FROM BRECHT TO BUTLER: AN ANALYSIS OF DIRTY GRRRLS

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“From Brecht to Butler: An Analysis of *Dirty Grrrls*” is a production centered thesis focusing on the image of the mudflap girl. The study examines the graduate production *Dirty Grrrls* as a form of praxis intersecting the mudflap girl, the theory of gender performativity, and Brechtian methodology. As a common yet unexplored symbol of hypersexual visual culture in U.S. American society, the mudflap girl acts as a relevant subject matter for both the performance and written portion of the study. Through the production, mudflap girl materializes at the meeting point of the terms performance and performativity. The written portion of this project examines this intersection and discusses the productive cultural work accomplished on the page and on the stage via live embodiment of performativity.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Our minds and senses are flooded daily with visual images, affecting our states of mind and understanding of the surrounding world. These images are seen in media, on billboards, decorating the walls of subway stations, and adorning the rear windows of passing automobiles. Often, these visual images become so incessant that we, as consumers, become desensitized to the recurrence of pictorial representations. The majority of the impact they have does not even fully translate, since only about 8% of an advertisement is consumed on a conscious level (Kilbourne). Many of the images that we are bombarded with focus on gendered and sexualized depictions of human beings. These portrayals reflect how culture(s) understand, produce, and live out our assigned gender roles. Judith Lorber claims, “Individuals are born sexed but not gendered, and they have to be taught to be masculine or feminine” (57).

These “naturalized” roles operate under a system of power that places masculinity and femininity as a binary standard for everyday life performance (Butler, “Gender” viii). This binary frame, in Western culture(s), directs the way consumers think about and produce performances of gender. Not only are these performances of gender learned, but also we are constantly engaged in the process of becoming. Specifically, media depictions of the body reflect a socially constructed self-identity, in which we negotiate these mediated symbols as an inscription on our own bodies (Blackman 22). Repetition allows one to embody becoming, often utilizing visual media as idealized and duplicate examples of “proper” gender. Lorber eloquently argues there is no “essential” sense of man or woman, “but once gender is ascribed, the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations” (58).
We are often bound by or subjected to a constructed gender identity, one that Judith Butler argues is “determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure” (“Performative Acts” 531). Each day, we put on this constructed identity, following or breaking social rules that give us a script depicting proper ways of performing. We are taught these scripts from birth and are often subjected to ridicule if we do not perform properly. Indeed, “we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (Butler, “Bodily Inscriptions” 420). Scholar Susan Bordo extends this notion, stating that “We learn the rules directly through bodily discourse: through images which tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements, and behavior is required” (17). Visual images in the media are constantly communicating ideas about gender roles, especially through pictorial representations of women in sexual, submissive, and violent contexts. How then are we to navigate our bodies as women through and among these images? When consuming visual media, we must consider the “surface politics of the body,” not only regarding what these images are projecting, but also how they are projected onto our own live bodies. Butler argues that the political body “implies a corollary redescriptions of gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body’s surface” (“Bodily Inscriptions” 416). Figures of fantasy, such as the sexualized female seen in media, are deemed normal yet are still fantastical, as they communicate an ideal and reflect one form of reality. When a body performs the role of femininity in everyday life situations, that performance is tied to the notion of gender. The role of femininity functions in a binary as “a negative and inferior status at which actual subjects, such as the working classes, people with different sexualities, colonial subjects and women, are usually positioned” (Blackman 77). This performance of femininity is tied to the notion of being
sexual, as it communicates a political statement of “sexiness” both when we intend to and also when we do not. The process of becoming feminine “is not the expression of ‘a pre-existing ability or compound’, but rather denotes the ability of bodies to ‘be affected by other bodies’” (Blackman 77). Our bodies are communicative outlets that produce a variety of messages, often reinforced by bodies within the media. Bordo and Butler alike often reference residing within this visual culture(s) of expectations where the female body is forced to perform femininity, sexuality, and desirability. These cultural expectations function within the masculine and feminine binary frame.

The “mundane social audience” becomes familiar with performing the role of “woman,” by learning how to pass as feminine (Butler, “Performative Acts” 520). We learn how to perform gender correctly by observing past historical performances of the feminine pole of the binary. But what happens when we take what has been “naturalized” in life and place it on to the page as a scripted role? What occurs when we then take what has been put into words and ink and place it on the stage for live embodiment? In a way, a pattern of mediation and repetition occurs. The body, performing gender, mediates and is mediated by visual images. The page negotiates and mediates the everyday life performance of the body. Additionally, and especially important for this project, a different embodiment of mediation occurs when these words are placed onto the stage. Indeed, gender, as a performance of everyday life, is further complicated when performed and staged in a live aesthetic show. What is a naturalized binary in our social surround can become defamiliarized once embodied on stage. This process was evidenced in the production, *Dirty Grrrls*, a show written and staged for the purpose of exploring this process of mediation through gendered bodies. The production was part of this thesis project, which explores constructions and productions of gender in U.S. American society. A production-centered thesis
is an ideal form of praxis scholarship within the field of performance studies, as the study allows me to theorize the production both on the page and on stage.

*Dirty Grrrls* was a one-hour performance held in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Texas in the spring semester of 2014, over the course of three nights (March 27, 28, and 29). The show, written and directed by me, Joanna Lugo, consisted of four women: two post graduate students (Miranda Chesson and Jenna Ledford), one graduate student (Karen Wisdom), and one post undergraduate student (Morgan Larson). All of these women are white, in their mid to late twenties, and have connections to the communication studies program at UNT (i.e., graduated with the major or took classes in the department).

Initially, I invited several women of various backgrounds and ethnicities to a closed audition for the show. Though I had not completed the entire script at that time, I had the desire to only cast women due to the subject matter of the show and to cast a diverse group of women to gain new perspectives on the subject. Ultimately, the majority of the women that attended the audition were white, which as this thesis demonstrates, speaks to the dilemma of the subject itself. The project originated in a performance theory graduate class at UNT taught by Dr. Justin Trudeau. He eventually became my major professor for this production-centered thesis. Dr. Trudeau assigned the class two specific projects that required me to select a subject matter of my choosing, to implement one or more performance theories with regard to the subject, and to create a solo performance and research paper showcasing the theoretical work. The subject that I chose for these projects was the image of the mudflap antler girl. Eventually, through further research and discussion with Dr. Trudeau, these projects evolved into a production-centered thesis about the subject.
Upon discovering the image of mudflap antler girl, I was immediately drawn to her. I was halted by her one evening while walking through a cinema parking lot. I recall being late to a movie with friends, so naturally I was in a hurry to get my ticket and seat in the theatre. As I made my trek across the lot, I abruptly stopped behind a gray mustang adorned with several decals and window stickers, most of which were associated with hunting culture(s). One image, that of the mudflap girl, stood out to me. Within a flashing moment her piercing antlers stung me with disgust and awe, creating in me a visceral desire to understand how she, mudflap girl, enticed me to this place of awareness. That she would be there waiting for me at a simple passing moment was a coincidence. This co-incident began a perverse love affair between the mudflap girl and me. When analyzing a potential relationship between an image and its consumer, Fried suggests that desire should also be placed on the image rather than just the person who gazes upon the image. Within an initial encounter and communicative process between an image and consumer, Fried suggests, an image “had first to attract the beholder, then to arrest and finally to enthrall… a painting had to call someone, bring him to a halt in front of itself and hold him there as if spellbound and unable to move” (Fried 92). In a moment of paralysis, the image consumed
me. No longer a simple passerby, I was participating in a dialogue between the image and me, forced to confront my own identity. As a woman, mudflap girl prompts me to examine my own feminine body, how it appears aesthetically, what it communicates to others, to myself, and how it performs in public and private spaces. As a Southerner, mudflap girl urges me to consider how gender is constructed regionally, how women are often portrayed in violent and submissive ways, how cars perform gender and in particular, masculinity. As a sexual being, mudflap girl forces me to confront my sexualized body and the scripts I have often been presented with and forced to perform or default with consequence. As a visual consumer, mudflap girl reminds me that images are everywhere, that images are a powerful communicative tool, that they too often have become mundane, passive, and normal. As a scholar, mudflap girl intrigues me to the point of discovery and application. As a feminist, mudflap girl encourages me to fight against the still present oppression of women in society. This covetousness between image and consumer is what French theorist Roland Barthes calls the punctum, or a “sting, speck, cut,” “that accident which pricks me” (27). Ironically, I took a picture of the image with my phone, as an attempt at capturing my own punctum moment. The punctum is what immobilized me one night in a cinema parking lot, mesmerized by the image of a mudflap girl with deer antlers perched atop her head. This sort of initial desire produces an intimate relationship between the image and consumer. Desire such as this drives visual critic W. J. T. Mitchell to ask the question, what do pictures want? (28). I, too, am motivated to inquire, what does mudflap girl want?

Dirty Grrrls attempted to pose this question as a riddle on the stage. Rather than attempting to provide a direct answer or solution to this inquiry, the show examined multiple perspectives on the image and the various effects circulated within U.S. American culture(s). The production consists of eight scenes, centered on the image of the mudflap girl as a symbol of the
ideal sexualized female form found in visual culture(s) in U.S. American society. Each scene represented a unique piece of the mudflap girl puzzle, presenting the audience with a cultural dilemma. In theory, the performance attempted to engage the audience so that each member might question the subject, might realize their own socio-political stance on the subject, and might come to some new perspective or understanding of the subject. The show focused on a common yet unexplored symbol that represents and is sustained by mediated culture(s). As a transient image, mudflap girl traverses public spaces and has done so since the 1970s, presenting an overtly sexualized and objectified version of the female body. This image has not only survived over decades, but has thrived in U.S. American culture(s) with little scrutiny regarding its circulation. The show addressed the problematics of this anatomically incorrect, untraceable, and mysterious image. Furthermore, the show brought the image to life, by means of a live performance. Utilizing the critical cultural intersections of race, class, and gender, the show exemplified the many ways the symbol performs misogyny in a patriarchal society.

Purpose (Statement of Problem/Research Question)

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the script and production process of Dirty Grrrls. Specifically, I analyze the show and its subject, mudflap girl, by means of the performance theory of performativity and Brechtian methodology. Within this analysis I address the image via critical cultural critique and enactment. Furthermore, I engage in a critical feminist reading of the object of study, as is evidenced even in the title, where “grrrls” references the 1990s punk rock feminist movement, Riot Grrrl. The Riot Grrrl movement played a critical role in understanding the notion that as a text, “the body becomes the explicit site of complexity” (Attwood 236). In Dirty Grrrls I addressed the many complexities of the body as a cultural text through the live embodiments of four female performers. Within the performance, I utilized Brechtian staging
techniques as a means of understanding the foundational aspects of Judith Butler’s gender performativity. I am primarily interested with how Brecht’s methods help us stage, problematize, confront, and reify the gendered aspects of mudflap girl. This show addressed and sought the answer to the following research question:

What is revealed about Brecht’s notion of dialectical theatre and Judith Butler’s idea of gender performativity when the image of mudflap girl is used as the basis of a production designed to place them in dialogue with one another?

Scope of Study (Definition of Terms)

Much like performance, the term “performativity” has linguistic origins that have evolved over time in performance studies scholarship. In the lecture series “How to Do Things with Words”, J. L. Austin coined the phrase “performative utterance” in which “to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it” (6). A performative utterance does or enacts whereas a “constative” utterance indicates “the circumstances in which the statement is made” (3). In his lecture, Austin provides the performative example “I do,” in which the speaking of these words is to perform an action and to alter a state of being. Austin’s lecture series provides a historical relevance to the term “performativity.” Though Austin focuses on discursive performative utterances, his writings provide a context for how we come to “do” things in the process of physical embodiment. He states, “it is possible to perform an act of exactly the same kind not by uttering words, whether written or spoken, but in some other way” (8). This noted “other way” applies to future interpretations of the term “performativity” and helps us to understand the performativity of identity.
Judith Butler took Austin’s performativity and reinterpreted it through the scope of gender and “corporeal acts” (“Performative Acts” 521). In one of her prominent works entitled “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” Butler explores the “ways gender is constructed through specific corporeal acts, and what possibilities exist for the cultural transformation of gender through such acts” (521).

Specifically, Butler defines gender performativity as,

An identity tenuously constituted in time – and identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body, and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movement, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (“Performative Acts” 519)

Gender is gender because of repetition. The female gender has been constructed by means of repetition, particularly in media, through acts associated by femininity, sexuality, and desirability. This iteration is then repeated through live bodies, or performers. Mediated gender performances, like the mudflap girl figure, impose a repetition of the perfect female form, a figure of fantasy that is circulated in our culture(s) and social surround, as we are constantly bombarded by visual representations of the ideal sexual body (Butler, “Performative Acts” 528).

The mudflap girl is one such ideal image. Through her work, Butler further argues that gender is a socially constructed identity functioning in, among, and through performers and their bodies. She notes:

That the body is a set of possibilities signifies (a) that its appearance in the world, for perception, is not predetermined by some manner of interior essence, and (b) that its concrete expression in the world must be understood as the taking up and rendering specific of a set of historical possibilities. (“Performative Acts” 521)

History has determined the agency of gender, how it is produced and maintained in culture(s). To render one’s identity is to perform accordingly which in turn produces significance. Butler postulates gender as an “intentional and performative” act “where 'performative' itself carries the
double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential’,” as performed according to the historical guidelines that we have been given (“Performative Acts” 521-22). This double meaning of performativity infers that there is a live embodiment in which a performer fills in the gaps of the absent other by means of repetition. We do gender as we have been taught to, through a materialization “of possibilities” (Butler, “Performative Acts” 521). Our bodies carry and produce multiple meanings simultaneously. Gender, as a performative act, often manifests in the body through a public presentation or challenging of the masculine and feminine binary.

Through this performative lens, I seek to apply Butler’s gender theory to the production of Dirty Grrrls. Gender performativity, in particular, provides a pertinent lens for viewing and understanding sexual depictions of women and how they are produced and maintained in society. By comprehending how gender is portrayed, scholars and visual consumers alike can then move towards a deconstruction, reapplication, and staging of gender in a productive and immersed manner. This performance sought to address the sexualized text of mudflap girl, noting that the image performs as a body, reinscribing the notion of the aforementioned masculine and feminine binary frame.

Within this project I also utilized several techniques and methods from German dramatist Bertolt Brecht to shed light on performative staging techniques. Brecht lived during World War I and II, and sought to politicize and reconfigure the theatre because of the turmoil that occurred around him, within his family, and most of all within his home country. Brecht sought to create a sense of purpose and timelessness in his methods in order to “create a theatre which was analytical, one which opposed existing theatrical orthodoxies” (Counsell 79). His methods are not only relevant to the show’s subject matter, but are also effective ways of staging gender. Because the production used the political aspects of his methods, Dirty Grrrls instilled a critical
cultural approach to staging. Some of the major techniques I used from the Brechtian methodology included dialectical theatre and the V-effect.

One of the concepts that Brecht explored in his later writings and his plays is that of the dialectical theatre. The dialectical theatre is “a mode of representation which continually reveals the contradictions in the incidents and objects it singles out” (Wright 36). This type of theatre pursues discovery through identification and isolation. This Brechtian method “treats social situations as processes, and traces out all inconsistencies. It regards nothing as existing except in so far as it changes, in other words is in disharmony with itself” (Wright 37). If mudflap girl is an object and my encounter with mudflap girl is an incident, the stage can become a space to begin the process of unveiling contradictions, inconsistencies, or problems that reside within the subject matter. Mudflap girl is a social situation that demands inquiry and Dirty Grrrls is a performance that not only responds to that need but also enacts social change through activism. Performances within the parameters of dialectical theatre typically showcase every side of an argument for the purposes of invoking an active response in the audience. Ultimately, according to Brecht, the performance should fight the passivity of the bourgeoisie and push audience members to formulate an opinion about the staged subject matter. Hence, Brechtian methodology is an effective means of studying and staging the mudflap girl.

Another Brechtian technique I utilized in the performance is “verfremdungseffekt,” also known as the V-effect, or an alienation/distancing effect on the stage. This particular technique of defamiliarization is a key component of Brecht’s original epic theatre because it is translatable across all portions of a production, including writing, staging, and acting. The main purpose of the V-effect is to provide a way for audience members to become critical consumers of the production and to view the subject matter from a social perspective. As postmodernist Elisabeth
Wright suggests, the v-effect “is an instrument for changing reality,” a social device that is used to create an intentional aesthetic effect on the stage (24). I used this Brechtian technique in *Dirty Grrrls* as a way of exploring how to stage gender performativity effectively and as a way of instructing through the arts.

**Significance**

As a subject matter for the show *Dirty Grrrls*, mudflap girl is a significant text that contributes to and expands the implementation of gender performativity and Brechtian methodology in performance studies. Though mudflap girl’s history is laconic and perplexing, she has still had a lasting impact in U.S. American culture(s). Little has been written about the recurring image, despite her frequent appearance in visual culture(s). The mere fact that her genealogy is “untraceable” and is often mythologized in the virtual sphere reveals a need for understanding this prominent symbol of visual culture(s) in the U.S. As a transient image, mudflap girl not only moves on the road but also traverses different spaces. Mudflap girl has moved from the back mud flaps of semis and eighteen-wheelers, evolving into a common representation of United States culture(s) in various sectors of media including fashion, education, and even politics. Her public appearance in these various spaces allows her to become widely circulated among diverse groups and classes of people. She is a roadmap to understanding the cultural performance of the feminine gender. As a sign of cultural intersection, her significance increases. Furthermore, mudflap girl has visually transformed into varying types of bodies. As is evident in her many reappropriations, mudflap girl is a culturally relevant text that reifies a patriarchal standard for how we perform at the intersections of race, class, and gender. This study and performance addresses the significance of the mudflap girl image by
bringing her to “life” on stage and opening up a space for dialogue about her gendered performativity.

Outline of Study

In chapter 1 I introduced the project Dirty Grrrls and its main subject matter, the mudflap girl. Within this chapter, I have proposed a method for utilizing and comprehending Brechtian method and gender performativity, primarily by means of live aesthetic performance, which embodies the problematics of the aforementioned image. Additionally, I defined several key terms that I will be referencing throughout this study and relevant theories that I will use to analyze the text, primarily from Butlerian and Brechtian methods. Moreover, in this section I stated the purpose and significance of this study, highlighting its relevancy in U.S. American culture(s) and the need to relate Brecht and Butler through a performative lens. Finally, I presented a research question that will guide the remainder of the study.

In chapter 2, I further discuss Butler’s theory of gender performativity and the mudflap girl image. In tracing the history of mudflap girl, I further analyze the image as a means of understanding U.S. American ideals of femininity, masculinity, and how these are performed and sustained through such images in U.S. American culture(s). Particularly, I trace the genealogy of the term performativity in the field of performance studies as to guide my analysis of the mudflap girl. Overall, the second chapter explores the evolution of mudflap girl in the context of a visual culture(s) of misogyny.

Much like the playboy bunny, mudflap girl appears in several public places and spaces. Her capacity to wield power is evident in how often the image has been reappropriated in our society. In chapter 3 I explore how the mudflap girl comes to life in Dirty Grrrls by means of Brechtian methodology. In this chapter I discuss and examine how Brecht’s techniques,
including alienation, gestus, and dialectical theatre, can be effectively used to stage gender
performativity in order to understand the function and sustainment of mudflap girl. Brecht’s
methods reveal that the subject medium of the mudflap girl, America’s provocateur, is thus a
symbol that grants command to U.S. American ideals of sexuality and gender in the public
sphere.

