



## VOICES IN LONGITUDE AND LATITUDE

Girlhood at the Intersection of Art and Ethnography

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In a “discipline mainly of words” (Mead 1995: 79), how might the visual open other possibilities, questions, and ways of knowing for girlhood studies?<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I explore this question through a discussion of a video art installation project entitled *Voices in Longitude and Latitude*. While in some of my previous work I have also been interested in using video as a visual methodology in exploring girlhood subjectivities (Gonick 2003), with *Voices in Longitude and Latitude* I worked with a professional filmmaker to create this video installation.<sup>2</sup> We videotaped eighty hours of documentary vérité<sup>3</sup> footage, landscapes and cityscapes, domestic and public settings, and a series of interviews with girls aged thirteen to twenty-three. The footage was then edited into a eighteen-minute piece to be shown in art gallery settings.

Shot in four Canadian locations and regions with girls from different communities—Inuit in Kugluktuk, Nunavut; transgender in Halifax, Nova Scotia; Jewish in Toronto, Ontario; and immigrants from different African countries (Congo, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Sudan) in Winnipeg, Manitoba—*Voices in Longitude and Latitude* is centrally interested in thinking about the concept of girlhood subjectivities and their relationships with the Canadian landscape and its urban and rural environments. In experimenting with the use of the visual, I am also exploring the hybrid space between ethnography and art—a methodological space that suggests or invites routes through embodied multisensory ways of knowing that may create new openings for how girls and girlhood are conceived. The rich description of ethnography is fused with the visual, the aesthetic, kinesthetic, and other sensory/felt dimensions of arts production, resulting in a form of epistemological entanglement. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam suggest, “the visual is one point of entry ... into a multi dimensional world of intertextual dialogism” (2002: 22). In recent literatures across a variety of academic disciplines, the visual is being situated alongside other corporeal experiences as elements of the multisensoriality of everyday contexts and as mutually constituting

our perceptions (for example, Pink et al. 2010; Mitchell 2011). The interface between ethnography and arts practice invites a perspective that situates knowledge-making practices as always contextualized through the multisensoriality that characterizes thinking, seeing, feeling, hearing, moving, perceiving, and sensing relations.

The question of the relation of girled bodies to place and space, as feminist geographer Linda McDowell (1999) notes, is that the hierarchies and divisions of gender, race, and class are infused in how place and the environment are lived, understood, and used. These divisions are also “deeply implicated in the social production of space, in assumptions about the ‘natural’ and built environments and in the sets of regulations which influence who should occupy such spaces and who should be excluded” (11). For Ivinson and Renold (2013), the focus is on how being emerges through ongoing practices that are entangled with place, history, and landscape. Using a Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of assemblage, Ivinson and Renold note that assemblages can be made of all manner of matter: corporeal, technological, mechanical, virtual, discursive, and imaginary that carry affective charges. Agency, what they call becomings, emerge(s) in the intra-action of elements in assemblages. *Voices in Longitude and Latitude* explores the multisensory and affective relations of place and girled becomings through assemblages of landscape, infrastructure, objects, and voice. In the hybrid space of ethnography and art, *Voices in Longitude and Latitude* explores how talk in ethnographic interviews intra-acts with images of landscape, place, and other manner of matter (images of animals, interior and exterior spaces of houses, soccer balls, etc.) to produce assemblages that open new epistemologies for making sense of girls’ experiences. Like Ivinson and Renold, I am interested in how these assemblages can provide insights into resources and barriers that girls encounter in their daily lives, their dreams, and their aspirations for the future. In this way, *Voices* was initially conceived of as a response to postfeminist discourses that espouse gender equality as a fait accompli, with girls outscoring boys in achievement tests, high school graduation, and university entrances (Ringrose 2013). These discourses are a regular feature of media stories and have infiltrated education discourse and practice where boys, rather than girls, are now considered to be in need of special programs and resources. I am wondering how a hybrid ethnographic-art project might participate in the production of a counterdiscourse to these postfeminist claims about successful girls and failing boys, at a time when it is becoming harder and harder to talk about inequality as an ongoing issue in a neoliberal North American context. How might a visual, sensory material environment produced through video installation create

such an opening? How might new conceptions of the relationship between girlhood and place also be opened in such an environment?

