

STYLING: MARY

THE FABRICATED
LOVE AFFAIR
ART PROJECT
ISSUE # 4

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THINGS I DIDN'T SAY



28 july 2004

OK folks, SO the basic idea is dialogue. Art through dialogue, or dialogue through art, one or both of the two. This is our artistic dialogue, and the art is the making of the dialogue and the making is the recording of our thoughts, the generation of words around a topic, the semantic expression of our thoughts and desires.

What I want to know from you is:

- (1) things you would have said but didn't and
- (2) the movies (and books and songs) most important to you—why they speak to you, what it means when something speaks to you. And maybe even what your experience has been trying to get your hands on those movies/books/songs that do speak to you. Was it a struggle?

Basically, I'm looking for you, whatever you have to bring to this discussion with me.

You can find me at katiefi@yahoo.com.

And you can read more stuff online here:

<http://www.alfabus.us/>

<http://www.wildpress.com>

AGENT K

Things I would have said
(not under my breath)
if I'd felt entitled
not been afraid
had more confidence
been 25 when I was actually 17:

1. STOP FUCKING ME!
2. May I pick out the movie this time?
3. Let's watch Girl's Town while I fuck you.

i'm gonna walk in there and rent

fresa y chocolate

still never watched that one

i still ... have never watched it

i got a video rental card in my name

i borrowed a tv set and a vcr

gonna sit there in my rented living room

and watch it

all by myself

we each have these small victories

in our lives and

this is

one of mine

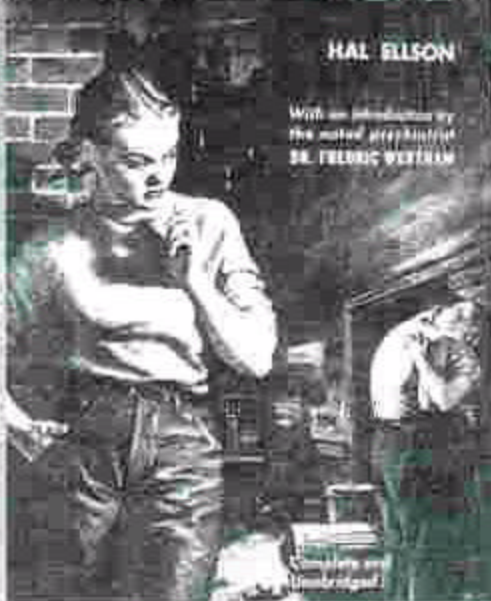


A Shocking Novel of Teen-Age Gang Life
in the Slums of Manhattan

TOMBOY

HAL ELLSON

With an introduction by
the noted psychiatrist
DR. FREDRIC VERTMAN



Complete and
Unabridged

I must announce, I finally watched *Fresa y Chocolate*, nearly seven years after I first intended on seeing it. This is a movie I have been meaning to see ever since Professor Alarcón didn't have time to show it one day in her Queer Studies class at Berkeley and she told us to rent it on our own. But that was back when I didn't have the guts to suggest an esoteric film to my boyfriend, and/or didn't feel empowered to go pick it out at the video store when we were together. And I didn't have a tv, vcr, and video card all to myself to watch the movie alone. And at that time, watching a movie alone was out of the question—it was not something I had yet learned I could enjoy by myself, and I wasn't convinced I really enjoyed it all that much with other people, either.

Even after I went to Cuba and sat in the very ice-cream parlor where the first and last scene from *Fresa y Chocolate* was filmed, I still never got around to seeing that movie. In between living with several roommates and then with my boyfriend, then living alone but without tv or vcr, I never did get around to watching it.