Chapter 4 concludes the study with a written analysis of the live performance in context
of Brechtian methodology, expanding on findings from the collected and reviewed research. In
this chapter I present relevant feedback from the show and expand on the need for activism in
performance. I also make suggestions for future research within the performance studies field.

The thesis includes an appendix that contains the Dirty Grrrls script.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In hunting sport, the hunter seeks to kill by targeting a prey, often observing from afar. Once the prey is in close proximity, the hunter skillfully prepares for the kill and attempts to slaughter the animal. Often, the hunter will mount the animal’s head for display. In a sense, the mounted head is a trophy to be admired and desired. As a metaphor, the image of the mudflap girl is the prey or the hunted, that which is gazed upon, captured, and exhibited in grotesque yet normalized ways. She appears everywhere, from the decals “mounted” on differing vehicles to neon signs “hung” above nightclubs. Mudflap girl is a reinterpretation of the cultural ideal of the feminine body. This reinterpretation of an original act or image creates a repeated state of being or framework for the U.S. American woman. As articulated by Butler, “This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (“Performative Acts” 526). Mudflap girl is a reappropriation of hegemonic oppression of women in the United States. She not only pertains to this state of misogyny, but also to social identity, directly correlating to gender as learned from birth.

In this chapter of the study I first discuss the mythic origins of the mudflap girl image. As a cultural ideal, this image presents a problem, one of misogyny as expressed in U.S. American visual culture(s). Indeed, there is no substantial literature written about her and therefore no means of fully understanding her place in a historical patriarchal society. The “mundane social audience” does not question mudflap girl, as she is an accepted performance of gender (Butler, “Performative Acts” 520). Hence, the theory of gender performativity becomes a means to explore and understand potential solutions to this problem. In this chapter I further discuss
Butler’s theory of gender performativity as it pertains to the mudflap girl image and the field of performance studies. *Dirty Grrrls* is, in a sense, a response to the problem and a way of enacting and embodying these potential solutions. After my presentation of the problem and solutions, I discuss the show as a unifying factor for the two aforementioned elements. Overall, this chapter provides an in depth examination of the relationship between the mudflap girl image, gender performativity, and the project show, *Dirty Grrrls*.

Mudflap Girl History

The mudflap girl is an U.S. American emblematic shadow of a woman with an hourglass physique characteristically seen on truck mud flaps, clothing, accessories, and many other types of U.S. American trucking paraphernalia (Trebay). Little has been written about the disputed origin of the mudflap girl. Currently, only a limited amount of information is available on the web that addresses possible accounts of mudflap girl’s inception. However, the earliest designs of this image began to appear on truck mud flaps some time between the late 1960s and early 1970s (Romick). Before then, mud flaps were “simple, heavy black rubber without much adornment” (Barr). Two stories of mudflap girl’s origin prevail online, intersecting at various points. One competing version of the story acknowledges trucker Stewart Allen with creating, drawing, and placing the design on his own long haul truck. This particular storyline concludes that Allen’s inspiration for the image derived from his wife, Rachel Ann. The story references Bill Zinda as the discoverer of Allen's silhouette, buying the rights to use it on the Wiz Enterprises mud flaps (Barr). While the history and origin of the mudflap girl is debated and contested in the virtual sphere of various auto-related websites, a second competing story claims that Bill Zinda of Wiz Enterprises created this famous design on his own in the 70s. This mudflap girl narrative suggests that Zinda based the image from the figure of an exotic dancer.
named Leta Laroe in order to promote his line of truck and auto accessories (Israel). Several stories and myths about the mudflap girl continue to circulate the virtual sphere. Since the conception of mudflap girl in the 1970s, the image has evolved into a common representation of United States culture(s) in various sectors of media including fashion, education, and even politics (Romick).

Since the early 2000s, mudflap girl has moved from the back mud flaps of semis and eighteen-wheelers to the fashion world of shirts, earrings, hats, other memorabilia, and the media. In fashion, mudflap girl is imprinted on different types of clothing and accessories and even sported by celebrities such as Victoria Beckham. In the popular television series *Sex and the City*, the character Samantha wore a mudflap girl pendant seen throughout episodes of season four. In the 1991 film *Thelma and Louise*, the image of the mudflap girl is highly visible on the back of an eighteen-wheeler; two protagonists, who encounter the driver and the image several times, comment on the inappropriate and sexist behavior of the truck driver. In the 1999 film *The Boondock Saints*, Connor, Murphy, and Funny Man continue a vigilante spree at a strip club called the “Sin Bin.” The doors of the club are adorned with neon mudflap girls. On the homepage of the website, mudflapgirl.us, an eighteen-wheeler displays a set of mudflap girls on its mud flaps. On the back of the truck there is a picture of a man and woman modeling polo shirts with the silhouette embroidered on the left breast. You can find an entire page on “Tumblr” dedicated to the mudflap girl image and various reappropriations, from gifs to tattoos to belly button rings (http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/mudflap-girl). Moreover, designer Lisa Kline uses the mudflap girl to frame her brand logo and also sells jewelry of the image with diamond studs appearing as the nipple of mudflap girl (lisakline.com). In education, mudflap girl has also been used as a promotional tool. A 2007 advertisement campaign from the Wyoming
State Library featured the mudflap girl reading a book “in an effort to get more men into the libraries” (Romick). This reappropriated image is now also printed on shirts, iPhone cases, bumper stickers, and sundry items as featured at www.cafepress.com/wyominglibrary. Furthermore, according to an auto-related website, mudflap girl was the cause of a local dispute in Montana between two natives (autos.aol.com). One disputer was a woman who drove a SUV that showcased a branded decal from Skin Industries, depicting a mudflap girl on top of the term “Skin.” The second was a man who filed a complaint against the obscenity of the image to the local police department. The police ultimately declared the decal was not obscene. In politics, mudflap girl has been the cause of a dispute in the Arizona State legislature, which introduced an amendment in 2007 that would have potentially banned mudflap girl due to her obscenity. House bill 2316 in Arizona was created to address the sizing of splash guards on motor vehicles (Arizona). An amendment to the bill was presented, aimed at banning obscene and offensive imagery and lingo on mudflaps. However, the amendment was ultimately rejected by House vote 31-19 (Romick; “Morning Roundup”).

Though mudflap girl’s history is laconic and perplexing, she has nevertheless had a lasting impact in U.S. American culture(s). She can be seen on cars and trucks alike, adorned with various attire such as halos, hats, flags, and guns. She can also be seen lying next to wind turbines, against the backdrop of a confederate flag, and other scenes commonly associated with U.S. American culture(s). Finally, mudflap girl has been transformed into varying types of bodies including an “ethnic” version depicted by the incorporation of an afro hairstyle, a “thick” version that increases her body mass/weight and elevates her pelvic region from the ground, and an animalistic version seen both as a full deer head in place of her own, or simply with the addition of antlers to her head. As is evident in these reappropriations, mudflap girl is a culturally
relevant text that reifies a patriarchal standard for how we perform at the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Without a complete history of her author and origin, one cannot fully determine why she was created. Nonetheless, as consumers we can speculate about her resiliency in culture(s) by first understanding how she functions. By means of constructed gender identity, mudflap girl perpetuates hegemonic gender roles, including masculinity and femininity, in U.S. American culture(s). According to Bates, hegemony “means political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class” (352). The term was originally coined yet never explicitly defined by social theorist Antonio Gramsci during the time imprisoned in the 1920s and 1930s. Hegemony is a social and political reality of oppression (Gramsci 506). Through a communicative lens, scholars John Warren & Deanna Fassett argue that “hegemony attempts to reveal how people or groups who are oppressed, or who have less power, participate in that process, even when it’s harmful to them” (46). The social construction of gender can be understood as part of this hegemonic process of configuring identities of dominance and submission, often portrayed in U.S. American culture(s). Mudflap girl, a sexualized object glorified as the idealized feminine figure, participates in this hegemonic cycle of domination by consent. As an accessible and accepted image, she has been normalized, reproduced, and reappropriated in society, with little to no objection by the public. In a way, mudflap girl represents general public mores and therefore is sustained by and through public circulation.

Mudflap girl is literally an unobtainable figure of fantasy, residing in a culture of “raunchness.” According to author Ariel Levy, raunch culture is an institution of explicit and public sexuality, which focuses on “the appearance of sexuality,” “hotness” as “cultural
currency,” and “sex appeal” as “a synecdoche for all appeal” (26-31). Mudflap girl participates in this culture as a constant sexualized silhouette of the feminine ideal. However the silhouette of mudflap girl indeed implies a lack of an actual identity, or rather an identity that resides solely in sexuality. She is forever posed in the sitting profile of a female, never exposing front or back views of the body. Moreover, she is predominantly seen as either black or white, as a binary layered upon an already gendered binary. Who is the mudflap girl? Yes, we can see her and even chase after her behind the wheel along highways. We can even place her on inanimate objects, granting her more visibility and accessibility in culture. Yet we can never fully attain her or expose her identity. We cannot even legitimately trace her history. She is neither here nor there, yet she is personified nonetheless.

Review of Literature

My purpose in this section of the chapter is to analyze the mudflap girl image by means of gender performativity. In 1990, Judith Butler first conceived the notion of gender performativity in her revolutionary book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Within this work Butler pulled from various feminist theorists and directly from Michel Foucault to explore the concepts of gender and sex. From this work, performance studies scholars have explored the notion of performativity using various subjects and cultural artifacts (Diamond, “Introduction” 4; Hamera 6). Performance scholar Judith Hamera describes the performance lens as “an organizing trope for examining a wide range of social practices” (2). Mudflap girl is itself a performative, “an agent of and a product of the social and political surround in which it circulates” (Hamera 6). In order to reveal a greater meaning behind the surface level appearance of a mere visual image in media, I employ feminist theory, such as that of Judith Butler’s discussion of gender as well as Susan Bordo’s critical work on the body. In my
analysis of the image, I seek to reveal and understand the performances of masculinity and the feminine body, via the aforementioned decal. As a basic premise, deconstructing an image such as this allows scholars and media consumers alike to become culturally critical about image consumption. However, a deeper significance lies within what is hidden beneath the initial encounter with an image, addressing not only what she is performing but how she is performing. Frequently, we have little control over the various images that media presents on a daily basis. Indeed, one’s lack of control can be problematic concerning how deeply images become entrenched in our psychology and in turn how they shape our views of masculinity and the feminine body. In particular, mudflap girl has become a commonly accepted symbol of sexuality in U.S. American culture(s) in such a way that we have become desensitized to its repeated depiction. For example, I was unable to control my chance encounter with mudflap antler girl. In some ways she forced me to confront myself as a consumer participating in unproductive hegemony. The original image of mudflap girl provokes little response within me. However, when she is depicted as further dehumanized through the incorporation of antlers, a new performance is enacted.

Mudflap girl, altered and parodied in several ways, depicts a silhouette of the ideal female body in U.S. American culture(s), complete with a svelte waist, buxom bosom, and long flowing “Farrah Fawcett” hair (Treby). In our culture(s), she is the quintessence of sexualized femininity and what some women strive to become in order to capture ultimate societal acceptance, adoration, and the male gaze. Scholar Laura Mulvey refers to this gaze as a system of “active/male and passive/female” roles in which fantasy and desire are projected “on to the female form which is styled accordingly” (9). Mulvey further explains, “In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance
coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (9). Art historian Norman Bryson echoes this point, stressing that even pictures become gendered “around an opposition between woman as image and man as the bearer of the look” (xxv). Mudflap girl is a symbol of this preferred and desirable female form, depicted as a shadow of sexuality. She is publicized in media, put on vehicular display and paraded around the highways of North America. Mudflap girl is an object of the gaze, seen as a profile without visible facial or skin features but with clearly discernable female body parts.

As a symbol of the ideal, mudflap girl embodies a gendered performance. This performance of gender may include the mimicry of qualities such as submission, frailty, beauty, innocence, silence, adaptability, motherhood, and many other “feminine” qualities. As Bhabha declares, “double articulation” creates an effect of camouflage, repeating ideologies rather than re-presenting them, and representing identity (126). The gender identity that is preserved through this iconic visual image “might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self” (Butler, Gender Trouble 43). Mudflap girl not only imitates the gendered identity of woman, but she also reinforces masculine culture(s) of violence, dominance, pride, and the attainment of glorified female trophies.

In perceiving and understanding mudflap girl through a performative lens, it is important to understand performance as an “essentially contested concept” which expands to notions of “process, activity, achievement, and as an object of study” (Strine, Long, and Hopkins 183). Performance is a dynamic area of study that intersects “aesthetic, psychological, historical, sociocultural, and political dimensions” to promote an encompassing lens to view our world
(Strine, Long, and Hopkins 181). As this term has continued to take shape in performance scholarship, scholars such as Hamera have interpreted performance as a “term on the move” that “is central to contemporary views of culture as enacted, rhetorical, contested, and embodied” (Hamera 2). Mudflap girl, as an object of performance, enlightens modern day cultural perceptions, critiques our practices for performing gender, and provides a roadmap to understanding performance as “restored” or “twice-behaved behavior” (Schechner 36).

Performativity has been implemented in myriad ways since its conception with J. L. Austin. Indeed, the term has come to be “marked by cross-purposes” across various fields of study, often falling between theatrical and deconstructive spectrums (Parker and Sedgwick 2). Much of the functionality of performativity lies in its definitional contention and malleability across various fields of study. However, for the purpose of this study, I focus on the use of performativity within the field of performance studies.

In her introduction to Performance and Cultural Politics, scholar Elin Diamond clearly defines the meaning of the term performativity in the context of gender, as coined by Butler. She describes:

> Gender, then, is both a doing – a performance that puts a conventional gender attributes into possibly disruptive play – and a thing done – a pre-existing oppressive category. It is a cultural apparatus that coerces certain social acts and excludes others across what Butler calls ‘culturally intelligible grids of an idealized and compulsory heterosexuality. (4-5)

In this sense, performativity becomes what it is by means of performance, a performance of repetition. Indeed, gender performativity functions within a set of cultural standards and historical boundaries. However, Diamond declares that performativity “doesn’t exist unless it’s being done” (“Introduction” 4). This repeated performance, when embodied in the public sphere, produces meaning among spectators and participants, forming and reforming social norms.
Hence, performativity is defined by the act and embodiment of performance. These performances must be present in order for performativity to transform into a reality rather than a mere notion. Diamond states this idea succinctly:

When performativity materializes as performance in that risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing (a reiteration of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpretations), between someone’s body and the conventions of embodiment, we have access to cultural meanings and critique. Performativity, I would suggest, must be rooted in the materiality and historical density of performance. (“Introduction” 5)

In order to satisfy and fully understand Diamond’s definition of performativity one must comprehend performance as directly tied to performativity. The two cannot exist alone. Diamond explained the two terms explicitly noting that performativity “materializes” through embodied performance. From Diamond’s definition, Butler’s gender performativity further evolves into a way of understanding how our culture(s) contributes to the process of doing. Gender is never done. Gender is always in the process of becoming what it is. Mudflap girl contributes to this process of doing, especially in visual culture(s). Because of problematic images such as the mudflap girl, we might even propose that gender must be undone or redone. This process of undoing gender might be better understood through a lens of performativity. Diamond’s understanding of performativity calls for an embodied materialization of sorts. Within the field of performance studies this translates to a call for staged or live aesthetic performances. Performativity can and does especially exist in this capacity, as performance is required in the process of materialization. Dirty Grrrls attempted to deconstruct a common image of our society and to rebuild it once more by means of materialization. Through Dirty Grrrls, staging gender performativity becomes a reality and the point where performance and performativity meet.

Scholar Elizabeth Bell delves into the functionality of performativity in her chapter in Theories of Performance titled “Performativity in Performance Studies.” Specifically, she looks
at the ways in which performativity aids in constructing social identities of race, class, and
gender and how these ever changing identities intersect with one another. Rather than
discovering the identity of the self through Butler’s performativity, Bell suggests that we must
come to question “how” we are constructed materially. In her analysis of performativity Bell
declares:

Performativity maintains that identity, especially for gender, desire, race, ethnicity, and
abilities, is a complex matrix of normative boundaries. These boundaries are created in
language… These boundaries are enacted in institutions. (177)

Performativity not only upholds these circulating identities, it also acts as a lens for
understanding cultural phenomenon. One of the most influential aspects about Bell’s discussion
of performativity is the trifurcation she presents of the complex term. She divides the subject in a
meaning and beneficial manner to include a new perspective, performativity as a “theory of
identity, a strategy of critique, and a political practice” (176). In this approach to performativity
one can evidence a vivid interweaving of bodies, history, and politics in a given performance. As
a theory of identity, performativity provides a critical cultural lens for understanding human
behavior and performance of identity. As a strategy of critique, performativity allows one to
consume culture(s) as an informed observer and participant in an ongoing hegemonic process. As
a political practice, performativity provides a way for advocates to challenge gender, racial, and
class norms, to produce and circulate new or informed ideas about perceptions of gender, and to
alter or undo negative or detrimental gendered binaries. These three elements of performativity
directly apply to the mudflap girl artifact. Utilizing performativity as a theory of identity allows
one to understand mudflap girl as not only an object worth studying, but as a subject that grants
us greater awareness of U.S. American culture(s) and gendered, racial, class identities. As a
strategy of critique, performativity allows us to consume mudflap girl as a visual representation
of the ideal feminine body and to recognize her as a part/reinforcement of misogynistic culture(s). Finally, as a political practice, performativity allows one to take ownership over his/her direct involvement in circulating visual media, to prevent sexism and misogyny in their own lives, and to encourage others to take a stance on unproductive hegemony. Via Bell’s three elements of performativity, I attempted to intervene in the communicative process between image and consumer through the production of Dirty Grrrls, so that the audience members’ perspectives would be activated.

In a prominent work entitled “Personal Narrative, Performance, Performativity: Two or Three Things I Know For Sure,” performance scholar Kristin Langellier extended the terms performativity and performance, to narrative theory. Langellier’s primary goal in the article was to address a question she posed in the introduction of the piece, “What do performance and performativity contribute to doing and studying personal narrative? What can we learn about personal narrative in no other way than through performance?” (127). Throughout the piece she maps out specific points of juncture between performance, performativity, and personal narrative, claiming that personal narratives are indeed speech acts (Langellier 128). By viewing personal narrative as innately Austinian, Langellier implies that stories are not merely constative utterances, but they also contain a performance quality by means of live embodiment. She notes:

Performativity articulates and situates personal narrative within the forces of discourse, the institutionalized networks of power relations… and performance implies the transgressive desire of agency and action. From the perspectives of performance and performativity, personal narrative is situated, embodied, and material – stories of the body told through the body which make cultural conflict concrete and accessible. (Langellier 129)

In this definition of performance and performativity, embodiment brings stories into the thing being done. This redefinition of performance and performativity underscores the intersections of the three aforementioned terms and how they function to help clarify performativity as a
multifaceted term. Stories not only tell or describe happenings, they also provide a portal into understanding cultural dilemmas, such as the mudflap girl. Indeed, over the course of the show, *Dirty Grrrls* presented several personal narratives, exemplifying this very notion. The personal narratives in the production all focused on instances of gender performativity, and through that embodiment the telling and re-telling of the stories closely followed Langellier’s notion of performativity. Like Diamond, Langellier illustrates the need for materiality in order for the denotative and connotative aspects of performativity to become fulfilled.

