

The Most Intimate Bodies: Women and Dolls in the Twentieth Century

By

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Dedications

To my daughters, Rosie and Eva, for allowing me to feel the greatest joy and deepest pain, fear and hope... and what cannot be articulated.

To my mother, who taught me to be an artist. You read to us every night, organized crafts on the dining room table, and led us singing in candlelight processions around the house.

To my father, for the gifts of curiosity, poetics, and “never good enough” that have made this what it is.

To Joyce, for being a mentor and a friend.

To Leisa, for steady en-courage-ment.

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Abstract

The Most Intimate Bodies: Women and Dolls in the Twentieth Century takes an autoethnographic approach to the investigation of women's relationships with doll-like objects, including puppets. As part of a practice-based PhD, this dissertation centers on my own creative practice, its larger cultural context, and the research that sustains it. I examine the doll and the creative work of women who have intimate relationships with doll-objects in their creative and performance work. I intentionally complicate the notions of what a *performance* is to explore women's contributions that extend beyond the formally theatrical; these include processes of making, play, collecting, arranging, caring for, manipulating, and documenting the posing *of* and posing *with* a variety of doll-objects. Giving special emphasis to pivotal cultural transformations, I argue that the doll, with its gendered, scaled, and material attributes, creates a powerful contribution to visual culture transmitting a poetics of woman in ways that are embodied, unconscious, and preverbal where powerful aspects of culture are held, created, sustained, and changed. Concentrating on modernism while drawing parallels and comparisons with the late twentieth century, I explore the role of dolls within the construct of womanhood and girlhood in Europe and the United States. Using a framework that acknowledges the troublesome misogyny and sexism embedded in much of modernism, women's sex-based oppression, and the *othering* of women that accompanied the scientific and cultural discourse of the period (as well as substantial subsequent erasure), I examine how women's participation in and creation of objects and performances with such objects responded to those forces and shape the larger notion of woman. I draw on work by Simone de Beauvoir, Toril Moi, Elizabeth Grosz, and Rosi Braidotti, among others, surveying feminist theory to examine notions of female subjectivity, embodiment, and sexual difference. I focus on the work of Theodora Skipitares, an American puppet artist, and others, such as Emmy Hennings, Louise Bourgeois and German doll maker Käthe Kruse, who re-imagined the visual culture of the child's psyche through doll design. I examine the potential these objects offer for analysis, play, change, and subversion—and their limits.

Foreword

In Julia Kristeva's words, the text is an “energized object.” As I write this, I glance over at a dissertation part-way done, printed out and spread in short stacks across my apartment floor. It is still in a living state—still breathing in through gaps. I can reorganize its bones and joints. It is waiting for citations. It is waiting to be crumpled into a ball and tossed into the recycling as I write over it digitally, wondering how and where it actually exists as a non-object and whether it will carry the resonance of the hours spent when it is floating immaterial on a screen. Writing a dissertation is an embodied experience in which the mind takes on real labor—and the body does as well. I think of my mother’s wonderful verbs from my childhood: *trudging* and *traipsing*. Writing, it is easy to lose track of the body, but then at those times my mind is the body—in the woods, then on a long road... then lost... weary. The mind gets parched and quenched again. But the body is also the mind writing—reaching for the book, looking around, getting up to get away, and sitting back down to write ... and writing.

I flip back and forth between pages of books and my mind’s eye and my fingertips (the way my performances *feel*). This space where sensation is part of the shaping of ideas seems to be the *chora* that Julia Kristeva speaks of. The most productive moments of writing weren’t putting words on the paper but time spent in a semiotic stupor which any place akin to and including the mind at 3 a.m. when images (colored with anxiety and possibility) shape shift, swell, and recede into sleep. This is the place from which almost every good idea emerges, hoping that daylight makes discernment of “good” possible and that coffee makes the muscles work once again.

I have been productively and yet at times frustratingly torn in this project (or is it the reverse, frustratingly and yet productively torn?). I find myself thinking that this work, which

was originally motivated by a love of dolls and puppets, is now ultimately all about comprehending contemporary feminist theory, through its application to objects (and compulsions, performances, and life). But I had intended the theory to be little more than a lens that could be lifted, held, and aimed towards content: my life and its connection to a long and rich history of women's making. Has the lens become the subject and the subject the lens? Perhaps a bit because, just like I might on a stage, I find myself thinking through objects here on paper, hoping to make sense of or make *sensed* the dense theory, to make it *matter*. This dissertation is a struggle being played out and the components are entangled and, like wool, felted. It is a tug-o-war of passions; my intellectual and philosophical drives push against my love of making objects and that same love digs down into precarious purchase against a third force, which is my desire—politically and poetically—to change things in the world for women and girls. I cannot give myself over to any of the three and can only make sense of them in their tangle.

Not to be underestimated in this project is the hope that all this labor will ground me *and* compel me forward in both my making and thinking (and the places where those are the same thing). Ultimately, what unifies all these disparate-seeming impulses are the threads of women's creative agency and the *poetics* that we collectively create. It is a utopian project that invites the productive and positive possibilities of sexual difference—what Luce Irigaray considered the impossible but still pursuable construction of a *female* subject—crafted in objects (material and narrative) that are as powerful as words.

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I. Introduction: The Doll and the Poetics of Woman

If women are to develop autonomous modes of self-understanding and positions from which to challenge male knowledges and paradigms, the specific nature and integration (or perhaps lack thereof) of the female body and female subjectivity and its similarities to and differences from men's bodies and identities need to be articulated.

—Elizabeth Grosz *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*¹

In *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz describes “a body as a social and discursive object, bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power.”² If the body is a discursive object, then the doll body or the puppet body is twice so—a body made by a body. The discourse of these undeniably material bodies is engaged in a deep cultural dialogue with our notions of the human. And one of the primary notions written on the human body is that of sex.³ At least that is the case if the body is female the markers of which immediately make

¹ Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 19.

² Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*. 17. Grosz says that sexual-difference feminists and patriarchy are in a battle to define the female body because “what is at stake is the activity and agency, the mobility and social space, accorded to women.”

³ A note on terminology, the term *gender* has become quite confused in the past twenty years as I describe in later sections. I do not think we currently have a coherent definition for the term—quite the opposite. Hence I attempt *not* to use it, especially when I mean the material body and biological sex, acknowledging, however, that this is an almost impossible task. When I do use gender, I do so in the feminist tradition, i.e. to denote a culturally-bound system of traits, behaviors, societal roles, and artifacts that *point towards* “sex” (the way the feminine points toward woman and female) but do not derive from the sexed body except through culture, society's shaping of a subjectivity in response to the sexed body. The connection is complex and intertwined but I find it helpful to separate the two. Traditionally, the feminist view on gender is that it is not determined by sex or pre-destined. Rather the bifurcated cultural training that starts at birth supports a system of hierarchy and oppression in simple and complex ways. While there are forms that involve direct external coercion and violence, others are internalized. For example, in Western culture, women have certain expectations around the use of cosmetics; the money and time women spend on meeting this gender expectation limits their ability to use those resources for other ends. The premise is that the female face itself is not acceptable without a modification. Women also choose to engage in this, creating a complicated way in which cultural expectations are enforced. There is a cluster of difference (not all women participate and a few men do). However, aspects of these clusters of difference seen between women and men are not easily separated into culture versus biology. Butler discusses Beauvoir's sense of the gendering of sex itself in terms of paradoxes. Butler says that for Beauvoir “we never experience or know ourselves as a body pure and simple, i.e., as our ‘sex,’ because we never know our sex outside of its expression of gender. Lived or experienced ‘sex’ is always already gendered. We become our genders, but we become them from a place which cannot be found and which, strictly speaking, cannot be said to exist.” Judith Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*,” *Yale French Studies* 72 (1986), 39.

impossible the reading of universality and instead move the viewer towards specificity, away from transcendence and towards immanence. In fact, in *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*, Anne Balsamo writes, “Gender is one of the primary effects of the discursive construction of the human body.”⁴ How do women, making and performing sexed and/or gendered bodies of puppets and dolls, enter the discourse of female corporeality? Is there a potential for a female universal? Is there an opportunity to critically challenge *otheredness*?

Even when it isn’t autobiographical, my own work is archetypal. It is woman’s work that creates a woman’s world with female characters that do not, for the most part, interact with males. Does this imply an escape from otherness? No, an escape cannot be; “If I want to define myself, I first have to say, ‘I am woman’; all other assertions will arise from this basic truth. A man never begins by positing himself as an individual of a certain sex: that he is a man is obvious.”⁵ This is the sexual difference that Simone de Beauvoir articulated in biological, historical, existential and phenomenological terms in her famous 1949 work, *The Second Sex*, a work I draw upon heavily.⁶ “There is a contradiction in the experience of a woman who is who is also an artist,” say Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro in their 1973 essay “Female Imagery.” “She feels herself to be ‘subject’ in a world which treats her as ‘object.’ Her works often become a symbolic arena where she establishes her sense of personal, sexual identity.”⁷

⁴ Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 22.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde, Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Random House, 2011), 5.

⁶ I have elected to use only the surname *Beauvoir* when referring to the author without her first name. While there are different models to accommodate the French language and customs, I will follow Beauvoirian scholar Toril Moi and the editor and translators of the new 2011 version of *The Second Sex*, Judith Thurman and Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, which I am using in this work.

⁷ Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro, “Female imagery,” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2003), 53.

The *discourse* our bodies manifest is, in many ways, quite similar to that of a puppet. Rather than simplify, this analogy begins to illuminate the complexity of the phenomenology of corporeal discourse, where the material, constructed body is a layered thing, perhaps with the suggestion of breasts, for example, (a gesture towards biology) but then also the decision to give the puppet long hair (material but also cultural). This is separate—but only to an extent—from the puppet's movements, motions, and gestures as well as context. Even as an object, decontextualized, sitting starkly in empty space, unmoving, the puppet exudes a complex and layered meaning derived from the viewer's experiences of embodiment and culture that inform the way this other body is read; the material cannot be completely separated from the cultural nor the reverse.

In this dissertation, I examine is the intersection of sexed bodies, subjectivity, and materiality, both in terms of the material bodies of women (and their sexual subjectivity) and the material bodies of the dolls and doll-like objects that women relate to in a variety of ways and use to make meaning. These ways include the interconnected and overlapping categories of performing (in a traditional sense), making, playing, posing, caring for, and collecting, among others—all forms of performance in the broader sense, I argue. My interest has grown out of my own work making and performing with dolls and puppets. As someone who drew and sculpted from childhood (using my mother's homemade play dough, or even lake mud), my first recognizable figures were probably made at two or three years of age. By age four I was drawing explicitly sexed—and gendered—figures, using dresses and elaborate hairstyles as signifiers of both. Even while I myself hated wearing dresses and had hair cut short, just like my brothers, I

still knew these figures to be persons like me—female.⁸ They were the *signs* and the symbolic but I was the semiotic—still something that was always *becoming* and only having to reference the sign and not become it.⁹ I was living in a body, somehow related to the hairdos that reached the ceilings and the dresses like layer cakes. In fact, my figures have always been and continue to be almost exclusively female; female bodies and faces are not just present, they are primary. They carry the story. It isn't every female's story, but it is part of the larger poetics of female and of woman.

It was through the combination of figures and storytelling that my transition to a practice of puppetry and performance took shape. Contextualizing my work within puppetry, however, was challenging—and at times still presents questions that, perhaps, in the current moment of postmodern aesthetics are moot. Nevertheless, notions of virtuosity (in terms of manipulation) gave me pause in identifying my work as puppetry—myself as a *puppeteer*. I imagined that there must be some sort of initiation or certification that I had not experienced. Oddly, too, my own feelings of inadequacy when faced with that word were matched by the inadequacy of the word itself to describe the involved and intimate process of making the objects and set and devising the entire piece which also had a life within my larger creative practice which included drawing, installation, and sculpture. I was not a puppeteer. Similarly, not only did I struggle to claim the word *puppetry*, I also felt puppetry didn't tell the real story of what my practice was and where it had come from. Wasn't my work more rooted in doll play? As one who has always had an

⁸ If I had been born in forty years later, I might have been labeled as gender non-conforming. I wore the same clothes as my brothers (my sister did, too). We wore a lot of hand-me-downs, but when I was allowed to choose new clothes I chose green jeans and a green boys' snowmobile suit. I remember fighting bitterly with my mother about wearing a dress to church and her compromising with a set that consisted of pink pants and a smock with girls on it. I hated it. I always wanted my hair long; I related intensely to Samson in the Bible— long hair was heroic.

⁹ In the Kristevan sense, as I discuss later.

intense attraction and attachment to the doll, its familiar yet complex visual culture allowed me to explore my stories in ways that were playful, meaningful, imaginative, and authentic to my life—and material. Surely this was akin to puppetry. In “Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects from Semiotic Perspectives,” Frank Proschan uses an analogy of a net that catches *all* the fish not small enough to swim through. Without dismissing the differences between the “fish,” he looks at the commonality of a multitude of performances that center objects as having core commonalities. These include, according to Proschan, bards that tell stories with dolls and children’s use of such objects in doll play. Puppets belong to a family, he says, of performing objects which “are material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in dramatic performance.... They may be mobile or stationary, permanent or ephemeral. They may, but need not, have movable parts or members.”¹⁰ Was doll play, then, a form of puppetry? Why did that feel lesser?

As a performing feminist, my work also bears similarities and, I believe, owes a great debt to performance art which I discuss later; I feel a resonance with that artistic movement of the nineteen-seventies and eighties that coincided with and connected to the second wave of feminism.¹¹ However, there are real differences between that genre and object performance, which is what I do, even though the lines have blurred substantially since the nineteen-eighties. While the blurring has opened the field, at times forcing a contrast through comparison, helps

¹⁰ Frank Proschan, *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects from Semiotic Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Mouton, 1983), 4. While Proschan insists that these function within a traditional theatrical event with performers and spectators, I will muddy these waters. For instance, can one imagine the hypothetical audience or the audience that will view a document such as a photo. In child play there is no designated audience and yet he includes that as a related form.

¹¹ I discuss this later with regard to Theodora Skipitares.

clarify important qualities. Performance art, in its inception as something different than theater, was predicated on the presence of the real body in real time and real space. I choose puppets specifically to counter that—and yet... As Amelia Jones says of the performative practices she calls *body art*, they emphasize the “body/self;” the body is the “locus of a ‘disintegrated’ or dispersed ‘self,’ as elusive marker of the subject’s place in the social, as ‘hinge’ between nature and culture.”¹² While my body is present and observably manipulating, I attempt at *almost* every juncture to locate the event in the body of the puppet. My body is not the site. My body is not the object. Nor is it the subject. Yet all is contained within my subjectivity. It is a complicated endeavor; the relationship of my body to these doll bodies is intimate enough to make them echoes of mine.

While working as a teaching assistant for a class that focused on the early twentieth century, I discovered a forgotten world of women performers and costume, mask, and doll makers—and puppeteers.¹³ The discourse of the material bodies they made, combined with their own bodies and reflected a rich dialogue and a production and disruption of cultural notions—not just of what is *human* but specifically what is *female*. These are quite different. In her list of ways that male intellectuals, starting with Aristotle, have discussed the woman problem, Beauvoir cites Julien Benda, an early twentieth century French philosopher and novelist. “A man’s body has meaning by itself, disregarding the body of a woman, whereas the woman’s body seems devoid of meaning without reference to the male. Man thinks himself without

¹² Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). 12-13. The word “hinge,” in this case, is taken from Elizabeth Grosz’s theories of non-duality where the body is the hinge between and the material and biological and the psychical.

¹³ I say forgotten to be generous or poetic; in reality, they were erased through sexism’s indifference and diminishment.

woman. Woman does not think herself without man.”¹⁴ Hence, in European and American modernism, questions of the body—existential, psychological, and phenomenological questions about embodiment—were at the forefront of intellectual and artistic projects. Not surprisingly, dolls and puppets enjoyed great popularity in the late 1800s and the early 1900s, as they do now.¹⁵ Puppet and doll bodies, despite their seeming emphasis on exterior likeness, spoke to burning questions about interiority and the metaphysics and poetics of being. Their complex relationship to aliveness, where the interior and exterior entwine, spoke to an obsession with the uncanny, the body–mind connection, and existential questions about the individual in the rapidly changing West, where industry, urbanization, science, commercialization, and authority challenged the givens of what it was to be human.¹⁶

I was instantly drawn to the excitement of uncovering women’s historical participation in puppetry. I found myself seduced by the objects themselves, perhaps a variation on the fetishizing that theorist Amelia Jones has pointed out happens to art historians.¹⁷ I still adore the objects, but in the years since starting this area of investigation, I have grown cautious about my own desire and the way it shapes my notions of the past. I think about Linda Nochlin’s complex essay about women’s lack of representation in art history, “Why Have There Been No Great

¹⁴ Julien Benda in Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde, Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Random House, 2011), 5-6.

¹⁵ As I describe in a later section, we are in a “puppet moment.” Dassia Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell explore this phenomenon: “Today’s proliferation of expressive objects reflects a current cultural context beyond the stage, concerns that preoccupy our times.” Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2.

¹⁶ I do not mean to suggest that there was no previous examination. To the contrary, this has been a focus of philosophy since ancient times.

¹⁷ Jones, Amelia. “Women” in Dada: Elsa, Rose, and Charlie.” In *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, edited by Naomi Sawelson-Gorse. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 142.

Women Artists?,” and find there are lessons for approaching this project.¹⁸ Certainly, just like there have indeed been great women artists, there have been great women puppeteers— and continue to be, but the fact that we must point to the exceptional has detrimental effects. Like in the other arts, all the conditions of erasure that Nochlin describes apply, as do the traps, like the notion of the term *genius*. Most importantly, as Nochlin notes, there are very real structural impediments to women’s full participation. And there is erasure. Add to this the ephemeral quality of performance and much work is lost. As Juliet Koss notes, “The study of theater is impeded by the nature of the medium, notoriously difficult to document and theoretically unruly.”¹⁹

My first attempts to research felt frustrating as I found myself falling into reporting on others’ findings and, at times, mimicking their hopeful exaggerations. I found myself projecting my desires, wanting to amplify women’s participation, something that blocked me from seeing other important contributions to the world of doll-objects in the twentieth century. I was limiting my view of the puppet to an established lens. My work, I discovered, was to find new lenses. Once I began to think of other ways women performed with objects, I found new territory, my research broadened, and my interests shifted and became enriched with other objects and object performances.

While firm lines are often drawn in scholarship between the puppet and the doll, I argue that these lines are more likely to be drawn in men’s narratives that seek to distinguish *their* work (or work they admire or research) from doll play. Ironically, were this discussion to happen

¹⁸ Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” in Amelia Jones, ed., *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 229-233.

¹⁹ Juliet Koss. “Bauhaus Theater of Human Dolls,” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 44 (2003): 724–745.

in German, the word *Puppen* would encompass both puppets and dolls, making it unnecessary for me to argue their connection.²⁰ In English, however, dolls are the domain of girls and of women and are therefore not seen to be the culturally powerful force that they are. They also lack, in women's hands, the aura of the transgressive that they gain when appropriated by men—especially when they are appropriated and abused or in some way asked to stand in as an object for misogynist impulses. In men's hands, they can become symbolic others with endless possibilities. The twentieth century was full of object performance with intense and continuous blurring of lines of all sorts when it came to performing objects, particularly in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland where they were all *Puppen*. Looking at dolls and puppets as a unified category reveals a rich discourse around humanness explored through material performing objects. Add to it masks, that sometimes become puppets and/or make the body into a puppet, as do many of the elaborate costumes of the era, and there was a plethora of ways that performers removed their own corporeality from performance—at least in terms of the expression and form of their flesh. This discourse of the body, so to speak, also inevitably and specifically theorized *woman*, but not as the universal because she cannot be. Her humanity and her connection to universal humanity needs always to be a separate point of inquiry due to her eternal status as

²⁰ The linguistic entanglement between words for puppet and words for doll in different languages reveals a complex interplay and points to richly shared ancestry that is mutually informing. The Latin word for doll, *pupus* or *pupa*, means “new-born” or “little girl” (as well as the pupa of a butterfly). While in English we came to use the word *doll*, in German the word *Puppe*, meaning both doll and puppet, is a direct descendant of the Latin. (Also: Albanian: pupë; English: pupa, puppet, poppet; French: puce, poupée, poupin, and poupette; and Italian: pupa, poppa). Language, intimately intertwined with cultural practices, challenges the division of puppet from doll when we look outside an Anglo-centric frame. Perhaps the crossover of words would make it less necessary to try to break down the boundaries around the rarified concept we have of performance. Etymologies from *Online Etymology Dictionary*. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/puppet>. However, it is important to note that in some cases in Germany terms like Figure Theater have developed to move away from the concepts related to puppetry that seem limited.

“other.”²¹ Therefore the ways that puppets, dolls, masks, and costumes performed in reference to sex and the notion of gender was something beyond the existentialist angst of being human and alive.

Here we begin to encounter the very problem that my dissertation cannot ignore, as Beauvoir would agree. What is a woman? What do I mean by that word? According to feminist scholar Toril Moi, “The word woman always carries heavy metaphysical baggage.”²² Recently efforts to use the word are often met with challenges that one is not being inclusive of all who might identify as a woman. Moi’s work has been immensely helpful in creating some ways forward. She draws from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. One helpful example she cites is his use of the word *game*, in which we all have a sense of what a game is and what qualifies as a game. However, once we begin to attempt to articulate in concrete terms what a game is it becomes nearly impossible; often no two games share all qualities and sometimes two games do not share any of the same qualities—not one. Such, perhaps is woman. Such perhaps is doll, puppet, or performing object. One finds through the examination of the doll-object category that puppets are a part of, that the differences that emerge between puppet and doll are at times less marked than the differences within the two categories. This process of defining, however, allows us to examine each object closely, noting more clearly its unique qualities framed by contrast. Perhaps there is usefulness in working with a category and finding the challenges. As women, we cannot *not* work with our word and the concept.

²¹ It seems obvious at first but it is actually quite profound to note that, unlike with men, theorizing what it is to be human is not the same as theorizing what it was to be woman, just like theorizing the universal is the opposite of what it is to theorize the specific (and non-universal).

²² Toril Moi, *Gender, Sex, and the Body* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10.

When men theorize the universal, they often conflate it with male. Beauvoir would say that male is male and it's the neuter. The non-sexed. Echoing Simone de Beauvoir, forty years later (as well as Luce Irigaray and the French feminists), theorist Judith Butler would ask, "Through what act of negation and disavowal does the masculine pose as a disembodied universality and the feminine get constructed as a disavowed corporeality?"²³ I have watched puppet shows where a universal theme is explored with multiple characters, often symbolic, and not one is female. The ability of the world to tell these stories without us is part of us—of what we are. Watching Puppet State Theatre of Scotland's *The Man Who Planted Trees*, I wondered how many people seated around me realized that this story of 'the difference one person can make,' did not include a single female character. In my mind I wondered, couldn't they have made the dog-narrator female? How would that have changed the show? It would have changed the show. A few years ago, I was in a workshop with a well-known puppeteer. We were making puppets and devising small scenes based on the characters that emerged, what they would and wouldn't do, and a host of other puppet truths. The first step was to brainstorm possible puppet identities for characters we might create (in much farcical puppet theater, one recognizes that odd mix of occupation and destiny). The list was already long and the basic workings of the world complete (king, madman, old man, policeman, clown, robber, devil, priest, hero), when

²³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 16. The French feminists are Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Helene Cixous. By this time, Joan W. Scott tells us, "'Gender' as a substitute for 'women' is also used to suggest that information about women is necessarily information about men, that one implies the study of the other. This usage insists that the world of women is part of the world of men, created in and by it. This usage rejects the interpretive utility of the idea of separate spheres, maintaining that to study women in isolation perpetuates the fiction that one sphere, the experience of one sex, has little or nothing to do with the other. In addition, gender is also used to designate social relations between the sexes. Its use explicitly rejects biological explanations, such as those that find a common denominator for diverse forms of female subordination in the facts that women have the capacity to give birth and men have greater muscular strength. Instead, gender becomes a way of denoting 'cultural constructions'—the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men. It is a way of referring to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women. Gender is, in this definition, a social category imposed on a sexed body." Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 1056.

“hooker” was thrown in. Awkwardly, we tried to add other females to this world: “mother... nun”.... silence. Ultimately, I made a mother and a small daughter puppet, feeling that maybe only this axis could center the female as the universal.

I am a subject—an artist—who understands herself through the sex and gender she *is* and *is creating*. Part of this understanding is that I am not the universal. My contribution to that creation is doubled because, in addition to doing the things that theorist Judith Butler says consolidate a notion of gender (walking, talking, dressing), I make work that enters visual culture and reinforces and reifies materially understandings of my sex and gender.²⁴ In keeping with the notion of performativity, discussed in later chapters, I can also understand myself as a woman performing the making of specific types of work and, in doing so, making both myself and making “woman,” be it out of felted wool or a dishcloth, clay, wood, shadow, cinnamon, or words. In this investigation, I engage with various theories and examples of female subjectivity, embodiment, and corporeality, loosely centering my investigation on the twentieth century. I am as much *longing* towards that history as I am investigating it, the final product tailor-made to help me understand my own work.²⁵ As a female who grew up in relation to a culture of dolls and doll play, I approach this study from an autoethnographic perspective. Autoethnography, one of many forms of feminist “writing in-between,” is a poststructuralist form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflective writing to explore personal experiences that

²⁴ In her critical works, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, feminist philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler engages, among other questions, the long-standing and ongoing challenge: what is the female and the feminine in relation to a sexed or gendered body? See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (Hove, UK: Psychology Press, 1993).

²⁵ Artists, for example, creating work in their sixties, as Louise Bourgeois, Sasha Morgenthaler, Mina Loy, and Theodora Skipitares did, are spanning time periods. With Skipitares, who was born in the 1950s, we have a modern subject and a postmodern approach—the modernity that is the core of postmodernity.

reveal wider cultural, political, and social knowledge. It is in between autobiography and ethnography, and in between storytelling and research. It has been specifically embraced and developed within feminist epistemology, understanding that the personal is political and that all knowledge is subjectively created. To examine how I use dolls, I must also examine the layers of meaning they have for me and how those layers consist of my own individual experiences intersecting with larger cultural and historical contexts—including gender. As a child, I was intensely attracted to dolls and enthralled by their potential for creating worlds, characters, and stories. As I discuss at length in the autoethnographic section, I owned a number of dolls, although my ability to *choose* which dolls to acquire was limited; I didn't grow up in a very consumerist household. Dolls came to me (and left) often with a story and a connection to another person.²⁶ They were a favorite gift or a hand-me-down or a coveted possession of a friend, touching the edges of human emotion (envy, loss, joy...).²⁷ They fulfilled a variety of functions, which I will uncover in this dissertation and trace forward to my current art and performance practices.

My study of dolls in Western history is idiosyncratic. While studying dolls and puppets has only confirmed my belief that there is a vast potential for inquiry, I am aware that there is a specificity to my examination that cannot represent the universal. In order to consciously locate my own position within a specific lineage of visual culture, I have chosen to frame this investigation within a fairly narrow space (Europe and the United States) and time (since the late

²⁶ Whether it was specific to my family's values and decisions around money, the time, place (rural Minnesota in the 1970s), or some other factor, I was seldom allowed to choose and purchase a specific doll. I go into these details extensively in my autoethnography section. I believe that the way that dolls came into and stayed in my life is personal but also reflects the cultures that I moved in as a child.

²⁷ Anyone who has had a child (or has been a child) knows the despair a lost toy can cause. Children's raw greed for a toy is displayed with transparency, whereas many adults are able to, if not mediate, camouflage that desire.

eighteen-hundreds. This is already quite broad. Attempting to bring in more of the diffuse history of the doll and/or including dolls of other cultures, would, rather than enhancing this project, weaken my focus on the intimate, firsthand experiences I have had with a specific cultural language of the doll.²⁸ While I touch on issues of race and class, that is not the primary focus. The background I have gained in this dissertation, provide a basis to further explore more diverse experiences from a better understanding of my own positionality. I am more deeply aware of my own inheritance.

Throughout the twentieth century, women have engaged in creating a sense of modern (and later postmodern) womanhood and girlhood, crafting sexual difference and a sense of what it is to be female. Women, the people, are continuing the never-to-be-concluded project of *defining* woman the category.²⁹ They have done this through writing theory, but also through writing poetry and prose, essays in women's magazines, and journalistic pieces. They have done this through making visual works: paintings, sculptures, and illustrations, but also figurines, dolls, doll houses, puppets, and more. In returning to Elizabeth Grosz's quote from the opening and the need to "articulate the specific nature of the female body and female subjectivity," I build off her use of the term *articulate* and come quite easily to puppets and dolls, whose material bodies are often literally articulated, with bendable joints that can be manipulated and posed in play, display, and performance.

²⁸ Also, for the purpose of this dissertation, I am specifically choosing artists who have had a strong affective draw for me personally as an adult, and rather than attempt to challenge this attraction, I am interrogating what it is about their work that draws me and creates resonance. This is one of the powers of the doll and the puppet that echo its fetishistic roots; it draws us and resonates in a phenomenological way.

²⁹ While outside of the scope of this work, one could argue, perhaps, that this also impacted the sense of what it was to be male.

Women have created a sense of *woman* also by placing their real bodies in real space, as in the performance art of the 1960s and 70s— and in the streets in protest! Earlier in the century they did this as well, through the varied cabaret performances, but also the silent *tableaux vivants* created by suffragists, to assert a visual culture of what women were so that they could no longer be denied vote.³⁰ Not always a writer *or* an artist, many women have crossed the border between word and image. For example, Kate Millet, who wrote pivotal second-wave feminist theory, also created sculpture and installations. Djuna Barnes wrote poetry, prose, and journalistic pieces, including “When Puppets Come to Town.” She also illustrated her own work with divine little engravings. Artist Louise Bourgeois drew from psychoanalysis and wrote (and spoke) extensively, insightfully, and poetically about herself and her artistic practice in relation to her womanhood. This exegesis is part of her body of work.

Many women also crossed the boundaries between high and low culture, incorporating practices, processes, and materials authentic to their worlds and not considered appropriate for fine art— speaking materially with an admittedly female voice and lexicon.³¹ Hermína Týrlová,

³⁰ While not speaking about the efforts of the suffragettes and suffragists, these acts exemplify what Rosi Braidotti calls “radical immanence”—a feminist political gesture: “Feminist politics is critical but also affirmative, it aims at the counter-production of alternatives to the present and to the structures of subjectivity. The spontaneous and creative aspects of feminist practice are coupled with a profound form of generosity; that is to say, with an ethics of non-profit to build upon micro-political instances of activism. This humble yet experimental approach to changing our collective modes of relation to the environment, social and other, our cultural norms and values, our social imaginary, our bodies, ourselves, is the most pragmatic manifestation of the feminist politics of radical immanence. It is one of our key contributions to radical democracy.” Rosi Braidotti, “Punk Women and Riot Grrls,” *Performance Philosophy* 1 (2015), <http://www.performancephilosophy.org/journal/article/view/32/63>.

³¹ Despite women’s increasing participation, they frequently remained less seen and were often, quite quickly, historically erased. As Eleanor Dickinson reports on the marginalization of women in the arts, “Especially problematic to women was Professor H. W. Janson whose authoritative textbook *The History of Art* of 1962 proclaimed his belief that an artist’s work must ‘have changed the history of art’ to be worthy of inclusion in his tome.” No women were. This lauded and required reading for most university introductory art history courses continued its exclusion of women until the 1980s, after Janson’s passing. Eleanor Dickinson, “The History of the Women’s Caucus for Art” (2007), <http://www.nationalwca.org/wcadocs/TheHistory%20of%20the%20WCA.pdf>. Growing up, I was more surrounded by art and art publications because of my father’s connection to the humanities. Only now do I realize the almost complete lack of women represented in these publications from the nineteen-fifties through the nineteen-eighties.

a Czech filmmaker who built puppets to animate, tied a strategic knot in a dishcloth with red trim, creating a specifically yonic-looking female figure for one of her most well-known animations. Hannah Höch, of the Dada movement, instrumental in the creation of photomontage, cut and tore apart the images of women's bodies pouring off the presses in the Weimar Republic, reconfiguring them. She combined bodies to reveal the (ideological as well as cultural) construction of the Weimar New Woman and the way that objectification works for the female body versus the male.³² Subjectivity, therefore, is a different matter for women than for men. It is a subjectivity marked as the non-universal. Their work was a product of a struggle against that very position—a struggle that was, of course, both a refusal and a reification of that position.³³ If we are to accept the theories of sexual subjectivity developed by Simone de Beauvoir, the work these women made was necessarily from an identity of other and an understanding of their otherness and seen and received as such.

In drawing from feminist theory on subjectivity and the sexually different body, I review and engage with various philosophers, specifically those who have worked with the material body, including Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, Simone de Beauvoir, and Luce Irigaray, among others.³⁴ The materialist turn, that has been building for

³² This is not unrelated to Irigaray's strategy of mimesis or "resubmitting women to stereotypical views of women in order to call the views themselves into question. Key to mimesis is that the stereotypical views are not repeated faithfully." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Luce Irigaray," <http://www.iep.utm.edu/irigaray/#SH4a>. While Linda Nochlin points out that certain cropping and cutting up of images in early modernism was a form of image-making as play, the male artists she discusses would not have the same edge of serious critique that Hannah Höch's image-making and play performed. Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 37–38.

³³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde, Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Random House, 2011). Originally published in France in 1949, it was later published in English. That version, since highly critiqued, was poorly translated and heavily abridged.

³⁴ Some, but not all, of these scholars are lesbians, which may create a greater investment and urgency in this project, a sense that an autonomous subject is lived sexually independent of males and therefore can be theorized.

several decades and to which many of these theorists have contributed, addresses issues of the body that is often left behind.³⁵ Feminist materialists specifically, through their inevitable work on sexual difference, have shaped the thinking in the field as a whole. New materialism also finds substance in art and objects (reflecting influence from Gilles Deleuze) in a way that suits my purposes and my passions and many others in the art world have unsurprisingly found resonance.³⁶ As the description of a recent exhibition, called “The Poetics of the Material,” states, “Contemporary art . . . can be regarded as being aligned with a movement called ‘new materialism’ which attempts to give expression to the interpenetration of material and immaterial aspects of reality. The latter reveal themselves, for instance, in the meaning of language or in the influence of cultural narratives on the perception of reality. They thus function—comparable to language—as a vehicle of the discursive constitution of reality.”³⁷

New materialism’s work with the immanent body is beneficial in any articulation of female otherness. Yet it also reifies the very impulse it interrogates; women have been described, in almost every philosophy and theory, whether promoting or critiquing the view, as intimately

³⁵ The Oxford Bibliographies defines this movement (which I sometimes refer to only as materialism) this way: “New materialism is an interdisciplinary, theoretical, and politically committed field of inquiry, emerging roughly at the millennium as part of what may be termed the post-constructionist, ontological, or material turn. . . . new materialism has emerged mainly from the front lines of feminism, philosophy, science studies, and cultural theory, yet it cuts across and is cross-fertilized by both the human and natural sciences. The revival of materialist ontologies has been animated by a productive friction with the linguistic turn and social constructionist frameworks in the critical interrogation of their limitations engendered by the prominence given to language, culture, and representation, which has come at the expense of exploring material and somatic realities beyond their ideological articulations and discursive inscriptions.”

³⁶ Elizabeth Grosz discusses ways in which the work of Deleuze and his collaborator Felix Guattari drew heavily from feminist scholarship and activism, in some ways *using* women’s theories of otherness to form concepts that universalized and depoliticized women’s own work on their condition, while also claiming the theory for themselves and having it attributed to them. When feminists and materialists cite Deleuze, one should note there is a complicated and contested lineage. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 161–168.

³⁷ Leopold Museum, “‘The Poetics of the Material’—A Celebration of Art and Artists” (n.d.). <https://www.leopoldmuseum.org/en/press/News/751>.

associated with the body, the immanent, and the natural. I too run the risk in talking of the woman and the body and the woman and the doll of playing into categories that are already enmeshed and failing to highlight the specificity of the enmeshment; the core of this dissertation is the entwined nature of these three things but my goal is also to make this entwinement visible and productive.

To make the invisible visible is crucial to an examination of woman. Motherhood, for example, is a mass of constructed notions so fundamentally entwined with womanhood in terms of both nature and biology and culture. Many have written about how the mother's body is the primordial ooze of consciousness and formation of the self. Julia Kristeva describes the mother's body as the *chora* and the semiotic; it exists as a dimension before a distinction can develop between self and other (one's body versus one's mother's), before the symbolic, before words, before ordering and category—a space of where pure sensation is the only thing that makes meaning.³⁸ In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich similarly says “that for most of us a woman provided continuity and stability—but also the rejections and refusals—of our early lives; it is with a woman's hands, eyes, body, and voice that we associate our primal sensations, our earliest social experience;” we know the sensation of our own body through our mother's body.³⁹ Yet,

³⁸ The “French feminists” commonly refers to Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous, although in Elizabeth Grosz's 1989 book, *Sexual Subversions*, she includes Michele L. Doeuff, who currently is less well known. All this can change, as Grosz herself is mentioned with more and more frequency.

³⁹ The *chora* is discussed in: Deborah Caslav Covino. *Amending the Abject Body: Aesthetic Makeovers in Medicine and Culture*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 18-19. Also: Adrienne Rich. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1995), 12. Much criticism is directed at women who speak about experiences that are not shared by all. Rich makes an effort to talk about the ways that motherhood can manifest in markedly different ways, including within the system of slavery in the United States, where white sons of slave owners raped enslaved black women for both pleasure and power and as an economic act to produce more “property in the form of children born to these women.” The subjectivity, despite sharing the notion of motherhood, is incomprehensible to those of us outside this violence, and I am glad that Rich has reminded us of the way that realities can differ so radically as to undermine what we consider universal associations. Rich attempts to connect women's bodies, not necessarily mother's bodies, to this indescribable stage

these women argue that the mother is abjected by society just as it is made quasi-invisible. The way the label and language, the institution, and the tropes inform the notion from inside and out erases the potential radioactive nature of motherhood. Does society discipline anyone as it does the mother? To be a mother (and an artist and/or a scholar) is a fraught proposition and one that permeates every mother's life in some or myriad ways. For that reason, I give special attention to matricentric feminism.⁴⁰

Inevitably, feminism has had an unsettled and often contradictory relationship with the body. While the first-wave feminists, at the beginning of the twentieth century, attempted to distance themselves from discussions of the female body in their efforts to gain equal legal status and intellectual respect, often arguing sexual difference was of no consequence, they were actually steeped in the sexually different body. The struggle for suffrage, though it appeared to be about law and language, was an embodied struggle. The bodies of the female suffragists were attacked; a core discourse was that these women failed to embody femininity, i.e. failed to be women and all else that failure implied for their sexual-orientation, desirability, and fitness for motherhood). The images of suffragists in the toys and postcards of the era attacked the female

in an infant's life. One could also argue that in many cases midwives were the caregiver. Rich points to women in Industrialization having to leave newborns for 12-hour shifts when another child or an older woman might step in. Clearly, Rich is aware that her reality and her concerns are markedly different from others. Kristeva's work is one of fleshing out, so to speak, body-based psychoanalytic concepts. I do not see her as attempting to argue for a universal experience but rather a potential way in which the beginnings of the psyche relate to women's bodies and the way this affects women's status. She is speaking abstractly while drawing on her own experience to be able to make a philosophical claim.

⁴⁰ As I edit this section, I am sitting in the emergency room with one of my daughters. A few weeks ago it was the other daughter. I cannot adequately explain the way this entire project is framed by being a mother and its intimate and intense emotional and physical engagements with two other people. Notes and photocopies for my dissertation have telephone numbers for doctors' offices and other tasks. My daughter and I joked she was a dissertation orphan. I then women, have men said similar things? During the final days of their dissertation, did they suffer the guilt of abandonment and of not providing a hot meal?

body through caricature. The mouth, the most hated female body part, was a focus of these images. Some attacks were actually physical when women were beaten or violently detained. Djuna Barnes, journalist and novelist, had herself “forcibly fed” to experience and write about what her fellow suffragists were going through in prison; upon striking and refusing to take food in prison, they were deprived of the control over their own bodies when they were force fed — violently penetrated.⁴¹ Again the mouth was the locus.

Another way in which women’s biological bodies were culturally centered in early modernism was the obsession with hysteria. In studies performed (literally speaking as they quite often involved public demonstrations), Sigmund Freud and French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, constructed a *hysteria* that manifested itself in the shape and movements of the female body, radically changing the very gestures and silhouette of femaleness with the *arc of hysteria*. Whether it was argued that the condition was located in the nerves (Charcot) or in the psyche (Freud), it was routinely treated through uterine massages or stimulating a woman until she orgasmed, locating the psychological in the physical body; the discourse of hysteria located

⁴¹ While this may seem like hyperbole, Sylvia Pankhurst, the British suffragette, reported, “Then the doctors came stealing in behind. Some one seized me by the head and thrust a sheet under my chin. I felt a man's hands trying to force my mouth open. I set my teeth and tightened my lips over them with all my strength. My breath was coming so quickly that I felt as if I should suffocate. I felt his fingers trying to press my lips apart—getting inside—and I felt them and a steel gag running around my gums and feeling for gaps in my teeth. I felt I should go mad; I felt like a poor wild thing caught in a steel trap. I was tugging at my head to get it free. There were two of them holding it. There were two of them wrenching at my mouth.... Then I felt a steel instrument pressing against my gums, cutting into the flesh, forcing its way in.... Soon they were trying to force the India-rubber tube down my throat.... They got the tube down, I suppose, though I was unconscious of anything but a mad revolt of struggling, for at last I heard them say, ‘That's all’; and I vomited as the tube came up. Day after day, morning and evening, came the same struggle. Sometimes ... I felt the tube go right down into the stomach. It was a sickening sensation. Once, when the tube had seemed to hurt my chest as it was being withdrawn.... But infinitely worse than any pain was the sense of degradation, the sense that the very fight that one made against the repeated outrage was shattering one’s nerves and breaking down one’s self-control.” Rebecca Onion, “A Suffragette Describes What It Felt Like to be Force-Fed,” *Slate* (July 17, 2013).

http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_vault/2013/07/17/sylvia_pankhurst_the_suffragette_s_first_person_account_of_force_feeding.html.

psychological pathology in female corporeality.⁴² In fact, in Charlotte Perkins Gillman's story "The Yellow Wallpaper," the body gives a shape and a vehicle to the narrator's madness, which the reader experiences from inside (through sight and sensation), discovering with horror that this body the reader has also inhabited has gnawed at the bedposts and worn the walls by scooting along the molding. Hence, by the time Simone de Beauvoir was writing, it was timely and inevitable that she acknowledge the fact of the body including menstruation and embark on a deep and conscious investigation of the material body and its connection to womanhood. In fact, her section on biology is so extensive that for the original translation of *The Second Sex*, a zoologist was thought to be apt.⁴³ Perhaps it was because she radically started with herself that her own inability to think and experience separate from embodiment became the framework for the book. She wrote as a subject with a lived body.

The second wave of feminism, which like the first was hardly a unified movement but more of a global time period and *Zeitgeist* across the West—could never separate woman from body nor did it, for the most part, wish to. The sexual revolution and the struggle for women's rights (reproductive and sexual in particular) located political struggles directly in and on the body. What became the important literature of the nineteen-sixties and seventies crisscrossed the ocean, in particular between the United States and France, where different approaches to the body were taken. In American academe, i.e. in women's studies departments, the body became more abstract. Within the development of theory and politics, accompanied by research and

⁴² Louise Bourgeois reappropriates this form and reimagines it headless and male, using the body of her male assistant for the piece called *Arc of Hysteria* (1993). "Louise Bourgeois: An Unfolding Portrait" (New York: Museum of Modern Art) <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/42/681>. I discuss further the various theories of Freud and Charcot, among others, in later sections. Nathan J. Timpano, *Constructing the Viennese Modern Body: Art, Hysteria, and the Puppet* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 43-44, 50.

⁴³ Judith Thurman, "Introduction to *The Second Sex*," viii.

publications in science and psychology, the word *gender* solidified as a new notion in American feminism. It is worth noting that *gender* only works as it does linguistically in English and thus is more common in the US, the UK, and Australia.⁴⁴ The word *gender* seems to have first appeared among American feminists who wanted to insist on the fundamentally social phenomena—versus biological—of distinctions based on sex. The emphasis on the construct of gender marked a rejection of the biological determinism that Americans worried was implicit in the French feminists' discussion of *sexual difference*.⁴⁵ However, this was a misunderstanding of the concept—one that powerfully marked the discourse going forward. Also, as Joan W. Scott wrote, in her 1989 essay “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” “‘Gender’ includes but does not name women and so seems to pose no critical threat.”⁴⁶ Perhaps not coincidentally, starting in the nineties, the word *woman* began to disappear from or be diluted in department names.

While not the first to do so, one of Judith Butler's most important contributions to feminist theory was her argument that the feminine (gender) could be located in any body. Her work, which I describe in more detail later, decorporealizes the feminine and the masculine,

⁴⁴ While contemporary scholarship regarding suffrage also sometimes refers to “gender inversion” (as a primary fear evoked by the prospect of granting women the right to vote), the anti-suffragists spoke of “sex inversion,” because the language of the day did not employ the term *gender*. It is interesting to see scholars in the twenty-first century swap them in and out when the words have quite different parlance. Terms like *gender* are applied to Freud's writing, for example, with no footnotes to explain how the writer reconciles the terms. I repeatedly found contemporary phrases such as “female gender identity” used to discuss women's sense of self in the early nineteenth-hundreds. I would argue this is a mistake because it projects a postmodern sensibility onto historical subjects—we learn less about them this way.

⁴⁵ Here I find myself struggling to not put in the noun women along with American, sensing how uncomfortable is the feeling that I might use the universal word “Americans” to mean women.

⁴⁶ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1056. She continues, “‘Gender’ as a substitute for ‘women’ is also used to suggest that information about women is necessarily information about men, that one implies the study of the other.”

wrenching it free of the materiality of the body and locating it in the performative; gender is “the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.”⁴⁷ While for some this is represented a possibility of liberation, for others it did not. Some would deem an articulation of sexual difference and the material body to be a necessary tool of analysis needed for liberation; for example, the specific reproductive organs women have permit females to be used as surrogates and as sources of eggs. Those two roles, the processes by which they are performed, and the economic arrangements they imply manifest differently in marked ways from sperm donation.

Feminism is required to deal with the body. Nevertheless, it is around the body that feminism has splintered and that splintering is to the core; “To discuss feminist theories of the body is in some ways to discuss feminist theory as a whole,” writes Krystal Cleary.⁴⁸ As I discuss in my later chapter on feminisms, if one is to draw distinctions between related fields that have derived from women’s studies in the past thirty years (specifically, gender, trans, and queer studies), those distinctions might be said to lie in the way each frames the body and the interplay of biology, psychology, politics, culture, and desire. While the body hasn’t disappeared in feminist and related theories, the kind of thinking that integrates material corporeality and questions of sexual difference into a theory of subjectivity, fell out of favor within many

⁴⁷ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519. Hélène Cixous, for example, also thought that while “l’écriture féminine” was a writing that was referent to female anatomical and system processes and metaphors of such, men could produce it and the writing of any marginalized group could become, in essence, feminized. From Mary Klages, *Key Terms in Literary Theory* (London: Continuum, 2012). <http://bloomsburyliterarystudies.typepad.com/continuum-literary-studies/2012/03/lecriture-feminine.html>

⁴⁸ Krystal Cleary, “Feminist Theories of the Body” in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, ed. Nancy Naples (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2016).

powerful currents of poststructuralist academics. New materialism and related theories started in the nineties but have remained marginalized in American discourse which has grown more suspicious of the material body. Almost twenty-five years have passed since Elizabeth Grosz wrote *Volatile Bodies*, drawing on the extensive Western traditions of subjectivity. She challenges mind-body dualism and the myth that traditional theories of corporealization are universal (versus male-centric) and proposes a move, as she suggests in her title, toward a corporeal feminism that she draws out in reason and logic and at the same time sensually evokes with its materiality. Queer and gender theories have found resonance among poststructuralist feminist academics, including male-bodied scholars and others who do not identify as females or with female corporeality. Ironically, the field moved more towards the body as object, albeit a dematerialized one; the body was, for many scholars' purposes, constructed through performative discourse, very separate from the actual matter of the bodies from which the scholars themselves wrote, thought, and felt (in concert with our sense gates—a body of sense-making matter). In recent years, some have extended offers of peace-brokering in the form of theoretical gestures. In her chapter entitled “Sex and Gender,” Gillian Howie aims to create language “that might facilitate coalitions and links between women’s political struggles.”⁴⁹ However, her attempts to delineate the illusive category of woman by creating a “cluster concept” which in part defines it as a series of effects or results of power structures has been critiqued as still too essentialist since she suggests that there might be a place for *biological dimorphism* to enter into the “cluster concept” as only “one feature of the cluster with no deep

⁴⁹ Gillian Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism: A Question of Method* (Springer, 2010), 155. Note the use of the contested word *woman* here.

causal explanation for regularities as they might appear.”⁵⁰ While her efforts might be similar to Toril Moi’s, Howie’s almost incomprehensible and non-committal language undermines the efforts to render language usable.

Interestingly, there is no such debate happening around the words *man* and *male*. In fact, the attention I feel obliged to devote within this dissertation to words I use for myself and people I understand to share a category with me is something no man, no male, is asked to do. It is exhausting and painful at times. The very contestation of the word *woman* seems to reify the notion of sexual difference. Part of being a woman is to write from a place of doubt about what a woman is. Might engaging in this arduous and fraught process move women farther from an autonomous subjectivity or does it move us closer? I would argue that this very dilemma actually defines a part of who we are as subjects—again this is in essence the notion of sexual difference.⁵¹ As Italian-Australian neo materialist Rosi Braidotti says, the politics of location refers to a way of making sense of diversity among women within the category of sexual difference understood as the binary opposite of the phallogocentric subject. “This is neither an essentialist statement, nor one of semiotic constructivism. It is rather the materialist acknowledgement of a historical location: a starting position of asymmetrical power differentials. This location is not only geopolitical, but also genealogical and time-bound.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Howie, 156.

⁵¹ Moi says with regard to the sexual difference that is the background to the book *The Second Sex*, “Beauvoir here realizes that she is writing in a situation where, unlike male writers, she is forced to define herself as a sexed being; where she has no choice but to fill the empty shifter ‘I’ with her sexual difference.” Toril Moi, “‘I am a Woman’: The Body as Background in *The Second Sex*,” *Paroles gelées* 17, no. 2: 2. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6h90406>.

⁵² Braidotti in Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Library, 2012), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001/1:5.4/--new-materialism-interviews-cartographies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

I could not simply opt out of this discussion. I am not really allowed to nor do I want to, as I discuss in the foreword. I am in some ways writing and becoming myself into a subject by engaging in this paradox and I am also contributing to the conceptualization of woman. In her article, “The Practice of Feminist Theory,” Elizabeth Grosz writes:

Without concepts we can think, but we cannot think conceptually, we cannot understand abstractly, we cannot understand the hypothetical, the possible, the virtual, the counterfactual, the alternative, or what is other than what is. We can think without concepts, but largely perceptually or affectively: we can perceive and feel, and this may perform some of the work of concepts, which perceive and feel the new or what does not yet exist or exist fully as it is.⁵³

As seen above, Rosi Braidotti argues for a return to difference feminism; it roots women’s experiences, activism, and creative work in their status as the other, in “that margin of non-belonging.”⁵⁴ Instead, gender theory’s dismantling of collective subjectivity (and queer theory’s reliance on the notion of performance as transformation) is sometimes seen to have undermined the type of civil rights work feminism originally sought to do.⁵⁵ With regard to the contestations that make the term *woman* so fraught, Rosi Braidotti reminds us, “I would be very careful in thinking that deconstructing is in itself subversive and dangerous, because that

⁵³ Elizabeth Grosz defends the need for theory but acknowledges the weariness and frustration: “These days it has become increasingly common for academics, especially feminist academics, to say, ‘I want to return to my original field of research,’ ... I no longer want to be distracted by those abstract, irresolvable, aporetic concepts, ideas, frameworks that once took me away from the real things in the world that fascinated me.” Elizabeth Grosz, “The Practice of Feminist Theory,” *Differences* 21, no. 1 (2010): 95. doi: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.bu.edu/10.1215/10407391-2009-019>.

⁵⁴ Rosi Braidotti with Judith Butler, “Feminism by Any Other Name,” *Differences* 6, nos. 2 and 3 (1994): 27–61, <https://bagelabyss.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/butler-and-braidotti-interview-feminism-by-any-other-name1.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Various scholars comment on this, including Chris Woods, Clare Hemmings and Felicity Grace, and Martha Nussbaum comment on this [as cited in Angelia Wilson “Between Post-Menopause and Post-Modern,” in *Intersections Between Feminist and Queer Theory*, edited by Diane Richardson, Janice McLaughlin, and Mark E. Casey. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006):156, 167, 169–171]. Indeed, many of the goals of the second wave, which addressed material concerns in women’s lives, are articulated as priorities in queer and gender theories. Focusing interest and resources on women’s control over reproduction, for example, is often seen as problematic due to its potential connectedness to a theory of sexual difference.

destabilizing force is what advanced capitalism does, mostly because advanced capitalism doesn't give a damn about anything."⁵⁶ Feminist and postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak, whom I discuss in a later section, is also invested in real change for women.⁵⁷ She suggests that creative makers of literary work and performance (and I would add the visual arts) can playfully use a "concept like 'gender as performance' along with often contradictory ideas ... suggesting that if a woman constructs a certain identity—say, taking a personal and nurturing stance in an intellectual debate—then that 'performance' could for strategic reasons momentarily stand in for her identity."⁵⁸ Non-belonging is at once the oppression that has limited women and the very position from which women create. In the process of articulating their marginalization, women have made powerful work.

Perhaps in this sense, art's imaginatively constructivist (as well as deconstructivist) contribution to the creation of a poetic category of woman—not a theoretical one—can actually serve feminists. Contradiction and categorical blur are problems for theory but are something quite expected in a "poetics," with its ambiguity, unconsciousness, phenomenology, contradiction, incoherence, and layered knowings. Poetics is the domain of imaginative knowing which is no lesser knowing.⁵⁹ Theorist Leslie Feinberg, who identified and has been claimed

⁵⁶ Pascal Lafontaine, "Deleuze, Feminism, and the New European Union: An Interview with Rosi Braidotti," *Transit* 4 (2006), <http://transit.berkeley.edu/2008/lafountain/>.

⁵⁷ Spivak is known for her pioneering theories of the subaltern. Here I am using her theories to address gender. In reality the importance of her work has been, in part, to challenge essentialism when it erases voices that have been marginalized, even marginalized by the marginalized. Nevertheless, as a feminist she has suggested strategic essentialism as a response to the categorical crisis of woman for feminism and the way this prevents actions on behalf of a civil rights.

⁵⁸ John Clifford, "Toward a Productive Crisis: A Response to Gayatri Spivak," *Journal of Advanced Composition* (1991): 191–196.

⁵⁹ On the topic of "poetics," I am using as a model Gaston Bachelard's poetics of the house: "First of all, as is proper in a study of images of intimacy, we shall pose the problem of the poetics of the house. The questions abound: how can secret rooms, rooms that have disappeared, become abodes for an unforgettable past? Where and how does

differently at various times as a butch, stone butch, lesbian, and transgender, stated, “Gender is the poetry each of us makes out of the language we are taught.”⁶⁰ To me this is an invitation to constructivism which might serve better than deconstructionism. In the arts the two processes might be more similar than they are different. Gender theory, for example, has been applied to performance and the arts, but there is little scholarship that takes the fabricated and performed material body—a puppet or a doll-- as its starting point in an effort to assert or analyze a material version of what the French feminists, whom I discuss in later sections, called “l’écriture feminine” or women’s writing.⁶¹ This includes the women who succeeded in integrating into the

repose find especially conducive situations? How is it that, at times, a provisional refuge or an occasional shelter is endowed in our intimate day-dreaming with virtues that have no objective foundation? With the house image we are in possession of a veritable principle of psychological integration. Descriptive psychology, depth psychology, psychoanalysis and phenomenology could constitute, with the house, the corpus of doctrines that I have designated by the name of topo-analysis. On whatever theoretical horizon we examine it, the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being. The house, quite obviously, is a privileged entity for a phenomenological study of the intimate values of inside space, provided, of course, that we take it in both its unity and its complexity, and endeavor to integrate all the special values in one fundamental value. For the house furnishes us dispersed images and a body of images at the same time. In both cases, I shall prove that imagination augments the values of reality. A sort of attraction for images concentrates them about the house. Transcending our memories of all the houses in which we have found shelter, above and beyond all the houses we have dreamed we lived in, can we isolate an intimate, concrete essence that would be a justification of the uncommon value of all of our images of protected intimacy? This, then, is the main problem.” Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 36. Interestingly, “poetics” were developed and have evolved from Aristotle’s theory. He had this to say, in *Poetics*, regarding the poetics of women, or perhaps more correctly, women in poetics: “Concerning ‘character’ there are four points to aim at. The first and most important is that the character should be good. The play will show character if, as we said above, either the dialogue or the actions reveal some choice; and the character will be good, if the choice is good. But this is relative to each class of people. Even a woman is ‘good’ and so is a slave, although it may be said that a woman is an inferior thing and a slave beneath consideration. The second point is that the characters should be appropriate. A character may be manly, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be manly or clever.” He also objected to Euripides attributing to a woman knowledge of science and philosophy, which to Aristotle was inappropriate for a woman. Aristotle. *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 23. Translated by W.H. Fyfe. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932).

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg.0086.034:1454a#note11>

⁶⁰ Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 10.

⁶¹ In the book *The Taoist Body*, Kristofer Schipper examines how puppets in China reflect deep cultural beliefs and understandings of the universe, including numerology, which I would argue points to the physical realm, which points to embodied experiences. Kristofer Marinus Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Senses/associations/connections do not translate across languages. The limits and the shaping force of language (as a trap one cannot escape) was a focus of the French feminists as well.

misogynist Italian futurists; Hannah Höch and the women of Dada, often described as the *girlfriends* or, worse, paramours; or Carolee Schneeman, who captured the quality of being female on text for the *Interior Scroll*.⁶² The personal is political.

Feminist theory is strongest when it contains the quality of storytelling that is both healing, agential, and utopian; much of feminist epistemology employs or harnesses the power of storytelling. Feminist epistemology, which this dissertation relies on, allows a bleeding-through between the personal, the everyday, and the academic. It acknowledges the defiance of the odds that are stacked against women and mothers in completing a dissertation because the sink is full and everyone is out of clean underwear. It provides concrete “tools,” in the form of structures and permissions, that allow for participation and for mattering and for the right to tell stories that don’t follow linear narrative and don’t have a traditional plot structure or a protagonist. They are self-justifying. Within feminist epistemology, I include art and practice-based research that has come from the breakdown of paradigms about knowledge. This is certainly the case with women’s pioneering efforts in performance art that radically revolutionized the art world. Performance and different ways of defining performance, as I have alluded to, broaden the net of women’s participation and re-evaluation. While performance is interesting to me, the objects with which women perform are what really compel me. In his book *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance*, John Bell describes performing objects as “the stuff, the junk, puppets, masks, detritus, machines, bones, and molded plastic things that people use to tell stories or represent ideas.”⁶³ The specific materiality of the items

⁶² Carolee Schneemann, “Interior Scroll, 1975,” Tate Gallery. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/schneemann-interior-scroll-p13282>.

⁶³ John Bell, *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 2.

and their shape, material qualities, and very objectness allow for the transport of story and emotion. In her work on materialism and thing power, Jane Bennet discusses the active presence of things and the way matter in the world speaks. In the talk, “Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter,” Bennet says, “We may not think of things in a certain way, but we *do* experience them that way.”⁶⁴ While Bennet specifically avoids approaching puppets and dolls, and Bell casts a broad net that allows for a range of objects to extend story between us, I focus here on the truly anthropomorphic objects with overt pareidolia. In touching humanness with their form and presence, they bring us into an affective relationship with them. Sometimes they are too human; the obsession with the “uncanny” of 1900 has resurfaced in the “uncanny valley” of 2000.

The doll (as well as the puppet) has seen a renaissance of symbiotic making and performing and of scholarly interest, as I will discuss in subsequent sections. As with many examples of material culture, the doll has a taken-for-granted nature; associated with women and children, it has suffered from their marginalization in scholarship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Much of the known early literature on dolls consisted of the writings of male scholars on the poetics and the pragmatics of the doll in culture. In recent years, however, feminist scholars have begun to analyze dolls as material, affective, and narrative artifacts that act on and embody cultural values in diverse ways; so while dolls have been critiqued as obvious instruments of a rigid pedagogy of gender, they have also been shown to be used in ways that are unexpectedly agentic (as well as problematic but with more complexity and nuance).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Jane Bennet, “Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter,” YouTube, 1:14:45, posted by The New School, September 27, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q607Ni23QjA>.

⁶⁵ For a critique of Barbie and examples of children’s internalization of the critiques in popular culture, see Tara L. Kuther and Erin McDonald, “Early Adolescents’ Experiences with, and Views of, ‘Barbie,’” *Adolescence* 39, no. 153 (2004): 39–51. However, chapters published in the book *Dolls Studies: The Many Meanings of Girls’ Toys and*

I am interested in exploring the materiality of dolls and puppets, from issues of mechanisms of manipulation to human likeness and from kinesthetic empathy to scale. In the section on embodiment, I use an investigation of the physical form of the doll and the process of making to explore the concept of corporeality and materialization. The corporeality of dolls can generate a kinesthetic empathy in which we sense their mass and matter and, with any level of skillful and breath-based manipulation, their liveliness (and perhaps ours through them).⁶⁶ What dolls and puppets can tell us about what it is to live in a sexed and gendered body? While discourse, philosophy, and theory often draw *distinctions* and create senses of *true or false*, poetics do not; a doll does not argue for its own truth in reference to the female; it simply references the female.⁶⁷ They are the semiotics that deceive us into thinking they have been contained in the symbolic.⁶⁸

I investigate the intrinsic power of the doll and puppet as narrative devices in my own work and that of specific artists whose work has preceded mine and with whom I find resonance. I investigate their lives, their art objects, and elements of their performances that can inform my

Play, for example, take on such diverse topics as the way Bratz dolls function in the culture of diasporic Iranian girls in Australia, and how Jewish culture is presented for an outsider's gaze through a Jewish American girl doll. Miriam Forman-Brunell and Jennifer Dawn Whitney, *Dolls Studies: The Many Meanings of Girls' Toys and Play* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2015).

⁶⁶ Brandon W. Shaw. "Sitting-there: Embodied perception, kinesthetic empathy, and reading pain in dance spectatorship" (2012).
<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations/AAI3546050>

⁶⁷ There is a great deal to unpack in terms of the way that gestures and intentions of irony, sincerity, and mimesis might work here and I will look at this more in later sections. Complicating this, however, is the intention versus the suggestion. In fact, as we routinely say things like "that quote was taken out of context" (and therefore its meaning is radically changed), images and objects are routinely taken out of context. In fact, apart from being located in a museum under careful curatorial practice, an object will experience a lifetime of contexts and each will change parts of its meaning. This may lend us some idea about how meaning functions in relation to the category woman, at times described by materialists and others as a sort of web or dynamic system.

⁶⁸ Here I am using Julia Kristeva's sense of the *semiotic* as preverbal and presymbolic. This is in contrast to symbolic in her usage.

own, and also help place it historically along with other artists working inter-categorically in doll-centered performance throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

II. Literatures and Methodologies

In addition to exploring women's relationship to dolls and the doll-like, this dissertation is an argument for arts-based research, for feminist epistemology, and for understanding the theoretical through the material.⁶⁹ Creating the sections and the order in this text has been challenging. My process and goals do not lend themselves to hierarchy, clean category, or directionality (i.e., "I explain x to analyze y."). It is not lost on me that the word *text* itself is closely related to the weaving of cloth. The word is derived from Latin *textus*, literally "thing woven," from the past participle of "to weave, to join, fit together, braid, interweave, construct, fabricate, build... to weave, to fabricate, to make; make wicker or wattle framework."⁷⁰ *Text* also speaks to texture. Calling on the material metaphor of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I may insist that this work is more like felt and less like weaving; the former they describe as smoother because unlike woven *fabric*, which is a closed and striated space defined by the warp and woof, *felt* is an entanglement of fibers, an infinite and open textile, unlimited in every direction.⁷¹ This dissertation is organized, or perhaps knotted, around my interests and my meaningful interaction with the content. In this section, I take on the task of reviewing the literature of important themes and frameworks, and the methodologies with which I engage. Through laying them out, without the pretense of indifference, I attempt to give them a conscious form. Unlike what I imagine to be the case with scientific methodologies, humanities methods can be political and contested, ambiguous and contradictory, rapidly evolving, and dependent on the unspeakable for their

⁶⁹ In fact, the latter is why I find new materialism to offer such compelling questions about the place of embodied humans in a material world.

⁷⁰ Online Etymology Dictionary. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/text>.

⁷¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari use the metaphor of felt, something I work extensively with, which I describe in the section on material and making. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 475–476.

spoken discourse. Hence, this is not merely a formality and preparation for the heart of my dissertation, some neutral discussion of sample size and the calculation of the mean, but rather a part of what I am trying to think through with this work. Dolls and puppets (my own creative practice) are just as much methodologies for looking methodologically at the theoretical frameworks of feminism, for example.

My investigation centers generally on twentieth-century Western culture. I look at the construction of modernism as my temporal and cultural reference and examine why early modernism is of significant interest now (the untimely and anti-chronological act of scholarly and artistic longing for a past period). I examine the production and reception of different forms of art—specifically those that relate to dolls and puppets. I explore traits of modernism that constructed notions of girl and womanhood and the developments that affected girls and women's lives. I explore some of the important concepts developing in rapidly changing modernist Western societies regarding women and girls, concepts that in part informed the notions of what women were, how their bodies related to their subjectivity, and notions of the feminine. I explore the ways feminist scholars have theorized the relationship women have with the body and representations in material making and performance.

1. Modernism (As Seen Through Post Modern Desire)

It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place.

—Fredric Jameson⁷²

I would like to once again push off of an idea from Elizabeth Grosz that proposes the challenge of doing feminist theory linearly. In “The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory,” Grosz says:

One of the central questions of contemporary feminist theory ... should be about what is untimely, what is out of its time. Something is untimely, out of its own time, either through its being anachronistic, which is another way of saying that it is not yet used up in its pastness, it still has something to offer that remains untapped, its virtuality remains alluring and filled with potential for the present and future (this is precisely what a good deal of feminist theory has directed itself to: re-reading the past for what is elided, repressed, unutilized, or unconscious in it).⁷³

I am fascinated by the developments in art of the past 150 years and specifically those of early modernism, with its transgressive theatricality, materiality, embodiment, artifice. It has, in the words of Grosz, “not yet used up in its pastness, it still has something to offer that remains untapped, its virtuality remains alluring and filled with potential for the present and future.” I, like many others, am enchanted by the images that have flooded the Internet of the costumes and dance, puppets and dolls, grandiose sets, and tiny theaters of those years. It seems almost every one of the males famous in that time (Giorgio de Chirico, Pablo Picasso, Fernand Leger, Marc

⁷² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), ix.

⁷³ Elizabeth Grosz, “The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory,” *NORA—Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 18, no. 1 (2010): 48–51.

Chagall, and Joan Miró) collaborated with theatrical productions. We see that movements were not confined to painting and sculpture as they were in high modernism but rather, like the Bauhaus and the futurists, worked as aesthetic totalities. Hal Foster turns his attention to the proliferation of performing with material objects at the beginning of the last century that sprang from divergent impulses in the crossroads of energies that comprised early modernism:

Such figures as marionettes and automata came to represent near-opposite values: on the one hand, principles of rationality and causality championed by the Enlightenment and, on the other, experiences of the irrational and the marvels explored by the Romantics such as Hoffman, these divergent associations persisted in the modernist period. In Futurism, Constructivism, and the Bauhaus, these figures often appear sleek, almost perfect, so many avatars of a new (super) human to come; while in Dada, Surrealism, and Neue Sachlichkeit, they are usually broken and fragmentary, as if thrown together out of discordant parts, in a bitter riposte to the technological ideals promoted by the former movements. In this case even when produced from scratch, dolls, puppets, and the like sometimes appear as emblems of a private childhood or relics of a collective past, in which guises they can carry a sense of aura or again of uncanniness.⁷⁴

This burst of interdisciplinarity and categorical blur was the material of the avant-garde—something that by mid-century ceased to exist.⁷⁵ There is an absolute delight when we witness the theatrical mischief of Lavinia Schulz and her partner Walter Holdt in the black and white photos. We root for a transgressive modernism and its bold (and often earnest) masquerade across the intellectualizing and conceptualizing mechanizations of abstraction. Is it the

⁷⁴ Foster does focus on women makers and performers, however, his is one of the examples in which desire may override what research bears out. Hal Foster, “Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties: Anthropomorphic Avatars in Dada and the Bauhaus,” in *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*, edited by Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsh. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), 22-23.

