s performance of over-processed, plastic-tiara femininity satirizes oversexed sorority girls and suburban princesses by juxtaposing their predictability with graphic sex acts. Swanson’s send-up of sorority-girl femininity is shocking not so much for its exaggerated quality as a parody, but rather for its status as a highly recognizable cultural type that far exceeds the confines of the sorority house and instead has come to pervade every level of commercial culture. As definitions of feminism get rehearsed, the scenes get more and more gay, “climaxing” finally in an interruption of the given “feminist script” as Swanson reaches orgasm with her female partner in the final scene. As the scenes progress, Swanson, the former sorority girl, outs herself as the lesbian that the young woman had phobically coded as feminist. Swanson’s project brilliantly ironizes the disjuncture between the typification of femininity in mass culture and its more illusory lived experience to imply that such irony might have something to tell us about the “open question” of contemporary feminism, as posed in her title (*The Feminism? Project*).

In 2006, Swanson also began *To Have and To Hold and To Violate* (2006–2008), a work that brings new meaning to the old adage “a labor of love.” Part coming-out project and part experiment in public sadomasochism, Swanson’s project explores themes related to her latent lesbian desire alongside her performance of a sorority-girl brand of hyperfemininity, a thematic juxtaposition that has become Swanson’s trademark. In this latest work, Swanson orders a Realdoll (the Hollywood special effects version of a blow-up sex doll) in her own likeness (fig. 1) and makes the doll into her own personal voodoo doll and lover. The artist (who has the word “Bully” tattooed on her wrist) and her doll (for whom the word “Prey” was painted on its wrist) are married in a backyard ceremony.²³ Swanson’s work appears to call the bluff on feminism’s claimed incorporation of lesbianism and sadomasochism, as she explores the aesthetic impact of the seeming ideological incongruities that arise from her double embodiment of femininity as that which would seek both to *have* and to *hold* itself. Swanson images diverse tonalities of femininity simultaneously, enacting femininity’s ability to stand as both object of *desire* (its to-be-hadness) and object of *oppression* (its to-be-heldness or to-be-violatedness). In so doing, Swanson’s projects dramatize femininity as its own “threat” to feminism—as not merely a site of political agency as many third-wave feminists have argued—but also as a site of complicity, cruelty, and sadomasochistic pleasure.

Swanson creates and manipulates the doll as synecdoche for childhood, which as a Realdoll comes to be associated in her project with extremely sexualized femininity. Swanson produces a disquieting image of femininity by conflating the cultural currents that index and shape it but nevertheless are given to contradict each other. The doll here convenes, rather disturbingly, these two usually partitioned sites of rigorous commodification of femininity: the child and pornography. In the figure of the doll, the same signifier that sends one to the realm of pure innocence *and* to the realm of pure perversion gets collapsed into one. As a site of the conflation of two supposedly separate realms, the doll becomes the instrument by which Swanson can explore the darker impulses in women’s supposed sexual emancipation. Of her decision to acquire “Amber Doll,” Swanson has said, “I was looking for a receptacle for the onslaught of attention and negative feedback—a stand-in for myself. It was just the right amount of crazy to order a \$12,000 doll” (McClure 2009). Swanson continues, “The total time from the beginning of my discussions with them to eventually picking her up to be mine was nine months.

23. Swanson’s marriage to Amber Doll was documented in an 11-minute video of the performance event during which guests were invited to interact with Amber Doll for the cutting of the cake, the first dance, the tossing of the garter, and the bouquet toss. Attendees of the reception could also pose with Amber Doll in portraits later exhibited as part of the project.

Which of course cracks me up, thinking about her as my twin, my wife, and a baby of sorts.” The artist creates the doll less as an oppositional object to distinguish herself from and more to materialize a sexual milieu that the artist herself inhabits. The doll is a parody, but a parody of herself, in her own likeness. By making the doll symbolize women’s objectification—by making herself into an object for her own self-objectification—Swanson produces herself as an objective correlative of femininity through which she can exorcise her own ambivalent feelings toward “herself.”

Kate Gilmore

With a background in sculpture, the performance artist Kate Gilmore is best known for methodically constructing physical obstacles and claustrophobic environments—propelled objects, plaster walls, piles of rocks—that she must either withstand or demolish in the short

durational performances that she documents as videos. Gilmore kicks, hacks, claws, and hurls her weight through her physically demanding performances. Her targeted actions are reminiscent of conventions established by Fluxus artists, as if she were following a simple “score” or set of instructions for performing the work: keep smiling while things are thrown at you, break through a wall, stuff your head through a wooden cutout of a star (fig. 6). In her performance *Walk This Way* (2008), Gilmore performs for a still camera. Wearing a color-coordinated dress and high heels, the artist begins to knock down an exposed wall, hurling the weight of her body and the applied force of her high-heeled shoe (fig. 7). The vaginal rupture reveals that the interior side of the wall is a glossy magenta, matching the silk flower in her hair. This earlier work seems to anticipate its three-dimensional version, the performance piece



Figure 6. Kate Gilmore strains to push her face through a star cutout in a piece of plywood in *Star Bright, Star Might* (2007). Still from performance video. (Courtesy of Kate Gilmore)

Standing Here (2010), featured in the 2010 Whitney Biennial, which has garnered Gilmore more mainstream recognition. In the work, Gilmore, adorned in polka-dotted dress and ponytail, uses the full force of her body to puncture holes, find footing, and ultimately scale the inside of a column—an uncanny structure akin to a vertical tunnel or upstanding birth canal—which she herself has designed. In both of these works, Gilmore dramatizes the “labor” of femininity, playing the part of Sisyphus in pink to expose femininity’s absurd complicity in often destroying the thing that it has itself built. Gilmore’s work visualizes the frustrating impossibility of final closure, as the motif of ceaseless repetition in her performed tasks conveys the narrative of femininity—and perhaps, by extension, of feminism—as one without the promise of easy resolution. While Gilmore has said, “The core of my work is about obsessively and determinedly trying to achieve something” (RocklandArtClasses.com 2010), the artist’s performances nevertheless “thwart victorious resolution” (Kilston 2009).

In May 2010 the artist changed gears, directing and choreographing a work funded by the Public Art Fund called *Walk the Walk* (2010) in New York City's Bryant Park (fig. 8). Seven young women hired by Gilmore, dressed in identical, brightly colored yellow dresses (and when it was colder, matching bright-pink cardigans), walk across an eight-foot-high, enclosed, yellow platform. They look like 1950s-inspired paper dolls come to life atop a minimalist Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade float. Purposefully, collectively, constantly, they walk together and into one another, with only 100 square feet of surface area available to them. Various critics have observed the work as homage to the urban pedestrian or a performance about Manhattan working girls. "Is it a psychology experiment? A catwalk gone horribly wrong? A reality show? An ad for



Figure 7. Gilmore uses her high heel to break through drywall in this still from her video *Walk This Way* (2008) made on-site for her show at New York City's Smith-Stewart Gallery. Still from video performance. (Courtesy of Kate Gilmore)

organic bananas?" asks one *New York Times* critic (Kennedy 2010). At times the young women's walking styles appear spirited or focused, but more often than not they just looked bored, tired, or cold. Spectators might just as easily have regarded the piece as a fairly explicit metaphor for the limited political positions available to young women in the Western contemporary context. The image is striking; it resembles that of seven young women trapped in an elevated playpen or crib, as if to caricature the tendency for bourgeois femininity to be at the same time put on a pedestal, infantilized, and circumscribed by a limited number of options.

