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Come As You Are, As I Want You to Be: Grunge/Riot Grrrl Pedagogy and Identity Construction in the Second Year Writing Program

Rory J. Callais
University of New Orleans, rjcalla1@uno.edu

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Rory J. Callais

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Abstract

A look at how artists in the grunge and Riot Grrrl movements constructed public identities that typically appealed to the economic, cultural, and social conditions of the early 1990s. These public personas -- perceived as "honest" -- were defined by negotiation with mainstream culture, the notion of the "confessional," and gender construction. By examining how these identities were constructed, composition students can see how cultural influences mediate their own identity construction. A "grunge/Riot Grrrl" pedagogy is proposed that encourages students to look at how identities are constructed across a multimedia landscape, reflecting the way grunge and Riot Grrrl artists built public personas using music, lyrics, interviews, album covers, photo shoots, and videos. An online assignment is suggested that would allow students to "profile" their public selves and the cultural conditions that influence them so that students can use multimedia to show their public identities.

I. "Sell the kids for food" ("In Bloom," Nirvana) -- Music in the Composition Classroom and an Overview of Grunge and Riot Grrrl

In our current landscape of expanding technology and social media where students have even more avenues for writing to a public audience, composition studies has been incorporating ways to use such new tools in the classroom. One suggested way has been an increased focus on popular music in the classroom, which some, such as Crystal VanKooten, see as a necessity in an increasingly multimodal world: "To continue to ignore the rhetorical capabilities of sound and music in our discipline is not only to limit ourselves as instructors, but to limit the ability of our students to fully realize all available means of persuasion." Since much of students' writing outside of the classroom takes place in an online environment where music and videos are used in tandem with text, a pedagogy that emphasizes the most effective method of using music as a composition tool will lead to students viewing text in new ways as they contemplate the effect a particular piece of music has on them.

Furthermore, music can enhance and even redefine how *ethos* -- classically and simplistically defined as the character of the speaker/rhetor -- can be constructed in rhetoric: "Music creates ethos, it carries a message in ways just as striking as a message delivered through written words, and it converges and mixes with image and with text to become something new, something even more powerful" (VanKooten). Music, images, and writing can be used to construct a writer's identity, and in the classroom students can analyze their role in a given popular musician's identity construction: fashion, interviews, album covers, and live performances. In its own way, a popular musician's persona is a rhetorical construction of *ethos*,

and one worth examining in the classroom: "Not only can music evoke, intensify, and coordinate emotion, but it can also develop character, carry an argument, organize a composition, elicit cultural associations, and link to memory" (VanKooten). Examination of these facets can expand students' understanding of how a text is created. They can make the transition from "writing papers" to true "composition": "*writing* isn't just print writing anymore. It's musical rhetoric. It's media and technologies. It's gesture, image, movement, and sound. It's design, materiality, remix, and community. It's argument. It's persuasion. It's *composition*" (VanKooten).

While scholars such as Jeff Rice and Geoffrey Sirc have argued for incorporating popular music into the composition classroom, I argue that the "grunge" and "Riot Grrrl" movements of the early 1990s can enhance and complicate the personal narrative essay by helping students see how identity construction can be carried out not only by using text, but also music, video, and images -- a true multimedia landscape. This study intends to explain how the complex identity construction of the two leaders of Nirvana and Pearl Jam (two of the grunge movement's most popular bands) and the Riot Grrrl group Bikini Kill can provide students with examples of the role that specifically performed personality traits play in an audience's perception of rock star "honesty." Traits such as "honesty" and "authenticity" are important to music fans who value "real" artists with "authentic" voices and not "phony" corporate knock-offs such as artists like Live, Creed, and Bush. This correlates to what composition theorists see as the ideal *ethos,* the projection of an "authentic" voice or display of character that will lend an argument credibility and persuasiveness. This paper will specifically examine three markers of Grunge and Riot Grrrl identity that these artists used in their music and public personas to construct an identity

perceived as authentic: an anti-establishment attitude (despite their general reliance on that system), the role of gender construction in composing, and the notion of the "confessional."

Grunge and Riot Grrrl artists were self-conscious about how they were perceived in a corporate rock structure, often trying to seem as if they loathed their monetary success while benefiting from it. This stance, obviously, complicates an examination of grunge's more successful artists. Cobain, for example, was quick to judge other grunge bands for attempting to achieve the mainstream success he enjoyed, as he stated in an interview with Jim DeRogatis in the fall of 1993:

> It's kind of sickening to see how these bands become careerists all of a sudden. That's what everyone was against when they started these bands. The reason I wanted to be in a band was to be in a band and write songs. You can be validated if you sell two thousand records, and you should be happy with that. (13-14)

Cobain's words take on new meaning when one considers his immense privilege: *Nevermind* sold millions of copies, and this interview was conducted in a rental home because the Cobains "outgrew the home it [sic] bought after Nirvana's initial success," needing to upgrade to a larger mansion (DeRogatis 4).

It is in this ironic divide between the rich, privileged millionaire that Cobain was and the earnest artist that he constructed for his audience where grunge finds its relevance to composition studies. In his book *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*, Thomas Newkirk argues that students also construct a "self" in personal narratives that is not necessarily their "real" selves: "a distinction can be made between a backstage, fragmented, autobiographical self and a 'better,' more unified version of self that we construct. The task for students, then, is not one of

revelation but of construction" (6). Students engage in identity construction -- whether they realize it or not -- every time they write a personal narrative, mediating the "self" that is constructed for a teacher. Just as Cobain chose to highlight his artistic beliefs and downplay his economic reality in the quote above, students can and do withhold personal information as they write papers for class: "The key feature of these presentations is their selectivity, every act of self-presentation involves the withholding of information that might undermine the idealized impression the performer wants to convey" (Newkirk 3). By exploring identity construction in grunge and Riot Grrrl artists, I will show how their public personas can be applied to students' identity construction in composition.

For my creation of a "grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy," I will stress the significance of cultural context in identity construction. As Newkirk argues, the cultural beliefs and assumptions of an audience are paramount to a writer's identity construction: "the key element of a socially competent performance is the ability to maintain a situation definition consistent with that of the audience. In these cases 'honest' can cue a mutually agreed-upon type of performance" (Newkirk 7). Grunge and Riot Grrrl artists' public personas reflect this as they downplay their monetary success in times of economic hardship for their audience and stress the importance of music when music is serving as a release for that audience. My goal in these analyses will be to show students how cultural conditions influence identity construction and how to use that knowledge to not only construct an "authentic" public identity in text and multimedia, but to be able to recognize culturally-appealing identity construction in others, particularly organizations that are appealing to cultural attitudes for their own economic ends.

To understand how grunge and Riot Grrrl artists constructed identities generally perceived as "honest," one must understand the cultural conditions from which the movements arose. To put it bluntly, grunge changed the landscape of American rock 'n' roll. Famously, grunge diminished the popularity of what was known as "hair metal," a sub-genre of rock that often portrayed rock stars as larger than life party animals--misogynistic, hard-drinking, and rich demigods sporting teased hair, makeup, and spandex: "glam's camp and sexual ambiguity became cockrock's (hair metal's) baroque staging of a peculiar form of long-haired, becostumed hyper-masculinity" (Gottlieb and Wald 259). While these bands served as a wish-fulfillment fantasy for many young men, they were also far removed from the realities of everyday life of most young Americans. In a review of economic conditions in the 1990s, Lynn White and Stacy Rogers write that, "until recently, each generation of men has fared better, in terms of median income, than their father's generation fared at comparable ages. In the last two decades, however, young men's fortunes stagnated and declined" (1038). Men working as hard as their fathers were beginning to see fewer and fewer fruits of their labor – if they had employment at all: "manufacturing jobs that once provided security and good wages for workers with less education became more scarce" (White and Rogers 1038). Furthermore, in economic terms, the gap was beginning to close between men and women's wages as "median earnings for young adult men decreased from 1980 to 1995, whereas the median earnings of young women increased over the same period" (White and Rogers 1036). For the first time in the twentieth century, young white men were no longer poised to dominate and define American society, and women were increasingly gaining equality. Many men were grappling with "the sense of betrayal, the suspicion of failure, the resentment of more fortunate generations, and

reconciliation with the absence of fulfilling jobs or glamorous lifestyles" (Moore, Tomorrow

260). With opportunities evaporating and increasing gender equality, is it any wonder that fewer

men were interested in watching Vince Neil have money fights with scantily-clad women while

swigging Jack Daniels? Grunge and Riot Grrrl reflected these cultural conditions for their

audiences by touting themselves "as low budget and unhyped, sensitive and antimacho, socially

conscious and morally outraged -- in short, the antithesis of the Eighties' excess and

greed" (Moore, Young, Gifted 117). Due to this stance, grunge artists' identity construction

projected an air of authenticity in the face of declining economic opportunities for its audience.

As young men became a diminishing economic force, feelings of helplessness and angst

began to arise. This predominantly white social group comprised a large portion of what was

eventually coined "Generation X."[1] Generation X's key characteristics – anger, cynicism, and

nihilism –caused distress for both the old and the young. As Ryan Moore points out, such traits

proved Generation X to be thoroughly postmodern:

> Lacking a means for mapping their social and personal histories or for grasping
>
> the underlying forces that have led to the 'broken promises' of downward
>
> mobility, family disintegration, and political apathy, many young middle-class
>
> whites have latched onto a defensive cynicism that knows that everything is
>
> simply a façade – that, in the end, nothing really matters. (Tomorrow 261)

This pessimism began to manifest in works of popular culture. Films such as *Slackers, Clerks,*

and *Reality Bites* featured aimless twenty-somethings in dead-end jobs. *Seinfeld's* promoters

boasted that it was a "show about nothing."

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[1] Generation X is defined as Americans born between 1965 and 1980 whose typical characteristics include cynicism, political apathy, and "a casual disdain for authority" (Kane).