I'd like to find someone or something to blame—not for the fact that I didn't see *Fresa y Chocolate* until now, but for the fact that I maintained such a disempowered relationship with movies for so long. But I can't. There are exhibits that I can dredge up, like the fact that, not thinking of myself as particularly knowledgeable when it came to movies, I wasn't confident enough to assert authority in the movie store. Who was I to suggest a film? I often happily acquiesced to some else's suggestion. There is the fact that I used to fall asleep

during movies—most especially those that just didn't speak to me, and that was the majority. The first time I saw Girls Town, however, I was bolted to the screen; my boyfriend fell asleep in my lap. And there is the fact that frankly, I'd developed a pretty negative relationship to movies by the time I was 19, so I didn't really care much one way or the other.

But there's something else. I've started this essay many times before, trying to wrap my head around just what this is all about—why I have such a strange relationship with movies and why it's such a big deal to me to simply go to the movie store, choose one, rent it, and watch it on my own couch—alone.

As I learn to detach my feminist politics from gender and from victimization—I mean, as I learn to articulate myself as a feminist while taking responsibility for those times that I failed to assert my needs, and without blindly generalizing about men, I try to speak in new language about my relationship to film. On the other hand, I find it hard to talk about my relationship to films without talking about my relationship with men, who've also been the primary gender of my sexual partners.

I guess the truth is, for a long time I thought about movie watching the same way that I thought about sex. I could put my two cents in, but in the end the boy's opinion mattered more and would always win out. To put it more clearly, my relationship to sex and my relationship to movies seem to have developed along a similar trajectory. And I'm proud to announce that not only am I much more equipped to pick out a movie and assert my opinion about movies in a

conversation with friends or lovers, I'm also much more equipped to ask for what I need in a lover and ask for what I need in bed. And I can't deny that there is something about these two victories that go hand in hand.

Sex and consciousness of movie watching started in high school, around age 16. There are several movies that come to mind immediately: Saturday Night Fever, Braveheart, and A Clockwork Orange, all of which my boyfriend at the time chose.

I might go so far as to say that as a woman I was being metaphorically fucked by these movies themselves. To say the least, I wasn't finding my feminist self in these films; I wasn't able to identify strong females in them, or a female voice.

I began to believe that there weren't movies out there that could speak to me. I didn't realize film could be a politically inspiring, creative art form. The entire culture of movie making seemed (correctly) to be male-dominated, and I couldn't imagine myself a "film buff." The label implied entry into an exclusive room to which I had not been invited. Like my experience with sex, I quickly learned that the politics of choosing, accessing, and viewing a film were loaded with power and entitlement—two magic words that have been plaguing me for years.

To be fair, those movies I mentioned—Saturday Night Fever, Braveheart, and A Clockwork Orange—I never saw them in their entirety. That's because, to be quite blunt, I was getting fucked. When I was a teenager, "watching a movie" was code for "having sex." The two soon became almost interchangeable in my mind.

That's not to say that every time that I had sex in front of the TV that it was uninvited. On the other hand, I have the distinct memory that my first boyfriend picked the movie and he picked the fuck. This significantly decreased my desire to "watch a movie" with him or anyone else for quite some time. And in fact watching a movie was the last thing I ever wanted to do for at least five years because of it.

Didn't WE get fucked while watching rented videos? Didn't WE? To identify myself, I'm talking about this WE: the mostly white sons and daughters of middle-class intellectuals, businesspeople, military families and politicians who lived in the Northern Virginia suburbs. The teenagers who drove around on the smooth sterile highways that belt the Nation's Capital in their very own brand new sports cars. As suburbanites we did not fuck in barns or hidden groves or real quick behind dumpsters in an urban jungle. No, WE spent a lot of time fucking in front of the TV. The rented movie was the pretense and the noise was the cover.

Looking back, I realize that in some ways, as girls, we were just as disempowered and ill-prepared for the politics of sex as the "Third World Women" WE smiled sympathetically at in our high school textbooks, with their arranged marriages, veils and bridal sheets. Except WE were supposedly enlightened feminists, and our boyfriends were sensitive to our plight. We were headed for Wellesley and they for Princeton. I mean to say, life was set up for us in ways that allowed us to mask some essential problems.

