Young-Girls in Echoland

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1. Iteration

Did you ever see Sally make water?
She pisses a beautifull [sic] stream
she can piss a mile and a quater [sic]
she’s a regular pissing machine

Did you ever see Sally make water?
She pisses a beautifull [sic] stream
she can piss a mile and a quater [sic]
you can’t see her ass for the steam.

Have you seen our Sally make the water
She sits and makes a flowing stream
She piddles 3 pints and a quarter
And you can’t see her bottom for the steam

—three variations of a children’s vernacular song, the first from New York in the 1940s, the second from Florida in the 1960s, and the third provided by an internet commentator, without a specified date or time period

Grinding Iteration

One of Tiqqun’s conversation partners is Mohammad Salemy, an Iranian-born artist, critic, and curator. His contribution to the discussion is the now defunct Preliminary Materials for Any Theory (2014). A work of internet art that transformed the title of Tiqqun’s text into a game in the style of Mad Libs, Preliminary Materials for Any Theory allowed users to input new words into the title’s
basic grammatical structure and to choose preferred gendered pronouns to be inserted into the body of the text. Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Confused-Starling. Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Tiny-Switchboard. Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Carnivorous-Hashtag. Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Theoretical-Theories (in an analogy worthy of German surrealist Hans Bellmer, Martin Elwell, writing for The Found Poetry Review, mentions offhand that he replaced “Young-Girl” with “Dirty-Sphere.” Barf.). ¹ New titles appeared on facsimiled covers, in thumbnail form, lipstick red as the original. The site then provided the first few pages of Reines’s English translation, taken from an online publication of a section of the book by arts organization Triple Canopy, as a PDF with all relevant words altered.

Salemy took the rhetoric of Tiqqun’s theory to a playfully absurd extreme. If the Young-Girl, as Tiqqun claim, can really be a child or adult, queer or straight, a man or a woman (or, we are to assume, neither or both)—that is, anybody and everybody subject to late capitalism’s processes of Young-Girlization—if she need not be young and need not be girl, then perhaps she need not necessarily be a Young-Girl either. Indeed, she is not only every body but also every thing, in the way that money is one thing that can be transformed into most any thing (“The ‘anthropomorphosis’ of Capital,” “living money,” the Young-Girl is full of infinite potential). ² Preliminary Materials for Any Theory performed the limit case of the Young-Girl’s condition by giving us a Young-Girl so Young-Girly that she is no longer a Young-Girl at all. In a similar fashion, New Zealand–born, London–based artist Stacey Teague writes, “The Young-Girl is everything, anything. The Young-Girl erases the meaning of The Young-Girl.”³

². Tiqqun, Preliminary Materials, 17, 92.
³. Stacey Teague, “Female Young Messiah,” in The Young-Girls Gaze
Salemy’s site arranged thumbnails of covers created by previous users in a grid pattern. In this way, Preliminary Materials for Any Theory resembled an image macro meme generator, with the solid pinkish-red rectangular cover as the image on which users’ text was superimposed. The cover of Reines’s translation was thus not duplicated but iterated, with the regularity of the visual rhythm of evenly spaced rectangles serving to highlight, by contrast, the differences between each title. Salemy’s work made the provocative claim that Preliminary Materials is a text defined not by its content or even its context but by its sheer iterability, a quality that is fundamental to networked culture. “It’s the way of the Web these days,” writes Ben Zimmer for the New York Times Magazine; “everything is iterating.”

Zimmer’s brief but insightful investigation of the currency of the word iterate is worth considering at length. Although it originally meant “done again,” and “had been associated with little more than dull monotony,” iterate was taken up by mathematics and later, computer science to refer to the process of repeating a formula or program to produce a series of different results. Software designers began using the term to indicate the incremental improvement of a particular application. “Now being skilled at iterating has emerged as a prized trait among the digital set,” Zimmer explains. “A recent job listing for a software-development engineer at Amazon singled out the ‘ability to iterate on an idea’ as a critical qualification.” Iteration is central to both digital industries and vernacular digital culture, the latter based largely on an iterative “‘copy the instructions,’ rather than ‘copy the product’ model of replication

\[\text{at Soma Contemporary (Waterford, Ireland: Soma Contemporary Gallery, 2014), 46, https://issuu.com/aoifeodwyer/docs/bunny_catalogue1.}\]


\[5. \text{Zimmer.}\]

\[6. \text{Zimmer.}\]
and variation,” as Jean Burgess describes the manner in which user-generated responses to viral videos disseminate on YouTube.7 However, while iteration in business and design is allegedly a process of progressive enhancement, it sometimes ends up being less about making something function better and more about making something function differently (which, in the case of software, makes corporations more money by encouraging people to buy these new versions of the software and new hardware to support these new applications). In the case of iterative memetic images, which include the user-generated videos Burgess theorizes, subsequent variants are not necessarily better, that is, more interesting, clever, or visually arresting, than prior ones. Memetic iteration, not mentioned in Zimmer’s analysis, is a kind of iteration that is not about progress but about continuing the basic rhythmic pulse, with the introduction of some harmonic paradigm or a new rhythmic embellishment.