However, the cultural movement best known in the period from 1991-94 was grunge. While "alternative rock" was nothing new by 1991 due to underground bands such as R.E.M., Sonic Youth, and the Pixies, there was something different about grunge. Mixing equal parts punk and 1970s-style arena rock, grunge was loud and abrasive; it had enough anger, angst, and irony to become the soundtrack for Generation X. While grunge was an alternative underground movement throughout the late 1980s spearheaded by bands such as the Melvins and Mudhoney, the subculture exploded into the mainstream with the September 1991 release of Nirvana's *Nevermind*, most notably the single that nearly instantly changed rock radio, "Smells Like Teen Spirit." Soon, more alternative bands such as Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Hole, Smashing Pumpkins, and Alice in Chains gained widespread success. Scores of young, white, middle-class Americans were soon sporting flannel shirts, torn jeans, Doc Martins, and unwashed hair as "alternative" bands quickly sold millions of records.

While the movement was relatively short-lived (most argue that the alternative movement died with Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain in April of 1994), its impact on white, working and middle-class American youth in the early 1990s is unquestionable. Few would expect such bands to ever break into mainstream culture (even bands such as the dissonant Sonic Youth, despite being around before grunge, enjoyed mainstream success post-Nirvana), but, as Ryan Moore points out, subcultures such as grunge are "in large part responses to the dissolution of sources of sincerity and authenticity in postmodern society, but they also serve as an increasingly attractive option among those having trouble breaking into the job market and seeking a kind of meaningful work that may be otherwise unavailable" (Tomorrow 264). With many – particularly white, young, middle-class men – out of work and seeing fewer chances for upward social and

economic mobility, the appeal of grunge bands was significant. Considering the cultural and economic shifts during this time period, the rise of cynical and nihilistic grunge bands seems almost inevitable. Many members of Generation X were feeling anger and angst for some time; they only needed someone to articulate it.

While this social group saw their traditional economic dominance decline, a new focus on gender construction arose from the grunge movement. However, as Gayle Wald writes, the notion of gender construction informing rock music was around for roughly a decade before the grunge movement, as seen in bands such as the Smiths and Culture Club: "'alternative' music in the early 1980s is pivotal, marking the end of an era during which black sources served as the primary inspiration for white cultural innovation and heralding a new era in which the performance of gender, not race, is paramount" (606). In these days of white male economic decline (and white female economic rising), the new white masculine model of rock star was often self-effacing and attacking conventional notions of gender by doing everything from dressing in drag to championing women's rights. This apparent repudiation of misogyny among mainstream rock stars was accompanied by the rise of the Riot Grrrl movement. Riot Grrrl was an all-(or mostly) female punk rock subculture that used loud, abrasive guitar-driven music to deliver its overtly political feminist message. While the movement is not directly affiliated with grunge, Riot Grrrl artists challenged gender norms through mockery and sought to expose gender inequality not only in patriarchal society, but in traditionally male-centric hardcore punk rock scenes as well. The identity Riot Grrrls constructed typically showed anger at this inequality, which in itself "marks a significant violation of the proscription against women's agency and desire, and seems to endorse the radically social constructionist rejection of gender

binaries" (McCarthy 76). Riot Grrrl artists never achieved significant mainstream success, but the philosophy of the movement was highly influential on Kurt Cobain, who brought some of Riot Grrrl's ideas into the mainstream.

Many of the artists were less than enthusiastic (or at least appeared to be) about their newfound fame, and found many ways to buck the corporate rock structure while still being very much a part of it. Furthermore, the economic improvement of women's lives during this time led to artists constructing and negotiating gender roles in various ways. While "hair metal" bands often wore makeup and tight clothing, their machismo was rarely questioned. Grunge bands, on the other hand, often dressed in drag (while often still sporting beards) and also championed women's issues in their lyrics and interviews. Moreover, many artists eschewed traditional alpha male roles in favor of a more self-effacing persona, tapping into the "loser" mentality of many of their fans. Paradoxically, the fashion of the movement often featured thrift store clothes such as torn jeans and old flannel shirts, giving the artists a "working man" aesthetic that resonated with their largely working-class fans and imbued their stardom with a rugged hyper-masculinity. This complicated construction of working-class white masculinity led to a sometimes messy performance of self for the artists, with often conflicting messages (anti-establishment while relying on it, dressing in drag for one show but torn jeans and flannel shirts the next). As the movement wore on, artists varied in their stances on these issues, but the main players all responded to them in some capacity.

II. "Jeremy spoke in class today" ("Jeremy," Pearl Jam) -- A Grunge/Riot Grrrl Pedagogy

As I envision it, a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would be a second-year composition elective. This is not only so students already have knowledge of genre and argumentative writing, but also because the identity issues that will come up (especially regarding gender) would be best for students who want to take the course as opposed to students meeting a course requirement. The course would be split into two halves, the first analyzing grunge and the second Riot Grrrl. The grunge section would establish the cultural conditions surrounding the movement and examine how the movement's two most famous acts—Nirvana and Pearl Jam—constructed public identities based on Generation X's anti-establishment values. Like Nirvana's Cobain, Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder was also acutely aware of his constructed public identity: "Vedder has created a public persona based on articles he read as a teenager in *Creem* and other rock magazines...much of what Vedder says to the press is for dramatic effect" (DeRogatis 59). The personas of both Nirvana and Pearl Jam were influenced by the cultural conditions of the time: "ideas are formed within the culture by a variety of forces (religious, media, literature, government)" (Rice 47). Looking further, the class would examine the specific historical conditions that defined the "culture" of Generation X and how notions of "self" and *ethos* were shaped within them: "what constitutes the 'self' in any culture is historically constructed" (Jarratt and Reynolds 39). By investigating the public identities that Nirvana and Pearl Jam constructed, students will begin to see how the band members' status as rich, white rock stars belied their public images as "anti-corporate rock structure." Like previous movements, grunge audiences were wary of corporate influence in rock music, and the fear of being labeled "sell-outs" forced

artists like Cobain and Vedder to downplay their privileged status. Through analyzing how

Cobain and Vedder built these contradictory personas, students will see how, when wishing to

build an "authentic" public identity, cultural conditions force the concealment of certain aspects

of the private self to align with the attitude of one's audience. As Jarratt and Reynolds argue,

"Meeting audience expectations will lead a speaker into a forced dissimulation" (43). By

examining how grunge artists negotiated their stance as anti-corporate corporate rock stars,

students will be able to see the effects of cultural attitudes on the construction of a public

identity.

The second half of the course will focus on the Riot Grrrl movement. While both

movements occurred simultaneously, the two are distinct for several reasons. A Riot Grrrl

pedagogy would cover the artists' rejection of the corporate rock structure. Due to their origins

in underground punk rock, Riot Grrrl artists were more uncompromising than their grunge

counterparts in their resistance to the commodification of themselves and their music and, as a

result, they did not enjoy the same degree of mainstream success as their grunge counterparts.

While their audience was relatively small, it was devout because Riot Grrrl artists reflected the

anti-corporate and gender role-challenging stance of the underground punk feminist audience.

Artists such as Bikini Kill enjoyed minor hits on radio and MTV, but their public identities were

more tailored to punk feminists -- a subculture of punk's subculture. However, the class would

investigate how Riot Grrrl's feminist message was appropriated by mainstream culture without

the artists' consent. This appropriation was both positive and meaningful (Sarah McLachlan's

Lilith Fair) and negative and commercialized (the Spice Girls' vapid slogan "Girl Power"). The

study of this appropriation would help students see how not only artists, but, the corporate rock

structure itself manipulates cultural attitudes to its own ends and why the grunge and Riot Grrrl

artists were reluctant to participate in mainstream music, as Jeff Rice argues when discussing

how "Advertisers have been quick to understand that terms familiar to youth culture can be

appropriated and redone in order to serve their own economic interests" (23). Understanding

how corporate entities also use cultural sentiments to further their own economic interests will

help students identify when such actions are at play and not be duped by them. Furthermore, this

angle of a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would not only show the many extremes of culturally-

influenced identity construction (through grunge's negotiation, Riot Grrrl's rejection, and the

corporate music world's appropriation), but also how grunge and Riot Grrrl artists sought to

establish authenticity in the face of rapid corporate appropriation by appealing to the concerns of

their particular audience.

Of course, an analysis of identity construction in a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would

include gender construction. A grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would focus on how culture

influences gender construction. Judith Butler explains how culture defines gender roles and how

those roles can be disrupted:

> If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and
>
> not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation
>
> are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a
>
> different sort of repeating, in breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (402)

Grunge and Riot Grrrl artists sought to disturb this culturally-enforced "style" by subverting

traditional gender roles in various ways (as will be discussed in depth later). Grunge artists

feminized themselves by showing a self-effacing masculinity, deflating the bravado of hair metal

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artists, in their appearance and lyrics while Riot Grrrl artists' appropriation of aggressive

masculine traits may have been too threatening for mainstream audiences. However, both would

be examined in a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy to show how gender construction is a reflection --

and sometimes a subversion -- of cultural ideals. By analyzing how grunge and Riot Grrrl artists

negotiated gender construction, I will move into a discussion of public identity construction by

showing how the cultural and historical factors influencing an identity are related to *ethos*.

Jarratt and Reynolds recognize the influence of culture on identity construction, stating "it is

precisely the concept of *ethos* in rhetoric that theorizes the positionality inherent in rhetoric -- the

speaker having been created at a particular site within the contingencies of history and

geography" (47). Through understanding how cultural conditions shape gender identity and

performance, students will be able to see how their own gender construction is an invaluable part

of the public personas they convey in their writing.

　　　With so much rich material in grunge and Riot Grrrl concerning identity construction, a

pedagogy based on this material necessitates an assignment in which students could take the

same analysis applied to the artists' identity construction and adapt it to their own. Nirvana,

Pearl Jam, and Riot Grrrl's Bikini Kill are all examples of how identity can be constructed not

only around a particular message, but also around audience expectations and cultural context. In

this regard, I propose a Final Project for a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy that is a "personal

narrative" assignment in which the students profile their public "selves" and show how cultural

conditions have shaped that identity. This would be supplemented by a mid-term

"autoethnography" assignment in which students investigate the characteristics of their own

culture. According to Andrea Greenbaum, the goal of an ethnography is "not merely to describe

a culture but to analyze the multiplicity of influences (work, class, kinship ties, myths, rituals, gender) that construct that culture's ideology" (Cultural Studies and Composition 38). A grunge/ Riot Grrrl autoethnography would ask students to turn these analytical lenses on their own culture in the mid-term and then define that culture's influence on their sense of identity construction in the Final Project. These assignments would show that, "inevitably and automatically, an identity story is at once a historical and a cultural story" because the autoethnography "requires writers to be critical of experience and self-reflective about culture" (Danielewicz 438). These assignments would focus on the "cultural and ideological biases" that ultimately shape how students present their public selves.