Young men and women, WE were the educated children of strong women and progressive men. We lived in the suburbs but kept intellectual tabs on urban hipster trends, esoteric writers and artists, "films," and at least thirty years of pop-music trivia, plus minimal familiarity with jazz, folk, and blues. We talked about musicality and lyrical genius. Like every teenager, WE experimented with drugs, alcohol, and sex. Just that WE got straight A's, too, and WE were going to run the country. "Which shall I be," I heard friends ask carelessly, hardly mindful of their privilege, "a biotechnologist or a lawyer?"

My first boyfriend and I knew the routine inside and out. We were gifted with the not-so-discerning eye of what I'll call our middle-class-intellectual-collective-un-conscience. This is the set of cultural icons that shaped our world. These icons defined something for us that remains allusive and yet highly present. There is something in those movies, books, artists and pieces of knowledge that might have to do with the gray, might shed light on where my finger cannot quite touch, where I want to go but can't, where I want to blame but lack evidence.

The middle-class-intellectual-collective-un-conscience, straight out of late twentieth century Northern Virginia suburbs, looked like this:

the Beastie Boys

A Clockwork Orange

S. A. T. scores

Bob Dylan

Spanish and/or French, at least three phrases

Picasso

Heat

March Madness

where to buy drugs

National Public Radio

The Godfather

New York and San Francisco

Salvador Dali

Reservoir Dogs

Nietzsche

what it means to form an educated opinion

Star Wars

Apocalypse Now

weed

eating clubs and fraternities

The New York Times

Adam Sandler

Pink Floyd

Bob Marley

Abercrombie and Fitch

Playboy Magazine

The Brothers Karamazov

Saturday Night Fever

the Vietnam War

the Smithsonian

porno

world geography

Pulp Fiction

how to become a doctor/lawyer/ engineer/politician

Now, don't get all pissy with me because you spotted your favorite singer or movie or porn or corporation or philosopher on my list. I'm a huge

fan of Dylan and a number of other items listed above. That's not really the point. The point is that I grew up learning to love, or feeling as though I was supposed to be loving, or just plain inundated with, this iconography.

I'm trying to understand how gray-area violence-like the feeling of being fucked while watching a movie with your very own boyfriend-operates in the gray areas-in places where crime is low, teen pregnancy is low, kids are educated, parents are "progressive," people talk about feminism, or at least "women's rights," and everyone is a goddamn Democrat. Somewhere in this list I can't pinpoint anything particularly misogynist-at least, not "unusually" so. And perhaps this idea-nothing being unusually misogynist-gets me closer to what I'm trying to understand. Perhaps it helps to explain why, as a teenager, I just couldn't find the kind of women I was looking to become in any of this iconography.

I'm convinced that the most powerful forms of persuasion have to be smart; they have to be packaged in brilliance in order to be subversive. Otherwise they would be identifiable. If "rape," and I use the term broadly, were easily identified, WE would root it out, especially kids that grow up in "liberal" well-educated households, right? Isn't that the point of education? Or is it?

It seems that this iconography is the brilliant, beautiful, complex foundation upon which WE built our lives. Knowledge. Social Protocol. Sexuality. Read, Power. Patriarchy. Rape. I acknowledge it as my familiar. All of it ingested into society in the subtlest, and most intelligent manner, so

that our successful mothers were nodding their heads and pushing us off to the movie theatres, buying our entrance to SAT prep courses, driving us to athletic events, taking us on college tours, snapping prom pictures. And everywhere we were breathing the air of what it is to be successful young women and successful young men. We would teach it to our children.

Ani says it best when she sings, "who said I like right angles? These are not my rules, these are not my laws."

I'm not saying that rape is the same as watching a (slightly misogynist) movie. But I'm suggesting that these the same power structure that produces such a (gray) iconography also produces (gray) date rape and (gray) coercive sex, and I'm not convinced that the two have nothing to do with each other. I'm not convinced, in fact, that anything in this world has nothing to do with any other thing in this world.

