October 2022

Queering the Weeki Wachee Mermaid and Its Renewed Aesthetic Value

Jacqueline D. Merveille
University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the American Studies Commons

Scholar Commons Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the USF Graduate Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.
Queering the Weeki Wachee Mermaid and Its Renewed Aesthetic Value

by

Jacqueline D. Merveille

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Brook Sadler, Ph.D.
Daniel Belgrad, Ph.D.
Andrew Berish, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
August 5, 2022

Keywords: objectification, feminist theories, comportment phenomenology, kitsch, camp

Copyright © 2022, Jacqueline D. Merveille
Acknowledgments

I would first like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to Dr. Brook Sadler, my thesis chair, professor, and mentor, for her unwavering support and belief in me. In moments of doubt, confusion, and stress, Dr. Sadler has proven to be the most reliable source of inspiration and encouragement. Thank you, Dr. Sadler, for always believing that I could become a legitimate scholar regardless of language barriers and other obstacles. I could not have done this work without your kind support.

Secondly, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Berish and Dr. Belgrad, who provided pertinent advice and guidance throughout the research process.

I am incredibly grateful for the people I call my friends who are and have always been my emotional supports throughout life and its most challenging moments. Thank you, Isabelle Raes, Caroline Orban, Nathalie Puissant, Philippe Bès, Alessandro Carola, and all my other wonderful friends I can’t name here but have had a positive influence in my life. Your love and unconditional support mean the world to me, and without you, this intellectual adventure would not have been possible. I am so fortunate to have all of you in my life.

And lastly, to my late father, who, I believe, would be proud of me.
# Table of Contents

List of Figures........................................................................................................................................... ii

Abstract......................................................................................................................................................... iv

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 1

The Mermaid Through Time ...................................................................................................................... 3

Weeki Wachee And Its Long-Lasting Mermaid Show ............................................................................. 6

Queering The Mermaid ............................................................................................................................... 10
  a. A Subjugated Mermaid ....................................................................................................................... 14
  b. Queering the Mermaid ....................................................................................................................... 51

The Mermaid’s Aesthetic Value .................................................................................................................. 61
  a. The Mermaid is Kitsch ....................................................................................................................... 61
  b. The Renewed Aesthetic Value of the Mermaid Through Camp-Style ........................................... 67

Conclusion: The Mermaid New Agency ..................................................................................................... 75

Bibliography ................................................................................................................................................ 80

Appendices ................................................................................................................................................ 85
  Appendix A – Fair Use Form .................................................................................................................... 85
  Appendix B – Getty Images Invoice ........................................................................................................ 87
  Appendix C – Weeki Wachee Springs State Park Permission to Reprint ............................................ 88
  Appendix D – University Press of Florida Permission to Reprint ....................................................... 89
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Screenshot from Pichel, <em>Mr. Peabody and The Mermaid</em> (0:44:05).</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Screenshot from Pichel, <em>Mr. Peabody and The Mermaid</em> (0:33:43).</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Screenshot from Pichel, <em>Mr. Peabody and The Mermaid</em> (0:34:54).</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Screenshot from Howard, <em>Splash</em> (0:28:59).</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Screenshot from Howard, <em>Splash</em> (0:28:59).</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td><em>Welcome to Weeki Wachee</em> (left to right), Lou Sikes, Mary Sue Wernicke Clay, Martha Steen Lambert, Florence Gothberg McNabb, Judy Schockley, Terry Ryan Hamlet, and Shirley Walls, ca 1956.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Vicki Smith (left), Mary Sue Clay (center), and Bonnie Georgiadis demonstrate the 3B's of mermaiding in this 1960 photo.</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Deep in the crystal-clear waters at Weeki Wachee Spring, Florida, pretty mermaid Joan Gately (left) is crowned Poinsettia Queen by shapely Diana Fry, another mermaid in the Weeki Wachee Underwater Show.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Nancy Tribble Benda in Newt Perry's short film, 1948.</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Bonita Colson rides “Bubbles,” the seahorse, ca. the 1960s.</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Mermaid Genie and Sue demonstrate mermaid skills, 1960s.</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Genie Westmoreland Young and Terry Ryan Hamlet pose for the National Hot Dog Week promotional photo.</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>Underwater swing with Bunny Eppele, Mary Darlington Fletcher, and Vina Rathfield, ca. 1947.</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td>Donna South prepares to take dictation from Bill Huckaby in their underwater office, 1963.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>Bonnie Georgiadis donned a frilly apron to do a little spring cleaning in this promotional photograph, 1967.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 16: Patsie Hadley Boyett performs in traveling tank while husband, Bud Boyett, announces, ca. 1950s. ...............................................................42

Figure 17: Weeki Wachee’s first brochure gave top billing to “The Mountain Underwater.” ....43

Figure 18: Mermaid posing with “Report Card.” ..........................................................44

Figure 19: Two of the Weeki Wachee Mermaids display the trademark and symbol of Weeki Wachee, the Agadio, in the underwater Grand Canyon at Florida’s Weeki Wachee located just north of Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater. ........49

Figure 20: Mermaids at Weeki Wachee Springs ..................................................................50

Figure 21: Screenshot from Howard, Splash (1:19:27). ......................................................55

Figure 22: Cheri Lynne Ragland as Cinderella and Pat Crawford Cleveland as the Prince, 1970. .................................................................58

Figure 23: Alice in Wonderland Postcard, 1964. .................................................................58

Figure 24: Peggy Westmoreland as Peter Pan climbs through the window to spy on a sleeping Michael played by Shinko Akasofu Wheeler, 1971-72. ..................................................59

Figure 25: Barbara Owens rides Bubbles the Seahorse on her way to an imaginary wedding, 1962. ........................................................................70
Abstract

Scholars have asserted that the visual representation of womanhood responds to a cultural context, which often adheres to patriarchy and the satisfaction of the male gaze.

The mediated depiction of the mermaid through time is polysemous and therefore deserves a thorough examination substantiated by robust theories. As a gendered feminine figure that complies with the patriarchal pressure of subjugation to gratify male desire, the mermaid can, however, elude the socially constructed dichotomy of genders, contributing to her agency and queerness.

By investigating the Florida roadside attraction of Weeki Wachee Springs’ mermaid shows and other mediated visual depictions of the sea creature, I contend that the sexualization of the mermaid and, simultaneously, the empowerment of an alluring genitalia-less feminine body participate in reinforcing the ambiguity of the mythological figure. Weeki Wachee Springs underwater theater started its operation in the post-World War II socio-economic and cultural context and has offered a unique and rich perspective on the mermaid’s narrative and the evolution of its role. Feminist theories highlight the subjugation of the female body to satisfy the male gaze when analyzing socially constructed feminine-coded body postures and choreographies of the Weeki Wachee’s shows, which support the claim of gender identity as performative. Through its hybridized body and the presence of a fishtail, the mermaid is sexless, which blurs gender dichotomy classification and suggests the possibility of gender non-normativity. In addition to examining the resurgence and mediated reappropriation of the mermaid’s representation and its aesthetic value through camp style and the popularization of
kitsch and nostalgia, I affirm that the mermaid has gained significant agency in participating in the contemporary empowerment of young girls through the practice of “mermaiding,” and has served as a powerful advocate for environmental conservation.

This project has the ambition to complicate the existing literature on the mermaid’s body and to underline the evolution of its cultural significance from the 1950s until today. The implicit and explicit connotation of the mermaid is not monosemous; therefore, it is essential to fathom and discern the polymorphous signifiers the sea creature suggests, which give women alternative options to traditional gender roles.
Introduction

Feminist scholarship has long asserted that the visual representation of womanhood fluctuates depending on the cultural context, which often adheres to patriarchal values. The subjugation of the female body has been a relentless endeavor of Western societies, permeating visual media such as paintings, films, and performances, among other media.

While I recognize the pertinence of this stringent observation, some representations of the female-gendered body can circumvent this predicament. My scrutiny of the complex depiction of the mythological figure of the mermaid through time and specifically, but not exclusively, the investigation of the Weeki Wachee Springs mermaids' show and its related visual representations confirms that the mermaid’s body simultaneously complies with the patriarchal urge to satisfy the male gaze and can also dodge the pressure of male subjugation while acquiring a unique form of agency. However, the mermaid remains impervious to a straightforward interpretation and grasping its significance requires a multi-layer approach, which proves its polysemous nature.

To better apprehend the mermaid's representation as adhering to the misogynistic cultural context, my project is rooted in feminist academic works that theorize the concept of female objectification to satisfy the male gaze. I also turn to comportment phenomenology to illustrate how females performing as mermaids adopt socially constructed feminine-coded postures. These theories provide substantial argumentative leverage when examining the mediated exploitation of the mermaid figure to gratify heterosexual imagination in films and spectacles.

To complicate the mermaid's phantasmagorical attraction, it is essential to note that the sea creature has consistently been recognized as female. However, even though the mermaid's
appeal consists in her hyper-femininized performance, the alluring mermaid's hybridized body blurs the gender dichotomic categorization and offers the prospect of gender non-conformity.

Furthermore, I assert that the persistently underrated aesthetic value of the mermaid as a visual trope, because of its association with kitsch, has regained artful appeal through the popularity of camp style and its concurrent revalorization of the mermaid persona. Equally significant are today's new applications of the mermaid through the practice of "mermaiding," which helps promote body-positivity and the recourse to its representation as a charismatic advocate for eco-conservatism.

To better grasp the contextuality of my argument that the physical hybridity of the mermaid is contrastingly posited as subjugated by male authority and, at the same time, can be an independent female-gendered creature who has the agency to evade patriarchal pressures, it is essential to reiterate briefly the history of this mythological creature.
The Mermaid Through Time

When examining mythological stories and folk tales worldwide, one observes the existence of a plethora of hybridized creatures such as the Centaur, Pan, the Harpy, Pegasus, and the Siren, whose bodies fuse humanoid upper or lower body parts and parts with animal features. These creatures transcend the limits of human existence in their environments, and, in the case of aquatic beings, they remedy the human inability to live underwater. Sea creatures’ myths have existed in different parts of the world for centuries. Ningyo, a fish body-female with a human head, found in Japan, was crying pearls instead of tears; in Polynesia, the god Vatea features a half-human and half-porpoise body; Mami Wata, whose origin points to Africa, is a river-mermaid who capsizes canoes. The Shetland Islands have a Sea-Throw, Nixe and Lorelei are German, while the sober Russians have Rusalka (Vickers & Dionne 80).

However, the most prolific sea deities are found in Greek and Roman mythology. Most people are familiar with Neptune and Poseidon. But the first merman was named Oannes. The fish-god Oannes was draped with the skin of a fish and wore a fish-head hat. He “waded from the sea each day to teach the Sumerians the finer points of life before sloshing back to the water in the evening” (Vickers & Dionne 80). The first proto-mermaid is Atergatis, a two-faced goddess who oversaw the tides. During the Middle Ages, mermaids lost their status as deities to enter the folk culture. Many popular stories relate encounters between fishermen and mermaids; however, the most likely sources of these sightings were probably dugongs or manatees.

The mermaid, one of the most popular phantasmagorical creatures, is known for inhabiting the liminal space between humanity and inhumanity with her composite body that
combines a female upper body with a fishtail. She has invariably been portrayed as an enigmatic, alluring, and extremely beautiful female-gendered being. However, through time, the mermaid's attitude has alternated between an active, dangerous siren and a passive yet evasive childlike creature. So first, let me present a brief history of the fascinating and enigmatic mermaid.

Through time, the portrayal of the mermaid has experienced various metamorphoses based on cultural contexts and the status of women in society. The origin of the mermaid remains unclear, but the first tales of sirens, the ancestors of the mermaids, were recorded during Ancient Greek times. For centuries, the underwater figure was portrayed as an alluring, voracious temptress whose ambition was to seduce naïve sailors to their death. From Christianity through the Medieval period, the mermaid represents a symbol of forbidden pleasures whose purpose is to divert men from their faith. Some of their representations were found in churches, which embodied “soulless creatures eager to seduce men in order to steal their souls” (Vickers & Dionne 80). The demonization of the figure reveals how these specific societies perceived women as sinful temptresses who disrupted spiritual order.

Hans Christian Andersen's tale, The Little Mermaid, first published in 1837, drastically changed the public's perception of the hybridized creature. Suddenly, the long-perceived redoubtable temptress became an innocent, childlike sea creature who wanted to marry a prince regardless of the sacrifice of losing her enchanting voice in exchange for being able to step on solid ground with a pair of legs. Andersen's contribution to this new attitude toward the mermaid

---

1 Tales of sirens appeared during Greek antiquity and at that time the hybridized creature was half-bird, half woman. The enchantress mermaid-siren embodied an “icon of temptation exercised by female wiles on powerless males.” However, goddesses with fish bodies have been observed as early as Egyptian and Sumerian times (“Mermaids | Encyclopedia.Com”).

2 The early 12th century, through the influence of Honorius Autun, marks the origin of the mermaid’s reputation as temptress, “a sea of travails on which sinners float and to which they succumb.” It is during the Medieval period that the fish-tailed mermaid became the dominant representation of the creature and was portrayed as unequivocally sexualized (deDonder).
marked a turning point in the subsequent depiction of the creature's femininity. The narrative of *The Little Mermaid* outlines the mermaid's self-sacrifice in order to find a soulmate. However, Andersen's character's metamorphosis grants her the agency to be part of the terrestrial world dominated by patriarchal values through the prince's desire and to return to the sea world.

In the late 1940s, stamped by the Post-World War II context and the popularized pin-ups, the mermaid gained glamorous value by performing ethereal underwater twirls while smiling at the audience. Mermaids have also inspired filmmakers from the advent of the moving pictures industry with films like *Neptune's Daughter* (1914) featuring famous professional Australian swimmer Annette Kellerman, *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid* (1948), and *Million Dollar Mermaid* (1952). More recently, the mermaid theme has also garnered rising public interest with the movie *Splash* (1984) and Disney's animated movie *The Little Mermaid* (1989).

More recently, considering movements such as #MeToo, the mermaid's subjugation has been diverted to promote female body positivity through the practice of "mermaiding" and to advocate for environmental conservation.

These historical and more recent representations of the mythological figure exemplify the complex and ambiguous signifiers of the mermaid, who can simultaneously be portrayed as a "femme fatale" siren feared for her implacable and uncontrollable desire or as a self-sacrificing, childlike mermaid who longs for a soulmate and adheres to patriarchal values. These depictions usually do not escape cultural hegemony and are important markers to better grasp women's culturally constructed position in society.
Weeki Wachee And Its Long-Lasting Mermaid Show

Weeki Wachee Springs’ mermaid roadside attraction is an ideal site for analysis to substantiate my argument. The mermaid’s personification by female athletes during seven decades of thematized spectacles has evolved through time and serves as a reliable text to observe how gender identity as performance has fluctuated from 1947 to the present.

The conception of the Weeki Wachee Springs underwater show originated in the popularity of Aquacade and aquatic-themed Hollywood motion pictures, which motivated Newton Perry, an underwater stuntman, to develop a permanent roadside underwater attraction in Florida in the late 1940s. Perry capitalized on the new craze for mermaids, the invention of the two-piece bathing suits, and the popularization of portable cameras that allow everyone to take photographs. At the premises, Perry taught swimming and diving techniques to local girls. The show included underwater choreographies carried out by "aquabelles\(^3\)," later renamed "mermaids." Perry’s decision to feature mermaids was influenced by the cultural context of the late 1940s when film, fashion, and female athletes' appearance became more popular and accessible. Indeed, Annette Kellerman, an Australian swimmer, gained fame for her swimming exploits and was displayed as a mermaid in a host of films. She was even nicknamed the “Australian mermaid.” In 1948, as soon as the Weeki Wachee Springs’ theater was completed, Universal-International’s producers selected the location to shoot the movie *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid*, starring Ann Blyth and William Powell.