While the mid-term would have a traditional academic paper format, the Final Project would ask students to use the internet to highlight the cultural aspects that shape the public identity they construct, which would allow opportunities similar to grunge and Riot Grrrl artists to use music, video, and images to construct a public persona. The students would use their existing Facebook accounts (or create a private one if a student does not already have an account) in a private group that only the class would see. Students will be encouraged to use the media available through Facebook (sharing pictures, video, and audio as well as status updates and the longer-form "notes" feature) to consciously construct a "profile" of their public identities. They would also comment on how their cultural conditions mediate their public personas (for example: do they only post Youtube clips of bands that are considered "cool" regardless of the bands they listen to in private?). Facebook has its limitations as far as the length of status updates and working within its format, but this format will provide a space void of annoying templates that snuff out "the very critical or creative values humanities seek to

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teach, the very heart of composition instruction" (Eldred and Toner 39). The students would then be encouraged to use any media available (within socially acceptable limits) to analyze their own culture and how it influences the public persona they display in their writing.

In order for students to investigate their public selves, documentation of their private selves is necessary. In a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy, I would ask students to reveal their private selves in a journal that would include personal observations, thoughts, and anything else about their private selves they want to record. This journal would not be read by me, but students would be partnered up with a "confidant" with whom they can share ideas about the cultural influences that mediate how much of their private selves are revealed publicly. The purpose of this document is to teach students to distinguish between their private selves and their public selves. The journal should make clear the distance between the private selves found in the journals and the public selves in their other writing. Students will then be asked to reflect on how they believe cultural conditions play a role in determining what aspects of themselves they choose to reveal in their writing. The students will not be required to turn in their journal writings (although I would ask to glance at the journals to make sure they are actually writing); I would only ask that they use private writing as a means to see how they filter their identities for public identity construction and then analyze how those public personas are influenced by cultural conditions.

Writing and composing within a grunge and Riot Grrrl-influenced writing pedagogy is important to composition studies because it illustrates how a rhetorical self in personal narratives is constructed. When writing about the cultural conditions that shape their public selves, I would want students to consider all aspects of their identity performance: language use, social media,

fashion, bumper stickers, where they choose to hang out, what bands they like, what sports teams they follow, and anything else that may come to students' minds. The goal here would be to show how students construct *ethos* not only in their writing for school, but also for any writing they compose online, for work, or in correspondence with others. How do cultural attitudes or taboos influence how students present themselves in their writing? Furthermore, just as grunge and Riot Grrrl artists constructed public personas, a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would ask students to investigate how they also construct public identities in various ways. Are they from a culture where masculine and feminine roles are strictly defined and they cannot act outside of the norm? Do they listen to certain bands so that people think they are "cool"? Why do they dress the way they do? All of these questions allow for a critical self-reflection on how the students construct culturally-influenced public identities.

Looking at the artists' construction of identity on many levels will enhance the students' understanding of *ethos*. An investigation of how grunge and Riot Grrrl artists built "authentic" and "honest" public personas appealing to cultural conditions will show students how cultural context influences identity construction. Furthermore, by analyzing the grunge movement with multimedia lenses, students will be encouraged to incorporate audio and visual rhetoric into their assignments as well as the written word. Just as *Nevermind'*s album cover of a naked baby swimming after a dollar bill on a fish hook (a commentary on the greed of the 1980s) helped establish Nirvana's identity as a punk-minded anti-establishment act (that sold millions of records), students will be able to find images -- along with video and audio -- to help construct an identity. Analyzing grunge and Riot Grrrl artists' use of visual and aural rhetoric will help the

students examine their own identity construction and how to use text, visuals, and audio in establishing *ethos* in written, as well as in multimedia, work.

The use of technology in a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy follows current trends in composition studies and reflects student writing outside of the classroom. The online nature of the Final Project will use various "modes" of literacy across different forms of media that enhance composition pedagogy:

> Increasingly important are modes of meaning other than Linguistic, including Visual Meanings (images, page layouts, screen formats); Audio Meanings (music, sound effects); Gestural Meanings (body language, sensuality); Spatial Meanings (the meanings of environmental spaces, architectural spaces); and Multimodal Meanings. Of the modes of meaning, the Multimodal is the most significant, as it relates all the other modes in quite remarkably dynamic relationships. (New London Group)

Using multiple modes in writing will help students craft more nuanced compositions since, according to Eldred and Toner, "Such assignments encourage students to consider relationships between visual and linguistic rhetoric and their efforts on an audience's understanding of a topic" (41). However, using technology does come with inherent problems. With students coming from various economic backgrounds, not all students will have the same level of access to computers with multimedia capabilities: "serious social inequities related to computer use -- known to many as the 'digital divide' -- continue to widen" (Eldred and Toner 34). Students may also choose offensive material to post on their pages or post negative remarks on each other's statuses. Parameters will be set so that students avoid potentially racist or sexist content, and any

use of sarcasm will be prohibited in commenting on other students' pages. Conversely, students

will be required to post meaningful comments of 50-100 words instead of empty praise (e.g.,

"cool video!"). These provisions would be enforced through the students' participation grade,

which will account for ten percent of their final grade will be negatively affected if students do

not taking commenting on other's works seriously. Despite any issues that may arise using

technology, the bigger risk would be ignoring technology's influence in contemporary writing:

"To ignore technology...is to ignore our students' backgrounds, experiences, and knowledges and

to undermine our best pedagogical intentions" (Eldred and Toner 34). A grunge/Riot Grrrl

pedagogy would use these "backgrounds, experiences, and knowledges" to enhance the

students' ability to display their public selves and the cultural influences that shape those selves.

Of course, when asking students to take a critical look at themselves (and dealing with a

highly specific music genre), there would undoubtedly be resistance. In anticipation of such

resistance, a teacher in a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would take a stance similar to Paulo Freire

in the classroom:

> the teaching of contents, undertaken critically, involves the teacher's total
>
> commitment to the legitimate attempt by the student to take in hand the
>
> responsibility of being a knowing subject. Even more than that, it involves the
>
> initiative of a teacher committed to the adventure of bringing to birth in the
>
> student a person at ease who can articulate in [sic] his or her subjectivity. (112)

The goal of a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would be for students to analyze their own cultures

and public identities. This objective, of course, comes with an inherent risk, as students may be

uncomfortable with or unable to take such a critical look at themselves. However, true learning

cannot thrive without taking on such risks: "For us, to learn is to construct, to reconstruct, to observe with a view to changing -- none of which can be done without being open to risk, to the adventure of the spirit" (Freire 67). A grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would take on this risk by encouraging students to view themselves in a historical moment and giving them a position of power as they investigate their own cultures: "critical ethnographers need not only to become more aware of the privileges, the economic and political power inherent in being an investigator, but also to recognize the emancipatory potential in interceding in the community under investigation" (Greenbaum, Cultural Studies and Composition 45). Through analyzing the effect their own cultures have on their writing, students will, I hope, write with authority on that culture even as they discuss how that culture shapes the selves they construct in their writing. Even if a student despises the artists discussed, he or she can still learn from seeing how the cultural, economic, and historical conditions in the late 1980s/early 1990s led to their success and how those artists negotiated the attitudes of their audience in their attempts to create an "authentic" public voice. This lesson can be applied to their own writing as they analyze which aspects of themselves they choose to reveal in their writing.

Composition cannot be separated from cultural context, as Andrea Greenbaum argues: "Writing, then, becomes writing in context, in relationships connected to discourses within and outside the classroom, shattering the quiet belief that composition may be taught as a discrete skill, separated from class, race, or gender" (Greenbaum, Cultural Studies and Composition 25). Positioning students within their own cultural context will allow them to see how cultural conditions mediate the "selves" they construct in writing and enable them to gain control over how their identities are constructed:

In discovering the differences between themselves and within their multiple "selves," in fashioning discourses that build on specific points of commonality with audiences, they (the students) both split and resuture textual selves. They examine the ways language both speaks to and forms their self-concepts, and they begin to learn some measure of control over that process. (Jarratt and Reynolds 57)

Controlling this process would allow students to negotiate various cultural beliefs to establish an authentic and "honest" voice in their writing. Examining cultural context will also lead to students developing a better sense of audience. Showing how the cultural attitudes of a writer's audience influence his or her construction of public identity, students will see the "creative, dynamic duality of the process of reading and writing, whereby writers create readers and readers create writers. In the meeting of these two lies meaning, lies communication" (Ede and Lunsford 93). In analyzing their culture and how that culture shapes their sense of *ethos,* students will see the interdependent relationship between reader and writer. While the students' literal audience would be the teacher and their classmates, students' ability to see the intertwining of writer and reader will allow them to shape a persuasive public self in not only the personal narrative/ethnographic assignment, but in all of the writing in their lives.

Of course, just as the grunge and Riot Grrrl artists were wary of corporate influence in their music, students of a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy will not only learn how to construct "authentic" identities in their writing, they will also see how other entities attempt to appeal to cultural conditions for their own economic ends. A study of the grunge and Riot Grrrl movements will show students how those subcultures, like other subcultures, sought "sites of

resistance through the manipulation and subversion of hegemonic signs, and since signs are

material, they are almost always commodities -- objects that can be bought or sold" (Greenbaum,

Cultural Studies and Composition 34). By examining how the artists themselves fought

becoming commodities through their "honest" identity construction and how certain aspects of

their respective movements were appropriated by the corporate rock structure, students will

begin to learn how to identify when entities such as advertisers attempt to move products by

appealing to cultural notions of "cool": "Such identifications blur the boundaries between our

consumption habits and our daily lives. We begin to think less about why we consume. Instead,

we buy products merely because we identify with them" (Rice 37). Furthermore, an analysis of

gender construction will show students the social expectations behind traditional definitions of

gender: "the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its

binary frame...the performance renders social laws explicit" (Butler 410). A grunge/Riot Grrrl

pedagogy would seek to expose these "social laws" to students in order to provide an opportunity

for critical self-investigation, and to promote tolerance along gender lines, helping students

become better citizens. Ultimately, a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would provide the link

between what rock n' roll and education should and sometimes do provide in different ways--an

interrogation of the status quo: "Education never was, is not, and never can be neutral or

indifferent in regard to the reproduction of the dominant ideology or the interrogation of

it" (Freire 91). By teaching students to view themselves and their culture in a critical light, a

grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would help students understand culture and the effect that dominant

ideology has on commerce, culture, and understanding.

