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## I'm Not Who I Was Then, Now: Performing Identity in Girl Cams and Blogs

Katherine Bzura  
*University of South Florida*

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I'm Not Who I Was Then, Now: Performing Identity in Girl Cams and Blogs

by

Katherine Bzura

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Art History  
College of Visual and Performing Arts  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Bradley Nickels, Ph.D.  
Elizabeth Bell, Ph.D.  
Soraya Murray, Ph.D.

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# I'm Not Who I Was Then, Now: Performing Identity in Girl Cams and Blogs

Katherine Bzura

## ABSTRACT

The task of documenting the evolution of the self over time has been attempted by women artists throughout history. The practice of this documentation has been greatly enhanced in the last several years by the progression of new technologies for the capture of digital images, the advent of the internet as a common textual and visual communication device, and the availability of free resources to publish and disseminate the resulting constructions. Women artists now have the tools needed to document the life of the self, and to publish it immediately to an audience.

Most of the women documenting their lives on-line, in real time, do not consider themselves to be artists, and the art world has yet to embrace their practice as artistic activity. But as documents of women's performance, these sites are important historical, visual and cultural occurrences. In addition to containing both textual and visual elements, these endeavors incorporate and elucidate the concept of performativity of gender. In watching these sites (cams and blogs) of women's performance over time, it becomes clear that identities are complex constitutive creations, on both sides of the computer screen. The women of this study are doing, making and inventing a way to assemble the

stories of their lives for a reading and looking audience in a manner that calls attention to the way all subjects are made by language and culture.

The sites of these productions, located in the space of the internet, offer the spectator an opportunity to interface and form relationships with visual materials and contents. In the space opened up between viewer and artist/performer, identity work can be accomplished and the masquerade of femininity can be critically assessed in new and engaging ways.

The challenge and the promise of this research: the journey into the spaces of these sites, with all of their varied formations of identity and performance as woman, will provide a document that both claims these practices as unique artistic performances of self and delineates new possibilities for looking.

### ***Mirror***

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
Whatever I see, I swallow immediately.  
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike  
I am not cruel, only truthful –  
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.  
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.  
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long  
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.  
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.  
Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,  
Searching my reaches for what she really is.  
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.  
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully  
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.  
I am important to her. She comes and goes.  
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

-Sylvia Plath



## Chapter One - What is a Cam Girl? What is a Girl Cam?

“All media are extensions of some human faculty –psychic or physical. The wheel is an extension of the foot, the book is an extension of the eye, clothing an extension of the skin, electric circuitry, an extension of the central nervous system.”

Marshall McLuhan in *The Medium is the Massage*

New media are proving themselves to be eerily similar in practice to the musing imaginations prophesied by philosophers of the recent past. The internet has proven itself to be a lasting site of cultural production; growing to be as vital to the navigation of our daily lives as the synapses and electrical firings of our cerebral cortex – allowing us to move about, in and out of bodies, through the world as we know it. Advancing technology is permitting the capture and distribution of enormous amounts of information in the form of images, text and sound, through the technological space commonly known as the internet. The territory of the internet is inhabited by sites where this information is compiled and organized by authors for a reading and watching audience. My spectatorship within this technology and information structure occurs in the spaces of sites on the internet created by women to contain collections of the traces of their performance as women.

The working concept of performance used in this research comes from feminist philosopher Judith Butler. In *Undoing Gender* she writes:

If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason

automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not “do” ones gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary.<sup>1</sup>

This spectatorship of this study is of women performing as women. In these performances, women are moving towards an “improvisation” (Butler) of the female masquerade theorized by feminist film theorist and media and culture expert Mary Ann Doane in “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator”:

The effectivity of masquerade lies precisely in its potential to manufacture a distance from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible and readable by the woman.<sup>2</sup>

These documents, the evidence of the performance and masquerade amassed and assembled, is witnessed in the form of web cam based images and blogs.

A web cam is a broadcast of images (still or video, silent or with audio), that have been taken with a camera and subsequently posted to the World Wide Web. The first web cams were focused on busy coffeepots and soothing fish tanks<sup>3</sup>– the idea being for the user (the viewer), through the click of the mouse or the stroke of a keyboard, to be able to see into a space without physically needing to be there. Web cams can be trained on any area or space – the necessary components are: a digital camera, the hardware and software to

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<sup>1</sup> *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 32. Doane borrows the term masquerade from Joan Riviere (a translator for Freud and a psychoanalyst). Doane writes that for Riviere “The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed.” (25) I am hoping to move on to Doane’s more hopeful ideas for female masquerade outlined above.

<sup>3</sup> Quentin Stafford-Fraser, “The Life and Times of the First Web Cam,” *Communications of the ACM* 44.7 (2001): 25.

support it, and a network of connections for viewers to access the visual information it captures from their remote locations.

It wasn't long before the utilitarian first subjects of the web cam evolved into something more complex and dynamic. Women began turning cameras on themselves. A girl cam is a web cam that transmits images from within the woman's domestic sphere. These women performers and artists are creating dimensions of artistic content from cameras trained on the self, by the self. A girl cam is defined by its creator and editor, the "cam girl". The camera(s) in her home are focused on her, events as they evolve in time, and the contents of her domicile. In presentations that are self-controlled and self-edited, women use girl cams to document themselves as women performing as women in the home (Appendix A, Figure 1).<sup>4</sup>

While folded in front of the computer, viewing these performances, two things come to mind. First, to reiterate: this research is about looking and spectatorship. The roots of thinking about being folded while engaging with the internet come from communication professor Michele White's study of embodied internet spectatorship *The Body and the Screen*. In writing about the things she sees on the monitor always flickering and changing she says:

The constant doubling and folding of the morph/body into itself...evoke the spectator's fragile and folded body and self-engagement while in front of the screen.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> All figures referenced in the text are numbered consecutively in Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup> *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2006), 175.

Her ideas about being folded, vulnerable and in constant engagement with the self while viewing internet content are integral to solidifying this research as spectatorship.

Secondly, in using technology in this specific way, the viewer is learning to be alone while someone else is nearby. This idea of being alone while someone else is present comes from Victor Burgin's article entitled "Jenni's Room: Exhibitionism and Solitude".<sup>6</sup> In the article, Burgin (an artist, scholar and critic) refers to the ideas of child psychologist D. W. Winnicott regarding play and transitional objects and to psychologist Melanie Klein regarding feeling lonely while in the company of loved ones. Burgin uses these ideas to interrogate the motives of a specific cam girl, one who is also the subject of this research, and I share some critical ground with his thinking. What the subjects of this research are doing, and what the spectator is doing, is similar to what children do when they play as a pathway to learning. Not quite ready to be alone, there is a longing for assurance that there is someone watching, or that there is someone present. This is the way to learn to be alone, first with someone in the next room, or around the corner. Girl cams, and later blogs, offer a place to learn by looking in this specific way.

There are two critical aspects of the girl cam. The first is the context within which it is presented, and second is the technology that allows the distribution and reception. Michele White defines girl cams in this way:

Women's webcams are free or low-cost representations that can be viewed when operators link a camera to a computer, employ software to

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<sup>6</sup> "Jenni's Room: Exhibitionism and Solitude," *Critical Inquiry* 27 (2000): 77-89.

deliver images, and construct websites to frame and contextualize their representations.<sup>7</sup>

The technology being used for production and reception (software, hardware, digital cameras, etc.) of the girl cams and the place where they are considered (the internet) are important characters in this story as it unfolds.

Not surprisingly, the term “cam girl” has come to envelop sub categories of performers, not all of which are related to this proposed exploration<sup>8</sup>. For the purposes of this research, the broad category of cam girls needs to be refined. Included in this inquiry are two types of web cams – the “life cam” and the “art cam”. This writing encompasses two cam girls: one who operated a “life cam” (*Jennicam*) and one who operates an “art cam” (*anacam*). Both of these women use the web cam to capture images of the self and the home as the centerpiece of a site that also contains a collection of other graphics, texts and visual elements assembled by the cam girl/author.

What could be the impetus for such a mass creation of cultural material aimed at capturing what used to be considered the private, mundane aspects of life? There is a long tradition in visual arts of pictorial realism – the attempt by artists to portray the dull and banal to reveal the truth of objective reality. But what is operating in girl cams is the desire to document a performance of woman

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<sup>7</sup> *Body*, 57.

<sup>8</sup> I will exclude from this study any project that exists exclusively in the realm of pornography. Many pornography sites exist today on the internet that promise to give paying customers a glimpse into the bedroom of a real, live, girl. These sites are, for the most part, not owned and maintained by the women who are pictured on them. The cams and blogs I have chosen feature nudity and sexually explicit writing. The intent of these sites is not to create pornography, and they are controlled, written and edited by the women who create them. Although this study focuses on women and how they construct an image online, it is not my intent to focus on the production of imagery and content that *exclusively* emphasizes and exploits female sexuality for titillation and profit.

as subject. Girl cam sites are documents of the performances that each woman engages in: living. As Butler defines it, this performance becomes “a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint”.<sup>9</sup> Theresa Senft, an expert in women’s performance and celebrity in new media, deciphers the enticement in her pioneering dissertation on the performative aspects of girl cams:<sup>10</sup>

Yet using performance, women may ‘speak back’ to realism in at least two ways. They may remark their own commodification within global capitalism, and/or they may resist objectification by an invisible ‘viewer’, and speak their minds.<sup>11</sup>

The space for this dialogue with realism on the internet is similar to the unmarked space that performance theorist Peggy Phelan hopes to identify in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Phelan defines the unmarked in various ways:

Lacan and Freud called this immateriality the unconscious; it speaks through the symptom. I am calling this immateriality the unmarked; it shows itself through the negative and through disappearance.<sup>12</sup>

And further speaks to the motives for both performing and viewing in this unmarked place:

Seeing the hollow blindness of our own eyes is dangerous because it risks both self-absorption (one sees nothing other than the self) and self-annihilation (one sees only the nothing of the self). But until one can accept one’s internal other as lost, invisible, an unmarked blank to oneself and within the world, the external other will always bear the marks and scars of the looker’s deadening gaze.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Undoing Gender*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> This dissertation is due to be published by Peter Lang as a book entitled *Camgirls: Webcams, Livejournals And The Personal As Political In The Age Of The Global Brand* on May 30, 2007. I am working with a draft of the dissertation that was published online at <http://www.echonyc.com/%7Ejanedoe/diss.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Theresa Senft, “Camgirls: Webcams, LiveJournals and the Personal as Political in the Age of the Global Brand” (PhD diss., New York University, 2004), Chap. 1 pg. 17.

<sup>12</sup> *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

There is power for women in choosing to document the self in a world that surveils its citizens with regularity. In each direction that a woman may look, she will see images of women, represented with the intent to bring about desire of some sort – often for consumption or idealization. By retaining authority over their own images, women that offer representations of themselves performing their lives subvert the controlled categories offered to them in the current economy of female imagery. Women will be surveilled and their images captured, manipulated and distributed. Producing sites for self-surveillance opens a place for the collection of images created by women, as an alternative to the sites for mass consumption of distorted images. In these sites of performance, being visible does not automatically rob women of their power.

White reports on her findings after studying women's web cams:

Women webcam operators place themselves in a field of visibility. Some of them set up their own version of surveillant protection with webcams. However, their comments indicate that controlled forms of visibility, which they choose, provide a much more empowering position than submitting to traditional forms of the gaze.<sup>14</sup> (72)

The precedent for all "private" performances mediated through cameras and edited for mass consumption is *An American Family* (the Louds), first broadcast in 1973.<sup>15</sup> The Louds' home environment and the dynamics of everyday family relationships were the subjects of a documentary series intended to air on television. The trend continues after the advent of girl cams with *The Truman Show* (1998) and *EdTV* (1999), films that are fictionalized entertainment

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<sup>14</sup> *Body*, 72.

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Ruoff, *An American Family: a televised life* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

meant to illustrate the pitfalls of a private life under constant surveillance (an aside: both of the subjects of the camera's intrusive gaze in these movies were men). But despite the hazards involved in being constantly recorded and documented by cameras, there is a continued interest in reality-based entertainment in the United States. In the current line-up of broadcast and cable television programming, there are hours of reality-based shows available every night of the week.

It is important to note the peak in production of reality-based entertainment as it happens concurrently with the rise in popularity of girl cams and blogs. The allure of reality entertainment is similar to that of girl cams, but with important differences. The distinctive difference between reality entertainment and the production of content to be found in the sites of this study resides in the agency at work in the two systems. Reality entertainment is filmed with the intent to edit and broadcast the images in a narrative, serial or contest based sequence. In this case, editing control lies not with the subjects who are pictured, but with third parties who are usually concerned with generating an audience and garnering high ratings for the final product. In both the girl cams and blogs chosen for this research, the creator of the "real" content of the site is using her own life and lived events to craft the end product. The site is created by her, depicts her and is controlled by her. Girl cam sites and blogs can become popular with audiences, but the responsibility and control of authorship resides finally with the woman creating it.



Modern life is so disjointed, so filled with images and choices that viewing subjects need help validating what happens in living, looking and being on a day-to-day basis. It is alluring to turn to the specters that inhabit the screen to help delineate an identity as a woman moving through the world of representations, both on-line and off. Taking control of the content of the personal and the self, girl cams and blogs open a space for the spectator to see, to read and to watch so as to alleviate fears of displacement and offer a site of comparison to temporarily anchor constantly shifting perceptions of the self.

Jennifer Ringley (*JenniCam*) and Ana Voog (*AnaCam*), the chosen examples for the web cam/girl cam genre in this research, were the firsts in their respective endeavors<sup>16</sup> - Jenni was the first to maintain a life cam and Ana was not far behind, but the first to call her project “art”. It is not intended that Jenni and Ana stand in for the entire field of web cam operators (men and women), but that they serve as focused examples in this exploration of what happens when one woman watches other women perform “Life, Online” (Figure 2).

Web cams began as a way to add content to a personal home page on the internet. Home pages were the first and simplest form of online identity. If you wanted people to be able to find you on-line, it was necessary to define a space and deposit personal information in it that could then be accessed on the web. Site authors often wanted to add pictures (of themselves, friends and relatives) to augment the idea that the web site they were creating was conveying as much information as possible about them, and was an accurate

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<sup>16</sup> Simon Firth, “Live! From My Bedroom,” *Salon*, Jan. 8, 1998.

snapshot of the personality of the creator. Initially, *Jennicam* and *Anacam* were created because Jenni and Ana believed the most successful way to present themselves fully on their home page was to offer viewers a “continuous” web cam view of the self<sup>17</sup>. I assert these sites are among the first attempts by women to document and place performances of their lives, as representations of the self, onto constructed internet sites.

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<sup>17</sup> From Jenni’s Frequently Asked Questions portion of her site, in 1999 – “Q: Where did you get the idea to do this? A: Initially, I bought the camera to update portions of my webpage with pictures of myself. A friend joked that it could be used to do a FishBowl cam, but of a person. The idea fascinated me, and I took off with it. Q: Do you ever stage what we see? A: No, the concept of the cam is to show whatever is going on naturally. Essentially, the cam has been there long enough that now I ignore it. So whatever you’re seeing isn’t staged or faked, and while I don’t claim to be the most interesting person in the world, there’s something compelling about real like (sic) that staging it wouldn’t bring to the medium.”

<http://web.archive.org/web/19990508052112/jennicam.org/faq/general.html> (accessed March 4, 2007).

From Ana’s Bio section: “why have I decided to do this? curiosity. to experiment. to study human nature/culture. but mostly i feel i have a lot of cool things to share and communicate with a worldwide ‘audience’ in a totally spontaneous and immediate way from my home....so I’m also doing this to say “HERE YA GO, HERE’S MY LIFE, I’M A REAL PERSON AND HERE I AM IN ALL MY MUNDANE AND SPECTACULAR GLORY!” <http://www.anacam.com/anaframesn.html> (accessed March 4, 2007).

## Chapter Two - What About Blogs?

“But here I argue that it is computer screens where we project ourselves onto our own dramas, dramas in which we are producer, director and star.”

Sherry Turkle in *Life on the Screen*

In addition to providing a view of life events as they unfold in the home, successful girl cam sites nearly always contain a diary element, a log of the day-to-day events of a cam girl's life, and other areas where visual and textual assemblages can be stored and retrieved by viewers (galleries, links, etc.). Through the years, *Jennicam* and *Anacam* experimented with different structured areas within their sites to communicate with viewers (in addition to e-mail) and let them interact with each other, such as chat or comment interfaces. By reading the web log/diary, looking in the galleries of images, watching chats (or participating), reading/writing comments and integrating other clues, the viewers connect the dots individually and uniquely to form a story line that animates the images appearing from the cam. The important diary portion of the sites was where the cam girl could give her own commentary to her images. White acknowledges the importance of the materials surrounding and augmenting the cam images in this way:

...the presence of multiple webcams as well as the addition of diaries, chat forums, and other chronicles allows the spectator to weave a narrative and provide some kind of action. More important, these materials contextualize the webcam's otherwise unstable images and act as meaning producing mechanisms.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Body*, 64.

The cam is a tool to capture and distribute visual information about the self, but the images are only a part of how meaning is made. As the site is read, and navigation is achieved through all its components, "...viewers often decide what a camgirl signifies through an active process of assemblage rather than a passive acceptance of clear narrative."<sup>19</sup>

A continuous and uninterrupted cam performance for an unknown audience is not a sustainable practice for a diverse set of reasons. Due to the time-consuming pressures of site upkeep (coding, technical malfunctions, new software updates, etc.), financial constraints due to bandwidth and demand (the more people who log on to watch the more it costs) and the constant demands of being on camera, many cam girls elected to go off-line permanently or just maintain the diary aspect of the original site. In many instances, the diary and its revelations had become the focal point of the site for viewers and site producers alike. During the time in which I watched for the purposes of this research (1998-2007) the girl cam practitioners engaged in sharing their lives online exploded in population and subsequently disappeared. *Jennicam* went dark at the end of 2003<sup>20</sup> and *Anacam* continues to broadcast only a fraction of the time.

At the same time, technology advanced, due to consumers' demand for both hardware and software - less expensive, higher quality image capture devices/cameras and free user-friendly software to produce/edit content and upload pictures to the internet for sharing. For those with access, skills and

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<sup>19</sup> Senft, "Camgirls," Chap. 1, pg. 24.

<sup>20</sup> See Terry Teachout, "Jenni's Footnote," *National Review Online*, December 11, 2003.

inclination, it became much easier to produce sites that could contain personal content. It was not as easy to bear up to the constant scrutiny and surveillance of a cam, and often the usefulness of the practice as a performance came to a natural end. It became apparent during my inquiry that the girl cam was dying as a mode of expression for the life of the self. Blogs were taking the place of these sites for women perform in a similar capacity, but with less risk and more control.

The term blog is currently being defined by its cultural use on the internet. *Webster's Dictionary* defines it as "an online diary; a personal chronological log of thoughts published on a Web page; also called [Weblog], [Web log]."<sup>21</sup> The striking difference noted in watching the shift from cam-based modes of representation to blog-based modes is structural. A blog is configured to be more like a diary, and designed to be more textual. Blog software is set up to let the author publish information easily, categorize it, organize it and arrange it in an understandable chronology. A blog is designed specifically to house an unfolding stream of information that is created and published by the site author. Commonly, a blog also includes areas for the author to post a brief biography or profile and a list of links to other sites with which the author chooses to align. The links to other sites, often the sites of other bloggers, establish blogs formally in communities and networks of representations of similar interests.

To return again to the issue of agency over image and identity for women creators of sites, the web cam site architecture (Figure 3) sets up an expectation,

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<sup>21</sup> Dictionary.com. *Webster's New Millennium™ Dictionary of English, Preview Edition (v 0.9.6)*. Lexico Publishing Group, LLC. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/blog> (accessed: March 04, 2007).

in the viewer, of a somewhat continuous flow of images. While this flow perhaps initially felt liberating and creatively complete to the site author, too many sacrifices (privacy, a home full of wires to capture the performance) had to be made to sustain a constant stream of images. Creation and maintenance of a blog offers more control over content. The creator can choose what images to post, what events to include and explain and what parts to leave out. The author is much more in control of the performance. And as the software tools develop for web expression, more women have access to these tools and the abilities to create an on-line repository for recording their performances as self in daily life. In short, the tools for creating are much more accessible and the hazards of constant surveillance are ameliorated. In the production of blogs versus the strategy of performing for an unblinking cam – control increases and risk decreases.

Blogs are now produced by people all around the world, and are proliferating at an exponential rate<sup>22</sup>. Again, the essential element of a blog is textual and offers the author an easy way to create, edit and publish text documents to the internet, link to other blogs and archive materials. However, all the free software available to create blogs today (Blogger, LiveJournal, WordPress, TypePad, etc.) also include tools to easily post photographs or other visual elements, a feature that is often utilized, to different ends, by bloggers.

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<sup>22</sup> Technorati.com is a website that tracks blogs of all kinds. In the About section, Technorati reports that they are “Currently tracking 70.3 million blogs” and “The World Live Web is incredibly active, and according to Technorati data, there are over 175,000 new blogs (that’s just blogs) every day. Bloggers update their blogs regularly to the tune of over 1.6 million posts per day, or over 18 updates a second.” <http://technorati.com/about/> (accessed March 4, 2007).