⁷⁵ Henry Sayres, also citing Craig Owens, says that at a time when there appeared to be no avant-garde, when the term seemed not applicable to the times of extreme upheaval throughout the arts, a “new feminist avant-garde” happened in performance, in particular. The notion of the avant-garde has held a powerful, nostalgic appeal since high modernism. While unrecognizable as such to many critics, it was the rise of women, women’s art, and feminist art practices that became this often hiding in plain sight. Part of the revolutionary quality of this work is that it didn’t happen within the art world structures of galleries and museums. Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 88.

naughtiness and playful immunity to the stiff authoritarianism that was asserting itself not only throughout the twentieth century in politics and the family but also in the figures of critics like Rosenberg and Greenberg? Is it the sex and the bodiliness? Is it the feeling of resonance with play in the shadow of totalitarianism? The turn toward the doll and the puppet happened simultaneously with the fading of religion and tradition, the rise of phenomenology and existentialism, the development of psychology and psychoanalysis; are these the meaning-makers when we find our humanity abstracted? And why their return in poststructuralist times?

I became *specifically* drawn to the era when I discovered the ways the women participated in *untimely ways* and *against the grain* of the grand narratives of abstraction and conceptualization.⁷⁶ Hal Foster, in his paper, “Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties: Anthropomorphic Avatars in Dada and the Bauhaus,” argues that what could be considered their untimeliness, is timely for our moment. “All of these concerns—the performative dimension of art, the doll and the puppet as primordial examples of representation, the role of sexual difference in image-making.... all have bearing on contemporary art, which might underlie the renewed interest in such artists as Tauber, Hennings, and Höch in recent years.”⁷⁷ For women, like me, who were raised at a time when H.W. Janson’s ubiquitous art history textbook did not include a single female artist, the discovery of women artists, like Alexandra Exter, is tinged with vengeance of all that had been forgotten and erased.⁷⁸ Like others, her accomplishments

⁷⁶ These intellectual projects, such as abstraction, had women participants, and one could argue for ways in which those movements were changed by female participation. For example, Ruth Asawa or Eva Hesse’s contributions to abstraction could be seen as resulting from a female-embodied experience. Nevertheless, I am most interested in women who not only transformed but also subverted by creating rivulets that flowed elsewhere.

⁷⁷ Foster, 25.

⁷⁸ Exter is also known as Ekster. There is a long list of accomplished women, including Sonia Delaunay, Sophie Tauber, Emmy Hennings, Lotte Pritzel, and Marie Vassilieff, as well as Kari Horna and Claude Cahun, who have only recently come to be known, some of whom I explore later. For a discussion on Janson’s exclusion of females in

make her anonymity particularly incomprehensible and defy notions of women's exile from the arts. Based in Kiev (but well-traveled), Exter was central to a vibrant avant-garde arts community. Her passion for and curiosity about a vast array of movements as well as the folk arts (pysanky and embroidery) of Ukraine allowed her to develop a broad and innovative style. In her chapter on Exter, Georgii Kovalenko writes:

It was in Kiev also that Exter cultivated an abiding interest in Ukrainian folk culture, which she studied, promoted, and exhibited, often incorporating indigenous iconographic references into her own studio work. Between 1918 and 1930, in the wake of war and insurrection, Kiev became a city of violence and devastation. Stranded in Kiev and thus isolated from Europe, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, Exter worked harder than ever before, and, despite the chaos and confusion of the ever-shifting conditions produced by revolution and counterrevolution, Exter helped maintain Kiev as a major center for artistic experiment. Her studio there brought together not only artists and writers, but also theater directors and choreographers such as Les Kurbas, Konstantin Mardzhanov, and Bronislava Nijinska. Above all, Exter nurtured an entire generation of aspiring painters who came to her for lessons and advice.⁷⁹

One of the "Amazons" of Russian art, she was an accomplished oil painter who engaged with many styles (joining no single movement).⁸⁰ In addition to painting, Exter created sets and costumes for theater and film (Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and the science fiction film *Aelita*). She

his textbook, see Paul E. Bolin, "Discussions and Depictions of Women in H. W. Janson's *History of Art*, Fourth Edition," *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* 15 (1996): 146–159.
<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1204&context=jstae>

⁷⁹ Georgii Kovalenko, "Alexandra Exter," in John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt, eds., *Amazons of the Avant-Garde: Alexandra Exter...[et al.]* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2000).

⁸⁰ Among many others, Exter was friends and colleagues with a wide range of important figures: Futurist Giacomo Balla, Fauvist Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Fernand Léger, Guillaume Apollinaire, Alexander Vesnin, Liubov Popova, Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Oscar Wilde, and Gertrude Stein. <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/exter-alexandra>. Women were not just represented in art movement after the Revolution, they dominated at times. This was the case with the Constructivists; in their inaugural show there were more female than male artists participating. This continued during social realism. Encouraging women's equal participation was part of the Marxist rejection of the exploitation of women under capitalism. Likewise, rejecting objectification and commodification, women's naked bodies were not considered an acceptable subject for art. See Christina Kiaer, "The Short Life of the Equal Woman," Tate Galleries, <http://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-15-spring-2009/short-life-equal-women>.

designed clothing to be worn. Most interesting to me, however, was her involvement in miniature theaters. In an essay entitled, "The Marionettes of Alexandra Exter," John E. Bowlit writes,

Just as Exter heralded a revolution in stage design in 1916, so in the same year the tradition of the professional puppet-theatre was suddenly re-established in Russia-with the debut of the great puppeteer, Nina Simonovich-Efimova, at an evening of the Moscow Association of Artists. Simonovich-Efimova, like Exter and Nechama Szmuszkowicz had started her career as a painter and had turned to the miniature theatre as a medium of movement, for, as she repeated many times, "(the puppets') charm lies in movement, the meaning of their existence lies in play ... the theatre of Petrushka is the theatre of action." It was this "art of play" which attracted many modern Russian painters, not least Exter and Popova, and concepts such as reasoned intuition and controlled fantasy were central to both the artistic and the literary avant-gardes in Russia.... Both Simonovich-Efimova and Exter were attracted by this.⁸¹

Exter was commissioned to produce the series of 40 of constructivist marionettes (along with the help of artist Nechama Szmuszkowicz, about whom very little is known) in 1927.⁸² That these compelling objects were more sought after than her accomplished oil paintings, even by us now, should tell us something about the era. Bowlit is adamant that, despite colleagues' interest in children's theater, these were not for children. Rather they were corporeal explorations of the same level of artistic and intellectual visual research, such as analytic cubism, that Exter was doing in her paintings and stage designs. An intense quest for artistic knowledge, which defined Exter's psychology permeated these figures making them extensions of herself visible "in their

⁸¹ John E. Bowlit, "The Marionettes of Alexandra Exter," *Russian History* 8, no. 1/2 (1981): 222, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24652395>.

⁸² Her puppets met with unquestionable success and were exhibited across Europe in shows with other constructivists interested in toys, such as Uruguayan artist Joaquim Torres Garcia. Louis Lozowick published an article in 1928 on her marionettes. Louis Lozowick, "Alexandra Exter's Marionettes," *Theatre Arts Monthly* 12, no. 7 (1928): 515-517, reprinted in *Alexandra Exter: Marionettes Created 1926* (exhibition catalogue) (New York: Leonard Hutton Galleries, 1974), 26-29.

expressive gestures ... in their angularity which has already become a plastic experience, in their incomparable movements."⁸³

There is no evidence of Exter performing, and my hunch is that she did not except as a tool in the development of the objects. Her skills were in conceptualization and construction. Also, it seems that for Exter's marionette's "performance" would have been different than what expected at conventional puppet shows. Bowlt sees them as impractical for that use, their elaborate details a hindrance. "Exter intended them to be used as the *dramatis personae* of a film proposed (but not realized) by Peter Gad in Paris."⁸⁴

It is likely that these marionettes, similar to the maquettes she made, were three-dimensional and kinetic sculptural and design work. This blurr is evident in a letter Exter writes: "I've finished the scale model for Salome...I've built it as if for an exhibition, with a great freedom. In my opinion it should be viewed as a plastic arrangement of colored masses."⁸⁵ This is quite a different gesture than making objects to essentially embody, but I will explore that more later in this dissertation.

While Exter had the means to engage with the avant-garde, many women did not. As I explore in later sections, their participation was not only challenged by their being women, but the participation they achieved was marginalized by its association with children and the home; different forms of erasure, invisibility, and dismissal affected women who made doll-like objects

⁸³ Bowlt, "The Marionettes of Alexandra Exter," 225.

⁸⁴ Bowlt, "The Marionettes of Alexandra Exter," 222. An article on The National Gallery of Australia's website states that the marionettes were made to take the place of actors in a film directed by the Danish filmmaker Urban Gad (1879-1947) but mentions another instance in which more than forty marionettes are used in a carnivalesque play. Her work was widely exhibited in Europe as well as the United States. See "Alexandra Exter," National Gallery of Australia, <https://nga.gov.au/International/Catalogue/Detail.cfm?IRN=103189>.

⁸⁵ Jean Chauvelin, *Alexandra Exter: Monographie*. (Chevilly-Larue, France: Max Milo Editions, 2003), 106.

that were connected to girls and women.⁸⁶ Leading up to this particular time period, the positions deemed appropriate for women were those that helped children or other women. These endeavors were of diminished significance.

In focusing on modernism, I do not attempt to differentiate systematically between Europe and the United States or among European countries, not that there are no contrasts to be drawn, but the geographic contrasts are not as marked as one might expect, especially between urban centers. I am allowing there to be slippage between nations and across the Atlantic Ocean, focusing on what I see as areas of cultural crystallization (as there are in any cultural moment) where forces come together in urban, artistic, and intellectual centers where communication, transportation, and media are readily available. There was a global intellectual and artistic culture being created and a commercial one as well. This was facilitated by trains and telegraphs, cheap printing and steam liners, film and photography, world fairs—and war.⁸⁷ Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and Zurich were centers of this type of activity and easily reachable by train. Reading about artist Alexandra Exter's international acquaintances, it becomes evident that high culture traveled. Taking an informal linguistic forensic approach, the exchange of languages during that

⁸⁶ It is also noteworthy that these types of works, even for male artists, tended not to be remembered either. Klee's puppets, that he made for his son, have only recently gained the visibility his paintings have had. I would suggest this is partly due to lack of interest. It is true that the rise of the critic coincided with an American dominance, one that privileged the painting and sculpture and a certain masculinity. Douglas Rosenberg has presented on this in his Foundations of Contemporary Art course at University of Wisconsin–Madison.

⁸⁷ The cultural exchange created by war cannot be overestimated. Industry was another source of exchange, with aspects of it in Europe being referred to as Americanism. Borders were shifting. Any sense of nationhood (that could change and cut arbitrarily through bonds of ethnicity and religion) was likely felt as an abstraction, if at all, by many; it was perhaps no more real than a sense of European-ness. My great grandparents (six of eight) immigrated to the United States at the turn of the last century. This level of transatlantic cultural movement, although often by those who were disenfranchised economically and culturally from an avant-garde, nevertheless had an impact. My ancestors, especially those from Eastern Europe, had a complicated sense of belonging in terms of a specific European nation state. My mother says that her grandmother spoke about Franz Ferdinand; somehow she knew him to be the ruler of her Carpatho-Rusyn homeland in the region of southeastern Poland.

time seems to be strong evidence of cultural exchange. The plethora of words brought into English from French in the early twentieth century reveals an American interest in French lifestyle, including beauty and self-care (lingerie, décolleté, douche, boudoir, leisure, toilet, negligee, brassiere, chaise, lounge, and cigarette).⁸⁸ Many of these could be seen as directly affecting notions of gender and sexed bodies. In fact, in later sections I talk about a specific cultural performance young women shared across the West of private, posed photos with dolls—a genre tied to the intimate vocabulary listed above.

We also see use of French words for artistic innovation as well as materials and processes (avant-garde, surreal, collage, montage, crayon, assemblage, and frottage). Low-culture examples of visual and material culture also crossed continents and the ocean, be it kitsch or folk.⁸⁹ The international doll trade, in all actuality a trade *war*, was booming, demonstrating that

⁸⁸ The many words for film and cinema likewise show a looking towards innovation. At the same time there are doubtlessly numerous words that are being imported from English into French and other languages from but the US and England. It is beyond the scope of this work to do an extensive etymological investigation, although that would be a fascinating approach to the cultural exchange happening. With English spoken by powerful nations on both sides of the Atlantic, it is also not as simple as saying that words started in the US or came directly from France to the United States rather than being acquired first in England and perhaps even anglicized there. To pinpoint all of this linguistic detail is beyond this paper's aim; the goal is to show a robust cultural exchange of material goods and their accompanying practices in the public as well as the private life and to point towards the embodied practices associated with them. For example, the precursors to modern bras began to appear in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The magazine *Vogue* first used the term *brassiere* in 1907. We see similar trends in the fine arts and the embedded intellectualism of those movements sweeping across Europe and crossing to the US, impacting Americans deeply. See "'Armory Show' That Shocked America in 1913, Celebrates 100." NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2013/02/17/172002686/armory-show-that-shocked-america-in-1913-celebrates-100>.

⁸⁹ I would argue that the domains, concretized by the academic disciplines, of visual culture and material culture create a rupture in the way we experience objects and images. I imagine that new materialism would find this specifically problematic in that it de-materializes objects and suggests we can experience them ocular-ly without embodied reactions and echoes of corporeal metaphors and responses. A doll very much problematizes this division. For a Marxist materialist view of cultural products (high art, kitsch and authentic folk products) one should read the 1939 essay "On the Avant-garde and Kitsch" by Clement Greenberg, in which he defines these in contrasts to how they function in a workers' life and thereby within Capitalism as a whole (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Avant-Garde-and-Kitsch>). Also, see Walter Benjamin for a discussion on toys; he was an enormous aficionado and collector (specifically Russian folk toys), writing on them in essays such as "The Cultural History of Toys," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Volume 2, 1927–1934, Rodney Livingstone et al., trans, Michael W. Jennings, eds. Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 113–121.

tastes were not confined to nations and that cultural objects could travel the globe quickly. Bryan Ganaway, in *Toys, Consumption, and Middle-Class Childhood in Imperial Germany*, reports on the feeling in the early twentieth century, when Käthe Kruse, who I discuss in later sections, was one of the most sought-after doll manufacturers. Despite some setbacks, the global German doll industry would continue to maintain “its dominant position (based on constant innovation) and assured there would be no land in the world where German dolls could not be bought.”⁹⁰ Dolls truly were global vectors of culture, as I explore in subsequent sections.

⁹⁰ See my further discussions in a later section on Käthe Kruse and other European doll makers exports to American markets and Bryan Ganaway, *Toys, Consumption, and Middle-class Childhood in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (Berlin: Peter Lang). Dolls, as I explore later, carried powerful content, speaking to not just gender, but ethnicity, national identity, and race.

2. Women and Womanhood in the Twentieth Century

Modern art was obsessed with the *other* and those individuals they deemed less “evolved:” the child, the mentally ill, the peasant or folk, the primitive, the woman.⁹¹ These tropes offered an opportunity to investigate aspects of the self. The notion of a cult of childhood, for example, is hardly an exaggeration; in reporting on the sensibility of the day with regard to childhood, G. Stanley Hall says that “the child is the father of the man.” Child study, he continues, “taught us that the child and its characteristic traits are ages older than adulthood.”⁹²

In her book, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*, Catherine Robson explores the complex relationship of men at the end of the Victorian era (in which many of the men in modernism were born) towards the feminine. A quality they moved in comfortably as small children, a part of the sense of themselves, it was essentially ripped from them at age six or seven, leaving ambiguous feelings towards girls and girlhood. She writes:

Although the breaching ceremony of the early modern—the great day when a six- or seven-year-old boy would shed his girlish dress and don trousers—had more or less fallen into obscurity for the Victorians, it was not until the 20th century that boys, in any of the social classes, would wear obviously gendered clothing before this relatively advanced age. Perhaps more significantly, for many boys of the middle and upper classes the age. Perhaps significantly, for many boys of the middle and upper classes of six or seven signaled the removal from maternal or feminine care in the home into the masculine world of the school: up until this point, their lessons would have taken place alongside their sisters in a female staff nursery. Trousers and school does mark the end of the first phase of existence for boys; girls of these classes, still wearing petticoats and pursuing their education, for the most part, at home, experienced no such division between early and later childhood. The garments and worlds left behind continue to be female, then, the first six years of male life in the 19th century carried a clear stamp of

⁹¹ Gauguin, Dubuffet, Klee, Picasso,...

⁹² Stanley Granville Hall, *Aspects of Child Life and Education* (New York: D. Appleton, 1921). Hall’s work gives us a rich source of information from that era, not just for American children (including girls) but also of mothers. There are numerous references to Germany, from a work published 30 years earlier, *Aspects of German Culture* (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1881).

femininity, especially when viewed in retrospect. While it may be a critical commonplace the Victorians adhered to a rigid system of separation, in this particular instance it seems that young boyhood cross that line, and actually looked more like girlhood.⁹³

These at times unconsidered cultural experiences, shed light on some of the ways men saw women and the feminine at this time. For the white, European, urban, adult males that drove the movements that formed modernism as we know it, the other became energies within and outside the self, to be explored, posed and positioned as foils, and consumed. Ever more so with the new notions promoted by psychology.⁹⁴ Men and women now understood that the root of their adult selves had been formed in childhood—boyhood and, for girls, an almost newer notion—that of girlhood. If women were a mystery, girlhood must also be so.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw radical cultural changes and an intense preoccupation with women and, therefore, conceptions of the sexually different body. The rapid production of new forms of knowledge (scientific and psychological) entered the public's awareness. In some senses, as much as we might view psychology as related to the mind, it was actually grounded in notions of sexual embodiment that was at the forefront of inquiry for people like Freud; the expansion of psychology (and also philosophy, neurology, and phenomenology) redefined the mind, but in doing so, redefined the body.⁹⁵ Psychoanalysis, which has informed many of the prominent feminist theorists of the twentieth century, saw the body as integral.⁹⁶ "The human body itself has a history. Not only has it been perceived,

⁹³ Robson, Catherine, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003): 4.

⁹⁴ Almost 100 years later, bell hooks would write "Eating the Other." in which she reflects on the way white society consumes the other, adding spice to their palate (which in this case, is bland with a "progress" they have created).

⁹⁵ There is no way to separate sexual difference from psychology in terms of hysteria, the preoccupation of the day.

⁹⁶ I do not pretend to analyze this in any conclusive terms. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, in its entry regarding psychoanalytic feminism, asserts: "Psychoanalytic inquiry does not fit comfortably with, and even

interpreted, and represented differently in different epochs, but it has been lived differently, brought into being within widely dissimilar material cultures” writes Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Walter Laqueur in *The Making of the Modern Body*.⁹⁷ This becomes apparent when we read a range of writings about women and look at work that suggested the way female biology and metaphysical essence intertwined with certain forces and characteristics in society. A female innateness, very different than that of men, is a corporeally based; the *two* hardly conceived of as a duality, cannot be separated.

While doubtfully sharing this construction, in the 1949 book, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir makes embodiment a central point. While some suggest she is speaking of gender as a cultural phenomenon, Beauvoir is clear that the body is only means for being in and taking on culture. At the start of her chapter, “The Psychoanalytic Point of View,” she writes, “The enormous advance psychoanalysis made over psychophysiology is in its consideration that no factor intervenes in the psychic life without having taken on a human meaning; it is not the body-object described by scientists that exists concretely but the body lived by the subject.”⁹⁸ Even a

unsettles, biological theories of sex and sociological theories of gender, thus also complicating the sex/gender distinction as it has often been formulated in feminist debates. While sex and gender are sometimes construed in feminist theory in terms of the contrast between biology and culture, or nature and nurture, Freud's theory, as discussed below, challenges these dualisms, developing an account of the sexual drive that traverses the mental and the physical, and undergoes idiosyncratic vicissitudes rather than assuming a uniform anatomical or social shape.” Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-psychoanalysis/>.

⁹⁷ Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Walter Laqueur. *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), vii.

⁹⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 49. At the turn of the last century Charcot and Freud positioned themselves in opposition to each other with regard specifically to the origins of hysteria in the female (and to a much lesser extent, the male). This is discussed at length in Nathan Timpano's book *Constructing the Viennese Modern Body: Art, Hysteria, and the Puppet* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017) as well as in *Sciences of the Flesh: Representing Body and Subject in Psychoanalysis* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), by Dianne F. Sadoff. Charcot's “hard science” of psychophysiology was rooted in the body and related to physical lesions found in the nervous system whereas Freud's “soft science” or psychology was rooted in the mind with the exception of a still-maintained belief that the uterus, through its wandering, contributed to symptoms that could be alleviated through massage of the female sexual organs.

desire to integrate a whole depends on acknowledging what is regarded as the parts—the body versus consciousness or, as Moi says, body versus subjectivity.⁹⁹ Separate culturally acquired behavior and sensibilities (aligned with the sexed body)—what might have been called “gender”—were increasingly theorized as being different than anatomical/biological sex. In the debates about nature and nurture that continue to this day, society’s powerful role in the shaping and enforcing of these differences was examined. Some maintain that sex itself (as a dimorphic phenomenon) was a new and modern concept and that prior to the nineteenth century there was a single sex model. Female and male anatomy were seen to be the same items in different arrangements. Toril Moi is skeptical; this doesn’t seem to bear out when looking at ancient notions of biology. Regardless, she is interested in the emergence of the hierarchical system of gender that has been layered over sex, with males dominating and centered as the universal. She says that by the nineteenth century, the genitals took on more importance and the quality that was understood as sex was seen as “pervasive, leaking into the cell of every being.”¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, this is not so different from our current understanding of human DNA, that each cell is coded with biological sex.¹⁰¹ What was leaking, however, and how that related to culture is up for debate—even now.

We have looked at Elizabeth Grosz’s thoughts on untimeliness. Christine Buci-Glucksmann offers a different application of that word, in her discussion of an untimely modernity—a feminine shadow to modernity’s masculine thrust.¹⁰² In “Catastrophic Utopia: The

⁹⁹ Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body*, 115.

¹⁰⁰ Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body*, 11.

¹⁰¹ Kalpit Shah, Charles E. McCormack, and Neil A. Bradbury, “Do You Know the Sex of Your Cells?” *American Journal of Physiology: Cellular Physiology* 306, no. 1 (2014): C3-C18, doi: 10.1152/ajpcell.00281.2013.

¹⁰² Again untimely borrowed from Nietzsche.

Feminine as Allegory of the Modern,” she looks to the thoughts of Walter Benjamin and other prominent male intellectuals (who, interestingly, also had a fascination with dolls as psychological others). One kind of modernism, she writes,

produces progress and is informed by it. It arises out of the great Hegelian synthesis and is characterized by linear, cumulative time; development “without barbarity” of culture and production; classic and romantic aesthetics of the Beautiful; and a historical vision stemming from a subject that even if alienated gives it meaning in Marxist evolutionary and historical interpretations....¹⁰³

The second form of modernity she calls “untimely modernity” and describes it as establishing “itself against ‘modernist’ or ‘historicist’ versions of modernity.” She connects this, through Benjamin, to Baudelaire and his specific appropriation of the feminine.¹⁰⁴ Untimely modernity “rests not on the fullness of a meaning, of a unified, perfectly intelligible history, but on a loss, and emptiness, a lack....”¹⁰⁵ For these and other men, this modernity can be, in part, symbolized by the prostitute’s body. An obsession in modernist work (both literary and visual), even the Italian Futurists decried the brothel, yet were fixated on it! In her article “Futurism and Feminism,” Lucia Re says, “The brothel will indeed become one of the favorite topoi of the futurist imagination, a symbol of modernity itself as a condition of existence finally stripped of all sentimental superstructures.”¹⁰⁶ It seems logical that against the sleek and shiny energy of

¹⁰³ Buci-Glucksmann, 222. Written in the mid-1980s, her work might now be repackaged as queer, her untimely modernity, as queer temporality. It is worth considering whether that frame would have made her work richer or more insightful or the opposite.

¹⁰⁴ Perhaps, were he alive now, we would see Baudelaire as “genderqueer,” with his appropriation of a performative feminine as a strategy of disruption, as described by Buci-Glucksmann. As a feminist and a lesbian, I find the growing body of work examining gender non-conformity in early modernism is fascinating. I am not able to explore it here, however.

¹⁰⁵ Buci-Glucksmann, 223.

¹⁰⁶ Lucia Re, “Futurism and Feminism,” *Annali d'Italianistica* 7, (1989), 253–272, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24003870>.

modernism, there would be an undertow of longing, and there was. It seems clear, however, that female artists could not engage with an allegorical modernism and certainly not one in the form of a prostitute's body with all its tragedy, damage, and loss. What language could they use? Indeed, were they even permitted such abstract musings or was their project of crafting a new and viable subjectivity of a more immediate nature? I explore later in my section on affect the way that empathetic embodiment works. How did the body figure into? Paintings of murdered and dismembered females, like the dolls of Hans Bellmer, could be experienced as traumatic objects.

The odd misogyny that might be teased out of the obsession with the prostitute's decayed body and soul was also expressed by the Dandies like Baudelaire, men who cultivated the feminine for themselves. This was captured in this private journal entry by Baudelaire:

Woman is the opposite of the Dandy. Therefore she should inspire horror.
 Woman is hungry, and she wants to eat; thirsty, and she wants to drink.
 She is in a rut and she wants to be possessed.
 What admirable qualities!
 Woman is natural, that is to say abominable.
 Thus she is always vulgar; the opposite, in fact, of the Dandy.¹⁰⁷

Modernism was filled with what in our postmodern terminology might be called "gender bending," including Duchamp's *Rose Selavy*. Rather than liberating women from a rigid set of expectations, it had the effect of appropriating and then policing a certain ideal that women could not attain.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ "Baudelaire on Gender," *LIVEJOURNAL*, <https://refinement.livejournal.com/135657.html>.

¹⁰⁸ *Marcel Duchamp as Rose Selavy*, Man Ray (1920-21), <https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/56973.html>.

The famous poet Mallarmé had a series of drag personalities he performed, as reported by Thais Morgan:

Mallarmé moves toward "modern camp" in *La Dernière Mode* [The Latest Fashion] (1874), where he impersonates "a series of commodified personalities" of Parisian women. Writing as a woman does not make Mallarmé a feminist, however. As "the dandy becomes the female spectacle," he reasserts "male technical control" over the fictitious and the real women of fashion in his text as well as over "the implied female reader." More openly misogynistic, Jean Lorrain represents the chic woman as "a ghostly doll."¹⁰⁹

It is the embodiment of the feminine in the female that these males find abject. This is not unlike many of the caricatures of females created and performed by male puppeteers during the twentieth century. Interestingly, many prominent theorists felt women were poorly suited to play women and said so in published work. In some senses men could "do" women better than women could. In fact, curiously, Oskar Schlemmer of the Bauhaus lamented that women ever appeared and replaced the men who had previously danced and acted their parts. Of the "decline" he says "1681, the first appearance of female dancers— until then female roles have been performed by men. 1772, the abolition of face masks."¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, he heavily costumed his dancers in archetypal sculptural suits— and masks— allowing them at times to fluidly cross the lines of sex.¹¹¹ Edward Gordon Craig viewed the female with disdain. In the book *Puppets and "Popular" Culture*, Scott Cutler Shershow quotes Craig who describes that as the puppet faded from popular favor, women moved in, exhibiting themselves, bringing chaos and riotous personality. Teasing out an almost psychoanalytic posturing, Shershow says, "Having previously

¹⁰⁹ Thais E. Morgan, "Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siecle (review)," *Victorian Studies* 42, no. 2 (1999): 711–712. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/35718/pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Oskar Schlemmer, in Juliet Koss, "Bauhaus Theater of Human Dolls," *The Art Bulletin*, 85, no. 4 (2003): 738.

¹¹¹ Koss, 737.

associated the actor with an empty corporeality, Craig here construes this status as *female*; and he suggests that histrionic illusion, mimesis itself, is causally linked to a physical attraction of the female for the male, construed as a female desire to represent “the divinity in man.... One notices, too, the conceptual slippage with which the corporeal (and female) arts of imitation and exhibition lead to a triumph of ‘the riotous personality’ ... which otherwise ‘conspires against art.’”¹¹²

In modernism, I argue, women often turned to puppets and dolls in performance or performed heavily costumed in order to retain their subjectivity and resist becoming objects and the something I will explore further in later chapters. Across the globe, new models of womanhood, like the Weimar New Woman and the Flapper, permitted women to dress in clothes that revealed more of their bodies and to be in more public places. This dramatic change from the Victorian norms of the period shortly before was complicated. The prostitute, a ubiquitous metaphoric trope in early modernism, was a real trope forced on women associated with theater, dance, and cabaret. Despite changing moirés, women were still caught in a paradoxical place, not unlike now. For Dadaist Emmy Hennings, who founded the Cabaret Voltaire with her partner Hugo Ball, this conflation haunts the scholarship done on her; Hennings is referred to as having been a prostitute, her sexual availability a defining factor in her identity in a way that it never is for men.¹¹³ Hennings often performed in ways that made her body completely inaccessible. The Baroness Elsa von Freytag, who was involved with the Dada movement, was a nude model (for money). Yet she also seemed specifically and tactically bent on disrupting the gaze. She dressed

¹¹² Scott Cutler Shershow, *Puppets and “Popular” Culture*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 199.

¹¹³ Chrystal J Hoffman, says: “For example, Hennings preferred to keep from history most of the creative work produced during her long career as a member of Munich and Zurich’s Avant-Garde inner circles, as it would unfortunately also reveal a long career as a morphine addict, prostitute, and hustler, who frequently promoted free-love, anarchy, and social revolution, and spent several stints in prison, at least once for forging passports for draft dodgers.” Retrieved from <https://crystaljhoffman.wordpress.com/>.

purposefully in the detritus she found in the streets, cropped her hair, and dyed it unnatural colors. When she showed up broke, hoping to model for a wealthy socialite painter (as well as to connect with regard to her own creative work), he asked her to strip. He reported that when she opened her coat, she revealed two large tomato cans bound together and covering her breasts—possibly as a commentary on the newest clothing invention, the bra. In this version of her costumes, she wore a small bird cage and other found objects and materials.¹¹⁴ Feminist art historian and theorist Amelia Jones laments the limit of effectiveness of the Baroness's subversions and underscores why perhaps nudity did not become a tactic embraced by Dada women (like it would for performance artists 50 years later): "The Baroness presented her body as object, sculpture, and stage, but ultimately the Dada concept of the female body was both too fixed and too fungible to truly reward its subversions: the Dadaist female body conveniently but obliquely announced the male artist's distance from and therefore mastery over mass production and commodification."¹¹⁵

The use by male artists (and entire movements) of women's bodies as allegorical material was an integral part of the Surrealists' work with the psyche's repressed animus. Linda Nochlin comments that the Surrealists were notable in the way the female form could be summoned to

¹¹⁴ In this vignette, we not only witness the Baroness's defiance but also, tragically, the way in which nakedness was exchanged for money and possible career advancement. It is enraging and also very telling. See Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity—A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), and Kimberly Lamm, "Readymade Baroness: The Gendered Language of Dadaist Dress," in *Dropping the Baroness in the Middle: Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Dada Dressing, German Arts, and Poetry Today*, ed. Tanya Clement (2011), <http://jacket2.org/article/readymade-baroness>.

¹¹⁵ Amelia Jones, "Eros, That's Life, or the Baroness' Penis," in *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Francis M. Naumann ed. (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1996), 245. In order to use nudity in the 1970s, for example, women had to take on directly the challenges of morality implied in the notion that sexually active women were sluts which many did in the scripts and exegesis that accompanied the ephemeral performances. One could also examine how ephemerality could be seen as a strategy in disrupting the gaze as no commodity is produced and able to be distributed, in many cases. In some the artist controls the distribution. This has, however, had a cost, in that many works have been essentially "lost" (my comments).

show the edges of man's psychic dispositions from the marvelous to the horrific.¹¹⁶ They appropriated the female body as one more object, granting themselves license to practice all forms of fragmentation and recombination (Bellmer is included here). Interestingly, in Eastern Europe, where women's participation, and actual leadership, in the arts was particularly pronounced, this use of the female form was nonexistent after the Revolution. The Russian avant-garde saw the commodification and objectification of women as part of capitalism. It simply did not appear as a device, and male attempts to use such images were met with harsh criticism. In this way, the Russians rejected the sex–death nexus that was the obsession and affective tone of many other European avant-garde movements.¹¹⁷ And, as Beth Ervin Lewis describes in “Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis,” this theme was prevalent in the visual culture of throughout the early twentieth century:

During the war years, Kokoschka, Kirchner, Klinger, and Barlach—all artists who had already achieved recognition—created graphic cycles and paintings on the theme of the artist violence struggle against a woman who would stifle his creativity... While older artists seemed to link their attack on women to fears of loss of their already-established artistic power, the younger generation moved to an artistic assault on woman that is stylistically much more nasty and vicious.... the degenerate man wielding fist or knife and the sexually aggressive female.¹¹⁸

It would take several decades before, women's own transgressive and defiant gestures built on these precedents. Nochlin notes that, is the case in the work of Louise Bourgeois and

¹¹⁶ Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 53

¹¹⁷ Speaking specifically about Rodchenko, Christina Kiaer discusses the post-revolutionary concept of the liberated woman in art. In a presentation done in conjunction with the Museum of Modern Art the exhibition “A Revolutionary Impulse: The Rise of the Russian Avant-Garde,” streamed live on February 8, 2017, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1668?locale=en>.

¹¹⁸ Beth Ervin Lewis, “Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis,” in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katharina von Ankum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 213–214.

Cindy Sherman, the former is subverting the rationalism of modernity (as well as violating conventions of materiality) and the latter using abjection as *atropeia* to interrupt the male fetishizing gaze, while she reappropriates the fetishistic mutilating of women and girls in the work of Hans Bellmer [my addition].¹¹⁹ I would include here Meret Oppenheim's substitutions of recombined and altered domestic objects for female body parts. Hannah Höch's work, not examined by Nochlin, anticipates these efforts. In her chapter "The Misogynist Machine: Images of Technology in the Work of Hannah Höch," Maria Makela cites Höch's assertion that, rather than glorifying modernity and technology, Höch was critical of the effects and attempted to visually connect them to the suffering of women. "Insofar as Höch intervened critically in the debates about technology and the new woman as early as 1919, her censure of modernity predated that of most of her male colleagues by nearly half a decade. Shaped by her uniquely female experience of Weimar Germany, Höch's vision was this remarkably prescient indeed."¹²⁰

Art movements are, by nature, untimely. The women who shaped late modernism were early modern girls. Those who created feminist performance in the seventies were born were born and raised during high modernism. In the case of Louise Bourgeois, her career spanned both eras and much of her modernist contributions were re-evaluated and re-valued in a postmodern context (this is the case with many modernist women); she becomes a postmodern modernist star. It is also important to point out the cyclical nature of art movements. The happenings of Fluxus became was fertile ground for performance art (Yoko Ono was a member of Fluxus when she did "Cut Piece"). It was sometimes referred to as Neo Dada, an echo of the

¹¹⁹ Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces*, 53-54.

¹²⁰ Maria Makela, "The Misogynist Machine: Images of Technology in the Work of Hannah Höch" in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katharina von Ankum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 122.

first third of the twentieth century— also a time of the horrors of war. Both were eras of interdisciplinarity, of increasing tumult, and the demand by people for rights. Authority was challenged at the very ground it stood on—reason. There was a regrounding and reassertion of humanity through conflict—and not compliance! Perhaps it was the century of personhood, with women and girls (and others), striving for full status.

The twentieth century has often been called the “Century of the Child,” but it could very well have been called the “Century of the Woman.”¹²¹ Laws and norms with regard to women were radically changing across the West with the same approximate mix of liberatory forces and opposing pressures.¹²² The movement for suffrage (bloody and violent in ways we forget), the entry of women into work and education, technologies around birth and obstetrics, and diagnoses of hysteria (with physician-assisted paroxysm) all crossed the Atlantic with remarkably little cultural differentiation. A cluster of suffrage legislation gives testament to this:

1918 Austria, Germany, Poland, Russia

1920 United States

1928 Britain, Ireland

Suffrage was a battle fought bodily, and it radically reconfigured, in both discursive and material terms, women’s bodies in the public sphere. Women’s mouths and speech had been focuses of

¹²¹ I have actually seen it referred to as the *Century of the Woman*.

¹²² By this I mean that no liberating force or invitation for women or girls comes without accompanying pressures that often leave the agency of the “liberated” woman in question and the liberation more of an orchestration in which the “liberated” must weigh, resist, and strategize around how they will weather the liberation. The F. Scott Fitzgerald story “Bernice Bobs her Hair,” while written by a male, captures some of the ways in which women were torn when new social conventions, especially those dealing with the body and virtue, were offered, and the danger of making the wrong call. I think young women experience this with choices around clothing, for example, quite consistently. Even now my daughter evaluates styles with certain necklines that are being promoted and agonizes over whether she can—just because she is told she can—wear that item and if she does what the potential ramification is of making the wrong choice.

disciplining and control and abjection throughout the centuries leading up to modernism and the visual culture that made women's speech unacceptable and objectionable continued throughout suffrage – used against them when they spoke on behalf of their rights.

In some cases, *liberation* itself brought a mixed bag of results. Being allowed to wear short skirts meant having one's legs on display which meant having certain features of a previously hidden body part judged as acceptable or not. It also meant having the pressure (in uncertain economic times) to acquire the items that made this exposure possible.¹²³ This radical reimagining of the female body was seen in changing standards of beauty. The spread of the bobbed hairstyle across Europe and the United States in a matter of years demonstrates how radical cultural (and technological) changes crossed the continent and the Atlantic and how embodied those changes could be.¹²⁴ Compared to the relationship women had in the Victorian era to weighty manes of hair that needed braiding and brushing, one can imagine a very different embodied relationship to hair with a short, boyish cut that exposed the nape to breeze and gaze.

Dolls, marketed to women as well as girls, embodied in their material and visual culture expectations of female looks and behavior. The smoking boudoir dolls (discussed in later

¹²³ Just as I have seen discussions of the day on which shape faces could wear a bobbed hairstyle, there was extensive discourse on the right kind of body. Beauvoir comments extensively on this throughout her chapters on female development. Women's bodies—specific bone structures and shapes—come in and out of style in a way that is not as much of an issue for males. Certainly the dandies of the previous decades felt pressure to look a certain way, but this did not permeate all male members of society the way women's bodily expectations do among women. Nor, I would imagine, did men experience the same level of abjection of self through their own bodies which do not conform. This has certainly been something that has shaped my feelings of my body since junior high school. As more parts are visible, there are more parts that girls and women understand have standards. I think of this in relation to my daughters' generation that, thanks to porn's wide distribution and accessibility via smartphones, now have notions of acceptable beauty standards for their sexual organs. In addition to the abjection of hair, they now experience anxiety over the shape and size of their labia majora and minora, for example, as is evidenced in the industry of vaginoplasty and labiaplasty. This, I would extrapolate, has been the effect each time a new revelation of a body part is promoted through the media, the way that the change in dress was across the West in the early 1900s. As I mention in a further section, recent research has supported the notion that men and women both perceive women as parts and men as whole.

¹²⁴ For young women, cutting their obligatory long hair must have been a fairly transformative relationship with the body.

sections) promoted cigarettes to young women. The new entanglement of photography, stardom, the private spaces of the bedroom, and dolls created a new cultural trope that also crossed the Atlantic.

At the same time, the underpinnings of modernist psychology and psychoanalysis were being developed, and they pointed to childhood. The *modernist* girlhoods of eventual *postmodern* women cannot be severed from their sensibilities. What is often considered a modernist invention, childhood and the child's unfolding into what might be seen as a preponderance of troubled adults was an area of fascination. Sigmund and Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, and her student Donald Winnicott were among those who focused on this area. With extensive research into the psychology and development of children, especially in Europe, perhaps there was no previous period of greater anxiety around children than there was in early modernism. Child labor raised important questions. The severing of children from nature and the challenges modernism posed to tradition were also on the landscape. In his book *Aspects of Child Life and Education*, G. Stanley Hall reported on extensive fieldwork with children. While not widely accepted in contemporary scholarship, his work made a tremendous impact in the early twentieth century. Published in 1921, his work was also shared far earlier in symposia and pamphlets and was reproduced, for example, in Brian Sutton Smith's well-respected work on play.¹²⁵ Hall asserted the importance of "child study" in the United States. Rooted in the relatively new field of anthropology, it had swept across Europe earlier and was seen as a cultural movement of great significance.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Hall's work is problematic in terms of race and gender, like most work of his time, but worth considering for the amount of information he includes and the imagination with which he approaches the task. Taken as quirky and, at times, more imaginative than scientific, it offers interestingly exhaustive lists of qualities and aspects of things.

¹²⁶ Recently, the field of girlhood studies has emerged as an important ground in feminist study, and here too it is evident that adult motives here are complex.

Women and children are connected in complex and varied ways. Birth and the primary role in the care of babies and young children is the most obvious. The education of the small child in the home or a school setting was also felt to women though not without the surveillance and opinions of experts and politicians, most of not all males. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the jobs deemed appropriate for women were those that involved serving and caring for other women and children. While this provided opportunities to work outside the home, it also shaped female ambition and reinforced an alignment of women with care and educational roles and reinforced their association with children. This has been a reality of my life a century later when more subtle yet still powerful forces drive women to careers that involve nurturing others' bodies and minds. It is complicated, of course. Some women used the sensitivities, knowledge, and experience gained through intimate contact with children to create and innovate, but this separated the way their work was perceived from those who did not center children in their lives. Throughout the 19th and early 20th century women entrepreneurs –often cottage industries run by sisters or mothers and daughters fabricated dolls. Women drew upon their knowledge of textiles and a willingness to experiment with them and push the medium. The audience for dolls ranged as did the aesthetic favored but many reflected the growing sense of realism. I profile many in this dissertation. They worked at a time when notions of progress abounded. There were new materials like plastic and processes developed through technology. There were increasing concerns for hygiene (recall the outbreak of polio, for example). Society was rapidly transforming through urbanism, the industrial revolution, commercialism, the concept of leisure, strife around racial and gender rights, changes in education such as special

training for women (for example in ceramics and china painting), and a new emphasis on science and psychology.

Some women, however, managed to create careers that did not center on children. In an article written about artist and marionette maker, Alexandra Exter, John E. Bowlit clarifies that the sensibility and intention behind Exter's marionettes was not about children.

But it is at this juncture that Exter's conception of the marionette differs.... Simonovich- Efimova and her colleagues such as the famous Sergei Obraztsov dedicated their productions to children. But Exter's marionettes contain no innocence, no gaiety, no simplicity of physical or psychological state. Even though Exter worked in the Moscow Children's Theatre in 1921 and even though her residence in Moscow coincided with an intense general interest in children's theatre, art and literature, she was not the kind of person to find an artistic satisfaction in the spontaneity and ingenuousness of the child's mind.¹²⁷

Not only in Russia, but globally, the child was a source of interest. In art, philosophy and literature there was a romanticizing and allegorizing of childhood, some even spoke of a cult of childhood in the late 19th and early 20th century. New understandings of the different state that childhood represented lead to bans on child labor and new ways of educating the child. Inspired by early nineteenth-century educational theorists progressive teachers of young children embraced singing, dancing, direct observation of nature, and, most importantly, open-ended play with real objects and materials. Perhaps the timing of the development of the concept of childhood also created a powerful connection to the growing field of psychology, The child and psyche were linked and childhood became the key to the individual and society. Psychiatrists such as Lowenfeld, Freud, and G. Stanley Hall placed immense emphasis on childhood.¹²⁸ But

¹²⁷ John E. Bowlit, "The Marionettes of Alexandra Exter." *Russian History* 8, no. 1/2 (1981): 221.

¹²⁸ The changing concept of the child and childhood inevitably changed the concept of the mother—among other this she became a ready source for myriad pathologies. Throughout the twentieth century, mothers have been blamed for both physical and psychological ills caused during the formation of the self.

even as men were writing about childhood, doll makers were doing their own practice-based research and response. Käthe Kruse's cloth dolls with hardened cloth faces had a very different materiality than the porcelain and bisque dolls of the Victorian era. Through trial and error and inspired by her own children, she developed an aesthetic that reflected a cultural and psychological turn which conveyed a sense of children's individuality and complexity. Through the popularity and distribution of her dolls, she impacted the culture.¹²⁹

Truly, the century of the child and the century of the woman go hand in hand. The theorizing of childhood and the theorizing of womanhood were interconnected. The girl became central to the unfolding of the woman.¹³⁰ With girlhood now a conscious part of their own womanhood, some artists expressed opinions about this developmental time period. One of the few *female* members of the Italian futurists, and a feminist, "Mina Loy linked art to sexuality and womanhood to female adolescence. For example, she recommended surgical removal of the hymen for all teenage girls as a part of the liberation from the chastity ideals of the romantic period."¹³¹

One of Freud's well-known statements that Simone de Beauvoir felt compelled to respond to is, "Psychoanalysis does not try to describe what a woman is—that would be a task it could scarcely perform—but sets about enquiring how she comes into being, how a woman develops out of a child with a bisexual disposition."¹³² Beauvoir wrote extensively

¹²⁹ Bryan Ganaway, *Toys, Consumption, and Middle-Class Childhood in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (Berlin: Peter Lang), 181.

¹³⁰ Djuna Barnes, for example, mines childhood and adolescence.

¹³¹ Susanne Dietrichson, "The Masculine Avant-Garde That Fostered Feminism," *Kilden Gender Research* (December 9, 2016), <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2016/12/masculine-avant-garde-fostered-feminism>.

¹³² By bisexual here Freud is not talking about adult human sexual orientation.

about sexual initiation in adolescence. In her book *The Second Sex*, childhood and adolescence are featured prominently in the examination of woman's formation. In her section on childhood, Beauvoir includes many references to dolls, both as possessions and as metaphors for the self. Beauvoir makes them pedagogical objects. Among other things, it is, to her mind, quite literally a prosthetic compensation for the lack of a phallus. She writes: "As compensation, and to fill the role of alter ego for her, she is handed a foreign object: a doll.... It is a figurine with a human face—or a corn husk or even a piece of wood—that will most satisfyingly replace this double, this natural toy, this penis."¹³³ So here the doll becomes not just a reference to the woman's body but a metaphor for the lack that defines her. While this notion of the doll as penis seems to be impossible to integrate into our day to day, it is this type of thinking that allowed women to unpack the quotidian givens that were associated with what was increasingly of interest in the early twentieth century: girlhood. Dolls are often so quotidian and ubiquitous, they become invisible for the purposes of theory; my hope here is that dolls and puppets can do that work.

Dolls, while not readily apparent in political rhetoric, were and are not inconsequential in the ideological and cultural battles over who and how to best shape the tender material that childhood has come to be seen as. Bryan Ganaway argues that in Germany, women vied for and often won control over childhood. This battle was fought in the middle-class invention of the nursery, or *Kinderstube*, where objects such as dolls interacted with the constructs of sex and sex roles. In this way, he argues, women entered political debates (and the efforts to control the future) without having the legal power to vote.¹³⁴ As I explore in later sections, women such as

¹³³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 293.

¹³⁴ Ganaway, *Toys*, 181.

the doll maker Käthe Kruse radically transformed notions of childhood and gender through the creation and production of new styles of dolls. It is important to note that many women toiled doing piecemeal labor in their homes sewing garments for dolls and even young girls were employed in factories making the dolls that other girls would play with.

Again, drawing on time spent in Germany, where he indicates much more study and thought had been given to childhood, G. Stanley Hall published an extensive section entitled “A Study of Dolls,” as part of his 1921 work *Aspects of Child Life and Education*.¹³⁵ Taken with the doll’s power and importance, he lists all of the aspects of (even anxieties around) doll play that a mother might consider in her oversight of a child’s possessions and play, and hopes to present some guidance. Even Brian Sutton Smith’s 1976 book *The Psychology of Play* includes Hall’s (with Alexander Casswell Ellis) “A Study of Dolls.” Despite merited criticism of Hall, his lists are fascinating. He includes:

The best form, size, material, amount of elaborateness or mechanical devices, dress, paraphernalia, degree of abandon in doll play, proper and improper imitations of human life, whether doll play is instinctive with and good for boys as well as girls, or for any generalizations concerning dolls’ names, doll families, dolls’ diseases, the age at which the doll instinct is strongest, when it legitimately declines, whether paper dolls precede, follow, or coexist with dolls of three dimensions, doll anatomy, doll psychology, the real source of the many instincts that are expressed in doll play, its form among savage races, whether it is related to idolatry, and if so, how.¹³⁶

Of such importance was the doll and play to childhood that to be considered an expert on one was to be an expert on the other. Most likely because of her expertise, Laura Starr, a wealthy

¹³⁵ This appears to have been published and presented in different formats much earlier so we can assume the research predates the twenties. For example, in republishing the section, Sutton Smith notes that it was published at the end of the 1800s.

¹³⁶ Stanley Granville Hall and Alexander Caswell Ellis. *A Study of Dolls* (New York: E. L. Kellogg, 1897).

woman who had traveled to collect dolls, was asked to participate in the 1909 *Proceedings of the Child Conference for Research and Welfare*, along with G. Stanley Hall and Alexander Casswell Ellis.¹³⁷ In 1908, Starr published a book of dolls that advertised many color plates of those she had collected and also images from museums and other publications.¹³⁸ Traveling, like Starr did, was recommended for those who could afford it. The modernists, wary of the loss of some intangible humanity caused by rapid urbanization and progress, often looked to what they saw as traditional societies. They were intrigued by the folk and the handmade. Puppeteer and scholar John Bell states in his introduction to the book *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, “In the early 19th century, the Romantic movement’s attention to popular culture *forced it* to analyze puppet and mask theatre, and the same imperative forced the newly minted fields of folklore and anthropology to examine performing objects.”¹³⁹ Like others of her time, Starr was fascinated with other cultures as well as history and archaeology—the fascinating continuum and divergence of the present and the past. In this journey and subsequent research, Starr found all these modernist passions, as well as the fascination with the child, embodied in the doll (and in the puppets she had as well).

While Starr and Hall were examining dolls in the anthropological spirit of child study, Eva-Marie Simms’ research into dolls evidences a void in doll-centered psychological investigation up until the time she was writing.¹⁴⁰ In her article, “Uncanny Dolls: Images of

¹³⁷ The conference was hosted by Alexander Casswell Ellis, of Clark University, and G. Stanley Hall, who published the proceedings in 1909 (New York: G. E. Stechert & Co.). Ellis, an active supporter of suffrage, also did extensive study in Germany.

¹³⁸ Laura B Starr, *The Doll Book* (New York: The Outing Publishing Company, 1908).

¹³⁹ John Bell, ed. *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 6.

¹⁴⁰ Eva-Marie Simms, “Uncanny Dolls: Images of Death In Rilke and Freud,” *New Literary History* 27, no. 4 (1996): 663-677.

Death in Rilke and Freud,” Eva-Maria Simms notes the literary musings but questions the absence of the doll as a subject of inquiry, especially in psychotherapy.¹⁴¹ She suggests that the doll was not thought to be a subject suitable for serious academic study; Sigmund Freud and others barely considered it as a source of insights. It seemed even less so into girls and women. Simms, who wrote in 1996, hints at a feminist critique of the works she cites and yet, by only looking at the work of male scholars on the subject of dolls, she ends up weighing each male’s perspective against the other without the intervention of a female voice (that might be seen as writing from within doll culture). Without an interrogation of sex and or gender she adopts the male lens available—one put forth as universal—and peers through it at the doll. She does not include references or an overt sensitivity we might attribute to her own doll play. While it might be presumptuous to assume she had such a background, it does seem likely. Perhaps it is not included because she is writing at a time when much feminist epistemology was still in development—or she simply chooses not to integrate that approach. It is an interesting dilemma that male scholars are less likely to face. It seems there might have been a broader lens captured were she more driven to find alternative voices. For example, she does not engage early twentieth-century child analyst Melanie Klein, despite Klein’s somewhat limited critical work with dolls.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Simms, “Uncanny Dolls,” 669.

¹⁴² While Simms points out that Freud dismissed the doll as not adequately Oedipal, Klein seems to find the opposite to be true for girls. Klein’s projective identification theories build on Freud’s work, however, in her fieldwork with young girls, the doll appears as a central object in many recorded therapy interactions, leading her to point towards a complex enmeshing of the doll and the self for some children—perhaps a self that needs to be disciplined or controlled as they act out violently against the doll. This enmeshing is demonstrated by a pairing of the doll to their own actions, including dress. She also postulates that the doll is intimately related to the female child’s relationship to her mother in a quasi-Oedipal struggle. See Claudia Frank, “Melanie Klein’s Discovery of Reparation” (2013), http://www.melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/domains/melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/local/media/downloads/Claudia_Frank___Reparation___Prague_2013.pdf.

Feminist scholars, such as Miriam Forman-Brunell, have begun a fuller examination of the doll as they seek to create a more complex and richer picture of girlhood in American and European cultures. Currently, while there are no academic journals specifically devoted to doll studies, there are several that sometimes feature scholarly research and essays related to dolls. *The American Journal of Play*, for example, features interdisciplinary scholarship related broadly to play. The journal *Sex Roles* frequently publishes empirical research from the social sciences related to gender in children's media culture, including some studies on the effects of doll play. *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* sometimes features historically focused scholarship on dolls, and the *Journal of Popular Culture* has featured work on dolls as an aspect of material culture. *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* dedicated an issue to the topic of dolls, the articles of which were later collected and published in a book Forman-Brunell edited: *Dolls Studies, the Many Meanings of Girls' Toys and Play* (not to be confused with the "doll studies" from the 1940s in which children revealed racial bias and enculturated beliefs based on the perception and treatment of black and white dolls). Though at times critical of the doll, its connections to consumerism, and the indoctrination of gender roles and body conformity, some feminist scholars currently see dolls as fulfilling complex cultural and psychological roles that must be investigated in nuanced ways that question easy assumptions about even the most vilified dolls, such as Barbie.

Still, in the past 20 years, there seems to have been little scholarship on the kind of agentive play that the doll and puppet offers and how that might relate to performance. Also, there has been little theorizing about the doll and girls and women's construction of sexual difference and subjectivity. Where we do see this kind of work being done is in the area of video gaming and avatars, where the materiality is an imagined materiality but the corporeal

phenomenology (or phenomenological corporeality) is very real. Perhaps because it is a newly emergent field, like the study of puppets and object performance, the women involved in technology and gaming are doing important scholarship around play, agency, and the gendered body in philosophical and theoretical ways.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000).

3. Feminisms Through the Body

The female is a woman in so far as she feels herself as such. Some essential biological givens are not a part of her lived situation: for example the structure of the ovum is not reflected in it; by contrast, an organ of slight biological importance like the clitoris plays a primary role in it. Nature does not define woman: it is she who defines herself by reclaiming nature for herself in her affectivity.

—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*¹⁴⁴

The women I explore in this dissertation made work in intimate dialogue with their status as female. Grosz would describe them as sharing with all women “a fixed perspective from which we see things. *It’s that through which I am* [my italics].”¹⁴⁵ The sex that women artists are born means that, by default, they belong to a subordinate category, a group of people directed (by force and persuasion) towards certain kinds of participation and certain embodiments.¹⁴⁶ While women find opportunities to participate as artists, women artists are marginalized.¹⁴⁷ Rather than merely dwelling on the limitations, I want to ask what is gained through the

¹⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, .

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, “Bodies of Philosophy: An Interview with Elizabeth Grosz,” *Stance*, 7, April (2014): 120, http://www.bsu.edu/libraries/beneficencepress/stance/2014_spring/12Grosz115-126.pdf.

¹⁴⁶ “Although by 1976, Sayre reports, more than half the professional artists in this country were women, receiving 67% of the art-related BAs and MAs; six years later women still received only 2% of the exhibitions given to living artists, nationwide. By Sayre’s count, the museums in enlightened New York give roughly 14 shows by living male painters for each given a female painter.” George J. Leonard, “Why Postmodernism Is Female,” *LA Times* (July 16, 1989), http://articles.latimes.com/1989-07-16/books/bk-5674_1_performance-art.

¹⁴⁷ Nochlin details the structures and mindsets that prevented women from making work including being seen and seeing themselves as “geniuses” an important concept in the art world which some might argue ended in modernism; I don’t think so. Nochlin writes: “The question ‘Why have there been no great women artists?’ has led us to the conclusion, so far, that art is not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual, ‘Influenced’ by previous artists, and, more vaguely and superficially, by ‘social forces,’ but rather, that the total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situation, are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator, artist as he-man or social outcast.” Linda Nochlin, “Why Are There No Great Women Artists?” in *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 147–158.

sensibility of otherness. What interesting dynamics emerge in the efforts to center the self? In difference feminism, Rosi Braidotti argues for emphasizing the margin of non-belonging.¹⁴⁸

While artists are central to this dissertation, in this section I look to language. At a moment in which feminism is suffering a bitter internal war and simple articulations have become fraught (such as the contested term *woman*), I spend an inordinate amount of time positioning my work relative to this moment in feminist scholarship and politics. Toril Moi's work goes directly to the language problem, supporting a commitment to speaking plainly and making language useful, always thinking about what serves women. I will adopt Moi's wise application of Wittgenstein's deceptively simple phrase, "the meaning of a word is its use in the language."¹⁴⁹ My personal interest is in language that allows me to discuss the historical woman as well as the symbolic woman, and to tell stories.¹⁵⁰ I am inspired by the rich theorizing of the category woman that has happened within the arts—a poetic theorizing. Theoretical language is easier to decry, to contest, and to suppress, and to pin down like a wrestler would, so that one can assert one's own dominance. Images are harder to use as foils, though not impossible.

Postmodern images, with their irony and semiotic slippages into allegory and pastiche, are also

¹⁴⁸ Rosi Braidotti with Judith Butler, "Feminism by Any Other Name," *Differences* 6, nos. 2 and 3 (1994): 27–61. <https://bagelabyss.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/butler-and-braidotti-interview-feminism-by-any-other-name1.pdf>.

¹⁴⁹ Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body*, 7. Moi faults feminists themselves for having caused the word woman to "slim down" to nothing based on "the belief that any use of the word 'woman' (and any answer to the question 'What is a woman?') must entail of philosophical commitment to metaphysics and essentialism..."

¹⁵⁰ The twentieth century is rich with women's voices in a way inconceivable before 1900. Women have used words (as well as images) to articulate their own subjectivity and to critique their status. Not all voices have been heard equally, and some have not been heard at all, but by the end of the twentieth century we find fairly robust participation across geographic, social, economic, racial, and ethnic lines and including voices of people with disabilities among others. Educational level (which correlates with other aspects) may be one of the final caste lines in place that allows for certain participation and not others. The way that speech itself creates further issues has also been critiqued, for example in the work of Gayatri Spivak and her work on the subaltern; see her "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press).

hard to pin into position. Because this is a project of poetics, my interest is in thinking about how words and images congregate to form imagos, albeit temporary and transforming.¹⁵¹

I am interested in the experience of sexual difference as key to creative work. Rosi Braidotti, one of the key thinkers in the field of materialism, insists feminism refuse to be lost in language not connected to “the concrete and complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power.”¹⁵² For this reason and others, Braidotti continues Beauvoir and Irigaray’s theories that take sexual difference as a necessity for any type of understanding of women’s condition and being. Taking a cue from Irigaray via Braidotti, the project’s aim is to affirm the *feminine* as some version of a metaphysical and archetypal willful destiny rooted in the particulars of the ever-changing sexed body by

expressing “women’s ontological desire” to develop into “corporeal and consequently sexed beings”. This must begin with emphasizing bodily aspects to oppose any apparently neutral discussion of subjectivity and embodiment. Desire becomes important in the construction of the subject, both libidinal and ontological. The feminine subject’s particular concern is with inequalities, and

¹⁵¹ I also find appealing Wittgenstein’s example of the game, which I discussed earlier and which Moi suggests as a parallel for the way we use and understand a word like *woman*. Wittgenstein points out that among games there is a multiplicity of rules and structures. In fact, there will be games that have no common feature and yet we somehow manage to understand their place within the category of game. That is because game in our mind is comprised of a complex web of ideas that crisscross and, at times, intersect but not in any rigid way that allows a single definition of game to emerge or even a single requisite trait. This example is discussed by Moi in *Sex, Gender, and the Body* (p. 39) and by Joyce N. Davidson and Mick Smith in “Wittgenstein and Irigaray: Gender and Philosophy in a Language (Game) of Difference Wittgenstein and Irigaray: Gender and Philosophy in a Language (Game) of Difference,” *Hypatia* 14, no. 2 (1999): 72-96. Moi finds, again through Wittgenstein, that imperfectly bounded categories to be no less productive (and perhaps are more productive) than rigidly defined ones.

¹⁵² To call this movement new is in part a way to locate it in relation to the Marxist tradition from which it draws but not solely. Braidotti has coined the phrase “neo materialists” because of materialism’s inherent suspicion of the new as some superior understanding. Many of those associated with it have been writing and developing the theories for years. Perhaps a coalescing of voices or perhaps more devoted texts and conferences have established or affirmed the sense of a movement. It is almost impossible to discuss a purely linear nature to feminism. A renewed interest in Irigaray, for example, defies a temporal locating of her work. Those who insist they are helping to rescue her through some reinterpretation may simply be recuperating original meanings. Certain people are read then not read, not necessarily ceasing their thinking and writing because they aren’t course syllabi for a decade or two. The new translation of Beauvoir’s *Second Sex* that I have mentioned, as well as renewed promotion of her insights by scholars such as Moi, mean that we could be living in a very Beauvoir moment, 70 years after her work was published.

asserts diversity and difference as a positive alternative. The feminine subject is rhizomatic “embodied and therefore perfectly artificial,” mechanic and capable of many interconnections. One of its main fields of operation is sexual difference. For Irigaray, “the feminine” is virtual, a project arising from transcending the usual conceptions of woman as the other of the same: it is the other of that other. This is an embodied transcendence, however.¹⁵³

My interest in the body is to be expected given the art that I make and have been most drawn to, the work I find most meaningful. Any sculptural gesture involving the human body seems to trigger a kinesthetic empathy. I am absolutely taken with the doll-power of small anthropomorphic objects. As I describe in a later section, the first time I saw an image of Theodora Skipitares, she was kneeling by a small figure, her likeness; I was instantly interested. Hannah Höch’s tender gesture of supporting on her lap two eager-looking dolls spoke to me. Louise Bourgeois’s cloth heads and dolls have the power of fetishes with metaphorical, archetypal, and material resonance. They are deeply psychological explorations, carried out through sexed bodies and not gendered ones. In fact, they defy gender -- naked and even bald, they have genital and breasts that tell us they are women. In “The Legacy of Simone de Beauvoir on Modern French Visual Art,” Rebecca Trevalyan says that “Louise Bourgeois had been drawing and sculpting since 1947 but only really engaged in the exhibitive artistic sphere in the early 1970s, when interest in her work took off, triggering a more explicit incursion into feminism and sexuality.”¹⁵⁴ Though we sense that Bourgeois’s work is personal and somatically autobiographical, the repetition of images across her large body of work centers the female body as the universal subject. By consistently female material narrative, told through doll-like objects,

¹⁵³ “Notes on: Braidotti, R. (2003) ‘Becoming Woman: or Sexual Difference Revisited’, in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 20(3): 43-64. <http://www.arasite.org/braidotti.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Rebecca Trevalyan, “The Legacy of Simone de Beauvoir on Modern French Visual Art,” *Journal of International Women's Studies* 14 no. 4 (2013): 61–79, <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol14/iss4/6>.

makes the incidental appearance of male figures into props or devices in the female subject's materialized psychological universe. The artist Kiki Smith, who has long been a favorite of mine, makes work that seems less overtly self-referential but nevertheless, her work is one of female subjectivity. She uses a full vocabulary of materialism and sexual difference in her work. She makes puppets and dolls, as well as life-size figures that often include references to body fluids and metaphoric skin. Smith has reveled in woman as what Beauvoir might refer to as "a thing sunk deeply in its own immanence." By allowing all the body's immanence to be felt in her work, she makes the female form a site of political and social meaning.¹⁵⁵ Like the artifacts from some utopian goddess culture, Smith's body of work taken as a whole creates a subjectivity that is female and refuses to take the position of other. Through sheer repetition and variation of femaleness, these artists center the female body as *the body*—the universal.

All of these artists' work is aligned with a theory of sexual difference, which could be said to have begun with Beauvoir's title to her book, *The Second Sex*. Braidotti explains:

It expresses women's ontological desire, women's structural need to posit themselves as female subjects, that is to say, not as disembodied entities but rather as corporeal and consequently sexed beings.... the redefinition of the female feminist subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting any universal, neutral and consequently gender-free understanding of human embodiment.... Not just libidinal desire, but rather ontological desire, the

¹⁵⁵Here I use Beauvoir's rather despairing phrase, capturing women's inability to extricate themselves from their bodiliness (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 189). Yet for Smith, this is a meaningful strategy. In the exegesis for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's 2006 exhibit "Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005" it states: "In the early 1990s Smith continued to engage the human body as a subject, moving away from her previous investigations of organs and systems to depictions of complete figures. Using materials such as beeswax, paper, and bronze, she made a number of pieces—often cast from life—that examine male and (more frequently) female forms as sites of political and social meaning. These disarming, anonymous bodies are far from the ideal nudes that populate much of art history. Like Smith's early sculptures, they are at once visceral and dignified, familiar yet discomfiting; they remain quietly introspective in spite of their debased states. Through the subject matter of these works, Smith established herself as an artist concerned with feminist themes, and through her remarkably physical materials, she presented the body in a wholly original way, forging new territory in the history of figurative sculpture."

desire to be, the tendency of the subject to be, the predisposition of the subject towards being.¹⁵⁶

This view is by no means universally accepted within feminism. At the same time that Smith, Skopitares, and Bourgeois were centering the female anatomy, feminist theorists (particularly American ones) were moving away from it, deeming it essentialist. Joyce Davidson and Mick Smith, in their article “Wittgenstein and Irigaray: Gender and Philosophy in a Language (Game) of Difference,” note a discomfort that feminist writers have.

While all feminisms inevitably incorporate their own conception of “woman” (explicitly or implicitly), most are wary of definitions that have recourse to a language of anatomy, the very language used so frequently to ensure women's subordination. Irigaray's frequent references to the body, in particular the labia, the “two lips” that mark women's difference, are all too easily interpreted within the terms of a pervasive, restrictive debate on the respective influences of “nature” and “culture.”¹⁵⁷

Indeed, there is no such thing, no such lens, as feminism in the singular. Rather, there are feminisms, each with their practices, writing, and speech that are fractured and, in some cases, completely at odds. A dizzying quantity of discourse and polemic happens not merely in feminist journals and academic classrooms but also in the press, which in this Twitterified moment blurs into any social media exchange on a multitude of platforms, from mainstream to underground. While feminist scholars write the books and articles and give keynote addresses (from which I have primarily drawn), another feminist theorizing is happening on Facebook, Reddit, and other

¹⁵⁶ Braidotti clarifies: “The approach to sexual difference involves both the description and denunciation of the false universalism of the male symbolic, in which one finds the notion of the subject as a self-regulating masculine agency and the notion of the ‘Other’ as a site of devaluation.... As Irigaray points out, women’s ‘otherness’ remains unrepresentable within this scene of representation.... Irigaray defends this irreducible and irreversible difference not only of Woman from man, but also of real-life women from the reified image of Woman-as-Other. This is proposed as the foundation for a new phase of feminist Politics.” Rosi Braidotti, “Becoming Woman: Or Sexual Difference Revisited,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 3 (2003): 43.