### *Voices in Longitude and Latitude: Place*

In each location I worked with local schools or organizations to identify youth who might be interested in being part of the project. The number of youth varied in each community. For example, in Winnipeg there were about twelve participants, while in Halifax there were only two. The concept for the piece evolved as we worked in each of the communities, such that the locations were not shot in identical ways. With the exception of the Nunavut material, the interviews were conducted in-studio with sets that were conceptualized by my collaborator and created by a professional designer, with each participant having one that was unique.<sup>4</sup> For example, the Toronto set was a palette of pinks, purples, and blues, with cushions and throw rugs that might be found in the bedrooms of middle-class girls (see Figure 2.1). Twirling sparkles and crystals hung in the foreground. We asked the girls to tell us something about their interests so that these could be part of the set designs. One was into sports, and her set integrated a basketball hoop, a ball, and other sports paraphernalia. Another told us that one way she identifies is as being good at math. Her set was built with a background screen with math equations on it.



**Figure 2.1.** Toronto set. Courtesy: Noam Gonick.

In contrast, the Halifax sets have a marine theme, with fishing nets, buoys, barrels, and boats. In the background are screen projections of the rocks and ocean scenes from Peggy's Cove, a widely recognized Nova Scotian landscape. We wanted the imagery to subtly mirror the idea of transitions, sea to land, sea to sky, land to sky, rocks to water, with the sexually transitioning youth in the foreground. That is, the images of the transitions of nature from one matter to another link the coexistent relationship between the material environment and trans-youth bodies. In Winnipeg, the palette is oranges and reds with swaths of rich and textured cloth draped in various configurations. There are different kinds of cloth, stained maps, wooden carvings, and hanging beads that frame each of the unique interview spaces. For the Nunavut interviews the backdrop is the same in each of the interviews and consists of a simple bearskin.

On one level the sets act as a shorthand visual cue as to the different regional origins of the participants. Toward that end, each location is introduced with an opening segment that highlights an assemblage of local landscape features. For example, Toronto is introduced by images and sounds around Dundas Square, a busy downtown intersection of neon signs, pedestrians, and streetcars; Winnipeg is signaled by prairie grasses blowing in the wind; and Nunavut with scenes of Arctic ice and snow. However, the iconic images of Canada also bump up against the ambient sounds, individual stories, and the juxtaposition of moving images, such that what is also signaled is something about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, and how we might conceptualize the temporary convergences of people, things, discourses, and place (Pink 2011) as participating in the production of subjectivities. The iconic images of Canadian landscapes are juxtaposed with the moving images work like Bollas's (1993) imaginings that as people walk around in their everyday lives, they are *called out* by the places they walk through and the objects they encounter (Ivinson and Renold 2013). Foucault reminds us that we do not imagine space as empty; instead we recognize that spaces are "laden with qualities," that they are "haunted by fantasies" (1978: 176; see Ivinson and Renold 2013). Foucault imagined that sometimes space can feel like "running water" and at other times, "fixed, solidified like stone or crystal" (177). According to Ivinson and Renold, these textured images provide an embryonic vocabulary for what we might call the affects of space. While the sets of *Voices* may conjure up certain kinds of spaces, the moving images invoke other kinds. With the girled bodies in the foreground, together these assemblages signal the idea that places can call us into being.



**Figure 2.2.** Halifax set. Courtesy: Noam Gonick.

As a four-screen projection, *Voices* is an assemblage of the girls, the sets, the local landscapes, cityscapes, and the documentary vérité footage of the girls going about their daily lives. In Winnipeg, for example, when we asked the girls to let us know the kinds of things they would like to be filmed doing, they invited us to watch them playing soccer, and participating in sessions of radio camp, broadcasting, and drama club. In Nunavut the girls invited us to film them ice fishing, playing hockey, and painting their nails, among other activities. This collection of activities and images plays across the four screens in constant non-syncopated movement, in a consideration of how the temporary convergences of people, things, discourses, and place constitute specific phenomenological realities that are constantly shifting as the very elements that compose them are themselves in movement. Neither voice, place, nor girl is understood as a fixed source, locality, or identity but, rather, as events created through interactive movement and viewed in movement as part of a world that is itself always in motion.