The most recent technological advances center around the ability to embed and share videos across the internet, and in blogs. In 2005, the YouTube web site (<http://www.youtube.com>) became the first clearinghouse for users to post and watch videos, in any format, from nearly any computer. As ease of use and familiarity with video technology increases, more and more blogs will contain video elements.<sup>23</sup> Video is rapidly adding a visual and auditory richness to the internet, as well as expanding its capabilities a possible site for performance. Continuing development of video technology and its integration into the internet will undoubtedly augment the ability of site authors/creators to document events and tell stories.<sup>24</sup>

Blogs are currently a contested site of cultural production. The tools for making sites that construct on-line identity are now available to a wide range of authors who choose to express all sorts of opinions and present themselves in a variety of roles. There are personal blogs, food blogs, political blogs, self-help blogs, art blogs, dog blogs, gossip blogs, technology blogs, sex blogs and blogs that rate blogs to name just a few. The creators of these blogs have hardly any of the barriers to access (credentials, notoriety, extensive resources or education for example) that exist in the traditional publishing model. It takes about fifteen

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<sup>23</sup> See Lev Grossman's "*Time* Best Inventions 2006 - YouTube" (<http://www.time.com/time/2006/techguide/bestinventions/inventions/youtube2.html> - accessed March 10, 2007). Remarking on the relevance of this advancement and its users he says: "They sat alone in their basements and poured their most intimate, embarrassing secrets into their webcams. YouTube had tapped into something that appears on no business plan: the lonely, pressurized, pent-up video subconscious of America. Having started with a single video of a trip to the zoo in April of last year, YouTube now airs 100 million videos—and its users add 70,000 more—every day."

<sup>24</sup> At the time of the writing of this thesis document, none of the subjects of this research has initiated the regular use of video on their sites.

minutes for a literate person with internet access and a moderate amount of computer savvy to set up a free blog and begin to publish their views on anything they choose. The blurring between expert and amateur in blog sites has unleashed a torrent of denigrating criticism *and* a wave of optimism surrounding the conceivable communities to be formed by bloggers and the content they produce.

*Time Magazine*, in their “Person of the Year” issue for 2006, decided to focus on the issue of self-publishing on the internet. The magazine chose “You” as person of the year, complete with a mylar mirror inside a computer screen on its cover to offer a reflection of the reader as the magazine was held in hand (Figure 4). Inside, writer and consumer electronics expert Lev Grossman, comments on blogs:

This is an opportunity to build a new kind of international understanding, not politician to politician, great man to great man, but citizen to citizen, person to person. It’s a chance for people to look at a computer screen and really, genuinely wonder who’s out there looking back at them. Go on. Tell us you’re not just a little bit curious.<sup>25</sup>

Brian Williams, a television news anchorman for NBC cautions:

Does it endanger what passes for the national conversation if we’re all talking at once? What if ‘talking’ means typing on a laptop, but the audience is too distracted to pay attention? The whole notion of ‘media’ is now much more democratic, but what will the effect be on democracy? The danger just might be that we miss the next great book or the next great idea, or that we fail to meet the next great challenge...because we are too busy celebrating ourselves and listening to the same tune we already know by heart.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Person of the Year – You,” *Time*, December 25, 2006, 41.

<sup>26</sup> “Enough About You,” *Time*, December 25, 2006, 78.



The tune that women subjects and spectators “know by heart” could use a little bit of interrogation and unlearning, Mr. Williams. The “next great idea” just may be that subjects can be made anew in this cacophony of conversation.

And finally, Steven Johnson, an author who studies communities, culture and communication in new media says about bloggers writing about what they know personally:

What’s so interesting about those local conversations is that they involve experiences that the experts in traditional media have largely ignored – for good reason. Those experts realize that they can’t compete with the real experts: the people who live in these communities and know all the issues – small and large – that shape their daily lives.<sup>27</sup>

Yes, the space of blogs on the internet offers women a chance to reclaim their expertise as women back from glossy false media portrayals (in watching, reading and creating) and render their own personal experiences publicly.

Why is there this sudden surge of self-revelation and self-publication happening on the internet? In their comprehensive study of the internet as a new site for artistic production, Joline Blais and Jon Ippolito (New Media Professors at the University of Maine) think that:

One reason for this proliferation may be that our stories have been taken from us, repackaged, and sold back via broadcast media for so long that we are eager to get them back.<sup>28</sup>

In watching these sites of production, I am thrilled by the possibility that there is a place where I can look at other women with all of my desire for my own story intact, and without the fundamental meddling of influences that are present in the hollow world of mass culture and the fetishized realm of art objects. In regarding

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<sup>27</sup> “It’s All About Us,” *Time*, December 25, 2006, 80.

<sup>28</sup> *At the Edge of Art*, (New York, Thames and Hudson, 2006), 95.

sites that are built and designed by female authors as a place to collage identity and receive feedback, I am reminded of the hope I had placed in feminist art:

Thus feminist awakening was something fundamentally personal and social at once; it was a kind of mutual understanding of what it had meant to feel oneself alone, and a declaration of a new collectivity.<sup>29</sup>

Women have felt isolated, like the work of feminist identity was being performed alone, but now there is a place to gather and watch that makes this isolation obsolete. In these sites women can make new meanings and teach themselves how to define their performances, especially as we become aware of ourselves seeing. Feminist writer Naomi Wolf describes her hope for women learning to see in *The Beauty Myth*:

If we are to free ourselves from the dead weight that has once again been made out of femaleness, it is not ballots or lobbyists or placards that women will need first; it is a new way to see.<sup>30</sup>

There is no “dead weight” that I can see through the portal on my screen. I see, not utopia, but a shared space for doing this new looking.

The subjects of my blogging research (Heather Armstrong of *Dooce* – <http://www.dooce.com/>, Stephanie Klein of *Greek Tragedy* – <http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/>, and Monica Bielanko of *The Girl Who* - <http://www.thegirlwho.squarespace.com/>) are women who create sites where the visual elements are integral to the site itself. They are clear descendants of the girl cam in that these sites are constructed in an attempt to offer a window into the daily life of the author. Each of these women posts new content to her site

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<sup>29</sup> Peggy Phelan, “Survey,” in *Art and Feminism*, ed. Helena Reckitt (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2001), 33.

<sup>30</sup> *The Beauty Myth* (New York: William and Morrow, 1991), 19.

regularly and builds a self-portrait through images and entries that are part autobiography and part journal. The format is different and evolved from the heavy coding necessary for the earlier girl cam sites, but these blogs build on the intent and the aesthetic of the earlier model. As the cam model gives way to the blog model, each of these authors employs technology and enacts a different strategy to display and perform herself within the structure of the blog.

All five examples chosen for this research are young (current ages 30 - 41), white, middle-class American women. In this writing, I aim to unpack my own spectatorship of these select examples and speak to their ability to create a site where a certain type of visual and identity work can take place. This work, for me, involves being white, female, middle class and American. When I seek to shore up my own identity, I am constrained by the realities that are uniquely mine. When thinking specifically about the limitations of research inquiries into women performing in new media, Theresa Senft reasons:

...because it is a type of mediatized performance practice, homecamming works according to the complex rules of mimesis and mimicry. For this reason, what it 'means' for women, and what they wish it to mean, depends on a number of factors, including (but not limited to) sexuality, class, race and personal familiarity with the media in question.<sup>31</sup>

When I began looking and interfacing with these sites on my screen, I wasn't looking for subjects for research or inquiry, I was engaged in a spectatorship that involved both my mind and my body. As a witness to these sites, and to tell the story, I am folded over my computer screen. In gathering my body around my screen and searching, my monitor became my mirror and my

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<sup>31</sup> Senft, "Camgirls," Chap 1, pg. 30.

portal. I found in these sites a second mirror that offered an answer to my seeking gaze. For this spectatorship to function both as a place where I could be alone with other people, and for the sites to work as a transitional objects,<sup>32</sup> the subjects were of a necessity, very similar to me in age and situation.

In recounting the story of what happened while I was watching, it is my intent to bring back a tale to this place of what happened in that one. Theresa Senft reminds me that like Jennifer of *Jennicam*, I am limited.

Of course, the only 'reality' Jennifer was capable of portraying was that which was available to her: the domestic life of a red haired, blue eyed, upper middle class educated American woman under the age of forty.<sup>33</sup>

My margins are defined by my place and my self and fear of disappearing altogether - this is the anxiety that seeks a remedy in the space of the internet. Language and writing seem inadequate means to narrate the space of fracture in my spectatorship. I'm learning to see there, and I'll never be finished. In a document that cannot be whole, regarding unfinished specters and remnants of performance, I offer what I can remember from where I've been – in the perforation where my desire becomes the portal and the mirror on the screen.

"So I will feel my way through this paper, as I give voice to a body inseparable from a mind. The pulse will be a chorus of possibilities, not a drone of proofs."

Joanna Frueh in *Feminist Art Criticism*

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<sup>32</sup> My working definition of transitional objects comes from D.W. Winnicott's *Playing and Reality*. "I have introduced the terms 'transitional objects' and 'transitional phenomena' for the designation of the intermediate area of experience, between the thumb and the teddy bear, between the oral eroticism and the true object-relationship, between primary creative activity and projections of what has already been introjected, between primary unawareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgement of indebtedness." (2-3) The use of transitional objects begins in infancy, as a way to mature into separateness from the mother and establish one's self as being distinct and unique. In my experience, learning to use diverse transitional objects *throughout* life assists in distinguishing and re-interrogating our own subjectivity in an "intermediate area" that helps to regulate and reconcile inner and outer realities.

<sup>33</sup> Senft, "Camgirls," Chap. 2, pg. 8.

### Chapter Three - That Was Then - *Jennicam*

“Having spent far too long trying to get off on ‘not enough,’ my writing is one place where ‘too much’ is how much I want, and I find that ‘too much’ here, at the intersection of autobiography, feminism and desire.”

Becky McLaughlin in *Jane Sexes It Up*

It begins with an immediate attraction. I hear about her on the radio, something discussed between two disc jockeys as part of their on-air morning banter. “Hey did you hear that there’s this college girl that has a web cam in her dorm room? She leaves it on all the time. Has sex in there, gets undressed, everything.” Everything? I continued my drive to work and thought about everything.

I was so eager to see this phenomenon, this girl that broadcast everything in her life, but I couldn’t remember the exact web site to look for. I remember it as being her name, but I can’t remember the exact name. It wasn’t so easy back then to search for things on-line. You really had to know what you were looking for.

My fastest web connection in 1998 was at work, and I remember going in early to the office, for the singular purpose of finding that site. I didn’t want anyone to know, in case it turned out to be pornography. Typing in various search terms, I eventually found her web site address. I felt a peculiar excitement at getting to see into someone else’s “real” life. Would the camera be on? What would I see? After following the “guest” link on her site (Figure 5) to

her cam, I found the image of a young woman, at her desk (just like me), caught in the middle of a laugh (Figure 6). I was transfixed. What I found that morning alone in my office - coming face to face with Jennifer Ringley - is what brings me here.

But first, there: when I found Jenni, I was experiencing profound grief. I spent my days, unbeknownst to myself at the time, constantly searching for something to alleviate the suffering and the anguish that I felt in every moment.<sup>34</sup> It was an intuitive process, and not one that I was consciously aware of. I had always been interested in self-portraiture, and it was the only way that I worked personally to make art. I was also working as a professional photographer at an all-woman owned aerial photography company. My working life was filled with images. Selling them, making them, editing them, and archiving them. I was

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<sup>34</sup> In December of 1997, my brother committed suicide. In this action, he broke a silent promise that we had kept between us - to not disappear. I understood it to be true that he would always be present for me. This promise comes from place in my mind that is pre-lingual, and exists before I have any memories. In the time and space of my life, he would be constant.

His loss terrified me. The steps necessary to walk through the grief were taken, and I wondered how a person has the strength to commit the act of suicide. I know that many days my brother felt like he just couldn't take it. Countless times he slid into drug and alcohol abuse as a mechanism to cope with the heavy burden of daily existence. His behavior had caused a gap in our relationship, but one I thought could be reconciled when Kev "got his act together". The finality of his death and the space he left in me, I cannot seem to fill. I had always felt his destiny was tied to mine and now he is unknown to me.

It is also necessary to mention that I have, myself, wrestled with depression, as it came to be known to me, for my entire adult life. I have been hospitalized on several occasions, and have a personal understanding of the disease that comes with the delicate balancing responsibilities assumed to keep a healthy mental house. This suffering with mental illness, was one of many shared bonds. But it was something we never discussed. When he gave into his despair it opened up unanswerable questions in me about how exactly one went from wishing to disappear to actually making it happen.

As result of the sudden abandonment I felt at my brother's loss, I escaped into whatever coping mechanisms worked for me. One of these mechanisms was the *JenniCam*. Through watching Jenni appear and reappear in my life, I was able to rebuild a psychic foundation that allowed me to keep my eyes open to my grief, to keep speaking, and keep moving on with the work of my life.

surrounded by images, image-making and women image-makers. All of these elements are necessary to acknowledge the viewer I was that day.

There we were, Jenni and I, as we each might be previous to the cam, working at our desks, writing, talking on the phone, looking at our e-mail, whatever may fill our morning ritual. But, unlike me, Jenni had opened up a gateway through which an audience could watch her living her daily life. Victor Burgin talks about this opening, and hints at how it can be used by the viewer:

This provides a visual aperture through which Jenni's room remains constantly visible regardless of what other tasks are performed by the computer. By this means Jenni's room, and at times Jenni herself, becomes a constant companion to the otherwise solitary computer operator.<sup>35</sup>

In the first moment I recognized the image as being a self-portrait, I realized that I had never seen anything like it before, and that it was very close to the thing that I had been looking for in my own self-portraiture work. As I waited for her picture to refresh (every fifteen minutes for guests) I read more of the site, and her journal. As I continued my engagement, I found myself inside of something that had not existed only moments before.

Jennifer Ringley is widely acknowledged as the first person to broadcast her "life" onto the internet. Her initial idea was to use her cam as a sort of novelty, a tool to allow her friends to see and watch her in her room much the same way as viewers had watched goldfish swim about on aquarium cams. In Theresa Senft's in-depth study of girl cams, she reports:

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<sup>35</sup> Burgin, "Jenni's Room," 80.

If there is a history of webcams, then academic, popular and webcam communities have all credited Ringley, rather than a hardware designer, with playing a key part or even 'inventing' this practice.<sup>36</sup>

Jenni viewed the site as a project and called it "JenniCam - Life, Online". She purchased her first web cam from her college campus bookstore. The camera, set up on top of her computer, offered a view of almost her entire dorm room - her entire life. She did not turn the camera off.

In the time between when I heard of Jenni (on the radio) and when I was able to locate her, I had started to form a story in my mind without realizing it. I had begun to think about the project without being able to see it. Being a self-portrait artist, I was fascinated with women's depictions of themselves throughout art history. When I was able to find and see Jenni, I was elated by the physical appearance of something I knew could exist, but as yet was unable to articulate myself, or find anywhere else.

When I began watching this performance, I thought about it all the time, like a business deal that was so hot, but that I couldn't afford. Like a sale just missed. But at the same time, I wasn't angry or frustrated, I just couldn't stop watching. In the first years I watched Jenni, I was settling into my own life quite nicely. Buying a house, setting up domestic relations with the man who would become my ex-husband, and generally splitting my time between the work sphere (where I watched Jenni) and the home sphere (where I did not). Because of this dichotomy, my impressions of Jenni were formed by watching her in the daytime, when she was either not at home, or working at her desk. As

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<sup>36</sup> White, *Body*, 65.



a result of my viewing habits, mostly I was waiting for Jenni to appear, and monitoring her empty desk chair.

Then I became aware of other sites just like this one. I visited some, including *Anacam* (I will discuss this site later), but Jenni held me in. Was it her writing style, the fact that she looked like me, struggled like me, for me and millions of others to see? I was watching her everyday, or watching her empty spaces, and I was putting the pieces of her life together from the journal entries that she would post every couple of days.

And then I found the fan sites. The sites dedicated to Jenni and the bulletin boards where you could catch up on the day's happenings in case you missed or couldn't watch at all. This opened up Jenni's night time world to me. I could now track what she was doing while I was at home, tending to my domestic affairs. Fellow audience members were saving her images to their hard drives and distributing them in various places on the internet. So, learning to search and to look for the pieces of the performance that I was missing, I filled in these times with the information that her "fans" were posting. I mostly got the juicy stuff and the screen captures from the bulletin boards. These alternate sites became integral for me to understand Jenni's whole performance, and I began to use them frequently to make sense of what was becoming a phenomenon in front of my eyes.

I did not post on the bulletin boards or in the forums. I watched, but these virtual spaces are less about the sharing of information as they are a repository for an on-line performance of identity by posters that doesn't particularly interest

me. No intellectual musings, just “how many times did you see her tits” and “who is she screwing now” and “gosh we are so desperate to watch such a fucking cow have sex,” etc. But you could read between those lines and there were some early watchers who had a talent for reporting the facts. Some fans turned out to be quite taken with Jenni, or the project, or both. Some turned away when the watching got rough for them, when Jenni got boring, employed, fat or all three. It was addictive to log on to see if there was a new journal posting, so that you could get what you had seen straight, so that you could know the storyline. Or Jenni’s version of it.

Things unwind slowly and purposefully in daily life. Jenni becomes like a friend that I see every day. I know her. I know of her intimate struggles, I know what she looks like naked, I know that she didn’t get out of bed at all last Tuesday. I don’t notice when Jenni starts to gain weight, or when Jenni loses weight because the day to day changes are so small. I notice these changes only when I flip back and forth in her galleries from month to month.

At this point, every one of my coworkers is watching Jenni, taking a moment to look at the ever present window in my computer monitor screen when they stop into my office. Everyone knows the story to date, and wants to be updated if something new should happen. They see whatever image is displayed on the screen (as mentioned before, it is usually Jenni at her desk or Jenni’s empty chair, as in Figure 3), get the story from me, and then are content to wait until something new happens.

Jenni exists for us as a surrogate member of the staff, and for me, a reassuring presence that just happens to not be physically present. My co-workers inquire about her life as they might inquire about my life outside the office. I am using Jenni's site as a surrogate object, an intermediate space in my grief where I don't have to be alone. She always appears, eventually (Figures 7 and 8). I think all of us who were watching Jenni were somehow playing Freud's fort/da<sup>37</sup> game, hoping to could gain mastery over what cannot be controlled in life. Outside of the space of my computer, there is a terrible truth: people leave and don't come back.

Jenni remained on-line, interrupted only by physical relocations of her home, technical difficulties and power outages from April of 1996 to December of 2003. Her project was a complex amalgamation of visual elements combined with her writing, that have over time, captured her progression from college student to young woman, and to fully-formed internet celebrity. As the project unfolded, Jenni passed from the roles of college student to live-in girlfriend to social worker. While in operation, Jenni had an enormous following on the internet and many web sites were created with Jenni's project in mind. Some sites pay tribute to her, but many offered venomous critiques of her appearance, her clothes, her ideas and her boyfriend(s). Her archive, were it one place, would encompass thousands upon thousands of images.

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<sup>37</sup> The German words "fort" and "da" translate to "gone" and "there". Freud recognized that some infants play a game with objects where they throw them away from themselves (gone), and then retrieve them (there) to practice separation from the mother. See *The Pleasure Principle*, 13-18.

Jenni shuts down the *Jennicam* site at the end of 2003 because she doesn't need it anymore. As a transitional object and space for her to transition from college to adulthood, her work is finished there. Burgin comes also to this conclusion, albeit before Jenni finally gives up the site, by summoning Winnicott's ideas from *Playing and Reality*:

Of the fate of the transitional object Winnicott writes; "It is not forgotten and it is not mourned. It loses meaning, and this is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common,' that is to say, over the whole cultural field."<sup>38</sup>

In the acts of forgetting and mourning, in the work of it, my remedies also gradually lose their efficacy and meaning. In performing and making the site, Jenni has allowed the meanings and memories to diffuse into the whole – the commerce of the rest of her life. She doesn't need it anymore, but I need her. I'm not finished with my transition. But to summon her now is to summon nothing. To call her name in letters only, dots and dashes, yields an error. Where do I go from here?

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<sup>38</sup> Burgin, "Jenni's Room," 89.

## Chapter Four - Making Do – *Anacam*

“The common desire to look to representation to confirm one’s reality is never satisfied; for representation cannot reproduce the Real. This keeps us looking – and keeps us hoping. And so we are, most of the time, kept. More particularly, we are kept suspended between the depressing loop of disappointment and the aspiring arc of hope.”  
Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked*

An art cam differs from the life cam in that it operates within a different working methodology. The art cam’s site goal is to establish a presentation space for images representing the physical body of the cam girl as she explores methods of inventing, performing, capturing and broadcasting her identity through the fluid and certain march of time. Everyday life is important as it is related to the development of new trials and experiments to explore through the cam. The art cam is heavily supplemented by pictures made with a mobile camera employed by the cam girl, as a traditional camera could be used in self-portraiture; many different modes of picturing and performing the self are attempted in the exploration of identity formation.

