Fleeting Images
Women Visually Writing the Web

Gail E. Hawisher
Patricia A. Sullivan

Hi everyone,

    The very idea of choosing a face to accompany my online words horrifies me. Should I choose an "authentic" image, one that shows my age and deviations from standard female beauty markers? Or does the electronic medium license me to alter my image? License? Does it *mandate* that I alter my image (think of the number of times people have sheepishly said after a first time on a MUD—gee, I used my *real* name! I didn't know [the rules]. . . (blush))?

In creating a face to accompany my words, how would I deal with the very diverse audience of the net—remembering that I might want to retain a professional image for the job search and in addition construct a fanciful image for other lists or create some feminist symbol-face for this list? Will my female face get more or less respect if I make it nice looking, smiling? Does nice-looking reinforce the nice training that I want to shed or does it indicate my insistence on new and nice rules? Or should I make a face very much at odds with my words (mean face/nice words or nice face/mean words) in order to subvert stereotyping?

Ah so many rhetorical decisions if we add visual rhetoric. And gender issues become heightened, I think, rather than lessened.

She adds, almost as an afterthought,

Is anyone here making home pages?
I have enough trouble with words.

<div align="right">Tina (November 1994)</div>

    In this statement about online living made before web pages were commonplace, Tina anticipates some of the issues about visual representation that we explore in this chapter. Self-image is problematic for her, and more problematic as it becomes more visual. She sees "authentic" as deviating visually from "standard female beauty markers" and ponders whether a "nice-looking, smiling" female face will attract "more or less respect" as she wonders about

how she wants to represent herself to the online world. Just as she considers retaining "a professional image for the job search," she also toys with the idea of making a face at odds with her words in order to subvert stereotyping. And although we suspect that a verbal description when juxtaposed with her picture is not so strong a tool for subverting viewers' stereotyping as Tina may suppose, her words help us understand the vexed relationship between online writing and images. Ultimately and interestingly, she connects image with face while, at the same time, remaining fully aware that she's creating her image through the very words that are also creating her. As visual as her verbal self-representation is, she foregrounds the complications that visual rhetoric will add to her creation of her own image on her home page. We agree that self-image and representation are at least as complicated as Tina suggests.

The Internet has been promoted in the popular press and in our professional journals as a space in which what is said becomes more important than who does the saying: the net is reputed to blind us to appearance and other markers of status which are readily apparent in face-to-face encounters (Sproull and Kiesler). Because online participants cannot see one another in electronic settings and therefore are unaware of paralinguistic cues such as voice, facial expressions, and dress, some argue that they are less likely to judge one another by differences in looks, race, social class, age, sexual preference, handicaps, and gender. Recent studies of writing and technology have begun to critique the adequacy of such egalitarian narratives for describing e-space. Instead of viewing the Internet as a space that masks differences because of its lack of visual and aural cues, some see women and other underrepresented groups as net victims, often unduly harassed on listservs and news groups. More recent work argues that these online environments are neither egalitarian utopias nor spaces devoid of communicative power for women (Hawisher and Sullivan). As of yet, however, published discussions have paid little attention to what happens when the mostly verbal online context of computer-mediated communication is transformed into the visually rich space of the World Wide Web. As women, we are interested in questions of how women and others represent themselves visually on home pages. As feminists, we are particularly interested in how these representations position women within society and what subject positions are available to them. As women visually construct themselves online, what issues of representation should they consider and how do they understand others' online construction of them? In other words, what happens to women's online lives when the visual comes into play? These are the questions this chapter seeks to address.[1]

GENDER IN ELECTRONIC DISCOURSE

In previous discussions of women online, the field of computers and composition has often focused on computer-mediated communication and read online issues inside a frame that is totally textual—or nearly so. As

computer-mediated communication became a pedagogical option for writing classes, considerable enthusiasm accompanied its arrival. Teachers argued that it could encourage quiet students to speak up and out and that it abetted students' writing through its totally textually-based environment. In addition to providing real and expanded audiences, it was also said to encourage a sense of community, with students demonstrating a high degree of involvement and equitable participation all around. Teachers also believed that there could be a decrease in leader-centered participation. All these claims were grounded in an egalitarian ethos (see Hawisher 1992 for a review of these claims). That computer-mediated communication might improve the writing class in ways that fostered egalitarianism grew out of writing teachers' experience but was also grounded in studies that Sara Kiesler and her colleagues conducted at Carnegie Mellon, research which began in 1984 and which continues today. (See Sproull and Kiesler's *Connections* 1991 for an overview of the research.) The "reduced social context cues model" that they articulated regards networked discourse as an efficient medium for communicating information in business settings where the content of the message is of primary importance. Those working in computers and composition, however, have turned the research to a different end. Compositionists argue that because participants cannot see one another in electronic settings, writing instructors have a greater possibility for decentering their authority and transforming their classes into egalitarian sites for learners. This absence-of-sensory-cues foundation for online equality—the "if we could just strip away markers of difference" wish—is, of course, almost impossible inside the visually rich world of the Web. Students might play with representations of themselves, but it is difficult to hide visible markers of difference.[2] Further, because the textual CMC theory has not anticipated a visual frame, the entrance of the visual is theoretically jolting: those who have been pen or email pals with strangers are now "seeing" those strangers.