As Hamera indicates, “performativity is a specific means of material and symbolic social production that centers on the repetition and apparent stability of a particular kind of embodied utterance”(6). Tracing its genealogy, Hamera reminds us that performativity is deeply rooted in Austinian values, which “has enabled a powerful appreciation of the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes” (1-2). In a chapter entitled “Burning Acts,” Butler analyzes the notable work of feminist scholar Catharine MacKinnon through a performative lens, critiquing the visual components of pornography. Because MacKinnon “has argued that pornography is a kind of hate speech,” Butler assumes that her claim is based on the notion that “the visual image in pornography operates as an imperative, and that this imperative has the power to realize that which it dictates” (“Burning Acts” 220). In accordance, Butler declares, “The visual field is then figured as speaking, indeed, as delivering imperatives, at which point the visual field operates as a subject with the power to bring into being what it names, to wield an efficacious power analogous to the divine performative” (“Burning Acts” 221). For MacKinnon visuals take on a performative power. In pornography, “the vulnerability of women’s projected sexual availability is victimization” (MacKinnon 198). Mudflap girl is not pornography, however I argue that this image wields a power similar to that
of pornography. MacKinnon claims “gender is sexual,” and that pornography submits to a male supremacist culture(s) that dictates and polices the female body (197). As a part of the term performativity, mudflap girl shows us that a picture enacts a thousand performances.

To further the understanding of gender performativity, I refer to the works of Richard Schechner, Susan Bordo, and John Sloop as supplemental resources to Butler. Performance scholar Richard Schechner describes performance as “restored behavior” or twice behaved behaviors, which “emphasizes the process of repetition and the continued awareness of some ‘original’ behavior, however distant or corrupted by myth or memory” (47). Though the foundation of the behavior may be recognized, once extracted and enacted, a new behavior is created. In this sense, the mudflap girl symbolizes a series of repeated gendered and sexualized acts (original behavior) of stereotyped women in the United States who, when sexualized, behave as someone else or in various states of being (a new behavior). When seen in the form of the original mudflap girl what becomes apparent is a symbol of sexual femininity. Once reappropriated, as depicted in Fig. 2, a new identity/behavior is achieved; in this instance, mudflap girl has transformed into a symbol of Southern culture(s) and oppression. As an object, her body consists of the Confederate flag mapped onto the silhouette, a controversial symbol of racial segregation. Though certain characteristics have been applied to the image the same sexualized form remains intact.
Furthermore, heteronormative and heterosexual relationships that replicate the form of dominant male and submissive female, or this binary system, are often deemed acceptable and normal in U.S. American culture(s). However, when the respective female becomes a sexualized body, she is often dehumanized and objectified, as in the case of the mudflap antler girl, thereby portraying an animalistic character that is exposed as the hunted.

Along with Butler I employ Susan Bordo’s application of the body, in which she suggests, “the body – what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body – is a medium of culture” (13). Mudflap girl germinates the feminine ideal on U.S. American culture(s). She does so through what Susan Bordo would consider “the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity” (14). This feminine ideal reinforces the belief that women must conform to aesthetic values determined by the media (i.e., “Barbie” like quality with augmentation to the breasts and buttocks). We have been trained as consumers to associate specific pieces of media to what we perceive as “sex” or “sexual.” For example, Marilyn Monroe was and still is labeled as a major U.S. American sex symbol, rarely historicized as much else. Similarly, we correlate the notorious bunny head silhouette with Playboy, the magazine featuring nude women founded by Hugh Hefner in the 1950s. Even this
magazine, which produces narratives from notable authors, is merely classified as a game changer and sustainer in the sexual revolution.

Repeatedly, women in media that are branded as being sexy conform to a certain standard of beauty; thin and busty. These emaciated female bodies translate to what we view as an ideal norm: hyperslenderness accompanied by large breasts. Cultural images, frequently viewed in myriad media, are indeed anatomically impossible and contribute to what Michel Foucault calls “docile bodies” or political bodies in which discipline “dissociates power from the body” (*Discipline* 138). Bordo further describes that these are docile bodies “whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, improvement” (14). For example, the anatomy of Barbie is not commensurate with the anatomy of a human female body, meaning it is anatomically impossible for any human, except through surgical intervention, to obtain her body proportions. As is noted by Magro, “the physical proportions and characteristics of the Barbie doll are not average but rather are exaggerated from the norm” (364). In addition to these perverted measurements of beauty, Barbie’s appearance “remains coded as white, slim, affluent, and able-bodied” and seems to “reflect and reinforce racist, heterosexist, and ableist values” (Collins et al. 108). Similarly, no female can ever redesign her physical form to match the silhouette of mud flap girl. Recently, female artist Fantasia released a music video for the song “Without Me,” which featured former Destiny’s Child singer and now solo artist Kelly Rowland. In the music video a neon sign of the mud flap girl outline is shown with Kelly Rowland placing her body within the image. Even Rowland, a slender body, cannot fully fit into the outline. The discipline of the docile body is enacted through cultural norms such as diet, make-up, and dress. Particularly, the docile body is widely accepted as an ideal feminine identity, or a woman who has achieved heightened cultural status through beauty, body image,
poise, sociability, and several other feminine qualities. Obtaining these characteristics seems necessary in order to attain the desired trophy status of a masculine husband that can provide. When focused on this sort of self-modification, women obsess over ultimate body appearance, memorizing cultural scripts that we are taught from birth which often lead to feelings of unworthiness, “lack, insufficiency/never being good enough” (Bordo 14).

The mudflap girl visual also advances a sense of masculinity, dominance, power, and violence. According to Foucault, “power is essentially what dictates its law to sex/meaning sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden” (History 83). The very decision to place the image of mudflap girl on paraphernalia produces power, which in turn produces sexuality in multiple ways. First, the mere application of this image on objects such as automobiles and various attire articulates qualities of sexuality and power, mainly that they do not exist without each other and that this form of sexuality is directly tied to male dominance and competition; sex informs power and power informs sex. According to New, “while men are frequently the agents of the oppression of women, and in many sense benefit from it… interests in the gender order are not pre-given but constructed by and within it” (733). Equally, masculinity is learned in the same way that femininity is and we frequently see this representation of masculinity through technology. Sloop references technology as a social construct and “femininity” and “masculinity” as malleable concepts, claiming that technology is often personified as “male” (193-4). The automobile, which is consequently construed as masculine, is “an extension of the man,” perhaps even a phallic symbol (Sloop 194). Maintaining masculinity through the use of objects is pertinent in U.S. American culture(s), for if a man’s vehicle is not masculine enough, he is then labeled as an other, more feminized gender. As Butler states, “we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right,” and for men,
masculinity is often portrayed through technology (Feminist Theory 522). The practices of automobile adornment are apparent in masculinity, especially in U.S. American culture(s). The masculine driven competition that occurs can be seen on vehicles, using variations of mudflap girl accompanied with other automobile accessories (such as hanging genitalia) as a form of currency to gain approval and respect in the masculine community. Kimmel suggests, “manhood is demonstrated for other men’s approval,” and that approval is precisely what is being sought in these vehicle additions (214). Furthermore, evidence of violence is also depicted in reappropriations such as the mudflap antler girl, which suggests that hunting animals equates to hunting women, both to be put on display and cherished as trophies. As Kimmel suggests, “Violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood… it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight” (215). Mudflap girl suggests a certain amount of manhood, which is often associated with dominance over women, in correlation to the sexualized feminine body. Once again the mudflap girl perpetuates the heteronormative relationship of man and woman, which can also be understood as the hunter and the hunted.

Though mudflap girl is a perplexing image, she might be better understood by means of performance. The production Dirty Grrrls intensely targeted the surface politics of her body, which included specific characteristics of different reappropriations of mudflap girl. Through the performance, mudflap girl was construed as performative “in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler, Bodies 417). Mudflap girl is an embodied symbol of the materialization of gender. Dirty Grrrls translated this symbol onto the stage as a fully embodied and live aesthetic performance of gender.
Although Butler has done a great deal to theorize the concept of performativity, she is not a practitioner of aesthetic performances. Despite the pervasive use of performativity in scholarship and academia, praxis is rarely used or documented as a way of furthering theorization of the term. Dirty Grrrls attempted to take the notion of performativity one step further by means of repetition, taking what has already been done, redoing it on the stage with live bodies, and undoing gender in a way that encourages the audience to come to terms with the self and surrounding others. Bell describes, “Bodies onstage are always produced by and change through history. So actors always perform bodies within a set of historical conventions and director’s cues for how the body ought to move, gesture, and articulate itself onstage” (179).

Descriptions of gender performativity often reflect a set of historical and patriarchal standards. Similarly, principles of theatre indicate a standard set of hierarchical institutions and elitism. As a metaphor, the theatre reflects cultural standards and societal norms. Therefore, the stage is an ideal place for exploring the notion of gender performativity. Bell states that this theatrical metaphor acts as “powerful explanations for how gender is materially and historically constituted, especially when we remember that performance is not solely mimesis (imitation), but also poiesis (making) and kinesis (breaking)” (180). Dirty Grrrls materialized this theatrical metaphor, utilizing the mudflap girl image and gender performativity to inform each other by means of live embodiment.

In this second chapter of the study I have reviewed the genealogy, or lack thereof, of the mudflap girl image, exploring her use and circulation in U.S. American culture(s) since the 1970s. In addition to exploring her origins, I have also introduced Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, the use of this theory within the field of performance studies, and the intersections of mudflap girl with aspects of the theory. Finally, I discussed Dirty Grrrls as a link
to the two elements. In chapter 3 I delve into Bertolt Brecht, his dramaturgical methodology, and the use of those methods in this project. I discuss why Brecht is an effective way of placing theory, particularly the theory of gender performativity, onto the stage.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

In 1818 French philosopher Victor Cousin used the phrase *l’art pour l’art* or “art for art’s sake” in a lecture series in which he stated, “We must have… art for art’s sake… the beautiful cannot be the way to what is useful, or to what is good, or to what is holy; it leads only to itself” (*The True*). However, writer and critic Théophile Gautier popularized the phrase in the 1830s defining the slogan as “the pursuit of pure beauty – without any other preoccupation” (151). The phrase later evolved into a general philosophy for the Aesthetic Movement in art and literature, whose followers asserted that art needs no social, political, or cultural justification in order to be art (“Art for Art’s Sake: Fallacy and Viciousness”).

Since its conception, art for art’s sake has been the cause of much debate between artists and authors in various sectors of art and literature. The term has been utilized by artists such as U.S. American poet Edgar Allen Poe, Chinese playwright Cao Yu, and French novelist Victor Hugo. This concept or “theology of art” encouraged artists of all kinds to abandon morality and to adopt purely aesthetic craftsmanship (Benjamin, “Mechanical” 224). Essentially, this kind of teaching encourages artists to remove thought from artistry and to pursue a raw and pure basic form of beauty. In his book *Art For Art’s Sake*, writer John C. Van Dyke claims, “An artist has no business to think at all” (17). Though there were many art-for-art’s-sake enthusiasts throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several artists opposed this way of life. For instance French author George Sand, a pseudonym for Baroness Amandine Aurore Lucile Dupin, once declared in a letter to a friend, “Arts for art’s sake is an empty phrase. Art for the sake of the true, art for the sake of the good and beautiful, that is the faith I am searching for”
What Sand was expressing in this and many of her writings was an anti-art-for-art’s-sake plea to realize the connections between art and humanity.

Within the confines of the art for art’s sake philosophy, art becomes an empty vessel for corruption and loses any remnant of humanity. In the 1930s Walter Benjamin, German critic and comrade to Bertolt Brecht, sought out and theorized an emancipation from this theology of art. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin claims that *l’art pour l’art* “denied any social function of art but also any categorizing by subject matter” (“Mechanical” 224). This battle between art-for-art’s-sake enthusiasts and those opposed to this school of thinking has persisted throughout the years, especially among writers, dramatists, and artists of every kind. For instance, in a response to art-for-art’s-sake enthusiast Gustave Flaubert, George Sand posited, “What is art without the heart and soul one pours into it? A sun which would not project its rays would give life to nothing” (“To Gustave Flaubert, at Croisset Nohant, Monday evening, 1 October, 1866”). Art-for-art’s-sake supporters insisted that creating art for the masses was an unnecessary moral and social elevation (“Art for Art’s Sake: Fallacy and Viciousness” 99). Contrarily others, like Sand and Benjamin, believed in art that meant something and art that pursued progressive ideas that defied tradition and ritual.

In the early twentieth century many followed the tradition of art for the sake of art, without social and political motive. However, artists in opposition of this philosophy called for a change in this way of thinking about the arts and its effect on society. They called for a shift from debate and discussion to artistic enactment. The author of a 1917 article concerning the historical shift away from the art for art’s sake philosophy noted, “The absurd fallacy of art for art’s sake resides in this, – that its adepts deny that art is a language organized by mankind of the past for communicating thought and emotion” (“Fallacy and Viciousness” 99-100). Bertolt
Brecht was an advocate for the shift away from art for art’s sake by means of socio-political revolution through the arts. Like Benjamin, he too recognized the façade of l’art pour l’art in both his written works and his theatre productions. In a comparison of traditional art and music to a woman he stated, “when neo-classicism, in other words stark Art for Art’s sake, took the field… music was to make use of the amateur. The amateur was used as a woman is ‘used.’ The cellist in the orchestra, father of a numerous family, now began to play not from philosophical conviction but for pleasure.” (“Brecht” 40). In this comparison, Brecht uses the metaphor of a woman to explain the “worth” of art when operating under art for art’s sake principles, noting that the role and use of a woman is one that is for man’s pleasure alone. Art for art’s sake was primarily concerned with beauty, as our visual culture(s) today is primarily concerned with the aesthetic appeal of a woman. This outlook in both art and culture is vacant, oppressive, limited, and maintains a hierarchical system that has been set in place for centuries. As a German dramatist living through both World Wars, Brecht experienced this type of thinking (or lack of thinking) firsthand, as he was jaded by warfare and oppression in his home country. He believed that the theatre also suffered from becoming a product of the bourgeoisie, claiming:

We are free to discuss any innovation which doesn’t threaten its social function – that of providing an evening’s entertainment. We are not free to discuss those which threaten to change its function, possibly by fusing it with the educational system or with the organs of mass communication. Society absorbs via the apparatus whatever it needs in order to reproduce itself. (“Brecht” 34)

Brecht recognized this injustice early on as a playwright and theorist. In his many and ever evolving works, Brecht had one primary and sustainable goal: to fight the bourgeoisie. During his time as a playwright and director in Germany, Brecht frequently experienced a national theatre that imitated the theology of art for art’s sake and existed for the purpose of pleasuring the elite ruling class. Weary and transformed, Brecht sought to revolutionize the theatre by
means of artistic reformation. Through his prolific writings and performative works, Brecht transformed empty and elitist art into revolution and Marxist protest.

Scholar Elizabeth Wright reevaluated the works of Brecht in her book entitled *Postmodern Brecht*. In this work she explores the postmodern impact of Brecht, inquiring, “Is Brecht dead?” (10). She responds to this question by noting that his work is very much alive in modern theory and by claiming that though his contributions to modern day discussion of theory are questioned and debated among theatre critics, Brecht continues to transform how we think about and produce theatrical works in our time (Wright 11). For example, in the 1970s German theatre and literary scholar Werner Mittenzwei coined the term “Brecht-fatigue” to describe the need to do away with Brechtian methodology as an “aesthetic emancipation of socialist literature” (101-14). Although there has been a renewed interest in Brecht since the 1990s, scholars continue to debate the relevancy of Brecht in theatrical literature and technique (Thomson 125). During World War II, Brecht sought to not only revolutionize the theatre but to extend that change to society, especially in Nazi Germany. Though he never fully infiltrated society as he had hoped, Brecht changed the face of theatre and the arts during and after his time as a dramaturg. Wright declared that Brecht “fluctuated” with the times, becoming more popular and widely accepted amongst “radicals” and “social intellectuals” during post war Germany (7-8). Today, Brecht continues to influence the theatre and its constituents in a different way, as his successors believe “that a new society has need of a new aesthetic” (Wright 11). For example, Brecht’s play *Mother Courage* was originally inspired by the German invasion of Poland, and was initially received by critics, to Brecht’s dismay, as sentimental at best. In 2008, *Mother Courage* was adapted to the modern stage with undertones geared towards the War on Terrorism and was received by critics as a successful anti-war piece (*Theater of War*). As a performance
scholar and practitioner, I too believe that the Brechtian methodology is alive, thriving, and necessary in continued attempts at effecting society through artistic works with political and social activist messages. Over the course of this production-centered thesis, I have often looked to Brecht’s writings and literature about him to aid me in the process of writing and directing a live aesthetic performance geared towards social justice. Indeed Brecht’s impact is vast, and many of his concepts continue to inform my understanding of the relationship between page, stage, and bodies. Due to his political motives and activist directing methods, Brecht serves as the ideal model for this project. Often times attempting to incorporate feminist theory or critique cultural misogyny in a production can be difficult when trying to advocate for a specific message. What may occur is a moralizing effect in which the work appears to force a moral viewpoint on audience members. In turn, this may appear as biased in that it appears to present only one side of an argument. However, feminist scholars such as Diamond suggest an alternate way of incorporating feminist critique and theory into performance. Specifically, she draws upon Brecht to accomplish this, stating:

As Brecht understood, theater’s representation apparatus – with its curtains, trapdoors, perspectives, exits and entrances, its disciplined bodies, its illusory coherent subjects, its lures to identification – might offer the best “laboratory” for political disruption, for refunctining the tools of class and gender oppression. (“Introduction” 3)

In adopting Brechtian methods, one begins to embrace a critical stance on subject matter and form. As a laboratory, Brecht’s theatre allows me to explore the difficult concepts of mudflap girl, misogyny, and gender oppression. For this very reason, I chose to implement Brechtian techniques in my production of Dirty Grrrls.

In this chapter I delve into several Brechtian techniques within his epic theatre including the alienation affect and gestus. I also discuss the evolution of the epic theatre into the broader and informal terminology known as Brecht’s dialectical theatre. In addition to exploring these
various techniques, I also reflect on the work of the late performance artist and choreographer Pina Bausch who was highly influenced by Brecht’s theatre. Not only have Bausch’s works greatly influenced this project, they also function as part of the intersection between feminist theory and Brechtian methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter by discussing how Dirty Grrrls acts as a bridge between gender performativity and Brecht.

Brechtian Methodology

Epic Theatre

Living during World War I and II, Bertolt Brecht sought to politicize and reconfigure the theatre because of the turmoil that occurred around him, within his family, and most of all within his home country. Brecht wanted to create a sense of purpose and timelessness in his methods in order to “create a theatre which was analytical, one which opposed existing theatrical orthodoxies” (Counsell 79). Brecht was in the business of change. His works explicitly called for a change in the theatre model, not just in the text. He desired for theatre to become critical, political, active, and to fight the passivity of the mundane social audience. He achieved this through his methods, though ultimately he did not receive recognition for the political impact in the time his work was produced. Yet the impact of his work has continued to increase posthumously, affecting the way performance scholars and practitioners view the theatre and its social footprint.

The epic theatre is the legacy of Brecht’s cumulative works in dramaturgy. In recognizing the negative effects of the bourgeois theatre, Brecht shifted away from Aristotelian dramatic theatre and into what he described as a non-Aristotelian style of staging, referring to “the elimination of empathy and imitation (or mimesis)” (Willett “Brecht” 47). The purpose of this transformation was to revolutionize the theatre, including the roles of directors, producers,
writers, actors, and spectators. In a way, much like his alienation effect, Brecht wanted to disrupt the accepted norms of the theatre as spectacle. The dramatic form or Stanislavskian method that had been so widely accepted at that time (and still is to this day) often focused on emotional connection and nostalgia among audience members. Yet Brecht desired to remove empathy from the stage, as he believed it to promote purely illusive qualities. In a work written in 1930 titled “The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre,” Brecht created a comparative table to demonstrate the differences between the dramatic and epic theatre:

![Brecht’s Comparative Table](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-WV3-ggm6cYs/T3lxIeA4pfI/AAAAAAAAAQ4/F3GDnHUUrRo/s1600/brecht+epic.png)

The table lists the many variations on theatrical elements in these two methods, especially the move from passive emotional tactics to active rational tactics. In his early works the young and
ambitious dramaturg attempted to remove certain emotions from his writing as well as from his actors. However, he later evolved his concepts to accept that a theatre completely devoid of emotion was in fact impossible and to attempt to remove emotional connections between audience and actor/stage would be both absurd and naive.