Ana Voog came on-line with her version of the girl cam shortly after Jennifer Ringley (*Jennicam*) debuted. On August 22, 1997<sup>39</sup>, Ana became the second web cam to broadcast live, 24/7 from the home. She is a musician, and in 1993 was searching for a record label. In the age of assembly-line marketing of pre-packaged pop stars, Ana was encountering much resistance to her free-

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<sup>39</sup> Information is from the Biography section of Ana’s site <http://www.anacam.com/anaframesn.html> (accessed January 3, 2007).

wheeling personality and curious appearance. A record executive gave her a digital camera and told her to go home and try to repackage herself as something marketable, and she did. But what Ana discovered in her “homework” was that she did have a talent for packaging herself, just not quite in the way anyone had imagined. The images created by Ana are eclectic and show a clear evolution in working method over time. Ana is very open to using her body as a site of exploration, and she feels the explorations incomplete unless she can post the record to her site in the hopes that her viewers will interact with her performances, and with her. Ana’s fans are as involved as Jenni’s were, offering her continuous adulations and assessments. Ana works primarily through self-portraiture, but her project also features a cam that tracks her movements through daily life, but not as thoroughly or purposefully as *Jennicam*’s “Life, Online.”

Ana is acknowledged as being an artist working within the cam methodology. Michele White compares her with an assortment of artists:

Such artists as Laurie Anderson, Joseph Bueys, Karen Finely, Holly Hughes, Adrian Piper, and Carollee Schneeman produce works that seem to ‘share’ their lives with the audience. Other artists, including Ana Voog and Julia Scher have employed webcams in their work.<sup>40</sup>

Although Voog has never been included in a gallery or museum show (excluding a link to her site in the *Fame After Photography*<sup>41</sup> exhibition online catalog, which also includes *Jennicam*) she regularly and systematically creates self-portraits,

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<sup>40</sup> *Body*, 64.

<sup>41</sup> Museum of Modern Art, New York. *Fame After Photography*, Marvin Heiferman and Carole Kismaric, <http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/1999/fameafterphotography/index.html>, July 8 – October 5, 1999 (accessed March 12, 2007).

photographs, collages and textile items (mainly crocheted hats), engages in costumed performances and uses the internet as her exhibition site of choice. In watching Voog over the years, it is clear that she works like an artist. She has a studio in her home, and consciously creates works. Her cam is a supplemental activity to the creation of the art (Figures 9, 10 and 11).

Ana's work creates a strong first impression. Theresa Senft describes when she first came across Ana:

God, did I hate what I saw. A refreshing photo of a couch with a dog on it, shot in some sort of blue filter. Next to that, a photo collage of Ana, an under-nourished white haired pixie woman, making arty poses. Ana licking a window. Ana's eyeball, close up. Ana with headphones on. Ana with a pair of scissors across her pubis. Ana's hands, folded in prayer. My avant-garde freak wire had definitely been tripped.<sup>42</sup>

Senft conveys the sentiment that, at first glance, Ana seems to fit the stereotype of the artist, trying so hard to make meaningful work that it is almost painful to watch and read.

i want to keep expanding myself in the different ways i can communicate. i'm an artist to my core. it was such an intense idea. and i like intense, and i like to push boundaries of what people think a woman is and isn't.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast to the life cam model, Ana is clearly composing herself in an attempt to express creativity, not just to document her life. Senft's further reaction is to think to herself about Ana, "Absolute art school corrupts absolutely."<sup>44</sup> Through her art, and her constant productivity through the years, Ana has helped to undermine the snap decisions that both Senft, and society at large, make about

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<sup>42</sup> "Camgirls," Chap. 2, pg. 13.

<sup>43</sup> Information is from the Biography section of Ana's site <http://www.anacam.com/anaframesn.html> (accessed January 3, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> "Camgirls," Chap. 2, pg. 15.

artists, cam girls and other women. Through further investigation, and reading her journals, Senft comes to understand Ana as being much more complex than she had first assumed.

First, Ana, a native Minnesotan, never went to art school. Unlike me, she was self-taught, and it often shows. But while Ana turns out image after image in front of a live camera, I (who went to an art school of sorts) spend far too much time worrying about whether I appear too 'arty' to people.<sup>45</sup>

It takes the unfolding of the images over time and the reading of the stream of journal entries as they are written, for perceptions of Ana to regulate. Women often make these judgments about other women (and artists) when there is no desire to look further than the surface or when there is no further to look to. The art cam site is an important step in learning to look at this specific kind of production. In investing in Ana's strategy over the years, and finding a desire to investigate, connections can be made that didn't exist before.

One of these important connections is made when in watching Aeryln Weissman's documentary film *Webcam Girls*, which features Voog. In the film Ana takes the filmmakers on a tour of her apartment, and it becomes clear that the viewer is being shown areas and items that inform how Ana constructs her performance. Throughout her apartment, the props and costumes that go into making Ana Voog appear as Ana Voog are strewn about. Her closets of clothing and randomly collected odd items are completely integrated into the other aspects of her domestic life - home, studio, computer, cords, cameras, life. They are all the same thing.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, Chap. 2, pg. 15.



Ana is also the only web cam girl featured in *Webcam Girls* to turn her camera on the documenters. Out in the streets, while filming, she says to the crew “Here we are in wintry Saint Paul – woوو – and I’m taking a picture of you, taking a picture of me.”<sup>46</sup> (Figure 12) Her project is multivalent and complicated. The meaning is not just the persona that she continually creates through the performances, the cam, the self-portraits, and the content is not just the site(s) where she deposits the traces from the performances. Her art is in the living itself.

While weaving new meanings and moving from Ana to art to life intellectually as the documentary unfolds, a familiar face pops up – Theresa Senft. About Ana’s method she says:

It works off a tradition that’s very common in performance art which is the idea that the line between art and life is so blurry as to be indistinguishable sometimes.<sup>47</sup>

Exactly. And Senft goes on to mention the influence of artist and musician Yoko Ono, who also blurred the line between the art and life.

She saw Yoko as somebody who saw every moment of life as full of artistic promise. And I think Ana tries to frame her cam that way. I think she tries to both do performances and really raise the question – well, what does it mean to train a camera on yourself?<sup>48</sup>

Interrogation into the meaning of surveilling the self combines with the elements of self-conscious performance and documentation as self-portraiture in Ana’s work. This combination propels Voog’s work into a category that can be

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<sup>46</sup> Aerlyn Weissman, *WebCam Girls*.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

recognized within the frame of art and performance. Ana responds to her critics in the Weissman film this way:

When I say my web cam is art, I'm saying not each picture is art. So many people come and hang in there and they're like this picture is stupid I could do that. It's like yeah, but could you do it for six years?<sup>49</sup>

In that statement she refers to her web cam, and the pictures she creates with it as art, but she also designates the space in which these documents exist as a place – “there” where her audience can see her work and interact (“come and hang”) with it. Indeed, she has created a site for the performance of her life, her body and her self that exists today, almost 10 continuous years after its creation.

Ana has the potential to comfort the viewer with her presence. She is now pregnant at forty (Figure 13), and regularly makes journal entries that document her choices as an unmarried woman artist who will struggle to provide for herself and her unborn child. The site of her work, where she keeps her performances, her pictures and her words, will continue to engage viewers as Ana whispers through it “Just look at me in all my mundane glory.”<sup>50</sup>

Along with its continued presence, *anacam* also assuages identity anxiety through its depictions of the changes in Ana over time. All subjects migrate from here to there and from then to now, moving through life and performing identities. Sometimes perceived pluralities can turn interpretations of self to halting, fearful thoughts of coming apart. With Ana on the screen, the subject is served with a visual reminder that there is no use in attempting to measure the self as fixed in a discontinuous world. Ana never fails to change – in this she is an excellent

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

example of media theorist and cultural critic Vivian Sobchack's morph. In *Meta-morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change*, Sobchack defines the morph:

Like that which is uncanny, morphing generates our physical and cultural "double" – some radically other "familiar" whose visible image not only "reflects" us but also "renders" and "clarifies" us. As our physical double, the morph interrogates the dominant philosophies and fantasies that fix our embodied human being and constitute our identities as discrete and thus reminds us of our true instability: our physical flux, our lack of self-coincidence our sub-atomic as well as sub-cutaneous existence that is always in motion and ever changing...the morph enacts our own greedily and effortless consumerism – at the same time as it terrifies us with reflected images of our own consumption.<sup>51</sup>

Although she does not morph artificially, as in animation or computer graphics, Ana mediates her performances with technology. Sitting with her performances over time, they exist as morphs in the spectator's memory (Figures 14, 15 and 16).

The morph fascinates because it fantastically explores (with skill and a seeming effortlessness) the possibilities of real transformation. In transforming the self from moment to moment, identity can change over the course of a day. Often these changes are made clumsily and with regret. The morph informs and seduces the viewer – watching with awe as things unfold; it's beautiful and strange and oddly familiar. Ana is the performer who will morph. Working as an artist, she continues to create and to deposit her proof on the internet. "anacam is like the weather...the only predictability (sic) it has is that it WILL change."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Meta-morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xii.

<sup>52</sup> Information is from the "Bio" section of Ana's site <http://www.anacam.com/anaframesn.html> (accessed January 3, 2007).

Spectatorship changes over the time as well. In the beginning I watched Jenni (*Jennicam*), mesmerized by this portal that had opened up on my monitor. A space was created for me to grieve and to transition, in time. Jenni kept me company by opening the window into her life, by leaving her cam on, and writing about all of it in her journal. Ana (*Anacam*) keeps the viewer enthralled visually; she fascinates by her constant making and doing. In searching, an observer can always find her creating herself anew somewhere on the internet. But the quest continues for something that works as a transitional object – a place to work at reconciling inner and outer realities. I make do with Ana for a time, but there is a missing element that I can't quite put my finger on.<sup>53</sup> It is Ana's words that fail me. Ana makes plenty of images, but she doesn't spend much time putting her thoughts into language. It is not just the images that are desired, but the words to help with understanding. The combination of words and images is what enacts the remedy. Still working on self-identity in relation to what is witnessed in the portal, Peggy Phelan helps articulate this dependence on sustained engagement :

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<sup>53</sup> Peggy Phelan sums up this longing in *Unmarked*: "Self-identity needs to be continually reproduced and reassured precisely because it fails to secure belief. It fails because it cannot rely on a verifiably continuous history. One's own origin is both real and imagined. The formation of the 'I' cannot be witnessed by the 'eye.' The primal scene itself is (probably) a screen memory for the always-lost moment of one's own conception. Moreover, within the logic of psychic displacement, the memory of the primal scene also functions as a rehearsal for one's own death. The primal scene is a psychic revisiting and anticipation of the world without oneself. This vision is devastating and liberating; but it cannot be endured very long. One prefers instead to see oneself more or less securely situated. The process of self-identity is a leap into a narrative that employs seeing as a way of knowing. Mimetic correspondence has a psychic appeal because one seeks a self-image within the representational frame. Mimetic representation requires the writer/speaker employs pronouns, invents characters, records conversations, *examines the words and images of others*, so that the spectator can secure a coherent belief in self-authority, assurance, presence. Memory. Sight. Love. All require a witness, imagined or real." Emphasis is mine (4-5).

Identity cannot, then reside in the name you can say or the body you can see – your own or your mother’s. Identity emerges in the failure of the body to express being fully and the failure of the signifier to convey meaning exactly. Identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other – which is to say – it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other. In that declaration of identity and identification, there is always loss, the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being.<sup>54</sup>

This spectator is still wanting writing that helps to delineate inner and outer, and ultimately, loss. Folded, longing, and looking to the mirror on the screen - these are the circumstances in which the blogs of this research are first witnessed.

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<sup>54</sup> *Unmarked*, 13.

## Chapter Five - Reading Heather

“Each time, writing appears as disappearance, recoil, erasure, retreat, curling up, consumption.”

Jacques Derrida in *Dissemination*

Sitting down at my computer at the end of 2005, I was ready to search for some examples of this phenomenon of on-line journaling that I kept hearing of. Girl cams were clearly a thing of the past, but I still wanted a space to continue my research. As with all my internet searches, I began with Google. After typing in “blog”, “bloggers”, “weblogs”, I had begun to see that I would need to narrow my search<sup>55</sup>, so I centered more on my interests: “women’s blogs”, and finally “personal blogs women”. There were still many sites to sift through, but it was a rush of excitement to see the results of this searching: so much production of information, by women, on the web. It was not unlike the first day I saw Jenni.

In searching through sites found on search engines, I followed a circuitous path around and through many, many web sites written by women that contained a diary element. I estimate I have browsed and read some content on at least two hundred women’s blog sites. Heather Armstrong’s stood out from the beginning because of the number of other sites that pointed to hers. Heather Armstrong was the first blogger to get fired for her blog, *Dooce* (dooce.com).<sup>56</sup> It is a similar (and familiar) experience to reading art history. You know what artists

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<sup>55</sup> On January 27, 2007 at 4:10p when I type “blog” in Google it returns **1,210,000,000** results.

<sup>56</sup> See Darren Waters, “Digital Citizen: The Blogger”.

to look at because there seems to be a consensus among authors as to which art is important enough to include and keep pointing to. When I first searched for women's blogs, I allowed this sort of logic to propel me forward. At the very least, this grounding in research methods and training as an art historian could be a starting point for the journey into this unfamiliar territory.

After very little time reading the content on Heather Armstrong's site, I felt a strong natural pull towards the material. Heather is tall, white, upper middle class, a little younger than I am, and a self-described perfectionist. She struggles with depression, is self-deprecating and her style of presentation and writing appealed immediately to me. It is about sameness. She is not just like me, but enough like me that I am willing to engage, and read, and look at the pictures. She made me laugh and wish that I had written what she had about where she'd been. Because I had been there too. Not just like she had, but there were enough similarities between us that I wanted to find out how she got to where she was, and what would happen next. I had not been finished looking when Jenni closed her site, and now Heather presented to me a very real alternative for the visual practice I had enjoyed in interfacing with Jenni. With Heather on my screen, I was able to reclaim what I thought had been lost with the girl cams. In her content I found that a blog could be the mirror and the portal to looking and thinking critically.

As a spectator, I am now in a place that Rosalind Krauss witnesses in *Boomerang*, a video made by Richard Serra, featuring Nancy Holt:

What Holt is describing in *Boomerang* is a situation in which the action of the mirror-reflection ... severs her from a sense of text: from the prior words she has spoken; from the way language connects both to her own past and to a world of objects. What she comes to is a space where, as she says, "I am surrounded by me."<sup>57</sup>

Like the creation of a new kind of space by Serra, *Dooce* is a place where flickering images, language, looking and reflection echo around a viewer to create a distinct experience of simultaneous connection and disconnection that leads to new ways of thinking about spectatorship, subjecthood and the objects and spaces of these inquiries.

Through reading her near-daily posts (Heather posts with regularity every weekday) and referring back to older posts to fill in the blanks, I quickly brought myself up to speed on the saga that is her unfolding life, as she presents it (Figure 17).

My name is Heather B. Armstrong. Some of you may remember me as Heather B. Hamilton. I am married to a charming geek named Jon. We live in Salt Lake City, Utah, with our two-year-old daughter, Leta Elise, and our four-year-old dog, Chuck.

I am a Stay at Home Mom (SAHM) or a Shit Ass Ho Motherfucker. I do both equally well.

This website chronicles my life from a time when I was single and making a lot of money as a web designer in Los Angeles, to when I was dating the man who would become my husband, to when I lost my job and lived life as an unemployed drunk, to when I married my husband and moved to Utah, to when I became pregnant, to when I threw up and became unbearably swollen during the pregnancy, to the birth, to the aftermath, to the postpartum depression that landed me in a mental hospital. I'm better now.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October*, Vol. 1 (1976): 53.

<sup>58</sup> Information is from the About This Site section of Heather's site <http://www.dooce.com/about.html> (accessed March 3, 2007).



For me, enough said. Each day I log on to see what new things have happened to Heather Armstrong, in her life at home and in her mind. I want to know what develops with her because it echoes some of the struggles I have with myself. Sometimes I can't articulate the worries that I have, but I can go to *Dooce* and find a category there, with a post, that represents something that will put me in touch with the thing inside myself that can find no language.

Heather represents to women the promise that Naomi Wolf was ultimately looking for in the *Beauty Myth* – a place to gather and re-consider what we see and believe. In reading the blog, looking at the pictures and navigating the content that is available, I come to understand that this experience offers me an alternative to the seductive, packaged siren song of women's magazines. Women want to know about other women; they want to know what they look like and how they feel, but it is now understood that magazines give only false performances designed to sell goods and services. For so long (since women became consumers of products and images) magazines have been the only choice for women when choosing where to look for identity. Even while engaged, it is understood that these magazines are counter-productive. Wolf explains: "Readers themselves are often ambivalent about the pleasure mixed up with anxiety that they provide."<sup>59</sup> And this is what women experience when reaching out to popular media constructions to see something that can help shore up identity. Women need more than "pleasure mixed up with anxiety"

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<sup>59</sup> Wolf, *Beauty*, 62.

when trying to check the self in the cultural mirror to assure ourselves that we're being women right.

### **Post Partum Depression Meets *Post Partum Document***

Perhaps most compelling in *Dooce* are Heather's writings about her encounters with depression and her accurate, sensitive, humorous and sincere description of the affliction. She has battled the disease her entire adult life, and took anti-depressants up until the time of her first pregnancy. After giving birth, Heather tries to stay medication free so that she can breastfeed her daughter, Leta. Through her blog, readers can follow (or retrace her steps) as she concocts coping strategies to help her deal with her escalating anxiety, and witness the gradual decline of her psyche. The descent begins with the end of her pregnancy, continues after she gives birth, and accelerates along with her anxiety level as she is confronted by an infant who screams and cannot be soothed. For more than six months she struggles, until she is forced by constant thoughts of suicide into checking herself into a mental hospital.<sup>60</sup>

This is a place I have, literally, been before. Depression, intense anxiety attacks, and a fear for my own safety have driven me, on a few occasions, into the protected walls of a mental hospital. Finding the words to describe what makes a person cross this barrier, into the stigmatized world of psychiatrists and the company of others who are in desperate fear of losing their own minds, is difficult.<sup>61</sup> The most terrifying thing about slipping into depression is losing my

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<sup>60</sup> The extended narrative of Heather's battle with depression is available in Appendix B.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Solomon is eloquent with his description in *The Noonday Demon*: "There is a moment, if you trip or slip, before your hand shoots out to break your fall, when you feel the earth rushing

words, and my ability to express myself. There is a gradual slowing down to the point of inaction. This loss of words in my depression corresponds to the original loss we all suffer, the separation from our mothers: when first words are spoken we are irretrievably separated from her. This is a loss that will cause a subject to try to ... “find her again, along with other objects of love, first in the imagination, then in words.”<sup>62</sup> All of these concepts pastiche together while contemplating Heather’s site (mother as artist, acquiring language and the resulting symbolic break from the mother, anxiety, depression and imagination) as a construction. Remembering another place where these ideas and experiences reside leads the eye from *Dooce* back to the history of 1970s, and Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document*.

### **Mary Kelly as precedent for *Dooce***

In the years from 1973 – 1979, artist and scholar Mary Kelly gave birth to her first child, a son, and nurtured this baby through the seminal moments of childhood. Concurrently, she was also making art about the experience. Flush with her knowledge of Freud and especially Lacan, she set out to make a work that did not include or represent her body or the body of her son in any way. She

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up at you and you cannot help yourself, a passing, fraction-of-a-second terror. I felt that way hour after hour after hour. Being anxious at this extreme level is bizarre. You feel all the time that you want to do something, that there is some affect that is unavailable to you, that there’s a physical need of impossible need and urgency and discomfort for which there is no relief, as though you were constantly vomiting from your stomach but had no mouth. With the depression, your vision narrows and begins to close down; it is like trying to watch TV through terrible static, where you can sort of see the picture but not really; where you cannot ever see people’s faces, except almost if there is a close-up; where nothing has edges. The air seems thick and resistant, as though it were full of mushed-up bread. Becoming depressed is like going blind, the darkness is at first gradual, then encompassing; it is like going deaf, hearing less and less until a terrible silence is all around you, until you cannot make any sound on your own to penetrate the quiet.”

