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Sarah Jacobson

Alana Moskowitz
Bard College

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Bard

Sarah Jacobson

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of the Arts
Of Bard College

by
Alana Moskowitz

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2009

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Preface

This project, as it stands today, is by no means complete. I am currently unable to make everything that I have learned make sense. Every time I attempt to write a conclusion or improve upon any of the following sections, feelings of immense and utter frustration start to brew, rendering me intellectually catatonic. I feel like nothing I write will be worthy, nothing I can say will fully communicate the meaning of a life. After eight months of research, I still do not know how to put the information I have gathered together in a compelling fashion. The only way I can submit this project is by taking a page from Sarah's book, in turn placing more weight on this paper as a piece of creative expression rather than getting caught up in the stifling limitations of technical perfection. This project will not end when I hand it in, or perhaps ever. For the moment I can only take solace in the fact that the experience of researching and writing has been invaluable. However, process is not product, and I will not be satisfied until I have created a piece that I am truly proud of… as of Wednesday, April 29th 2009, there is no end in sight.

Introduction

Culturally, explosion is a word reserved for the most meteoric movements; one would never link it, or any of its synonyms, to any of the ways women and film have collided within the mainstream; there has never been any kind of definitive proliferation, only marginally progressive exceptions to the tyrannical male standard. Of course there have been transient instances of minimal progress, especially within the fields of documentary filmmaking, as well as in various theories and films pertaining to the avant-garde, and it would be absolutely criminal to omit these contributions from this haphazard two-sentence history. However, women in the realm of mainstream film production are, and have always been, in desperate need of revolution, girls style now.

Enter Sarah Jacobson, a scrappy filmmaker from the Midwest addressing such neglected issues as girlhood sexuality, representation, and empowerment, all communicated with a sense of fun and accessibility. Active in the 1990s, she was able to virtually single-handedly write, edit, direct and distribute her films, almost like a superheroine, possessing powers of infinite gumption. On the weight of her creative shoulders rested the hopes and dreams of marginalized and underrepresented girl-youth across the country. Exit Sarah Jacobson; dead at the age of 32 from a truly and deeply tragic case of stage four uterine cancer, so far progressed it had metastasized to her bones. Like countless other politically likeminded female filmmakers, Sarah was never able to breach the mainstream; in her fifteen year artistic breadth, she never had the opportunity to access what became the male-dominated field of independent cinema or

reach the ultimate goal of creative production within Hollywood. Instead, she took the reigns of distribution into her own hands, personally schlepping her films across the country and world.

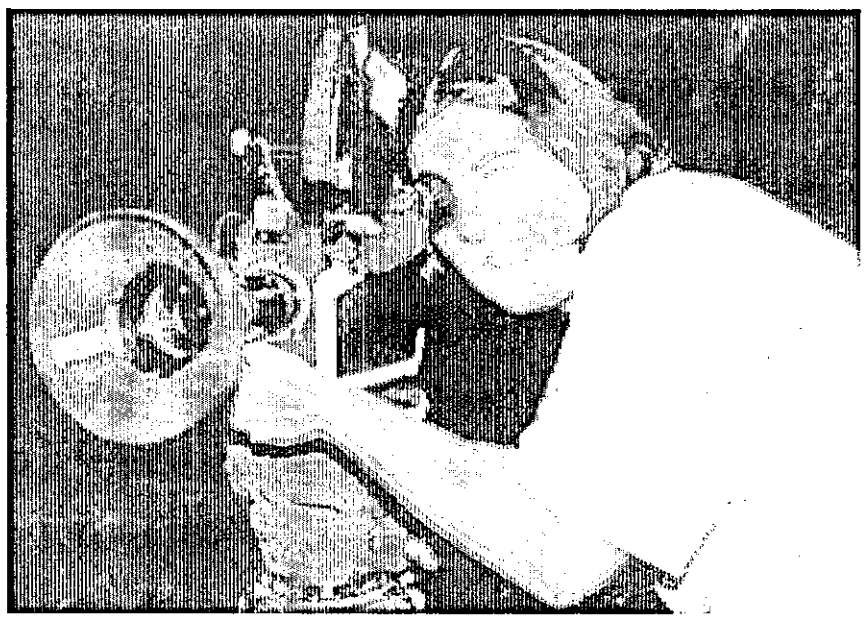
Why then can't women in the film industry grow at the same rate as the group of cells that killed one of its potential leaders? This project attempts to shed light on the various hindrances that have traditionally impeded on the emergence of this unrealized explosion. These patriarchal obstructions are all-powerful and seemingly infinite; accordingly, it is impossible to enumerate all contributing factors in a meaningful fashion. Rather, this is a case study of someone who very well may have sparked a movement, igniting a group of girls to filmically share their experiences and change oppressive representation to a widespread degree, yet was never able to infiltrate and supplant those powers of male technocracy and plutocracy. Sarah's quest for expansive change within popular representation and imaging of girlhood was curtailed, and the same misrepresentations visually inundating girl culture in the early nineties are still present and thriving today.

In attempt to disavow certain powers in place, this is a project about Sarah Jacobson. In other words, I do not want to place validity on the patriarchal structures that Sarah intertwined by viewing her life purely in opposition to them; instead I want to highlight the alternatives she purposes through her work. This project is not solely focused on the heartbreaking, all-encompassing difficulties associated with being artistically productive in a capitalistic, therefore patriarchal society. Those issues invariably arise, yet in order to escape from being defined by the oppressor, it is important to glance at all areas of a life deserving of unbridled recognition. The life and

films of Sarah Jacobson warrant more critical and factual analysis than presently received; therefore this project is based more on compilation and pastiche, rather than a restrictive, defeatist dissertation recapitulating all too familiar difficulties.

Potential transgressive possibilities perhaps can come from a new realization of older films, or transgressive actualities. The life of Sarah Jacobson provides a mapping of how to create in a manner that builds new ways of representation and realization for generations to come. Though eruption of the Internet and cheaper forms of technology have arisen since her passing, Jacobson's guiding principles of DIY, or do-it-yourself, filmmaking and distribution still provide a useful tool and strategy for filmmakers who aspire to create by out-foxing the political and financial restrictions in place. In turn, her life weaves a subversive cartography, maneuvering through the intricacies of the film and music world to land in a realm of cultural entitlement outside of patriarchal representation.

Since under-representation speaks to the heart of almost all issues raised by Sarah Jacobson through her life and art, representation is the thrust of this paper. This is an earnest attempt to look at a life in a myriad of ways, through biography, critical analysis, interviews, images and general implications that arise from her life and work. The goal of this gathering of materials is to represent Sarah as thoroughly and comprehensively as possible. In the ensuing sections there is only one unassailable truth: the meaning, impact, and influence of Sarah Jacobson transcend the pages that follow.



The Life of Sarah Jacobson, Abridged

"My name is Sarah. I grew up in Edina, Minnesota, the snottiest suburb in the Twin Cities area. I was a total geek when I was younger and hated school. My dream was to become famous and to come back one day and make everybody jealous"
From *High School Reunion*

Sarah Jacobson was born August 25th, 1971 in Norwalk, Connecticut. Her family moved from Connecticut to Morris Plains, New Jersey, and finally settled in Edina, a small suburb of Minneapolis in 1983. Sarah's parents chose that particular suburb because they had heard that the public school system was one of the best in the country. The High School was primarily comprised of students with politically conservative leanings. Sarah's liberal democratic beliefs were antithetical to those of the schools general populace, making the inherent hardships that go hand in hand with Midwestern adolescent development especially pronounced. Later in life, Sarah jokingly thanked her parents for sending her to that specific public school saying, 'It gave me something to

rebel against'. In retrospect, Sarah's mother, Ruth believes she might have been better off in the Minneapolis public school system because even though it was filled with drugs and other corresponding problems, it was a much more liberal environment. Realistically, her times in Edina seem to have brought about massive amounts of creative ammunition, as seen in Sarah's film *High School Reunion*, where she goes back to Edina ten years after her graduation and reopens some of the issues she dealt with as a teenager. *High School Reunion* however was only one of the many productive conceptions birthed from high school, coming to fruition later in her filmmaking lifespan, showing that her experiences in high school were incredibly formative and helped to shape her outlook on filmmaking in later years.[1]

Not too surprisingly, traces of Sarah's adult character can easily be seen in early moments of childhood creativity and independence. In a personal interview, Ruth recalls, "when she was in preschool, before kindergarten, they had a play for the parents and we came and we were singing and Sarah stepped forward like she had a solo and led the group, except she didn't have a solo". This type of behavior sheds light on the type of unrefined independence exhibited by Sarah in her later years, displaying a type of sheer determination mixed with uninhibited moxie.

In further recollecting her eldest daughters earliest years, Ruth emphasizes Sarah's precocious nature. Learning to talk at eighteen months, Sarah's first verbal utterance was 'exit'. Though a past marker of advanced maturation, when the word is recontextualized it devolves into a maladjusted set of negative implications; it harkens back to the pains attributed to an unfair loss, or early 'exit'. However easily the trap may

[1] The biographical information is compiled from an interview with Ruth Jacobson, 21 February 2009. See Appendix F, 113.

be set, it is not productive to fall into such a restrictive lamenting, mythologizing limitation. Let us then turn a blind eye to such menacing remuneration and instead focus on illuminating the life of the film worlds self-proclaimed "queen of the underground", and the expansive possibilities that exist within her narratives.

