

Strappy Sandals and Skinny Belts: The Hyperfeminine Position in Painting (1995)

[ZIP + FLIRT=FLIP]

"Ornament is a crime." -Adolph Loos 1908

"I'm not glamorous/Or polished/In fact I'm no ornament."

-lyrics from *The Raincoats* song "Odyshape" *Paper March* 1994

"What's so great about what Courtney has done is she's sort of redefined things for young women. You know, "Don't fuck a rock star, be a rock star... Feminism definitely informs my fashion."

-Stacey Sher, president Jersey Films *Vogue* Sept. '95

"The generosity of flirtation is in its implicit wish to sustain the life of desire; and often by blurring, or putting into question, the boundary between sex and sexualization." -Adam Phillips *On Flirtation* 1994, pp. xvii-xviii.

"Modernism at its most institutional privileges the "masculine" attributes of heroic endeavor. Domesticity at its most traditional privileges the "feminine" attributes of pleasure and privacy."

-Hunter Drohojowska-Philp "The Pleasure Posture" *Art Issues* November 1993

"...if you look like that in my world, you're assumed to be insubstantial..."

-Anonymous Professional, commenting on the *Glam Look* ca. 1995, *Bazaar* January 1995

"Any signs of non-masculine strategies have been regarded as derogatory, even if the maker is male." - Shirley Kaneda, "Painting and Its Others" *Arts* Summer 1991

"Words like Pussy, Poot, Beaver?...I think it's great! If a group of people can assimilate derogatory terms into their culture and change those hateful terms into a positive or empowering gesture, they destroy that demeaning weapon."- Eli Gessner, 23 *Paper* Mar 1994

"To me the most important thing is to show people that you can be yourself."- Kim Gordon, Sonic Youth/Vocalist, X-Girl Designer (Robin Eisgrau, *Paper March* 1994)

"A woman's work is never done."

"They say it's a man's world, but it's fast becoming a woman's world." (a fleeting thought during the summer of '95, while pondering the expansion of e-mail, Internet chat rooms, talk shows, talk radio, surfing the WWW, daycare, work-at-home, flex time, tele-commuting, home pages and the very real fact that 48% of married women provide at least half of the family's income.)

"Like most women, I'm sick and tired of that eternal female dialectic: Be good or be a slut. Serve yourself or serve others. I do not find my life to fit in either category, and I'm not

2

satisfied with balancing on one end of the teeter-totter or the other. I want to pull women out of this stupid dualistic notion and provide a third option. I want a ballot in a new election." -Liz Phair, "Whip-Smart" pop singer, *Bazaar* September 1994

Serious Inquiries Only

This fall, fashion, painting and feminism have found themselves on a political and aesthetic collision course. As the strappy sandal, skinny belt and flip hairdo become 1995's forgotten fashion accessories, such frank flags admonished the hyperfeminine's indeterminate behavioral traits. Strappy sandals connote her unpredictable spontaneity, since she's just as likely to fly out of the sandals and run barefoot through the grass, as she is to toss one at an unsuspecting pest. The futile skinny belt she opts to wear marks her alluring ebullience, yet it originated in the 19th Century as her rebellion against the oppressive adornments he wanted her to wear. The "I don't give a damn" logic of the flip hairdo's outward turn signals her flippant irreverence. This paper seeks to identify the strategy of the hyperfeminine, the radical feminine disposition which seeks to retain the diversity of the feminine realm, while facilitating spontaneity, ebullience and irreverence.

Not surprisingly, these qualities are also turning up in today's spontaneous, ebullient and irreverent paintings, the ones sporting a hyperfeminine 'tude. For the purpose of this paper, feminine are socio-political dispositions and behavioral attitudes, that don't directly correspond with either gender category. The men who traffic in the hyperfeminine have chosen to affirm the feminine's positive attributes, which is a wildly different stance from those men who either critique masculinity or co-opt feminine allure. For this reason, she and he refer here, not to the categories of women and men, but to the feminine and masculine aspects of each person's personality, which combine in varying proportions to form the truly infinite variety of gender possibilities that we awkwardly file under female and male.