---

\(^3\) Aquabelle refers to an attractive young woman in a bathing suit (“Aquabelle”).
In 1959, the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) bought the Weeki Wachee Springs attraction from Perry. The company opened a larger theater and filmed advertisements in the facilities, which then aired in an ABC-owned theater. The new theater, equipped with a sophisticated underwater sound system, allowed the mermaids to perform in sync with the music. ABC brought celebrities to the park, such as Elvis Presley, Annette Kellerman, and Esther Williams, increasing the attraction’s visibility. Upon ABC’s decision, topless stone mermaids were commissioned to decorate the park entrance. Unlike their stone counterparts, the Weeki Wachee mermaids were not swimming topless but wore “falsies.” They weren’t wearing fishtails at that time either, as the prosthetic prop appeared shortly later. Narrative shows were also incorporated to replace ballet routines. One of the first shows was Alice in Waterland, followed by The Mermaid and the Pirates. During that time, the new art directors and choreographers designed a tail that the mermaids would wear.

Weeki Wachee’s shows became notorious, and women from the U.S., Germany, and Japan flocked to Florida, hoping to become mermaids. New spectacles were created: Mermaids on the Moon, Snow White, Peter Pan, The Perils of Pearls, and Wizard of Oz, which would alternate yearly. No event went unnoticed at the roadside attraction: Safe Drive Week, National Hot Dog Week, etc., and for several years, the reigning Miss Universe would stop at the springs and swim with the mermaids for a photo shoot. ABC decided to make some cheesy short films like Beauty in the Deep and The Care and Feeding of a Mermaid, which played in ABC theaters across the country, to promote the attraction and lure young women to Weeki Wachee to be mermaids. Tourists from the entire country did not want to miss a chance to admire the underwater performances. In the 1970s, a combination of tasteless shows, various unwise financial decisions, and the harsh competition of Disney’s Magic Kingdom caused the number of
tourists to drop. In response to these adverse circumstances, ABC expanded its offering to the public. They opened the Buccaneer Bay water park featuring steep slides along with a kiddie pool and bumper boats in the early 1980s. For the first time in Weeki Wachee Springs’ history, the mermaids lost their status as the leading attraction. In the early 1990s, the mermaids encountered another major problem: Brown algae that contaminated the springs and spoiled the pristine water with high levels of nitrates. If this devastating pollution was not enough, pop-culture critics Jane and Michael Stern listed the Weeki Wachee’s mermaids in their *Encyclopedia of Bad Taste*. Nevertheless, the Florida mermaids still garnered public interest, and people continued to visit the park with awe. In 1997, for the fiftieth anniversary of Weeki Wachee, a few retired mermaids decided to set an emotional revival titled “Unforgettable,” with 25 former performers ranging in age from forty-five to seventy. During the show, the mermaids paid tribute to the past; “they walked a tight-rope, played underwater golf, performed balletic moves taught to the original mermaids by Newt Perry: the foot-first dolphin, the flowing knee-back dolphin, the Ferris wheel” to the pleasure of the public (Vickers & Dionne 234). At that time, the attraction exploited the spectacle's sense of nostalgia, and some new mermaids performed retro-themed shows. In 2003, the park was on the brink of bankruptcy, and the “threat to drive the mermaids to extinction made national and international news” (Vickers & Dionne 254). The mayor of Weeki Wachee, a tiny town of nine residents and former mermaids, campaigned to save the attraction. The slogan was “Save Our Tails,” and many headlines across the country echoed their plea (Vickers & Dionne 254). In another attempt to save the roadside attraction, the state of Florida decided to take over the attraction, make it a state park, and address the necessary renovations in 2008. Thanks to the help of the Friends of Weeki Wachee
Springs State Park, and the enthusiasm of many former mermaids, the Weeki Wachee mermaid show continues to draw thousands of visitors yearly from all over the world.

In the following section, I visit some of the most significant mediated representations of the creature in two films before diving into the close-reading and interpretation of the Weeki Wachee Springs mermaids' spectacles. I discuss the mermaid's ambiguous position between subject and object in a patriarchal context where she simultaneously complies with and rejects norms of femininity that serve the male gaze. The creature's queerness and gender fluidity steer the discussion to a possible misconception of the mermaid's body and endow her with an agency that thwarts cultural hegemony.
Queering The Mermaid

The mediated depiction of the mermaid through time is polysemous and therefore deserves a thorough examination substantiated by robust theories. As a gendered feminine figure that complies with the patriarchal pressure of subjugation to gratify male desire, the mermaid can, however, elude the socially constructed gender dichotomy, contributing to her agency and queerness. Before diving into the close reading of Weeki Wachee mermaids and their visual interpretation, I will scrutinize the representation of the mythological figure in other popular texts, such as the 1948 motion picture *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid* and a more recent film *Splash* (1984). This paper focuses on the visuality of the mermaid; therefore, I narrow my scope of scrutiny to pertinent texts which offer a significant iconographic portrayal of the figure in relation to the cultural environment⁴. The films I selected to analyze concurrently with Weeki Wachee’s mermaid show are essential to better understand how, through time, the representation of the mermaid has evolved and embodies a cultural marker with epistemic value. The production of *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid* coincided with the opening of Weeki Wachee’s mermaid show in the late 1940s. Interestingly, the Florida springs also served as the location for the film’s underwater scenes. By comparison, the movie *Splash* is a product of the postfeminist era, which witnessed a backlash of the women’s movement and is deeply tied to consumerist

---
⁴ Despite the success and popular significance of the animated movie, *The Little Mermaid*, distributed in 1989, I choose not to discuss this text in this paper. The centrality of the mermaid’s voice, hence its subsequent loss in exchange for two legs, would shift the discussion away from the mermaid’s visual representation.
I then turn to the main focus of my discussion, the Weeki Wachee mermaid show. This section is divided into two critical arguments. Supported by prominent feminist theorists’ works, I first examine how the mermaid is coopted within a patriarchal diktat. Next, I complicate my scrutiny by affirming and demonstrating that the mermaid’s physical representation grants the mythological figure the capacity to evade gender’s social construction, circumventing misogynistic pressure through the absence of genitalia. The innovation of my approach resides in the combination of multiple theoretical perspectives that assert that the visual representation of the mermaid is polysemous and that its cultural significance has fluctuated through the years. Its portrayal is marked by sustaining patriarchal coercion, but I affirm that, because of its hybridization, the mermaid can bypass gender determinism, acquiring agency and offering non-binary gendered opportunities through its non-normative physicality.

For over 1,000 years, mermaids have been marked by changes in female beauty, social perceptions of femininity, and sexual differences in Western art (visual, literary, and audiovisual media). Many representations of mermaids in frescoes covered Medieval Christian churches across Europe; the aquatic figure was designated as a sexual temptress, which had to be defeated to save the Christian faith. Lisa McSherry states that the “mermaid became a victim of the repressive sexual attitudes of the Christian Church and carvings of her figured prominently in

---

5 Post-feminism ideology actively undermines the gains of the 1970s and 80s. The subtlety of post-feminism is that it does not directly respond against feminist arguments but, rather, it both rejects the emphasis on women as victims and dismisses the need for gender equality. Post-feminist concept focusses on individual lifestyle choices and a presumptive pleasure women take in adopting femininity tropes. It promotes women’s transformation to adhere to the patriarchal values of femininity through consumption (Sadler).

6 A comparison may be drawn between the mermaid’s depiction as dangerous seductress stripped from spiritual qualities in Christian iconography with the myth of Eve as a temptress. In his theological work, Jean Higgins affirms that Eve, who in the Bible is referred to as the first woman and the companion of Adam, is compared to a serpent. He writes that “Eve tempted, beguiled, lured, corrupted, persuaded, taught, counseled, suggested, urged, used guile and cozening, tears and lamentations, to prevail upon Adam, had not rest until she got her husband banished, and thus became ‘the first temptress’” (Higgins 641).
church decorations in the Middle Ages, symbolically reminding worshippers of the fatal temptations of the flesh” (McSherry). Interestingly, the term “mermaid” characterized prostitutes, pointing to the creature’s presumptive uncontrollable sexual drive (McSherry). While the mermaid’s feminine characteristics have ensured the myth’s longevity, mermen are not as famous. They are defined as “the male of the mermaid,” also known as Triton (Hayward 10). Mermen’s myths have not benefited from the same popularity as mermaids’ because male sexuality has never been considered a threat to the Catholic church nor been perceived as disruptive to the patriarchal order. In folk tales, mermaids are often depicted interacting with men—for example, the sirens’ myth recounts how the sea creature lures men to their watery realm.

During the 19th century, the mermaid reached a renewed visibility in art and literature after the publication of Hans Christian Andersen’s tale The Little Mermaid. The period’s romantic yearnings influenced the tale’s narrative style. The mermaid became a symbol of impossible “attractions of doomed passion” (McSherry). At the turn of the 20th century, the alluring creature gained fame through the advent of moving pictures, where the folkloric/mythological theme was associated with the confident expression of female physicality, which sometimes resulted in public outrage.

Indeed, Annette Kellerman, an Australian aquatic performer who became a famous Hollywood actress, was the first female lead character to appear nude in a Hollywood production. She impersonated mermaids in numerous films and often blended folkloric motifs to create a modern “female persona and identity”7 (Hayward 54). The suggestive depiction of

7 During her long career as swimmer, actress, health, fitness and natural beauty advocate, Annette Kellerman featured in films and documentaries (The Mermaid (1911), Siren of the Sea (1911), Neptune’s Daughter (1914), Queen of the Sea (1918), Venus of the South Seas (1924)). She also helped popularizing the sport of synchronized
partially nude female bodies was, and remains, an essential element of the mermaid’s visual appeal. The limited nudity of the mermaid is erotically charged, which contributes to her popularity. The study titled *Gender and Visibility of Sexual Cues Influence Eye Movements While Viewing Faces and Bodies*, published in 2012, based its experiment on the attractiveness of nude bodies as opposed to clothed ones. The results show a significant discrepancy between men’s and women’s patterns when looking at someone naked of the opposite sex. Men focus on the female chest and pelvic regions for significantly longer than women when looking at a naked man. Men also spend less time fixating on the face than on more sexualized parts of a female nude body. The research highlights that these female body regions, the breast, and the pelvic areas, indicate both attractiveness and physical and reproductive fitness. This observation suggests that the fascination for mermaids may be rooted in male heterosexual desire and its visual component; however, patriarchal societies must guarantee her sexual taming, ensuring her inability to reprisal through misogynistic mechanisms. Kate Manne redefines misogyny in the patriarchal context and asserts that “misogyny should be understood as the ‘law enforcement’ branch of patriarchal order” (Manne 63). This policing structure targets girls and women perceived as acting against or violating patriarchal norms. Patriarchy rewards females for displaying docile endeavors and subdued sexual drive while punishing those who do not submit.

---

8 (Nummenmaa, et al.)

9 This study has determined that faces and bodies give critical signals relevant to identifying a potential sexual partner. However, in our societies, the wearing of clothes significantly restricts the exposure of the body. A gender-contingent visual examination of nude bodies shows that “nude bodies attract more attention, particularly to the regions relevant for the identification of sexual partners” (Nummenmaa et al. 1449).

10 Misogyny is a byproduct of a patriarchal society and should be understood as political. Kate Manne defines misogyny as a system that exists within a patriarchal environment which purpose is to “police and enforce women’s subordination and (...) uphold male dominance” (Manne 33).
to its authority. Punitive hostilities work as a deterrent and can be polymorphous, ranging from infantilization, belittling, humiliating, vilifying, demonizing, sexualizing, shunning, and blaming, among many other ways to discourage women from disrupting male dominance. The more extreme hostilities can be physical violence, threatening behaviors, or death. And since one woman can represent many others, almost all of them will experience a vulnerable position in one form or another during their life. The mermaid, being culturally gendered feminine, her representation has varied according to the perception and role of women in society through time. This interconnection inevitably generates misogynistic coercive practices geared toward the phantasmagorical creature.\footnote{The mermaid’s earlier form, such as the siren who lures men to their death, is also deemed to be punished for breaking the rules of femininity normativity by losing her voice. Misogynistic mechanisms systematically chastise females who are not only sexually desirous but also use their voice, which is considered to be a threat to patriarchy.}

\section{The Subjugated Mermaid}

In what follows, using feminist concepts of objectification, the male gaze, and comportment phenomenology, I inspect specific scenes from the movies \textit{Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid} and \textit{Splash} and turn to the analysis of photographs depicting Weeki Wachee’s mermaids.

\textit{Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid}, a Classical Hollywood movie released in 1948, coincides with the inception of Weeki Wachee’s roadside attraction, placing both texts in a post-World War II cultural context. After the war, gender roles in a traditional American couple were strictly defined: the husband was the breadwinner while the wife stayed home, raised the children, and cared for the household. This period was characterized by social pressure on women. The return of mobilized men and their demand to reinvest in the workforce implied that women, who thrived professionally during the absence of men, had to return home. Under mediated pressure
and a misogynistic cultural environment, women internalized the norms of femininity\textsuperscript{12} and chose to limit their lives to being homemakers and mothers. In her book, \textit{The Feminine Mystique}, Betty Friedan scrutinizes the positionality of women in mid-century American society. Friedan states that women’s role was to “seek fulfillment as wives and mothers” while “they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity” (Friedan 1-2). Women were trapped in a squirrel cage, oppressed by a cultural context that required them to be pretty, sexually available, and dependent on their husbands. Now that I have introduced the cultural background that bolstered the entrepreneurial ambition to open the Weeki Wachee mermaid show and the production of \textit{Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid} movie, it is indispensable to introduce the concept of objectification, which is essential to understand how the images of mermaids participate in or reinforce the subjugation of women.

Objectification is the use or treatment of a person by another person as a mere object and is ethically questionable. Martha Nussbaum argues that objectification is detrimental because “it cuts women off from full self-expression and self-determination – from, in effect, their own humanity” (Nussbaum 250). The ethical issue of objectification is “treating one thing as another” (Nussbaum 256). For Nussbaum, objectification is polymorphic, and she has conceptualized several ways to treat a person as a thing. For clarity, this paper exclusively considers two of the seven forms of objectification framed by the scholar: \textit{instrumentality} and \textit{denial of autonomy}. Nussbaum adds that several of these components can frequently coexist when the term “objectification” is mentioned.

\textsuperscript{12} Norms of femininity are imposed under patriarchal domination on women as disciplinary practices. Women become “docile” to embody a peculiarly feminine endeavor, adhering to standardized body size, repertoire of gestures and movements and the use of the body as an ornamental surface. Femininity norms are internalized by women who self-commit to a relentless self-surveillance, which is a form of obedience to patriarchy (Bartky 80).
The movie *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid* is a definitive text because it illustrates how contemporary ideology reaches the public through mediation and helps uncover how the mermaid’s representation complies with a mid-century misogynistic cultural context. Mr. Peabody, the main character, a married man experiencing a mid-life crisis, falls in love with Lenore (played by Ann Blyth), a beautiful mermaid he catches on a remote islet. Lenore is portrayed as a very young, docile blonde (Fig. 1).