In this chapter, we identify such nonprogressive, nonteleological iteration as a fundamental operation in theories of the Young-Girl across visual art, theater, and text-based criticism. Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl is itself iterative, featuring the rhythmic reappearance of the name of their antagonist attached to a series of differing phrases. For example, in the body of the text, we learn that “The Young-Girl is…” over and over again. “Hundreds of sentences,” reviewer Nina Power estimates, grumbling about the text’s “grinding repetition” (hearing in the voice of Narcissus another Echo, but at her least creative).8 And what is the Young-Girl? She is “a vision machine,” “a polar figure,” “the elementary social relation,” “an instrument of degradation,” “a design element,” “true gold,” “a reality as massive and crumbly as the Spectacle,”

7. Jean Burgess, “‘All Your Chocolate Rain Are Belong to Us?’: Viral Video, YouTube and the Dynamics of Participatory Culture,” in Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube, ed. Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008), 108.
8. Power, “She’s Just Not That into You.”
“an oxymoron,” the list goes on.\(^9\) Boom boom boom. The text is an accumulation of variants, like *Preliminary Materials for Any Theory*, a database for iterations. Megan Arlett thinks Tiqqun’s argument is both reiterative and incantatory: “These aphorisms build and build throughout the texts, repeating the term ‘Young-Girl’ into a kind of chant: the Young-Girl X, the Young-Girl Y, the Young-Girl Z.”\(^{10}\) A chant. An algorithm. An algorithmic chant. Arlett’s essay is called “A Preliminary Theory on Kissing.” A musical interpretation of *Preliminary Materials* on SoundCloud keeps returning to a sample from Suzanne Vega’s “Tom’s Diner” (1987), asking us to hear Vega’s “Do do do do do dodo do” in new ways as the underlying trance rhythm wanders and the sonic atmosphere becomes denser.\(^{11}\)

Over the course of its 144 pages, *Preliminary Materials* replaces the logic of a typical philosophical argument with grinding *iteration*. Let’s linger on this maneuver for a moment. Central to the text’s characteristic style, grinding iteration conjoins *Preliminary Materials*’s affective impact (it irritates the reader) with its form (difference within repetition). Whether perceived as a motivation, inflammation, or relentless bore, grinding iteration as a rhetorical strategy invites a productive consideration of textual style outside of its customary frame within literary studies, which understands style as an author’s identifiable voice, tone, and formal inclinations. More specifically, we might fold together this conventional idea of literary style with the concept of political style as “a coherent repertoire of rhetorical conventions depending on aesthetic reactions for political effect.”\(^{12}\) For Robert Hariman, whose definition we borrow here, political style “account[s] for the role of sensibility, taste, man-

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ners, charisma, charm, or similarly compositional or performative qualities in a particular political culture.” Hariman develops his theory of political style through close readings of certain texts that provide theories of political actors and conditions of power. After close listening to Hariman’s *Political Style: The Artistry of Power, Preliminary Materials*, and theories of the Young-Girl writ large, we propose an amended definition of style that weaves together threads from literary studies and research on political rhetoric: a theory’s *textuo-political style* is the characteristic formal and affective manner through which it animates political subjects and the formal and affective mannerisms of the responsive political subjects it participates in bringing into being. Unlike literary style, which isolates and individualizes the author—indeed, the emergence of literary style, “conceived as a way of writing unique to a particular individual, one who does not aspire to submit to collective conventions of composition, was thus coextensive with the rise of the bourgeois individual as such”—textuo-political style includes readers’ reactions to the text and to each other as constitutive but not predetermined artistry. The cacophon that is textuo-political style accounts for compositional and performative actions coproduced by the readers themselves and the affordances of the text, regardless of authorial intention.

Key to *Preliminary Materials*’s textuo-political style, the strategy of grinding iteration is emphasized by a boldfaced list of sentences that appears in chapter 7, “The Young-Girl as War Machine.” All ten sentences in the list begin with “The Young-Girl has declared war on . . .” And on what, you ask? On “germs,” “chance,” “passion,” “time,” “fat,” “obscurity,” “worry,” “silence,” “politics,” and even “war” itself, despite her status as a “War Machine.” This iterative chain uses the format of the list to provide the visual

appearance of linearity without what McLuhan calls “lineal” logic.\textsuperscript{16} Chapter 7 thus gives us the poetics of the most basic thread on social media, an accumulation of individual utterances that “build and build” in response to an original post.\textsuperscript{17} Here Tiqqun’s rhetoric is a boring or annoying machine shitting out a turdlike iterative series, and Tiqqun/the enlightened reader of theory is a political subject as active media user of that machine.

This ten-sentence series is an echo of another ten-sentence series, the list of ten chapter titles in Preliminary Materials’s table of contents. The first seven chapters all begin with “The Young-Girl as . . .” (“The Young-Girl as Phenomenon,” “The Young-Girl as Technique of the Self,” “Social Relation,” “Commodity,” “Living Currency,” “Compact Political Apparatus,” and “War Machine”) and the next two with “The Young-Girl Against . . .” (“Communism,” “Herself”). This fairly regular rhythmic run of “The Young-Girl . . .” is rudely interrupted by the title of the final chapter, “Putting an End to the Young-Girl.” Reading the first nine titles in the table of contents, we are reminded of double-dutch jump rope chanting games in which new words are inserted into the flow of a pulse that must be maintained if the jumper is to continue. By establishing and then, in the end, disrupting the rhythm of the text’s list of chapter titles, the table of contents anticipates the tactic that the body of the text proposes: to rid ourselves of the Young-Girl and be properly empowered political actors, we must throw ourselves into her rhythm and then trip, fuck it up, fuck her up, stop the rope’s mesmerizing rotation, end the chant, stop the game.