¹⁵⁷ Davidson and Smith, “Wittgenstein and Irigaray,” 73.

sites. What these writers share, interestingly, is that often they seem to define themselves against each other instead of against systems of patriarchy or oppression, or see the oppression as generated within feminism. Some feminisms do not mention women. Some specifically note that women are not central to their project. Others become entirely about defining women as though that in and of itself is the ultimate goal of feminism.¹⁵⁸

Having grown up in the 1970s and early '80s, I missed the second wave, but these feminists were in essence my big sisters. The notions I had about feminism had to do with the struggles of that time (e.g., expanding options for girls and women, challenging beauty standards and the way beauty standards shaped the value of girls and women, rights to be sexual and control fertility, greater safety from domestic violence, murder, and rape, international solidarity, such as supporting the women of Guatemala and South Africa, and more).¹⁵⁹ Perhaps the sins of the mother are being visited upon the daughter, with feminists developing the art of critique par

¹⁵⁸ A page on my daughters liberal arts college website, entitled "Feminisms," mentions women and men each exactly once, saying simply that they experience oppression differently. They do not acknowledge a connection between women and feminism, historical or otherwise. While, people remark on the contemporary popularity of the word, much of contemporary "feminism" seems trapped in an internal critique, that has become the locus of energy. Feminism is hesitant to speak about women. Merriam-Webster Dictionary declared feminism the "Word of the Year" for 2017 based on its status as a top lookup throughout that year. That feminism no longer mentions women comes out of, in part, what Joan Wallach Scott saw as a central paradox: "Feminism was a protest against women's political exclusion; its goal was to eliminate 'sexual difference' in politics, but it had to make its claim on behalf of 'women' (who were discursively produced through "sexual difference"). But Dolphijn and Van der Tuin do not see this as a paradox at all, rather they see it as the grounding of feminism's path forward if sexual difference is to be brought into the conversation rather than rejected. See Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Library, 2012), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001/1:5.4/--new-materialism-interviews-cartographies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

¹⁵⁹ Critiquing Judith Butler, Martha Nussbaum bemoans Butler's distancing effect: "For a long time, academic feminism in America has been closely allied to the practical struggle to achieve justice and equality for women. Feminist theory has been understood by theorists as not just fancy words on paper; theory is connected to proposals for social change. Thus feminist scholars have engaged in many concrete projects: the reform of rape law; winning attention and legal redress for the problems of domestic violence and sexual harassment; improving women's economic opportunities, working conditions, and education; winning pregnancy benefits for female workers; campaigning against the trafficking of women and girls in prostitution; working for the social and political equality of lesbians and gay men." Martha Nussbaum, "The Professor of Parody: The Hip Defeatism of Judith Butler," *The New Republic* 22 (1999): 37–45.

excellence such that it has become a main praxis in what used to be known as “Women’s Studies” programs; it is, perhaps, no surprise that the critique (that was always as much aimed inward as outward) has become almost completely internal.¹⁶⁰ At the core of most of the schisms are questions of the body as it relates to any notion of woman. Toril Moi points out, as do others, that this failure to agree on language leads to an inability to do what feminism set out to do, which was to improve the real lives of women as historical subjects. Perhaps because of that, what gained a place in the academy under the name “women’s studies” has now frequently jettisoned the word *women*, choosing titles such as “gender” or “sexuality” studies or something of that nature.¹⁶¹ It is challenging to diagram the relationship between various fields that have evolved from and, in many cases, replaced women’s studies, both in name and project. Despite

¹⁶⁰ For a radical feminist, one who seeks to address the root causes and real-world conditions of women (bodies and psyches enmeshed), it is a frustrating and disheartening moment. I believe it can be argued that little, if anything, has improved for women during the past 30 years, even in the West. While women’s numbers in the workplace and educational institutions have increased, half of the women murdered in the US are killed by an intimate partner (or former intimate partner). This is the case not only in the US but also in Australia and the UK. Horrific rates of femicide are reported in places in Latin America and human trafficking is a global phenomenon facilitated by the internet and movements to decriminalize the sale of women as commodities and the inevitable increase in the trafficking of younger and younger females. There are other issues affecting women, such as poverty, that are continuing. There is increasingly violent and specialized porn genres that consistently reinforce a narrative not just of objectification but also of violence and dehumanization; they are available on demand to adults—and children—via the internet. The hyper enforcement of gender (through toys and clothing and all consumer goods and experiences) has reinforced and reified a binary system (now effectively argued by many, disparate groups outside of radical feminism establishment to be *hardwired* and *innate*). Reproductive rights, which include not just access to abortion but also to birth control and sex education, are threatened. Rates of suicide and self-harm for girls is high across the Western world.

¹⁶¹ I do not propose that a single cohesive feminism could be crafted in this climate. I hope here to highlight the potential offered by the work of certain feminist theorists and movements (from the past 70 years) whose work I find to be meaningful and to offer a regrounding potential. In Europe also, this debate is lively. They have tended to remain cool towards queer theory and the centering of “gender,” two dominant forces in American feminism. The title “feminist studies” often wins out over “gender,” in part due to the linguistic difficulty of a term that has become dominant in the US. For a discussion on the decisions around department names in Europe see Rosi Braidotti’s comments on page 17 in the article “Feminisms by Any Other Name” (an interview between Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti) in *Differences* in which she discusses how naming changes can “signal especially the take-over of the feminist agenda by studies on masculinity, which results in transferring funding from feminist faculty positions to other kinds of positions.” <https://bagelabyss.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/butler-and-braidotti-interview-feminism-by-any-other-name1.pdf>.

the poststructuralist cynicism towards progress narratives, feminism is often implied to be linear, coming in waves. This is deceptive. To assume that each point in history builds upon, corrects, and refines what has gone before is obviously an illusion, albeit an appealing one. In some senses, we absolutely must maintain this narrative to advance and to locate ourselves in a moment of inheritance and insight. Yet we know this simply cannot be, and here I point back to Grosz's notion of the untimely, to challenge the notion that each successive evolution of the field has found better ground—at least as serves women.

The United States, not surprisingly, has been a force in shaping some of these transformations in a way that has felt at times hegemonic to non-US feminists. Here I refer specifically to European feminists whose standards of living resemble ours. Nevertheless, they find many disconnects and are increasingly motivated to create meaningful frameworks that reflect more local needs.¹⁶² Gender (which had a life before gender theory) was also a somewhat new concept in the twentieth century that evolved out of new ideas but also out of the overlaps and slippages between the various European languages in which works of science and theory were exchanged during this time period. It is interesting to note that the concept of gender depends linguistically on the English word *gender* and does not work the same in Romance languages. Toril Moi states, “Gender is ideological because it passes social arrangements off as natural.”¹⁶³ Isolating gender, seen as a sort of cultural training and a part of a system of social arrangements based on membership in a sex category (like a caste), was central to the feminist work of dismantling inequality.

¹⁶² See Braidotti and Butler, “Feminism by Any Other Name.”

¹⁶³ Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body*, 25

Gender could not be “natural” if things were to become equal. Many first-wave feminists sought to emphasize the natural equality of women, trapped in a self-perpetuating cultural arrangement of inequality. In “From Gender to Queer,” Laura Palazzani argues that gender is a fundamentally modern concept because (in addition to being so temporally) it is based in “confidence in the ability of reason to develop an explanation of the possibility to know ontological truth, accepted as given and whose existence is not questioned.”¹⁶⁴ Gender, what it is and its relationship to bodies, continues in this poststructuralist and post-poststructuralist moment to be the central focus. It is problematic, however, when scholars do not. Linda Nochlin’s article “Why Are There No Great Women Artists?” could be seen as an effort to deny “gender” as stable (and therefore biological quality of women linked to their anatomy) when she challenges efforts to establish a narrative that might be seen as a woman’s way of making:

Another attempt to answer the question involves shifting the ground slightly and asserting, as some contemporary feminists do, that there is a different kind of “greatness” for women’s art than for men’s thereby postulating the existence of a distinctive and recognizable feminine style, different both in its formal and its expressive qualities and based on the special character of women’s situation and experience. This, on the surface of it, seems reasonable enough: in general, women’s experience and situation in society, and hence as artists, is different from men’s, and certainly the art produced by a group of consciously united and purposefully articulate women intent on bodying forth a group consciousness of feminine experience might indeed be stylistically identifiable as feminist, if not feminine, art. Unfortunately, though this remains within the realm of possibility it has so far not occurred.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Laura Palazzani, *Gender in Philosophy and Law* (New York: Springer: 2013), 36.

¹⁶⁵ Nochlin goes on: “While the members of the Danube School, the followers of Caravaggio, the painters gathered around Gauguin at Pont-Aven, the Blue Rider, or the Cubists may be recognized by certain clearly defined stylistic or expressive qualities, no such common qualities of ‘femininity’ would seem to link the styles of women artists generally, any more than such qualities can be said to link women writers, a case brilliantly argued, against the most devastating, and mutually contradictory, masculine critical clichés, by Mary Ellmann in her *Thinking about Women*.... In every instance, women artists and writers would seem to be closer to other artists and writers of their own period and outlook than they are to each other. Women artists are more inward-looking, more delicate and nuanced in their treatment of their medium, it may be asserted. But which of the women artists cited above is more inward-turning than Redon, more subtle and nuanced in the handling of pigment than Corot?... The problem lies not so much with some feminists’ concept of what femininity is, but rather with their misconception-shared with the public at large-of what art is: with the naive idea that art is the direct, personal expression of individual emotional

She goes on to articulate how women's art resembles that of their male contemporaries more than the work of other women across time and space. But sameness of difference is not what difference feminism is about. Rather, it is about the sameness of being different that underpins her entire article. Not unlike the inherent paradox of Nochlin's article, sexual difference, in turn, structures and is structured by feminism, according to Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, in their book *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. Citing Joan Wallach Scott in *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*:

Feminism was a protest against women's political exclusion; its goal was to eliminate "sexual difference" in politics, but it had to make its claim on behalf of "women" (who were discursively produced through "sexual difference"). To the extent that it acted for "women," feminism produced the "sexual difference" it sought to eliminate. This paradox—the need both to accept and to refuse "sexual difference"—was the constitutive condition of feminism as a political movement throughout its long history.¹⁶⁶

The interdisciplinary field of gender studies, gender identity, and gendered representation often forgets its feminist beginnings, however: "Gender criticism began as feminist criticism; it could never have developed as it has without the precedents set by feminist theorists."¹⁶⁷ Enter Judith Butler.¹⁶⁸ In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"*

experience, a translation of personal life into visual terms. Art is almost never that, great art never is." Linda Nochlin. "Why have there been no great women artists?." Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in Amelia Jones, ed., *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 229-233.

¹⁶⁶ Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001/1:5.4/--new-materialism-interviews-cartographies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

¹⁶⁷ Ross C. Murfin, "Feminist Criticism and *Jane Eyre*," in *A Critical History* (1999): 460-465.

¹⁶⁸ Martha Nussbaum is critical of a certain gathering of gender theory around Butler's name and work arguing: "This notion, of course, is nothing new. The denaturalizing of gender was present already in Plato, and it received a great boost from John Stuart Mill, who claimed in *The Subjection of Women* that 'what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing.' Mill saw that claims about 'women's nature' derive from, and shore up, hierarchies of power: womanliness is made to be whatever would serve the cause of keeping women in subjection, or, as he put it, 'enslav[ing] their minds'....Mill's application of familiar notions of social-construction to gender needed, and still needs, much fuller development; his suggestive remarks did not yet amount to a theory of gender.

feminist philosopher and gender and queer theorist Judith Butler engaged, among other questions, the long-standing and ongoing challenge: what is the female and the feminine in relation to a sexed or gendered body? Ultimately, Butler demonstrated that it was the weaving of discourse connected the two. What's more, she argued that even the sexed body was constructed through discourse, essentially a result of the effects of gender. Butler describes sex not as a fact or a condition, nor as a situation (or a materialist becoming), but rather as "an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time ... a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms."¹⁶⁹

However, the dichotomy of gender and sex, rather than being undone (and this is the case with most efforts to destroy a binary), was reinforced by continuing to treat them rhetorically as separate things defined in opposition or even muddled. It was also made more unwieldy by the further abstracting of the concepts such as gender.¹⁷⁰ Dolphijn and van der Tuin note this downside as well: "Theorists of gender position themselves in dualistic opposition to theorists of sexual difference, and end up re-affirming sexual difference in its narrowest definition (the

Long before Butler came on the scene, many feminists contributed to the articulation of such an account." Beyond these male contributions, Nussbaum, looks at many feminists' (Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, Nancy Chodorow, and Gayle Rubin) work on gender that Butler builds on and she could look further and earlier at Wollstonecraft or even Beauvoir. Nussbaum, "The Professor of Parody," <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Nussbaum-Butler-Critique-NR-2-99.pdf>.

¹⁶⁹ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 2.

¹⁷⁰ This began as the notion that gender was purely discursive. For example, Anne Balsamo wrote that "Gender is one of the primary effects of the discursive construction of the human body" (Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996], p. 22). Butler advanced the discursive to include the material body itself—especially in response to criticism that there was no body in her talk about bodies. The critique, by Geerts and many others, is that with sex being a product of gender as gender is of sex, we enter a conceptual (through a linguistic) end-game. Inevitably new theories have emerged—most of which reground themselves in matter such as those of the new materialists. See Evelien Geerts, "Performativity," in *New Materialism: How Matter Comes to Matter*, <http://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/p/performativity>. In some senses, one could argue that all of the persuasive words uttered by Butler emerge from a material body in an intra-active relationship with everything. Matter trumps words?

biological essentialism of sex).¹⁷¹ Past feminist interpretation and reception of the work of Beauvoir saw a dichotomy the philosopher did not create. This is not unlike the way that Beauvoir's declaration "One is not born a woman" is claimed by opposing discourses.

Toril Moi argues that the strategies and frameworks that have evolved as the core of gender studies have created more problems than they have solved, as they attempted to flee the body and sever themselves from notions of sexual difference.¹⁷² She disputes the inherently oppressive nature of "essentialism." Moi writes:

In contemporary feminist theory so much energy is spent keeping the specter of biologically-based essentialism at bay that it is easy to forget that generalizations about gender are just as oppressive as generalizations about sex. In many situations to deny biological determinism is not the most pressing obstacle to an emancipatory understanding of what a woman is.¹⁷³

Braidotti would argue that the extensive focus on gender, a word and concept, not readily adopted by the European feminists, was full of traps:

More generally, though, the focus on gender rather than sexual difference presumes that men and women are constituted in symmetrical ways. But this misses the feminist point about masculine dominance. In such a system, the masculine and the feminine are in a structurally dissymmetrical position: men, as the empirical referent of the masculine, cannot be said to have a gender; rather, they are expected to carry the Phallus—which is something different. They are expected to exemplify abstract virility, which is hardly an easy task. Simone de Beauvoir observed fifty years ago that the price men pay for representing the universal is a loss of embodiment; the price women pay, on the other hand, is at once a loss of subjectivity and a confinement to the body. Men become disembodied and, through this process, gain entitlement to transcendence and subjectivity; women become over-embodied and thereby consigned to

¹⁷¹ Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (as well as Moi and Braidotti), comment on how a great deal of gender theory can be now seen as misinterpretations or limited readings of works like *The Second Sex*. Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, 88, http://openhumanitiespress.org/books/download/Dolphijn-van-der-Tuin_2013_New-Materialism.pdf.

¹⁷² As I explain later, new materialists retain with the body (and sexual difference) present in their theory.

¹⁷³ Moi, *Sex, Gender and the Body*, 7.

immanence. This results in two dissymmetrical positions and to opposing kinds of problems.¹⁷⁴

Through the reign of gender, I am following a different thread started by Beauvoir, carried by Irigaray and Kristeva and then Grosz and Braidotti (not without substantial differences among and between them).¹⁷⁵ Together they offer a mix of pragmatism and affect, bravery and confidence, sensuality and the sensory, poetry, and a deep commitment to the material, which, as an artist and puppet lover, is deeply gratifying and meaningful to me. They are invested in the real and historical female-bodied person within a global social context.¹⁷⁶ For Anne Fausto Sterling, who has written extensively on the nature of sexed bodies and gender, the body is embedded in the world (“and it’s a social and sensory world”). She looks to developmental systems theory, where “everything is always 100 percent nature and 100 percent nurture at the same time.”¹⁷⁷ In her book, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, she provides insight into Elizabeth Grosz’s thinking about how the body and the mind come into being together:

Unlike Butler, feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz allows some biological processes a status that pre-exists their meaning. She believes that biological instincts or drives provide a kind of raw material for the development of sexuality.

¹⁷⁴Braidotti with Butler, “Feminism by Any Other Name,” 38.

¹⁷⁵ In particular, the new translation of *The Second Sex* released in 2011 (see bibliography). Braidotti has opened my eyes to the way that American feminist discourse has dominated globally and the trouble with that but also the rich assertion of European efforts to create a place of their own in the field because, as she states, “All of this makes us dependent upon the commercial, financial and discursive power of American feminists.” For me, this challenge to American cultural hegemony holds promise for different feminisms that might speak to more of us. See Braidotti with Butler, “Feminism by Any Other Name.”

¹⁷⁶ Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). This is also the time that Rosi Braidotti published her work *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

¹⁷⁷ Fausto-Sterling believes there are more than two sexes (when considering intersex people). She does not support the notion of hard-wired gender and hence she is not saying there are multiple genders. See Azeen Ghorayshi, “This Sex Which Is Not Two” [interview with Anne Fausto-Sterling], *The New Inquiry* (February 15, 2016), <https://thenewinquiry.com/this-sex-which-is-not-two/>.

But raw materials are never enough. They must be provided with a set of meanings, “a network of desires which” organize the meanings and consciousness of the child's bodily functions.... Grosz tries to understand how human sociality and meaning that clearly originate outside the body, end up incorporated into its physiological, demeanor, and both unconscious and conscious behaviors.... Grosz proposes that we think of the body—the brain, muscles, sex organs, hormones and more as comprising the inside of the Mobius strip. Culture and experience would constitute the outside surface. But, as the image suggests, the inside and outside are continuous and one can move from one space to the other without ever lifting one's feet off the ground.... Thus Grosz also rejects a nature vs. nurture model of human development. While acknowledging that we do not understand the range and limits of the body's pliability, she insists that we cannot merely “subtract the environment, culture, history” and end up with “nature or biology.” This is where a lot of feminist constructed work happens.¹⁷⁸

So how might we understand gender's happening if it is to be understood as culture acting on the body acting on culture? Is it performed or performative, or are there other ways to articulate a process for which most of the theories acknowledge a movement both ways? Perhaps Fausto-Sterling's view (which I believe is essentially shared by Grosz, Braidotti, and Beauvoir) is that “both sex and gender are in part social constructs. But they take place in the body, and so are simultaneously biological. Dynamic systems theories link the social—which impinges on the developing body—to the body itself. Cultural experience has physiological effects.”¹⁷⁹ Perhaps there is an untimely aspect to gender. “Gender is a soft assembly process,” argues psychoanalyst Adrienne Harris. “Our sense of time has to be re-written not as a unidirectional process but as a movement that flows back and forth, producing effects retroactively.”¹⁸⁰ She says, “As experience unfolds and becomes part of what is fed back into memory schemas, memories alter

¹⁷⁸ Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 23.

¹⁷⁹ Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Gender and Sexuality,” <http://www.annefaustosterling.com/fields-of-inquiry/gender/>.

¹⁸⁰ Adrienne Harris, “Gender as a Soft Assembly: Tomboys' Stories,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 1, no. 3 (2000): 222-250. 231.

and reconfigure. Powerful effects from contemporary experience enter and rework memory. An ever-altering and renewing developmental narrative takes shape.”¹⁸¹ For Harris, complicating matters is that the body also presents questions of sexuality and desire, which add further dimensions to the self: “The assemblage of gendered experience in sexual life is contingent and emergent, not preprogrammed. Desire and gender may be set up antagonistically or feel seamlessly enmeshed and obvious.”¹⁸²

While gender was the territory of feminism, sexuality became the territory of a new, growing discursive movement that posited a constructedness of not only gender but also sexual identities and categorizations. Emerging in the early 1990s out of the fields of gender, feminist, and women's studies, queer theory became a dominant force, and remains so.¹⁸³ Drawing heavily on notions of the performative, queer theory promised to center alternatives to the heteronormative. It seemed to offer productive forms of play that foreground inevitably ill-fitting categories and their permeable edges. In it there was a brief moment in which scholarship around lesbians and gay subjectivity developed—a moment in which living openly as a lesbian or gay man was a possibility. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is considered one of the principal figures in the development of *queer* as a term that describes a specific deconstructive strategy and a critical theory within the field of poststructuralism; “to the queer theorist, heterosexuality and homosexuality are binary social constructs that hold saliency only in certain historical moments.”¹⁸⁴ In her book *Tendencies*, Kosofsky Sedgwick lays out the feel of what is queer:

¹⁸¹ Harris, 231.

¹⁸² Harris, 231.

¹⁸³ There is a frequent crossover of names when it comes to gender and queer theory.

¹⁸⁴ April S. Callis, “Playing with Butler and Foucault: Bisexuality and Queer Theory,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, no. 3-4 (2009): 213–233, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15299710903316513>.

The open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically. The experimental linguistic, epistemological, representational, political adventures attaching to the very many of us who may at times be moved to describe ourselves as (among many other possibilities) pushy femmes, radical faeries, fantasists, drags, clones, leatherfolk, ladies in tuxedos, feminist women or feminist men, masturbators, bulldaggers, divas, Snap! queens, butch bottoms, storytellers, transsexuals, aunties, wannabes, lesbian-identified men or lesbians who sleep with men, or ... people able to relish, learn from, or identify with such.¹⁸⁵

In some sense, queer theory continues the challenging task of locating gender in some place that can be, at once, neither, one, or both of the following: part of the essential self or a socially constructed pattern of signifiers. Queer theory's interest in and centering of the sexually minoritized is important, responding to ways in which people with non-normative sex practices were not only marginalized but brutalized, and were attempting in some ways to make more space for diverse identities. I include queer theory in this discussion because my work, especially for a certain time, dealt with being a lesbian, which is still certainly an aspect of my subjectivity. Nevertheless, queer theory can be a damaging tool when applied to the historical (or real) lesbian and gay subject. In his article entitled, "Gay But Not Queer: Toward a Post-Queer Study of Sexuality," Adam Isaiah Green, in his argument against the application of queer theory to lesbian and gay male historical subjects, notes:

"Radical deconstructionism" superimposes a postmodern self-concept onto the homosexual subject, thereby glossing over the enduring institutional organization of sexuality... [and its] "radical subversion" superimposes a politically marginal self-concept onto the homosexual subject, thereby grossly oversimplifying complex developmental processes attendant to sexual identification.... these deficiencies have the ironic effect of erasing the homosexual actors in these studies, either by contesting the epistemological grounds upon which their sexual

¹⁸⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.

identities are formed... or by inventing a transcendental queer that exists outside of culture and social structure....¹⁸⁶

As I mention in the later section on performance and play theories, there is a potential offered by queer theory and the notion of performativity. However, the more deeply I work with these multiple examples of the untimely, the more skeptical I grow of certain frameworks. In some ways they could be seen as newer, more politicized terms for what has existed in some form or another—the *carnavalesque*, for example. By disconnecting from the body, they also become less useful to me. My interest in female embodiment requires that I have a certain bodily groundedness of terms in order to do my work and tell more interesting stories.

¹⁸⁶ Adam Isaiah Green, “Gay But Not Queer: Toward a Post-Queer Study of Sexuality,” *Theory and Society* 31, no. 4 (2002): 521–545, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1023/A:1020976902569.pdf>.

4. Matricentric Feminism

Mothering is a significant if not the defining dimension of their lives... arguably maternity matters more than gender.

—Andrea O'Reilly¹⁸⁷

That “mother” is most core to my being feels at once like something to affirm and something to disavow; my relationship with motherhood is complicated. Like most mothers, the place of motherhood in my life is a source of meaning that flows throughout me and is also a container of meaning in which I feel entrapped. When I think about the word woman and when could think about that notions in relation to myself, I suppose it was early adulthood. It was probably a process of (little by little) finding I was a woman through the relationship of my body to others,’ not by myself. In fact, it may have been through becoming pregnant and becoming a mother that I was fully able to somehow feel that I was embodying some meaning of that word. Motherhood is a physical reality and a psychological double-edged sword for mothers. Attending a ten-day workshop last year with an established and accomplished German puppeteer—and mother—illustrates the way mother permeates the self. She brought her toddler and, while she taught, the toddler climbed on top of her and hung off her. The image is so clear; in part it is because I can remember literally and metaphorically being hung off of, pulled to one side or the other, blinded by little hands, and anxiously hearing my children’s cries. She led us through exercises that were often interrupted. I watched the struggle on her face when a planned nap didn’t happen. I watched other students’ irritation—and, admittedly, even my own at times—when focus was lost. Leading us through movement, her dance was a double body dance with the

¹⁸⁷ Andrea O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* (Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2016), 2.

center of gravity no longer just the mother's. It was a different kind of graceful. At the end, she asked us to reflect on her teaching while mothering and I said, quite sincerely, "It was the only way we could have you and I feel lucky to have had you."¹⁸⁸ Many of the women I discuss in this dissertation worked while raising children, and we can only have them that way. As I have frequently felt life sabotaging my endeavors in writing this dissertation, given the multiple demands on my time and attention, I remind myself that I can only have it this way.

As a mother, a poet, feminist, and a lesbian, Adrienne Rich holds a special place for me. I named my MA show after a line in one of her poems that a therapist shared with me when I thought about graduate school and other life-altering choices: "The door makes no promises, it is only a door."¹⁸⁹ In her work *Of Women Born*, Rich discusses the institution of motherhood and

¹⁸⁸ These are no small materialist matters. In recent days we have seen Tammy Duckworth bring her baby onto the Senate floor, after a vote allowing her to do so. The body of Duckworth (who also uses a wheelchair) is now reconfigured by a nursing baby on her lap. These are revolutionary appearances of embodiment in public spaces and invite further inquiry.

¹⁸⁹ Rich's poem is entitled "Prospective Immigrants Please Note":

Either you will
go through this door
or you will not go through.

If you go through
there is always the risk
of remembering your name.

Things look at you doubly
and you must look back
and let them happen.

If you do not go through
it is possible
to live worthily

to maintain your attitudes
to hold your position
to die bravely

but much will blind you,
much will evade you,
at what cost who knows?

the lore of motherhood (often perpetuated by mothers themselves). She writes at length about the intersecting and often contradictory feelings about her children, their needs, and her own. Rich complicates motherhood and wished it to remain so—complicated. In an interview, with regard to the tropes of motherhood, she said: “We tried to correct those, and in so doing, I think we unearthed a great deal that was real and important and useful. To idealize, to sentimentalize, to mythologize that—those powers, those strengths, those teachers—takes us into yet another place where I think we are disempowered.”¹⁹⁰

While not a mother herself, in her psychoanalytic practice, Simone de Beauvoir encountered the pitfalls of motherhood for women as well as for children, declaring motherhood was neither natural nor enough for a woman. She stated there is “no such thing as an unnatural mother, since maternal love has nothing natural about it: but precisely because of that, there are bad mothers. And one of the great truths that psychoanalysis has proclaimed is the danger ‘normal’ parents constitute for a child.”¹⁹¹ Reading Beauvoir’s words, one finds little comfort, but perhaps that is the point.

Mothering has become more central to and visible in female artists’ practice. As women with established practices have children, they are faced with this theme that is paramount in their lives and often, despite being discouraged from pursuing it, feel as artists they must make sense

The door itself makes no promises.
It is only a door.

Text of and Rich reading the poem at: <https://billmoyers.com/story/adrienne-richs-prospective-immigrants-please-note/>.

¹⁹⁰ Adrienne Rich, in an interview with Terry Gross, March 30, 2012, <https://www.npr.org/2012/03/30/149678681/adrienne-rich-on-the-powerful-powerless-mother>

¹⁹¹ By this, Beauvoir means mothers who are how society creates them, often deeply unhappy people. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 567.

of through their work.¹⁹² The very postmodern sensibility ingrained in us tells us this type of “meaning” is exactly what we should be making work about. Yet, each time, I feel it also puts the woman at risk of being categorized into a category that has no prestige and is not sexy. For all the raw material motherhood offers, many of us do not wish to create from that place. In *Of Women Born*, Adrienne Rich recalls, “Once in a while someone used to ask me, ‘Don’t you ever write poems about your children?’ The male poets of my generation did write poems about their children—especially their daughters. For me, poetry was where I lived as no-one’s mother, where I existed as myself.”¹⁹³ Society often curates an artist’s work, as I would argue was the case with Louise Bourgeois, such that images of motherhood are less exhibited or are interpreted to have more universal meanings, as though birth was not the most universal one there is.

Perhaps because of maternity’s bodiliness, for mothers it forces a complexity and intense struggle with structures that gender the body, life, and psychology.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, I decided, in all my discussion of feminisms and the body, to separate out and frame by itself “matricentric

¹⁹² I realized in graduate school that I had never had a female art professor (or heard of one) that was a mother. The opposite was true for the men; I knew of few who were not fathers. Taking classes in design studies (a field that arguable grew out of home economics as evidenced by its location in many universities within the “school” that evolved from a vocational connection to the arts, as opposed to fine arts), I encountered three professors who were mothers and all had been single mothers. This was quite interesting. By the time I had left, two women in the art department had had children.

¹⁹³ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 31.

¹⁹⁴ Some feminist theory seems to rest on separating women from the destiny of the maternal, which sets up *woman* in opposition to female reproduction and aspects of her embodied experience such as menstruation, ovulation, and menopause, and the preoccupation with the possibility of pregnancy that affects women who do not wish to be mothers as well. Though I am not advocating for motherhood as a value, it is a real aspect of a sexed-ness of the female body and has real hormonal effects that are linked to emotive and affective states. It is also a source of violence and oppression and myriad health issues. The process of pregnancy and birth, while not shared by all women, are feminist concerns. As Rich describes, “From the beginning the mother caring for her child is involved in a continually changing dialogue, crystallized in such moments as when, hearing her child’s cry, she feels milk rush into her breasts; when, as the child first suckles, the uterus begins contracting and returning to its normal size, and when later, the child’s mouth, caressing the nipple creates, waves of sensation in the womb where it once lay; or when, smelling the breast even in sleep, the child starts to root and grope for the nipple.” Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 36.

feminism.” In doing this, however, I am not suggesting it cannot or should not come into full dialogue with the other feminisms. It absolutely does speak to new materialism, for example. It doesn’t need to justify a theory of “sexual difference,” because this feminism presupposes a subjectivity that centers woman and defies a subjectivity that starts with the position of “other.” Yet, overall, feminists have been uninterested in motherhood, and matricentric feminism remains something disregarded and unacknowledged by other feminisms. Recently, I had a chance to attend a motherhood studies conference where I heard Andrea O’Reilly, of York University in Canada, speak. In her book, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice*, she explores motherhood as the “unfinished business of feminism,” which was also the subject of her talk.¹⁹⁵ Participating in the conference, where I also did a performance, there was a sense of not sitting at the cool girls’ table; anecdotally, women shared stories of the ways in which their work has been and continues to be marginalized by mainstream feminists, mentioning that panels (even those typically granted automatically to a caucus) were rejected from feminist conferences (or specific topics imposed if the panel was to be considered). Perhaps the term *matricentric feminism* calls up notions of goddess mothers and of a feminism that is family-centered, child-centered, and heteronormative, and possibly insistently locates sex in the domain of reproduction—all anathemas to much feminist theorizing.¹⁹⁶ Among its goals, however, matricentric feminism “seeks to correct the child centeredness that defines much of the

¹⁹⁵ Andrea O’Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* (Ontario, Canada: Demeter Press, 2016), and Andrea O’Reilly, “The Baby Out With the Bathwater: The Disavowal and Disappearance of Motherhood in 20th and 21st Century Academic Feminism,” presented at the Museum of Motherhood second annual conference “Teaching Mother Studies in the Academy and Beyond,” <https://mommuseum.org/conferences/conference-schedule-2018/>.

¹⁹⁶At one point, using the voice typing feature, the computer spells out “Mattress Centric.” I have to laugh. Beds are a large part of what it is to be in the realm of motherhood.

scholarship and activism on motherhood.”¹⁹⁷ This disrupts a default of constructing the mother-person with reference to the child, an extension of what we ideologically propose around childhood.

I am keenly aware of my own internalized “matrophobia,” as O’Reilly calls it, and believe that women (mothers or not) experience an unease with this realm that is so close to what we fear. Rich says to have born and reared a child is to have done that thing which patriarchy joins with physiology to render into the definition of femaleness.¹⁹⁸ Yet it is, for most mothers one of the most meaningful ways of looking at their lives and their identities. Far from simplifying or romanticizing this, in actuality, matricentric feminism complicates it. The field is engaged in a deep critique of the culture that surrounds pregnancy, birth, and child-rearing. Most matricentric theorists are far more interested in the uncomfortable rubs in the construct of motherhood and resistance to the weight of over-laying the image mother onto the image of woman onto the woman herself. Matricentric feminism welcomes complicated stories and, necessarily, opens space for taboo. While second-wave feminists had strained relationships with motherhood and mothering (and, at times, their mothers¹⁹⁹), as Andrea O’Reilly highlights, there is a lack of interest in motherhood among third-wave feminist academics, reflected by the lack of journal articles published on the topic.²⁰⁰ Yet, what matricentric feminism seeks to do is

¹⁹⁷ O’Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 4.

¹⁹⁸ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 37.

¹⁹⁹ My mentor, who came of age during the second wave, recalled with regret the anger many women had towards their mothers for their lives of compromise.

²⁰⁰ O’Reilly cites the sparse number of articles relating to motherhood in the journal *Signs*, for example; since the nineteen-eighties the number had substantially decreased, implying that the designated third wave is less interested than ever in theorizing motherhood. O’Reilly, “The Baby Out With the Bathwater.”

fundamentally interesting: to deconstruct the norm and expose the falsity of it, to complicate motherhood. According to O'Reilly, matricentric feminism “asserts that the topic mothers, mothering, and motherhood is deserving of serious and sustained scholarly inquiry.”

Subconsciously, perhaps part of what might make some people recoil, especially if they are not mothers, is the very association with the fluids of pregnancy, birth, and physical acts of mothering, such as breastfeeding, but also changing soiled diapers—it is the body showing up, and not merely discursively but in a way that can actually make a person sticky; it has a smell, it's all we don't speak of. Julia Kristeva would argue this is so. She would, perhaps, see feminism's arm's-distance stance regarding motherhood as a result of our abandonment of the messy semiotic as we move to the symbolic. Clean and proper feminism, with its symbolic language, leaves the mother behind—abjected “and with her, all elements of the self that threaten or violate codes of behavior and discursive expression. For Kristeva, everything that is filthy or disorderly or uncivilized is in the same place as the left-behind mother, in the realm of the abject”²⁰¹ The semiotic is an echo of the parallel dimensions where sense-making and becoming happen for new materialists and upon which they rely in their forging of a non-dualistic relationship between matter and being.²⁰²

In fact, it is through a matricentric feminist lens that I am most critical of queer theory because, ironically, there is little place for investigating motherhood without norming it. When I read titles for papers and talks along the lines of “Queering Motherhood,” I have to laugh

²⁰¹ Deborah Caslav Covino, *Amending the Abject* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), 21.

²⁰² Kristeva reminds us that the semiotic and symbolic are not separate: These two modalities—the semiotic and the symbolic—are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved; in other words, so-called “natural” language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic. See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 24.

because motherhood is always queer and always has been. One need only look to the Greek myths to see the way that the mother is the source of all categorical destabilization. What I see queer theory offering mothers is more proscription—through the act of norming mothers so that they can create queer mothers that disrupt mothering in ultimately quite predictable *queer* ways. Queer theory might wish to have the mother stand still and be the ultimate foil against which queerness can be constructed, but this is a simple fantasy of what the mother and mothering is. Is not carrying another human within your body and then sitting across the table from them when they come home from high school the queerest thing one can imagine? There have been violent mothers and mothers who leave, incestuous mothers, and animalistic mothers, and rather than being outside motherhood, these are embedded in motherhood's poetic construct.²⁰³ This is an area I discuss in the section on my own bodies of work.

I am not the only mother and creator who has experienced a frustration with the *academy* and the half-outsider (maybe whole-outsider) status that mothers have. In an interview with the recently created national artist-parent organization Cultural Reproducers, artist and writer Lise

²⁰³ I have gone back so many times to the Medieval Bestiary where we see motherhood in all its abjection. It illuminates a way we burden motherhood with a psychological underbelly. In her work, "The Social Construction of Maternal Absence" and many other writings, Diana Gustafson complicates mothering by examining the many ways and aspects of absent mothers. See Gustafson, "The Social Construction of Maternal Absence," in *Unbecoming Mothers: The Social Production of Maternal Absence* (New York: Routledge, 2013) 43–70. Also, returning to Elizabeth Grosz's and many others' critique of queering, I have to assume that I won't find my story to be queer enough to be queer. I could define my motherhood against the heteronormative, the copulative, and the family-oriented, but would that tell my story? And would it mean that only mothers mothering against motherhood could qualify? Lesbian mothers raising children in a lesbian family could not truly be queer since by many interpretations within queer theory their partnering is the same as heterosexual partnering; they would be flattened out into a normed social situation. Grosz also points out the ubiquitous claiming of the term *queer*: "I wonder, who isn't queer? I have a whole bunch of heterosexual friends who are now queer. Close up, in fact, given psychoanalysis, everyone's utterly queer. But if that's true, if we're all queer, then the political sharpness of that concept is somewhat muted." Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies of Philosophy: An Interview with Elizabeth Grosz," *Stance* 7, April (2014): 120, http://www.bsu.edu/libraries/beneficencepress/stance/2014_spring/12Grosz115-126.pdf. Since writing this footnote, I noticed this recent article in the New York Times: "Some L.G.B.T. Parents Reject the Names 'Mommy' and 'Daddy.'" The article profiles a married male and female who identify as queer and their struggle to make their queerness visible. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/26/well/family/some-lgbt-parents-reject-the-names-mommy-and-daddy.html>

Haller-Baggesen states: “I became increasingly frustrated that in this environment... where we were talking art theory, queer theory, feminist theory, intersectional feminism, body politics, etc. I found little willingness to consider my experience of mothering, and how it had affected my view on these matters. I felt like I was being sent “back to the Mommy-blog” with my musings – like it wasn’t academic material.”²⁰⁴ This was an experience I had in a medieval art class when we discussed images and examples of lactation and the professor made it clear that he did not want to hear any of my lived experience or the research I had done into breast-feeding. Such was the disembodied embodiment we frequently discussed and something that contributed to a skeptical attitude I have towards academic trends.

For these and other reasons, matricentric feminism may be an epistemology in and of itself, because of the way that care and attachment (both physical and psychological) impact participation; I certainly experienced this.²⁰⁵ Even beyond the hours that seem stolen, parts of the mind are stolen, too. It is an act of defiance of the rules of time and space that mothers participate, just as it is a revolutionary notion that women’s lived (and very body-based)

²⁰⁴ “Mothenism: An Interview with Lise Haller Baggesen,” *Cultural Reproducers* (May 4, 2016), <http://www.culturalreproducers.org/2016/05/mothenism-interview-with-lise-haller.html>.

²⁰⁵ The “sticky floor” is a metaphor used to describe the way women are concentrated in low-paying jobs with low prestige. When I heard it, I thought of other ways that sticky floor might work and how it was particularly appropriate for motherhood’s impact on our ability to create and participate in the production of knowledge. I thought of it as the way that the general crud and constant spillage of a kitchen accrues and attaches itself both literally and metaphorically so that when you go to work in an office or a studio you feel the soles of your shoes slightly sticky from jam or spilled juice and also slightly sticky from the constant sense that you should make a doctor’s appointment or check in with a child, the awareness that they now might text at any moment to tell you they have been electrocuted (true story) or have a hangover and a paper due (another true story). Even when I didn’t live with my girls and was what Gustafson studied—the absent mother—our constant connection by text and phone meant that I was always on call. In the times in between, I couldn’t (and can’t) quite turn off messages in my mind—like sticky little hands and the aftergrip of a sticky floor. Something tugs to pull me always a bit out of the flow. Rich experienced frustration and even anger at this and some saw her work as one of bitterness. She didn’t see it so. It is reality and there are costs to the parts of us that aren’t mothers. I wonder if the theme of stickiness here could be expanded to be encompassed by new materialism; A neighbor (and mother) once told me that mothers are always the glue in the family, and I have also heard of the “connective tissue” (from which glue was made). The material reality of sticky-feeling substances and their metaphors abound for women and especially for mothers.

experiences could be knowledge. Like other feminist epistemologies, matricentric feminism challenges the lack of value given to mothers' stories of mothering as sources of new knowledge. O'Reilly points out that several theorists have shown that even when feminist narratives address motherhood, they very frequently are framed as or evolve to become daughter-centric stories, unable to sustain the view from inside motherhood—a mother's subjectivity; they rapidly give way to the mother *as experienced* (and as defined by others) and not lived; while we learn what it is like to be mothered, we do not hear what it is to mother.²⁰⁶

In her piece on Lise Haller-Baggesen, called “On the Mother-Shaped Hole in Contemporary Art,” Julie Niemi discusses Baggesen's motivations to write the book *Mothernism*, a play on “mother” and “modernism.”²⁰⁷ The book comprises a series of letters Baggesen has written to specific people, including her daughter, in which she interrogates topics relating to being a mother and an artist.²⁰⁸ In all her work, her goal to “reframe how motherhood is perceived by inserting it both within and in opposition to the canon of art history.” She references Mary Kelly's famous “Post-Partum Document,” a six-year exploration of the mother–child relationship. Reflecting my earlier comments on the abject, Kelly says that when the work

²⁰⁶ O'Reilly looks at ways in which mothers' stories are elided. One example she gives is Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother / Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, where the author draws attention to the glaring omission of Jocasta's voice (and therefore story) in *Oedipus Rex* as an example of a central mother, like so many, who are silent. They are mute plot fixtures in dramas of partners and children. See O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*.

²⁰⁷ The book jacket reads: “If the proverbial Mother is perhaps perceived as a persona non grata in the art world, because her nurturing nature is at odds with the hyperbolic ideal of the singular artistic genius, *Mothernism* amplifies her presence, channeling her energy, complexity, and sublime creative potential in a series of intimate and critical reflections. The resulting collection of letters—dedicated with love from one mother to her dear daughter, sister, mother, and reader—fuse biography, music, art, and history into an auto-theoretical testimony that recalls and redefines the future imperfect. Lise Haller Baggesen, *Mothernism* (Chicago: Green Lantern Press, 2014).

²⁰⁸ Since publishing the book, she has gone on to center conversation and correspondence as a radical act. “This is strikingly conveyed in her latest project, *Mothernism*, a series of nomadic, tented environments for conversation, reading, lactating, partying, and introspection.” See Julie Niemi, “Lise Haller Baggesen: On the Mother-Shaped Hole in Contemporary Art,” *Art21 Magazine* (June 10, 2015), <http://magazine.art21.org/2015/06/10/lise-haller-baggesen-on-the-mother-shaped-hole-in-contemporary-art/#.WsE2QdPwbow>.

was exhibited in London in 1976, people were outraged because it included stained diapers.

“Each of the six-part series concentrates on a formative moment in her son’s mastery of language and her own sense of loss, moving between the voices of the mother, child and analytic observer. Informed by feminism and psychoanalysis, the work has had a profound influence on the development and critique of conceptual art.”²⁰⁹ Interestingly, Kelly’s work shows that the conceptual and the material, rather than being in opposition, are intimately linked; the concrete conveys an idea in the way that the illusory cannot. The conceptual turn of that allowed Kelly to make “Post-partum Document,” which shows an evolution that occurred throughout the twentieth century, particularly owing to Dada and Fluxus, in which the ready-made object and all its content entered a work. The objects women chose were often intimately related to their bodies (and, in this case, to their children). Mothers have always been in touch with materialism; the vocation is materially intense: from their own bodily transformation during pregnancy and after birth, to the artifacts that Mary Kelly describes, to the bodily manifestations of children’s illness (accompanied in previous eras by high rates of infant death). The child’s bowels and skin with its rashes, boils and jaundice, pink eye and thrush are all experienced by the mother almost as if it were her body. Mothers are experts on cottons (and in previous eras, wools). They intuit the sensation against their baby’s skin. They sense absorbency. They test for the stretch of it ... the warmth. The presence of fabric (in place of bronze) in women’s art, and the knowledge that that requires, is seen across the gamut of work from utilitarian craft to the most conceptual art.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Mary Kelly, “Post-Partum Document,” http://www.marykellyartist.com/post_partum_document.html.

²¹⁰ I understand here that I am not speaking about all times or all places or all mothers. I am strategically positing a universal experience to make an argument about women, knowing full well that there are mothers who still face high rates of infant mortality and mothers who experience alienation and postpartum depression. There are mothers who do not have sufficient money or support. Nevertheless, I gain nothing from not telling this story the way I did. In fact, to continuously be faced with the poststructuralist, knee-jerk “NOT *ALL* MOTHERS!” is to lose the voice to assert an idea-something women need to be able to do. I am aware that I am speaking from my own family tradition

Neither Kelly nor Baggesen are the first artists to theorize through their practice. Mina Loy, an English poet and artist, joined the Italian futurists, despite a culture of a misogyny (articulated in their manifesto and writings) that specifically rejected women's insidiously domesticating power over men.²¹¹ She and the few accepted female futurists were often brash, bold, bodily, and sexual. In her book on Loy, Madeleine Gedde Metz tells us that the female Futurists made work about "pregnancy and birth as an image of the artistic process of creation." Mina Loy's texts, while ranging in theme and changing throughout her life, shocked her own contemporaries in the early 1900s, because they explicitly delved into matters of *women's sexuality* drawing from her own life; she included marriage, sexuality, pregnancy, and birth as themes.²¹²

As I explore in later sections, women who made dolls, especially those who innovated in materials and design, used embodied knowledge of babies and children, one with subtle understandings of corporeality, phenomenology, and affect, to create toys that people responded to strongly. They were mothers. While Thomas Edison was filling a doll's innards with mechanics to produce horrifying speech, Käthe Kruse was noting the weight and presence of the

of motherhood and some broader cultural practices. This is what Julia Kristeva did as well. She wrote abstract theory from intimate body experiences with birth and mothering entering into consideration some notions of the universal derived from the personal. Adrienne Rich does a beautiful job of pointing out the contrasts in experiences of mothering and this is valuable too. Nevertheless, we must be careful to not police out ideas so much with the cries of "NOT ALL" that women cannot write (or think or speak) without being stopped by a category crisis that reinforces their powerlessness. In the next section, I address some of this in the response to critiques on standpoint theory. Toril Moi also discusses this at length, saying "The fact remains that it is impossible to write theory without generalizing and universalizing." Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body*, 123.

²¹¹ "Woman embodies the antithesis of everything they value. Woman is passive, parasitical, peaceful, pacifists, ... a prisoner of those very same static social institutions which the futurists abhor." Lucia Re, "Futurism and Feminism," *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989): 255, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24003870>.

²¹² Madelien Gedde Metz in Susanne Dietrichson, "The Masculine Avant-Garde that Fostered Feminism," Kilden genderresearch.no, <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2016/12/masculine-avant-garde-fostered-feminism>.

body. I mentioned in the beginning section that another way in which the puppet and doll are more alike is revealed in the work women doll makers have articulated in terms of responsiveness, weight, and joints. I observed that the doll and the puppet both must interact with the human manipulating or handing them. They work in tandem with a human being and the knowledge is not dissimilar to a mother's knowledge of her infant's body. These are insights I have because of holding babies and toddlers for years.²¹³

It is not surprising that the study of doll makers is often only taken up by those who avidly collect or specialize in dolls (versus fine art). A stumbling block to finding research to include is that the vast amount of knowledge is held and passed between people who are not in the academy. They do not have scholarly backgrounds. They speak with each other at shows and get-togethers or with customers in the shops they own.²¹⁴ They may have blogs, and some have published pamphlets or even books, but there is so much knowledge that is not exchanged in a marketplace of ideas that the academy recognizes. Much of the knowledge is anecdotal. This is yet another argument for different forms of valuing knowledge that is held in body, material, and story.

²¹³ This is so apparent when someone holds an infant for the first time and has no intuitive sense about how to support the head; their lack of knowledge shows in their awkward and uneasy efforts to work with an infant's body, something they have no corporeal knowledge of.

²¹⁴ I took a trip out to a famous doll shop in Anoka, Minnesota and spoke to the owner and bought a few tiny dolls. Like a librarian, standing in a library full of books she had read or at least skimmed, in that store, crammed full but orderly and piled high, the women had knowledge of each item I touched.

5. Feminist Epistemologies: Arts-Based Research, Autoethnography, and Writing In-Between

I WAS PERMITTED TO BE AN IMAGE BUT NOT AN IMAGE MAKER
CREATING HER OWN SELF-IMAGE.

—Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*²¹⁵

Because of the autoethnographic nature of this work, it will not be universal and it does not pretend to be. Certain themes, objects, and people have entered my field of vision, caught my attention, and created resonance, enough so that I want to think and write about them. Only through exploring (while acknowledging) the specificity of my experiences and interests can I make a meaningful and honest contribution. Part of the project of this dissertation is one of feminist epistemology which rethinks the production of and the value attached to certain knowledge. Wanting to do work on dolls and to think that doll play, for example, is worthy of academic attention is already a somewhat revolutionary act—just as it is a revolutionary act to write a dissertation *and* keep food in the fridge and enough clean spoons and bowls that we can at least have cereal for supper.²¹⁶

The more I read and think about dolls and puppets, gender, and the body, the more aware I am of the way that issues of race, class, culture, and structures of power could be endlessly explored and illuminated through this topic. I wouldn't have taken on this project if I didn't fully

²¹⁵ Carolee Schneemann, "Interior Scroll, 1975," Tate Galleries, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/schneemann-interior-scroll-p13282>.

²¹⁶ In a call to return to women academic's connection with the material [and the cereal (my addition)], Rosi Braidotti says: "When it comes to gender, the paradox is this: idealism was created by males who were in an academic environment in which their material practices were reduced to a minimum, and who had wives who did all the material work. And yet the moment feminism became academic it became deeply idealist. Hence I welcome any return to materialism by feminists, even if based on entirely different ideas." Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 48, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001/1:5.4/--new-materialism-interviews-cartographies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

believe that dolls have immense power as objects within material and visual culture. The hegemonic and ideological power of dolls is not to be underestimated. Their relationship to means of production, distribution, and consumption, as well as, for example, their entanglement with militarism are certainly topics for further investigation; I touch very briefly on them here. The topic I seek to investigate centers on sex and gender and the body, within a given time period and the dominant American and European cultures during that time. This, in and of itself, is intimidatingly broad and I will not be able to explore comprehensively much less exhaust this topic. The psychological power of dolls is also a rich area of investigation. The relationships that different individuals and groups have with dolls will be affected by the way dolls appear to them, unavoidably entwined and enmeshed with issues of identity and opportunity (including race, class, religion, and more).²¹⁷ I simply cannot do more here than point to some of these themes and validate their worthiness of deep study, while acknowledging the limits of this work.

The expectation in contemporary feminist scholarship is that one not speak about women if what is said does not apply to all women. Toril Moi spends a significant amount of time challenging this type of critique in her book *What Is a Woman?*. She summons Beauvoir's play between "foreground" and "background," a formula she believes solves the problem of women's narratives.

Beauvoir avoids reductionism and essentialism (the individual woman in the foreground cannot be reduced to the general historical situation which is her background) while still enabling us to grasp the historical factors that influence and shape the choices of individual women. In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir tries to produce a historical analysis of women's condition. A historical analysis cannot be all-inclusive or universal in the sense of reaching a level of abstraction that

²¹⁷ For example, it would be pointless to attempt to integrate a discussion of the important and painful *Doll Study*, that demonstrated the racism (and internalized racism) of American society and how dolls are embedded in that system. There would not be a way to do justice to that discussion. Neither can I address the complexity of *ethnic dolls*. These are rich and complex themes that need to be dealt with as the main topic of an investigation.

might hold for all women in all countries at all times. In order to have any analytic and historical power at all it needs to be specific and particular.²¹⁸

Central to feminist epistemology is standpoint theory.²¹⁹ In a response a critique about the exclusive (essentialist?) nature of feminist standpoint theory, Dorothy E. Smith wrote: “In this political context, the category ‘women’ is peculiarly nonexclusive since it was then and has remained open-ended, such that boundaries established at any one point are subject to the disruption of women who enter speaking from a different experience as well as an experience of difference.”²²⁰ The misinterpretation, over-application, and, I would venture, *weaponizing* of the very important framework of intersectionality has led to an environment in which many of us are

²¹⁸ Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body*, 199.

²¹⁹ “Feminist standpoint theorists make three principal claims: (1) Knowledge is socially situated. (2) Marginalized groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of things and ask questions than it is for the non-marginalized. (3) Research, particularly that focused on power relations, should begin with the lives of the marginalized.” Tracy Bowell, “Feminist Standpoint Theory,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fem-stan/>.

²²⁰ Although I could offer many thousands examples, I will point to one here from the late nineties to give us a sense of the beginnings of a trend in feminism of attempting to condemn the methods that substantiated the initial movements’ work; I describe this more in my section on feminist epistemology. It is a response written by sociologist Dorothy E. Smith to Susan Hekman’s “Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited” in which the former defends standpoint theory against various critiques. The entire quote reads: “Beginning in women’s experiences told in women’s words was and is a vital political moment in the women’s movement. Experience is a method of speaking that is not preappropriated by the discourses of the relations of ruling. This is where women began to speak from as the women’s movement of our time came into being. When we assembled as ‘women’ and spoke together as ‘women,’ constituting ‘women’ as a category of political mobilization, we discovered dimensions of ‘our’ experience that had no prior discursive definition. In this political context, the category ‘women’ is peculiarly nonexclusive since it was then and has remained open-ended, such that boundaries established at any one point are subject to the disruption of women who enter speaking from a different experience as well as an experience of difference. It is this commitment to the privileges of women to speak from experience that opens the women’s movement to the critique of white and/or heterosexist hegemony from those it marginalizes and silences. The authority of experience is foundational to the women’s movement (which is not to say that experience is foundational to knowledge) and has been and is at once explosive and fruitful.” It is this very contribution to the constituent “women” that parallels my sense of the poetic of woman and also of the way that visual culture operates where images join a larger pool of images making broader the imago of woman--whatever that ever changing imago be at a given moment. This poor understanding of and/or lack of interest and curiosity in theory, often deprives feminist theory of nuance, power, and poetics. While many have sought to condemn theories of sexual difference which Luce Irigaray was instrumental in articulating by calling them determinist and essentialist, Rosi Braidotti reminds us that “Irigaray defends this irreducible and irreversible difference not only of Woman from man, but also of real-life women from the reified image of Woman-as-Other. This is proposed as the foundation for a new phase of feminist politics.”

trained to quickly point out when someone appears to be speaking for a group to which they do not apparently belong, and others of us trained to censor or qualify our voice if it cannot speak for everyone.²²¹

In the introduction to the new edition of *The Second Sex*, Judith Thurman reveals that Simone de Beauvoir initially conceived of the book as “an autobiographical essay explaining why, when she had tried to define herself, the first sentence that came to mind was ‘I am a woman.’”²²² Siting the deepest understanding at the level of the personal is something feminists have contributed to epistemology, increasingly in the late twentieth century, inserting itself into the academy through feminist scholarship and the creation of the field of women’s studies. Just as autoethnography sought to change knowledge production in modernism, the feminist genre of fictocriticism, which developed in Australian universities, seeks to challenge the modernist and

²²¹ Intersectionality is an important framework developed by Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 to explain how different forms of oppression intersect and amplify oppressions. See Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics” [1989], in *Feminist Legal Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 57–80. Its broad application as a form of critique without a specific reference to (and at times understanding of) the original context for meaning is part of the problem. Toril Moi speaks to this in Ida Irene Bergström’s discussion with Moi: “Theory today has become so abstract and overgeneralised that it no longer says anything relevant about women’s lives.” She also states, “I choose to look at the concept of intersectionality precisely because I am convinced that the study of such phenomena is crucially important.” On the one hand, there is the desire to create one comprehensive theory which covers every case of oppression and exclusion, something Moi thinks is impossible. Moi goes on to say: “Many feminists and intersectionality theorists believe that words such as woman, black—or intersectionality itself—have a clearly bounded meaning, independent of use and context. The result is a self-defeating concern about the inclusion and exclusion of words that no feminist can possibly avoid using.” Moi also expresses concerns that we confuse inclusive language with real inclusion. See “Toril Moi: Feminist Theory Needs a Revolution,” <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2015/09/toril-moi-feminist-theory-needs-revolution>.

²²² Judith Thurman’s introduction to Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011), ix. This new edition, retranslated and unabridged, was long awaited by feminists. Starting in the nineteen-eighties, scrutiny of the poor translation, motivated by a renewed interest in Beauvoir, revealed that the translation done by H. M. Parshley (1884–1953) was unacceptable. Parshley, a zoologist at Smith College with limited French, was not only inaccurate and incomplete, but radically changed the voice and content. For example, Parshley omitted illustrations of women’s rage and examples of their oppression while preserving men’s psychological presence. Toril Moi, one of the preeminent scholars and admirers of Beauvoir (whom I quote extensively in this work), found that “only a tome as long as the book itself could document all the flaws’ in the translator’s ‘deplorable’ text.” Nevertheless, she is unsatisfied with this newer version as well. Most people, however, have welcomed it. Carlin Romano, Chronicle Review: The Second ‘Second Sex,’” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 10, 2010), <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Second-Second-Sex/65962>.

Enlightenment notions of authority. Helen Flavell, in her paper, “Writing-Between: Australian and Canadian Ficto-Criticism,” contrasts the way various forms of writing-between happens, noting that in the United States, the focus of scholarship on “writing-between” is very much on autobiography (and presumably within that discussion is autoethnography).

Central to my dissertation is a “writing-in-between” method, that of autoethnography, with its tools of autobiography and expressive writing. I see my creative work as autoethnographic as well, and this dissertation as a larger autoethnography that envelops this creative core. The porous boundaries between art and scholarship are perhaps less obvious in literary work, with language used to study language. Nevertheless, the new in-between genres especially seen in feminist work are other ways of knowing. They are, however, not entirely new. *A Room of One’s Own*, written by Virginia Woolf in the 1920s, is exactly the kind of in-between writing that feminist epistemology has found to be useful in crafting a new way to do theory in an overtly subjective manner—with the subject fully present in the work—and no pretense of the sort of objectivity that had never worked for women even when they aspired to it. Woolf writes:

At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one’s audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact. Therefore I propose, making use of all the liberties and licenses of a novelist, to tell you the story of the two days that preceded my coming here—how, bowed down by the weight of the subject which you have laid upon my shoulders, I pondered it, and made it work in and out of my daily life.²²³

²²³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/PikliNatalia/Virginia_Woolf_-_A_Room_of_Ones_Own.pdf.

Many forms of “writing in between” have emerged in and towards the end of the twentieth century, with specific names that recognize each as genres overlapping at times; they include such genres such as auto-theoretical writing, autoethnography, and fictocriticism, all seeking to blur the boundaries between the authoritative and canonic fields and methods and the ever more flexible structures of modern and postmodern poetry, fiction, and other forms of creative writing.²²⁴ I would argue that these are not so new and that we see them stylistically as modernist gestures as well as postmodernist—and often specific to women’s modernist writing. Autobiography was already popular in the nineteenth century, and women, particularly French and Italian women, participated in the form. These works anticipated a different approach to truth—or the acknowledgement that there was no truth—and challenged what knowledge counted as important. In “Fictocriticism, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences,” Anna Gibbs says:

Fictocriticism is a 'haunted writing' (note 1): traced by numerous voices which work now in unison, at other times in counterpoint, and at others still against each other, in deliberate discord. The problem of haunted writing comes to the fore in academic discourse when disciplinary authority and discursive protocol function as the voice of the dead stalking the present so as to paralyze it with terror, or else as a kind of watchful superego as resistant to modification as if it were a text inscribed in stone. In an act of defiance, an attempt to exorcise the paralyzing interdictions of disciplinary academic authority, feminist writers in particular have sought other relationships to such forms of authority than those of simple submission and unthinking repetition.²²⁵

Feminist performance art was a kind of performance of autobiography even when the stories weren’t true. Elin Diamond refers to the release in performance art of “the body’s

²²⁴ Mothernism is described by the publisher as an *auto-theoretical* work. Lise Haller Baggesen, *Mothernism* (Chicago: Green Lantern Press, 2014).

²²⁵ Anna Gibbs, “Fictocriticism, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences,” *Text* 9, no 1 (2005), <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april05/gibbs.htm>.

unauthorized truths.”²²⁶ It entwined itself with the art and theater world and influenced both. It was predicated on locating real bodies in real time and real space. It took up time with stories that were less climactic or differently climactic. It eschewed the artifice (perhaps for other types of artifice, but nevertheless). Echoing fictocriticism, in *Unmaking Mimesis*, Elin Diamond describes three women performing as

‘struggling to appear,’ to take up an “I.”... The narrative “I” has been a staple of feminist performance art since the 1970s, a means of inciting the expectation of narrativity only to displace it. Feminist theatre of the 1980s offered self-consciously nominated ‘texts from elsewhere’ to provoke a connection to authoritative narratives of history. In juxtaposed fragments of multivocal narrative the stage space became a scene of desire in which women were incitements to speech, never subjects of discourse.²²⁷

Theodora Skipitares, whose work I discuss in depth in a later section, echoes Virginia Woolf’s famous line that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write.²²⁸ Skipitares says of her move from using her own body in performance art to manipulating puppets and eventually only to directing and devising:

From the minute I started doing these [puppet pieces], I always felt that I was the author and no one would ever challenge that. That just was sort of *there* and I don’t know why.... My voice was always gonna be my voice and there was never any wavering about that. I think my strategy was start off small and pay for it yourself and you can do whatever the hell you want and sometimes now when I am doing shows for which I don’t have enough money, I still do whatever I want. So I still have that, but I don’t think I ever doubted that I had something to say. I just think that I had sometimes to experience the disappointment of people watching my work when it somehow changed and they did not like the way it changed like when I left performing solo some people were disappointed. When I left the stage some people were disappointed.... You leave some people behind you. You lose some people and maybe you gain some other people.²²⁹

²²⁶ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 38.

²²⁷ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 152.

²²⁸ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*.

²²⁹ Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, April 2, 2016.

This story-and-self turn was seen in the humanities as well, with the development of autoethnography, especially important to feminist scholarship. Autoethnography takes autobiography and applies it to an intentional exploration of the larger culture. Carolyn Ellis describes it as a written work that retrospectively and selectively examines

epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. Proponents not only point to it as a method of generating new knowledge but also to its transformation of established methodological practices to include and value the personal and experiential.²³⁰

Perhaps most revolutionary in the autoethnographic turn is the re-rooting of knowledge in the act of telling stories and demonstrating the power, craft, and responsibilities of stories and storytelling.²³¹ The reflexive structure of autoethnography offers me an opportunity to mine my experiences for the sources of the implicit (in both a scholarly and autobiographical sense). Ellis says:

When researchers write autoethnographies, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience. They accomplish this by first discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice.²³²

In his work on feminist criticism, Ross Murfin argues that the motivation behind feminists' tendency to advocate and practice "personal" or "autobiographical" criticism is to underscore "the understanding of woman not as a single, deterministic category but rather as the

²³⁰ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, eds., "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Research* 12, no. 1, article 10 (January 2011).

²³¹ Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²³² Ellis et al., "Autoethnography: An Overview."

nexus of diverse experiences.”²³³ Murfin notes the important reversal that took place in the 1980s and ‘90s in which feminists’ reluctance “to inject themselves into their analyses for fear of being labeled idiosyncratic, impressionistic, and subjective by men” actually became the *preferred* approach to research and criticism as women became “openly skeptical of the claims to reason, logic, and objectivity that have been made in the past” and which excluded their voices.²³⁴

As I discuss in the section on matricentric feminism, Andrea O’Reilly cites several authors who point out the absence of what she calls the “matrifocal story,” mentioning that even stories that initially frame themselves as the mother’s story lose that center and ultimately tell the story of the daughter—or the mothered.²³⁵ Is this a case of internalized matrophobia that causes a woman who has experienced both motherhood and daughterhood to lean towards the latter in the stories she tells about mothers? Hence, the potential offered autobiography is not without problems:

Traditional autobiography was also gendered, "masculinist" genre. Its established conventions, feminists have recently pointed out, call for a life-plot that turns on action, triumph through conflict, intellectual self-discovery, and often public renown. The body, reproduction, children, and intimate interpersonal relationships are generally well in the background and often absent. Arguing that the lived experiences of women and men differ—women's lives, for instance, are often characterized by interruption and deferral.²³⁶

Interruption and deferral are constant qualities of my projects. At fifty, I attempted to keep a journal once again, and only by allowing myself nonlinear and fragmented scrawling

²³³ Ross C. Murfin, “Feminist criticism and *Jane Eyre*,” *A Critical History* (1999): 465.

²³⁴ Murfin, 465.

²³⁵ Andrea O’Reilly cites Marianne Hirsch, Brenda O’Daly, and Maureen Reddy, in *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* (Ontario, Canada: Demeter Press, 2016), 4.

²³⁶ Murfin, 465. Shari Benstock wrote about this as well in *Textualizing the Feminine* (1991).

could I sustain it. I have notebooks full of this sort of thing, waiting. Simone de Beauvoir sees the journal, the autobiography of many girls, as an extension of the act to talking to one's dolls, addressing it as a person.²³⁷ What is the connection here with women's words and stories and doll play? Maybe I can find comfort in the fact that many of these bits of story I've written find themselves in my performances. My puppetry is a kind of writing-in-between; a mix of impulsive scribbles and phrases combined with intellectual curiosity: the theoretical, the personal and narrative, and the material.

Susan Finley, in her chapter "Methodologies" in the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples and Issues*, says, "Arts-based research makes use of emotive, affective experiences, senses, and bodies, and imagination and emotion as well as intellect, as ways of knowing, and responding to the world."²³⁸ An important piece of advice, given to me by a professor, still resonates. He said, "Don't let your head get ahead of your hands, don't let your hands get ahead of your head." It came at an early point in my MFA when I felt the world of scholarly knowledge beckoning me in a way that competed timewise with making things. This situation has never improved. It isn't a separate wanting; it is a drive to integrate and to literally incorporate what I hear and see, passing it through my body by making work. The advice aligns with the notions of corporeality and non-dualism that I have referenced and now arrived at again in a different way. It was, at that time, the symbiosis represented in scraps of paper stuck to my studio wall with new words I was learning, like *palimpsest* and *immanence*. It was a bit of somehow important wire pinned to the wall and a series of images of people carrying

²³⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 352.

²³⁸ Susan Finley, "Methodologies" in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples and Issues*, J. Gary Knowles and Adra L. Cole, eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press, 2007), 74.

others (me and my babies, husbands and wives in wife-carrying championships, and *St. Christopher Carrying the Christ Child*, by Hieronymus Bosch). Immanence, weight, and wire— notions and substances one could literally have a bodily relationship with, taking them in and turning them back out, having gone full circle. Even now as I write, I long for the feeling of making work in that seductive flow state of Kristevan semiotics where there is no mind-body duality but hand-eye, eye-hand coordination: the hand is not not the eye, and the eye is not not the hand. Everything is suspended in the state of becoming.

Practice-based research and scholarship implies a fluid way of working that, rather than imposing a new structure, formalizes a way familiar to most visual artists. In my own work, I think through making things—crafting objects and manipulating them in space to make meanings that are then perhaps challenging to articulate in words but, if pursued, can reveal new knowledge. For me, academic research inspires ideas for making and uncovers more complex symbolism and content in intuitively generated pieces. I work out a metaphor with my hands with and through real materials; I may change a piece after reading about Melanie Klein’s theory of the “good mother” or “the good breast.” Practice-based research lies at the places where art and scholarship touch and meld with sensitivity, creativity, intuition, curiosity, discipline, and persistence.

Crafting language creatively and poetically, which is part of my practice, offers something to the conveyance of ideas and information in both the power of its delivery and the pleasure in the making and receiving. Likewise, making also imparts a knowledge; materials and their metaphors can teach us a great deal about the invisible and abstract workings of the world. *In Deleuze's Way: Essays in Transverse Ethics and Aesthetics*, Ronald Bogue describes the way that felt (an important Deleuzian metaphor) is different from woven cloth.

To create felt, by contrast, is to construct a smooth space. In felt, threads are not separated; instead, fibers are entangled by being pressed together, the microscopic variations in the fibers allowing unpredictable interconnections and adhesions. In this regard the felt forms of smooth space, its elements are heterogeneous. Felt opposes fabric in all respects.²³⁹

Theory and art have never been wholly separate. After all, aesthetics have been a domain of philosophy since the Greeks. Perhaps the shift was that artists in the twentieth century began to write theory or theorize their work and in doing so proposed that what they did was a form of research. Susan Finley notes:

Arts-based research was initially constructed within a dialogue occurring in academic circles with regard to research—it was a product of a time in which researchers were actively rethinking the science behind social science research methodologies.... Culturally, historically, and sensually this contextualizing foundation was shared by artists working toward new genre public art in which artists deliberately functioned as social critics.”²⁴⁰

In some senses, the modernist movements with their manifestos and specific veins of inquiry, were doing arts-based research and theory. The materialists have a specific love of art. Because I make material things (bodies whose making is a becoming), I understand what Rosi Braidotti (again reflecting Deleuze) talks about when she says, “A radically immanent, intensive body is an assemblage of forces, or flows, intensities and passions that solidify—in space—and consolidate—in time—within the singular configuration commonly known as an ‘individual self.’”²⁴¹ Artist and materialist Barbara Bolt also draws heavily from Deleuze and Guattari. In her 2015 keynote speech for the “SCA New Materialisms Conference: New Materialism in Contemporary Art,” she drew on her experience as a maker to describe the irresistible forces in

²³⁹ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze’s Way: Essays in Transverse Ethics and Aesthetics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 128.

²⁴⁰ Finley, “Methodologies,” 74.