In this way, *Voices* is a convergence of Deleuzian thinking on becoming and space with the notion of place from feminist critical geography (Massey 2005). In a Deleuzian framework, identity/difference emerges as an effect of connections and relations within and between different bodies, affecting and being affected by each other. It is a continuum and a multiplicity in a constant state of becoming or differentiation in relation to each singular body as it affects other bodies and is itself affected

(Deleuze 1994). For Deleuze, becoming entails the interconnectedness of things in the world (Deleuze and Guattari 1987); things are always-already in relations with multiple and different others, and, most importantly, these things become through these dynamic relations. Becoming is a constant state of movement and transformation through the interconnectedness of things. Space in a Deluzian sense is fragmented, rhizomatic, fluid, ambiguous, vulnerable, and open to constant change. It is linked with how one encounters, constructs, and performs the body, thereby mapping the relationship of space to subjectivity and ways of knowing (Springgay 2008).

Elizabeth Grosz (1995) contends that an understanding of the ways in which subjects occupy, materialize, and disrupt space is predicated on an exploration of how bodies and spaces define and shape one another. Space becomes both the production of culture and the making and circulation of intersubjective experiences. This notion of space is what Rosi Braidotti calls enfolded materialism. Materiality in this sense does not refer to the body's natural or biological structure, but to the "complex interplay of highly constructed social and symbolic forces" (2006: 21). Enfolded materialism envisages the body through intensities, flows, and affects. Thus, the embodied subject becomes a process of intersecting forces and spatial connections—a becoming body.

Similarly, for feminist geographer Doreen Massey, the "event of place" (2005: 140), or the making of places, is contingent on movement. She defines place as "the coming together of the previously inter-related—a constellation of processes rather than a thing." It is temporary: "the elements of this 'place' will be, at different times and speeds again dispersed" (141). In this perspective, there is an ongoing reciprocal relationship between people and the places they inhabit. People produce places and also derive identities from them. People are constituted through place (Osbourne 2001). In this way, landscape, according to Osbourne, is a verb not a noun; we should think of landscape not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process. Landscape is never inert; people engage with it, rework it. Osbourne suggests that the question to be asked is not just what landscape is or means but what it does, how it works as a cultural practice. The suggestion is that landscape constitutes a discourse through which identifiable social groups historically have framed themselves and their relations with both the land and with other human beings and that this discourse is related epistemologically to ways of seeing (Cosgrove 1998).

As a video installation, *Voices in Longitude and Latitude* represents the notion of landscape as an active actor in the creation of girlhoods as the images emerge, merge, fade, disappear, and reemerge in ever-chang-

ing mutually constituting relations. The four screens are positioned in such a way that viewers must walk through the exhibition space and thus no single position allows for taking in the full range of images. The audio track invites the movement of the viewer through the space. However, there are myriad possible combinations of images, sound, and movement, depending on how the viewer moves or does not move through the space. In this way, viewers may experience the landscapes as enfolded and girded through a process of connective relations where flows, intensities, and forces between these relations produce generative possibilities. As moving images, the rocks at Peggy's Cove, the Manitoba grasses, the lights on Dundas Square, and the snow-covered hills of the Arctic are not inert, fixed backgrounds against which things occur; rather, they become active and participative, complex bodies creating new ways of organizing thoughts, events, and meaning. Each is busy with its own kind of activity. For example, Dundas Street hums with the sound of streetcars and a disembodied voice directing pedestrians to cross the road; objects and people enter and exit the frame; streetcars pass each other; lights change color; bodies pass through a crosswalk. The CN Tower at nightfall almost imperceptibly transitions the Toronto setting to Nunavut with its own telecommunications tower lit up at dusk. A snowmobile buzzes through the shot; an oil delivery truck turns the corner; people walk along the snowy road—it is an active landscape. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to this as haptic space,



**Figure 2.3.** Gendering the Nunavut landscape. Courtesy: Noam Gonick.

which generates new becomings through connections, deterritorializations, intensities, and a succession of always-shifting linkages. Like the CN Tower shot, the scenes are interlinked. Each transition is accomplished through the movements within the landscape shots, moving between the four screens.