In terms of remembrance, there are certain moments within these narratives that change with Sarah's ambitions. In 1993, early in her filmmaking journeys, she told the zine "Nervendings," that she made her first film in her sophomore year of high school stating, "It felt like it was a great way to make a difference. So much more powerful than being a lawyer or marching in protests, because in a way, you change people internally [...] A really good film can almost save you. I wanted to be able to do that". Her so-called first film was about a man committing suicide and was apparently so emotionally evocative that it made her teacher cry for the first time from a student film. Though temporally the inception of Sarah's filmmaking origin aligns at age sixteen, her remembrance of this beginning experience was quite different in the year 1998. When asked about her initial movie-making involvement Sarah replied,

> "when I was 16, I saw Stranger Than Paradise on TV, and I just was like, 'I'm going to do this. This is what I'm going to do.' So when I was in high school, I would do a lot of video projects and stuff. They were horrible. It was hard, because my dad had a video camera, which supposedly was a 16th-birthday present to me, but he wouldn't let me use it. I had to sneak it out of the house, I would end up doing stuff like, 'Oh, look, me and my friends smoking a bong.' Really stupid stuff ("Virgin Territory").

Perhaps Sarah wanted to personally embody the pluralism of experience she sought within mainstream representation. However, it is more likely that her attitudes towards filmmaking in 1998 were not those of 1993, and this shift in remembrance speaks to a shift in creative focus. Therefore, this instance is not one of contradiction but productive

implication. However there are more pertinent areas of her high school experience to navigate before getting into these larger, meta-textual issues.

Extra-curricular activities were always very important and meaningful experiences for Sarah. In addition to working at an art house movie theater in Minneapolis, she would regularly partake in various plays and theatrical productions. Her extra-curricular activities were not limited to those of the average Edina Senior High School student. From biking in France to a program for gifted children in Israel, Sarah continually embarked upon various adventurous escapades, all while maintaining a formidable GPA. Sarah graduated high school in 1989 with honors and three suspensions, one of which was a type of tribute to the film *Fast Times At Ridgemont High* (Directed by Amy Heckerling). During math class Sarah delivered a pizza to the classroom, much to the delight of her classmates, yet to the dismay of her teacher.

As easily witnessed through this brazen pizza stunt, Sarah's personality has often been described as abrasive and aggressive. It would appear that this type of character trait came from a combination of traumatic personal hardships, coupled with experiences from being the only Jewish kid in a primarily Christian high school. These experiences helped her to acquire the rough chops necessary to be a woman in the masculine dominated field of filmmaking. She explains in regard to high school, "When I moved to Edina from New Jersey when I was twelve, I never fit in, I always had to fight. Big groups of young guys made fun of me and it toughened me up" ("Star Tribune"). Although Sarah was 'toughened up' by this particular breed of Edina jock, the group of professors she encountered after graduating from Edina High School in 1989 proved to be an entirely different animal; one Sarah could not so-easily adjust to.

Immediately after high school, Sarah ventured East to Bard College, however she could only tough it out for two years. During this time she faced many challenges surrounding her interest in film and the Bard Film program's methods of instruction. She felt that Bard was too focused on the avant-garde approach to filmmaking. As Marc Madenwald explained in 1993, "the decidedly avant-garde atmosphere of Bard's film program left Sarah feeling constrained and unable to pursue her cinematic interests" and as Sarah states, "where people were just as rigidly liberal as my high school classmates were rigidly conservative". Her relationships with various members of the college were filled with animosity and Sarah's abrasive tendencies did not mesh with their type of unilateral program. She felt that Bard would not teach anyone working after 1965 who did color, and deemed the programs approach "super preservationist" (Jacobson, Interview 2004). However, in retrospect Sarah was somewhat disappointed that she did not learn the type of avant-garde film Bard purported in more loving, passionate way. She later became more open to the types of film being taught at Bard (more esoteric and theorized film), but clearly at that point in her life she was primarily concerned with the power film has to internally change the spectator (as realized in her high school film pursuits). In 1990, for Sarah, that power came from accessibility coupled with the narrative form.

It was not only the materials being taught at Bard that left Sarah frustrated and ready to explore other places, she also believed that professors did not provide constructive criticism of her work. In fact, Sarah thought that some of her teachers would undermine her work through their criticism. One of her projects at Bard centered on a female character seeking liberation through escapism. This venture of emancipation is

embodied in the station wagon, and like most of her films, it reflected her life and was incredibly meta-textual. In this tale constructed by Sarah, her female protagonist is a filmmaker, and the tone of the film as described by Sarah, is serious. Sarah stated that when acquiring guidance for the film a male professor suggested she change the last line to be a criticism by the male character of the woman's film, and in doing so suggest that the film end on a humorous note. In Sarah's opinion this change would make the female protagonist a caricature of the intended character, as she explains in a paper she wrote at Bard, "everything would be undermined by this change" (Jacobson, "Early Writings").

In 1990, while Sarah was a student at Bard, experimental filmmaker Peggy Ahwesh came to present some of her work while attempting to gain a position as a professor within the film department. During the showing Sarah "went ballistic" inciting other students to somewhat verbally assault Ahwesh's film, *Martina's Playhouse* (Jacobson, Interview 2004). When the proverbial dust had settled, Ahwesh wound up crying in the bathroom. Although there was never any formal type of reconciliation, Sarah later elected to take a group production course with Ahwesh (after she had gained employment). While at Bard her parents got divorced and this was a very traumatic experience for Sarah. She wound up crying in Peggy Ahwesh's office, even though in Ahwesh's opinion, the two of them were never really that close.

Drawing meaning from the various reasons Sarah and Peggy did not get along during their time together at Bard is an interesting exercise. Superficially their alliance would seem to be natural, two women filmmakers struggling to keep their respective heads above water in the male dominated world of film (scholastic and underground

being the variety aforementioned). Glancing beneath the surface, historically and subtextually, clarifies the specific reasoning for why the two were at ends.

Ahwesh's employment at the college marked a type of turning point, she was the first woman to be hired to teach film production. Yet instead of seeking a type of ally through Ahwesh, Sarah openly disliked her. In Ahwesh's opinion, "I think I was just someone who represented something. I was this woman who wasn't really making the kinds of films that she wanted to make. She was only really ever invested in, and all about what she was going to be doing. I wasn't part of her package". It is interesting to note that Ahwesh viewed Sarah Jacobson and Jennifer Reeves (*Fear of Blushing, Light Work I*), both attending Bard concurrently, as 'book-ends'. Sarah being primarily concerned with narrative filmmaking and a more accessible approach to the underground while Reeves's work was more based on a theorized approach to filmmaking. Overall Ahwesh believes that the heart of Sarah's discontent with the Bard Program lies within her feelings of displacement.

In 1998, while San Francisco experimental filmmaker Greta Snider[2] was teaching at Bard (she replaced Ahwesh for a year), Sarah came back to show her films. While staying at Ahwesh's house (where Snider was residing at the time), Sarah was still voicing her dislike for Ahwesh. Ahwesh took her harshness with a grain of salt stating, "It could have been a time in her life, where it could have been anybody who was me, and she would have been like 'fuck you'. I never really took it that personally, because she didn't know me".[3]

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[2] Sarah on Greta Snider: "Her films are like her zines, made up of different stories and patchworked together. Even though they are very experimental, they don't bore me like that self-indulgent avant-garde shit I was forced to watch in art school"

[3] For more information regarding Peggy Ahwesh's interactions with Sarah Jacobson see Appendix C, 88.

Sarah made two other films of note while studying at Bard, *Sweet Miss: The Disco Years*, and *Road Movie, or What I Learned in a Buick Station Wagon.* The former is a 16mm black and white dance video, and the later is a more conceptual piece about the experiences of being a female filmmaker. The latter features some of Sarah's Bard professors, including Adolfas Mekas, who was later responsible for bringing experimental filmmaker George Kuchar to Bard for a lecture and screening of his work.

While Sarah was at Bard she met underground film legend George Kuchar and the two immediately hit it off. Kuchar was teaching at the Art Institute in San Francisco, and in 1991 Sarah decided to leave Bard in hopes of being more comfortable in the urban environment of San Francisco. Kuchar was her mentor and taught her the ropes of low budget filmmaking. As Sarah stated later in an interview with Ed Halter, "you can get away with anything by making a fake paper rose and make that the background [...] If you can cheat with the way you do your music why can't you cheat with the way you make your films". Though Bard was not the best fit for her filmic pursuits she was able to benefit immensely from the technical skills acquired as well as utilize some avant-garde traits through *Serial Killer*. During summers between college she interned at the Walker Arts Center where video and film curator Bruce Jenkins helped to teach her the interworkings of the film world in regard to distribution, publicity, and practice. She was able to gain access to the facilities at the center because her mother, Ruth was employed there as a tour guide.

While in San Francisco and attending the Art Institute, Sarah shot her feminist cine-manifesto, *I Was a Teenage Serial Killer*. The film was shot over the course of a year and a half and was financed primarily through Sarah's job working at a local record

store (her parents generously donated the rest of the funds). Sarah was always looking for the most creative way to film, shoot and distribute her films. More often than not, the word 'creative' in Sarah's world of artistic production was synonymous with 'cheap'. The film was shot for $1600 and Sarah attributes part of the reasons for leaving Bard for San Francisco to the tools she was able to utilize there, "that's why I went to the San Francisco Art Institute, because they had three mixers and I wouldn't have to pay a ton of money to mix my film, I could just get it out there". The film was shot with a Bolex 16mm camera and sound was taped on a Pixelvision camera (fisher price videocam that records on cassette). The process of filming involved shooting a scene once for visual content and then again for the sound. Sarah acquired advanced technical skill from taking numerous production classes at Bard. While she was a freshman at Bard she was able to get into upper level production courses. As a sophomore at the Art Institute, she utilized these skills acquired at Bard, and taught seniors how to use some of the more complex equipment.

Sarah further integrated these more experimental techniques into her narrative films. For instance, while she was making *Serial Killer* a print came out scratched, and Sarah somewhat despaired over the thought of having to reshoot the 'ruined' scenes (the process of filming *Serial Killer* was arduous. She would only shoot one scene a month due to financial and temporal restrictions). George Kuchar recollects:

> It either got scratched in the printer, it was ruined some how. She got it out of the lab and it had giant scratches in it. And she showed it to me and said, 'I have to throw it away' and I said 'no'. All you gotta do is design another sequence that has big lines running through it and make it look like it's a motif'.[4]

[4] For more information regarding George Kuchar's relationship with Sarah Jacobson see Appendix B, 76.