While the table of contents suggests that putting an end to rhythmic regularity and its ease of entrainment is “Putting an End to the Young-Girl,” and the body of the text claims to provide the tools for ending the Young-Girl’s life, the rhetoric of the text unwittingly


\textsuperscript{17} Arlett, “A Preliminary Theory on Kissing.”
implies that she might never end. “The Young-Girl is . . .,” “The Young-Girl is . . .,” the Young-Girl is . . . everything, it seems. If she is indeed everything and anything, then she is an infinite series, a being without end. There is no “Young-Girl Z.” Or perhaps we are to hear the text as saying that it is not the Young-Girl herself but Tiqqun’s brutal critiques that have the ability to continue past the book’s final page. When taken to the max, critique as a potentially unending series of denunciations functions like an image macro meme generator. That is, critique becomes Salemy’s Preliminary Materials for Any Theory.

Other artists have participated in theorizing the Young-Girl by reproducing the seriality and rhythmic urgency present in much of Tiqqun’s text. For example, Irish artist Samantha Conlon’s i pledge allegiance to the young-girl (2015), one of a large number of works she created in response to Preliminary Materials, is a silkscreen of a column of text printed in lavender on a piece of silk suggesting a flag. Every line begins with “I pledge allegiance to . . .” To what? “Sexts,” “lying,” “her,” “illusion,” “rot,” “nudes,” “misery,” “womb,” “worship,” “fame,” “heaven,” “waste,” “dread,” and, finally, “girlhood.” While Conlon hasn’t chosen these words randomly (“worship” and “fame” resonate with her oeuvre’s emphasis on female celebrity; “rot” and “illusion” are words used in Preliminary Materials), it is visual rhythm and the oral-aural pulse internalized by the reading viewer—and not meaning—that dominates i pledge allegiance to the young-girl.

Conlon’s response to Preliminary Materials does little quoting from the text itself—there is no “pledg(ing) allegiance” in the book, a point to which we will soon return—and is not a clear critique of


19. Key quotations from Preliminary Materials include “When she loses the possibility of re-entering the marketplace, she begins to rot” and “The Young-Girl is an optical illusion.” Tiqqun, Preliminary Materials, 88, 45.
Tiqqun’s argument. Her rejoinder is instead a *continuation* of the book’s iterative, rhythmic motifs. But unlike Tiqqun’s list of chapter titles, the rhythm of Conlon’s work remains regular to the end. There is no “Putting an End to the Young-Girl” as an attempt to arrest the rhythms to which Conlon—or her stand-in, the reader-viewer as “i”—pledges allegiance. The text may stop, but we both keep on standing there awkwardly with our hands over our hearts, facing a flag.

When Conlon does Tiqqun (that is, when she reperforms Tiqqun’s iterative and rhythmic strategies), there is another difference. Conlon does not disclaim her Young-Girliness. With *Preliminary Materials*, on the other hand, the authors position themselves and, we maintain, their readers as *not* Young-Girls, despite the capacious formulation of the book’s antagonist as a generic conceptual persona applicable to subjects across lines of identification. Tiqqun stand opposite the Young-Girl, who is their object of derision and repulsion. As Sarah Gram reminds us vis-à-vis *Preliminary Materials*, “disgust is about contempt. It polices the boundaries between observer and observed.”

Tiqqun’s Young-Girl is a “she” over there, not a “we” over here. Or rather, “the Jeune-Fille is *them*” (and not us), a statement from the poem, previously mentioned, included in Lopez and René-Worms’s performance *Bubble Boom*, the Jeune-Fille said: *a bit of bubble and a little bit of boom* (2015). As the poem proceeds, it becomes a troubling fantasy about the “penetration” and death of the Young-Girl. Lopez and René-Worms imagine violating the “them” of the Young-Girl through “ammoniacal” perfume; Tiqqun mercilessly mock her by mimicking the mode of address of supermarket fashion magazines and beauty advertisements, such as “Because I’m worth it!,” a quotation of L’Oreal’s tagline.

Importantly, the “I” that claims to be worth it in *Preliminary Materials* is not the “I” of the writers or even the reader, who is not asked to identify with the

Young-Girl as subject of advertising (and the “them” whose body is “penetrated” by “colours” in Lopez and René-Worms’s poem is not to be mistaken for an “us”). The us-versus-them quality of Tiqqun’s argument, a division maintained throughout Preliminary Materials via its politics of disgust, reflects an unfortunate “tendency evident throughout Tiqqun”—a residual “politics of identity” that contradicts the collective’s argument against individualized, packaged subjectivity. As Nicholas Thoburn explains,

the declared process of becoming anonymous takes the form and injunction of identification with a “we” or an “us” against a “they.” Ejecting capitalist relations by force of will and acts of marginal lifestyle—externalizing the “they,” in other words—this “us” becomes a privileged subject or party, despite protestations to the contrary and however various and fragmented its composition.23

Conlon’s allegiance pledger, on the other hand, is not a “they” but an “i,” a lowercase “i,” not “worth it” enough for L’Oreal, we assume. This “i” may be Conlon the creator, owning up to being a participant in capitalism’s imperious victory cheers, and/or the viewer-reader, whose internal voice is asked to embrace the rhythms of Conlon’s text without what some perceive as Preliminary Materials’s ironic distance.

Of course, when interpreted most literally, to pledge allegiance to the Young-Girl is not exactly to be the Young-Girl any more than to pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America makes one a rectangular piece of polyester or to pledge allegiance to Satan makes one indistinguishable from the Dark Lord. That said, pledging allegiance is a performative that brings into being one’s flaglike qualities, Americanness, or Satanic affinities, if only in their most rudimentary form. When we pledge allegiance in the manner of U.S. schoolchildren, who do so together and out loud (if not in the manner of Satanists, of which we are not acquainted), we bring ourselves into an often uncomfortable bodily alignment with things,

ideas, and other people through rhythmic entrainment, regardless of the authenticity of the performance. While Conlon’s *i pledge allegiance to the young-girl* invokes a coercive rhythmic oral-aural ritual associated with youth as a response to the oral-aural rhythms of *Preliminary Materials*, the specificity of pledging allegiance brings into being a Young-Girly “i” and “we” absent from the text itself.

