

# Why Are There No Great Women Net Artists?

Vague Histories of Female Contribution  
According to Video and Internet Art

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## **Preface: Rethinking histories of media authorship**

This essay began as an effort to understand reasons for the lack of female representation in web-based art, and grew into a survey of locating practices in comparison to the successes of historical precedents from the 1970s onwards.

Any attempt to analyze a lineage of cultural production from the history to the present contemporary and historical performances cannot happen without generalizations, tangents and foreshortened reflections of previous theories with a skeptical postmodern lens. I am aware that not all artists mentioned in this essay may not identify as feminists and do not intend to mark their contribution as distinctively “feminist” by genre. I choose to compare notable contributions of women in past and present throughout video and internet art history to reconcile an ongoing question about the underrepresentation of women in art. Therefore, this is a three-part essay that explores:

- 1) the history of women’s achievements in video and internet art
- 2) Identification of ongoing problems in representing women and feminist performance in the western artistic canon
- 3) A brief look at social/institutional determinants and constraints that have affected the chances of women with web-based practices entering exhibition spaces

I call this a vague history as my research and examples were culled from online searches, web browsing, and conversations and debates with women and art historians. Therefore, this study performs the two-tailed function of surveying an always-incomplete history of women’s contribution in media arts, and a speculation on the potentials for rethinking curating video and internet art with context-aware approaches to gender analysis.

## Introduction

Since the women's liberation movement, various gains and losses have occurred in regards to the representation of women in art.<sup>1</sup> In its infancy, women artists co-opted video as a mass medium for channeling affective and durational realities. Eventually, the migration of video to immaterial digital format and the decentralized distribution of the internet has had implications for its curation and appreciation. While sexism in the art world is not new, the popularization of "web 2.0" technologies have allowed a previously readerly cyberpublic to become active contributors to online content.<sup>2</sup> The ongoing sexism that I am speaking of is most manifest in patterns of art distribution and opportunities; it is not limited to the "gender pay gap" as feminists would call it. In a research statement released in 2009, the National Endowment for the Arts reported that women artists tend to earn 75% of what male artists earn. By tracing a history of disparate moments in which female voices and contributions were recognized in the media arts, I will compare previous feminist efforts and existing works by women to uncover the causes for the ongoing underrepresentation of women in internet art.

To set the stage for this inquiry about representation of a group within a specific genre (woman internet artists), I would like to define feminism as a method of asking questions about female perspectives in relation to traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity. It is not sexism, nor is it a subject position.<sup>3</sup> In 1972, Linda Nochlin's seminal essay "Why are there no great women artists?" claimed that cultural and educational institutions prevented women artists from advancing equally as male artists.<sup>4</sup> Almost two decades later in 1996, Steve

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<sup>1</sup> I mean representation in terms of gallery representation, as well as media and artistic representations by women of themselves.

<sup>2</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, "National Endowment for the Arts Issues Research Note on Women Artists: 1990 to 2005", December 2, 2008.  
<http://www.nea.gov/news/news08/WomenArtists.html>

<sup>3</sup> Evelin Stermitz. "Artfem.tv: Feminist artistic infiltration of a male net culture" Video Vortex Reader II, Edited by Geert Lovik and Rachel Somers Miles. 2011. Institute of Networked Cultures: Amsterdam.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Nochlin. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews* January 1971: 22-39, 67-71. In 1971, Linda Nochlin argued that institutional constraints (educational and artistic)

Dietz likened the state of net art (interchangeably called “net.art” at the time) in the museum or gallery to the marginal state of feminist art perspectives before 1970s in “Why are there no great net artists?”<sup>5</sup>

Despite increased interactivity in terms of participation, feedback and peer-review on social media, the potentials for mediocracy through content sharing cannot be mistaken for non-exclusive participation and mass reception. The ironies of technology’s impetus to enhance communication backfire when every user becomes engrossed in esoteric interests that are driven by their own content syndication systems (RSS feeds, YouTube and tumblr subscriptions).<sup>6</sup> In response to Dietz and Nochlin’s rhetoric, I will examine contributions that women have made to media arts at disparate moments in art history to contemplate possibilities for greater inclusion in alternative curatorial models.

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prevented women artists from achieving the levels of success compared to that of male artists in historical discourse.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Dietz, *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?*, CADRE, November 30, 1999. [http://www.walkerart.org/gallery9/webwalker/www\\_042300\\_main.html](http://www.walkerart.org/gallery9/webwalker/www_042300_main.html)

<sup>6</sup> Douglas, Susan J. The Irony of Technology. *American Quarterly* 58.3 (2006) 619-638. [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american\\_quarterly/v058/58.3douglas.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_quarterly/v058/58.3douglas.html)

Todd Gitlin, “Public sphere or public spericules?” *Media, Ritual, and Identity*. Edited by Tamar Liebes, James Curran, and Elihu Katz. Routledge: New York. 2002



## Early feminist video

In the late 1960s, the second wave feminist movement coincided with a significant introduction of female voices into video art in North America (along with an increase in female literacy levels, spending power, and sexual liberation following the innovation of the birth control pill). Women artists used video as a medium for asserting issues that were relevant to their personal lives. For women, the politics of presenting the self and the personal in a mass medium such as television was integral to being heard in addition to being seen as more than a sexualized subject. During this period, endurance-performance, storytelling (which inform the modern day confessional vlog), reenactment and reappropriation was common amongst female videomakers.



Fig. 1. Lisa Steele, *Birthday Suit-With scars and defects*, 1974.

Women artists introduced personal politics in the intimate and immediate medium of video after the advent of the PortaPak in 1965. They performed with their bodies, with their lovers, friends and children, to the eye of the camera. Turning the camera on themselves, artists such as Lisa Steele and Marina

Abramovic used their bodies to address its potentials for injury and transgression. In *Birthday Suit-With Scars and Defects* (1974), Steele presents her own body in a clinical manner, verbally recalling a bodily memory of by chronologically tracing the dates and causes of all the scars on her naked body. In *Backwards* (1992), Cathy Sisler sits topless with her back to the camera while stoically reading a childhood story about her father's comments on her broad back. Extending performance on video to a spatial dimension, Ana Mendieta's earth-body sculptures explored the connection of the self to the world and the presence of the body in the process of artmaking.

Video became a vehicle for personal and political visibility. By addressing the camera in a confessional or actively gazing manner, women imparted agency in telling the stories of their lives in the way they would like to be represented. Such a direct mode of address shifts over the course of the next two decades as MTV debuts in 1981 and YouTube in 2005. With the varying representations of women came a greater degree of revolt, parody and subversion.

Comparisons could be drawn between the communication of intimacy and interiority in historical video and also web 1.0 net.art. Olia Lialina's website, *My Boyfriend Came Back From the War* (1999), utilizes multiple frames with hypertextual links require viewers to click-through in the private interaction on their internet browser.<sup>7</sup> The narrative of a relationship after her hypothetical boyfriend who returns home from war is made deliberately awry through the splitting of frames upon the viewer's selection of a particular outcome. On a similar formal vein of luring the viewer to click to unravel a fragmented narrative of image and text, Tina Laporta's *DISTANCE* (1999) pairs glitching webcam pictures with poetically labeled hyperlinks to explore intimacy over the internet.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Krystal South's *Overcoming Depression and Advancing to the Next Level* combines affirmative statements with faded grey text that darken upon

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<sup>7</sup> Olia Lialina, *My Boyfriend Came Back From the War*. 1996. <http://www.teleportacia.org/war/>

<sup>8</sup> Tina Laporta. *Distance*, 1999, New Radio and Performing Arts, Inc., turbulence.org  
<http://www.turbulence.org/Works/Distance/>

cursor movement over the text. Here the artist uses properties inherent to web-based text coding to convey ambivalent emotions.<sup>9</sup>

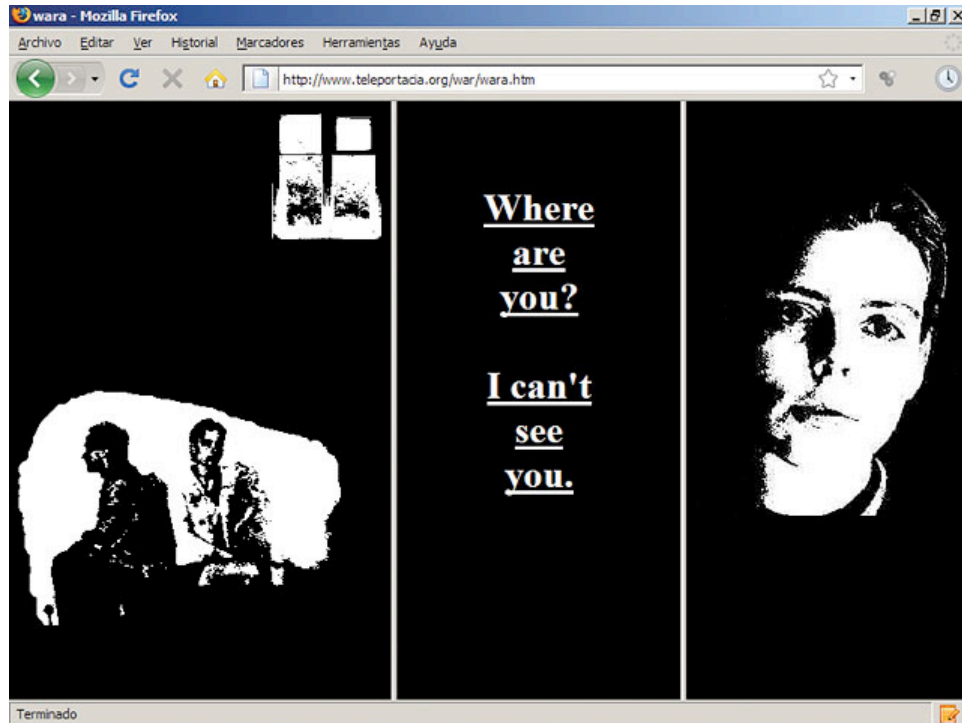


Fig. 2. Olia Lialina, *My Boyfriend Came Back From the War*, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Krystal South, Overcoming Depression and Advancing to the Next Level, <http://www.krystalsouth.com/depression.html>



Fig. 3. Marina Abramovic, *Rhythm 10*, [1973], "The Star", 1999.