In future interviews Sarah would discuss how much George Kuchar influenced her filmmaking and was a type of mentor, and perhaps this instance is what truly cemented their bond. When asked about his influence, Kuchar simply stated, "she was strong on her own. In other words I might have been somebody who [...] was supportive". Regardless of the direct impact Kuchar had on Sarah's life, it is clear that his support had a tremendous amount of influence on her creative work. She was "strong on her own" but was able to get the support necessary from Kuchar to make films and to find her artistic voice.

Sarah created *I Was A Teenage Serial Killer* in response to the lack of strong or accurate representations of women within mass-consumed media. The film was a response to such films as *Fatal Attraction (1989)*, *Basic Instinct (1992)*, and *Single White Female (1992)*. Films which address the politically changing atmosphere of sexual relations and as Sarah explains, "These films are manifestations of men's fear of changing roles in a society where women don't necessarily need men". *Serial Killer* incorporates many experiences Sarah went through with her relationships with men during the film, Sarah states, "Guys I was dating or guys I knew would do dumb things that really made me angry. I thought 'wait a minute, I make films. I'll put this in'. I didn't really have a pre-planned script, just an immediate need to get my anger out and the film was the perfect way" (Jacobson, "Film Threat"). Friends and people in Sarah's immediate community were integral to her type of DIY filmmaking process. For instance Sarah's friend at the Nose gave the film its first national review in 1993.

While attending the Art Institute Sarah wrote a packet on how to distribute film while still in school. The impulse in making this packet came from her realization that,

"when you're in school no one ever tells you what to do after you finish a film, there's more of a focus on learning basic technique". She continued to produce a packet that highlighted some essential aspects of filmmaking that are not usually taught in school such as: self confidence, talking to as many people as possible and other techniques grounded in a certain type of networking sensibility. As the packet states, "the ultimate goal is to make films that other people will like besides the ones you go to school with, so don't isolate yourself". In understanding this dynamic of attracting people to view a student film Sarah stated, "Have a band play the premier cause they will attract a different crowd, more people" (Jacobson, "Early Writings"). Sarah was able to craft this document through her sheer savvy creativity, determination and ingenuity.

In addition she championed a type of anti-perfection aesthetic, where finishing films are always more important than making sure the film is technically flawless. In prioritizing completion over perfection she aligned herself with the DIY style of creative production and helped to define the DIY movement. She wrote, "this quest for technical perfection serves to alienate people on a certain level, especially people who don't have a lot of technology in the first place." She saw the oppression instilled in various technologies, and therefore created alternatives through creative means. Her creativity was not solely bound to the ways in which she made films, Jacobson also approached distribution and networking with the same mentality. She employed many of these creative techniques at the opening of *I Was a Teenage Serial Killer*.

At the premier of the film in San Francisco Sarah combined her love of music and film, and booked the band Blood Simple to play (also tying into the overall theme of the evening). Ruth came out from Minneapolis and bought the beer for the event, cereal was

served and the 5 days Sarah spent putting up flyers paid off, the event attracted a large crowd. This one event helped Sarah to network and promote her film, she met Mark Taylor who enjoyed the film and put Sarah in touch with Liz Canning whose video *Handmirror/Brush Set Included* later screened multiple times in San Francisco with *Serial Killer*.

While working on *Serial Killer*, Sarah further honed her DIY distribution technique and created her own production company called Station Wagon Productions. In essence, the station wagon was the perfect metaphor for her style, coupling the way bands tour and promote their music with film distribution. Sarah stated in regard to this model, "A lot of my punk rock friends collected bootleg film, and it dawned on me that I could get *Serial Killer* out there too, through a similar network. I could package and sell my film to people the way K Records and Dischord sold music---through mail order" (Jacobson, Bust). Prior to touring the film, Sarah made 50 dubs of the film and then subsequently sent out copies to numerous places that showed independent film. In an interview with Tina Sprangler, Sarah expresses the power that comes from running your own production company, "Making films is cool, but knowing business is a lot cooler because you're working from within the mainstream and there's more power from being behind the scenes, thus more chances to fuck shit up". Sarah tremendously valued the power that is achieved through being the president of a company rather than solely a filmmaker. Ultimately, this position yielded a certain amount of ease in terms of being able handle filmmaking and distribution logistically.

This type of power that Sarah exacted in her filmmaking and film distribution model comes from the understanding that, "you don't need a big company or lots of

money to validate you" (Jacobson, Hernandez). Sarah was always crafty, always able to utilize certain circumstances to benefit her ambitions. For instance while living in San Francisco she was able to buy food through the T-Shirts and videos she made from *Serial Killer*. She took up jobs with various bands like Fluffy, and Man or Astroman, in order to supplement her income while also remaining true to her subcultural values. In addition when attempting to embark upon a lengthy overseas tour of *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*, she was able to gain funding through each of the separate festivals that she gained entry into. One paid for her flight there, one paid for her flight back, one paid for her food. Her experiences overseas were so influential that later Sarah requested that her ashes be scattered over Amsterdam.[5]

While in San Francisco Sarah also pursued other counter-hegemonic underground forms of cultural production, including publishing the adult comic book "Hardcorn". The comic book was released in 1993; Sarah was editor in chief and worked with Diana Mars, as her assistant. Mars later contributed $5,000 to the making of *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*, and took over Sarah's position as editor for the second instillation of Hardcorn. In the first issue Sarah's piece was called "Art School Chick, Save Rock and Roll: Avengers of Evil and Mediocrity." The images on the pages are comprised primarily of film stills, the imaging incorporating the freeze frame style that appears in *Serial Killer*. The story revolves around a "rock star guy is sick of his sexist, booze soaked lifestyle," who desires to give up his career and sing about health care. Within the piece many of Sarah's views of consumerism and rebellion are made clear, as she states in handwritten exclamations that accompany the images, "things that are sold as rebellion have become

[5] For more information pertaining to this desire see Appendix F, interview with Ruth Jacobson.

the status quo and the mundane becomes the cutting edge this often leads to commercializing of rebellion so that it's not really a rebellion at all" She also used the comic book to further promote her individual work, an advertisement for I *Was a Teenage Serial Killer* appears in the back of the issue (Jacobson, Hardcorn).

Sarah graduated from the San Francisco Art institute in 1993, and after a short stint touring *Serial Killer* she began working on her second film, *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore. Mary Jane* is a type of punk rock coming of age story based on a novel Sarah wrote while at Bard College. Sarah wanted to show the process of female sexual awaking in a more honest fashion stating that, "I wanted to show something that people haven't seen before, because there is so much people don't see. Film is so hard that it's not really worth it unless you're showing something that hasn't really been said before. That's the reason I got into it". She realized that certain blinders are in place when it comes to the representation of feminine sexuality in the media and stated, "there's so much power that comes from being in control of your sexuality and knowing how it works" (Jacobson, Nervending Zine). She also noticed that mainstream movies are always from a male perspective; therefore women are rarely depicted as sexual agents. The only movie, Sarah believed, that showed a somewhat accurate depiction of female sexuality was *Fast Times At Ridgemont High.* However, in this film the female character is never shown having positive sexual interactions. The film was a direct response to the teensploitation films of the 1980s. These films fascinated Sarah, and in 1996 she wrote an article for Bunnyhop Magazine addressing this interest. She had a type of love/hate relationship with teen movies made in the 1980s, and wanted the film to be a direct response to John Hugh's films. In regard to this desire Sarah stated, "I guess I always

wanted to see Molly Ringwald having really great sex, fucking Jake's brains out in sixteen candles" (Besmirched Zine, 14).

The films of the 1980s depict teen sexual maturation and relations in a very restrictive manner that only served to further mystify the general teen public. Sarah herself was a type of victim of this mystification, losing her virginity at the age of 16, and stating in regard to the experience, "The first time it sucked, the second time it was better, but still, I didn't see what the big deal was. I never really had an orgasm until I was 20". Her own sexual awakening came when her gynecologist gave her a book called, For Yourself. The book centered on masturbation and the specific ways the body works. When Sarah began to understand the intricacies of the female body, she wondered why it took 20 years to learn about her physicality, "then I realized that everything you see on TV or in the movies or in media representation, it's all that women are sexual objects." She addresses these types of issues directly through the film, in one scene specifically Jane is seen examining herself with a mirror, and in other scenes the topic of masturbation is openly discussed.

The film incorporated the same kind of DIY guerilla filmmaking tactics as *Serial Killer*, however on a much larger and labor-intensive scale. During the shoot only three people out of the entire cast of over fifty received monetary compensation. Instead of paying the individuals who helped out with the film, Sarah would thank them by baking cookies or buying beer; As she stated in an interview after the film was complete, baking cookies was, "the only way I could think of thanking someone in a sincere way". The film depended on a lot of favors from the surrounding San Francisco community, and as

discussed in the concluding chapter, perhaps Sarah called in all of her favors in completing the project.

The concept arose from her experiences working at the Uptown Theater in Minneapolis. She started working there when she was 15 years old, her mother Ruth would drive her to the mall to catch the bus (Sarah was too young to legally drive). Sarah found the experience of working there quite fascinating because of the cross section of individuals who worked at and frequented the theater, a type of cross section of punks, skaters, movie enthusiasts, and individuals from the surrounding Minneapolis area. Her interest was everlasting and she began to write a novel concentrating on her experiences at the theater while she was Bard at 2 am. At first conception she wanted the film to be called, *Popcorn*, she later changed the title to *Sex At The Movies*, and finally settled on the title, *Mary Jane's Not A Virgin Anymore.*

While attempting to distribute and show her film to as many people as possible her mother, Ruth Jacobson joined her tireless crusade. She left her home in Minneapolis to assist on the project and lived with Sarah in San Francisco for two years. Ruth handled everything from bringing in people from ADR (additional dialogue recording) to keeping up the mailing list to marketing and promotions. Even with Ruth and a community of friends, the film took three years to complete, and was a grueling, labor-intensive experience for Sarah. All of her hard work (relatively) paid off and the film began getting accepted to various prestigious film festivals throughout the county. The first festival that the film got into was The Chicago Underground Film Festival, where it received a positive review from renowned film critic Roger Ebert. The film was later accepted into the Sundance Film Festival and had three sold out shows, yet the primary goal of gaining

distribution was never realized and in regard to this disappointing experience, Sarah stated that the film was "dropped like a cold potato" (2004 Interview). She believed that the bigwig distributors at the festivals were all looking for the next hot guy, and did not want to risk putting money into a project that would not be commercially viable due to its risky subject matter consisting of female sexuality.