Conlon is a founding member of a Young-Girly “we” called Bunny Collective, a group of artists based in Ireland and the United Kingdom. The catalog essay for their 2014 exhibition at Soma Contemporary Gallery in Waterford, Ireland, titled *The Young-Girl’s Gaze*, emphasizes the relationship of identification between the participating artists and Tiqqun’s bogey(wo)man. In other words, the Young-Girls who gaze are the artists themselves. More specifically, author Kathryn O’Reagan, responsible for the catalog essay, describes a triangular relation between Bunny Collective, Tiqqun’s Young-Girl, and all the young women of the world who “have harnessed the Internet as a space of self-expression and subversive potential.” This nostalgically named “cyber-sisterhood” of “Young-Girls” uses social media “to investigate the multivalency and dynamism of female identity,” attempting to become feminist revolutionaries of sorts through digital media. Bunny Collective, O’Reagan writes, is a family of cybersisters who make art about this resistant digital girl culture as well as a girlsquad that owes its existence to social media as tools for group promotion, communication, and transnational coherence. Our point here is not to affirm the efficacy of social media platforms in promoting radical feminism or to argue for the radicality of Bunny Collective; instead, we want to note this new iteration of the Young-Girl as intended feminist freedom fighter, a role irreconcilable with the one written by Tiqqun, and yet not, in O’Reagan’s essay, explicitly framed as a critique or revision.


of Preliminary Materials. “The Young-Girl is everything, anything. The Young-Girl erases the meaning of The Young-Girl,” to repeat the words of participating artist Stacey Teague. The Young-Girl’s ability to iterate trumps her content.

The catalog reproductions of the art from the show include Conlon’s The Young-Girl Declares War—a wall-sized photographic print, split into strips in the style of a billboard, of a young woman’s neck and the lower portion of her face, with the word “surrender” cutting across her throat—and Teague’s Female Young Messiah, a series of photographic portraits of three of the artist’s friends paired with quotations from Preliminary Materials. Teague’s artist statement includes the admission “The Young-Girl is my friend.” Here we have a different affirmation of affinity with the Young-Girl than Conlon’s pledge of allegiance to the girl-flag and O’Reagan’s equilateral triangle, and certainly much different than the war Tiqqun wage against the face and body of Empire. Looking at Teague’s contribution to The Young-Girl’s Gaze, we ask ourselves, How might the theory of the Young-Girl be different if the Young-Girl were a friend and not an enemy? Actually, what if she were not just a friend but a series of friends like Teague’s, all framed from the knees up, all standing straight with arms down, staring down the camera with a level gaze, all variations on a theme, iterative?

“It’s the way of the web these days: everything is iterating.”

Because I’m/You’re/We’re Worth It

Conlon’s body of work responding to Preliminary Materials, most of which was not part of The Young-Girl’s Gaze, is extensive. One of the most memorable is the video The Young-Girl Blames Herself (2014), which includes a morphed sequence of appropriated photographs

capturing the troubled celebrity Lindsey Lohan from childhood to adulthood.\textsuperscript{28} Lohan’s face grows, shrinks, and shifts grotesquely with a regular pulse as each new image is introduced (the pictures are not matched exactly in size and pose, resulting in the expansion and contraction of her features). Importantly, despite the sequence’s chronological nature, it does not trace the teleological development of a little girl into a mature woman. The majority of the images are from Lohan’s adulthood and do not constitute a run in which the actress gets visibly older (or prettier or uglier or happier or sadder) by degrees. This is not a narrative of progressive evolution or even incremental decomposition, of upward mobility or tragic downfall. Instead, this is a series of different Lohans that looks like it could continue without end, an iteration produced by a rhythm that appears to have an agency of its own. (BUBBLE) BOOM new Lohan (BUBBLE) BOOM new Lohan (BUBBLE) BOOM new Lohan: mugshot Lohan, lip gloss Lohan, cheery Lohan, fat-lipped Lohan, passed-out Lohan, cut-cheekbones Lohan, no-freckles Lohan . . . a potentially infinite number of Lohans. After all, the public figure known in the blogosphere as La Lohan—and, capitalist uses of Young-Girliness more generally—is most valuable to her consumers as a kind of computational generator of Lohan variations (and La Lohan can no longer be La Lohan once she fails to generate new versions). When Lindsay Lohan was at the height of her popularity, she most fully occupied the machine called La Lohan. She is certainly no longer there.

Tiqqun’s idea of the Young-Girl is the La Lohan of political theory. It is as if the Young-Girl herself were a computational subroutine that produces an iterative series of descriptions and attributes, forming the distinctive rhythm of \textit{Preliminary Materials} and its rejoinders. The programmatic and generative ability of Tiqqun’s theory finds a related form on stage in \textit{Manifesto of the Young-

Girl (Manifeste de la Jeune-Fille), written and directed by Olivier Choinière and performed by his company, l’Activité, in 2017 at the Espace Go theater in Montréal.29 An adaptation of Tiqqun’s manifesto in Choinière’s original language, the play is staged as a parody of a fashion show, with seven actors (male and female Young-Girls of different ages) entering through a rotating closet and moving toward two illuminated circular podiums that function as soapboxes to showcase their outfits and isolate actors in small groups or individually for monologues. The closet—suggestive of rotating platforms in car showrooms, but positioned far enough upstage left so actors can enter from backstage unseen—behaves scenographically as a kind of machine for generating variations of the Young-Girl with different sizes, shapes, and obsessively changing lewks. Although the performance has a finite number of actors, of course, their small number is multiplied by the effect of extreme costume changes, including masks and wigs, giving us the feeling of a never-ending supply of raw material to fashion and spin out onto the stage. Making a mockery of revolutionary politics bubble boomed by capitalism, the revolving wardrobe is La Lohan rendered tangibly scenographic.