III. "'Once upon a time, I could lose myself" ("Once," Pearl Jam) - Problems with Identity Construction in the Personal Narrative

Grunge artists' use of confession in their lyrics provides a template for students' personal narratives/ethnographies. When grunge exploded into the mainstream in the early 1990s, loud, aggressive rock music (hair metal) was largely focused on male escapist notions of vapid partying. Personal, confessional music was written and performed almost exclusively by acoustic singer/songwriters, and was often seen by the public as "real" music. Grunge artists melded forceful rock music with personal lyrics, effectively taking back both hard rock and the confessional. A grunge pedagogy would show how the confessional was effective for grunge artists because of what they were confessing and its effect on their audience. To be clear, grunge artists typically were "confessing" their own personal demons and broken childhoods: parental divorce, drug addiction, depression, etc. As I discussed before, this was a reflection of the social and economic conditions of young white men at the time. However, the confessions of grunge artists turned out to be both therapeutic and marketable: "Simply identifying and acknowledging your damage is empowering, because society seems to deny you the right to feel damaged" (Ferguson 61). The anger and hopelessness of Nirvana not only resonated with young white men in the early 1990s, it also offered an identity for damaged youth listening to this music: "The hit 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' was an anthem of powerless rage and betrayal...it made psychological damage -- with all its concurrent themes of child abuse, drug addiction, suicide, and neglect -- a basis for social identity" (Ferguson 60). This embrace of "damage" in the face of conventional societal/masculine norms shows how grunge artists managed to be highly

personal while still appealing to their audience. Because of the cultural conditions of Generation X, "damage" became a desirable trait for grunge artists to use in identity construction, as it gave them authority and made them figures with whom their audience could relate. Appearing "damaged" downplayed the social privilege of artists like Nirvana and Pearl Jam and made millionaire rock stars appear to be just like their economically struggling audience, reflecting Newkirk's claim that culturally approved traits of identity construction imply "honesty" to the audience. A grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would show students how certain personality features -- even "damage" -- can be used to convey "honesty" in the right social circumstances.

Of course, traditional uses of the "confessional" in the personal narrative have relied on students writing about themselves without considering cultural context, denying students the chance to negotiate cultural characteristics that convey honesty as the grunge artists did with notions of "damage" and their audience. To avoid this pitfall, some theorists have argued for the use of the "personal self" in critical academic essays: "Writing instruction should enable students to recognize the writerly self as a *persuasive instrument* that can be strategically deployed…to take personal stands on public issues *that transcend the confessional*" (Comfort 555, emphasis in original text). This argument, proposed by Juanita Rodgers Comfort's use of black feminists' essays in the composition classroom to show students how race and gender affect *ethos*, recommends that composition students use personal experience to discuss social issues, creating a hybrid of personal narrative and critical analysis:

> In a society that is so culturally diverse, technologically sophisticated, and hierarchically complex, finding a vantage point, a place to stand, and a locus of authority, respect, influence, and power cannot be ignored as a teachable subject

in rhetoric and composition courses. What many student writers seem to long for, even without knowing exactly how to articulate it, is meaningful instruction in using writing to assess, define, and assert who they are becoming as knowing beings. (558)

While Comfort discusses how differing cultural identities based on race and gender can be better used to refine *ethos*, she does not discuss how writers construct *public* identities via multi-media considering cultural influence. Still, her emphasis on students using the "self" of personal narrative in academic essays provides a foundation for a critical look at how culture influences identity construction in student writing.

There are theorists who do discuss how cultural ideals shape identity construction. The notion that the public self is influenced by cultural conditions is taken up by Jane Danielewicz, who believes that "the story of the self cannot be told outside of a cultural context" (437). Danielewicz argues for the use of personal writing to build public "voice," primarily through autoethnography. Danielewicz reflects Newkirk's idea that writers who construct a public "voice" build public personas that exhibit "authority, the weight or totality of a person's presence or a believable constructed persona behind the words" (425). However, Danielewicz, aside from her encouragement of autoethnography, does little to analyze how cultural conditions shape "public voice" and instead focuses on the need for such a voice in the first place: "Students may be able to construct voices that not only represent the 'person' or 'individual' but that also invoke or stand for the pluralistic, the group, the communal" (440). She speaks of cultural influences on identity construction in general terms, but without placing a writer in a specific cultural environment, students' will have difficulty ascertaining how particular cultural conditions

mediate public identity construction. Through an analysis of grunge and Riot Grrrl, a pedagogy can arise that discusses specific cultural conditions and their effects on identity construction. In a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy, students can see *how* identity construction is influenced by cultural conditions to convey the sense of authority and honesty necessary for an effective "public voice."

IV. "Rebel Girl, You Are the Queen of My World" ("Rebel Girl," Bikini Kill) -- A Grunge/

Riot Grrrl Intervention in Composition Pedagogy

Members of Generation X desired a voice to articulate their frustrations with dwindling

economic opportunities, and a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would recognize Danielewicz's claim

that such voices are still necessary in today's culture: "We (and our cultures, communities,

families) need such assertions of self, such articulation of differences, as a way to fight against

the depersonalized and homogenizing effects of globalization" (439). However, for students to

truly grasp how cultural conditions shape identity construction, a concrete example is needed.

Grunge is closely tied with its time as it "recapitulates the violation of childhood innocence, the

ultimate betrayal kids see in commercial culture, which promised *Brady Bunch* lives and gave

them single-parent homes" (Ferguson 62). This distrust of consumerism is also a result of the

economic hardships experienced by young people in the early 1990s. Grunge and Riot Grrrl

artists were immensely plugged into this sentiment, constantly worried about how they were

perceived and eager to avoid the label of "sell-out" at all costs, despite their often lofty financial

circumstances. By appealing to the ideals of a Generation X audience, grunge and Riot Grrrl

artists achieved as much of a level of authenticity possible with their underground audience

while simultaneously moving into the mainstream. In order for students to learn how to

construct an identity that resonates with the beliefs of their own audience in and outside of the

classroom, students must see how grunge and Riot Grrrl artists met the cultural expectations of

their audience to achieve a sense of "honesty."

Because a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy will investigate both identity construction and the world that identity finds itself in, a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy cannot focus on the music alone. A grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy would encourage students to consider how their own identities are constructed in the context of their times. As Alyson Bardsley reports, a class dedicated to using pop culture (which, in her case, included Riot Grrrl music as well as zines, films, and standup comedy) can have a dramatic effect on students: "we had learned how to go beyond the personal insights, though, and put them in a political context. For me, the principle that the personal is political and is not the antithesis of intellectual became real in a new way" (200). Echoing Comfort, Bardsley shows how the use of personal experiences can be used to discuss social issues and develop a culturally-influenced sense of *ethos*. By placing personal insights in a social context, students can begin to see how cultural forces affect their own identities and, by extension, their rhetorical selves. Learning these concepts will not only lead to students being able to better negotiate cultural influences in their own identity construction, but also to students recognizing when they are being appealed to by others.

Furthermore, analysis of Riot Grrrl's rejection of traditional femininity as being complacent in a male-dominated rock world can be applied to the classroom. Andrea Greenbaum argues that it is important for women to be assertive in argument -- even if it means being labeled a "bitch" -- because many "women may simply be hesitant to be perceived as violating cultural norms of femininity" (Greenbaum, "Bitch" Pedagogy 161). This was not a problem for Riot Grrrl artists. Often abrasive, Riot Grrrl artists confronted gender norms with astounding vigor, openly mocking gender norms and sexual stereotypes. This open, aggressive challenging of gender roles is important for female students in that it shows how to gain traction

in the often male-dominated field of argumentation: "In a phallocratic worldview, power is inherently hierarchical, and therefore female empowerment can only be gained through emasculation -- by being a nut-crunching, ball-wacking, *bitch*" (Greenbaum, "Bitch" Pedagogy 156). Riot Grrrl artists' rejection and mockery of gender stereotypes perpetuating quiet, complacent females can teach students not only about gender construction, but also about argumentation in written work. By thinking of argumentation along gender lines, students can analyze the cultural assumptions that allow the characteristics of a "strong" male writer to appear "bitchy" when a female writer employs them, such as a female writer taking an assertive, hard-lined stance against gender inequality. Furthermore, Riot Grrrl artists can illustrate the need for assertive argumentation to promote gender equality: "unless we can help women resist the social stigma against employing argumentation strategies [sic], they truly will never be able to have the same institutional footholds as men" (Greenbaum, "Bitch" Pedagogy 163). Riot Grrrl artists understood this and changed what it meant to be a female punk musician. The same lesson can be learned in our composition classroom when we ask students to analyze the gender baggage that is associated with specific personality traits, such as male "assertiveness" becoming female "bitchyness." Considering the social nature of these personality traits will help students see how societal notions of gender play a large and sometimes damaging role in identity construction in their writing.