![Figure 1](image.png)

**Figure 1.** Screenshot from Pichel, *Mr. Peabody, and The Mermaid* (0:44:05). Fair use.

This film still image shows Lenore in the center of the frame, she looks exceptionally childlike, and her hairdo is impeccable despite emerging from the water. Mr. Peabody is above Lenore, who is forced to look at him upward, emphasizing her servility. Her intense stare at him with sparkly eyes conveys admiration and submission while she kindly smiles at him (*Mr.*
Peabody and the Mermaid 0:44:05). His hand is on top of hers as if Mr. Peabody is trying to constrain her, and one can only notice desire in the young mermaid’s facial expression. Not only does she seem to accept his dominating posture, but to enjoy it. This scene accentuates Lenore’s youth, beauty, and admiration for the older man. As noted by Friedan, in mid-century America, advertisements for children sometimes had recourse to the sexualization of young girls. For example, in the New York Times in 1960, one could read “[s]he Too Can Join the Man-Trap Set” on a commercial for girls’ dress (Friedan 3). Filmmakers and image creators use different tools to direct viewers’ attention to specific visual elements to convey a particular message, like Lenore’s youth and infatuation. These cinematic automatisms13 include, but are not limited to, lighting, mise-en-scène, music score, and camera angle and movements. In this scene, the camera frame presents the mermaid as enamored and subservient; she is objectified for Mr. Peabody’s pleasure and the male spectator’s gaze. Lenore is portrayed as a sexually desirable object staring at Mr. Peabody amorously, regardless of his lack of attractiveness.

Lenore is physically and intellectually passive. She regards the older man with a naïve admiration, while Mr. Peabody endorses the role of Pygmalion, teaching the young creature how to kiss and molding her to fit his desire. He must “straighten [her] out” (Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid 0:43:21). This film’s excerpt illustrates Nussbaum’s objectification concept of instrumentality, which is the most widely observed and is defined as the objectifier treating the object as a mere tool to reach their end. Peabody wants “a woman who can’t do anything very much,” which reinforces the idea of unthreatening female passivity to safeguard the patriarchal system (Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid 0:22:51-53). The movie’s emphasis on Lenore’s beauty

---

13 “Automatism” is a term used by Stanley Cavell, a prominent philosopher whose work deliberated on ethics, aesthetic and cinema. Cavell redefined the concept of “medium” considering “cinema’s technological basis, generic conventions, and aesthetic capacities” (Ahern 8). His concept of automatism points to cinematic mechanical means such as photochemical processes, camera movements and framing, and projection to the audience.
that simultaneously mesmerizes Peabody and the male audience is variously highlighted throughout the narrative. Spectators can admire the mermaid’s body when Lenore combs her hair while taking a bath (Fig. 2).

![Figure 2. Screenshot from Pichel, *Mr. Peabody and The Mermaid* (0:33:43). Fair use.](image)

The young mermaid smiles while looking at her reflection in a mirror and placing a hairpin¹⁴ (*Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid* 0:33:43). Interestingly, a mermaid’s hair and her braids also express specific meanings. Her tresses and singular habit of combing her hair represent a sexual invitation and even a form of wantonness (Hayward 15). Foam covers her body, but one

---

¹⁴ In her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft, who some consider as one of the founding feminist philosophers, advocated for women’s rights. She claimed that women are not inferior to men but could acquire agency if given access to education. She notes that young girls learn that being pretty and superficial is quintessential of being a woman. Wollstonecraft writes, “… vanity is oftener fostered than sensibility by the mode of education … and that coquetry more frequently proceeds from vanity than from inconstancy, which overstrained sensibility naturally produces” (Wollstonecraft 141). Some may argue that Wollstonecraft observations belong to another era; however, they prove that at least as far back as the 19th century, cultural pressure on women’s appearance has been applied and that early feminists’ legacy and concerns are sadly still prevalent today.
can anticipate she is naked in the bathtub. The camera’s position works as a facilitator to the spectator’s gaze. It mirrors the Cupid adorning the bathroom tiles, which looks at her from behind, revealing the filmmaker’s intention to exhibit Lenore to the male’s scrutiny.

Female objectification to gratify male desire is closely interconnected with Laura Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze and the female body’s subjugation. In her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey argues that the fascination for spectacle is entrenched in the subject’s pre-existing socially constructed and internalized patterns. Cinema, and by extension any form of spectacle, taps into scopophilia (the pleasure of looking), which places women as objects in a dominant patriarchal context. In other words, this mechanism uses the image of women for male satisfaction through sight, which denies her full agency. Therefore, she argues that this produces the voyeuristic objectification of the passive female figure and the male perception of active females as a threat to the patriarchal order, which needs to be controlled or punished. In films, this results in active/male and passive/female dichotomous representations where the “male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure” whose appearance must be shaped accordingly (Mulvey 19). To complement Mulvey’s concept, Theresa de Lauretis has established the presence of three types of looks constitutive of the male gaze (De Laurentis 139). The most straightforward one relates to the diegetic eye of men on women, who become objectified. Consequently, the film spectator’s identification with the male character subjugates the female character simultaneously and is defined as a second “look.” Finally, in films, the camera embodies the third gaze through the act of filming, which becomes subservient to the male look. While Mulvey and De Laurentis affirm that a woman is preemptively subjugated, she is predominantly objectified because of the male gaze. In other words, the filmmakers, the diegetic characters, and the movie spectators participate in the subjugation of women through
camera positioning and movement. De Laurentis’ approach substantiates that the male gaze expands on different levels and, as expounded, is facilitated by the preexisting mechanism of female objectification, which positions the character of the mermaid as a passive, harmless creature.

But then, what about the female spectators who are also avid filmgoers? In *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid*, Lenore’s passivity is outlined by her inability to speak and her position as a naïve teenage girl who needs Mr. Peabody to teach her how to behave and shapes her according to his desire. The mermaid is presented as an object to be looked at and admired through camera work. Mulvey adds that “traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (Mulvey 19). Surprisingly, female objectification’s intent does not exclusively target the male spectator. Iris Marion Young draws on Mulvey’s film theories on the male gaze and states that “[t]hrough active looking the subject acquires a sense of subject set off against objects” (Young 65). She uncovers the possibility of a “narcissistic identification” by looking at one’s reflection in a mirror. In other words, a woman who looks at herself adopts a masculine way of looking, which she has internalized. By looking at her reflection, a woman can behold herself as a unity. A woman can see another woman through the internalization of the male gaze as an object to be looked at, but because she is a woman, she does not want to possess the woman. Instead, she wants to *be* her; her pleasure is triggered by her aspiration to be objectified and desirable. Young’s observation offers a dualistic interpretation that could induce the pleasure of spectatorship for both males and females. When Lenore is exhibited in the bathtub, the camera simultaneously offers her image as a desirable object for the male gaze to “possess her” and an
object of identification for the female spectator to “look like her.” This desire to “look like” the passive, subjugated mermaid onscreen allows the female viewer to comply with patriarchal norms hence, benefit from the rewards of male approval and conform to gender standardization that protects her from misogynistic reprisal measures that are inflicted on those who do not adhere to these norms.

Mr. Peabody directly refers to the creature’s appealing and childlike features when he states that she has “the beauty of a child, simple, direct, uncomplicated, like [her] love for [him]” (Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid 0:46:04). In her book, which draws upon the observation of the position of the female in mid-century America, Friedan notes that the image of woman conveyed in media is “young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home” (Friedan 27). Lenore, while sensually craving, is depicted as innocent and candid, exhibiting no threat to the diegetic male characters or the spectators. As a mermaid, Lenore is also physically constrained in her mobility on land because of her tail. She entirely relies on Mr. Peabody, who carries her around (Fig. 3).
This physical restraint and lack of agency exemplify Nussbaum’s *denial of autonomy* form of objectification, implying the objectifier’s disregard for the object’s freedom and self-determination.

Catherine Williamson argues that the popularity of mermaids in films is motivated by “an excellent opportunity to display the female body in various stages of undress, while the wholesomeness of the narrative deflected any possible reprisals” (Williamson 5). Williamson’s statement is exemplified in earlier films such as *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid*. Still, the display of the mermaid’s naked body finds its pinnacle in a more recent popular movie, *Splash*, distributed in 1984 by one of Disney’s adult-oriented production companies. As previously mentioned, the knowledge of the cultural context surrounding the origination of any text is essential to adequately observe and grasp how socially constructed elements can permeate an
artwork. When *Splash* was released in the 1980s, the United States was experiencing a backlash against the feminist movement, which produced a singular sensibility in media representations of women. Postfeminist ideology questions the future of feminism and unjustly antagonizes two types of women: the Superwoman and the mother. In her book, *Material Gils: Making Sense of Feminist Cultural Theory*, Suzanna Danuta Walters states that “[t]he intention of numerous 1980s films, television shows, and other forms of popular culture is precisely this: to further dichotomize mother and woman, with an additional postfeminist gloss by identifying ‘woman’ not only as sexual, but as ambitious Superwoman” (Walters 122). This misogynistic ploy attempts to reinstate the value of motherhood and femininity by demonizing working women, usually portrayed as overtly sexualized and dangerous. Women’s image has shifted from classical temptresses such as Eve, Dalilah, or Salome to the more contemporary femme fatale depicted in movies whose ambition is to manipulate and lure men to “arousal work to disclaim male ownership of the body and its desires” (Bordo 6). These biased views are undoubtedly rooted in misogynistic patriarchal mechanisms, which aim to vilify women who, instead of being portrayed as victims, are now presented as threats, aggressors, or perpetrators of traditionally masculine violence. Susan Bordo adds that “even when women are silent…, their bodies are seen as ‘speaking’ a language of provocation” (Bordo 6). Female bodies are inherently perceived as inviting and “flaunting” (Bordo 6). If they don’t acquiesce to the male desire, the latter may interpret the female bodies as teasing or mocking them. Romantic comedies featuring a female fantasy of romance and of being rescued by “prince charming” serve the purpose of teaching

---

15 Susan Faludi extensively studied postfeminist retaliation against feminist movements who commanded for a gender equilitarian society. She notes that in the 1980s, in films and TV shows “single, professional, and feminist women are humiliated, turned into harpies, or hit by nervous breakdowns; the wise ones recant their independent ways by the closing sequence” (Faludi xi). Even some prominent scholars like Megan Marshall, proclaimed that “the feminist ‘Myth of Independence’ has turned her generation into unloved and unhappy fast-trackers, ‘dehumanized’ by careers and ‘uncertain of their gender identity’” (Faludi xii-xiii). Politicians pointed finger to feminist ideologies as the cause of women’s unhappiness and misery.
women to be content with male authority and power. Depictions of women on screens are “representations that have the veneer of feminism but are actually encoding reactionary ideas about women and women’s lives” (Walters 134).

The romantic comedy Splash is an ideal text exemplifying mediated postfeminist ideologies through the depiction of Madison (Daryl Hannah), a mermaid. Madison falls in love with a human, Allen Bauer (Tom Hanks), and exhibits an unapologetic sexual drive to delight Allen and the film spectators. She is simultaneously portrayed as sexually voracious and as an innocent, childlike woman who wants to gain Allen’s love with whom she wants to spend the rest of her life. Her character embodies a combination of the threatening peculiarities of the siren and the inoffensiveness yet sexualized traits adhering to patriarchy. Daryl Hannah’s physical aesthetic is extensively presented in various degrees of nudity to satisfy the male characters’ (diegetic) gaze, as well as the male film viewers’ gaze and desire.

It is noteworthy to highlight the transformative characteristics of Madison as opposed to Lenore’s condition, whose lower body remains a fishtail. Madison trades her tail for legs to spend six days with Allen on land, benefiting from the agency of being able to walk. The movie offers two blatant examples of Madison’s objectification through the exposure of her entire naked body to the view of Allen and the audience. In the first excerpt, Allen regains consciousness on a deserted beach after almost drowning and being rescued by the mermaid. She suddenly appears from behind bushes and is naked, apart from wearing a necklace. Madison stares at a stunned Allen with enamored eyes, approaches him, and kisses him before disappearing into the ocean’s waves. Locks of hair cover her breast and buttock, yet her fashionable, thin, white body is exposed to the spectator’s gaze (Splash 0:23:47 – 0:24:54). The viewers only see her from behind. This partial view of Madison’s nudity encourages male
spectators to covet Allen’s position, who can visually enjoy the mermaid’s entire naked body. The exposure of Hannah’s nudity in this film is not fortuitous. Instead, it aims to present to the female viewers a “standardized” body that responds to the contemporary canons of beauty. In modern culture, where slenderness is promoted, and the terms fat and thin have moral meanings, a slender and fit body symbolizes the “‘virile’ mastery over bodily desires that are continually experienced as threatening to overtake the self” (Bordo 15). Since the 1980s, women have reshaped their bodies to the wishes of their lovers and employers and taken significant health risks by having implants to enlarge or reshape their breasts. Andrea Dworkin frames the consequences of beauty standardization and scope. She states, “in our culture, not one part of a woman’s body is left untouched, unaltered. No feature or extremity is spared the art, or pain, of improvement… From head to toe, every feature of a woman’s face, every section of her body, is subject to modification, alteration” (Bordo 21). Postfeminist theories aim to exonerate men from any responsibility by affirming that women have a presumptive “free choice” to comply and accept “their sufferings from the whims and bodily tyrannies of fashion” (Bordo 22). Bordo continues, writing that “the culture that subordinates women’s desires to these men, sexualizes and commodifies women’s bodies, … offers them little other opportunity for social or personal power” (Bordo 22). In other words, women must endure the constant mediated pressure to conform to unattainable standards of slenderness and beauty with no further reward than the tacit approval of the patriarchal authority. In Splash, Madison may have the agency to walk on land through her corporal transformative ability, yet, the pervasive displaying of her body commodifies her character as a vehicle to promote the standards of idealized femininity and distill the idea that to be integrated into the American society at that time, women had to look (be
slender and white), behave (exercise, be sexually driven, and in need of male mentorship), and consume (buy fancy clothes) like her.

The other excerpt in that film that exposes the transformative mermaid in the nude occurs when Madison, in search of Allen in Manhattan, runs aground on Liberty Island\textsuperscript{16}, wearing no clothes. The viewers, as opposed to the diegetic characters, exclusively see Madison from behind (Fig. 4); the camera follows her, switching from fragmenting frames focusing on her legs (Fig. 5) to zooming out, presenting her whole naked body.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Screenshot from Howard, \textit{Splash} (0:28:59). Fair use.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{16} The Statue of Liberty is a national symbol of freedom and justice, which are core principles of the United States’ Declaration of Independence (Hudson). Ironically, the solemn and composed facial expression of Lady Liberty represents a harsh contrast with the juxtaposition in the same frame of a naked mermaid. Additionally, a mob of men surrounds her and starts to grope her and takes pictures of her while she looks uncomfortable. Appallingly, Madison is the only person arrested for publicly exposing her nudity while the men surrounding her harassed her, which is in blatant contradiction with the symbolized principles of freedom and justice.
A mob of men becomes frantic, hysterically surrounding her while taking pictures of her nude body (*Splash* 0:28:54 – 0:29:42). Compared to *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid*, which more subtly represented Lenore as a passive sexual object driven by a strong desire to kiss Mr. Peabody, *Splash* subjugates the mermaid by straightforwardly presenting Madison’s naked body to the public eye. Here again, the three-fold level of the male gaze is manifest: the filmmaker’s look, the diegetic character, and the spectators’ gaze.