This machine, like all machines, processes animate and inanimate matter (something the Luddites of British history, to whom we will return in chapter 2, knew so well). In a visual argument suggestive of modernism’s obsession with dolls and other stand-ins for the commodified female body, the set of Manifesto of the Young-Girl has white mannequin legs and busts sticking out of clothing displays, giving the impression that in/animate Young-Girls are either en-cased in or caught in the process of diving into the shop furniture. (Or maybe the geometrically aligned limbs of the Tiller Girls were broken off and discarded after their choreographic rhythms were extracted. Poor things.)

The play opens to the dunz-dunz of EDM, its energy building, breaking, and then dropping. Each Young-Girl enters the La Lohan machine to model an outfit, walking to the beat and stepping up onto the larger podium to address the other actors and the audience at the same time. One asks, casually, “How is it going?” (“Ça va?”), followed by a positive but vacant response of “Super good!” (“Super bien!”). Repetition and variation are the centerpieces of the play’s style. The actors often repeat each other’s lines, seemingly ad infinitum.

Choinière picks up where trash theory about trashy girls leaves off. If we dismantle the La Lohan machine and the morphing mannequins it produces, what do we do with its parts? The play presents recycling as the answer, reframing the repetition and variation central to Preliminary Materials as an eco-politico-economic strategy of creative reuse. Manifesto of the Young-Girl recites, revoices, reverberates, remediates, and reiterates words in a series of language games that ask audiences to consider upcycling the massive, grinding dysfunctional machine of capitalism for its valuable parts. Moreover, the show brings environmental issues into its content with the character Joanie, a Young-Girl who aims to do good in the world by making extra sandwiches for the homeless she encounters on her way to work but is chided by the others for contributing to the mountain of plastic, since she wraps each sandwich in cellophane. While the ecological aspects of disassembly, reassembly, and reinvention are not a significant concern for Preliminary Materials, the connection between the appropriation of cultural products like images (as well as quotations from magazines, we might add) and the recycling of objects has already been made by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud in his theorization of postproduction art of the 1990s.  

Manifesto of the Young-Girl does not position itself as a critique of Preliminary Materials. Instead, it borrows and stages some of

the text’s central ideas, adapting Tiqqun’s iterational approach and translating Preliminary Materials’s language of magazines to the choreography of a fashion show and costumes that embody a wacky high-fashion sensibility (to be more precise, the costumes are a loose parody of high fashion’s appropriation of streetwear). That said, it is ultimately a more hopeful presentation of the Young-Girl than is its predecessor. The show’s title highlights a play on words between the French manifestation (which means “something that appears,” as in its English counterpart, as well as “political demonstration”) and manifesto (or “public proclamation”). As the performance progresses, each Young-Girl comes to a realization denied her by Preliminary Materials: “Today I will march/demonstrate!” (“Aujourd’hui je vais manifester!”). Manifesto of the Young-Girl allows for the possibility that the manifesto of the Young-Girl may not only be about her but also be possessed by her, and that the rhythms of the catwalk can be morphed into the rhythms of the political march.

About fifty minutes into the performance, the characters join a political protest they can hear but not see. Prior to their exit, a Young-Girl named Maude shouts “listen” (“écoutez”) seventeen times in a row, directing the others’ attention away from their discussion about the role of religion in society and toward a ruckus outside. The Young-Girls soon understand that the explosions originate from a group that has spontaneously formed and is marching in the street “shouting slogans.” Though the Young-Girls don’t know the reason for the demonstration, they leave the stage to participate. In their absence, footage from Montréal’s 2012 student protests is projected on two upstage screens. The series of strikes and demonstrations known as the Maple Spring began in opposition to a proposal to raise university tuition; support broadened when a bill was passed to ban demonstrations on or near university grounds (Bill 78). Echoing the French student strikes of May 1968 and Québec’s Quiet Revolution of the same year, Québécois students performed a later iteration of youthful defiance. Boom. Choinière’s Young-Girls leave one by one to protest an unknown oppression. Boom. They march. Boom. Tear gas clouds the screen. Boom. Flash-bang gre-
nades are thrown. Boom. We see the mask of hacktivist collective Anonymous moving in the crowd of student protesters.

Surprisingly, perhaps, when the Young-Girls return from the protest, they continue their catwalk circuit, albeit with less enthusiasm. In other words, they haven’t permanently swapped modeling for protesting. Though the production is, in part, critiquing the Young-Girls’ temporarily passionate alignment with the protests as another fashionable cause as easily put on as a new outfit, the issues that are brought up in their discussions (tear gas, police brutality, human rights violations) demonstrate that it is as much a calling out of those in the audience who do even less to combat injustice and inhumanity. Manifesto of the Young-Girl does not reconcile the seemingly oppositional pursuits of vanity and political involvement. Instead, we might more accurately consider the play’s transformation of Tiqqun’s vacant and useless feminine nothing into an “I” that “will march” in alliance with others as a kind of polyrhythmic composition overlaying the rhythms of mass consumption with the rhythms of mass demonstration.