Although media-driven journalism has mistakenly aligned the hyperfeminine with the all-too-familiar '40s femme fatale, separate socio-political factors have manifested radically different archetypes. The femme fatale specifically recalls the female who flaunts her feminine mystique to subvert male power and authority, but when a patriarchal culture emphasizes beauty so as to stifle her intellectual growth, her talents are debilitated, since her self-worth is tied to her lover's reflection. In contrast to the femme fatale, whose identity corroborates male power and authority, the hyperfeminine neglects masculine power and authority. Rather, the hyperfeminine's independent spirit facilitates her own identity and autonomy. Because the hyperfeminine need not acquire her self-worth from others, she proves more of a threat than the Siren and Scylla femme fatales, especially when power-obsessed individuals evaluate their self-worth in terms of the total number of people they control. Moreover, her beguiling nature is an added strength, as it confounds those who relish the belief that beauty and brawn are inversely proportional.

Most have passed off the au courant hyperfeminine attitude as simply a trendy fashion moment. However, it actually articulates a positive reaction to the desexualization of intelligent and talented women, as well as the acceptance yielded male artists who have successfully co-opted the ultrafeminine (until now, not even an option open to ambitious female artists). Faith Wilding, who considers needlework exemplary of "enforced femininity," refuses to teach men traditional crafts, which illustrates this ugly phenomena. Wilding mused, "but then, men have always ripped off women's activities and gotten famous

from them, so I'm not going to teach them (M. G. Lord, "Women's Work is (Sometimes Done), *NY Times* February 19, 1995)."

Just as most women feel they must choose between acting attractive and acting smart, (a.k.a. being complicit and being ambitious), most female artists must decide between making seductive work and making conceptual art (a.k.a. frivolous and serious). It's been particularly frustrating for female artists to watch so many men build serious careers with paintings that would have been judged frivolous, had women produced them, as if co-opting feminine style is a radical male option.

Consequently, the hyperfeminine position in painting is a radical wresting away of the feminine from those who have been rewarded for slyly denegrating the feminine. In the manner of "Take back the night," the feminist action to make the streets walkable again, women and men are taking back the canvas in order to thwart the preponderance of feminine painting that subsists on irony. Although it's not surprising that the *Pattern and Decortion* movement developed concurrently with Cal Arts' Feminist Art Program, it is remarkable how rarely people associate P&D with the women who actually galvanized it (Miriam Schapiro, Joyce Kazloff and critic Amy Goldin).

Unfortunately, the patriarchal culture is not the only group responsible for limiting women's options. Second-generation feminist theorists disparaged feminine allure (and its associative relations to pleasure, desire, flirtation, fantasy, erotica and seduction) in order to facilitate the independence necessary to challenge socio-economic inequalities. Twenty years ago, feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey argued that cinematic presentations of eroticized women, presented as scopophilia (pleasure in looking) corroborate with projected male fantasies of power (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Screen* 1975).

In many ways, when second-generation feminist artists critiqued the first-generation's essentialism (an attempt to define a historically unchanging feminine essence), they broadened the complexity of gender, but they also undermined the first generation's success at recognizing attributes previously disregarded. Tragically, feminism became particularly anti-feminine. The second-generation feminists would not have lost valuable ground had they extended their critique of what is innately feminine to the impossibility of weakness, inferiority, and worthlessness accorded any kind of visual expression that challenges the dominant culture. Paradoxically, some first-generation feminists were labeled essentialist even though they specifically looked to cultures that didn't view patternign as feminine.

In order for art like Jane Kaufman's to succeed in making its affirmative and hence powerfully feminist political statement, her audience had to accept as natural- as many did in the 1970s- the association of women and the decorative. In reality, of course, these qualities are not innately female, but are rather part of the cultural construction of the female that Western society has imposed upon women. This essentialist interpretation of the decorative, moreover, is entirely relative to our own culture, a culture that has gendered ornament as female, and hence inferior, because it is produced not only by women but also by those in non-Western cultures that we classify as other. Thus, when Pattern and Decoration artists of both sexes looked to sources... not considered

to be the biologically preordained province of women, they did so...as an effort to liberate an area of visual expression that has long been feminized- and hence policed and artificially controlled- by our male-dominated and Eurocentric art establishment. (Norma Broude, "The Pattern and Decoration Movement," *The Power of Feminist Art*, 1994, pp. 219-220).

Just as hyperfeminine dressing insists that personal style manifests liberty, hyperfeminine paintings exude independence, because they actively reclaim their suppressed femininity.