Echoing my inquiry about the appeal of *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid* for female viewers, one could wonder why *Splash* was so popular among women. Walters examines the “mechanism of viewing” at play and its connection to gender. She states that the apparently passive act of looking can instill “relations of power, access, and control,” thereby creating an imbalance between men’s and women’s agency where “men look at women [and] women watch themselves being looked at” (Walters 51). The author borrows some of John Berger’s concepts that outline female objectification in images, establishing a male power dynamic over women and provoking the internalization of men’s look. She observes that a woman’s identity
incorporates male subjugation through appearance, which becomes paramount to fulfilling the perception of self. In accordance with Walters, Mulvey and other feminist cultural critics contend that Hollywood films bolster two types of pleasure of looking: voyeurism and fetishism. Walters elaborates by stating that “[v]oyeurism is a way of taking pleasure by looking at rather than being close to a particular object of desire, like Peeping Tom” (Walters 54). This observation outlines the voyeur’s position of control. Fetishism implies the granting of an object or body part with a sexual connotation. Freud’s psychoanalytical writings extensively explore fetishism as a masculine defense tool against castration threats and, in visuals, often sexualize women’s body parts. Mulvey pertinently conveys this idea when she states that “[w]oman as representation signifies castration, inducing voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms to circumvent her threat” (Walters 55). The fetishistic look is mainly promoted in films and advertisements when female bodies are “fragmented.” These body parts acquire sexual meaning to stimulate and attract attention and objectify women. A woman is a person, not a combination of body parts. The fixation on portions of her body attempts to reduce the woman to a passive assortment of objects.

The scene in Splash discussed hereabove illustrates this body fragmentation where the frame switches between her legs and her entire body. Walters argues that “[w]omen are urged to think of their bodies as ‘things’ that need to be molded, shaped, and remade into a male conception of female perfection” (Walters 56). Spectatorship status for male and female seating in the darkness of a theater or a spectacle venue reinforces a voyeuristic/scopophilic demeanor.

---

17 It is noteworthy that in Splash, Allen’s brother, Freddy, casually exhibit a pornographic magazine (Penthouse Magazine) to his co-workers. Catharine MacKinnon writes that “[p]ornography sexualizes rape, battery, sexual harassment, prostitution, and child sexual abuse; it thereby celebrates, promotes, authorizes, and legitimizes them” (MacKinnon 171). The Dworkin-MacKinnon ordinance states that “porn [is] a violation of women’s rights for which they could sue” (Cameron 785). Pornography predominantly resorts to voyeuristic and fetishistic mechanisms through female objectification and body parts’ fragmentation.
encourages ego identification with the featured characters. E. Ann Kaplan notes that the male gaze can’t be applied to a purported female gaze because of patriarchal power. She states that “[men] do not look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession which is lacking in the female gaze” (Walters 58). On female spectatorship, Mulvey adds that the female spectator is culturally forced to adhere to and identify with the heterosexual male gaze, denying any form of identity agency. Mary Ann Doane summarizes this concept, writing that “[t]he female spectator... in buying her ticket, must deny her sex. There are no images either for her or of her” (Walters 59). Therefore, the female viewer gravitates into a visual universe created for exclusive male satisfaction. Her fate is to reflect and identify with the image through narcissist and masochistic identification processes with her own objectification.

Because of their subjugated status, women in classic Hollywood cinema are often offered secondary roles where the male protagonist carries the narrative. On that topic, Walters writes, “[w]omen are the stuff of ocular spectacle, there to serve as the locus of the male’s desire to savor them visually” (Walters 61). In other words, the camera tends to linger on the female character, slowing the action to pose her and offer her as an object of erotic contemplation, which occurs on numerous occasions in the movie Splash. The male gaze theory has broad sociological applications in popular culture. It encourages the internalization of beauty norms extolled by men and channels women’s behaviors to “perform” to satisfy the male desire.

Madison appears to have some agency; she exhibits an insatiable sexual appetite. When Allen forces his way into the bathroom where Madison is taking a bath and does not want him to see her fishtail, he misinterprets her behavior as prudishness. He exclaims: “You were shy? After the car, elevator, bedroom, and on top of the refrigerator?” (Splash 0:50:25). This line directly points to Madison’s sex-craving, which again feeds the viewer’s fantasy. However, Madison’s
agency through her unapologetic sexual desire, which could be perceived as menacing, is thwarted by her childlike naivety and Allen’s Pygmalion’s role, who teaches her how to behave in society. Her apparent agency is performative, gratifying male desire. Madison as a mermaid, exemplifies post-feminism ideology. She has no other ambition than to swim away with Allen and “live happily after.” She adheres to the ambient consumerism that marked the 1980s as she is seen in a department store frantically buying clothes that comply with the period’s standardization of femininity. While Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid and Splash use similar mechanisms to portray a subjugated/passive yet sexualized mermaid, their differences signal their timely cultural contexts. Both films’ narratives and visual automatisms directly correlate with Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze while complicating the implication of the female viewers and Nussbaum’s instrumental and denial of autonomy forms of objectification. Lenore and Madison are instrumentalized as sexual objects to please the male protagonists and the audience. Yet, their simultaneous display as ingenuous creatures needing a male mentor and incapable of any form of reprisal conforms their representations to the misogynistic pressure dictated by patriarchy. Additionally, their freedom is denied by being portrayed as immature, credulous creatures needing a Pygmalion to adjust to their new environment.

As these two films, Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid and Splash, demonstrate, the myth and the figure of the mermaid have been implicated in patriarchal and misogynist representations of women, both non-feminist (Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid) and postfeminist (Splash). As I will show, the mermaids at Weeki Wachee should be read in this context as contributing to an American engagement with the mermaid figure. Yet, I will also argue that the mermaid can be re-read and reimagined in ways that resist female subjugation.
In scrutinizing the representation of Weeki Wachee's mermaids, I will implement the theoretical concepts that helped decipher objectification mechanisms and the ensuing scopophilic male satisfaction in the previous visual texts. Using Nussbaum and Mulvey’s theories, I examine how the Florida-based mermaid also acquiesces to patriarchal values. Still, I complicate the discussion by demonstrating that with or without a fishtail, she adopts feminine-coded postures and movements.

The mermaid shows at Weeki Wachee Springs opened its door a few months before Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid’s production, which ascribes both texts in a similar cultural context. Since 1947, the Weeki Wachee show has continuously featured spectacles with the mythological figure; hence the representation of the mermaid has been influenced by the fluctuation of women’s roles in American society. From the inception of the roadside attraction, its founder, Newton Perry envisioned the unique opportunity that the Florida crystal-clear water of the springs offered. At that time, tourists from the Northern United States heading to the Sunshine State’s Western fine sand beaches drove past pretty girls along U.S. 19, waving at them and inviting them to see the whimsical and exotic mermaid show (Fig. 6).
The postcard features seven beautiful women wearing red swimming suits and bending their heads as a sign of invitation to come to watch the underwater show. Perry, a Florida native entrepreneur, was inspired by synchronized swimming but wanted to go further than the popular Aquacades’ entertainment by creating an underwater spectacle. Even though swimmers at the Weeki Wachee Springs had always been referred to as mermaids, they did not wear tails until later. During the first years of operation, some men were included in the shows as mermen, but soon after ABC purchased the attraction, the roles of men were limited to behind-the-scenes personnel. In her article, Jennifer Kokai notes that Perry wanted to highlight the natural quality of the springs; therefore, the “tamed” yet not entirely subdued mermaids were a perfect option as opposed to male swimmers who would have likely been perceived as “conquering” the water (Kokai 73). This “tamed” yet undomesticated characteristic reflects a patriarchal contradiction between the desire for, and fear of, a feminine creature who needs to be controlled. This echoes
what I have previously discussed about depicting a harmless, childlike, yet sexualized mermaid in films.

Perry wanted to display women who looked beautiful and could swim but didn’t look like athletes. He stated, “I’m looking for mermaids, for girls to be swimmers who don’t look like swimmers” (Kokai 72). Perry’s emphasis on beauty and grace is exemplified in a photograph (Fig. 7) featuring three beautiful women posing in replicating a sportive podium.

![Image of three women demonstrating the 3B's of mermaiding](image)

**Figure 7.** Vicki Smith (left), Mary Sue Clay (center), and Bonnie Georgiadis demonstrate the 3B’s of mermaiding in this 1960 photo. Public Domain.

On each step, one can read the letter “B.” The highest position goes for “Ballet Grace,” then the lower steps show “Body Beautiful” and “Breath Control.” The three “winners” wear a one-piece swimsuit\(^\text{18}\). The swimmer on the top podium performs a ballet semi-split position with a leg and an arm extended while the other arm gracefully arches above her head and her right leg

---

\(^{18}\) Two-piece bathing suit were introduced later in the United States. European women started wearing two-piece swimming suits in the 1930s, but it is not until the official invention of the bikini, named after the Bikini Atoll, by French designer Louis Réard, that it became popularized. Prudish America resisted the introduction of the bikini until the early 1960s. “A new emphasis on youthful liberation” favored its introduction on the U.S. beaches (History.com Editors).
is bent underneath her body. The two other women, positioned on both sides of the winner, admiringly look at her while smiling in an elegant “turned-in passé” ballet posture. This visual reinforces the idea that the most coveted attributes for a woman are to be graceful and pretty and accentuates females’ passivity as opposed to their athletic skills. Perry even recreated an underwater beauty pageant (Fig. 8).

![Image of a ballet dancer](image.jpg)

**Figure 8.** Deep in the crystal-clear waters at Weeki Wachee Spring, Florida, pretty mermaid Joan Gately (left) is crowned Poinsettia Queen by shapely Diana Fry, another mermaid in the Weeki Wachee Underwater Show. It’s a shame to waste those bright smiles on denizens of the deep! (1961). Getty Images.

In the picture, one can see two alluring women. One, presumably, the beauty laureate, holds a bunch of flowers while the other adjusts the crown on the elected beauty contestant. As demonstrated, Weeki Wachee’s shows have consistently celebrated mermaid beauty and grace while showcasing the female performers’ stunts as effortless.
In his article, ‘The Perfect Woman:’ Annette Kellerman and the Spectacle of the Female Form, Peter Catapano, argues that in the 1940s and 1950s, female sportive prowess was downplayed, as can be observed in the comparison of Annette Kellerman, a professional swimmer, and actress, to a mermaid. Kellerman’s body was sexualized to hide her skills and exploits as an athlete. In other words, misogynistic societies have always been reluctant to associate athletic skills with femininity. It could have jeopardized the sexist status quo that erroneously states that women are physically weaker than men. In her book, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Mary Wollstonecraft says, “[t]hat woman is naturally weak or degraded by a concurrence of circumstances,” which is what young girls learn and internalize early in their lives (Wollstonecraft 59). Even though some may argue that Wollstonecraft’s writings pertain to another era, I contend that this sexist way of thinking is still common in our societies. The author adds that women “are not allowed to exert any manual strength,” which inexorably does not authorize them to gain physical skills (Wollstonecraft 66). The lack of exercise keeps them in a position of corporal vulnerability needing a man’s assistance and protection, which is substantiated in the previously analyzed movies. This observation is essential; however, the attention of this paper resides on the representation of the mermaid, and I do not intend to thoroughly discuss the physical prowess of the female swimmer athletes impersonating them.

As seen on vintage promotional visuals, female performers at the Weeki Wachee Springs were intentionally sexualized through tropes of femininity such as make-up, long hair floating in the water, costuming, postures, choreographies, and movements. Most photographs, postcards, and advertising pamphlets from the early years of the attraction’s operations depict the female body in passive subservient activities such as feeding fish, admiring their reflection in a mirror.
(Fig. 9), drinking sodas, or even more sexually suggestive tableaus like riding a sea horse (Fig. 10) and eating bananas.

**Figure 9.** Nancy Tribble Benda in Newt Perry’s short film, 1948. Photo by Ted Lagerberg. Fair Use.

**Figure 10.** Bonita Colson rides “Bubbles,” the seahorse, ca. the 1960s. Photo by Ted Lagerberg. Postcard. Public Domain.
In her dissertation, Rebecca Schwandt states that “making banana eating a part of the performances gives credence to the innuendo that came with this position” (Schwandt 62). A photograph from the 1960s (Fig. 11) shows two mermaids with yellow and red one-piece swimming suits, demonstrating mermaid “skills” still performed today.

![Mermaids Genie and Sue demonstrate mermaid skills, 1960s.](image)

**Figure 11.** *Mermaids Genie and Sue demonstrate mermaid skills, 1960s.* Postcard. Public Domain. Reprinted with permission.

The mermaids face each other in a mirroring posture, legs bent under their bodies, resting on a submerged tree trunk. They do not wear a tail, but their legs are tightly closed while their torsos are vertical. Sue, the mermaid on the right, drinks a small bottle of soda, while Genie, placed on the left, eats a banana. The phallic association with bananas is clear. Psychoanalysis has pushed forward that many objects resemble human sexual organs, and bananas have consistently symbolized male genitalia (Brauner). Therefore, the positioning of the kneeling mermaid swallowing a banana indicates the performance of fellatio, which can trigger the male
spectator’s sexual arousal. Similarly, another black and white visual also dated from the 1960s (Fig. 12) features a couple of mermaids, Genie and Terry, and a gigantic hotdog.

Figure 12. Genie Westmoreland Young and Terry Ryan Hamlet pose for the National Hot Dog Week promotional photo. Photo by Sparky Schumacher. Reprinted with permission.

Genie is kneeling and seems to be about to bite the hotdog sausage, which she holds with her two hands. Terry stands up behind the sandwich on the right, and her two opened hands demonstrate surprise or excitement. They both wear a one-piece bathing suit, and their long hair floats around their head. These two tableaus immortalized in photographs are conspicuous examples of sexually charged scenes of oral sex performed by women with phallic objects and are incorporated into the show to satisfy the male gaze and desire.
It is equally noteworthy to outline that some scenes could be interpreted as “childish.” In a picture dating from 1947, one can see three young women playing on a swing (Fig. 13), which concurs with Friedan’s observation of American mid-century norms of femininity.

![Figure 13. Underwater swing with Bunny Eppele, Mary Darlington Fletcher, and Vina Rathfield, ca. 1947. Reprinted with permission.](image)

Although women may have had the feeling that they had free choice, the internalization of these norms of femininity responded to the patriarchal need to maintain them in the domesticity of their homes. When Friedan compares the representation of New Woman of the 1930s and women featured in 1960s magazines, she notes that the latter look like “childlike, kittenish young housewives” (Friedan 30). Many vintage photographs illustrate the mermaids involved in frivolous activities like feeding fish, playing with a ball, and performing ballet routines. All these occupations converge to sustain Friedan’s observation about women’s playful
and childish endeavors expected from them by societal norms. Some rare pictures show other activities, such as taking dictation and typing (Fig. 14).

![Figure 14. Donna South prepares to take dictation from Bill Huckaby in their underwater office, 1963. Reprinted with permission.](image)

This photograph dating from 1963, is unique because it features a man. As previously mentioned, men were mostly absent from Weeki Wachee’s shows. This tableau illustrates the subservient position of a secretary whose straight back and tense bodily pose on the chair contrasts with her boss, who is smoking a cigar and laying his feet up on the desk with a dominating and authoritative attitude.

In its themed mermaid depictions, Weeki Wachee’s spectacle reflects stereotypically “feminine” activities related to homemaking. For example, one picture dated 1967 (Fig. 15)
shows a mermaid with an elaborate white fishtail wearing an apron and a white cap happily
dusting an object.