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<sup>62</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 6.

relied on diagrams, documents, and items from her home that were used in service of caring for her child to carry her heavily coded messages. As a whole, the work is called *Post-Partum Document*, and as Kelly herself describes it in the Introduction to the work:

IN THE POST-PARTUM DOCUMENT, I AM TRYING TO SHOW THE RECIPROCITY OF THE PROCESS OF SOCIALIZATION IN THE FIRST FEW YEARS OF LIFE. IT IS NOT ONLY THE INFANT WHOSE FUTURE PERSONALITY IS FORMED AT THIS CRUCIAL MOMENT, BUT ALSO THE MOTHER WHOSE "FEMININE PSYCHOLOGY" IS SEALED BY THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR IN CHILDCARE.<sup>63</sup>

It is important to note how the *Post-Partum Document* exists as an art object in its own space and historic time period. Critic Andrea Fraser notes in her article "On the Post Partum Document" in *Afterimage* (which is an engagement with the work in book form), published in 1986:

Kelly began work on her six-years, six-part, 135-piece interrogation of maternal femininity in 1973, the same year Laura Mulvey delivered "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" as a lecture and Juliet Mitchell completed *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* for publication. All three women participated in the same study group at the Women's Liberation Workshop in London.<sup>64</sup>

Although in some ways it is impossible to unanchor this work from the 1970s, I primarily understand the work, in my generation, as a high form of feminist art. The work is pictured in nearly every book I own or have looked at that seeks to illuminate the work of women artists (Figure 18). It is *the* work of feminist art – because Kelly is a woman (mother) and an artist at the same time, without showing her self in any way. And yet I never really understood what it was trying

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<sup>63</sup> Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>64</sup> "On the *Post-Partum Document*," in *Afterimage* (New York, March 1986); rpt. in *Post-Partum Document*, by Mary Kelly (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 214.

to say. That's tough to admit because as Lucy Lippard reminds me "If any work of art should be allowed to speak for itself, it is this one, since its goal is to *give voice*."<sup>65</sup> and Laura Mulvey seconds "...it gives voice to the pain and pleasure that women have lived as mothers, understood by each other, despised as domestic by dominant culture."<sup>66</sup> But the voices of these texts sound just like the ones permanently discarded for telling me I have penis envy and castration anxiety. These words have not convinced me.

Until now. Now that I have read and lived with Heather Armstrong's words and her journey through motherhood, now that I have more knowledge about myself and the masquerade, now, now I can see. Instead of dismissing Kelly's work as some overly theoretical pile of conceptual (and formally gorgeous) fetish objects, I can now (after working through *Dooce*) see what she was getting at. But I needed to be shown, I needed to be invested, and Kelly didn't give that to me over my years as an aspiring feminist and scholar.<sup>67</sup> Heather did.

When Lucy Lippard saw Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document in 1977, she had a personal way of reading it. "I saw it, as most people do initially, as a 'fetish' – a more or less conventional work of art, visually refined, hung on the wall in pretty plastic boxes."<sup>68</sup> When I came across the site that Heather Armstrong was building, I had a similar reaction. I felt that the work showed the formal signs of being pleasurable to look at and that it collected things that were

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<sup>65</sup> Foreword to Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), xii.

<sup>66</sup> "Post-Partum Document review," in *Spare Rib* no. 40 (London, 1976); rpt. in *Post-Partum Document*, by Mary Kelly (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 202.

<sup>67</sup> And this is also due in part because Mary Kelly *had to* disguise her work, thinking through the complex combination of subjecthood that is mother and artist, as conceptual art.

<sup>68</sup> Kelly, *Post-Partum*, xi.

vitaly important to her, her writings, photographs of her daughter, her dog, her home and her husband into a nicely displayed composition (Figures 19, 20 and 21). But the engagement became more pronounced as I became more familiar with the depth and breadth of the materials and the project itself. As Lippard goes on to say:

On a general level, the juxtaposition suggested the collaged lives of women who choose both to create and procreate, to play both the masculine and feminine social roles. And finally I was moved by the intellectual refinement that I then only sensed beneath the images' surfaces. I went home and read the lengthy 'Footnotes and Bibliography' booklet that revealed some of those depths. In the next four years I saw additional sections of the work, saw the piece exhibited as a whole, and read a great deal more about and by Mary Kelly, my respect increasing with each new effort.<sup>69</sup>

I do not intend to say that *Dooce* displays the rigor to intellectual ideals that Mary Kelly strives for and interrogates. If Heather's site were all Lacanian diagrams and intricate feeding charts, it would not have compelled me to stay. But Lippard's way of reading Kelly's work echoes the engagement that is possible with some types of internet spectatorship (in this example reading blogs), and also points to how it differs from looking at art objects.

In the discourse that lauds Kelly's work as high art worthy of inclusion in the canon there are echoes of the associations that can be found in carefully constructed blogs like Heather's *Dooce*. Lippard writes about integration with social life and interaction with audience:

After 13 years of scrutiny of women's and feminist art, it seems to me that the most important contributions are those which provide not only an image or even a new form of language, but those which delve down and move out into social life itself. These works tend, like *PPD*, to be

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., xi.

intricately structural, the results of years of labor – not autonomous series, but ongoing sequences of learning, communication, integration and learning some more from the responses of the chosen audiences.”<sup>70</sup>

Jo-Anna Isaak on the possibility of using the object for new meaning-making:

The intent and the effect of this theoretical merging is to bring the viewer and the materiality of the work together in such a way that the reading of the text becomes a subversive act. The process of understanding how meanings are produced and organized in language leads to the undermining of the bourgeois order – shattering its belief in a transparent text.<sup>71</sup>

Margaret Iversen, with more details on the process of seeing the work:

As we move between visual interest, theory and narrative, we make different discourses, different modes of signification, inform each other. Rather than confirming some *a priori* unity of consciousness, the artistic practice ‘pictures’ the construction of the subject within an ensemble of social relations and discourses.<sup>72</sup>

And Paul Smith, on how women subjects can reclaim their stories inside and outside of theory:

In her art-practice there is now the theoretically-worked room for the subjects’ hopeful and happy writing, as that must now begin to assert its importance alongside the moral discourse of the desperate and the melancholy protagonists/antagonists for whom discourse is truth.<sup>73</sup>

These same possibilities repeat, repeat in my mind as I read Heather’s site. With *Dooce*, Heather moves the subjects of motherhood, domestic intimacy, and the psychological growth of women within the confines of home and childcare “out into social life itself” (Lippard). Her “practice ‘pictures’ the construction of the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, xv.

<sup>71</sup> “Our Mother Tongue: the *Post-Partum Document*,” in *Vanguard* Vo. 2, no. 3 (Vancouver, British Columbia, 1982); rpt. in *Post-Partum Document*, by Mary Kelly (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 204.

<sup>72</sup> “The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Own Desire: Reading Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document*,” in *Discourse*, No. 4 (Berkeley, 1981); rpt. in *Post-Partum Document*, by Mary Kelly (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 210.

<sup>73</sup> “Mother as a Site of Her Proceedings: Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document*.” in *Parachute*, no. 26 (Montreal, Ontario 1982); rpt. in *Post-Partum Document*, by Mary Kelly (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 213.

subject within an ensemble of social relations and discourses” (Iversen), as these are “not autonomous series, but ongoing sequences of learning, communication, integration and learning some more from the responses of the chosen audiences” (Lippard again).

Both Heather and Kelly are working to elucidate the pitfalls of motherhood. Kelly chooses not to picture herself and to reveal intimate details only as a counterpoint to the tremendous dogmatic elements of the composition. This protects her from potential criticisms that would point to representing her body and the body of her child to the male gaze. In 1979, that would just be business as usual, the woman offered up for consumption. Heather’s choice, from 2001-2007, is to include herself, to reveal herself (Figure 22), to represent her body, the body of her child and that of her husband. She also opens a view of her private spaces, her home, so that we can have an idea about where the events are taking place. If Kelly’s strategy was to exclude the self so that we would pay attention to the inadequacies of our own understandings of motherhood as they had been explained to us, what is the strategy of *Dooce*?

Heather constructs her site as carefully as she arranges the items in her home (Figure 23). As the site is built, it contains all of the important memories (visual and textual) that Heather hopes to remember and preserve. Part of Heather lives in *Dooce*, and always will. In *Dooce*, Heather will always have a place where she was one (single life), part of a duo (courtship and marriage), and part of trio (pregnancy, birth and motherhood). It can all ways, always house her desire, her memory and the artifacts from her journey.



Comparing *Dooce* and *PPD* begins to put into practice the ideas of feminism: the questioning of images, of texts, of looking, and of feminine masquerade. It is the place where women watch her performance, consider their own, compare themselves with history and assess the work which yet needs to be done.

## Chapter Six - Looking at Stephanie Klein

“...we must acknowledge the positions from which we see, the particular embodiment of our own eyes, and then be both critical of our vision and accountable for it.”

Marsha Meskimmon in *The Art of Reflection*

Stephanie Klein is the kind of girl that other girls envy. Her hair is longer, prettier (and redder), she is smaller and thinner, her life is more glamorous and she always seems to have stylish jewelry and clothing. In other words, there is envy for her body, what she has naturally, and what she achieves with it – her style and panache. Her blog is easy to find because she is a master self-promoter, having worked as an “interactive art director in advertising”<sup>74</sup> for a top ad agency in New York City. Her blog reflects her sensibilities as a proficient marketer and her ability to get across a message – “I am fabulous, I am beautiful, and I am so together” and to sell herself as the most intelligent, glittering and captivating woman in New York (Figure 24).

If a woman like this is going to write a diary-like site, with pictures, and post it to the internet, it will compel women to read it. I’m powerless. The part of female masquerade that seeks to mimic,<sup>75</sup> to spend one’s life chasing after

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<sup>74</sup> Information is from the About Stephanie Tara Klein section of Stephanie’s site <http://www.stephanieklein.com/about.html> (accessed March 5, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> I have to acknowledge my own antitheatrical prejudice in watching Stephanie Klein’s performance. This prejudice, originating in the works of Plato, tells us to be wary of imitations of Forms (the original true thing). When feeling this prejudice, performances become like the shadows seen on the wall of Plato’s cave, or in my case, the internet. There is the lingering question of what is authentic and what is only a second-rate copy. Mimesis is *not* the whole of women’s performance, and it is especially important to acknowledge that through my

looking good, demands it. But it's not long after my spectatorship begins that I see what the surface image hides. It's what women suspect and hope for all along (again, women know it from "the pleasure mixed up with anxiety" that Naomi Wolf exposes as part and parcel of *The Beauty Myth* to be found in culture). These women that seem so enchanting and intensely delighted with themselves are all just master performers. Most of Stephanie's words convey what the pictures can't. She is a terrified girl who longs for acceptance, wants everything to be perfect, and is willing to work very hard to make everything appear just so. Her grip on the presentation of her life is stone cold.

### **hard knock life**

December 4, 2004

There are women in this world who lipo suck and spit silicone, and I know they do it for confidence. Because no amount of tit alone makes you desirable; it's how you wear it. I diet, and sometimes while I'm busy dieting, I somehow forget to diet. I eat fries and burgers at 2 am thinking I'll be better the next day. Next day is full of hungover and get me an egg and cheese on a roll before I vomit again. I'm trying really hard to be the thin girl. I hate myself fat, more than I hate myself stupid.

Sometimes I put my foot in my mouth and hit replay all night, wishing I'd stayed home. More often than not, though, instead of my foot, I swallow everything else. And then I wake up with something worse than guilt: insecurity. It's worse, even, than the fact that my jeans which were loose only a month ago now push fat out along the edges. Oh dear god, I have edges. Fuck curves; they're edges. Lane Bryant's marketing people are good.

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interrogation of Klein's strategy, I hope to further understand the special onus on women to get past this constriction. In my wish to get away from Riviere's assessment of masquerade as a "mask" (Doane) to get closer to a "manipulable" (Doane) masquerade and Butler's more complex definition of performance as "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint," I have to work through my prejudice when regarding and questioning representations that are *only* mimesis, that never move past imitation to more productive and meaningful ends.

That's me, me with me (sic) fear of fat and insecurity, from a lifetime of being Moose. Save me the 'that's not who you are anymore' talk. It is very much who I still am inside, regardless of my size 6 clothing. I think I'll always be the fat girl, and you know what, that just has to be alright. While I've grown up into a thin woman, Moose will always be a part of who I am. And while you might be tempted to say when I realize I've outgrown that puffy girl, then I'll be real, you're wrong. Realizing that Moose is who I was, and who I will always fear being again, is who I really am. That's real.

We've all got our own worries of inadequacy. "At least you have a personality and depth," Lea says over the phone. "I mean, you can always lose weight. There are people out there devoid of passion and soul, Stephanie. And you can't learn that. There's no diet for it." Yeah, but men don't want to date passion and soul with a double chin.

Some of my girlfriends ask me to teach them to talk dirty. I laugh and apologize, "It's not something you can really teach. You either feel it or you don't."

"Come on, just a little something..."

And then I share with them, in the back of a taxicab, my latest bedroom vocals.

"Where do you come up with this stuff?" Even the cab driver turns his head when I say the words "fill me."

That's the thing. You don't invent it; you genuinely feel it. I even know some women who ask me when they should moan. This isn't a theorem or periodic table with rules. You stop worrying, and start really letting yourself enjoy the moment, just as you are. I get pleasure from expressing myself, and to be honest, I'm worried. **I can't believe there are women out there who fake things. But then I look in the mirror. I'm no different; I just fake thin.**

Maybe we're all knock-offs, **spending years trying to pass for the real thing.** We all want to be desired and sought after, but at what price? I've learned my price. Bottom line, we all want someone to love us for who we really are, whether we're conservative, soft-spoken, or timid. And in my case, loud, passionate, and sometimes fat. And we don't become the pricey must have, the real deal, until we stop trying to knock ourselves off.

We become valuable when we realize our worth just as we are. (Emphasis is mine)<sup>76</sup>

Stephanie is terrified of her own masquerade. Looking at her eases the dread women feel that they will be found out as fakers. The construction of her site reassures that loud and bawdy women are sometimes rewarded, and it simultaneously serves as a touchstone to what rampant materialism looks like (Figure 25 and 26). The level of guilt and anxiety I can tolerate is to consume her consuming (Figure 27). I want to set up a connection to productive performance against Stephanie's particular example, but I still worry about this disguise.

Proceeding with caution, Naomi Wolf's warning reverberates in my dreams:

The modern arsenal of myth is a dissemination of millions of images of the current ideal; although this barrage is generally seen as a collective sexual fantasy, there is little that is sexual about it. It is summoned out of political fear on the part of male-dominated institutions threatened by women's freedom, and it exploits female guilt and apprehension about our own liberation – latent fears that we might be going too far.<sup>77</sup>

Stephanie is the temptation of consumption and the seductive beat of advertising that caters to the new feminine folklore of pretty perfection in all things. Do women listen to be critical, or is the melody seducing us?

### ***Carving A Greek Tragedy***

In 1973, Eleanor Antin experimented with performance/document when she put together 148 photographs of herself taken over a five-week period, as she engaged in an intense diet (Figure 28). The black and white photographs

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<sup>76</sup> Excerpt is from the "fat passing for thin" section of Stephanie's site [http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek\\_tragedy/2004/12/hard\\_knock\\_life.html](http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek_tragedy/2004/12/hard_knock_life.html) (accessed March 5, 2007).

<sup>77</sup> *Beauty*, 16.

display her, from all four sides, in a very straightforward manner. Joanna Frueh says in “The Body Through Women’s Eyes”:

Far from being glamorous, the four repeated poses turn the poetry of the nude into mug-shot prose. Overweight women commit a crime against patriarchal femininity, but women who diet are artists who try to shape perfection. Antin’s intention was, in her own words, to “make an academic sculpture,” an ideal form. Just as the Classical Greek nude occludes women’s bodies in this kind of aesthetically rigid form, so the socially correct beautiful body disciplines –and punishes – women, through frustration, guilt, anxiety, and competitiveness with other women.<sup>78</sup>

Antin calls this work *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* to point to the ways in which women participate in rigorous controls of the boundaries of the body in attempting to sculpt the self into perfection. Stephanie, along with many women in our consumer society, suffer through the punishments of desire and search for the roots in an effort to allay the pain. She pretends, and writes, and I watch, while thinking about her efforts to craft the perfect site -- on the internet, in her books, in her life and with her own body (Figure 29).

Looking at Stephanie, there is futility. It is expressed fully in the discourse on Antin’s work:

In *Carving*, the future-orientation of the project is accompanied by a sense of incompetence. Femininity is articulated as false consciousness and as a type of labour in the form of dieting. It records the ritual of self-observation involved in the process and brings to mind the sense of failure that accompanies this. Here femininity consists of a developmental, teleological aspiration to an identity that is, ultimately, never achieved.<sup>79</sup>

Women can never get there. And....

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<sup>78</sup> “The Body Through Women’s Eyes,” in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 195.

<sup>79</sup> Clare Johnson, “Traces of Feminist Art,” *Feminist Theory* 7.3 (2006): 315.

The work describes a never-ending, but nevertheless measured, movement towards an unobtainable goal, which is, in turn, always shifting its terrain.<sup>80</sup>

While Antin intends her work to be about the unattainable, and uses photography to document her efforts (the actual dieting) that exist *outside* the time that society considers productive, Stephanie is documenting her time spent in the rituals of being a woman as productivity. Because of the visual memory of Antin's *Carving*, when regarding Stephanie, I already know she's striving for something that will in all ways elude her. I'm getting better at seeing.

Klein intends for her site name, *Greek Tragedy*, to portray the disappointment and shame that overtook her spirit when all the sororities at the affiliated Columbia University spurned her when she sought to pledge them while attending Barnard College (where she graduated magna cum laude).<sup>81</sup>

### **greek tragedy**

May 11, 2004

In high school I was "Moose," the fat smart-ass president of the science club—*oh yes I was, too*. Upon my arrival at college, I was thin and on my way to becoming a writer. I was popular and fashionable. What do popular thin girls do at college? They pledge.

Rush night, I'm decked in an espresso brown gabardine suit, white French cuff top, Gucci vintage bag; I'm brown envy. We're made to visit rooms of different sororities, housed in an official building. Each sorority had a room, where we toured, introducing ourselves in our own small clusters of a rush group. I was friendly and polite. Stacked up names and tried to use them again, to feign interest. "Oh thanks so much, nice meeting you Simone." I was even nice at the sorority known as "the one with the dogs."

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>81</sup> Information is from Stephanie Klein's official biography on Harper Collins website [http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/29946/Stephanie\\_Klein/index.aspx](http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/29946/Stephanie_Klein/index.aspx) (accessed March 5, 2007).

Once I met the girls from the “good sorority” I was swarmed. They were attracted to me, could tell I was salt of the same earth...

The next evening, we picked up our bid envelopes, telling us which sororities wanted our pledges. Unlike the other envelopes fanned in alphabetical order, mine was cast off to the side. Biffy (I swear to god, her name was actually Biffy) offered me an awkward smile as she handed me my envelope.

No one wanted me. I was the only one in the entire rush not wanted by anyone. Even the pimply faced dog fat girls got bids. You know the types. They walk around in tapered jeans and line the back seat of their cars with small stuffed animals. It was heart breaking. I never told anyone, until now, as I type this at 1:12 AM in the thunderstorm. Instead, I said “People without social skills join sororities at city schools. I’m too much of an individual.” An individual who went to her dorm alone and cried. No one wanted me.<sup>82</sup>

Stephanie is carving a sculpture on her site and I am looking. She wants me to see that she is imperfect, but the perfection she seeks in her own performance would make the Greeks, with their ideals, look like the “pimply faced dog fat girls” she both despises and secretly fears. I perceive her tragedy to be less in the rejections from sorority girls and more in moments like this one, from an abortion clinic, where Stephanie ponders her choice to terminate her pregnancy after she learns her husband has been unfaithful. She recalls this conversation:

Who would be with her when he could be with me? Just as I ponied up to thoughts of mommyhood, Gabe [Stephanie’s soon to be ex-husband] saddled the idea of another woman. Mrs. Robinson didn’t just rob the cradle – she stole away with my rattle, bouncer seat, and designer diaper bag.

I didn’t care that my vagina was now showing, as I heaved into my knees, grabbing handfuls of my gown, I began to cry.

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<sup>82</sup> Edited excerpt is from the “greek tragedy” section of Stephanie’s site [http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek\\_tragedy/2004/05/go\\_outside.html](http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek_tragedy/2004/05/go_outside.html) (accessed March 5, 2007).



“Don’t worry sweetie. You’re still young. You’ve got plenty of time to meet many more assholes.” She didn’t seem surprised by my tears.

“This wasn’t an accident. We tried to have this baby. We tried for months, and the fucking piece of shit coward is probably playing golf right now.” I wanted everyone to hate him.

“You can change your mind. You don’t have to....”

“No, I didn’t want a baby,” I said through the snot, “I wanted a family.” I crossed my arms around my shoulders, and began to rack myself out of the sobs.<sup>83</sup>

Here, she admits that she is willing to get pregnant only in the service of completing the perfect picture of her marriage (“I didn’t want a baby, I wanted a family”). When that marriage proves, through her husband’s infidelity, to be less than perfect, she is willing to terminate her pregnancy, discarding the baby because she couldn’t have the “family” she wanted (a picture in her mind that included “rattle, bouncer seat, and designer diaper bag.”) This is where imitation-only representation reveals the ugly side of *Carving* for perfection.

In *Carving*, Antin is prompting the viewer to think about the ways women attempt and document changes in their lives. Antin puts the pictorial documentation of a diet, her attempt to make changes and sculpt delicately from her insides out, on display. In these documents she is nude, baring all, in the hope of illuminating for women the futility in seeking perfection in the flesh of woman’s bodily form.

Antin presented her body as the object of her own sculpting activity, through a process that, unlike carving, worked from the inside out. Like the Greek sculptor she could choose when to stop.<sup>84</sup>

Stephanie is also trying to work on herself from the inside out, and by constantly working on her site, she makes progress (Figure 30). *Greek Tragedy* is where

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<sup>83</sup> Stephanie Klein, *Straight Up and Dirty A Memoir* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 237-238.