Of course, it would benefit students to have a fuller understanding of their whole "selves" when deciding which aspects to share when constructing identity. This can be done by asking young writers to write without concerns for audience or message in journals. Composition theorist Geoffrey Sirc uses Cobain's posthumously-released *Journals* as a way to

discuss the importance of composition pedagogy that emphasizes students recording their

everyday experiences as opposed to mere analysis of others' texts. Sirc imagines a composition

pedagogy where the students' own lives and experiences, not pre-ordained "great" works, are

used for sources:

> I'm questioning, then, the limits of assignments that simply settle for a student's
>
> understanding. I want writing that offers revelations about the ordinary. I want
>
> lists: lists of what you did one afternoon; lists of what you saw in the street; lists
>
> of people from high school; lists of favorite bands, albums, songs; lists of things
>
> you bought; lists of traits that define you; lists of what you ate; lists of what you
>
> saw on television or at the movies; lists of reasons why the drummer in your band
>
> should be fired. The everyday runs on lists. (24-5)

This emphasis on students using their everyday, mundane experiences in the classroom reflects

grunge's "slacker" culture. Grunge artists used their common psychological damage and

unemployment-induced boredom to bring emotional catharsis back to a rock music they felt no

longer represented them and their audience. When students write about their mundane, everyday

existence, they articulate their private identities on their own terms, even if this reveals

frustrations with the university institution they are a part of: "Instead of students writing about

the sort of essays we talk about when we talk with our colleagues, how about letting them write

on how they don't want to read them?" (Sirc 23). Allowing students the freedom to air their

grievances, fantasies, or daily routines in their writing puts the focus back on their private selves

in a manner that aligns with the selfhood presented by the grunge artists. Furthermore, students

cataloguing their everyday experiences will provide a stockpile of topics and effective

personality traits they can later use in identity construction, deciding which aspects of themselves to reveal for the greatest rhetorical effectiveness, even if those traits are negative. By teaming with a "confidant" to discuss the contents of their journals, students will be able to discuss the disparity between their private and public selves and critically examine the space between the two. While there might be some negative aspects to this discussion, it would benefit the students to see how culture mediates the presentation of their public selves. After all, as Sirc states, composition is in dire need of a little more rock 'n' roll: "What Composition needs most, perhaps, is a bad attitude" (23).

By asking students to look both inward (through journals) and outward (through the cultural context of identity construction), a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy provides a more thorough look into the construction of the self in personal narratives. While the need for a "public voice" is clear, students must also understand the cultural dimensions influencing what they reveal of their private selves in their writing. A grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy encouraging students to develop their private identity while placing their public identity in a cultural context provides an opportunity for students to obtain a firm grasp on the self they present in their writing.

V. "Here we are now, entertain us" ("Smells Like Teen Spirit," Nirvana) -- Analysis of

Grunge/Riot Grrrl Artists' Identity Construction and Correlation to Pedagogy

In this section, I will analyze Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Bikini Kill specifically, showing

how lessons learned from their attempts at identity construction can be applied to students'

construction of identity. I discuss Nirvana and Pearl Jam simultaneously while breaking the

examination into two separate sections discussing the bands' struggles with the status quo and

manipulation of gender construction. Since Riot Grrrl is technically a distinct genre and

movement from grunge, I will discuss Bikini Kill in a separate section focusing on their

subversive gender construction. While it would be convenient to split grunge and Riot Grrrl

artists along gender lines with male students focusing on grunge and female Riot Grrrl, the

lessons that can be learned from both movements will prove useful in negotiating culturally-

influenced identity construction.

A. Battle with the Status Quo

Typically, bands craving success must perform certain activities, such as be willing to

tour extensively, produce music videos, release records in a timely fashion, and, above all, take

its economic opportunities seriously. All of these activities allow major label companies to make

as much money as possible out of a band before it falls out of fashion. Most bands are more than

happy to play along given the alternative of going back to dead-end day jobs and obscurity.

Nirvana and Pearl Jam were not most bands.

Nirvana and Pearl Jam worked against these expectations on many occasions. They openly challenged major corporations, bemoaned the loss of an underground scene in major music magazines, and used television as a platform for irony and subversion of the cultural norms surrounding live performance. The following analysis will show how Nirvana and Pearl Jam rebelled against the corporate rock structure they depended on and constructed public identities that reflected an anti-establishment attitude to their audience. While most of these identity-constructing acts were unstated–from Pearl Jam refusing to produce music videos at the height of their popularity to Nirvana's decision to follow up the slick-sounding *Nevermind* with the rough, abrasive *In Utero*–both bands also overtly portrayed themselves as struggling with the mainstream music machine. The simultaneous rebellion against the mainstream while depending on it was a major aspect of both bands. The bands negotiated the conflict in different ways: while Nirvana used irony to minimize the fact that they were, in effect, a mainstream band, Pearl Jam purposefully chose to shy away from the spotlight and intentionally become a niche act without significant radio play (granted, a "niche" act that still sells out arenas).

Both bands, however, took a clear stance in their lyrics as a means to carve out a location both within and against the mainstream. While they financially benefited from their mainstream status, both bands sought an identity defined by authenticity. This was done by tapping into identity tropes embraced by their audience--disaffected Northwesterners that included angry, disillusioned young men. Notions of nihilism and cynicism became common tropes in the lyrics of both bands' songs. In the opening line of "Serve the Servants," the first track on *In Utero*, Cobain sings in a deadpan tone "Teenage angst has paid off well/Now I'm old and bored." This declaration at the outset of the follow up to the multi-platinum *Nevermind* displayed Cobain's

wariness of stardom. His music is no longer only about self-expression; it is now a career he

increasingly disavowed. It also shows his disconnect from the musical movement Nirvana

single-handedly brought into the American zeitgeist. Similarly, Pearl Jam expressed this

discontent in the *Vitalogy* track "Not For You," although Eddie Vedder's lyrics reflect his disgust

with the formerly underground alternative scene now turned into a corporate, mainstream music

movement: "Small my table, it sits just two/Got so crowded, I can't make room/Where did they

come from? Stormed my room/And you dare say it belongs to you/This is not for you." In

contrast to Cobain, Vedder's cynicism is directed at the corporate influence in post-*Nevermind*

alternative rock rather than the movement itself. His opposition to major record labels and

corporate media–without which his lyrics would never have reached a wide audience—

showcases an immense distrust of a corporate music structure with a long history of milking

subcultural music movements for all they were worth.

This fear of corporate culture co-opting the Seattle subculture from which grunge sprang

reflects the anxiety Nirvana and Pearl Jam's audience felt while witnessing the same fate befall

other movements such as punk and New Wave. As Dick Hebdige writes in *Subcultures*, the

mainstream culture's recuperation of a subculture has two distinct characteristics: "(1) the

conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music, etc.) into mass-produced objects (i.e. the

commodity form); (2) the 'labeling' and re-definition of deviant behavior by dominant groups --

the police, the media, the judiciary (i.e. the ideological form)" (94). As grunge's presence in the

mainstream grew, many more radio-friendly -- but less authentic in the eyes of many rock critics

and fans -- bands such as Bush and Stone Temple Pilots began to arise, normalizing the genre.

This led to Nirvana and Pearl Jam's reliance on nihilism and cynicism to appeal to their

audience's feelings and reassert their authenticity in an increasingly crowded "alternative" national scene. While both bands played the major label game, their songs signaled an opposition to the status quo.

Song lyrics were not the only vehicle of these bands' opposition against the mainstream. Pearl Jam used its fame to battle the ticket-selling monopoly Ticketmaster in the mid-1990s, calling the company's "service charges" unfair to their fans, most of whom were economically strapped. For its tour supporting *Vitalogy*, Pearl Jam refused to play venues that sold tickets through Ticketmaster. Considering Ticketmaster's hold on the ticket-selling market, this blocked Pearl Jam from playing in a vast number of suitable venues. The tour was plagued with problems as many of the alternative venues proved to be unsafe or difficult to reach, and Pearl Jam's popularity never quite recovered. However, this act of defiance against a major American corporation was unprecedented in rock music, and the political act of boycotting Ticketmaster gave Pearl Jam the reputation of a group willing to stand up to injustice. It reflected Pearl Jam's fans' own frustration with Ticketmaster and strengthened the group's bond with its audience, despite the band's later capitulation to the ticket service giant. This career-risking move appealed to Pearl Jam's audience and established their identity as an honest group that cared about its fans, even if its actions caused an unpleasant concert experience for those fans.

Pearl Jam produced few music videos, but two of the three videos it did produce in the early 1990s merely covered the band's live performances. The message of these videos–that the group was just "doing their job"– is evident in the clip for "Even Flow." The video starts with Vedder's declaration of authenticity for the location of the "video:" "This is not a TV studio, *Josh*…this is a rock concert!" From there, edited clips of various Pearl Jam performances are

synced with the recorded track, all of which show the band in "workingman" attire: flannel shirts, t-shirts, torn-up jeans, and shorts. The message of the video is that Pearl Jam is no better than its fans. They do not spend money on expensive sound stages for videos, and they shop at the same thrift stores as their fans. A similar strategy is employed later in the video, when Vedder climbs the venue's rafters to fall into the crowd from a dangerously high ledge. The message to the audience (both in the crowd and watching the video at home) is clear: Pearl Jam is willing to risk personal well-being to put themselves on the same level as their fans. This effort to downplay corporate influence on the video (although it was marketed to major media outlets) shows Pearl Jam's fans that while the group was a famous rock band, it made every effort to retain authenticity by never appearing to be "better" than anyone (except, perhaps, the people signing their checks). Pearl Jam used the video medium to appeal to its audience's association of "lo-fi" with "authenticity," constructing an identity that was perceived as "honest" in the process.

Nirvana's public identity was more ironic and downplayed the group's status as a "famous rock band" as a way to share in their audience's distaste for the corporate rock structure. As Ryan Moore writes:

> Even as rock stars, Nirvana was able to present both a voice for a more sincere alternative to the music industry and the trappings of stardom and, by virtue of their own "incorporation," testify to the lack of such an oppositional space; the best example of such frustration – and the use of irony to "resolve" these contradictions – was Cobain's appearance on the cover of *Rolling Stone* with a hand-written tee-shirt reading "Corporate Rock Magazines Still Suck." (258)

Of course, *Rolling Stone* still ran the photograph, which implies they were in on the irony as well: "Even anti-corporatism can be rerouted into a marketing ploy. MTV makes fun of itself in order to ingratiate itself with its audience, but it's still one big extended commercial" (Ferguson 61). However, this only serves to underscore the concerns of Nirvana's audience. As corporate media institutions such as *Rolling Stone* began commodifying Generation X's ironic detachment and anti-corporatism into marketing tools, grunge audience's fears that their subculture was being absorbed into the mainstream were confirmed. In response, Nirvana gave voice to their fans' concerns in confessional song lyrics and interviews, and the gratified fans rewarded them by buying their albums and attending their concerts, thereby providing them all the benefits of rock stardom (like a *Rolling Stone* cover), even as Nirvana railed against those benefits.