Even in discussions of online violence and victimization, feminists focus for the most part on the textual world of CMC. Calling on arguments from the popular press—the *Village Voice's* "CyberRape" (Dibbel); *Ms. Magazine's* "The Strange Case of the Electronic Lover" (Van Gelder); *Vogue's* "Terror Online" (Gill)—and also television news shows, such as *DateLine*, discussions of stalking and sexual harassment are used to combat the egalitarian narrative and the reasonableness of the research that supports it. Feminists have relied on very powerful stories of gender deception, violence, and harassment to counter the prevailing notions about the utopian possibilities of textual e-space. Stories such as Lindsy Van Gelder's "The Strange Case of the Electronic Lover," in which a fifty-something male psychiatrist posing as a crippled and mute woman who gives much advice and support to disabled women, have highlighted how deception has shattered women's trust in the online utopian community. As one woman who was duped noted: "Although I think this is a wonderful medium, it's a dangerous one, and it poses more danger to women than men" (375). Feminists in technology have further argued that stories of

gender deception, violence, and harassment also prevail in professional settings. In a study we conducted of the online verbal lives of academic women in composition, again and again they reported being increasingly shut out in mixed-group electronic discussions. And analysis of online discourse finds that women make fewer and shorter contributions than men and that both men and women respond more frequently to men's postings than to women's (Selfe and Meyer; Herring; Ebben), thereby reinforcing the off-line status quo.

Our point? Feminists in computers and composition have understandably focused almost exclusively on the textual. But the heightened possibilities for self-representation brought about by the Web suggest that a simple transfer of arguments about women's online verbal lives is inadequate as a strategy for exploring visual representations. While writers can enhance (and even mask) their visual representations, it remains 1) that they are visually represented and 2) that most cultural castes are visually marked. If a woman features a woman on her homepage, that picture signs her into the feminine gender online. In order to extend and complicate electronic discourse theories, we need to examine online visual depictions in a variety of discursive settings.

The body, and representation of the body, certainly are key feminist concerns. Such feminists as Susan Bordo have argued that because "the construction of body as something apart from the true self . . . and as undermining the efforts of that self" (5) is seen as an historical constant and because "woman [is] cast in the role of the body" (5) reading the feminine body is central to feminism. But in a postmodern world where context is everything, Bordo concedes, reading bodies becomes extremely complex. Although she admits that readers will bring different interpretations to their reading, she argues that "to focus only on multiple interpretations is to miss important effects of the everyday deployment of mass cultural representations of masculinity, femininity, beauty, and success" (24). Bordo approaches the everyday interpretation through two analytical moves: finding how representations "homogenize" and articulating how these homogenized images "normalize"—that is, how they go about representing that which the self continually measures, judges, disciplines, and corrects itself by. (24-25) Although Bordo uses this analytic primarily to read ads and celebrity images, here we see its potential for reading pictorial representations of bodies on the Web.

In cyberspace the body of the machine (and its relationships to humans) adds yet another complicating factor to the visualization of gender online. Sandy Stone ("Will the Real Body") argues that Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour have already convinced cyber theorists that machines are artifacts with agencies, but that the multiple agencies enabled by the human-machine cyborg complicate the task of researchers who now have to determine what it is that they need to target for analysis. Online pictorial representations of the body treat theorizing to several new *whats*. Not only do these cyborgian images challenge feminist theorizing about CMC by adding a visual dimension to the previously textual renderings of the online body, but they also challenge gender

binaries and stereotypical representations of the body that theorists such as Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, and Bordo take as starting points.

Haraway has linked the biology of bodies with the mechanisms of machines in her consideration of cyborgs. For Haraway, "Technology is not neutral. We're inside of what we make, and it's inside of us. We're living in a world of connections—and it matters which ones get made and unmade (quoted in Kunzru 209)." Admittedly, this is not necessarily a visual view of cyberlife, at least not one that we would easily name visual. Nor does it reveal a process for interpreting the visual as Bordo does. But, it does, as Haraway unfolds it, revolve around the notion of the cyborg as a collection of networks "constantly feeding information back and forth across the line to the millions of networks that make up [the] 'world.'" (according to Kunzru 158) For Haraway, then, the cyborg—fully connected in ways that heretofore have not been possible—is cause for celebration.

Susan Leigh Star, on the other hand, responds more cautiously to cyborgian notions. When she examines the consequences of "links crisscrossing the world, these rearrangements of work and play," in relation to her sense of "freedom, privacy, and naturalness," she wonders whether "we may all be moving into a regime of virtual detention simply to manage the information available" (3). Star cautions that the cyborg is "an exciting, avant-garde notion of the merger of people with technologies, making possible new ways of being," and is at the same time "a despairing look at the devastation wrought by technophilia as coupled with late capitalism (21)." Thus, for Star, the cyborg evokes a mixture of hope and despair—both productive and troubling at once.

Haraway and Star agree that connections are key. Star draws on Haraway to define the cyborg as "the intermingling of people, things (including information technologies), representations and politics in a way that challenges both the romance of essentialism and the hype about what is possible technologically. It acknowledges the interdependence of people and things, and just how blurry the boundaries between them have become (21)." Both theorists focus on boundaries and interrogate them from the vantages of human-machine connections and feminist perspectives to encourage new ways of seeing.

Star uses "boundary objects" as an analytic for probing boundaries because it allows groups to come together for a specific purpose through a focusing of their mutual attention on a particular object at hand. Although members of the different groups may have radically different understandings of the object, their thinking is somewhat flexible and the object is understood on multiple levels. According to Star, such objects "occupy a tense but necessarily malleable position between several worlds ("The Politics" 96)." In earlier work, Star, with her co-author Griesemer, uses boundary objects as analytics in their construction of the ecology surrounding the emergence of a natural history research museum in the early twentieth century. In their concern with "the flow of objects and concepts through the network of participating allies and social worlds" (389), Star and Griesemer look to establish multiple stories that are supported by their data

at the same time as they establish a coherent account to the institution's emer-gence. The boundary objects, which "inhabit several intersecting worlds" (393), are accepted by the various constituencies even though they are understood somewhat differently by each group. This allows for diversity and cooperation across groups because the boundary objects are "plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites" (393). Further, the "creation and management of boundary objects is a key process in developing and main-taining coherence across intersecting social worlds" (393).[3]

Similarly, Haraway would have us "[nurture and acknowledge] alliances with a lively array of others, who are like and unlike, human and not, inside and outside what have been the defended boundaries of hegemonic selves and powerful places" (269). She breaks down the boundaries between human and non-human, thus attributing to non-humans the possibility for agency. Star, by contrast, locates agency in humans and groups, the traditional stuff of soci-ology. She struggles with the tension of humans needing to fit into a particular society while at the same time their needing increasingly to connect across cul-tures and groups.[4]

Thus we turn to all three theorists for this particular analysis of women's online visual representations and images. Bordo's analytic allows us to interro-gate images through the binary relationships and pre-existing categories active in our culture. She helps us read visual culture through a gendered lens. Haraway and Star help us focus on the connections that might extend or refashion pre-existing categories. As complicated through the notion of boundary objects, their focus on cultural connections adds the dynamic qual-ity needed for an analysis of the electronic imagery of the Web.