Tracing the elements of the epic is necessary in order to further understand the role and implications of audience in the epic theatre. Brechtian expert John Willett stated in his notes on Brecht’s early work, “There were in fact three threads that went to make up Brecht’s own epic theatre… the playing in quotation marks, the portrayal of new and complex processes and the detached, unemotional style” (“Brecht” 17). Actors were not to fully take on and become character personas. Rather, he encouraged his actors to quote gestures and movements of characters, as if narrating their circumstances. This element is especially evident in Brecht’s metaphor of the street scene, in which he called for a sense of awareness of all possible circumstances in a given situation. The street scene was an experimental process initially mentioned in an excerpt from Brecht’s “The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre,” which further developed his original notion of the epic in the 1930s (“Brecht” 121-9). The purpose of this experiment was to “portray social processes as seen in their causal relationships” (Brecht, “Brecht” 121). The scene revealed multiple perspectives and conclusions as if it was being analyzed like a murder scene. According to Brecht, “the point is that the demonstrator acts the behaviour of driver or victim or both in such a way that the bystanders are able to form an opinion about the accident,” such as in a car accident (“Brecht” 121). The street scene refers to the natural scene on a street where an incident takes place. The incident is something that is being constantly constructed by all who are involved, including bystanders. The scene is an event that is repeated rather than imitated, or in other words, the scene is not mimetic but rather is
interpretive. What takes place is meant to illustrate complex processes for both actor and spectator, and both are required to complete the scene. Perfection of the scene is not required, as transformation can often be construed, especially for Brecht, as a distraction. Through the street scene metaphor, Brecht steered theatre away from emotional functionality and focused instead on a different purpose. That purpose is not to get the audience to experience the street scene per se on an emotional level, but instead to recognize its “socially practical significance” with a bigger picture in mind (“Brecht” 122). The audience takes on a much more significant role in the epic theatre than in earlier forms of dramatic theatre. Brecht stated succinctly:

In short, the spectator is given the chance to criticize human behaviour from a social point of view, and the scene is played as a piece of history. The idea is that the spectator should be put in a position where he can make comparisons about everything that influences the way in which human beings behave. (“Brecht” 86)

To grant agency to an audience was a revolutionary notion in itself. Brecht wanted to provide the opportunity for spectators to move beyond their roles as consumerist audience members. He wanted to alter the notion of l’art pour l’art into art that mattered, art that challenged the bourgeois pushers, art that put thought back into the stranger’s mind. As Diamond claims, these differences between actor and spectator as set in the street scene metaphor were essential in order to “free both actor and spectator from the temptation to identify with, feel a sameness with, a unified, undialectical character” (“Rethinking” 87). Audiences needed to move beyond illusionistic, emotion driven theatre. They also needed to share in the responsibility of breaking of the proverbial fourth wall. This fourth wall was originally built to maintain the audience members’ stance as passive, motionless bystanders in a hierarchical system designed to produce passive consumers. Brecht commented on the status of the epic theatre’s spectator, stating that their thought process may follow the pattern of, “Yes, I have felt that too – Just like me – It’s only natural – It’ll never change – the sufferings of this man appal me, because they are
unnecessary – That’s great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh” (“Brecht” 71). The purpose of the epic theatre is to change the cathartic thought process of the spectator, transforming any experiential empathy they may feel towards a character into a critical awareness of the self.

Though the formula of the epic theatre’s purpose focused on the reactions and transformations of audience members, several other techniques defined the process of creating an epic production. Some of the practices Brecht noted that were necessary to create such a play “include representation by the actor, stage technique, dramaturgy, stage music, use of the film, and so on” (23). This list would later evolve to include the alienation effect, gestus, use of bright lighting, and several other prevalent techniques often associated with the epic theatre. Though these practices certainly contributed to the overall goal of the epic production, Brecht acknowledged that a vital part of the epic theatre pertained to reason, influencing audience members by means of logos. Rather than participating in an emotional connection or experience the bystander should come to a point of social reality, though emotion will always remain (“Brecht” 23). Yet the epic theatre should inform and deny the automatic sensationalism associated with the theatre as spectacle. The epic theatre must live up to its name and transform the passive mind in a notable and socially active way.

Gestus

In one of the first scenes of Dirty Grrrls, one of the performers enters the stage as Marilyn Monroe. Though she is obviously not Marilyn and not even fully pretending to be so, there are a few characteristics of her performance that reveal the persona of Marilyn. One specific element is her walk from upstage left to center stage, which is more of a Marilyn “wiggle” than an actual stride across the stage. Here she places one foot directly in front of the
other stepping from toe to heel, much like the way Marilyn Monroe did in her films and in front of the public eye. This intentional action is what Brecht would refer to as “gestus.” In a work entitled “On Gestic Music,” Brecht explicitly describes gest as, “not a matter of explanatory or emphatic movements of the hands, but of overall attitudes. A language is gestic when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men” (“Brecht” 104). Gestus is directly correlated to the body and specific movements enacted onstage for a specific purpose. Gestus even extends to both “gist and gesture; an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words or actions” (Willett “Brecht” 42). In addition to the Marilyn “wiggle,” the performer giggled, sighed, and played coy throughout her monologue in a true Marilyn fashion. In rehearsals I asked her to study videos of Marilyn, not so that she could perfect a mimetic performance of Marilyn, but instead to showcase a sexualized gestus through an iconic feminine body. Indeed, gestus may be used as a means of embodying gender performativity onstage. In one of the final scenes of Dirty Grrrls, one performer “becomes” the mudflap antler girl by means of gestus. She transforms from a shadow to a fully present version of the mudflap girl by standing immediately behind a hanging deer head in place of her own. She delivers a narrative about performing her gender in the South as directly tied to sexual violence. This is accomplished in both verbal and physical ways, by means of the elaborate narrative and awkward embodiment of the mudflap girl. She stands timidly throughout, utilizing nervous gestures to showcase the submissive qualities about her. Indeed, the hanging deer head is alienating, however the gestus tells us a story on its own depicting an evolution of the subject matter, that of the mudflap girl image. In this instance gestus places the theory of gender performativity on stage by means of an embodied narrative, forcing the audience to confront the image as a live body.
Not every gesture on the stage is indicative of Brechtian gestus, as a gest must meet certain requirements. For Brecht, the gestus “reveals how relations of production determine our social relations where we believe them to be at their most ‘natural,’” exaggerates “ideological gesture,” and “shows the relation of people to one another” (Wright 20, 27). At one point during her Marilyn monologue, the performer pauses to blow a kiss to the audience, doing so in “Marilyn” fashion. As she does this, three performers shown as shadow figures behind the curtain replicate her motions in unison. What does this type of gesture do or accomplish for the audience? As gestus, this movement reminds us that we have come to accept the imaginary kiss as normal, perhaps as a flirtation device or indication of love, passion, or other emotional quality. The kiss appears to be normative. However, when embodied by three other performers who are unrecognizable at this point, it becomes defamiliar. Furthermore, this gestus exaggerates the function of the kiss, taking a simple gesture associated with the Marilyn icon and isolating/elevating the movement to show its cultural ideology. Finally, the kiss reveals the relationship between performer and persona, performer and audience, and audience and culture(s). The kiss does not exist without a receiver or audience member and cannot be naturalized by one person alone. We all produce and receive the kiss simultaneously.

Diamond described Brecht’s gestus as “a moment in performance that makes visible the contradictory interactions of text, theatre apparatus, and contemporary social struggle” (“Gestus” 519). Brecht’s gestus serves the same function as the epic theatre, showcasing the seams of a performance and revealing social truths about a character or circumstance. Marilyn’s “wiggle,” or rather the enacted movement by the performer, reveals a major contradiction. Juxtaposed against the verbal text, the gestus of that particular moment reveals that the performer was not trying to “be” Marilyn. In actuality, she is asking the audience if that is what they desire from
her. Even with the incorporation of actual quotations from Monroe, the performer is engaging in a distant version of the famous actress. She is performing Marilyn as icon. The Marilyn “wiggle” seen in her entrance reveals the social struggle of “sexiness.” Surely, quickly walking around in heels with one foot directly in front of the other can not be construed as “natural.” However this is “natural” for the iconic version of Monroe, the one that is constantly performing “sexy.” In other instances within the performance the female performers embody various mudflap girls.

In the process of staging the show I tasked each performer with choosing one reappropriation of the mudflap girl and creating a narrative for the image as if she were a living being. What developed from this production technique was an “unnatural” set of narratives that highlighted various social issues juxtaposed against projected images of the reappropriations. In the scene, the performers attempt to first embody each image projected (i.e., mudflap girl with gun, fat mudflap girl) and then perform the narrative they wrote. Here, gestus is used to reveal a seam and to put a social issue on display, much like the body is on display throughout the performance. The performer who chose the fat mudflap girl chose to display issues of accepted body images and social negative stigmas about fat women. Though her body does not in any way resemble the fat mudflap girl, her body placed in conversation with both the image and the narrative produced an effective instance of gestus. As these three components – image, narrative, body – collided, the gestus made visible the premise of the show, to showcase multiple viewpoints and possible interpretations of the mudflap girl image. Theatre critic Rob Baum inquired about the reality of gestus, stating, “Is gestus tangible? The question brings us closer to the truth of this operation: gestus exists because we feel it; in the sensory recognition of an event, the gestus is born. In this regard at least, gestus is non-theatre. Gestus is testimony” (Baum 49).

The performance and embodiment of the “fat mudflap girl” is a testimony of gender
performativity, of the physical and emotional struggles to be sexy, of the social reality of idolization of the sexualized female body, and of the struggle to re-perform a stylized repetition of acts on the stage. German scholar Nagele Rainer described the function and relationship of the body within Brecht’s gestus, stating:

Brecht’s Gestus paradigmatically shows the difference in the body: Gestus is the sum of concrete bodily gestures, facial expressions, tones of voice, and rhythm and figures of speech… It is structured by the symbolic code of a specific social situation. The body does not have the identity of its wholeness in itself. It provides the ideal and the idol, the Gestalt, of wholeness, which it only finds in the distribution along symbolic chain. (Rainer 112)

Brecht’s gestus redefines the way we think about physical and verbal expression on the stage. Gestus allows one to explore social issues by means of the body and voice, not just in chosen subject matter. Brechtian elements such as these aid in the cause of the epic theatre, to refunction and revolutionize the complacency of the bourgeois theatre.

Alienation

Another way in which I incorporated Brechtian technique occurred in the aforementioned icon scene as all of the performers join together to perform a repetitive series of motions each had established earlier in the scene. Along with Marilyn, the remaining performers enter the stage at separate times in the scene as “Madonna,” the “Playboy Bunny,” and the “Mudflap Girl.” Earlier in the scene, during their individual monologues, each character performed some specific action of “sexiness” while vocalizing a “sexy” word. Towards the end of the scene the performers join together to recreate these points of gestus in unison. At first, they perform the gestures in a slow and sensual manner. Then they repeat the original series over again in a quickened manner. This repetition occurs several times before they come to a halt in the gestural series. As the motions are performed more quickly, the original “sexiness” is completely undermined. This technique provokes alienation. Brecht described the alienation effect as:
A technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labeling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this ‘effect’ is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view. (“Brecht” 125)

By extrapolating specific movements from each performer’s monologue and placing them in a series to be continuously repeated, each individual movement becomes separated from any remnant of their original context and intent. What was once familiar and “sexy” becomes defamiliar and “grotesque,” what scholar Ralf E. Remshardt describes as “an ephemeral attribute in the work of art, eliciting a response it refuses to sustain” (10). What was once deemed “natural” becomes unnatural and disturbing. What was once accepted now calls for an explanation and cannot be taken for granted. In the final performance of this sequence the shadow mudflap girl joins in behind a screen in the back. They all end the gestus in the position of the mudflap girl pose. The shadow further alienates the audience and encourages them to accept the mudflap girl as a popular social icon.

One must look towards the origins of Brecht’s technique in order to fully understand alienation. In 1935, Brecht experienced a traditional Chinese theatre performance by Mei Lanfang, which utilized alienation technique throughout (Bai 389). After this encounter, Brecht introduced the German term *Verfremdungseffekt* in several of his works and began to develop the concept further throughout the 1930s and 1940s. As Willett states in his notes on Brecht, “The word translated as ‘seem odd to’ is ‘befremden’, a cousin of the term ‘verfremden’ that occurs so often later and will be translated as ‘alienate’” (“Brecht” 19). Many scholars claim that there is no exact translation from the German word to English terminology and therefore, alienation inadequately describes the original concept (Wright 24). As Wright suggests:

*Verfremdung* is a mode of critical seeing that goes on within a process by which man identifies his objects. It goes beyond the concept of ‘defamiliarization’: it sets up a series
of social, political, and ideological interruptions that remind us that representations are not given but produced. (19)

The alienation effect is not and should not be used as a simple technique to simply make something odd or unfamiliar. Instead, the v-effect should be used to enact social change and to make the audience aware of the performance and any surrounding social issues. A moment of alienation is not the thing itself, but rather is a means to an end, “an instrument for changing reality” and a “social device, undoing the effects of reality under bourgeois capitalism” (Wright 24).

By the end of the “sexy” sequence, each performer is out of breath and exhausted, and not in any way sexy. Their physical bodies show exhaustion from the performance of sexualized gender, of icon, and of ideal femininity. The process was not a pleasant one, however I believe was an effective technique. The alienation was reminiscent of a historical patriarchy of misogyny and oppression. Brecht declared, “The production took the subject-matter and the incidents shown and put them through a process of alienation: the alienation that is necessary to all understanding” (Brecht, “Brecht” 71). In this instance, alienation was needed to reveal truths about our culture(s) and to encourage audience members to change the way they view performances of sexiness.

**Dialectical Theatre**

One of the concepts that Brecht explored in his later writings and his plays is that of the dialectical theatre. The dialectical theatre is “a mode of representation which continually reveals the contradictions in the incidents and objects it singles out” (Wright 36). Though Brecht was never fully able to develop his theories in dialectical theatre, many argue that this terminology was a mere extension of the epic theatre (Willett 281; Wright 36). In essence, the dialectical theatre encompassed the basic premise of the epic theatre as a prerequisite of sorts, “which
exposes the contradictions while perpetuating the institution which produces them” (Wright 13). In fact, Brecht even described the term “epic” as being too informal and inadequate for fulfilling his purposes for the theatre (Brecht, “Brecht” 282). Performances within the parameters of the dialectical theatre, which were essentially a more developed version of the epic, typically showcased every side of an argument for the purposes of invoking an active response in the audience. This type of theatre pursues discovery through identification and isolation. This Brechtian method “treats social situations as processes, and traces out all inconsistencies. It regards nothing as existing except in so far as it changes, in other words is in disharmony with itself” (Wright 37). To accomplish a dialectical production is a difficult task, yet one that was appropriate for completing a project of this caliber. Instead of attempting to merely deconstruct the image of the mudflap girl and present all of the problematics of such images, Dirty Grrrls undertook a different, dialectical approach. Rather than pulverizing the image of the mudflap girl I attempted to create an outlet for the audience to first relate to the image and to later choose and enact their own perspectives of the image. A complete deconstruction of the image would have been a disservice to the audience, at it would have only presented one biased perspective. However, to take on the task of presenting various sides to a spectator just might be enough to revolutionize the way audience members consume and think about images such as the mudflap girl.

Pina Bausch, Feminist Theory, and Brecht

Much like those opposed to the art for art’s sake movement, Pina Bausch once reflectively declared, “I do not want to take your thoughts from you,” describing her desire for audience members to participate as engaged active spectators (Hoghe 63). According to theatre scholar Thomas Riccio, Pina “drew on the emotive work of German expressionists and the social
consciousness of Brecht,” as is evident in her aforementioned statement (693). As a primary resource in this project, Brecht serves as a unifying factor for feminist theory and the stage. His methods are not only prevalent in Bausch’s performances, but also serve as an effective way of approaching and understanding gender performativity within the production of *Dirty Grrrls*. Because of the political aspects of Brecht’s methods, his insights allow performance practitioners to further understand the universal applicability and praxis of Butler’s performativity. This intersection is evident in the many works of Bausch, whose work influenced the final scene of *Dirty Grrrls*.

Pina Bausch was a German dancer, choreographer, director, performance artist, and practitioner who was born in 1940 and died in 2009 from an unknown form of cancer. She was a leading influence on modern dance, conceptualizing the revolutionary genre of “Tanztheater,” a style combining dance and theatre. As noted by Riccio:

Pina Bausch, who worked in the small industrial city of Wuppertal, Germany, remains the most controversial, innovative, and influential choreographer of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Her single greatest legacy is *Tanztheater*, a postmodern approach to performance expression that interweaves the intellectual elements of theatre—dramaturgy, text, character, and social awareness—with the more abstracted, raw, and immediate bodily expression of dance. (693)

Bausch’s Tanztheater utilized expressionist dance and was heavily influenced by Brecht and by historical post-war Germany. She is often celebrated for her unique style of dance, her intricate use of the body, and her elaborate use of the stage. Bausch has been consistently classified as a feminist performance artist and choreographer, whose work was strongly influenced by Brecht. What sets Bausch’s Tanztheater apart from other genres of dance “is her development of an art form based upon a binary opposition that does not reproduce an either/or dichotomy; instead, Bausch’s productions are both dance and theater” (Price, 322). In 1972, Bausch was appointed director of the “Wuppertal Opera Ballet” and later transformed and renamed it to “Tanztheater
Wuppertal Pina Bausch” (Riccio, 692). Many of her works produced in the company used repetition, implemented surrealist and other avant-garde techniques, had intricate and elaborate set designs, and were multi-media. Bausch often centered her works on themes of love, emotion, expression, politics, oppression, and especially gender construction, often challenging the normative roles of everyday life gender performance. Because she was affected by oppression and war in post-Nazi Germany, “Bausch questioned accepted social and gender constructions and defended women from what she saw as an aggressive, often destructive German patriarchy” (Riccio, 694). Bausch created, directed, and produced several performances over the span of thirty plus years, many of which exemplified Brechtian techniques and socio-political motives.

Similar to Brecht’s epic theatre, Bausch took “pleasure in shattering the illusion of theater” (Price, 326). As is evident in her many performances, her productions veered away from concepts that entrenched the audience into a world of fantasy. Rather, her performances focused on socio-political realities as embodied by dancers. In a sense, “her work took Brecht a step further, with the event enacted on the bodies of her performers potently yet ambiguously wavering between the theatrical and the real” (Riccio, 693). Her work was dialectical, composed of performance, dance, realities, and symbolic structures (Price 322-3).

As a Brechtian predecessor, Bausch took on a postmodern perspective, rejecting notions of pure aesthetics and creating “evocative staging that unearthed the deep social structures lurking beneath the modern psyche” (Riccio 693). Bausch’s work is Brechtian in many ways. Following her lead, directors can use the stage to begin the process of unveiling contradictions, inconsistencies, or problems that reside within the subject matter. Performance practitioners can view Bausch’s work as a social situation that needs to be questioned and analyzed and as a performance that not only responds to that need but also enacts social change. Ultimately,
according to Brecht, the performance should fight the passivity of the bourgeoisie and push audience members to formulate an opinion about the staged subject matter. Hence, Brechtian methodology is an effective means of studying and staging gender performativity.