Manifesto of the Young-Girl may have a compound cross-rhythmic take on Preliminary Materials, but it is not entirely contrary. Other interlocutors adopt an explicitly oppositional stance toward Tiqqun’s text, often also by making use of the particular affordances of iteration. These critiques reorient the theory of the Young-Girl’s algorithmic, generational capacity for their own subversive ends, frequently iterating the name of the figure as well as descriptions and attributes. Indeed, theories of the Young-Girl writ large are full of antagonists and protagonists with two-part names fashioned to outmuscle Tiqqun’s Young-Girl. Proposed replacements for “Young-Girl” in the popular critical literature include “Man-Child,” “Sad Girl,” “Hot Babe,” “Adult-Man,” and “hipster” (the latter from an article supporting Tiqqun’s theory, but offering a “marginally less inflammatory” name). Coming up

31. Weigel and Ahern, “Further Materials toward a Theory of the Man-Child”; artist Audrey Wollen explains the connection between her Sad
with new characters has become a kind of fun feminist game in the more playful corners of Young-Girl discourse.

“Man-Child” is by far the most discussed substitute. It comes from Weigel and Ahern’s “Further Materials toward a Theory of the Man-Child,” published online in the New Inquiry in 2013 (notably, given the acoustic framework of this study, Charlotte Frost describes the New Inquiry as “something akin to a ‘movement’ rather than simply a publication. It was about finding and uniting these disgruntled voices [of the precariously employed] in a louder critical cacophon”). Published in the same issue as Hannah Black’s “Further Materials for a Theory of the Hot Babe,” Weigel and Ahern’s piece is a humorous condemnation of the rhetoric of Preliminary Materials. The authors argue that despite Tiqqun’s insistence that they have “lady members” (pun intended), Preliminary Materials only confirms that “the protagonist of contemporary radical politics styles himself as a him.” Weigel and Ahern aren’t buying the book’s “ironic performance of misogyny” or its anonymous (really, pseudonymous) authorship as an expression of “solidarity.” The book is sexist, straight up, part of “a long intellectual tradition that uses ‘woman’ as shorthand.” Tiqqun are not woke baes but fuckboys in disguise, as journalist Marquaysa Battle would say.

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32. Frost, Art Criticism Online: A History, 188.
33. Weigel and Ahern, “Further Materials toward a Theory of the Man-Child.”
Weigel and Ahern choose to replace the Young-Girl with the “Man-Child,” their name for Tiqqun and leftist misogynists more generally. For Weigel and Ahern, the Man-Child is the Young-Girl iterated into a new object of critique. “Talk[ing] Tiqqun talk” (a strategy common throughout the field of responses to Preliminary Materials), the authors write an extended diatribe against their antagonist, including the following statements:

The Man-Child wants you to know that you should not take him too seriously, except when you should. At any given moment, he wants to [sic] you to take him only as seriously as he wants to be taken. When he offends you, he was kidding. When he means it, he means it. What he says goes.

The Man-Child thinks the meaning of his statement inheres in his intentions, not in the effects of his language. He knows that speech-act theory is passé . . .

Why are you crying? The Man-Child is just trying to be reasonable. This is his calm voice. . . .

Just as not all men are Man-Children, neither are all Man-Children men. 35

The Man-Child, they write, historically developed as a response to the feminization of labor, an issue that also motivates Tiqqun to write Preliminary Materials. But while Man-Children can make some good points about the gendered aspects of the capitalist exploitation of workers, they misdirect their criticism, cloak sexist rhetoric in irony, and offer no compelling solutions. Weigel and Ahern close with the provocation “what would Preliminary Materials for a Theory of Motherhood look like?” 36

The Man-Child has proven to be a compelling idea for scholars and cultural critics. An edited academic volume on musical prodigies has a mystifying application of the term, considering the specificity of the Man-Child to theory-loving, irony-sporting leftists: Weigel and Ahern’s concept is suggested as a possible frame

35. Weigel and Ahern, “Further Materials toward a Theory of the Man-Child.”
36. Weigel and Ahern.
for the persona of popstar Justin Bieber (but ultimately rejected as insufficient for failing to account for the feminized “domesticity” of Bieber’s videos). Less surprisingly, it is used to illuminate a racist and misogynist music video for the Pixies’ “Bagboy” (2013). It also inspired an art exhibition, *The Politics of Friendship* (2013), for which the primary participating artists (Anicka Yi, Jordan Lord, Lise Soskolne, and Carissa Rodriguez) procured graphic and textual responses, including very short essays from Ahern and Weigel. A contribution by artist Lisa Jo appropriates the branding of Monster energy drink, an acid green M that looks like three parallel claw scratches from an irritable werewolf, and replaces the name of the product with “MANCHILD.” The cover of the exhibition catalog has an image of the words “man,” “child,” “young,” and “girl” carved into a thin coating of yellow grease. This is presumably a photograph of the gallery walls, which were covered in butter by Yi, Lord, Soskolne, and Rodriguez in reference to the lubrication used by the character Paul to rape Jeanne in Bernardo Bertolucci’s *Last Tango in Paris* (1972). Actress Maria Schneider has spoken out against Bertolucci for adding the scene without her permission in order to elicit an unsimulated reaction to abasement. Making a brief

40. Yi et al.
42. Anna North, “The Disturbing Story behind the Rape Scene in Bernardo Bertolucci’s *Last Tango in Paris*, Explained,” *Vox*, November 26,
reference to Schneider’s violation, Soskolne articulates her own stance on both Tiqqun’s concept and Weigel and Ahern’s response:

Efforts to finely distinguish between the Young-Girl and the Man-Child, and arguments about whether embodying the system within which we function is a superior critical strategy to pretending to function outside of it are to miss the point: we are each capable of cruelty under any circumstances. Until that very basic fact is acknowledged we will all continue to be butter under capitalism.\(^{43}\)

The butter decomposed over time, undoubtedly perfusing the gallery with the retching smell of butyric acid, also a component of mammal sweat. “When she loses the possibility of re-entering the marketplace, she [the Young-Girl] begins to rot.”\(^{44}\) So does, Soskolne suggests, the Man-Child.