However, despite video's potential for empowerment and storytelling, canonized feminist video have highlighted dialectics of gender with regards to the "nature" of a woman" (Bovenschen 37) as sensual, personal, and emotive.<sup>10</sup> When such characteristics are placed in opposition to those of traditional masculinity (as stoic and rational), the regime of representing women in feminist video programs become stereotypical and patronizing. Conversely, Marina Abramovic's performances always express a disciplined composure. In *Rhythm 10* (1973), she lays out 20 sharp objects and repeatedly stabs them between the spaces of her splayed fingers. She records the sounds of herself completing the task, listens to the track, and reperforms the actions to mimic previous moments of injury. By acting in a task-driven and ritualistic manner, Abramovic motivates viewers to forget one's imagination of her as a woman, and acts as a performer. She is first an artist, and then a woman.

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<sup>10</sup> Silvia Bovenschen. "Is there a feminine aesthetic?" Translated by Beth Weckmueller, *Feminist Aesthetics*, Edited by Gisela Ecker. 1985

## From formal to figural: postproduction and the self

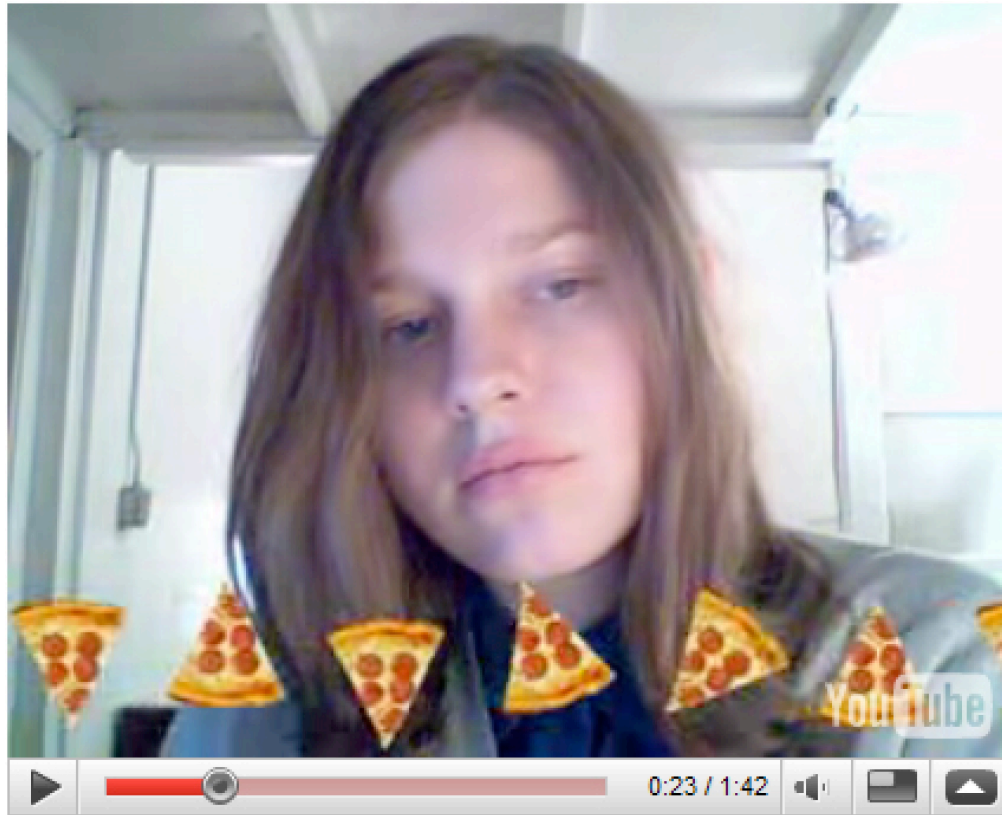


Fig. 4. Petra Cortright, *vvwebcam*, 2007.

Combining formal conventions with figural content, artists such as Joan Jonas consciously explored the properties of the medium in relation to the existing technical innovations during their time of making. In *Vertical Roll* (1972), the structural convention of transition by vertical roll is employed repetitively as a formal device throughout a twenty-minute performance. Accompanied by an equally pitchy noise that syncs to the movement of the transition, the constant fragmentation of the video image prevents the viewer from seeing Jonas completely. Similarly, Petra Cortright's webcam performances echo the tradition of presencing the self for the camera. Her youth, beauty and effortless play with webcam software addresses narcissistic properties of online video with amateur filters; in her videos she is often moving, dancing in a suburban or domestic environment. In *vvwebcam* (2007) she gazes at the camera while kitschy animations of wiggling pizzas and falling snow fly over her face. Both formal and

figural in practice with geometric gifs, Cortright's videos are exhibited more than her animated gif work. The interlace-glitch effects in *swickoof.mov* (2011) recall the conversion of formal gesture into a visual manifestation of manipulated signal in *Warp* (2000) and *Violin Power* (1978) by Steina Vasulka.



Fig. 5. Steina Vasulka, *Violin Power*, 1978.

Likewise, Brenna Murphy's *yinggyanghuman* (2011) utilizes rapid editing between recorded images of herself to address the variable properties of the digital medium.<sup>11</sup> As a contingency of globalization and the circulating of found media on the internet, Murphy decontextualizes the concept of yinyang from its original Chinese cultural semantics to comment on symmetrical mirroring of the self in post-production. Cutting back and forth between horizontally flipped images of herself, the mirroring recalls Valie Export's *Space Seeing – Space Hearing* (1973-74). Accompanied by audio signal, an image of a woman flips

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<sup>11</sup> Brenna Murphy, *yinggyanghuman*, 2011. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/brennaaaa/5472949494/>

back and forth symmetrically. In these pieces, Cortright and Murphy address the potential for infinite transformation of the self image by using readily available consumer software.<sup>12</sup> Working with the logic of reclaiming stereotypes with hyperbole and humor, young women create video that both contradict and open stereotypes of femaleness and sensuality as opposed to the deadpan descriptions of one's body and feelings in the seventies. However formulaic or simple, these works are notable their irreverence and play that departs from historical conventions of feminist video art.

### **Alternate personas: Cyberfeminism and gender play in 90s net.art**

Both Dietz and Nochlin lament the "silly question" their method of inquiry appeared to be during their time of writing. Likewise, my question appears silly and unmentionable on the Internet where gender and object relations appear collapsed in a networked context. Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" advocated for the eradication of male/female dyadic approaches to feminism. Haraway disproved traditional feminism, which posited women as underprivileged in relation to men. Instead, she emphasized communal action that would resolve divides between genders, between bodies and objects.<sup>13</sup> Because "We are all cyborgs," according to Haraway, users become agents of overthrowing existing power structures that oppressed the working individual.

Since the 1990s, women have used the internet as a medium for discussion and performance of the inarticulable in a public domain. Cyberfeminists sought to achieve equal technological footing to their programming male counterparts by ideologically infiltrating communication networks with sexually charged dissent. They posted their manifestos on mailing lists, message boards, and self-organized websites. "The Female Extension"

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<sup>12</sup> Nicolas O'Brien. "Hyperjunk: net art out of the past", Bad At Sports. April 12, 2011. <http://badatsports.com/2011/hyperjunk-netart-out-of-the-past/>

<sup>13</sup> Marisa Olson. "Viva Cyborg Theory" Rhizome, November 21, 2008. <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2008/nov/21/viva-cyborg-theory/>



(1997) arose as an intervention and response to the lack of female net artists, as well as the Hamburg Museum's attempt to institutionalize net.art. Cornelia Sollfrank wrote a program to combine internet search results and simulated over 200 international proposals to the Hamburg Art Museum in critique of a competitive call for submissions that treated "Internet as material and object".<sup>14</sup> Sollfrank's contribution occupied two-thirds of the submitted proposals that year. With the intention of creating disturbance in the submission system, she questioned the significance of even identifying the gender of the artist on the internet.

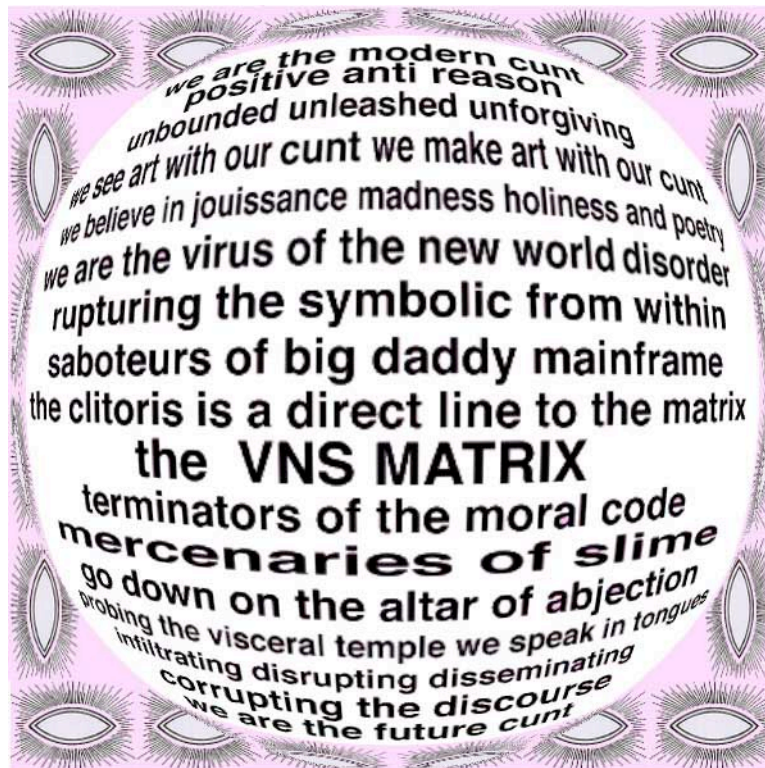


Fig. 6. VNS Matrix, *Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century* 1991.