The hyperfeminine represents the third generation's radical wresting away of the feminine, a strategy that relies on the strengths inherent to feminine attributes, rather than abandon and negate them, which rather reinforces the erroneous and narrow stereotypes associated with the feminine. After three generations of feminist activity, masculine/feminine are socio-political dispositions and behavioral attitudes, since it's impossible to correlate masculine/feminine with gender. Moreover, it's nonsensical to construct masculine/feminine paradigms along the lines of strong/weak, active/passive, big/small, stable/unstable, or conceptual/intuitive, once considered core biological differences.

Rather, it's useful to construct the masculine/feminine paradigm in terms of socio-political dispositions such as speaker/listener, exclusive/inclusive, cube/sphere, power/liberty, rigid/adaptable, authoritative/compromising, objective/subjective, determinate/indeterminate, fixed/open, or gaze/touch. Such contrasting aspects of each paradigm's attributes speak less to good vs. bad, or right vs. wrong, and more to the complexity of roles and tasks we encounter continually. For example, the adjective 'bold' means different things, connoting either a feminine "Listen to me, too" vantage or a masculine "Listen to no one but me."

While second-generation feminist theorists (Laura Mulvey and Mary Kelly) rebuked pleasure's capacity to enslave women in the male gaze, today's generation of independent feminist painters not only feel comfortable exploring the pleasure akin to femininity, but no longer consider the masculine realm the only model for strength, authority and autonomy. What's at issue is what we associate with the feminine, in particular- do images of eroticized women empower men or do suggestions of women's vulnerability further victimize women? Nonetheless, it's a boon that some smart ambitious women are finally independent enough to find strength in the pleasure akin to femininity.

While it may seem that the hyperfeminine is a post-feminist (coined in 1919 to pinpoint those who consider gender analysis divisive), the hyperfeminine is indeed a feminist. (Most post-feminists are either wealthy privileged women or women who prefer masculist strategies). The hyperfeminine is very aware of the continued negative stereotyping accorded the feminine, as well as the ongoing masculine strategy to debase anything remotely associated with the feminine. As a result, the hyperfeminine seeks to reclaim feminine space, amidst Feminism's typically anti-feminine discourse. The move to forefront the feminine parallels the current revival of camp, "which was often posed as an embarrassment to post-Stonewall gay culture (Myers, p.74)."

The hyperfeminine argues that Feminism is most useful when it maximizes women's choices, rather than limits them. To be effective, Feminism must be home to flaky, militant,

lesbian, hyperfeminine and some ultrafeminine (the femme fatales) feminists. The hyperfeminine is just one option among many, but its availability accords respect for the feminine (by men and women alike). Ultimately, the hyperfeminine's welding beauty and intelligence upends snap judgments, which indicates the total radicality of the hyperfeminine position.

Perhaps the best model for the distinction between the hyperfeminine and the ultrafeminine is that of the bad girl (call girl) and the good girl (prostitute). An eternally bad girl, the hyperfeminine's behavior is not audience-dependent (take it or leave it), while the good girl gladly adjusts to meet the desires of others. Similarly, the hyperfeminine/ultrafeminine split falls along these lines- internal/external, flirting/seductive, joyous/content, autonomous/compliant, sexual/sexy, glam-girl/show-girl, and most important decoration/ornament. The internal hyperfeminine may rethink, evolve, shift, or change, but she draws the line at masquerade and seduction.

It is the way decoration and ornament function that makes this split so significant. Terry Myers posits the decorative "in the work of some painters as a deliberately meaningful activity and/or property which remains fully operational even after it enters the mainstream...[A]s a representative sampling of some "whole," their work redistributes power in terms of what will be granted the right to be constructive (Myers, Flash Art, p. 73 & 74)." Decoration empowers the decorator (the wearer or artist), while ornament serves to attract viewers. Ornament is eye candy, unrelated to the maker's identity or personal values.

In the face of "a woman's work is never done" and the significance of decoration, one begins to understand the feminine's compulsion to decorate and redecorate, to make-over, to shop til she drops, and to reinvent her image continuously (hairdos, hair color, scarves, barettes, shoes, pantyhose...). The house or body in perpetual re-decoration signifies the feminine's need to personalize, to territorialize, and to mark her space. Angie Dickinson once answered Johnnie Carson's question "Do you dress for men or women?," with "I dress for women and I undress for men." I would surmise that the outrageous hyperfeminine dresses only for herself.

The hyperfeminine's greatest contribution is that she has finally rescued the feminine from the impossible quagmire of seduction, fully explored in Jean Baudrillard's Seduction. Baudrillard's ultrafeminine can never enter the realm of the real. More worrisome, Seduction makes a case for why she's so fortunate to have been banished to the world of the unreal.