Art critic Lyra Kilston has written of Gilmore in the magazine *Modern Painters* (referencing Carolee Schneemann's groundbreaking 1975 performance *Interior Scroll*): "The bluntness of her acts seems appropriate for the female stereotypes Gilmore parodies, yet this is *not your mother's* feminist video art: lipstick, color-coordinated hair ribbons, and an eager-to-please smile usurp 1970s scraggly underarm hair and vaginal scrolls" (2009). To be sure, Gilmore indexes femininity as a stand-in for frustrations of and with feminism, her choices appearing to be symbolically important for their flattened-out, preordained quality—her "matchy matchy," monochromatic color schemes, her minimalist sculptural forms. Gilmore's carefully chosen imagery appears as if reduced to the pure conceptualization produced out of the high contrast between tropes of femininity and the comparatively unadorned surface of their armature. The overthought quality of her passive aggressive symbolism—one that insistently *gestures* toward feminism but never dares speak its name—suggests that there is something necessarily opaque about young women's present-day relationship to making explicitly feminist representations, an assertion that gets mediated, as Kilston suggests, in the adolescent transmission of Gilmore's nonetheless feminist art.



Figure 8. Sponsored by the Public Art Fund, Kate Gilmore's *Walk the Walk* was staged during office hours in New York's Bryant Park throughout the work week of 10 to 14 May 2010. Performers included Sae Hae Chung, Amanda Gale, Lindsey Graham, Michelle Kane, Aiyana Knauer, Kirby Mages, Seyhan Musaoglu, Habby Osk, Kenya Robinson, Becky Sellinger, Geneva Sills, Sophia Stoll, Jessica Whittam, Rachel Wieking. (Courtesy of Kate Gilmore)

Ann Liv Young

Ann Liv Young's "anything goes" performance style seems to be serving her well. Performing camp adolescence as a deranged fairytale, her performances have been puzzled over in the pages of *Artforum* and, recurrently, in the *New York Times*, rewarding her with an intrigued, if befuddled, cult following. Recently, Young has appeared to seal her professional transition from choreographer to performance artist, adjusting to her ill-fitting costuming as "Sherry"—her trash-talking, Southern alter ego, who incidentally has also made Young more than a few enemies over the past few years.²⁴

In early November 2010, Young opened *Cinderella* (2010) at Brooklyn's ISSUE Project Room. After three "false starts," the performance began when Young-as-Sherry-as-Cinderella glided out on a pair of roller skates through a field of iridescent balloons (fig. 9). Young's self-conscious aesthetic of failure has been consistently misread as such. In a review of *Cinderella*, filed as a dance review, *New York Times* critic Alastair Macaulay makes clear that he came to the

24. In February 2010, during Brooklyn Is Burning at the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center (now MoMA PS1), Young was abruptly shut down when PS1's Director Klaus Biesenbach ordered the power cut in a windowless room.

Young, performing as Sherry, had confronted the performer who went on just before her, Georgia Sagri, and had, according to the account in the *New York Times*, "embarked on a blunt, profane monologue accompanied by masturbation, urination and an attack on Ms. Sagri's work" (La Rocco 2010). Sagri and friends responded by threatening Young in return and, according to witnesses, had to be physically restrained. More recently, Young is said to have incensed veteran performers and activists at a January 2011 Delancey Lounge performance as part of the American Realness Festival (DiGiacomo 2011).

show expecting to see a particular brand of avantgarde virtuosity (pegging Young, at the beginning of the review, as “belong[ing] to the movement in the arts that was labeled Sensation in the 1990s” [2010]) and left very disappointed.²⁵ He writes: “there are three things for which I was unprepared on Friday night [...] the startling ineptitude of Ms. Young’s performance; the campy, cliquey way she assumed that everyone present already knew all about this show and her previous ones; and the silly consensus whereby most of her audience, giggling coyly now and then, encouraged her” (2010). Macaulay scolds Young for her general ineptitude, boring performance style, and weak dic-



Figure 9. Ann Liv Young debuts her *Cinderella* with a stage made for a (13-year-old) princess at Brooklyn’s ISSUE Project Room on 4 September 2010. (Photo by Davide Trentini)

tion: “[the show’s] first 95 minutes demonstrated many layers of failure. Principally, Ms. Young lacks technique. In addition to the problems already cited, she had to consult notes, repeat passages to get them right and tell her audio technician to change things” (2010). The extraordinary pretension of this review proves a thinly veiled attempt to account for all the things that Macaulay—and many others—simply don’t *get* about what Young is doing as an artist: principally, her shrewdness as an artist who cannot possibly fail because failing is exactly what she sets out to do in the first place. Macaulay proves unable to recognize her as an artist for whom failure is the condition of possibility for creating something unpredictable and surreal, indeed for her own kind of success. Poorly fitting prom dress, campy animal balloons, terrible wigs, false starts, cheesy pop music—calling Young’s performances “bad” is like calling Santa chubby. As an adolescent might say: “Duh.”

Macaulay critiques the artist, and her audience, using the very same aesthetic and ideological frameworks that her performance practice works to expose as self-righteous and shortsighted—frameworks that disallow new possibilities by postulating, for instance, that art must aim toward ideals of mastery, beauty, coherence, professionalism, and resolution. In so doing, Macaulay and likeminded critics unwittingly validate the very relevance of her method, more grist for the mill of an artist who has said of her process: “I want to regurgitate what people think of me onstage” (in Conlan and Beckman 2009:31). Young has a gift for exposing institutional orthodoxies by overidentifying with them so as to perform back for her audience their very own taboos.²⁶ Many, many weird and interesting things were, in fact, happening during her performance of *Cinderella*, a performance that really began in the lobby when a female usher

25. By comparing Young to one of the Young British Artists, such as Tracey Emin or Damien Hirst, and then chastising her for failing to measure up, Macaulay insists Young be bad in a good way: that she be, in spite of all, commercially appealing.

26. A similar sentiment appeared in the pages of *Artforum*. In September 2010, David Velasco wrote: “Sherry is, after all, not as mad as she appears: she dramatizes the capriciousness of power, but when confronted with authority, she seizes the occasion to expose its ‘twisted’ logic, making authority reflexive, getting it to turn in on itself” (2010).

bullied waiting audience members into buying candy from her for five cents. Inside the theatre, Young's male collaborator and real-life romantic partner, whom in one interview she comically describes as playing the role of "stunt double" in the show, is adorned in an even cheaper version of Young's own spectacular costume: worse-fitting wig and cerulean Lycra leotard with what appears to be a menstrual stain down the back (Kourlas 2010). As the show begins, he fidgets over the technical aspects of the show under Young's hostile glare. Before long, we hear Suzanne Vega's 1984 a cappella song "Tom's Diner" playing over the speakers, while one of Young's two male backup dancers, sweating and exhausted as the song continues on, keeps the rhythm by violently cracking a whip against the floor. The innocent and nostalgic quality of the folk-inspired song is disrupted in juxtaposition with a young man of color forced to overexert himself in time with the tune of Suzanne Vega. He stops when she stops, starts when she starts, corrupting a particularly earnest portrait of whiteness in a scene decorated like a little girl's cracked-out birthday party. In what follows, Young-as-Sherry-as-Cinderella performs her trademark hardcore karaoke, singing Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" and rapper T.I.'s "Whatever You Like" as if her life depended on it. She sings: "Stacks on deck / Patrón on ice / And we can pop bottles all night / Baby you can have whatever you like (you like) [...] / Late night sex so wet and so tight [...] / Baby you can go wherever you like (you like)." The soberness of Young's vigorously performed hip-hop minstrelsy refuses the conniving wink at the audience that might defuse the cringe effect of her aesthetic choices and awkward-seeming lack of politically correct awareness. Rather than rushing through particularly graphic lyrics of a song, she enunciates them as one might declaim romantic poetry. But instead of reproducing or valorizing the seeming misogyny of T.I.'s song, which positions women as easily attained and discarded materialists (a reading that the song's music video makes particularly pronounced), Young's caricatural re-performance cartoons it as just another commodity to be mined for her not altogether accessible, if undeniably ironic, creative universe. By performing an overidentification with the song's supposed misogyny, Young discloses an ironical, rather than straightforwardly critical, affiliation with the song. This effects a certain opening up of ironic affinities that demonstrate the adolescent performed by Young as a political subjectivity endowed with more complexity than she is often granted by either capitalism or feminism.