Figure 15. Bonnie Georgiadis donned a frilly apron to do a little spring cleaning in this

Her dark hair floats in the transparent water, and she looks content, reinforcing the idea
that house chores are enjoyable activities devolved to women. Drawing conclusions about gender
roles in the 1960s, Friedan writes that women are “confined by necessity, to cooking, cleaning,
washing, bearing children, … a pattern by which all women must now live or deny their
femininity” (Friedan 36). In other words, to be feminine and adhere to cultural norms, women
must embrace domesticity, maternity, and subjugation. Society’s pressure coerces them into
“sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love” (Friedan 36).

Perry capitalized on the new craze for mermaids, the invention of the two-piece bikinis,
and the popularization of portable cameras that allowed everyone to take photographs (Fig. 16).
The emphasis on the objectified female body exposed to the male gaze is outlined in vintage advertisements. Light cameras became accessible to individuals. Taking pictures of the partially naked women was a selling argument to encourage tourists to come to Weeki Wachee Springs and immortalize the alluring, eroticized mermaids presented as “family-safe” creatures (Fig. 17).
Inside the brochure, though, was this enticing image of the mermaids performing the “Underwater Babe’s Ballet,” 1947. Photo by Ted Lagerberg. Reprinted with permission.

The tagline “Take pictures like this yourself of the underwater babe’s ballet” is a blatant example of the instrumental form of objectification highlighted by Nussbaum, where the male spectator uses the mermaid as a mere object to satisfy his sexual fantasies. However, as previously argued, the male gaze also applies to women as this way of looking has been internalized. But instead of desiring the mermaid’s body, women will identify with the creature to be desirable and rewarded for complying with culturally constructed femininity norms.

Reinforcing the idea of the mermaid’s virtue and unthreatening characteristic, a postcard depicts a mermaid holding a report card where one can read that she earned “A” ’s in bathing, ballet, and breathing while failing with a “G” for boys is a stunning example of this ambiguity between sexualized femininity and virtue (Fig. 18).
This specific visual demonstrates the need for a spectacle presumably geared to attract families yet exhibiting half-naked women to conceal the implicit eroticization and subjugation of the latter for men’s pleasure. It also outlines the attraction’s ambition to depict the mermaid as typified by safe femininity and domesticated sexuality. Kokai adds that the women performers “contributed to a family-safe yet chastely erotic spectacle” (Kokai 73). Similarly, Peter Catapano contends that Kellerman’s ballet routines were “masquerade[ing] [as] being family-friendly but were underlaid with sexual objectification” (Catapano 24). Whereas scholars interpret the letter “G” as a failing grade, one could read the “G” as “good” – the mermaid is “good” with boys – leading to another reading of the alluring figure who, thus, becomes a direct threat to the “family-safe” claim. The preceding arguments outline the subjugation of the mermaid’s representation, considering the theories of objectification and the male gaze. However, females’
compliance with the pervasive and coercive misogynistic mechanisms also encompasses other practices.

The pressure of patriarchal authority on the female body to serve the male desire is polymorphous. In Iris Marion Young’s book *Throwing Like a Girl*, the author observes that subjugation processes often involve the woman’s internalization of a restrictive mobilization of her entire body, affecting mermaid performers’ motility and use of space. The choreographies created for Weeki Wachee Springs underwater spectacles feature female swimmers often, but not systematically, wearing a fish-like tail that ties their legs together and forbids their free usage independently. The fishtail could be compared to the Victorian corset women were forced to wear to exhibit a wasp waist, which constricted their torsos so much that it made breathing difficult. The female body has always been politicized, “its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control – from foot-binding and corseting to rape and battering to compulsory heterosexuality, forced sterilization, unwanted pregnancy and (in the case of the African American slave women) explicit commodification” (Bordo 21-22).

Young’s phenomenological approach to feminine comportment and bodily use of space reveals the cultural mechanisms of internalization that posits women in a subconscious and symbolic straitjacket that limits their bodies’ mobility. Young observes and analyzes that patriarchal constraint can take unsuspected forms, often integrated through self-regulating mechanisms. In other words, the subject uses self-discipline, often unconsciously, to control and adjust its natural propensity to obey the feminine-coded behavior imposed by misogynistic conventions. Young roots her theory on Erwin Straus’s observations about the remarkable difference in the use of lateral space between young girls and boys, and she investigates the causality of such disparity. For example, she notes that boys use the entirety of their body and
lateral space when throwing a ball, while girls only use the upper part of their body and do not expand their movements. After dismissing the limitations of physical attributes (presence of breast or muscle weakness), Straus explains the feminine difference in using space through the concept of “feminine attitude” (Young 28). Yet, Young complicates Straus’s findings and extends the analysis to a host of body comportments and styles of movements. French philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, underscores that women experience their bodies as a “burden,” inhabited by “fearful” and “mysterious” hormonal variations (Young 29). De Beauvoir believes that a woman’s body movements and interactions with her surroundings are grounded in physiology and anatomy, determining her “unfree status” (Young 29).

I aim to fill the gap in existential phenomenology and feminist theory by examining the mermaid’s body comportment, way of moving, and relation to space, which, as previously mentioned, significantly differ from these identical actions performed by men. Young’s research on feminine movement and positionality within her surrounding area reveal the “structure of feminine existence” (Young 30). She adopts de Beauvoir’s delineation of a woman’s existence in a patriarchal context where she is objectified and culturally and socially disallowed “subjectivity, autonomy, and creativity,” which inherently defines being human. In patriarchal societies, women are caught in a contradictory system where their “free subject” attributes are opposed by patriarchal denial of subjectivity (Young 32). Young observes bodily comportment, physical involvement with things, and bodily self-image. She notes that a woman limits her spatial and lateral full use of her body even in basic postures such as sitting, standing, or walking. Indeed, women have a restrained gait and stride compared to men. Additionally, women tend to be less open in their postures, usually keeping their arms across their upper body in a shielding position and legs close together, contrasting with men’s freer bodily motion and expanded postures.
When performing a task requiring some muscular involvement, women frequently do not exploit the “full possibilities of [their] muscular coordination, position, poise, and bearing” (Young 33). In other words, they limit their physical efforts to a specific portion of their body rather than investing the whole-body potentialities. Young adds that the “woman’s motion tends not to reach, extend, lean, stretch, and follow through in the direction of her intention” (Young 33). Women’s surrounding space is imagined as more restricted than men’s, and their lack of confidence in their bodies’ capacity and fear of injuries are equally remarkable. Young states that women “often experience [their] bodies as a fragile encumbrance, rather than the medium for the enactment of [their] aims” (Young 34). As a result, women tend to ascribe themselves to a self-fulfilling cycle of underestimating their bodily capacities, leading to unsuccessful physical performances, frustration, and awkwardness, which points back to a depreciation of their physical abilities. Women’s comportment, motility, and pre-emption of their spatiality do not originate in anatomy, physiology, nor an enigmatic “feminine essence” (Young 42). Instead, they result from a sexist oppressive cultural environment’s pressure on women. Young goes as far as to state that “[w]omen in a sexist society are physically handicapped” because feminine corporal behaviors are molded and learned in a patriarchal context, which encourages inhibition, confinement, positioning, and objectification of their bodies (Young 42). That is, girls and women are not incentivized to expand their full bodily capacities when interacting with their surroundings and the world. As a result, they have fewer opportunities than boys and men to develop specific physical competencies.

Young notes that “[t]he girl learns actively to hamper her movements” so as not to get hurt, dirty, or damage her clothes (Young 43). Girls from an early age become physically timid in how they interact with the world and believe in a presumptive inherent body fragility. As seen
on screen, because of its fishtail, a mermaid who does not benefit from transformative powers (like Madison in *Splash*) is restricted on land and must depend on a man. For example, the movie *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid* conveys that while sexually available and showing a blatant sensuous appetite, Lenore is innocent and disabled in her motility. Her inability to walk guarantees the inoffensiveness of her intention and puts at bay any threat to the male desire through objectification’s control structure and physical restraints. While Madison benefits from a relative physical agency in *Splash*, the movie illustrates two floundering moments when the lower part of Madison’s body, her legs, morphed into a fishtail. During these metamorphoses, she is no longer a human or a mermaid. She is in a liminal space that incapacitates her.

In the Weeki Wachee shows, the mermaids’ poses are consistently feminine-coded when not dressed up with the lower body constricted in a fishtail. Their legs are together, or one leg bent on top and the other extended in a lascivious posture, and, even though underwater, they always display an amenable smile. In her book, *Femininity and Domination*, Sandra Lee Bartky argues that “[f]eminine faces, as well as bodies, are trained to the expression of deference” (Bartky 68). This appearance of acquiescence is expected to find its manifestation through an amenable smile, which studies show is systematically not returned by men. Weeki Wachee’s mermaids have perfected the “knee-back dolphin” adagio pose (Fig. 19), which requires a duet, and is usually performed without a tail.
Figure 19. Two of the Weeki Wachee Mermaids display the trademark and symbol of Weeki Wachee, the Adagio, in the underwater Grand Canyon at Florida’s Weeki Wachee located just north of Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater. Photo by Claude Long. Postcard. Public Domain.

The photograph depicts the swimmer at the bottom lifting another mermaid by supporting her in the lower back and one foot. Both creatures’ legs form a “passé” ballet posture where one leg is extended, and the other bends with the foot touching the extended leg’s knee. The supporting performer is vertically positioned while the other floats horizontally. The pose is elegant and graceful while featuring a restricted lower body extension. Bartky, building on Young’s analysis, adds some critical remarks. She states that “[f]eminine movement, gesture, and posture must exhibit not only constriction but grace as well … She must try to manage her movements with the appearance of grace” (Bartky 68-69). When mermaids wear a fish-tail, their
motion is significantly limited because of the mechanical constraints of their legs being artificially maintained together. A more recent picture (Fig. 20) features seven mermaids wearing fancy costumes mimicking different types of fish.

![Mermaids at Weeki Wachee Springs](image_url)

**Figure 20.** *Mermaids at Weeki Wachee Springs.* Public Domain.

They look at each other while smiling and holding hands. The verticality of their bodies in the water exposes them to the spectators who can linger their gaze on their partially naked bodies. The use of space and expansion of their bodies flagrantly illustrate how patriarchal pressure on women has been effectively internalized and is exemplified through the mermaid’s restricted use of space. Through the facial expression of an amenable smile, fancy glittering costuming (with or without a tail), feminine-coded activities and endeavors, and body postures, mermaid’s performances in films and at the Weeki Wachee Springs iterate and create a creature gendered feminine.

Applying the concepts of several eminent scholars to analyze the mermaid’s portrayal in *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid, Splash,* and the Weeki Wachee underwater spectacle, I have
highlighted that the mediated representation of the mermaid is more complex than meets the eyes. Whereas these texts outline the systematic objectification of the mythological figure to satisfy the male gaze, the mermaid’s representation is more perplexing. Unexpectedly, male viewers are not the only beneficiaries of this exploitation. Under patriarchal pressure, female viewers, through identification processes, profit from the female-gendered creature as a model of rewarding femininity. The system of female oppression can be insidious and malicious yet often remains abstruse. Its most efficient form is through women’s internalized self-discipline who subconsciously comply with the patriarchal diktat by adopting behaviors that communicate subordination while, through feminine-coded tropes, seeking male desire and approbation.

b. Queering the Mermaid

Now that I have discussed the frame that demonstrates that through objectification, the male gaze, and comportment phenomenology, the mermaid adheres to a misogynistic system, I intend to complicate my argument by asserting that, because of the presence of a tail, she does not possess genitalia; therefore, she can avoid the culturally constructed gender dichotomic classification and belongs to a liminal universe at the interface of masculinity and femininity.

For Carl Jung, the Mermaid is an “erotic fantasy” that “might complicate [the male] psychic life” (Hayward 11). Scholar Philip Hayward examines the representation of mermaids in Western culture through various audiovisual texts and discusses the sea creature’s physicality, agency, and sexuality. He notes that the mermaid’s sexual appeal comes from different elements, including her young, alluring human female upper body, propensity to seek masculine attention, seductive voice, and her most complex attribute: her tail (Hayward 92). I agree with Hayward’s observation about the complex nature of the mermaid’s body when he suggests that the male fascination for the hybridized anatomy of the creature’s body “functions outside the usual realm
of male heterosexual proclivity” (Hayward 51). Even though the mermaid’s appeal resides in her hyper-femininized body and feminine-coded comportment, the absence of sex ascribes her to a non-binary gendered categorization. Some may argue that regardless of the lack of genitals, the mermaid has breasts and is, therefore, gendered female. As the study discussed earlier shows, the bosom is a powerful suggestive female physical attribute that can fuel a male’s sexual fantasy and arousal (Nummenmaa et al. 1449). However, breasts alone cannot determine someone’s gender, especially today when plastic surgery allows breast augmentation or construction using implants. If they so wish, men and women can have breast implants. Consequently, the mermaid’s bosom cannot determine its sex, and since it does not possess genitals because of its tail, its gender determination is physiologically baseless. The same conclusion can be made about the tropes of femininity associated with the mermaid: long hair, make-up, costumes, and postures. None of these elements are exclusive manifestations of someone’s biological sex, hence gender. Male transvestites, for example, borrow those socially constructed feminine signals to alter their appearance. On this subject, Bordo notes that “[i]t is commonly and wrongly said that male transvestites, through the use of make-up and costuming, caricature the women they would become, but any real knowledge of the romantic ethos makes clear that these men have penetrated to the core experience of being a woman, a romanticized construct” (Bordo 21). In other words, “the core experience of being a woman” does not depend on a biological sexual apparatus, it is socially constructed. But let’s examine the consequences of the mermaid’s absence of genitalia more closely and how this can open new interpretations of the creature’s physicality. This paper does not intend to offer answers. Instead, uncovering different layers of understanding the representation of the mermaid’s body in relation to its cultural context encourages exploring oppressive patriarchal mechanisms and their targets. Yet, a question
remains: do misogynistic repressive tools focus on the subjugation of women (gender) or the subjugation of females (biological sex)?

Ailene Goodman states that “despite the desire she arouses,” the mermaid” cannot possibly fulfill her promise as a sex symbol in any way, shape, or form” (Goodman 32). Similarly, I argue that the absence of genitalia precludes the alluring sea figure from engaging in traditional sexual intercourse; because of her physical characteristics (her tail), she does not offer any heterosexual coupling. Therefore, the mermaid’s sexual charge is complicated. As Jennifer Kokai argues, “the mermaid is always female, and the mermaid tail inherently signifies female” because of “the cultural signification of mermaids in general, their dual role as a seductress of male sailors and as chaste, childlike women who can never actually engage in heterosexual penetration” (Kokai 70). In other words, the mermaid is presented as sexually available; however, she cannot fulfill her erotic promise because of her tail (the absence of genitals).

Complementing Kokai’s utterance, Laura Essig broaches the mermaid in the context of the heterosexual imagination. She examines the pre-requisite for the mermaid to be considered soulful, hence belonging to the “human” category. Essig states that “[t]he absence or presence of a vagina, like the absence or presence of a soul, is a riddle not about mermaids, but about us, about our culture and our beliefs and, ultimately, what it means to be human” (“The Mermaid and the Heterosexual Imagination” 151). This statement outlines that today, the preoccupation is not about the existence of a moral compass but rather about the current “cultural obsession with women’s bodies and their accessibility to men” (“The Mermaid and the Heterosexual Imagination” 152).