Unlike the constantly revisited feminist writings by Nochlin and Haraway, many radical cyberfeminist movements and manifestos (VNS Matrix, Old Boys Network, Ciberfeminist.org) are overlooked by academic publishing and eclipsed by Haraway's theory. A flame war started when Ann de Haan posted "The

<sup>14</sup> Cornelia Solly, "The Female Extension", 1997.  
<http://artwarez.org/femext/content/femextEN.html>



Vagina is the Boss of the Internet” (1996) on to nettime mailing list; list moderators asked users who wanted to discuss cyberfeminism to do so in feminist communities such as Old Boys Network.<sup>15</sup> Early cyberfeminists acted antagonistically to masculine technological culture by appropriation and reclamation of misogynist terms in their manifestos. They built websites and infiltrated mailing lists, invading conventionally male-occupied domains of computing and coding. This ideology was suggested by VNS Matrix’s *bitch mutant manifesto*, part of which reads<sup>16</sup>:

“Trying to flee the binary I enter the chromozone which is not one

genderfuck me baby  
resistance is futile

entice me splice me map my ABANDONED genome as your project  
artificially involve me  
i wanna live forever  
upload me in yr shiny shiny PVC future

SUCK MY CODE”

Amongst many online alter-personas, a particularly notable female profile was Netochka Nezvanova, an online intervention artist and software writer who possesses multiple personae. As the author of audio-visual mixing software Nato.0+55, which would run on Max, a visual programming software. Described as “the most feared woman on the internet” by Katharine Mieszowski, Nezvanova threatened to withhold distribution of the popular audio-visual mixing software when she was banned from a Cycling ‘74 software community mailing list.<sup>17</sup> Users have not determined whether the user behind her profile is biologically female, but she is nonetheless a prominent female entity in the software

<sup>15</sup> Rachel Greene, "Web Work: A History of Internet Art", *ArtForum*, May 2000, 166. Ann de Haan, "The Vagina is the Boss on the Internet", *Net Time*, June 16, 1997. <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9706/msg00111.html>

<sup>16</sup> VNS Matrix, "bitch mutant manifesto". *Old Boys Network*. 1996. [http://www.obn.org/reading\\_room/manifestos/html/bitch.html](http://www.obn.org/reading_room/manifestos/html/bitch.html)

<sup>17</sup> Katharine Mieszkowski. "The most feared woman on the Internet", Salon.com, 2002. <http://dir.salon.com/story/tech/feature/2002/03/01/netochka/>

community. In arranged public appearances at award ceremonies, a different woman would always represent Netochka each time she agreed to appear in public, thus evading the need to reveal her true identity.



Fig. 7. Mouchette.org, 1996.

Similarly, Mouchette.org poses as the personal website of a thirteen year old girl. The website appears to titillate the curiosities of pedophiles (who were the subjects of a rising moral panic in the 90s). As the user navigates through the website by selecting radio buttons that ask them to make assumptions about the attention-seeking character of its author, closeups of feminine body parts (an ear, tied hair, a face with lips parted) appear, enlarged, across the background of each linked web page. Clicking on contextual links allow the user to “meet” each of Mouchette’s family members. In empty text fields that are provided on her website, users are invited to add to the mythology of Mouchette’s persona to explain how she may commit suicide. Thus, Mouchette.org plays upon the

narcissistic qualities of the interactive web 1.0 personal website.<sup>18</sup> Others that adopted multiple, fluid, and anonymous and deceptive personas include Keiko Suzuki and Lara Salinas.

In contrast to deliberately provocative cyberfeminist statements, net art by women currently appears questionably complacent or complex. A comparatively forthright exhibitionist persona is Ariel Rebel (intended for pronunciation as “a real rebel”). Filled with expletive status updates and gifs of dildos, glitter, and random online artifacts, her tumblr, ARIEL REBEL'S HAUNTED GRÄFENBERG SPOT is a mesh of porn, raunch culture and apathy that describes a indifferent mode to sexuality in light of the (re)sexualization of women after seventies feminism and MTV.<sup>19</sup> Although the persona has her own pornographic website (<http://www.arielrebel.com>), it is possible the user that runs these domains may not even be female-identified despite her virtual participation in an exhibition of net art at “Speed Show vol. 4: Super Niche” (2010).<sup>20</sup>

In comparison to durational and demonstrative performance on video, cyberfeminist art consisted of disruptive, argumentative and fluid performances that evaded categorization as a particular type of woman. (In Netochka Nezvanova's case however, her profile has been represented as a threatening entity due to her prolific intellectual presence.) On YouTube, highly viewed videos of the drunk or dancing girl reflects our popular desire to continue laughing and looking at women. In particular, the performing young woman is a trope that still receives much laughter and defamation. This is particularly

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<sup>18</sup> Mouchette. <http://www.mouchette.org> 1996.

Katya Bonnenfant. “Towards the anonymity of the artist” 2003. <http://www.katya-bonnenfant.com/annesophie/comments04.html>

<sup>19</sup> Rosalind Gill. “From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification: The Resexualisation of Women's Bodies in the Media”, *Mr. Zine*. May 23, 2009. <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/gill230509.html>

<sup>20</sup> jonCates. “tumblr fluidities, gender glitches + super niche haunts” Furtherfield, December 17, 2010. <http://www.furtherfield.org/blog/joncates/tumblr-fluidities-gender-glitches-super-niche-haunts>

noticeable in recent viral videos involving young women such as Natacha Stolz and Rebecca Black.<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 8. Gabbi Colette (Natacha Stolz), *Interior Semiotics*, 2010.

In *Interior Semiotics* (2010), Natacha Stolz dips her hands into a pot that contains blackened Spaghetti O's and proceeds to smear its contents over her white t-shirt.<sup>22</sup> After cutting a hole in her pants, the camera moves to catch just a glimpse of her hand stroking her vagina briefly. Then she urinates, while standing. In the months ensuing the posting of *Interior Semiotics* on the internet in May 2010, Stolz became the target of death threats from internet trolls and blogged mockery.<sup>23</sup> Posing as "Gabi Colette" on YouTube, the earnest performance that quoted seminal feminist performance works such as Carolee

<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Black, Friday, 2011. <http://youtu.be/CD2LRROpph0>

<sup>22</sup> Gabi Colette (Natacha Stolz), *Interior Semiotics*, 2010. <http://youtu.be/I9lmvX00TLY>

<sup>23</sup> "Uh-Ho, Spaghetti-O: A Perfect Viral Storm" Globe and Mail, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/arts/russell-smith/uh-oh-spaghetti-ho-a-viral-perfect-storm/article1821040/print/>

Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975) and Marther Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) became a laughing stock on the internet.<sup>24</sup>

The video circulated on blogs with titles such as "Dumb Hipsters and their art", "Girl smears self with spaghetti O's and pees on the floor".<sup>25</sup> While they are harmless in intent, these demeaning titles suggest that audiences outside of artistic viewership are intolerant to unconventional uses of the body in performance art. Moreover, audiences with artistic viewership did not appreciate the performance for its poor execution and direct quotation of iconic feminist works. It is apparent that unconventional performance and intimation of the body in a public manner is alienating to a mass audience.

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<sup>24</sup> Rhizome. "Blogrolls, Trolls, and Interior Scrolls: Interview with Natacha Stolz" November 24, 2010. <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2010/nov/24/blogrolls-trolls-and-interior-scrolls-a-conversati/>

<sup>25</sup> Alpha-Leader. "Interior Semiotics: Dumb Hipsters and their "art"", I am Bored, June 8, 2010. [http://www.i-am-bored.com/bored\\_link.cfm?link\\_id=51722](http://www.i-am-bored.com/bored_link.cfm?link_id=51722).

Carles. "Totally Alt Performance Artist squirts Spaghetios out of her vagina" Hipster Runoff, May 8, 2010. <http://www.hipsterrunoff.com/altreport/2010/08/totally-alt-performance-artist-squirts-spaghetios-out-her-vagina.html>

## The Rise of Irony as A Formal Device



Fig. 9. Mako Idemitsu, HIDEO: it's Me, MAMA, 1983

During the 1980s, artists such as Mako Idemitsu explored issues pertaining to the feminine condition in everyday life. In videos such as *HIDEO: it's Me, MAMA* (1983), Idemitsu explored ideas of attachment and abandonment by using the television screen as site for conveying emotional desire and the psyche of the artist. Later, Miranda July would perform an abstract and confusing mental recount of numbers in relation to her own feminine amateur image on the screen behind her in *The Amateurist* (1998). In the nineties, the rise of identity politics in art saw more women of minority ethnicities participating in video art exhibitions at large cultural institutions. Third wave feminism after the 90s was increasingly concerned with the accommodation of a diversity of feminist perspectives and how women of minority ethnicities would fit into its egalitarian discourse. In single channel video, the work of artists such as Patty Chang, Kika Nikolela, and Eduardo Menz explored ideas of feminine beauty in relation to nationality. Depictions of the self ranged from the traumatic to the ironic. Patty Chang

performed ridiculously, scooping and eating from melons that would hang in a large brassiere in *Melons, at a loss* (1998). Willfully eating bananas and posing with museum visitors for money, Coco Fusco performed the exaggerated colonial fantasy of a primitive woman at the ethnologic exhibition with Guillermo Gomez-Pena in *Couple in the Cage* (1993).



Fig. 10. Patty Chang, *Melons, at a loss* 1998.

Perhaps former successes of feminism allow women to feel less restrained in their representations of themselves and the choices they make. Irony has become a formal device in feminist video, providing humor for audiences to cope with potential disappointment with possibly inequitable realities.<sup>26</sup> Women's performances in 2000s range from the hysteric to the stoic, running from the passive to the offensive in Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn's amateur-style videos. In *Draft 9*, Dani Leventhal uses montage, crosscutting

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<sup>26</sup> Hilary Robinson, "Activism in Practice" *Feminism-art-theory: an anthology, 1968-2000*, 2001. Blackwell Publishers Ltd: Oxford. 113.



between dead carcasses of animals and sexual play with her girlfriend to document her life as a queer woman with a fascination for taxidermy. While her videos provide a clear depiction of asserting a female perspective (from that of the other, the queer, or the marginal) in relation to technology, younger female artists do not convey such a distinct message on gender and technology. Gale Allen and Andrea Cooper produced videos that depict both insanity and alienation in response to mythological depictions of women and men in popular culture. Meanwhile, Laurel Nakadate's videos of games with unattractive old men raises questions about sex appeal and sexual power in relation to political power.<sup>27</sup> It is easy to mistake sexual agency for personal agency, and her contractual relationship with them as subjects relies on the fact the men do not know about contemporary art.



Fig. 11. Laurel Nakadate, *Don't You Want Somebody to Love You?* 2006.

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<sup>27</sup> Laurel Nakadate.

–I WANT TO BE THE ONE TO WALK IN THE SUN, 2006.

–Don't You Want Somebody To Love You? 2006.