Young's girlish aesthetic is informed by her longtime preference for popular culture (and in particular, pop music) over art, fabrics and textures over fashion *per se*, social dynamics over the history of choreography and theatre:

I wasn't interested in any sort of choreographers at all. I wasn't influenced by that. I never even took a dance history class... I was really inspired by pop culture. The same thing all 29-year-olds were inspired by. Like I love Michael Jackson. I loved... I don't know. I think a big inspiration for me was what I was surrounded by [...] I think I'm more influenced by like social dynamics and the way people interact and the way women interact and the way men interact and the way men and women interact then I am like, "Oh I love this visual artist." You know what I mean? (Young 2010)

Young made *Melissa Is a Bitch* (2005) when she moved to New York after graduating from the dance program at Hollins University. The performance begins with a young bikini-clad woman doing an extended dance to Lionel Richie's '80s hit "Running with the Night." The audience becomes her bedroom mirror as she dances energetically from one position onstage for the entirety of the song. In the next scene, two new girls come onstage, eating ice cream. The entire cast's costumes seem to have been dyed green in the same batch. Throughout the performance, as she does in others, Young shouts orders at her performers. From offstage Young's drill-sergeant-like voice screams a command and the two dump their ice creams on the ground simultaneously. A second command prompts them to take off their clothes at warp speed, again perfectly in sync. Two swings drop from the sky and the girls mount them on a third command. The completely unclothed girls hang upside down and begin to shout in unison: "I wish I were dead / I want to fuck everybody I see. / If the world were fair P. Diddy

wouldn't get / the prettiest woman in the world, J-Lo." The bawdiness of Young's play with graphic if utterly de-eroticized nudity, foul language, and erratic behavior takes a surreal form under her militaristic direction and disciplined choreographic methods. Young is a perfectionist reigning over a total mess.

Young explains that *Melissa is a Bitch* was influenced by *Peter Pan*, with the performers resembling the Lost Boys, drawing comparisons with her staging of *Snow White* (2007) and *Cinderella*. Young defiles her fairytale princesses, staging deconstructed versions in which her protagonists appear lost, their gowns dirty and tattered, and their heterosexual romances perverted. In *Snow White*, "Prince Charming" is played by a young actress who dons a ridiculous nude strap-on to the tune of Aaliyah's "Are You That Somebody?" *Cinderella* concludes not with a "happily ever after" but with Young attempting to defecate on command (fig. 10). In a closing monologue, Young-Sherry-Cinderella reads from her Apple laptop: "I am dirty. By dirty, I don't mean skanky or fresh. I mean filthy

[...] I am overwhelmed with the idea of myself, who I am, who I may never become and all I see is me [...] I'm sick of regurgitating myself, if there were interesting things around me, I guess I wouldn't have to."²⁷ In her adolescent drag, Young borrows the camp fairytale back from drag performers. Esther Newton explains the typical drag scenario: "Almost every joke the camp makes elaborates [...] the stories of Snow White or Cinderella" and the drag queen, explains Newton, says, "'Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?' and the mirror [responds] (sarcastically), 'you are, girl.' [...] But usually the mirror brutally replies, 'Snow White, you ugly bitch!'"

Newton notes that in the gay male drag subculture of female impersonators in the late 1960s, "the camp is always the evil stepmother, the jealous ugly sisters, or the wicked queen" (1979:56). Young's camp fairytales borrow more from drag subcultures than Disney to effect a reflexive disruption of the narrative. The adolescent protagonist is the pure and unqualified ideal, who in Young's hands is camped, debased, and worn down.

Adolescent Autogenesis

The critical reception of all three artists has been marked by a certain political confusion: How might such work—performances so clearly indexing issues of contemporary femininity—be read in relationship to feminism? How has what signifies as feminist art changed over the past 40 years? Whereas celebrated women performance artists of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s—Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke, Marina Abramović, Adrian Piper, Yayoi Kusama, Karen Finley,



Figure 10. *Cigarettes and coffee at hand, Young as Cinderella attempts to defecate onstage. ISSUE Room Project, Brooklyn, 4 September 2010. (Photo by Davide Trentini)*

27. This is from Young's unpublished script for the fourth monologue of her September 2010 performances of *Cinderella* at the ISSUE Project Room.

and Ana Mendieta, to name a few—engaged in arguably more explicit and overtly politicized body art practices, this younger generation of artists exhibits work that visualizes a certain amount of ambivalence about what it means to inherit a feminist position, something that I want to distinguish from ambivalence about, in fact, *being* a feminist. When asked this question directly in a 2007 interview about *Snow White* with the magazine *Time Out New York* (“Is this a feminist piece?”), Young responds:

I don’t know. I don’t know what the fuck it is. I mean, some people would say it is. We’re actually doing two shows in Italy this year, and one is a women’s-gender yadda yadda. These people are really into the piece, which I find very interesting. It makes sense that they would be, but I don’t know. I feel like this piece is so open-ended. I guess I don’t really see it as a feminist piece. I see it more as a solo. (*Time Out New York* 2007)

In my own interview with the artist, Young responded to this same question with an altogether different answer:

Definitely. 100% for sure. I think [the works] are feminist because I’m a female and I made it. The word feminist is so funny to me because it’s become such a broad term, and I think that in some ways that’s good and in some ways it’s sort of confusing. I think they are feminist, but I am not trying to make feminist work. [...] Whatever I am thinking about at that time, whatever I’m trying to do at that time is... I’m not like women should be free. You know what I mean? For Sherry, it is like women should be free. But that’s not my goal. My goal is to portray this character. But yeah I think they are definitely feminist. I don’t see how they couldn’t be. [...] It’s like yes and no mean the same thing to me. I could say maybe. (Young 2010)

Young reserves for Sherry the position that “women should be free.” By rendering a liberationist position caricatural, its revolutionary politics are deferred to the land of make-believe. Reserving the positivistic outlook for her alter ego, Young offers a sly critique of a feminist position that would imagine such a thing as “freedom” to be within the realm of possibility and offers instead forms of tactical irony that make use of maneuvers such as obfuscation and multiplication: *no, yes, maybe*. Sherry might be likened to Swanson’s sorority girl or Gilmore’s anonymous walking girls, as caricatural embodiments of the overdetermined positions offered by a conception a feminism that, ironically not unlike misogynist discourse, puts pressure on women to take a position and stick to it. Performance provides the artists masks that grant the feminist project access to greater political latitude, a wider field of what might count as feminist, and, however paradoxically, one possible way out of caricature. Swanson, Gilmore, and Young’s performance art suggests that it is through caricature that feminists might, in fact, escape the problem of their own caricature. Young, a self-described “escape artist” when it comes to having to explain her practice to people,²⁸ plays the politics of performed ideological inconsistency and historical ignorance to avoid being made to maintain a single political pose that would too easily risk becoming dogmatic or fossilized over time. In our interview she told me that she “[doesn’t] really know what feminist art is,” that she “to be perfectly honest” had never heard of Marina Abramović until “the other day,” has “never seen anything by” Karen Finley despite constant comparisons, having poured chocolate all over herself in her aptly titled piece *Solo* (2006),²⁹ and knows “a little bit about” Annie Sprinkle. Claims Young:

28. Young explained her response when asked what her profession is: “I’m always like, ‘I’m sorry I don’t really know what I do.’ [...] If it is somebody who I don’t want to understand what I do and for instance, if it is somebody who doesn’t know what a choreographer is, I usually use the word choreographer... And if it is someone who would know what a choreographer is, I usually say performance artist. It’s evasion. I am an escape artist” (Young 2010).