²⁴¹ Rosi Braidotti, “The Ethics of Becoming Imperceptible,” in *Deleuze and Philosophy*, ed. Constantin Boundas (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 136.

art, the dynamism of materials, and the performative aspect of pictures and their picturing, which she describes as the invisible forces of gravity and time: “Textures rub and bruise, lines quiver, and shapes push and shove and topple over.... It is the clay [itself and not the artist] that gestures.”²⁴²

In graduate school, driving between a cramped and lonely apartment in Madison, WI, and an enormous and empty house in St. Paul, MN (that I was desperately terrified of losing, and also longing to), I struggled to find time to make things. Prof. Douglas Rosenberg, teaching our introductory MFA seminar, told us we didn’t need to be in the studio to be making; that we were effectively always making.²⁴³ That was comforting as I drove back and forth to be with my kids, who had remained in Minnesota with their father. Sometimes I stopped to pick up pine needles off the forest floor in Black River Falls, or I would film the rows of human-planted trees ticking by in a steady visual percussion on my phone. I could sing and speak into my phone and tell stories. Sometimes, not much else. I would arrive back at school with a bag of pine needles and a story. In arts-based research, the everyday comprises its own aesthetic, characterized by vernacular language, cultural and historical aesthetics, and ephemeral moments in daily life.²⁴⁴

Perhaps these two pieces of crucial advice from professors at UW set the stage for this practice-based degree, a structure that is gaining in popularity in a variety of fields, not only art. Bridging the gap between a hospital emergency room and the academy is not unlike the bridging of the studio and the academy. Yet the practices, as well as the goals, of these degrees are still

²⁴² “Barbara Bolt: SCA New Materialism Conference,” YouTube, 53:28, Posted by New Materialism in Contemporary Art, July 29, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJEMWmStu9E>.

²⁴³ Prof. Douglas Rosenberg, lecture in “Intro To Grad Studies Seminar,” University of Wisconsin–Madison, fall, 2012.

²⁴⁴ Susan Finley, “Methodologies,” 74.

being defined. At the European Graduate School in Switzerland the goal of the PhD is to be a catalyst for creative work: “the dissertation is a philosophical thesis that adds to the intellectual disorientation, risk, and eventual potency of an artist’s future work. At the same time, this research is a discourse based in text and situated in extensive research, as opposed to a studio practice.” Emphasizing a more externalizing orientation, the prestigious Goldsmiths College in London states, “Our research programmes are designed for artists who would like to explore and develop their understanding of their practice, and in so doing to contribute to the wider cultural context through original critical work.” Elliot Eisner was one of the first proponents of arts-based PhD products that might include art or dance and drew on the different ways that artists produce knowledge.²⁴⁵ The art PhD reveals a further shift in what we could understand an artist to be: not separate, not positioning themselves or their knowledge outside of the academy of letters and sciences, but rather fully included in its endeavor to create new knowledge and new understandings.

For example, the nature of the puppet has been a focus of philosophical and semiotic inquiry throughout the twentieth century. Innovative work, like that of puppet artist Theodora Skipitares, asks questions *through practice* and presents fascinating chances to test *theories*. Her use of projection tests conventional definitions of puppets by transferring a moving simulacrum onto an animated but often non-anthropomorphic object. In her piece *Six Characters*, for example, two actors became puppet manipulators in a scene by each carrying (at head level) a large, flat, white shape that they used to visually lift or peel a face away from the larger projections that covered the stage and the set. By inserting themselves in front of the projection

²⁴⁵ Finley, 74.

screen and capturing a face on a contained surface, they became puppeteers and masked faces of 1970s proto-reality TV celebrities, Lance Loud and his mother Pat.²⁴⁶ When I asked her about these objects, Skipitares agreed that, if not puppets, these discs with captured projections of faces were undoubtedly “performing objects.”²⁴⁷ The projections corporealized the flattened form as the form corporealized the projections. An elusive and precarious subjectivity was created when they met. To use drawing as a metaphor, there was a gestural quality in the way Skipitares left the layers of the visual and the textual loose, letting them slip around, purposely in and out of sync; at times the characters even switched faces, making one wonder about Lance and Pat’s connectedness in a way static avatars would not. This piece speaks to materialism in ways words cannot.

It is not surprising that this shift in viewing creative work as research is occurring. The expectations of the artist in society and within the academy have been evolving for decades. Even the idea of the studio, though still relevant for many artists, is completely antithetical to new ways of making work. Contemporary artists engage extensively in cultural dialogue—not just by making but also by commenting. This could be seen as a logical result of the trickle-down effect from new and increasingly popular post–World War II university art degrees, the rise of conceptually based artwork, and newly articulated structural critiques from artists themselves, for example, feminists. The result is that most, if not all, academically trained artists have been asked in their programs to reflect upon and investigate the meanings and motivations behind

²⁴⁶ For more information on this reference see: “An American Family: Anniversary Edition,” PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/program/american-family/>.

²⁴⁷ Skipitares, interview, April 2, 2016. Originally coined by Frank Proschan, “performing object” is a phrase that is frequently used to describe a broader category to which puppets belong and is especially useful in contemporary puppetry where the traditional notion of a “puppet” is challenged but sometimes it can lead to an evasion and marginalization of the word *puppet* and the connotations.

their work, and their place in society, and to articulate this understanding. Some, like Mary Kelly's "Post-Partum Document" only do their full work with exegesis.²⁴⁸ While the twentieth century saw the emergence of the critic as a dominant voice in artistic sense-making, in the latter half of the century, it also became common for artists to write or speak about their own artistic practices, as evidenced by the essays in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, by Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz. Feminist artists, as I mentioned, felt they must take control of the discourse that suspended work in play. For example, Nancy Spero elaborates reflectively on her work, explaining that her choice to depict the female body as universal—not as "other"—is the most subversive aspect of her work. She articulates the way in which her work connects to a larger feminist project.²⁴⁹ Puppet artist Theodora Skipitares, whose work I discuss at length in future sections, wrote extensively about her own work and about others' as well.

Perhaps, the reader will think that I am slipping and sliding past hard claims of "research" or "theory" by arguing that the arts contribute to a poetics. After all, anything about poetics can hardly be disproven. Can art be theory? Can art be philosophy? Elizabeth Grosz would say, not exactly. When asked by Julie Copeland in an interview about the nature of the ideas generated in art and whether they might be philosophical, Grosz responded, "I think that art can produce good ideas, but only indirectly. I think its fundamental goal is to produce sensations—and sensations, if they're complicated enough, if they're interesting enough, if they're surprising enough, of

²⁴⁸ Mary Kelly, "Post-Partum Document," http://www.marykellyartist.com/post_partum_document.html.

²⁴⁹ Kristine Stiles and Peter Howard Selz. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, Vol. 35. Berkeley: University of California Press, (1996): 244.

course they generate thought.”²⁵⁰ While artists might disagree with her complimentary view, she does give to art a power that only art has.

The hand-and-glove nature that Grosz articulates is well in keeping with the new materialists, as I mentioned earlier. Art allows the forces and material to be brought close to the concrete so that words can be tethered to something. As Copeland probes further into the relationship between art and philosophy, Grosz defines more clearly the relationship she sees and acknowledges that it is the French feminists who have made the sexual element of art clear.

I think one of the beauties of philosophy is it is like art to the extent that it celebrates this chaos instead of attempting to tame it, which is what science does. So at its best, philosophy has a certain wildness that is kind of conceptually artistic alongside of the most adventurous works of art. At its worst, it's a form of containment.... Philosophy doesn't intensify sensation, and anyone who's been reading philosophy much knows that it actually dulls sensation in order to intensify concepts. So, for me, the idea of philosophy would be to use its conceptual intensification, to highlight the bodily intensifications of art; in other words, to work alongside of art as a kind of artistic opening up. That, to me, is the best thing that philosophy can accomplish.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Elizabeth Grosz. “Elizabeth Grosz: The Creative Impulse” (Interview, August 14, 2005), Radio National, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/legacy/programs/sunmorn/stories/s1435592.htm>.

²⁵¹ Grosz. “Elizabeth Grosz: The Creative Impulse.”

6. Corporealization, Phenomenology, Gaze, and Affect: The Complexity of an Embodied Subjecthood

Woman does not have the option of transforming her flesh into will.

—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*²⁵²

What is the body? Charlotte Ross cites Descartes, who thought the body to be “leaky, unreliable and moving inexorably towards decomposition.” She surveys several other ways men have understood the universal human body and, through theories, transmitted this understanding into the *Zeitgeist* of the twentieth (and now the twenty-first) century. These include Freud’s sense that we come to know our bodies in a partial way, for example, through pain. His split subject comprises the ego (sense of self, a mental image of what our body is) and id. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological concept of body image is a map of the material body and a psychical representation (neither the exact corporeal “reality” of that body). Jean Paul Sartre (Beauvoir’s companion and classmate) saw a three-part ontological phenomenology of the body: for itself, for-others, and the alienated body. Finally, for Jacques Lacan, the “body in pieces” (the experience of the child) consolidates in the mirror stage during which a myth of apparent wholeness allows one to keep anxiety about fragmentation at bay.²⁵³ Upon, among, around, against—women made sense not as the universal but as the other.

Rosi Braidotti says the body is

Neither a sacralized inner sanctum, nor a pure socially shaped entity, the enfleshed Deleuzian subject is rather an “in-between”: it is a folding-in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding outwards of affects. A mobile entity, an enfleshed sort of memory that repeats and is capable of lasting through sets of

²⁵² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 392.

²⁵³ Charlotte Ross, “The ‘Body’ in Fragments: Anxieties, Fascination and the Ideal of ‘Wholeness’,” Paper presented at “Thinking in Fragments: Romanticism and Beyond.” University of Birmingham (UK), December 16-17, 2010.

discontinuous variations, while remaining faithful to itself. The Deleuzian body is ultimately an embodied memory.²⁵⁴

Poststructuralists have contended that the body is a discourse. As I said in the introduction, puppet and doll bodies are more convincingly so; they allows us to see how our own bodies might be read. They are metaphors but they are also real. In the beautiful, object-filled book *Black Dolls*, editor Frank Maresca leads us through sensitive, ocular examinations of the dolls' material narratives. He writes: "The doll's weary appearance comes from both her countenance and her long, uneven arms ending in large hands made of children's gloves. She is wearing a fine-quality dress to which poor-quality ruffle sleeves have been inexpertly attached."²⁵⁵ And further: "Large so-called 'lobster claw' hands are fairly common in nineteenth-century black dolls; in this case they are coupled with delicate facial features. The striped Cape, which matches a hidden petticoat, was probably made from a southern workman's blanket."²⁵⁶ To try to speak about the body is to craft language that is rich and visual, where sounds of words evoke phenomenological sensations. As Maresca guides us through the dolls' descriptions, we read their bodies like texts, full of dense information that also includes possibilities, some of which one cannot be sure, and some that one cannot state in words. The dolls' material presence takes us through passages of time and processes. There is still something more that is beyond discourse. Affect theorist Eric Shouse states, "The body has a grammar of its own that cannot be

²⁵⁴ Rosi Braidotti, "The Notion of the Univocity of Being or Single Matter Positions Difference as a Verb or Process of Becoming at the Heart of the Matter" [interview], in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, eds. Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001/1:4.1/--new-materialism-interviews-cartographies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

²⁵⁵ Deborah Neff, Frank Maresca, Margo Jefferson, Faith Ringgold, and Lyle Rexer, *Black Dolls: From the Collection of Deborah Neff* (Santa Fe: Radius Books, 2015), 29.

²⁵⁶ Neff et al., *Black Dolls*, 54.

fully captured in language.”²⁵⁷ Even as Maresca describes the visual clues, he crosses into territories of affect and phenomenology. He mentions how a doll’s flat leather hands contribute to its “formidable” presence or that another has an “eerie” or “spiritual” presence. These qualities are not located in the dolls’ bodies any more than they are in our own as viewers. They are located in our encounter. We recognize what he means when he says “intriguing,” “suggestive of,” “remarkably heavy,” or “nicely-shaped,” or when he mentions a doll’s “emotional impact.”²⁵⁸ But again, these are not qualities of the doll, they are our affective responses, which could be said to be psychological—and yet *all* of them refer to an experience we know through the body. Presence—used over and over—could perhaps best be described as a form of interaction between the doll’s body and our being. This dynamic relationship is key to materialism. Whitney Stark elaborates on Karen Barad’s (and others’) work on materialism’s qualities of intra-action:

Intra-action is a Baradian term used to replace “interaction,” which necessitates pre-established bodies that then participate in action with each other. Intra-action understands agency as not an inherent property of an individual or human to be exercised, but as a dynamism of forces in which all designated ‘things’ are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably. Intra-action also acknowledges the impossibility of an absolute separation or classically understood objectivity, in which an apparatus (a technology or medium used to measure a property) or a person using an apparatus are not considered to be part of the process that allows for specifically located ‘outcomes’ or measurement.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Eric Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect” *M/C Journal* 8, issue 6 (2005), <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>

²⁵⁸ Neff et al., *Black Dolls*, 20, 189.

²⁵⁹ Whitney Stark, “Intra-action,” *New Materialism*, <http://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/i/intra-action>.

Intra-action describes the way that any two material bodies relate to each other and, in some sense, perhaps through that, back to the self. The modernists were also interested in affect. The *uncanny* is an affective state. Man Ray developed his rayographs to affect viewers corporeally through sight. The Italian futurists marveled at the sensation of the body in rapid motion on trains and in cars and planes. Describing what was essentially intra-action, in his 1912 “Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture,” Boccioni declares: “Our bodies penetrate the sofas upon which we sit, and the sofas penetrate our bodies, just as the tram rushes into the houses which it passes, and in their turn the houses throw themselves upon the tram and are merged with it.”²⁶⁰ While not a new preoccupation when one considers the preoccupations of the futurists, the myriad ways the body *feels* is explored extensively by contemporary affect theorists (with much crossover with the materialists). Affect is our experience within the intra-action—what happens in and on our bodies. While a materialist might suggest that the dolls are in some way changed by our response to them, we can only really explore that response. In *Dolls & Clowns & Things: Essays for a Symbolic Self*, Lisa Pavlik-Malone writes:

A hallmark characteristic of any thing or object, is its ability, if not tendency, to be subjectively molded and shaped by the particulars of the mind that does the emoting, intuiting, and discerning. Indeed, at times a lot of internal “stuff” seems to happen without the physical nature of the thing or object changing at all. In fact, this very “stuff” can even bring about the creation of the object itself in the first place. What internal mechanisms might be at work (and play) here? There seems to be a “subset” of mental processes, structures, and abilities that exists within the subjective realm. This “subset” can be referred to as the intra-subjective.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ Umberto Boccioni, et al., “Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto,” in *Futurism*, eds. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 65.

²⁶¹ Lisa Pavlik-Malone, *Dolls & Clowns & Things: Essays for a Symbolic Self* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), xvi.

Brian Massumi attempts to divide the response we have to things into two aspects: a qualification (which is the type of response aroused) and an intensity. Both are immediately embodied, not processed by the mind but felt on the body in specific ways. “Intensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin—at the surface of the body, at its interface with things. Depth reactions belong more to the form/content (qualification) level, even though they also involve autonomic functions such as heartbeat and breathing.”²⁶²

Affect theorist Eric Shouse clarifies that the terms *affect*, *emotion*, and *feeling* must not be conflated.

Affect is not a personal feeling. Feelings are personal and biographical, emotions are social, and affects are prepersonal.... A feeling is a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labelled. It is personal and biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting and labelling their feelings.... An emotion is the projection/display of a feeling. Unlike feelings, the display of emotion can be either genuine or feigned.... An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential. Of the three central terms in this essay—feeling, emotion, and affect—affect is the most abstract because affect cannot be fully realised in language, and because affect is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness. Affect is the body’s way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience.²⁶³

While materialists are not specifically thinking of anthropomorphic bodies, we know from the work on the uncanny, a form of affect and intra-action, that dolls and puppets have a specific effect on us. A doll and related objects are usually defined through phrases like “in the likeness or shape of” or “looks like” a person. Unlike a portrait, these objects are not mere

²⁶² Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique*, 31, The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II (Autumn, 1995): 85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354446>.

²⁶³ Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect.”

visages. Puppets have a materiality and a corporeality. They have mass and the bulk of a body in space. They have a thingness that gives their humanness presence. Even flat paper dolls (which I briefly address in the work of Eleanor Antin) and flat shadow and toy theater puppets have a quality of being an object; they are different than illustrations in a book and certainly different than digital avatars. Add to this body double, the quality of movement that a puppet (or a doll) may have and it becomes even more complex. How do we articulate the phenomenon of mentally and affectively inhabiting other active matter? Puppets move through space concentrating energy and narrative (movements and speech are events that happen in their bodies). Dolls, and specifically puppets, fit almost too well with materialist notions of the body “as a discontinuous nontotalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, speeds and durations...”²⁶⁴

Dance is another field in which spectators are asked to be present with, and affected by, the form of a body in motion. Dance theory has a lot to offer puppetry. Both corporeal narratives, there are commonalities between the dancer’s body and that of the puppet. Douglas Rosenberg, author of many books and articles on dance made for the screen, discusses the way the body on the screen goes in and out of a sense of wholeness that even as it falls short exceeds that of a human body in real space and time. In doing so, he demonstrates the complexity of conceptualizing a body’s corporeality and the complicated way in which a viewer experiences a symbolic (and, he notes, impossible) body, like that of the dancer on the screen (or, I would argue, the puppet). He uses the term “recorporealization” to describe how screen techniques

²⁶⁴ Grosz, *Corporeal Bodies*, p. 164. In her critical analysis of Deleuze and Guattari’s borrowing and repurposing of feminist thinking and activism, Grosz embraces the potential there is in the ways that the two have articulated concepts around women and sexual difference while at the same time exposing the appropriation and cooptation of these ideas from female theorists—and the ways in which their conceptions ultimately work against feminist goals through an inevitable process of othering.

reconstruct the dancing body that, like the puppet, is “not encumbered by gravity, temporal restraints or even death. Screendance recovers the deceased body, in some cases reinvents it and recorporealizes it, objectifying it or re-materializing it....”²⁶⁵ Another apt concept pioneered for dance, “kinesthetic empathy,” was coined by Theodor Lipps, who theorized in the late 1900s that when observing a body in motion, viewers experience an “inner mimesis,” where they feel the action in their own bodies.²⁶⁶ I argue that this is the case when a doll or puppet is positioned or manipulated—perhaps even as the skin of certain dolls compresses under touch and we feel the potential plasticity of our own flesh. They can trigger a projection of our own proprioceptive and tactile senses as we form an idea of their weight, texture, and density.²⁶⁷

Judith Butler, a proponent of the discursive interpretation of sex and gender, asserts that there were three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance.²⁶⁸ Butler’s theories tend to focus on an externally oriented formation. Gender and corporeality have strong connections to affect in the internal. Women are never far from the body. Nevertheless, there is a contradiction that induces a schizophrenic state of embodiment or, at the very least, a state of cognitive dissonance. This is described in the book *Being Doll: A Study of Youngness & Oldness at Interface*. Author Lisa Pavlik-Malone discusses the relationship between women and doll-objects as potentially therapeutic tools that can address cognitive dissonance, the uncomfortable feeling caused by holding two contradictory ideas

²⁶⁵ Douglas Rosenberg, “Essay on Screen Dance,” presented at the Dance for the Camera Symposium, Madison, WI, February 2000, 4. <http://www.dvpg.net/docs/screendance.pdf>.

²⁶⁶ G. Jahoda, “Theodor Lipps and the Shift from ‘Sympathy’ to ‘Empathy,’” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 41, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 151-63.

²⁶⁷ Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect.”

²⁶⁸ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 175.

simultaneously: “Cognitive dissonance theory includes an intimate relationship between integration, wholeness, and self, through the characterization of certain thought-emotion complexes that are necessary in order to maintain emotional equilibrium and a sense of internal harmony.”²⁶⁹ Pavlik-Malone suggests doll-objects could, through the creation of an object-subjectivity, play a role in therapeutically constructing notions of self with corporeality central to that notion. For while women experience immanent corporeality, they are also alienated from it because they have learned to see their bodies as objects, as viewed through others’ eyes. Before Laura Mulvey developed her theory of the male gaze, women were well aware of being watched. Mary Wollstonecraft spoke of it in the late eighteenth century.²⁷⁰ Simone de Beauvoir pointed out that while boys are encouraged to be in the world actively through their body (to climb trees and play rough games), girls are trained to treat themselves—their body—as a doll.

On the one hand, the doll represents the whole body and, on the other hand it is a passive thing. As such, the little girl will be encouraged to alienate herself in her person as a whole and consider it an inert given. While the boy seeks himself in his penis as an autonomous subject, the little girl pampers her doll and dresses her as she dreams of being dressed and pampered; inversely, she thinks of herself as a marvelous doll.²⁷¹

In the book *Being Doll: A Study of Youngness & Oldness at Interface*, Lisa Pavlik-Malone discusses the way an object like a corset, popular in the Victorian era, set up a doll-like

²⁶⁹ Lisa Pavlik-Malone, *Being Doll: A Study of Youngness & Oldness at Interface* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 1.

²⁷⁰ Mulvey, Laura. Visual and Other Pleasures. New York: Springer, 1989. In Wollstonecraft's 1792 text, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she exclaims: “To preserve personal beauty, woman's glory! The limbs and faculties are cramped with worse than Chinese bands, and the sedentary life which they are condemned to live, whilst boys frolic in the open air, weakens the muscles ... artificial notions of beauty, and false descriptions of sensibility have been early entangled with her motives of action.” Cited in Kathleen Lennon, “Feminist Perspectives on the Body,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-body/>.

²⁷¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 293.

interaction between a woman and her body.²⁷² Carried to an extreme now through technological advances, there is a movement of “human dolls,” women who seek, through a variety of cosmetic, surgical, and prosthetic means, to look like dolls. Spending sums of money and hoping to profit in addition to becoming what they desire to be, they submit to dozens of plastic surgeries in order to transcend all that is undesirable in real flesh, to move closer to plastic.²⁷³

While some might see this as one of individual choice or a cyborgian liberation, taken within the context of girls’ mental health I see it as a flight from the natural body driven by media and consumerism.²⁷⁴ It has never been particularly easy to transition to adolescence. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir lays out how each new stage of sexual development is experienced as a trauma in the process towards womanhood. “What is happening in this troubled period is that the child's body is becoming a woman's body and being made flesh ... as her breasts and body hair develop, a feeling is born that sometimes changes into pride, but begins as shame; suddenly the child displays modesty ... she inspects herself with surprise mixed with horror.”²⁷⁵ As the girl’s body matures, society reacts in an increasingly hostile and threatening manner. “The young girl feels that her body is getting away from her ... on the street men follow her with their eyes

²⁷² Pavlik-Malone, *Being Doll*, 36.

²⁷³ To investigate this trend one need only Google “doll plastic surgery” or search on YouTube. To go more in depth on the monetization of becoming a doll, see Adrienne Evans and S. Riley, “The Entrepreneurial Practices of Becoming a Doll,” in *Aesthetic Labour: Dynamics of Virtual Work*, eds. Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill, and Christina Scharff (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 133–148, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-47765-1_7.

²⁷⁴ Josh Magness, “‘I Tried to Kill Myself 3 Times’: Suicide Rate for Teenage Girls Hits 40-Year High,” *Miami Herald* (August 4, 2017), <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article165396627.html>.

²⁷⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 320.

and comment on her anatomy. She would like to be invisible; it frightens her to become flesh and to show flesh.”²⁷⁶ Beauvoir says, “The gaze is danger; hands are another threat.”²⁷⁷

Certain male scholars, John Berger among them, have acknowledged the way that women are trained to self-objectify (the opposite of embodiment) so that they experience themselves as though they are being watched.

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman.... One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.²⁷⁸

There is an irony when men deliver this message that women have long known of themselves. It adds another layer of gaze.

In performance art, the confrontational nakedness of the body was used to disorient and disrupt this gaze, at a time when the control of women’s bodies (sexual and reproductive) was front and center. Elin Diamond says, “It produced critiques of the aesthetic dematerialization of the woman's body precisely to disturb the rationalizing, fetishizing gaze.”²⁷⁹ While

²⁷⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 333. One place that Beauvoir says that girls find comfort in their embodiment is in the fields and woods, where they experience their bodies as nature while also through them they experience nature. This is not that distant from materialist notions of embodiment. She writes, “In the midst of plants and animals she’s a human being: a subject, a freedom, she is freed both from her family and from males she finds an image of the Solitude of her soul in the secrecy of forest and the tangible figure of transcendence in the vast horizons of the plains...” (p. 376).

²⁷⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 394.

²⁷⁸ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 46.

²⁷⁹ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 38.

Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* is a famous example, nudity was ubiquitous in the 1970s performance scene. Theodora Skipitares, whom I discuss in greater length in subsequent sections, performed naked (as well as heavily clothed to the point of being disguised) before turning to puppets. Adrian Piper, an artist and philosopher who works with issues of embodiment and gender (dressing as a male and wandering the streets, muttering with the apropos series titles "I Am the Locus" and "Mythic Being"), has also explored race, gaze, and embodiment.²⁸⁰ While Piper did not perform naked, in the documentary *Sphinxes Without Secrets: Women Performance Artists Speak Out*, Piper describes the complexity of the potentially fraught strategy: "As woman's point of view becomes more distributed in the world, women working using their bodies in their work will be taken less and less as a kind of objectification of the male gaze because it's going to be possible to emphasize and identify with the woman's point of view."²⁸¹ Elin Diamond calls the intentional and unavoidably material placement of the woman's body into the performance space "semiotic realism," yet she is specifically taken with an instance of the use of a doll-like object (versus the human body). She describes the power of Theodora Skipitares' material performances with figures rather than her own body. Through the non-human material body, Diamond argues, Skipitares can truly explore dematerialization. "Theodora Skipitares stood by her 28-inch-high likeness as it/she decomposed in an illuminated

²⁸⁰ Adrian Piper, *I am the Locus* (#3), Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, <http://smartcollection.uchicago.edu/objects/10063/i-am-the-locus-3;jsessionid=5070A40D18EF3F445E9A4D96D3D4FA97>, and *The Mythic Being* (1973; 00:08:00), http://www.adrianpiper.com/vs/video_tmb.shtml.

²⁸¹ Maria Beatty, *Sphinxes Without Secrets: Women Performance Artists Speak Out* (Chicago: Video Data Bank, 1990).

jar of formaldehyde.”²⁸² Women in the 1970s and ‘80s did make use of performing objects, if not puppets. In the film *Sphinxes Without Secrets*, there are images of at least one staged event where participants wear large genitalia and perform various acts.²⁸³ The *Womanhouse* project, led by Judy Chicago, featured multiple performing objects and one memorable 1972 performance of Faith Wilding and Janis Lester in which they also wore large genitalia, highlighting the power structure that follows sexual difference (including gender as a set of expectations around housework).²⁸⁴

All of this rich and overt exploration of the body in the arts had its parallel in the theory of that brief period, but it rapidly waned. In *Material Feminisms*, editors Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman argue that the body occupies an “absent presence” in contemporary postmodern theory. They observe that there has been a tremendous outpouring of scholarship on the body, nearly all an analysis of discourses about the body.

Women have bodies; these bodies have pain as well as pleasure. They also have diseases that are subject to medical interventions that may or may not cure those bodies. We need a way to talk about these bodies and the materiality they inhabit. Focusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse excludes lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance from consideration. It makes it nearly impossible for feminism to engage with medicine or science in innovative, productive, or affirmative ways—the only path available is the well-worn path of critique. Moreover, bracketing or negating materiality can actually inhibit the development of a robust understanding of discursive production itself,

²⁸² Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 152–153. From my conversation with Skipitaes, I know this was not actually formaldehyde (or intended to be). Nevertheless the effect was powerful enough to elicit this sense when the figure of latex did what thin things do in lit jars of water—they effectively dissolve their form by losing their defining relationship to gravity and their energetic presence in a new relationship with the surrounding forces and flows of fluid.

²⁸³ Beatty, *Sphinxes Without Secrets*.

²⁸⁴ Entitled, “Cock and Cunt,” one could see this as an effort to reclaim a sexist slur through confrontation, just as we are confronted with the massive prosthetic genitals. The performers’ bodies were covered in leotards, making them inaccessible to the gaze. See Temma Balducci, “Revisiting *Womanhouse*: Welcome to the (Deconstructed) Dollhouse,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 27, no. 2 (2006): 17–23, <https://ahis3320.files.wordpress.com/2009/10/womanhouse.pdf>.

since various aspects of materiality contribute to the development and transformation of discourses.²⁸⁵

Even metaphor suffers when the body is denied a place. There is something crucial that metaphor provides and a way that it reveals truths by effectively lying. With regard to the metaphor that is the puppet (or the doll's body), Theodora Skipitares says, "Puppets are such a sensational lie of their own—but a very innocent lie—that I don't think you can ask them to support anything but the truth."²⁸⁶

In speaking of absence, sometimes the puppet can symbolize absence in a ways that an actor cannot. A puppet that is present but not animated, for example, can suggest this. Puppets can live in their own space and by their own material rules. Several times, the notion of haunting comes up when people describe Skipitares' work. This haunting again returns us to the phenomenological and the affective; we sense a presence with a specific quality—even the quality of absence. A psychoanalyst and phenomenologist, Beauvoir's use of metaphor to describe sensed qualities is also grounded in material and sensation. With regard to an amorphous (meaning without shape) historical concept (meaning with idea) of women's sex drive, Beauvoir says, "Her passive eroticism reveals her desire not as will and aggression but as an attraction similar to that which makes the dowser's pendulum quiver."²⁸⁷ Because of our ability to corporally sense what she means as well think it, she has succeeded in communicating

²⁸⁵ Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 4.

²⁸⁶ N. J. Stanley, "History as Theme Park: Reconfiguring the Human Journey in the Art of Theodora Skipitares," *TDR: The Drama Review* 47, no. 2 (2003), 37.

²⁸⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 638-639. Beauvoir is giving form to the many ways we understand an eternal feminine and, in this way, critiquing the way the woman "wallows in immanence." Ultimately, she is not asserting this as the reality but as a powerful mythology to overcome in the establishment of an emancipated female subjectivity defined in its own right.

a complexity of abstraction through a metaphor. Etymologically, *metaphor* means to carry over or transfer to, but it also referred to large carts used to move things from one place to another in ancient Greece. Beauvoir has moved us to a new place in our understanding of her concerns for woman. These concerns are not incompatible with materialism which accommodates and incorporates the key developments of performance studies, phenomenology, and affect theory. New materialism's "mattering" does not invoke "matter-as-opposed-to-signification but captures mattering as simultaneously material and representational."²⁸⁸ While new materialism is not a specifically feminist theoretical framework, the work women material theorists have done specifically required them to articulate the experience of sexual difference, which has been influential on the field as a whole. I wonder if the thinness of theory that depends too heavily on words that are pinned into place has left people with a craving for the rich and concrete (albeit metaphorical) language and physical and sensual imagery of affect, a craving that takes us out of the digital mirage of language that we can't ever really embody. I see the new materialists hammering away in their workshops, at least trying to capture how experiencing and being are a simultaneous happening. I would argue that along with the material comes the affective and the return of the phenomenological.²⁸⁹ The puppet, in its phenomenological existence as a material metaphor, offers much to our ability to conceive of our own embodiedness.

²⁸⁸ Dolphijn and van der Tuin, *New Materialism*.

²⁸⁹ While I previously commented on the affective nature of queer theory, its basis in a narrow band of sex-related affect doesn't allow for more expansive ways of experiencing the affective landscape.

7. Into Performance and Play

All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify.

—Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*²⁹⁰

Play and performance are intimately related to one another. This is certainly the case for children, but also for adults. In a workshop I took with Norwegian puppet artist Yngvild Aspeli of Plexus Polaire, we spent two days handling her life-size male and female puppets in a spirit of improv but also of material investigation. They were uncanny, with deep black marble eyes, and wood and foam limbs that mimicked bone and flesh. Screw eye joints allowed the limbs to do what limbs do in concert with gravity and borrowed will from us, the manipulators, not unlike the disobedient bodies of drunk friends or toddlers in a state of refusal. The matted, messy black wig of the female half hid her resin face at times, prompting us to want to lift her hand to her forehead and push it out of the way. She felt oddly “handled” in her thrift store clothes and snagged stockings in a way that added to her realness. The waistband cinched a soft belly of middle age. All this came together to create a corporeal and phenomenological presence that was in a constant state of play with gravity, and us. Where does play end and performance begin? With the increase in the technique of devised theater, such as what we tried with Yngvild, play is the only way to build a character and, through the character, a piece. The play is the devising. The results become a formalized composition and, ultimately, perhaps a performance.

²⁹⁰ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 22-30. “Ordinary social intercourse is itself put together as a scene is put together, by the exchange of dramatically inflated actions, counteractions, and terminating replies. Scripts even in the hands of unpracticed players can come to life because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing.”

This dissertation is written at a time when the performative turn, with its concept of performativity and other frameworks offered by performance studies, is well established in the social sciences and other fields. What is a performance? Performance studies separates performance into what the layperson might consider variations of theatrical, framed, artistic, and staged events and the performances we enact with our everyday actions. Performance is described frequently as a “bodily practice that produces meaning.” The line between performance and play is blurry. Richard Schechner, considered one of the most influential theorists in performance studies, believes that play is one of the fundamental qualities of performance. He divides performance into these categories:

“To perform” can also be understood in relation to:

- Being
- Doing
- Showing doing
- Explaining “showing doing.”

“Being” is existence itself. “Doing” is the activity of all that exists, from quarks to sentient beings to supergalactic strings. “Showing doing” is performing: pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing. “Explaining ‘showing doing.’”²⁹¹

We humans are always in motion and doing; social creatures, sometimes we are showing our doing or practicing showing our doing. I think of the Apple program Photobooth. Like a new millennium mirror that records, we recently discovered dozens of photos and short videos my daughters made when they were in upper elementary and junior high. Alone or with a friend, they gaze into the screen, sing, speak, and gesture, and then they watch their own videos. This feedback allows them to be their own audiences. The fact that they could record themselves

²⁹¹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 3rd edition, revised (New York: Routledge, 2017), 28.

formalizes ephemeral performances; I am certain I engaged in similar activities but have no photos or videos of myself. The proliferation of Instagram and Snapchat might productively help us to see that, for example, young women posing for photos in the early part of the twentieth century was only separated in available technology from the ubiquitous and spontaneous performances enacted—and more specifically framed—throughout the day by young women now. While we might see the changes my daughters’ generation has experienced as revolutionary, the invention and proliferation of cameras at the turn of the last century radically changed women’s relationship with their own image. It is interesting to note that dolls were often included in the camera frame. In this dissertation, I am arguing that much of what we do with dolls are performances as well as play, posing, and display, beyond the obvious incidences of dolls used as puppets.²⁹²

Using Schechner’s divisions affirms the complexity, ambiguity, and fragmented nature of this categorizing performance. With doll play, there are many murky middle grounds where it is difficult to designate whether the activity is artistic and staged *or* the “being” performances one enacts through everyday actions, or something else entirely. One might think that puppets would be the troublemakers in this endeavor to categorize various types of performances, but dolls present a greater challenge yet. Dolls (fashion dolls, baby dolls, action figures and action-intended dolls for girls, dolls meant to be a girl’s twin, not to mention sex dolls and hyper-realistic baby dolls) hardly fit into a single category. Children’s play often slips in and out of attempts at the formal. The difference may consist in grabbing an adult’s hand to pull them over

²⁹² I have mentioned elsewhere that the two categories are not distinct and that, in some languages, the same word is employed. Even in English, puppeteers have been referred to as “dolly-wagglers and dolly-wigglers,” albeit often pejoratively.

to a tabletop scene for a moment. The words, “Watch this!” immediately shift categorically the type of performance (or play) in which they are engaged. Can play also be performance? In play theory there are four domains identified: play as power, play as progress, play as fantasy, and play as self.²⁹³ Doll play and performance, as I am framing them, could be seen as examples of all these. In her book *Desi Divas*, Christine Garlough examines the multiple ways that adult creative and critical play interact with culture. She looks to play theorist Sutton-Smith and Hans Georg Gadamer for insights on play as it relates to performance, specifically politically engaged, diasporic feminist performance.²⁹⁴ She discusses the way that play, a creative act, essentially reinvents culture for the participants and refreshes and regrounds the artistic voice so essential to the kind of critical play that she studies. As Garlough notes, Gadamer argues “that play is such a fundamental function of human life that culture is inconceivable without it.”²⁹⁵

Someone once asked me, when I referred to my objects as “puppets,” “Have you actually performed with them? Because if you haven’t they are *just dolls*.” Once on this road, it becomes a slippery slope of validation: “Where have you performed? How many times? For whom?” This credentialing is part of what kept me from claiming the word *puppeteer*. It can seem a particularly gendered gesture, if not in intent, then in effect. Many women in the field of puppetry have commented on the exclusion and marginalization they feel. They often feel, as many visual artists do, that if their piece had been made by a male it would have received more recognition. One person spoke to me about the numbers of jobs for males as compared to

²⁹³ Anthony D. Pellegrini, *The Future of Play Theory: A Multidisciplinary Inquiry into the Contributions of Brian Sutton-Smith* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995).

²⁹⁴ Christine Garlough, *Desi Divas: Political Activism in South Asian American Cultural Performances* (Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi Press), 191-192.

²⁹⁵ Garlough, *Desi Divas*, 192.

females in the field. Theodora Skipitares was entering puppetry at a time when it was even more rare for a woman to create her own work. Perhaps it was the style of the work, which evolved from a sculpture and performance art background, but when she began to perform what others referred to as puppetry, she was met with harsh criticism. She told me:

What happened when I entered the puppet world, *Micropolis* seemed to have been really accepted well in the performance art world and the visual art world. However, I encountered a whole new world of puppetry which, at the time, there weren't that many identified contemporary puppet practitioners. This would be in early '80s, and the puppeteers that started coming to see my work HATED IT. It was because the field hadn't developed and flowered into the great, great thing it is now. That happened in the '90s. So that boundary thing was kind of messing me up a little, and to this day there are still people in the puppetry community that don't want to validate what I do and that's *ok*. It's fine.

While Skipitares doesn't point to the role of gender, I would argue that her work was accepted in performance art and visual art because feminist artists had made inroads there; they were literally transforming, if not inventing, genres. It is tempting to write an essay titled, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Puppeteers?" The conclusion would be much what Nochlin reached in her famous essay on women artists: it is structural.²⁹⁶ Women's lesser access to stages of all sorts would be one main barrier. Many women did share companies with their husbands, but in almost every instance the name of the company was that of the husband, erasing the wife's identity (once by taking a married name and then again with no mention of her first name in the company). Names, lack of names, order of names, naming relationships ("and his wife" versus "and her husband") are all obviously powerful forces of recognition that women have struggled against in order to be seen. An example is Rufus and Margo Rose, who were a husband-and-wife performing troupe that had a significant impact on American puppetry—both of them strong

²⁹⁶ And just like Nochlin lists many great women artists, the numbers pale compared to males, and they are seen as anomalies.

limbs in the lineage of Tony Sarg. The Rufus Rose Marionettes toured throughout the United States and were billed as “America’s Foremost Artists of the Marionette Theater.” In a course in marionette building that I took with Jim Rose, their son, at the O’Neill Theatre Center, he told us about his mother and father, the famous Rufus and Margo Rose, for whom a theater is named at the site. He described his mother’s equal participation in the company, as well as her specific talents in fabrication and manipulation. At Jim’s insistence the theater at the O’Neill that is dedicated to them also has his mother’s name. It was the custom (and still is) for Margaret Skewis (Margo Rose) to take her husband’s surname, but by naming the company as they did, her participation was erased from public record. Even those who knew of her equal participation can’t help but be influenced by the power of Rufus Rose’s name.

In addition to rescuing women puppeteers from oblivion, this project is also about acknowledging a broader array of “performances” that includes activities more closely related to dolls, perhaps, than puppets. I find these blurred lines in the work of many women as well as in my own. These include play, performance, posing, making, arranging, caring, dressing, fixing, altering, and more. *Performance* is a term applied to puppets in the most obvious way; we observe the body of the puppet and ascribe meaning. Yet complicating the theory is that fact that, unlike the actor, the puppet’s body is not a living body. Nor is it a lifeless one. It is more than a mediating object. In most contemporary instances the manipulator of the puppet produces a second layer of meaning through the manipulator’s own body, particularly in the increasing practice of co-presence, where the manipulator is intentionally visible in the performance. This presents ontological challenges: the puppeteer or manipulator is in some way visible, and that

visibility is meaningful to the effects of the performance.²⁹⁷ Also complicating matters is that *contemporary* art and performance practices (both of which we see brought together in contemporary puppetry) create different relationships to artifice and different affective goals, not simply sincerity. Contemporary puppetry often lives on the edge of puppetry and performance art. (Traditional forms are still common. They function as the source and the origin but also a place from which to draw renewal.) It can be raw. It can be ironic. Its most essential workings can be exposed and, thereby, the tricks revealed, an effect that somehow *sometimes* intensifies the magic.²⁹⁸ Contemporary puppetry contains performances embedded in other performances. And this was true in modernist movements such as Dada as well.

Related but different than performance, dolls and puppets are also performative. Performativity is based on the model of discursive or speech practices that enact or produce that which they name. Common examples are the phrases “I swear,” “you’re fired,” or “I quit.” Performativity, as it is used in the body, is the extrapolating out to the nonverbal the ability to create reality through a range of gestures (versus just utterances). These ways of being produce and consolidate an effect through and in the body.

Judith Butler has developed the notion performativity, particularly as it relates to the constructed nature of gender. She stresses that the performative is different from a performance in which a choice is made to express and create an effect. Butler's example of a drag performance—not unlike many of the puppets that rely on exaggerated performances of

²⁹⁷ Penny Francis, *Puppetry: A Reader in Theater Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 165. Puppets' connection to ritual is another area where they invite thought about different forms of performance, but not one I can explore here.

²⁹⁸ Almost everything that can be said about painting in the past 50 years could likewise be said about puppetry. Terms like deskilling and “provisional” painting and efforts to expose the way the canvas is stretched across the frame all parallel moves in contemporary puppetry.

gender—shows how the norm of the performance of gender actually functions, how the norm is instituted through our bodies, through our stylistics, through our bodily gestures.

There's something else that's going on: the performance of a gender is also compelled by norms that I do not choose. I work within the norms that constitute me. I do something with them. The norms are the condition of my agency and they also limit my agency. They are that limit and the condition at the same time.... There is an aspect of performance, but that does not mean that the meaning of the performance is established by the intention of the actor—hardly.²⁹⁹

As extensions of ourselves, performative creatures that we are, I would argue that puppets amplify our performativity. When puppets repeat gestures and moves (at least if the puppeteer is at all skilled) they consolidate a sense of the puppet's persona. And here I refer also to the effects these produce for those manipulating the puppets. For if our own body's activity reinforces our sense of ourselves, then the same could be said of puppets' bodies, whose movements we inform. Much of this is inevitably determined by the materials and making of the puppet; much as the manipulator might seek to impose a personality, the puppet doesn't allow imposition. The materials the maker selects are also performative, the materials themselves contributing to the consolidation of a sense of things. And in a world that sees gender, as it sees color, this is a consolidation of gender and a contribution to the larger poetics. Perhaps this is most visible in the plastic bodies of dolls. I would argue that over the past 70 years, plastic has informed the poetics of skin for girls and women.

While the new materialists have critiqued the loss of the body itself in performativity, my inclusion of puppets and materials suggests that material can be performative. Indeed, Evelien Geets believes that new materialism can easily incorporate the performative (and the material potential is a possibility which she suggests Butler is rushing to catch up with). Materialism

²⁹⁹ Sarah Salih, ed., with Judith Butler, *The Judith Butler Reader* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Balckwell, 20014), 344-345.

relocates the performative in bodies that are material and not merely discursive. Perhaps the discourse is material. She specifically looks to Karen Barad, who she notes is able to both critically and affirmatively engage Butler and Michel Foucault's performativity, "linked to the coming into being of the human subject and the (gendered) materialization of bodies, and the sociopolitical interpellation process that goes along with it...."³⁰⁰

Alexandra Exter and Kiki Smith, mentioned in an earlier section, have made wonderful material bodies (dolls, sculptures, puppets, and objects in between) but have never performed publicly, if at all. One reason I chose to include Louise Bourgeois' cloth, doll-like sculptures in my discussion here is that she doesn't appear to have publicly performed her figurative work and so provides an opportunity to consider its making and positioning as a performance.³⁰¹ Arranging a collection of dolls (for display) or combing a doll's hair might be seen as a performance or even different kinds of performances, depending on context. Lotte Pritzel's enigmatic wax doll tableaux were in their day and have become lately a source of fascination. Her creation, arranging, and photographing of dolls, which crossed the barriers of craft to be considered high art, must be seen in a cultural context and as part of innovations in illustration, using posed photos of dolls instead of drawn illustration. Käthe Kruse and others also posed and photographed dolls to create postcards, for example.

³⁰⁰ Evelien Geerts, "Performativity," *New Materialism: How Matter Comes to Matter*, <http://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/p/performativity>.

³⁰¹ Bourgeois did perform and she created costumes in which to do so, but she did not manipulate her doll-like objects as a performance. I believe that she must have done so in order to make them. There is no way to arrange a figure without getting to know it through movement and exploration. There is a wonderful video of Bourgeois cutting the rind of a tangerine to create a figure as she tells a story about her father. This approximates a puppet performance. It is like watching the birth of a puppet whose body's making is a story and whose meaning is material. See "Louise Bourgeois—Peels a Tangerine," YouTube, 5:05, Posted February 17, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2mx1gZqh1E>.

Pritzel's doll vignettes were sometimes called "cabinet puppets" (recall that this word could also be "dolls" in German). They coincided with Austrian modernist and puppeteer Richard Teschner's puppet shows that he often performed in his home. Inspired by Indonesian puppetry, Teschner created intimate stages that framed the productions and, when documented, created small scenes not unlike paintings.³⁰² Pritzel's work must be seen as part of a larger, global doll culture of collecting, arranging, and displaying. Technology must always be considered in any new artistic form; Pritzel's ability to create glass cabinets for the vignettes she made with her dolls was dependent upon new technologies for producing sheets of glass. It was also connected to the development of the vitrine as part of the urban landscape in cities across the world. Joseph Amato discusses the way technology allowed for the proliferation of glass in urban and domestic spaces, changing the way people related to each other:

A versatile material, increasingly manufactured in varying sizes, thicknesses, strength, opaquenesses, and tints, it mediated ordinary glances and permitted the long stares of perceiving and conceiving minds. Glass windows, refined and relatively inexpensive, appeared in abundance in homes and businesses thanks to the mass production of flat glass. Serving as the mirror of consumer democracy glass became decoratively and structurally indispensable to domestic and public architecture from the turn of the 20th century onward. It became a common portal.³⁰³

Perhaps part of the inspiration for Pritzel's diorama-like work came from the city shop windows made of large glass panels that were now more easily available, to frame seductive worlds where goods were displayed and, hopefully, made desirable. John Bell, in a lecture he gave at Hunter College, mentions the automata of department store window displays as one of the many

³⁰² They knew each other's work and likely influenced each other. Nathan J. Timpano, *Constructing the Viennese Modern Body: Art, Hysteria, and the Puppet* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 136-139.

³⁰³ Joseph A Amato, *Surfaces: A History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 187-188.

interconnected modernist performing objects.³⁰⁴ In an odd parallel more than a half-century later, Theodora Skipitares notes that the evolution of her work was truly a product of the times and culture of New York in the 1970s—specifically the new storefront gallery scene she discovered in her SoHo neighborhood. These venues, open to the streets, allowed a different scale of work to develop.

At nighttime I would walk three blocks south or four blocks south and I'd be in SoHo, where you could just, in an unplanned way, in any storefront, find things going on every night and they turned out to be remarkable things. Like Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, and Joan Jonas—they were all there, they were doing things, and it was incredibly open, so I think that openness has made my art possible.... There were just opportunities for you. You could go somewhere and say, "I want to do a performance next month at your space. Is that Ok?" And they would say, "Yes."³⁰⁵

The adult performances of doll play are perhaps more conscious than those of children—perhaps censoring or editing themselves. I remember with a certain amount of shame a time when I was playing with naked dolls (Mr. and Mrs. Sunshine) on the tray in front of me on a plane. I might have been six. I seem to remember someone saying something to me about it, causing me to realize that it was a performance—some internal drama I was working out—now visible to the world and marked as bad. I was reminded of this when Jeannie Banks Thomas described her interview with a girl, in *Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, & Other Forms of Visible Gender*. The girl didn't want to discuss aspects of dressing and undressing her dolls that bumped up against taboo. It is noticeable, especially in the girl's refusal to discuss her experience of undressing the now-naked doll that she held, that shame had perforated the realm of fantasy as it

³⁰⁴ John Bell, "Puppetry and Material Performance, A Manifesto," YouTube, 1:23:51, Posted by The Segal Center, December 14, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5WIPKWdr64&feature=youtu.be>.

³⁰⁵ Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016.

inevitably does in childhood. In fact, she became frustrated with Banks' pressure to answer details about it and whether it was "fun."³⁰⁶ The girl yelled at Banks twice (as evidenced by the use of caps), implying a wish to stop the questions and perhaps protect the answers and protect the realm of uninhibited fantasy that was being wrenched away from her. This is intriguing because, while we might see dressing and undressing a doll as the functional performance of a task, the girl's emotion in this scene suggests that the undressing imaginatively crossed into a different type of performance that the child chose not to share.

The use of dolls in therapeutic settings also creates possibilities in terms of framing performances. Many times dolls are used to help children talk about trauma. This practice is at times controversial. Through use of objects, including dolls, Melanie Klein and her student, D.W. Winnicott, worked across the fields of psychology and play theory (before the latter was a designated field) and established "object relations theory." They focused on children and their relationship to things and to themselves and others through those things. Their interest in fantasy (but also phantasy) was linked to the world of imaginative and deeply functional play. After describing traits the very young child requires of an object, such as texture and the ability to survive expressions of both love and hatred, and to never change (unless changed by the child), Winnicott declared, "at this point my subject widens out into that of play, and of artistic creativity and expression, and of religious feeling, and of dreaming, and also of fetishism, lying and stealing, the origin and loss of affective feelings, drug addiction, the talisman of obsessional rituals, etc."³⁰⁷ This poetic inventory reveals the way the doll-object takes hold of the psyche and its interface with the world.

³⁰⁶ Jeannie Banks Thomas, *Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, and Other Forms of Visible Gender* (Champaign-Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 136-137.

³⁰⁷ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge Press, 1971), 5.

It is interesting, then, to think about how dolls trouble the gender and sex dichotomy, as well as the efforts to connect the two. Can a doll have a gender, and what does that mean? Can a doll have a sex? How would that be different, and perhaps, if it is not, does that tell us something about human gender? Dolls are pure performance and material; how they appear gendered reveals the constructed and performative aspects of gender. The materialists use the term *assembly* for subjectivities. Arienne Harris' proposes a concept of softly assembled gender, mentioned in the section on feminisms. Assembly with dolls and puppets could be literal assembly in terms of materials and mechanics, but assembly could include the performance, for example, of an ultra-feminine character. The puppet or doll's assembly would also draw in the experiences and impressions of the viewer. It would incorporate aspects of the manipulator as well. If it is softly assembled, per Harris, then the linear time frame would fold in on itself and what we saw at the end would inform what we thought we knew at the beginning. Can doll-objects say anything about sex and gender, what they are and the connection between them? Louise Bourgeois represents her own very long hair in many ways in her work, symbolically and literally. Sometimes, as in the spirals of chaos, it is hair as energy—not adornment. However, among many of the cloth figures she creates (and others), she purposefully represents their female sex (breast, hips, and even giving birth), but not gender. There is nothing in the representation of these bald figures that is cultural. In the case of two figures touching tongues, we might assume it to be a heterosexual pairing (the different jaw and brow would suggest this), but there is no dominance and submission that might mark the cultural hierarchy dictated by their sexed bodies. There is nothing that marks them culturally or historically. Some are even animal. In the famous photo entitled "Fillette" (or young girl), Bourgeois makes real Beauvoir's

statement that the doll is a substitute for the phallus the girl lacks, by carrying tucked under her arm an enormous penis and scrotum.³⁰⁸ This reflects back to the story Bourgeois tells and reenacts of her father's performance, cutting the rind of a tangerine to produce a figure with a penis formed by the fiber at the fruit's center. He states that he thought she was his little son until he saw she had "nothing" between her legs. Bourgeois tells of her shame.³⁰⁹ It is an incident that inspired her to make several such dolls. Two, including one entitled *Orange Episode*, are in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.³¹⁰ Speaking of Bourgeois and another French artist, Valérie Belin, Rebecca Trevalyan says:

Bourgeois and Belin's oeuvres dramatise Beauvoir's thought on the ambivalence woman experiences in relation to her body.... Both artists fight to dismantle the myths surrounding woman's body, critiquing the way social associations with the body are considered natural, negating the repulsion and mystery surrounding female genitalia, frustrating the male tendency to objectify the body and raising an eyebrow at woman's narcissism born out of this objectification. They distort body parts, presenting the viewer with something at once familiar and unfamiliar, male and female, life and art, thereby liberating woman's body from the shackles of an expectant gaze.³¹¹

What of the reverse, when there are no anatomical markers that reflect sex characteristics? Do the clothes gender and, therefore, point to sex? Or does the gender simply point to gender? As I quoted earlier, in *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*, Anne Balsamo writes, "Gender is one of the primary effects of the discursive

³⁰⁸ Robert Mapplethorpe, "Louise Bourgeois" (1982, printed 1991), Tate, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mapplethorpe-louise-bourgeois-ar00215>.

³⁰⁹ "Louise Bourgeois—Peels a Tangerine," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2mx1gZqh1E>.

³¹⁰ Louise Bourgeois, "Untitled" (2005), Museum of Modern Art, https://www.moma.org/collection_lb/browse_results.php?object_id=116431.

³¹¹ Rebecca Trevalyan, "The Legacy of Simone de Beauvoir on Modern French Visual Art," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 14, issue 4 (2013), 70.

construction of the human body.”³¹² The ways one is specifically gendered vary from culture to culture and across time.³¹³ Many would argue that all dolls and puppets reflect this. They are almost invariably intentionally gendered or experienced as gendered. Perhaps one could find some examples of truly androgynous figures, but it is rare. Last year, in a workshop with Mervin Millar at the O’Neill Theater, the discussion arose that even when we were using sticks and twigs to act out stories, each of us understood a gender of those objects, regardless of the gender of the stick’s manipulator. This particular attribution can be neither proven nor disproven, and with the cultural and political trend where people seek to override their phenomenological experience of gender, it is less likely we would acknowledge whether a stick that enters a room and comforts a sulking twig has a gender, much less a sex. There is strong evidence of an innate human tendency to uncover sex, and efforts to resist and defy the gender binary often seem to reify the very impulse to gender.³¹⁴

Androgyny was part of the visual culture of early modernism. It was part of the avant-garde but also of politics. Many suffragists specifically wore attire that defeminized themselves, although this was also used against them. In the book *The Masculine Woman in America, 1890-*

³¹² Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 22.

³¹³ In general, most cultures seem to pair binary concepts of biological sex and cultural notions of gender. Fausto-Sterling, among others, has done work that challenges the notion of there being just two sexes (as well as having deconstructed the concept of a pre-cultural biology). Certainly there are examples of other genders across the globe, and many in the West, proliferating in name and identity, especially in the past decade. It seems, however, that as we attempt to make more complex the structure of human identity with regard to biological and material characteristics and interaction with culture (chosen, acculturated, or imposed), we continue to describe this against the binaries that are well ingrained in our discourse such that negating them has a similar effect to affirming them. Hence, I will still refer to the binary as a real notion we contend with in culture and in speech, even as we might seek to dismantle it.

³¹⁴ Lamb chop and Big Bird are two puppets whose gender has been at times debated. Often people use a strategy of mixing overt gender markers in order to confuse gender, but in doing so reify their orientation towards the genders they are rejecting and the stereotypical markers they might otherwise seek to undermine. The psychological subconscious drive to identify gender (or perhaps more specifically sex) and resist ambiguity could in part explain the need to require incentives such as legislation with penalties to change cultural practices.

1935, Laura L. Behling describes the fascination and also fear surrounding the concept of sexual inversion and the danger it posed to society. This fear was wielded to leverage opposition to women's right to vote.³¹⁵ In the chapter "In the Mirror of Fashion," in *Women in Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, Sabine Hake notes, with regard to the heavy use of mask-like make-up that accompanied both androgynous and hyper-feminine dress (obligatory for evening cabaret attendance),

Both aspects of fashion, dress, and make-up, treated sexuality as a spectacle and identity as a construction. Yet where as the one expanded gender definitions to include images of androgyny, the other dramatized older assumptions about female beauty and eroticism through its use of the mask. This division of labor helped to ease anxieties about possible gender transgressions and confirm the link between woman and culture, while at the same time acknowledging her physicality.³¹⁶

In addition to—or, perhaps, rather than—being mask-like, I would suggest that the make-up was doll-like. In fact, in an earlier chapter, which explores female friendship and a similarly ambiguous and complex attitude towards lesbianism, "The Conspiracy of Women: Images of a City Life in the Work of Jeanne Mammen," Annelie Lütgens specifically features a painting by Mammen, entitled *Boring Dolls*, from 1929. The two lounging young women, with androgynous haircuts and clothes, still have faces that are as doll-like (implying make-up and plucked brows) as the real Pierrot boudoir doll featured in the background of the painting.³¹⁷ This causes me to

³¹⁵ Laura L. Behling, *The Masculine Woman in America, 1890-1935* (Urbana-Champaign IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

³¹⁶ Sabine Hake, "In the Mirror of Fashion" in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katharina von Ankum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 189.

³¹⁷ Annelie Lütgens, "The Conspiracy of Women: Images of a City Life in the Work of Jeanne Mammen," in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katharina Von Ankum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 99-100.

recall that my own flapper grandmother prided herself on her “bow lips,” so different from the full lips prized on women today.

Perhaps then a doll maker like Käthe Kruse could have a more profound and subversive impact starting in the nursery, a place under female control. The German doll maker, who started making dolls at the beginning of the twentieth century, was innovative but not alone in her attempts to create baby dolls that were androgynous. At a time when women were questioning the roots of their identities in gendered childhoods and rejecting the biological determinism that denied them full societal participation, androgyny in the nursery was a female strategy to transform society. Bryan Ganaway describes this period in her thinking, before an unfortunate societal turn towards nationalism and militarism— two interestingly and complexly gendering forces that neither Kruse nor her dolls escaped. In the period leading up to World War I,

Käthe Kruse introduced a series of individualized, hand-crafted, gender neutral baby dolls designed to allow children to play and develop on their own without having adult expectations foisted upon them. She marketed them across the West, and her best customers were all located in New York City. Although she was committed to making cosmopolitan miniatures that could not be used to further what she saw as restrictive gender and national identities, her position changed after 1914.³¹⁸

Also, while acknowledging the damage done by gender as a set of enforced norms, in my own work, I choose not to flee from it. It is part of my “soft assembly” and that of my objects. I want to return to Leslie Feinberg’s quote: “Gender is the poetry each of us makes out of the language we are taught.” Gender can be material. Often I lean towards, embrace, and explore constructs like the “feminine” as a way of exploring them, deconstructing them, and fragmenting

³¹⁸ Bryan Ganaway, *Toys, Consumption, and Middle-Class Childhood in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 232-233. There is some debate in Ganaway’s book about Kruse’s accommodation and essentially promotion of the Nazi party. She was certainly influenced by a nationalistic pride that summoned folk images of German children and may have created some dolls in Nazi uniforms.

my own social roles and identities into their many contradictory parts. The feminine for me is a way, or series of ways, to be an embodied presence in my culture—and is created performatively. Judith Butler does point to ways in which gender can be subverted when gender is performed (a part of its performativity). Butler cites Luce Irigaray in describing the feminine as a “site of subversive multiplicity.”³¹⁹ In speaking about sex and gender in the article “Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion,” Butler states, “Precisely because such terms have been produced and constrained within such regimes, they ought to be repeated in directions that reverse and displace their originating aims.”³²⁰ In my work, I specifically represent aspects of myself as foils, exaggerations, and disguises. It is through the subversive wearing of the costume of gender that it is agentively appropriated. Perhaps in the case of puppets or dolls, it could be thought of as taking gender for a walk to parts unknown and returning it changed. Use of puppets or dolls might be seen as a strategy of mimesis rather than of drag, which Butler highlights in discussions on performativity. Seeing drag as an example of people’s agency to play with gender, she argues, “The way in which we understand gender actually changes the way we live gender. As we interpret ourselves differently, we also live ourselves differently.”³²¹

Play and playfulness present opportunities to transform reality on an individual if not a collective basis. They also risk remaining in the realm of play and of liberation of the individual. Are parody and drag, which Butler points to as a strategy, in and of themselves effective as subversive? Queer theory’s reliance on the notion that performance can enact a sufficient

³¹⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 16.

³²⁰ Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion,” in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, eds. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

³²¹ “Interview with Judith Butler,” May 2007, <https://ilga.org/interview-with-judith-butler>.

transformation has been critiqued in a previous section, along with Martha Nussbaum's charge that Butler's "parody" is an untenable strategy. One could look to the example of Barbie, an imitation of a woman for whom, even morphologically, there is no original, but because this imitation exists, it informs our concept of "woman," which in its most extreme cases has led women to pursue the dolls' physiology through plastic surgery. While many have tried to use Barbie against herself and to harness the power of parody or imitation of other forms to reveal how she works on us culturally, even when one mocks or rejects Barbie, we define the female and the feminine against her, she still stands within the frame.

One question that Butler avoids dealing with is the way in which male parodic or mimetic performance of the female is not that different from men's persistent use of the female throughout the history of art and theater, dominating the cultural dialogue around woman through the sheer power of difference they maintain. How is drag different from what we saw of the dandies in an earlier chapter, or the sex-death obsession of many modernist movements? These were transgressive in the way that drag is argued to be transgressive. But were they at all liberatory for women? In fact, it was argued in earlier sections that these impulses were often accompanied (Mallarmé's drag) with a certain disgust for real women. Charlotte Coles talks about drag's failure to escape (or even critique) the persistence of power hierarchies. In opposition to queer theoretical discourse, Coles asserts Butler's proposition (that drag can be a political and productive subversion) misses the extent to which drag reinforces the power imbalance between men and women, and this is where the feminist critique lies:

When drag queens first emerged as proud symbols of the gay liberation movement, many felt a need to distance themselves from what, as they saw it, was a mocking of women. Although drag drew on the transparent performance of gendered imagery to challenge stereotypes of gender and sexuality, those performances were (and continue to be) defined primarily by male mastery of the depiction of highly selective feminine

identities that focus on surface aesthetics (hair, clothing, make-up) rather than social narratives of family or reproduction. Consequently, feminist criticism has critiqued drag as the reproduction of a specifically sexualized rendering of feminine identity, which reflects persistent hierarchies of desire and desirability: of men dressing as the male-oriented version of women. In other words, drag performs and sustains forms of femininity which primarily serve patriarchal interests.... I want to argue that the feminist discomfort surrounding drag's claim to transgression stems from drag's role in sustaining retrogressive power hierarchies, which in turn directs critical attention to the reiterative persistence of underlying binaries, that is to say, socially created gender dichotomies.³²²

This also brings to mind the quote from Braidotti in which she asserts that gender, Butler's focus, "misses the feminist point about masculine dominance" and that "in a structurally dissymmetrical position men, as the empirical referent of the masculine, cannot be said to have a gender; rather, they are expected to carry the Phallus—which is something different."³²³ Indeed, I think most people who have seen a lot of drag have found the frequent absence of drag kings and the lack of hype around their performances to reveal just this: men do not have a gender the way women do, at least not one that can be imitated like the feminine can.

Perhaps this is revealed if we question whether puppets and dolls are like drag. In some senses puppets are, using Butler's famous phrasing for drag, "imitations with no original."³²⁴

³²² Charlotte Coles, "The Question of Power and Authority in Gender Performance: Judith Butler's Drag Strategy," *eSharp* Issue 9, https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41211_en.pdf. Drag is incredibly complex and not something I can do justice to here, but it is worth consideration because of how it intersects with puppets. There is an interesting affective quality that I experience watching drag and that is one of abjection of the female. This is also often entwined with age. It is interesting how drag separates the feminine from the female (the female body) such that it is unclear what is being *abjected*. Some have posited that drag performers are both perpetrators *and* victims of a misogyny, or hatred by a masculine culture of the feminine. It is more mainstream than ever thanks to programs such as RuPaul's *Drag Race*. It is worth noting that there have been a few female drag performers impersonating females. They are not always welcome, and it is not clear that the public finds this as compelling as their male counterparts. It is also not clear whether they are impersonating females or males impersonating females. See Steve Bird, "Female Impersonators Hit Out at Misogyny as Drag Declared Men-Only," *The Telegraph* (March 2018), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/30/new-breed-drag-queens-upsetting-traditional-female-impersonators/>.

³²³ Braidotti with Judith Butler. "Feminism by Any Other Name."

³²⁴ Butler says: "Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems, there is no

Some come closer to the expression of drag when they appropriate and then *exaggerate* the proscribed gender expression and, like the argument above, serve to reinforce the hierarchies of gendered power. Perhaps we could consider some puppets to be a sort of drag-like prostheses when male makers and performers take on an exaggeratedly feminine aspect and persona that can subsume them, even if just for the duration of a show. In fact, looking at the work of many American modernist puppeteers (and continuing today), we find an aesthetic not dissimilar to drag.³²⁵ Bill Baird, who made many female puppets that relied on stereotypical racial and gendered tropes said, “When you make a puppet you emphasize the important features and de-emphasize the unimportant.”³²⁶ This is semiotics. Simone de Beauvoir stated about woman, “In

original or primary gender that drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original.” Judith Butler, in *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. Sara Salih (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004) 127.

³²⁵ Anecdotally, it seems many gay male puppeteers often incorporate what could be considered a drag style female representation. I have observed this myself. Looking at some examples at a small puppetry museum, the curator said (of some examples he had displayed) that the very sexually exaggerated female puppets were typical of many gay male puppet artists he had known, which would fit well with the tradition of drag in the gay community. In an informal conversation with an openly gay puppet scholar, I asked him about images of aging female bodies and abjection in the gay male community (in puppets and drag). He stated that he felt that rather than this being a rejection of the aging female, it was more of an identification “with.” He suggested that aging female divas, for example, represent a tenacity that gay males look to, a way of saying “I am *still* here!” This definitely complicated my initial sense of the gesture as abjectly parodic. Nevertheless, it is still an example of the male claiming the image of the female body as a symbolic aspect of self. In the process, woman is made to be something in accordance with male needs.

³²⁶ Like many of the puppets from this time, the bodies of many of Baird’s marionettes were racialized and gendered through caricature and exaggeration. Female figures meant to represent women of other ethnic or racial backgrounds got marked for race and gender in a way that is compounded exponentially. The breasts are unusually large, as are the eyes and lips. The waist is impossibly small. Of a marionette this article says: “There are 26 strings on Scheherazade, an Oriental dancer who is required to wriggle a number of parts of her body. A character like Scheherazade will require several operators to handle all her strings. On the other hand, one operator can manipulate an entire school of fish.” See “Bill Baird’s Puppets – September, 1954,” <https://otrfa68.wordpress.com/2009/09/12/bil-bairds-puppets-september-1954/>. If a similar effect is to happen to male bodies in puppetry, it is often through racial stereotypes (which we recognize much more quickly at this time as problematic). These are ubiquitous in puppetry from the pre–Civil Rights era. Males *can* also be marked through body form or performance, making the puppet into a personification of a negative trait, much like the cardinal sins. A puppet could be fat, stupid, lazy, dishonest, etc. There isn’t a way to make the puppet’s “maleness” the brunt of a joke unless perhaps through being a seducer. Still, this is a trait and not his maleness. Hence a puppet embodies laziness, for example, and not lazy maleness, much less maleness. Bubbles (see below) embodies the male notion of the available female body and its accessibility/possessibility.

fact, she will gain value in the eyes of males not by increasing her human worth but by modeling herself on their dreams.”³²⁷

Collector Mel Birnkrant acquired the marionette “Bubbles La Rue,” created by Baird in 1942, at auction. His description of his feelings about obtaining and possessing the object is not dissimilar to one by a man who has just purchased an expensive sex doll.

I never dreamed that I would ever have a chance to own her. Now, here she was, in person, hanging from the rafters.... So what is her special trick, you might be wondering? I won't, merely, describe it; I've arranged for her to do it for you. When Bubbles did her strip tease act, many years ago, she appeared on the stage, fully, and glamorously, clothed. Piece by piece, she removed each article of clothing, slowly, with lots of exotic dancing, in between. Finally, when she had taken off everything, within the bounds of decency, she removed one final thing. Can you guess what it might be? No, it wasn't her sparkling G string. It was something else, instead. Do you give up? The answer is: her head! That was the finale of her act, she reached up and took off her head! She could only do it once. And then, that was the end! But, if you scroll down, past this picture, *she will do it for you, again and again* [my italics].³²⁸

If this is parody, then we see that not all parody has the same intentions or potential. A marked difference is *whose* humor it is. The notion of insider and outsider humor has long been used to disrupt stereotypes, but it is never a tool that an outsider can wield with the same effect. Particularly helpful in terms of strategies of subversion for women, feminist and postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak brings play and performance (drama) together with writing. She uses the

³²⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 347.