When she did not receive distribution Sarah decided to tour the film independently. She applied the underground sensibility of touring it the way a band tours, showing the film in 23 cities. The film grossed $70,000 using this model and created quite a buzz throughout the underground film world. Her experiences making and distributing the film were only part of the creative challenges Sarah undertook during this time in the mid 1990s. She was also incredibly productive with her writing, reviewing abundant amounts of films, and documenting her experiences on the road. In this sense she was able to generate positive (and sometimes negative if she found the films to be offensive) buzz and media for some of her fellow filmmakers also partaking in the world of underground and independent film (although while in San Francisco she would occasionally right about mainstream movies, such as James Cameron's *True Lies*).

In 1997 Sarah was named to Spin Magazine's list of influences on girl culture. Sarah was ranked at number 43, in between Chelsea Clinton (42) and Freaky Mamas (44). Maureen Callahan and Kim France wrote:

> A director who has made two inventive girl-coming-of-age films Jacobson is a full on proponent of DIY moviemaking. Last year she hauled herself across the nation, screening *Mary Jane* wherever she could. It eventually played to sold-out houses at various festivals, but she's still struggling to break through—mainly, she says, because male distributors operate under the notion that girls only go to movies with their boyfriends (Spin).

Girl culture was all the rage in the mid-late 1990s, with the onset of female pop groups like the Spice Girls and the mass popularity of spirited television and movie stars like Claire Danes and Christina Ricci. Sarah was able to carve out her own place in terms of these types of influences demonstrating her impact on the burgeoning world of girl culture.

Sarah was also able to gain alliances with other female filmmakers of the 1990s, including Allison Anders and Tamra Davis. She had positive relationships with each of these directors, one being from the independent realm of filmmaking (Anders) and one being more based in the commercial. She was able to refine her ideological backings through various conversations and interactions with these other filmmakers. In one conversation with the three filmmakers, a type of refined idea of the types of female characters Sarah attempts to portray is discussed. The conclusion Sarah reached is documented in many of her writings, and became a kind of mantra for her filmmaking practice:

> As a female filmmaker, I try to have female characters in my films that are strong, independent and real. I would like to write characters that one doesn't find in the mainstream Hollywood output, women who aren't manifestations of some man's perfect dream or worst nightmare, but women who have flaws, physically and emotionally, and ambitions that go beyond having a man to complete them as human beings.

The Fabulous Stains is a movie made in 1981, written by Nancy Dowd and directed by Lou Adler. The film was financed through Paramount Pictures, yet due to a poor run at a handful of art house movie theaters, was not immediately commercially released or distributed. The film had always been one of Sarah's favorites and in 1999 she began working on a documentary with filmmaker and close friend Sam Green. Sarah

met Sam in San Francisco at the Film Arts Foundation. Sam had just made *The Rainbow Man/ John 3:16* man and got into Sundance, he was attending a seminar at the Film Arts Foundation on what to expect at the festival. Sarah was there with her mother, and Sam describes them as being "armed and ready", as well as completely organized. When they met they instantaneously struck up a meaningful friendship, Sarah later suggested that he tour his film and the two embarked upon a trip up the West coast, stopping in Portland, Olympia, and Seattle to show his film. Sam states,

> There's nothing better than making a movie and showing it to people it made me realize. With independent film there was this huge thing about like getting distribution and kind of like being part of being part of the indie world, but like that whole thing is like make a movie give it to somebody else, never be part of the process and that's totally lame the funnest thing is to do a show and get twenty bucks. Way better than to make a movie and never be apart of any show and never make any money anyways.[6]

Though the film did gain major distribution, Sam continued to use this DIY model of film distribution through his tour of the film, *The Weather Underground.*

While working on *The Fabulous Stains* documentary, Sarah's filmmaking sensibility stayed consistent and aligned with her general attitude towards women and filmmaking. As Green recalls,

> There was one part, that we fought over a lot where (Nancy Dowd) was talking about (having) a really hard time with the movie. She was talking about being sexually harassed after the camera guy grabbed her boob. But I was always like, 'Sarah can we cut this out?' She was always like 'NOOOO! This has to stay.' After awhile I realized for her it was that was an important part of the difficulty of being a female director, which she definitely dealt with and I did not (Green).

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[6] Green, Sam. Personal interview. 9 January 2009. See appendix A, 61.

The movie was shot as a segment for John Pierson's television show on cutting edge independent cinema, *Split Screen.* After being shelved for 18 years, the film was slated for wide release in 2008. The company that picked up *The Fabulous Stains* for wide DVD release, Rhino Records, donates money to the Sarah G. Jacobson Film Grant, noting how much influence Sarah had in reviving the once shelved film.

In 2000, burnout on the San Francisco arty/punk/party scene, Sarah moved to New York City. She had gone through the various hoops associated with underground filmmaking and distribution and felt that it was time to take steps toward more professional pursuits. There was one specific instance that tipped the scales instigating her coastal move. One night while attending a show with her friend, Beth Allen (Erika in *Mary Jane's Not A Virgin Anymore*), Sarah was involved in a fight that culminated in a glass bottle being broken over Sarah's head. Sarah had to go to the hospital, and her friend Beth remained with the girl who had attacked Sarah. This became the reason why Sarah felt like she had to leave San Francisco, stop drinking and attempt to straighten her life out. At this point in her life Ruth was living in Wilmington, Delaware and was delighted by the news that Sarah would once again be living in relative close proximity to her.

One of the last projects that Sarah was working on, which unfortunately was never completed, was a film called *Sleaze.* It was slated to be a type of coming of age, rock and roll Cinderella story featuring one of Sarah's favorite bands Babes in Toyland. Sarah was close friends with the drummer, Lori Barbero, and wanted the film to be a type of tribute to the band (interestingly enough, Babes in Toyland is also from Minneapolis and their music is featured in *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*). Sarah worked

arduously on the scripts, rewriting it about twenty times, but could never find the right financial backing to actualize the film. She worked with one producer for about two years, attempting to get the proper funding for the film. After he was fired Sarah got in contact with Andrea Sperling (producer of *But I'm A Cheerleader*), but at that point her cancer was far too progressed and the project never materialized.

While in New York, Sarah worked with various networks and corporations as a producer, and also spent time teaching at The New School. As a professor, Sarah taught "16mm Sound Sync Production" and "Indie Film Production: From A to Z." Her teaching style was as innovative and creative as her approach to filmmaking, crafting assignments meant to challenge her students while simultaneously showing them the ropes of real world networking. For instance, one assignment in her film production class involved a trip to a bar where students were required to acquire ten business cards before departing. She continued to teach at The New School while also holding other jobs that were based in producing as well as editing.

One of Sarah's other professional endeavors involved working as a producer at Oprah Winfrey's network, Oxygen. In her role as producer, she supervised and coordinated a crew of seven and created segments on politics and culture for a news-magazine show for young women. Through the network, Sarah covered such areas of cultural production as Ladyfest (a type of pro-women festival involving female musicians, artists, poets, and workshops), and ABC No Rio, renowned for its extensive zine library as well as its intensely punk ethos as an anti-corporate space. Sarah's initial excitement about working for an all-women television station soon dissipated when she realized it was just as corporate and dog-eat-dog as other production companies. After her

brief stint at Oxygen (June-October 2000), Sarah began working at Pseudo.com, where she created and developed a show called Underground Floor, which focused on cutting edge arts and culture, profiling cultural pioneers like John Waters, as well as radical shops like Toys in Babeland (a woman owned and operated sex shop).

Perhaps one of the most impressive facets of Sarah's professional endeavors stems from her ability to discuss almost every issue imaginable relating to girlhood through her freelance journalism. She approached a variety of issues, writing for such publications as, *Spin*, *Jane*, *Playboy.com*, *Grand Royal*, *SOMA*, *Ray Gun*, *Bust*, *Tripod.com*, *Punk Planet*, and *Film Threat.* While working on a piece for the publication *YM*, Sarah gained access to Rikers Island for an exclusive story on their high school for girls--- a feat not easily achieved---gaining exclusivity through her craftiness.

After working at Psuedo.com and raising their production by 30% by teaching staff how to use digital camera's as well as shoot and edit, Sarah began working at Much Music (which later became Fuse), a television station focused on music and other culturally hip topics. Sarah later worked as a field producer for a series called, "Tastemaker," which garnered the highest ratings in the show's history. The show revolved around local kids (teenagers-20s) discussing how they felt about certain pop music intercut with music videos. There Sarah met Aaron Zisman, one of her most intense and influential relationships, they became involved romantically after Sarah got laid off.

In 2003 Sarah and Aaron went to North Carolina to attend a friend's wedding. On the return trip Sarah was complaining about a pain she was experiencing in her pelvic region. She could not carry any bags, leaving Aaron mildly aggravated and with four

bulky suitcases. After they returned Sarah went to a general care practitioner, who misdiagnosed the pain as a simple pulled muscle, and suggested a physical therapist. When the pain did not subside, Sarah decided to get some more extensive tests done and a biopsy discovered stage four uterine cancer, which had spread to her bones. Although Ruth, Sarah, and Aaron where somewhat unsure of what cancer meant, the diagnosis was a type of death sentence. Sarah was productive until the bitter end, working on scripts in the hospital, and cutting out photos of celebrities that she wanted certain characters in *Sleaze* to resemble, just in case she did not make it to see the film get made.[7]

Sarah was always attempting to gain control over certain situations within her life and creative endeavors. Whether through directing a film, running a production company or creating an army of networking disciples at the New School, control was something Sarah truly coveted. Her final exercise in control was organizing her funeral and retrospective in New York City, which transpired February 15--two days after her death on Friday the 13th, 2004.