However, I do not want to suggest that the relations of bodies, things, and landscape are merely random. On the contrary, there is a politics to the interactions of forces, agents, objects, sites, and locations of subjectivity (Braidotti 2005/2006). In a central sequence of *Voices*, the shifting images are of houses and neighborhoods in each of the four locations—trailer parks, suburban bungalows, and modernist mansions. In some instances, the girls are seen standing outside their homes. The images shift and change to the breath of one girl who is seen on various screens doing a martial arts sequence on her front lawn—she kicks, yells, bows, and breathes deeply in and out, and the images of houses move and shift. Some dwellings have antlers on the roof while others sport manicured lawns or views of smokestacks from a window. While attention is given to visual symmetries of color, shape, styles, and textures between and among the various houses and in the vegetation, attention is also drawn to the asymmetries of resources, capital, and possessions.

This segment of the piece conveys how the relations between landscape, girls, gender, and objects signifies power relations but is also an instrument of cultural power since particular places can be read as constituting exclusions(s) and inclusion(s) and thus embodying thresholds of certain kinds of (un)belonging (Fortier 1999). Furthermore, with the inclusion of images of infrastructure such as highways, communication towers, and electrical wires, place is seen to operate at the intersection of both global and local processes, and these processes include social, economic, political, and technological inputs (Massey 1994). Thus, the piece aims to disrupt the idea of landscape as simply given and inevitable and makes the case for seeing it as a cultural and social construction that features in the reproduction of social inequalities. This asymmetry is also a feature of the audio track, which, as the piece's title suggests, is of particular importance.

### ***Voices in Longitude and Latitude: Voices***

The audio track consists of ambient sounds—the whirl of a snowmobile, the lapping of waves against rock, the crunching of feet on a gravel path, and the voices of the girls. Their stories are heard as short snippets rather than full narratives, and most often the voices are heard

without a corresponding visual image of the speaking girl. The idea of traditional documentary, with stories that are often crafted as unitary, fully conscious, complete, and non-contradictory, is thus disrupted. The visual-sound event becomes one of discontinuities and rupture. The Toronto girls enthusiastically list the numerous vacation destinations they have visited, while one of the Inuit girls speaks wistfully of her desire to go to Paris. The Winnipeg girls speak of the national traumas of their countries of origin (the genocide of Rwanda, the civil war of Congo), while one of the Halifax participants talks about experiences of abuse and homelessness. While some of the girls speak of their imagined future families, others speak of the children they already have or that their families have lost. Aspirations of becoming doctors, lawyers, and celebrities are juxtaposed to those of others who hope to be able to graduate from high school. The voices, together with the images previously discussed, are organized in such a way as to intervene and disrupt the postfeminist neoliberal discourse of *successful* girls (Gonick 2006; Pomerantz et al. 2013; Ringrose 2013), which positions girls as the inheritors of new structures of power and advantage. Some girls' stories do reveal a skillful negotiation of the education system and an anticipation of a smooth entry into the job market and/or family life, while other stories suggest a struggle with just being able to meet basic needs. The latter are without exception girls who have been marginalized because of race, sexuality, immigration status, regionality, or class.

The stories are personal but also speak more generally to the complexities of becoming a girl in the twenty-first century, including the question of who is a girl. From Shameen,<sup>5</sup> an Ethiopian immigrant living in Winnipeg who tells a story about wanting to become famous and to meet the pop star Justin Bieber to Amber, a transgendered working-class youth in Halifax who fantasizes about wearing a purple bustier to her high school prom, and Sedana, an Inuit girl who speaks tearfully of wanting to leave her boyfriend and the father of her child, the narratives are treated like a form of textile threaded in a non-linear pattern and interwoven into a textured, subtle soundscape. The voices are ephemeral, in transition, opening and unfolding such that meaning emerges not through the individual voice, but in the relations between voices, bodies, and images. Their meaning never finds a final resting place but is constantly being reconfigured in new and unpredictable ways. What is created is an interstitial space of *other thans* that point toward other possible emergent stories, complicating understandings instead of reducing them to universal points or markers.