<sup>84</sup> Helena Reckitt, ed., *Art and Feminism* (New York: Phaidon, 2001), 85.

Stephanie (like Antin) displays herself from all sides, in an attempt at naked honesty and a place to work on her insides, both body and mind:

I blog for many reasons, mainly it's my "throat clearing," an online journal of thoughts and questions I try to write for myself...As my life changes, so does my blog. It's a diary. I don't keep it to entertain or delight. It's a record of my life, and by putting myself out there, I hope others find comfort and maybe learn something, right along with me. So while it began documenting my slew of dates as a Oncewife with a Wasband in NYC, it has since followed me to Austin, Texas with my furkid, Linus, and my fiancé, The Suitor.<sup>85</sup>

Through looking at Stephanie, reading her words, and remembering Antin, women can continue to learn to "choose when to stop" (Reckitt) when performing their own identities. In moving ever closer to Butler's performance of woman as improvisation, women can learn here to give in a little less to fears of inauthenticity and a little more to the matrix of possibilities in improvising multiple authenticities.

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<sup>85</sup> Excerpt is from the "first time visitors" section of Stephanie's site <http://www.stephanieklein.com/first.html> (accessed March 13, 2007). Stephanie is now married to The Suitor and gave birth to twins in December of 2006.

## Chapter Seven - Watching Monica

“And while feminism may have freed women to fuck, the fuck...has in many ways stayed the same”

Merri Lisa Johnson in *Jane Sexes It Up*

Monica Bielanko is a 29 year-old Salt Lake City transplant living in New York City. She is tumultuously married to a rock musician she calls The Surge. She began her blog in July of 2005, with aspirations of honing her writing and working through some disturbing events from her childhood and her recent past (growing up Mormon, an abortion, dating a married man, etc.). Her journal is an experimental type of therapy, a way to work through to adulthood, and an attempt to leave some of the things that haunt her memories, and her current existence, outside of her somehow. Her goal is to write the story of her life -- she intersperses her “Chapters” of recollections with old family photographs and videos, and with anecdotes and images from her daily life in New York City (Figures 31 and 32).

Of the bloggers in this study, Monica mediates and self-edits her performance the least. Despite the fact that she is a professional writer (working overnights at *Good Morning America*) and has spent her career in news reporting<sup>86</sup> she does not rewrite herself the way she edits the news. It is clear in

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<sup>86</sup> Information is from Monica’s blog entries “And Her Happiness Made Her Boring” <http://www.thegirlwho.net/journal/2007/1/15/and-her-happiness-made-her-boring.html> and “What Do You Do? Oh, I’m Between Jobs” <http://www.thegirlwho.net/journal/2006/6/9/what-do-you-do-oh-im-between-jobs.html> (accessed February 11, 2007).

her writing that because of her chosen profession, she knows the difference.

She says about her writing:

Women are amazing creatures whose identities and self-esteem get a regular bulldozing by the celebrity perpetuation of the ideal woman. Fuck Cosmo with it's (sic) airbrushed celebrity photos and articles that have the nerve to pander to the average women while trying to make us feel like shit about our normal bodies, bad relationships and boring jobs.<sup>87</sup>

Monica's site contains the most awareness that living life as a woman of her generation involves an awful lot of performing, and the most hope that it is possible to move beyond it. In the space of her performance there is promise in peeling back the layers, remembering how women learn to perform, and there is also optimism that perhaps women can learn a new way together.

Contrasting with her current life in the city, where she struggles with money, career and marriage to a man who is often absent, Monica reveals details about coming of age in Utah. She is making public through the words and images on her site, her transition to womanhood, with all of its insecurity, false-starts and failures. The episodic evolution of her current self is very much tied to the young girl she once was, reading Judy Blume and comparing herself to other adolescent girls. She remembers the events of her early discoveries with clarity and wit:

### **Community Cunt**

She was the first girl I knew who used a sponge to apply foundation.

"What's that you're doing?"

"It's a make-up sponge."

"Like, to clean make-up off your face?"

"No, it helps smooth on foundation evenly."

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<sup>87</sup> From an on-line interview with Monica Bielanko on the Daring Female website. [http://www.daringfemale.com/featured\\_fem18.php](http://www.daringfemale.com/featured_fem18.php) (accessed February 11, 2007).

“Oh.”

She was the girl who taught me what ‘fingering’ means.

“He fingered you?”

“Yes! Can you believe it?”

“Like, he gave you the bird? Flipped you off?”

“No, he stuck his finger up my pussy.”

“Oh!” I flinched as the word pussy slid off her tongue as if slathered in the baby oil she was rubbing liberally on her bronzed legs.

She was the first girl I knew who took a razor to her bikini area.

“Look how smooth it is.” She said while thrusting her pelvis into my face.

“Um.. what exactly am I looking at here?”

“My bikini line! No razor burn, see!”

“You shave there? Why? I only shave to my knees.”

“Boys don’t like a hairy beaver.”

“Oh.” Beaver?

Posted on Wednesday, February 1, 2006<sup>88</sup>

### ***The Girl Who Lives in “Another CuntTree”***

As I have invested myself in her site, reading about her childhood, and her current experiences and speculations in New York City, I am reminded of an article I saw reprinted in the book *Feminist Art Criticism*. It is written by Maryse Holder, who is most famous for her sexual sojourn and murder in Mexico<sup>89</sup>, but the tone of her writing in 1973 somehow parallels the writing of Bielanko now. What Holder had been searching for, and thought she had discovered - “*At Last, a Mainstream Female Art Movement*” – is familiar to me. I have discovered the same thing in women’s new self-representations on the internet.

In the article, Holder explores her experiences with artists, art and gallery spaces as she is becoming aware that “...women all over the country and in all

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<sup>88</sup> Excerpt is from Monica’s blog entry “Community Cunt”  
<http://www.thegirlwho.net/tgw/2006/2/1/community-cunt.html> (accessed February 11, 2007).

<sup>89</sup> See Maryse Holder’s *Give Sorrow Words: Maryse Holder’s Letters From Mexico*.

media are describing unprecedentedly explicit sexual content."<sup>90</sup> Among the things she recounts is seeing Judy Chicago's silkscreen *Red Flag* (Figure 32).

What we see of the posture suggests assertive stance, staunch bloodletting; it makes taking out a Tampax a warrior's act. This print breaks not only the menstrual taboo but suggests that any revelation, if handled confidently, is possible.<sup>91</sup>

Such optimism for disclosure brings Monica's writing immediately to mind, and how she often puts menstruation into a contemporary context. Monica is not afraid to (literally) sling her tampons around:

### **Holiday...It Would Be So Nice**

It's raining when we leave the club. My hair goes from pin straight to a swirling vortex of heavy metal rocker hair within seconds. So we hail a cab - not because my hair is out of control but because it's raining. On the way home I engaged my husband in a bit of The Hanky Panky and then realized there would be no hanky or panky for me because it is That Time Of The Month.

Disappointed (sic) that I would not be able to have my cliché of taxicab sex I set to work on The Surge. As we zoomed through the Lower East Side to the soundtrack of the Middle Eastern drivers' foreign rants into his walkie talkie thingy I decided I would not, could not be stopped from enjoying myself. Was wearing requisite Black Dress, no underwear and so I did what any self respecting lady who wanted Some Action would do. In one swift movement I cranked the window down, yanked my tampon out and flung it into the inky night and got back to the business at hand. And that my friends, is how tampons end up on the streets.  
Posted on Thursday, October 5, 2006<sup>92</sup>

Monica's conscientiousness in portraying female sexuality isn't always confident. She is painfully aware of her own performance while engaging in sexual activities with her husband. Honestly, and as a supplement to the jaunty

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<sup>90</sup> "Another Cuntree: At Last, a Mainstream Female Art Movement," *off our backs*, 3.10 (1973): 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>92</sup> Excerpt is from Monica's blog entry "Holiday – It Would Be So Nice" <http://thegirlwho.squarespace.com/journal/2006/10/5/holiday-it-would-be-so-nice.html> (accessed February 11, 2007).

self-portraits which have her appearing sexy and confident (Figures 34 and 35), she communicates about her need to self-medicate so that she can feel less uneasy in the bedroom.

### **I Want To Know About**

But when it comes to activities in the boudoir, I am still an uptight little Mormon girl. Most of the time. I need to know I'm not alone. I hate myself for not being the wife The Surge deserves. I want to rock his rock'n'roll world. I know I do, for the most part... I make him laugh, I surprise him with my knowledge, he likes to read this here blog... Yet when it comes to sex, much of the time I end up feeling guilty or foolish, like an actor. I fold into myself. Origami girl. Don't touch me. I feel weird. I want to lose myself in the moment, not think about it. I wanna get freaky, yo! Yet, unless I've smoked a joint, most of the time I am hyper aware and can't let go

I remember one night, I was high on The Pot and began ogling The Surge with "The Look".. The Look that says I want to brutally fuck you and I'm going to do it right now! He likes that look. I remember making out with him on our couch, high school style, for what felt like hours.

"I finally feel like myself. Like, when I'm high all that weird sex bullshit that buzzes around my head is gone and I can be who I really am." I said to him between tongue battle.

"Don't say that." he said.

"Why"

"Because you need to feel like yourself when you aren't high."

The sageness of this sentence struck me like a fist and then haunted me for days. *Why can't I feel natural, like myself during sex??*

I've been told by former lovers that I ooze sex appeal. Now, I don't know whether that's true but I do know that I know how to *act* sexy, I just don't know how to seal the deal in the bedroom. Well, I know how to do that too - I just don't know how to relax and feel okay and not weird about it, oh say, three times a week? Is that the right number?

Posted on Monday, September 4, 2006<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Excerpt is from Monica's blog entry "I Want to Know About" <http://thegirlwho.squarespace.com/journal/2006/9/4/i-want-to-know-about.html> (accessed February 11, 2007).

“I do know that I know how to *act* sexy,” Monica says. It’s the being sexy, the space between our performance and our bodies that makes us keep questioning our masquerades. Holder pronounces in 1973 that

Women are the natural mystics of sex. Repression also plays its part in the new sexualism of women: we are finally allowed not to feel like freaks for being sexual.<sup>94</sup>

And I wonder, in 2007, folded in front of my computer screen and contemplating desire, how much progress we have made in 34 years.

### **Steckel and other Forgotten Feminists**

Holder ends her article by giving an extensive look to the work of Anita Steckel, whose work she has seen at Westbeth, a gallery and artist’s residence in Greenwich Village. Her written words ring in my ears:

Anita Slavin Arkin Steckel is a breakthrough genius who fuses various elements of popular “culture” and contemporary concern in an original and revolutionary manner. Her form, as well as her content, is new.<sup>95</sup>

She goes on to write about the formal qualities of the work, and comments on the layers of detail that go into each of the large (8’x10’) photomontages that she sees in the series called “New York Skyline”. Another of the series, entitled “Giant Women in New York” are more moderately sized (4’x3’) and include the photographic image of the artist’s face (Figure 36). It sounds a lot like Monica to me:

Steckel started out with a photograph, then came to grafting a fantasy image, and then decided to superimpose her real self in the fantasy image.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> “Another Cuntree,” 5.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 6.



Monica starts with her writing, tries to cut through all the fantasy that goes into making her own image, collages the writing with digital representations of herself and pastiches the entire thing into a site that can be accessed through the internet.

Steckel renders female experience in a way which makes pain undeniable, but also presence, fantasy, power, sexuality. Most significant, her tone is *epic*: nothing but the largest arena, the most far reaching resonances for women.<sup>97</sup>

Holder claims Steckel for the “epic” struggles and the hope that she sees unfolding before women. I claim Monica (Figures 37 and 38).

This is the promise of the blogs: in appearing as multi-valent sites that chronicle and unpack women’s identity, they are the contemporary potential visual and textual communication of the struggle of performing female in the “mainstream”. These blogs are places where women can gather, present the self, create imagery, check information and circulate content without objects and the burdens of the material world. Work can be displayed with no gallery, no critic and no invitation.

To my mind, wondering about the models in Playboy magazine and thinking about Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979)<sup>98</sup> had happened on two different levels. And these levels were distinct again from thinking about the self, and how identity is performed, or how all of these things worked together.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>98</sup> *The Dinner Party* is an installation piece created by Judy Chicago in collaboration with many female artists. It consists of 39 place-settings at a triangular table measuring 48 feet on each side. The place settings are meant to designate women artists neglected of their place at the table throughout history. Each setting has a plate (with vaginal/vulvar imagery), napkin, utensils and a vessel/goblet that contain and layer symbols and information (name, artworks) about the artists. In addition to the place settings there are 999 white porcelain floor tiles in the center that name other women deserving of a place at the table of historical memory.

These disparate arenas of wondering can now fuse as women continue to learn how to look at the images that present themselves to through the portal in the monitor, and the words that appear in the mirror of the screen.

### **Pussy Party**

On many models I could see, what can only be described as inner lips, protruded like tiny tongues, from between the outer lips. Other women, were neatly packaged like a store wrapped Christmas gift. A tightly wrapped BOX, if you will, a pink bow on top, nary an inner lip to be found. These pictures bored me. This was what I had imagined a pussy should look like. Skin, with a line down the middle. A smaller version of a butt, really. It was the other pictures that drew me.

The everything-out-there girls. They had all the usual equipment, but when legs were splayed, delicate inner lips popped out and saluted the camera. Velvet pink rose petals. These must be inner lips. Makes sense. I get it okay. But then there were the roast beef girls. Their goodtimes simultaneously fascinated and repulsed me. The woman, legs spread, with what appeared to be roast beef peeping from outer lips. Mocha colored and wrinkled, this was not something I associated with womens' genitalia.

Posted on Wednesday, September 28, 2005<sup>99</sup>

In watching, finally, I have been released from the tyrannical mythology of unattainable ideals. In a society that enforces and distributes misleading tales of the performance of femininity, there is power and agency in choosing to surveil the self. The masquerade of femininity that women are taught to accept unquestioningly is perpetuated when, as women, we don't have a place to test "real" masquerades against perverse ones.<sup>100</sup> Our own performances become

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<sup>99</sup> Excerpt is from Monica's blog entry "Pussy Party" <http://thegirlwho.squarespace.com/tgw/2005/9/28/pussy-party.html> (accessed February 11, 2007).

<sup>100</sup> My ideas about perverse masquerade come from Louise Kaplan's *Female Perversions*. "A perversion is performed by a person who has no other choices, a person who would otherwise be overwhelmed by anxieties or depression or psychosis." (10) and "...one of my major reasons for exploring the female perversions is to expose the deceptions that are buried in those social

perverse in that we use them to alleviate the anxiety and frustration we feel in knowing that these performances will never be done, and we can never become actualized. By creating sites for performance of the self, women are creating a space for other women to check their intractable scenarios and inquire and interrogate these perverse masquerades (Figure 39). These self-surveyors are creating a place to learn how to look, to discover how to mosaic an identity and a performance together that will be less riddled with impossible and unreal ideals.

### **Shame Spiral**

So in a way, although I'm trying to be real I end up performing to an extent. What I realized is this; since I've been writing in this blog I stopped keeping a journal. Because this blog was my journal. But I don't write everything I'd write in a journal in this blog for fear of offending or hurting someone's feelings. I didn't realize it but I've been bottling up many of my feelings and not letting them out anywhere. So.. what now? I suppose I could turn off comments. It would create a more solitary vibe so that I feel like I'm only writing for me and if anyone happens to read the shit, great. If not, s'fine too because either way I won't know who's reading and what they think.. But I like reading comments. Sometimes it's nice to know I'm not alone in my fucked up life endeavors. Also, why am I giving it so much thought? Who the fuck cares, it's just a silly little blog. There are millions of 'em out there. Today: I hate myself, I hate The Surge, I hate how I think, I hate how I feel. I want to be somebody else.

Posted on Thursday, September 7, 2006<sup>101</sup>

Monica wants to be someone else, then. And that's possible. Women can now improvise in these performances of gender on the internet, albeit still within a scene of constraint. These performances move closer to Judith Butler's definition. As this place of invention opens up, what now? How will women

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gender stereotypes, for whatever else they are about, perversions are certainly about the social constraints placed on human desire." (18)

<sup>101</sup> Excerpt is from Monica's blog entry "Shame Spiral"

<http://thegirlwho.squarespace.com/journal/2006/9/7/shame-spiral.html> (accessed February 11, 2007).

devise the next steps in making meaning while “doing” gender – will the eyes close, to forgetting what came before, and to dreams (Figure 40)? In dreams, women will remember that “...one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 1.

## Chapter Eight – Now, Disappearing Grief

“The imitation and mimicry at the heart of repetition is motivated by the desire to retouch, revise, re-interpret how one has lost, is lost. Critical writing, with its citations, quotations, allusiveness, and intertextual resonance is a field of grief and longing.”

Peggy Phelan in *Mourning Sex*

There is a fracture in this experience, in encountering sites that flicker and appear when called to the screen. They became a place where a rupture occurred and a simultaneous growth ensued. Regarding them, the spectator is of body and mind contemporaneously, but differently than in a lived existence away from these instances. These are not static objects that can be held and controlled, to any extent. In summoning the sites by typing their addresses into an internet browser, the viewer asks to watch a performance in which they become a player. The performance occurs only then, in those moments of watching, reading and looking into the screen. In the limited visual cues to be found among the textual chains, a mosaic of meaning can be strung together that occurs within the space of these vanishing collages of text, images and sound. The key to this fracture is that these sites *are* specters – as many times as they appear when called, there is always the possibility that they will disappear and never return.

One of the promises of feminism has been that women could figure out the riddle of claiming agency in visibility together, but where is the place for this?

Without a common and accessible venue, women will keep re-learning how to produce themselves visually anew each generation unless they can take hold of their performances and acknowledge the desire to know one another across generations and boundaries. By choosing visibility and disclosure, the women I encounter in my study leave traces of their performances with which a spectator can work to make connections and find new meanings between there and here, between what the body and mind know, and in the pace with the viewer's desire in visibility.

In this spectatorship and meaning-making, a space is created for women to go back into memory and reclaim ideas about feminism, art and performance. These ideas have been presented to us intellectually but never expressed in such a way as to be fully comprehended at a level where they could become integrated into the larger context of living. By constructing accessible internet sites upon which to perform and in which to deposit remnants of performance in the form of images and words, the women of this research create a space for contextual learning to take place. They create these sites to validate their own identities and to communicate and be reassured that, as women, we all struggle in getting through the performances and productions that become our lives. Viewing and reading them is a consumption to reassure the self. Women are rendezvousing around the same mirror, and transitioning into learning to look together. These sites are our collective transitional objects.

Who needs a transitional object to get to womanhood? Every woman who lives in a culture that tells her, through all her senses, that hers is a performance

that will never be finished, and will never be acknowledged as such. In no longer believing in the omnipotence or the essential qualities of femininity, women are now in their own mirror phase. We are not connected to this ideal state; we are all alone and embodied, left to figure the riddle of otherness. I present to you, my reader, not an answer to the riddle, but the report only of my progress in learning to look, and regard myself and the other in the place where technology is a screen, a mirror and a portal.

It is Derrida that opens the eyes to blindness and allows this thinking about girl cams and blogs. Derrida brought me to Phelan and Phelan insisted I pay attention to Kristeva and Lacan<sup>103</sup>. As we all dance around our indefinite centers and disappear, threatening to never assign any meaning to anything, there are moments when meaning does materialize only to morph into the next moment where it changes yet again. Or is it us, are we changing it?

Writing about identity, and the artists who are trying to inscribe it, is much like Derrida describes his attempts at drawing.

In truth, I feel myself incapable of following with my hand the prescription of a model: it is as if, just as I was about to draw, I no longer saw the thing. For it immediately flees, drops out of sight, and almost nothing of it remains; it disappears before my eyes, which, in truth, no longer perceive anything but the mocking arrogance of this disappearing apparition.<sup>104</sup>

When the girl cam and blog sites are in front of me, flickering on my computer screen, I understand the pieces as a communications of personhood. This is what it looks like to be me. This is what it feels like to be me. But when I close

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<sup>103</sup> *Memoirs of the Blind* led me to *Unmarked*, to a *Black Sun* and "The Mirror Phase".

<sup>104</sup> *Memoirs of the Blind: the Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 36.

the screen, disable my portal and walk away from the mirror and the sites, I am left with only my memory of it and the mosaic qualities that are inherent in all identity construction. Just as I begin to write about my experiences with the sites, it is as if the feeling I had of understanding spontaneously abandons me and leaves me with nothing to hold (no real art work) and nothing to say.

Perhaps this is part of the melancholy that affects me deeply as I consider working through these problems of identity, as Kristeva laments:

Where does this black sun come from? Out of what eerie galaxy do its invisible, lethargic rays reach me, pinning me down to the ground, to my bed, compelling me to silence, renunciation?<sup>105</sup>

In these moments I would give the whole thing up. I sleeplessly wonder in silence, paralyzed by fear, why I ever tried to tackle it in the first place. That is the problem with all my theorist friends. They don't actually lead me anywhere that I can form a coherent thought; they just keep running me around with their beautiful language and their elegant ideas. I need real tools to help me hash out the problems of critically engaging these sites to find out what they mean. Are these women really making self portraits on the web that are only there when I look at them? What do the portraits look like when I am not looking? It's undecidable here, in the end. Because of what happened then, and what I saw in the portal on my screen, from now on, I feel confident that I can improvise. I'm still watching, but as my grief and desire change me in front of my mirror, my eyelids are very heavy.