Theatre scholar David Price claims that Bausch’s work “examines gender construction and explores the possibility that gender attributes are both expressive and performative” (323). What is particularly interesting about Bausch in regards to this project is that her work puts gender performativity to work on the stage. For example, Bausch once created a performance in which a woman sat in a chair while men repeatedly threw tomatoes at her. She begged them to continue, yet would also interject the process by asking them to hold her hand, hug her, or show some form of affection. Here, Bausch staged gender roles focusing on the “oppressed” and “oppressor” relationship. Like Bausch, I attempt to stage gender performativity and am influenced by Brecht’s methods. The major components of the project including Brecht’s epic/dialectical theatre, Butler’s gender performativity, and the mudflap girl image function symbiotically, revealing contradictions and truths about each other. These discoveries are present through the medium of the body, and extended through gestus on the stage. Similarly, Bausch’s Tanztheater “reveals the body as the site of a social inscription – the body on which the writing of the politics of gender reveals itself in performative acts – and the body as the nexus of the nonlogocentric imaginary, which reveals itself through expressive acts” (Price 323). In Bausch’s choreography, any sense of illusion or entrancement is removed from the production. Her “actors” do not perform the tragic hero or draw in audience members to believe in some distant form of reality. Rather, her performances remain and do “not circulate separately in the world” (MacNeill 306). Her message traverses across the bodies on the stage “in real time, and through painful exertion,” and they cannot be individualized from one another (MacNeill 308).
Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced and reviewed Brechtian methodology, including his techniques of gestus, alienation, and the epic/dialectical theatre. I also discussed the work of Brechtian successor Pina Bausch and the intersections of feminist theory and Brecht’s methods. From Brecht to Bausch to Butler, *Dirty Grrrls* acts as a point of intersection for the theories, methods, and concepts utilized in this project, taking what is on the page and bringing it to life on the stage by means of live performing bodies. Diamond suggests that “as soon as performativity comes to rest on a performance, questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects, all become discussable” (Diamond, “Introduction” 5). This discussion commences with the dialectical theatre. Chapter 4 illustrates that praxis seems an appropriate response to Brecht’s call for revolution and Butler’s rhetoric towards social change. Brecht once stated, “True progress consists not in being progressive but progressing” (“Brecht” 40). Change does not just occur by changing one’s mindset, but instead extends to a live embodied progression. *Dirty Grrrls* was one such progression and attempt at fulfilling the purpose of Brecht’s dialectical theatre.
CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

That first punctum moment in the cinema parking lot has since faded, yet throughout this project, I have had several stinging moments, which also bruised me and are “poignant to me” (Barthes 27). Even now as I peer at my computer screen, I am stung once more with feelings of awe, disgust, and wonder. When I first began this project almost two years ago, I had no idea where the mudflap girl would lead me. The journey she has taken me on has been both an incredible and incredulous one where I have learned and discovered much about visual misogyny in U.S. American culture(s). Along with the mudflap girl and her many appropriations I have been guided by Judith Butler, Bertolt Brecht, and Pina Bausch. These revolutionary intellectuals have provided a way to study and materialize the mudflap girl, revealing several truths along the way. Thus, I am reminded of my initial research question that began this written project, “What is revealed about Brecht’s notion of dialectical theater and Judith Butler’s idea of gender performativity when the image of mudflap girl is used as the basis of a production designed to place them in dialogue with one another?”

Throughout this final chapter I use this research question to guide a discussion about specific findings and results I have discovered throughout the production process. I begin this conversation by reviewing specific parts of the performance Dirty Grrrls and correlating them to the Brechtian methods I presented in chapter 3. These methods include epic/dialectical theatre, gestus, and the alienation effect. In addition to these main dramaturgical techniques, I also delve into a few other relevant Brechtian ideas the will aid in my overall explanation of the performance, specifically the use of media, music, and breaking the fourth wall. Following this
analysis I discuss critical feedback about the show and any further related findings of the project. Finally, I present suggestions for areas of future research.

Dirty Grrrls

Initially this project began as a full thesis project but later evolved into a production-centered thesis. This change allowed me to explore and investigate the image, which originally halted me almost two years ago, further by means of a live aesthetic performance. One aspect that separates performance studies from other departments, majors, and programs is the notion of praxis. Performance scholar Stephen Farrier examined the significance of theory and performance in an article, defining praxis as “an effort of will to transform theoretical concepts and considerations into shared physical activity” (Farrier 129). Praxis is the very essence of a production-centered thesis in which theory and practice meet the stage. Praxis is a significant part of performance studies as it is a way of embodying and understanding theoretical concepts and cultural artifacts by means of creative work. Several scholars have written about the importance of praxis, including Dwight Conquergood, who notes:

The performance studies project makes its most radical intervention, I believe, by embracing both written scholarship and creative work, papers and performances. We challenge the hegemony of the text best by reconfiguring texts and performances in horizontal, metonymic tension, not by replacing one hierarchy with another, the romance of performance for the authority of the text. (151)

This notion of praxis might justifiably be reconfigured as a “liminality,” which performance scholar Jon McKenzie describes as functioning within that in-between space of the dichotomy, whether that be the page and the stage or even masculinity and femininity (27). Rather than perceiving each end of the spectrum as wholly more important than the other, performance practitioners are constantly negotiating each side of the dichotomy, residing somewhere in the middle where the two meet and comeingle as allies. The uniqueness of performance studies exists
in the constantly evolving and revolving relationship between critical theory and aesthetic craftsmanship. A thesis project, bereft of performance, may be a work of intellectual savvy and subject mastery, yet its audience will most likely not reach beyond a small and specific community of scholars. A graduate level performance project too has both positive and negative aspects. Though the performance may reach a wide variety of people and communities, the theoretical groundwork is often times implicit rather than explicitly discussed like it is on the page. The page is the place where one discusses and explores theory in the traditional form of expositing essay while the stage allows one to put that theory into practice. For this study specifically, a production-centered thesis allows me to engage in both of these types of scholarship simultaneously, providing an outlet to engage in productive cultural work and to reach different audiences.

Several benefits are associated with this type of project, some of which Conquergood describes as “experiential and participatory engagement with materials both for the researcher and her audience” and “a more accessible and engaging format for sharing research and reaching communities outside academia” (152). As a performance studies scholar, I have been able to acquire a skill set I would not have without the experience of writing and directing a show about the mudflap girl. Those that witnessed the show were also able to gain valuable information about and critique of gender oppression and misogyny in U.S. American visual culture(s). A performance allowed me to reach beyond the world of academia and to participate in social change with a more diverse audience. Similarly, writing a thesis centered on the show itself has allowed me to explore the mudflap girl further by means of performativity and Brechtian methodology. Together, performance and written scholarship function not against but for one another to produce critical and impactful research within our field.
Conquergood claimed that performance studies could be summarized in three words, also known as the “three a’s” including “artistry, analysis, activism” (152). Though there are many facets to the field of performance studies, these three terms succinctly encapsulate the vision of our community. Rather than operating separately the three a’s perform in and through each other. For instance, Dirty Grrrls did not simply fulfill the notion of artistry. Instead, Dirty Grrrls created an aesthetic critique of the mudflap girl and advocated for a change in our perceptual consumption of misogynistic images within visual culture(s). In other words, the performance does work.

As imagined in the first chapter of this study, Dirty Grrrls brought the mudflap girl image to life, and questioned the existence and transience of the mudflap girl through a critical feminist perspective. This performance art piece used Brechtian techniques as a means of understanding and staging Butler’s notion of gender performativity. Using techniques such as the defamiliarization effect, which alienates or distances the audience in some way, Dirty Grrrls challenged the audience to adopt a critical perspective of the subject matter. The show evolved over eight scenes, each designed to contribute a new understanding of the subject matter. This performance does work in several different ways. In the section that follows, I explore several instances from the show in which this cultural work is evidenced.

Pre-show

The stage is blank, with only a large white curtain across the upstage span. No performers are on the stage at this point. As audience members flood the Department of Communication Studies Black Box Theatre, a compiled music video is projected onto the back white curtain. The video is a montage of various popular music videos showcasing women (female singers such as Beyonce, Shakira, Rihanna, and Katy Perry) in sexualized variations of the mudflap girl pose. I
commissioned Jake Beck, a fellow Communication Studies graduate student, to assist me in constructing the montage video. After several months of researching TV shows, music videos, movies, tumblr pages, and other forms of media. I compiled a list of several examples of the mudflap girl image. Since the production ran a little over an hour, we decided to create a four minute video to be shown as audience members entered the space and as part of the last scene of the show.

I had several purposes in choosing to use this type of media in the performance. One of my primary intentions for incorporating media was to utilize Brechtian techniques such as defamiliarization from the outset of the show. Brecht describes the alienation effect as “a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labeling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural” (“Brecht” 125). Showing the audience a compilation of popular media images accomplished several tasks. First, an immediate distancing effect takes place in choosing to set up the show by means of a virtual medium designed to bombard the audience with sexualized female images. Though the audience may initially perceive the video as entertaining, when the video is repeated at the end of the performance its excess appears more “grotesque” and, hopefully, causes the audience to see the implications of seeing such videos as mere entertainment. Furthermore, the performative choice of beginning with a video showcasing common representations of sex promotes the idea of the U.S. American icon. Though the audience may not evidence this at first, the goal of repeating the video at the end of the performance is to invite audience members to engage fully with the critique of an icon. At first, this tactic immerses the audience in the sensationalism of it all, though the images being shown are specific appropriations of the mudflap girl pose. What appears to be new media and popular culture(s) turns into a quickening
montage of epitomized gender performativity. What is a normal trope often seen in media culture(s) is now put on display for examination. These female depictions have no voice.

Brecht often cited using media and music as intentional political devices used to support a production’s “die fable.” Though no exact English translation exists for this term, Wright describes Brecht’s “die fable” as “the moral of the story not in a merely ethical sense, but also in a socio-political one” (28). The purpose in using media is to set up the overall moral of the story and to make complex the notion of spectacle. Brecht notes that music should participate as “an active collaborator in the stripping bare” of the bourgeoisie (“Brecht” 86). Rather than using the video as a device to merely capture the audience’s attention, I utilize this performative choice to prepare the audience for what is about to occur and to foreshadow the story’s ending. In place of the female voices seen in the compilation, the Arctic Monkey’s 2013 hit song, “Do I Wanna Know” plays throughout the video in place of the female performers’ voices. This popular song, like many others, has a music video that showcases cartoon drawings of the mudflap girl and sexualized female bodies on cars, in short shorts, and with single parts of the body often put on display. The song itself is about unrequited love, yet sexual undertones are evidenced throughout. The music combined with the media begins the process of challenging the socio-political reality of the mudflap girl and contributes to the overall goal of confronting hegemonic oppression. In the montage video for Dirty Grrrls, parts of the Arctic Monkeys music video are dispersed throughout, providing a through line of modern day representations of the mudflap girl. Once a mere shadow, she is now re-presented and re-performed through depictions of the female body in popular media today. The video is a synecdoche that is brought back once more in the final scene of the performance, for purposes I discuss further in a later section of this
chapter. As is evidenced in this video montage and performative choice, mudflap girl, though born in the 1970s, is still very much alive in our culture(s) today.

*Scenes 1 and 2: Evolution of the Sexual Female and Iconic*

As the pre-show video ends one final image of the mudflap girl appears and then fades to black. Throughout the performance the blank white curtain remains tight and in place. In this particular scene, the curtain is used as a shadow device in which the performers move their bodies immediately behind the curtain in front of several lights. After the video, bright lights from behind the white curtain turn on, revealing an embodied silhouette of the mudflap girl upstage right. One technique Brecht frequently used in his productions was the use of bright and harsh lighting (Brecht, “Brecht” 141). One reason for this technique was to shock the audience into realizing that the production was just that, a production. He suggests, “If we light the actors and their performance in such a way that the lights themselves are within the spectator’s field of vision we destroy part of his illusion of being present at a spontaneous, transitory, authentic, unrehearsed event” (“Brecht” 141). Through the curtain, the lights are blatantly visible to audience members. Their visibility prevents the audience from fully immersing the mind into the spectacle and from even recognizing the production as purely spectacle. Emerging from the singular image of the mudflap girl comes another body slowly moving out of the first shadow and into another sexualized pose behind the curtain. In the metamorphosis of one image into two, the performer crawls slowly in a sexualized way into a pose that is slightly higher than the original mudflap girl shadow. This emerging effect occurs two more times with the other performers. A third body emerges from the second pose, creating an odd and defamiliarizing double effect of the female body. This performer walks sensually until she strikes a standing, bent over position. Finally, a fourth performer emerges and walks to her final standing pose.
What is revealed in the final image is a parody of the familiar “Evolution of Man” image, which now depicts an “evolution of the female sexual body” image (Refer to Figures 4 and 5 below).

![Fig. 4. Evolution of Man](http://www.infoplease.com/images/evolution_of_man.gif)

This parody alone indicates several ideas. For instance, the image refers back to the social norm of gender being tied to biological sex, which Butler debunks in her theory of gender performativity. Furthermore, the image indicates that the mudflap girl is a primal depiction of different sexualized icons. She has no distinct identity and therefore represents all sexual icons.
simultaneously. In this process of evolution of sexualized female bodies, Brecht’s gestus is utilized to convey the parody, as a social gest that is “relevant to society” and “that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances” (Brecht, “Brecht” 104-5). Also, defamiliarization is incorporated to distance the audience from these images in order for potential critique to occur. Coupled with this evolutionary process is a Shakespearean verse about the repercussions of lust, which is purposefully recorded in a digitalized voice that bares no remnant of humanity. Indeed, the verse is barely audible to the audience and is therefore convoluting or alienating. My purpose in this scene was to introduce the idea of the performing icon. Rather than merely showcasing images of the icons themselves, these images come to life, but not as the character of its origin. For instance, though the character performing popular sexual icon Marilyn Monroe embodied specific qualities associated with the star, she was actually performing a distant version of Marilyn, one that has been constructed as purely iconic. This performance is repeated in the three other icons represented in the scene. Madonna bursts out from behind the curtain and immediately performs the popular hit 80s song, “Like A Virgin,” almost taunting Marilyn. The Playboy Bunny arrives on the stage with pep and jaunt, teasing the other performers for their lack of sexiness. Even though the original representations of the icons do not exist in reality, on the stage they coexist as sexual icons that traverse time and space.

Each performer has some sort of prop or signifier that serves as an index of their character. For instance, Madonna comes out with lace gloves, the Playboy Bunny has a pair of bunny ears atop her head, and Marilyn has bright red lipstick and long white silky gloves. These singular props align with Brecht’s minimalistic style of staging, in which he often only distributes one or two props to characters and only if they are necessary for conveying a message. As in the street scene metaphor, Brecht describes the use of props as pertaining to the
performer’s character: if a driver is to put his hat on, he should do so with a purpose as if to indicate his drunkenness and general state of being (Brecht, “Brecht” 127-8). This incorporation of props contributes to the notion of gestus that both movement and vocalization should convey “overall attitudes” (Brecht, “Brecht” 104). In this “iconic” scene, props are used solely to convey character and to divert the audience’s imagination from fantastical to reality. What is shown is what is important and necessary to guide the audience away from full immersion.

Scene 3: Girls

Scene three focuses on narrative versions of gender performativity in which each performer speaks about and confronts a personal experience about sex, a sexual icon, experience, or their own sexuality. In this scene, Langellier’s notion of narrative performativity comes to life, with each performer materializing their own experiences. In the scene the “grrrls” are enmeshed in a long white rope, pushing and pulling on the proverbial idea of gender. The concept of this scene was a simple yet poignant one. In one of the rehearsals for the show I asked each performer to write down a specific experience they had with either a sexual icon or a sexual experience. What they produced were beautiful stories of sexual identity, first time encounters with sex, and even sexual trauma. I believe this exercise was a bonding experience for all of us, to know that we are not alone in our experiences of sexuality and womanhood. Furthermore, the stories provided a new perspective of the subject matter, revealing how far visual images and experiences alter and affect our psyches. In the transition from scene one to scene two, each performer dances around the space to a song entitled “Femininity” from the movie Summer Magic. I watched this musical often as a child and sang along to for years afterward. The song itself occurs in a scene where two older teenage girls are trying to teach a younger girl how to be more feminine and appealing to men. In the song they sing phrases such as “let him do the
talking, men adore good listeners” or “hide the real you” (Sherman and Sherman). As disturbing and tragic as these instructions are to me now as an informed feminist performance scholar, these rules reflected my perception of gender as I was growing up. The production provided me an opportunity to implement one of my own experiences with femininity and sexuality by means of defamiliarization.

As the performers dance around to this song of feminine tropes, one of them uses a rope to “collect” the remaining performers into a confined circle, including herself. When the music ceases, each performer conveys their story as the others continue to dance with and against the rope, negotiating the tension from the other performers. At first, the circle is small, but the circumference of the rope increases with each story. Symbolically the rope functions in many ways. First, the rope confines the women to a particular storyline, one of constructed gender norms and expectations, particularly for women. The rope is white, indicating a sense of “purity” required when performing gender “properly.” Second, with each story the rope expands, as if their understanding of these norms increases. They push and pull on the rope more aggressively. We see that the rope cuts into their bodies and prevents them from moving fully and fluidly. In turn, we see that societal norms often cut into our bodies, just as these memories have remained with us, scarring our way of thinking about gender. Furthermore, Brecht’s notion of gestus continues to contribute to the overall performance. The classical dance moves and positions exhibited by the performers convey a constant sense and awareness of cultural expectations of the female body. Brecht once compared acting to acrobatics, “using his countenance as a blank sheet, to be inscribed by the gest of the body” (“Brecht” 92). Here, the performers attempt to use their bodies as an inscription of gender norms and expectations. This comparison between actor and acrobat symbolizes the hegemonic system of patriarchy, directly dealing with how
individuals perform gender for others. Under this system our bodies are stretched and pulled to the limit. The gestus of the tension between body and rope communicates this struggle. Finally, as the last story is spoken, each performer pulls tight on the rope and declares an echoing phrase of awareness and presence, “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” (Beauvoir 301).

Scene 4: An Untraceable History

When the lights fade on the previous scene, the rope that enmeshed the bodies glows in the dark. A spoken poem commences about the mudflap girl, her history, and the mystery that we follow throughout the performance. While this poem is articulated as an echo, the performers use the rope as a giant cat’s cradle creating different shapes and formations. Much like the history of the mudflap girl, the origin of the cat’s cradle game is unknown and bewildering. Cat’s cradle is a children’s game in which two or more players engage in a series of string manipulation to create symmetrical shapes. Each shape has a different name that varies across countries and cultures. The game is one that has been around for centuries. The giant cat’s cradle used in this scene reflects the notion of the mudflap girl, transforming into various shapes and sizes, present for a moment and disappearing the next. Furthermore, the cat’s cradle is reminiscent of the child-like perceptions of femininity that were discussed in the narratives of the previous scene. The glow-in-the-dark effect coupled with the echoing voices is designed to create a haunting, alienating result for the audience. This performative choice toys with notions of presence and absence by means of disappearance. The bodies that were present in the previous scene, almost hyper-present with the incorporation of gestus through dancing, are no longer visible to the seeing eye. Instead, the audience is immersed in darkness, guided by a string of light. Feminist performance scholar Peggy Phelan discussed this notion of disappearance in her controversial book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. She claims, “The disappearance of
the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered” (Phelan 147). One purpose of this scene was to highlight the disappearance and reappearance of the mudflap girl, similar to the cat’s cradle shapes created by the performers. Yes, we see her often, however, she has become so entrenched in our culture(s) that we do not recognize her. Indeed, her very shadow is a present absence, passing us on the highways in a fleeting moment. She longs to be remembered, reperformed, and reproduced in our society. As Phelan notes in her book, “Performance’s being… becomes itself through disappearance” (Phelan 146). Similarly, mudflap girl becomes herself through disappearance. Mudflap girl is neither here nor there, yet personified nonetheless.