29. Young said that she was recently approached by someone about doing a double bill with Karen Finley, an offer that she says Finley subsequently declined. Says Young: “I feel like she is offended or something because she is

What is so funny is that I am really not influenced by anybody else and I think for some people that is frustrating because I don't go see performance and I don't support my community, whatever that is supposed to mean. I think that is so silly because what is supporting community? Is there only one way to do that? By making work I am supporting my community. Yes it's feminist art. (Young 2010)

"Karen Finley has been doing basically the same thing for 30 years, only better," writes Andy Horwitz, a dance and theatre blogger (in La Rocco 2010).³⁰ Claudia La Rocco and Gia Kourlas, for the *New York Times*, write of Young's show, *The Bagwell in Me* (2008):

[T]here was nothing in this half-baked mess that many an artist hasn't done before, and better. Ms. Young has trumpeted her willed artistic ignorance and disdain for her peers. Let's hope for her sake that's the truth, as, just 27, she still has time to look around and learn her history. Either of these actions would enrich her compellingly raw but one-note stage presence. If only she would show less of herself and more of the world. (La Rocco and Kourlas 2008)

Swanson, Gilmore, and Young all respond with a shrug of ironic indifference to those who have come before them, a reaction that is actually more attuned to aesthetic and political projects of their predecessors than the reverence called for by La Rocco and Kourlas. These expectations betray the critics' own misunderstanding of artists such as Schneemann and Finley, whose body art critiqued masculinist formal preoccupations with patriarchal concepts such as originality and genius. Swanson, Gilmore, and Young lay no claim to novelty and insist instead on employing hackneyed signifiers toward an aesthetic of amateurism. Sidestepping the logic of art historical progression may just be their way of refusing the anxiety that comes with acknowledging the influence of the "mother," which would, if ironically, put them deeper into conversation with the "mother" artists of which they are said to be heirs. This claim nevertheless becomes more tenuous when their work is considered in its conceptual frame.³¹ In their play with adolescence, they call for a reconsideration of cumulative history and progress as aesthetic and political ideals. They challenge the very desirability of a developmental model as a yardstick of political agency. La Rocco and Kourlas may chastise Young for her "willed artistic ignorance," but such a judgment does not account for the possibility that the artist's purported historical ignorance is, rather than a sincere insight into Young's admitted egotism or laziness, instead part and parcel of her adolescent spectacle. Rather than wag a finger at Young and her peers for failing to fall in line within a larger historical scheme of feminist art, what would it mean to read Young's claimed ignorance instead as a tactical performance of political forgetting, one Judith Halberstam has described as effecting a willful interruption of generational modes of transmission that allow for a different conception of history to become possible (2011:161)?

Swanson, Gilmore, and Young's performance art inhabits a structure of feminism that no longer necessarily bares its name openly and obviously. In picking up and dragging with them the remnants of feminist art, these artists necessarily maintain some vested interest in feminism,

like 'she is trying to replace me,' but I don't know anything about her. I would think that might be insulting to her. I was thinking like, should I approach her and try to get her to do this double bill with me and act as if I am a huge fan? Or should I tell her, 'I don't know anything about your work?'" (Young 2010).

30. Blogger Andy Horwitz wrote in 2008 on *Culturebot*, a contemporary dance and theatre blog, in a post that has since been removed: "For that matter Penny Arcade, Diamanda Galás and countless other women performers have explored these ideas — and presentations of the human body — in more intelligent, capable, insightful and artful ways" (in La Rocco 2010).

31. Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* proposes that poets are hindered in their creative process by an ambiguous relationship to the poets who came before them (1973). Bloom argues that "the poet in a poet" is inspired by reading another poet's work and will then tend to produce poetry that is derivative therefore weaker because it is not original.

even if only in salvaging its conceptual form. The impossible position of being both inside and outside of feminism speaks to the adolescent awkwardness of the feminist inheritance that can never be given back, *even if it is refused*. “Clearly, this ain’t your grandmother’s storybook heroine,” La Rocco and Kourlas write of Young, echoing Kilston’s “not your mother’s feminist video art” proclamation about Gilmore. I know somehow it’s feminist art, critics seem to say, but it no longer looks like it. Young’s claim to “see it more as a solo” indicates a preference in certain moments to maintain her independence by refusing to claim her inheritance and, in others, claiming it only up to a point. By saying “I think [the works] are feminist, but I am not trying to make feminist work,” Young argues that feminism always exceeds that which has the pretension to represent it, suggesting her provocative methods as attempts to disallow an all-too-easy consolidation of feminism with a particular set of visual and rhetorical practices. In this way, Swanson, Gilmore, and Young’s performative activations of the adolescent as allegory-cum-caricature make a lot of sense, given allegory’s work to “designat[e] primarily a distance or relation to its own origin” (de Man 1983:207), here a distancing “of relation” to a particular set of assumptions about feminist art.

The critical reception of these works has been laced with certain preconceptions about so-called antiquated “feminist content”—the “women’s-gender yadda yadda” represented by the “ickiness” of Schneemann’s “1970s scraggly underarm hair and vaginal scrolls” that critics claim these works index. These works suggest a nostalgia for a lost origin and yet pay homage to the simulacrum through the artist’s aesthetic accumulation of borrowed signs, bad copies, and passing fads culled from childhood: fairytales, sentimental pop, baby-doll dresses. Susan Stewart has written of nostalgia as a longing for the purity of home and origin that inevitably proves unreachable. Stewart writes, “Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears [...] a face that turns toward a future-past” (1983:23). The depropriative quality of this work—its quality of a certain political homelessness—might be a way of coming to terms with the sense one has that, for these artists, everything is borrowed. The unintelligibility of irony makes it a fitting mantle for the strand of feminism represented by these artists. Given such refracted accumulation around the concept of feminism, these artists engage irony as a tactic for re-producing images of themselves by reworking borrowed images of “themselves.”