Now woman is but appearances. And it is the feminine as appearance that thwarts masculine depth. Instead of rising up against such "insulting" counsel, women would do well to let themselves be seduced by its truth, for here lies the secret of their strength, which they are in the process of losing by erecting a contrary, feminine depth (Baudrillard, Seduction, 1990, p. 10).

Lacking a prescribed self, the ultrafeminine must constantly deceive. There's no doubt that ultrafeminine compliance and acquiescence make her more popular at the office, but she sadly sacrifices more than she gains.

Contrarily, the hyperfeminine values flirtation, but more with herself than with others.

In *On Flirtation*, Adam Phillips remarks that "flirts are dangerous because they have a different way of believing in the Real Thing...In so far as we value reliability and the relatively predictable, it is inevitable that flirtation- the (consciously or unconsciously) calculated production of uncertainty- will be experienced at best as superficial and at worst as cruel...(Phillips, *On Flirtation*, 1994, p. xvii). Flirtation further facilitates hyperfeminine independence. "Flirtation is an early version of the experimental life, of irreverence and curiosity (*Ibid.*, p. xxiv)." Because "flirtation can add other stories to the repertoire by making room for them (*Ibid.*, p. xxv)," flirtation shares decoration's qualities of spontaneity and endlessness, which incidentally recalls Luce Irigaray's model of feminine incompleteness.

The Radical Wrestling of the Feminine

A recent Bullock's Department Store ad in the *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine* billed Fall 1995 as the most feminine season ever. Art's profound desire to flaunt its newly-appreciated femininity, perhaps, more aptly termed the hyperfeminine position, is no secret. Particularly feminine art has been gaining momentum throughout the nineties (witness the ascending careers of Philip Taaffe, John Wesley, Thomas Trosch, Carl Ostendarp, Ross Bleckner, Lari Pittman, Jim Isermann, Fred Tomaselli, Richard Prince, Peter Schuyff, Helmut Federle, Richard Tuttle, Richard Smith, Matthew Weinstein, Terry Winters, Norman Bluhm, Gary Stephan, Carroll Dunham, Charles Long and Alan Turner).

Tragically, few women artists whose work exudes femininity have gained recognition. Male artists who traffic in the feminine are considered radical, although it was women artists who first rigorously defended femininity, demanded its respect, and ultimately carved out a space for it. Consequently, the hyperfeminine has become today's radical approach to femininity. Moreover, outside of Shirley Kaneda's ground breaking 1991 essay "Painting and Its Others," most gender-oriented aesthetic discussions have critiqued the dominant culture by constructing an anti-masculine polemic, rather than specifically declaring a feminine vision. Still, Kaneda demarcates the feminine (the other) in deference to the masculine (painting). This paper has sought to present the hyperfeminine, without citing the masculine.

There is a preponderance of anti-masculine critiques, because most writers, especially young gay writers (operating within Queer Theory) are careful to remain within the sphere of masculinity, rather than co-opt the feminine, as Christopher Knight's 1994 "Effeminism" did. Although Christopher Knight proclaims that no other social movement in the past 150 years has had so great an impact on American art as feminism, he has the gall to use this premise to insult women. "Traditional feminism's mistaken supposition that art is simply dominated by masculine prerogatives contributes to the suppression of culture's actual standing as a feminine activity in American society. That's why I am for 'effeminist' art: Power resides in the capacity to disclose and exalt the ostensibly unsuitable feminine qualities residing at American culture's core (Knight, *Art issues*, p. 25)."

Indubitably, Knight finds mobility, engagement, participation, openness, elasticity, indeterminacy, incompleteness, and flexibility "ostensibly unsuitable feminine qualities." If emasculate means to castrate (to weaken) I shudder to imagine what his term effeminism means (effeminism must mean to deny the feminine her pleasure, a.k.a. clitoridectomy). What's clear is the conscious manner in which he ignores the disrespect shown the feminine, so he can co-opt her and turn her against her "unsuitable" self (whose pleasure has been stolen). Contrarily, Terry Myers' 1994 "Painting Camp" and Bill Arning's 1992

"(strategies of) The Anti-Masculine (Overlapping but not corresponding to the feminine)" stretch the masculine realm, rather than explicitly co-opt feminine strategies.