Such use of irony as a deliberate rhetorical strategy to establish identity did not stop at photo shoots. For their live performance of "Smells Like Teen Spirit" on the popular, live-broadcasted British television show *Top of the Pops*, Nirvana used the music program's insistence that the band play to prerecorded tracks (save for the vocals) to mock the program and the institution it represents, with Cobain singing the song's lyrics in a low, out-of-rhythm atonal voice as the band smashes their instruments while the music they are "performing" plays in the background. The occasion of the show – that musicians play along to their prerecorded selves and try to look good while doing it – allowed Nirvana, with tongue firmly in cheek, to put up resistance to the show's producers and their expectations that the status quo be met. By openly mocking the show's "Top 40" focus and insistence on removing the human element of live performance, Nirvana constructed an identity of ironic pranksters that appealed to their

audience's disdain for such corporate rock-driven shows, a disdain that had led that audience to discovering formerly underground music like grunge in the first place.

Along with Pearl Jam's boycotting Ticketmaster on behalf of their fans, this televised Nirvana performance was a reflection of Generation X's anti-corporate ideals. For a generation that felt underserved by corporate America, Nirvana and Pearl Jam rebelled against that system using a public platform unavailable to most Generation X'ers. Both bands constructed an identity that resonated with the beliefs of their audience, thus earning them a degree of authenticity while still enjoying the benefits of global rock stardom. In a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy, analysis of these lyrics and actions can show students how Cobain and Vedder constructed identities that aligned with their audience's beliefs while still remaining in (and benefitting from) the corporate rock structure. Many grunge fans feared the commodification of the scene by the corporate rock structure, and Cobain and Vedder both spoke to that. Cobain used irony to paint himself as a "sell-out," while Vedder directly lashed at major record labels' attempts to commercialize the grunge scene. Of course, both singers sang their "rebellious" lyrics on albums released by the very major record labels against which they were railing. This dichotomy is a part of Cobain and Vedder's identity construction and can show students how the artists negotiated both defiance and reliance on the corporate rock structure either through ironically making fun of oneself (Cobain) or turning institutional power into an aggressor that "storms my room" (Vedder). These disparate methods served the same goals of reflecting the attitudes of Cobain and Vedder's audience and of building a public identity based on authenticity despite the bank accounts of the musicians' private selves.

B. Gender Construction

      Despite their working-class aesthetic and forceful male lead vocalists, both bands also subverted conventional gender constructions. According to Judith Butler, gender itself is a "performance" that is constant in one's life: "what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (402). Nirvana and Pearl Jam found various ways to encroach on "taboo" in relation to gender identity. In many photo and video shoots, as well as live performances, the members of Nirvana frequently wore women's clothing, presumably to tear down cultural assumptions about how a "blue collar" rock band should behave. Also, for his first appearance on MTV's *Headbanger's Ball* – a show devoted to heavy metal and hard rock – Cobain appeared in a ball gown, mocking the show's title while subverting the show's typically macho appeal. Furthermore, while Pearl Jam never broke from their masculine image, vocalist Eddie Vedder was always a staunch public defender of women's rights, going so far as to inscribe the words "PRO CHOICE" on his arm at the end of a performance on *MTV Unplugged.*

      Nirvana and Pearl Jam's subversion of traditional rock gender roles may seem at odds with their "working man" aesthetic, but it was in fact a reflection of what working class men were going through, if not necessarily how they may have felt:

> Changes in the ideologies of manhood, including the 1960s counterculture's
> embrace of androgyny, the encroaching obsolescence of anticommunist
> machismo, and the looming attractiveness of the 'sensitive man,' were
> undergirded by a massive shift in political economy...Economy and identity came

together in working-class men's felt inability to *provide* – a masculine ideal the

social script increasingly disdained anyway. (Lott 196)

As the traditional "provider" role of the American working class male waned, so did the claim to superiority that accompanied it, particularly for disillusioned working-class young men to whom the grunge subculture appealed. This too was reflected in Nirvana and Pearl Jam's lyrics. In stark contrast to the misogynistic hair-metal bands, Nirvana and Pearl Jam often wrote lyrics from the first-person perspective of female protagonists. In Nirvana's most controversial song "Rape Me," Cobain sings as a rape victim, repeating the title of the song throughout the verses before shifting to a more hopeful, unity-driven chorus in which he declares "I'm not the only one," presumably finding comfort in fellow victims. The song seeks to set an authoritative identity for Cobain on numerous fronts. First, Cobain was heavily influenced by the Riot Grrrl movement (as will be discussed later) and sought to champion women's rights. Second, Cobain sings of the metaphorical "rape" and undoing of the underground grunge movement by mainstream record labels. This taps into the fears of many in his grunge audience concerning the "scene." Third, he sings of his personal "rape" by corporate America, co-opting his music and disenfranchising him, just as many Americans were feeling economic disenfranchisement during this period. While Cobain became a millionaire due to this "disenfranchisement," "Rape Me" reflects Cobain's apprehension of monetary success coming at the cost of the appropriation of himself and his music: "Eventually, we stop discussing the real-life figure and begin using the icon of the figure to express other ideas" (Rice 26). By using a controversial song, Cobain manages to intersect his public and private identities while still connecting with his audience and speaking to their values. This can show students in a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy how culture

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influences what aspects of private identity are made public. He took his personal feelings

towards the commodification of his music and his Riot Grrrl-inspired feminist beliefs and

combined them with the fear he and his audience both shared of the grunge movement's co-

opting. In doing so, Cobain created an identity that appealed to various concerns of his audience,

gaining him a greater sense of authenticity. Through this, students can see how to choose certain

aspects of their inner selves (in Cobain's case, feminism and fear of commodification) to

interweave with their public selves. By comparing their personal feelings with that of their

audience, students can see how they can use Cobain's methods in "Rape Me" to construct

"honest" public identities.

Similarly, Vedder sings from the perspective of a victim of child abuse in "Daughter":

"Can't deny there's something wrong/Don't call me daughter, not fit to/The picture kept will

remind me." Also like Cobain, Vedder's protagonist comes to grips with her victimization.

Although she initially accepts her aggressor ("She holds the hand that holds her down"), she

eventually triumphs over her pain ("She will rise above"). Also, Vedder switches to third-person

perspective at the song's climax, allowing his female protagonist to overcome on her own terms

without Vedder as her mouthpiece. Unfortunately, while such stories suggest female

empowerment in the face of terrible tragedy, both songs, despite Cobain and Vedder's intentions,

frame women in terms of victimization at the hands of a presumably male aggressor. This

regression to violent – but traditional – gender roles is a symptom of the loss of identity for the

working class male, according to Eric Lott: "If anything, male physical violence and abuse…

have redoubled in hysterical fashion in the face of troubled self-definition" (196). In losing his

traditional stance in society, the white American working class male lashes out against women,

even if unintentionally. As products of that class, Cobain and Vedder seem unable to escape their masculine roles. However, the effort of writing from the perspective of young women whose stories end in a kind of triumph reflects the rising economic status of women in the early 1990s (and, presumably, an increased demographic for record sales). While some male members of the bands' audience may not have shared the sentiment ("For grunge's primary audience, white male teens, damage offers a defense against the claims of...punk rock feminists"), championing women's values also reveals a more inclusive gender-identity construction for Cobain and Vedder (Ferguson 60).

Furthermore, the way Nirvana and Pearl Jam manipulated gender construction is different from the androgyny of earlier rock acts like Marc Bolan and the New York Dolls. While those artists blurred gender lines, it was always under the guise of "glam" rock, which lent itself to a certain marketability through its use of "prettiness" and, despite the androgyny, reinforced traditional gender roles defining femininity in terms of that prettiness while also still singing songs from a male-dominant vantage point. Nirvana and Pearl Jam, on the other hand, blurred gender lines by singing from a woman's perspective about issues effecting women. Even if their stance was ultimately flawed, it still attempted to shape gender identity in a politically responsible and progressive way, unlike those groups who played with gender for its shock value (although Nirvana, with their sarcastic use of drag, was not above this). However, while Cobain himself appeared in drag on *Headbanger's Ball,* his unshaven face betrayed the ruse and highlighted the performative aspect of his actions: "That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative

aspect of gender is concealed" (Butler 412). Where artists like the New York Dolls seemed to be "passing" at times, Cobain's juxtaposition of the ball gown and beard show a disruption of "social performances" used in gender construction. Through this use of gender construction, Nirvana and Pearl Jam constructed identities that not only appealed to the closing economic gap between men and women in the early 1990s, but were also gender-inclusive. In a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy, students can use this as an example of how to negotiate gender roles when constructing their own identities. The change in gendered perspective in songs like "Rape Me" and "Daughter" show how roles can be ascribed to different voices and how students can choose aspects of their personalities to construct identities that do not always align with the binary of male/female gender identity, thus allowing students to not feel constricted by traditional gender roles.