Scene 5: Drive-her

The following scene, “Drive-her,” is one of the most pivotal scenes of the performance. Here, the performers intentionally set-up and implicate the audience members as active participants in cultural hegemony. What ensues is a blatantly crude display of hyper-masculinity in which three female performers enter the stage as stereotypical versions of masculine truck drivers. In engaging Brecht’s alienation effect, switching gender roles was a crucial element of the overall performance. As Brecht notes, “If the part is played by somebody of the opposite sex the sex of the character will be more clearly brought out” (Brecht, “Brecht” 197). In choosing three female performers to embody masculine roles, what is revealed and put on display is a culture(s) of dominance, violence towards women, misogyny, and an overt parody of hyper-masculinity. Throughout the scene the performers ride around the stage on small tricycles – a critique on the absurdity of vehicles performing as an extension of the man – uttering various offensive comments reflecting both sexual violence and homoeroticism. Originally, when I presented the idea to the performers during a rehearsal, they were excited about the
ridiculousness of the scene. Before I even presented the script to them, we “rehearsed” masculinity by attempting to walk, talk, and perform “like men.” The girls laughed at themselves and my suggestions for how they could be more masculine. The notion was all very silly, at first. They felt uncomfortable when I asked them to spit, burp, hold their “junk,” and even lift their shirts up to scratch their bellies. One performer refused to try any of these things, as she felt awkward and “too self-conscious” about her body. Though I tried to be sensitive to my performers, I felt perplexed that they, as active feminists, would embrace the first scene in which they had to perform sexualized female icons but fear and fight a scene where they had to perform grotesque masculinity. But I, too, was confronted with the difficulty of the scene. Of course women struggle with embodying and challenging these concepts when the hegemonic structure (including the narratives told in “Girls”) has been entrenched since birth! After much discussion with Dr. Trudeau about the many difficulties I was having with staging the scene, he suggested incorporating more Brechtian techniques, such as breaking the fourth wall, as a way to create an outlet for the performers to express their outrage at the injustices depicted in the scene. During rehearsals, I began an exercise with the “grrrls” in which they would slam into each other, like bumper cars, and create a moment of reality, performing their own commentary to the audience. What ensued from the performers was a level of self-reflexivity that I had not conceived before. In a commentary about the role of a performer, Brecht states:

The actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying… He produces their remarks as authentically as he can; he puts forward their way of behaving to the best of his abilities and knowledge of men; but he never tries to persuade himself (and thereby others) that this amounts to a complete transformation. (“Brecht” 137)

Part of creating a scene that would implicate the audience members and encourage them to confront their own social realities was granting the performers autonomy in the roles they
assumed. In order for the scene to be effective, the performers could not (and would not) fully transform into their assigned violent roles of masculinity. The goal was not to persuade themselves or the audience of a realistic representation of masculinity, but to instead dissuade themselves and the audience of the authenticity of the scene. The scene is absurd and extreme because the culture is often absurd and extreme.

In rehearsals the performers created both comical and realistic statements about the scene, such as warning audience members about the misogyny that was about to occur and even stating that the word “cunt” does not equate to weakness. In an essay about staging techniques for producing the alienation effect Brecht notes, “It is of course necessary to drop the assumption that there is a fourth wall cutting the audience off from the stage and the consequent illusion that the stage action is taking place in reality without an audience… it is possible for the actor in principle to address the audience direct” (“Brecht” 136). Breaking the fourth wall was necessary in a scene such as this, forcing the audience to realize that a distant version of this instance of gender performativity is taking place, rather than an emphatic performance of reality. Breaking the fourth wall accomplished several things in addition to reminding the audience of the performance that is taking place. On one particular night of the performance, one of the performers approached a male audience member in the front row and “checked him out” in an intense manner. She made direct eye contact with him, brought her face close to his, and recited an inappropriate comment about having sex with him. The audience member reacted in an offended and awkward manner, not knowing what to say or do in response. This moment was particularly poignant because the audience member was forced to confront and experience a culture of objectification in which he was the victim. In other instances the audience often laughed at the dialogue between the truck drivers and the moments of reality the performers
created in which they spoke their stage directions aloud. At one point during the scene one of the performers bends over the mudflap girl, humps her from behind, and utters an explicit line about wanting “a girl like her to sharpen your dick on.” She then pauses, addresses the audience, speaks stage directions aloud, and returns to her original position behind the mudflap girl. By further incorporating direct stage movements into the dialogue as Brecht often did in his plays, the performers were further alienated from any notion of spectacle and sensationalism and the audience was reminded that they were witnessing a constructed performance. Several moments with gestus and alienation occurred during the scene in which the performers showed the characters rather than fully becoming them. These moments were extremely alienating to the audience members, as the performers directly addressed the subject matter and set up the spectators for a more physical representation of misogyny that would be explored in the next scene.

Scene 6: Dirty Grrrls

The scene entitled “Dirty Grrrls” was the most difficult of the production as it was physically, emotionally, and spiritually trying for me, the performers, and the audience. At the end of the previous scene, the mudflap girl appears center stage for all of the performers to objectify. The three truck drivers arise from their tricycles and begin to address her directly, surrounding her and making obscene comments about her body. They “push” her up onto a single black box center stage. During the scene, the live embodied mudflap girl stands on this black box while the three masculine performers circle around her like vultures. As they silently yet actively participate in the scene, the mudflap girl breaks the fourth wall and begins speaking to the audience suggestively, touching her own body in a sexual manner. This scene is also extremely crude and explicit, but necessary in portraying oppression of women. Throughout the
scene the performer repeatedly asks to be made “dirty.” Each time she says this word, the other performers throw dirt onto her body. This sequence of actions is repeated several times until she is on the ground, defeated and apathetic, as the surrounding performers continue to kick dirt onto her body. This scene in particular is one that I wished I could have avoided but felt necessary to include in the performance. We rehearsed the scene only a handful of times, each instance resulting in tears and several “Are you okay?” discussions. Again, the commitment of my performers was astounding, resulting in a beautiful yet monstrous depiction of oppression and sexual violence.

This scene was originally inspired by the aforementioned Pina Bausch piece in which two male performers threw tomatoes at a female performer as she requested “more!” and then would hug her immediately after (from the production “World Cities” as referenced in chapter three). This scene explores the intersection of performativity and performance in which a female body desperately performs what she has been taught is expected of her as a sexual body meant for pleasure. Diamond speaks on this intersection, “as soon as performativity comes to rest on a performance, questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects, all become discussable” (“Introduction” 5). When the struggle of “becoming a woman” is evidenced on the stage, these aforementioned “questions” are put up for analysis and debate. The term “dirty” serves as a guidepost to this discussion. Within the scene the mudflap girl becomes progressively dirtier as does the mudflap of a truck, which was originally created for the very purpose of capturing mud. The mudflap girl, as a double entendre, gets dirty first by being overtly sexual in her performance. Women are often criticized as “dirty” (among many other derogatory terms such as “slutty”) when they are too sexual. Yet, in addition to the physical evidence of her dirtiness, she is also becoming “dirty” in the sense that she is
filled with shame, guilt, regret, hurt, and other emotions associated with sexual violence, oppression, and negative stigmas. She is both the victim and accuser. Butler suggested, “the category of ‘women,’ the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 2). In utilizing the term “dirty” as a signifier of female sexuality, the audience may begin to recognize that gender is a part of a hierarchical system that produces unhealthy and impossible expectations of sexuality. This system contributes to raunch culture and our perceptions of emancipation. If a hegemonic cycle has been produced and normalized in visual culture(s), how do we break free from gender norms and oppression? We see this same tragic process of oppression in the unfolding narrative of the mudflap girl within this scene, never able to perform the idealized sexuality of the shadow that many use to adorn their automobiles. Specifically, the mudflap girl image tells us that we need to be petite yet bodacious, sexy yet not too erotic, mysterious and silent, lacking in identity, indefinable, mute and uncomplaining, animalistic and not fully human. Furthermore, mudflap girl is a cultural image of “slut” perpetuating sexuality as dirty and raunchy. As Attwood describes:

The history of ‘slut’ demonstrates a number of things; that historically women have often been seen in terms of their sexual relations to men, and often as a source of pollution; that the term is not only an indicator of gender, but of class; and that it is used by and between women, as well as by men of women (235).

Therefore, both men and women embody and preserve this common cultural image through restored behavior; women by attempting to become the image, and men (and women) by encouraging or requiring this performance of gender performativity from women. In this scene we evidence this paradox by the actions of the “masculine” performers. At this point they are participating in the role of “other,” the role of producer and sustainer of culture(s). They, too, as women, are also involved in the process of getting mudflap girl dirtier by the repeated throwing
of the dirt. There is blood on their hands, as the dirt remains on their bodies as evidence of what just occurred. The audience members are also implicated. The laughs from before are now a distant memory and the dirt remains on the floor for the rest of the performance as a constant reminder of the scene and the negative effects of misogyny in our culture(s).

Scene 7: Punctum

The seventh scene of the performance portrayed my personal and initial experience with the mudflap antler girl, as described in the first chapter of this study. The scene commences with a flashlight sequence in which three performers walk around the space at various speeds with two flashlights in their hands. The moving lights act as a form of gestus and symbolize the headlights of a car. These flashlights gesture towards several metaphoric ideas such as the “deer in the headlights” look of an animal in front of a moving car, the notion of cars being the initial dwelling place of the mudflap girl, the absent present of the passing image, and the death and resurrection of the animalized trophy of the mudflap girl. As the performers move throughout the space, my narrative is bifurcated between them, and they describe the scene in detail. When the exact punctum moment is illustrated, a shadow of a live mudflap antler girl appears in shadow on the white curtain as a still and reverent image. A single spotlight from behind the curtain shines on her silhouette. The other performers stand in awe as they detail my initial fascination and obsession with the image, often reaching out to touch the shadow. They begin to sing the hymn, “Down By the River to Pray,” as they open the curtain in the center, revealing the mudflap antler girl. The mudflap girl then comes to life, speaking her own story (or the story I assigned to her) of gender performativity in the South. The story originated from an interview I conducted with a close friend for my first solo mudflap girl performance in Dr. Trudeau’s performance theory class. The narrative depicts the life of a Texan woman and her many experiences with sexual
violence and gender oppression. Once more, the audience becomes alienated as they witness the thus far stagnant image come to life behind a hanging deer head. Concurrently, the other performers construct a shrine from animal skulls and bones around her body as if preparing a grave or paying homage to a once living being. They conclude the narrative by singing the haunting hymn, “Down By The River To Pray.” Mudflap girl materializes as the prey, that which is preyed/prayed on, hunted, and put on display as a visual image.

*Scene 8: Final Sequence (dead bodies)*

In the final sequence of the show, known as the “dead bodies” dance, the performers move on the stage in Bausch’s Tanztheater fashion. For this portion of the performance I commissioned my friend and dance choreographer Ursula Hicks to help materialize my vision for the scene. We met several times before actually choreographing the piece together in order to create a dance that depicted the fleeting life and death of the mudflap girl. Pina Bausch, often described as a feminist dramaturge and choreographer, was highly influential for this scene and its subject matter. Price noted in a discussion on her many works, “Bausch demonstrates how sexual behaviors are learned and how the body submits to cultural inscription” (Price 326). Part of the purpose in creating such a distinct scene was to achieve and capture a moment of gender performativity on the stage, much like Bausch often did in her performances. Particularly, we attempted to capture this moment by means of the female body. Throughout the dance, performers constantly reference the mudflap girl and various portions of the performance. For example, at one point the performers glide their hands upward in a gesture referencing the mudflap girl reappropriation they embodied earlier in the performance (i.e., one performer raised her hand in the gesture of a gun as “mudflap girl with gun”). Here and in other moments, I
attempted to remind the audience about the many arguments showcased throughout the production.

The dance begins with each performer in the pose of the mudflap girl, peering out to the audience with a “deer in the headlights” look on their faces. One by one, these images begin to collapse and then reform into the mudflap girl. This action happens repeatedly until each performer is in a standing position. In unison, they begin to touch their bodies in a defamiliarized manner, as if they are touching their own bodies for the first time. With their hands, they stretch out and crinkle their faces, arms, bellies, backs, bottoms, and legs, pointing out any inconsistencies or imperfections to the audience. They appear displeased with their bodies. By the end of the dance the bodies return to dust, so to speak, as they crawl around in the dirt like infants. At this point, an eerie amoeba figure emerges in a sea of red fabric, beckoning the bodies towards her. Eventually, the bodies immerse the amoeba and form her into a mudflap girl. As the performers gaze upon their creation, the lights fade and the video that was shown throughout the pre-show commences once more. As the amoeba figure exits the stage, the other performers commence a murder scene, in which two performers use caution tape to separate the audience from the stage, and two other performers use the original glow-in-the-dark rope to create a silhouette of the mudflap girl on the floor. The reprised video brings the audience back to that initial encounter upon walking into the Black Box. What may have seemed upbeat and fascinating at first is now revealed as a product of cultural misogyny. The caution tape creates a shadow across the projected image, creating a cage of confinement for the performing women in the video. The shadow reflects the cat’s cradle image, reminding the audience of the mudflap girl as an absent present. The word “caution” spans across the space as a resounding plea to consider
the effects of our visual world. Mudflap girl becomes the dead body on the stage and ends as she began – as a mere shadow.

Although many elements contributed to the construction of this scene, the incorporation of live female bodies doing physical work on the stage is the most important aspect. In a critique on Bausch, Price argues, “Her use of the body, particularly the female body as the site of performative acts, suggests not only gender as a culturally inscribed artifact but also gender as irreducible difference which discloses itself through the imaginary” (328). Implementing Butler’s gender performativity through the medium of live bodies not only speaks to our visual culture(s) of body politics and identity, but it also provides a space for us to explore how Brecht, Butler, and the mudflap girl can intersect and converse with one another on the stage.

Feedback about Dirty Grrrls

Dirty Grrrls was an incredible yet challenging experience, one from which I continue to learn. All three nights of the show were sold out, with a waiting list of several people wanting to see the show each day. The second night of the show featured a talk-back session hosted by Dr. Trudeau featuring the cast and crew of Dirty Grrrls. During the session Dr. Trudeau gave a brief introduction about the process of the show, having worked closely with me and the project for over a year. After this statement, he opened the discussion for questions from audience members. During this portion of the session I received several critical questions and comments from students, colleagues, faculty members, family, friends, and strangers. Generally, all of the feedback I received was both positive and impactful to both my own and the audience members’ critical understanding of the subject matter. Together, we navigated our way through the mudflap girl image, attempting to define, redefine, and question her existence.
The entire process of producing the performance certainly challenged and stretched my perceptions of the subject, but even the actual production and discussions I had thereafter continued to foster my thoughts. Conquergood’s three a’s of performance studies (artistry, analysis, and activism) allow me to map out this process of evolution (152). Through artistry I am able to craft an aesthetic performance that acts as a complementary component to the theoretical written work I have completed. Analysis allows me to engage the subject matter of the mudflap girl through a critical cultural lens and allows audience members to engage in this same process, though on a different level. This engagement is not from the viewpoint of a bystander, but instead from the perspective of an active participant in an ongoing dialogue about cultural misogyny. Finally, activism provides a space for discussion to continue beyond the confines of a theatre. What is rooted in the minds of audience members flourishes outside of the arts and into society. I believe that performance art and this specific performance are forms of activism, activism that does not cease once the performance is finished. With the help of the spectators, activism reaches, disrupts, and seeps into our culture(s) through discussion and action.

Some of the best feedback I received about the show was from former students. One individual, a student in my Performance of Literature section, and I had previously had a discussion about one of her performances, a prose piece from Alice Walker’s *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Woman*. The student, Madi Rodriguez, was having difficulty with the performance because it centered on a traumatic rape experience for the character. The discussion between us was difficult as I tried to explain to her the meaning of rape culture and the ethical implications of re-creating a performance about rape. Though at the time I felt she did not fully understand why I was so passionate about the topic and its importance in relation to her
performance, she understood well enough to get through the performance successfully. Indeed, this topic was one I would have liked to explore further with the class but was unable to due to time constraints and the fact that I was teaching an entry level performance class. Nonetheless, this experience brought me to another discussion with the same student. After the performance I received an email from Madi that read:

I don't know if it's like this in all cases but I guess becoming a feminist is a journey for most. I've been trying a lot harder lately to learn what being a woman is really about and it's nice to hear lines like "I didn't even know that was oppressive." Growing up with three beautiful older sisters it's easy to forget we can be more than a fuck bag. So thank you for making me cringe and laugh at the same time. (Rodriguez “Dirty Grrrls”)

Her words stung me like that first punctum moment I had with the mudflap girl. This performance-centered thesis would not be what it is without an audience. The importance of reaching an audience member is crucial in the process of addressing and negotiating sensitive topics and artifacts. Reading this particular email gave me hope and courage in the project, realizing that performance is an effective means of advocacy and social change. Realizing Brecht’s initial desire to enact social change and to alter the very foundation of theatre provides an effective space for creating artistic, analytical, and activist work.

Findings

Once more I am drawn back to the initial research question, “What is revealed about Brecht’s notion of dialectical theater and Judith Butler’s idea of gender performativity when the image of mudflap girl is used as the basis of a production designed to place them in dialogue with one another?” Each scene of Dirty Grrrls functions in a specific way to answer this question. Utilizing traditional Brechtian techniques, the performance was created by means of dialectical theatre, “a mode of representation which continually reveals the contradictions” (Wright 36). The performance does not operate under a linear storyline structure. Instead, each
scene acts as a separate piece contributing to the overall argument of the production. Each scene presents one facet of the story, exploring various reappropriations of the mudflap girl and narratives associated with the subject matter and theory of gender performativity. Brecht’s methods are multifaceted and complex, much like gender. Using Brecht’s methodology allowed me to explore gender performativity on the stage, not as an unwavering notion but as a complex idea that human beings are constantly negotiating within our social and political identities. Just as Brecht allows us to discover Butler on the stage, Butler reveals much about the mudflap girl. As Miller suggests, “Judith Butler’s work is the missing link,” the link from performance studies to performativity (222). Her work acts as a unifying factor between Brecht and the subject of the mudflap girl. The show’s subject matter addresses and materializes Butler’s notion of gender performativity, revealing that a performance in the style of Brechtian theatre is an effective means for studying and embodying performativity. Just as Brecht utilized repetition as a form of defamiliarization on the stage, Dirty Grrrls uses repetition to defamiliarize a stylized repetition of gender performativity. Together, the mudflap girl, the theory of gender performativity, and Brechtian methodology worked symbiotically to help create a performance that challenged the way the director, the actors, and the audience viewed visual images and, by learning to critique them to enact social change.