WOMEN'S WEB PAGES: READING TO THE ISSUES

What follows is an exploration of several websites that visually portray women online. We seek to address the issues in this area that are key for femi-nists in computers and composition who theorize gender in online environ-ments. Our overarching aim is to elucidate how women make use of the cyborgian connectedness of electronic environments to claim multiple agen-cies for themselves and to show how institutional and cultural-ideological forces work against women's efforts at self-representation. Several questions related to the ones we posed earlier pertain: How do women use these new spaces to accommodate varied and multiple subject positions? In what ways are women writers, authorizers, and controllers of e-space in their web pages? How do the sites they connect with their names function? What subject posi-tions does the central figure of their sites occupy? What messages about the women do the sites convey?

Our examples are drawn from several sources[5]: a group of professional women we studied in another setting, a group of young women drawn from two

online directories of women's web pages, and several commercial sites. Only a few website classifications[6] address audience and purpose, and none provide rhetorical distinctions that allow us to probe the range of visual online representations of/for/by women. In order to ensure that our websites (1) paid attention to the ways in which they construct identities and (2) were intended to communicate with viewers, we drew examples from sites featuring three dimensions of promotion in its widest sense: advertisements of society's wares (commercial); repositories/dispensers of information (institutional); personal and professional disclosures of information (personal/professional). While we admit that these categories do not exhaust the rhetorical positionings found on the Web, they do relate to our work as teachers of writing and as professional women: a person developing a web page writes to represent herself to others who read the page. Likewise, an institution builds a representation of itself online, as does a commercial site. In the discussion that follows, we use several examples of web pages to articulate the issues attending women's visual representations on the Web.

COMMERCIAL

Commercial sites abound on the Web and when they picture women's bodies in their selling of wares these sites are open to the same kinds of feminist critique that advertisements in other venues attract. Representations of women in our society often occur as advertisements: women's bodies (and men's) used exploitatively to sell products. The World Wide Web also increasingly has its share of advertisements that depict women in much the same way as they appear in print. These are the images that the women themselves do not create and are posted to the Web not to announce their professional or their departments' credentials but to sell wares to online society. These are the same images which appear daily in the popular media and, more recently, in the catalogs that have taken over snail mail. For the most part, these female bodies are objectified and bartered by others: they are not under the control of the women pictured; nor do they speak those women's words.

The Victoria's Secret website offers an example we can straightforwardly connect to Bordo's reading of visual bodies.[7] Here we have an image, which begins as a "thumbnail" and when clicked upon becomes a lingerie-clad woman—the new pin-up of the home catalog industry. In this representation, the woman, who gazes directly out from the screen, seems to be inviting viewers into her parlor. (See figure 1.) But this image and other similar ones at the Victoria's Secret site are not controlled by the woman depicted, and instead are assembled by someone other than the woman herself. The crafters have a particular purpose in mind, ostensibly to sell the items featured, the images of the women as well as the clothes. In order to convince potential buyers to purchase this lingerie, the crafters seek to homogenize the woman's image as normal and attainable. The homogenized image is white, impeccably groomed, and perfectly formed. The Victoria's Secret webmaster seeks to be the master sculptor of the fantasy version of a desirable woman.[8]

Figure 1

And as Bordo has argued, "Popular culture does not apply any brakes to these fantasies of rearrangement and self-transformation. Rather, [women] are constantly told that [they] can 'choose' our own bodies" (247). The Victoria's Secret bodies do little more than foreground the current homogenized representations of "femaleness" and serve to reproduce the age-old stereotypical relations among the sexes. Obviously this is not self-representation.

But there are other commercial sites offering alternative representations of women in which the women themselves very much take control. Carla Sinclair's "Net Chick Clubhouse" serves as a fascinating example. Viewers can enter her cartoon-like, colored clubhouse to find out about her and her interests, but she also provides another front door (actually there are many) which features an advertisement of her book, *Net Chick*. Samples of email about the book, along with an excerpt from the book, accompany the necessary information for ordering a copy. (See figure 2.)

Although an instance of commerce, her home page also serves as a gateway into a playful nineties' designed environment, and she adroitly mixes the commercial purpose of peddling her book (found in the office room of her

Figure 2
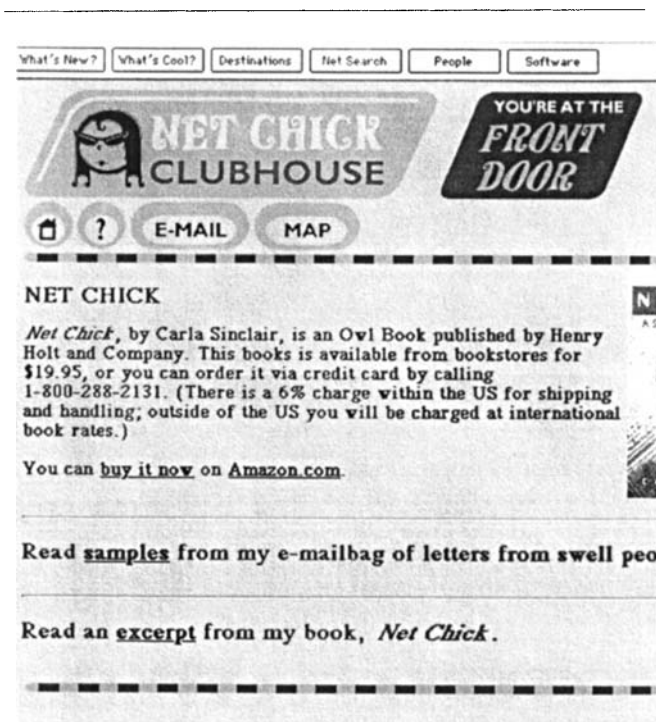
house if entered from her personal address) with biographical information, toys and games (found in the rumpus room), connections to other relevant pages and so on. Reminiscent of a child's playhouse in its upbeat attitude, the Net Chick Clubhouse is hardly the typical commercial exploitation of women's bodies that the word "commercial" schools us to expect. Instead of encountering lingerie and loud pitches to buy products (as at the Victoria's Secret site), we encounter many renditions of Carla.