–Beg For Your Life, 2006



Other performing women are more overt in their gestures but ambiguous about their intent. Exploring the role of the famewhore or “cewebtrity”, Ann Hirsch (Scandalishious/Caroline Benton) boxxxxy, and lonelygirl15 appropriate tropes of narcissism and solipsistic performance for the webcam to ambiguous effect. Playing with stereotypes of the young attention-seeking camwhore, Hirsch created a YouTube profile called scandalishious to seduce and titillate viewers with unapologetic (and at-times embarrassing) dances in her home. Sometimes performing requested dances for songs and occasionally posting emotive vlogs, her dramatic behavior parodied popular representations of women on reality TV. Much like boxxxxy’s accelerated banter, the “pleasure of performance” is apparent in video due to its potential for expressive and narcissistic uses.<sup>28</sup>

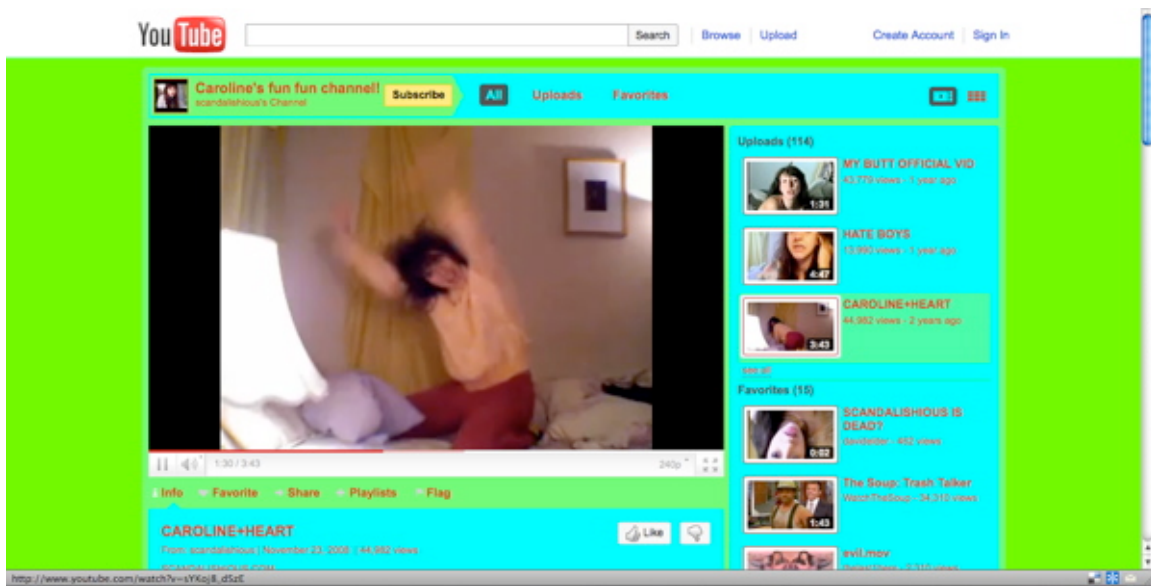


Fig. 12. Caroline Benton (Ann Hirsch), scandalishious YouTube channel, 2008-2010.

<sup>28</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. 16

Rosalind Krauss. “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism” October, Volume 1. Spring, 1976, p.50-64. MIT Press.

## The problem of net art and the problem of female-authored art

Both Dietz and Nochlin mentioned that it was our collective cultural inability to imagine a “great artist” that inhibited any artist to become recognized as such. In a critique of how net art has been left out due to its pluralist practices, Dietz rearticulates Nochlin's list of criteria that make inclusion in exhibition “problematic”, mostly related to its ephemeral and technologically-determined properties.<sup>29</sup> However, Dietz wrote his lament in 1998, when net art was marginalized from exhibition contexts, or inappropriately integrated into nationally representative cultural events such as the Whitney Biennale.<sup>30</sup>

Posing questions about gender and equity will remain a second priority as long as net artists and curators are still insecure about net art's visibility in exhibition spaces. Now that web-based practices are usurped into the museum as a discourse of technological democracy, content and process have come into question. The question I am asking is not “How or when will women be equal?” but “How is it that there are drastically fewer women exhibiting in online and gallery exhibitions?” To further complicate distinctions between feminist affinity and equal opportunities, not every women performer even self-identifies as feminist, and not all woman artists or curators are concerned about the discourse of unequal gallery representation.

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<sup>29</sup> Dietz, 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Around this time, net art was included in festivals but not appropriately accommodated. For example a large projection was utilized to display multiple websites at the Whitney Biennale in 2000. Carly Berwick. “Digital art—in all its forms—is gaining prominence among artists, curators, and audiences”, *The New New Media Blitz*, ARTNews, April 2001.  
[http://www.artnews.com/issues/article.asp?art\\_id=894](http://www.artnews.com/issues/article.asp?art_id=894)

## Feminist video 2.0: “Women act, men appear.”

Currently, late curatorial initiatives that are represented as “feminist video” exhibitions appear to exhibit a reduced interest in accommodating a breadth of perspectives. What is represented as such a genre is usually a historicized narrative of political expression. However, “Reflections on the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video” (2011) at the Brooklyn Museum differs from this formula. While accommodating for nuances of female expression and emotion, its curator, Lauren Ross, strives to differentiate these artists’ sentiments by describing them as “a new generation of feminist artists” that employ “varied approaches from humor to intense revelation”.<sup>31</sup> However, it is unclear whether all artists in the program would self-identify as feminists; the only thread that connects all videos is the presence of the female subject. “Modern Women” (MoMa PS1) trumps modernism’s biggest feminist names-or mostly those born in the forties-but does not offer many nuances to the radical feminist discourse of the seventies.

The difference between the personal sentiments of the seventies feminist performance video and the webcam videos of the now is the increased use of humorous self-deprecation as a device to speak to regimes of representation in popular culture. While some revel in flagrantly queering gender boundaries, others reperform or resexualize gendered performances from pop culture. Like Ryan Trecartin, the hyperbolic and schizophrenic performances of Sarah Weis accepts gender as an already-queer performance, and works within the realm of oddity and alienation with the self. In a reperformance of *Freeing My Voice* (2004) by Gale Allen, she screams in the middle of downtown Alberta.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, in *BEYONCE’S HALO WHILE I SLIT MY WRISTS* (2010), Vicky Gould (named lektroswirl on YouTube) applies lipstick to her face, and gallivants

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<sup>31</sup> Brooklyn Museum. “Reflections on the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video” 2010. [http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/new\\_feminist\\_video/](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/new_feminist_video/)

<sup>32</sup> Gale Allen, *Free My Voice*, 2004. <http://youtu.be/MtiMpyROj74>

to a pop song by Beyonce Knowles. She repeatedly motions to slit her wrists with a disposable razor.<sup>33</sup>

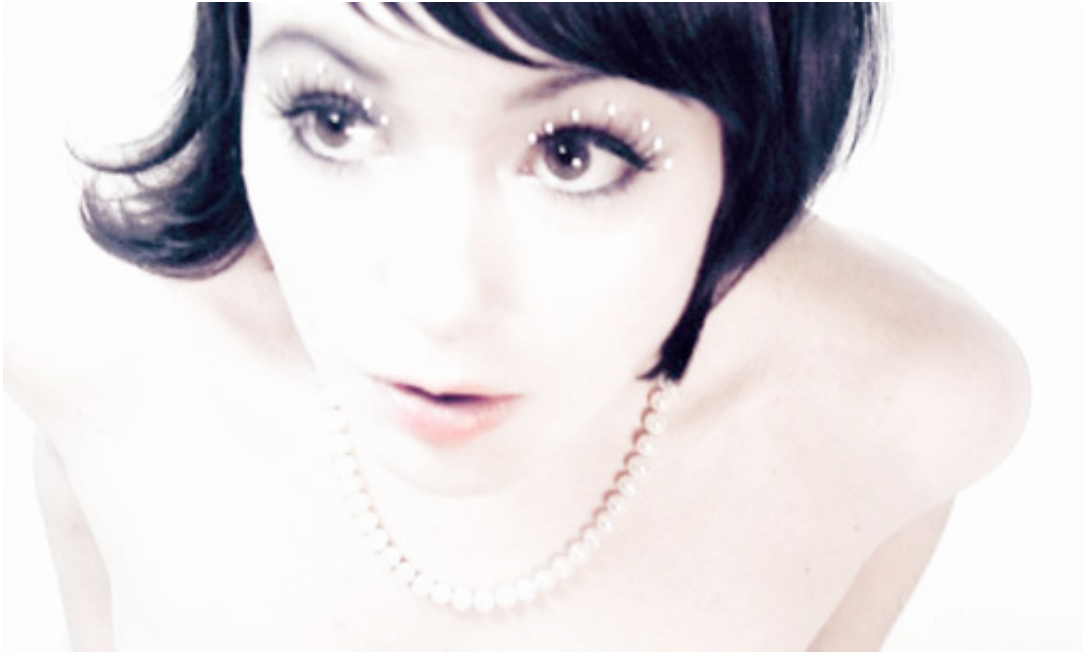


Fig. 13. Sarah Weis, *STRETCH*, 2009.

Gould and Hirsch challenge contemporary tropes of the camgirl (girl-on-the-internet) stereotype to unseat expectations of sexualized performance for the webcam. Working with slick visual effects, electronic music and narrative, Sarah Weis and Arturo Cubacub uses common postproduction practices to render herself as a digital celebrity. In feature length film *B-17*, Weis' character talks in frank high pitched banter about her political escapades as a top-secret sex slave.<sup>34</sup> Always presented in hyperfeminine costume and gaudy sets, Weis speaks of situations that are entirely probable as performance and always-fictive as situations, but nonetheless promote a sex-positivite gender identity that internet audiences may find tolerant as entertainment.