In high school, WE never acknowledged the content of our iconography, WE never thought about it, and WE certainly never critiqued it. I had to get outside of it, just for a second, to even begin understand what just didn't feel right for all those years. I had to watch Girls Town after a life of Braveheart to begin to understand what the hell was going on. And I've still got to wake up to the most important thing-it's not my boyfriends' fault, not any of them, bless their hearts. It just is.

Ironically-or not so ironically, perhaps-it was my first boyfriend, years after we had broken up, who was the one who gave name to some of the discomfort when he finally decided to call those

many sexual experiences we had shared during movies "rape." "I raped you," he said. He had just read Germaine Greer's, The Female Eunuch, which, as he noted, might have been influencing him. Fascinating and intellectual, I think, on one level. Deeply painful and horrific, I think, on another one. And I want to somehow blow this intellectualism apart because it packages everything just a little too neatly.

Those words blew my world apart. They woke me up to something I had known deep down since age 15. R-a-p-e was not just a word written in between the lines of my life, it was actually part of my iconography. It was as seemingly insignificant as the existence of the coat rack by the door. That's why, when the time came, it could be so easily intellectualized, normalized, by its very perpetrator.

But why? What allows it to be normal? It has something to do with all those men and women, including myself, men and women whose consciousness is "awake" and mature, who may even use the word feminism in their vocabulary, who have even learned to talk in ways that are not only politically correct, but sincere. I think that even during the worst of the power-trip sex, I believed that my first boyfriend was, at the heart, a feminist. Was I right? Were we more feminist than those women in textbooks; were we? From what was the feminism we knew constructed if not from our NPR vocabulary, if not from our academic parents? Yet somewhere in this iconography I did not find tools to pick out a movie and tell my boyfriend loud and clear: stop fucking me!

Perhaps I speak for others when I ask, Why are some of us seemingly born with a sense of entitlement ... in regards to choosing a movie ... or initiating sex? How do we learn this entitlement, and from whom, if we aren't born with it? What does it mean to be powerful in this world without disempowering others? What does it mean when two people meet in the street-from where does their power come, how will it be exercised, will someone "win," or can they walk away feeling equally powerful and empowered by each other?

I'm a recovering movie-hater. I'm a recovering fucked-during-movies kind of a girl. And I'm going to go to the movie store and rent about five movies, watch them my own damn self, that's what, thank you very much. And I'm gonna tell my friends to watch them; hopefully they'll take my advice.

Why I May Never Read Cervantes

Ana Castillo,
Cherrie Moraga,
Sandra Cisneros,
Gloria Anzaldúa [bless her soul],
Aurora Levins Morales,
Rosa Marta Villareal,
Alma Villanueva,
Kathleen Alcalá,
i said
these are some of my favorites.

he gave me a blank look
nodded distantly
didn't exactly respond, just
said
have you ever read Don Quixote?
now that's a book.

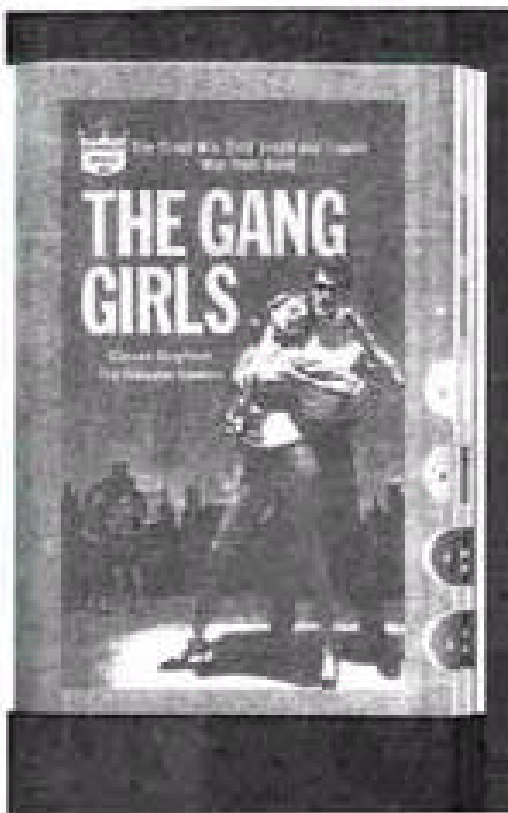
no
i said.
i didn't quote Dylan
didn't say
you don't read women authors, do you?
[though male authors,