³²⁸ The middle section of text of Mel Birnkrant's website describing his acquisition of Bubbles LaRue reads: "I climbed a precariously tall ladder to behold her. I did so, discreetly, hoping no one else would notice her, hanging up there, so inconspicuously. I knew, whoever beheld her, would want her too! The bidding was Hot and Heavy. A puppeteer, who knew Bubbles well, was there to operate her. When she appeared, a gasp rose from the audience. My heart was beating wildly. Her every move was magic. I held my paddle in the air, and didn't put it down. With every string the puppeteer pulled, the bidding rose. Every little bump and grind cost me a hundred dollars. I was suffering. As fascinated as I was to see her perform, I was wishing she would stop, already! Finally, the bidding began to slow down. Bubbles was doing everything she could to keep it going. And just as the bidding came to an end, a few seconds, too late (I got her) she did her special thing! Thank God, she waited until the bidding was over. Had she done it before, it would have cost me many dollars. <http://melbirnkrant.com/collection/page45.html>.

metaphorical phrase of bringing ideas “into play.” Spivak says: “Women's writing and women's teaching, based on gender and drama, bring into play notions like performance, both in the sense of acting out and bringing about through saying, representation, and self-representation.”³²⁹ In the section on feminisms, I discussed how Spivak suggests that constructing “gender” and playing it against itself in a non-earnest performance could expose and undermine it. Puppets can easily summon the Bakhtinian notions of the *carnavalesque*, but also *heteroglossia*, or speaking with different voices (this can be a literal speaking using different voices, or it can be the discourses we find in the material bodies and performances of objects such as puppets, costumes, sets, masks, and the like).³³⁰ Rosi Braidotti, in keeping with a notion of the feminine grounded in sexual difference, uses the example of women involved in punk rock who dramatize the most subversive aspects of the feminine by appropriating notions of the abject or the female grotesque.³³¹ Braidotti's and Spivak's tactics are also similar to the potential tactic of mimesis, which is one of the most famous tools Luce Irigaray employs. “Mimesis is a process of resubmitting women to stereotypical views of women in order to call the views themselves into question. Key to mimesis is that the stereotypical views are not

³²⁹ Phillip Sipiora, Janet Atwill, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Rhetoric and Cultural Explanation: A Discussion with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.” *Journal of Advanced Composition* (1990): 293-304.

³³⁰ “Mikhail Bakhtin: Main Theories: Dialogism, Polyphony, Heteroglossia, Open Interpretation,” <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Bakhtin-MainTheory.html>.

³³¹ Rosi Braidotti, “Punk Women and Riot Grrls,” *Performance Philosophy* 1 (April 2015): 239-254, <http://www.performancephilosophy.org/journal/article/view/32/63>.

repeated faithfully.”³³² According to Irigaray, the very possibility of repeating a negative view unfaithfully suggests that women are something other than the view expressed.³³³

In feminist politics as a strategy, according to Braidotti, “it all begins with the body and the construction of our desires. It begins by framing spatial and temporal scales of becoming that may enable us to understand which plateau of power we happen to be dealing with, right now.”³³⁴ To connect this to the puppet and doll, I rely on Braidotti’s discussion of the mask (in this case, the balaklava of the band Pussy Riot). The mask is a performing object itself. Like the doll, the division between it and the puppet is complicated. As mentioned, it can be used as a puppet and it can also, when worn, convert the body into a puppet, dislocating and relocating subjectivity. Braidotti, who sees this as a form of subjective nomadism, says:

Feminist politics ... needs to juxtapose the recognizable faces of icons to the anonymous forces of the masses or the multitudes, the iconicity of some to the anonymous faces of endless others.... The radical political stance today consists in becoming-minoritarian or nomadic, in a viral manner: you put on your mask, you become Pussy Riot, you take it off, and you no longer are Pussy Riot. The process of becoming-Pussy Riot is subversive in that it works actively towards the transformation of the signs, the social practices and the embodied histories of white institutionalized femininity, of resisting citizenship, of human rights campaigning, feminist and gender politics and art practices. In other words, the quest for identity is expanded to activate multiple becomings, away from reterritorialised identities, away from faciality as a despotic regime.... And in

³³² Sarah K. Donovan, “Luce Irigaray,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/irigaray/>. The quote goes on to say that “if women are viewed as illogical, women should speak logically about this view.” According to Irigaray, the juxtaposition of illogical and logical undermines the claim that women are illogical. Or if women’s bodies are viewed as multiple and dispersed, women should speak from that position in a playful way that suggests that this view stems from a masculine economy that values identity and unity (e.g., the penis or the Phallus). She also states that *mimesis* is a form of strategic essentialism. This is not, however, the definition of Spivak’s concept of the same name. This source draws on Irigaray’s essay (and text of the same name) “This Sex Which Is Not One.”

³³³ Ibid., <http://www.iep.utm.edu/irigaray/#SH4a>.

³³⁴ Braidotti, “Punk Women and Riot Grrls.”

putting on the balaclava you don't hide yourself but rather express another political subjectivity.³³⁵

If masks becoming or acting as puppets seems a jump, it is important to note that many artists have used both, from Dada to Julie Taymor's contemporary work like *Lion King*. A more interesting connection, perhaps, is the transition from the mask to the puppet in Theodora Skipitares' work, where the presence of the self became more complicated over time. From her beginnings as an autobiographical performance artist to a director of puppet productions, there are threads of displacement of her subjectivity. Absence of autobiographical content alone does not signify her complete absence from pieces, but her presence certainly became less literal.

I was making solo (performance art) works in galleries and in performance spaces that had nothing to do with puppetry. They were stories of my life with objects and masks that I made and wore. The puppets that I currently make still come from a mold that is a self-portrait. I think my process in moving to puppets was another kind of mask; it slowly (took over) as I was leaving the stage, as I was leaving the performance arena.³³⁶

It seems obvious and yet it is profound to note that, through puppets, we can watch an unfolding materiality of the human story. In the work of puppet artist Theodora Skipitares, we find parody and politics, grounded in bodies. Her sensibility resembles the theater of the absurd and the carnivalesque (different than drag), but it is crafted from the absurdity of real situations. Many of her works confront us with primary source material that might be otherwise lost or forgotten. Using real historical text, Skipitares creates an embodied material subjectivity through

³³⁵ Braidotti, "Punk Women and Riot Grrls." Braidotti calls this a *nomadic* political project because of its emphasis on the difference that women embody and looks at the "interconnection between female identity, feminist subjectivity and the radical epistemology of nomadic transitions from a perspective of positive sexual difference." Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, second edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 149.

³³⁶ Dolores Brandon, "Theodora Skipitares: Under the Knife 3 (1996)" [interview], *Airspace: The Quarterly Journal of the Association of Independents in Radio* (1996), <http://doloresbrandon.com/interviews/theodora-skipitares/>.

puppets who, like masked actors (in theater, protest, or a hybrid of both), transcend the individual. They are not acting. They are being. The historical vignette features naked midwife dolls stalling a pregnant puppet's painful birth, waiting until the stars are aligned in an auspicious manner. Much to the humor and horror of the audience, the naked puppets sway and sing as the birthing mother screams in pain. James Frieze describes Skipitares' work, *Under the Knife*, as "an anthropologically informed focus on scholarly traditions and the disciplining of the body."³³⁷ Her use of material, female bodies engages the political and social body as a material narrative in a way that has an explicit element of didacticism (Skipitares has even used the term "propaganda").³³⁸ Her untimely entwining of the past and present causes the audience to question the perpetuation of absurdity—and injustices—and to sense that perhaps their own time will not hold up to the scrutiny of reason and care. Frieze argues that Skipitares' work is almost unique in her continuation of engagement with powerful critiques and identity politics more common in work from artists of earlier decades.³³⁹

In crafting a female subjectivity, women makers cannot escape gender any more than they can escape sexual difference. To be gendered also provides the opportunity to work against, within, around, and past the proscribed performance. Gender can come "into play" and into poetics. Perhaps herein lies their most effective strategy—one puppets and dolls can contribute

³³⁷James Frieze, *Naming Theater: Demonstrating Diagnosis of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 76. Frieze laments what he sees as a moving away from theater as an effective tool of change. He sees Skipitares' work as continuing to do this while presenting nuances and complexities which are grounded in an anthropological turn and historical research. He notes that her approach has evolved with time so that, for example, these critiques include a new re-grounding in historical contexts and in particular moments.

³³⁸ Bruce D. Schwartz, "Interview: Working with Puppets," *Performing Arts Journal* 7, no. 1, 110.

³³⁹ James Frieze, *Naming Theater: Demonstrating Diagnosis of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 76.

to. Like masks and masked subjects, puppets shift subjectivity.³⁴⁰ Puppets materially embody the qualities and narratives of the gendered characters they represent and reterritorialize identity with a new *faciality* (Braidotti's words). They offer textures of humor, irony, pain, beauty, and more. In making objects, and devising and performing, there can be a subversive form of play by intentionally exploring gender—even embracing it—to summon intentional complications. However, while parody is not incompatible, it is not sufficient. There is no power in creating a subjectivity completely from a place of irony or disavowal. One must also create an affirmative female subjectivity, through a strategy of sexual difference through the ongoing collective project of earnestly centering female stories and bodies.

³⁴⁰ This is a good illustration of how Moi has used sex vs. gender as *body* vs. *subjectivity*. Moi, *Sex, Gender and the Body*, 114.

III. Chapters: Disruptive Poetics: Performance, Play, and the Serious Work of Dolls

Introduction

In the following sections, I revisit the way that cultural and artistic forces in modernism shaped women's experiences and experiences of women. The discourses of medicine and of art, among others, created a backdrop that colored women's engagement and their senses of self. I continue my exploration of woman's subjectivity and the female body, and examine, through case studies and examples, the way that dolls functioned in Western culture throughout the twentieth century, highlighting specific artists and instances. In order to *see* women's engagement with puppetry and object performance, I trouble the notion of what counts as *performance* in order to highlight the quotidian gestures that women and girls perform with dolls. I also look at the powerful performance of making material objects and how this engages affect, phenomenology, and materialism. Specifically, I look closely at the work of American puppet artist Theodora Skipitares and her unique contributions to late twentieth-century American avant-garde puppetry and examine how her work relates to dolls and doll play.

I describe and discuss my own bodies of work and relate them to the themes that have been explored in this dissertation, including corporeality and sexual difference. I look at what performance offers that other media do not. I define what my practice is and how it relates to puppetry and doll play. Informed by the research in the dissertation, I explore why I intuitively structure performances the way I do and reflect on how and where I do them. What do these decisions bring to the narrative and affective content of the work? In doing so, I demonstrate the enriching potential of research and reflection in untangling the meanings within creative work. I highlight the importance of practice-based research and an autoethnographic sensibility.

In the final section, I conclude with the directions forward that build on this work. I summarize my findings and conclusions and draw insights from the previous chapters and the new perspectives gained through their interplay. I suggest directions for further inquiry and engagement, both scholarly and artistic. I close the discussion with a statement of the contributions that have been derived from this dissertation and how this work has revealed hidden elements of my previous creative work, how it connects to work done concurrently with the writing, and how it sets the stage for further projects.

1. Modernism, Women, Dolls, and the Body

History is really just a story the gets told; the stories that get told become history. In writing this dissertation, I often found myself doing what I specifically did not want to do, centering and giving more space to the male writers and artists of the day, who already had a strong hand in shaping our notions of modernism. And yet, it is against this backdrop and from within this enculturation that women have had to work and to negotiate a subjectivity of their own. This is sexual difference, to be the other, the problem, the thing. Without understanding what women were told they were, we cannot understand their response. Madeleine Gedde Metz says, “I would claim that major parts of the modernist movement excluded women. By studying this period more closely, we can learn how such exclusion mechanisms worked and hopefully prevent them from working today.”³⁴¹

Puppets and dolls played an integral part in early twentieth-century art, theater, and domesticity. Dolls, although more a subject for research now than they were in the past, are still a marginalized field within scholarship. Parallel to their marginalization as a subject of investigation, within the modern and contemporary art world, dolls seem to be most acceptable as subjects when used for the most transgressive intentions. For example, the art world as well as many male scholars engage admiringly with Hans Bellmer, who made dolls that sexualized girls, often while dismembering them and creating new creations with their parts including prepubescent genitalia. His was a world in which the destruction and reassembly of the female body was an erotic act. The art world, nevertheless, was not interested in the work of Käthe

³⁴¹ Madelien Gedde Metz in Susanne Dietrichson, “The Masculine Avant-Garde That Fostered Feminism,” *Kilden genderresearch.no* (December 9, 2016), <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2016/12/masculine-avant-garde-fostered-feminism>.

Kruse who made dolls for girls.³⁴² There is a firm divide. When dolls entered the public arena of theater in new ways in modernism, they served well to re-theatricalize theatre.³⁴³ This theater, however, might be the same stuff of the nursery or the bedroom, if we expand our lens of performance and of theater.

Like with all the doll endeavors I have investigated, we can read these objects (with their origins and their use) as rich texts. Starting with the various materials and techniques that were tried, some were abandoned, some built upon, and some persisted. Each doll was made in the context of its moment, and the smallest details, shape of eyebrow or style of the eye, reveal the practices of the shop, the available materials and technologies, the evolution of design, and its place in the chronology, as well as trends and tastes—and history. The dolls made by German doll maker Erna Meyer, for example, are such texts. Perusing the photos available on the Web, one could conduct an entire historical, psychological, or sociological/anthropological study reading the discourse of the photographed tableaux of Meyer dolls produced over the past 50 years. The assembly and posing, the clothing and the vignettes reveal much about German society over the course of modernism and beyond. They speak to the persistence and dynamism

³⁴² Bellmer was a surrealist known for his sexualized, girl-sized, dismembered and reassembled dolls. The dolls were often reconfigured, for example, having two sets of lower torsos and four legs (no head) or to be missing one or more limbs, frequently the arms. Kruse, a former dancer, mother, and homemaker, made dolls that captured a complex and completely unsexualized twentieth-century child. Both used the doll to explore psychology, but while her dolls had a tremendous effect on doll design internationally, they were of no interest to the art world, where the lack of any transgression through mutilation and sexual violence made the subject of children in her case very different than Bellmer's overt reference to prepubescent genitalia at the disposal of the male artist and viewer. Bellmer's work is featured prominently in museums and art collections, whereas the work of Kruse is collected by doll collectors and would be unlikely to be found in an art museum. For more information on Kruse see "About Käthe Kruse," <http://kathe-kruse.eurosourcecellc.com/about-kathe-kruse>. I do note later that I saw a Kruse doll as part of a contemporary art piece at MOMA PS1.

³⁴³ Since the beginning of the twentieth century, artists as diverse as Meyerhold, Brecht, and Copeau have called for the retheatricalization of theater as a place of artifice, and the re-establishment of theatrical reality as a more productive way of representing social life than naturalism. Retheatricalization aims at highlighting the rules and conventions of the stage. Brecht conceived of retheatricalization as a better way of depicting social reality, exposing its construction, and in this way denaturalizing it. See Patrice Pavis (1998) p. 395, Fischer-Lichte (1997), and Lehmann (1999).

of gender roles, of nostalgia and the exhilaration of progress, of materialism and consumerism. Hidden in plain sight. These are performances of frozen in time. They are also histories and suggestions of utopias. However, in the enmeshed categories of dolls and puppets, gender lines are drawn in scholarship. Because *many* of women's activities did not enter public dialogue in the same frames as men's did, the intellectual theater of the arts, theory, and literature, it is important to highlight the ways in which their different participation did similar work. It is important to see the way gendered categorization worked against recording and acknowledging women's endeavors. We *tend* to see puppets as an interest of male scholars, whereas immense interest and knowledge of dolls is found among women, many of whom have no academic training and may informally exchange information in such venues as doll shows or family lore. With puppets, the *event*, that is performance frames an importance. Can we trouble these categories by finding different types of performance? In order to do so, it is importance to examine the way people lived life and the performances found in the quotidian as well as the rarified.

In writing about the roots of the twentieth century, in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the 19th Century*, Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur remind us:

The human body itself has a history. Not only has it been perceived, interpreted, and represented differently in different epochs, but it has been lived differently, brought into being within widely dissimilar material cultures ... and incorporated into different rhythms of production and consumption, pleasure and pain.... We often imagine that the previous century was a time when the body had no place in public discussion and sexuality was considered a dirty Secret... [however] the Victorians managed to win for themselves the reputation of the most sexually, and indeed physically, repressive society in history precisely by bringing the body ever more fully into discourse.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Walter Laqueur. *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), vii.

In her chapter entitled “Catastrophic Utopia: the Feminine as Allegory of the Modern,” Christine Buci-Glucksmann describes how prominent male definers of the modern, such as Walter Benjamin and Baudelaire, made constructs of woman into the “allegories of the modern.” Even when they appeared as fragments, obscurities, or metaphors, Baudelaire’s categories, echoed in the art of the era, such as the prostitute, the barren woman, the lesbian, and the androgyne, created a lexicon for modernity, allowing it to be symbolically thought through and represented.³⁴⁵ To these regressive figures, I would add a continued (though perhaps notably diminished) interest in the archetypal figures of the symbolists (later the Jungians) and the general renewed interest in fairytales and folklore that developed in the nineteenth century. The girl (prepubescent and pubescent), the maiden, and the crone became re-popularized in Jungian psychoanalysis as well as the anima, or the woman in men (secondary female sexual features).

It is amazing how the female body has been and continues to be available symbolically to male artists in a way that it never can be to female artists; a woman cannot use woman to symbolize some part of herself. It is the visual and psychological matter of the *other*, laden with a multitude of psycho-sexual significations as the work of Freud and others began to uncover.³⁴⁶ The female nude is shorthand for a few hundred years of the Western male thinking through a multitude of problems and fascinations, fantasies and fears, but never to the psychological extent we find at the turn of the last century. While Picasso used the female body to work out his fear of

³⁴⁵ Gallagher and Laqueur, *The Making of the Modern Body*, 20.

³⁴⁶ And here I am not trying to validate all of Freud’s theories but rather to point to the dominance of that thinking at the time; it is fully in the *Zeitgeist*, offering itself as content and comment for the work of the period.

syphilis in *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon*, Duchamp used it in service of the visual analytics of movement in space, in *Nude Descending a Staircase*.³⁴⁷

As male (and female artists) became increasingly preoccupied with the more intellectualized projects of various forms of abstraction, both males and females used the body as a starting point, a process, and an end when applying vast theories that brought together concerns for humanism in a moment of intensifying industry and mechanization, consumption and authoritarianism. In movements such as the Bauhaus, this can be seen in the work of Oskar Schlemmer. The human body was abstracted in other unexpected ways that questioned notions of individuality and collectivity. Such was the case with the female-dominated movement of Russian constructivism, which took on clothing the proletariat body—both male and female—illuminating how deeply ideological is the garment.³⁴⁸

The First World War created a new space for women's bodies in factories, clubs, tennis courts, and the streets. Writing about the paradoxes of the Italian futurists, Madeleine Metz says, "At the same time, the First World War created a new space for women in society. By

³⁴⁷ "Mr. Rubin shows how 'Les Demoiselles' (whose working titles, often jokingly invented by Picasso's friends, included 'The Avignon Bordello' and 'The Philosophical Brothel,' a reference to the Marquis de Sade's book 'Philosophy in the Bedroom') is not, as is sometimes assumed, a humorous caricature or a parody. According to Mr. Rubin, it was by creating personal fetishistic symbols that Picasso attempted to resolve his conflicts with ... fear of disease and illness, and, most forcefully, 'his deep-seated fear and loathing of the female body, which existed side by side with his craving for and ecstatic idealization of it.'" Julia Frey, "Anatomy of a Masterpiece," *New York Times* (1995), <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/04/30/books/anatomy-of-a-masterpiece.html>.

³⁴⁸ "Until the early 1930s, ideas about the reconstruction of everyday life according to the principles of functionalism and constructivism were disseminated through discussions on the problems of dress design and production." Natalia Adaskina, "Constructivist Fabrics and Dress Design," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 5, Russian/Soviet Theme Issue (Summer, 1987), 157.

the end of 1916, seventy percent of Italy's industrial workers were women.... Most men were soldiers in the war while the women were cultural and industrial workers."³⁴⁹

Male public bodies saw another radical change. After World War I, male bodies and psyches bore the disfigurement of war in both public and private spaces. The numbers and the severity of injuries changed the notion of the human body and did the prosthesis manufactured to attempt to rehumanize faces that had lost noses and mouths. As Beauvoir would tell us, "The price men pay for representing the universal is a loss of embodiment; the price women pay, on the other hand, is at once a loss of subjectivity and a confinement to the body. Men become disembodied and, through this process, gain entitlement to transcendence and subjectivity."³⁵⁰ Their wounded bodies, however, do become embodied as disabled bodies do.

Economic and political instability challenged men's ability to stabilize their own image and reconcile it with masculinity. This had been in development as an aspect of the Industrial Revolution and attending social forces. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur note that there is

the simultaneous impulse to equate women with their bodies and render them insensible; the self-defeating attempts of male interpreters to differentiate themselves from Woman, the object of their interpretations.... Women have been reassigned orgasms; syphilis is no longer a pressing social problem. But other diseases have come to occupy the same discursive place. Women's pleasure inside an increasingly commercialized psycho-sexual economy remains a controversial topic, even in feminist circles. Inside and outside feminism, moreover, the impulse to fix the true essence of Woman in a set of characteristics that differentiates her from Man continues. Populations are more than ever seen as entities to control. Many of the details of the discourse outlined here may seem

³⁴⁹ Madelen Gedde Metz in Susanne Dietrichson, "The Masculine Avant-Garde That Fostered Feminism," *Kilden genderresearch.no* (December 9, 2016), <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2016/12/masculine-avant-garde-fostered-feminism>.

³⁵⁰ Braidotti with Butler, "A Feminist by Any Other Name." 38.

bizarre, outrageous, or even comically absurd, but we cannot deny the continuity between its governing assumptions and our own.³⁵¹

In a time of rationality, reason was no match for the effects of war. So much so that Dada artists made a point of confronting the madness, disguised as rational politics, with their own madness. Tension had been building from the various breakdowns of modern society. Christine Buci-Glucksmann says of the upheaval in sex roles that had been developing during the nineteenth century, “This social dynamic urgently requires that the symbolic distinctions separating feminine and masculine be redefined, a task becoming all the more pressing in that the beginning of the nineteenth century is marked by the historical development of the first feminist movements.”³⁵²

In her chapter about the artistic obsession with depictions of femicide, “*Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis*,” Beth Ervin Lewis says:

This obsession with sexuality also emerged in the high culture of the prewar period. The fear of women became visible in misogynist writings by intellectuals and in the preoccupation with sexuality in the medical world throughout Europe. The science of sexology that emerged in the late 19th century was both a response to and a manifestation of anxiety about moral and national degeneracy.... This concentration on women’s sexual nature and reproductive purpose indicated that underneath the concern for respectable and healthy sexual norms lay considerable anxiety about the threat to the traditional male dominant role that the woman question was posing.³⁵³

³⁵¹ Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Walter Laqueur, “Introduction,” in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), xv.

³⁵² Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “Catastrophic Utopia: The Feminine as Allegory of the Modern,” in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Walter Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 222.

³⁵³ Beth Ervin Lewis, “*Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis*,” in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, edited by Katharina von Ankum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 208.

The misogynistic response to rapid changes and disruption was also reflected in art, literature, and philosophy—dangerous times for women. Maria Tatar, in her book *Lustmord*, states that it was the “Weimar Republic, often viewed as the birthplace of a transgressive avant-garde modernism, where representations of female sexual mutilation abound. Here a revealing episode in the gender politics of cultural production unfolds as male artists and writers, working in a society consumed by fear of outside threats, envision women as enemies that can be contained and mastered through transcendent artistic expression.”³⁵⁴ Sexual murder was accepted as an expected manifestation of men’s angst.³⁵⁵ Ervin goes on to say:

These images can only make sense if they are viewed in the context of the pervasive cultural and social struggle over sexual roles that took place in German urban industrial society in the first decades of the century. In each of these images, there is an overpowering fascination with sexuality combined with an obsessive dread of woman. In the midst of the profound unsettling of boundaries between the sexes that the war accelerated, these artists’ apprehension and anxiety produced vicious images that grew out of complex emotional and social responses to women’s changing role. The sentence of death against women pronounced in these images was a reactionary response that had its roots deep in contemporary culture and social misogyny.³⁵⁶

In modernism, men might have been *playing* with women’s bodies in their paintings as though they were objects-- like dolls, but they were also *playing* with real dolls. The two engagements found very different forms thus there were competing significations being created for the doll’s body in modernism. One function seemed to be to examine a range of angst-filled questions and preoccupations men had, some quite strong. In a time of theater, performance, and the blurring of categories across movements such as Dada, Bauhaus, and futurism, they must

³⁵⁴ Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

³⁵⁵ Lewis, “*Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis*,” 206.

³⁵⁶ Lewis, “*Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis*,” 226.

have been intrigued by the power of time-based narratives— and of objects. In telling their stories (what might be termed later as psychodramas), Nathan Timpano argues that painters, too, sought to bring theatricality to their canvas. He investigates the incorporation of the puppet or doll-object, as seen frequently in the work of Egon Schiele who responded to this impulse.³⁵⁷ Flesh as matter to be both abjected and fetishized, Schiele traversed between his own body and that of the women, the woman and the doll, the woman and the prostitute, the body and the quasi corpse ... the doll.³⁵⁸ Even Freud in his writings on the uncanny connected the favorite doll to its metaphysical shadow— death.³⁵⁹

In his review of the shows *Berlin Metropolis: 1918-1933* and *New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic, 1919-1933*, Lance Esplund talks about the exhibitions' takes on a rapidly transforming Germany, including the Weimar Republic's construction of the New Woman, or *Neue Frau*. The competing demands represented in the visual culture of the era (commercial as well as artistic) placed on the *Neue Frau*, just like the social forces she was subjected to, were a minefield of contradictions. These included contrasting views of androgyny and femininity, but also an appropriation of lesbianism through an obsession with lesbian porn, not unlike that of the current era. Not only do we see women, like puppets, performing lesbian sexuality for the male gaze in the images of Egon Schiele, we also see it quite explicitly in the

³⁵⁷ While Schiele might be an example of an artist who made himself an object as well, he included dolls and women, at times interchangeably, in his work.

³⁵⁸ Nathan Timpano, *Constructing the Viennese Modern Body: Art, Hysteria, and the Puppet* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017). Timpano describes Schiele's interest in real puppets, describing a time when Arthur Rossler allowed Schiele a choice of gifts. He chose a shadow puppet.

³⁵⁹ Hal Foster, "Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties: Anthropomorphic Avatars in Dada and the Bauhaus," in *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*, edited by Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsh. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), 22.

work of Christian Schad, a German painter associated with Dada and the New Objectivity movement, who lived in Vienna and Berlin in the years following World War I. In speaking about the painting showing two women masturbating for the viewer, Esplund says, “We encounter posters, fashion and set design, jewelry, perfume bottles, paintings, collages and clothing. Schad’s sexually explicit ‘Two Girls’ (1928) is so objective that it verges on clinical.”³⁶⁰ Far from affirming lesbianism, like contemporary porn, this gesture of appropriating the private corners of female sexuality and desire for the male gaze undermined women’s sexual subjectivity (through the objectification of their bodies and their pleasure). It was not for them, but for the viewer.³⁶¹

A potent mix of theater, death, dolls, and sex became popular in the artistic community of Vienna. There were many doll-like objects being made by men, as well as paintings of dolls, sometimes cracked and destroyed. Rudolf Wacker painted dolls almost obsessively, posed, tossed to the side, broken, ageing, and often, like in the case of Rudolf’s *Nippfigur mit Puppe*, theatrically psychological. These were small still lifes, but the dolls shifted them to theater

³⁶⁰ Lance Esplund, “‘Berlin Metropolis: 1918-1933’ and ‘New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic, 1919-1933,’ Review,” *Wall Street Journal* (December 21, 2015), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/berlin-metropolis-1918-1933-and-new-objectivity-modern-german-art-in-the-weimar-republic-1919-1933-review-1450734422>.

³⁶¹ Of Schad, Robert Sievert states in “Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s,” a show held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2007, “The art seemed to glory in the outer limits of society, very rich or very extreme. Among them was Christian Schad whose work is quite literal but whose notoriety [sic] seems to come from his choice of subject matter. Schad painted freaks, people of color and people with physical deformities. The edginess of his subject matter seemed to energize him. He contained himself in a pristine style but delivered Expressionist images.” Robert Sievert, “Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s,” <http://www.artezine.com/issues/20070415/gd.html>.

through framing and scale and a sense of an actor's presence. There was a general theatricality to life, as artists work frequently across borders and disciplines.

And yet, in the same world, albeit worlds apart, dolls existed in very different ways, meaning very different things. Overall, there seems to be a greater acceptance when men appropriate the doll than when women and girls use it, either within a common cultural context or reappropriating it from their own girlhoods; there is an invisibility effect when the doll is in a woman or girl's hands, whereas it is suddenly visible in male art pieces and writings. Even in women's scholarship, one can find a distancing that is the antithesis of the autoethnographic approach discussed in the Literatures and Methodologies section. Perhaps women scholars have turned to a rigorous, indifferent scholarly approach to the doll in pursuit of validity, ultimately sacrificing the poetic power of the embodied and personal—and thereby, in some senses, *the power*—that Rilke or Baudelaire wielded and still wield in their essays more than a hundred years later. We have to look to less academic sources at times to find work on dolls that does not abstract them.

While men were using dolls in transgressive manners, women continued a utopian project with dolls at both the personal and the commercial scale.³⁶² For instance, earlier I mentioned Käthe Kruse's work to redesign dolls in Germany that would undo gender in the nursery and reimagine the psychology of childhood. Deborah Neff, a contemporary collector, specializes in Black dolls from the United States and talks about the universe of homemade Black dolls and the obvious care and use that were part of their histories. She is drawn to the ingenuity and variety of readily available materials that were used to craft faithful representations: "It wasn't long before I

³⁶² Some men were also engaged in the utopian potential of the doll.

began to notice that handmade black dolls of the 19th and early 20th centuries embodied the best of this tradition regularly crossing the boundary from craft art in accomplishing portrayals of ordinary souls.³⁶³ The range of photos of children, Black and White, posing with their dolls, is a testament to the vibrant charm of dolls and the affection granted them. In Paris in 1900, Stefania Lasarska, a Polish artist, was making cloth art dolls that ranged in size from tiny fetish dolls to large boudoir dolls. They were highly sought after by adult female collectors of the day.

Alabama Indestructible was actually the name of a cloth doll developed and marketed by Ella Smith, an American art teacher in 1899. As the name implies, the doll was designed to stand up to rough play, taking advantage of some new materials that allowed for hygiene and resilience as well as the look of a real child. Many of these small shops were started by women, sometimes families. In the mid-nineteenth century, Vermont doll maker Izanna Walker and her daughters made classic gender-neutral baby dolls. Many women sought to employ friends and other women.³⁶⁴

This is not the modernism we are familiar with. According to Anne Birgitte Rønning:

There are female artists and writers within modernism, and our understanding of modernism might be much broader if it was based on women's literature and women's art. At the same time, there are good reasons to regard modernism as a response or countermove to "the feminisation of culture" around the turn of the century. And when it comes to various avant-garde movements, these have often been close-knitted homo-social, self-proclaiming, and self-confirming male communities.... Surrealism, for example, explores and praises the dream, the unconscious, and love, and here the woman, often the childlike woman, plays a special role as inspirer, motif, and muse, if not as an independent artist.³⁶⁵

³⁶³ Deborah Neff, Frank Maresca, Margo Jefferson, Faith Ringgold, and Lyle Rexer, *Black Dolls: From the Collection of Deborah Neff* (Santa Fe: Radius Books, 2015), 7.

³⁶⁴ The doll industry also exploited women and girls, who labored in their homes sewing clothes, piecemeal.

³⁶⁵ Susanne Dietrichson, "The Masculine Avant-Garde That Fostered Feminism," *Kilden Gender Research* (December 9, 2016), <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2016/12/masculine-avant-garde-fostered-feminism>.

If we venture to think that the doll might have been a form of self for a woman, then we can imagine the doll and woman as twin others for the man; the doll and the woman were both objects available for use, to trigger affective sensations, pursue intellectual inquiry, make a political statement, or shock, perhaps all as a theatrical gesture. There was a collusion between male artists and writers in the cultural work they engaged in. In his book *The Artificial Body in Fashion and Art: Marionettes, Models and Mannequins*, Adam Geczy writes that art caught up to literature when the doll shed any connotation of charm in the visual arts in the twentieth century, and its *use* in literature came into alignment with what was happening already in the literary arts.³⁶⁶ He argues that the new role for dolls (and automata) was twofold: to animate the “positive onward march of science and technology,” while at the same time warning of the dangers if “science goes askew.”³⁶⁷ It is odd that he states that the dolls have lost all notion of charm. For whom? He does not differentiate between the sexes (despite what most would suspect could be an area of great affective and sentimental difference). He speaks as though this were the universal, basing his analysis on the work of Baudelaire, Hoffmann, Kleist, Freud, Lacan, Le Corbusier, Nietzsche, and Rilke, among others.³⁶⁸ For many women, even more than charm, the doll represented an intimacy with her own body. At no time has that ceased to be the case. There were instances of autoethnographic musings, where male writers attempted to work through a

³⁶⁶ Adam Geczy, *The Artificial Body in Fashion and Art: Marionettes, Models and Mannequins* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 52. I would suggest he is actually talking about more than visual arts because of the interdisciplinarity of the era, since one could hardly consider Dada or the Bauhaus to be *visual* arts movements. The performing arts present a hybrid between the visual arts and the literary in many cases.

³⁶⁷ Geczy, *The Artificial Body in Fashion and Art*, 51-52.

³⁶⁸ Idris Parry and Paul Keegan, eds., *Essays on Dolls* (London: Syrens, 1994). See also Patrick W. Moran, “Elizabeth Bowen’s Toys and the Imperatives of Play,” *Éire-Ireland* 46 no. 1 (2011): 152-176. As the Industrial Revolution took hold and artists, poets, scholars, and philosophers yearned for antidotes such as the handmade, the material, the occult, the natural, and the folk, an interest was kindled in the doll, for all these reasons.

new psychological and existential self-awareness reflecting on their relationship with the inanimate; affective qualities such as the uncanny and the nostalgic were emphasized. Though gender was inevitably embedded in the content (Rilke was said to be working out both gender confusion and a problematic relationship with his mother), it was not addressed directly and any query into the difference in women's experience with such objects was absent. Interestingly, the collection *Essays on Dolls*, published in the 1990s, contains no female authors, nor does it acknowledge that fact. Idris Parry, the editor, ends his essay, saying, "The speculations of man are amusing and noisy. The doll is above all this, infuriatingly divine in its silence."³⁶⁹

Citing several male writers of the day, Juliet Koss, too, notes a melding of the feminine and the mechanical as a new model of female subjectivity. "Waxworks, dolls, marionettes, and puppets had long substituted for humans in German literary imagination."³⁷⁰ Hal Foster surveys a wider range of art objects, including many women, in his work, "Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties: Anthropomorphic Avatars in Dada and the Bauhaus."³⁷¹ However, ultimately Foster also connects the objects to the same well-known male writings of the day that display a general interest in psychological enmeshing with aspects of the uncanny and the fetishistic. Not unlike Geczy's assertion that the doll reflects a fascination and foreboding with technology and feelings of the ambiguity of humanness in modernism, Foster argued, "Marionettes and automata came to represent near-opposite values: on the one hand, principles

³⁶⁹ Parry and Keegan, *Essays on Dolls* (London: Syrens Press, 1994).

³⁷⁰ Juliet Koss, "Bauhaus Theater of Human Dolls," *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (2003): 728.

³⁷¹ Hal Foster, "Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties: Anthropomorphic Avatars in Dada and the Bauhaus," in *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*, *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*, edited by Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsh. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), 21–33.

of rationality and causality championed by the Enlightenment and, on the other, experiences of the irrational and the marvels explored by the Romantics such as Hoffman, these divergent associations persisted in the modernist period.”³⁷² Foster focuses on the way these objects get their power from the *para-* status they held—not considered something to be exhibited or sold (Paul Klee never exhibited the many puppets he made for his son). And yet they were completely in keeping with a certain cult of the other that was popular at the time, touching the same animistic force as the masks artists collected and made (such as Marcel Janco of Dada). The raw, spontaneous energy could lend itself to mad play, seen as energy, by Western eyes, in tribal art and that of children, the mad, and other outsiders.

In his “Response to Hal Foster,” Stefan Deines makes an important distinction that might align with a female perspective that privileges experience—experience with doll play; it is less an intellectual argument that seeks to create a diagrammatic understanding. Making an important point that seems lost in the philosophical and metaphysical musings of many, the doll, Deines argues, is “concerned with the past and represents childhood” whereas the automata, essentially a robot, to technological powers. The doll, he notes, is animated by its *possessor*.³⁷³

Another way in which the puppet and doll are more alike than the latter is to automata, is revealed in the work women doll makers have articulated in terms of responsiveness, weight, and joints. The doll and the puppet both must interact with the human manipulating or handing them. They must deal also with motion’s negotiation with gravity. They work in tandem with a human

³⁷² Foster, “Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties,” 22-23.

³⁷³ Stefan Deines, “Response to Hal Foster,” in in *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semicapitalism*, *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semicapitalism*, edited by Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsh. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), 35.

being and the knowledge is not dissimilar to a mother's knowledge of her infant's body. An Automata and other robotic objects are self-sustaining.

Deines reintroduction of childhood and one's past affections speaks to a different set of examples than the ones that Geczy uses. These other examples we might search for foreground relationships, intimate connections, childhood with its longing and nostalgia, animation, and sense of ownership for one who is lucky enough to possess a beloved doll. This animation might be theatrical, or take the shape of dressing and playing, of posing and positioning, or of posing alongside for the camera.

While these same male writers are still more recognized in doll scholarship perhaps because they are so in general, recently more attention has been paid to women's writing about dolls and puppets. Nina Efimova wrote extensively about her career.³⁷⁴ Djuna Barnes, in her article, "When Puppets Come to Town," devotes significant time to a conversation with renowned puppeteer Tony Sarg, who describes, to Barnes' fascination, the way wood is integrated into our lives and how its other uses affect our sense of the wooden "dolls" or marionettes that he uses in performances in early twentieth-century.³⁷⁵ Elizabeth Bowen included many dolls and doll-objects in her work. Patrick Moran says of her toys, that she "favored the toy theater, a plaything that, itself, reflected the changing sociomaterial conditions of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Children would construct a miniature proscenium, figures, scenery, and props from large sheets of mechanically reproduced, printed paperboard, which

³⁷⁴ Nina Efimova, *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theater Including its Discoveries in Making and Performing with Hand-Puppets, Rod Puppets and Shadow Figures, Now Disclosed For All* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2012).

³⁷⁵ D. Barnes, "When the Puppets Come to Town (introduced by Rebecca Loncraine)," *PN Review* (2004): 48-52.

they would cut, paste, water-color, and often embellish with found domestic objects (ranging from fabric, string, and tinsel to feathers and locks of hair).”³⁷⁶

From building houses, cradles, and the cross and heating homes, the affective layers of association we have with a material accumulates complexly. A subsequent collection of these and other works, edited by Kenneth Gross, includes a poem by Elizabeth Bishop and an essay by the contemporary scholar Marina Warner on works in wax (which has an interesting focus on materiality). Nevertheless, even Gross neglects—or perhaps even denies—the topic of gender, speaking in an almost odd way of “the child” and “the child’s doll.”³⁷⁷ While perhaps this could be seen as laudable—a way to not acquiesce to gender divisions—it has the effect of erasing the feminine relationship with the doll by defaulting to the *everychild*, which cannot be the female subsuming the male but can always be the opposite. It has been the job of feminist scholars to begin to fill out and fill in these late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century musings on the doll, adding female writers and early and mid-twentieth-century child development experts such as Melanie Klein and her student, Donald Winnicott.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Patrick W. Moran, “Elizabeth Bowen’s toys and the imperatives of play,” *Eire-Ireland: a Journal of Irish Studies* 46, no. 1-2 (2011): 154.

³⁷⁷ Kenneth Gross, ed., *On Dolls* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2018), xii.

³⁷⁸ Melanie Klein saw the doll as intimately related to the female child and her relationship with her mother in a quasi-Oedipal struggle. In one case she treated a violent and compulsive young child. “Rita asks what is inside there, pointing first to doll then to herself (stomach area). Klein interprets: “‘curiosity mother orientation.’ Rita throws large bricks on the floor and says she wants to break the floor. She also throws a chair around and sits astride it: ‘now I am breaking Mummy.’ She is ‘very wild.’ She fetches a long chain, puts it on, then hits the floor with the chain – and says she is breaking the floor and chain. She hits the doll with the chain and throws the doll away.” Later Rita does a series of cleansing, dressing, and cutting (of clothes) rituals where she alternates with identical actions she performs on herself and on her doll. In Claudia Frank, “Melanie Klein’s Discovery of Reparation,” paper presented at the seminar “Facing the Pain of Crimes and their Reparation” at the 48th International Psychoanalytical Association Congress, Prague, 2013.

Like in literature, the visual arts are a site of corporeal fragmentation. Women are the frequent object. In modernism, fragmented, dismembered, and damaged bodies of women were quasi-interchangeable with sex. In an earlier section, I mentioned what Christina Kiaer calls the death–sex nexus of the early twentieth-century European avant-garde (as opposed its Russian counterpart).³⁷⁹ Capitalism’s version of modernism generated excess. The dolls that poured off the assembly lines, though nothing in comparison with today, still were more disposable. In “Catastrophic Utopia: The Feminine as Allegory of the Modern,” Christine Buci-Glucksmann states:

In the realm of sociology, there is the new status of women in large cities, subjected by work and urbanization to a certain sexual uniformity. The violent insertion of women into commodity production collapses both material (division of labor) and symbolic differences of sex. Women become mass-produced, widely available commodities with the “massification” of industrial labor and society, simultaneously losing their “natural” qualities (a feminine essence, a nature determined by child-bearing) and their poetic aura (beauty as the sublimating idealization that surrounds Dante’s Beatrice).³⁸⁰

And in “Bauhaus: Theatre of Human Dolls,” Juliet Koss describes the character Maria in Fritz Lang’s film *Metropolis*, released in 1927 as a prototype for later replicas. She cites the enthusiastic cry: “We will put one in every factory!” Maria represents “the wondrous potential of serial production.”³⁸¹ At a time when women were demanding more full humanity, the commodification of women’s bodies through industry or prostitution revealed an impulse towards dehumanization, humans as commodities to be bought and sold.

³⁷⁹ Christina Kiaer, presentation in conjunction with the Museum of Modern Art exhibition “A Revolutionary Impulse: The Rise of the Russian Avant-Garde,” streamed live February 8, 2017, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1668?locale=en>.

³⁸⁰ Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “Catastrophic Utopia: The Feminine as Allegory of the Modern,” *Representations*, 14, The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century (Spring, 1986): 222

³⁸¹ Juliet Koss, “Bauhaus Theater of Human Dolls,” *The Art Bulletin*, 85, no. 4 (2003): 729.

Just as the Russian avant-garde complicates the modernist narrative with regard to women and their place in the rejection of capitalist commodification, so too did the Italian futurists, in a very different way. While both movements sought a utopia different from the present, they took the opposite position on women.³⁸² While a primarily male movement, there were a few women tied to the movement but their status could not avoid a certain ambivalence. The Italian-French poet and art critic Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who is regarded as the founder of futurism, published *Manifesto del Futurismo* in leading newspapers in Italy and France in 1909, declaring the movement's contempt for women and feminism. Anne Birgitte Rønning says that futurism stood out from other contemporary literary currents in a number of ways: "With its cultivation of velocity, progress, machines, and war, futurism is explicitly—and extremely—male gendered in a way that no other avant-garde movement is."³⁸³ Echoing her, Lucia Re states:

Among the various European avant-garde movements of the first half of the twentieth century, Italian futurism appears as the one most deeply marked by a misogynist world view.... Not only is "contempt for woman" explicitly called for by the founding fathers of futurism; feminism itself is singled out as a particularly important target in the movement's oppositional project.... As in almost every aspect of its aesthetic and ideology, the futurist vision of "the woman question" as well as the sporadic participation of women in this essentially male-dominated movement are characterized by paradox and contradiction.³⁸⁴

Oddly, their misogynist provocation, embodied in manifestos declaring their negative position on women, succeeded in triggering a response from the powerful, polemic-minded women who had associated themselves with the movement. It was through crafting their

³⁸² And here again, even my own language cannot help but to "other" women and turn them into an object of social discourse. Hence, any feminist sexual difference project cannot avoid the powerful historical condition of the sexual difference of women.

³⁸³ Susanne Dietrichson, "The Masculine Avant-Garde That Fostered Feminism," *Kilden Gender Research* (December 9, 2016), <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2016/12/masculine-avant-garde-fostered-feminism>.

³⁸⁴ Lucia Re, "Futurism and Feminism," *Annali d'Italianistica* 7, (1989): 258.

opposition that the women were able to articulate a subjectivity. Such a specific situation did not arise in Vienna or Zurich. There was no female response to what might have well been called the *Lustmord* movement. Even the marginalization women experienced in Dada didn't allow for the published public dialogue around womanhood and their inclusion. I discuss a story written by Höch below, in which she does this work but it is subversive and not polemic. Despite Marinetti's manifesto, the futurists were complicated. While they could be seen as despising *womanhood*, they may have also envisioned a different kind of futuristic womanhood that could emerge from their socially and culturally disruptive notions, and perhaps this is why they supported equal pay and women's suffrage as part of their agenda. The international quality of the Italian futurists also likely led to complexity of ideology since much of the futurist rhetoric spoke to the Italian reality. Mina Loy, an English writer and artist, and Valentin Le Pont, a dancer, were two of the women who engaged in public dialogue with the Italian futurist movement. They were vociferous supporters of women's suffrage at a time when there was no real women's movement in Italy.

The male futurists were intrigued by the outsider potential of some women, especially those seen as X variables, defying the conventions accorded to their gender. The futurists' ability to imagine a different kind of woman—one that female futurists worked to articulate seeing it as liberatory for themselves as well—was the reason, Madeleine Gedde Metz argues, that women, including Valentine de Saint-Point, Maria Ginanni, Enif Robert, Rosa Rosà, Mina Loy, and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, found a place in the futurist movement. These women shared the futurists' rejection of Italian social conventions inherently connected to women, such as marriage, romantic love, and chaste sexuality, which they opposed.

“It is important to demonstrate the diversity among women also a hundred years ago.

There is a tendency to present history as only consisting of male, and no female, writers,” says Metz.³⁸⁵ Perhaps the disentanglement of women from womanhood was the way forward for the female futurists who rejected the conflation of a female essence and real flesh-and-blood women. While many of the female futurists promoted futurists view on women, they saw themselves as more masculine than other women, representing the potential for different qualities—in some senses a different social construct of gender including a proclivity for violence and aggression when necessary and a more libertarian sexuality.

Their overt and bold misogynist provocations, led by Marinetti, provided a polemical stage for women to articulate, and in some senses perform, not just their social position but their very psychological make-up (at a time when psychology and physiology were still entwined).³⁸⁶ By writing as they did, they performatively embodied the new futurist woman; it allowed the women who responded to formulate a sense of sexual difference and female subjectivity, and to perform it publically. In “The Manifesto of Futurist Woman (Response to F. T. Marinetti)” from 1912, Valentine de Saint Point declares her love of futurism. She analyzes gender as both a cultural/historical construct and an essence that, while concentrated in the different sexes, can be heightened, diminished, and exchanged in order to advance a movement:

We are living at the end of one of these periods. What is most lacking in women as in men is virility. To restore some virility to our races so benumbed in femininity, we have to train them in virility even to the point of brute animality. But we have to impose on everyone, men and women who are equally weak, a

³⁸⁵ Madelien Gedde Metz in Susanne Dietrichson, “The Masculine Avant-Garde That Fostered Feminism,” *Kilden genderresearch.no*, <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2016/12/masculine-avant-garde-fostered-feminism>.

³⁸⁶ While it is tempting to assume that an embodied notion of the female (and non-dualistic) would create a more challenging place from which to advance women’s causes, this may not necessarily have been so. Lucia Re “Futurism and Feminism,” 258.

new dogma of energy in order to arrive at a period of superior humanity. Every woman ought to possess not only feminine virtues but virile ones, without which she is just a female. Any man who has only male strength without intuition is only a brute animal. But in the period of femininity in which we are living, only the contrary exaggeration is healthy: we have to take the brute animal for a model. Enough of those women whose “arms with twining flowers resting on their laps on the morning of departure” should be feared by soldiers; women as nurses perpetuating weakness and age, domesticating men for their personal pleasures or their material needs! ... Enough women who create children just for themselves, keeping them from any danger or adventure, that is, any joy; keeping their daughter from love and their son from war! ...

Women are Furies, Amazons, Semiramis, Joan of Arc, Jeanne Hachette's, Judith and Charlotte Corday's, Cleopatras, and Messalinas: combative women who fight more ferociously than males, lovers who arouse, destroyers who break down the weakest and help select through pride or despair, “despair through which the heart yields its fullest return.” Let the next wars bring forth heroines like that magnificent Catherine Sforza, who, during the sack of her city, watching from the ramparts as her enemy threatened the life of her son to force her surrender, heroically pointing to her sexual organ, cried loudly: “Kill him, I still have the mold to make some more!”

Yes, “the world is rotting with wisdom,” but by instinct, woman is not wise, is not a pacifist, is not good. Because she is totally lacking in measure, she is bound to become too wise, too pacifist, too good during a sleepy period of humanity. Her intuition, her imagination are at once her strength and her weakness.³⁸⁷

Valentine de Saint-Point's focus on the embodied quality of virility is fascinating. A curious quality, it can hardly be located in the body without implicating the psyche and vice versa. This would prove interesting to look at through Grosz's lens of non-dualism or a new materialist Deleuzian sense of flows and intensities. The very intercorporeal sense of virility that she develops in her statement—belonging to the subject but provoked into evidence by another

³⁸⁷ Bruce Sterling, “The Manifesto of the Futurist Woman,” *Wired* (November 12, 2008), <https://www.wired.com/2008/11/the-manifesto-1/>. The nod to nationalism in her mention of Caterina Sforza connects her ideas to a specifically ethnic aspect of her gender. Her discussion of the possible reimagining of the quality of gender in motherhood is also something interesting to consider in light of my discussion of matricentric feminism.

body—is interesting. Saint Point does something else that Braidotti does, which is to suggest that certain nations get gendered in their interactions with others.

When one thinks of modernism, often there is an imagined a trajectory towards the abstract and analytical. The Italian futurists, like the Bauhaus, the constructivists, and the cubists, distanced their work from the psychological narratives that were developed as the *raison d'être* of surrealism, realism, and new objectivity. Abstraction, for example, gestured towards some sort of purity and the body came into service of that quest. Despite being the prevailing grand narrative of the movement towards abstraction, we see many other currents in art, including “New Objectivity,” which was committed to figurative representation with its own set of specific rules and motivated by stories of humans suffering—physical, psychological, and the enmeshment of both. This is, of course, the notion of embodiment, a dominant theme in this dissertation. Here we see the body, often framed and set within a densely narrative context. *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Objectivity, solidified itself as a movement after an exhibition held in Mannheim in 1923. Proving that misery has its own logic of order, “The exhibition was part of the phenomenon of the ‘return to order’ following the First World War (when artists rejected the more extreme avant-garde forms of art for more reassuring and traditional approaches).”³⁸⁸

The movement was almost exclusively male, with the notable exception of Käthe Kollwitz, who rendered the bodies of her predominantly female subjects as physically enduring (if not always powerful), wracked with a grief, malnourished, continuing past complete despair. They appear able to sustain the moment, owing directly to a muscular and corporeal presence

³⁸⁸ <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/r/return-order>. The New Objectivity movement also attracted an artist named Wacker who painted dolls, cracked and damaged, “to show a ‘hidden reality’, behind the obvious image.” His doll pictures, the Puppenbilder, deserve mention for their ability to clearly show existential misery.

with which Kollwitz renders them: mothers literally cradling dead children, figuratively doing so as they receive the news of a fallen child, and holding each other in grief, yet another form of cradling the dead child. In contrast to these deeply humanizing and hallowing images of the female body, her colleagues in the movement, Otto Dix and George Gross, painted from a specifically male subjectivity using women as the other. Joseph Akel tells us that it wasn't the woman that interested them, but rather her anatomical capabilities (and I might suggest anatomical inventory).

Interestingly, a recent study found that the brain of both women and men process women's bodies as a series of parts and men's as wholes. The researcher, Sarah Jervais, found that, "Women's sexual body parts were more easily recognized when presented in isolation than when they were presented in the context of their entire bodies. But men's sexual body parts were recognized better when presented in the context of their entire bodies than they were in isolation."³⁸⁹ Whether that is owed to brain training or something more deeply hardwired, it is safe to assume that there exists a self-perpetuating symbiosis in representation and reception. Females also, as I argued in previous sections, experience their body as objects and therefore easily as pieces. Simone de Beauvoir laid out how, for girls, each new stage of sexual development is experienced as traumatic as they proceed towards womanhood. Philosopher Felicity Joseph describes the painful process of differentiation that Beauvoir articulates:

Each (stage) demarcates her more and more sharply from the opposite sex. As the girl's body matures, society reacts in an increasingly hostile and threatening manner. De Beauvoir talks about the process of 'becoming flesh', which is the process whereby one comes to experience oneself as a sexual, bodily being exposed to another's gaze. This does not have to be a bad thing; but unfortunately, young girls are often forced to become flesh against their will:

³⁸⁹ Steve Smith, "Research Shows Brains See Men as People, Women as Body Parts," *Nebraska Today* (August 7, 2012), <http://newsroom.unl.edu/announce/todayatunl/1469/8272>

“The young girl feels that her body is getting away from her... on the street men follow her with their eyes and comment on her anatomy. She would like to be invisible; it frightens her to become flesh and to show flesh.”³⁹⁰

The female, because she is more embodied, lends herself to fragmentation. This likely contributed to the fragmentation seen in the representation for the female body. There were others factors as well. Dix, a former soldier of the First World War, a war that left many men walking wounded. The public display of disfigurement is inconceivable in our day. One need only search for images of the prostheses developed for missing faces and limbs to imagine the fragmentation witnessed on the streets. Perhaps this was part of why Dix explored the darkness in the world which consumed his work and was often expressed through the presence of the abject female. Akel writes:

Indeed, one could argue that Dix’s representations of women are profoundly intertwined with the horrors of war.... women occupy spaces where erotic fulfillment is combined with violence and death.... In other, even more grotesque works, especially the *Death and Resurrection* (1922) series, the female sex becomes the object of a savage and murderous primitivism. One such image, titled *Lustmord*, translating literally as “sex murder,” portrays a dead, prostrate female figure with her genitalia bloodily mutilated. The composition’s savagery is echoed in Dix’s heavy, expressionistic hand, effectively scarring the metal plates upon which the image is etched. The crime recorded by Dix is two-fold, the brutal slaying second only to the sex act itself.³⁹¹

Dehumanization of women, a key quality of misogyny, is a strategy that George Grosz employs throughout his body of work. The *Lustmord* imagery was in part inspired by a real pattern of horrific acts of violence against women and girls starting in the mid-1800s, seemingly linked to the urbanization, which was led by industrialization. These murders became common in

³⁹⁰ https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/Becoming_A_Woman_Simone_de_Beauvoir_on_Female_Embodiment

³⁹¹ Joseph Akel, “All That Glitters ... Otto Dix at Neue Gallery,” *Idiom* (April 10, 2010), <http://idiommag.com/2010/04/all-that-glitters-otto-dix-at-neue-gallery/>.

Germany, for example, but other places as well. What some considered an urban “epidemic” of gruesome femicides often involving rape and dismemberment or some form of torture and/or mutilation of the body was theorized in the growing field of psychology. While communities became terrified of these events, psychologists became fascinated with the connection to sexual gratification, which could finally be discussed. The term *Lustmord* was coined.³⁹² Many male artists acted upon and dehumanized the female body on the canvas, tasking the woman to stand in for all the defilement and dehumanization of the body seen in war and the suffering in the aftermath. And yet this violence seemed specifically misogynistic given that Kollwitz used the female body (as well as that of children) to convey universal suffering while elevating it, rather than debasing it.

Like Dix and others, Grosz was interested in images of brutal femicides, often with the male still in the scene, perhaps washing up after a beheading. His work reveals an obsession with images of prostitutes and sex murders (relying on a systematic dehumanization of the subject). The bodies are front and center, and the rendering itself seems to convey the same gestural energy a stabbing might require. The figures were often heavy and often older (at a time when slim and almost boyish females were favored). Grosz found other ways to create dehumanizing females in his work, such as a cigar-smoking pig, in hat and suit, French-kissing a naked prostitute.³⁹³

Maria Tatar demonstrates in her book *Lustmord* that male artists openly identified with real-life sexual murderers; George Grosz posed as Jack the Ripper in a photograph in which his

³⁹² Interestingly, this gave the psychologists of the day a chance to ponder the relationship between actual coitus and sexual gratification and whether violence itself could provide sexual release.

³⁹³ (LACMA’s spacious “New Objectivity,”)

model and future wife was the target of his knife. Tatar also reveals the ways in which victims were disavowed and erased.³⁹⁴ Women faced a heavy psychological burden, to be both terrified and traumatized by the descriptions of real murders while also seeing a visual culture that created a sense of disposability and culpability.

The victim of the *Lustmord* was often conflated with the prostitute, the ultimate dehumanized female. In the context of these paintings, she is quite literally a damaged doll—gender-marked and gender-damaged, a tragic fetish object. As was discussed in the first section of this dissertation, the prostitute's rendering calls attention to the abjection surrounding women's bodies and the implication of age, damage, and use. In George Grosz's work we see the prostitutes' large, lumpy cellulite-covered hips and backsides; the ideal for beauty for women at that time was closer to the body of a young boy. The abjection of the sex-specific fat deposits (biologically determined and post-pubescent) alone tells us that gender and disgust are entangled here. Her damage right on the surface of her skin and the canvas, and the gestures in which she is rendered reenact the method in which the subject might have been killed. Interestingly, many contemporary male academic writers, when looking at male artists' work within the primarily male-driven movements of modernism, discuss the doll and female in similar ways. Even when indicating that this visual violence is a way of commenting on societal violence, it is from a male-centric viewpoint that, I suggest, allows them to examine the maimed, defiled, and dismembered female body as a fascinating visual strategy without the embodiment a female would perhaps experience. They cannot help but reinforce the othering of woman, through a critique of the representation, callousness, or titillation. Women's bodies in art as objects of

³⁹⁴ Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

academic papers easily fall into the same trap they did as objects for artists (like Picasso's *Les Demoiselles*). Each analyzes the body (without the women) as content and raw material, symbolism, allegory, and flesh.

Another cultural obsession that involved marking the woman was the psycho- and physiopathology of hysteria. In the book *Constructing the Viennese Modern Body: Art, Hysteria and the Puppet*, Nathan Timpano argues that “the conundrum of the modern body was born in Vienna.” The modern body that Timpano examines defied the notion of a universal move towards a fragmentation of the body in the arts. He finds a direct challenge in the Viennese approach to the figure that crossed various art forms and permeated bohemian life and the culture of the city. This figuration drew from the cultural obsession with corporeal pathology in medicine and psychiatry. The puppet body could be that of real puppets, which were certainly of interest in this era, but it could also be a metaphorical puppet body, the one in the hands of doctors and psychiatrists, or the body in the hands of the artist.³⁹⁵ Timpano refers to what he calls “hystero-theatrical gestures” found throughout the arts, including theater and dance. It was used as “a means of bringing material form to a body fashioned through the inner and outer vision of the artist, playwright, or physician.” The artists of the day, the male artists, Timpano suggests, were attempting to codify a body that could represent modernism or, I would argue, a phenomenologically embodied experience of modernism through a symbolic other.

Examining the work of women's work with dolls, one does not find a tendency towards fragmentation or damage. There seems to be an impulse to make whole, and not merely in body—in psyche as well. “On the Wax Dolls of Lotte Pritzel” was an essay written by Rainer

³⁹⁵ Nathan Timpano, *Constructing the Viennese Modern Body: Art, Hysteria, and the Puppet* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 3.

Maria Rilke about the mesmerizing dolls created by his friend and collaborator.³⁹⁶ Pritzel was a doll maker who gained great recognition for her work, crossing the boundaries between doll making and high art in early twentieth-century Europe and the United States, where her dolls were also known. Sara Ayres writes about Pritzel in her article, “At The Uttermost Limit of Vision: The Wax Dolls of Lotte Pritzel (1887-1952).”³⁹⁷ Ayres explores this exceptional maker and the challenges of contextualizing her within her time, revisiting the notion of untimeliness, challenging our ability to tell a linear and coherent story. Pritzel’s dolls are highly original artworks; while potentially drawing on a wealth of possible precedent objects, they demonstrate no absolute reference points. The wax figures and their historicized costumes render them, at first sight, queerly anachronistic, as strange little relics of the Rococo, perhaps. Pritzel’s work can be seen in relation to the work of her close friend, the Surrealist sculptor and photographer, Hans Bellmer. Photographs of Pritzel’s doll sculptures reproduced in books and journals directly prefigure Bellmer’s Surrealist strategies for the photography of his *Poupées*. Pritzel’s dolls’ photographic representation, their resistance to interpretation, and their strangely sterile sexuality rehearse and anticipate Bellmer’s disturbing, irrational images of his repeatedly dismembered and reconstituted doll-sculptures. Like Bellmer’s *Poupées*, Pritzel’s figures are handmade and unique. Pritzel’s dolls bear a striking family resemblance to one another, whether male or

³⁹⁶ In the dissertation, I explore Pritzel more in depth. I am confused by the paragraphs in Harold Segel’s book *Pinocchio’s Progeny* where he describes Pritzel as a puppeteer and her sculptures as “life-size.” This is not in keeping with other material I have found about her or her work. I am intrigued by the possibility, but skeptical. It is true that she was not just the focus of Rilke’s essay but also collaborated on illustrations for the small book *Puppen*. I am also curious about why, if what he says is true, Segel would not have spent more time examining her in her own right, as opposed to treating her as a footnote to Rilke. This bears further investigation. See Segel, *Pinocchio’s Progeny*, 47-48.

³⁹⁷ Kamil Kopania, ed., *Dolls and Puppets as Artistic and Cultural Phenomena (19th–21st Centuries)* (Warsaw: The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art, 2016).

female, pale- or dark-skinned, fantastical hybrids or orientalist dancers. Instantly recognizable, they form a singular, queer species in the sculpture of the period and demonstrate the diversity of modernist art practices emerging in late Wilhelmine Munich. Pritzel also worked as a costume and set designer in the theater; traces from this experience are particularly visible in the complex gestures and expressive mobility of the later, static figures.

There is an exceedingly strong affective presence in Pritzel's dolls, who are sensuous and almost ethereal. Ayres argues that Pritzel's dolls are *queer*—denying in their construction and ornamentation a normativity with their *androgyny*.³⁹⁸ I would argue the dolls have gender non-conforming presentation, but rather than androgyny (which implies a non-gendered presentation or often a female who does not present as feminine, but rather neutral or even masculine), the dolls are all highly feminized. In fact, there is a hyper-*feminization* of both the males and females and some figures are impossible to gender or determine their sex; the Rococo attire and hair blur the boundaries of gender, but more importantly skew it to the extreme feminine side. The figures one would assume to be male, many bare chested, are sleek and sensuous, delicate and lithe. And while one might read the female bodies as extremely thin, even for this era, the ones that read as males are even more markedly so. At a time when attitudes towards the feminine were ambiguous and appropriation of the affectations of the other sex were somewhat common, Pritzel's dolls dialogue with the drag and dandies of the avant-garde. At the same time, they defy the abjection of the prostitute and the *femme fatale* and reject any frailty or hystericism. The

³⁹⁸ Sara Ayres, "At The Uttermost Limit of Vision: The Wax Dolls of Lotte Pritzel (1887-1952)," in *Dolls and Puppets as Artistic and Cultural Phenomena (19th–21st Centuries)* ed. Kamil Kopania (Warsaw: The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art, 2016). She also discusses the way that people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds are depicted in what could be interracial couples and comrades.

women and men both perform the erotics of the overtly feminine without menace from either sex.

While some call Pritzel's dolls puppets, there is no evidence she performed, though Ayers says the originals were jointed.³⁹⁹ Pritzel's work speaks to performance; "reading" her specifically posed doll vignettes unfolds a narrative. Her making and positioning performatively undermined gender, race, and notions of innocent versus degeneration. While some of her challenges to these norms may seem radical, they may also indicate a cultural flexibility in that period not always recognized. Views of sexuality, for example, were more complicated in that era than often thought.

A movement that demonstrated much of the complexity of the era with regard to women as well as puppets and dolls is Dada. Paula K. Kamenish, in her book, *Mamas of Dada: Women of the European Avant-Garde*, lists at least 50 women who were part of the loose movement; that is, twice the number of men.. Membership is implied if they participated in Dada activities. She notes that, until recently, scholarly work all but eliminated their vital participation.⁴⁰⁰ Recalling art historian Amelia Jones's response to the Baroness's failed attempt to subvert through shock by using her own nudity (she opened her coat to reveal two large tomato cans bound together and covering her breasts), women were not able to use the identical subversive tactics as the men. Involving their bodies, however, became a loaded gesture of which the outcome was not clear. Jones laments, "The Baroness presented her body as object, sculpture, and stage, but ultimately the Dada concept of the female body was both too fixed and too fungible to truly reward its

³⁹⁹ Ayres, "At The Uttermost Limit of Vision."

⁴⁰⁰ Paula K. Kamenish, *Mamas of Dada: Women of the European Avant-Garde* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 6-7, viii-x.

subversions.” Deborah Lewer, in “Hannah Höch, Performance and the Ante-Review,” describes Dada performances as “characterized by extreme noise, verbal and physical assault, and aggressive posturing, [and] these events (and by extension, Dada’s public identities) invoked and deployed very male identities.”⁴⁰¹ In this context, women needed to find other strategies and/or to participate in a negotiation with the masculine culture of Dada. After all, this is a movement which saw Hannah Höch as a good girl, appreciative of the sandwiches, beer, and coffee she managed somehow to conjure up despite the shortage of money. In the chapter, “Hannah Höch, Dada and the ‘New Woman,’” in the book *Hannah Höch*, Dawn Ades describes a short story that Höch wrote in 1920 called “The Painter” where she reveals much about the way the gender dynamics of Dada and her own partnership may have worked.

Her story is of the painter-genius, thwarted by his wife because he was asked to wash the kitchen dishes on four occasions in four years... The painter’s wife might be the other, private face of the New Woman or her opposite a reformed *Hausfrau*—Höch doesn’t specify. The central irony of the story concerns an oil painting in which the artist represents the essential likeness between chives and the female soul, thus expressing his resentment at ever being asked to help in the kitchen. The painting, in which he eventually abandons the attempt to paint the female soul, ends up an unremitting green, but is a surprise hit. The president “propelling his presidential belly” around the exhibition, calls it a masterpiece. Its creator than omits any mention of chives and proudly declares its title, “The Soul of Woman.”⁴⁰²

New scholarship in the past twenty years has highlighted women’s contributions, and while this is laudable and gratifying to see, it makes it all the more obvious that these movements were male driven and that women’s participation is a secondary category to consider. Hal Foster writes: “The dolls and puppets that also appear at this time, point to a new performative

⁴⁰¹ Deborah Lewer, “Hannah Höch, Performance and the Ante-Review,” in *Hannah Höch*, eds. Dawn Ades, Emily Butler, and Daniel F. Herrmann (New York: Prestel, 2014), 31.

⁴⁰² Dawn Ades, “Hannah Höch, Dada and the ‘New Woman,’” in *Hannah Höch*, eds. Dawn Ades, Emily Butler, and Daniel F. Herrmann (New York: Prestel, 2014), 19.

dimension in artistic practice, which is especially pronounced in the work of women involved in Dada.⁴⁰³ It is important to be cautious when examining women's artistic participation. Many of us who love puppets and dolls would love to find immense amounts of puppetry and dolls in Dada, and indeed, there was a significant amount, but perhaps not as much as we would desire. The proliferation of specific images of Hannah Höch and her dolls, for example, creates a sense that this practice was developed and continuous, but often the research is not there, and not just because performance is notoriously hard to document. Even when dolls are mentioned and images included, as is the case in the chapter "Hannah Höch, Performance and the Ante-Review," by Deborah Lewer, it is clear that Höch was involved in all manner of performance but the blur of mask and doll, costume and spectacle, make it hard to argue she was a "puppeteer." We do see Höch and the dolls photographed time and time again. Her connection to the dolls is one of attention and tenderness. In photos, we even see Höch dressed like one of the dolls and we see her with them in old age. What we know and what we might wish are different. Some of the specifics of her practice may be lost. Nevertheless, increasingly we are seeing new information and images coming to light.