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[7] Information compiled from a personal interview with Aaron Zisman, Appendix E, 101.

Kristin Calabrese in *I Was a Teenage Serial Killer*

Girls Will Be Grrrls:

A Critical Examination of Sarah Jacobson's *I Was A Teenage Serial Killer*

"True speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges the politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such it is a courageous act---as such, it represents a threat. To those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced." - bell hooks

Sarah Jacobson's film *I was a Teenage Serial Killer* is an incredibly textured account of feminine resistance under patriarchal oppression. The film works on numerous levels to communicate the anger of a marginalized group fighting to be heard. Coming from a position of subordination, Mary seeks to remedy the vast injustices inflicted upon her, injustices committed socially and culturally by patriarchal institutions; injustices that are predicated on notions that allow for the consistent victimization of femininity but do not allow for the communication needed to counteract and mend these experiences. She repudiates her silenced position by permanently silencing those who perpetuate sexist ideals that render women as defenseless victims. Over the course of the 27-minute film,

Mary comes to the powerful realization that the most forceful resistance comes from the unwillingness to be silenced, by no longer allowing hegemony to mute the crimes it commits. This realization comes from a three-fold path of coming to consciousness marked by silence, serial killing, and finally the end result of activated speech: being heard.

Jacobson created *Serial Killer* in response to the lack of strong or accurate representations of women within mass-consumed media. The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed an onslaught of films that negatively depicted independent, sexual women not only as psychotic but also in opposition to each other. In the film world, any women that posed a threat to the nuclear family or displayed a type of deviant sexuality outside that of the hetero-normative, wound up fatally punished. The films that specifically influenced Jacobson while working on the concept for *Serial Killer* were *Single White Female* (1992) and *Fatal Attraction* (1987). In each of these films, the independent female character is brutally murdered by a woman who does in fact fit into the circumscribed nuclear family model. In these films, powerful, sexual women always die and patriarchal rule always reestablishes itself. Jacobson saw these films as a reaction to the new types of liberties women were gaining socially, those outside of the confines of the traditional wife-mother. She saw the women being punished in these films as "manifestations of men's fear of changing roles in a society where women don't necessarily need men" (Madenwald). Jacobson sought to remedy this trend by creating a narrative that did not punish actions that fell outside of the patriarchy. Of primary importance to this goal is the establishment of a powerful centralized female lead character through whom the spectator is meant to feel empowered.

Mary is a teenage girl, 19 years old. This facet of her character helps to subvert standardized notions of what it means culturally to be a girl of this age. As author Mary Celeste Kearney states, "female youth of this age [12-21] are encouraged to identify as heterosexual beings and to position procreation and the attraction of male attention as the primary goals of their adult lives" (Kearney 5). These viewpoints are inflicted upon Mary particularly when her brother commands, "you need to find a man, and you need to have some kids". She disrupts this notion by quelling his antiquated ramblings with d-CON poison. Socially produced concepts of femininity act to convey a type of standardizing in terms of submissive/passive behavior, and Mary strives to enact a certain resistance that subverts and draws attention to these pejorative notions.

Silence has been an ever-present "characteristic" of femininity, and speaks to the roots of gender exploitation and oppression. From youth, girls are taught to act in a manner of constriction, one that suppresses action and focuses on self-diminution. Simone du Beauvoir was one of the first to shed light on this concept in her work The Second Sex, where she discusses the processes involved in becoming a woman, "The delights of passivity are made to seem desirable to the young girl by parents and educators, books and myths, women and men" (du Beavoir 325). The reactive gestures against the sexism experienced by Mary, from lack of consensual sexual relations (when the man takes of his condom without telling Mary) to the preaching of a heteronormative lifestyle (her brother), are also acts combating ageism and issues that address feminine adolescence. Any action contributing to patriarchal rule is met with the same resistance.

Mary acts out against a society that positions her as victim, a type of victimization that is inextricably tied to her femininity, adolescence and inaccurate culpability. She is

doubly de-privileged by her age and her sex, which act to mute her desires and feelings through established patriarchal limitation. Therefore, her actions are not simply murderous impulses, but ideologically charged forms of resistance. Karen Boyle further discusses this issue, "The sexual and criminal transgressions of girls and women are closely linked, for both desire and aggression require an activity and subjectivity which women are denied" (Boyle 36). These prescribed limitations work in conjunction with those who perpetuate these standards to disavow true speaking, and hinder female adolescence.

Through disenfranchisement, a place of subordinated voices; 'true speaking' tends to be muffled by the hegemonic powers in place. In the case of *Serial Killer,* Mary strives to be heard through any and all means, initially finding murder to be an appropriate avenue for expression. This compulsion comes from a place of utter frustration to be heard, but as seen through the film, it may not be the most productive way. Coming to this realization is necessary in order to combat the powers in place in a more meaningful fashion. The people she meets along the way are integral to the development of a technique to reach a place of 'true speaking;. In addition the film itself acts as a fantasy to vent the justifiable rage of Mary, and expands to the ways in which the female spectator is able to identify with her character. Furthermore, the type of social critique demonstrated is not merely one-dimensional. Coming from a place of feminine adolescence, Mary is combating injustices not only bound to her femininity but also to her age, as exhibited in the tactful title, "*I was a Teenage Serial Killer*." Therefore the tale can be viewed as a potent coming of age story, where an adolescent consciousness comes to a type of true enlightenment. Though perhaps peripheral to the overarching

thrust of the tale, the plot yields an understanding where emotional self-realization trumps the traditional brand of heterosexual awakening.

Through compulsive, reactive actions fueled by anger, larger social critiques become obvious by a certain rawness Jacobson conveys. Adolescence, the time in a woman's life where she is taught to be seen and not heard, to give precedence to heterosexual development, and ultimately become a subservient being, is completely and fully rejected by Mary. She is defiant; her transgressions are fueled by an intense desire to be heard by any means. Her anger of being silenced by patriarchal institutions transforms into brutality and when no one listens to her, she takes matters into her own hands. This is the second stage in the process of coming of age, a time in female maturation that should presumably allow for mistakes. Undeniably, there has been a type of consciousness inscribed on feminine adolescences, where every mistake, or "misstep" is internalized and the victim, or girl, places all blame on herself. This is in direct contrast to normative male behavior. In the typical case of boyish upbringing, any mistakes are blamed on circumstance. This is a familiar sentiment often combated by other women filmmakers. For example Susan Skoog, director of the teenage rebellion coming-of-age flick *Whatever* states, "Girls tend to give up easier. When boys run into difficulties they tend to blame their circumstances, but girls blame themselves. They think they're bad or not talented. I think that's endemic of a lot of women and girls" (Skoog). *Serial Killer* acts to subvert this notion and implicates those culpable in perpetuating sexist behavior. Mary is fed up with the mentality inculcated by men that the type of sexual abuse she has experienced is her fault, (in particular the last man she speaks with). If men are unaware

of the type of sexist behavior they are furthering, it becomes a matter of dire proportion for Mary, and warrants immediate retribution.

This retribution tends to lead to momentary satisfaction, rather than lasting gain. This is shown through the ways Mary enacts her vengeance (in this case vengeance and the desire to be heard are synonymous). In the first scene Mary traces the corpse of a young white male covered in blood. An authoritative male news announcer conveys that the male victim was shot in the chest, as a close-up of Mary's face communicates no remorse. Another close up of Mary's face shows her applying lipstick, her mouth aesthetically readying itself to be heard.

Mary does not use the same technique twice, yet the bludgeoning performed on Henry, Mary's love interest, is reminiscent of the introductory corpse. Perhaps she is seeking a type of killing that would permanently satisfy her urge to be heard, blaming the momentary satisfaction not on the killing itself, but on how the killing is exacted. She goes on to poison, strangle, and bludgeon yet does not return to the same technique twice, practices that oppose those of the typical serial killer. In addition, killing in and of itself is subversive, due to the fact that violence is a gendered action. Typically, female serial killers have been deemed "The Quiet Killers," due to the fact they tend to rely heavily on poison and their deeds go unnoticed for longer amounts of time (Kelleher 1). When Floridian prostitute Aileen Wuornos was going through trial, it was stated that she "kills like a man," due to the fact that she wielded a .22 caliber handgun and would kill in cold blood (Kelleher). Although Jacobson's serial killer is hyperbolized and appropriated, Mary is enmeshed in this lineage that is extremely pertinent to the film as a social critique.

To fully understand the potency of a female serial killer and the subversion enacted by killing "all the sexist pigs", it is first important to understand the normative (male) serial killer and how violence has been gendered and deemed masculine. As author David Bergman states, "Within the patriarchy violence between men is more acceptable than affection between them" (Bergman 143). Implicit in this viewpoint lurks a simple assumption: violence is characteristic of maleness. Furthermore, when men act in a violent manner it does not elicit surprise or shock; rather it has become viewed as a normative aspect of male behavior. Socially, men are assumed to be violent in the same manner they are assumed to be heterosexual, both normalized to the point of reproach. As Jane Caputi States, "The serial killer is a product of normalcy, the logical, if extreme, manifestation of a systematically misogynist culture that subordinates and objectifies women and one that associates violence with virility" (Caputi 131). The issue of a female serial killer becomes one of particular intrigue due to the fact that conversely, in relation to men, women and violence are culturally assumed to be mutually exclusive. Violence is excluded from the codified definition of womanliness in the same manner as lesbianism, violating hegemonic construction of what it means to be female. Jacobson's *Serial Killer* mocks these constructions by creating a vehicle that allows rage, anger and discontent to be voiced and expressed through this type of exacted subversion.