For Myers, camp offers the possibility for rescuing the "story" of painting after (almost) everyone has "abandoned" it (Myers, p. 73). Similarly, hyperfeminine painters rescue femininity from its ironic, and clearly debased status. Further, Myers' camp "contains an explicit commentary on feats of 'survival' in a world dominated by the taste, interests and definitions of others (*Ibid.*, p. 74)." A hyperfeminine at heart, Myers acknowledges the liberating qualities inherent to play, flirting and fantasy. What Drohojowska-Philp has termed the "pleasure posture" facilitates survivability, in a manner similar to camp. "Plenty of artists now adopt the pleasure posture as a strategy of survival, a means of silencing the critical parental voice of the modern. ...It cries out the importance of pleasure in the face of fragile mortality (Drohojowska-Philp, p. 23)."

Bill Arning remarks that the anti-masculine is quiet, indefinite, mutable, soft, ephemeral, sentimental, and humble, in contrast to the strong, loud aggressive posturing of the law-giving "Father Knows Best" role we associate with the masculine. Perhaps Arning's observation that the feminine is "perverse, simultaneously worshipped and dismissed out of hand by the dominant culture, allowed its place so long as that place is marginal" explains his wish to remain within the masculine. Like the hyperfeminine who thrives on the variety of feminine options, Arning admonishes- "For to displace the dominant culture is to become it- these strategies need their alternative to remain true to themselves and they are interesting when their existence suggests a plethora of possibilities, rather than re-establishing any new doctrine." Nonetheless, in the absence of widespread feminine affirmation, anti-masculine positions indirectly further feminine subjugation.

Equally aware of the value for competing methodologies, Shirley Kaneda remarks- "What needs to be stressed is the notion of 'difference' as a perpetual challenge to the fixing of individual and collective identities. ...What has been marginalized, suppressed, or excluded from (our culture's) painting's discourse are the issues of 'difference' that we must acknowledge (Kaneda, p. 59)." Kaneda was perhaps the first to use masculine/feminine to signify behavioral dispositions, rather than gender. She divides the masculine/feminine paradigm along the lines of logical perspective (despair and alienation)/sensual perspective, hard and opaque/ephemeral, objectify it/engulfed by it, assertion/incompleteness, absolute/indeterminate, and toughness/lyricism.

Kaneda's most interesting observation singles out feminine painting as the site of resistance, independence, and criticality.

Since feminine painting is propositional rather than assertive, it questions the motive and intent of the making; for rather than being authoritarian, it wishes to establish the criteria by which to judge the painting before you, rather than all paintings....A successful painting convinces us that this painting is what it wants to be....It confirms these criteria by clearly demonstrating that it is what the artist has chosen to paint consciously and significantly, and its appearance is not one of default, but of criticality (Kaneda, p. 62).

For good, when categories become stretched beyond recognition, the category's

associations become indeterminate. Similarly, a painting or outfit that appears non-masculine, can no longer be dismissed as insubstantial or disparaged. In some ways, the breadth and inclusiveness of the current anti-masculine critiques resembles the very early anti-feminine critiques inaugurated by Betty Friedan's 1962 *The Feminine Mystique* (one of the first books to critique the narrowness of the feminine realm). As a result, the Women's Liberation Movement (one of the most thorough critiques of the limits of femininity) was organized. The related art movement was the Feminist Art Movement, launched at Cal Arts by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro in the early '70s.

Initially, the anti-feminine position broadened women's roles and spheres of influence beyond the domestic sphere, while making room for aspects of the feminine culture previously disregarded (Miriam Schapiro's *femme*-sewing, piecing, hooking, quilting, and appliqueing). However, as the roles for women expanded, the anti-feminine critique (which was meant to open up the feminine's realm) abandoned the strategy of demarcating the feminine, trading in its exclusive model of the feminine for a more exclusive model, who gained independence and autonomy by rejecting any feminine qualities. As a result, women began viewing the *feminine* as derogatory, which is why ambitious career women took their dress cues from men, rather than appear too feminine or too interested in typically female hobbies (child rearing, home making, shopping).

Similarly, female artists were discouraged from exploring any specifically feminine concerns in the artmaking process. Moreover, doing so was increasingly viewed as a conservative gesture towards preserving traditional roles. Fortunately, today's woman has enough independence and self-confidence to dress as she likes and still command respect. Similarly, feminine paintings are finally appreciated for attributes that might have been misunderstood (arbitrariness, colorful, decorative, flimsy, vulnerable, lacy, fickle, ephemeral), and hence dismissable only five years ago.