Elizabeth Freeman has been especially attentive to the political multiplicity of “the girl.” She develops her concept of “temporal drag” through her own set of questions about the “commitment to the ‘girl’ icon [in the] contemporary political context.”³² Freeman writes, “But the ‘girl’ revolution also refuses to locate the ‘girl’ as the beginning of either identity or politics; instead, she represents what Elspeth Probyn calls ‘a political tactic [...] used to turn identity inside out’” (2000:741). Like temporal drag, adolescent drag is a tactical model for “turning inside out” the soiled garment of a politics that feminists want to wear again, but differently this time. Deploying the girl figure to different ends, Freeman writes: “‘girl’ embraces an embarrassing past as the crucial augur of a critical, yet also contingent future [...] The girl-sign acknowledges [...] the uncontrollability of the past, its inability to explain the present—and the promising distortions effected when the past suddenly, unpredictably erupts into the present forms of sexual and gendered personhood” (740–41). Like the lesbian for Freeman’s “temporal drag,” these artists drag 1960s and ’70s feminist art like one would something regarded as a “big drag”—that which appears outdated in its over-earnest politics, symbolized by “scraggly

32. Freeman writes, “The deployment of the girl in recent queer/feminist videos, ’zines, song lyrics, and so on, implicitly critiques radical feminists’ repudiation of their own 1950s girlhoods as false consciousness, allowing the politicized adult a more empathetic and even erotic relationship to her former vulnerabilities and pleasures” (2000:740). Freeman’s argument engages an extended reading of Elizabeth Subrin’s independent film *Shulie* (1997), a shot-for-shot remake of an unreleased 1967 documentary film by the same name by the feminist Shulasmith Firestone. Both the film and Freeman’s essay explore regression as a strategy for feminist redress.

underarm hair,” not unlike the nagging mother who just won’t leave you alone. “Let us call this ‘temporal drag,’” writes Freeman, “with all of the associations that the word ‘drag’ has with retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past upon the present” (728).

In their *performed* ignoring, forgetting, and denying of the figure of the foremother (the feminist theoretical foremother, the art historical foremother) and in their reluctance to accept their position within a generational cultural model as daughters, these artists visualize an uncanny wish to *give birth to themselves*. Swanson literally undertakes to produce herself as her own child, “giving birth” to Amber Doll. Gilmore’s work obsessively reenacts a birthing of the self through her own physical materials, pushing her face through holes, breaching barriers with the full force of her being. Young sees it all “more as a solo.” What is intriguing about this desire to “re-produce” the self is that, much like their predecessors before them, these artists utilize their diverse media as a means to produce an image of themselves through which they can emerge as political subjects produced in their own likeness (here one need only think of the significance of genres of autobiography and self-portraiture to feminism). Carol Mavor uses the phrase “reading girlishly” to describe the creation of one’s own subjective playground, finding “my own place to revel [...] a place to play ‘out’ those girl-things disavowed by the culture that I call home: from dress-up, to a love for girls, to motherhood itself” (2007:28).

Mavor continues, “The Greek root of the word nostalgia, *nostos* means ‘the return home.’ But anyone who has been there knows that the return home can be painful” (38). Such has been one lesson of queer theory. Freeman writes, drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s suggestion in her essay “How To Bring Your Kids Up Gay,” that “a genuinely queer politics must refuse to abject even the most stigmatized child-figure from formulations of adult political subjectivity” (2000:741). As queer theory has actively intervened on behalf of those subjectivities rendered homeless or orphaned by compulsory logics of normative development and social maturation, some homes must be made in the time and space of the in-between. Swanson, Gilmore, and Young appear to represent a generation of women who are actively in the throes of a certain disidentification with “themselves”: those commercialized stereotypes that claim to mirror them in mainstream culture and with the overdetermined political positions on offer to them in supposed contradistinction. Nothing would seem to support this reading more than a recent project of Young’s: during an early 2011 artist-in-residency in the choreography department of the Amsterdam Theaterschool (School voor Nieuwe Dansontwikkeling [SNDO]), Young produced a performance with 36 students, based on her character Sherry, called *37 Sherrys* (2011). The show effectively literalizes my reading of Young’s work as a performance of adolescent self-refraction and ideological multiplication. Some of the 36 Sherrys eventually turned on Sherry, in what Young claims was an ambush in which four students attempted to force her onto a table and to tape her down (Young 2011).³³

These three artists “drag” themselves, soberly and irreverently, adorning themselves in the cultural costuming and staging of the white girl fairy princess in late capital. Only this time, the gown is worn too tight or too baggy, stained and dirty, lopsided and terribly unflattering, much like Young’s perfectly disturbed Snow White (fig. 11), who literally pulls herself across the floor or Gilmore’s surrogates who are all dressed up with nowhere to go. In their performances of autogenesis, the artists present allegories, caricatures, and parodies in their own image. Adolescent drag thus emerges as a mode for staging tactical refusals of compulsory constructions of feminine identity and feminist politics that some women refuse to recognize as representative. And while they may give birth to images of themselves, these images are far from idealized or aspirational—rather, they model a feminist politics that does not aspire to redemption.

33. In a post on the artist’s Facebook account, Young (as Sherry?) writes: “I think they were saying that Sherry forces people to do things so they were gonna force me onto a table and tape me down but they didn’t get that far” (Young 2011).

Adolescent Interference

“If we refuse to become women [...] what happens to feminism?” Judith Halberstam asks in *The Queer Art of Failure*, a book that proposes a queer feminist approach that she terms “shadow feminism” (2011:123–25). Her project, which follows the anti-social turn in queer theory to ask what’s in it for feminism, is one “grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence, silence” that “offers spaces and modes of unknowing, failing, and forgetting as part of an alternative femi-



Figure 11: Ann Liv Young is Snow White (right) with Emily Wexler as the Evil Queen in her 20 November 2006 premiere performance at Théâtre de la Bastille, Paris. (Photo by Nicholas Strini)

nist project” (124). Halberstam writes, “This shadow feminism speaks in the language of self-destruction, masochism, an anti-social femininity and a refusal of the essential bond of mother and daughter that ensures that the daughter inhabits the legacy of the mother and in doing so, reproduces her relationship to patriarchal forms of power” (124). Halberstam argues that feminism should “lose the mother,” citing Saidiya Hartman to advocate for a dismantling of conventional feminist politics by refusing to become the woman defined by Western philosophy, and particularly Western feminism. She engages Gayatri Spivak and Saba Mahmood to critique Western feminism’s prescriptiveness regarding notions of freedom and resistance that have, as Mahmood has suggested, “impose[d] a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power” (in Halberstam 2011:127) and further reproduced this model by “passing down” knowledge from mother to daughter. This prescriptiveness has, according to Halberstam, benefited white heteronormativity in the process.

Halberstam proposes that feminists refuse the choices on offer to seek escape routes in incoherence, unbecoming, disorganization, and passivity that make up what she calls “a shadow archive of resistance” (129).

Halberstam’s position appears to pin the burden of humanism, colonialism, and universalism on a particularly unsympathetic image of the white feminist “mother,” which she prefers to forget by identifying instead with postcolonial and critical race feminism. Her argument met with resistance in an article by Susan Faludi which argues that the “mother-daughter” divide within feminism has become a significant impasse for the contemporary feminist movement, “[a] generational breakdown [which] underlies so many of the pathologies that have long disturbed American feminism” (Faludi 2010:29). Faludi describes the faultlines said to sepa-



Figure 12. 37 Sherrys (2011), Ann Liv Young's collaboration with students from the School of New Dance Development at Amsterdam's School of the Arts. *Something Raw Festival*, 18 February 2011. (Photo by Michael A. Guerrero)

rate the feminist “mother figure” of second-wave feminism and the “daughter figure” of third-wave feminism. Despite her claim not to take sides in the fight, Faludi appears to identify with the “mother,” an affiliation betrayed by the article’s ultimate declamation against Halberstam’s scholarship (implied as too adolescent) juxtaposed with a sentimental portrait of an older feminist, disputing Halberstam’s desire to take down “just the mother part of the equation” (Faludi 2010:41). Rather than addressing Halberstam’s written work, Faludi takes issue with a conference presentation the scholar made at the “No Longer in Exile” symposium at the New School in the Spring of 2010 where she argued that Lady Gaga’s music video *Telephone* proposed a “brave new world of Gaga girliness” that represented “something like the future of feminism” (in Faludi 2010:42).³⁴ Faludi’s critique of “theoretical and consumer-saturated academic feminism” suspiciously conflates Halberstam’s theoretical approach with her investment in the tactical possibilities suggested by Lady Gaga’s queering of pop culture. Faludi argues that such an approach derails the feminist project from what she proposes to be its ultimate objective: “revolutionary change.”