The convergence of the ideas of violence, sexual orientation, and pathology is also realized through parallel filmmaker Tammy Rae Carland's piece *Lady Outlaws and Faggot Wannabes.* In Carland's video, her sympathetic view of the atrocities committed by the media against Aileen Wuornos is presented as intertwined and bound to the historically pathologized depiction of lesbianism. Implicated in the murders of nine men,

Wuornos was guilty before she even went to trial. Mistakenly deemed "the first female serial killer," she was sentenced in 1992 and subsequently put to death in 2002 by lethal injection. Carland uses her own voice over images of Wournous, stating different types of evidence that at once provides a basis for the manner in which Wournous was criminalized by the media, while also doubling as a declaration of her orientation as a lesbian; the two are inseparable. Carland states, "Her hands are evidence. Hands that have trailed the bodies of women looking for the place that makes breath halt" (Carland). When pushed to its logical conclusion, an insidious position is reached, one that explicates the criminalization of lesbianism within representations provided by popular media. The same physical characteristics that predicate her marginalized sexuality are at once those that act as an accomplice in cementing her guilt. The pathologized link between sexuality and violence has been seen historically through numerous occasions. Filmic depiction in the 1990s was wrought with these types of films demonizing active homosexuality, for instance Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* (1994). These pieces attempt (but fail) to communicate that the impulse that drives violence and criminal behavior is the same impulse that causes homosexuality. Each formidable representation in mainstream depiction ignores the systematic structures that leave no room for healthy (homo)sexual development.

The pointed use of the female serial killer becomes increasingly valuable due to the type of mythos she is channeling and subverting. Historically, the serial killer (always male, always psychotic) has gained a type of immortal or mythic status. This is in part due to the founding father of serial sex murder, Jack the Ripper, and his everlasting anonymity, but is also due to the fact that culturally, the serial killer has been used as a

tool to perpetuate patriarchal institutions and constructs. As Jane Caputi asserts, "such mythicization terrorizes women, empowers and inspires men…and participates in a cultural propagation of frequently lethal misogyny" (Caputi 101). The male serial killer is almost always exalted from his guilt, rendering the (female) victim as culpable, and placing all scrutiny on her instead of on the institutions in place, which allow for constant victimization. This is almost always the case in terms of rape cases that go unpunished, tied to the inimically shoddy, yet politically accepted claim 'she was asking for it'. This concept in relation to the sex murder and pinpointing of blame is clarified by Caputi's statement, "Blame for the male executors of such punishments---from witchburnings to sexual murder---is expediently dumped back on the women themselves---a consummate 'double bind.' Such a process is particularly obvious in the all-out tendency to blame the mother of the sex criminal for his unrestrained violence against women" (Caputi 66). The sticky issue of blame can be reduced to the re-establishment of the patriarchy; any situation or circumstance that falls outside of the white, male dominated realm absorbs guilt like a sponge. In male serial killers' assaults it is the mother, in female accounts of murder it is their unbridled sexuality, more often than not of a homosexual nature. Whatever the case may be, since the myth of the Fall blame has relentlessly been placed on the feminine other. Mary's subversion and enactment of typically male forms of violence and attack yield a type of elevated positioning of Mary's own subordinated status. She is able to use this mythic form of instilling masculinized trauma to clarify, pinpoint, and combat the victimization that serial killing perpetuates. Violence thus is wrenched out of the hands of the patriarchy and becomes a legitimized form of resistance.

Culturally taking up a standardized male position and feminizing it yields a powerful, subversive message; however when combined with the form of the film itself, this position gains a more digestible and accessible meaning. The raw emotional honesty and moving power forefronted by *Serial Killer,* sheds light on all that underlies the film's more politically nuanced messages. *Serial Killer* attempts to counteract almost every atrocity committed against contemporary femininity, from overt acts of sexism, to less obvious forms of ageism. A certain immediacy of these issues, discussed and combated, is communicated through the roughness of the film's physicality. Shot on 16mm reversal film with a Bolex 16mm camera, the images resist the polish of more commercially thus stylistically refined images of mainstream filmic production. The film works as an enactment of an antiperfection aesthetic, an aesthetic that works to supplement the overarching message of the film instead of being concerned primarily with formal mastery, also allowing for the imprint of the filmmaker herself to be ever-present. This type of visual communication is more concerned with accurate representation of identity and experience. The film's bare-bones form complements the content, and in doing so aligns itself with the essential DIY ethos of reclamation and representation. Furthermore, these types of counterhegemonic ideals communicated through counterhegemonic types of production exponentially strengthen the notions of empowerment communicated through the film.

In addition to the film's physicality, its soundtrack also helps to strengthen its raw emotional output. The music involved in the film is predominantly Riot Grrrl, bands whose songs exhibited a similar message of girl empowerment and independence. The most poignant moment of this occurs in the final moments of *Serial Killer*. As Mary

walks off into the distance, Heavens to Betsy's song 'My Secret' erupts, sonically communicating an alignment with Mary's defiance, "My Secret is coming out, and each word, I live it out…these words are a threat to you, a knife in you" (Tucker). This song, like most of the music within Jacobson's films, helps to counteract and oppose traditional forms of commercial filmmaking where soundtracks and musicians are predominantly male. In addition it helps to strengthen the drive of the film by further connecting it to other counter-hegemonic forms of girl-made cultural production.

A central component of the Riot Grrrl/DIY ethos was that of controlling and creating the types of media being consumed by marginalized and disenfranchised groups, particularly those of girls. Riot Grrrls believe that if the media is not representing girl culture in an honest or accurate fashion (or at all) it becomes increasingly important to create types of media that do. This concept appears in the second issue of Bikini Kill's self-titled zine published in 1991, "we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings" (Hanna). In turn, girl culture in the early '90s witnessed a drastic shift from passive consumers to active producers, forming bands, crafting zines, and making films. Although she never considered herself to be a Riot Grrrl, Sarah Jacobson enacted this seminal DIY sentiment and created her own media that portrayed a more honest representation of female existence. Here the desires of Jacobson and her protagonist Mary are one and the same, each possessing an insatiable desire to be heard. Most of the writing about the movement discusses how it acted as a vehicle of empowerment, assuaging notions of fear that traditionally come along with being a girl and producing (too young, too female, too inexperienced, too stupid to be heard (Kearny

63)). In this sense, the film can be seen as a type of manifesto or doctrine that communicates the inability of empirical fetters to silence feminine youth.

Accessing Speech, "you can't keep me quiet"

> I am a killer but I've committed no crime… No woman can be a criminal. To be a criminal one must be a man…I am saying that you are criminals, all of you: the fathers, the uncles, the husbands, the pimps, the lawyers, the doctors, the journalists, and all men of all professions…I prefer to die for a crime I have committed rather than to die for one of the crimes which you have committed…When I killed I did it with truth not with a knife. That is why they are in a hurry to execute me. They do not fear my knife. It is my truth which frightens them ---Firdaus

Killing men might be a satisfying way to immediately deal with the oppression and dominant power they extol, but is also a closed action. By expressing the feelings associated with victimization and voicing reactions to these wrongdoings, a more proactive solution can be reached. This is the final conclusion Mary reaches as she proclaims:

> My story exists whether anyone's gonna listen to me or not. Killing all these men who don't understand is bullshit. You know I'm gonna do something worse. Whether you want to ignore me or invalidate my stories I'm gonna tell them anyways, you can't keep me quiet.

This sentiment is not solely a personal achievement individualized by Mary, it extends to the particular group of girl youth she represents, and as far as exterior feminist circles that do not acknowledge a feminine capacity for violence. This is shown throughout the film, but is explicitly communicated by Mary when she exclaims, "No one wants to listen to my story and then I get this anger that I am not allowed to express because its not right for a woman to have any rage". In the specific moment when *Serial Killer* was released,

there was little capacity for feminine anger and aggression to be viewed as a viable feminist tactic. The film helps to show that within the struggle, violence is a necessary issue that must be grappled. Patricia Pearson takes up this notion in her book, When She Was Bad. She states in regard to the lack of discussion of violence within feminist circles:

> It affects our capacity to promote ourselves as autonomous and responsible beings. It affects our ability to develop a literature about ourselves that encompasses the full array of human emotion and experience. It demeans the right our victims have to be valued. And it radically impedes our ability to recognize dimensions of power that have to do with formal structures of the patriarchy. Perhaps above all, the denial of women's aggression profoundly undermines our attempt as a culture to understand violence, to trace its causes and quell them (Pearson 232).

By allowing the female protagonist to exhibit emotions that are typically viewed as unfeminine, the film helps to open a more expansive dialogue.

Actions might speak louder than words, but they sometimes do not reverberate. This is one of the many reasons why Mary's conclusion of activated speech, coupled with her previous actions is incredibly potent. The individuals she combats throughout the film can be viewed as raw masculinist archetypes, embodied in the brother, boyfriend, or the verbally abusive man walking down the street. These are men that perpetuate, either actively or passively, notions and sentiments that make it possible for women to be consistently victimized and silenced. Therefore, through these complicit individuals, a clear depiction of a culturally problematic issue displays communal liability. It is not that these men are the exception, they in fact are the standard, killing them on an individual level does not lastingly challenge the sexism they collectively purport. Sexism is communicated as a structural phenomenon rather than reductively viewed as an

individualized act. In this sense the film can be viewed as an attempt to scrutinize not the 'criminal' but the society, which directly created this type of resistance or 'crime'. Mary, by the end of the film, is able to realize this notion, or as Mary states, "killing all these men who don't understand is bullshit. You know I'm gonna do something worse," and goes on to attempt change through a more open form of activated speech.