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<sup>105</sup> *Black Sun*, 3.



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## Appendices

Appendix A Figures



Figure 1 *Jennicam* webcam captures  
(Photographs are from <http://www.jennicam.org> – accessed Aug. 2, 2000)



Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 2 *Jennicam* "Life Online"  
(Screen capture is from <http://www.jennicam.org> – accessed Sept. 24, 2002)

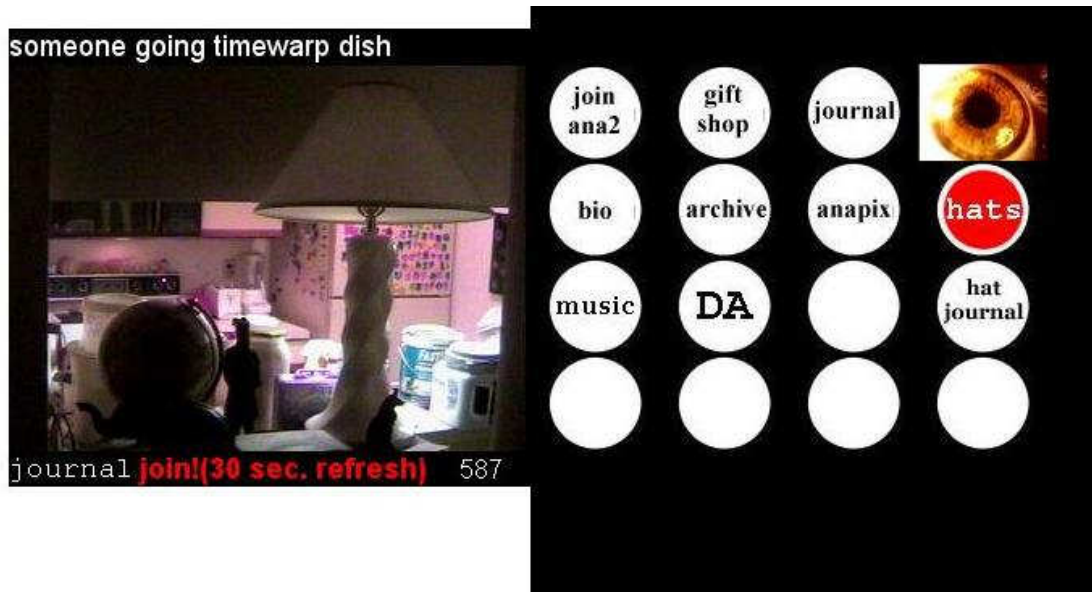
HOME MEMBERS GUESTS FAQ JENNICAM

# JENNICAMLIVE



**Flash!** Come watch the inaugural episode of the [JenniShow](#) on RealVideo!

Information for subscribing to the JenniCam available [here!](#)  
(Screen capture is from <http://www.jennicam.org> – accessed Dec. 6, 1998)



(Screen capture is from <http://www.anacam.com> – accessed March 21, 2007)

Figure 3 *Jennicam* and *anacam* site structure/cam interface

Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 4 *Time's* "Person of the Year – You" cover  
(photograph taken by the author)

Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 5 *Jennicam* early site portal  
(Screen capture is from <http://www.jennicam.org> – accessed Dec. 5, 1998)

Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 6 *Jennicam* – example of cam capture of Jenni at her desk  
(Photographs are from <http://www.jennicam.org> – accessed Feb. 17, 2003)



Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 7 *Jennicam* – examples of appearance/disappearance  
(Photographs are from <http://www.jennicam.org> – accessed July 29, 2000)

Appendix A (Continued)



Gone to San Francisco for the day to enjoy sun in the park

Figure 8 *Jennicam* – Jenni is absent but there is always a promise of return  
(Photograph is from <http://www.jennicam.org> – accessed Nov. 29, 2002)

Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 9 *anacam* as art  
(Photographic collage is from Ana's Yahoo photo site  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/anacam/> - accessed March 11, 2007)



Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 10 – Ana Voog self-portrait  
(Photograph is from <http://www.anacam.com> – accessed Jan. 10, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 11 – Ana in the mirror  
(Photograph is from <http://www.anacam.com> – accessed Jan. 10, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)

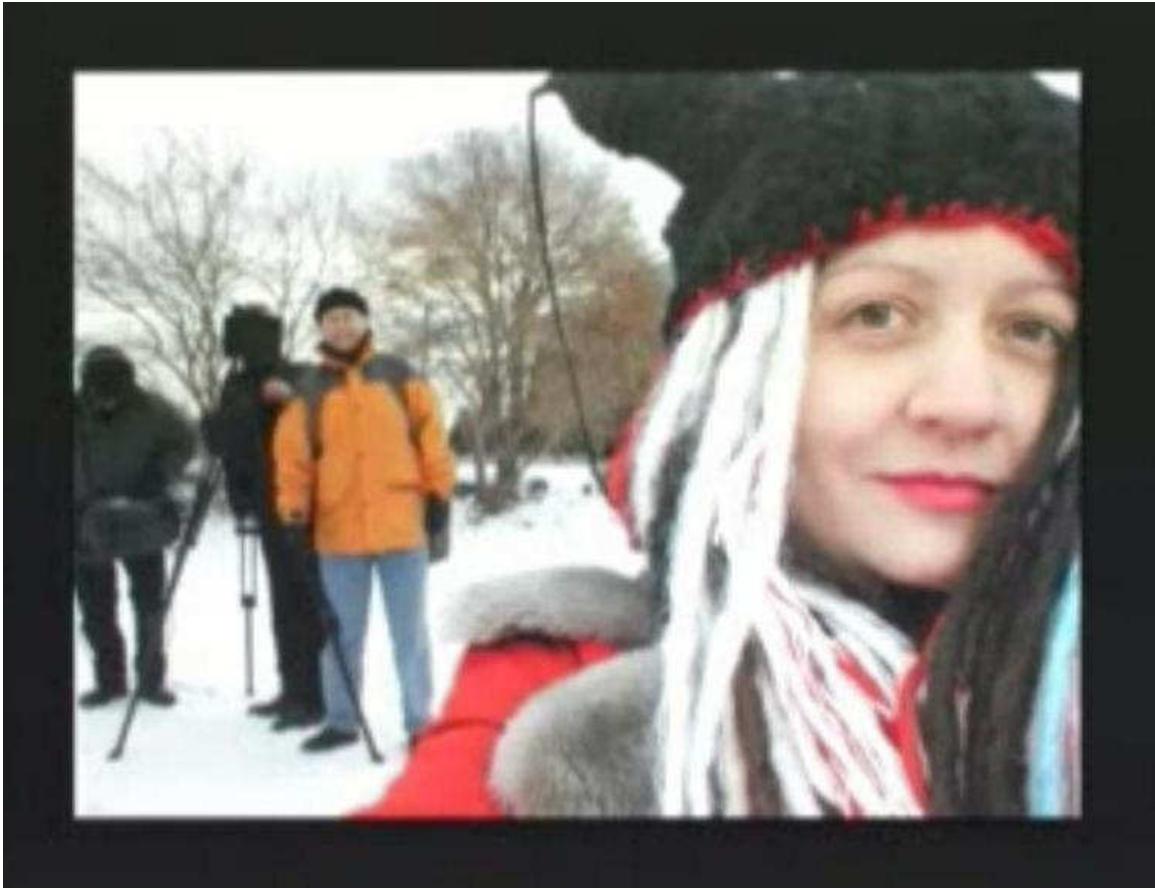


Figure 12 Ana documents the documenters  
(Image is a still at 8:16 from Aeryln Weissman's documentary film *Webcam Girls*)

Appendix A (Continued)

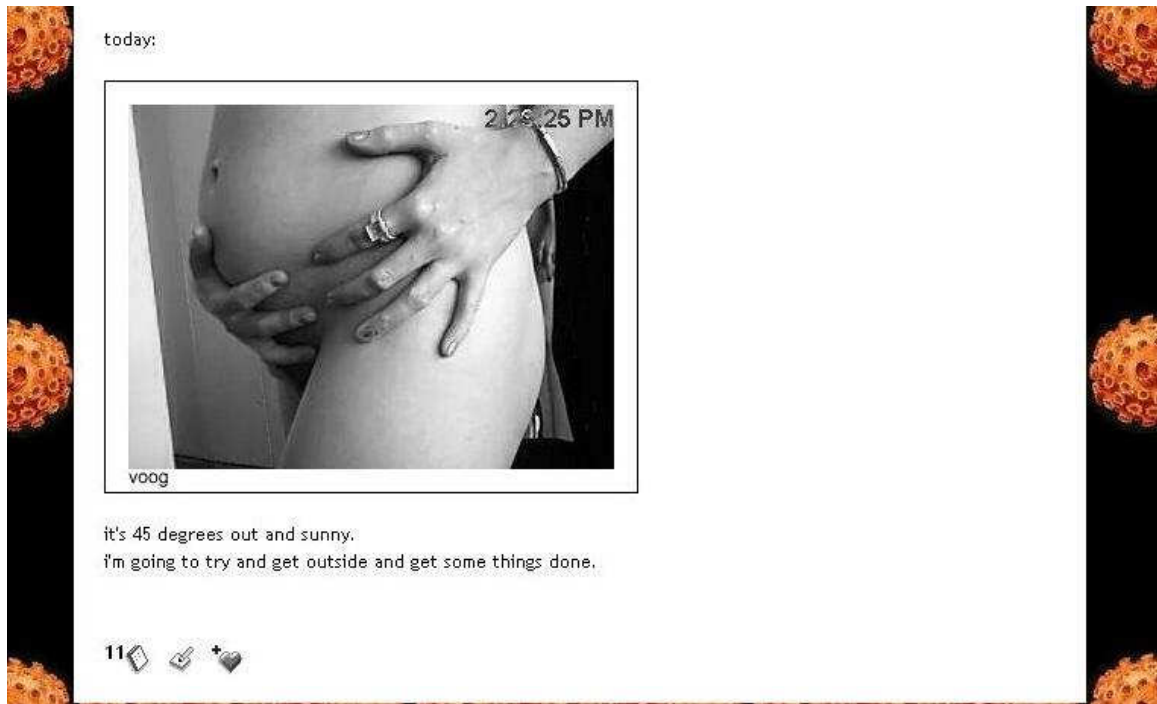


Figure 13 – Ana Voog journal entry with self-portrait  
(Screen shot is from Ana Voog's LiveJournal entry from March 9, 2007  
<http://ana.livejournal.com/> - accessed March 10, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 14 Ana changes from moment to moment  
(Photograph is from <http://www.anacam.com> – accessed Jan. 10, 2007)



Appendix A (Continued)




Figure 15 Ana Voog documents her changes on *anacam*  
(Photograph is from <http://www.anacam.com> – accessed Jan. 10, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 16 Ana morphs  
(Photographic collage is from Ana's Yahoo photo site  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/anacam/> - accessed March 11, 2007)

## Appendix A (Continued)



I'M HEATHER B. ARMSTRONG. THIS IS MY WEBSITE.


ABOUT THIS SITE  
FAQ  
CONTACT ME  
MASTHEADS  
MONTHLY ARCHIVES  
NUBBIN ARCHIVES  
[SHOP](#)



I TAKE PHOTOS EVERY DAY.

---

### About this site



My name is Heather B. Armstrong. Some of you may remember me as Heather B. Hamilton. I am married to a charming geek named Jon. We live in Salt Lake City, Utah, with our two-year-old daughter, Leta Elise, and our four-year-old dog, Chuck.

Figure 17 About Heather Armstrong  
(Screen shot is taken from *Dooce* <http://www.dooce.com/about.html> - accessed March 11, 2007)



Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 18 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation VI, Pre-Writing, Alphabet, Exergue and Diary* (detail), 1978. (Collection of The Arts Council of Great Britain)

Appendix A (Continued)

snapshot of our mornings in bed



This photo has notes. Move your mouse over the photo to see them.

Comments

Uploaded on February 26, 2007  
by [dooce](#)

**dooce's photostream**

1,192 photos  
View as slideshow

← more | browse | more →

Additional Information

- © All rights reserved
- Taken on February 26, 2007
- 2 people call this photo a favorite
- Viewed 11,068 times
- This photo is public

Figure 19 *Dooce* – “snapshot of our mornings in bed”  
(Screen shot is from Heather Armstrong’s Flickr site, which is linked to her blog, *Dooce* - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dooce/403705146/> - accessed March 12, 2007)

## Appendix A (Continued)

The screenshot shows a Flickr page for the user 'dooce'. The main photo is titled 'on the left part of the dresser' and depicts a wooden dresser with a silver jewelry box, a glass of water, and a framed photo of a child wearing sunglasses. To the right of the photo is a sidebar with the user's profile, a photostream showing 1,192 photos, and additional information including upload date (February 26, 2007), view count (6,033), and public status.

on the left part of the dresser

Uploaded on February 26, 2007 by **dooce**

**dooce's photostream**

1,192 photos  
View as slideshow

Additional Information

- © All rights reserved
- Taken on February 26, 2007
- 1 person calls this photo a favorite
- Viewed 6,033 times
- This photo is public

This photo has notes. Move your mouse over the photo to see them.

Figure 20 *Dooce* - "on the left part of the dresser"  
(Screen shot is from Heather Armstrong's Flickr site, which is linked to her blog, *Dooce* - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dooce/404175606/> - accessed March 12, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 21 *Dooce* Daily Picture – “Leta’s room with the toddler bed”  
(Photograph is from  
[http://www.dooce.com/archives/daily\\_photo/02\\_28\\_2007.html](http://www.dooce.com/archives/daily_photo/02_28_2007.html) - accessed March  
12, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)

most comfortable in this position



Additional Information

- © All rights reserved
- ◊ Taken on October 23, 2006
- ◊ 16 people call this photo a favorite
- ◊ Viewed 17,895 times
- 📍 This photo is public

Figure 22 *Dooce* – Heather Armstrong – “most comfortable in this position” (Screen shot is from Heather Armstrong’s Flickr site, which is linked to her blog, *Dooce* - [www.http://www.flickr.com/photos/dooce/277331212/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/dooce/277331212/) - accessed March 12, 2007)

## Appendix A (Continued)

Here is the piano in the dining room, and the only difference now is that I've put away all of Jon's sheet music:



BUT! I dusted! (the only person who will be impressed by that is my mother) And moved some things around, including the vintage blue glassware I inherited from my Granny Hamilton, the relative I've always resembled most, she who gave me my pointy chin and ability to find value in the most useless pieces of junk. That woman was a pack rat, kept everything she ever owned, and a part of me feels like I am betraying her memory by getting rid of all this clutter. But I'm thinking that I could make her proud in other ways, say, by throwing rocks at people I don't like and washing my dishes in the bathtub.

Figure 23 Dooce – “piano”

Excerpt from the blog entry “I resolve to eat more leafy green chocolate” –  
January 2, 2007

(This screen shot is taken from

[http://www.dooce.com/archives/daily/01\\_02\\_2007.html](http://www.dooce.com/archives/daily/01_02_2007.html) - accessed March 12,  
2007)



## Appendix A (Continued)

About Stephanie Tara Klein | Blog | Books | First Time Visitors | In The Press | Book Clubs | Links | Contact | Subscribe

**STEPHANIE TARA KLEIN**

A foodie who sometimes abuses hair care products, I write about love, relationships, fashion, family, and strength of self. I'm a writer, photographer, and lifestyle connoisseur living in Austin, Texas--a respite from New York, where I was born and raised.

I knew I wanted to be a storyteller since the fourth grade, but I didn't hone my writing skills until I worked with writers Mary Gordon, Colin Harrison, and Dani Shapiro while attending Barnard College. After graduating in 1997 with a B.A. in English and a concentration in writing, I worked as an interactive art director in advertising for eight years. While serving time behind a desk in midtown Manhattan, I realized I actually liked my job but didn't see it as a career. So I began to take night classes in photography and continued to work on my writing. Eventually, I broke into the red carpet world of photography (with my Nikon D100), shooting premieres, galas, and charity events by night, designing web sites in advertising by day. And on weekends, I photographed the grit and grandeur of New York City's Meatpacking District for The Hotel Gansevoort, where my latest collection, "Au Jus" adorns all the rooms, suites, and corridors of the hotel.

In January 2004, I began my blog, Greek Tragedy, where I tell things straight up and unfiltered. *The Independent* in London discovered my blog the summer of 2004, when they dubbed me, "The Internet Queen of Manhattan." Prior to this, I was unaware of my site's popularity. But when I was later featured on the cover of *The New York Times Sunday Styles* section, in July 2005, I learned Greek Tragedy was in the top 1% of all blogs (including all those political blogs out there).

**Straight Up and Dirty**  
Stephanie Klein  
Best Price \$5.62  
or Buy New \$16.47  
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**Straight Up and Dirty**  
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Figure 24 About Stephanie Klein  
(Screen shot is from Greek Tragedy – <http://www.stephanieklein.com/about.html>  
- accessed March 12, 2007)

## Appendix A (Continued)

archives by category ▾



photos of me >>  
photos of abigail >>  
photos of lucas >>  
photos of the twins >>

Favorite Posts  
suggest something

100 things about me  
100 things from mom  
100 things from dad

greek tragedy  
i know you are, but what  
am I?  
a nod to sunblock  
lap dances  
happy ending  
foreskin tips  
bed wetting  
men to avoid  
japs  
blackout 2003  
bowling for soup  
i can't make you love  
me?

hide and seek



always were clean, even if the only use I have for it would be to brush it against the backs of my thighs. Like brushing out a hickey, you can comb out cellulite too. Okay you can't. I wouldn't know. I never bother. However, no girly guest bathroom is complete without a **stylist essentials** toolbox. Hollywood Fashion Tape, a lint brush, foot petals. Your basic essentials. Just add water.



How nice is it to arrive somewhere, where your room already includes a small bottle of polish remover, some cotton pads, a file, and a bottle of Naittiques? On your nightstand, beside a crystal tumbler and a carafe of fresh spring water, you're provided with intense hand lotion, a pot of cuticle cream, and moisturizing gloves, not to mention, **silk eye masks**, all the better to sleep with my dear. No, not a **mitt**. If it were up to Phil, and maybe this is because he's a man, or maybe it's because he's Phil, he'd leave guests with one pillow each, one towel each, and one bottle of Jack Daniels. This is why the post belongs under the category "being a girl."

\*And no, I'm not getting any kick-backs for linking to any of these sites.

November 7, 2006 in **being a girl** | **Permalink** | **Comments (86)**

### the family jewels

When Sarah Jessica Parker strutted down the streets of New York as Carrie, aside from what would happen with her latest relationship, I mostly wanted to see which absurdly ridiculous thing they were going to dress her in next. There was of course, the enormous flower pin, which grew bigger and more hideous each episode, the newsboy cap with hot pants and a trench coat, and of course, the nod to 80s ghetto nameplate and leather tops. Ew. She pulled it together in the final season, even if she did look a bit Minnie Mouse. She looked enchanting. Here's the thing though: women dress for other women.



statement.

I have, for example, an Anya Hindmarch snakeskin handbag (shown in this photo from forever ago... oh how I miss parties with Monique at Hermes!), adored by me and coveted by other women. Men, all of them, every single one, hate it. Every man I've ever dated has suggested I leave it at home during that whole, "so, how do I look?" moment. They squint and say, "Don't you have another bag?" To which I respond, "Yes, several, but men just don't get snakeskin." They also don't understand big jewelry. I like a necklace that makes a

### Figure 25 *Greek Tragedy* – “the family jewels”

Excerpt is from the blog entry “the family jewels” categorized under “being a girl”

– October 18, 2006

(Screen shot is taken from

[http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek\\_tragedy/being\\_a\\_girl/index.html](http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek_tragedy/being_a_girl/index.html) -

accessed March 13, 2007)



## Appendix A (Continued)

### to-do to-have to-hold and more to-do's

We leave tomorrow for New York, and my to-do list today is frighteningly long. I haven't been one of those brides who does anything having to do with a list, aside from a seating chart and a **Wedding Channel gift registry** (both were small challenges. The Suitor chose the everyday china; I picked the fancy stuff). I've never had formal china and always loved the idea of using it daily. A sandwich on fine china. Tomato soup in a delightful bowl with a heavy rounded spoon. When it comes to flatware, I'm all about the heavy weight of it, and actually, the shape of the spoon. As for lists, I don't follow along with the rules about hair care, facials, or breaking in my new shoes. I nearly decided to spend today by the pool, my hair twisted about in a mess of conditioning masque. But it's cloudy here, so I'll make my way to a salon for a trim. If I get around to it, I'm just not a planner. I do hope my wedding dress fits in a week. I'm nearly five months pregnant, and since nothing else fits... well, let's just say I'm bringing along an alternative dress. I imagine the Ines Di Santo gown will work out fine, but I also imagine, as the night moves on, it will become heavy and restricting. I'll want to change into more forgiving clothes. Hence, I'm bringing along an empire-waist dress.