Areas for Future Research

Although this study has allowed me to discuss and investigate several theories and concepts in conjunction with the mudflap girl, there are certainly other areas that might be explored in the field of performance studies. For example, though I have mentioned classist qualities – such as white trash culture – that can be evidenced when analyzing the mudflap girl image, this study focused on the gendered and sexualized aspects of the image. In performance
studies race and gender are often the subjects of study. However, class is one area that could be expanded upon through further research, especially through images such as the mudflap antler girl. Furthermore, as we are increasingly bombarded with visual images in culture(s), it is important to address these subjects that directly impact our social perceptions and cultural understandings. For this reason, I feel that it is pertinent to explore the performativity of visual images, as I believe that these pictures are performing in many ways. Historically pictures have been studied through an interpretive or rhetorical lens, focusing on the meaning and significance of a given image, “how they communicate as signs and symbols, what sort of power they have to effect human emotions and behavior” (Hariman and Lucaites 28). Visual rhetoric and the study of iconology contributes greatly to our comprehension of visual culture(s). However, the rhetorical lens could be expanded by scholarship that explores the explicit performativity of images. I suggest that understanding images and icons through a performative lens would be an excellent complement to the ongoing work on visual images from a rhetorical perspective. Through this type of research, performance scholars can further respond to Mitchell’s question, “What do pictures want?” (28). Rhetorical scholars Robert Hariman and John Lucaites confirm Mitchell’s notion of the performing image in their claim that “photographs can operate performatively, and performance theory provides a rich vocabulary for their interpretation” (31). Through further study and analysis of cultural images and icons, performance studies scholars can provide a greater understanding of how images perform. In addition, another area that bears further exploration is a critical feminist theatre as an extension of Brechtian methodology. Though Brecht never identified or pursued feminist values, his theatre certainly called for an elimination of oppression. The works of Pina Bausch are one example of implementing Brechtian techniques through a feminist lens. By studying works such as Bausch’s, scholars and
practitioners might discover once again the potential of Brechtian style theatre in today’s world of performance. Feminist theatre is one area that might benefit from an in depth exploration and implementation of Brechtian methods.

Conclusion

Throughout this study I have utilized my initial research question to guide my discussion of the mudflap girl, gender performativity, and Brechtian methodology. I introduced the subject of the mudflap girl, the theory of gender performativity, and Brechtian methodology in chapter 1. In chapter 2 I described the history of the mudflap girl image and her cultural relevancy. I also traced the history of Butler’s notion of gender performativity in the field of performance studies, and several other relevant and applicable theories for the study. In chapter 3 I delved into Brechtian methodology and specific techniques I used throughout the performance, Dirty Grrrls. Finally, in chapter 4 I responded to the initial research question. In addressing this question I articulated the importance and purpose of the project, an overall analysis of the show, the social impact of Dirty Grrrls, specific findings of the show, and areas for future research. This production-centered thesis has been both a challenging and rewarding project. It arose unexpectedly from a punctum moment in my life and grew into a project that changed my life. Additionally, the women in the cast helped me explore and realize my vision in encouraging audience members who, hopefully, through their encounter with the production have become more critical consumers of visual images.
APPENDIX

DIRTY GRRRLS SCRIPT
Dirty Grrrls
By: Joanna Lugo

(During the Pre-show, as audience members are entering the theatre, “sex” is everywhere. A montage style music video is projected against the large white backdrop curtain located US (A compilation of music videos/videos that showcase the mudflap girl silhouette). An upbeat, sexual song blares in the background, so loud that spectators are unable to converse at normal levels (Do I Wanna Know? by Arctic Monkeys). This makes for a club-like yet overwhelming environment for the audience. The pre-show can even be seen as a modern clothing store with a contemporary ambience. As the director closes the door and takes her seat, the stage lights/video fade out and bright lights behind the curtain appear.)
I. Evolution of the Sexual Female

(A silhouette of a mudflap girl appears behind the curtain USL. Four female performers, appearing as one body, create this figure. During the introduction of the show, scene one, the performers will use their silhouettes to depict the evolution of woman as a parody (or defamiliarized way) of the evolution of man. The frozen images will include various sexualized images of femininity, including the mudflap girl pose and other famous poses.)

Voiceover 1 begins. (This is a monotone voiceover describing the evolution of woman, complete with scientific terminology. At this point, all of the performers are located behind the curtain, USR. There bodies are in a line, posing as a mudflap girl. During the voiceover, performers two, three, and four step out of the mudflap girl silhouette to create a second frozen sexualized image They move in unison, as if one body. After several seconds have passed, performers three and four step away from the second pose to create a third pose next to the second performer. Finally, performer four steps out of the third image to create a fourth and final image of sexuality. Together, these frozen images create a parodied version of the evolution of man. Rather, they represent the evolution of the sexual woman. After the voiceover ends, the performers transition into a second sexualized pose (i.e. Marilyn Monroe’s seven year itch, Madonna’s vogue).)

_The expense if spirit in a waste of shame_
_Is lust in action; and till action, lust_
_Is perjur’d, murderous, bloody, full of blame,_
_Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;_
Enjoy’d no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,
Past reason hated, as a swallow’d bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof – and prov’d a very woe;
Before, a joy propos’d; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

(Shakespeare Sonnet 129)
II. Iconic

(Shadow images appear in a domino effect from SL to SR, depicting each sexual icon to be represented at the cocktail party of sex (Marilyn, Madonna, Playboy Bunny, and Mudflap Girl). Frozen images are held for approximately ten seconds. When this time has passed, the Marilyn character begins walking from behind the curtain to CS in a typical “Marilyn” jaunt.)

Marilyn: (Sings just as Marilyn did to the President.) Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday Mr. President. Happy Birthday to you. (Blows a kiss to the audience. Performers behind curtain blow a kiss simultaneously.) What do I wear to bed? Why, Chanel No. 5, of course. Sex is a part of nature. I go along with nature. Sex. Sexy. Sexual. Sensual. Which do you prefer? I can be all of these, one by one (she points from stage left to stage right, performers in the back simultaneously switch poses.), or all at the same time. Do you want to see her? Do you want me to be her? I can be Marilyn. All you have to do is be sexy dear. I can never not be Marilyn. Norma Jean is dead. Marilyn lives forever! (Giggles and strikes a frozen image. Madonna interrupts her last line with a song entrance.)

Madonna: (“Like a Virgin” begins to play as she exits from behind the curtain and dances/makes her way to DSR. Two performers behind the curtain act as backup dancers, mimicking her moves as a silhouette.) What are you lookin’ at (Refers to Marilyn in a comical manner)? Cause we are living in a material world and I am a material girl. Just like a prayer I’ll take you there. Vogue. Strike a pose (All performers, including Marilyn, strike a pose). Vogue. Strike a pose. Vogue. Strike a pose. That’s how you get ‘em (Makes her way CS

Playboy Bunny: ("Pour Some Sugar on Me" plays as bunny makes her way out to DSL. She interacts with Madonna and Marilyn, taunting them throughout as they respond with disgust and surprise.) Welcome to your wildest fantasy! We are the one of a kind. The playboy bunnies. But if you really want to be like we all you have to do is follow these simple instructions (Moves through each rule as a peppy and coy teacher):

1. Be 18-24 years old. Or as we like to put it, years young.
2. Meet the 'Bunny Image' requirement - the young, fresh and beautiful appearance.
3. Maintain a slim but sexy figure. Bunnies are regularly weighed to ensure maintenance of our requisite 'Bunny Image'. One pound over or under will result in termination (Refers to Madonna and Marilyn).
4. Must have excellent and well-kept hair, nails, and skin.
5. If not naturally voluptuous, must be willing to stuff bra (stuffs Madonna’s bra). Remember, it’s all about the appearance.
6. Must be personable, cheerful, and flirtatious.
7. You must also learn and master maneuvers such as the “Bunny Stance," a posture required in front of patrons. The Bunny must stand with legs together, back arched and hips tucked under. When the Bunny is resting or while waiting to be of service, she must do the "Bunny Perch." She must sit on the back of a chair, sofa, or railing without sitting too close to a patron. Finally, there is the "Bunny Dip," where the Bunny gracefully leans backwards while bending at the knees.
with the left knee lifted and tucked behind the right leg (All performers attempt different poses).

8. The final and primary attribute a bunny must have is physical beauty (All performers pose as their character).

(Regina “Playboy Manual”)

In an echo, all: Sex. I am pure sex. Sex. Sexy. Sexual. Sensual. Body. Stage. Vogue. Beauty. (Performers create various repetitive motions for each word, embodied in unison. They repeat this sequence several times, each time becoming quicker and more grotesque than before. This creates defamiliarization. Eventually, they are interrupted by the remaining silhouette of the mudflap girl behind the curtain.)

MFG: Hey! What about me?

Marilyn: (giggles) What about you?

MFG: I’m sex too.

Madonna: Hardly.

MFG: I’m more sex than you are. Feminine mystique. Mysterious. Coy. A figure of fantasy. A silhouette of the ideal female body. Svelte waist, buxom bosom, and long flowing “Farrah Fawcett” hair. In fact you all want to be me. You try to be me. What do you desire? (Trebay)

Marilyn: Adoration

Madonna: Societal acceptance

Bunny: Male gaze (Mulvey 9)

MFG: I have all of these. I am a shadow of sexuality, a synecdoche for all appeal. (Levy 26-31)
Bunny: But you have no actual identity

MFG: Well neither do you. Think about it. All you’ve ever amounted to is… Sex. Iconic sex.

Marilyn: (scoffing) Who does she think she is? Marilyn Monroe?

MFG: Of course. Icon. An icon that does cultural work. An image that represents much more than itself. An icon that performs…


(Marilyn steps away from frozen image and begins to walk around the grid stylistically, like Marilyn. After ten seconds, Madonna joins her, walking the grid and posing occasionally. Playboy bunny then follows suit after ten seconds. Finally, mudflap girl arises and begins to prowl behind the curtain. Each performer is moving sexually, yet mechanically across the grid, only walking in straight lines and angles. The walking pace increases over time and each performer begins to incorporate a repetitive sound. The amount and volume of the sounds increase along with the pace of the walking. After awhile, Marilyn begins the human machine with a repetitive motion and continues the sound she created previously. Each performer follows her, until the machine is completed. MFG remains behind the curtain performing her repetitive motion.)
III. Girls

(“Femininity” plays as a transition song. All girls are standing CS. A long rope (to be used in the next scene) is encompassing the girls. Each performer is standing, facing one wall. As each story progresses, the performers shift counterclockwise, extending the rope around them. There is a single spotlight on the box, which increases to a general wash as the circle expands. The performers should be in place for the next scene by the end of the monologues.)

(Performers that are not speaking move their bodies delicately, like ballerinas. Movements become bigger as each narrative progresses.)

Jenna: While many young girls grow up wanting to be Disney princesses, I wanted to be Red Sonja! Y’all remember? The horrific 1985 movie with Brigette Nielson and Arnold based off the comic books? While movie Red Sonja didn’t wear the infamous chain mail bikini of comic lore, she did wear a boobtastic breastplate and short ass skirt. She rode a horse and wielded a sword equal to me. And she was still very much about sex. Inaccessible sex as she would bed no man who could beat her in battle. I thought she was the shit! She was all saving the world and she had a sword and a horse, which were kinda my two goals as a child. But I also liked her because she was sexy and fierce. Still desirable in her unattainability.

(Randomly, performers whisper words from the previous scene, “sex, sexy, sexual, etc.” As the performer in front speaks, each performer shows resistance towards the rope.)
Miranda: My parents are divorced and the first time my dad got married again, I was 10 years old. He married a woman named Emma and I hated her. She took all of my dad’s attention and she didn’t care about me at all. I went to go visit him and she lived in a trailer park with her four kids (all under 16). This was also the first time I ever saw someone smoke weed and doing cocaine. The first night I was there, her 16-year-old son brought his girlfriend over and I walked in on them having sex. He ended up putting his dirty condom on my pillow and by the time I went to bed, ants started eating the semen from the condom. I never went back to visit and he divorced her 2 years later. I remember thinking something wasn’t right but I didn’t know how to tell anyone. I was scared this would happen to me.

(Randomly, performers whisper words from the previous scene, “sex, sexy, sexual, etc.”)

Morgan: So you know how early 90’s Disney movies have subversive sexual undertones?...Yeah that’s a thing, that’s real. I was one of those children unknowingly affected by it. This is pretty common with Disney from that time, I know I’m not the only one. Which one was it for me? Aladdin. You know the end where Jasmine is chained up in that red outfit and she has to seduce Jafar to escape? Yeah...uhhhh totally had awkward feelings. I didn’t know what being turned on was! I didn’t know I was being turned on! All I knew was that scene made me hug my pillow tight and feel warm. Also, to back me up, there is a theory out there that “A Whole New World” is about orgasms. (Sings) “I’m like a shooting star, I’ve come so far!...” Think about it. Disney is sick.

(Randomly, performers whisper words from the previous scene, “sex, sexy, sexual, etc.”)
Karen: When I was a child, somewhere between the ages of 6-10, I was at my friend’s house and she took me to her parents’ bedroom and into their personal bathroom and showed me her dad’s personal stash of nude magazines. I didn’t have any words and wasn’t grossed out (maybe I should’ve been?). I’m not sure… I was more intrigued and couldn’t stop staring. I’m not sure if it was more “train wreck” mentality or interest? If those are even different? I think I wondered most of all, why he needed so many? There were at least 40!

All: One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one (Beauvoir 301)

(All performers begin to rotate clockwise, speaking their stories out into the air, as a cacophony of personal narratives, emphasizing words like “her” or “she”. The lights slowly fade out as the narratives are spoken.)
IV. An Untraceable History

(As the light fades, the glow-in-the-dark rope is revealed. Two performers stand with a rope around their waists: one SR, and the other SL. The rope is long and continuous. The other two performers stand to make a perpendicular line, one DSC and the other USC. As the performers begin to speak their lines, performers 3 and 4 begin to draw the string from the waists of performers 1 and 2, manipulating it to form a giant cat’s cradle. Throughout this section, the performers work together to create various images with the rope, playing an enlarged game of cat’s cradle. The final image created is that of the “oil rig” or “Eiffel tower.” The performers place the image on the ground as an image of a map of the U.S. projects onto the ground. The rope points at various locations on the map.)

Miranda: Trace the past of a girl unknown.


Morgan: Black rubber to showcase a silhouette of sexuality, a shadow of nothingness.

Karen: An identity tenuously constituted in time (Butler, “Performative Acts” 519

Miranda: A gender produced by repetition

Jenna: A body.

Morgan: The body.

Karen: Her body.

All: Our body.

Miranda: A medium of culture. (Bordo 13)

Jenna: A cat’s cradle.

Morgan: Bending lines, crossing boundaries
Karen: Transforming into different shapes and sizes

Miranda: Unsolvable

Jenna: Missing: white female, slim, buxom, long flowing hair

Morgan: Identity unknown. Forever posed in that fatal sitting profile

Karen: Exposed, yet never exposing front or back views of the body.

Miranda: Who is the mudflap girl?

Jenna: Yes, we can see her and even chase after her behind the wheel along highways.

Morgan: We can even place her on inanimate objects, granting her visibility and accessibility in a mundane culture.

Karen: Yet we can never fully attain her or expose her identity.

Miranda: We can’t even legitimately trace her history.

Jenna: She is neither here nor there, yet personified nonetheless.

(As the lights come up, performer 2 is now standing in the middle of the oil rig while the other performers stand at the corners of the image. Performers sue their bodies to create a mechanical repetitive motion.)

Jenna: It was the 70s. Big hair was in and communism was out… Well, sort of. The earliest designs of the mudflap girl began to appear on truck mud flaps. Before then, mud flaps were simple, heavy black rubber without much adornment. One version of the story acknowledges trucker Stewart Allen with creating and drawing the design. Allen’s inspiration for the image derived from his wife, Rachel Ann. Bill Zinda, of Wiz Enterprises discovered Allen's silhouette
on the back of Allen’s truck, and made an offer to buy the rights to use it on the Wiz Enterprises mud flaps. (Barr; Romick)

(Jenna joins in with a mechanical repetitive motion but now includes a repetitive sound.)

Miranda: While the history and origin of the mudflap girl is debated and contested in the virtual sphere, many claim that Zinda of Wiz Enterprises actually created this famous design in the 70s. (The other performers begin dancing moves.) He based the image from the figure of an exotic dancer named Leta Laroe to promote his line of truck and auto accessories. Now, the image has evolved into a common representation of United States culture, class, race, and gender in various sectors of media including fashion, education, and even politics. (Barr; Israel)

(Miranda rejoins in with her mechanical repetitive motion but now includes a repetitive sound.)

Morgan: Since the early 2000s, mudflap girl has moved from the back mud flaps of semis and eighteen-wheelers to the fashion world and the media, sported by celebrities such as Victoria Beckham and Samantha from Sex and the City. Designer Lisa Kline uses the mudflap girl to frame her brand logo and sells jewelry of the image with diamond studs appearing as the nipple of mudflap girl. Let’s just say mudflap girl has gotten around a lot since the 70’s!

(Morgan rejoins in with her mechanical repetitive motion but now includes a repetitive sound.)

Karen: A 2007 advertisement campaign from the Wyoming State Library featured the mudflap girl reading a book, “in an effort to get more men into the libraries”. Mudflap girl was the cause
of a local dispute in Montana between two natives where a man filed a complaint against the obscenity of the image on the back of a woman’s SUV to the local police department. The police ultimately declared the decal as not obscene. In politics, mudflap girl has been the cause of a dispute in Arizona State legislature, which introduced a bill in 2007 that would have potentially banned mudflap girl due to her obscenity; the bill never passed. (Romick; autos.aol.com)

(Karen rejoins in with her mechanical repetitive motion but now includes a repetitive sound. The four performers create a machine, repeating three more times. As the next section commences, the performers begin a “clock walk” around the rope, which increases in speed throughout the spoken lines.)

Jenna: Though mudflap girl’s history is laconic and perplexing, she has still had a lasting impact in U.S. American culture.

Morgan: As a transient image, she not only moves on the road but also traverses across different spaces.

Karen: She can be seen on cars and trucks alike, adorned with various attire such as halos, hats, flags, and guns.

Miranda: She can also be seen lying next to wind turbines or against the backdrop of a confederate flag. She has transformed into varying types of bodies including an “ethnic” version, a “thick and chunky”, and an animalistic version.

(All performers except Miranda sit down and pose as the mudflap girl with a gun. In this section, an image of each reappropriation of mudflap girl is projected onto the back curtain.)
Miranda: I was eight years old when I got my first gun. Daddy had bought Bubba a camo BB gun and I threw a huge fit until he bought me a pink one just like it. Mom was real mad but I knew as soon as I had the gun in my hands, I was in love. I was 11 years old when I got my 9 mm pistol for Christmas. Daddy had bought a pink one from Bobby Joe down the street because his wife had accidentally shot him in the… The penis. Anyways daddy took me right outside and let me have shooting practice with Bubba. It was so cool. But when I was 15 I got the best birthday present ever. Daddy knew I really wanted a marline 336 XLR for Christmas. Mom I wanted to take me shopping because she said I needed one of those padded bras because I had itty-bitty titties. But daddy knew what I really wanted. On my birthday I woke up and I ran right downstairs and there he was. Daddy was standing with my marline 336 XLR. He'd even gotten it painted pink and sequins just for me. I never felt more powerful than with that gun in my hands. Daddy taught me how to shoot it, how to store it, and how to clean it. And even though he would never say anything in front of Bubba, he knew I was better.

(Miranda sits down and poses with the other girls as Jenna stands up to deliver her mudflap girl narrative. The girls switch their positions to pose as the smart mudflap girl as the projection also changes.)

Jenna: She grew up on books. Books as babysitters. Books as teachers. Books. Books. Books. Her favorites were iconic - girl and her horse stories. This later evolved into Jane Austen and the classics, and by the time of college, feminist theory and philosophy: Judith Butler, bell hooks, Foucault, you know the uz. And she noticed this weird evolution. See being a bookworm made her precocious as a child, it was still a good girl activity, passive in appearance, in junior high and high school, it made her a nerd and totally undesirable and threatening. In college, that
changed though. Suddenly smart was sexy. She learned how to flirt while talking about
philosophy. Can you imagine Judy B and Foucault having sex?! Neither can I! Let’s go to your
place, and I’ll show you some Discipline and Punishment. At first it was new and exhilarating,
but it got old. Because of course you get pegged as the sexy, smart girl - emphasis on sexy.
Being sexy is a whole helluva a lot of work, and so is being smart. Sometimes a girl just wants to
lounge in her bed in her crusty shirt, eating an entire bag of Cool Ranch doritos, drinking cheap
beer, and farting.