While there has been widespread interest in the idea of the Man-Child, Weigel and Ahern have also been brought to task. They have been critiqued for failing to provide “any kind of structural analysis of capitalism”; for neglecting to put *Preliminary Materials* into relation with other texts written by Tiqqun, namely, *Theory of Bloom* and *Sonogram of a Potential*; and for “assimilating the figural to the real, as if Young-Girl were an idea, a concept, of actually existing young girls.”\(^{45}\) After all, writes Critila for online anarchist publication the *Anvil Review*, confusing the Young-Girl with young girls is as dopey as assuming that Deleuze and Guattari really “think psychotics should be shuffled into the place of the revolutionary subject.”\(^{46}\) A MetaFilter thread offers some choice insults; one of

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43. Soskolne, untitled, in Yi et al., *Politics of Friendship*.
46. Critila, “Mind the Dash.” Tumblr user Tremblebot also defends *Preliminary Materials* by connecting it to the work of Deleuze and Guattari:
the more colorful among them describes Weigel and Ahern’s article as “the usual nonsensical pre-copernican fare.”

One commentator snarks, “Is this one of those machine-generated pieces of writing?” Perhaps, another suggests, mansplaining the “Man-Child,” Weigel and Ahern forgot that their “whole man-child construct was meta-ironic” and instead “went full circle past meta-irony and into sincerity.”

Whoopsies.

A more pointed assessment comes from Dominic Jones, whose response is included in the exhibition catalog for *The Politics of Friendship*. Jones sharply critiques the authors’ neglect of issues of race. “I will refer to Mal Ahern and Moira Weigel’s ‘Further Materials toward a Theory of the Man-Child’ as the collective response of the White Woman.”

The Man-Child, the Young-Girl, and the White Woman are all bound tightly together by white privilege, taking up all the oxygen in the room, leaving none for the [racialized] Other. “But the Other simply doesn’t exist in our commodified society. He/she has nothing the Young-Girl, Man-Child or White Woman could possibly want or, more importantly, need. The Other is told to go occupy him/herself while the White people take time


48. boo_radley, July 9, 2013, comment on GameDesignerBen, “Further Materials toward a Theory of the Man-Child.”

49. ennu.bz, July 9, 2013, comment on GameDesignerBen, “Further Materials toward a Theory of the Man-Child.”


Ahern and Weigel’s essay, as Jones states with cutting directness, is “For White People, by White People.”

“Further Materials toward a Theory of the Man-Child” is republished in 2014 as a hard-copy pamphlet paired with Jaleh Mansoor’s “Notes on Militant Folds: Against Weigel and Ahern’s Further Materials toward a Theory of the Man-Child,” originally published online by the *Claudius App* the previous year. After the shutting of the *Claudius App*, the essay is later slightly revised and released as simply “Notes on Militant Folds,” a stand-alone pamphlet available on the website for the journal *Hostis*. Mansoor’s essay is the most extended critique of Weigel and Ahern’s concept and methodology. She argues that by replacing one figure with another, the Young-Girl with the Man-Child, Weigel and Ahern embrace a problematic “brand of feminism that takes symmetry for ‘fairness,’ ‘equity’ for ‘equality,’ as though those were not already part of the metrics on which our contemporary social relations are founded.”

Mansoor turns to another of Tiqqun’s texts, *Introduction to Civil War*, as support for her critique of the rhetoric of symmetrical exchange, which is central to neoliberal capitalism. Sure, she admits, *Preliminary Materials* “collapses the etiology of social pathology it diagnosis [sic] onto the object of its analysis . . . as though cis men and trans men were somehow ‘free’ of the problem.”

“But the way out is not to construct an equivalent avatar to blame better,” Mansoor insists, advocating instead for “exit[ing] this geometry of rationalization (capitalist accounting) entirely.” Additionally, Mansoor objects to Weigel and Ahern’s turn to reproduction at the article’s end (“What would *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of Motherhood* look like?”). She contends that reproduction, and the reduction of cis women to

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51. Jones.
52. Jones.
54. Mansoor, 7.
their “dominant matrix,” is still defined by capital (a criticism that could be leveled against motherhood-obsessed French antifeminists Les Antigones, discussed in the introduction). Therefore the nonreproductive—“the luxury of pure expenditure without reserve”—might be a better site for conjuring new ways of being in the world. George Bataille’s ecstatic excess echoes grotesquely, beautifully, in our ears.