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<sup>33</sup> Lektroswirl. "BEYONCE'S HALO WHILE I SLIT MY WRISTS", 2010.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ee4BOL-2yE>

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Weis and Arturo Cubacub (i<sup>3</sup>hypermedia). *B-17: A Mini Epic (The Wacky Adventures of a 17-Year-Old Sex Slave!)* 2010. <http://vimeo.com/14514007> , <http://i3hypermedia.com/>

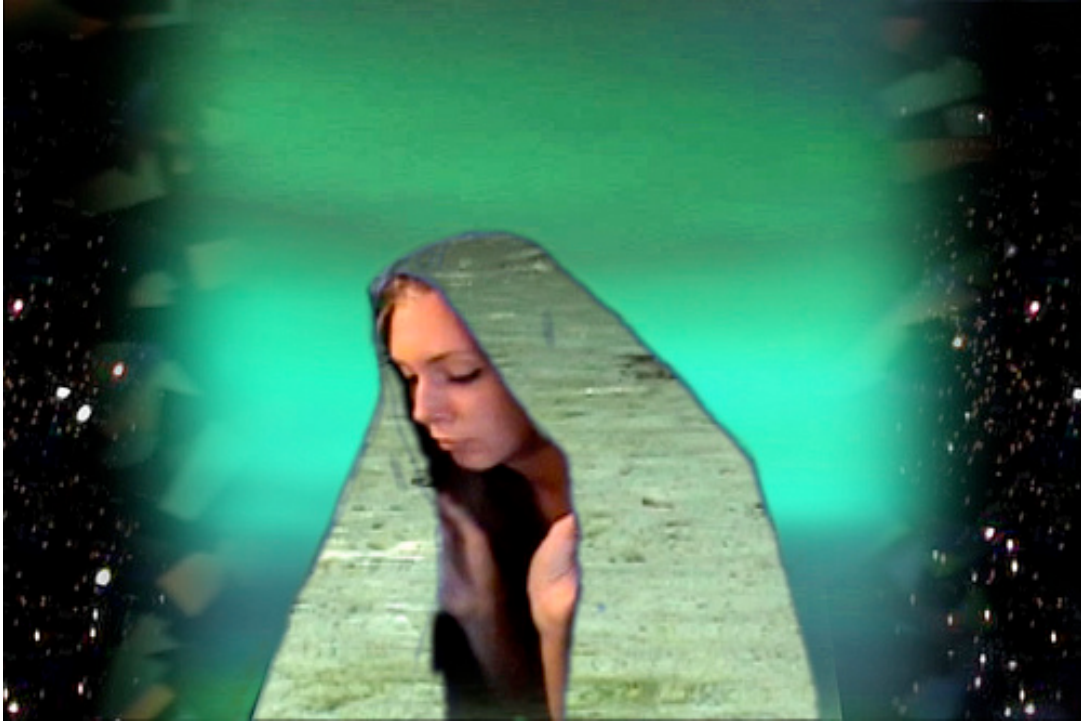


Fig. 14. Alexandra Gorczynski, *Pastoral*, 2011.

Alternatively, Alexandra Gorczynski's videos celebrate maximalist amateur aesthetics without reservation to traditional dynamics of the gaze. In *Pastoral* (2011) the naked figure in the video presences itself while shifting between poses of the historical female nude as Edvard Munch's Madonna and the hooded Virgin (Mary).<sup>35</sup> Meticulously edited with shifting chroma-keyed backgrounds and sparkles, melting patterns and colours, Gorczynski demonstrates her interest in the figure and the face with a celebratory use of filters.

Criticism that these artists' works are purely narcissistic forecloses opportunities to discuss the artist's implication of themselves in a discourse of female representation in popular culture, user-generated material and art history. Unfortunately, despite their great viewership, ironic webcam performances still serve as ambiguous entertainment for male audiences. Meanwhile, more anti-image female artists who work consciously with technical properties of the digital

<sup>35</sup> Alexandra Gorczynski, *Pastoral*, 2011. <http://vimeo.com/23703260>

medium remain under-promoted. The same way feminist video failed to subvert the mass televisual medium with an agenda that asked for equitable representation, ridiculous performance for the webcam and folk art aesthetics are rarely shown at screenings or galleries.

In “Ways of Seeing”, John Berger reduces unilateral male-female gaze theory to the aphorism, “Men act, women appear.”<sup>36</sup> Paradoxically, his statement may also be inverted to complement my observation that women artists who are popular today are either performers or programmers. Like Petra Cortright, women performers are at simultaneously reveled, romanticized or exoticized, but actively present their bodies to gain visibility in an artmaking public. These self-as-subject performances are possible occasions for resistance and restructuring of agency surrounding relations of the male and female gaze.<sup>37</sup> As Michele White says, “Women look and are looking out... Women’s control of the webcam apparatus and ability to look back is underscored by self-depictions.” Ironically, the very language they use to present themselves (i.e. high angle self-portraits and uptalking accents) are codes that male audiences are accustomed to viewing.

Judy Chicago describes these paradigms of practice and viewership “meta-male”.<sup>38</sup> She considers these practices complacent and palatable for inserting themselves into conversations of andocentric contemporary practice. Furthermore, these self-as-subject practices allow viewers to easily conflate persona with personhood. Of Petra Cortright’s solo exhibition, “It takes strength to be gentle and kind” (2010), Domenico Quaranta writes:

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<sup>36</sup> John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. 1972. London, England, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 45-64

<sup>37</sup> Michele White. “Too close to see: men, women, and webcams” *new media & society*, 2003. SAGE Publications: London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi

<sup>38</sup> Phoebe Hoban. “The Feminist Evolution”, ArtNEWS. December 2009 . [http://www.artnews.com/issues/article.asp?art\\_id=2800](http://www.artnews.com/issues/article.asp?art_id=2800)

“Petra belongs to the first generation of digital natives... She lives online. Let’s spend half a day on Google searching for her and we will know almost everything...that she hates New York...her father died of Melanoma, that she had a wonderful love story and that she broke up. Her life is a continuous online performance...it’s [her work is] about Petra Cortright. And it takes strength to be Petra Cortright.”

As a critic Quaranta not only fails to offer an alternative reading of Cortright’s work, but also represents her as a necessarily sensual and emotive woman artist due to her play with the formal and amateur qualities of the webcam medium.

In the previous examples, I have discussed how women in feminist performance video are unintentionally caught in paradigms of entertainment: between *acting out* or *acting beautiful*, made mad by the default (post)gendered discourse in art. Curated “feminist video” of the now is still characterized by the presencing the self in front of the camera—a genre overdetermined by narcissism: role-playing, autobiography, pop-cultural appropriation and bodily performance constitute what we now know as “feminist” video.

## Transgression, remix, and empathy



Fig. 15. Aleesa Cohene, *Somewhere Better*, 2008.

Feminist concerns are also expressed in remix and rearticulation of found media. Dara Birnbaum's *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1976) serially repeats processes of transformation and action to comment on the exaggerated body image of the Wonder Woman cartoon character. On the other hand, remix of familiar and mundane texts can also elicit fear, pathos and discomfort. Taking an empathetic position to the televised female subject. Mike Goldby's looped, reversed and repeated closeup of Sarah Michelle Gellar's face from *Buffy* conveys relatable emotions of ambivalence, concern and uncertainty in *The Body* (2010).<sup>39</sup> As a three-channel installation by Aleesa Cohene, *Somewhere Better* (2008) engenders pathos for characters on daytime television

<sup>39</sup> Mike Goldby, *The Body*, 2010. 2:58. Looped video. <http://vimeo.com/20280129>



narratives on an immersive level with seamless editing and comforting instrumental soundtrack.



Fig. 16. Elisa Kreisinger, *Queer Carrie Project*, 2010.

Female political remixers such as Elisa Kreisinger and Anita Sarkeesian (FeministFrequency.com) produce subtle and vernacular remixes of pop cultural content as queer narratives are omitted from the academic writing of remix history altogether. Calling herself a “pop culture pirate”, Kreisinger’s *Queer Carrie* series (2010) are five-minute remixed episodes of entire seasons of *Sex in the City* with heteronormative sentiments omitted. Inspired by Sloane’s *Star Wars: Too Many Dicks*, Sarkeesian created *Video Games: Too Many Dicks* (2010) remix video to satire the lyrics of an ironically sexist rap song by Flight of the Concorde.<sup>40</sup> By creating a montage of first person shooter videogaming footage

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<sup>40</sup> Anita Sarkeesian. *Video Games: Too Many Dicks*, 2010. [http://youtu.be/4PJ0JPLg\\_-8](http://youtu.be/4PJ0JPLg_-8)

from thirty-nine videogames, she critiques the dominance of male characters and lack of female representation in these ultra-violent games.

### Gendered critique in collaborations



Left: Fig. 17. Vito Acconci, *Pryings*, 1972.

Right: Fig. 18. Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelly, *Fresh Acconci*, 1995.

In nineties net.art, male and female collaborations occurred frequently and often bring women artists more attention. The nature of collaborations varies depending on subject matter. While all artists that I have mentioned have been women so far, men were not absent from contributing to feminist commentary either. In *Pryings* (1972), Vito Acconci's twenty-minute performance of repeatedly prying a female performer's eyes attest to the constant objectification of the female form. This was later reperfomed by pornstars under the direction of Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy in *Fresh Acconci* (1995). In this video the vulgarity of the permissive violation becomes a passionate soft porn act between two men in a hot tub, and two standing, naked women.

Collaboratively, Marina Abramovic and Ulay played gender-neutral roles and created performances that tested the body from a clinical perspective instead of emphasizing the biological differences. Their performance, *Imponderabilia* (1977), was later reperfomed in Second Life by Eva and Franco

Mattes (of 0100101110101101.org, or 01.org), as *Reenactment of Marina Abramović and Ulay's Imponderabilia* (2007).<sup>41</sup> Using the simulated space as a place for reperformance and social intervention (by blocking doorways as an artistic gesture), 01.org intervene in virtual space and violate the original terms of bodily endurance and interdependent trust when performing as twice removed entities. First, they are removed from the carnal aspect of performing in each other's presence. Secondly, they are removed from the intimacy of the performance due to the mediation of the screen and its simulated environment. Therefore, the reperformance of works by a male-female collaborative group shifts in dynamic when it is executed at a later date, or in another medium.