As previously discussed, the mermaid is simultaneously portrayed as a childlike, innocent, docile woman or girl who welcomes men’s desire and a treacherous sexless character
who seduces men to lure them to their death, a remnant of the figure of the monstrous siren. This indicates that to be fully human, the mermaid must adopt heterosexual norms and be sexually available to satisfy the male desire. However, because her character can be perceived with and without a vagina, she embodies a powerful and complex phantasmagorical creature in a heterosexual context. I adhere to Kokai and Essig’s observations, claiming that the mermaid’s lack of genitalia precludes her from engaging in traditional sexual intercourse. However, pushing further Kokai and Essig’s interpretations, I contend that the feminine symbolism of the tail can be challenged and interpreted as a masculine attribute. Hayward states that the mermaid’s tail can be considered a phallic object that evokes the male penis. He writes that “[o]nshore her tail is often flaccid, as a sign and symptom of her powerlessness in the human domain (which can also be understood as that of patriarchy). If aroused – by various stimuli – the mermaid’s tail is frequently shown jerking, uncurling or flexing” (Hayward 14 – 15). In the movie Splash, the viewer witnesses Madison’s tail uncurling when she takes a bath (Splash 0:48:27 – 0:48:36). Madison is noticeably delighted to be in an aquatic element. The camera shows her erectile tail emerging out of the water, which can be read as a direct connotation of an aroused penis.

Another convincing example that illustrates the mermaid’s queer quality occurs toward the movie's end. Walter Kornbluth is a scientist who relentlessly tries to capture Madison to expose her as a mermaid. Madison’s transformation into a watery creature is ignited when her body is in contact with water. When Kornbluth sprinkles her with a hose after a dignitary dinner, a red fishtail appears protruding from beneath her turquoise dress to the disbelief of Allen and the surrounding crowd (Splash 1:18:42 – 1:19:29). The red, erected tail flapping on the pavement leaves no room of misinterpretation: the tail reads as phallic (Fig. 21).
The scene focuses on the male characters’ faces showing disgust and dismay when the “true nature” of the mermaid is unmasked: a presumptive woman with a large penis.

The tail can equally be read as a trope of agency. Bordo notes that for Christian ideology, the body epitomizes our gross instincts, “the animal, appetitive side of our nature” (Bordo 4). This metaphor that compares the human body to an animal can be interpreted variously. Some scholars have compared the animal side of human nature to masculinity and, more precisely, to the “rebelliously tumescent penis”¹⁹ (Bordo 4). Therefore, the mermaid hybridized body, which is part animal and human, could be interpreted as both masculine and feminine and offer an additional layer of complexity.

¹⁹ In her book, Unbearable Weight Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body, Bordo refers to Augustine for whom “the animal side of human nature – symbolized for him by the rebelliously tumescent penis, insisting on its ‘law of lust’ against the attempts of the spiritual will to gain control – incline us toward sin and needs to be tamed” (Bordo 4).
When immersed, the mermaid’s piscine appendix becomes a powerful means of mobility that propels her into an environment where humans are less agile and can’t survive without adequate equipment. It is noteworthy that the mermaid’s tail complicates the creature’s understanding and its enduring appeal. In what follows, I further elaborate on the polysemous characteristics of the mermaid by affirming that her tail allows for bypassing the socially constructed binary of male/female and masculine/feminine and questions the social construction of “woman.” This innovative application of Judith Butler’s theory on the discursive construction of genders opens the possibility for the mermaid to evade patriarchal pressure through queerness.

In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler questions the social construction of “woman.” She adopts French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir’s concept that biological sex does not define gender and that one becomes a woman through discursive processes, thus, not because of physical characteristics. Butler pushes de Beauvoir’s reasoning further. If gender and sex are discontinuous and if gender is socially constructed, it could evade gender hegemony. She writes that “the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it” (Butler 9). By this, Butler means that if gender is “constructed” and does not necessarily comply with the sexual apparatus, she argues that the subject has the agency to accept or reject that discursive construction. Consequently, if gender does not reflect sex because of its discursive elaboration, gender could be considered the “variable cultural construction of sex, the myriad and open possibilities of cultural meaning occasioned by a sexed body” (Butler 152). While I borrow Butler’s ideas and agree with her postulate that gender is constructed a posteriori through cultural discursive processes, I expand her binary discussion by arguing that the mermaid may erroneously be recognized as being gendered as feminine. Indeed, this prediction cannot be
rooted in her anatomical sex because she has none. For this reason, the mermaid could escape the hegemonic gender duality of masculine/feminine and male/female and offer a queer, gender-fluid possibility of undetermined gender.

As I just argued, the presence of the tail evokes a wide range of possible interpretations by the spectators that can go well beyond the understanding of a lack of genitals. Hayward suggests the potentiality of various forms of “Gay gaze,” “Queer gaze,” and/or transgender perspectives (Hayward 14). Undeniably, the polyvalence of the mermaid corporality because of her half-human, half-fish hybridization constitutes a form of queerness. She is queer, and those fascinated by her might be deemed queer as well. Hayward mentions Nick Mansfield, who says that “queerness and transgender perspectives embody and emphasize the ‘both/and’ logic of various practices and entities and, within those, ‘the fetish object both is and isn’t the phallus and what the mermaid’s body does is intensify all the contradictions of the woman as phallus: highly sexualized but completely unattainable, an object of desire that will always elude the practical manifestation of that desire” (Hayward 23).

To support my claim of the possibility of queering the Weeki Wachee mermaid, I want to outline the absence of male performers for many years; the mermaid spectacles exclusively featured female swimmers. However, many themes, such as The Mermaid and the Pirates, Wizard of Oz, Peter Pan, and The Little Mermaid included male parts, and female performers played these roles. In vintage photographs (Fig. 22 to Fig. 24) extracted from Cinderella, Alice in Waterland, and Peter Pan, one would be astonished to note that female athletes embody the princes and male characters.
Figure 22. Cheri Lynne Ragland as Cinderella and Pat Crawford Cleveland as the Prince, 1970. Photo by Sparky Schumacher. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 24. Peggy Westmoreland as Peter Pan climbs through the window to spy on a sleeping Michael, played by Shinko Akasofu Wheeler, 1971-72. Reprinted with permission.

Weeki Wachee's underwater world, inhabited by mermaids, is a universe of females. I argue that the obliteration of men from that space may indicate the queerness of the mermaids who, liberated from patriarchal pressure and embracing homoeroticism, can live “happily ever after.” This all-female universe where mermaids cross gender boundaries by performing both male and female roles can create a context for lesbian desire among performers and simultaneously generate sapphic arousal in spectators, which adds a layer of ambiguity.

To sum up, the mermaid’s mediated portrayal has fluctuated through time. Yet, it has systematically been strongly influenced by patriarchal values, which have relentlessly subjugated the culturally constructed feminine gendered mythological figure to satisfy the male gaze. However, I have discussed that the female look is likewise a critical element of spectatorship. Still, its finality differs in that it is rooted in the identification with the alluring creature to be
regarded as desirable in a misogynistic environment. Instead, the male gaze’s stake is grounded in possessing the objectified mermaid to satisfy his desire. The novelty of the queering approach of the mermaid is rooted in the contemporary social environment. The 21st century is witnessing a more open discourse about queerness, gender fluidity, and non-binary identities, which fosters new interpretable possibilities for a mythological figure whose body, because of its hybridization, calls for ambivalence and equivocation. Consequently, this paper demonstrates that the interpretation of the mermaid persona and the Weeki Wachee Springs mermaids’ show is polysemic on different levels. In today’s context, the presence of the fish-tail, which proscribes visible genitalia, can disallow the creature to be gender classified upon the culturally accepted male/female dichotomy. Therefore, ascribing the mermaid to a liminal space between femininity and masculinity opens new queering possibilities that grant her unsuspected agency, which can evade patriarchal hegemonic pressure. Analyzing the complex depiction of the mermaid through time uncovered that the visuality of the sea creature simultaneously exploits and empowers the female body through its hybridity, which makes for a polysemic sexualized yet sexless body.

The following section discusses the aesthetic value of the visual representation of the mermaid, which, as we will discover, does not offer a straightforward interpretation. The artistic appreciation of the mermaid’s iconography is also complex and has fluctuated through time. However, the aesthetic expressions of kitsch and camp provide ideal tools that bridge the mermaid’s queerness with its renewed artistic infatuation.
The Mermaid’s Aesthetic Value

a. The Mermaid is Kitsch

The complexity of the depiction of the mermaid spills outside the limits of its gender ambiguity and patriarchal attempts to subjugate the sexless creature usually exploited to respond to male desire. In what follows, I examine how the once aesthetically disdained figure of the mermaid, considered kitsch, has regained artistic value through its reappropriation by camp style and proves, from an aesthetic perspective, the queer component of the mermaid.

Kitsch is a relatively recent phenomenon, which appeared around hundred and fifty years ago. Tomáš Kulka states that “the proper conditions for both the consumption and the production of kitsch did not exist before the modern era” and is associated with industrialization (Kulka 13). But let us examine what “kitsch” entails and what it refers to in an aesthetic context. The term "kitsch" originated in Munich's artists' spheres in the late 19th century and is referred to as "cheap artistic stuff" (Ortlieb & Carbon 2). Although the word's etymology remains obscure, its origin points to the German language or German-derived dialects. It designated anything of poor, crude quality. Arguably, it was coined to signal trivial and sentimental literature, which aimed at "giving immediate affection and cheap thrills" to the reader for a small amount of money. Robert Solomon’s etymological investigation substantiates other scholars’ analysis; however, he augments the discussion by stating that the term “kitsch” means “to smear” or “playing with mud.” In this case, the mud in question is emotion, implying that someone is playing with it “dirty” (Solomon 1). In other words, emotions have a pejorative connotation. By the 1920s, numerous languages had integrated the term and the context of its use extended beyond lousy
taste in painting and literature. Today, kitsch labels anything from movies (e.g., romantic comedies), gardening (e.g., garden gnomes), architecture (e.g., fake Greek columns), fashion (e.g., flower-shaped sunglasses), and interior design (e.g., plastic chairs). But what exactly delineates kitsch, and how can this aesthetic concept be applied to the Weeki Wachee mermaids show?

In their article, *Kitsch and Perception: Towards a New “Aesthetic from Below,”* Stefan Ortlieb and Claus-Christian Carbon have observed several distinctive elements that uniquely characterize kitsch and contrast this artistic expression with Modern Art. For this discussion, I focus on kitsch’s appeal to pleasant emotions and its deliberate and consistent intent to portray what is considered beautiful. Kitsch is mostly appraised on its content rather than style, which invites positive emotions such as love, birth, family, and nostalgia. In their argument, Ortlieb and Carbon quote Kulka, who, in his book *Kitsch and Art,* claims that "[t]he subject matter typically depicted by kitsch is generally considered to be beautiful (horses, long-legged women), pretty (sunsets, flowers, Swiss villages), cute (puppies, kittens), and/or highly emotionally charged (mothers with babies, children in tears)" (Ortlieb & Carbon 4). In other words, the critical attribute of kitsch is that its subject matter triggers an immediate emotional response. However, whereas other forms of aesthetics may prompt strong emotional reactions such as rage, anxiety, fear, or revulsion, to be labeled kitsch, a text must produce “soft,” “tender” emotions culturally understood as “feminine.”

Mermaid-themed cinema and spectacles originated in the early 20th century and experienced their heydays in the 1950s – 1960s, which ascribe them to a distant past and convey

---

20 In her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* Mary Wollstonecraft has extensively observed and noted that emotions and feelings related to “[n]ovels, music, poetry, and gallantry” make women the “creatures of sensation” (Wollstonecraft 69).
nostalgia\textsuperscript{21} while engaging the viewers in an emotional experience, inviting positive feelings. Svetlana Boym observes that nostalgia is characterized by a sense of loss and deracination while simultaneously referring to the attachment to our own fantasy. She adds that nostalgia refers not only to the longing for a place but also to “a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams” (Boym 8). This experience immerses the viewers, male and female, into the realm of their childhood, in a time when fantasies and imagination were intertwined with real-life events.

To illustrate this characteristic based on a pleasing visual aesthetic that generates a positive feeling, I want to reiterate Weeki Wachee Springs mermaids’ spectacle founder, Newton Perry, who desired to feature women with long hair who look beautiful. Perry bet the show’s success on the sex appeal of the mermaids discussed in the previous section. One of the early performers recounted that “they wanted voluptuous mermaid-looking people” (Vickers & Dionne 30). In a brochure promoting the roadside attraction, one can read, “[i]n all the world there is nothing else like Weeki Wachee … Incredibly Beautiful!” (Vickers & Dionne 37). The show’s attractiveness has always been centered on the depiction of beautiful, innocent femininity performing alluring ballet routines and impersonating kind, inoffensive creatures in fairy-tale such as \textit{Beauty in the Deep} (1960-1961), \textit{Alice in Waterland} (1964-1965), \textit{Mermaids on the Moon} (1969-1970), \textit{The Little Mermaid} (1972-1973), \textit{Pocahontas Meets Little Mermaid} (1995-1997), or more recently \textit{The Wonders of Weeki Wachee} to only name a few of the show’s themes. To ensure a lasting connection between the mermaids’ spectacle and canons of beauty, Perry held a “Florida Mermaid Queen” beauty pageant in the springs, which encountered a massive success and solidified the notion that “what made a mermaid a mermaid was first and

\textsuperscript{21} The word “nostalgia” finds its roots in Greek and is composed of \textit{nostos} meaning “return home,” and \textit{algia}, “longing” (Boym 8).

63
foremost her beauty” (Kookai 72). The park was publicized as a nature-based attraction where “tamed” mermaids populated the crystal-clear waters of the springs. Consequently, the depiction of the Weeki Wachee’s mermaids avoided any form of amalgamation between the innocent, family-friendly, beautiful creatures presented in the spectacle and a threatening aquatic figure like the siren. The ongoing obsession to beautify the mermaids and produce fairy-tale-themed spectacles throughout the decades of the attraction’s operation supports the compliance of the Weeki Wachee’s mermaids with what characterizes kitsch as an aesthetic expression in which the subject matter is based on content rather than style and triggers an immediate positive emotional response. However, regardless of people’s enthusiasm for the Weeki Wachee’s mermaids show, its beautiful creatures, and the subsequent positive feelings it instills, critics have often disparaged the roadside attraction for its quirkiness and questionable aesthetic value.

In her dissertation, Rebecca Schwandt observes that Weeki Wachee is one of Florida's last operational remnants of roadside attractions. Its glorious days stemmed from when tourists from the Northern United States heading to the Sunshine States' Western fine sand beaches drove past pretty girls along U.S. 19, waving at them and inviting them to see the outlandish mermaid show. She adds that academics have always regarded with contempt what they consider a “quirky piece of kitsch” where snowbirds from another era enjoyed a “peaceful, innocent place set outside of time” (Schwandt 87). By the end of the 1940s, Florida’s tourist attractions were already stamped as kitsch and weird, which inspired Joel Achenbach of the Chicago Sun-Times to write, “[b]efore you go to Florida, you have to decide if you want to see the Authentic Florida, the Fake Florida or the Authentically Fake Florida” (Vickers & Dionne 77). Several decades

---

22 For Jean Baudrillard, kitsch can be best defined as “a pseudo-object, …, a simulation, a copy, an imitation,” which emphasizes on the fakeness of what is characterized as kitsch. For the author, kitsch is the antithesis of what is “rare, precious, unique object” (Baudrillard 105).
later, in the early 1990s, while Weeki Wachee Springs Park wrestled against a new enemy, the proliferation of brown algae that clouded the once pristine springs water, pop-culture critics Jane and Michael Stern included Weeki Wachee’s mermaids in their *Encyclopedia of Bad Taste* (Vickers & Dionne 229). This is the description the couple gave about the mermaid’s performance in the springs:

“What do the mermaids do when they put on a show? ... They do everyday things. They toss a Frisbee back and forth. They drink soda pop from bottles. They eat, actually swallow, apples and bananas... If it weren’t for the manes of hair hovering weightlessly up and around their heads and a period suck on the air hose that each mermaid carries (and sometimes wields like a whip), you could almost forget they are underwater: they look like lovely lunatics dressed in fishtails who happen to have been stunned into a slow-motion stupor by a heavy dose of Thorazine, and for whom these everyday activities are a considerable challenge” (Vickers & Dionne 229).