And who is Carla? Is she the inventor of "Magic Eight Bra," an online game in which viewers make a wish, push the cups together, concentrate, and then open them for an answer? Or, is she the image in the sultry photo[9] that inspired Toups's choice for Babe of the Year for 1995? Or, is she the published author of a serious net book intended to educate women in the ways of the Web? The answer is "Yes" to all three questions. Her whimsical use of the bra deserves examination. Star might label it a boundary object because of the potential range of responses that visitors to her site might have to the "Magic Eight Bra" game or to Sinclair's opening statement from *Net Chick:* "Loosen your bra straps and take a deep breath—you're about to embark on a most sumptuous, estrogenic journey ever taken through online culture" (3). Because of the connections with bra-burning feminists, the bra can be seen as a symbol

of rebellion. Because of its connection with constraining women's breasts, it may be seen as a token of subservience or of modesty. Because of its connection with fashion, the bra may be connected to the enhancing or reshaping of the breast—to creating allure. Because of its connection with Madonna, the bra may be seen as a provocative piece of outer wear. Regardless of the particular connection, Carla bets that her readers will respond in some way to the bra as cultural object: perhaps in Carla's mind the bra conveys some meaning to everyone she wants to reach. Ultimately, the bra is a teaser.

Carla integrates commerce into her panoply of selves—collapsing work/commerce with sexual play and children's club houses, pictures of victorian houses with the pink and blue of babies, and so on. She and others like her offer a more complex view of the commercial than does the Victoria's Secret site, though she still invites viewers to buy so that they can join in on the construction of net play. A cynical societal reading of Carla's house is that it is carefully crafted to produce sales.

INSTITUTIONAL

Unlike the commercial websites, institutional sites emphasize dispensing information, though not from an innocent or neutral position. The purposes of university websites, for example, are often related to image promotion; each university crafts information that promotes the image that it wants prospective students, future employers, and the public to associate with it. But in addition to advertising the university, these sites come to represent the institution online. Their dominant image is often a group of buildings—the institutional setting. To the general public and alums, the image of their university is historically situated in its campus architecture. Thus these websites frequently mimic and reflect dominant architectural features of the university. Here the body being visualized becomes the institution, the substance often the brick and mortar distinctive to that "body." The buildings comprise the body of the institution.

And the buildings are more than pretty pictures. They gain speech through the talk of the people, the knowledge, and the activities that inhabit them. The people contained are not always pictured or depicted visually; nor do they always control the words and pictures connected with their names. Further, because of the rapid growth of the World Wide Web, representations of people are not always placed consistently within the site. Universities are always still constructing their websites, so various departmental and program web pages are connected in such a way as to have some top-level consistency but not to convey a totally consistent design throughout. At Purdue University, for example, visitors enter through the red brick of the campus, and that red brick follows them to the department level. But inside a departmental page, categories can lead to subpages with entirely different design approaches (business writing and renaissance studies, for example, do not integrate with the overall design; nor do they share the same design philosophies).

Further, between departmental buildings at Purdue the people are pre-
sented differently. In Agricultural Economics the departmental space is domi-
nated by pictures of faculty, while many other departments just list their
faculty's names. In some senses, this inter- and intra-departmental variation
stamps the Website as similar and familiar at the architectural level at the same
time as it is varied, and perhaps erratic, when it intersects with people and
their current agendas. Only one "human" body is at times shown in the photo-
graphic frame reserved for buildings—Purdue Pete, the University mascot that
is a hard-hatted, plaster big head (of Caucasian persuasion) worn by three
unknown, and real, male students at sporting events and civic functions.
Purdue Pete, also called Boilermaker Pete, will sometimes appear on the open-
ing page of the site, striking a strong-jawed pose wielding his hammer. A mute
in "real life," Pete's wide-eyed and vacant stare, crafted in the 1920s, and only
mildly updated in today's version, offers us a thoroughly anonymous human
stripped of languaging capabilities beyond physical mime. The only central-
ized "human" photo that the institution presents, then, is a male student who
has been thoroughly tamed and de-languaged. Thus, in almost all senses,
human bodies are marginalized in favor of more stable architectural bodies—
both particular buildings and the omnipresent red brick—as the Website con-
structs the institutional image as one where buildings and, by connection,
knowledge pronouncements endure through the changing nature of the bod-
ies that temporarily people them.

Thus it comes as no surprise that institutions tended to overshadow the
women from our previous study when we looked at their web pages. We found
that most were represented in institutional pages more often than in profes-
sional or personal pages that they themselves constructed and controlled.
Although a few reported that they had authored those institutional pages, the
authorship was limited by the wider website standards of the institution. Often
these web pages take on an image that cuts across institutions, becoming a
genre unto themselves. Consider, for example, Susan Hilligoss's departmental
home page at Clemson University (see figure 3).