C. Riot Grrrl

Of course, when it comes to subverting gender roles, Riot Grrrl's approach was far more direct than that of Nirvana or Pearl Jam. The all-female punk subculture (which also originated in the Pacific Northwest -- Olympia, WA, to be exact) featured more overtly political maneuvers than its grunge counterpart. The Riot Grrrl movement's goals and implications are outlined by Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald:

> riot grrrls seek to forge networks and communities of support to reject the forms of middle-class, white, youth culture they have inherited, and to break out of the patriarchal limitations on women's behavior, their access (to the street, to their own bodies, to rock music), and their everyday pleasures. (253)

Gottlieb and Wald also give a brief working history of the movement, reporting how one of the

movement's major bands, Bikini Kill, published a two-page manifesto in 1990 called

"Revolution Girl-Style Now" outlining the movement's beliefs:

> Under the banner of "envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit christian
>
> capitalist way of doing things," the manifest urged girls to "resist psychic death,"
>
> "cry in public," join bands, teach each other how to play instruments and produce
>
> fanzines, and generally fight back [sic]. (262)

The primary artists in this movement include the aforementioned Bikini Kill as well as

Bratmobile, Heavens to Betsy, and L7, which included a member who infamously threw her used

tampon at a male heckler at a 1992 concert in Boston. While such an act can be considered

extreme, the sentiment behind it reflected Riot Grrrl ideals: "Aside from raising the question of

what happens when women exercise their power in the form of an aggressive and confrontational

expression of their sexuality, this act -- a reverse rape? -- takes the notion of a woman's being 'on

the rag' and literally hurls it back at patriarchy" (Gottlieb and Wald 261).

An all-female hardcore punk movement is, by definition, an overt act against patriarchal

social scripts (or at least typical punk rock social scripts): "Given the long association of women

with commercial, vocal-oriented pop music and men with the more 'authentic,' guitar-based rock

genre there is a sense in which by simply picking up a guitar women musicians are committing

the kinds of gender trespass that feminist theory celebrates" (McCarthy 72-3). Furthermore, the

cultural impact of the movement led to many more women taking up the charge to move from

the traditional rock roles of "groupie, girlfriend or backup singer [whose] primary function [was]

to bolster male performance" and to "testify to the ways in which the experience of seeing

women occupy otherwise 'phallic' positions (such as lead guitarist) can indeed be transformative" (Gottlieb and Wald 256, 263). This appropriation of traditionally male rock roles was itself a show of *ethos* in that it built an identity based on disrupting social gender norms: "the ideas of place, position, and standpoint in feminist theory offer us a way of reconceiving *ethos* as an ethical political tool -- as a way of claiming and taking responsibility for our positions in the world, for the ways we see, for the places from which we speak" (Jarratt and Reynolds 52). The "position" Riot Grrrl artists took was that of opposition to traditional gender performance:

> Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds. (Butler 415)

The "subversive performances" of traditional gender roles are reflected in Riot Grrrl artists' often abrasive music. The qualities typically associated with "feminine" music -- softer sounds, gentle vocals, pretty melodies, glossy production values -- are discarded in favor of loud guitar, often furiously atonal vocals and lo-fidelity, punk-inspired production values. While there were predecessors to Riot Grrrl in this vein such as Joan Jett and Patti Smith, few women were quite as aggressive as Riot Grrrl artists in their approach. This rejection of traditional female roles and sounds in rock music reflects the appropriation of the traditionally male personality trait of assertion argued in Greenbaum's "bitch" pedagogy. Riot Grrrl artists building an identity based on masculine values within rock culture expose the societal nature of and the privilege granted to such gender roles, which is the thrust of "bitch" pedagogy. By showing how the same character

traits have both positive and negative connotations along gender lines, a study of Riot Grrrl in relation to "bitch" pedagogy would show students the influence of cultural conditions and beliefs on gender construction. Riot Grrrls built an identity by appropriating typically male tropes -- such as the punk rocker -- for females, constructing an identity that, by its existence, is an act of defiance.

In many ways, Bikini Kill is as much the standard-bearer for Riot Grrrl as Nirvana is for grunge. In fact, Cobain had a brief "relationship" with Bikini Kill drummer Tobi Vail, though in typical Riot Grrrl fashion, Vail rejected traditional heterosexual romantic relationships: "What Kurt was searching for in a relationship was the kind of family intimacy he had lacked since early childhood; but Tobi rejected the traditional relationship he sought as sexist" (Cross 158) The experience greatly influenced Cobain's attitude towards punk rock feminism: "In his notebook, Kurt wrote out two rules of rock that were quotations from Tobi: '1: learn *not* to play your instrument; 2: don't hurt girls when you dance (or any other time)" (Cross 159). This mindset was at the forefront of Bikini Kill's visual presentation. Visually, Bikini Kill sought to downplay a traditional selling point of female musicians: attractiveness. While Bikini Kill singer Kathleen Hanna was attractive, a Google search yields pictures that are mostly in black and white where the band looks every bit as "grungy" as Cobain or Vedder, showing her ability to deconstruct traditional notions of female beauty and attitude. Hanna typically takes photos (and performs live) with words such as "slut" scrawled across her chest or abdomen with a Sharpie. This is not only a mockery of the classic double-standard separating sexually active men and women, but an appropriation of a misogynist term that serves as "a form of social resistance, an attempt to strip the word, demystify it, displace its hegemonic power by co-opting the term and

claiming it as women's own" (Greenbaum, "Bitch" Pedagogy 162). Like the grunge artists' use of their bodies to complicate traditional masculine roles, Bikini Kill employed their bodies to mock traditional gender roles in a patriarchal society, thus empowering females by calling attention to the social constraints of gender roles. By downplaying their "prettiness," Bikini Kill built an identity that sought to be judged by its music and message, not its looks: "Not only do girls wield their bodies in performance, but they do so in such a way as to make their bodies highly visible: this visibility counteracts the (feelings of) erasure and invisibility produced by persistent degradation in a sexist society" (Gottlieb and Wald 268). At a time when women were gaining greater economic equality, this rejection of female performers as sexualized objects shows how Bikini Kill constructed a gendered identity that adhered to the attitude of their punk-feminist audience. This counter-identity deliberately not only complicated and challenged gender roles in rock music and patriarchal society at large, but it also gave Bikini Kill an air of authenticity, as "real" women who refused to conform to male-dominated ideas of what women performers should be.

Bikini Kill not only used its look to challenge gender norms, but also music and lyrics. Their songs are nearly exclusively abrasive, hard-edged punk rock, which, as discussed before, is an identity constructed against the traditional roles of women in rock music. Bikini Kill's lyrics are more overt in their approach. Lyricist Hanna's words often mockingly assume subordinate female roles to expose the damage they inflict on women. "White Boy," which appears on the reissue *The C.D. Version of the First Two Records*, opens with a young white male answering questions from a female interviewer. While the initial question is not stated, it quickly becomes clear that the young man is justifying sexual aggression towards young women: "Some of these

dumb hoes, those slut rocker bitches walking down the street, they're asking for it. They may

deny it, but it's true." Hanna begins mocking this sexist sentiment when the song properly

begins, ironically embracing a submissive role in the song: "Lay me spread eagle out on your

hill...It's hard to talk with your dick in my mouth." These lyrics juxtaposed with the interview

undermine misogynist views of female sexuality. This role-playing is typical of many Riot

Grrrls, and, as Gottlieb and Wald state, it has a specific intentionality and purpose:

> While self-consciously and ironically 'putting on' the guises of conventional
>
> female sexuality and femininity (that is, by acting alternatively or even
>
> simultaneously 'girlish' and 'slutty'), Riot Grrrls also express rage at violence
>
> against women (such as rape, incest, battering, as well as the self-inflicted
>
> violence of eating disorders), rage which ultimately challenges dominant
>
> vocabularies and ideologies. (267)

Bikini Kill's rage against standard gender roles is presumably shared by their audience (other

female punk fans), and it helps establish their authority as a group that is willing to undertake a

more pointed assault on gender construction than their grunge counterparts. This appeal to the

cultural beliefs of their audience helped Bikini Kill construct an "authentic" public identity that

students can see is a product of the band's culture and times.

Despite (or, more likely, because of) the direct challenging of gender norms, Riot Grrrl

never had the mainstream cultural impact that grunge enjoyed. While this can be blamed on the

fact that the movement is more of an offshoot of underground punk than grunge, it is mainly due

to an even greater hesitation in engaging corporate or mass culture than that shown by grunge

artists: "While Riot Grrrl recognizes the inevitability of gender as a social construct, and

attempts to disrupt ideologies of the feminine/femininity through counter-representations, the

movement has been more reluctant to extend this critique to its interaction with mass culture

generally" (Gottlieb and Wald 270). In typical alternative subculture fashion, the Riot Grrrl

movement really stopped before it ever had a chance to enact real social change: "in rejecting the

popular, Riot Grrrl may preclude the possibility of having a broad cultural or political

impact" (Gottlieb and Wald 271). However, Riot Grrrl's philosophy highlighting the inequality

of gender roles did manage to sneak into mainstream culture through its influence on grunge

artists (most notably Nirvana), and the movement did enjoy a fiercely devoted, if small, fan base.

Furthermore, a watered-down version of Riot Grrrl *ethos* was eventually co-opted by corporate

music, most notably in the form of the Spice Girls' "girl power" chants. The movement may

have been a tough pill to swallow for a mass patriarchal society, but its importance in

empowering young, predominantly white women to directly challenge gender roles is not to be

underestimated.

Of course, despite the ground gained by women by the early 1990s, patriarchal society is

still dominant, and Riot Grrrl artists' direct assault on that culture's beliefs may have been a

cause of the movement's smaller fan base. Grunge's gender manipulation was generally less

confrontational, but also still performed by white men, blunting the attack of their gender

construction. However, this only underscores the importance for a grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy

taking cues from Greenbaum's "bitch" pedagogy, as an analysis of cultural influence on

traditional gender roles and Riot Grrrl's appropriation of "male" personality traits can help

students see how the influence of their own culture mediates how they view gender roles and,

more importantly, how they chose to construct a "male" or "female" (or "other") identity around

those cultural tropes. Riot Grrrl's exposure of the societal influence behind how we see gender

shows students how to negotiate traditional gender roles in their own public identity

construction. By examining traditional gender construction in punk culture, Riot Grrrl artists

shine a light on how such roles shape identity and, when manipulated, can expose social

inequalities.

VI. "All in all is all we are" ("All Apologies," Nirvana) -- Conclusion

Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Bikini Kill all carefully constructed identities tailored to the circumstances of their audience. Whether this was grunge artists speaking out against the system that gave them financial privilege or Riot Grrrl artists' "self-conscious appropriation of the male rock star's script of sexual aggression and rage," these bands constructed an identity that was meant to convey honesty to the audience by appealing to cultural (or subcultural) beliefs (McCarthy 76). In analyzing these different constructions, students can see how cultural contexts also mediate their own public identity performances, which will guide them to greater self-awareness when constructing a self in their writing.