34. According to Faludi, Halberstam describes the “brave new world of Gaga girliness”: “What one wants to inspire is new work that one barely recognizes as feminism, and that’s what I’m going to call Gaga feminism” (in Faludi 2010:42). In response to Faludi’s article, Halberstam writes on the blog: “While Faludi characterizes me as a glib twit who proposed Lady Gaga as the answer to what ails feminism, I actually had tried to show that Lady Gaga’s duet with Beyoncé in *Telephone* provides an exciting and infectious model of Sapphic sisterhood that moves beyond sentimental models of romantic friendship and references a different kind of feminism [...] The Gaga piece of my talk was just a humorous ending to a lecture that covered changing notions of gender, evolving models of institutional relevance and argued for an improvisational feminism that kept up with the winds of political change” (2010).

Faludi and Halberstam at the same time debate and *perform* the so-called “mother-daughter conflict,” Faludi assuming the stereotypical role of conservative mother and Halberstam that of provocateur daughter, even as they work to expose it as inadequate to the complexities of feminism’s present situation.³⁵ Restaging long-held debates between second- and third-wave feminism about feminism’s (in)attention to other forms of difference and the pleasures and dangers of commercial culture, their disagreement evidences a symptomatic elision within similar feminist discourse as both Faludi and Halberstam forget the possibility of the intermediate figure: the adolescent who might avoid having to take sides in the conflict between mother and daughter. Adolescence exploits the poverty of both options, asserting childishness as an excuse and adulthood as too conditioned by tradition. The adolescent figure usefully intervenes in this debate as both and neither mother and daughter, both and neither second- and third-wave feminism. Adolescent drag, significantly, does not purport to be a performance of radical refusal, as proposed by Halberstam for shadow feminism. Rather than claiming to occupy a neutral territory, Swanson, Gilmore, and Young stage both mother and daughter as they image their own autogenesis in the adolescent, as the figure of their own self-birth. The artists embody adolescent drag not as a performance of pure refusal—a way of fleeing the ruins of an objectionable political past that they inherit, whether acknowledged or not—but rather as an enactment of messiness and contestation. Halberstam presents feminism as the white mother who bears all of the blame for its own failure, a failure that is not bequeathed with any tactical potential. Within the wide landscape of her book’s broader inquiry into the queering of failure, it is notable that the white mother proves an exemplary site for failure that is in no way redeemable. The ironic quality of Halberstam’s playful call to abjure the force of the maternal, however, is highly generative for my own analysis and a move that I would be remiss to read too earnestly. Nevertheless, it bears troubling that the protagonist of “shadow feminism” emerges as the default queer daughter/child figure in order to (re)claim the innocence and purity of childhood offered in the tabula rasa of orphanhood. Halberstam’s sincere identification with critical race and postcolonial feminism is, thus, nevertheless problematic. The condition of possibility for her claim to purity in performances of refusal (passivity, absence, silence) threatens to position scholars such as Spivak and Mahmood as the healers or surrogate mothers of Western feminism. Halberstam seeks relief from the failures associated with the white mother and, as such, appears to attempt to quarantine a certain set of conventions within second-wave feminism, as if a form of contagion.³⁶ Her turn to feminist negativity, however, seeks to effect a problematic erasure that would sterilize troubling histories that might instead be contested directly through methods of appropriative reversal.

Adolescent drag is instructive for this debate as a tactic that aspires to impurity over purity, an operation that models an alternative to Halberstam’s shadow feminism. Swanson, Gilmore, and Young’s adolescence engages irony instead of negativity or shadow play, which prove too purely consequential, risking too little by removing itself from the causal linkages of inheritance and contamination in which these artists instead choose to immerse themselves. Halberstam’s

35. Writes Halberstam on her blog: “Faludi, though she may sound like your grandmother, is actually my age, so I guess this is sibling rivalry if one must stick to familiar metaphors” (2010). That Halberstam and Faludi are around the same age is only further evidence that the mother-daughter conflict posits a false binary. See also Astrid Henry’s insightful study, *Not My Mother’s Sister*, which describes the increasing tendency to articulate feminism by drawing generational lines to argue that an overemphasis on metaphors of generational rebellion has come at the expense of political action (2004).

36. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz critiques theorists for whom the anti-relational turn sanctions an escape from relationality that gets equated as a distancing from the contamination of race, gender, and other particularities that “taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference.” “In other words,” Muñoz writes, “antirelational approaches to queer theory are romances of the negative, wishful thinking, and investments in deferring various dreams of difference” (Muñoz 2009:11). Halberstam’s shadow feminism is a romanticization of difference that nevertheless reproduces the thrill to feminist purity that she wants to work against.

shadow feminism risks, in its radicality, an unsavory purity reversed in the performance of the adolescent for whom the accumulative potential of irony, rather than refusal, mediates an inheritance that cannot be refused.

Caricaturing Girl Power

Adolescent drag enacts a double disidentification: challenging both second-wave feminism and third-wave feminism in its performance of autogenesis. The self-engendering described by autogenesis is, significantly, an *ironic* representation of the self that is neither pure reproduction nor pure refusal. Instead it bespeaks a process that José Esteban Muñoz has characterized as neither a straightforward identification nor a counter-identification but rather a “working on, with, and against a form at a simultaneous moment” (2000:70). Muñoz’s description of disidentification helps to explicate the important difference between refusal and irony in adolescent drag. While Swanson, Gilmore, and Young may at first glance appear to perform disidentification as a dissociation with second- and third-wave feminism, closer inspection reveals their adolescent drag instead to be a form of dissimulation effecting in its use of irony not a closure but an accumulation of possibilities or interpretations, recalling Young’s successive responses of “no,” “yes,” and “maybe” to the question of her feminism.

Swanson, Gilmore, and Young engage irony not merely by saying one thing and meaning another but as a form of circumnavigation that, rather than being cynical or malicious, is the creative and ethical pose assumed in adolescent drag.³⁷ The turn to irony critiques the limited spectrum of representational models available to young women who do not accept the paucity of positions on offer by the mass media and by feminism and who instead undertake to contradict themselves through performance. In this sense, irony indexes a means of saying or doing something with the understanding that it does not necessarily correspond with one’s consciousness. While the cynic speaks from a position of power or mastery, irony responds as an “adolescent” maneuver for renegotiating models imposed from outside, a performance that attempts to thwart the problem of totalization. The mediums of conceptual art and performance—which seize the characteristic capriciousness of the adolescent taken as their subject—align as frameworks befitting a game of action and language that do not transparently offer their meaning, modalities wherein the question of what one “actually means” often remains an open one. Swanson, Gilmore, and Young engage the ironic stance as one that lends feminism a multiplicity of meanings (no, yes, maybe) that, activated in the undecidable liminality of performance, remain imbued with potential. These artists perform the adolescent for her ability to say something that power does not completely understand, something that cannot be easily assimilated as telos or cliché, because it is already allegory, already caricature.