The departmental home page "look" of Hilligoss bears a strong resemblance
to those in other English Departments[10] and features the pleasant smiling
image, along with links to her education and employment history, publica-
tions, and teaching activities. One of the authors' institutional web page is
almost an exact replica (e.g., smiling picture, scholarly areas of interest, contact
information), but in some ways it is even more institutionally shaped than
Hilligoss's, with the "University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign" bannered at
the top of the page in orange and blue. Although there is some variation in the
kinds of institutional home pages featuring the women in the study, most fore-
ground a headshot, similar to those on passports, and display scholarly qualifi-
cations—the women's credentials for engaging in university commerce. This
approach to portraying faculty conforms to an image of faculty members as
nomadic travelers moving through the institutions, the pictures changing

Figure 3

What's New? | What's Cool? | Handbook | Net Search | Net Directory

Susan Hilligoss

Department of English
Clemson University, Box 341503
Clemson, SC 29634-1503
803.656.3168
fax 803.656.1345
Internet:
Hilligoss@clemson.edu

Education / Employment History

Scholarship

Teaching

Consulting / Professional Development

Honors / Memberships

from time-to-time. In contrast, the buildings signal stable, enduring portrayals of the university's substance. This is not to say that faculty are considered unimportant. Taken together, the portraits of a department's faculty validate the institution's claims to knowledge and expertise (e.g., teaching and scholarship) in a particular field. But people are seen as marginal to the body, as pictures and credentials to be replaced at any time by other equivalent pictures and credentials. These faculty depictions are the most frequent kinds of online portrayals to be found among the women's web pages in our earlier study. They are not unlike what's done in yearbooks, company reports, brochures, all kinds of print sources before the World Wide Web—they are just what's done. In Bordo's terms they are homogeneous and normalized images. It is worth noting that such representation does not usually allow for multiple subject positions—the institutional framing of head shots is almost as singular and fixed as the oil portraits hanging in the stone and mortar faculty clubs.

Figure 4
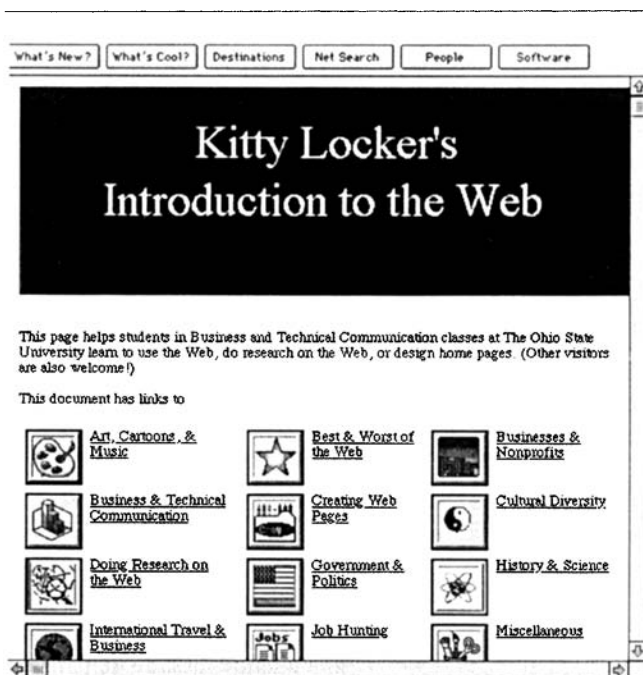
We also encountered a second kind of institutional page free of personal images and constructed by the study's participants for purposes of dispensing pedagogical resources. These pages usually aim to help students do appropriate web research, or to locate tutorial sources and tools for web page construction, or to assemble corporate web pages for employment research, or to serve as online writing labs and to point out online writing resources. Kitty Locker's web page (see figure 4) serves as an example of one such institutional resource site.

Although she doesn't picture herself, or personalize the site as a home or a parlor or even as a classroom, Locker clearly is present within the site. She titles her website "Kitty Locker's Introduction to the Web," and states that the page "helps students in Business and Technical Communication classes at The Ohio State University learn to use the Web, do research on the Web, or design home pages," with other visitors also welcome. The page displays links clustered into twenty-one tiles that educate and sometimes entertain, conveying the sense that the Web is fun and inviting as well as serious scholarly business. Disciplinary distinctions do not dictate organization so much as do writing procedures ("Resources for Writers" or "Creating Web Pages"), information about business sectors ("International Travel & Business" and "Businesses & Nonprofits"), and information of general interest ("News, Weather, & Sports"). In this page, Locker's assessment of students' needs and interests

drive the development of the categories and contents. But this representation of the Web is not without a stamp of Locker herself and her view of Business and Technical Communication's pedagogical tasks and disciplinary reach—it gives viewers her take on how the Web should operate for those in her field. It also features her name prominently and places her institution's name in finer print, perhaps a move to establish her institutional presence as more than marginal, as less fleeting than the head shots of people in the departmental institutional pages. Although her page itself doesn't disrupt conventional notions of femaleness, it transcends the ready-made departmental photo album approach and conveys her teacherly persona. Although bodiless from the visual image point of view, Locker crafts a self out of her textual and graphical choices.

In the institutional pages we examined, on the other hand, women rarely had much say in how they sculpted a visual image for themselves. Buildings tended to dominate the visual landscape in these institutional sites and thus worked against women's efforts at self-representation.

PROFESSIONAL TO PERSONAL

Professional sites for women are contested as well. Constraints on visual representation online are many: first, it seems reasonable to expect that women's emerging representations would be restrained by their professional positions. Second, these representations might well be dominated by text because of the women's professional passion for text or because text is easier to craft online. Third, good feminist pedagogy might dictate that a site invite and encourage students to interact with their teacher. And, finally, feminist positions about online violence might dictate that women omit self-portraits and email addresses, so as to avoid crank email and other intrusions. Such complexity leads some to inject elements of the personal into the professional and the professional into the personal in interesting ways.

One solution for constructing web pages is to have two sites and, indeed, we found that several participants in the earlier study had written web pages that acknowledge societal expectations at the same time that they bend them a bit. Nancy Kaplan, for example, shows viewers two of her selves. She has an institutional home page devoted to professional identification—with a short academic biography and no visuals. But at the bottom of the page viewers can click on the link to Kaplan's home page and move to the professional web page she controls. Here they see an inviting set of pages which has further links to additional biographical information. (See figures 5 and 6.)