i've had 12 parochial school years of my share]
no, i said,
i have not.

oh,
he feigned shock
well.
you will when you
Grow Up.

i was 23 years old.
i had blue eyes and a cunt
he was over 40, i'd wager, 43.
brown eyes.
penis.

i stared at him and
simply
smiled
as i was taught to do
when interviewing
with the director of a prestigious
program
for which i had submitted an application.



I Could Take It As Performance Art

i could take it as performance art
that time the professor took out his dick
said theorize this!
cause he thought it was funny
in light of the class his
female student-friend attended down the hall
called theorizing the body

i'm not a queasy girl
i like dirty jokes
i frequent strip clubs and
stick dollar bills down cleavage
or clamp a buck between my teeth
'till they grab it with their ass cheeks

i'd get naked right now
if i thought i could share something
profound
about sexual politics
by showing you my cunt
or my nipples
in an "educational setting."

but i'd probably ask your permission first.

no, i don't fall into the anti-porn
i'm offended!
camp.

i probably wouldn't ever sue anyone for anything
if i did

i'd have litigation written all over my body
the date-rapes
the gym teachers who touched me inappropriately
the professors who spoke out of context
the customers who'd have me bring them something extra with
their food

i'd have spent my life in a courtroom and
i don't have the time for that
or American Puritanism
i'll happily move to Europe
take 100 lovers at a time
you know, she's gotta have it

yeah,
i could take it as performance art
i've got a sense of humor
a dry sarcastic one at that.
tell me a joke
i'll laugh
or nod my head and grunt.

but i'm not about to sit here and
applaud him
cause the truth is,
it's just plain bad art
like Muzac
the same shit we've heard over and over
except repackaged—even worse

i'd say, show me something i haven't seen yet
like a little respect
from someone who can afford to constantly disrespect me

and get away with it
cause your dick in my face
i've seen plenty.
spent my life
theorizing your
member

if i'd been feeling especially saucy
and had my head on right
i'd have taken out my dildo and strap-on
mimicked fucking him in the ass

theorize this, motherfucker
i'd have said
and laughed

now that's something he hasn't seen before.
fun-fun-funny performance art
us one-upping each other
flipping gender on its
backside
but i bet he wouldn't want to
play that hard

betcha i'd get in trouble.

movies that spoke to me, for one reason or another

girl's town

hedwig and the angry inch

donnie darko

waking life

orlando

mulholland drive

the harder they come

lost highway

fallen angels

chungking express

in the mood for love

midnight cowboy

cinema paradiso

secretary

basquiat

sid and nancy

frida

she's gotta have it

breaking away

fried green tomatoes

beaches

the color purple

steel magnolias

slam

il postino

y tu mamá también

roshomon

last tango in paris

breathless

my beautiful launderette

dead man walking

afterlife

naked killers

amelie

like water for chocolate

amores perros

men with guns

party monster

party girl

night on earth

eyes wide shut

coffee and cigarettes

stonewall

the hours

velvet goldmine

kamikaze hearts

life is beautiful

high art

sex, lies and videotape

after hours

sophie's choice

tape

rocky horror picture show

moonstruck

return of martin guerre

heat

eternal sunshine of the spotless mind

grimm

american history x

but i'm a cheerleader

chasing amy

fresa y chocolate

la femme nikita

thirteen

monster

heavenly creatures

i shot andy warhol