Adolescent drag, enacted as tactical dissimulation, proposes a critical framework for interpreting the contemporary phenomenon that Swanson, Gilmore, and Young dramatize, whereby young women have increasingly claimed to disidentify with feminism: uttering the now-familiar phrase personified by Swanson’s sorority girl, “I’m not a feminist but...” In her 2010 book *Enlightened Sexism*, Susan J. Douglas associates this phenomenon with what she calls “the new girliness” that emerged in 1990s media representations, a collage of images that straddle both third-wave feminism and postfeminism. This proliferation of representations, she argues, contributed to a girl culture of “postfeminism triumph.” “Young women were not supposed to identify with feminism; instead, they were supposed to actively *dis*-identify with it,” Douglas writes (2010:103). Douglas does not account for the possibility that such “girliness” might be a performance, rendering it instead as evidence for her diagnosis of a pervasive political nihilism that

37. See Claire Colebrook’s book *Irony* for an extended account of the term. Colebrook writes, “Despite its unwieldy complexity, irony has a frequent and common definition: saying what is contrary to what is meant, a definition that is usually attributed to the first-century Roman orator Quintilian who was already looking back to Socrates and Ancient Greek literature” (Colebrook 2004:1).

threatens the legacy of feminism. Without the depth model offered by Muñoz's account of the term, Douglas misreads "girliness" as a flat counter-identification, failing to register it as a tactical maneuver available to young women who seek to work on the concept of feminism in their very disavowal of it. What would it mean to consider this form of dissimulation as, rather than the crisis for feminism that Douglas claims, a performance staged by young women who desire to expand the repertoire of feminist discourse beyond the normative borders (patrolled by feminists such as Douglas and Faludi) of affirmation and frontal earnestness? The sense of estrangement that has been produced within feminism by these apparent denials, cast as the mother-daughter conflict, gets reworked in the figure of the adolescent for whom irony manipulates pressures to render oneself coherently and legibly feminist, staging a critique of compulsory performances of having to "bear witness" in order to be counted.

Recognizing adolescence as a form of drag, rather than always a "straight" or sincere identification (as Douglas reads "girliness"), recommends a widening of the normative feminist scope beyond the rubric afforded by third-wave feminism. In her study of third-wave feminism, a phenomenon she describes as little understood even by feminists, R. Claire Snyder surveys popular and academic literature in an attempt to read beyond the movement's appearance as "a confusing hodgepodge of personal anecdotes and individualistic claims" (2008:175). Third-wavers, Snyder explains, rejected media-sensationalized postfeminism and were unwilling to cast aside completely the agenda of second-wave feminism.³⁸ Snyder identifies third-wave feminism with its active play with signifiers of femininity toward a "fun, feminine, and sex-positive" politics that nevertheless has often been critiqued for reproducing the same white, middle-class bias that first and second-wave feminism did, despite claims made to queer, multiracial, and ideologically flexible multivocalities. Snyder notes third-wavers "girly" play with femininity, sexual pleasure, and self-expression through consumption:

Girl power, or girlie culture, is a central—yet contested—strand within the third wave [...] Girlie encompasses the tabooed symbols of women's feminine enculturation—Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels—and says using them isn't shorthand for "we've been duped." Makeup isn't a sign of our sway to the marketplace and the male gaze, it can be sexy, campy, ironic, or simply decorating ourselves without the loaded issues. (2008:179)

Rather than merely reproducing signs of third-wave feminism, Swanson, Gilmore, and Young *caricature* its investment in the adolescent figure, dragging its "girl power" slogan to mock its commercial complicities with their own amateur aesthetics—from Swanson's cheap parodies of pornography to Young's ironic mash-ups of karaoke, fairytales, and improv comedy. All the signs are distorted and degraded: the doll is rendered as life-size by Swanson, the makeup caked on like a clown by Young's alter-ego Sherry, the high heels soiled and broken down by Gilmore. The artists challenge third-wave feminism's presumption to represent them by reproducing and manipulating characteristics associated with the movement, satirizing the "spiritedness" of its "spirited individualism," allegorizing the "girl" of its embrace of "girlie culture," and camping its "camp" celebration of sex, gay culture, and fashion. The girlish aesthetics of Swanson, Gilmore, and Young mock the at times naïve, hyperbolic, and liberationist rhetoric of a "girl power" feminism that celebrates a discourse of mastery over and purity within commercial culture, advocating instead a representation of the girl that, quite simply, does not aim to master her universe. All the while, the artists also demonstrate their inheritance from the third wave, further elaborating on what Snyder considers third-wave feminism's turn to tactical approaches by which they negotiated three important critical impasses with the second-

38. Snyder differentiates third-wave feminism from postfeminism, which she associates with a number of figures (such as Katie Roiphe, Camille Paglia, and Rene Denfeld) who gained prominence by misrepresenting second-wave feminism and exploiting such misrepresentations (Snyder 2008:176).

wave. The politics of adolescent drag is deeply informed by third-wave feminism's embrace of the collapse of the category of "woman," their turn to multivocality and action over synthesis and theoretical justification after the rise of postmodernism, and their emphasis on approaches that refuse to police boundaries of feminist politics following the sex wars (Snyder 2008:175). By wearing out its own overprocessed forms, adolescent drag presents a critique of third-wave feminism's complicity with dominant narratives of success, refusing to move easily within certain artistic and political economies of profit, influence, and triumph with their use of vulgarity, awkwardness, and amateurism that render their work less easily commercially digestible by the public body that might buy pornography and kid culture separately but not together. Such "vulgar" juxtapositions are enabled by irony, which at the same time exposes the artists' own complicity within structures of dominance that sanction their art (no, yes, maybe...). The play with enjoyment and humor to be had in caricature enacts a generative distortion in adolescent drag that produces an image of feminist impurity through irony, whereby everything cannot be made neatly reconcilable.

At the close of *Brave New Girl*, Neal Medlyn's October 2010 drag performance of pop sensation Miley Cyrus's onscreen alter ego Hannah Montana, he tells the audience that you can be as many people as you want at once. Snow is projected onto The Chocolate Factory's small stage, falling throughout the show, though the stage "never remains lily white for long."³⁹ Despite Medlyn's description of the show as "about": "purity, snow, teenage-hood, multiple personality, secrets, pop, indie music, 5 A.M. 'me' time, loneliness, parenting, ghosts, forests, cassettes, pop music, Disney, Twitter and fairytales" (in Stonebraker 2010). But as one critic of the show writes, "At the center of this look at purity is Mr. Medlyn, a performer who evokes giggles by the nature of his gawky appearance (greasy hair, a slightly distended stomach and hunched shoulders)" (Stonebraker 2010). Adolescent drag, for Medlyn as for Swanson, Gilmore, and Young, visualizes the ironic potential in failing to pass as the ideal.

Adolescent drag exploits the already fractal and performative identity of the adolescent girl in mainstream and feminist discourse, refracted back by Swanson, Gilmore, and Young as a generative and ironic reflection for its very overcitationality. Adolescent drag draws upon the adolescent figure as a chain of significations, a network of reflections that bounce off of each other—the "girliness" of girl power, the African-American inflected "grrl," the "riot grrrl," the "girl" camped by drag queens. She is always multiple, always overloaded, both allegorical and caricatural. Swanson, Gilmore, and Young mobilize in adolescent drag a set of tactics whereby feminists might exploit such impurity by reappropriating images that have been projected onto them, images that they do not recognize as representative of them. As a performance of alienated self-parody, adolescent drag enacts a model of autogenesis or self-making whereby feminists might give birth to the self that they are given and that they are given to embrace, to have and to hold.