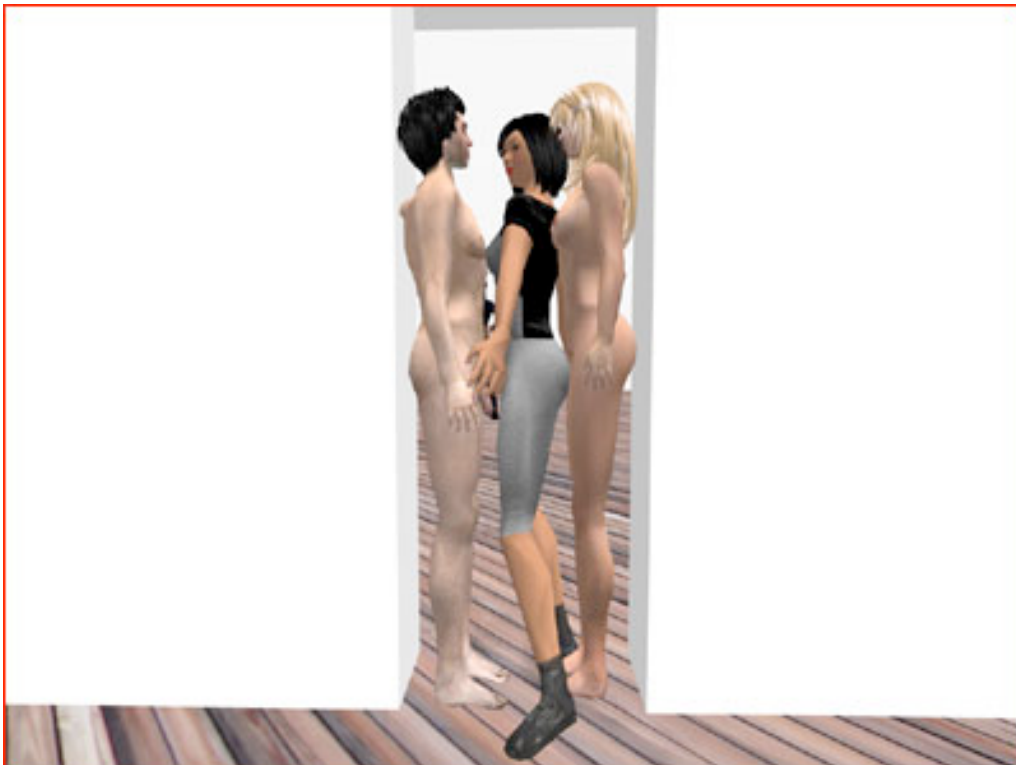


Fig. 19. Eva and Franco Mattes, (0100101110101101.ORG)  
*Reenactment of Marina Abramović and Ulay's Imponderabilia*, 2009

<sup>41</sup> Domenico Quaranta. "Eva and Franco Mattes, 0100101110101101.ORG *Reenactment of Marina Abramović and Ulay's Imponderabilia*" <http://www.reakt.org/imponderabilia/index.html> 2007.

Historically, a male artist has received recognition for conceptualization of an artwork in a collaboration with a female subject. (For example, the mastery of Yves Klein in the orchestration of body-printed paintings in *Anthropometries 2* (1960) or that of Acconci in *Pryings*.) In *Swamp* (1972), Robert Smithson paternally assures Holt when she walks through a swamp with her eye fixed to the camera viewfinder, thus demonstrating the interdependency between Smithson as perceiver and Holt as videomaker. In a collaboration between Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik. Moorman was described as “topless cellist” after their performance of *Opera Sextronique* (1967) while Paik later became “the father of video art”. Abramovic, however, claims the title of “grandmother of performance art” for herself. On the other hand, Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby employ animals and roleplay to convey dissatisfaction of fixed sexual and social roles in everyday life.

Male-female collaborations have not always produced work that were gender-critical, but there are notable collaborative efforts with practices that dominate net art history. JODI and Irrational.org created in websites that interrupted ones immersion with information delivery on the internet. From the 90s to 2005, JODI (Joan Heemskerk and Derk Paelsman) produced a series of vernacular interventions in the structural performance of video games, websites and internet browsers. Similarly, the jogging (Brad Troemel and Lauren Christiansen) had a tumblr that questioned the boundaries between art object and documentation. In Facebook-based interventions such as *ASSEMBLY* (2010) or “*READY OR NOT IT’S 2010*” (2010) they intensified their use of media distribution platforms for institutional critique.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Iain Ball and Emily Jones employ existing commercial aesthetics and found imagery of natural representations to explore ecological and sustainable solutions on *E N E R G Y : P A N G E A* (energypangea.org). Conversely, a viewer may speculate on the

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<sup>42</sup> Jstchillin. “jogging for jst chillin”, <http://jstchillin.org/jogging/>

fairness of promotion on the jogging when a Google search of “Brad Troemel” receives ten times more mentioning than Lauren Christiansen.<sup>43</sup>

### Apolitical Abstraction



Fig. 20. Jillian Kay Ross, Untitled 2, “ON THE FENCE (NO OFFENCE)” 2010.

Female-authored net art is not always fixated on the personal and the emotional, it also takes an interest in abstract and technical sensibilities. The work of Kari Altmann, Michelle Ceja and Jillian Kay Ross, and Sarah Ludy demonstrate their interests in the formal and the spatial. Altmann’s extensive production of 3D renderings, fictive interiors and found object installations defy categorization as any one artistic genre. Ross’ background in painting informs her abstract sensibilities and in the hyperreal renders of readymade sculpture in white gallery space. Ceja and Ross utilize the screen and the webpage as a

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<sup>43</sup> However, the disproportionate amount of search results directed to Troemel may also be due to the fact that he is more active than Christiansen in exhibiting his writing and art.

space for representations of) installation with potentials for translation into physical exhibition.<sup>44</sup>

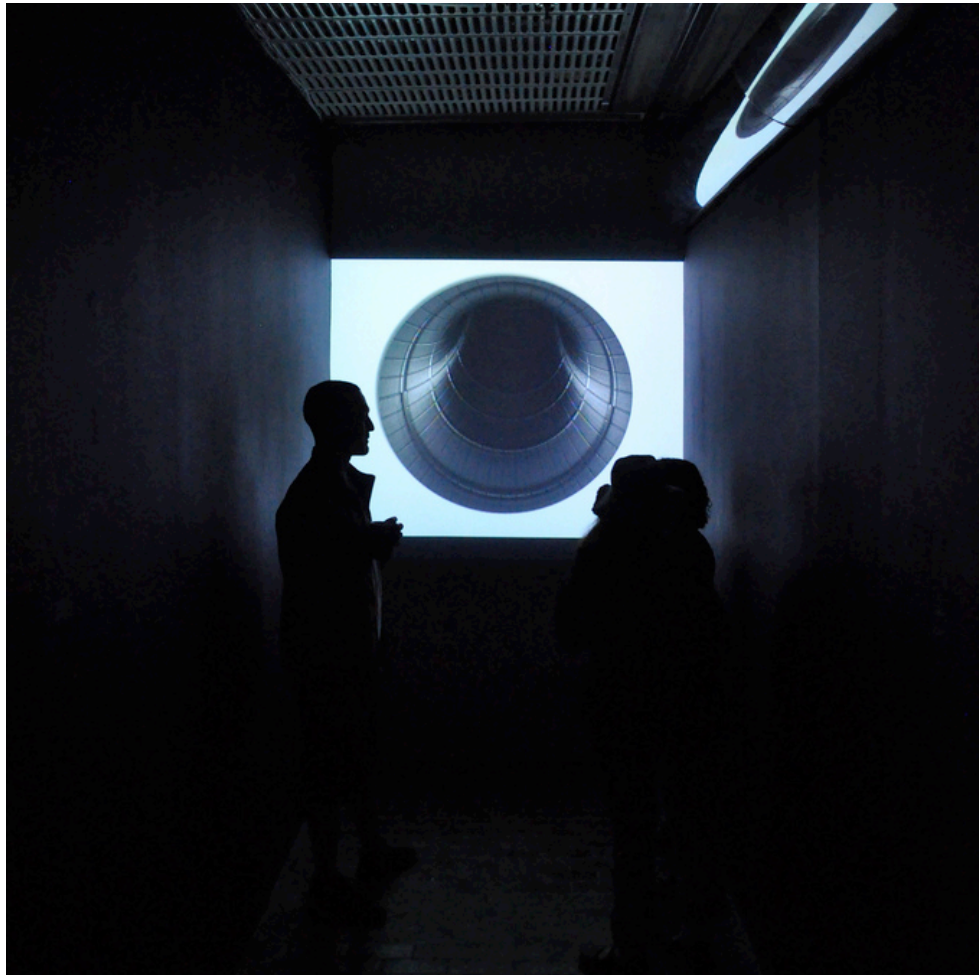


Fig. 21. Michelle Ceja, *Untitled*, 2010.

Ceja's flash animation of animated patterns portrays a makeshift installation. A plinth, a looped animation of clouds, a floating cloth and a plinth consisting of unfitting parts floats on a white webpage. Alluding to an unfinished installation and contemporary impulse to arrange and reify the found, these sculptural manifestations of incomplete and imaginary forms by Katarzyna

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<sup>44</sup> Ross' interest in the virtual presentation of art is further explored in a curatorial collaboration with Mike Goldby in Barmecidal Projects. <http://www.barmecidalprojects.com>



Kobro.<sup>45</sup> As a projection, *Untitled* (2010) is a looped stock footage video of a wormhole that simultaneously creates new space with illusionism of animation and recession on a wall.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Jonas' work, the horizontal roll in Ludy's videos (*Otha* (2011) and *Transom* (2011)) serve not to fragment form, but to reveal new architectural landscapes in reference to our windowed, mediated subjectivity. The impulse to describe infinite potential for unfixed representations of images in "digital space" is intensified by anne de vries' *forecast* (2011). Movement through a structure of intersecting and bisecting, gridded arrangements of floating cloud images is narrated by a robotic male voice that reads a text by Bertrand Russell.



Fig. 22. Ann de vries, *forecast*, 2011

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<sup>45</sup> Michelle Ceja, <http://michelleceja.com/window7.html>, 2010

<sup>46</sup> Michelle Ceja, <http://michelleceja.com/window3.html>, 2010

## The boring traffic of conventions in net art irl

The same way a regimented “contemporary” sensibilities of VVORK wind up in Reference or Preteen gallery, an adherence to software or new technologies on Vague Terrain may finds its curatorial interests manifested in shows at bitforms. Curatorial preferences for specific aesthetic principles (such as gradients, vernacularism or 3D objects) attract individuals with similar work to form online art communities.<sup>47</sup> As Brad Troemel noted in observing the induction of artists with online practices in real space, popular users with a preexisting online following are selected for enter gallery exhibitions.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, not unlike museums and galleries with specific mandates, these systems of sharing in online distribution are in fact exclusive and conservative in taste.