Furthermore, the study of how grunge artists attempted to negotiate the corporate rock structure while Riot Grrrl rejected it will show that, despite the artists' best efforts, their identities were still defined by the dominant ideology. The notion of the "confessional" shows students how grunge artists appealed to the feelings of disenfranchisement rampant in Generation X, while Riot Grrrl artists' aggression regarding gender roles appealed to a smaller subculture. Of course, Riot Grrrl's message was co-opted by dominant culture and alternative rock radio airwaves were soon populated by copycat bands such as Bush and Stone Temple Pilots. However, the fact that Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Bikini Kill still retain cultural importance underscores how they built "authentic" public identities where imitators could not. The way these artists also managed gender construction will show students how dominant culture defines gender by requiring performative acts that can be manipulated or appropriated by rebellious "actors":

that culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the

illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that on some level there is

social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and

in no sense ontologically necessitated. (Butler 412)

Gender construction in grunge/Riot Grrrl pedagogy highlights how culture defines identity in the

most basic terms (the first question anyone asks at the news of a birth is "Boy or Girl?"). Being

able to recognize these cultural influences on identity construction will show students how to use

those same influences to establish an "authentic" voice and to recognize when they are being

targeted by advertisers or others who wish to garner their support. The ability to negotiate the

influence of culture on identity construction will not only make students better writers, but more

able to see how dominant culture defines not only their lives, but the lives of all.

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ENGL 2090 Course Syllabus

Grunge, Riot Grrrl, and the Construction of the Rhetorical Self

Course Overview:

"Here we are now, entertain us"

> *- Kurt Cobain, "Smells Like Teen Spirit"*

This course focuses on how grunge and Riot Grrrl artists built public personas in light of cultural influence. Through rhetorical and critical analysis, we will discuss how Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Bikini Kill used music, lyrics, videos, live performances, and interviews to construct a public identity that appealed to the cultural conditions of the day. Through this appeal to cultural conditions, these artists constructed a public identity that was perceived as "honest" or "authentic" by many fans and critics.

Through analyzing these artists' public personas, we will apply our findings to how culture influences our own public identity construction through writing and other kinds of composing projects. We will use the discussion of grunge and Riot Grrrl artists as a starting point to analyzing the cultural conditions that mediate our own public identity construction in writing as well as on social media sites such as Facebook. The goal of this will be to see how "authentic" public identities are constructed in our own culture. We will look primarily at the artists'

negotiations with (or rejections of) the status quo, use of the "confessional" and how personal revelations helped build a public persona, and how the artists constructed notions of gender. By examining these three ideas, we will produce to main pieces of writing: an "autoethnography" in which you will examine your own cultural conditions in terms of economic, social, and historical context, and a "profile" of the public persona you use in your writing in academia as well as online in social media. These assignments will be supplemented by journals in which you will explore your private "identity" unhindered by outside influence (these will not be read by me). While the Final Project will be an unconventional writing assignment taking place online and using multimedia, by examining our own cultures and public personas, we will see how cultural conditions mediate the "identities" we show to the world.

Required Text:

- Cross, Charles R.: *Heavier Than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain*

- DeRogatis, Jim: *Milk It! Collected Musings on the Alternative Music Explosion of the '90s*

- Ferguson, Sarah: "The Comfort of Being Sad: Kurt Cobain and the Politics of Damage"

- Gottlieb, Joanne, and Gayle Wald: "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution and Women in Independent Rock"

- Moore, Ryan. "'...And Tomorrow Is Just Another Crazy Scam:' Postmodernity, Youth, and the Downward Mobility of the Middle Class."

Course Requirements:

- *Journal* - Your journals will be where you can write whatever is on your mind and document your "private" self. The purpose of the journal is for you to write your private thoughts and feelings without worry of what others may think. While I will check to make sure that you are writing, I will not read it myself.

- *Mid-term Project* - An ethnography-based assignment in which you investigate and describe your own culture. Information found will be used in Final Project.

- *Final Project* - An online "profile" describing your public self and the cultural influences that mediate the rhetorical identity you construct for the world. You will be encouraged to use not only text but pictures, videos, and audio to develop a representation of your constructed public identity.

- *Peer Workshops* - Peer workshops will serve two functions: for students to read each other's drafts to help guide each other, and for one-on-one groups in which you will have a "confidant" with whom you can discuss your journal. The purpose of this is to not only ensure that students are fulfilling the journal requirements, but also so that you all have a partner you can bounce ideas off of when examining the critical space between your private and public selves.

- *Conferences* - My door is always open to anyone who wants to come to see me during regular office hours or by appointment, but we will have *at least* two scheduled, mandatory conferences during the semester. These will be so that you can come to me directly with any questions or concerns you have about the class and so that I can provide you with more personalized feedback on your work.

- *Attendance/Punctuality* - You are allowed five unexcused absences. Beyond that, I will take five points (half a letter grade) off of your final grade per day missed. Also, coming in late for class is distracting to myself and your classmates. The knowledge of this class hinges on you being present for every class, so come to class and come on time.

- *Grading* - Grading breakdown is as follows:

      - Final Project: 40%

      - Mid-term: 30%

      - Quizzes/Daily Writing: 15%

      - Participation: 10%

      - Presentations: 5%

- *Late Work* - Please turn in work on time. Any assignments not turned in at or before the specified time will receive a ten-point (one letter grade) deduction.

- *Writing Etiquette* - While several of our assignments will center on unconventional writing platforms, I still ask that you take the assignments seriously and give an honest effort. For those assignments which are to be typed in turned in, adhere to MLA formatting.

- *Online Etiquette* - When responding to your peers online, please only post respectful, meaningful comments. No sarcasm, "trolling," or general meanness. Conversely, do not post vapid praise such as "cool pic!" Post substantive comments of at least 100 words. Failure to do so will effect your participation grade.

Calendar:

- Week 1 - Introduction/Introducing Identity Construction, Ethnography, and Research Methods

    - Introduction to course, ideas of identity construction and ethnographic research. Will also discuss popular music in composition classroom and its effects.

- Week 2 - Public Persona/Intro to Grunge

    - Continue with Newkirk's discussion of identity construction. Introduce grunge as a movement and Nirvana and Pearl Jam in particular. Begin to discuss identity in terms of performance.

- Week 3 - Generation X and Cultural Conditions

    - Begin to examine the cultural traits of "Generation X." Will also discuss current cultural trends in the same terms as Generation X (economic, historical, gender relations, etc.).

        - Reading: Ferguson "The Comfort of Being Sad: Kurt Cobain and the Politics of Damage"

- Week 4 - Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Identity Construction

    - Begin to discuss how Nirvana and Pearl Jam constructed identities that appealed to the cultural conditions of their day. How did they appeal to certain cultural conditions to construct an "honest" identity? How would their identities be different if they were emerging in today's culture?

        - Reading: DeRogatis, *Milk It! Collected Musings on the Alternative Music Explosion of the '90s* (selections)

- Week 5 - Nirvana vs. Status Quo

- How did Nirvana construct an anti-establishment identity while being reliant on that

"establishment" for their livelihood? How was their rebellion co-opted by corporate

music? How do we publicly express grievances against institutions that we disagree

with?   Is our "rebellion" similarly co-opted?

- Reading: Cross, *Heavier Than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain*

- *Week 6 - Pearl Jam vs. Status Quo*

- How did Pearl Jam construct an "anti-establishment" identity while being reliant on that

establishment for their livelihood? How did the Ticketmaster incident and the lack of

music videos support this construction? How did these aspects result in Pearl Jam's

dwindling popularity? How did Pearl Jam's identity stop appealing to their audience?

- *Week 7 - Grunge Gender Construction*

- Discuss how Nirvana and Pearl Jam both subtly and not-so-subtly constructed

masculine identities. Will analyze song lyrics, videos, and photo shoots. How did their

gender construction reflect the cultural conditions of their day? How do we define

"male" and "female" in our own culture? How do those definitions influence our own

identity construction?

- *Week 8 - Continue Gender Construction, Midterm*

- Wrap up discussion on gender construction. Midterm ethnographic assignment

detailing your own culture due.

- *Week 9 - Mid-Semester Break*

- *Week 10 - Gender as a Social Construct, Introduction to Riot Grrrl*

- Explore Butler's idea of gender as a social -- not biological -- construct. Do we see

signs of this in our own culture? Introduce Riot Grrrl as a whole, specifically Bikini

Kill

- Week 11 - Bikini Kill and Gender Construction/Introduction of Final Project

- Discuss how Bikini Kill appropriated typically male tropes within punk rock. How do

we ascribe certain personality traits along gender lines? How does this influence the

"self" we present in our writing? Will also introduce Final Project and commenting

methods when responding to peers' work.

- Week 12 - Bikini Kill vs. Status Quo

- How did Bikini Kill negotiate the mainstream? How did they appeal to their smaller

feminist punk rock audience? Does appealing to a small subculture undermine or

enhance a writer's attempts to construct "honesty?"

- Reading: Gottlieb and Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution

and Women in Independent Rock"

- Week 13 - Legacy of Riot Grrrl

- How was Riot Grrrl's gender rebellion eventually co-opted by corporate music? Do we

still feel Riot Grrrl's influence today? Are there any contemporary examples of

subcultures becoming appropriated by mainstream culture?

- Week 14 - Online Identity Construction/Discussion of Final Project

- How do you construct a public persona on your Facebook page or Twitter account?

How do cultural conditions influence this construction? Discuss details of final project.

- Week 15 - Peer Workshop on Final Project/Conferences

- Week 16 - Presentations of Final Project

      - Discuss your projects in front the class and give justifications for decisions made.

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Vita

Rory Callais was born in Metairie, LA and raised in Marrero, LA. He obtained his Bachelor of

Arts in English from the University of New Orleans in 2007. He began his graduate studies in

English at the University of New Orleans in 2010 and will receive a Master's of Arts in 2012.

His music journalism work has been published in *Offbeat* magazine and he will soon be a

Development Writer for Tulane University.