In conclusion, the pattern that the film communicates is structured around the ways a group, particularly female youth, combats masculinist ideologies. From the problematic forms of back handed compliments to the overtly menacing forms of sexual abuse, the film shows a proactive mapping of the path necessary in order to meaningfully combat victimization.

Self-Reflection and Reflecting the Self

"Art unfailingly reflects its creator's heart. Art that comes from a heart open to all the possible paths there might be to a healthier tomorrow cannot help but be medicine for the tribe" ---Alice Walker

Though the film itself stands as a type of feminist manifesto, a portrayal of a woman scorned and her discontent, actions must follow in order to mend such experiences; the serial killer can be viewed as a type of representation of the female filmmaker. In the most straightforward realization of this concept, the serial killer is a type of artist; one who kills in a somewhat democratized fashion in order to find the type of path that will permanently satisfy the wrongdoings previously imposed. Mary's choices, as noted previously, are an attempt to combat a structural dilemma within modern social constructions, within these structures women filmmakers and artists in general are drastically and ever-presently hindered and marginalized. Research has

shown that men who own cameras outnumber women who own cameras ten to one (Kearney 191). This statistic alone would warrant combative action amongst the aggravated female filmmaker, but this sentiment is exponentially intensified when other related oppressive factors, from capitalistic and patriarchal restraints to professorial discouragement, come into play.

If Mary is to be viewed as a type of representation of the female filmmaker, Henry can therefore be viewed as the male filmmaker. Her initial alignment with him, their desire to kill, or make films, demonstrates superficial commonality. Yet it is clear they are coming from completely different positions and any initial similarities are not substantive. His actions are selfish, using a perceived shared interest to exploit and gain access to Mary's emotions/body. He can never quite make films under the same constraints as Mary's; therefore he can never be fully aligned with Mary (or the female filmmakers) position.

Ultimately, *I Was A Teenage Serial Killer* acts as a type of vehicle for Jacobson to exact her rage. Fed up with the types of gender oppression ingrained in everyday interaction, the film communicates unadulterated anger, and is a meaningful step toward productive means of counteraction. The centralized conclusion, the release of violent reactive gestures, enables a radical position within the female character. Mary is able to progress to a stage where meaning can be communicated verbally and proactively, as opposed to the closed response of violent reaction. In a sense, by being saturated with her compulsion, attempting to gain this complete domination and control over the patriarchy (through killing its embodiment), Mary realizes that she is granting it validity. Her actions are defined through the actions of men, and the only way to proactively remedy

this facet of her character is emancipation---a complete release from this unhealthy dependency. Thus with this pointed final realization of activated speech, Mary is no longer contingent on men for her (re)actions, she is now able to create meaning in the new context of liberation.

Jacobson and Cast

Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore: a '90s Response to '80s 'Teensploitation' Film

"I'm not going to abandon the youth of America. They're the ones who support the industry, yet are not always well served by it. A youth picture does not have to be synonymous with exploitation"

---- John Hughes

"Instead of spending our energies acting out clichéd "erotic" scenes in order to fulfill gender images relentlessly promoted by mass media marketing and much of the commercial cinema, we need to have a more effective sense of what the real experiences of the genders are."

---Scott Macdonald

Cinematic expression in the 1980s was marked by its view of teenhood through myopic bubblegum tinted glasses. The average teen was depicted as a heterosexual, white suburbanite whose limited concerns verged on an amalgamation of the superficial, mundane, and bland pursuits of circumscribed dating rituals. Within these roles the main goal of a female adolescent, more often than not played by Molly Ringwald, was to attract the older, popular male. On the flipside, male pursuits in these types of "soft porn

teen boy films" were quite strictly of a sexual nature (Jacobson, Original). In essence, boys in these types of teen movies focused on sex (getting it, talking about it, scamming it), while girls focused on relationships and romance (who to take to the big dance, who would make a viable partner). Interestingly enough, by this time in feminist discourse and thought, these traditional spaces of femininity, e.g., the classroom, bedroom, home, were incredibly politicized and under a type of scrutiny that historically had never before been realized/actualized. These discourses were also visualized and theorized in relation to feminist filmic depiction/creation (as later discussed). An unprecedented focus on teen life marked the cinema of the 1980s, yet apparently these types of discourses had not yet trickled down to the average teen moviegoer. Ultimately the film uses punk subculture of 1990s to address and mend damaging representations of teens as depicted in the 1980s.

Sarah Jacobson created *Mary Jane's Not A Virgin Anymore* as a direct response to these types of teen exploitation films of the 1980s. In these films, feminine sexual experience was portrayed in an uninformed, unrealistic, constricted manner, marked by the soft-focus, gloss-over depictions of sexual experience within high school. The few films that did deal with feminine experience (*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*) were by far the exception to the misleading standard of exploitative nature of most teen films. When embarking upon the making of the film Jacobson had a simple desire, "I wanted Jane to be like the coolest sex film ever made" (Jacobson, Original). The backdrop of this impulse was set as semi-autobiographical, taking place in an art-house movie theater very much like the one Jacobson worked at in high school, basing the interactions in the film from her real life experiences, and at one point letting the female actors improvise their feelings on masturbation. So much of an individual's understanding of the world is

informed through the big screen, and almost every representation in the standard type of teen film in the 1980s shows the world as being completely constrained and defined by hetero-normative interactions which re-inscribe patriarchal ideologies and constrict the scope of possibility in terms of feminine adolescence. Jacobson responded to these limitations by making the implicit, explicit, thus opening a range of possibility for adolescent development and unshackling teenhood from its deceptively rosy prison.

The average teen film of the 1980s served to mystify the typical teenager, especially when it came to understanding any type of sexual relationship (whether the relation be of a physical or romantic nature). Jacobson herself never had an orgasm until age twenty, and later was confused as to why it took so long to discover this normal aspect of healthy sexuality. When contemplating this facet of her development she stated, "I realized that everything you see on TV or in the movies or in media representation, it's all women as sexual objects" (Besmirched Zine). Though this realization is crucial in understanding the strength of Jacobson's film as reactive critique, the problem of sexual ignorance amongst teenagers extends even further. Formal sexual education within the school systems of the 1980s served to further mystify the average teen, reinforcing sexism, while rendering the students ignorant, not only of their own bodies but those of the opposite sex as well. Mariamne Whatley discusses this relationship in her groundbreaking essay, "Raging Hormones and Powerful Cars: The Construction of Men's Sexuality in School Sex Education and Popular Adolescent Film." As in the John Hughes film, Whatley states, "school sexuality education leaves out any discussions of women's desire, sexual pleasure, and positive aspects of sexual experience" (Whatley 125). Whatley goes on to discuss that the context of sexual

education within high school is limited to biology class, and "Discussions of masturbation, sexual pleasure and desire, and homosexuality, are almost completely absent" (Whatley 122) In turn these notions clarify that sexual representation (or lack thereof) was not isolated in the films of the 1980s. These ill-informed notions of sexuality were ever-present and extended to numerous facets of teen life.

The political climate in the 1980s can be understood through a certain relationship of radical political discourse's inability to change popular culture's conservatism. As taken up by Ann De Vaney "the 1980s body politic sought to rein the female body that had been unleaded by the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s" (De Vaney 201). The films of John Hughes attempted to further constrict the roles of women by representing them as Daddy's girls, confined to the spaces of home and school and with little attraction to cultural or scholastic accomplishment and productivity (De Vaney 209). While there were films that negotiated female experience, sexual desire, and new political discourse, (for example Bette Gordon's *Variety*) they were not even in the periphery of Hollywood's limited vision of sexuality. It is, however, useful to glance at Bette Gordon's film and see the ways in which these similar filmmakers attempted to construct a more realistic version of feminine experience by combating the objectification and depersonalization of mainstream culture and film.

Bette Gordon employs similar tactics and issues raised by *Mary Jane*, but does so about fifteen years prior to Jacobson, and through the lens of a slightly older ticket taker at a pornographic movie theater (instead of a high schooler working at an art house independent cinema). In some ways Christine could be an older, more jaded version of Jane, emancipated from high school and now bound to a harsher reality. She is sexually

knowledgeable but presently concerned with the systemic issues that burdened her adolescent experiences. Gordon and Jacobson are aligned by their respective desires "in investigating fantasy and pleasure, especially how they are constructed in culture and therefore in cinema" (Gordon 420), yet neither were able to widely distribute their visions and elicit widespread change (though *Varity* is presently distributed by Kino International). Gordon, like Jacobson, confronts the mainstream with alternative views of sexuality that are not normally represented. They each, as Gordon states, "intervene with the way dominant culture presents ideas. My work is in the mainstream, but I insert questions and discomfort into images, narratives, and stories" (Gordon 420). This goes against some views of radical feminism in a certain desire to not succumb to their ever-present marginalization. Whereas some feminists desire to create a completely alternative type of feminist erotica, both Jacobson and Gordon understand their already marginalized position and desire to create a more inclusive mainstream representation of feminine experience.

The most subversive element of the film is its introduction of the protagonist, Jane. The typical John Hughes film culminates in one perfect, pristine, almost sublime moment, often signified by a kiss (always heterosexual subjects). That is where the story ends, and by drawing from the faulty fairy-tale logic of happily every after, the spectator is left to assume the best conclusion. These two young individuals will go on to lead a charmed life of heteronormativity which in turn perpetuates the cycles through giving birth to a new generation of princesses, popular boys, and geeks. *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore* unveils this type of fallacies by showing the not so sublime actuality of being de-virginized, or 'loosing it in a cemetery'. It is not pretty. It is real. The real

potency lies within the standards that the opening scene counteracts, those of feminine youth positioning romance to be the ultimate goal of adolescence. As Amanda Maxfield states, "The loss of virginity and subsequent heterosexual activity does not merely signal biological entry into adulthood; it constitutes a male acceptance of the female into her place in patriarchal society--- namely as sex object and eventually as child bearer" (Maxfield 146). By showing and starting with the not so pleasant reality of adolescent sexual relations, Jacobson establishes an honest glance into teen life that John Hughes films never accomplish. This scene is also liberating in the sense that these are the only the beginnings of Jane's encounters and she is not defined through her desire to be romantically involved with Ryan. In addition, in Hughes's films the goal of the individuals is either sex, or a relationship, Jacobson already establishes these aspects of teen life (through the cemetery scene and subsequent party scene), creating an environment that moves past the bland goals of the typical Hughes film.