The cover of Mansoor, Weigel, and Ahern’s pamphlet, titled #Young-Girl, is an advertisement for refrigerators that appears to be from the early 1960s. A pretty, bobbed brunette poses in four different outfits next to the appliance. In one, she’s wearing a poncho and pedal pushers, in another, a turquoise day dress. This attractive floor model reminds us of another iteration of the Young-Girl, Hannah Black’s “Hot Babe,” whose “hotness” is “frozen, cold, zero degrees.” The Hot Babe “is the much-vaunted machine that comes to replace the mother.” She is also the product of social media. “Her ‘I’ is generalized; although apparently totally individuated, without a shred of interest in collective life, the Hot Babe is always plural.” Referencing the infamous Brazilian pornographic trailer featuring two actresses eating what appears to be shit out of a shared vessel, vomiting, and then eating the vomit—a viral video falsely identified in the New York Times Magazine as launching the phenomenon of the reaction video—Black describes the “Hot Babe” as “two girls, one cup; 2 million girls, one body.” L’Oreal’s tagline iterated over the past forty years from “Because I’m worth it!” to “Because you’re worth it!” to “Because we’re worth it!”

Inga Copeland (the alias of Russian Estonian musician Alina Astrova) returns to the original slogan for her album Because I’m

56. Mansoor, 11.
57. Mansoor, 11.
Worth It (2014), a sonic exploration of Preliminary Materials. The title track is a recording of Copeland whispering the Preliminary Materials quotation “Because I’m Worth It” looped over the course of the song’s two minutes and forty-one seconds. We believe that Copeland applied a delay effect unequally across the frequency spectrum of the recorded clip, resulting in an echo of speech degraded into the rhythmic sounds of ticks and pops (“The Young-Girl doesn’t age. She decomposes”). While this reverberative rot gets more pronounced as the track proceeds, the original loop doggedly continues unchanged, as if the Young-Girl were stuck in arrested development while the acoustic architecture responsible for her echo is constantly shifting. “Looking down on the Hot Babe should give you vertigo,” Black writes; listening to her does as well. The impact of Copeland’s use of audio effects is that the Young-Girl’s stubborn assertion that she’s worth it, she’s worth it, she’s worth it becomes more unbelievable as the instability of the shifting standard against which that worth is measured becomes increasingly audible. Perhaps the iterative rhythmic popping in the song is the same as the “clacking” bone percussion Black hears in the Hot Babe’s approach to fucking: “She pares sexual relations down to their barest bones and ends up with forms of violence; her laughter rings out in this reliquary, over the orgiastic clacking of bone on bone, and at this extreme, it is only her laughter that stands for ‘more life.’”

The Young-Girl laughs. Listen for that later.

61. The connection to Preliminary Materials is effectively substantiated in a review that quotes extensively from Tiqqun’s text. peer2peer, review of Because I’m Worth It by Inga Copeland, Rate Your Music, August 20, 2018, https://rateyourmusic.com/release/album/copeland/because-im-worth-it.p/.


63. Tiqqun, Preliminary Materials, 45.

64. Black, “Further Materials toward a Theory of the Hot Babe.”

65. Black.
Fluttering Eyelids

*Preliminary Materials*’s aesthetic of iteration is a major aspect of its textuo-political style, one that asks others to be iterative, too. Or rather, let’s go back to the word *provokes*, since *Preliminary Materials*’s appeal is heard not always as a question but sometimes as an aggravation (Tiqqun’s anticapitalist contemporary Gilles Châtelet reminds us that “style is not a polite way of thinking”).66

Take Jennifer Boyd’s description of Tiqqun’s provocation, worth discussing at length:

Tiqqun make apparent the previously invisible imprint of the Young-Girl upon the body by deploying a tautological didacticism, repeating different versions of the same concept multiple times, relentless conceptual fragments beginning “The Young-Girl is”: The Young-Girl is the termite of the “material.” Through this tactic, Tiqqun perform the current war as molecular infection, eating the reader alive through these preying mantras. By grinding the reader into the Young-Girl’s position of subservience, Tiqqun simultaneously make apparent the presence of the Young-Girl within the reader’s own body. This awareness grows as the text develops; as it heightens, Tiqqun can be heard growling, in an undercurrent beneath every word.67

While Boyd clearly disagrees with us on one point—we hear Tiqqun’s version of the Young-Girl as “her” and “them” and not the “body” of the reader—our interest here concerns Boyd’s understanding of iteration as an aesthetico-affective strategy. Iteration, she explains, infects the reader’s body through words (preying mantras) and sounds (growls). However, out of this disease comes a reciprocal tactic for resistance, one she details later in her essay, in the form of the “Strange-Girl.” The Strange-Girl begins her emergence when iteration devolves into simple, boring repetition—the Young-Girl’s


wink locked “on repeat.” Boom wink boom wink boom wink boom wink. This “flutter of the eyelid”—which Boyd likens to “the rhythmic high-tempo cracks of flickering strobe lights”—is actually the choreography of the Young-Girl’s death (at least, that’s how Boyd imagines it). But the flutter is also the quickening of the Strange-Girl as a formidable force of “ragged rage.” The Strange-Girl can finally possess her power when the wink becomes novel once again—when repetition becomes iteration, but an iteration freed from its servitude to both capitalism and “tautological didacticism.”

While Tiqqun have trash theory and we have close listening, McKenzie Wark has “thin description.” With “thin description, one might not be terribly interested in whether a wink is caused by a tic, an infection, or an intention, but rather that the gesture is communicable across space and time to an observer, who writes it down and communicates it to another, in contexts unknown, far away,” she explains. In close listening, this is also true. We are not terribly interested in whether the Young-Girl’s wink is caused by a tic, an infection, or an intention. However, we are terribly interested in the Young-Girl’s wink as an infection and in the behavior of the infected corporeal and textual bodies that flicker and rage raggedly in response.

68. Ibid.