References

- Althusser, Louis. (1971) 2001. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- AnnLivYoung.com. 2009. www.annlivyoung.com (7 May 2009).
- Badinter, Elisabeth. 2006. *Dead End Feminism*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

39. Medlyn's irreverent association of the false innocence and purity of youth with the "snow" of white privilege is reminiscent of Muñoz's interview in *Disidentifications* with artist Vaginal Davis who appears in the chapter dressed as a white child—blond wig, pigtales, polka-dot dress. Davis provides this description of her disidentification with the white girl: "When you come home from the inner city and you're Black you go through a stage when you try to fit the dominant culture, you kinda want to be white at first—it would be easier if you were White... That's what I call the snow period—I just felt like if I had some cheap white boyfriend, my life could be perfect and I could find some treasured thing" (1999:97).

- Benjamin, Walter. 2003. *Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938–1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press.
- Bernstein, Robin. 2011. *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bloom, Harold. 1973. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Colebrook, Claire. 2004. *Irony*. London: Routledge.
- Conlan, Anna, and Erica Beckman. 2009. "She's Magnificent, She's Nuts: Ann Liv Young, interviewed and photographed by fellow New Yorkers Anna Conlan and Erica Beckman." *Dance Theatre Journal* 23, 2:31–36.
- Cotter, Holland. 2002. "Art Review; Two Nods to Feminism, Long Snubbed by Curators." *New York Times*, 11 October. www.nytimes.com/2002/10/11/arts/art-review-two-nods-to-feminism-long-snubbed-by-curators.html (1 May 2006).
- De Man, Paul. (1983) 1996. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (2nd edition, revised). London: Routledge.
- DiGiacomo, Frank. 2011. "Hipster Warfare Breaks out During Performance Artist Ann Liv Young's Show at Delancey Lounge," *New York Daily News*, 12 January. http://www.nydailynews.com/gossip/2011/01/12/2011-01-12_hipster_warfare_breaks_out_during_performance_artist_ann_liv_youngs_show_at_ps_1.html (13 January).
- Dinshaw, Carolyn. 1999. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Douglas, Susan J. 2010. *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work is Done*. New York: Times Books.
- Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Faludi, Susan. 2010. "American Electra: Feminism's Ritual Matricide." *Harper's Magazine*, October:29–42.
- Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage.
- Freeman, Elizabeth. 2000. "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations." *New Literary History* 31, 4 (Autumn):727–44.
- Genz, Stéphanie, and Benjamin A. Brabon. 2009. *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 2000. "Hegemony, Relations of Force, Historical Bloc." In *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs. New York: New York University Press.
- Halberstam, Judith. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press.
- Halberstam, Judith. 2010. "Justifiable Matricide: Backlashing Faludi by Jack Halberstam." *Bully Bloggers: The Queer Bully Pulpit You Never Dreamed Of...* WordPress Blog, 19 October. <http://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2010/10/19/justifiable-matricide-backlashing-faludi-by-jack-halberstam/> (21 October).
- Halberstam, Judith. 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Halley, Janet. 2008. *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Henry, Astrid. 2004. *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jackson, Shannon. 2004. *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jameson, Frederic. 1991. *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kennedy, Randy. 2010. "Pounding the Pavement on a Bryant Park Pedestal." *New York Times*, 7 May. www.nytimes.com/2010/05/08/arts/design/08gilmore.html (1 October).

- Kilston, Lyra. 2009. "Kate Gilmore." *Modern Painters*, 1 March. 1 March. www.artinfo.com/news/story/30354/kate-gilmore/ (7 May).
- Kourlas, Gia. 2010. "Ann Liv Young Poops on Command in Cinderella." *Time Out New York*, 23 August. <http://newyork.timeout.com/arts-culture/dance/78968/ann-liv-young-poops-on-command-in-cinderella> (10 October).
- Kraus, Chris. 1997. *I Love Dick*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Krauss, Rosalind E. 1999. "Reinventing the Medium." *Critical Inquiry* 25, 2 (Winter):289–305.
- La Rocco, Claudia. 2010. "Provocative Artist Fights for Return to P.S.1." *New York Times*, 11 August. www.nytimes.com/2010/08/12/arts/design/12young.html (1 October).
- La Rocco, Claudia, and Gia Kourlas. 2008. "Dance Review: The Bagwell in Me." *New York Times*, 3 October. www.nytimes.com/2008/10/04/arts/dance/04roun.html?_r=1&scp=5&sq=ann%20liv%20young&st=cse (7 May 2009).
- LosingYourself.com. 2009. "Amber Hawk Swanson." *Losing Yourself in the 21st Century*, 10 May. www.losingyourself.com/amber-hawk-swanson-2/ (10 October 2010).
- Love, Heather. 2007. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Macaulay, Alastair. 2010. "This Time the Trouble Isn't Wicked Stepsisters." *New York Times*, 5 September. www.nytimes.com/2010/09/06/arts/dance/06cinderella.html?_r=2&ref=alastair_macaulay (6 September).
- Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Mavor, Carol. 1999. *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mavor, Carol. 2007. *Reading Boyishly: Roland Bartbes, J.M. Barrie, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Marcel Proust, and D.W. Winnicott*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- McClure, Kelly. 2007. "When Amber Met Amber." *Chicago Reader*, 2 August. www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/artist-amber-hawk-swanson-look-alike-sex-doll-realdoll/Content?oid=4258953 (10 May 2009).
- Muñoz, José Esteban. 1999. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. 2000. "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's *The Sweetest Hangover* (and Other STDs)." *Theatre Journal* 52, 1 (March):67–79.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.
- Newton, Esther. 1979. *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- OED Online*. s.v. "awkward." Oxford University Press. <http://oed.com/view/Entry/13971?redirectedFrom=awkward> (10 May 2009).
- Phelan, Peggy. 1993. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge.
- RocklandArtClasses.com. 2010. "Kate Gilmore: Standing Here." www.rocklandartclasses.com/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/kate-gilmore-standing-here (31 December).
- Román, David. 2005. *Performance in America: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the Performing Arts*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Schechner, Richard. 1985. *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Schneider, Rebecca. 2006. "Intermediality, Infelicity, and Scholarship on the Slip." *Theatre Survey* 47, 2 (November):253–60.
- Schneider, Rebecca. 2011. *Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. London: Routledge.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1991. "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay." *Social Text* 29:18–27.
- Snyder, R. Claire. 2008. "What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 34, 1:175–96.

- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg, 271–316. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Stewart, Susan. 1983. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Stockton, Kathryn Bond. 2009. *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Stonebraker, Leslie. 2010. "Brave New Girl: Neal Medlyn's New Show Finds the Miley in Britney." *New York Press*, 29 September. www.nypress.com/blog-7369-brave-new-girl-neal-medlyn-rss-new-show-finds-the-miley-in-britney.html (30 December).
- Swanson, Amber Hawk. 2006. "Not a Feminist Way of Thinking, Daddy's Little Girl." *The Feminism? Project*. Artist's video.
- Time Out New York*. 2007. "Dance Review: Pure as the Driven Snow?" *Time Out New York*, 597 (8–14 March) www.timeoutnewyork.com (10 May 2009).
- Velasco, David. 2010. "Dance Queen: David Velasco on Ann Liv Young." *Artforum*, September. <http://artforum.com/inprint/id26143> (11 September).
- Young, Ann Liv. 2010. Interview with author. Brooklyn, New York, 6 March.
- Young, Ann Liv. 2011. Facebook status. Facebook.com, 19 February.
- Young, Ann Liv. 2010. *Cinderella*. As performed at the ISSUE Project Room, September. Unpublished manuscript.
- Work of Art*. 2010. "A Shock to the System." Season 1, episode 4, first broadcast on 30 June, Bravo.
- Zerilli, Linda M.G. 2005. *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**To view supplemental media related to this article, please visit
www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/suppl/10.1162/DRAM_a_00143**