(Jenna sits down and poses with the other girls as Karen stands up to deliver her mudflap
girl narrative. The girls switch their positions to pose as the feminist mudflap girl as the
projection also changes.)

Karen: It took me awhile to find my own place in the world. I guess everybody goes through
that. I had what you would call a regular childhood. I graduated toward the middle/top of my
class and went on to college. It wasn't until college when I got my first taste of feminist
literature. It was Jessica Valenti's "feminism 101" and was it fucking amazing! I had so many ah-
ha moments I thought my fucking head was going to explode.
Fuck everyone for trying to mold me into their own expectations.
Fuck you for putting me in a tiny little box of acceptance.
Fuck you for telling me my gender is "underneath" another's.
Oh and speaking of "underneath" - fuck "missionary" - that is the worst possible position for
women and the quickest way to "that never happens to me" for men.
I want sexual independence. I want to free sex from old religious morality of heterosexual
marriage as the only life style.

Fuck "being a lady." Fuck etiquette.

Fuck you for ruining the word cunt. You know the word cunt is related to words from India, China, Ireland, Rome, and Egypt. Such words were either titles of respect for women, priestesses, and witches, or derivatives of the name of various goddesses: in ancient writing the word cunt was synonymous with "woman," though not in the insulting modern sense. The words "bitch," and "whore" have also shared similar fate.

My body, my choice. My cunt, my body, my life, my choice.

(Karen sits down and poses with the other girls as Morgan stands up to deliver her mudflap girl narrative. The girls switch their positions to pose as the fat mudflap girl as the projection also changes.)

Morgan: She didn’t feel gross, but she knew that people saw her that way. She was size 18 pushing 20. Her whole life people hadn’t give her the chance because she was fat: the awkward chubby girl in her group of friends in elementary school, she had crushes but never was crushed on in middle school, the funny one but never the pretty one in high school, she was good enough for a booty call but never a relationship in college. She was pissed and she knew why: people never saw her beauty or treated her the way she deserved, you know like a human being with feelings? Then she discovered fat swap, this glorious, upon glorious, upon glorious group of fat women who traded cloths once a month. W would meet up, and the raddest, most bad ass looking plus size women would show up carrying clothes, shoes and accessories. I was in heaven! They introduced patterns I was normally afraid of, showed me spandex was my friend, and taught me to honor all of my curves, folds rolls and all. It’s because of them I can stand here
today and reject your flattering hemlines and fascist beauty standards! Fat is beautiful and so am I.

(Morgan returns to her position on the floor, posing as the fat mudflap girl.)

(Miranda stands up and begins a mechanical repetitive motion as she speaks, Morgan rises and walks to Miranda, quickly attempt to “fix” her by posing her as more feminine and fluid.)
Miranda: As an accessible and accepted image, she has been normalized, reproduced, and reappropriated in society, with little to no objection by the public.

(Jenna stands up and begins a mechanical repetitive motion as she speaks, Morgan and Miranda quickly walk to Jenna, and quickly attempt to “fix” her by posing her as more feminine and fluid.)
Jenna: In a way, mudflap girl represents general public mores and therefore is sustained by and through public circulation. She is publicized, put on vehicular display and paraded around the highways of North America.

(Karen stands up and begins a mechanical repetitive motion as she speaks, Morgan, Miranda, and Jenna run to Karen, and quickly attempt to “fix” her by posing her as more feminine and fluid.)
Karen: Mudflap girl is itself a performative, “an agent of and a product of the social and political surround in which it circulates.” (Hamera 6)
(Morgan, Miranda, Jenna, and Karen overwhelm Morgan, pushing her and forming her body as she delivers her line. At times, they even cover her mouth. They force her back to her original position and set her down in the image of the mudflap girl.)

Morgan: She is a roadmap to understanding the cultural performance of the feminine. She is seen everywhere but is still untraceable.

(Performers return to original position on the rope and pose as mudflap girls on the map.

Lights slowly fade as final lines are spoken.)

Miranda: Who is the mudflap girl?

Karen: Where does she come from?

Jenna: Why does she haunt us?
V. Drive-her

(Female performer is dressed as a male truck driver, with a flannel shirt. Another performer is adorned with a trucker hat and another with aviator sunglasses. Trucker 1 enters from USR on a small tricycle. His arm is outstretched, driving one handed with a can in the other hand. He occasionally spits into the can as if he is chewing tobacco. He breaks the fourth wall and interacts with audience members, objectifying them. Another female performer enters USL on a tricycle dressed as a man and sits on a black box CSL. He looks over at the driver CS and gives a subtle head nod. His belly is sticking out. He occasionally looks around and then takes a sip from a beer bottle. Another performer enters on a tricycle and moves to CSR. He gives a large belch. Each performer breaks the fourth wall and directs derogatory comments towards specific audience members. Throughout the scene, the performers have Brechtian breaks in which they run into one another and have a moment of reality, speaking their stage directions and addressing the problematics of the scene. During their entrances, several Brechtian breaks occur to set up the trajectory of the scene.)

Trucker 1: We got a blue light special comin’ up here on the left hand side.

(Miranda enters as cop, making siren sounds and cruising around the space. All begin to immediately hide paraphernalia and begin whistling, putting both hands on the steering wheel, driving slower than before.)

Trucker 2: 10-4. I’m pretty sure he’s gotta picture taker on him. May wanna watch out for smokey bear in a plain white wrapper takin polaroids.

Trucker 3: Ah shit. I done already got stopped by the cocaine cowboy last week! 103
Trucker 2: Did he give you a safe driving award?

Trucker 3: Negatory. Thankfully he got distracted by my mudflaps.

Trucker 2: Mudflaps?

Trucker 1: Is that a euphemism?

Trucker 3: What in the hell is a euphemism?

Trucker 2: Is that another way of sayin you blowed his load? Choked his chicken? (Brechtian break.)

Trucker 1: Painted his pickle?

Trucker 2: Blue his whistle?

Trucker 1: Polished his knob?

Trucker 2: Copped his stem?

Trucker 1: Creamed his panties?

Trucker 2: Chaffin’ the carrot?

Trucker 1: Saying hi to his monster? (Brechtian break.)

Trucker 3: Hell no! It means he literally got distracted by my mudflaps!

Trucker 2: Now how in the hell is that possible? I call bullshit.

Trucker 1: Dude musta paid him off or sumtin.

Trucker 2: That dog won’t hunt. Nah, I’m still stickin with the blew his horn story.

Trucker 1: Hey there ain’t no judgment here. Life can be ever so lonely on the road! (Truckers one and two cackle)

Trucker 3: Y’all can suck my dick.

Trucker 1: Yeah I’d bet you like that.
Trucker 3: I bet you’d like my foot in your ass.

Trucker 2: If foot is a euphemism for your dick, then I’d bet you’d like your foot in The Dude’s ass.

Trucker 3: Shut the hell up, bunch a faggots. (Brechtian break.)

Trucker 1: Hey Rider, why can't gays drive faster than 68mph?

Trucker 2: Why?

Trucker 1: Because at 69 they blow a rod. (Brechtian break.)

Trucker 3: Y’all can shut the f----

Trucker 2: Dude, Why are gays happy that they have nutsacks?

Trucker 1: You tell me Rider.

Trucker 2: Because they use them as mudflaps.

Trucker 3: Oh I’ll show you a pair of mudflaps.

Trucker 1: Please no!

Trucker 2: Spare us the pain!

Trucker 3: Howdy look over your shoulder. I’m gonna slowly switch lanes to get around this mobile parkin lot.

Trucker 1: (Still laughing) Come on back?

Trucker 3: I said I’m gonna cut in front of this eighteen-wheeler stacked full of cars.

Trucker 1: 10-4.

Trucker 2: Come on then!

(Trucker 3 switches lanes and pulls ahead of the other truckers. Mudflap girl appears behind trucker three. A dim spotlight shines on her.)

Trucker 1: Holy mother of ----
Trucker 2: Oh sweet Lord baby Jesus!

Trucker 1: *(wolf whistle)* Wouldya look at the flaps on that one!

Trucker 2: *(hoots and hollers)* I’d drive that beaver any Goddamn day!

Trucker 1: I’d grind that meat muffin.

Trucker 2: *(Grabs dick)* Never in my life did see such a purty penis penitentiary. *(Brechtian break.)*

Trucker 3: Yeah, wouldn’t you want a girl like her to sharpen your dick? *(Brechtian break.)*

Trucker 2: Hell yeah

Trucker 1: Fuck yeah

Trucker 3: Now ya see what I mean? I keep the shiny side up and the dirty side down!

Trucker 1, 2, & 3: I’d like to rev up some dirt on that! *(In unison)*

Mudflap Girl: Hey boys!

*(Unison wolf whistle from all truckers as they crane their necks behind with bodies facing forward. Center spotlight increases as general wash fades out. Truckers begin to surround her like vultures while simultaneously cat calling at her. They push her up onto a box and cheer.)*
VI. Dirty Grrrls

(Performer stands on a black box, leaning back with arms raised above head, in a sexual manner. She is glaring towards the audience suggestively. Truckers are now slowly walking around the box, silently.)

Mudflap Girl: I’m a dirty girl. Oooo I’m a dirty girl.

Dirty. Girl.

(Makes breathy noises and vocalizes in a pouty manner. Improvises various sexual comments throughout the scene. During this scene the truckers have a silent role yet are actively participating in making mudflap girl progressively “dirty”. Each time mudflap girl asks to be made “dirty,” they throw a handful of dirt on her.)

I’m so dirty.

Keep me dirty. Oh yeah, baby. I like it dirty. So dirty. Make me dirty. Dirtier! You want me like this? Do you want to fuck me like this? Do you want to touch me? Oh yeah! Touch me like this.

Fuck me in my mouth. Dirty. Dirty. So dirty.


(Other performers become a bit more aggressive with throwing dirt on her body. As performer 1 continues to “ask” for them to throw dirt on her, she becomes hysterical, as if emotionally offended and repulsed by the act. She moves down, kneeling on the box. The spotlight fades a bit.)
Mudflap Girl: So dirty. So very dirty. Do you like me like this? Do you want me like this? Do you want to fuck me like this? I’m so dirty. So very dirty. Make me dirty. (Defeated and exasperated. Dirt is all over her body.)

Mudflap Girl: Dirty. Dirty. So very dirty.

(Mudflap girl is now on the floor, surrounded by dirt. The spotlight has faded even more. She moves from defeated to a state of apathy. The truckers are now kicking the dirt on her. The spotlight fades out as she finishes her last line.)
VII. Punctum

(Highway sounds begin playing. Three performers enter the stage with two flashlights each. They move around the space stylistically, like cars. Sometimes they are walking quickly and “flashing” the audience with the flashlights. At other times, the performers walk slowly and flash their lights towards the wall. This occurs for approximately one minute.)

Jenna: Abruptly decelerates vehicle and makes a sharp turn into the parking lot. Does not use signal. (Embodies what is being spoken.)

Morgan: Circles parking lot to find place to park. (Circles the space.)

Miranda: Finds spot but is driving too quickly to halt car in time. (Stops body and then continues walking.)

Jenna: Backs car up into parking spot. (Moves body backwards towards curtain, USL. Lights are on audience.)

Morgan: Turns off ignition while simultaneously unclicking seatbelt. (Moves body backwards towards curtain, USC. Flashes right light while “unclicking.”)

Miranda: Checks face in mirror though it is night and the cinema will be dark. (Stops DSR, flashes light up at face, moves USR.)

Jenna: Whatever, no time to fret. Exits car and slams door shut. (Turns LS and then towards audience.)

Morgan: Begins walking swiftly. Realizes that speed walking is useful. (Walks quickly around the space to DSR, facing wall.)
Miranda: Accustomed to being late, yet regrettably misses the previews. (Moves quickly to USL, faces audience.)

Jenna: Too late to have absurd conversation with self. (Moves quickly USR, faces audience.)

Morgan: Walks. Quicker. Light jog. (Jogs to USC, faces audience.)

Miranda: White flicker from the right. (All performers flicker flashlights.)

Jenna: Stop! (Performers turn off flashlights. Audience is in complete darkness.)

Morgan: Walks back and peers to the right. (Performers turn and flash their lights on the curtain. Spotlight from behind the curtain fades up, revealing the silhouette of mudflap antler girl.)

(The performers turn off the flashlights and place them down. They stand towards the image and pull their bodies towards her, zombie like. They reach out to her and interact with her as they speak their lines.)

Morgan: I was drawn to her. Within a flashing moment her piercing antlers stung me with disgust and awe. (Barthes 27)

Miranda: How did she entice me to this place?

Jenna: Primitive. Process. Image and consumer meet-cute. First, the image attracts the beholder, then arrestment, finally enthrallment. (Fried 92)

Morgan: She called to me, halted me in front of herself. I was spellbound, unable to move. (Fried 92)

Miranda: In a moment of paralysis, the image consumed me. No longer a simple passerby, I was participating in a dialogue between the image and myself.
Jenna: But the initial desire to gaze upon the image no longer belonged to me, instead it belonged to her, the mudflap girl. As if she wanted to gaze upon me.

Morgan: A coincidence, that she would be there waiting for me at a simple passing moment. A co-incident that would begin a perverse love affair between me and the mudflap girl.


Jenna: Halted, one night in a parking lot, mesmerized by the image of a mudflap girl with deer antlers perched atop her head.

(The light fades out. Performers begin to sing, “Down by the River to Pray.” They kneel USC with backs to the audience as the curtains slightly open in the middle, revealing the mudflap antler girl. She comes alive and begins a narrative, sitting behind a mounted deer head. Throughout this section the kneeling performers begin to make a shrine of animal skull and bone pieces around the mudflap antler girl.)

Karen: I was born in Texarkana. My parents got divorced when I was two and my mother bought a house in Nash, where I grew up. When I was 9 we went to see my dad in Houston and after that he disappeared. My brother Rick bossed me around. He tried to punish me in ways he thought he should. He would hit me; throw my head against the wall. One of his friends said I said something bad about his girlfriend… he slammed me against the cabinets and, “don’t tell mom or I will beat your ass again tomorrow.” Our relationship is, well… I will never talk to him or see him again which is okay because he is really, really weird.
(MFG continues, using gestures throughout yet still exemplifying a sweet shyness about her.)

Karen: Anyway, growing up I thought my dad didn’t love me, thought he was more interested in his women and his work than he was in us, until I was about 13 when we found him again. He just divorced his fifth or sixth wife, so I was his wife, daughter, maid. One day it was pouring down rain and we lived in a trailer with solid white carpet and we had gone somewhere when Rick realized he left his keys. He got out of the truck and walked all on the white carpet with muddy feet. Guess who got to clean it? The maid. But I grew up fast because my dad wasn’t around. I cried to mom and asked why doesn’t dad love me, why doesn’t he come around, why isn’t he here? It was hard and it was hard on my mom.

Karen: My grandfathers were in my life. My dad’s dad… I thought he walked on water. He was an alcoholic and he would go down to the office, which was the 7/11 and we would go with him. He had a little nigger girlfriend (that is what he called her). He would go in and talk to her and would get one of those little cokes that come in a tiny bottle and he had a little clear plastic solo cup and he would fill it up with about this much bourbon and then a little bit of coke and say, “here you want the rest of this coke? Would you like some bourbon with that? You know where it’s at if you want it, go ahead.” But he was always, always, always there for us. He was an amazing man.

Karen: But there were other men in my life. I started dating probably about 13. I felt like I was grown. I remember his name was Billy. (Performers begin to hum song. Miranda takes a
skull and places it at the front of the shrine.) He was my best friend’s boyfriend’s best friend. Um it went really good in the beginning but then he started being really possessive, telling me what to wear and who I could talk to. He wanted more than I wanted and I wasn’t ready. He forced himself on me. I was 13 he was 18. Fighting it wasn’t going to do any good so after a while I just agreed to it. I grew up a southern kid; you waited till you got married. Both of my grandmothers were very church going. And you just didn’t do that you just didn’t do it. That’s why I never told anyone. (Performers begin to close curtain as spotlight slowly fades out.) Besides that I was molested by the time I was like five, so saying no was not an option. After you go through that for so many years and this happens to you then you’re like well I guess this is just how it is. I was not ready I didn’t want to do that. (Performers return to singing the song in the dark.)

Morgan: Mudflap girl is the prey or the hunted, that which is gazed upon, captured, and exhibited in grotesque yet normalized ways. (Spotlight is completely faded out. Line is delivered in darkness.) (Spotlight from behind the curtain slowly fades in, once again revealing the mudflap antler girl silhouette.) Jenna: The original image of mudflap girl provokes little response within me, as a normalized image. Almost too familiar and seemingly unimportant. But when she is depicted as further dehumanized with antlers atop her head, a new performance occurs. A performance that astounds. It is a performance of gender, a performance of sexuality by means of violence. But aren’t the two just the same? (Turns head toward the wall as a profile.)
(Now turns body to profile and sits like the image of mfg.) A picture marked with personhood and animation. Beckoning for our gaze.

Jenna: This is a visceral desire, a lust between the image and the consumer. What do pictures want? What does mudflap girl want? What do you want?

(Looking at mudflap antler girl yet still remaining in pose, then turns head to look at the audience with a “deer-in-the-headlights” gaze. The silhouette then turns her head toward the audience. Lights fade out.)
VIII. Final Sequence

(The last scene is performed in the style of Tanztheatre. The final sequence begins with dim lights, and performers behind white sheet emerge, crawling from underneath the curtain while droning sounds play. They use their bodies to push the bones under the curtain. Jenna is still in mudflap girl pose. After the bones are gone, the performers make their way into a mudflap girl position at various spots on the stage. A song begins playing (A slowed down and mixed version of Florence and the Machine’s “What The Water Gave Me”). The performers begin a dance sequence. At the end of the dance sequence, the song fades into a mixed version of Bjork’s “Dark Matters,” and the performers squirm across the floor to SR. An amoeba like figure exits behind curtain SL, dressed in a red stretchy body suit that extends past the head. The face of this performer is unrecognizable. The red body appears as an amoeba that is enticing/is enticed by the bodies onstage. The bodies are drawn to the image, moving slowly across to SL. They move the amoeba with their bodies to CS and then encompass and overwhelm the amoeba with their bodies, forming her into the mudflap girl pose. Finally, when the amoeba is revealed as a mudflap girl, the bodies stare at and admire the image, and then collapse her down, as they did to themselves at the beginning of the dance sequence. The bodies depart from the amoeba. Now, the compiled video from the pre-show begins to play, appearing on the amoeba and white curtain behind her. She is still moving like an amoeba. While all of this is taking place, two bodies are using caution tape to obstruct the audience’s view from the images and the amoeba, like a murder crime scene. The performers are moving stylistically, creating angles with the caution tape and their bodies in a Bauhaus fashion. The caution tape is hung from wall to wall, intersecting at varying points. After some time, the black bodies crawl back behind
the curtain. Simultaneously, two bodies are using the rope from before to create an outline of the mudflap girl on the ground, like a dead body. The amoeba exits SL. At this point, the audience is bombarded with images and sounds. As the scene comes to a climax, the video ends and all lights go out, revealing the glow-in-the-dark figure of the mudflap girl. End scene.)
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