Unlike Hilligoss's web page, which was created by someone other than herself using a snapshot taken for the specific purpose of advertising a department, Kaplan's home page is homegrown, so to speak, created by her to show students her interests and to broadcast her persona to anyone on the Web who might come across her website. Yet despite its being more clearly under her control,

Figure 5

| What's New? | What's Cool? | Destinations | Net Search | People | Software |

faculty
of the school of
communitcations design

Nancy Kaplan

Associate
Professor

Nancy Kaplan was an early adopter of computing technology
instruction, having begun this quixotic journey in the days of
developed two networked classrooms at Cornell University c
directed a computer-intensive freshman composition program
Texas at Dallas in the 1990s. She was one of three developer
(Prompted Revision of Student Essays), a computer applicat
writing instruction that was awarded national recognition for
the School of Communications Design she teaches hypermed
information design, and writing. She publishes articles on el
communications and develops web sites including ones for E
Inc., Eastgate Systems, and Monumental General Insurance.
"architexts" for E/Street, she continues to learn by going wh

Visit

UB
university
of baltimore

Academics | Web Design Resources | Showcase | A
School of Communications Design

Figure 6

| What's New? | What's Cool? | Destinations | Net Search | People | Software |

What's Really Important

Nancy Kaplan -- born quite a few years ago and then some time later educated at the University of Mic
really important things to be everything that's absent from her official home page:

Her children, Eva and Erica (a small bit of whose artwork can be found in the story about one
E/Street, a WEBaltimore Community)

Her friend, partner, lover Stuart

And their three cats -- Athena (the portly), Lilith (the paranoid), and Vyvyan (the playful)

I won't embarrass any of us, least of all Athena, with the family portraits.

posted January 28, 1996

Figure 7

the visual representation Kaplan sets forth in her personal page is only slightly more graphic than Hilligoss's. Although she achieves considerable identity through her text, that identity is more abstract than embodied.

The range of visual representations for women, then, remains limited in this sampling of the personal components of professionals' websites. In order to appreciate more fully the possibilities for visually writing oneself online—a freedom that our students often enjoy—we need to widen our examination to the Web pages of young women students. For it is in their sites that visual representations may be less constrained by institutional culture. The personal home pages of 20-something women and students begin to forge different connections than the women from our earlier study created. When we looked at several examples of young women who are not writing teachers, many of them represented themselves as taking risks, pushing boundaries, and proclaiming themselves to be net chicks. Consider, for example, Amanda Wolf, a 24-year-old college student, studying graphic design (see figures 7 and 8):

Here there seems to be an irreverent sensibility at work—an attitude that we sometimes speak of as "in your face." Like the Victoria's Secret women,

Figure 8

Amanda Wolf stares straight out at her viewers, alluringly—"PurEvil" is her trademark. Thus, she establishes contact using a visual form of direct address. But, unlike the Victoria's Secret women, her home page and image, she tells us, is "about me." And that "me," for those of us on the net, is batwoman, "goddess of all things Dark and Evil." Yet Amanda's page is not purely personal; the second paragraph of her description of herself explains why her program in graphic design at the University of Cincinnati is an excellent program. Clearly, if viewers are meant to see her as a person, it is as a professional person who very effectively draws viewers to her work as a graphic designer.

As one scrolls to a second screen, however, the view of Wolf expands and changes. Here there are the 'Bat Stats,' which are presented as a regimented list of facts and figures: status, birth date, height, weight, current hair, eye, and skin color, body piercings (nose, navel, numerous ear), and tattoo. Wolf then explains to viewers the origin of her tattoo—an imaginary childhood friend— which is inscribed on her left calf. She thus articulates a number of connections: current and future employers, friends and fellow students, would-be lovers, net surfers, childhood memories, mythologies. Not all of the connections operate in the same way for the same groups. Here we're thinking specifically of tattoos and body piercings. They may, in fact, be thought of as boundary objects, to use Star's terminology, that is, as "objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites" (Star and Griesemer 393).

Figure 9

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the famous
Eve Astrid Andersson

I'd like to telepathically communicate with you, but it is only safe to do so if your browser can handle animated gif89s!

Try out my new fun game,
The Pi Trivia Game
(if you know of any good pi-related questions that I could add to my game, please tell me!)

3.141592653589793238462643383279502884197169399375105820974944592307 8...

My dreams have been fulfilled! I finally made it to
● **The Uselessness of Pi and its irrational friends!** ●
(a subset of the hilarious Useless WWW Pages)

● I have recently received a bachelor's degree from Caltech and am now a graduate student at U.C. Berkeley, doing research in Intelligent Vehicles and Highway Systems in the department of Mechanical Engineering. ●

● Do you want to know more about me? Yes / No ●

Some in encountering her web pages would share her view of tattoos and body piercings as desirable; others might view such objects with disdain. They might see her as not constructing a professional and personal identity so much as rebelling against society's norms and standards of propriety. Regardless of the interpretation, however, Amanda carves out a visual identity that attracts layers of interpretation that resist easy categorization.

Another 20-something woman, Eve Andersson, greets us with a headshot that strikes a traditional pose, smiling and affable, but with green face, red hair, and antennae, all enhanced by a constant stream of soft murmurings of the numbers that are *pi*, namely, 3.14159. (See figures 9 and 10.)

She calls herself the "famous" Eve Astrid Andersson. Although the green face and antennae signal deviations from a professional demeanor, Eve populates her space with displays of her academic credentials and work experience. The

Figure 10

Here are some recent pictures of me. Each of them links to a larger version of the picture.

viewer learns that she graduated from Cal Tech, moved to Berkeley as a graduate student in the department of Mechanical Engineering, and was formerly an employee of Creative Internet Design, a web consulting agency in Pasadena, California. Interwoven in her credentializing are fables, personal information, games, creative writing, art work, photos of herself and family, and spoofs of her lived experiences. Through it all, she visually represents herself as an athlete, lab technician in work-out clothes, traveler, jailbird, wine taster, thinker, 20-something with-it chick—all working to challenge stereotyped images of a 20-something woman engineer. An alien, who as a baby was yellow, Eve entertains viewers with stories of her growth to her adult green state. The mixture of

cartoons with colorized photos (and "real" ones) lends a childlike whimsy to the life of a young woman who also depicts herself as devoted to *pi* (pie?).