For example, in juxtaposing the narratives from the different regions and communities, each is encountered as always in relation to

another's story, rather than as an individualized account of a singular story. The indeterminacy of meaning-making is suggested. Not only are notions of girlhood and what it means to be a girl challenged, but so are neoliberal conceptions of the isolated, rational, self-inventing subject (Gonick 2006; Davies and Bansel 2007). What slowly emerges in between the gaps and interstices of voice and image, body, and landscape is the flow of potentiality, the subtle and open processes that link subjects and their social, physical, and structural milieus together in ways that may help young people negotiate the constraints of the place/space/gendered/sexed expectations of their everyday lives. This is not, therefore, some free-flowing potentiality that is unconstrained by power or power relations, but, as Ivinson and Renold suggest (2013), it is a potentiality in assemblages that are always located in their socio-historical places, and that sometimes produce moments of deterritorialization, when girls, places, and other manner of matter come together in dynamic ways to create, if only temporarily, something new, something Other.

## Conclusion

In recent literatures across a variety of academic disciplines the visual is being resituated as one element of the multisensoriality of everyday contexts (Pink et al. 2010). As different facets of living in the world, attending to the senses requires us to engage with the question of how to produce research from within an ontology and epistemology where affect, the pre-discursive, and the discursive are mutually articulated (Taguchi 2012). For Taguchi and others using a postconstructionist framework that encourages social scientists to think of the intra-action of more than human worlds (landscapes, places, spaces), attending to these dynamics is crucial for “transgressing what we already know and for extending knowing into other potential realities” (267). In creating *Voices in Longitude and Latitude*, we are exploring the in-between-ness, or hybrid space, between ethnography and art. In combining contemporary art practice with sociological questions, *Voices* produces what Springgay (2008) has called an entanglement—a space where seemingly disconnected ideas and affective relations come together: girls, landscapes, urban-scapes, objects, snippets of words and stories. These disconnected ideas and images are not necessarily ever resolved into coherence. They produce surprising and unpredictable forms of relationality where knowledge is created, mediated, and ruptured, and where meaning may be unfamiliar.

As a visual and audio experience, *Voices in Longitude and Latitude* opens up the possibility of multisensory ways of knowing in which images, sounds, affects, and spatial delineations are read onto and through one another. The visual, sensory, material environment of the piece situates knowing and meaning in movement and in the in-between where language hesitates and falters, where uncertainty cannot be represented and where knowledge may remain unspoken. We aimed to create an encounter that is not a visual/auditory objectification of experiential realities but is instead performative. It is one that opens bodies to other bodies and encounters, where the meanings, understandings, theories, and research methodologies generated become multiple and entangled. In creating *Voices in Longitude and Latitude*, I am interested in producing a research, aesthetic, and affective encounter that can begin to engage the complex, dynamic assemblages that Deleuze and Guattari theorize about. It is one that explores what new ideas about girls and girlhood may emerge in the intra-action of bodies, landscapes, places, and other matter and what new concepts of place materialize with the insertion of a multiplicity of girled bodies.

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## Notes

1. Mead here is, of course, speaking of the field of anthropology. However, the description is equally true for other disciplines within the social sciences.
2. The filmmaker is my brother, Noam Gonick.
3. Documentary *vérité* is a style of documentary filmmaking and is sometimes called observational cinema. It often takes an ethnographic stance, documenting film subjects in the contexts of their daily lives. Some forms of the genre are also concerned with disrupting notions of truth and reality in film.

4. The Halifax sets were designed by Ian Grieg; the Toronto and Winnipeg sets were designed by Taavo Sedoor.
5. These names are all pseudonyms.

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