Chasing the It Girl

Media-based journalism has coined the term ultrafeminine in order to downplay the hyperfeminine (ultra only means extreme, while hyper means beyond). The Riot Grrrls of Olympia, Washington and girl bands like Hole, L7, Bikini Kill, the Breeders, Babes of Toyland and Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon have spawned the hyperfeminine position nationwide. Fascinated by this counter culture, the media has been quick to dismiss its effectiveness and appeal. "The Riot Grrrls were publicly trounced for their flimsy political theories and half-baked notions: 'How can just talking to each other be a revolutionary act?' skeptics asked. 'Don't these girls know you have to get out there and march and lobby if you want to change the world?' (Ann Japenga, "Grunge 'R Us," *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1993)."

Constructing the world on their own terms, Riot Grrrls think globally, yet act locally, furthering Thumbelina's Theorem, which proposes that Liberty yields Fantasy to make Place (Spaid, "Thumbelina's Theorem," 1994), to carve out a stiny place that they find acceptable. In the introduction to Luce Irigaray's "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other," Helene Vivienne Wenzel probes the significance of Irigaray's woman-to-woman poetics.

The varied emotions provoked by the fusion in which mothers and daughters are forced to lose their separate identities resolve themselves into grief over the lost possibility for a real relationship between two separate, whole women...[H]ere the desideratum for

woman-to-woman relationships is more specifically described as: women become subjects, mothers and daughters may become women, subjects and protagonists of their own reality rather than the objects and antagonists in the Father's drama. (Wenzel, Introduction to Luce Irigaray's "And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other," *Signs* Autumn 1981, p. 59).

The effectiveness and relevance of girls working and sharing, rather than competing as society urges them to do, is lost on the invasive media. Riot Grrrl mottos include "Cherish your scene," "Smaller is better" and "Personal connection is everything." While the media's co-option "attempts to rip substance from their image, people who resist hang onto meaning with all their strength (Japenga)." The Riot Grrrls have generated a DIY (do-it-yourself) survivability and methodology.

On a related topic, the media has printed scores of articles downplaying the hyperfeminine's independence, toughness and very existence. What I find most amazing is not just the media's total denial of the hyperfeminine (I have already discussed the media's reducing her to the Femme Fatale), but the way some men's magazines have enfolded the hyperfeminine's sexuality into their own fantasies of violence and other magazines have pretended to critique the ultrafeminine from a faux-feminist vantage. Tad Friend's trendy tabulation of today's feminists (*Esquire*, February 1994) introduced the ultimately perjorative phrase "Do-Me" Feminism. In hindsight, what seemed like a promising article that highlighted dozens of intelligent and talented women, who also happened to be sexual, now stands as a "bellweather of a disturbing shift in our cultural life." We now recognize his intention to turn female sexuality and women's positive relationships to their bodies on their head, so to speak.

Acknowledging one's sexuality makes one vulnerable to being recontextualized in terms of straight-male sex-on-demand fantasies; whereby, it's ok to describe women in terms that suggest that they're asking to be fucked (the term "do me" still posits the man as the initiator and aggressor). "Besides, even some of the women who are trumpeting their sexual urges worry about being seen as hussies, doxes, strumpets. In stirring the deep muck of our ideas about sex, the do me feminists are turning up a widespread fear of untrammled female sexuality." No Tad Freind, when your yellow journalism is feamed as an article advocating female-sexuality, which truly feeds male fantasies of domination and conquest. I'd say that you're the one "turning it up." *Future Sex* editor Lisa Palac may enjoy games of submission, but she still commands "Degrade me when I ask you to."

Mim Udovitch's "Done to Death" in the *Village Voice* finally pulled the plug on the media's insistence on tweaking female sexuality. "...[T]hat the simple fact that a group of women writers want to have sex and want to have some say with whom and how they have it, does not, in my opinion, constitute a trend... And although locating feminism primarily below the waist is a very viable strategy, as a political tactic, it's an instrinsically limiting choice. Unless that's where you keep your wallet (*Voice*, March 1, 1994, p. 18)."

I'd like to argue this point further. Hannah Arendt has written extensively on the inverse relationship between violence and power. When people resort to violence, they lose power in their attempts to reinforce power. "[L]oss of power becomes a temptation to substititue violence for power...that violence itself result in impotence (Arendt, *On Violence*, 1970, p. 54)." Luce Irigaray has obseved, "In this race for power, woman loses the

uniqueness of her pleasure...Mythology long ago assigned this role to her in which she is allowed a certain societal power as long as she is reduced, with her own complicity of sexual impotence (Irigary, "this Sex which is not One," 1977)."