Emmy Hennings was a monumental figure in Dada and is gaining recognition among historians and performance and cultural scholars. Recent scholarship credits her with the co-founding of the Cabaret Voltaire, along with Hugo Ball, her partner. Feminist scholar Paula K. Kamenish designates Hennings the "First Mama of the Dada."⁴⁰⁴ Like Höch, although it is

⁴⁰³ Foster, "Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties," 24 .

⁴⁰⁴ Kamenish, *Mamas of Dada*, 10. See also Jed Rasula, *Destruction Was My Beatrice: Dada and the Unmaking of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2015). Although he does include Hennings in the project of founding the Cabaret Voltaire in the first chapter, he chooses to list them consistently as "Ball and Hennings" and never the reverse, which, though subtle, bears pointing out. This format perhaps forecasts the fact that she is mentioned in connection to him throughout the book almost incidentally as we see his story told. In other words, Hennings becomes a character necessary to tell Ball's story. Rasula describes her and Ball as "partners." I have seen

becoming easier to find information about her life and, in particular, her writing, it is more challenging to find information about the puppets or dolls she created and performed with or the costumes she wore for performances. One exception is Thomas Rugh's article in which he describes the importance of Hennings' dolls and puppets at the Cabaret Voltaire, the center of Dada performance. Rugh notes that she performed with these dolls and, among his detailed descriptions, he writes that Henning's dolls expressed concern for the fragility of human relationships: "The faces are gaunt and frowning, their bodies angular. Using ordinary objects and materials, she transformed her dolls and puppets into Dadaist objects."⁴⁰⁵ Foster draws a distinction between Hennings' puppets and dolls. There are very few photos of these available and, in terms of the two puppets I have seen, there is little stylistically in common other than their obvious hand-made quality and aesthetic. The dolls (and it is hard to draw the distinction, except that these figures are described as having been used for decoration and not performance), of which there are only images of poor resolution, have heads similar to one of the puppet's heads. Two of the three *dolls* in the photo have long, gestural bodies, which might have been the artist's vision or which could have had to do with time—an elaborated head and a body quickly implied through fabric so as to get on with the show. From what I have seen, it is almost impossible to say with certainty what each is and how they were intended and used.

It does seem that Hennings worked with the notion of co-presence. Starting perhaps with the humanette, female, fortune-telling spider she created when traveling and possibly continuing in the scene we see documented of Hennings beside and sharing presence with a male puppet

her referred to as Ball's paramour and his girlfriend (never centering her but always him). Worse are instances in which she is referred to as a prostitute, as is the case in a few instances.

⁴⁰⁵ Thomas F. Rugh, "Emmy Hennings and the Emergence of Zurich Dada," *Woman's Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (1981): 1-6.

head whose size is similar to her own, they seem paired. There is another off to the side. To me, it seems obvious that this puppet spoke (there is no other reason to make a movable mouth).

While perhaps she is simply posing, it may have actually been operated by Hennings, whose hand appears to reach behind and into the mouth mechanism. In the image of Hennings with a hand puppet, we are left unsure what the relationship or significance is of that object. Unlike the typical focus that a puppeteer or doll player brings to their object, Hennings is disconnected and alienated from both the camera and the object—and it is just that. Unlike Höch's doting and motherly body language when posing with her two Dada dolls, Hennings' gaze tells us she is far away, even troubled, where the puppet does not accompany her.

Hennings is quoted in Foster's paper as saying, "I sit here in front of my mirror and I can observe this doll. I know that I can double myself."⁴⁰⁶ But what doll did Hennings mean? Likely herself. She used dolls (or puppets, as it is the same word in German) extensively as metaphors in her writings for herself and the other Dadaists—perhaps more than she did in performance. Ruth Hemus states, "It becomes clear, in reading biographies about Hennings as well as work by her, that her life and work, fiction and memoirs, poetry and confession, performance and persona overlapped. At times, it is difficult to separate her personality from her performance, her real life experiences from her fiction."⁴⁰⁷

One caution I would like to assert here is that Hennings was a prolific and gifted writer and performer. She helped build and sustain a movement, against many odds. She maintained a lifelong spiritual inquiry that framed a rich and highly complex life. More than any of the women

⁴⁰⁶ Foster, *Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties*, 26.

⁴⁰⁷ Ruth Hemus, *Dada's Women* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 48.

profiled here, Hennings' life and her art may have been so entwined as to make them one—only truly understood as a *life*. Juliet Koss says: “The study of theater is impeded by the nature of the medium notoriously difficult to document and theoretically unruly.”⁴⁰⁸ Lost are many of the performances and the contexts in which objects were produced and used. This means that, in some senses, we can never fully understand these objects, and the objects themselves cannot fully enlighten us. In fact, Amelia Jones points out that art historical accounts of Dada fetishize the objects and that this approach potentially underrepresents the performative quality such that we *objectify* puppets and masks, missing the performativity, which is where these objects make the meaning they do with regard to gender and politics.⁴⁰⁹ We must be careful that, in our attempts to see the compelling objects that are puppets and dolls, we do not reduce her (or others) to a few incidences in a lifetime of rich making and performing. The same could be said for many of these women who were truly interdisciplinary artists, whose main accomplishments may not be in puppetry or doll making. We should not make puppets embody our sense of their contribution.

Hennings had a daughter and was a single mother for the most part, something Kamenish describes at length. This was a part of Hennings' life that is of interest to me personally, her fraught relationship with motherhood and her drive to self-actualize. Hennings was “in her element” in the theater, her daughter apparently reported in her memoir. This forced Hennings to frequently leave her daughter with her mother. It appears that the constant struggle to balance roles as mother, provider, role model, ... and Catholic with her desire to engage fully in the

⁴⁰⁸ Julie Koss, “Bauhaus Theater of Human Dolls,” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (2003): 724-45.

⁴⁰⁹ Amelia Jones, “‘Women’ in Dada: Elsa, Rrose, and Charlie,” in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 142.

artistic scene of the day caused her immense anguish and limited her ultimate participation.⁴¹⁰

Many of the judgements made against Hennings' character, which was complex but no more so than the men of her group, were likely amplified because she was a mother. Hennings, some argue, wrote herself out of history. Was the irreconcilability of choices all too much?

The Dada women did take on the Dada anti-art aesthetic. Perhaps they helped forge it; it is clearly visible in the puppets of both Hennings and Höch. In fact, by the very reappropriation of the doll and the scraps of cloth and domestic material, they created an anti-art aesthetic rooted in inserting the domestic realm into the cabaret. Many dolls were made this way in the home by children and for children, some lasting only a minute or an hour, others leading to techniques that would become a model for industrial design.

Dolls can be as simple as any materials that form a human gesture. They touch and can be touched. There is a tender photo of Czech stop-motion animator Hermína Týrlová seated at a table arranging knotted dishcloths like the ones she animated in her famous films blending stop motion and live action.⁴¹¹ They stand like women's bodies. In her film, Týrlová tied a knot in a dish towel or cloth—not unlike a girl or woman's impulse to make a doll from a piece of fabric or a flower. She created an emblematic figure that, rather than being phallic, if anything subconsciously calls to mind female genitals. She would make many of these simple

⁴¹⁰ Kamenish, *Mamas of Dada*, 22

⁴¹¹ Born in 1900, Hermína Týrlová was a pioneer of stop-motion animation and made a total of 19 films over 60 years. She learned puppet-making skills from her father, who was a woodworker and made small wood figurines out of linden wood for her as a child. She, like many of the women I discuss, took part in arts training across the gamut, including voice and dance as well as visual arts and illustration. Finding her way into the new field of animation, she spent her life doing this. It was a new field, and so there were opportunities that may not have followed strict gender lines. Also, perhaps women's manual abilities, honed by sewing and other such tasks, prepared them for the work. It is also possible that the unavailability of men during war allowed women to continue working, honing their skills and becoming invaluable. Though she made films, she also got her start in the growing market for commercial work animating products for advertising clips to be shown in film houses.

anthropomorphic figures during her career. In the film “The Knot in the Handkerchief,” shot in 1958, Týrlová says the form is a symbol of the lack of human memory. There is something powerful in this notion of the hand making a knot and making that sense of it. Like many nouns common to the domestic, material world, *knot* is also the verb. The word *knot* is the thing and the very way it got that way. *Tear, stitch, twist* all name the act that made them.

Hermína Týrlová made the puppets (frequently combining them with live actors). She invented the mechanisms for movement and built the sets. Each 24 movements of each puppet corresponded to one second of the action on the screen, and since the wires’ joints only survived 500 movements, Týrlová had to learn to weld. She used pieces of glass, wool, tin sheets; found objects, marbles, and balls, an apron and domestic fabrics. When they worked, she might use felt hats or kid gloves.

Working in the arts, humanities, and education in this day and age of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), it is easy to see the way that certain types of knowledge get privileged, and a lack of scrutiny of the assumptions contained therein leads women’s work, and lives, to be undervalued. Not unlike the push by feminist epistemology to value other ways of knowing and other ways of sharing knowledge, it is important to interrogate assumptions that accompany words like *invention* and *technology*. Saying those words out loud likely summons images of men working in factories, metal and gears, or maybe motherboards and code. Nothing in the words invention or technology necessitate these qualities.

When we think of a concept like invention, it can fall into similar traps to the concept of research and we can prize certain qualities without thinking, many of which are associated with the male world and male accomplishments. I am not able, nor would I wish, to make any claims about any sex-based innate orientations towards what might be called the hard sciences. It isn’t

necessary to point to the brain or hormones when we have myriad evidence of the acculturation gender. The process of assembling a gender, with its artifacts, environments, and performances, encourages the development of certain traits. Women are encouraged to develop traits of empathy, skills of soft touch, nurturing, and sensitivity. This is certainly not universal and there will inevitably be exceptions. It is a continuum with clusters that self-reinforce through social interactions, material and visual culture, medicine, politics, pedagogical practices, and more. The research, extensive knowledge, and invention of women and girls may, in some cases, be different than the manifestation of these in males. They are still to be valued for the advances they bring. For example, in advertisements for Mary Chase's American dolls at the turn of the last century, we see language like "natural life-like responsive body of a young child" and "stuffed ... and firm as flesh and blood."

While acknowledging that it is a generalization (and that some men, like G. Stanley Hall, had an immense sensitivity towards the doll), I would argue that women's innovations in doll making were sensuous and led primarily by affect, including an advanced psychological phenomenology. They excelled in reforming the doll in its connection to humanness, whereas men tended to be led by mechanical and industrial innovations and technology and developments in materials from outside doll making, such as new rubbers or paints. While perhaps gimmick has a pejorative term, Edison's embedded voice technology and other inventors' work to design mechanisms that made dolls move and crawl were just that when it came to marketing. The terrifying voice that Edison's babies emitted did not make them more real or more loved—nor, I would argue, did they give them more presence. Perhaps Izanna Walker's patent on a metal press for a doll face seems simple in comparison to Edison's vocalizations, but given the overriding importance of the doll's face in winning a child or adult's interest, it is a different priority and

preoccupation. While one might think that these were complimentary endeavors, a harmonious sexual division of labor, that is not the case. The doll business was a business. For example, in Germany, the competition of the prominent reform doll makers, Käthe Kruse and Marion Kaulitz, created anger among the male industrialists who wished to maintain control of the market and the aesthetics of the market. Bryan Ganaway quotes the German doll journal *Wegweiser*, “We must energetically resist attempts that portray [character dolls] as legitimate competition for the products of our German industry.... Reform dolls are nothing more than spectacles created by clever hands and outlandish intellects ... but still female artists and artisans try to imitate the success of Käthe Kruse and Marion Kaulitz and give the whole thing no rest.”⁴¹² This is a second place where dolls and women intersect and where one can see quite clearly how the value of certain knowledge and practices falls along the lines of sex, diminishing women’s contributions. Doll collectors, mostly women, are meticulous about detail and, like the material historians they are, are often attuned to the small changes in method and material and the significance of those changes. Like a lot of knowledge gained through the sharing of informally gathered, experiential and anecdotal, it doesn’t easily intersect with academia. I would argue it must be considered as legitimate sources if we are to be able to record and document the lives of women and many of the objects associated with those lives. Not exactly folklore, *informal* doll knowledge does share some qualities with folklore and touches on the realms of life, such as the domestic, that folklore often does. With blogs as a way to share their knowledge with a wider community, there is more access to the important work these women (and some men) do in recording this part of history, technology, and culture as well as the rich

⁴¹² Ganaway, *Toys, Consumption, and Middle-Class Childhood*, 190.

accompanying lore. Anna-Maria Sviatko, who currently runs the website *Dolls Houses Past and Present*, for example, has provided a wonderful resource with information not available elsewhere. It is important to note that, as mentioned previously, the autoethnographic sensibility brought to these endeavors is quintessential, and symbiotic; the information encoded in the personal is immensely valuable, and *that* validates the place of individuals' stories. Sviatko is particularly interested in modern homes, which offer a study of an aesthetic but also changing domestic lifestyles at a point in history. She is both a creator of precisely scaled miniatures and a collector based in Australia, whose houses have been displayed in museums.⁴¹³

In *Dollmakers and Their Stories, Women Who Changed the World of Play*, Krystyna Poray Goddu reports what American mother and doll maker Martha Chase wrote in her journal while observing her daughter: "Bessie played all day long by herself and talks to her playthings as though they were alive. She sees a dolly in everything, a stick of wood, a rag, a piece of paper, a bootjack, anything she can carry around has to be treated as though it were a baby." As her younger daughter ages she joins in: "They play very prettily together all sorts of things, but their favorite play is to each take a doll and walk side-by-side round and round the table talking to each other."⁴¹⁴

Also in *Dollmakers and Their Stories*, Goddu profiles a few of the women who revolutionized dolls in the twentieth century. One is Käthe Kruse, who has been mentioned here frequently. Kruse grew up quite poor, the daughter of a single mother (of which there were many). Nevertheless, her mother was a respected seamstress. She and Kruse lived together in one

⁴¹³ "Erna Meyer, Doll Manufacturer—A Chronology," *Dolls' Houses Past & Present*, <http://www.dollshousespastandpresent.com/issue27jan2016p6.htm>.

⁴¹⁴ Krystyna Poray Goddu, *Dollmakers and Their Stories: Women Who Changed the World of Play* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 13.

room where everything happened—work, consulting with clients, Kruse’s childhood schoolwork, meals, and sleep. Goddu says that that in Kruse’s autobiography, she recounts how she needed to fall asleep grasping her mother’s hand. Her mother would slowly take all but one finger away. Finally her mother had the ingenious idea of slipping a wooden spoon into her daughter’s grasp.⁴¹⁵

Käthe Kruse didn’t have a doll growing up and actually remembered being horrified by typical Victorian dolls with hourglass waists and dangling legs. When she was given one, she said, “She was not alive!” Her own older daughter wanted a baby doll, “a child like yours,” she said to Kruse. But again, Kruse and her husband were horrified by the offerings: cold, hard, and stiff. Käthe set about making her own doll: “I took a cloth, I filled the middle with some sand, I made knots in four corners, it was arms and legs, and lengthwise, I tied up a potato, it was the head. With a burned match, I drew eyes, mouth and nose.”⁴¹⁶ When it came to needing an example for a more permanent fabrication, Kruse, whose husband was a sculptor, inspired her. In her search for a natural-looking baby’s head, Kruse looked to the Nativity painting of Andrea del

⁴¹⁵ Goddu, *Dollmakers and Their Stories*, 28. When my daughters were young, I breastfed both of them. Despite choosing and valuing this, there were times when after nursing them to sleep I was desperate to reclaim my body. After they had drifted off, I would attempt to insert a finger along my nipple to break the seal, hoping they would remain asleep. Often they immediately awoke. My mother said that I needed to finger their hair for them to fall asleep. These types of embodied experiences connecting to another body profoundly affect mothers. In her exegesis for the installation, “The Post-Partum Document,” Mary Kelly argues for lived experiences: “Feeding or dressing a child depends as much on the interchange of a system of signs as teaching him/her to speak or write.... The documentations of specific moments such as weaning from the breast, learning to speak, and entering a nursery demonstrate the reciprocity of the process of socialization, that is, the intersubjective discourse through which not only the child but also the mother is constituted as subject.”

⁴¹⁶ Goddu, *Dollmakers and Their Stories*, 29. Later Kruse would try sawdust, going through many iterations, testing materials.

Verrocchio and later modeled the head after a seventeenth-century Belgium bust of a child; this became the inspiration for the famous face of the Kruse baby doll.⁴¹⁷

By 1909, Käthe Kruse was obsessed with making dolls and seeing this as a career and life's work. Multiple showcase events and a passionate societal interest in childhood, in Germany as well as France, helped to create a movement that promoted innovation and the participation of intellectuals and artists in toy design. Kruse's dolls were unique and met with great success. The rapid demand led to contracts and a factory, but after a long process of unacceptable prototypes and pressure on her family, she withdrew her brand, unwilling to accept the materiality and aesthetics of the dolls: "They looked like frozen blue flounders with pumped-up limbs. Among the complaints she had: the heads were hollow, the bodies were too bulky, the joints were awkward and visible at the knees and neck. Kruse went through many variations of materials and assembly. She was clear that it was important that the dolls be fabric, for warmth, as opposed to the porcelain that comprised previous dolls. She strove for a gentle and calm presence and "a hint of awkwardness of a young child's body." With the weight and presence of a real baby, she wanted her dolls to inspire a "maternal instinct" and the "deep need to care for another living being."⁴¹⁸

Another artist that Goddu profiles in her book is Sasha Morgenthaler of Switzerland, who remarked that "thanks to my strong fantasy I was able to give life to the inanimate objects around

⁴¹⁷ Goddu, *Dollmakers and Their Stories*, 30. The Kruse doll is unmistakable. In fact, at MOMA PS1 in New York, spring 2018, they had a large installation made by Cathy Wilkes, and in one of the most enigmatic vignettes there was almost certainly a Käthe Kruse doll. I got as close as I could and bent down low to view it. If it was not a Kruse then it was a doll of similar age and deeply influenced by the character dolls Kruse created.

⁴¹⁸ Goddu, *Dollmakers and Their Stories*, 32-34. I have experienced this quality of awkwardness in some of the most gratifyingly realistic puppets I have been able to handle and work with.

me.”⁴¹⁹ She studied painting seriously as well as anatomy.⁴²⁰ She was close to Paul Klee and his wife through her family (as well as Franz Marc), who encouraged her as a child and continued to support her work. It is likely that she also experienced the now famous puppets and puppet shows he made for his son, Felix. A mother and a midwife, in addition to an artist, in 1941 she won a prize from a Swiss federation for her toy making and began to produce dolls in earnest. Her desire was that her Sasha dolls be durable, inexpensive, and sensitive. Being inexpensive was a quality that eluded her handmade dolls for Morgenthaler’s entire career. They were exquisite but not within reach of many children, and this bothered her deeply.⁴²¹ It didn’t prevent her from having a successful business. For example, in 1945 there was a display of her dolls and people were obsessed—the cost had no bearing on demand.⁴²²

Part of what made Morgenthaler’s dolls so compelling was the artistic sensibility. Unlike many other doll makers, she was keenly aware of the asymmetry of the face, and this was brought into her dolls. She was expressive with just a few strokes of paint, all that was required to bring a face to life. At flea markets, she bought recycled fabric that was soft from wear. To create expressive dolls, she used simple shapes, but the proportions and gestures made them recognizable. The bodies and skin of youth were a specific quest in her material investigations. Having seen the war and having worked with refugees, Morgenthaler was determined to make dolls that were peaceful and non-nationalistic. She used natural human hair that harmonized with

⁴¹⁹ Goddu, *Dollmakers and Their Stories*, 41.

⁴²⁰ Goddu, *Dollmakers and Their Stories*, 44.

⁴²¹ Goddu, *Dollmakers and Their Stories*, 48.

⁴²² Goddu, *Dollmakers and Their Stories*, 49.

the skin that ranged in hues to give Sasha dolls the sense of an ethnicity beyond designation—children of the world.⁴²³

It is worth mentioning that doll fairs, competitions, and various events that gave exposure to smaller doll shops were fundamental to these women's business success. The climate was one that valued the natural and the artistic—and childhood or at least a romantic version of it. All of these things created a moment that can't quite be imagined taking place the same way today. German and European consumers demanded specific qualities in children's toys—and still do. My sense is that the taste of American consumers, apart from the very selective and wealthy, in many cases turned toward more commercial toys, cheaper and more abundant selection, and more gimmicks. I mention in a later section that my grandmother actually acquired a few of these toys for me. She had exceptional taste for quality and charm.

I did not own a Käthe Kruse or a Sasha doll, but I did have some Erna Meyer dollhouse dolls (and still do). A bit younger than Kruse and Morgenthaler, Erna Meyer was born in 1924 in a small town in Upper Bavaria, eventually relocating to Munich, where she was trained as a kindergarten teacher by age 19. This was during and right after the war and, along with many of her friends, she was unable to get a job. She began to make small dolls as gifts after making a pair for her parents' anniversary. When the Americans captured the city she was able to sell small costumed dolls to the soldiers to take back to the United States, and in this way established a small company in her parents' home employing friends in the "Handcrafted Production of Cloth Dolls."

⁴²³ Goddu, *Dollmakers and Their Stories*, 32-34, 50-51. This was my sense when I saw Sasha dolls for sale in California. In my autoethnography section, I mention the impression this doll, which we could not afford, left on me.

The bodies of Erna Meyer's small figures, like many other dolls women designed and produced, were made of domestic materials, items women would use around the house for sewing and mending, intimate apparel, cleaning and caring for babies and wounds, and for flower arranging, decoration, and correspondence. Meyer used wire, such as that used to stabilize flower arrangements, for the center of her figures. A knowledge of what fibers and fabrics had which qualities was essential to doll making. A layer of stretchy crepe paper was wrapped around the wire to give form. A fabric called *stockinette*, a soft, loose and stretch-knit fabric, often used for making underwear, cleaning, and bandaging, was wrapped over the top, containing but also holding the shape of the form. Stockinette has been used frequently in doll making for that ability to accommodate bulges and concavities, creating a smooth, uniform surface that twill fabric could not. For hair, paper and flax were used, but also wool and scraps of flokati rug (a kind of wool shag rug). Discarded clothing was repurposed for the dolls' clothes.⁴²⁴

A page on the website *Erna Meyer, Doll Manufacturer* documents the many changes that occurred in Erna Meyer's dolls over more than 60 years,⁴²⁵ noting such changes as the dolls' heads, which gained contours first and later were made in two parts out of papier-mache, which was pressed in molds, dried, and joined together on a cotton wool ball. The surface was covered with fabric, painted, and lacquered. This was arrived at by trial and error, and new ideas were continuously tried. The website discusses extensively the evolution of the shoes, feet, and legs, noting that from 1950 until approximately 1960, the dolls' legs had knee caps!⁴²⁶ There were

⁴²⁴ "Erna Meyer, Doll Manufacturer—A Chronology," Dolls' Houses Past & Present, <http://www.dollshousespastandpresent.com/issue27jan2016p6.htm>.

⁴²⁵ This information is reprinted from this website: <https://diepuppenstubensammlerin.blogspot.com/search?q=meyers>, and translated by Rebecca Green.

⁴²⁶ "Erna Meyer, Doll Manufacturer—A Chronology," Dolls' Houses Past & Present, <http://www.dollshousespastandpresent.com/issue27jan2016p6.htm>

even plastic versions specifically made to accompany the famous Lundby Dollhouses, which were the height of modernism, including, at that point, the eschewing of stockinette in favor of plastic. Needless to say, those are less prized than the fabric dolls are.⁴²⁷

The references, materials, and techniques of women's work, including dolls and puppetry, often center woman's world as the material from which things can be made. In early modernism we also see examples of the transgressive (as well as the continued sincere) use of domestic-based materials. For example, Dada artists Emmy Hennings and Hannah Höch crafted figures with which to pose and perform that allowed them to explore models of female identity in the rapidly changing cultural climate of Weimar Germany.⁴²⁸ The presence of that which was associated with childhood, women, and the home was absent in high modernism—not commonly designated as suitable material for high art and the triumphal narrative. With the breakdown of modernist aesthetics and the introduction of new forms, female artists created another wave of material and practical disruption within what was already a disruptive practice.⁴²⁹

In some senses, men can only access this language second hand or after the fact. It cannot be authentic to them. They can appropriate after the fact but not originate or reappropriate as women can. They use it in reference to the other. And yet when Robert Rauschenberg took at quilt and mounted it and spattered it with paint, changing the authorship, his piece was elevated

⁴²⁷ When Erna Meyer participated in the first Nuremberg toy fair, in 1950, Käthe Kruse encouraged Meyer and dedicated her biography to her “great little competitor.” See “Erna Meyer, Doll Manufacturer—A Chronology,” *Dolls' Houses Past & Present*, <http://www.dollshousespastandpresent.com/issue27jan2016p6.htm>. Lundby dollhouses were started in 1945 by Grete Thomsen of Sweden, who started designing and building a dollhouse and furniture for her niece. Her husband joined her after her initial success. Their houses embody modernist sensibilities in domesticity. <https://lundby.com/en/about-lundby/our-history/>

⁴²⁸ Foster, “Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties,” 26.

⁴²⁹ Sayre, *The Object*, 161-162. By “disruption” here I mean the type of confrontation and transgression many in the performance art movement felt was core to their mission and what separated them from other forms of art.

above any quilt in the eyes of the art world. This is similar to Mike Kelly's use of almost certainly woman-made craft objects from thrift stores.⁴³⁰ The change in authorship and positionality relocates these objects in an intellectual project that is more highly prized than the *craft* and intention of the maker. With the feminist art movement starting around 1970, women's extensive use of such materials and processes ranged in the way the maker positioned herself to that. Louise Bourgeois used the materials and processes of her childhood, growing up in a family that repaired textiles. With others there may be more irony. While some women make work that continues a tradition of highly skilled work, others revel in less virtuosic ability and more spontaneity.

⁴³⁰ Certainly this is complicated and there are men who are engaged in making work traditionally associated with women. They are few, though, and usually they receive attention for their weaving, crochet, and quilting that women in the same way do not. Their work points back to a borrowing across sex lines. It isn't exactly drag, but it is a performance that crosses gender lines.

2. Women and the Matter of Making: Crafting Sexual Difference

To know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women.

—Rozsika Parker⁴³¹

The doll is brought into the world through a performance of making and therefore carries a narrative already told through its construction, the materials chosen, and the scale. Just as Butler suggests, that what might be seen as the materiality of the body is actually procedural—a process of materialization—the procedure of making informs the eventual experience of materiality.⁴³² The narrative of these processes exists even before an object is touched or manipulated in performance, let alone voiced or named; the story is an implicit and morphological one. Makers like Hermína Týrlová and Louise Bourgeois know this and use it as an end in and of itself. A dishcloth or the remnants of damaged tapestry tied or stitched into a body or face already tell stories. Dolls might be quickly read for basic information, but their physical characteristics also merit critical investigation. For example, the roughness of the buzz-cut hair of my brother's 1970s G.I. Joe had a violence to it—an abrasion. I had a sense of his deeds and life from my fingertips rubbing his prickly hair, even without looking at the scar on his cheek (which looked like the oblong chocolate sprinkles that I disliked on cookies).

While a trip through the toy aisle today in the United States finds little more than plastic, dolls from the past were wonderfully and materially rich and had inventive bodies. Materials that were used included wood, sand, velvet, and many other special fabrics; rags, yarn, leather, dried apples, corn husks, walnuts, ceramic, porcelain, and bisque; compositions of various types; glass

⁴³¹ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1984).

⁴³² Butler, *Bodies that Matter*.

eyes, real human hair, chenille, stockinette, cotton batting, resins, rubbers, Bakelite, flour and water; gingerbread, cork, plant fibers like cattail, felt, pine cones, acorns, flowers, and straw; cellulose, plastics, wires and various metals; sawdust and wood shavings; paper and paper maché; wax muslin, nettle cloth, deer hair, wax-soaked muslin and wax-soaked silk, hardened silk, and more. While some of these decisions are practical, the artists I profile here were highly sensitive to the affective result of each choice.

How they worked at skin! One area where dolls and puppets differ, except in the case of puppets for film, is the intimate distance at which the object is viewed and touched. Wax, long used to approximate the dewy translucent glow, and used by Lotte Pritzel for this reason, has many drawbacks when used for playthings. For Elena Scavini of the Lenci dolls, it was felt that best diffused the light, was warm to the touch, and likely transferred a sense of the porosity and the micro-hairs that cover real skin.

It would be difficult to precisely articulate the experiences of choice in these artistic decisions, exactly because dolls' implicit material narratives function *preverbally*. In fact, working with materials can bring powerful effects to the maker, just as the end result affects the viewer. A few years ago, I attended a Puppeteers of America event and I had the opportunity to listen to a puppet therapist present on his work, and while I didn't record the words exactly, what I took away from his talk was that the real work happened in the touching and the manipulating of the materials. Despite our sense of the power of puppetry lying in the ability to tell stories, in his experience he found that the making was the most transformative. It was there that people experienced strong emotions—so strong that he often had to remind them that he was “a therapist, but not *their* therapist.”

Making, by its very nature, is a poetic endeavor, and making dolls and puppets, any referent to the human form, any effigy, is an act of poetry. Kinesthetic empathy creates a resonance with the experiences and the motions of others, the surfaces and processes and affects as well. Images of the body hold powerful sway over us. In a piece he dedicated to the artist Judith Scott, a prolific maker who was deaf and had Down syndrome, disability theorist Tobin Siebers describes the power of the anthropomorphic art object to both maker and viewer. In “Disability Aesthetics” he says: “The human body is both the subject and object of aesthetic production: the body creates other bodies prized for their ability to change the emotions of their maker and endowed with a semblance of vitality usually ascribed only to human beings.”⁴³³ While Siebers was speaking of sculpture, he could have been referring to puppets or dolls.

Against the modernist background of fragmentation, frequently this was accompanied by gestures of misogyny or at the very least an othering that resulted in woman as less than human, object, symbol. In the male-dominated modernist intellectual landscape, science, psychology, and psychoanalysis were all used disproportionately by men and disproportionately on women. And while perhaps psychoanalysis attempted to see the woman as whole, when it approximated this goal it still couldn’t help but see her as object. In fact, with its focus on woman’s lack of the phallus, could she ever be complete? Not the other, not an absence and not a eunuch, but a centered autonomous identity, creating the situation and meaning of that body and the gender that attached itself from birth on. Women have attempted to craft and to de-craft through language a subject whose sexed body was inseparable from her own phenomenon of subjectivity. Could we, perhaps, see gestures in women’s work that point to that same integration? Could the

⁴³³Tobin Siebers describes the power of the anthropomorphic art object to both maker and viewer in “Disability Aesthetics,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 7, no. 2 (2006): 63.

making of the doll-body be an act for wholeness and against fragmentation? How different this association is from that of Charles Baudelaire: “The overriding desire of most little brats is to get at and see the soul of their toys, either at the end of a certain period of use, or on occasion *straightaway* [the child attacks tears the toy apart]. But where’s its soul? This moment marks the beginnings of stupor and melancholy.”⁴³⁴ Käthe Kruse, rather than seeing the soullessness of the doll, wanted to heighten its humanity, specifically seeking to “impoverish the doll in earthly terms and imbue it with more soul.”

The material is a powerful metaphor. The material and performance, even more so. There are so many metaphors derived from sewing, weaving, and mending. Already here we have seen Deleuze and Guattari’s use of felt and the very origin of the word *text* in textile. But when Louise Bourgeois says, “The act of sewing is a process of emotional repair,” she isn’t speaking of the metaphor that simply illustrates an abstract concept like those I mentioned do.⁴³⁵ Rather, she is telling us that one act is another act. Bourgeois associated sewing and repairing textiles with her mother, whose job it was and to whom she was tremendously loyal within a family in which cruelty and infidelity had left its mark. Bourgeois’s figures were often fragments—short-hand for the sexed body and its archetypal immanence. But these were not dismembered figures. They sometimes seemed to be object-stories. In other cases they were stripped of story and seemed to exist as a universal. Perhaps for Bourgeois, unlike her bronze and marble pieces, our experiences with fabric tell us that it is always about repair—it is always open to darning, stitching, patching,

⁴³⁴ Alexander F. Robertson, *Life Like Dolls: The Collector Doll Phenomenon and the Lives of the Women Who Love Them* (London: Psychology Press, 2004), 119.

⁴³⁵ Google this phrase and one finds hundreds of hits, most of them of women involved in the arts and specifically fibers. What this tells me is that this phrase resonates with women (and others). Metaphor functions deeply in the body, at least certain metaphors do. In fact, I would argue that metaphors around the body are experienced as embodied in some non-cerebral place—as well as resonating intellectually they move our energy.

and attaching. Perhaps these figures were a desire for repair—a general quest for the wholeness or a female subject in a process of continued self-repair. Jane Bennet speaks about certain people's (hoarders/ and artists') sensitivity to the somatic effectivity of objects and their ability to hear the aesthetic call of things to respond and play with them, even to join to them.⁴³⁶ It is the sensitivity that might allow someone to have a metaphorical healing of the kind Bourgeois speaks of.

Louise Bourgeois' work gained and continues to gain interest, especially among feminists, but more broadly as well. Once she had gained more solid recognition, something that happened during the height of the feminist movement in the arts in the 1970s, Bourgeois was able to turn to textiles and fabric, taking a risk, but less of one than earlier in her career, which began shortly before the period of high modernism. Speaking about Bourgeois' untimeliness, feminist art critic Lucy R. Lippard wrote: "Rarely has an abstract art been so directly and honestly informed by its maker's psyche. It can't be categorised. Can't be art historicised."⁴³⁷ Her century of art making reached across eras of massive changes and many movements and, in that sense, exists in a temporal space all its own.

Bourgeois' work connects well to that of Simone de Beauvoir. Both grew up in France and experienced a French girlhood of means. While they are not quite contemporaries, their lives and work have substantial overlap, and Bourgeois was well aware of Beauvoir's work. Both have a sensibility for the material, affect, and metaphor in combination. Beauvoir uses material

⁴³⁶ Jane Bennet, "Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter," YouTube, 1:14:45, posted by The New School, September 27, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q607Ni23QjA>. Bennet speaks about objects as being vibrant, operational, aesthetic, finding that vibrancy is opposed to both the others.

⁴³⁷ Lucy Lippard (*Art Forum*, March 1975) cited in Hannah Westley, *The Body as Medium and Metaphor* (Editions Rodopi B.V., 2008) 165-166.

examples frequently, as when speaking about what is essentially sexual difference theory (a theory in which female subjectivity attempts to center itself apart from being defined in relationship to man). Both have crafted a new way forward as women with heightened awareness of all that subjectivity entails. Beauvoir uses the example of the inadequacy of simply putting on men's clothing for a woman to find a new way to be. She says it is a gesture that might seem emancipating—a solution to woman's problem of being *other*. Yet it is not really a possibility, says Beauvoir. “[M]ost often, she appears as a ‘real woman’ disguised as a man, and she feels as awkward in her woman's body as in her masculine garb. She has to shed her old skin and *cut her own clothes* (my emphasis).”⁴³⁸

Women are historically associated with the fiber arts. Women are historically associated with fiber because at the most concrete level they have been charged with providing the garments to cover the body and mending those garments and altering them to fit bodies as bodies change. It's as intimate a relationship with a material as can be imagined and, unlike other materials (stone or steel), fabric has a certain structural plasticity with its own vocabulary, its own way of joining, its own way of shaping. One need only look at the innovations women made in the fabrication of dolls during the twentieth century to see where their expertise lay and the type of material problem-solving experience they had.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Dolphijn, Rick & Tuin, Iris Van der *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*.
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001/1:5.4/--new-materialism-interviews-cartographies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>

⁴³⁹ This term is often used pejoratively, creating an artificial category apart from “sculpture” because of the use of textiles and fiber, which are associated with women's work and therefore marked for marginalization. In the book *Destruction of the Father Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews, 1923-1997*, Bourgeois explores the connection between her work and her biography and offers an internal view of her creative process.

Making and performing certainly bleed into each other, driving innovations in materials and techniques as well as construction for a variety of ends--sometimes just to create the object that matches one's vision. Like a puppet maker must test movement, for example, over and over while working, so too must a doll maker. Much of the design was done through a process of trial and error—research like any other. This research built women's knowledge of materials but also their knowledge of embodiment and affect. There was an unspoken body's knowing about other bodies that allowed Kruse to experiment over and over with weight of the head and the body, weight distribution, size, the looseness or tightness of joints, textures, refraction of light, and facial expressions. These were some of the many considerations when creating a doll with presence. Kruse would have drawn on her sensuous embodied knowledge of how a baby moved, how their weight fell when held, how their limbs responded when lifted or lowered.

While not a puppeteer per se, Bourgeois' performance of positioning the dolls in specific poses adds another layer of content. Bourgeois has also consistently employed suspension in her work, which further underscores a dialogue with puppetry. These small figurative sculptures are made of materials familiar to her as the daughter of a Paris rug merchant. They display complex psycho-sexual dynamics and explore the body as gendered and sexed in different ways that I tease out through careful observation.⁴⁴⁰

⁴⁴⁰ Frances Morris, "Louise Bourgeois: Stitches in Time. exh. cat." *Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art* (2003) and Germano Celant, Louise Bourgeois, and Fondazione Emilio e Annabianca Vedova, *Louise Bourgeois: The Fabric Works* (Catalog of the exhibition held at *Fondazione Emilio e Annabianca Vedova*, Venice, Italy, June 5-Sept. 19, 2010). Fondazione Emilio e Annabianca Vedova, 2010. And Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, eds., *Louise Bourgeois, Destruction of the Father Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews, 1923-1997* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998). Just as Hennings' complex relationship with motherhood interests me on a personal level, Bourgeois' intense thoughts about her upbringing and formation within her family also has resonance for me.

In addition to the knowledge, intention, and sensibility, another aspect of making and of the material is *labor*. Bourgeois' body of work is immense and impressive. Each piece asking a different question and providing a different answer in a tireless poetic endeavor. Theodora Skipitares' is equally tireless. Martha Wilson, founder of the performance art space Franklin Furnace, says that performance art becomes about labor and expenditure and endurance around the body.⁴⁴¹ In an interview with Skipitares, I asked her if she and if she believes that the residue of lived labor transfers into the frame of what the spectator sees; after all, for one piece she made 300 hundred puppets. She responded:

Yeah, it is about labor. Now the idea of endurance, that might be a stretch, but it's still something to think about.... I think that's true of all puppetry and actually I have always been interested in endurance performance work, but I only see it as one strand of many other possibilities. But you know what? When I think of puppeteers, I think of labor. It's a really labor-intensive field.

Making is always an embodied experience. It is labor. Some might not consider German shadow puppet artist Lotte Reiniger a puppeteer but rather an animator, since her work is shot stop-motion style. But rather than shooting painted cells, it is through a flow of subtle and slowed manipulation that the films are made. One could consider Reiniger's body an extension of the animation process, or the process of her body; her work is constant and rhythmic. In Olive Blackham's book, *Shadow Puppets*, she devotes substantial discussion to Reiniger's material (of mass and detail) and technical (a trick table) investigations.⁴⁴² A puppeteer herself, Blackham notes Reiniger's body's involvement in the process. It is "painstaking and laborious work": each figure is positioned and a switch is pressed to shoot a photo. Then, with her fingertip, the figure

⁴⁴¹ Wilson, *A History of Performance Art*. Wilson says that performance art puts the "body's expenditure of time at the center of the idea" In performance and that time is it's subject

⁴⁴² Blackham, Olive. *Shadow puppets*. (Barrie and Rockliff, 1960). 86.

is moved “a hair’s breadth” and the switch pressed again, over and over. “This method of moving the figures produces a slightly staccatto rhythm, but this is neither distracting you nor displeasing. The staccato is so gentle that it has a rather endearing quality and seems quite rightly to be the puppet’s natural movement overriding the staccato element. There’s a graceful flow of movement running throughout the film.”⁴⁴³ Blackham likely used the experience of her own corporeal presence in her practice to sense how Reiniger might have embodied the work she did.

Another puppeteer who speaks of labor is Russian performer Nina Efimova, who , along with her husband, toured the country with a puppet stage. Efimova’s vivid descriptions of the physical labor involved in their touring, the movement of the ambulatory theater, the maintaining the material elements of the performance, and the performing itself, demonstrates an embodiment of her work: “In the early years, we carried the whole theatre (weighing 60 pounds) on our backs.”⁴⁴⁴ There is a pride with which Efimova describes the physical endurance of the practice she and her husband maintained. It seems to be both real and metaphorical. She makes clear that there was no support received —this was a *labor* of love but, in that sense, it allowed them complete freedom and full credit.

Women who work with puppets and dolls tend to be collectors of things and materials. Those with a sensibility for the material tread the fine line and flirt with the danger of hoarding. For artists, however, accumulation is a vice divorced from the cardinal sins of envy and greed. It is simply that the materials are the vocabulary. Louise Bourgeois was said to not be able to get

⁴⁴³ Blackham, 87.

⁴⁴⁴ Nina Efimova. *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theater Including Its Discoveries in Making and Performing with Hand-Puppets, Rod Puppets and Shadow Figures, Now Disclosed for All*. (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2012), 36.

rid of anything and that is why she created the many installations she did— to give items she could no longer store a place to be and to make sure their significance endured. Many of Bourgeois' pieces feature clothes from herself and from her children.

When I moved to Madison, Wisconsin, I was delighted to discover a by-the-pound thrift store outlet run by St. Vincent De Paul. I acquired far too much stuff. A professor of mine once asked me, gesturing vaguely out towards the gallery exhibition I was involved in then into my overrun studio space, "Is that the work ... or is this the work?" I am used to the disdain people have for people who can't *not* accumulate. If I think of what I have felt the most shame over throughout my life it has been accumulation and the impossible management of what I accumulate. I am listening to Jane Bennet's talk entitled "Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter" on YouTube.⁴⁴⁵ As she describes how *vibrant matter* functions, I stand at the kitchen sink rinsing popsicle sticks to add to a box for a future toy theater workshop that contains a Ziploc bag of pistachio shells and a set of metal hangers discarded by a neighbor; the irony isn't lost and an empathetic anxiety or an anxious empathy begins to take hold. I listen to her hypothesize about the phenomenology of hoarding and hoards. I put the sticks in the box.

However, despite wanting to center the Heideggerian "thing power" of the hoard, she can only manage to describe it in relation to the hoarders themselves and to us, the audience, and our relationships of varied intensity to things. I realize that she is describing people I might understand more than she can. I am the autoethnographic subject who can perhaps speak to her own ethnography to a certain extent through an examination of my positionality, my subjectivity, and my embeddedness within a culture (in contrast to other cultures). Most importantly,

⁴⁴⁵ Jane Bennet, "Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter," YouTube, 1:14:45, posted by The New School, September 27, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q607Ni23QjA>.

according to feminist autoethnography, I have stories to tell as an informant and my information worthy of consideration. Bennet suggests in the talk that I may be what researchers call someone with “an extreme perception. They notice too much about their things—they are struck too hard by them.”⁴⁴⁶

The power to bring objects to life is a complex process that involves breath and movement. For the doll that, if not manipulated, does not benefit from these things, anthropomorphism is an important quality for drawing our bodies into an affective dialogue with that of the doll. In his book *Life Like Dolls: The Collector Doll Phenomenon and the Lives of the Women Who Love Them*, A.F. Robertson discusses the process of “dollification,” a concept developed by Hall and Ellis. They argue that anything can be dollified, including pillows, sticks, corn cobs, half-burned forks and spoons, flowers, and even one’s own hand. Something becomes dollified when one ascribes psychic qualities to an object and treats it as if it were animate and sentient.

The imputed personality may actually be more important than the materialness of the object itself: in their survey Hall and Ellis found that ‘if a doll has its head replaced it usually retains its identity.... Children are often under a long delusion concerning the material of which dolls are made. Even long after it is known that they are wood, wax, etc., it is *felt* that they are of skin, flesh, etc.... finding sawdust or kapok oozing out of their doll’s little children.’⁴⁴⁷

While a child might reach for a stick or a spoon and dollify it, it may be far harder to make a doll that enters children’s affections—and parents’ as well. Käthe Kruse and other women achieved a certain psychological mastery of the child and the child’s affections. Like

⁴⁴⁶ Jane Bennet, “Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter,” YouTube, 1:14:45, posted by The New School, September 27, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q607Ni23QjA>.

⁴⁴⁷ Robertson, *Life Like Dolls*, 118-119. Kapok is a natural cotton-like substance that was used as stuffing for cushions and soft toys.

Kruse, after losing her own child, Elena Scavini, a sculptor, turned to doll-making in her native Turin. Like other women, Scavini experimented with materials such as wool and developed a technique to create pressed-wool faces for her dolls, soft, supple, absorbing the light, with eyes askance. These dolls revealed a new concept of children's psychology. With a sideways glance, unsmiling, they seemed at times sullen, lonely, melancholy, or recalcitrant. They presented the adult with the child who refuses to be completely available. What the psychoanalysts might have attempted with words, Scavini achieved with felt and paint. Like Kruse, her dolls became huge a success in Europe and abroad.

There was something uncanny in the faces of the Lenci dolls that Scavini created. This was noted and exploited by photographer Dare Wright in her *Lonely Doll* series, which she started in 1957. Wright and Edie, her mother, had a strange relationship in which the latter was overprotected and in some senses perpetuated a dollification that made life easier to live through or alongside a double. In "The Creepiest Children's Book," an article written by Rebecca Bengal for the *New Yorker*:

Edith the doll, who was named after Edie, was an Italian Lenci creation, her body made of felt. The material made her inherently "more malleable, more expressive, with kind of an eerie face," Brook Ashley, a family friend who became the executor of Wright's estate, told me recently. "You could impose your whole imagination on these dolls." With her curly crop of hair, Edith initially more closely resembled Edie than Wright. But, on her hand-cranked sewing machine, Wright began making miniature versions of costumes she'd stitched for herself, and paired the doll's outfits with a new blond wig and hoop earrings. Edith became, according to Nathan, an "effigy of her owner."⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁸ Rebecca Bengal, "The Creepiest Children's Book," *New Yorker* (September 26, 2017), <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-cultish-allure-of-the-creepy-childrens-book-the-lonely-doll>.

In the book *Being Doll*, Lisa Pavlik-Malone writes about the power of personified and personalized dolls.

The self can exist as both psychologically “a part of” and “apart from” another self, being in two different psychological places at once.... Compared with fashion dolls and porcelain collector dolls, art dolls seem uniquely suited for cognitive integration within the intuitive self-construct. Although the adult engages in aspects of personification and fanciful activity with all three of these kinds of dolls, in doing so, the art doll may place the most creative demands on the imagination of the individual mind, and thus, allow for the most intensive and exhaustive application of the several cognitive processes just described.⁴⁴⁹

It may seem that I have argued here for a universal tactility of the female. Could women’s puppetry, made of cloth and lace and yarn, be a material écriture féminine, or “women’s writing”? “Women’s writing” describes the cultural and psychological inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text. For Hélène Cixous, representational writing is part of symbolic order and non-representational writing is associated with the female and maternal bodies. Refusing to really define and thereby imprison it, Cixous says that it comes from the female body, and she describes l’écriture féminine through a variety of metaphors, including milk, orgasm, honey, and the ocean; she claims that l’écriture féminine serves as a disruptive and deconstructive force, shaking the security and stability of the phallogocentric Symbolic Order, and therefore allowing more play—in gender, writing, and sexuality—for all language-using subjects.

Is there a danger in asserting that women, even through acculturation, speak a certain *common* language of materials, sensibilities, and techniques? Of course, this would be absurd.

⁴⁴⁹ Lisa Pavlik-Malone, *Being Doll: A Study of Youngness & Oldness at Interface*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 74.

There is a fine line to tread when looking at women's making and avoiding falling into essentialism. Linda Nochlin wrote her famous essay "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" at a peak moment of radicality within feminist discourse (published shortly after Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* in 1970). Nochlin seems to reject any notion of women's art, specifically admonishing feminists as she much as anyone. She might have, in a sense, been responding to the notion of a visual arts equivalent of "écriture féminine." Rejecting one of the many answers Nochlin poses to hypothetical suggestions—that there could be some female art form that is different than that of male art (and somehow, then, less valued)—she writes:

This, on the surface of it, seems reasonable enough: in general, women's experience and situation in society, and hence as artists, is different from men's, and certainly the art produced by a group of consciously united and purposefully articulate women intent on bodying forth a group consciousness of feminine experience might indeed be stylistically identifiable as feminist, if not feminine, art. Unfortunately, though this remains within the realm of possibility it has so far not occurred.... The problem lies not so much with some feminists' concept of what femininity is, but rather with their misconception—shared with the public at large—of what art is: with the naive idea that art is the direct, personal expression of individual emotional experience, a translation of personal life into visual terms. Art is almost never that, great art never is.... The language of art is, more materially, embodied in paint and line on canvas or paper, in stone or clay or plastic or metal—it is neither a sob story nor a hoarse, confidential whisper.⁴⁵⁰

However, as I have argued in earlier sections, sexual difference and women's writing is the argument that women, while different, are positioned as "other" in a masculine symbolic order, can reaffirm their understanding of the world through engaging with their own outsiderness. This outsiderness can be seen in the marginalization of a variety of ways women make and participate. As Lucy Lippard remarks,

It seems all too likely that only in a feminist art world will there be a chance for the "fine" arts, the "minor" arts, "crafts," and hobby circuits to meet and to

⁴⁵⁰ Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), 229-233.

develop an art of making with a new and revitalized communicative function.... Visual consciousness raising, concerned as it is now with female imagery and, increasingly, with female process, still has a long way to go before our visions are sufficiently cleared to see all the arts of making as equal products of a creative impulse which is as socially determined as it is personally necessary; before the idea is no longer to make nothings into somethings, but to transform and give meaning to all things. In this utopian realm, Good Taste will not be standardized in museums, but will vary from place to place, from home to home.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵¹ Lucy Lippard, "Making Something from Nothing," *Heresies* 1, issue 4 (1978): 65.

3. Puppets and Dolls in Performance

Women prefer to perform in the dark (and men in the light) because females are comfortable with the womb.⁴⁵²

—Martha Wilson, “Performance Art According to Me”

What does it mean when a woman holds a doll? Moves a doll? Positions it? Makes it breathe and move a bit? Because of my own work with dolls, I am interested in women’s use of the doll and/or the puppet in performance work. What are dolls, exactly? How do puppets and dolls and play and performance differ or intersect? What can dolls tell us about women and the construct of the female? What can dolls tell us about materiality and embodiment? What are women’s relationships to dolls like? As part of a practice-based, autoethnographic dissertation, I seek to deepen my own work through an analytic and reflective examination of one of the central kernels, of my performances—the doll’s body.

Mieke Wagner states that the puppet is a mediator and puppet theater ultimately an intermedial art form which poses massive *ontological* problems. “Is the puppet a live performing body, present, perceptible and sensitive like the body of the actor? Is it an object body, a body image, or a medial representation of the human body.... Contemporary puppetry breaks out of the ancient framework and transgresses the old borderlines.”⁴⁵³ To allow for an object to mediate, theatrically and otherwise, there must be an ability to invest the object with some power. Perhaps it is the dollification that Ellis and Hall speak of or something greater. The

⁴⁵² Martha Wilson, *The History of Performance Art According to Me* [video], Franklin Furnace with Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art (2005).

⁴⁵³ Mieke Wagner, “Of Other Bodies: The Intermedial Gaze in Theater,” in *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, eds. Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 127.

anthropologist Margaret Mead argued that in many respects as people age the more adept they are at experiencing mystification.⁴⁵⁴ In certain moments, certain circumstances, many of us allow objects to have power as we did when we were children. Oddly, for many of us, the two places we are able to allow ourselves work the magic of a doll or puppet is on a stage, in front of an audience, *or* alone in a private space. Two such loci couldn't be more different.

Dolls, among toys are distinct. An affective response to dolls, puppets, and figurative objects is often insuppressible. A doll's movement is implicit and potential, rivaling the uncanniness of movement with the uncanniness of stillness. The mere simulacrum of a person has an inherent power which has been and is used for narrative, pedagogical, and religious purposes. Once an object approaches the proportions and signifiers of "human," it gains great power to draw our attention. Because of this power, dolls have long resided in the realms of both comfort and discomfort, which is what makes them intriguingly ambiguous. The uncanny quality of their life-like nature draws us and provokes strong reactions. They are categorically linked to religiously significant idols, votives, and fetishes.⁴⁵⁵ The fact that these objects reference bodies from a safe, *symbolic* distance allows an exploration that ventures into the abject and the monstrous with just enough reality to cause discomfort.

When people have commented that my figures, for example, "feel haunted," the haunting is a form of affect. It might also be asked where affective triggers come from. Is affect more powerful in the "puppet" because the puppet enacts explicit movement (and hence kinesthetic empathy), no matter how subtle these movements may be?

⁴⁵⁴ Cited in Robertson, *Life Like Dolls*, 120.

⁴⁵⁵ George L. Hersey, *Falling in Love with Statues: Artificial Humans from Pygmalion to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Because Skipitares' entry into puppetry was the result of investigations with materials and objects, the word *puppet* did not begin as overly mystified for her.⁴⁵⁶ However, at times, in her decades-long engagement with a medium that is so powerfully marked by a word, others have forced her to articulate her relationship with puppetry. In a forum held in conjunction with one of Skipitares' recent pieces, *The Chairs*, the artist was asked by an audience member, "What defines a puppet?" Clearly her work had tested the word for this participant. Opening up the question to ideas from colleagues present in the audience, concepts such as "intentionality in movement" and "gestures that become symbols" were offered and Skipitares nodded in agreement.⁴⁵⁷ This echoes, in some strange way, Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "the body is not a thing, it is a situation: It is our grasp on the world and a sketch of our projects."⁴⁵⁸ Toril Moi furthers this thought: "The body then does not carry its meaning on its surface. It is not a thing but a situation."⁴⁵⁹

Posing with dolls was a momentary performance or a moment from an extended performance. Hal Foster says that it is important to note that all three Dada women were photographed with their doll-like objects. He connects this to role-playing, staging, and testing models of femininity and possibly enacting desire. As I quoted earlier: "All of these concerns—the performative dimension of art, the doll and the puppet as primordial examples of

⁴⁵⁶ Theodora Skipitares, "Art Work." Skipitares describes a moment of transition in her work when she had a group three-foot high self-portraits. "And one day I took one of these dolls, and I took a saw, and I chopped off the arm at the shoulder, and then I stitched loosely the shoulder and the arm together and then I did the same thing at the elbow and then I put a hole in the hand and I put a string up to the ceiling and across the wall and I realized that I had this animated figure that looked just like me and could move a little bit."

⁴⁵⁷ "Large Likenesses: The Work of Theodora Skipitares," interview by Martha Wilson, YouTube, 29:13, Posted by The Graduate Center, CUNY, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tnq8YT0T40o>.

⁴⁵⁸ Moi, *Sex, Gender and the Body*, 62.

⁴⁵⁹ Moi, *Sex, Gender and the Body*, 65.

representation, the role of sexual difference in image-making.... All have bearing on contemporary art, which might underlie the renewed interest in such artists as Tauber, Hennings, and Höch in recent years.” Ultimately, women have engaged in the same manner with dolls as others have in formal puppetry, not only in dramatic play but also in dressing and undressing, talking to, collecting, arranging, naming, accessorizing, and displaying (among other activities). The blurring of categories between puppets and dolls is not unlike the blurring of categories between movement and stillness, posing and performing, and between play and performance, public and private.

Though less theatrical, Morgenthaler, Kruse, and Meyer all posed with their dolls, much like the Dada women did. What’s more, they posed their dolls, creating elaborate vignettes and producing postcards and, in the case of Meyer, children’s books illustrated with scenes of her dolls. Elena Scavini, maker of Lenci dolls did as well. Dolls were made to advertise themselves as well as other products--even cigarettes and the doll as display became a popular motif in the commercial and domestic spheres.

Boudoir dolls, which I have mentioned several times, represent a kind of private puppet in the stage of young women’s bedrooms, newly accessible with the proliferation of the camera. These soft long-limbed fabric dolls were glamorous adult dolls meant to be positioned in repose on a young woman’s bed (a flapper or New Woman). Often a young woman had many such dolls. She posed with them, imitating the movie stars who posed in their own bedrooms and dressing rooms with their dolls. Earlier I discussed words imported to English from French in the early twentieth century. As I mentioned earlier, these same words populate the lexicon of a new lifestyle relating to beauty and self-care (lingerie, décolleté, douche, boudoir, leisure, toilet,

negligee, brassiere, chaise, lounge, and cigarette).⁴⁶⁰ They reified behaviors that created gender—and a specific moment in gender. The boudoir was a newly public space for many young modern women—a space for performance and the performative one that frequently included dolls and tableaux. The camera and, therefore, the eye could enter these private stages where the mirror was often the other eye. The interplay of something as quotidian as the mirror within modernism cannot be underestimated. Joseph A. Amato discusses in his book, *Surfaces: A History*, how the mirror in part formed modernist aesthetics: “Its sleek surface was integrated into the experience of modernity, for example, in the way that it entwined with portraiture, hung alongside portraits as another version. Mirrors were often included within portraits as a prop or attribute or even as the means through which the viewer accessed the subject’s face.”⁴⁶¹

This object functioned within women’s transatlantic culture—a culture that responded to new roles—and revealed specific developments in the culture of the doll in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Fashion dolls had long been intended for women, but this was the first doll intended for the bedroom and that involved the display of the bedroom. It was a doll not for girlhood, but for young adulthood or adolescence as a second extended girlhood, one that

⁴⁶⁰ The many words for film and cinema likewise show a looking towards innovation. At the same time there are doubtlessly numerous words that are being imported from English into French and other languages from the US and England. It is beyond the scope of this work to do an extensive etymological investigation, although that would be a fascinating approach to the cultural exchange happening. With English spoken by powerful nations on both sides of the Atlantic, it is also not as simple as saying that words started in the US or came directly from France to the United States rather than being acquired first in England and perhaps even anglicized there. To pinpoint all of this linguistic detail is beyond this dissertation’s aim; the goal is to show a robust cultural exchange of material goods and their accompanying practices in the public as well as in private life and to point towards the embodied practices associated with them. For example, the precursors to modern bras began to appear in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The magazine *Vogue* first used the term *brassiere* in 1907. We see similar trends in the fine arts and the embedded intellectualism of those movements sweeping across Europe and crossing to the US impacting Americans deeply. <https://www.npr.org/2013/02/17/172002686/armory-show-that-shocked-america-in-1913-celebrates-100>.

⁴⁶¹ Amato, *Surfaces: A History*, 210.

hopefully could accommodate leisure, glamor, and fun. Many of the boudoir dolls were sponsored by the cigarette companies and smoked, or at least looked as though they were.

It is important to understand the culture of display and collecting that women engaged in in the early part of the twentieth century. Erna Meyer started her business by creating a holiday display, and this continued with magazine spreads that featured the dolls in elaborate scenes and even led to storybooks illustrated with her dolls.⁴⁶² Käthe Kruse and Elena Scavini did the same with their creations. These illustrations became ends in themselves as well as encouraging certain types of display. In the case of the Lenci and Kruse dolls, the posed photos also strengthened the dolls' affective presence, likely with not just the hope of selling more dolls but also in conveying the feeling the makers had been motivated to create. There was a symbiotic relationship with the arrangements women and girls created at home and those of the doll makers. The way that women posed vignettes and sequences of dolls for the camera was similar to how women had been displayed and arranged; this is an easy crossover between the types of animation that Lotte Reiniger and Hermína Týrlová were doing in their animations.

Posing with dolls was a momentary performance or a moment from an extended performance. Hal Foster says that it is important to note that all three Dada women were photographed with their doll-like objects. He connects this to role-playing, staging, and testing models of femininity and possibly enacting desire. As I quoted earlier: "All of these concerns—the performative dimension of art, the doll and the puppet as primordial examples of representation, the role of sexual difference in image-making.... All have bearing on contemporary art, which might underlie the renewed interest in such artists as Tauber, Hennings,

⁴⁶² "Erna Meyer, Doll Manufacturer—A Chronology," *Dolls' Houses Past & Present*, <http://www.dollshousespastandpresent.com/issue27jan2016p6.htm>.

and Höch in recent years.”⁴⁶³ Ultimately, women have engaged in the same manner with dolls as others have in formal puppetry, not only in dramatic play but also in dressing and undressing, talking to, collecting, arranging, naming, accessorizing, and displaying (among other activities). The blurring of categories between puppets and dolls is not unlike the blurring of categories between movement and stillness, posing and performing, and between play and performance, public and private.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶³ Foster, “Philosophical Toys and Psychoanalytic Travesties,” 25.

⁴⁶⁴ As well as costumed human bodies and dolls, as we see in the work and writing of Oscar Schlemmer, in Juliet Koss, “Bauhaus Theater of Human Dolls,” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (2003): 728. We also see how doll and puppet-like the human figure can be in the work of Lavinia Schulz. See Karl Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910–1935* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997).

4. Theodora Skipitares

Marie Curie also symbolized the artist herself. Just as Curie cooked tons of pitchblende to get her ounce of radium, so Skipitares read voluminously, reducing and transforming her research into images and action which expressed her vision.

—Joan Driscoll Lynch⁴⁶⁵

Theodora Skipitares is an American puppet artist who has been making work in New York City for almost 40 years. I have been enthralled with her work ever since I saw a photo of her, kneeling by three small effigies of herself—simple, vulnerable figures about a third her size. The enigmatic and doll-like quality of these objects was immediately captivating, and I experienced that kind of envy one has when someone has made something you covet, not only to own but also to have created. The figures were naked, two against the wall and one standing straight, with Skipitares' hand resting at the back of its neck and shoulders. One sensed the gentle downward pressure she exerted, which in turn activated the puppet's rise against gravity. It gained corporeality in this act. Her gesture was quasi-parent-like, but not. This was another kind of merging. There is no equivalent. Though in the photo Skipitares gazes straight at us with her dramatic eyes, through the magic that puppetry relies on, her presence is transferred to her small avatar, and this figure (unlike the others) is given life through simple touch.

I had the opportunity to attend one of the performances of her work, *Six Characters: A Family Album*, in 2016, and to meet Skipitares.⁴⁶⁶ *Six Characters* had just opened at La MaMa

⁴⁶⁵ Joan Driscoll Lynch, "Theodora Skipitares' Performing Objects," *TDR: The Drama Review* 33, no. 2 (1989), 156.

⁴⁶⁶ I had the opportunity on three occasions to interview or converse with Theodora Skipitares. These interviews took place on February 28 and April 2, 2016, and on April 8, 2018. The first and third were done by phone and the second in person in her loft in New York City. *Six Characters* is the name and a part of the plot of the piece in the work.

Experimental Theatre Club in SoHo, New York City, where she has performed for decades.⁴⁶⁷

On a cold spring morning, my older daughter Rosie and I walked the block of doors, windows, stairs, and gates, looking at the house numbers until we found the SoHo loft that Skipitares first moved into in the 1970s, shortly after arriving from the Bay Area to attend graduate school at NYU. As the elevator opened right into her loft, my daughter and I were met by Skipitares standing before a wall of large, colored shadow puppets. The wall that led to the living space was lined with figures and, sitting down at her table, we were kept company by an extended family from past productions. They weren't all doll-like. Some were ceiling height, and even the smallest, one of her "Little Theodoras" or "Theodora dolls," which I had seen in the photo I mention above, was larger and more present than I expected. The surface was delicate and beautifully aged. This figure was not a mere sculptural object; she bore the aura of having performed.

Having just seen *Six Characters*, the faces, images, and text still lingered in my mind from this piece that was filled with many kinds of object performance. Speaking about her connection to the word *puppetry*, she began to suggest that perhaps this piece, *Six Characters*, fit less within that medium. But she caught herself and smiled as she recalled the three 10-foot tall paper maché Pinocchio puppets on rigs, the slightly smaller-than-life Margaret Mead in a

⁴⁶⁷ *Six Characters* is taken from Luigi Pirandello's 1921 modernist play of the same name. It was considered a precursor to theater of the absurd. It connects to this dissertation in terms of changing notions of subjectivity and the self, which was a male obsession in twentieth-century art. What I have tried to show here is the particular way that women's subjectivity and the self was impossible to consider free of sexual difference. Pericles Lewis says, "Pirandello's work plays with the central tension in the modern theater between the desire to create a perfect illusion of extra-theatrical reality on the stage and the contrary impulse to celebrate the very illusoriness of all theater. Modern drama calls attention to the fact that theater is both a representational art, like painting or writing, and a performing art, like dance or music.... a person is a person pretending to be another person. See Pericles Lewis, "Six Characters in Search of an Author," <https://modernism.coursepress.yale.edu/six-characters-in-search-of-an-author/>. Images of the show and a review can be found at <http://hyperallergic.com/289494/six-characters-in-search-of-a-puppetmaster/>.

motorized wheelchair, and the Oedipus and Jocasta puppets (made and operated in the tradition of Japanese Bunraku, with their robed operators visible). While Skipitares is known for innovations, hybrids, and pushing the boundaries of puppetry, even in the most traditional sense, puppets appear throughout her pieces. Even when she has included new concepts in her work, the life-like puppets have been a part of her pieces since the 1980s. Engineered as well as sculpted, the eyes sometimes move, and the hands are often capable of grasping. They are oddly real. At times their movements are simple and stiff. This imparts an uncanniness and also a formal and regal quality of authority in some instances, a robotic presence in others. It is not surprising that, having trained as a set designer, I find that the images from Skipitares' early work have an aesthetic of a special toy world built for these charming yet eerie dolls, often filled with dark humor and mischief.

Because of her background and approach, Skipitares has changed the genre of puppetry. Puppeteer and scholar John Bell includes Skipitares as one example of a new tradition of New York puppeteers making work from the 1960s onward who did not see themselves as part of a lineage of puppeteers. Rather, they were thrust "*de facto*, into the world of puppet theater" as a result of "desires to see their artworks move, speak, and transform themselves in performance [which] ultimately made them realize they were, in fact, making some sort of puppet theater, and thus almost unintentionally joining the puppet tradition."⁴⁶⁸ He argues that this innovation is a specifically American contribution to puppetry that started in early modernism. In the rich cultural landscape of the 1960s and '70s, this spirit of curiosity, borrowing, and rule-breaking

⁴⁶⁸ John Bell, *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 97-98.

reasserted itself.⁴⁶⁹ It seems that we are in the midst of another resurgence and renewal, and Skipitares' innovative work underscores why puppetry has such relevant and moving offerings for our moment. John Bell, Claudia Orenstein, and Dassia Posner (editors of *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*) call this a "puppet moment." They state:

Today's proliferation of expressive objects reflects a current cultural context beyond the stage, concerns that preoccupy *our* times. As we revise our understanding of humanity in regard to both the man-made and natural elements that surround us, these new views simultaneously transform our concept of what a puppet is and how puppets manifest in performance.... Today's puppetry highlights the relationship of actor and object, connecting them in new, varied ways. Rather than simply standing in contrast to one another—human actor versus puppet—... human flesh and material constructs now intermingle in an endless array of configurations.⁴⁷⁰

For more than 35 years, Theodora Skipitares has sustained a practice of bold pageantry and performative tableaux.⁴⁷¹ As stated earlier, Skipitares could perhaps best be described as a puppet artist. Starting as a performance artist, set designer, and sculptor, Skipitares' sculptural work with the figure and the inclusion of elements of time and space almost inevitably led her to puppetry, as it did for me. Her puppetry is exceptionally rich. The intersection of two, three, and four dimensions creates a combination that embraces and agitates the uneasy label of "puppetry." Often with librettos and multimedia, they are truly a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or all-embracing art form, and for this reason she is often referred to as an interdisciplinary artist. The word *puppeteer* is certainly not adequate or appropriate to describe her role in the performances

⁴⁶⁹ Bell, *American Puppet Modernism*, 97.

⁴⁷⁰ Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2.

⁴⁷¹ Robert Stearns, "From Performance: Costumes and Other Works by Delia Doherty, Robert Kushner, Theodora Skipitares and Jeff Way." (Cincinnati: The Contemporary Arts Center, 1980). He quotes Sue Heinemann who uses the terms "living fresco," "frieze-like," and "image-stills that accumulate over time."

because it speaks primarily to manipulation and of performance; Skipitares has not done the manipulation of her objects since a piece called “*Micropolis*, from the early eighties.”⁴⁷² More often used for manipulators, John Bell notes that the word *puppeteer*, coined by Ellen Van Volkenberg of Chicago’s Little Theater Movement, denotes performers who “play with the material world.”⁴⁷³

Skipitares works in a way that only those who love the materiality of objects could. She explores not only the visuality but also, in her early costume work, the quality of weight, with a gown of glass weighing 90 pounds. In one piece, she gathered the power of the multiple with a gown made of hundreds of walnut shells. In another, she harnessed symbolism and narrative evocation in a costume hung with dozens of plates over layers of male dress clothes.⁴⁷⁴ She has explored how objects change with scale, from the miniature to the giant. Compulsion, repetition, and adornment (with the unexpected) are all hallmarks of Skipitares’ practice. Jane Driscoll Lynch comments:

The costumes Skipitares wore to present these stories, told on slides and audiotapes, were symbolic of women's entrapment—skirts of dead fish, wooden treadles, and armor-like, trapezoidal stainless steel. Ritual acts were associated with each of these costumes—lemon juice was squirted on the fish miniskirt which encircled her, her hair (beneath a hat of wooden spoons) was cut in a gesture of self-mutilation, and rows of altar candles welded to the long, unyielding, metal skirt were lit. All of these were powerful metaphors for the suppression of women's desires for creativity, autonomy, and self-realization.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² As discussed later, Skipitares is a designer of puppets and creator/director of her work but doesn’t consider herself a puppeteer since she doesn’t perform herself and hasn’t since the early 1980s. In our April 2 interview, she expressed feeling less skilled at manipulation than others and laughed about some of the people she works with in her productions being “quadruple threats”—acting, singing, dancing, and manipulating puppets with great skill.