When placed alongside the professional and institutional home pages, these women stake out multiple subject positions for themselves. They doctor photos, use cartoons, animate quirky representations of themselves, and in general play with the visual in ways that blur the boundaries between physical selves and virtual selves. It's a cyborgian move in that they're using the technology to capture representations of themselves while at the same time they're using technology to add and change bodily features. In displaying their ears, calves, and tattoos, they celebrate their own writings of their bodies. In contrast, the professional women that we studied earlier are ostensibly valued for their minds and knowledge— their bodies are extraneous (at best), and potentially damaging to their success.

With these images, then, we begin to see how some women (both in and out of the field of writing) visually represent themselves on the Web and how they themselves get represented. When others control the Web images, we see women represented commercially in ways that seem familiar to us—as objects to be ogled, objects to stimulate, commodities to be bought and sold—and represented institutionally as serious, if smiling, heads that are interchangeable across schools and disciplines. But there are also examples of women writing their own visual representations in cyborg territory. These women begin to forge new social arrangements by creating a visual discourse that startles and disturbs. In claiming this cyborg territory as their own, the 20-something women on the Web—Gilbert and Kile tell us that "grrrls have attitude, girls don't"—clothe themselves in "attitude" and, as Donna Haraway aptly states, commit their cyborg selves to "partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity (151)."

WOMEN AND WEB REPRESENTATION ISSUES

What conclusions can we draw from these visual snippets of the World Wide Web presented here? First there's the realization that current commercial portrayals of women's bodies as useful for selling products are likely to continue to function in much the same way in web space. We have come to think of the new technology as replicating and then extending the old—online publications, for example, are still strongly influenced by print. Thus it is not surprising that online commercials visually mimic, at least initially, commercials in print and on television. Certainly the Victoria Secret's pages mirror the glossy catalogs. But the possibilities of the new media also offer points of departure that challenge and subvert stereotypes. Carla Sinclair's home page is decidedly commercial but playful, ironic, complex in its portrayal of the women that Carla invites to buy her book. Here she uses old stand-bys such as the bra as an entry point into the male computer culture of games. But instead of attracting lustful gazes, she invites women to play. Thus, with Carla's computer game there is a possibility for interactivity and playfulness that was not possible in the Victoria Secret's commercial renditions. In both we see lingerie

used to establish boundaries between older and emerging media, using con-
nections already made, and making connections that have previously gone
unmade and all related to women's bodies. Instead of burning the bra, this new
generation of women toy with it, transforming it from a sexual display mecha-
nism to an interactive animated computer game.

Second, the institutional control of professional women leads to visual
depictions that are regimented and prescribed. In the institution's desire to sell
its image to alums, parents, potential students, and legislators, it crafts faculty
depictions in ways that conform to stereotypical images of the body-less pro-
fessoriate. Thus, even when a group of academic women think that at times the
visual might help invent new connections for online communication, institu-
tional expectations dictate and shape their official portrayals of themselves.
Some of these women, however, circumvent such expectations by creating
alternate online personae that begin to complicate notions of professional rep-
resentation. Others resist the institutional portrait by cloaking their multiple
visual personae and displaying in text instead the wealth of their disciplinary
knowledge. Still others alternatively construct themselves by wrapping them-
selves in teacherly or program-related activities. Many display words rather
than pictures. Although today academic women can represent themselves visu-
ally on the Web—headshots are permitted—the institution shapes that visual-
ization for its own purposes, striving to retain control of authorship, visual
and otherwise.

Third, as women have more control over writing their own visualizations
online, we see some women representing themselves complexly in creative,
rhetorically effective ways. As students, Amanda Wolf and Eve Andersson make
the visual work for them, even though we recognize that some would disagree
and call them audacious. Although we do not see them disregarding their
emerging professional selves (Amanda as a graphic designer, Eve as a mechani-
cal engineer), and indeed we do see the online playfulness as displaying their
online technological knowledge (important to some potential employers),
these young women also manage to use visual discourse to construct multiply
rich selves. Technologically and educationally privileged, these women write
themselves in sophisticated ways. Multiple and competing visuals, animation,
mythological drawings, and even sound all command the viewer's attention.

Perhaps the most obvious conclusion to be drawn from these examples is
that the electronic world, and even the "unelectronic" world, is packed full of
images that individuals view and interpret on a daily basis and which, in turn,
exert a tremendous influence over them. When women become visual objects
on the Web and have no say in the ways in which they are represented, the out-
come is predictable—old identities like those of the "pin-up girl" or academic
talking head are reproduced, and traditional narratives are re-created with new
technologies.

Throughout this discussion we have been using examples taken from a
number of venues to percolate our ideas about the range of online visualiza-

tions attempted by women who are writing themselves onto the Web. In addition to contrasting the various sites which have different purposes, we have also examined the connections and disconnections that cyborgian and feminist theorists foreground, if from slightly different perspectives. The play among the making, bending, extending, transforming, machining, and breaking of connections, both in societal and gendered contexts, and the danger of being constrained by inflexible connections—Star's notion of virtual detention—continues to fascinate us. We do not think we have located the necessary and sufficient features that are needed to control visual discourse online. Instead we have begun to position the visual as an inevitable component in the writing of women's online selves. In its profusion of visual images, the World-Wide Web is doing little more than imitating the material world we all inhabit. As inhabitants of this world—as women, as English professionals, and as teachers—we cannot afford to ignore the visual. We do so at our peril.