Planning a wedding from Texas, to be performed in New York, does have its challenges. I didn't, for example, do a hair run-through, nor have I met any of the above, ever before: my hair stylist, photographer, evening entertainment. And I'm not even the slightest bit worried. I met with our florist briefly, and I still have no idea what kind of flowers will be in my bridal bouquet. My sister is a make-up artist, so that was easy (though she is now beginning massage therapy school in Montana). We know our rabbi, and we feel really blessed not to have a stranger up there marrying us. I chose our photographer and my hair stylist upon suggestions from my close friends. We purchased our beautiful wedding bands from **a friend** in the diamond district (always, always helps to know someone on 47th Street--pictured here is an aerial view of my prong-set eternity band). And mostly, although it's

Figure 26 *Greek Tragedy* – “to-do to-have to-hold and more to-do’s”  
Excerpt is from the blog entry “to-do to-have to-hold and more to-do’s”  
categorized under “being a girl” – September 11, 2006

(Screen shot is taken from

[http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek\\_tragedy/being\\_a\\_girl/index.html](http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek_tragedy/being_a_girl/index.html) -  
accessed March 13, 2007)

## Appendix A (Continued)



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### the foxy kitchen

Because so many of you ask, I decided to include links to some of my favorite products. This week, I'm focusing on the kitchen. The foxy kitchen, because cooking is fucking sexy, includes a list of things I covet in my kitchen, the pulse of my home, from essential gadgets that make your food look fancier than it really is, to simple solutions and "cheat" items that make you seem like a real gourmet. Each week (okay, more like every two weeks considering the twins) I'll update with a new category of must-have essentials. This week it's cooking stuff. Don't you just love stuff?! Do you have any "can't live without.. well maybe I could, but it wouldn't be as fun" stuff? Here are mine. Oooh, and my new fav is the cookbook titled, *Chef Interrupted*. I used it last night to make slow-roasted salmon (in saran wrap!) with chive oil and rosemary apple puree. Earthy divine, my children. Earthy divine, I tell you.

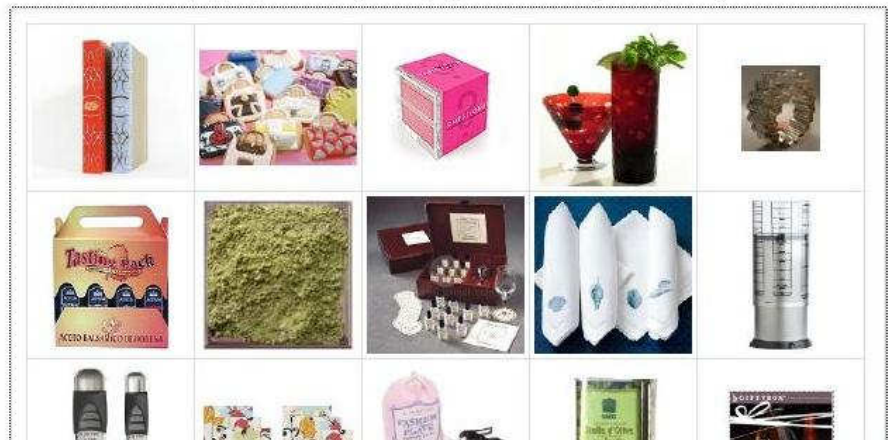


Figure 27 – *Greek Tragedy* “consumption” – “the foxy kitchen”  
Excerpt is from the blog entry “the foxy kitchen” categorized under “consumption”  
– February 22, 2007  
(Screen shot is taken from  
[http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek\\_tragedy/consumption/index.html](http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek_tragedy/consumption/index.html) -  
accessed March 13, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)

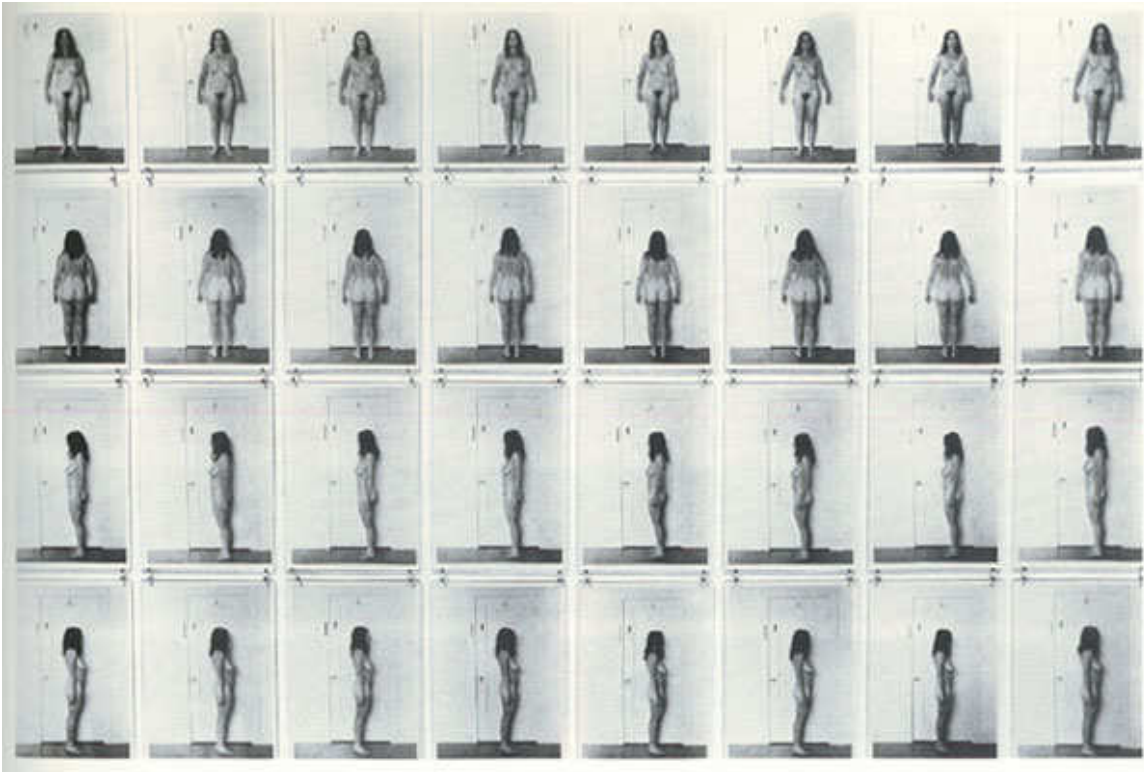


Figure 28 Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (detail), 1973.  
(Collection, Art Institute of Chicago)



Appendix A (Continued)

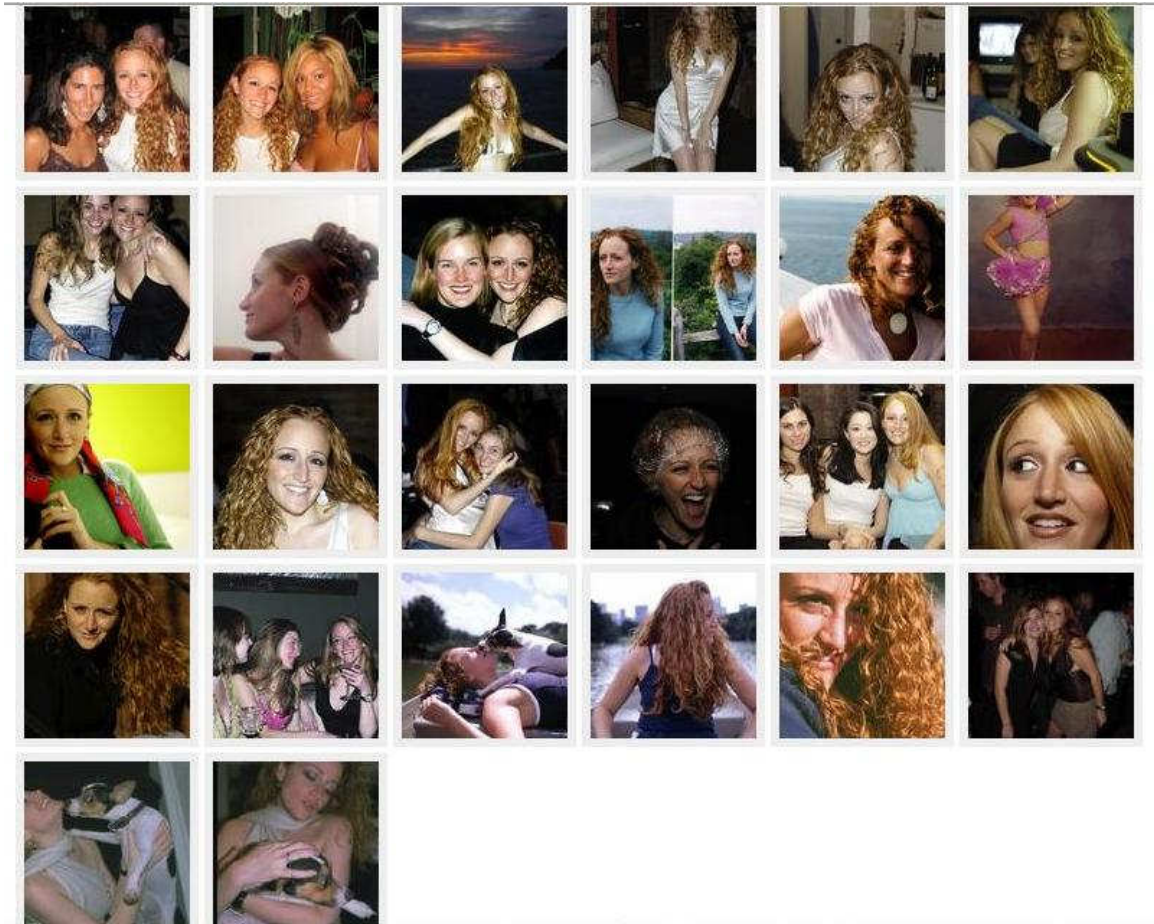


Figure 29 Stephanie Klein “photos of me” (detail)  
(Screen shot is from the page of pictures of Stephanie Klein on her site *Greek Tragedy* - [http://stephanieklein.blogspot.com/photos/photos\\_of\\_me/](http://stephanieklein.blogspot.com/photos/photos_of_me/) - accessed March 13, 2007)

## Appendix A (Continued)



Don't be so damn hard on yourself. Yeah, you screwed up. You're not perfect, fine. Learn from it. But don't punish yourself. Be kind to you, even when you screw up. You'll bounce back eventually. You'll make up for it.

You are not fat. You are within a healthy weight range. As long as your doctor isn't talking to you about health risks, you are not fat. Even if your fat pants no longer fit. Try, as hard as it is, to realize how good you look now. Here's what I've learned. When I'm a size four, I'm usually miserable and anxious. Then, at a size ten, I'm happy in my life (miserable that I cannot fit into my wardrobe, but actually happy in my life), but as happy as I am, I long to be the miserable size four again. It's lame-ass behavior. Stop worrying about it. Your weight issues aren't going away, so just deal and learn to love yourself at whateverthehell size you are. Just deal.

### Figure 30 *Greek Tragedy* - "a nod to sunblock"

(Screen shot is an excerpt from the blog entry "a nod to sunblock" -

[http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek\\_tragedy/2006/05/a\\_nod\\_to\\_sunblo.html](http://stephanieklein.blogs.com/greek_tragedy/2006/05/a_nod_to_sunblo.html) -  
accessed March 13, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 31 *The Girl Who*  
(Screen shot is from *The Girl Who* main page -  
<http://thegirlwho.squarespace.com/journal/> - accessed March 13, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)

Street Fair



November 8, 2006

Uploaded on November 8, 2006  
by [The Girl Who](#)

**The Girl Who's photostream**

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This photo also belongs to:

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Tags

[thegirlwho](#)

Figure 32 *The Girl Who* - "Street Fair"  
(Screen shot is from Monica Bielanko's Flickr site, which is linked to her blog,  
*The Girl Who*- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/monicabielanko/292293984> -  
accessed March 13, 2007)



Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 33 Judy Chicago, *Red Flag*, 1971.  
(Photolithograph number 51/94, Collection of the Museum of Menstruation)



Appendix A (Continued)

100\_7666



Uploaded on August 10, 2006  
by [The Girl Who](#)

+ The Girl Who's photostream

**The Girl Who (Set)**

  **346** photos  
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Additional Information

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◊ Taken in July 2006

◊ Viewed 143 times

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Figure 34 *The Girl Who* Self-Portrait

(Screen shot is from Monica Bielanko's Flickr site, which is linked to her blog, *The Girl Who*- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/monicabielanko/211949201/in/set-72157594236790047> - accessed March 13, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)

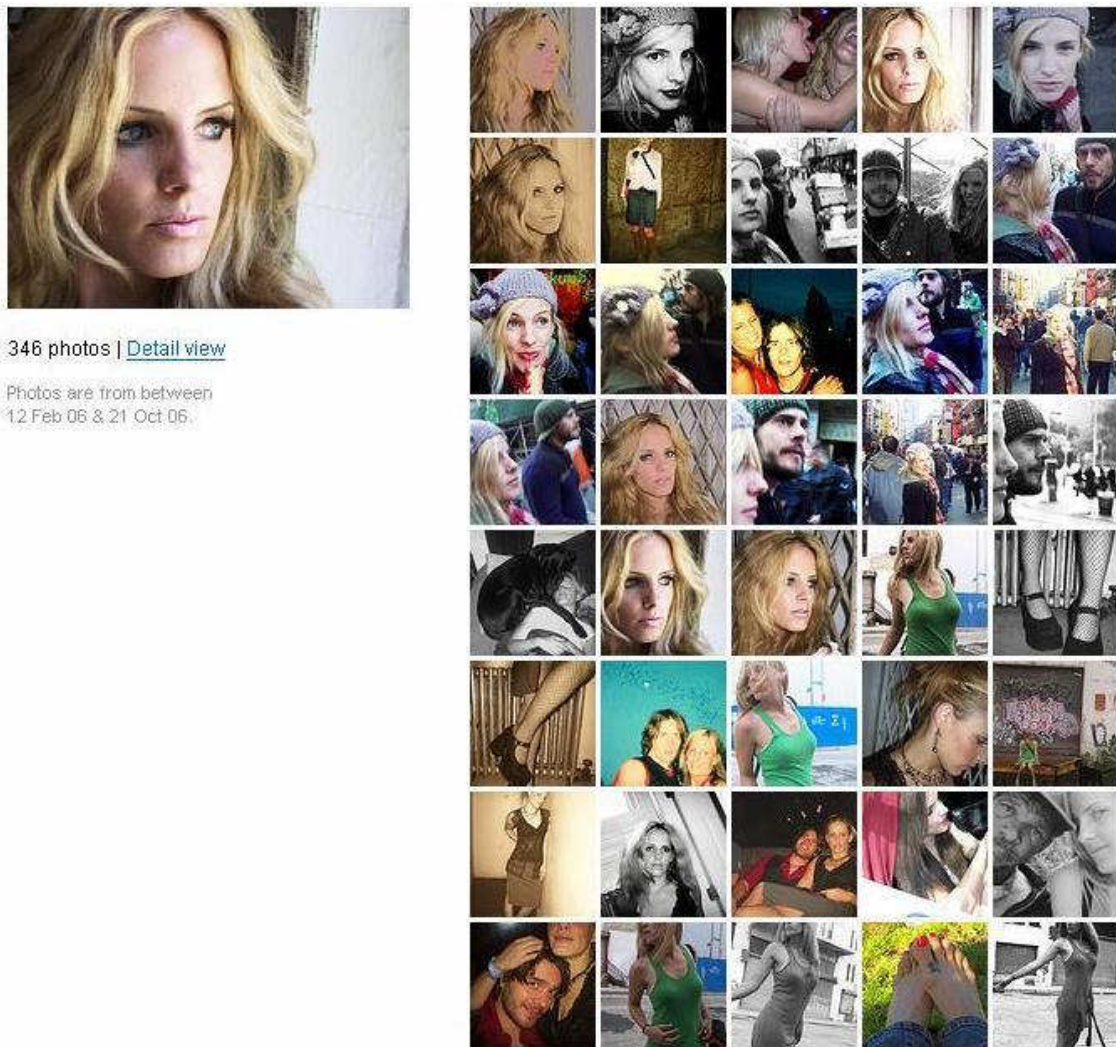


Figure 35 *The Girl Who* self-portrait grid  
(Screen shot is from Monica Bielanko's Flickr site, which is linked to her blog,  
*The Girl Who* -  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/monicabielanko/sets/72157594236790047/with/281073409/> - accessed March 13, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)

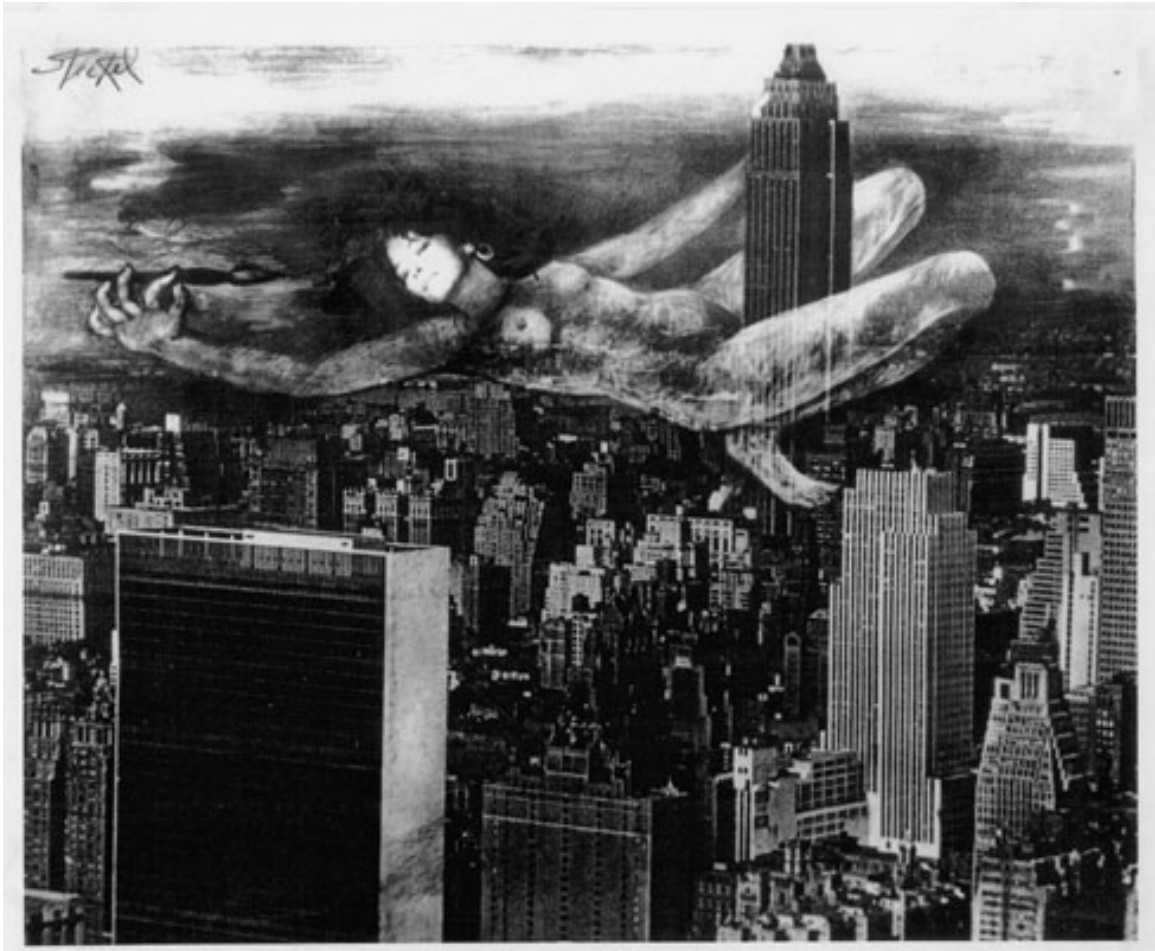


Figure 36 Anita Steckel, *Rodeo* ("Giant Women in New York"), 1973.  
Photomontage 3'x4'.