⁴⁷³ Bell, *American Puppet Modernism*, 64.

⁴⁷⁴ “Thematically, personal and universal concerns merge in this image of woman repressed, restricted and bound by traditional household duties; formally, the image raises a number of aesthetic issues that will develop throughout the artist's work,” in Jane Driscoll Lynch, “Theodora Skipitares’ Performing Objects,” *TDR* 33, no. 2 (1989): 137–60.

⁴⁷⁵ Lynch, “Theodora Skipitares’ Performing Objects,” 142.

Skipitares herself has described these early performing objects and object-costumes as fragments of stories connected to her body.⁴⁷⁶ Layered with fragments of text, they offer incomplete narratives to be read one through the other, creating conditions for the powerful seeds of allegory. I would argue that Skipitares is a true materialist. Her sensibility and attunement drive her work and its material and formal specificity. She understands the meaning, metaphors, and language of given materials the way a sculptor must.

As I scrolled through this (then) unfinished document after hanging up from a call with Theodora on a gray April evening, I glanced at the title I had chosen for this dissertation and was struck by its rightness: “The Most Intimate Bodies” truly does speak to Skipitares’ body of work. Until the time when puppetry emerged from Skipitares’ performance and body art, the vulnerability of her own body, at times naked, had been “front and center.”⁴⁷⁷ The shift, which I describe later in this section, was a form of material slippage from the body to the puppet, when Skipitares made one and then many “Little Theodoras” out of paper maché and then latex. It was the start of a surrogacy that “went on for a very long time.”⁴⁷⁸ The thread of the materiality of the body runs throughout the visuality of her work and her thematic preoccupations. As I write this, Skipitares is working on a piece about police brutality. Her commitment to the body is political, but it is corporeally political. She has looked at bodies poisoned by water, bodies in eugenics, bodies in medicine, and many other themes concerning the body, such as food. Like Kiki Smith, Skipitares was making work during the AIDS crisis, a devastating period that brought the

⁴⁷⁶ Sally Banes, *Subversive Expectations: Performance Art and Paratheater in New York, 1976-85* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 36-37.

⁴⁷⁷ Theodora Skipitares, conversation with the author, April 8, 2018.

⁴⁷⁸ Theodora Skipitares, conversation with the author, April 8, 2018.

immanence of the body to the forefront, particularly in a state of illness and dying, a state in which the body becomes concretized. At a time when many feminist performance artists were using their bodies, Skipitares transitioned away from that.

So at first I began to develop an audience and I would do these pieces and then I think what happened, how I transitioned into puppetry was, I was always working with some aspect of the self, whether it was masks or these little figures that I had made, these little Theodoras, because I was a sculptor, you know, by sensibility, and that's what I think I still am really... I began to realize that I had a really ambivalent idea or feeling about being the star of the show in real time, I did not like it. I was compelled to make these pieces where I was half-naked. But I ... it was not just that that was throwing me off. I just wasn't that comfortable performing. And if you talk to puppeteers, you find that the reason they end up with objects is that somehow they still want to be in the performing realm but they don't want to be the center of attention.⁴⁷⁹ Also, it's a very alone thing ... being there alone ... and also I got tired of telling my life stories. I mean, Spalding Gray, who was a friend, was a genius in bringing up a certain kind of autobiographical performance. Spalding made an entire lifetime telling about the stories of his life, but I knew that wasn't me. It wasn't interesting anymore. I started having ideas for large shows that would involve several objects. The first had, I think, about 300, and it was called the *Age of Invention*.⁴⁸⁰

It would seem too simple to say that Skipitares' move to puppets coincided with a move away from autobiographical work, and yet this appears to be the case. At the same time, an enduring aspect that persisted was self-portraiture—from her earliest New York pieces (where, for example, she created and wore a series of masks cast from molds of her own face), through *Micropolis* (where her cast face appeared on many puppets, including a dinosaur), to the latest pieces (where she uses molds of her face to make puppets, despite the fact that the viewer might be oblivious to this detail).⁴⁸¹ No longer a character herself, the molds continued to be used and

⁴⁷⁹ Banes, *Subversive Expectations*, 268-269. Skipitares is quoted in a 1985 article, "In my autobiographical work, I was always veiled and masked.... The puppets freed me. They can bleed on stage. They can vomit. They can provide intensity that remains at a distance."

⁴⁸⁰ Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016.

⁴⁸¹ In "The Age of invention" she would do something similar with a buffalo, as seen in her photo essay "Articulations," which was written in the late 1990s.

augmented with other versions and sizes. It was self-portraiture that led to the birth of puppetry in her work, when she created a clay likeness and worked meticulously to capture her own features and the shape of her body; realism was always important to her. From this original she made multiple castings in latex. These became her Theodora dolls, which were brought on stage for performance. The strategy of multiples figures frequently in her performance aesthetic and her process. It has also allowed for the kind of material investigation in which she could, for example, saw off an arm just to see what could happen as she investigated the potential of the object.

Skipitares identifies as a feminist and makes work from a place of strong identification with the female, both generally and within a specific family and cultural tradition, both big *C* and little *c* culture. “There was really something new going on, mostly women, and it happened to coincide with a lot of feminist art-making in other fields and so I just fell into it.”⁴⁸² The time period and community in which she came of age and her sensitivity to women’s issues have shaped the work she creates.⁴⁸³ And while it is problematic in postmodernity to attempt to label works as “feminist,” it can be productive to ask whether a given piece “does feminist work.”⁴⁸⁴ Skipitares’ art does feminist work.

Self-portraiture is a way in which Skipitares centers female subjectivity. Through the castings of molds of her own face, she is, in a sense, everyone. In her dissertation entitled

⁴⁸² Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016.

⁴⁸³ Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, April 2, 2016.

⁴⁸⁴ To ask whether a work of art is feminist in this era is challenging. Does work with what seems to contain feminist content but a maker who does not identify as a feminist (or does not describe the work overtly as such) qualify as feminist art? It seems more appropriate to discuss how the work enters feminist dialogues. Does it challenge notions of the body? Does it reveal power structures? Does it reclaim aspects of marginalized experiences?

“Selected Perspectives on the Puppetry of Theodora Skipitares,” Lauren Hobbs Sexton examines how Skipitares complicates the gendering of her puppets. Her use of the female form—her own form—as the neutral or non-gendered subject is powerfully subversive. The addition of male anatomical markers on her neutral female puppet defies the construction of the female sex as the “other.”⁴⁸⁵ In this world, one does not need to be reminded of what Toril Moi ironically states: “Women’s bodies are human as well as female.”⁴⁸⁶ Other complications to traditional gendering arise with Skipitares’ decisions about co-presence and manipulation; “when several male and female performers operate one or more female puppets, Skipitares’ symbolically examines ‘woman as sign’ and deconstructs that cultural construct ‘woman.’”⁴⁸⁷

There are other ways that Skipitares has played with subjectivity. As discussed in an earlier section, Elin Diamond, in “Unmaking Mimesis,” explores the strategies of subjectivity and materiality of feminist performance artists with regard to bodies and specifically notes a power in Skipitares’ work from her use of material body doubles. In the show *Micropolis*, Diamond notes that a thin latex casting (essentially a doll or puppet) of Skipitares’ likeness is able to *be* what it *means* as it literally dematerializes, dissolving into liquid.⁴⁸⁸ This is the counterintuitive truth of puppets: they are what they are and exist only to be that. In this sense,

⁴⁸⁵ Lauren Hobbs Sexton, “Selected Perspectives on the Puppetry of Theodora Skipitares,” 132. This recalls how the *vierges ouvantes*, or Madonna shrines, were destroyed during a particular period in the late Middle Ages by religious leaders because when they were opened to reveal all of the Trinity it was implied that the female body encompassed all. This was seen as blasphemy. See Andrew Breeze, “Two Bardic Themes: The Trinity in the Blessed Virgin’s Womb, and the Rain of Folly,” The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, <https://www.dias.ie/wp-content/uploads/webstore/celt/pubs/celtica/c22/c22-1.pdf>.

⁴⁸⁶ Moi, *Gender, Sex and the Body*, 8.

⁴⁸⁷ Sexton, “Selected Perspectives on the Puppetry of Theodora Skipitares,” 132.

⁴⁸⁸ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (London: Routledge, 1997), 152-153.

they are not merely mimetic.⁴⁸⁹ Perhaps there is a unique intimacy in a second skin (like a selke).

When I ask Skipitares about that moment, she said:

That's from *Micropolis*. . . . I just put a part of a self-portrait naked body of Theodora in a big jar of liquid in a very brief scene and I put my hand in the liquid and manipulated her from behind. Well, you know it was a self-portrait and it was manipulated in water, which was interesting and it is sort of . . . haunting . . . but it was also a kind of very improvised way to manipulate a figure because it was a skin of latex and my hand just behind it got it to sort of flutter in the water.⁴⁹⁰

Skipitares' relationship to material and its language is always intentional, skillfully and technically ingenious. What began as an impulse to create a miniature body-double yielded great potential for a performance artist. The original face, modeled on her own, eventually became the face of 300 puppets that she created for the *Age of Intervention*. This claiming of 300 subjectivities as her own, male and female alike, is a powerful move, especially given the political content of the work she makes.⁴⁹¹ These "intimate bodies" became extrapolations of her own body, and, as Braidotti phrases it in speaking about masks and activism, "the quest for identity is expanded to activate multiple becomings."⁴⁹² The material possibilities of puppetry

⁴⁸⁹ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 152-153. Diamond describes the act of (what she perceived as) Skipitares allowing the decomposition of her own likeness to be "just as arresting" as Carolee Schneemann removing and unfurling a scroll from within her vagina in terms of being a "text from elsewhere." She states that in feminist performance, "body/presence with all its humanist implications of ego and consciousness is decisively severed from the spoken 'I' of subjectivity." Feminist performance, she argues, in its many presences of the body challenge the ontological presence of the body, therefore the failing of words to contain it. As mentioned earlier, this was a thin latex figure that did not dissolve but rather sort of lost its corporeality in the water. Skipitares notes that "particularly in the beginning there was an interesting way in which there were actual material experiments such as the latex in water. It is interesting that Diamond didn't actually see what she thought she saw. The effect of the body and the materials were so strong." Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016.

⁴⁹⁰ Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016.

⁴⁹¹ Theodora Skipitares, "Articulations: The History of all Things," in *Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects*, ed. John Bell, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), 129.

⁴⁹² Braidotti's thoughts on feminism and masking, generosity, multitudes, subjectivities and radical immanence all speak to Skipitares' life's work and the method—puppetry—that she had used.

exceed the body and, as material, animate metaphors whose materiality can be a totality of meaning. In recent years, Skipitares has become more interested in the materiality of projection. “In this show,” she says, speaking of *Six Characters*, “you know projectors have gotten so tiny now—and strong! ... I have actually found a way to project from inside a chest into a clear plastic face.”⁴⁹³

Projection’s complex relationship with materiality has always been part of her work, specifically when she pairs it with skin; projection layers over skin, decorates skin with story, or becomes skin itself. While metaphorical, this is also a very materialist exploration, because the physical cloth or surface is animated by the projected image while providing the matter that allows the projection to take form and be perceived. They are not two, much the same way Elizabeth Grosz’s “Möbius strip” illustrates the non-dualism of the body and subjectivity.

These interactions and linkages can be seen as surface effects, relations occurring on the surface of the skin and various body parts. They are not merely superficial, for they generate, they produce, all the effects of a psychical interior, and underline depth, individuality, or consciousness, much as the Möbius strip creates both an inside and outside. Tracing the outside of the strip leads one directly to the inside without at any point leaving its surface.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹³ Stearns, “From Performance.” Even in the late 1970s Skipitares was known for her multimedia approach, which included props, body coverings, masks, costumes and coverings, audiotapes, slides, video, and projections. See Theodora Skipitares, “Articulations: The History of all Things,” in *Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects*, ed. John Bell, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), 127. Skipitares describes the various costumes and props she developed as well as the performances. In photo documentation of *The Mother and the Maid*, she points out the projections of Greek villages on both her back and a ceramic plate she later allows to shatter. She returns to projection time and time again in different contexts to allow for scale and the incorporation of mediated actors as puppets, their faces on large fabric structures. She incorporates tiny projectors in *Six Characters* to illuminate clear plastic heads with moving video faces, suspending the Pirandello characters in their state of lives unwritten, eerily almost alive. The projection, with its metaphysical sensibility, creates haunting and haunted objects. They create flickering, ephemeral semblances of people whose lips are not in sync with the words we are hearing. *Six Characters* is full of ghosts and ghosted people, including the subjects of the Pirandello play from which she takes the name. Tragic proto-reality TV star Lance Loud, still tender and young—and alive—in the 1970s, seems to have returned with a message that can only be told in the dream state.

⁴⁹⁴ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 116.

Skipitares was able to bring together not just these media but these approaches that foreground the powerful, albeit sometimes subtle and unconscious, ways that material, method, and concept converge because she started in performance art where, in opposition to artifice, artists sought a way of making their presence real without being mundane—and making it significant. The time period in which she came of age as an artist made this possible:

You know, the thing is, in the late '70s when I started doing performances, it is hard to describe how open and un-judgmental the scene was. There was really something new going on, mostly women, and it happened to coincide with a lot of feminist art-making in other fields and so I just fell into it. I always had objects that I made.... [When] I came to New York ... I wasn't interested in doing street performances here because it was the very different environment. But at the same time there was a movement.... At nighttime I would walk three blocks south or four blocks south and I'd be in SoHo, where you could just, in an unplanned way, in any storefront, find things going on every night and they turned out to be remarkable things. Like Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, and Joan Jonas, they were all there, they were doing things, and it was incredibly open, so I think that openness has made my art possible. So I just started just doing it in spaces, brand new spaces like Franklin Furnace, like Artists Space, Robert Wilson's, Byrd Hoffman's space. There were just opportunities for you. You could go somewhere and say, "I want to do a performance next month at your space. Is that Ok?" And they would say, "Yes."⁴⁹⁵

Performance art had been developing in New York and other places for more than a decade when Skipitares began performing in the mid-1970s. The new porous boundaries between visual art and performance practice were pivotal in creating a medium-less medium that allowed Skipitares to incorporate her affinity for image, text, and time. Skipitares began performing in places such as Artists Space Gallery, the Byrd Hoffman Studio, the Performing Garage, and New York's Franklin Furnace, which, in addition to the style of work she was creating, further cemented her identification within the genre of performance art. The old borders

⁴⁹⁵ Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016. For more detail about this time in her life, see Skipitares, *Large Likenesses*.

drawn on the landscape of performance had been overrun, first in the early part of the twentieth century and then (having resolidified slightly) by Fluxus (and others) in the 1960s. Each time there was an insistence on the possibility of a category-less creative utopia. Yet, boundaries seem to emerge naturally. Definitions and names were tentatively drawn by artists and curators who sought to make distinctions, not only between new and old forms of art but also among the new forms themselves. Paratheater, autoperformance, monodrama, pop drama, and autobiographical art were some of the terms that were floated in reviews and descriptions to categorize a practice that set itself apart from theater, even in its more experimental states.⁴⁹⁶ Perhaps these were efforts to locate certain new practices, to find language with which to articulate intention and outcome or even to simply designate an immediate community of colleagues, collaborators, rivals, and what performance studies theorist Richard Schechner calls the “integral audience.”⁴⁹⁷ Perhaps within loosely galvanized movements, such as feminist art, the need to sustain and replenish the momentum and purity required a group affirmation of “this is but that isn’t” (in lieu of the manifestos of the early twentieth century). The chosen venue where one presented work and otherwise engaged artistically often determined the way it was labeled (experimental theater versus performance art, for example).⁴⁹⁸ For example, Franklin Furnace, founded by Martha Wilson, was specifically as a venue for performance art.⁴⁹⁹ Skipitaes admits not having gone

⁴⁹⁶ Jay Sanders, *Rituals of Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama—Manhattan, 1970-1980* (Booktopia, 2013) 28-29.

⁴⁹⁷ Schechner, Richard, and Mandy Schuman. *Ritual, Play, and Performance: Readings in the Social Sciences/Theatre*. New York: Seabury Press, 1976.

⁴⁹⁸ Douglas Rosenberg, conversation with the author, April 24, 2016.

⁴⁹⁹ Gary Sangster, *Outside the Frame: Performance and Object: A Survey History of Performance art in the USA since 1950* (Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 1994), 187. Franklin Furnace was founded in 1976 by artist Martha Wilson to create a space for performance and artists’ books.

initially to venues connected to theater. Nevertheless, she ended up with her feet in many worlds and, while she watched her audience fluctuate at times as her practice evolved, she doesn't recall feeling the marked separation others did.⁵⁰⁰

As Skipitares moved into working with puppets, some felt she was abandoning performance art, which was predicated on “real bodies in real time and real space.”⁵⁰¹ Skipitares had begun with autobiographical themes that explored the self and the family—specifically gender roles and relationships among women. Martha Wilson, having witnessed the evolution of Skipitares' work, has been known to lament, albeit teasingly, Skipitares' move from performance to *theater*.⁵⁰² Skipitares recalls:

I refer to something [Martha] told me earlier, where she said that she was “so sorry that I went the direction of theater.”⁵⁰³ And you know, for me it's a non-issue, but I believe for most people, there is still a hard line between performance art and theater, and lot of it has to do with where it's done but also a lot of it has to do with a certain kind of provocation, that I think some performance artists think I am not doing. I would love to have those boundaries blurred. I think they have been blurred for so many people. I mean, you can go to old school performance artists and you can see their work—you can't divide it up. What are you gonna do with Laurie Anderson?⁵⁰⁴

Some welcomed a break from what at times emerged (and have persisted) as performance art tropes. The term *psychodrama* emerged around this time. Defined by the Whitney Museum

⁵⁰⁰ Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016.

⁵⁰¹ Wilson, *A History of Performance Art*. Martha Wilson attempts to define performance art and to draw some distinctions between performance art and theater. One difference she sees is that performance art tends to involve confrontational ideas.

⁵⁰² Skipitares, *Large Likenesses*.

⁵⁰³ Skipitares, *Large Likenesses*. Martha Wilson says, “I was disappointed, shocked and unhappy when Theodora transitioned out of performance art and into theater.”

⁵⁰⁴ Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016.

for the show *Rituals of Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama-Manhattan, 1970-1980*, the catalogue defines psychodrama as the insertion of autobiographical material and staging of varying emotional and psychological states within live performance.⁵⁰⁵ Used to describe a genre, it was also at times used as a pejorative, quite possibly a gendered one that might imply a critique of a nonlinear (and possibly plot-poor) psychological landscape as valid content. As mentioned in the section on feminist epistemology, this privileging of a certain event-in-the-world narrative structure has been seen as a barrier to valuing women's knowledge that is rooted in the personal. Skipitares' work did not receive this criticism. The critic Sally Banes expressed enthusiasm after seeing *The Venus Café*, a 1977 work by Skipitares. Banes describes her own otherwise cynical feelings about much of the performance art of the moment. Despite overt autobiographical content—what Banes was growing weary of viewing in other artists' performances—Skipitares' introduction of object theater into performance art's overabundance of “psychodrama, narcissism and self-loathing” offered hope. Skipitares' haunting piece seemed to suggest a path to salvation in the form of objects, their materiality and also their material culture. Noting the use of traditional performing objects from Greek theater and the thematic incorporation of family history, Banes alludes to the objects' power to transcend by triggering allegory through myth and cultural tropes that haunt:

Playing off the ambiguities inherent in both material and format—the contradictions arising from the clash of two cultures; the use of Greek theatrical techniques (the mask and the megaphone) ... Skipitares transcends the cult of personality to create a mythic geography filled with a panoply of objects and signals that range from familiar to bizarre.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁵ Jay Sanders, *Rituals of Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama—Manhattan, 1970-1980* (Booktopia, 2013).

⁵⁰⁶ Banes, *Subversive Expectations*, 36-37.

Skipitares started her venture into puppetry in the early 1980s, at the same time that she moved away from the autobiographical work that explored gender and her family's Greek roots.

I saw myself shifting. It just wasn't interesting to me anymore to tell autobiographical stories. So then I started bringing these little sculptures on stage. I knew nothing about puppetry and I cared nothing about puppetry. I started animating them by chopping up their limbs and re-sewing them. And I am really a big sewer—that was my original thing at home, that I was making things, always sewing things as a kid. So I started bringing these figures on. Then there was one show I did where I was the main performer and someone else was assisting me and it was called *Micropolis*. It really is a special piece but then, after that, my ideas started getting much bigger and they had nothing to do with my biography and I became the director, I just sat in the audience and I got other people to manipulate these people, and that was the major shift, and . . . that happened in '82 or '83.⁵⁰⁷

The world of *Micropolis* was different than the one created by the male puppeteers performing at the time. It was not just a miniature world but, perhaps like the description in Susan Stewart's *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, it was meant to be experienced much as we do a dollhouse, "focused on one scene and then another."⁵⁰⁸ Mel Gussow proclaimed in a 1982 review of *Micropolis* for the *New York Times*: "Theodora Skipitares is a miniaturist." Gussow, who took an interest in her career wrote:

Watching her table-top performance piece, "Micropolis, or, Five Portraits and a Landscape," at the Performing Garage, we become her Gullivers. As she and two associates present cameo puppet plays on small portable stages, the effect is that of being in an intimate gallery as sculpture secretly comes to life. Sometimes the movement is as minimal as the nod of a head, and at other moments it is an

⁵⁰⁷ Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016; also see Sanders, *Rituals of Rented Island*, 22. Even while doing *Skysavers*, Skipitares described her presence in the performances as that of a "glorified stagehand." While her body was part of the production and she moved about manipulating objects on stage, she saw her role as someone activating elements of a tableau which ultimately held all the story. Stearns, "From Performance." The catalogue states that at the time of this exhibition, Skipitares' work was still preoccupied with an autobiographical exploration of her Greek American childhood. They quote her as saying, "They were about a rather flamboyant person in a traditional strict Greek home, the tension between the Greek and American culture, the heroic myths and the everyday realities of life that I felt all the time." Skipitares, *Large Likenesses*. Theodora says she wanted to talk about other things bigger than herself. When she left her own life and became interested in more documentary type material she wanted to become the director, to step away and frame the event.

⁵⁰⁸ Stewart, *On Longing*, 63.

orchestrated mechanization. This hermetic art demands our concentration and earns our attention. While figures are manipulated by unseen devices, the voice of the puppeteer or a recorded soundtrack describes an event, beginning with the story of a woman growing up in Buffalo at the turn of the century. Visually, the most evocative piece is “Wild Ducks” and it consists simply of a woman in a brightly lit room with people peering at her through a window. As we watch, the heads slowly start to move until they become a chorus of reactors invading the woman’s privacy.⁵⁰⁹

I would argue that women do the private and the intimate well, especially when they summon the qualities of doll play. Skipitares says she was never specifically interested in doll play herself as a child. Nevertheless, there has been a dollhouse quality to her work, even as her work grew in scale. One way that Skipitares’ work aligns itself with and then defies Stewart’s description of a dollhouse, however, is in the potential to experience the puppet world in an embodied way. “The miniature universe of the dollhouse cannot be known sensually; it is inaccessible to the languages of the body,” Susan Stewart laments.⁵¹⁰ While it is true that we cannot reach into a staged room in a performance and touch the sofa and move the puppet to the left or lean her against the table, we can inhabit the puppet’s world through the puppet’s body, projecting our own kinesthetic empathy into their corporeality. Unlike the human, whose own soul takes up the whole space of their body, puppets are open to our inhabitancy.

The puppet’s world is a cohesive world with rules that, in Diamond’s words, are “governed by the logos of the playwright’s text ... a unique temporal and spatial framework or dramatic ‘world.’”⁵¹¹ Louise Krasniewicz, miniature maker and anthropologist, remarks,

What miniaturists are doing is making worlds, not just scaled objects. Worldmaking is an activity carried out by ... anyone who sets up a place or space for exploring alternative ways of being in the world.... It is creating that space in

⁵⁰⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/11/theater/theodora-skipitares.html>

⁵¹⁰ Stewart, *On Longing*, 63.

⁵¹¹ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 84.

such a way that others, viewers, are intrigued enough to enter that world, to engage with its design and components.... Worldmaking requires being aware of more than just the objects in that world; it requires making consistent and coherent space that suggests more than it shows. And it requires knowledge of the elements of worldmaking that include coherence, consistency, narrative, and depth.”⁵¹²

Unavoidably, Krasniewicz enters into dialogue with what Stewart lays out in her book, *On Longing*. Stewart describes the immersive nature of the miniature world: “The miniature world becomes a stage on which we project ... a deliberately framed series of events.... once we attend to the miniature world, the outside world stops and is lost to us.” She argues that “the toy world presents a projection of the world of everyday life; this real world is miniaturized or giganticized in such a way as to test the relation between materiality and meaning.”⁵¹³ This captures the way that Skipitaes’ work functions—oversized or doll-like and seldom exactly human scale. But Krasniewicz disagrees with Stewart’s analysis, which is based in psychoanalytic, Marxist, and deconstructionist theories, rather than the sensibilities of a maker like Krasniewicz.⁵¹⁴ She finds Stewart’s philosophy of miniatures to function better as poetic musings than in application and, in doing so, they miss important truths. In “Miniature Manifesto Part 2: Stop Quoting Susan Stewart,” Krasniewicz argues that these worlds are not “static, contained stillnesses that point at places and affective realms (such as the nostalgic and longed for) that are too much to contain except by a form of metonymy.” Rather, she tells us, “Great miniatures are not an escape from

⁵¹² Louise Krasniewicz, “Miniature Manifesto Part 1: Call Us Makers,” <https://thewonderofminiatures.com/2015/05/20/miniature-manifesto-part-1-call-us-makers/>.

⁵¹³ Stewart, *On Longing*, 57.

⁵¹⁴ This is, of course, an argument for the practice based research. Stewart uses a philosopher’s sensibility to create an affective description of the miniature and it is a compelling read, in part because the theme is so compelling to so many of us. Nevertheless, she is attributing intentions and processes upon others who by virtue of being driven to make these worlds could not experience the world itself like Stewart does, This is something Krasniewicz makes clear.

the real world but a way to engage, confront, question, critique, or consider it.”⁵¹⁵ This is where there are parallels to Skipitaress’ politically and poetically driven puppetry.

Skipitaress’ work still exists in a space between theater and performance. There is a bargain in Skipitaress’ work, as in all theater; if one accepts the rules: one will be visually rewarded with enchantment. In the book *Unmaking Mimesis*, Elin Diamond lays out the different ways performance and theater work, referring to the “theoretical debates in the 1970s and 1980s about performance and theater, and the place of feminism in those debates.”⁵¹⁶ One can find elements of both in Skipitaress’ work; the puppet may be what defies her categorization:

Theater is governed by the logos of the playwright’s text; actors represent fictional entities of that text to produce a unique temporal and spatial framework or dramatic ‘world.’ Theater spectators are encouraged and pleasurable narrativity: prompted to identify with the psychological conflicts of individual subjects, to respond to the lure of suspense, reversal, and deferral, to decode gestural and spectacular effects. Performance, on the other hand, dismantles textual authority, illusionism, and the canonical actor in favor of the ‘polymorphous thinking body’ of the performer, a sexual, permeable, tactile body, a ‘semiotic bundle of drives’ that scourges audience narrativity. In performance, linear fictional time gives way to spatial intensities or projections of the performer’s thought, gesture, movement, and voice. Theater, the art of *representation*, transforms this polymorphous, drive-ridden, repressed, instinctual—can we call it an ‘orificial?’—body into what Roland Barthes calls “an emphatic formal body, frozen by its function as an artificial object.”⁵¹⁷

The puppet is nothing if not a “semiotic bundle of drives.” Yet, there is something undeniably theatrical in Skipitaress’ work. She brings an aesthetic to her pieces that maintains a distance from our world; her puppets are not in our world. Instead, she crafts a universe that reinforces a doll-world sensibility—something she has done since her initial puppet pieces. The

⁵¹⁵ Krasniewicz, Louise. Miniature Manifesto Part 2: Stop Quoting Susan Stewart. <https://thewonderofminiatures.com/2015/06/01/miniature-manifesto-part-2-stop-quoting-susan-stewart/>

⁵¹⁶ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 84.

⁵¹⁷ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 84.

scale, however, has grown. And this is also why puppets are right for her world and human actors would not be. This choice was one made over and over during modernism as echoes of human bodies were deemed better able to tell stories of humans and the bodies that betrayed them. Alexandra Exter's marionettes, mentioned in the first section, were made to do what human actors could not: belong completely to a formal constructivist universe.

Another Eastern European modernist, Russian puppeteer Nina Efimova argued this as well and believed everyone would come to see the superiority of puppets over humans. Efimova did perform and made a life of it. "Five chance puppets became tools for the building of our puppet theater." Despite the disdain people had for puppets initially, she persisted thanks to the serendipity with which she began, her successes among the community—particularly the "lads," and her encouragement by artists in her community.⁵¹⁸ There is an evident thrill at the plasticity and the playful agency Efimova finds in these wooden figures.

In his famous 1908 essay, "The Actor and the Über-Marionette," Edward Gordon Craig lays out the reasons why he would replace human actors with puppets.

As material for the theatre [man] is useless. In the modern theatre, owing to the use of the bodies of men and women as their material, all which is presented there is of an accidental nature. The actions of the actor's body, the expression of his face, the sounds of his voice, all are at the mercy of the winds of his emotions; these winds which must blow forever round the artist, moving without unbalancing him.... [Later he adds] I speak of Puppets and their power to retain the beautiful and remote expressions in form and face even when subjected to a patter of praise, a torrent of applause.... "Puppet" is a term of contempt, though there still remain some who find beauty in these little figures, degenerate though they have become. To speak of a Puppet with most men and women is to cause them to giggle. They think at once of the wires; they think of the stiff hands and the jerky movements; they tell me it is "a funny little doll." But let me tell them a few things about these Puppets. Let me again repeat that they are the descendants of a great and noble family of Images, Images which were made in the likeness of

⁵¹⁸ Nina Efimova. *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theater Including Its Discoveries in Making and Performing with Hand-Puppets, Rod Puppets and Shadow Figures, Now Disclosed for All*. (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2012), 34-36.

God; and that many centuries ago these figures had a rhythmical movement and not a jerky one; had no need for wires to support them, nor did they speak through the nose of the hidden manipulator.⁵¹⁹

While Skipitares was not motivated by a rejection of the egos and frailties of the human actor, the puppets complete her worlds. Eileen Blumenthal, in *Puppets: A World History*, notes that Skipitares “invents new species of actors for every show,” which include a vast range of puppet styles (many of her own invention) as well as unique puppet-human “meldings.”⁵²⁰ Craig saw a better-than-human fluidity (not unlike the line “It is simply impossible for a human being to reach the grace of the jointed doll,” from “On the Marionette Theater” by Heinrich von Kleist, an eighteenth-century dramatist who was convinced of the marionette’s superiority). Skipitares uses a range of manipulation strategies, from an approach that is almost provisional to one that is highly skilled. However, she sometimes chooses movement that is not human-like.⁵²¹ It is not always necessary or ideal to employ what might be seen as virtuosic manipulation technique, in which the fluid movements of a human are reproduced. Sometimes it is the absence of great movement that comes closest to life. In the film *Puppet*, by David Soll, one of the puppeteers describes the magic of subtle movements and the puppet they are working with: “He could sit

⁵¹⁹ Edward Gordon Craig. “The Actor and the Übermarionette.” In *Mask* 1, no 2, (1908):13.
<http://bluemountain.princeton.edu/bluemtn/cgi-bin/bluemtn?a=d&d=bmtnaau190804-01.2.5&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txin----->

⁵²⁰ Eileen Blumenthal in *Puppets: A World History*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Publishers, 2005), page 57

⁵²¹ “On the Marionette Theater” by Heinrich von Kleist <http://www.virtually-anything.org/kleist.pdf>. “These marionettes,” he said, “have another advantage. They haven’t discovered the law of gravity. They know nothing about the inertia of matter. In other words they know nothing of those qualities most opposed to the dance. The force that pulls them into the air is more powerful than that which shackles them to the earth. What would not our dear G— give to be sixty pounds lighter or to have a force that would lift her for her entrechats and pirouettes. These marionettes, like fairies, use the earth only as a point of departure; they return to it only to renew the flight of their limbs with a momentary pause. We, on the other hand, need the earth: for rest, for repose from the effort of the dance; but this rest of ours is, in itself, obviously not dance; and we can do no better than disguise our moments of rest as much as possible.”

there at the table the whole time, just lean against it and breathe a bit, maybe turn and look and the viewer is feeling all the emotional content.”⁵²² Skipitares has a multitude of ways to signal human presence—and absence—to the audience through paper, light, latex, fabric, and voice. These ways of hinting, signaling, improvising, and gesturing at humanness are part of what makes Skipitares’ work so powerful, and perhaps what has held her in puppetry, a medium she never intended to take on. Skipitares’ nonlinear narrative performances *do* bring human actors into the world through voice and sometimes projection. There are also some instances of embodied actors interacting on stage. In an interview with Celia Ipiotis in the series “Eye on Dance” in 1987, Skipitares brought a life-sized puppet of Charles Darwin. Not unlike the image I described of Skipitares with her hand on one of her little Theodoras, her on-camera interactions with Mr. Darwin and her descriptions of his inner character defied his inanimate state.⁵²³ He had an actor’s presence because she permitted him one.

Skipitares embraces the dynamic of co-presence with ingenuity, trying out a range of ways to have humans and puppets interact with one another and coexist on stage. Also, she has created many unique hybrids of puppets and humans, as she did in her scene of “Helen of Troy” with the “humanettes,” which are actors’ human heads and faces with miniature puppet bodies attached. The humanettes also interact with human actors, bunraku-style puppets, and masked humans.⁵²⁴ Large video projections of actors on twenty-foot-high fabric towers are subtly but

⁵²² Soll, David, Dan Hurlin, and Paul Trubachik. 2011. *Puppet*. New York, NY: Distributed by the Cinema Guild.

⁵²³ Theodora Skipitares and Ralph Lee, *Eye on Dance*, interviewed by Celia Ipiotis (New York: ARC Videodance, 1987).

⁵²⁴ Skipitares has incorporated ideas, techniques and aesthetics from a variety of traditions across the globe such as Bunraku from Japan and has published an essay about the technique. Nevertheless, she does not seem bound to an orthodox technique, rather she incorporates it into an eclectic practice.

powerfully animated by the sway of the cloth. Skipitares sees scale as one of her most important devices and, in addition to building large puppets, she frequently uses projection as a way to achieve this large scale. Always willing to push the mechanics of puppetry and manipulation, in *Lysistrata*, Skipitares created rigs to attach puppets to live actors in order to triple the number of bodies activated on stage.⁵²⁵

Because Skipitares began as a sculptor and fabricator of objects and costumes, the material matters.⁵²⁶ Objects and their articulation initiate the way and the form; other components are developed according to what the object, in a sense, wants and is willing to do.⁵²⁷ Skipitares at first used the expression “kinetic sculpture”; her initial gesture towards what eventually became a puppetry practice was a spontaneous act of separating the arm on an otherwise static sculptural self-portrait and re-attaching it with needle and thread so that it could wave.⁵²⁸ This accidental discovery of puppetry created the conditions that allowed Skipitares to use the medium without a sense of trepidation or self-consciousness. In addition to her Theodora dolls, her show *Skysaver* featured other articulated figures that appeared as proto-puppets through necessity: the “two-foot, pompous psychiatrist and a chattering lamb that functioned as a Greek chorus commenting on the action” allowed Skipitares to avoid using actors.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁵ Theodora Skipitares, “Art Work.”

⁵²⁶ Stearns, “From Performance.” Costumes played an important role in Skipitares’ performances and also in her design work at school. She mentions the costumes she made such as dresses from 3,000 walnut shells and one of 90 pounds of glass. This also foreshadows her commitment to an almost obsessive making evidenced in puppet shows that have included hundreds of figures.

⁵²⁷ Skipitares, “Art Work.”

⁵²⁸ N. J. Stanley, “History As Theme Park: Reconfiguring the Human Journey in the Art of Theodora Skipitares,” *TDR* (1988-) 47, no. 2 (2003): 34–70.

⁵²⁹ Lynch, “Theodora Skipitares,” 143.

Ultimately, the puppets are vessels that she has created to contain and to embody fragments of human story. They carry truths and “deeply felt emotions” in a way that audiences accept.⁵³⁰ Skipitares describes herself as a collage artist, which is easily observable in the images and bits of text she chooses that drive and shape her work. When she and I discussed her piece *Six Characters*, which functioned as a collage of vignettes, Skipitares acknowledged that the last-minute inclusion of the Flint, Michigan water crisis as a final scene made it harder to tie the work up, and yet it was important to her that she acknowledge that contemporary crisis and to literally give space for the voices of the individuals affected.⁵³¹ Because her process, in which she is always deeply politically and personally invested, involves the generation of material in a scrapbook of images, phrases and ideas that capture her imagination, I would consider Skipitares’ work a form of fictocriticism, per Anna Gibb’s description:

Fictocriticism’s self-conscious mixing of registers and (already mixed) genres matches (or mimics) both a multidisciplinary approach—which may encounter areas of incommensurability in the overlaps between disciplines—and the ‘methodological impurity’ of cultural studies. It is a risky approach which must be offset by a commitment to attention, openness and reflexivity about questions of the politics of poesis on the part of the writer. But in risk lies excitement, and to demonstrate the thrill of excitement in one’s approach to a project is perhaps the best guarantee of arousing it in one’s readership.⁵³²

⁵³⁰ Theodora Skipitares, “Articulations: The History of all Things,” in *Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects*, ed. John Bell, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), 125.

⁵³¹ Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, April 2, 2016. Skipitares seems to frequently include what I might describe a “plus 1” model in which more is attempted and incorporated thematically than can be easily contained within the work. This is a strength that keeps Skipitares’ work still living at the moment of presentation. This is a performance art quality that is unlike traditional theater because it courts the risk of failure to keep a devotion to the piece’s effect in the world and an authenticity of the act of creating within the process of presentation.

⁵³² Gibbs, Anna. Fictocriticism, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences Vol 9 No 1 April 2005 <http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/> Editors: Nigel Krauth & Tess Brady.

The desire to use specific text is also a driver in Skipitares' work. Skipitares is a scholar and a primary source treasure-hunter. Her works reveal her expansive curiosity, an appreciation for the absurd, and strong social justice convictions. These political sensibilities inform the choice of source material she draws from and provide a motivation for making work.⁵³³ Eileen Blumenthal, in her book *Puppetry: A World History*, describes how Skipitares draws her fragments from primary sources such as archives, literature, and the news and reassembles them into a collage that both illuminates and adorns often hidden or forgotten moments of history and human experience.⁵³⁴ Part poetry, part pun, and part primary source, this is how N.J. Stanley references the idiosyncratic way Skipitares sources her text, unearthing what has been "hidden from history."⁵³⁵ She states that Skipitares' productions "demand a rigorous intellectual engagement on the part of her audiences."⁵³⁶ At times her work is informatively historical to the point of being educational; this is not something she resists.⁵³⁷ In many cases the figure is a way of corporealizing words and historicizing them. The characters in Skipitares' work become akin to *vessels* of text; they contain it, carry it, and deliver it to us. This creates a fascinating dynamic

⁵³³ Skipitares has consistently addressed issues of class, race, and gender, such as the abuse of the powerless in medicine and hunger, food, and famine. Primary source material, verbatim and transformed, composes almost the entire hour of *Six Characters*, the script drawn from the news, a memoir, Collodi's nineteenth-century novel the *Adventures of Pinocchio*, *Oedipus Rex*, a 1970s PBS reality TV show, and the movie *The Bad Seed*. They are altered very little and very little is added although there are some original compositions that elaborate poetically on themes and fragments.

⁵³⁴ Blumenthal, *Puppets*, 180-181. Skipitares uses both original text she composes as well as historical texts from a surprising range of time periods and sources. This collage that she herself later refers to creates a unique blend of her own authorship that reactivates other textual authority through Skipitares' unique compositions and recontextualization.

⁵³⁵ N.J. Stanley, "History as a Theme Park: Reconfiguring the Human Journey in the Art of Theodora Skipitares,"

⁵³⁶ Stanley, "History as Theme Park," 65.

⁵³⁷ Jay Sanders and J. Hoberman, *Rituals of Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama: Manhattan, 1970-1980*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2013), 108-111.

in which fake bodies deliver real text. Yet time and time again, Skipitares refers to these avatars as being more honest and more able to deliver truths.⁵³⁸ Perhaps they are real bodies delivering false text; regardless of the version one chooses, there is a mismatch that creates a powerful subjectivity. Watching an almost robotic puppet give the words of the “Father of Eugenics” a locus in a body provokes a sense of amused dismay. This is similar to the strategy of feminist fictocriticism. Anna Gibbs says, “Much feminist fictocriticism (even contemporary) can be read as an attempt to surprise the paternalistic voices of theory in action, to unveil them and reveal them for the partial rather than the universal view they in fact represent.”⁵³⁹ Perhaps a human actor, in an effort to dramatize, might interfere with us hearing the verbatim transcript of this misguided thinking.⁵⁴⁰ In a 1980s *Eye on Dance* interview, Theodora says she only regularly uses puppets, which she prefers because “Puppets don’t lie.” They have an “innocence and emptiness that makes them a powerful vehicle for great tales.”

Many in the puppetry community have not supported this approach. Skipitares says, “I have received so much criticism about that.... So many puppeteers have tremendous problems with that in my work and you know, I just learn to live with it.... I mean there are people that say, “Don’t use the puppet as a megaphone, as a microphone.”⁵⁴¹ Her approach is not unlike the

⁵³⁸ She says, “Puppets are such a sensational lie of their own-- but a very innocent lie—that I don’t think you can ask them to support anything but the truth.” Stanley, “History as Theme Park,” 37.

⁵³⁹ Gibbs, Anna. Fictocriticism, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences Vol 9 No 1 April 2005
<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/> Editors: Nigel Krauth & Tess Brady
<http://www.textjournal.com.au/april05/gibbs.htm>

⁵⁴⁰ Skipitares, Theodora, *The Age of Invention: Defenders of the Code*,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWcBak4KMPc>

⁵⁴¹ Skipitares, Interview, February 28, 2016. Wilson, *Performance Art* and Skipitares, *Large Likenesses*. Theodora describes her work with text as a “collage artist” and states that she has only recently worked with a play. She says she was always attracted to “real language” and “words that were actually there.”

amplifying masks used in Greek tragedy that Skipitares studied when she spent time in Greece. It is also similar to the dramatic structure that centers on the telling of events that happen outside the audience's view. Richard Schechner says that speech isn't only speech; it is an embodied behavior because the body is always first.⁵⁴² Speech is also embodying in that it is volume, location, presence, and waves of energy. Most of Skipitares' puppets are voiced (even those that exist as diaphanous fabric and projection), and their voices galvanize their substance and specificity where physical matter does not.

Skipitares experienced other boundary enforcement as she began to receive more attention as a "puppeteer." Other puppeteers were more apt to reject her work.⁵⁴³ Was this a territorial reaction? Was there a gender component to this gate-keeping? Skipitares also heard general skepticism and criticism from the traditional community as the art form began to experience the beginnings of a renaissance and transformation. This renaissance was coming from *outside* the traditional lineages and apprenticeships and broke rules about what puppetry was that were previously taken for granted. A few artists created room in the field on their own terms, as an elite group of traditional puppeteers who were connected (and frequently traveling) to Europe. Skipitares was not coming from tradition but rather fits within what John Bell describes as a wave of interest from visual artists finding their way into the medium in the 1960s and '70s, "unencumbered by tradition."⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴² Richard Schechner

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrRmXb4FLwQ&t=0s&index=2&list=PLphf_NvSmVMoNtgV3Xj_xG8Braf6_euRc Speaking with regard to the French poststructuralists' focus on speech acts and text in performativity (as opposed to American and British), Schechner says that we must remember that language is derivative of embodied behavior; language derives from gesture.

⁵⁴³ Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016.

⁵⁴⁴ John Bell, *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 61.

There is an otherworldliness to Skipitares' work that seems to connect to the intimacy and drama of dimly lit dreamworld that echoes women's and girls' private play in the bedroom, be it with dolls or the self before the mirror. "Arresting," Elin Diamond said of the illuminated dissolution of a figure in *Micropolis* in the early 1980s.⁵⁴⁵ "Haunting" was the word used by art historian and critic Sally Banes.⁵⁴⁶ Performance artist and art historian Martha Wilson contends that women prefer to perform in the dark (and men in the light) because females are comfortable with the womb.⁵⁴⁷ I would argue that Skipitares is drawn to the dark for other reasons. Perhaps in the beginning it was a desire to be almost invisible; she alludes to a discomfort with being the star. The theatrical lighting added a sense of overt drama and theatrical magic to her performance art, which, rather than reject, she embraced along with elaborate sets. However, her abiding interest in the medium of projection (be it as an aesthetic layer, a puppet, a set, or text) might be one of the most compelling reasons for staging her work in the dark.⁵⁴⁸

Skipitares' figures continue to have a compelling doll-power hold on me, as they did when I discovered her. In January of 2018, while visiting New York, I met Skipitares at her apartment to go for dinner. It was garbage night and she gestured at me through the glass door to

⁵⁴⁵ Diamond, 153.

⁵⁴⁶ Sally Banes, *Subversive Expectations: Performance Art and Paratheater in New York 1976-85*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 36-67. Here as well as other places there is an extensive description of this piece, that contained many forms of object performance and elaborate costumes and props in a range of scale. It was multimedia and contained what were the beginnings of puppet figures.

⁵⁴⁷ Wilson, "The History of Performance Art."

⁵⁴⁸ In "Articulations: The History of all Things," one can see the use of projection onto Skipitares' own body in *Venus Café* (1979), *The Mother and the Maid* (1980), and *SkySaver* (1981). There are also cases of illumination like with the figure dissolving in water from *Micropolis* (1982) that seemed to be lit and the glowing figure from *Under the Knife* that John Bell uses for the book *Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects* which he edited and which contains the photo essay "Articulations."

wait as she gathered up a couple of bags to place on the curb. In her hand was also a doll, about one-third her size, with a sculpted face and wire and tube limbs. I have a momentary fantasy that she is going to give it to me. Instead, she places it on the bags on the curb. I ask incredulously whether she is going to throw it out, and she says, “Yes,” that it is old latex and breaking down. I say, “You can’t,” but she insists. I express the obvious wish to have it, but she is somehow quite insistent that I don’t want it. It isn’t modesty. It is an insistence that tells me not to pick it up and claim it. She chats briefly with a downstairs neighbor who appears in the doorway and who also expresses the same shock that she is leaving the figure there to be thrown away. I see in his eyes the same lust for the doll. My coveting has come full circle, but I am thwarted by my good manners and respect for her wishes. I do not pick up the doll. We turn and walk away, leaving it on the pile of garbage bags on the curb, under a streetlight, in the bustle of a Friday night, with all the doll’s fetishistic power and anthropomorphic vulnerability exposed to the passers-by at dusk. Skipitares was ready to part with this puppet, and yet there was a gesture of care in the way she placed the doll on (and not inside) the garbage bag, not crushed, hidden, or disassembled. Rather it was *whole*—and wholly visible as we turned the corner. I knew it wouldn’t be there when I returned.

5. Autoethnography: My Life Told Through Dolls

How should research stories be told?

—Susan Finley⁵⁴⁹

I start like this:

If only I could find that picture of Val and me in 1975. It was that year we moved from rural Minnesota to urban California. Val lived across the street in Riverside. In the photo I have long, wild brown hair and freckles and a huge smile. I stand with a hip cocked, a white body suit covers my flat chest. My long hair is wild.

Val is taller. Her part is straight. Her belly protrudes under a striped shirt and she is just beginning to develop breasts. We each have a Dawn doll on our heads. Smaller than Barbies, I prefer them and have about three. The dolls are doing the splits on our heads—undoubtedly my idea. I look ecstatic. Val looks self-conscious. She is two years older. Val's father was an opera singer. He would come out of the house at dinner time and call her.

Oh, Valerie...

...Cooooooooome hooooooooome (I end singing in my best male operatic voice).

This is an autoethnographic account of my life told through dolls I owned, wanted, lost, named, and cherished. These dolls were secondhand finds or hand-me-downs, gifts, denials, and playthings that revealed relationships, affective states, and situations that have marked me. The accumulation of affect experienced and transmitted through objects. There is agency girls and

⁵⁴⁹ Susan Finley, "Methodologies," in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples and Issues*, J. Gary Knowles and Adra L. Cole, eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press, 2007), 74.

women have in and through dolls. There is a strong affective sense surrounding the doll as possession and acquisition. I explore many examples of the roots of subconscious knowing or sensing or embodiment held in the corpus of a doll. For example, I still have an Italian doll that was given to me when I was little by the stranger who was my father when he came back after a long absence when I was a toddler. I was standing, or believe I was standing, in my grandmother's narrow coal-town duplex backyard where the prickly, stiff-leaved hedges made walls. When I see this doll I always think of the hole in the knee of her stocking and can almost feel the texture of the rough stocking where the hole slides over the plastic and the reverberating sensation when I moved her because her neck was weak and the flop of the head added a faint echo to each movement.⁵⁵⁰ This type of incidental yet profound sensing that attaches itself to an object is a fundamental affective quality of my relationship with that doll. It is not unlike certain back-stories Louise Bourgeois has articulated about the familial origins of her body of work. In the tradition of autoethnography, I "seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience ... discerning patterns of cultural experience ... and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice."⁵⁵¹ I also intend this to be fictocritical. I

⁵⁵⁰ My father was in Sicily for a period of time when I was very young and he was finishing his doctoral research. We stayed with my mother's parents. I felt like he was a stranger when he returned. I remember all of this only through and because of the doll. I came across this doll a few days ago. The hole isn't in her knee. It's in her toe. The knee holes were always in my tights and I know this from many family photos where perhaps there wasn't time or money to buy new ones. But I can still feel the knit fabric sliding over her plastic knee. What I didn't know if that the pressed faces of the two Italian dolls (one for Tony and one for me) were directly inspired by those of the Lenci company started by Elena Scavini which I wrote about in a previous section. The sideward look made them wide-eyed--alert and curious without confrontation. Another reason these dolls looked familiar was that Edith, of *The Lonely Doll* (a book I had seen many times as a child) was a Lenci doll. As I describe in an earlier section, it was this wide eyed look (at times slightly wary) that allowed many projections upon the doll. See Rebecca Bengal, "The Creepiest Children's Book," *New Yorker* (September 26, 2017), <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-cultish-allure-of-the-creepy-childrens-book-the-lonely-doll>.

⁵⁵¹ Ellis et al, eds., "Autoethnography: An Overview," 14.

am interested in using language in an expressive way. This dissertation is full of footnotes and while I provide some here, this is more about how I made and make meaning, and no amount of scholarly support can change that.

I never cared for puppets so I cannot tell you the story of how I “got into them” as a child. I had no experience with marionettes, and the hand puppets’ gaping holes (simply where you insert your hand) bothered me as toys. They lacked completeness. But dolls...

When I gave a talk a few years back, I asked everyone to make a quick note to themselves, on a piece of paper (to do their own performative ethnography):

- A way in which dolls function in society
- One way in which a doll connects you or connected you to someone—often as a gift but not necessarily
- A material, fabric, texture, or other sensory aspect to a doll and its object-ness
- (In your tiniest writing) a doll secret

These questions speak to this dissertation, capturing all the reasons that I think of doll play as a source and a metaphor for women’s object performance. To me these four questions capture the power of the doll, the affective power, the corporeality and materiality, the personal narrative, and culture. For those of us who have cared for a doll, the doll in our memory is a like the little hard bean from which roots grow down and the stem grows up. It is hologram of the past. The doll body is, in Rosi Braidotti’s words, an enfleshed sort of memory that repeats ... an embodied memory.⁵⁵² Steeped in affect, I cannot remember dolls without feeling something or a lot. In her book *Being Doll: A Study of Youngness & Oldness at Interface*, Lisa Pavlik-Malone describes

⁵⁵² Braidotti in an interview with Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, “The notion of the univocity of Being or single matter positions difference as a verb or process of becoming at the heart of the matter,” <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001/1:4.1/--new-materialism-interviews-cartographies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

the way that “elements of both childhood and adulthood become intertwined to produce personal understandings which symbolically portray episodic memories involving the (doll) object in principally phenomenological and existential ways.”⁵⁵³

Dolls connect me to other females (and occasionally males) in my life; they *flesh out* relationships in an intermedial way, the same way that puppets can be considered theatrical intermediaries between audience and puppeteer. They are conduits of family lore, values, and culture, deeply psychological. In fact, so much so that I realized, in writing this section about myself and dolls, that I needed to talk about my own body and my body in relationship to storytelling in order to be able to talk about dolls. This intuitive move further underscores the logic of the connections that have emerged in this dissertation between body and story and doll. Strangely, though, I also realized that to talk about my own body, I needed to talk about my mother and the way she embodied hers. Julia Kristeva would say that the subjectivity I call myself was formed in the space of no clear separation between us. She created my image of woman, but also shaped my life as a girl and a human. Often it seems to me that two more different people could not exist, but this in no way contradicts my sense of her in myself and my stories. A few weeks ago I texted my mother, who is in her seventies,

...and say: If you can write anything you remember about my dolls as a child that would be helpful...

She texts back: I remember you would play energetically with all my old dolls cloth and plastic you would play with stuffed animals also putting clothing on them i think you wanted a bride doll that someone dressed in cottonwood

I write: oh interesting [and] I think I had tarboy and targirl

⁵⁵³ Lisa Pavlik-Malone, *Being Doll: A Study of Youngness & Oldness at Interface* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 11.

She replies: Yes also danner and derry who were friends. not dolls but we had those smaller baby dolls that were easy to work with you were great using pieces of cloth and. Odds and ends
Dad said remember Henrysville who was henry? and the dollhouse he built but grandma and grandpa made that dollhouse that you could look down on was it a Dawn dollhouse?

I suppose, by today's standards, I would be considered a "gender-nonconforming" girl even as I write about dolls—the quintessential performance of being a girl (or so they might say). I wore mostly boys' clothes and played out in the woods and ditches, building forts with my band of friends and siblings. In the 1970s that was *far* from a form of deviance. In fact, there was a sense that progress itself entailed greater justice and opportunity for girls in the form of equality. The breaking down of gendered limitations was synonymous with the future and so I got to know myself as a girl as the world was doing away with limits and, in some senses, difference. Certainly we had far to go, but with a clearer path than I see now. Despite living in a very patriarchal home in a town of 800 in rural Minnesota, there was a *Zeitgeist* of an immanent gender utopia—that powerful state of becoming. We rarely had a TV in our house, but somehow all the culture of the '70s entered the two-story Victorian we lived in.

My parents had a very traditional marriage as far as gender roles go; my father was a patriarch and my mother was a stay-at-home mom throughout my entire youth. My mother, however, did not do things like diet or paint her nails. She wore a little make-up here and there (lipstick and powder if she was going out or to church). She spent almost nothing on clothes. She cooked and she served us food. She cleaned and washed. She took us to the doctor. She set up crafts at the kitchen table. She read to us every night. She dressed us all in the same turtlenecks and tights beneath footed pajamas for the drafts of Minnesota winters.

My mother very seldom asked me to abide by gendered expectations; there was an occasional battle about dresses for church—I hated them. I loved to wear the sleek Danskin

bodysuits and stretchy pants my grandmother sent. Our clothes were often unisex and I remember being allowed to go topless in early childhood and younger, my sister as well (which by then was an embarrassment to me). Everything in my mother's life was intimately connected to her children, and as the oldest I was at times a mini-mother to my sister. My mother was a La Leche League leader and a strong proponent of breastfeeding, so I watched her model this maternal gesture. I distinctly remember a sort of nurturing feeling and envy watching her with my little brother, but I have no memory of mimicking that or any type of baby care with my dolls. And there are no residual doll items of that size/kind, which further seems to confirm that baby dolls weren't a part of my childhood (except perhaps in toddlerhood).

My mother was not a feminist. In fact, she cautioned me in junior high that feminists regret their choices to be feminists. They think it sounds like a great idea, but "feminists die alone." Still, she bought me the 1974 coloring/paper doll book called *Great Women Paper Dolls* that featured, among others, Anna Pavlova and Sarah Bernhardt. If I had only known about my future love of modernism.⁵⁵⁴ We had the record album *Free to Be You and Me*, and although a gender and women's studies class I was in as a student, deconstructed and critiqued it recently, it impacted my generation tremendously and infected us with a utopian becoming.⁵⁵⁵

My hair was a battleground between my mother and me. My own daughter reminded me recently that one of her cousins is not allowed to cut her hair because her mother thinks she would look too masculine. That was not my mother's position. She wanted my hair as short as possible. In part it was the times; I was born at the end of the '60s, when the pixie had been in

⁵⁵⁴ *Great Women Paper Dolls*, Bellerophon Books (1974). The book, which has been reissued, included Sappho, Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, Pocahontas, Susan B. Anthony, Florence Nightingale, Golda Meir, Maria Tallchief, Amelia and others with a costume and a speech for a feminist cause.

⁵⁵⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_to_Be..._You_and_Me

vogue. In part it was having four kids six years old and younger. My hair was thick and course and tangled easily. My mother cut my hair in a pixie whenever she could. I hated it! For me, hair was power and autonomy. Even the men in the '70s were growing theirs. Jesus had long hair. And Samson! As a preschool child, I looked to male heroes as role models, specifically Robin Hood and Samson of the Old Testament; the power of Samson's hair wasn't lost on me. When my mother did let me grow it long, she would tell me I looked like a witch and made two painfully tight ponytails with a crooked part, and I would go to the neighbor's house crying and hoping the old woman there would loosen them.

Robin Hood, Samson, Jesus, and Pinocchio were a few of my early childhood heroes. Perhaps there was a dearth of female heroes in books, movies, and TV in the early 1970s, but there were a few series of children's books that my mother read aloud that held possibilities and offered a full humanity for girls. The Hoban's *Frances*, the badger series, was very important. My mother used to read this aloud to us. It is interesting to think about the contrast even between Tolkien and C.S. Lewis—the difference a few strong female characters made. And although even otherwise progressive shows, such as *Star Trek*, were woefully sexist, gradually there were more female figures I could identify with. While not perfect, the programming from the *Children's Television Workshop* offered girls a chance to see themselves as part of a narrative about progress.⁵⁵⁶ Laura's character on the *Little House on the Prairie* series was the kind of gender-non-conforming (current lingo) girl that I could relate to. There were a few superheroes that were female. Mary Marvel was a favorite of mine. There was also Isis, Wonder Woman, and the

⁵⁵⁶ I wrote a paper that looked at the complex reasons it took so long for Sesame Street to create female monsters. In some senses it boiled down to the fact that the female becomes monstrous easily and would take on different significance. For example, the gluttony of Cookie Monster, were he to be a female monster, would have been perceived markedly differently.

Bionic Woman. Often, to be a girl meant limited choice. When we acted out our favorite shows and movies, like *Star Wars*, there was a single female character I could be, and the uncomfortable undertone of love interest was always lurking.

There were four of us and a band of neighborhood kids. I am the oldest—two boys and a girl (the youngest). My siblings and I are a total of six years apart; by necessity we were given freedom to roam. We had an elaborate system of forts within walking distance with their own narratives; visiting the fort was visiting and feeding an endless story in progress. The “foundation” was across the alley from me. An abandoned basement that was overgrown with trees and brush, we descended from the mostly mowed lawn of that vacant lot down into a house-sized jungle to play for hours. In the fall, my friend Mel and I raked the leaves into elaborate, yard-sized floor plans (that at other times we created in miniature in the dirt). With regard to my siblings, we had only one brief but beautiful stint of playing “dolls” together, which I describe later. Tony, my brother who is a year younger, maintained an elaborate and active world with his stuffed animals, but we never played together. They were all his creatures to animate. I had one stuffed animal, Bear, from infancy. Bear was my confidant. He was the godfather I never had. The timeless, ageless elder covered with ever-more-worn plush.

I wasn’t much of a reader and preferred active and imaginative play as well as art. My mother never played with us, nor did my father. My friend Emmett and I (or other times, my friend Melanie and I) engaged in elaborate role plays—but with our own bodies. The doll’s body and one’s own body were equally available for telling stories at that age. Through early elementary school, I don’t recall playing dolls much. For me, dolls were a solitary activity for the most part. When there were other kids, there were other bodies to act out stories. The world was not just a playground, it was theatrical. Porches and garages were obvious theaters. My mother

always kept a large box of dress-up clothes. There were two landings on the stairway between the first and second floor, one with a cubby. I don't think we played in basements, but even now the different smells return (the attic, the basement, the sap-covered needles under the low spruce canopy pine next to the front door). As a child, my mind slipped easily back and forth from miniature worlds to my body's own size and from plastic to petal, when the lily of the valley bloomed (or spirea, like perfect little bouquets, or the hollyhocks that made perfect girls in dresses). In the chapter on affect, I mentioned the way that play and performance overlap for children, and for us there was definitely a blur; we felt we were performing as much as playing. When we pulled chairs up to the front of Emmett's garage and begged our mothers to sit and watch, they usually saw us do what we always did, oblivious to our spectators. We lived far away from any extended family (which was small anyway, since my father was an only child and my mother had one sister). We visited my paternal grandparents in Detroit twice a year, and my maternal grandparents in Pennsylvania once a year. My maternal grandmother sent packages a few times a year, which were highly anticipated. She liked to send special (and what I now know to be very high-quality) toys, clothes, and candies. They were likely expensive, but it wasn't just about that. They were made well, often in natural materials. Those were the days when the UPS shipments arrived wrapped in brown paper and inside were special boxes with signature gold-stenciled buildings from the department store in the city near her. They were tied in fuzzy red ribbons. My mother would pass them out and we would immediately devour the chocolates. My grandmother sent me a pair of nylons for Christmas in fifth grade, perhaps signaling the end of something and the beginning of something else.

Adolescence is its own trauma (and likely has been for all of modernism, as Beauvoir highlights in her book). In my experience, it was a rupture in a trajectory of becoming that

seemed idyllic. I grew up in nature, smelling like sweat and the outdoors, with a body oriented towards play and performance and towards being in and taking in (food before a fear of fat, etc.). Halfway through fifth grade we moved a few miles to a larger town, and I was severed from nature both by my age (what was appropriate play) and by the encircling houses and endless groomed farm fields ringing the edges of town, coming right up to the houses and stores. There were no wild groves. Puberty and breasts, the pain of having a period, the first thoughts about weight ... the shifts that Beauvoir mentions were all rites of passages that complicated my relationship with my body.

When I did play with dolls, I was interested in character dolls (as the Germans called them during the early twentieth century when the re-envisioning of childhood called for imaginative play). I wanted dolls to *be*—and not to be cared for. I actually began to play with dolls more than ever in late elementary school and even more in early adolescence. I spent a substantial amount of time from fifth through eighth grade playing alone and sometimes with a single friend. I had a dollhouse, which I describe below, but I also was increasingly drawn to Barbie and dolls like her. There were things to own and accumulate with Barbie and sets of dolls to create a wider repertoire and more characters in the drama.⁵⁵⁷ Also, the alienation of Barbie's plasticity was not unlike my alienation with my own body.

A lot of economics run through the culture of my childhood, and this should be expected in speaking about possession and accumulation. My family was middle-class status, without a lot of disposable income. Although I didn't think of our family as poor, my mother and father spent very little on toys and clothes. My parents were frugal and resistant to consumption and popular culture. They disapproved of a lot of the world—and embraced before my birth the philosophies

⁵⁵⁷ I remember not liking singleton dolls that had no others like them.

of the Catholic Worker movement. While perhaps this devotion faded a bit, my mother's Spartan nature and their continued Catholicism seemed to create a culture of material denial, but not with a capital *D*. In all truth, we lived in such an isolated area most of my youth that there wasn't a lot to buy. I remember distinctly a couple occasions in which I got to select a new item of clothing (an emerald green snowmobile suit and green bell bottom jeans) and do not remember ever really expecting or requesting toys to be purchased—quite different from my own children's upbringing. In middle school, my mother started giving us a holiday allowance. At that time, I used any funds almost exclusively for dolls and doll-related items (dollhouse and later Barbie). There were colored J.C. Penny's catalogues we poured over and marked pages of. I did the math over and over to see if I could get one thing more.

Some dolls I remember:

Melanie's little brothers got the boy versions of a doll called Baby Tender Love, complete with penises. (I was confused her mother bought these for them because Melanie's father was strict and terrifying.)

I remember horrible dolls like Ms. Beasley that I didn't own and didn't want to.

I remember 1970s weird-bodied dolls with masses of matted, poor-quality hair. Their bodies were like troll dolls. Not sexual. Toddler-like. Not unlike the odd '70s comic *Love Is*, which explored the never-ending courtship of a male and female (lovers) with bodies like toddlers and no genitals.

My grandma or mom bought me a reissue of the devastating 1925 story *The Little Wooden Doll*. After many years in the attic, the doll fears that she will never again be loved by a child again. And she is right until she is transformed by animal friends that make her beautiful again.⁵⁵⁸ The book came with a little wooden doll. The morality and guilt triggered in a doll-owner girl says something about our capacity for empathy and perhaps the way it becomes part of our gender through popular culture.

And the terrifyingly strange stories of Raggedy Ann and Andy.

⁵⁵⁸ Margery Williams Bianco, *The Little Wooden Doll* (1925).

My grandma's palm-sized bisque doll with wire to move the arms, one of which was broken. Also a couple of strangely shaped rubbery ones that were discolored and had become sticky. I remember many dolls whose inner wire discolored an elbow or the body and head that, once matched, transformed with the years and sunlight until they no longer were the same.

My mother says that as very young a child I had three dolls (Kikipeppa, Tarboy, and Targirl) but oddly, while she told me these stories early on in childhood, the dolls were never anywhere to be found, and there are no photos of them. I have no image of those dolls in my mind, either.

Tony had some parts of a set of Johnny West and Jane West handed down. Their clothes were molded on—Western shirts and jeans. They mounted horses with no time for costume changes other than their detachable vests.

I never cared about horses. I only cared about people.

Tony also had Evil Knievel and his motorcycle while I had Derry Daring—the female version. The '70s were a time of bionics and stunts.

I didn't want to buy paper dolls but I liked making them as drawings and the problem solving that went into making the clothes work.

I liked to make things but I wasn't good at sewing. I failed to understand how things needed to be structured to fit around legs. I made envelopes that the legs could never enter.

One of the first sets of dolls I had was the Sunshine Family. I don't know who bought it for me but it came new from the store. Maybe it was my mom or maybe it was Santa. The Sunshine Family was a wholesome hippie family: a father, mother, sister, and baby. Dad had longish hair and mom a long skirt. I don't really know why but I always took off their clothes and Mr. Sunshine would throw Mrs. Sunshine over his shoulder naked and he would take her to the river. Nothing happened there because I didn't know what would happen next. It was the rapture that mattered—that moment. I also think as the daughter of a humanities professor (as was my friend down the street) I saw far too many versions of the rape of the Sabine women. I wonder what people on the airline thought when I would act this out on my tray table. Like all

kids thinking in the world, I only saw what I wanted it to see and thought others could only see what I showed.

I remember desiring several dolls I never got. We didn't really ask for things as kids, at least we didn't beg. Desire was often just that—without a thought of actually possessing. When we lived in California the year I was in third grade we went to Los Angeles one day and ended up in an amazing toy shop. I got a small ornament for the tree: a clothespin ballerina. There I saw a beautiful doll. Her coloring was unusual—like no race or every race, or so it seemed to me. Her skin was dark and her hair midrange, creating an unusual effect. Her face was mellow and placid. Her skin was made of a matte material, plastic perhaps, but with more of the finish of bisque. I knew she was extravagant and I didn't ask for her. There wouldn't have been a point. I simply longed for her and that felt like a secret that held some part of me in place—a wall that gets propped up by unrequited desire for something. I later realized while pouring through a doll book that this was one of Sasha Morgenthaler's creations.⁵⁵⁹

Another doll I longed for was a doll called "Leggie." Between fifth and eighth grade, I spent a lot of time playing with dolls with my friend Dea. We were unsophisticated and immature middle-schoolers, playing dolls, making divinity, and going to the roller rink. She had tons of dolls, many of which her mother stated were "collector's items." She had to play with them carefully but was able to have them out of the boxes and remove the plastic band that held their hair in place, much like the toilet paper Dea said her mother wrapped around her own hair at night to keep her Dolly Parton-like do looking good. Leggie was nothing like my awkward middle-school self, and yet neither was she sexualized. She was simply all long legs—her body

⁵⁵⁹ "Sasha dolls were created by Sasha Morgenthaler (1893-1975), a Swiss artist and artisan. She was also a humanitarian and a keen observer of all the world's children. Her vision was to create dolls that represented and reflected the spirit of children of all races and cultures during their age of innocence." <http://www.sashadoll.com/>.

defied any possibility of being real, and maybe that was what I liked about her. I wanted her desperately and offered Dea money for her, but her mother wouldn't let her sell her to me, because of her collectability. I had a hard time letting go.