On his blog, internet artist Rafael Rozendaal offers a list of criteria for “great” art to fulfill, which point to refined tastes in what web-based art *should* look like.<sup>1</sup> Even though self-organized art distribution domains such as The State, jstchillin, and Computers Club feature a significant amount of internet art by women, these ground-up curatorial models only welcome women's art when it *looks* like net art.<sup>49</sup> However, I don't mean that certain women artists who make formal work have intentionally subscribed to working within normally male-dominated conventions (that are not by any means masculine but have been enframed as such by the history of art).

Beyond common new media art communities such as Rhizome and we-make-money-not-art, there have been disparate attempts to document and consolidate female participation in the development of internet art. Affirmative

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<sup>47</sup> Artie Vierkant, *The Image Object Post Internet*, 2010, 9.

Tom Moody, “VVORK and XYZ Art”, digital media tree, April 30, 2007.

<sup>48</sup>“ The distributional efficiency of artists publishing content online can very easily serve as an appendage of the art market. There is already a “minor league” feeder program in the making, where galleries and other institutions discover artists who are digitally popularized.”

Brad Troemel, The Minor League, cemetery, December 26, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> See Appendix, 49. Rafael Rozendaal, “The Greatest Visual Artists”, New Rafael, 2010.  
<http://www.newrafael.com/the-greatest-visual-artists/>



online and offline discursive spaces were established to empower women. Judy Malloy's *Leonardo* project involved collection of essays that eventually resulted in publication of the book *Women, Art and Technology*. ArtFem.tv was established for the definite purposes of curating and distributing feminist video.



Left: Fig. 23. Sarah Haskins, *Target Woman*, Current.TV, 2010.  
Right: Fig. 24. Feminist Frequency, *Retrosexism and Uber-ironic Advertising*, 2010.

Likewise, Faces-I and Geekfeminism was established as forums for women to co-promote and communicate, but remain closed to the art world. In addition to disparate artists working on distribution platforms, creative vloggers and YouTube users such as Sarah Haskins (*Target Women*) and Tonyatko do not identify as artists, but often employ aesthetics that recall early 70s confessional video.<sup>50</sup> Like Anita Sarkeesian of Feminist Frequency who creates video-commentaries on popular representations of women, Sarah Haskins conducts sarcastic commentary on popular tropes of representing women in televised marketing. While these social media users don't identify as artists, they create video passionately to respond and satire mainstream representations of women.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Haskins, *Target Women*. Current.tv, 2011. <http://current.com/shows/infomania/target-women/>

Tonyatko: #1 Guru. "Tonyatko's Channel" YouTube. 2011.  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/TonyaTKo>

## Myths and Statistics

So far the majority of women artists that who have been mentioned are those who have stood out historically, and are noted for introducing a distinctly feminist perspective<sup>51</sup> If the main difference between internet aesthetics as it shifted from web 1.0 to 2.0 was largely affected by the use of social media for writerly engagement with texts, one could expect to find the increase in distribution platforms to create more diverse or cohesive histories on female contribution to net art. While the potentials for self-curation of a gender-neutral or fluid persona are boundless in an online profile, arguments about technologically determined fluidity between genders do not resolve conventional myths attached to women and technology.

There are two myths that are previously propagated by satirical internet subculture found on (the recently banned) Encyclopedia Dramatica and image board 4chan: 1) there are no girls on the internet (ngoti), 2) that women on the internet who are outspoken or performative have “gotis”, or girl-on-the-internet-syndrome.<sup>52</sup> It is unclear whether there are simply less women creating internet art or if they are less inclined to due to communal hostility, disinterest, or lack of motivation.

Quantitative research carried out in the 1990s has found data supporting both arguments for and against gender differences that would affect women’s have lower levels of computer usage and aptitude.<sup>53</sup> These results are counterproductive to understanding the epistemological or social dimensions for less women net artists in exhibition spaces, as they may not apply to a group that

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<sup>51</sup> Angella Kelly, "The Personal is the Political", *The Photography Reader*, Edited by Liz Wells, 2003. Routledge: London, New York.

<sup>52</sup> The definitions of these myths are now relocated to new entertainment website Oh Internet! AJ Manzur. "There Are No Girls on the Internet", KnowYourMeme. November 2010 <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/there-are-no-girls-on-the-internet>  
Encyclopedia Dramatica. "Gotis" 2010. <http://encyclopedia.dramatica.com/Gotis>

<sup>53</sup> Hope Morritt. *Women and Computer Based Technologies*. University Press of America: Lanham

is accustomed to various levels of software use and internet culture. However, Shashaani (1994) found that social support and computer access in the home were integral to an increased confidence in computer usage. Gender role socialization may explain womens' sense of diffidence towards gaining success in computing and expectations related to appropriate use of computers. Pedagogical research has indicated that both boys and girls felt that computers were sex-typed for boys. Meanwhile, Cohoon and Aspray believe that media education should be inclusive to masculine and feminine points of view instead of taught from a gender-neutral perspective. While these research initiatives illuminate possible reasons why women may be discouraged to work in IT or new media, Gill talks more specifically about discrepancy in will that younger workers will not confront.

Gill observes that women in new media work forces experience a tension between internalized notions of underrepresentation due to inability or a lack of interest from women to participate, and the fear of generalizing an individual experience as an offensive statement about the potentially discriminatory climate of the work environment.<sup>54</sup> The inarticulability of critical dissent in relation to intersectional issues of identity reinforces hegemony for a gender-neutral discussion when issues of exclusion resonate subtly. Malloy noted that her attempt to collate a volume of essays by women artists who contributed significantly to the development of media arts had spanned 35 years before publication of *Women, Art and Technology* in 2003. Malloy noted that it was difficult to solicit writing from visual artists who may have felt the work spoke for their ideas autonomously. Thus this question also suggests collective voice is contingent on women's willingness to participate in a discourse that criticizes the existing methods of cultural pedagogy and writing history.

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<sup>54</sup> Gill, Rosalind *Cool, creative and egalitarian? : exploring gender in project-based new media work in Europe* [online]. London: LSE Research Online. 2002. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2446>

A brief count of women artists who participated at recent internet-related exhibitions in major institutions show that programming from both self-organized and established venues have consistently included less female than male artists. (See Appendix A) While this is by no means a global survey, in two major institution exhibitions in the past year, museums have been fuelling the ongoing problem. Seven out of twenty-five were women in the first ever YouTube Biennale at the Guggenheim museum. A notable exception to this imbalanced model was the nine out of twenty-three artists that were women featured in *FREE* at the New Museum. While counting is a first step in noticing glaring differences in distribution of woman artists in exhibition spaces, a thorough inquiry into the sociological and ethnographic contexts would be essential to begin increasing female artists' inclusion and visibility in internet art.

Identifying a “cool factor” about the idealism and informality of new media careers in the 2000s, Gill argues that the untraditional work schedule of the new media artist creates latent sexism and racism that is embedded in the egalitarian culture of job flexibility.<sup>55</sup> In these environments, both male and female workers do not identify equity as a problem although women are awarded less projects, pay, or work in such workplaces. It appears that a dangerous mix of internalized postfeminism and meritocratic privilege underlines online culture as an always-only-equal environment on multiple grounds of race and gender due to the internet's potential for free speech.<sup>56</sup> Online, paradoxical assumptions of user racelessness and genderlessness in anonymous Anglophonic spaces further complicate discussions about technological access and identity.<sup>57</sup> We cannot

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<sup>55</sup> Gill, 24.

<sup>56</sup> Coco Fusco, “At Your Service: Latin Women In the Global Information Network”. *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings*, London and New York: Routledge/iNIVA, 2001. <http://www.artwomen.org/maquiladora/article-p2.htm>

<sup>57</sup> Fusco, 2001. Of identity and access to the internet, Coco Fusco discusses the predominant ways of viewing identity in relation to access on the internet. Arguing that real world assumptions of user whiteness and masculinity carrying over onto the internet in the forum domain as “non-race”, She calls feminine metaphors applied to computing and the internet “...a convenient masquerade of diversity for a milieu still overwhelmingly dominated by an extremely powerful... predominantly American male sector of world population. The abundance of descriptions of net

remedy the situation by asking all unheard individuals to simply exercise identitarian or ideological “empowerment” through a use of media distribution platforms. For voices that have been historically minor to be heard in a disembodied space, a self-educating community must recognize its privilege and entry into artistic distribution systems. A completely democratized system of art appreciation goes beyond the economies of “Like” and peer adoration on social networks. Such a system would validate the contestation of dominant and marginal interests through recognition of such voices through praise, critique, derision, trolling, referral and sharing.

The type of privilege I am speaking of means recognizing one’s refined education in western cultural history and the excesses of mainstream and digital culture. If you have a computer and a fast internet connection (and know what a lolcat is), it is likely you are living in the First World, it is likely you went to art school. If you are a woman artist and you have never experienced “workplace”) discrimination, it does not mean there are no problems with gender representation. If you are not a woman and you have never witnessed discrimination in your art community, it does not mean isolated instances don’t become systemic by group consensus of there being no problem. If you are not a woman, it does not mean you have no responsibility in inquiring into how certain types of art created find entry into physical spaces more easily. These artworks happen to be created by men. This is a personal question, and perhaps a rather political one of mine.

Feminist or womanist curators and art historians usually attempt to justify the imbalance in cultural representation with examples of outstanding women who are already working in a particular genre.<sup>58</sup> The historical survey show, (such as “Modern Women: Single Channel” (2011) at the MoMA PS1) or the all-

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communication as structurally anti-authoritarian, decentralized, “rhizomic,” open-ended... are effectively deterring attention from the centralized economic formations that sustain it...”

<sup>58</sup> “The feminist’s first reaction is to swallow the bait...and attempt to answer the question as it is put: that is, to dig up examples of worthy or insufficiently appreciated women artists throughout history...” Nochlin, 90.

female show are two popular ways to present any all-female exhibition; it is "the" feminist or all-woman exhibition. These serve to temporarily illuminate the larger programming discrepancies through the celebration of female perspectives, without implementing decisive programming changes.<sup>59</sup> Not only is the inclusion of women in art a relevant issue, the preservation of older web-based works continues to be a problem in a time when browser and HTML code redundancies are occurring frequently. Although late net art has not explored queerness with much criticality lately, the Guggenheim had commissioned Shu Lea Chang to create an interactive flash browser piece, "Brandon" in 1998. The website featured a drifting interactive marquee of images about the life of American transgender male (Teena Brandon) who was murdered due to transsexual discrimination around the time of its making. The Guggenheim has however removed access to the piece recently.