The teeter-totter that constructs desire and power is well documented. The power asserted by virginity is transferred to a desire for pleasure, as the female's identity blooms over time. Tragically, virile male desire is subsumed by the oppressive society's utilitarian attitudes toward production, which fuel power, Baudrillard's anti-body (Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, 1977, p. 25). "Any force or any liberated speech constitutes one more turn in the spiral of power (*Ibid.*, p. 26)." Hence, those who don't value power are ripe with desire, which further fuels the need to dominate those who have access to their desires.

Jean Baudrillard has seemingly dedicated his career to mapping the exchange inherent to the twin theories of desire and power.

[T]hey are synchronous and isochronous in their "device"...that is why they can be interchanged so well...and can generate as of today all the by-products ("enjoyment of power," the "desire for capital," etc.) which are exact replicas of the previous generation's by-products (the "desire for revolution," "enjoyment of non-power," etc.) For in those days,...desire and power were under opposite signs; today micro-desire (that of power) and micro-politics (that of desire) literally merge at the libido's unmechanical confines. (*Ibid.*, pp. 18-19)."

If one combined Arendt's model of violence with Baudrillard's model of desire, one begins to understand why violence is sexually arousing to someone who fears losing his/her power (a.k.a. a repressed male). When one enjoys a violent act (the "Do-Me" myth, snuff, rape, derogatory porn), it seems as though one's power is reinforced. However, as long as violence destroys power, it actually signals impotence masked as undirected desire. This proves why it's absurd for singer Liz Phair to think that violent lyrics (like "I want to fuck you til your balls turn blue," "I want to take you doggy style," "I want to be your blowjob queen") would have an effect other than digging up instant fans who want to fuck her. It's not surprising that Phair and her cohorts' lyrics regularly turn up in *Playboy* columns. Irigary's women of pleasure, who have outlets for their desires, would find violence rather ineffectual. Similarly, Arendt described the vulnerability of hyperfeminine independence. "It is in the nature of the group and its power to turn against independence, the property of individual strength (p. 44)."

Paradoxically, the onset of the most fashionable fall ever has produced several articles critiquing feminine dressing, as if to further enoble its radicality. However, they cleverly disregard bad-girl resistance, such as the radical hyperfemme, in order to tread on the good-girl version, the vulnerable ultrafemme. The logic seems to be that if we shore up the dawning dangers of the ultrafeminine vamp, the hyperfemme will wither away. For example, *Paper* led with "Pussy Power Dressing," *Newseek* featured "The Cult of Cute," *Buzz* magazine ran "Good Girls are Back" and *Harper's Bazaar* questioned the "Dials-a-Decade-Glam Sham?" Since the good girl does what others want her to do and the bad girl behaves as she likes, coining "do me" feminism represents a conscious effort to deflate the young feminists' resistance.

11

Buzz' article, meant to be funny, actually made me the angriest. Author Sandra Tsing Loh seemed to leave out one vital step. Unless one isn't very interesting, it's nearly impossible to end up a good girl, who's totally complicit and content with one's life, unless one has already been a very very bad girl that has managed to twist society into one of her creations. Yes, "Bad Girl tells us something is terribly wrong with society (p. 70)." However, the Good Girl tells us something far worse, that the Stepford Wives have returned, because we all know that there's only a slim chance that a woman is either sexually, financially, romantically, emotionally or intellectually satisfied. To increase the change of locating such a happy gal, I counted them as separate categories. Ultimately, Tsing Loh concedes that her spunky purposeful good girl is flourishing, because she's a "tough and prudent" cookie who is incidentally detached from anything that could tap her bad girl temperament.

Newsweek warns that the cult of cute is a backlash against strong women. Andrea Dworkin comments- "Infantilizing women is society's way of keeping women inferior, weaker, smaller and dumber....Women are choosing to do something very detrimental by letting this preoccupation continue (*Newsweek*, Karen Schoemer and Yahlin Chang, August 28, 1995, p. 58)." (Some might consider Dworkin's trademark overalls similarly too Osh Kosh By Gosh) Sonic Youth bassist/X-Girl designer Kim Ordon challenges Dworkin's picture of infantilization.

I think the word girl is loaded with meaning. I like the term girl because it kind of refers to a time before women go through adolescence, when they seem to have stronger self-images... [M]aybe girls are less passive before adolescence. Their true personality is to take control and be active and suddenly they go through adolescence and are taught to be more passive (Eisgrau, p. 34).

Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

Dworkin's casual logic reminds me of conservative arguments that attempt to control how women dress by rationalizing that scantily dressed women provoke male aggression. Aggression is the by-product of a society obsessed with power. Why doesn't she just acknowledge what we've always known- it's ridiculous to judge a book by its cover. If you continue to treat the hyperfemme as if her dress code indicates inferiority, you're gonna get your head bit off. They only look cute! By strictly associating femininity and sexuality with the repression of women, Dworkin enslaves women in Loh's model of good girl detachment.

The truth is that cutecore (girls sucking lollipops during all-night raves, wearing pig tails and braids and carrying furry backpacks) was a rebellion against "the dogmatic noise and macho posturing of hardcore punk (*Ibid.*, p. 57)." When Courtney Love sang with Babes in Toyland, she and Kat Bjelland "combined tattered baby-doll dresses with "Valley of the Dolls" tawdriness and visceral, screechy punk, and dubbed the look "kinder-whore (*Ibid.*)." Alicia Silverstone may be responsible for marketing cuteness to the masses, the fact that she's a serious actress, a total klutz in terms of choosing outfits and the beneficiary of a two-picture deal worth more than \$10 million indicate her might and muster. Now that's a hyperfeminine '90s gal.

Harper's Bazaar presented the most serious analysis of glamour's allure. The glamour pushers were eager to emphasize how glam runway models carried themselves with new

assuredness. "They looked womanly and powerful...glam beauty had great powers of transformation. Whether it was '40s or '50s or '70s was immaterial. They like how it made them feel. And it was communicated in a happier looking lot (Annemare Iverson, *Harper's Bazaar*, January 1995, p. 107)." Iverson cautioned against extrapolating this "to normal postfeminist working females- women who've perhaps never considered glamour a serious option- will feel the same (*Ibid.*)." Sound familiar? Once again, the derogatory status of the feminine limits her capacity to explore her femininity (re: fashion and painting).

Although Mizrahi was inspired by '40s photographs, he unconsciously recognizes the hyperfemme's arrival. "What makes it different today is that a woman is totally in control. It's not about ladies. It's about women. Now everyone wants to be this powerful woman... It's a way to try to understand the power of women, the power of women with style (*Ibid.*, p. 110)." Fortunately, *Harper's Bazaar* figured out how to make glam powerful. When we stop associating femininity with idiocy, women will be free to dress as they like. As long as women uphold society's conservative dress codes, they further the derogatory status of femininity.

[I]f you look like that in my world, you're assumed to be insubstantial. Changing an attitude like this is what dial-a-decade glam is all about. To be sexy and strong and to have fun doing it should be the credo of the modern thinking woman (*Ibid.*, p. 1114).

The phrase Lipstick Killers, used in an *LA Weekly* review of new albums by L7 and Hole, takes another degrading jab at the hyperfemme. The term Lipstick Killer (again girl bands (Donita and Courtney), media heroines Tonya, Lorena, Brenda and Anita) refers to the angry woman archetype, who motivated by rage, manipulates power greater than herself to some greedy or altruistic end. If indeed she wants to dominate, control or exercise her power over others (trafficking in the masculine model), as Liz Phair does when she belts out violent lyrics, she has abandoned the hyperfemme in favor of the double negative, who espouses Feminism, but unwittingly facilitates the degradation of the feminine.

I have already shown how the woman who co-opts violence to drive home how such mistreatment feels actually legitimizes violence and sexually arouses the repressed male. Not a very effective punishment. "Whip-smart" killer Phair's confidence is foreboding. "It would be hard to take advantage of me because I'm going to exploit myself better than anyone else could...I'm a little fascist you know (Ann Magnuson, *Bazaar*, September 1994, p. 25)." Contrarily, when the hyperfemme opts for liberty, autonomy and independence, she's just as desirous, but she's no killer!

All of these articles (save *Paper's*) simultaneously relish the return of feminine dressing, but don't quite know how to handle it, making it seem quite problematic. The media is casually inventing its own scandal, under the guise of selling more feminine clothes. *Newsweek* and *Harper's Bazaar* actually offered defenses, such as cute is silly and profoundly inane and glamour is fun and sexy, respectively. Unfortunately, such defenses undermine the very ground that the hyperfemme has managed to forge.

Chalk 1996

97a. & b.. Uta Barth "Field #19"1996 "Field # 9" 1995