There was also Noreen Garzio's first communion doll, a baby prince in all his finery. Her parents were high school sweethearts, her mother was my mom's high school best friend. I envied Noreen for her glamour; she was tall and tan and hunted deer with her father. The legend of Henrysville that my father remembers to this day goes something like this: We moved to Marshall from Cottonwood in the winter while school was out. For two weeks we were in the new house. We knew no one. In a rare instance of the four Amato children playing harmoniously rather than fighting the bitter battles we often fought, we erected a city with all the moving boxes stacked like high-rises in what I imagine looked like the far-flung suburbs of Madrid. The linoleum basement rec room floor was plotted and divided to form blocks and streets (the masking tape later impossible to remove). Adam's stuffed dog Henry was the mayor, with Scoober the weiner dog as his right-hand man. The Barbies lived in condos with little dolls we called the "clodhoppers." Everyone's animals and dolls had apartments and places to park their vehicles. For 14 days and 14 nights, Henrysville was a bustling metropolis. Then vacation ended and the city was dismantled. The rec room floor bore the traces of the main streets for years.

Twice in my life I tormented my father with the purchase and assembly of a dollhouse, asking him with his softly assembled gender that did not include handiness or manual skill to perform his gender by performing its assembly.⁵⁶⁰ Each time the task was hell. The first

⁵⁶⁰ I am revisiting Adrienne Harris' notion of gender as a process of soft assembly from feminisms section.

dollhouse was in California where we lived for a year when my father took a sabbatical. It was the Barbie Dream House, plastic and several stories high with an elevator. My father struggled in the backyard for hours to follow the instructions and put the floors and walls together and to thread the elevator string through its path.⁵⁶¹ The other time was when I was in fifth grade and I begged for an enormous Victorian dollhouse (from a kit). We had just moved to a new town at Christmas. Again, it was a miserable task for him to assemble the house, and it was a miserable time spent together, which was hardly unusual. I think there are instances where this type of project encourages bonding, but when the shame of feeling inept that he couldn't make heads or tails of the instructions led to anger.... I didn't think to ask my mother to do it. Somehow we didn't trust her (a woman who does detailed quiltwork now in retirement) with that sort of precise work. And yet somehow we were able to complete it. My father, not unlike me later in life, wanted to be reading and writing—or golfing. He wanted to be proficient, and nothing manual or with a manual came easily to his fumbling and short-tempered fingers. I put on the finishing touches of the cedar shingles and planked floors. I papered walls and bought some books on making miniature plants for the greenhouse structures (glass and copper) that my grandma sent me.

Miniatures have always fascinated me—or perhaps it is that they gratify me. I am an adult woman who owns multiple dollhouses. In the fall, on a garbage night in Brookline, Mass., I was out for a walk. Turning a corner I spied, under the streetlamp, what looked to be a large dollhouse placed on an ironing board. It could have been a performance piece of mine! As I

⁵⁶¹ It was close to my height and had bright modern furniture. Like with the dollhouse my grandmother made and others of that era, I did not care for other furniture being depicted on the wall. The class of real and illusory was deeply uncomfortable for me. Around that time I received a Barbie Carousel kitchen as well. Battery operated it lit up and rotated and plastic rotisserie chickens that circles in another compartment behind clear colored plastic. The bold primary and secondary colors of the seventies could not have predicted Barbie's cultish monogamous obsession with the color fuchsia.

approached it, it was clear that it was a dollhouse. I lifted it—it was as tall as I was and heavy, and little by little I made my way back to the apartment. Sometimes at night, when I can't sleep, I sift through the dollhouses on Craigslist on my phone and just wander the rooms, looking at what's left. Often the rooms are emptied of furniture. Lonely.

In *On Longing, Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*,

Susan Stewart says of the dollhouse:

Transcendence and the interiority of history and narrative are the dominant characteristics of the most consummate of miniatures—the dollhouse. A house within a house, the dollhouse not only presents the house's articulation of the tension between inner and outer spheres, of exteriority and interiority—it also represents the tension between two modes of interiority. Occupying a space within an enclosed space, the dollhouse's aptest analogy is the locket or the secret recesses of the heart: center within center, within within within. The dollhouse is a materialized secret; what we look for is the dollhouse within the dollhouse and its promise of an infinitely profound interiority.⁵⁶²

Wealth and nostalgia, however, were not what I sought in fifth grade. But now?

I have always been an avid maker and sculptor. As a child, the diorama was one of my favorite mediums. I bought several books downtown that showed me how to make small accessories: plants, books, and other objects. I played with the dollhouse fairly constantly that year and the next. In my corner of the rec room, most likely with a brother watching TV or playing Legos a few feet away, I would arrange and rearrange an interior world of three stories that was mostly Victorian, as much as I understood what that was.

I would come home from junior high and spend hours in the basement rec room in my secluded corner. My grandma Bovolack, Nonnie, sent me some small dollhouse dolls. I later discovered, like so many things she sent, that these dolls were the best. These were Erna Meyer

⁵⁶² Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984). 61.

dolls. Erna, a German woman like many others I have discussed, grew a cottage industry into a successful company by using her understanding of the materiality and affect of the doll. She created her original bendable dollhouse dolls from rags, flax, and florist's wire.⁵⁶³ There was a little Victorian girl, dressed in pink. She was special, out of time and out of place among the rest. Or she was simply in the right time and space of the Victorian mansion that vaguely resembled my home before the move.

The storied dollhouse my mother and her sister had in their childhood disappeared at some point before we were born. My mother wondered out loud about that frequently. There were furnishings left—much like those in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, by Beatrix Potter. Specifically, I remember there was a very realistic little cake on a small wooden table that my brother managed to bite off. I never cared for things that were fixed and glued into place, but it was a lovely cake on a blue plate. It was painted as golden as any pound cake baked to perfection. These things were discovered by searching in my Nonnie's attic, which was flanked by stuffy, hot cubbies full of boxes we would sneak open.

My grandmother Catherine Bavalack (née Polansky), “Nonnie” as we called her, grew up extremely poor. She was one of ten children of a coal miner and his wife. Both were Carpatho-Rusyn from an area now in southeastern Poland. They immigrated separately at the turn of the last century, he first and then she followed. They went for a walk, then married. My grandmother trained to be a teacher at Kutztown normal school, something she did until she married my grandfather, in her thirties—quite late for that time. My grandfather's parents were shop owners

⁵⁶³ In October 1945, Erna Meyer, a 21-year-old trained kindergarten teacher, registered an industry for the “arts and crafts of dolls made of cloth” in Munich. She had made many dolls for friends and family over the years, such as was a custom. The first employees were friends, who could not find work in postwar Germany after the war. <http://www.dollshousespastandpresent.com/issue27jan2016p6.htm>.

and were less than enthusiastic about her background. I loved them both but suspect they had a troubled marriage. They angered easily with each other, and I remember my grandmother's mouth, pursed in defiance—silence that was what she could muster for defiance. Family lore was that part of the hurt was the house. They lived in a modest side-by-side duplex; despite my grandfather's decent job and her pleas for a "house," he never bought her one, and she never forgave him. When I was two, my father came back from Sicily after doing research for his degree, having left my mother, baby Tony, and me with my mother's parents. I imagine him walking through the gate and up the backyard sidewalk of my grandparents' impossibly long and narrow coal town backyard.

Truly the nicest of our toys and stuffed animals came from Nonnie. Having grown up abjectly poor and Russian in a time and place where Slavs were looked down upon marked my grandmother with a sense of shame. Appearances and select indulgences in some finer things—albeit always practical—were important to her. As a child, she told us, she used to have to ask mine owners' kids for the core of their apple when they finished. She would wait and watch to see if they would leave a fair amount of fruit or eat everything to the sharp center fibers.

The Polanskys, my grandmother's family of ten children, made everything—even their toys. My mother has a framed set of homemade yarn dolls that belonged to her mother. They are skeins of yarn, looped and bound to make each figure's body and limbs. The children did not have store-bought toys. One of the most painful stories told about Nonnie involved a doll. Her oldest sister Anna had gotten a job and, with some of her salary, had bought a fancy doll for all the younger girls in the family to share—their first and only. Snooping through the attic, Nonnie and her sisters found the magical doll. They just knew this would soon be theirs; why else would it be there? They dressed and undressed her, playing so carefully. The anticipation was

overwhelming as Orthodox Christmas slowly approached. On Christmas morning, however, each package was opened and the doll was nowhere to be found. The girls were confused and devastated and could not even ask about it.

It was years later that Anna would tell them that, *terrified* of her miner father's wrath at her wastefulness, she returned the doll to the store before Christmas.

(pause)

Perhaps that is why my grandmother bought me beautiful things, some for play and others for display and some in between. I had a Madame Alexander doll of *Alice in Wonderland*; my mother and her sister had two of the Little Women, Beth and Amy. Beth and Amy had the rich composite skin, mellow a bit towards the tan that was typical of the nineteen-forties. The light reflected off them in a satin-like glow. Alice was the pink of pink plastic skin. She was lighter, and more hollow. Nonnie gave me and my sister each a lovely painted set of *matryoshka* nesting dolls. A universe of females inside of females, a true matriarchal and linear world. The doll wasn't satisfying to *play* with in the narrative sense, although it was somewhat mesmerizing in a performative way—a bit like a miniature *vierge ouvrante* or opening Madonna shrine. It had an element of discomfort, with the smaller and seemingly younger dolls continuing to open and produce a child—like children giving birth, cracked open. These dolls, however, connected us ethnically to Nonnie's Slavic roots. They were an object of pride and identity that passed between the generations. There is much to explore in the way ethnic dolls function. I did not have many, but Nonnie did give me a Peruvian doll, a statuesque beauty with coarse, dyed-wool clothes typical of the Andes and a drop spindle in her hands. She had a baby on her back and large breasts. She had a peculiar smell of wool and strange pigments. She was not meant for play since she was stiff, posed, and affixed to a stand. To me she was like an anthropological object

from a far-away place that detailed interesting information. So much so that when I was a Spanish teacher I used her and other authentic dolls in my teaching.

From Nonnie, as toddlers, Tony and I also received two plush hand puppets, a dog and a squirrel, and two other quite realistic plush animals: Kanga with a little Roo (who was perpetually lost), and Tigger, but not the Disney version. They were realistic, with firm bodies and airbrushed fur with a bit of gratifying bristle to it. The eyes were glass, and quite real. I still remember, with a bit of irritation, the metal button in the ear, of which there was no removing; I only know now that these were Steiff toys and quite expensive.⁵⁶⁴

For a holiday or a birthday, she sent dollhouse dolls and absolutely lovely wooden dollhouse furniture with drawers that opened.⁵⁶⁵ My grandmother also gave us miniature villages and farms with animals and figures made of bits of brightly painted wood, vibrant green trees and vibrant red roofs. Never plastic, although many children's toys were metal and wood then, before the plastic turn of the late '70s. Playskool, in those days, was all wood.⁵⁶⁶ Without

⁵⁶⁴ They were made by a company founded in 1880 by a German woman, Margarete Steiff, who lost the use of her legs and one arm after a bout with polio in early childhood. She trained as a seamstress, only able to sew with one hand. She founded the company Steiff where toys were created from drawings of the animals at the Stuttgart Zoo. Echoing the interest in childhood as a precious time, Margarete Steiff would say, "Only the best is good enough for children." The metal button in the ear as a solution to counterfeits was devised in 1904 by Margarete's nephew Franz (<http://www.steiffusa.com/steiff-the-story/>). Somewhere along the way, we acquired a small plush mouse that, during the year we lived in California, became part of my integration onto a group of girls who I could not believe included me. They all had beanbag animals that they wore on their shoulder; it was a club. The beanbag animal on the shoulder club. My firmly stuffed mouse was a constant balancing act, much the way I experienced being included in this group.

⁵⁶⁵ <http://www.dollshousespastandpresent.com/issue27jan2016p6.htm>.

⁵⁶⁶ These little villages were also German toys, no doubt. Playskool was American, founded by a woman, a former Milwaukee schoolteacher named Lucille King, in the 1920s, "she and another teacher had developed plans earlier for wooden toys for use in the classroom. King took her plans to the lumber company's management and launched the Playskool Institute in 1928. King's line of toys consisted of basic, durable wooden items that aimed to develop coordination and stimulate the minds of children. By 1930 Playskool produced more than 40 different toys, including a pounding bench, wooden beads and blocks, a table-mounted sandbox, a pegboard, and others. Playskool Institute's slogan was "Learning While Playing," and some items were billed as "Home Kindergarten." Another slogan the company used was "Playthings with a Purpose." As early as 1930 Playskool's toys were endorsed by

knowing it, I had become infected with a German sensibility in toys and all the values that entailed (high quality, with a utopian vision of childhood, of natural materials, educational, and innocent). I think my mother mentioned once a toy store my grandmother frequented. I wonder if it wasn't Pomeroy's Department Store. Reading the descriptions of their famed toy department on the sixth floor, I imagine her there in another time and world. My grandmother, a modestly elegant lady, browsing with her purse and shopping bags. In her classic shift dress and jacket and pop pearls, she is telling the saleslady about her ragtag grandkids in Minnesota that she sees once a year.

My father's mother was nothing like Nonnie. She grew up lower/working class, a descendent of vaudeville performers and bar owners. My father also had a lower-working-class upbringing as an only child in Detroit. Ethel May, my paternal grandmother, was a force to be reckoned with. She wasn't allowed to take on or create anything in the world, forced by the era and my grandfather to be a housewife. All her energy—and to be honest, *mania*—was concentrated within the borders of her house and yard. When we visited, we entered an energy field that she ruled. It was like Lost Vegas ("Lost Wages" she called it) with a full-size roulette wheel and decks of cards. One time we'd get there and maybe there would be a collection of negligees for dress-up, or tools for all of us and a space in Grandpa's woodshop. She might have a new candy recipe that she would make every day (maybe more than once), or a favorite store we would visit (again, *at least* once every day of the visit). In the backyard, she would set up specific stages for drama: a treehouse or a wrought-iron garden set arranged just so. Grandma Amato was a complicated person. She was charismatic and eccentric. She rode around her

child guidance experts, and the aura of educational enrichment clung to the brand.”
<http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/playskool-inc-history/>

neighborhood on a large emerald-green tricycle (her birthstone and the color of every car they ever bought). She was an imaginative maker. She was diagnosed as bipolar at one point and certainly had those traits. Visits to her house were their own form of magic and hell. She had a temper. She was vengeful—and smart. And yet she was like a ringleader, a diva, and a playmate.

When we visited my Detroit grandparents at Christmas and in the summer, I begged and begged to be driven to where there were miniatures to buy. Usually Frank's Nursery for inexpensive items, but once to a special shop in Gross Point where I bought a brass decanter with tiny goblets that fit on a tray that was no wider than an inch. The tiny brass stopper was removable! These small objects filled my palm with so much potential. A densely packed possible performance. An almost assured tragedy of lost parts—and yet for years I managed to keep the set whole. It was a magic place with miniature silverware, working scissors the size of a pumpkin seed, and blown-glass punch bowls. I could only get one or two items. Choosing was hard, but beautiful.

My grandma Amato always had an odd assortment of the craziest examples of doll culture (hand-me-downs or garage sale finds). They were often gimmicky, ones Nonnie wouldn't have chosen. For example, the teenage girl-looking dolls with ponytails that grew to their butts as you pulled on the hair and then retracted when you pushed a button in their backs. When she gave my three-year-old sister a puberty-themed Barbie doll called "Growing up Skipper," whose breasts protruded through thin rubber when you twisted her arm in its socket, my mother was horrified. Her dollhouse was painted sheet metal with molded plastic furniture. When she was an old woman, my grandmother acquired a large doll—not a pretty one and not a well-made one. She was posed, dressed garishly, and displayed in her nursing home room where my grandmother lived. My mother didn't know what to do with the doll after my grandmother's

funeral. It seemed to be about death, I think. Its clothes and eye-shadowed baby face ... all done in baby blues. Like cold flesh. Later I realized that dolls in bedrooms were typical in my grandmother's flapper days.

At one point she and my grandfather brought me a dollhouse they had made just for me. Unlike any other, it opened from above—a single-story plan with no roof. Grandma carpeted it and then, much to my chagrin, papered the walls with photos of room interiors. The flat picture of the sofa on the wall disrupted the three-dimensional presence and bothered me. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the house immensely. I felt its resonance in a work I did a few years ago with a house that opened from above—full of dirt. I took my iPhone and roamed through the house filming it, creating a confusion of scale. Like the journeys dolls took through that house.

There was the time, however, when she made me another little world, this time in a shoe box. Her works were often sort of charmingly junky. She wasn't a craftsperson, but she was a maker. There were mismatched dolls and odd improvised furnishings. Just for me—this little world—was presented to me upon my arrival at her house. There were caps for cups and a makeshift bed! Tiny blankets and doodads. I was thrilled.

However, as often happened with Grandma Amato, something I did or said flipped her mood and she took it away from me with a promise to give it to the neighbor, a second cousin, the paper girl... I don't remember who in that case. She never made idle threats. My grandma knew how to wound. When we left town the next day, I held an imaginary transparent bag up to the window of the car. As we drove through the twilight Detroit streets—stores closed and the freeway quiet—I imagined capturing the entire city in this bottomless bag. Later in my imagination, I knew I would sort and locate all the elements she had combined in her unique

creation and I would remake that house—she couldn't really take it away. She could though. In many ways, she could.

6. The Doll and Puppet in My Practice

I make objects—doll-like things that don't want to be objects—they want to be stories. Animation, even at its simplest, shatters their *objectness* with story.

—Felice Amato

*****WHAT IS IT ABOUT PUPPETRY?: A MANIFESTO*****

As with the dollhouse and other terrains of children's play, there is a rich visual and material world that puppets create and into which we are invited to be fully absorbed. Puppetry offers the superpower of scale—and that alone makes magic. The puppets' world revels in its own materiality and then transcends it. It's a world that mimics and then transcends mimesis.

Puppets haunt and inhabit in a way that we cannot. These worlds, so apart from our own (and so familiar), offer both the creators and the spectators a completeness (however sparse, however full) of a place and a time ... of beings ... of happenings. Even when puppets perform alongside live actors and in human settings, they claim the actors. They claim the settings and pull them into a new context, redefining them, and reshaping them on the puppets' terms.

We need those other worlds. They offer a refuge from the world of our own bodies. Like Bakhtin's "carnavalesque," we need some way of making it all strange. Puppets are a forgetter and a reminder of our humanness. They are a turn toward the real (through the unreal) and make believe—in the literal sense.

Puppets exist as material metaphors, but they are also little beings of desire. Or maybe they are becomings. We covet them and want to own them. We make them with excessive devotion—past the demands of function or aesthetics. Maybe it's a bit of fetishizing triggered by desire for not only that little figure but also those tiny shoes, that miniature chair, a little cup. Is that so wrong or is it so right?⁵⁶⁷

I came to puppetry later than most practitioners and from a different route that led me from drawing to sculpture to performance to here. Part of what inspires me most in the work of Theodora Skipitares is the unencumbered way in which she has approached puppetry and her willingness to take risks. It was really hard for me to not simply say, "Oh, but if only I had tried

⁵⁶⁷ This is an edited version of a manifesto I wrote in 2016 as part of the application for the O'Neill Theatre Center.

puppetry.” But I needed to. As Rich notes, I could open the door that makes no promises—and I have been doing that. The medium of puppetry, with its contemporary breadth of expression, both allowed and encouraged, is the perfect medium for me. Each piece I make is different, and yet all combine in some way objects and narrative in time and space.

I have been searching for an old script I wrote in 2013. Maybe it is better that it remain in that vague place with lines about anger and train whistles and holding my daughter while she sleeps. I had been asked to give an artist’s talk my second year of graduate school, and I hadn’t made a body of work worth talking about. My shame and fear and frustration were overwhelming. My mind and my body were torn between St. Paul and Madison, back and forth weekly and never really being anywhere, and never feeling, despite the sacrifices I was making, that I was anything other than failing at it all. And yet there I was, doing this exhilarating thing. And yet there I was, waiting to be foreclosed on. And yet there I was, learning. Always engaged in a vision quest or purification ritual in order to guard against anything that could dull my edge. I had intense waves of emotion constantly—every moment seemed like one of *those moments* when I felt so full but I didn’t know of what. Some mix of sorrow and joy, like the mulberries in spring—it was just awe, I guess. But the awe was mixed with exhaustion. Awe mixed with grief. Awe that was overpowered by guilt, the only substance as strong as awe. I decided, for this artist’s statement, to create a sort of stream-of-consciousness piece and show an overload of disconnected but meaningful images (like moments) out of sync. Maybe, if I was lucky, every now and then they would line up exactly right, as an unexpected truth or a big brave lie or something that caused you to catch your breath or sigh. I don’t know how it was received. However, there was something in that piece. A couple of visiting artists that came to my studio for visits encouraged me to proceed, and what could I do? It was all I could do. In the first

section I described that, for me, making work was gathering up pine needles, walnut shells, windfall apples, or eggshells. I started to perform while the script played. I built things by wrapping objects with cloth covered in thick clay slip with cinnamon added so that the smell permeated the air. This still wasn't puppetry, but it made a few people cry.

But backing up slightly to the fall of my first year of graduate school, I was in a class with Douglas Rosenberg at UW-Madison. His background in performance meant that we watched a lot of interesting interdisciplinary work. I tried out a couple performances. Thinking of my mother and of Eve, I filmed my mouth and hands as I peeled a bowl of windfall apples and ate the peels, the wormholes, the bruises, and the scabs. My mother always ate the peels of the apples she peeled for us. I was thinking of sin and food. I was thinking of sin eaters and of atonement. I made a few clay sculptures and created an installation. They were dolls, really, and, while I felt the disdain of most of my classmates, Fred Stonehouse was encouraging about the puppetry and drama. Rosenberg came to my studio and I showed him what I was making. Known for being blunt, he told me he really wasn't interested in any of the ceramic sculpture, except one: a small, darkly fired puppet. He asked me to walk it around the white cube we were meeting in. He said, gesturing to the work I had hung around the space, "I have seen all this before, but I have never seen that before." He looked at the puppet I was holding, hung from a looped chain that I used to lift the left, then the right, microscopic movements that allowed the puppet to walk.

Elizabeth Grosz says that "art comes from that excess, in the world, in objects, in living things, which enables them to be more than they are, to give more than themselves, their material

properties and possible uses, than is readily given in them.”⁵⁶⁸ I came to puppetry in part through storytelling, but in all honesty it was the objects that made it puppetry. As stated earlier, I have always loved objects and materials. Dolls and puppets have had a particular hold over me. I am vulnerable to the thing-power that Jane Bennet describes.⁵⁶⁹ As a teacher for 20 years I used puppets in every class (every sort of class). From practicing the reflexive verbs in Spanish by telling a love story between the stapler and the hole punch, to shadow puppets on the overhead to learn Mexican ghost stories, to toy theaters about ocean life, I loved the workshop feeling and the pageantry of puppets. When I lived in the Twin Cities I had the chance to see a lot of puppet work. When I was in fifth grade, In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater came to our small school and created a water pageant with us.

As an artist and a woman, I am that subject that understands herself through the sex and gender she is creating. Living an embodied, female life shapes and compels my work. The marked nature of my female body is doubled by the facticity of my maternity and lesbianism—both beyond mere identities because they are historical and material. My stories are not every female’s story but they are part of the larger poetics of female and of woman. The narratives are always at least somewhat autobiographical even when they veer into the realm of the fantastic and absurd. In making work as I do, I do the things that Judith Butler says consolidate a notion of gender (walking, talking, dressing, gesturing), but also I make work that enters the visual culture of the world and reinforces my understanding and reifies materially notions of sex and gender.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 47.

⁵⁶⁹ Bennet Jane, *Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter* | The New School
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q607Ni23QjA>

⁵⁷⁰ In her critical works *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* feminist philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler engages, among other questions, the long-standing and ongoing

As one who has always had an intense attraction and attachment to the doll, its familiar yet complex visual culture allows me to explore my stories in ways that were and are playful, meaningful, imaginative, and authentic to my life.

The kind of puppetry that I am most interested in is very direct: my hands are visibly touching the puppet, and no rods or strings to mediate.⁵⁷¹ The first puppet that felt right for me, the first puppet I really animated and breathed into, was a cloth doll I found at a thrift store. She was whole. She was a figure like one might draw or paint or sculpt a story with but instead, she performed one. Unlike a hand puppet or a marionette, she was right there before me and I could watch her as the audience watched her—except I was transferring all my life to her. And maybe through her to them. She performed because I breathed and touched her body just so with the breath. But even though I found her, I changed her. Working with dolls is embodied research—doubly so when they are used as puppets. I had to work with my own body, but also with hers. Practice-based and arts-based methods of research are integrated in every piece so fluidly that I forget I can finally take down the torn sheet of paper on which I scrawled a key phrase I wanted to include here in order explain how trial and error come into play: “Pulling out some of her

challenge: what is the female and the feminine in relation to a sexed or gendered body? The discursive nature of In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler further develops her distinctive theory of gender by examining the workings of power at the most "material" dimensions of sex and sexuality. Deepening the inquiries she began in *Gender Trouble*, Butler offers an original reformulation of the materiality of bodies, examining how the power of heterosexual hegemony forms the "matter" of bodies, sex, and gender. Butler, *Gender Trouble*. See also Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Hove, UK: Psychology Press, 1993).

⁵⁷¹ Puppetry that is performed through direct manipulation with visible hands and visible puppeteers is often described as “Bunraku-style” because of the similar directness in that traditional and highly-formalized, Japanese art form. I am moving away from that comparison and/or category, however, because I do not see that as the heritage I am actually tapping into. I do think it is often a helpful comparison when used to explain and even justify an exposed style of puppetry manipulation in disbelief is and the presence of the puppeteer somehow amplifies the puppet’s power. However, while Bunraku shares qualities with the work I do, I think of my work as growing out of the almost universal urge and practice of creating mimetic movements in human-like objects for narrative purposes (and others). Unlike Bunraku practitioners, puppeteers such as British artist, Renee Baker work very spontaneously and responsively with objects and materials that are ubiquitous and improvised—very different than the Bunraku puppeteers. The objects often drive the movements and stories rather than being fabricated to the specifications of a pre-established script.

stuffing allowed the doll to respond—the overstuffed doll was stiff and unyielding. There is something about room under the fabric like room under the skin for things to shift; it's like there is space for breath under the skin, which is so necessary for the doll to move as a result of being inhabited by that breath.” What results from all this research is the piece, and also knowledge. Some of this knowledge cannot be put into words, at least not adequately. In the tender tactility of manipulating that doll, I was able to experience the same tenderness and touch. I was able to be slow and be deliberate. As Audre Lorde says, “I am deliberate and afraid of nothing.” The ability to move and breathe without being rushed or reactive took time. I struggle with it still. But in those few moments of deliberation and presence, I felt I was not afraid of anything in a way that I could not take on.

I never set out to do a *puppet show*, and by this I mean a show in which the curtain rises and puppets march out and perform. When Skipitares was asked about her bold entry into puppetry, without the weight of tradition, she said:

[If I were starting now] I would be so aware of something like that and how it might work and how original it is, or how skillful I would be at it. I mean it is so different now, but then I was really just extending myself. That's what I was doing. There were so many unconventional things I did with figures then because I didn't know about puppetry and I wasn't interested. That interest developed later.⁵⁷²

Like Skipitares, I come from other traditions, and the story I wanted to tell with the cloth doll was a story about me telling the story and struggling to do so. I wanted to be in the work so my figures would find their most meaningful integration through the structure of co-presence. Literally signifying *being with*, this phrase is used in puppetry to describe a current aesthetic, practical, and ontological tactic in which visible manipulators and other human actors appear

⁵⁷² Theodora Skipitares, interview with the author, February 28, 2016.

with puppets.⁵⁷³ Having both the objects and myself in the same space creates compelling narrative dynamics and also adds meanings embedded in the meta-narrative of my presence. This is a space in which my work crosses genres, including aspects of both theater and performance art: my real body in real time and real space.

Movement and narrative unfolding over time has always been something I wanted to achieve in my work. Even in my previous sculptural work, I tried to include a sense of movement, time, and narrative. I attempted this through installation and filling a room with so many vignettes that one would need to spend time experiencing the unfolding of the story and the layering of visual information. This was the case in the multiple iterations I installed of *Persephone's Cortege*—a room-sized, processional installation of ceramic and mixed-media figures led by a grieving Demeter as her daughter Persephone descends in a chariot (in Greek, a *metaphor*). It was ultimately more gratifying to make the pieces and to assemble and arrange them than to have them displayed. Even the wet clay, manipulating an arm or gently coaxing a different expression on a face, had a power that the fired objects lost. They became like brittle shadows of my ideas. I realized that kinetic articulations were seeds of characters and stories and what I most desired was a time-based narrative: objects, movement, character, and text led me into a sort of inevitable puppetry.

*****DEMETER and the DOILY WARS*****

It was through the combination of my figures and my stories that I made sense of a very hard time in my life. The heartbreak and guilt about separation from my children pitted my own

⁵⁷³ Mateusz Borowski and Malgorzata Sugiera, eds., *Fictional Realities/Real Fictions. Contemporary Theatre in Search of a New Mimetic Paradigm* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 14.

need to survive against a deep self-hatred. While this sounds dramatic, I think most of us experience the deepest existential struggles. Beauvoir would not doubt me, nor would Rich. Also, having come out as a lesbian in midlife created a lot of upheaval and efforts to find connections through which to understand who I was—one of the many people who I was, because if nothing else has become clear through this dissertation’s exploration of identity and subjectivity, it is clear that we are not just one thing. Our being is like the verb *being*, not the noun. Our being is a becoming, a situation, and a doing. We exist as interactions with other forces, even seemingly inert ones such as clay and dirty dishes. Also certainly with people, and none more than family and intimate partners. For a mother, though, having intimate partners is a fraught proposition. It may be natural but it is not culturally so—and yet it is ubiquitous. It is not, however, stories we tell. “The mothers’ boyfriend” is a phrase we hear on the news in unfortunate circumstances and seldom otherwise. “The mother’s girlfriend” is something we never hear. Yet these stories exist in all their complexity, not unlike those of families of all sorts. *The Mothers of the Bestiary* started with this gesture—to allow the mother to be bestial and abject. Following is an edited version of a piece I wrote and published in *Puppetry International* about my practice and that piece.

*****A SPLIT BROOM FOR LEGS⁵⁷⁴*****

At forty-five or forty-eight I thought, “How am I going to claim that what I do is *puppetry*?” I am not a virtuosic manipulator—I am a middle-aged woman with a few stories. But it started with an ongoing creative investigation that I have come to collectively call *The Mothers*

⁵⁷⁴ This is based on a piece that I wrote in 2015. It is striking how consistent my preoccupations have been. I now, perhaps, have better language to explore them but they remain quite similar.

of the Bestiary. It continues today, performed in various forms. I keep returning to it because there is still more story there. In fact, I just performed a new version at a motherhood studies conference in February 2018. I performed in the dark behind a screen with colored puppets of my children and the mothers of the bestiary: the ape mother, the pelican mother, among others, real and invented. I craft them all and the lands they come from. How many miles from Babylon? Pliny would want to know.⁵⁷⁵

Craft is a word I grew up with. At home we did crafts at the kitchen table. In graduate school it became a word that scared me; I don't sew well or have the patience to sharpen a carving tool in this compulsive state of making. What I see in my mind can't be brought to life through meticulous skill. Maybe there is some reassurance that, unlike the Middle Ages with their guilds and apprenticeships, I can take heart in the feminist thought on craft that pushes back against hierarchy to say that, just maybe, "Quality in art might be that element that *moves* the viewer [*italics added*]." ⁵⁷⁶ I all but gave up on trying to fire clay, preferring the uncooked immediacy and open pores of concoctions that included paper or glue or cattail fiber.

As my life was interrupted and my place in the world became unclear, I found myself in the odd psychological process of accumulating things in inverse correlation to the stability of any home. Listening to Jane Bennet describe the power of things for the hoarder, I could empathize,

⁵⁷⁵ In a time of limited possibility for travel, Pliny the Elder was one of the first to catalogue what he called the *monstrous races*, sometimes called the Plinian races. They were creatures like cyclops and others with feet in odd places and faces on their stomachs, etc. Thought to be real, their native lands were mapped in relation with an often mis-locating of the city of Babylon. See Michael Seymour, *Babylon: Legend, History and the Ancient City* (I.B. Taurus, 2014), 89-90.

⁵⁷⁶ Lucy Lippard quoted in Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 4. 153.

maybe more that empathize with the comfort of stuff.⁵⁷⁷ It was like I was shoring up against the sense that the winds of uncertainty might simply blow me away. I felt a comfort in the cast-off objects from the by-the-pound thrift store. I was always in a mindset of dumpster diving for pieces of wood and abandoned doll parts, not really knowing where I was going to be. Was I building momentum with all the objects filling multiple boxes or bags of catch-alls? And yet out all of this illogical frenzy there emerged a cast of emblematic figures. The material has a message and a use.⁵⁷⁸ I spend the most hours crafting the faces from materials like needle-felted wool. The meditative pricking at the shadow below the lower lip, the subtle animal smell, the way the wool depresses under my thumb and rebounds like real flesh, the way it spreads light around its form gratify me equally to the hours spent. I often leave them in the natural color, for just as Athena might have been polychrome, the ages have washed her to a timeless stoic ivory. The materials I incorporate have a palimpsest quality with the *scriptio inferior* of other times and places, other uses. Objects come to me and I incorporate them into figures, in part because of their form, and in part because of their content. Just as the reliquary gives voice to the relic, the use of the cast-off is given “fresh testimony,” be it a potholder or steel wool.⁵⁷⁹

Slowly, *The Mothers of the Bestiary* has taken form as a performance consisting of a series of vignettes that include puppets and performing objects. It’s a negotiation. We, the puppets and I, negotiate a shared presence. We negotiate materiality. We negotiate success and failure. We negotiate a narrative. What can and will the object do? If the puppet’s arms don’t

⁵⁷⁷ Bennet Jane, *Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter* | The New School <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q607Ni23QjA>.

⁵⁷⁸ Herbert L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art*, (Broadview Press, 2004), 27.

⁵⁷⁹ Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art*, 36.

reach up high enough to scan the horizon, do I change the puppet? Do I change the story? Do I live with a puppet that cannot scan the horizon as she should? Could this gesture have a truth in it I neglected to imagine?

I think the roots of this series started even before my return to graduate school and the de facto *abandonment* of a home that happened in broken lurches and starts and stops. A divorce, then leaving two children to drive weekly across state lines for graduate school, and then the sale of the house. It probably started before the end of a marriage, though. Maybe some of it is older than my own children's births, but it *is* the mother in me and the ways I haven't been able to be that *thing* that has caused me to turn to those bestial mothers for comfort (or at the very least a tribe or a species).

The bizarre animal mothers of the medieval bestiaries are found among all the creatures recounted in those enormous illuminated tomes that detail the workings of the natural world and how we are like and unlike rocks, mandrakes, and the monstrous races. First an illustration and then a description of an animal mother's behavior. Then a metaphor. Then an allegory.

The pelican mother lives in the land of Egypt. The pelican mother loves ... loveth her children too much (is there ever too much?), but when the children be haught and begin to wax hoar, they smite the mother in the face: Smite! Smite! Smite! Many beaks and many smitings. The Pelican babies are never satisfied. They cry. They peck and peck at her. Until she gets fed up and she pecks them all to death. In the silence, she gets really sad. She hadn't meant to kill them. The grief is so great (I mean, it comes and it goes) such that on the third day, despairing, she pecks her own chest. Blood rushes forth spilling on the babies. Reviving them. They rise ungrateful to cry again.

And that is why the pelican (and the mother) is a symbol of self-sacrifice and ... of charity.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁸⁰ My version of a traditional story.

Motherhood's bizarre construct is illuminated for all to read as a powerful pedagogy; culture has always laid claim to mothers. But I look to them with solidarity as a way to cope with and claim the abjection and disgust that colors the mother once she departs from the holy and impossible path. And the only good stories are found off the path.

The *Mothers of the Bestiary* is a deeply personal exploration that I disguise in metaphor, allegory, myth, fairy tale, tall tale, and confessions that might not even be true, all gathered up in stories and objects and loosely bound into a performance. The puppets I make have shaped the telling of these tales: A broom becomes a woman and tells a story of a broom woman. The very morphology of the materials created her character. Materials are so much wiser about the story than I could be.

There's a woman with legs of broom ... decorative broom, the ribbon torn away, with a gap in the middle of the bristles that I helped along to make two legs. And she becomes the two-track trail woman, always sweeping parallel lines, never finishing the job. Because she has two legs—two lives, two destinies that never can reconcile, mother and woman (or lover or artist or...) never meeting and always a gap apart ... leaving the dirt of the world like a mountain range or a scar or a brush stroke. And what would be her soundtrack (beyond the words I have just told you)? The roar of the furnace, the creak of stairs, a song I made up in a bout of insomnia, the birds at 4 a.m., a love letter's close, or an angry text from my daughter? All of it offered up to Pliny to catalogue and categorize and draw the line of distance to her lands from Babylon.⁵⁸¹

And even before she was animated, she had been performed through her making, and traces of that performance speak materially. Be they carved, lashed, perforated, veiled, rough-stitched, stitched with care, puppets' bodies are sets of verbs ("Craft only exists in motion,"⁵⁸²)—each with a metaphor and each a relic of lived labor. There is a repetitive and compulsive quality to

⁵⁸¹ My song.

⁵⁸² Glenn Adamson, 4.

making ... the pricking of wool into a face, the wrapping and tying. In attaching, for example, I choose efficiency and gesture—the action itself becoming part of the aesthetic. Wrapping becomes a powerful way that functions to attach but also brings with it millennia of human activity: covering, tying on, layering, enclosing, enveloping, grouping, gathering, quantifying, swaddling, protecting, controlling, adorning, revealing, concealing, and, not least of all, redefining the shape of something. “At the heart of the idea of wrapping lies the great diversity of available materials, each with very different materialities.”⁵⁸³

I would be tempted to say that the primary content of the work is failure, which is all rage in postmodernism. But failure is luxury I cannot afford, and as the puppets attest, it is actually about a cobbled-together persistence and triumph. Every figure I made had a story and it was no coincidence that once I figured out what their tale was, I was struck by the uncanny and oddly familiar echo of some part of me.

In the beginning I thought I could simply make the objects and back away from them, and the potential to be animated would suffice, but gradually I realized my “objects” demanded to exist in time and space. I obliged, discovering the power was not in their potential without the actual punctuation of moments of *life*. Wrapping, stuffing, gluing, impregnating, drawing, fussing, stitching, poking, coating—there is a moment when I finally feel a certain connection with a figure I have been making. Materially, she has come into her own full existence. It’s not through perfection but through sufficiency—a rightness in tactility and metaphor. She has been taken just far enough to seem more real than I am. Is it the pencil line near the eye and the patch of wool on the side of the face that doesn’t fully match the rest? It agitates a bit, a quality that is

⁵⁸³ Susanna Harris and Laurence Douny. *Wrapping and Unwrapping Material Culture: Archaeological and Anthropological Perspectives*. (London: Routledge. 2016), 19.

so very human. I place my hands on “her” and sense the possibility of transferring my own presence over to her—through breath, through gaze, through belief. This is perhaps what Kenneth Gross describes in “The Madness of Puppets”:

It lies in the hand’s power and pleasure in giving itself over to the demands of the object, the curious will to make the object into an actor, something capable of gesture and voice, with a will of its own. (I call this a madness, but it could as well be called an ecstasy.) It will have something to do with the made puppet itself, so often a crude and disproportioned thing.⁵⁸⁴

I have that same feeling of self-conscious power, almost a touch of shame, that children feel animating a doll or toy when it suddenly seems public and observed. I am an *amateur*—from the Latin verb “to love”—and, Glenn Adamson tells us in *Thinking Through Craft*, one of the hallmarks of being an *amateur* is a “lack of critical distance from the object of desire.”⁵⁸⁵ I am thankful for this lack. I am a permanent and consistent *amateur*. I lack in manipulation skills as well, but the power of the material and the presence it evokes often means that the puppet doesn’t have to move a lot to speak. In our most human moments, we don’t move a lot. We watch a puppet in stillness and then we watch a puppet perform, the two informing each other.

If we needed to move a lot for meaning to occur, we would miss the powerful simplicity of gesture that Elina Gertsman describes in *Visualizing Medieval Performance*. The infrequent openings of the *vierges ouvranes*, the statues of the Virgin Mary with hinged doors that reveal the heavens and the drama of the crucifixion, allowed a dynamic viewing with tension heightened by the potential held in the mind in the form of memory and anticipation.⁵⁸⁶ Our

⁵⁸⁴ Kenneth Gross describes this in “The Madness of Puppets” in *Puppet: An Uncanny Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 182.

⁵⁸⁵ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 139.

⁵⁸⁶ Elina Gertsman, *Visualizing Medieval Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 96.

proprioceptive knowledge of materials and gravity is activated so we can read in them what is heavy and dense, what is soft, what has the resilience of skin. Our gaze is beyond tactile, like childhood fever dreams where we sense what we see so vividly—a dynamic viewing. Like the activation and transformation of other medieval ecclesiastical performing objects, theater brought awe.

Why do I think *my work* has anything to do with the Middle Ages? Grant Kessler says it was a time when objects were created to build “a cognitive relationship between the physical world and the heavenly realm beyond”; for me heavenly is just the supernatural space of awe where puppetry happens. Like in the Middle Ages, when materials were selected to negotiate between the world of matter and the world of the spirit, they function similarly for me in my secular mysticism.⁵⁸⁷ The accumulation of unspoken meaning derived from the very stuff they are made of, and the enduring residual memory of the performance of their making, impels them into life—with ready-story. Raw, unrefined, openly made by hand, for me this material humanity has a medieval quality from when, as Kessler says, “overt materiality force[d] the viewer to bridge the gap between object and image through the exertion of imaginative will.”⁵⁸⁸ Puppets’ material is made alive in the gap. Medieval objects such as the *vierge ouvrante*, as well as a general medieval sensibility, are alluring to me for many reasons. The bestiaries of the Middle Ages offer visual imagery that allow me to work with the monstrous *and* the domestic in a fanciful way. The colorful imagining and illustrative illuminating of the body allows a quasi-cartoonish way of dealing with real pain, real trauma, real anguish ... and folly. There is drama,

⁵⁸⁷ Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art*, 40, 29.

⁵⁸⁸ Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art*, 20.

and drama can be real. Part of mothering for me—actually many parts of mothering—are akin to wounds both metaphorical and real. By grounding painful experiences in images of a fantastical body—even a monstrous or chimeric body—the wounds become allegorical and I can abide with them. Sometimes I invent my own mothers, taking inspiration from the powerful material contained in the bestiaries:

The female ape always gives birth to twins, one of which she loves and the other she hates. When she carries her young, she holds the one she loves in her arms, but the one she hates she throws on her back where it clings to her. But the hunter comes. The ape mother, pursued, tires from running on two legs while carrying her two children; when she is in danger of being caught, she drops the child she loves in order to escape. The one she hates continues to cling to her back—it will never let go. The loved baby falls and the hated baby is saved. Every time.⁵⁸⁹

What is our response to this? A horror and loathing for her. A shameful familiarity?

Compassion? Even a little? And do we even remember that this mother was also the hated twin?

Failure has to have its welcome place in all this. Shame too. I have always had a problematic relationship with homemaking in the way I imagine it ought to look or rather in the way it has been imagined into my mind by others. I kept and keep house tenuously and with the exertion of something against one's nature. That struggle is evident in the makeshift construction and the mess of materials that define my puppets. The kitchen is a good place to make work. There, it is easy to impregnate wool with wax or boil it in coffee or Kool-Aid-mixed pomegranate juice. There is alchemy involved, and risk. When a figure isn't right it may require an irreversible step, such as dipping the head in shellac or cutting off the legs, like another of life's processes that alter us irrevocably.

⁵⁸⁹ My version of a traditional story.

And what of all my spolia? My by-the-pound story possibilities? The storage locker full of things I just can't discard—is it like some purgatorial space Bosch neglected to capture (or the behind the scenes) where bird heads waited to be paired with matched bodies before the stage manager says “You're on!”? Glenn Adamson says that in an effort to speak about humanity, artist Mike Kelley turned to thrift stores for his spolia of cast-off stuffed animals and handicrafts. They called to him because of their degraded state and invisibility. As raw materials they were full of pathos and unable to be elevated, but the struggle to elevate them is where we find the content of his work.⁵⁹⁰ They speak to the human condition in their ability to evoke both “sympathy and disdain.”⁵⁹¹ How often have we found ourselves gazing at others with that mix of emotion while knowing we, too, are held with disdain and yet redeemed with sympathy. The ape mother can tell you about this.

*****MOTHERS OF THE BESTIARY *****

(A Vignette from Another Version)

The bits of story and dialogues come to me in the middle of the night, when I am driving, while taking notes. I had been writing about a hard time with my younger daughter and a poem came about. In fact, I kept a temporary journal of the kitchen sink as a site of events for a couple weeks when things were hardest with her and the sink never stopped filling. In the section on matricentric feminism, I discuss how the mother's stories are often lost to the daughter's stories. This has not been the case for me. Motherhood has been far more impacting for me than daughterhood. The attachments and clashes I have with my own daughters have shaped me as

⁵⁹⁰ Adamson, 160.

⁵⁹¹ Adamson, 161.

much and in more urgent ways than my childhood, or so I seem to think. I see this as an ongoing piece: I have performed *it* (meaning things with the same title and the same format of loosely strung-together vignettes that explore the complexity, power, unease, abjection, and discomfort in motherhood). I incorporated the poem as a vignette in my last version. It was timely and I liked what I had written. This version of *Mothers of the Bestiary* was performed at the motherhood studies conference in St. Petersburg, Florida.

I had to fight there to get a dark space. While the conference was a feminist conference and other forms of knowledge and knowing were encouraged, finding support and accommodation for meaningful and nontraditional presentation of that work was much more challenging. I finally secured a dark space for this shadow puppet version. Most of my work is done down to the wire. This was no different. In the micro-trailer I rented the condensation from the room of the building beside it dripped all night onto the aluminum roof. Drip, drip ... but I was up anyway, recording some of the dialogue. It is painful to produce pieces under such pressure, but almost everything I have made has been done this way. The pressure that makes diamonds is an apt analogy because the pieces crystalize as my mind is able to focus on just that one thing. The dishes are left. I don't change clothes. I just make.

The vignette is at the end of a longer piece of several vignettes. The light comes on, illuminating the screen. From behind the little theater, I slowly spin a lazy Susan behind a shadow screen. The flashlight illuminates a small table on top which it rotates cinematically, closer then farther, passing us in its orbit. There are patches of weeds and we see their silhouettes as well. With my large hands, I proceed to stack small dollhouse dishes and cups and even tiny spoons onto the table as it slowly turns. Each time it comes around, one or two more are added. The stack grows as the audience hears:

What can I tell you about the kitchen sink?

(pause)

Except once again it has filled up.

The crowning glory, a small white glazed dish with a fudgsicle stick resting cocked to the side a pool of chocolate centered.

I open yesterday's thermos. The metallic finish holding the glare of uneaten squash and butter. Even now still lukewarm.

I place it directly under the faucet and let the power of the hot water lift it up and it flows everywhere. Mixes with coffee grounds, mixes with gray-tinted water.

She emerges from her room almost six feet tall and says, "Mom can you tie these?"

I kneel down without making eye contact.

I have a lump in my throat from fifteen-minute-old rudeness staged in that same spot... still lukewarm.

And there I am, knelt at her feet, watching myself, an atypical typical American mom at the feet of some adolescent queen she has birthed and raised. "Tight! And pull the lip up ... double knot."

Then "My back hurts so much," she adds, which makes me soften.

Almost six feet tall her upper back and shoulders round noticeably.

It isn't just the back that makes her not want to bend. She has pulled on pants she doesn't want to stretch or crease.

They stretch smooth across her hips and belly.

I stand up. She wraps her arms around me and smiles.

What did we just perform?

I don't know. I take the sponge in my hand and fill it with detergent and start the soapy orbits that leave each dish clean enough.

As I reach "I don't know," I begin to spin the lazy Susan faster and faster. The dishes fly off and clatter to the ground. Fade to black as my palm covers the light.

*****THE DOILY WARS*****

The few people who really mark us, mark us with and through very hard times—hard times that are often hard to sort out. Like collages, juxtaposed vignettes that last seconds or minutes carry so many layers of significance, somehow communicate a preverbal or presymbolic place of experienced understanding. That was what I tried to capture in *Doily Wars*: moments in

which that mixture of pain and awe is palpable, not describable; I wanted the audience to ache with awe as well.

The title comes from an absurd but painful dispute over—doilies. All that lacey fussing and labor to adorn the piece of cotton. The level of absurdity seemed to speak to something, many things, and while that is a story for another time, it is worth mentioning the piece here because it was transformative for me. I was attending Blair Thomas's Chicago International Puppet Festival and had a chance to take a workshop with David Commander, whose irreverent and nontraditional theater I admired after seeing him perform in a house setting in Minneapolis. David and Dan Kerr of the neo-futurists gave a workshop called "How to Multi-Task and Not Freak the F*ck Out"; it was transformative. I brought a few bags of objects and some images and a story fresh in my mind. They had us make work remarkably quickly and almost immediately perform it—twice in a row. Their value for the raw and their insistence that the audience come to see you mess up gave me permission to create a piece that was the seed of this. They were enthusiastic about the content and the rawness. I went back and began to work on it and it became a part of my MFA show.

The puppet I describe above, some of whose stuffing needed to be pulled out so she could breathe, was part of that piece that explored two tracks, one of mothering and one of the woman as a sexual subject, the two things entirely incompatible in our culture. The latter was explored through vignettes around a relationship I had that was part of my coming out. Thinking of Demeter and Persephone as well as Demeter *as* Persephone (since it is believed they were originally the same goddess), I explored the notion of the underground. I had read an absolving book by Thomas Moore called *Care of the Soul*, in which he talks about dysfunctional family. The prefix *dis*, he writes, is "the old Roman name for the mythological underworld." The family,

the place where the soul is crafted has connections to the underworld. “[The] Soul enters from below, through the cracks, finding an opening into life at the points where smooth functioning breaks down.”⁵⁹² This underworld is a part of each of our making. Each of us, to be full human beings, must at some point be open to the underworld. He states that good Demeter mothering must allow for this journey—essentially danger and unknown mysteries that take us to the edges of our experiences in order to know ourselves and be full. Mothering one’s self requires this as well.

I found a large round Victorian table by the roadside and flipped the top and put it on a lazy Susan. I filled it with peat moss and created an underworld. The vignettes mostly take place there. This is the world of that same puppet, the one whose legs bent at the hips so much better with half the stuffing removed. The figure, who each time I perform, is more stained and loose-jointed, awakens to find herself alone and, though she digs down, it is she who is below. The table rocks her when I slowly move it side to side with her breath. But the table could have all the violence of a storm when I spin it hard and fast. I could animate her sleeping body from below the mounds of peat moss; like the spring shoots pushing up through the earth, she is lifted and lowered with the pulse of the earth.

Also in this piece was a vignette that included paper dolls called the “Lesbian Dance Hall.” It was a tongue-and-cheek nostalgic revisiting of a lesbian club that existed briefly in Minneapolis when I came out. I used some images from National Geographic of some women dancing together in brightly patterned 1960s double-knit shifts. This piece involved lazy Susans

⁵⁹² Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul* (New York: Harper, 1994), 26.

as well. The simple rotation served as a powerful animation that dared the audience to believe that this simple gesture is all they could want.

*****SHERDS*****

Sherds is a short toy theater piece I developed for *Toy Theater After Dark*, at Open Eye Figure Theater in Minneapolis in the spring of 2017. It started with bits of broken porcelain dolls and the notion of sewing them to gloves in order to animate them. While this initial idea did not end up in the piece, the sheer fact that I remember it now with curiosity, as I write, is valuable and means that it will likely re-emerge as a strategy in a future piece.⁵⁹³ There *were* dolls and doll-like objects in the piece, but they were animated by moving the recording device, not the dolls. It was a different way of animating. My body was in the piece, but not as an object. I was hidden by the house and the dark. An iPod in my hand served as my eye, which transmitted my subjectivity to the audience through live-streaming the projection to a screen.

There was a sense of disconnect between body and sight. There was a sense of disconnect between material and virtual. There was a disconnect that heightened the illusory and unreliable act of remembering and also highlighted memory as creative, not merely factual. In the piece, the dollhouse has some internal lighting, but it is lit primarily by a flashlight traveling along with an iPod that films the world inside, showing an interior through a process that is distorted, disorienting, close up then pulling away, then holding, then sweeping in a panorama, never giving a clear view and never under the audience's control. The effect created is just like the

⁵⁹³ The image is morphing now as I write—the rhizomatic destiny of any object in the imagination—an example of intra-active thing-power.

images in memory and even recent dreams that flee and dissolve, just when we would try to hold them still for inspection.

This piece certainly references doll play in the most literal sense. The stories, from childhood, are located in the childhood domain of the dollhouse, a metaphor for the child's mind and the child's sense of drama and the *real*. I take advantage of the jarring disconnect between the large projection and the miniature world and the spectator's tenuous ability to sustain both truths.

This piece relates strongly to much of what I wrote in the autoethnography section. The reader might recognize references. The vignettes I include are like sherds (and shards), fragments that act as a metonymy for the larger magical pain of childhood with larger personal and cultural narratives. Like the way that dolls crystalize episodic memory, objects appeared to me that could help me tell the story materially as well as in words.

(Blackout)

Stage right there is a large dollhouse facing inward. An isolated spotlight hits the front, which is cream-colored and highly textured. There are a few windows, bare or with curtains, through which a glow emits. I am standing behind the house.

Inside there are rooms but also landscapes. Tiny rows of corn create fields and culverts, there is a wooded area. There are rooms representing scenes from many houses, not just mine. It is surreal and mixed media. Some of it is believable and other parts are not. It has a lot of dirt in some of the rooms and some roots growing down, giving the feeling of being underground.

For the cues I sing the chorus of "Lemon Tree." It was a song I listened to a lot as a child on an old Peter, Paul, and Mary album. I wanted something that left the audience feeling nostalgic and slightly uneasy. That melody seemed to be right.

The show begins. I enter and lift the flap over the projector and go behind the house and the lights come up on the house. On the screen the audience sees rows and rows of corn and a black pick-up truck on a gravel road. All of this is built in the attic of the dollhouse. As the voice starts, the camera begins to move, exploring the house and landing on images that in some way relate to the stories.

(Sing the chorus of “Lemon Tree” twice.)

*“I always thought they were saying shard ... the bits of ceramics you find where people lived. Later I learned it was Sherd—and they are just slightly different. shard means broken and having sharp edges.
a sliver, splinter, shiver, chip, piece, bit, particle
‘a shard of glass in her heel!’
sherd is also broken but also brittle ... and artifact
a sherd is a fragment and ‘an important piece of the evidence’
a piece or part of a whole;
separated from the whole
zoologically and by that I mean poetically and it can also be
a. the scale of a fish
b. a shell, as of an egg or snail
c. the hardened forewing of a beetle*

None of the names have been changed. We are all innocent.”

(Sing “Lemon Tree”)

Innocent

“The hot space above the garage at Melanie’s house had all her mom’s old prom dresses and her dad’s magazines.

Mel and I ran away down to the culverts at the edge of town. We were going to live there and get money from the bank uptown for food and stuff. Mel’s dad found us with his pick-up. He hit her hard and threw her bike in the back then yelled at me, ‘Cece... you get home.’ I biked home.”

(Sing “Lemon Tree”)

The Girl

“Walking home from school, Mel pointed to a girl walking in the shadows of the trees across the street. She said, “You see her? She fucked with a boy and got pregnant. I couldn’t understand how that could happen just from sticking your middle fingers up.”

(Sing “Lemon Tree”)

Widowers

“There was a house by the lake and the man’s wife died and he took all the curtains down forever.

The janitor at our school burned his trash and once he threw in a spray paint can. It exploded and the pieces of metal burned deep into his body. He was also a widower.”

(Sing “Lemon Tree”)

Dangers

“We had a cistern behind the house. It was deep and full of old furniture and branches covered over with some boards. You had to stay away or you could fall in.

One time my mother’s leg broke through the second floor wooden heat vent. Tony and I were downstairs on the couch when we saw mom’s leg come through the ceiling. We laughed and laughed. It was purple and cut up. I think she must have cried before she came down to cook dinner.”

(Sing “Lemon Tree”)

Places

“We had forts all over. We had sites all over. One was the basement—the foundation of an old house that was never built or burned down. A forest grew inside of it and there were still suggestions of walls and rooms. ‘Meet you at the foundation’ or ‘the platform’ we would say.... One was in a grove out by the corn fields. The evangelical pastor’s son named it Spooky Saucer Surface because it looked like aliens had landed and flattened all the tees.”

(Sing “Lemon Tree”)

C

“The Clemenson sisters never really played with Mel and me but one time they did. We were up in their fancy bedroom feeding sweet tarts to our dolls and they discovered they had all been born by C-section—Mel too! They made a club for girls who came out of their mother’s tummies. I couldn’t be in it because I came out of my mother’s butt.”

(Sing “Lemon Tree”)

The Bridge

“Emmett and I used touch tongues in the attic and show each other our parts. But then he told the Javens brothers about it. They chased after me—show it to us! Show it to us! I ran ... I ran faster. Under the bridge, I could hear their feet on the planks above and ... my own heart.

(pause)

The town was small and we went where we wanted as long as we were home when the whistle blew. Years later I heard my sister angrily say ‘Mom let us skate near open water—I skated near open water!!’ It was only recently I understood what she really meant.”

(Sing “Lemon Tree”)

Sherd

“Dad only took us places once in a while. Once it was to explore an abandoned farm house. I found a bit of a china cup. A single flower. I took it home. Mom said ‘Joe, they could have fallen through the floors!’

I used to dream about falling down escalators. I used to dream about leaping for chandeliers and missing. I used to dream about things deep down in holes.”

(Sing “Lemon Tree”)

Salamanders

“We weren’t allowed to play at the abandoned mink farm that was just across the street—but we did. My mom thought rabid minks might still be left there from when the farm was going. The sheriff’s kid whose last name was Finger broke in and had dirty

magazines hidden in the loft. Running along the broken cages there were shadows from the trees and cicadas. Behind the boarded-up buildings there were deep holes and I wasn't too afraid to reach my hand down and grasp around for salamanders."

(Sing "Lemon Tree")

Water

"My brother climbed the town's tall water tower. I was too scared.

Hippies stopped at the lake one day and asked our parents if they could draw on us with markers. They said 'ok.'

A boy drowned in the rushing stream one year before I was born. My mother said they made a human chain to try to pull him back to safety."

(Sing "Lemon Tree")

Bess

"Bess next door was sixty when I was six. We used to watch TV together: Lawrence Welk and Starsky and Hutch. We were best friends. She had one son who never came to visit. She told me that once at the Javens' house, before they lived there, someone said something bad about Jesus and the next morning all the pictures were upside down."

(Sing "Lemon Tree")

Mel

"One time Mel's dad hitched up all our wagons to his four-wheeler and pulled us around town. That night she said I could sleep over in his new camper but my mom said no. He left the next day and never came back."

(Lights down. Sing the chorus of "Lemon Tree" twice.)

(End)

****THE BODY****

In 2017, I had a chance to attend a workshop with Mervyn Millar at the National Puppetry Conference hosted at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center. The workshop was called "Signs of Life, Exploring Psychological and Neurological Phenomena through Objects and Puppets." The workshop covered concepts of embodiment. We talked about phantom limbs and empathy, about brain scans that included the hammer as part of one's own body while hammering. We created performances that attempted to create movement that would provoke emphatic sensations within viewers. After reading Djuna Barnes' powerful journalistic piece on the force-feeding many suffragists endured, I wanted to test it out as a script for this kind of work. Creating a shortened version of "How It Feels to Be Forcibly Fed," I suggested we try it in a workshop given by Eric and Shoshona Bass of Sandglass Theater during the Puppeteers of America's Conference in St. Paul, MN, in 2017. Using one of my needle-felted dolls, several of us manipulated the rough wool-batting figure that was about half my height. The puppet body allowed undulating contortions that matched Djuna Barnes' descriptions of the trauma of the procedure. We became the forcers and also those who gave her humanity and struggle. The empathy produced by her writhing was not disrupted by *acting*; the figure was the truth of the sensations:

The pit of my stomach had lapsed long ago, had gone out into absolute vacancy... I, too, was detached and moved as the room moved. The doctor's eyes were always just before me. And I knew then that I was fainting. I struggled against surrender. It was the futile defiance of nightmare. My utter hopelessness was a pain. I was conscious only of head and feet and that spot where someone was holding me by the hips. Still the liquid trickled irresistibly down the tubing into my throat; every drop seemed a quart, and every quart slid over and down into space. I had lapsed into a physical mechanism without power to oppose or resent the outrage to my will. The spirit was betrayed by the body's weakness.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁴ Djuna Barnes. "How it Feels to be Forcibly Fed."
https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/How_It_Feels_to_Be_Forcibly_Fed

IV. Conclusion: Ways Forward in the Practices of Thinking and Making (and Teaching)

The door itself makes no promises. It is only a door.

—Adrienne Rich⁵⁹⁵

As I said in my foreword, this project is really about a way forward. Writing this dissertation has given me an opportunity to revisit what my trajectory has been and to recall the various themes that have mattered in my making. I have uncovered ideas that weren't developed but still hold potential. It has also given me a chance to see that there are enduring preoccupations and connections that continue to ground and drive my work.

In my extended investigation into feminism, corporeality, sexual difference it has become clear to me that the entwining of these three, particularly as is done in new materialism, is meaningful to me as a scholar and artist. Women's relationship with embodiment and subjectivity are at the core of this project; I remain committed to centering women's stories in relation to dolls and puppets. In the section on play, I discussed Gayatri Spivak's strategic essentialism. Like Moi, Spivak is motivated to find a way in which the category of woman, which has at times seemed so beaten down with challenges and demands, can serve as I need it to here to address a certain type of oppression—one that comes from not having one's work and lives seen and, by the same token being denied the imago of one's own sex in the roles, positions, and narratives that encourage one to aspire. It is the oppression of the quotidian practice of othering that happens throughout the arts, including puppetry. Without the word woman (and the ability to assume the shared meaning reflected by how we actually use it in the

⁵⁹⁵ From Adrienne Rich, "Prospective Immigrants Please Note," in PBS broadcast April 6, 2017, <https://billmoyers.com/story/adrienne-richs-prospective-immigrants-please-note/>.

language and cultural conditions in which I am writing this, I cannot do this work. Without the ability to strategically essentialize, to talk about commonalities of experience that enough women share to create such generalizations, with a specific and situation-bound purpose, I am afraid that women will not be able to do this kind of scholarship or that they will become so burdened with cautious and laborious articulations that they will be less productive and their work less powerful. I am not willing to accept that outcome.

There are other perils when researching women's history. Amelia Jones points out that art historical accounts of Dada fetishize the objects and that this approach potentially underrepresents the performative quality; we *objectify* puppets and masks, missing the performativity which is where these objects make the meaning they do with regard to gender and politics.⁵⁹⁶ It may also miss the performativity of making which could potentially be a more powerful and meaningful experience for the maker than the end use. It also depends on welcoming in new knowledge in the arts, that flesh out the work not included in museums. We must be careful that in our efforts to find examples, ones whose forms have been that validated as worthy of fine arts consideration, that we approach women's lives with a myopic view, looking for compelling objects and reducing what we see to these. If there is not a rich wealth of examples, then we risk reifying a woman's marginalization by pointing over and over to what amounts to a scarcity and hence and impoverishment. This is a lesson to myself as well. As much as I struggle to make work that enters the puppetry community's field of vision, my life cannot be defined by my acknowledgement or reception.

⁵⁹⁶ Amelia Jones, "'Women' in Dada: Elsa, Rose, and Charlie," in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

One of the largest questions for me is about the return and/or persistence of autobiographical content and how that might take shape. I have in part felt less interested recently in my own personal stories—the very things that motivated me to start making performances. There is some grief in moving away from my intimate stories. It is a sort of farewell to a certain way of being in the world and wondering what the new way might be. At the same time, I see many stories and references from my life: the vignette about my daughter and a flip doll I made this past year that represented a bitter fight between my other daughter and me. Maybe there is more autobiographical content here. Also, maybe there is another way for autobiography to enter the universal and the theoretical, pursuing something akin to fictocriticism where the quotidian and the personal illuminate the theoretical. Perhaps it is simply understanding that autobiography always enters my work because the story is part of my own subjectivity. We are at a moment when arts-based research practices and performances of research outcomes and fictocritical expositions are finding places in academia and beyond. This way of working that allows artistry and intellectual curiosity to be showcased in life and work fit well with the often competing but ultimately complimentary passions I have and that have been evidenced in this dissertation.

Something that has shifted is the ultimate purpose of my work. No longer needing it to figure myself out or to survive, it has been suggested to me by a Jungian analyst that as women age, our libidinal forces (meaning pertaining to life) change and orient us outward—towards the community. This crone mentality might manifest itself in more overtly political work addressing the social justice causes I feel committed to, such as the conditions for women and girls around the globe and here in the United States.

In my teaching, I would like to develop skills in facilitating people's creation of puppet works, both in the mechanical and material making, but also in breaking through their hesitation around this medium as I have. I am also curious about whether we can learn about certain abstract theories together by making puppet work, not for the end of performing but for the embodied experiences of a text. For a recent call for workshops I proposed the following:

Lead an experiential and collaborative workshop for about six to eight people, including myself, combining the methodologies of feminist epistemology and new materialism which would allow the participants as a group to use puppetry to analyze and understand aspects of a scholarly text that includes, for example, phenomenology. In this case, it would be a short section of Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*. The aim is to create new knowledge as well as new kinds of knowledge and new concepts of what knowledge can be, by thinking using materials and our bodies. Our work would be a response to her ideas through making (a material engagement with her ideas). The end result could be some sort of spontaneous collaborative performance or simply a repository of embodied ideas from the experience that participants have integrated and take with them.

The workshop organizers wished me luck.

I plan to continue to engage with new materialism, discovered through this dissertation, and the theorists I have explored here, seeking a renewed place from which to work for change by regrounding *woman* in the material phenomena of an embodied, sexually-different subject. Moving to more contemporary work, or perhaps going back further in the past, I may find interesting ways to build on this work. Still, there is much to be studied within modernism. I have been exploring how I can do performances that share research and or explore my ideas relating to theory. It seems that in the academy people have begun to embrace forms such as autoethnography and fictocriticism. The personal literally enlivens the theory and research content. Ultimately, though, I want to create something that takes people on a journey that is visual and aural—sensory—and that celebrates magic and the mind the way we do when we imagine our way through texts. I think that puppets and performing objects can do this. Puppet

theory? Could it be a thing? For the workshop I applied for, I wanted to create performances around theories of woman and a body marked as female. I described it as giving body—or concreteness—to the abstraction of these ideas. I wanted it to be compelling as art, though, as well and assured the organizers that I planned to blend song and story. I promised a range of affective qualities, heavy and light, and serious and silly (or at least playful). As goals I stated to entertain and educate and illuminate and confuse.

I will continue to make work in the context of my investigation into the articulation of the poetic relationship between dolls and puppets and the female material body, looking at the making (and using of these objects) by women as an important part of the project of feminist theory. A next project I envision is a puppet version of the *Second Sex*, testing what of the long text can be captured and communicated with beauty and magic so that it isn't lost to this generation of young women who, in few cases, will read all 500 pages of the book.

When I asked Theodora Skipitares why she has stayed committed to puppetry, a field she never planned to enter, she says that it is the *truest medium* for her work, which is narrative and time-based. She is a storyteller and collagist. Through puppetry she is able to make a world that defies physical limitations and can be at once both magical and real. The puppets she makes embody the abstract, but they also make the real take more fanciful flight. This holds true for me as well. This is the medium that has most resonated with me—accommodating my love of making objects and imagery and telling stories. As the field of puppetry expands, there is space to do new types of work while connected to a tradition that is ancient and universal. There is a community that supports that work. I believe that these doll-objects can and do stand next to discursive theories of subjectivity; the doll-object is part of a larger and powerful poetics of woman—a necessary source if women are to continue to craft a subjectivity that is not *other*.

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