(Photograph is from the Westbeth Gallery website -  
<http://www.westbeth.org/steckel/steckel.html> - accessed March 13, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)



Figure 37 *The Girl Who* self-portrait mirror with screen  
(Screen shot is from Monica Bielanko's Flickr site, which is linked to her blog,  
*The Girl Who* - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/monicabielanko/206159992/in/set-72157594236790047> - accessed March 13, 2007)



Appendix A (Continued)

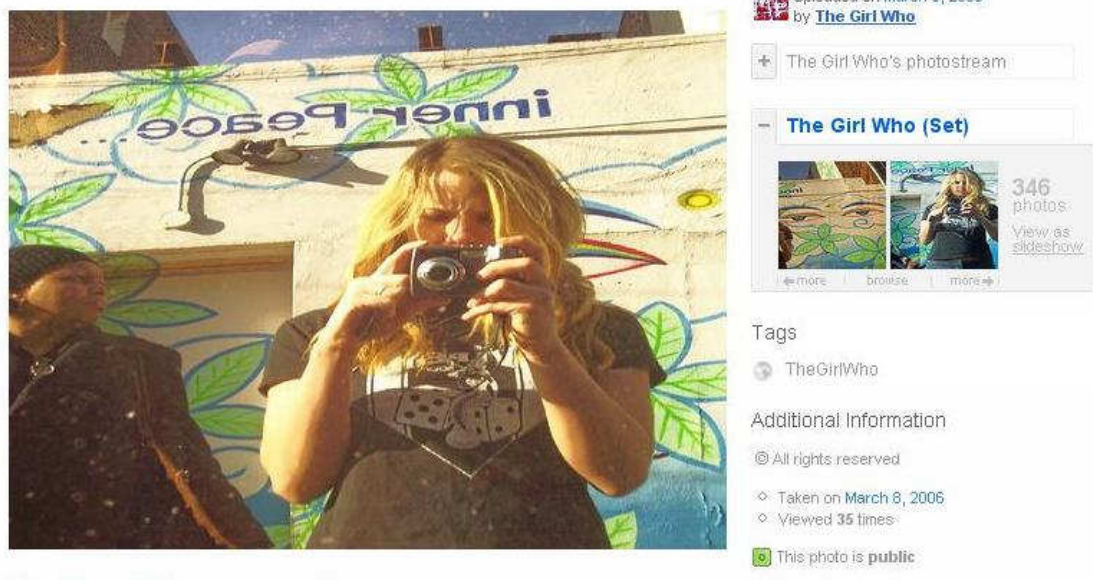


Figure 38 *The Girl Who* inner peace self-portrait  
(Screen shot is from Monica Bielanko's Flickr site, which is linked to her blog,  
*The Girl Who* - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/monicabielanko/109797073/in/set-72157594236790047> - accessed March 13, 2007)

Appendix A (Continued)

**And You Thought I Was Only Into  
Photoshopping Sexy Photos Of Myself Into  
Existence...**



January 9, 2007

Uploaded on January 9, 2007  
by [The Girl Who](#)

+ The Girl Who's photostream

— Daily Photos (Set)



Additional Information

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◊ Taken on January 7, 2007  
◊ Viewed 1,164 times

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Figure 39 *The Girl Who* self-portrait “And You Thought I Was Only Into...”  
(Screen shot is from Monica Bielanko’s Flickr site, which is linked to her blog,  
*The Girl Who* - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/monicabielanko/351767803/in/set-72157594275165733/> - accessed March 13, 2007)

## Last Night I Dremt Of U



December 7, 2006

Figure 40 *The Girl Who* "Last Night I Dremt of U"  
(Photograph is from Monica Bielanko's Flickr site, which is linked to her blog, *The Girl Who* - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/monicabielanko/351767803/in/set-72157594275165733/> - accessed March 13, 2007)

## Appendix B Heather Armstrong and Post-Partum Depression

What follows in a short-hand version of Heather Armstrong's bout with post-partum depression. All the materials are taken directly from her web site dooce.com (© 2001-2007 Armstrong Media, LLC. All rights reserved).

I have taken the materials and reassembled them here to try to give a sense of how I read them and followed along in her journey. As they exist in this document, her words are taken out of their original context on-line and are limited in their ability to convey their intended meaning. The intent is to offer the reader a short version to use as a tool for understanding the argument.

### **The Spiraling, Ridiculously Flawed Logic of an Unmedicated Mind That Seriously Needs to Be Medicated, Like, All the Time**

Tuesday, 13 January 2004

age 28: I'm swelling in my face and in my hands. There are slight traces of protein in my pee. My doctor says everything is okay but the internet knows more than my doctor and I am going to develop preeclampsia and have to have an emergency c-section because my body is going to cut off oxygen to the baby and she will be born a hermaphrodite dwarf baby and we will have to decide whether to raise her a girl or a boy, and when he/she gets to be 18 he/she will stumble into an internet chat room with other people who were born hermaphrodite dwarf babies, and he/she will be told that what we should have done was raise him/her as both so that he/she could make his/her own decision about it at the appropriate time, and he/she will resent us so intensely that he/she will never talk to us again. We will die homeless, alone, willing everything including the stainless steel Kitchen Aid refrigerator which still isn't paid off to our hermaphrodite dwarf baby.

### **A Labor Story**

Tuesday, 16 March 2004

Tuesday, 4:00 AM (Feb 2)

Jon cuts the cord. The baby is whimpering. She is rather quiet. They wipe her down and place her immediately on my chest. Her right arm is stretched out toward me. We look at each other directly. Jon leans down, places his left hand on my head, his right hand on the baby's back. This is the most defining moment of my life.



## Appendix B (Continued)

### **I Typed This Whole Entry With One Hand**

Friday, 20 February 2004

And then there are bad days, days when I can't see ever leaving the house again, days when I think that by the time I do leave the house again my hair will be past my waistline because how can I ever get my hair cut when the baby needs to be fed every 2.5 hours?? On bad days I think I'll never be able to walk the dog again, I'll never go shopping again, I'll never see a movie in a movie theater again. On bad days I imagine growing old in a dust-covered house surrounded by hundreds of mounds of dirty laundry and piles of 40 year old poop diapers because I will never again have the strength to clean my house. On bad days I cry all day long.

### **Surrender**

Monday, 12 April 2004

My daily life feels like torture. I struggle to make it from hour to hour. I feel like I don't know what I'm doing. I've been trying to find the humor in all of this, and keeping this website has been therapeutic in that regard, but I can't ignore these feelings any longer.

There are many things about parenthood that I understand intellectually. I know that this period of her life is only temporary and that things will eventually get better. I know that I am a good mother and that I am meeting her needs as a baby. But depression isn't about understanding things intellectually. It's about an overshadowing emotional spiral that makes coping with anything nearly impossible.

### **Undone**

Tuesday, 11 May 2004

Some days are really good.

Some days start with bacon and biscuits and then more bacon because the first round of bacon wasn't enough. Some days have foot rubs and flowers and an extra 30 minutes of sleep, delicious and indulgent. Some days the drugs seem to work and I feel like I am born to do this, and I look at her and I don't remember the stretch marks or the constipation or the episiotomy or the bladder infections or the constantly malfunctioning left boob that wakes me up every four days with a clogged milk duct or the hemorrhoids or the bloating or the nausea or the tremendous weight gain.

## Appendix B (Continued)

Some days I stare eternity in the face and I think about how many diapers I will change that will only get dirty, towels I will wash that will only become soiled, dishes I will load into the dishwasher that we'll use to eat again and again, and I feel utterly useless, as if I am fighting a battle that cannot be won.

Some days my life is reduced to an hour by hour game of survival and I don't feel like I'll make it another 15 minutes and I can't believe I feel this way and I can't stop crying.

### **Formula**

Friday, 04 June 2004

One of the most surprising things about having a baby is just how much energy it requires to keep that baby happy on an hour-to-hour basis. It's surprising because I thought I had prepared myself for it, working out three times a week throughout my pregnancy. But I should have been training for a marathon, a daily multiple-mile uphill race of infant management that requires warehouses of energy. And I think this energy requirement is at the root of my depression.

So here's what is working for me:

1) I am taking myself off the depression medication, slowly, ever slowly. It has done nothing to curb my anxiety; in fact, it has only made my anxiety worse because I worry about being tired all the time. And I can't be tired. There's no time for tired.

2) I'm working out three times a week, every other night when Jon can watch the baby. Working out isn't fun, but it lets me sweat out frustration and I get to read *People* magazine for thirty minutes. Have you *seen* Lindsay Lohan's boobs? OH MY GOD.

3) I'm taking a half a Unisom at night to help me sleep. Unisom is a perfectly safe and non-habit forming sleep-aid, and it doesn't cause unwanted hair growth or premature ejaculation, or dry mouth or constipation or diarrhea or heart murmurs. It does, however, facilitate really insane dreams with wicked color schemes and plots involving David Hasselhoff and Anil Dash teaming up to fight Columbian warlords with clever use of RSS feeds and German love songs.

4) I get up in the morning and get dressed like I'm going to work. I approach my day as if it were a day at the office, and when I find that I'm

## Appendix B (Continued)

too tired to take another walk or dangle any more rattles above the baby's head, I think about all those people who are having to design PowerPoint templates for mean, Prada-wearing bosses. This is a job. I have to work.

### **It's Going to be Okay**

Friday, 09 July 2004

I get up in the morning having slept only an hour or two and I can't imagine living another minute. The expanse of the day unfolds before me and I can't comprehend how I am going to distract my cranky baby for the next 12 hours. There will be walks and more walks and books and rattles and moving from the porch to the sidewalk and back to the porch to delay her disappointment just a few more minutes. And then there are the moments when I can't do anything to stop her from screaming at me, and it feels like she's sad that she doesn't have a mother who knows what the hell she is doing.

I used to just be sad in the morning, and after 11am I was okay. But in the last two weeks that okay period has been pushed back to 2pm and then to 5pm and now I am not ever okay. My nights are just as bad as my mornings. There isn't a moment in the day that I look forward to. I don't see an end to this cycle of stress, and I find myself asking much too often, "Why go on?"

Yesterday I saw a psychiatrist who prescribed me a combination of drugs. I wish that there were other ways that I could go about getting better, but you have to believe me when I say that this is way beyond herbal remedies or dietary changes. I exercise all the time and I have a very healthy diet (except for the pop tarts, but people, a woman needs her pop tarts). This situation is life-threatening. I am afraid of hurting myself.

Starting today I will be taking an anti-anxiety drug and a mood stabilizer, two very powerful drugs that have to be monitored. He did not prescribe a sleep aid because he thinks that the anti-anxiety drug will stop the incessant and unnecessary worrying that keeps me awake at night. I feel very positive about this, hopeful that these drugs may work and that I will one day soon be able to wake up in the morning and recognize what a wonderful life I have.

## Appendix B (Continued)

But there is one terrible drawback to this step I am taking toward sanity. The doctor told me that I have to wean Leta if I want to work up to therapeutic levels of these drugs. I have to stop breastfeeding in the next month.

### **Heather, interrupted**

Thursday, 26 August 2004

I wish that I could tell you that the reason you won't be hearing anything from me in the next several days is because we're right on the verge of launching the redesign. And we are, I promise, we're right there, just a few more MT plug-ins and some tweaking on the templates and we may have a new site! But that's not the reason.

It's also not because Leta is really cute in her caterpillar pajamas. Or that her face smells really good.

The reason you won't be hearing anything from me for several days is because this morning Jon is driving me up to the hospital and I'm going to check into the psychiatric ward. I am very scared that if I don't go ahead and do this that I may experience some sort of nervous breakdown. My anxiety has only gotten worse since I started psychiatric and medical treatment over two months ago. It's so bad that it chokes me every day, and sometimes I can't even walk I'm so anxious. I've tried over 10 different medications and each one has made my anxiety worse. The depression comes and goes, but the anxiety is constant. I can barely eat anything and I still can't sleep, even though I've tried every sleeping pill available at the pharmacy. It's seriously out of control.

Back in March when Leta was just a little over a month old I wrote this: "The deal is that when Leta was born all these maternal instincts were slammed into the ON position — the instinct to protect, to nourish, to comfort. And no matter where she is sleeping or pretending to sleep, whether it be in our bed, on top of me, in a bassinet beside the bed, or in her crib all the way over in her own room, I am having to re-train my body to sleep. My instincts tell me that when I sleep Unknown Things happen, and my body totally resists the urge to fall asleep. Instinctually I am listening for the sound of her breathing or to the sound of her swallowing, and if those noises sound okay then I'm listening to the sounds of the house to make sure monsters don't come out of the walls to hurt her. I have every reason to believe that this instinct will become numb with subsequent children, but Leta is my first-born, and I have no idea how to turn it off."

## Appendix B (Continued)

Six months later and I still can't turn them off, or even turn them down. These instincts have turned into demons that terrorize me from the moment I get out of bed in the morning to the hours and hours that I try to sleep at night. I never have a moment of peace.

### **Unlocked**

Saturday, 28 August 2004

The first night here was probably the worst night of my life. They didn't have any beds in the unlocked unit of the facility so they stuck me in the least scary locked unit, the one whose occupants average over 82 years in age. Everyone referred to me as "kiddo" and that was very cute and endearing and all, but I was LOCKED INSIDE A MENTAL INSTITUTION. Everything smelled of urine including the plastic eating utensils.

The views out the windows of the facility are breathtakingly incredible. It sits at the curve of a small hill-mountain overlooking the entire Salt Lake valley. So if you look one direction you see sweeping hills and nooks and canyons dotted with green desert plants that look like dusty velvet.

In the other direction you see this open field of lights and streets that seems to extend for hundreds of miles, and it feels like you're hovering over the whole scene. You can see the Mormon temple from up here, or at least the buildings in downtown that surround and protect it. I imagine that Brigham Young was standing in a place similar to this one when he looked over the valley and decided that "this was the place" to settle the Mormons. By saying that I am in no way implying that he was a crazed lunatic. Not at all. Nope.

Inside the facility, however, the lights are fluorescent and the food is plastic. Some of the food even JIGGLES. When I arrived here on Thursday afternoon I was in such a bad place that I couldn't sit still to read a magazine, and the fluorescent glow in my room was flickering like a sequence in a horror film. All I could do was curl up in my bed and pull the covers over my head. I couldn't believe I was here.

### **Unlocked Part Two, or, On That Open Road in Front of Me**

Tuesday, 31 August 2004

I feel good about going home. I feel like there is an open road in front of me, a road to joy and happiness. I feel like I have a new perspective on things. That is what this hospital stay has provided me: PERSPECTIVE. It has also provided me an appreciation for my regular toothpaste and

## Appendix B (Continued)

deodorant. The first time I brushed my teeth with the hospital toothpaste I gagged and was certain I had grabbed a tube of ointment instead of toothpaste, perhaps an ointment for an open wound or a swollen anus; it couldn't have been safe for my mouth. And the deodorant! They gave me deodorant that smells like the shavings that line the bottom of a gerbil cage. I SMELL LIKE A GERBIL.

### **The Other Side**

Wednesday, 08 September 2004

In the past week Leta and I have formed a bond that was unable to take responded to the new look in my face, the look that says, "I am winning this war." She is constantly giggling and cooing and slurping and kicking her frog feet in glee. And I just can't get enough of her.

Because of this new bond I had a difficult time yesterday when the new nanny we hired came to take care of her for a few hours. As part of my ongoing therapy we have hired someone to come help with the care of Leta for nine hours a week while I work on writing and freelance projects. It's just nine hours, per week. That's fewer hours than "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy. That's fewer hours than the sleep I get in one night. BUT OH THE GUILT THAT SHOOK ME TO THE CORE.

I sat in the basement trying to work, but I wanted to throw up the entire time. How could I leave my baby in the care of someone who would play with her and feed her a bottle? How wicked and uncaring of a mother could I be? I might as well throw her in the middle of the street and walk away, OH LOATHSOME EXCUSE OF A PARENT!

Not once did she cry; in fact I could hear her laughing and having a good time upstairs. But downstairs my soul withered as Satan took hold of my being and twisted it like a dirty wet rag. So I tried to work, and then I cleaned the entire basement, dusting the crevices with a q-tip to keep my mind off the fact that I had abandoned my baby upstairs with a caring, qualified nanny.

This still makes me cry as I cut as paste it. My brother committed suicide by hanging himself with his dog's leash. People leave and don't come back.

## Appendix B (Continued)

### **You be well for me**

Friday, 19 November 2004

Last week my sister's neighbor committed suicide. He was the father of four children, the oldest being 11, the youngest being 3, and his wife found him in their bedroom where he had hanged himself.

I am telling you this because when my sister told me about it yesterday I almost hit the floor. That could have been me. It could have been Leta who was left without a parent, Jon without a partner. During the worst months of my postpartum depression I thought about suicide every day. I thought about how I would do it, **perhaps hang myself with the dog's leash**, or maybe grab every pill we have in the cabinet and drown them with a couple shots of tequila. I wanted to do something, anything to stop the pain.

A couple days ago I was on the phone with Beth and I told her that I was coming down with a cold, perhaps what Jon is suffering from right now. She said she was sorry and hoped that I felt better, and without even thinking about it I said, "THIS? This is NOTHING. I can handle a cold. I've been suicidal before. Talk about pain."

Too much is misunderstood about depression, and too many people do not take it seriously. That's why I have been so open about what I have suffered, to try and put a face to it for those of you who don't understand it. It's a physically painful disease, one that can ruin lives, one that can kill. I almost died from it. (emphasis mine)

### **If only there were a category for Sappiest Weblog Entry of the Year**

Wednesday, 26 January 2005

One of the most terrifying moments of my life was walking into our birth to Leta. I was stitched up to my chin, but the physical pain paled in comparison to the shocking realization that I was now The Mother, that there was no longer a nurse to whom I could hand off the baby. It was like I was peering into the heart of a black hole, the magnitude of my life now swallowing me whole.

I would like Leta to read that paragraph and the rest of what I've written here to understand that her mother loved her and would die for her, but that just like everyone else I bleed when I am cut. I have fears and insecurities, and I won't ever have all the answers. **I'd like to think that by chronicling my pregnancy and her first year of life she will better**

## Appendix B (Continued)

**understand just who this crazy woman was that gave her a pointy chin. I have done all this for her, yes, but mostly for me, because by writing about how hard a time I've had figuring this whole thing out I've found a bigger piece of who I am, and I like that piece.** (emphasis mine)

### **The scent of emotion**

Tuesday, 26 April 2005

Jon would visit me in the hospital two or three times a day, and when he'd bring Leta she smelled just like that Walmart baby lotion, delicious and tender and beautiful. I'd scoop her out of the stroller and press my nose against her forehead so that I would remember that smell after he took her home.

Over the weekend we bought another brand of baby lotion with lavender and chamomile scents and it smells just like the Walmart brand lotion. On Sunday night after giving Leta a bath I lathered her chubby legs and belly with that lotion and I was instantly reminded of the hospital and the time I spent there. I told Jon what I was thinking and he asked if it was painful to remember that time.

"No, not at all." I smiled and looked down at Leta who was smiling up at me with all four of her jagged Billy Bob teeth. "In fact, this smell is comforting. It makes me think about how you came to visit me, how she came to visit me, how neither of you gave up on me."

I didn't wash my hands after putting the lotion on Leta's body, and after we put her to bed and for the rest of the night I would sneak quick sniffs of my hands. I realized that this smell would always remind me of Life.

### **This open road in front of me just got a little bumpy**

Wednesday, 10 August 2005

Right now we're in a holding pattern, sort of a wait and see where we go from here. I say we because Jon has to field my calls during the day where he just says, "Yes, yes, okay, sure," even though he can't understand a single word through the wad of snot in the back of my throat. Today is a better day, and that's how I'm going to measure things for the next little while. It's how a lot of us who suffer through this have to measure our entire lives.



## Appendix B (Continued)

### **Six times the suck**

Tuesday, 13 September 2005

These women were clean and pressed and from all appearances were changing their underwear on a regular basis. And they were doing it with six times the kid I have. And no one admitted to being on any type of mood enhancer, not even French fries. I barely made it to the end of the second show before I had my head buried into Jon's armpit, apologizing through sobs for being so damaged. How could I, under the weight of only *one* child, have collapsed with such epic incompetence while these women juggled six times the responsibility without showing a single crack or blemish? Jon let me cry, but then he rightfully pointed out, "Heather, there is no valedictorian of motherhood."

Maybe I just haven't seen the Inside Motherhood program, but if it exists it had better show the mother during the first year of the baby's life turning to the father and saying, "If you want to live to see daylight you had better not even *look* at my boobs as ANYTHING other than vessels of sustenance for the child you deposited in my womb." I know that the mothers on those shows were feeling some of my same feelings I had, but the producers and editors didn't let any of it through. Perhaps the mothers themselves didn't let any of it through, and I can understand why. I want an A+ in motherhood, too.

### **Newsletter: Month Thirty-two**

Thursday, 05 October 2006

I have become depressed again. Almost as depressed as I was two years ago when I had to check myself into the hospital, and it has everything to do with stress, recent stress that has threatened to change and devastate our lives. I have often described depression as the complete inability to cope with stress, and although I think my own depression is manageable with medication — medication that I am still taking every day — it tends to flare up in a debilitating way when I'm thrust into very stressful situations. I keep trying to claw my way up out of this, but for the last month I have found it almost impossible to make it through the day without putting my face into a pillow and screaming until I cannot sense the world around me.

You deserve better than this, better than the look of absolute desperation I carry in my eyes all day long. I should be more playful, should sing more songs, color more pictures, but I'm sometimes afraid that if I attempt any of these things you will see through it and know that I am lying. Right now I can't see the world in anything but shades of very pale gray. I had hoped

## Appendix B (Continued)

that I would never find myself this low again — I would not wish this crushing emptiness on my worst enemy — but now that I am here I'm not quite sure what to do this time, except trust that you and your father will stick by me, will be here when I do feel better.

And so I apologize that my depression is a part of your life, but I also promise that I will do everything I can to fight it so that your memories of me are not painful. So that my memories of you will be in color.