The Sterns condescendingly ascribed the roadside attraction to the realm of bad taste and kitsch. In art, the notion of “taste,” which implicitly points to “good” taste, can only exist against its opposite, “bad taste,” and, therefore, “bad art.” However, “bad art,” which is a common denominator of kitsch, is not straightforward because different elements can bias judgment, such as the “ignorance of the medium, the tradition and its history, the current fashions and the taste of the timing” (Solomon 1). Solomon states, “bad art may be just bad timing” (Solomon 1). Solomon’s view invites the question: could kitsch regain aesthetic value in a different cultural context?

At this stage, I want to briefly examine what art means to posit kitsch accordingly. However, the purpose of what follows is not to integrate kitsch into art but to contrast both
concepts. In an article published in 1920, famous painter Paul Klee wrote that "[a]rt does not reproduce the visible; rather it makes visible" (Ortlieb & Carbon 6). In Klee's mind, art is invested with the power of making the viewer see the world through the artist's eye without imitating it. It forces the audience to gain insights and intentionally challenges its mental representations by "breaking up the familiar and acquainting us with the unusual" (Ortlieb & Carbon 8). On the other hand, kitsch has no intention of bringing new insights; instead, it taps into people's normative associations by presenting them with stereotypes and clichés. In other words, its expression relies on imitation as it stems from pre-established models and forms, which contradicts Klee’s concept of art. Kitsch aims to reinforce our basic sentiments and beliefs, not challenge them, which is why kitsch remains popular; people can relate to content that easily connects to their everyday experiences. Therefore, kitsch defies the distinction between “bad” or “good” art because privileging content over style, its purpose is exclusively to provoke emotions, which circumvents the system of knowledge that art appreciation requires.

Ortlieb and Carbon argue that "[d]espite all efforts of Pop Art to embrace kitsch and to question normative values in art, current models of aesthetic liking … still adhere to an elitist notion of Modern Art that privileges style over content and thereby excludes what is essential not only for popular taste and Postmodern art but also for premodern artistic production emotionally rich content" (Ortlieb & Carbon 1). To redress kitsch's lack of serious scholars' attention, the authors examine kitsch through the empirical aesthetics lens, which considers art

---

23 Pop art is art movement of the late 1950s and '60s that was inspired by commercial and popular culture. Although it did not have a specific style or attitude, Pop art was defined as a diverse response to the postwar era’s commodity-driven values, often using commonplace objects (such as comic strips, soup cans, road signs, and hamburgers) as subject matter or as part of the work (“Pop art”).

24 Postmodernism is an art reaction against modernism. It is mostly a concept and an attitude toward art, culture, and society rather than a unified movement. The main characteristics of this trend include “anti-authoritarism, … and the collapsing of the distinction between high culture and mass or popular culture, and between art and everyday life” (“Postmodernism | MoMA”).

66
perception and state that the popularity of kitsch is entirely content driven: “People are attracted to kitsch because they like its subject matter” (Ortlieb & Carbon 10). This observation points to what I previously stressed: kitsch is built on a positive perception that relates to people’s childhood through nostalgia and everyday lives without requiring special hegemonic knowledge. Kitsch is for everybody, while art is for the elite. Despite a poor reputation, kitsch benefits from a powerful popular appeal; therefore, one of the kitsch's most enduring mythological creatures25, the mermaid, occupies a forefront standing in North American culture.

b. The Renewed Aesthetic Value of the Mermaid Through Camp-Style

Now that I have installed and argued that the Weeki Wachee Springs mermaids show is a blatant example of kitsch by expanding on the characteristics of kitsch expression and perception and how the mermaids adhere to standardized beauty canons and appeal to immediate and pleasant emotional experiences, in opposition to the knowledge incentivization that “art” demands, I am turning to the second element of my assertion. I assert that although the mermaid has long been overlooked as kitsch and labeled “worthless,” camp-style appropriation of the creature has propelled her to the forefront of the aesthetic discourse. I affirm that because the mermaid belongs to the realm of fantasy and visually utilizes extravagance and artifice, its portrayal has gained artistic importance, and her presence has spilled into media, lifestyle, and fashion.

Postmodern culture has absorbed mermaids’ iconography as a commodity. Their portrayal has been used as support to promote numerous merchandise, such as beauty products, soda drinks, snacks, detergents, and cigarettes (Mortensen 204). The mermaid appears in

25 A website ranking the popularity of mythical creatures based on Google searches placed the mermaid in the fourth position after dragons, vampires, and fairies (“The 10 Most Popular Mythical Creatures”).
televised commercials and famous corporates’ brand identities. In the 20th century, mermaids were “reimagined, reinterpreted, commodified, parodied, globalized, and Disneyfied” through Ariel, the main character of the animated movie *The Little Mermaid*, famous actress Esther Williams, and the Weeki Wachee professional mermaids in Florida (Mortensen 204). Since its inception, Weeki Wachee’s underwater performance has not only exploited the mermaid’s beautification to provoke positive emotions but has also consistently presented extravagant aquatic spectacles featuring smiling mermaids in faux-shell bra tops and shimmering turquoise fishtails. As I will explain, these flamboyant gambits represent markers of camp.

Today, kitsch and camp co-exist in different sub- and pop-cultural contexts but are often associated and can overlap. Kitsch and camp have long been disparaged by art critics who considered these aesthetic forms as “low brow” aesthetics, the “antithesis of fine art and an embarrassment to modern culture” (Stępień 1). As I have discussed, kitsch focuses on content rather than style, whereas “art” is based on style. Susan Sontag’s 1964 *Notes on Camp* argues for a theoretical notion of camp. For Sontag, camp is an aesthetic style and sensibility that enthusiasts revere because of “its ironic, over-the-top challenging of the norms of ‘good behavior’ and ‘good taste’” (Rosenberg 93). Sontag interprets camp as contentless, a “celebration of style or the high art of kitsch,” which posits camp distinctively from kitsch; however, one is often associated with the other (Sontag 283). Similarly, Benton Jay Komins notes that some

---


27 Many brands such as Starbucks, Virgin Voyages, Princess Cruise have incorporated the mermaid into their brand identity. However, when investigating the rationale behind that choice, marketers offer little insight into their ‘mermaids’ adds origins and individuality, preferring to maintain an aura of mystery and intrigue” (Graham 147). Susan Graham argues that “for consumers, [the mermaid] remains alluring as an object of aspiration, desire, and mystery. But most of all, she is inviting – beckoning into her world” (Graham 147).
scholars argue that “camp is a pretentious expression of kitsch that belongs to the ‘artsy’
demimonde” (Kimons 2). The author adds, “where kitsch takes itself seriously, camp joyously
celebrates in its own ridiculous non-sequiturs” (Kimons 3). As opposed to kitsch, camp is not
gauged based on beauty canons but instead on the degree of artifice and extravagance.

Post-modernist ideology has transformed the original understanding of art by blurring the
line between high culture and Pop culture. Postmodernism has the ambition to raise these once-
perceived low forms of art to the status of highbrow culture. Justyna Stepień notes that kitsch has
been incorporated into our everyday environments and has become part of our modern culture,
while camp has spilled its influence outside its initial frame. Originally related to homosexuality
and defined by an “overtly and outrageously queer” representation, camp praises the
exaggerated, the fantastic, and the artificial and is recognized for its queerness quality (Stepień
10).

In this paper, I have uncovered that the Weeki Wachee Springs mermaids’ attraction
fulfills kitsch requirements, offering content-based narratives impersonated by beautiful
creatures triggering positive emotions. Yet, many critics have labeled the show of stylistic “bad
taste.” Pushing my argument further, I claim that the representation of the mermaid at Weeki
Wachee also adheres to camp aesthetic, which places the creature in contemporary artistic
discourse. Indeed, Weeki Wachee’s spectacles showcase extravagant tableaus where the artifice
of fake tails and tacky props coincide with the springs' natural beauty. The photograph featuring
a mermaid-bride riding a plastic seahorse and carrying artificial flowers while happily smiling is
a pertinent example of Weeki Wachee’s combination of the camp extravaganza and kitsch
aesthetics (Fig. 25).
The deception of the tail is not entirely hidden; one can see the shape of the performer’s knees and notice the rigid flippers covered by the fabric of the tail. The small pieces of metal used to ballast the bride’s veil, so it does not float are also visible, while the seahorse barely conceals the hose that provides air to the swimmer. This ostentatious exhibition of disparaging artificiality and excessiveness perfectly illustrates Sontag’s definition of camp as “a love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration … something of a private code, a badge of identity” (Sontag 105). Stepień’s earlier remark emphasizing camp’s queerness property and how the homosexual and (later) trans communities have embraced camp brings us back to my assertion that the mermaid can be queered.

As we have seen, camp aesthetics is regarded as defying normative cultural codes, reorganizing these conventions through the transgression of “binaries such as art/kitsch,
natural/artificial, serious/frivolous” to denounce the arbitrary nature of cultural hegemony (Stępień 1). In other words, camp defines practices, behaviors, or visual attributes that promote non-normativity and ambiguity to hamper the aesthetic diktat of the dominant. For Sontag, camp belongs to the realm of sensibility and is an alternative form of sophistication. Camp is the repulsion of the natural in favor of artifice and exaggeration. Sontag notes that camp is the celebration of epicene style where ambiguity exists. Epicene, which means the absence of characteristics of either sex, directly connects with the mermaid’s sexual ambiguity. Under this new light, it seems essential to draw a connection between the epicene style which celebrates sexual fluidity, and the representation of the mermaid, a sexless creature culturally constructed female gender that can be considered artificial. This inclusion of the mermaid persona in the queer world can be illustrated by the *Coney Island Mermaid Parade*, a popular event that draws many people from across the United States.

The *Coney Island Mermaid Parade* started in the 1980s when a group of artists decided to create an art event in the spirit of Coney Island’s American popular culture. Contrary to mermaid films, the *Mermaid Parade* extends the limits of heterosexuality and flirts with homosexuality and queerness. After two years of interruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the *Coney Island Mermaid Parade* celebrated its 40th edition in June 2022 and gathered over 3,000 merpeople who joined in the “celebration of creativity, nautical mythology, fertility, and letting ones freak flag fly” (Hatfield). During the procession, participants wear “costumes, featuring everything from fins, feathers, floral headpieces, … shells, … pasties, jewels, sequins, and glitter” (Hatfield). This bacchanalian parade embraces gender non-normativity where camp aesthetic is paramount. The *Coney Island Mermaid Parade* resembles Gay Pride parades where

---

28 Bacchanalia is “a Roman festival of Bacchus celebrated with dancing, song, and revelry” (“Bacchanalia,” def.)
people from the LGBTQ+ community can freely express gender diversity using the mythological character of the mermaid as a figurehead. Laurie Essig argues that the event “is a manifestation of the heterosexual imagination at its very limits” (Essig 155). It appears that the parade’s popularity draws upon heterosexual desire tickled by women strolling topless and the recurring question of the mermaid’s “fishily unclear genitalia” (Essig 155). Hence, this reinforces the idea that sexual desire is framed around the ambiguous characteristics of a female body that is not entirely human. A body that exists in the liminal space between heterosexuality and queerness.

The Mermaid Parade in Coney Island draws from the phenomenon of cosplay\textsuperscript{29}, a form of performance discussed by Tiffany Hutabarat-Nelson in her dissertation Fantastical body narrative: cosplay, performance, and gender diversity. Hutabarat-Nelson explores how the phenomenon of cosplay, based on creative play, has engendered the expression of various masculinities and femininities. The author contends that cosplay can be understood as an experience that expands or challenges the gender binary through gender performance. Cosplay is a unique laboratory where people of all ages can embrace non-normative body performativity, extensively studied by feminist phenomenologists like Gail Weiss and Iris Young. Participation in these events becomes a liminal space where both participants and viewers can enjoy gender fluidity safely. Hutabarat-Nelson rallies to theories of both Judith Butler’s presented in Gender Trouble and Donna Haraway’s Cyborg Manifesto that focuses on “how the body and self are constructed entities and therefore cannot be faithfully described by only two rigid concepts of biological determinism” (Hutabarat-Nelson 32). Both scholars advocate for a better understanding of what gender construction implies in shifting possibilities and fluidity. The

\textsuperscript{29} Cosplay is the combination of the words “costume” and “play”. It first was coined in 1993 and is defined as the activity or practice of dressing up as a character from a work of fiction (such as a comic book, video game, or television show).
concept of cosplay and the Mermaid Parade gives a better insight into how the mermaid belongs to the contemporary world of queerness. This reinforces my previous argument that the mermaid is polysemous, therefore, can elude hegemonic gender dichotomy. But let us briefly return to the crucial claim of this section, which states that the mermaid has (re)gained aesthetic value through camp style by illustrating how both aesthetics, kitsch and camp, can blend into highly regarded art forms.

To demonstrate how kitsch and camp styles have successfully blended to create an art form highly considered in the art scene and applauded by art critics, I would like to present Janaina Tschäpe’s visual work. In 2004, German-Brazilian artist Tschäpe created a video/photo/drawing art piece featuring a couple of mermaids. The work titled Blood, Sea was exhibited at the Contemporary Art Museum at the University of South Florida in Tampa. In the exhibition catalog, art critic Gean Moreno wrote:

“Value is certainly redistributed when Tschäpe introduces a beautiful image of maiden doing her sublime aquatic ballet, conjuring up timeless metaphors and narratives of the sea, and we then learn that the video was filmed in the American world of Weeki Wachee Springs, Florida. It’s almost as if the most refined part of the culture meets its opposite … All of a sudden, our maiden, so Nijinsky-like in her grace when we first saw her, is sublime in the way that a lava-lamp is sublime in the thick incense for and Marlboro smoke of a trailer” (Vickers & Dionne 262).

Camp sensibility is, therefore, ambiguous because it can be polymorphic. It can be simultaneously a symbol and a pure deception. Mermaid’s shows’ kitschy aesthetic, because of the wearing of prosthetic tails, unequivocally draws upon Sontag’s interpretation of the Camp aesthetic, celebrating the artifice and the exaggerated. Similarly, the non-normative gender
identity of the mermaid can situate the mermaid’s bodily experience in an androgynous liminal space between feminine and masculine, reinforcing my argument that the mermaid’s rendition adheres to camp-style characteristics hence, benefits from, and contributes to the revalorization of this aesthetic style.

Although the Weeki Wachee mermaid’s show has been labeled cheesy and kitschy, even during struggling times, the roadside attraction has never been deserted by visitors, proving that despite its oft-disparaged aesthetic reputation, the Floridian mermaids still captivate a fervent audience. Therefore, I contend that the intrinsic artful quality of the mermaid figure, which has been aesthetically depreciated for a long time and unjustly qualified as “bad art,” has recently reclaimed a place in the forefront of contemporary art conversation through its integration within the popular camp style.
Conclusion: The Mermaid New Agency

Before emerging to the surface after a dive into the depth of the complex interpretation of the mermaid’s representations, where I discussed the mermaid’s compliance with the pressure of patriarchal misogynistic mechanisms to fulfill the male desire or eluding hegemonic gender dichotomy because of its hybridized, sexless body, and even floating between the disparaged kitsch aesthetic expression and the acclaimed camp sub-cultural style, I want to steer attention and conclude this paper with the mermaid’s contemporary new agency as a powerful advocate for body-positivity and eco-conservation.