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NOTES

1.   We realize that we view the visual reorganization of our online selves through the eyes of women and that these questions have implications for others as well. But women have always had complicated relationships with their representation in culture. They have also had troubled relationships with technology. For us, then, women are an appropriately fascinating case.
2.   It would, of course, be possible to impersonate another by sampling other individuals' pictures from the Web and representing that person as oneself.
3.   What might be a boundary object? In the Star and Griesemer study, one key boundary object is the State of California. Various groups important to the emergence of the museum can come together around California as a shared concern even when their meaning for it is quite divergent. Administrators, for example, like the fact that the museum focuses on California zoology because of their mandate as a state university to the State of California; the key scientist uses California as an ecological region of reasonable size to test his theories about the interaction of species evolution with environmental evolution; the patron wants to preserve a record of California wildlife; workers from nature groups want to study the animals of their home state; trappers know the most about the animals in their area; the institution can gain credibility more easily because of its regional (rather than national or international) focus. California becomes a connection point for divergently interested groups—a boundary object—and one that works to establish the zoological museum.
4.   Later in this collection, Anne Wysocki and Johndan Johnson-Eilola offer another perspective from which to view the visual—one grounded in marxist and cultural

studies articulation theory. Focusing on the ways that linkages are repressed and enabled by society, and in hypertext environments by technology, they argue for a conception of online literacy "not as a monolithic term but as a cloud of sometimes contradictory nexus points among different positions. Literacy can be seen as not a skill but a process of situating and resituating representations in social spaces" (353). The representations in social spaces interests us for this project, particularly as those representations are worked out visually. Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola view the linkages as operating through a lens of social structures (i.e., a society, as Stuart Hall puts it, where some linkages are repressed and others are enabled by ideology). Held in contrast with Haraway and Star, their framing points to a tension between the biological dimensions of information technologies (in cyborgian theory) and the social dimensions of the same information technologies (in articulation theory). Both relate to building an understanding of visual representation of women in cyberspace. While articulation theory allows us to discuss the ways that societal views and pressures enable and repress certain imagings, cyborgian theory accommodates women's multiple agencies: actions of visual representation can thus be understood as actions of power.

5.   We began this review of web pages with a consideration of the women professionals who participated in our "Women on the Networks: Searching for E-Spaces of Their Own." That study (see Hawisher and Sullivan for details on the constitution of the group and the course of the research) had been conducted in the fall of 1994 before web pages were very common, and we wanted to see what our research group had done with web pages in the ensuing years. The group itself included women of various ranks, ages, institutions, and geographical locations. All conversant with computer-mediated communication, the group was not a cross-section of the field of composition studies. They were, however, a wide-ranging group of women with diverse opinions. We were eager to look again at their work.

    Because the women of our earlier study are exclusively professionals, we expanded the scope of our review to young, twenty-something women whom we found through various national directories of web pages. Working from the Yahoo Top Ten Sites of the Week Column that featured "Top Ten Sites about Women," we located two directories of web pages, Rob Toups's "Babes on the Web" and Leslie's "Pick of Chicks" that provided links to over four hundred web pages, most of them run by women. Despite its name, Toups's site proved to be an excellent resource because it required that women submit a photo be featured at the site. This ensured us that the visual representation was rich and self-authorized for wider distribution. The pages we ultimately review in this chapter, Amanda Wolf's and Eve Andersson's, were selected through random sampling of the top-rated pages.

    Because we also wanted to look at commercial sites featuring women, we located Victoria's Secret. Since the Victoria's Secret example did not include a commercial use controlled by women, we also looked for websites of women authors of web texts (Laura LeMay, Carla Sinclair, Crystal Kile, and Laurel Gilbert), settling on Sinclair because she had a commercial site embedded in her home page and was also celebrated in Toups's "Babes on the Web."

6.   We've sorted our discussion rhetorically in order to distinguish among the purposes of the sites and the positioning of women who inhabit the sites. Hunt offers one of the few published classifications of websites that is constructed

rhetorically, and he claims that there are two types of sites—organizational sites (representing sites that exist in the real world) and special interest sites (representing sites that usually exist only in virtual worlds and are created by an individual). Because he does not sufficiently distinguish commercial and institutional cultures, Hunt's classification is inadequate to our analysis, though we do preserve his idea that some sites are group developed while others are individually developed and controlled.

7. To verify that http://www.cc.gatech.edu/people/home/jake/vs.html was indeed a site where one can legitimately order Victoria's Secret wares, we called the 800 number given at the Website. Our inquiry was greeted by a recording typical of those found at mail order sites. A woman, who incidentally spoke with a British accent, gave us various options for numbers we needed to press to gain information about processing an order.

8. This use of the perfect model's body resonates with Gunther Kress's observation that, "The body is coming to be used as a medium of representation and communication: even a brief look at a contemporary rock video will illustrate this clearly enough, and so do the industries of aerobics, jogging, roller-blading, and the televisual entertainments developed out of these." He might well add the World Wide Web. Kress goes on to argue that "These changes are not in themselves new: The body has been used in many cultures and in many periods as a medium of communication . . . . The point is . . . that after a period of some two-to-three hundred years of the dominance of writing as the means of communication and representation, there is now, yet again, a deep shift taking place in this system." (69) But, as Kress would readily admit, not all uses of representations of the body are the same.

9. While Carla's photo is the only realistic image at her site, it is not the first image you encounter. Instead, it is buried fairly deeply in the site, so that viewers must hunt for her sultry photo.

10. See, for example, the following websites which are just a few of the many we also visited: http://ernie.bgsu.edu/~kblair/index.html; http://www.english.uiuc.edu/facpages/Hawisher.htm; http://www.louisville.edu/~pdtaka01/; http://miavx1.acs.muohio.edu/~mtsccwis/jdautermann.html; http://www.pitt.edu/DOC/95/52/54269/mmarshall.html; http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~cyselfe/cindypages/; http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sg7/; http://rhet.agri.umn.edu:80../Rhetoric/Faculty/facbios/a-hduin.html