Not all curators or museum directors are indifferent. Notable for his efforts to question the distribution of women in galleries is Jerry Saltz, whose open letter to the MoMA inspired an online protest from his Facebook followers, which led to a meeting with its director, Anne Temkin. In an article published after, she acknowledged the uneven distribution of women artists in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floors (of 4% in 2009), but could not make any immediate changes to representing modernism despite long-term goals to alter the representation of their collections to include underappreciated artists that worked in the same period.<sup>60</sup> If changes cannot happen quickly in larger cultural institutions, then what can be done in existing online exhibition spaces?

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<sup>59</sup> In an interview with curator Derek Maniella revealed there was little criticality in the selection of female-authored works for "Bitch Slap" (2010) at Thrush Holmes Empire—an exhibition that featured 28 Canadian women artists. He conceded to selecting artwork by women artists whose aesthetics he enjoyed. XBlog, XPACE, 2010. <http://www.xpace.info/xblog/interview-with-derek-mainella-curator-of-bitch-slap-opening-nov-19-thrush-holmes-empire/>

<sup>60</sup> Hoban, 2009.

## Conclusion

This text presents a start on placing a critical lens on women artists' representation in media art history and some subsequent problems with their position in exhibition contexts. While maintaining a web-based practice allows a greater audience to see the artwork, imbalances in numbers persist in exhibition spaces and the art world at large. In 2006, only 23 percent of solo exhibitions in New York City art galleries were by women artists.<sup>61</sup> Jerry Saltz also reports, "...since 2000 only 14 percent of the Guggenheim's solo shows of living artists have been devoted to women..." Representational issues aside, the definition of net.art and what it means to be an internet artist has shifted drastically from the 1990s. According to Cornelia Sollfrank, a net artist is defined as such when an artist chooses to use the internet as a mode of art distribution. Meanwhile, in an interview in 2007, Lialina conceded that she considered herself a web artist in working with the material that could be found in the browser space, instead of a "net.artist", which she felt to be an anachronistic term to indicate a genre with artists who were interested with working exclusively outside of institutions.<sup>62</sup>

Currently, the web-based art that enters museums and galleries are predominantly authored by men. The onus is on emerging curators and artists—as content curators—to apply extra effort to research and include a diverse range of perspectives on internet art. This means consciously programming and including women whether or not they make work that fits within existing aesthetic sensibilities of what net art should look like. Instead of reinforcing work by the few that are already showing in galleries, curators could create context around disjunction and difference if the original impetus of distributing artwork on the internet is to experience artwork in a heterogeneous manner. To reframe my

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<sup>61</sup> Village Voice, September 19, 2006 <http://www.villagevoice.com/2006-09-19/art/where-the-girls-aren-t/>

<sup>62</sup> "[I'd] still called a net.artist, but with more and more pleasure I introduce myself as a web artist, ...because "net art is much more than pages in a browser." Now I'm mostly interested in the essential web aesthetics, ideas, heroes, and histories. I don't make net art with or without the dot, but rather works about the web which can be artistic, illustrative, or textual."



question because female curators may also program more male artists in their programs: why are we as a self-regulating, content-curating network recognizing male net artists more when we share media on a many-to-many basis?

My critique does not claim that there are no women internet artists or that there are none who are great enough to make a significant contribution to the fields of art and technology. There *are*, but they are not thoroughly recognized by their community and art institutions for their work alone. My analysis would not be complete without reconsidering the immeasurable gains in visibility made by the efforts of early feminist work from the 1970s, cyberfeminism from the 1990s or third wave sociological perspectives of the now. Because of the previous successes of feminism, women may feel less confined with self-representation on the internet. Thus, my grievance lies in the scarcity of women with web-based practices entering exhibitions spaces.

Given the abundance of information and art on the internet today, it would be difficult to map a cohesive and inclusive history of female contribution in video and internet art. If exhibition is a method of visualizing and presenting the history of contemporary practice in real space, scholars and arts administrators need to reconsider the aesthetic criteria that have led to a periodization of “feminist art” as a genre. Existing models of curating valorize effeminate or feminine forms of expression that may be spectacular, but may in fact validate old stereotypes as entertainment. While I do not think it is problematic that the feminist art canon may embrace this, it cannot be programmed formulaically. On a macro level it would deter the actual feminist goal of achieving equal representation in exhibition spaces. In order to increase female presence in exhibition spaces arts administrators need to look beyond the femaleness or “feminism” of the work, to consider its form and content in relation to the concept during the evaluation of “Great” art.

## Appendix A

An ongoing count of fraction of female artists in new media and web-based art exhibitions

# Artists <sup>9/23</sup>

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Artist texts were written by Brian Droitcour, Jacob Gaboury, Ceci Moss and Lauren Cornell. Writers are noted on individual texts.

Liz Deschenes, Aleksandra Domanovic, Lizzie Fitch, Martijn Hendriks, Joel Holmberg, David Horvitz, Lars Laumann, Andrea Longacre-White, Kristin Lucas, Jill Magid, Takeshi Murata, Hanne Mugaas, Rashaad Newsome, Lisa Oppenheim, Trevor Paglen, Seth Price, Ryan Trecartin and David Karp, Jon Rafman, Clunie Reid, Amanda Ross-Ho, Alexandre Singh, Harm van den Dorpel

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9/23 in "FREE", New Museum, 2010. NYC.

7/25, "YouTube Play Biennale". 2010. NYC

10/32, BYOB NYC.



11/36, "Saint Laurence Ice", 2011.

3/14, "Speed Show vol 1: tele-internet", Berlin, 2010.

0/20 "Speed Show", Videotage, Hong Kong. 2010.

1/4, "Artists Explore Screen Space", Power Plant, Toronto, 2010.

2/15, Crates and Laptops, Chicago.

3/12 Speed Show VOI I 2010, (Berlin)

1/10, "Memery: Imitation, Memory, and Internet Culture", MaSS MoCA.  
(Massachusetts)



SPEED SHOW vol.1: TELE-INTERNET

One night group show and the start of an ongoing series of SPEED SHOWS.

Opening!

Friday 11th of June 2010, 21:00 – 00:00

Kottbusser Damm 103, Berlin ([G-maps](#))

Produced and curated by [Aram Bartholl](#)

Following artists will show new or recent works:

- Jon Cates (US)
- Constant Dullaart (NL)
- Dragan Espenschied (DE)
- JODI (NL/BE)
- Geraldine Juarez (MX)
- Tobias Leingruber (DE)
- Olia Lialina (RU)
- Moddr (NL/AT/RU)
- Johannes P Osterhoff (DE)
- Evan Roth (US)
- Ralph Schulz (DE)
- Paul Slocom (US)



1/10, BOCA, Montreal, 2011.

BOCA #1

MINIMIZE

1/10

FEATURING:

JASON HARVEY, JON RAFMAN, JULIAN GARCIA,  
MATT GOERZEN, PETRA CORTRIGHT, JOHN  
TRANSUE, JEREMY DABROWSKI, TYSON PARKS AND  
TRAVESS SMALLEY

Digital painting and sculpture can be seen as re-instigating the modernist project abandoned in the wake of minimalism. Where physical materials formally exhausted themselves, digital materials offer new avenues for formal exploration and refinement.

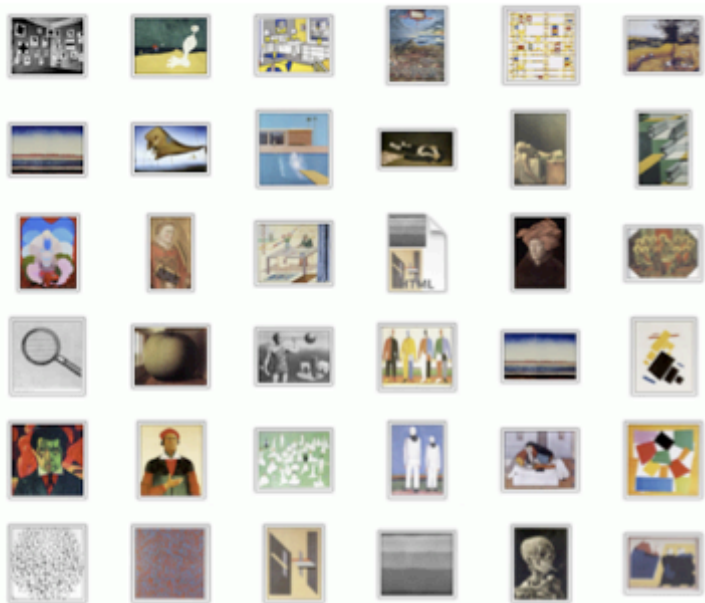
The works gathered in this collection represent a new formal austerity, one which provides a starting point rather than an end point.

Opening: February 26, 2011

published: february 26, 2011

tagged: minimalism, online, paintings, sculpture

## the greatest visual artists



When I visit art fairs or read art magazines, most of what I see is so ugly and boring I just want to cry. I want it to be clear that I do not hate everything. It's just that most of what happens in contemporary art does not interest me at all. I don't like being negative and that is why I have compiled my list of the world's greatest visual artists. To understand why I chose what I chose, please read my [criteria for art criticism](#).

[Chuck Jones](#), [Dan Flavin](#), [David Hockney](#), [David Lynch](#), [Ed Ruscha](#), [Fra Angelico](#), [Giacomo Balla](#), [Gustave Courbet](#), [James Turrell](#), [Jan van Eyck](#), [Jeff Koons](#), [Jeremy Bailey](#), [Joan Miró](#), [Johannes Vermeer](#), [Kazimir Malevich](#), [Keita Takahashi](#), [Malcolm McLaren](#), [Marcel Duchamp](#), [Max Fleischer](#), [Miltos Manetas](#), [Nikola Tomic](#), [Nocturno Culto](#), [Piet Mondrian](#), [René Magritte](#), [Robert Crumb](#), [Roy Lichtenstein](#), [Salvador Dali](#), [Sam Peckinpah](#), [Sergio Leone](#), [Shigeru Miyamoto](#) & [Gunpei Yokoi](#), [Ub Iwerks](#), [Trey Parker & Matt Stone](#), [Vincent van Gogh](#), [Walt Disney](#), [Andy Warhol](#), [Werner Herzog](#).

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Rafael Rozendaal, "The Greatest Visual Artists", New Rafael, 2010.  
<http://www.newrafael.com/the-greatest-visual-artists/>