Mermaids don’t exclusively exist in screen narratives or spectacles anymore; they have extended their existence in lifestyle through the practice of mermaiding. Maria Mellins observes that “mermaiding has become a legitimate leisure activity and business opportunity for people enthralled by the mythological hybridized sea creature” (Mellins 128). Mermaiding pertains to the cosplay concept and is a lifestyle that combines free diving techniques and underwater dolphins’ swimming style with the swimmer’s legs bounded together in a mono-fin tail. Recently, the number of mermaids and mermen aficionados has grown significantly. Mellins notes that one thousand professional mermaids are working full-time across the United States while mermaid schools are booming, attracting both adults and children. But more interestingly, mermaiding has created a new momentum for the mythological figure and offers new agency to this once objectified feminine-gendered creature as a persuasive advocate.

Long flowing hair, seashell bra tops, shimmering make-up, crowns, and hair jewelry are unavoidable tropes of the ultra-feminine representation of the mermaid. And, of course, the most
crucial element is the tail, often made of fabric or silicone. The conception and creation of the
tail are critical for the mer-community and are meant to show individual artistry; however, the
ultimate ambition for the community is to maintain a sense of authenticity. The preeminence of
realism has engendered a constructive debate within the community to present “real” women
instead of idealized female bodies. Feeling beautiful in a mermaid’s body is essential for the
community; therefore, mermaiding conveys a body-positive image, helps women feel more
confident, and raises self-esteem. Mermaiding invites people with any body shape to post
pictures of themselves on social media platforms to present an empowering alternative to
“women’s bodies that are usually portrayed in fashion and advertising, which have been
airbrushed and carefully posed” (Mellins 132). The “Keep your thigh gap – I’ve got mermaid
thighs” meme campaign exemplifies this empowerment. Indeed, the tagline outlines that if
women’s thighs touch, they are a step closer to being a mermaid. This body-positive drive allows
women whose bodies don’t have a gap between their legs, supposedly a characteristic ideal
female body should have, to feel good about their curvaceous shapes.

Many swim schools aim to “edutain” young girls to be strong, help their self-esteem, and
empower them; these young girls learn that femininity is associated with prerogative and agency,
which marks a drastic change from femininity norms dictated by patriarchy. One of these
schools, owned by Canadian businesswoman Raina the Halifax Mermaid, whose celebrity within
the community originates in the success story of her business, targets children and young adults
who want to acquire mermaid swimming techniques. Raina’s school “edutainment” program has
the ambition to “teach technical swimming skills, but it also focuses on empowering students and
raising self-esteem” (Mellins 138). Mellins concludes her essay by stating that “[b]ody positive
mermaids have emerged from the depths, as they celebrate women’s curves and use the mermaid
To discuss issues of strength and power and the importance of presenting images of ‘real’ bodies” (Mellins 140). Yet, the mermaid representation’s new influence through its extensive visibility is not limited to body non-normative inclusiveness.

As previously discussed, the mermaid’s charisma also stems from the ambiguity of its embodiment. The mermaid inhabits a liminal space between the familiar and the alien; she is a composite, a hybridization of terrestrial and aquatic beings. This hybridization of two worlds may denounce the narrow-minded intent to close-categorization and fixed boundaries. In his article, Peter Mortensen argues that “[b]y blurring human-animal distinctions … mermaids highlight the restrictiveness of anthropocentric ideology and signal the possibility of critically revisioning human beings-in-the-world” (Mortensen 204). Mermaids can be recognized as peacemakers between land and sea, animality and humanity whose monstrous power may encourage us to better understand our world. Since the emergence of the mermaiding phenomenon, self-styled performers who embodied the mythical sea creature also endorsed the role of marine conservation advocates. In their article, Sara Malou Strandvad, Tracy Davis, and Megan Dunn note that many entertainers assert concern for “the wonder of the ocean” and what being “part of the system, and not above the system of its caretaking” entails (Strandvad et al. 264). The authors discuss the performance of Hannah Mermaid, who, in 2012, was filmed diving with a pod of whale sharks. The video was posted on YouTube to raise awareness of the extinction of aquatic species, condemn over-fishing practices, and promote the development of eco-tourism in the Philippines. Unlike iconic photographs of wildlife in the Anthropocene, which show heartbreaking images of emaciated polar bears, sea birds trapped in sticky spilled oil, or turtles entangled in plastic bags, the use of a mermaid as an ocean conservation advocate

---

30 Merriam-Webster defines Anthropocene as “the period of time during which human activities have had an environmental impact on the Earth regarded as constituting a distinct geological age” (“Anthropocene,” def.)
casts another form of activism. And as Hannah Mermaid pertinently states, it may be possible to “rally the mermaid iconography to make a change in the world and bring about more awareness for ocean creatures” (Strandvad et al. 266, 267). For Hannah, her activism pays off because her “images … inspire people to direct action” as she creates petitions to change laws about ocean animals’ rights (Strandvad et al. 274).

Another example of eco-conservation activism is the *Dolphin Dance Project*[^31], which portrays mermaids in a close encounter with open-ocean dolphins. The association produces films about inter-species communication through dance. Their artsy documentaries endorse marine mammals’ protection initiatives and promote the idea that “dolphins (and large-brained cetaceans) deserve to be treated as non-human ‘person,’ with the same rights and protections as … homo sapiens” (Dolphin Dance Project).

Mermaid Kat, who owns a mermaid school, takes pride not only in teaching how to swim with a mermaid tail but wants “to make all of [the mermaid trainees] ambassadors of the oceans so that they have more and more people out there who can create awareness for our underwater world” (Strandvad et al. 275). Mermaid activists use social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook but also participate in mermaid conventions, gathering fandom, hobbyists, and professional producers.

Mermaiding activities, lifestyle, and activism are new phenomena that have gained popularity worldwide, attract both children and adults, and offer an opportunity to live out their fantasies in real life.

Whereas many scholars have asserted that the hybridized body of the mermaid has been subjugated by male authority and suffered from kitsch labeling, this paper does not pretend to

[^31]: [https://dolphin-dance.org/about/](https://dolphin-dance.org/about/)
give answers, but rather, its ambition is to open the reader to new possibilities that originate in its unique hybridized body, which grants her the prospect to evade patriarchal systems and serve as a contemporary model for body positivity while being engaged in eco-conservatism advocacy. Far from its disreputable kitsch or sentimental nostalgia characteristics, the mermaid’s polysemy gives her image a renewed aesthetic value through today’s fascination with the practice of mermaiding and the valorization of extravagance and fantasy that marks camp style. This unpredictable recent aesthetic reevaluation and agency of the mermaid elevates the once-perceived discreditable mythological figure to the foreground of contemporary art conversations and lifestyle and proves that Anais Nin was correct: the mermaid does “have no fear of depth and a great fear of shallow living” through her polysemous persona that offers multi-layered, and often ambiguous interpretative possibilities.
Bibliography


Hayward, Philip. “Mermaids, Mercultures and the Aquapelagic Imaginary.” *Shima (Sydney, N.S.W.)*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2018, https://doi.org/10.21463/shima.12.2.03.


Mortensen, Peter. “Half Fish, Half Woman: Annette Kellerman, Mermaids, and Eco-Aquatic Revisioning.” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 29, no. 2 (102), Brian Attebery, as Editor, for the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, 2018, pp. 201–21.


https://doi.org/10.34041/ln.v25.676.


Appendices

Appendix A – Fair Use Form

INSTRUCTIONS
Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: Jacqueline D. Merveille Date: 10/3/2022
Class or Project: Thesis "Queering the Weeki Wachee Mermaid and Its Renewed Aesthetic Value"
Title of Copyrighted Work: Movies "Splash" (1984) and "Pretty Woman" (1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likely Supports Fair Use</th>
<th>Likely Does Not Support Fair Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use)</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research or Scholarship</td>
<td>Bad-faith behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism, Parody, News Reporting or Comment</td>
<td>Denying credit to original author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative Use (your new work relies on and adds new expression, meaning, or message to the original work)</td>
<td>Non-transformative or exact copy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted Access (to students or other appropriate group)</td>
<td>Made accessible on Web or to public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Profit-generating use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the purpose and character of your use supports fair use or does not support fair use.

NATURE OF THE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likely Supports Fair Use</th>
<th>Likely Does Not Support Fair Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factual or nonfiction</td>
<td>Creative or fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to favored educational objectives</td>
<td>Consumable (workbooks, tests)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published work</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the nature of the copyrighted material supports fair use or does not support fair use.

AMOUNT AND SUBSTANTIALLY OF MATERIAL USED IN RELATION TO WHOLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likely Supports Fair Use</th>
<th>Likely Does Not Support Fair Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small amount (using only the amount necessary to accomplish the purpose)</td>
<td>Large portion or whole work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount is important to favored socially beneficial objective (i.e. educational objectives)</td>
<td>Portion used is qualitatively substantial (i.e. it is the 'heart of the work')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower quality from original (ex. lower resolution or bitrate photos, video, and audio)</td>
<td>Similar or exact quality of original work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Letitia Schmidt, lmschmidt@usf.edu and Drew Smith, dsmith@usf.edu
Reviewed by USF General Counsel 08/11/2015
Appendix A – Fair Use Form (Continued)

University of South Florida

Overall, the amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole supports fair use or does not support fair use.

EFFECT ON THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likely Supports Fair Use</th>
<th>Likely Does Not Support Fair Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ No significant effect on the market or potential market for the original</td>
<td>□ Replaces sale of copyrighted work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ No similar product marketed by the copyright holder</td>
<td>□ Significantly impairs market or potential market for the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ You own a lawfully acquired copy of the material</td>
<td>□ Numerous copies or repeated, long-term use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ The copyright holder is unidentifiable</td>
<td>□ Made accessible on Web or to public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Lack of licensing mechanism for the material</td>
<td>□ Affordable and reasonably available permissions or licensing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the effect on the market for the original supports fair use or does not support fair use.

CONCLUSION

The combined purpose and character of the use, nature of the copyrighted material, amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole and the effect on the market for the original likely supports fair use or likely does not support fair use.

Note: Should your use of copyrighted material not support fair use, you may still be able to locate and request permissions from the copyright holder. For help on this, please feel free to contact your Copyright Librarian.

This worksheet has been adapted from:

Cornell University’s Checklist for Conducting A Fair use Analysis Before Using Copyrighted Materials:
https://copyright.cornell.edu/policies/docs/fair_use_checklist.pdf


Smith, Kevin; MacKinnon, Lisa A.; Galland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from:

LeEtta Schmidt, lmschmidt@usf.edu and Drew Smith dsmith@usf.edu
Reviewed by USF General Counsel 08/11/2015
Appendix B – Getty Images Invoice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invoice No.</th>
<th>176996939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer No.</td>
<td>25401108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoice Date</td>
<td>24-SEP-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Order No.</td>
<td>2085726108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Order Date</td>
<td>24-SEP-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Order No.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job or Project Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordered By</td>
<td>Jacqueline Mervelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>Jacqueline Mervelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bill To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Mervelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Mervelle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Payment Terms</th>
<th>IMMEDIATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tracking Number</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipping Method</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Shipped</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ship To Contact</td>
<td>Jacqueline Mervelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due Date</td>
<td>24-SEP-22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This order is subject to the license agreement and other terms and conditions agreed to when the order was placed. Getty Images (US), Inc. PO Box 550664, St. Louis, MO 63195-3604 To reach our Getty Images Sales & Service Team Phone: 800-IMAGERY (800-462-4379) Or visit: www.gettyimages.com/customer-support To reach our iStock Sales & Service Team Phone: 1-666-479-6251 Or visit: www.istockphoto.com/customer-support

Invoice reflects order placed on GettyImages.com

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Ordered &amp; Delivered</th>
<th>Unit Price</th>
<th>Extended Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BET 51776058 Performers in Water</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>175.00</td>
<td>175.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Photographer: ARTHUR BERTMANN
Start Date: 2022-09-21
Duration: 1 day to 1 year
End Date: 2027-09-24
Usage: Editorial - Standard · Low Industry Description: All industries
Meta Territory List: World
Rights Exclusivity: No Exclusivity
Restrictions: Contact your local office for all commercial or promotional uses.

Sub Total | 175.00 |
Tax | 0.00 |
Total | 175.00 |
Paid/Credited | 175.00 |
USD | 175.00 |
Total Due | 0.00 |
Appendix C – Weeki Wachee Springs State Parks Permission to Reprint

Anderson, Robyn <Robyn.Anderson@floridadep.gov>
To: Jacqueline Merveille

Jacqueline,

If any of those photos were found on the internet and our Facebook page, they are public therefore no need for approval. I would love to read your thesis once it's complete. Best of luck to you. Go Bulls! My daughter attends USF.

Robyn

Robyn Anderson
Manager Analyst I
Weeki Wachee Springs State Park
6131 Commercial Way, Spring Hill, FL 34606
Robyn.Anderson@FloridaDEP.gov
Park: 352-610-5660
Office: 352-610-5665
Good afternoon Jacqueline,

I've reviewed your request and since these are for publication to your university's database, we feel comfortable granting permission in this case. I do apologize for the brief delay, I just wanted to do a review and make some inquiries.

Warm regards,
Milo Brocks | Rights and Permissions Assistant
Her/Him/They
University Press of Florida
University of Florida Press
352.294.6824 | rights@upress.ufl.edu
Timucua and Seminole Land

Because of Florida’s very broad public records laws, this e-mail communication may be subject to public disclosure.

Currently Reading: *The Children of Hurin* by J.R.R. Tolkien, edited by Christopher Tolkien

---

[External Email]

Please, find attached the photos for *Wookey Hole: Mermaids*.

Photo 1: Brochure (page 38). Caption: By permission of Mary Darlington Fletcher.
Photo 2: Swing (page 51). Caption: By permission of Mary Darlington Fletcher.
Photo 3: Office (page 79). Caption: By permission of Vera Hukaby.
Photo 4: Bride (page 88). Caption: By permission of Sparky Schumacher.
Photo 5: Housekeeping (page 102). Caption: By permission of Bonnie Georgiadis.
Photo 6: Peter Pan (page 127). Caption: By permission of Bonita Colson.

I do hope I don’t need to ask permission from all these different people because I’m afraid some of them couldn’t be reached!

Thank you so much for your kind help!

Best regards,

Jacqueline Mervelle, M.A.
Adjunct Instructor
Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies
University of South Florida
4202 East Fowler Avenue
Tampa, Florida 33620
jmervelle@usf.edu
Good afternoon, Milo,

Thank you very much for your kind answer.

Please, find attached the photos for *Weekly Wachee: City of Mermaids*.

Photo 1 -> two mermaids in a tank (page 130). In the book, it mentions: *Courtesy Pat Hady Boyett*

Photo 2 -> two mermaids eating a hotdog (page 172). The book mentions: *By permission of Photographic Concepts, New Port Richey, Fla, which does not exist anymore.*

Photo 3: Cinderella scene (page 183). The book mentions: *Courtesy of Barbara Smith Wynn.*

I will send you a second mail with the *Weekly Wachee: Mermaids* book photos.

Thank you very much for your prompt response, as this matter is time sensitive.

Best regards,

Jacqueline Merveille, M.A.
Adjunct Instructor
Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies
University of South Florida
4202 East Fowler Avenue
Tampa, Florida 33620
jmerveille@usf.edu