Though Hughes has outsiders in his films, they are all standardized by their relationship to the institution that binds them together and creates and maintains their social grouping (high school). In *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin* Anymore, Jane's relations are of a more countercultural backing; that is to say, she is deemed 'the token high schooler' of the groups of individuals she interacts with. The film establishes that Jane's social group is not made up of high schoolers, and Jacobson goes even further to show that certain individuals did not even graduate from high school. Being from suburbia is not the unspoken standard; it is instead something that marks Jane as a minor outcast, or different. Though the role of the outsider is taken up in most of Hughes's film, they still play an integral and essential role within their respective high schools. In *Mary Jane*,

Jane's attachment to high school is of a purely academic nature, whereas she seeks sexual experience outside of these limiting confines.

Antithetical to Hughes's scant representations, *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore* is a refreshing glance of girlhood in high school, one that does not obscure conversations about sex through innuendo or hidden lingo. A particular example of this would be the way in which Jane openly asks and converses with her co-workers about the loss of their respective virginities. They are open to taking up this kind of dialogue and impart various information on Jane that she is later able to utilize in her own sexual pursuits and experiences. It seems healthy, as if the knowledge that is being shared is building a community that is comfortable and creates a type of safety net. Though it is of note that not everybody in the theater community is open and caring on the surface, Jane maintains healthy and beneficial relationships with everyone at the theater. Jacobson's dialogue (drawn from real life experiences) pertaining to sex is completely opposed to the type of ways teens go about talking about sex in Hughes films. The characters in Hughes's films have structured a type of secretive hidden language where any information appears to fit into a power dynamic that perpetuates antiquated courtship rituals. For instance they do not talk about sex through speech. Instances where sex is mentioned are covert, and rarely occur. One instance in *Sixteen Candles* occurs when Sam is filling out a questionnaire with such inquires as, "have you ever done it," (note that the word sex is not explicitly stated), "What was it like?" and "If you haven't done it, who would you pick to be your first?" Though there are moments of verbal sexual explicitly, they more often than not rely on innuendo instead of straightforwardness. For instance panties become proof of sexual intercourse, and in the realm of teendom,

acquiring a girl's panties is converted into a signifier for sealing the deal. These actions also shed light on the drastic gender divide that infiltrates all areas of high school life, and constrains individuals to prescribed, restrictive roles. Therefore these types of films about teen life communicate and perpetuate such notions as 'boys will be boys' (as demonstrated with the panty scene and the homo social behavior of busting out of the bathroom door to reveal pink panties to a group of drooling troglodytes), as well as the '"proper" ways for girls to speak about sex (by, in fact, not).

There is one John Hughes film that does openly discuss issues of a sexual nature, but does so in a tactful way that does not impose on the neoconservative nature of his films. In *The Breakfast Club*, after the five characters have smoked marijuana they openly discuss their views and personal histories regarding sex. This can only happen due to the double transgression that has already occurred, first establishing that these students somewhat all border on delinquency and warrant a certain amount of reprimand from the administration of their high school, and secondly, they are high. This is by far one of the most interesting occurrences in Hughes' films because it forefronts that which has previously been subtext, while demonstrating the nastiness that can be sexual encounters in high school. It also marks the only time when both boys and girls speak openly about sex; a type of co-mingling that is usually shown in opposition in his previous films. This is allowed to occur by placing sexual insight in the opinion of the loose cannon of the group Allison (Ally Sheedy). In relation to the double standards girls face, she states "if you don't you're a prude; if you do you're a slut. If you don't, you want to and can't. If you do, you wish you didn't". In this instance Hughes' and Jacobson are aligned in discussing the pitfalls and paradoxes of adolescent high school sexuality. The main

difference lies in the fact that this was a minor happening in Hughes film, whereas Jacobson chose to make it the thrust of *Mary Jane*'s subject matter. Also Jacobson shows her characters to be normal, caring, honest portrayals of Midwestern youth, while Hughes' characters are only allowed to speak on the taboo subject of sex under the influence of drugs and in school suspension.

Another important issue to take into consideration is that Sarah herself was directly dealing with the types of issues addressed in *Mary Jane*. John Hughes was already well in his thirties when he began writing screenplays and was thus more detached from the real life and experiences of teenagers. In addition, it is important to consume these films individually in terms of technical prowess and profession finesse, due to the fact that the budget of *Mary Jane* ($50,000) was what a typical Hughes film spends on catering. In fact only three people out of Jacobson's crew of over fifty got paid. Jacobson individually labored and was responsible for directing, editing, and writing the film, whereas Hughes has always had a tremendous amount of monetary support. Once again, as with her previous short film *I Was a Teenage Serial Killer*, Jacobson employs the punk ethos of DIY filmmaking, which serves to strengthen the message of her film by linking its physicality to the type of counter-culture she is examining. The film is gritty, scrappy and raw, just like the characters Jacobson is representing.

Death is an issue that is almost never discussed in the light and airy films of John Hughes and his brat pack constituents. It does not fit into the liveliness of teen-hood discourse and would be too real of an issue to take up in their depictions of airbrushed high school experience. Therefore the death of Jacobson's character Tom yields intense

and extreme impact and potency. Much aligned with the rest of the film, his death shed lights on the actualities of Midwestern coming-of-age, and the kind of dark underbellies that major Hollywood pictures tend to shy away from. Or as bell hooks states, "Hollywood is not into plain old sorrowful death. The death that captures the public imagination in movies, the death that sells, is passionate, sexualized, glamorized, and violent" (hooks 91). To take up the issue of death within the parameters of high school becomes a particularly compelling issue due to the fact that it had previously not been included in the discourses of John Hughes's films. In addition, it is an action of responsibility due to the copious amount of drug and alcohol use within the film. Coming full circle Tom's death highlights accountability and consequence, not from a measly authoritative figure, but of real life actuality. Tom is buried in St. Davis cemetery, interestingly enough the same place where Jane lost her virginity. Once again Jacobson takes a taboo topic that is ever-present in reality yet omitted from fictitious representations and makes it something that confronts the audience and creates a certain amount of sympathy for the story of *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*. This is by far the most textured and poignant moment in the film, and somewhat fall short in terms of evoking the most potent response from the viewer.

Each Hughes film relies on certain codes or tropes to inform the average spectator. Therefore, when the spectator sees a character in a Hughes film that wears glasses, he/she is immediately identifiable as a geek. This is not only established through John Hughes's films (his body of work does seem to rely heavily upon self-reference) but is also reinforced in the reality of high school existence. These characters are pure Hollywood, romanticized images of unrealistic exaggerations. What helps to make the

characters more life like in *Mary Jane*, are their eccentricities, or quirks (Ryan's smiley face collection, for instance). Jacobson film does away with these standards and creates characters who somewhat play with these limited standards. For instance even though Jane is the centralized female character she is not aloof, quite, skinny---reductively she does not fit into the normalized gender scripts of a high school girl looking for love. Furthermore, her mannerisms are abrasive, boisterous, and she spits curses without a second thought. This was quite deliberate on Jacobson's part, as a result the actress who plays Jane (Lisa Gerstein) was required to gain ten pounds in order to secure the role.

Masturbation is a topic that still has not been fully dealt with in mainstream motion pictures, and is perhaps one of the reasons *Mary Jane* never acquired a distribution deal despite its crowd pleasing nature, and acclaims the film received. The political climate of the 1990s was an interesting one, and for all the progress made, there was a certain amount of backlash and unjustified consequence. For instance the first African American Surgeon General, Jocelyn Elders, was appointed by Bill Clinton, yet was fired for suggesting that masturbation be taught in school; essentially she was terminated for endorsing natural behavior[8]. With this kind of tyrannical action it seems nearly impossible for Hollywood to ever take an informed stance on taboo issues.

The portrayal of family with *Mary Jane*, in relation to the typical Hughes film is truly fascinating. In Ann De Vaney's essay, "Pretty in pink? John Hughes Reinscribes Daddy's Girl in Homes and Schools," the roles of the family and paternal interaction are discussed. In regard to this facet of familial interaction, De Vaney states, "It is telling that in the thirty films Hughes wrote from 1982-2000, mothers are absent, preoccupied,

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[8] Jacobson on Elders: Ultimately, I'd just like the film to open up a whole side of women's sexuality that just isn't there right now. Or even to provoke the whole argument about masturbation. I mean, how dare they fire Joycelyn Elders for suggesting that kids should jerk off. I mean, it's free! (Jacobson, Girls).

neglectful, or uncaring" (De Vaney 210). She furthers this point by discussing the nature of the relationship between fathers and daughters within these films, concluding, "fathers have control over the bodies of their wives and daughters" Jacobson's film is interesting because Jane's father (and mother) are never seen, only heard bickering momentarily in the background (De Vaney 209). They both demonstrate the type of neglect De Vaney is speaking to (always on business trips, they do not attend Jane's honors dinner), yet Jacobson's Jane is sophisticated and resilient. While her parents are arguing she sneaks out of her room, when they cannot attend her special dinner she takes her gay coworker Matt instead. Therefore an alternative way of coming of age is realized through her surrogate family, her coworkers at the movie theater.

In regard to paternal relations within the typical John Hughes film, the role of the centralized girl shifts back and forth between child and mother. *Mary Jane* does an amazing job at addressing the slippage that has been established in Hughes films. This slippage, a restrictive caricature of female adolescence, is shown through countless films and draws from the previous statements surrounding the father's ownership of the daughter and wife, and is explicated by the disavowal of girlhood adolescence. As Mary Celeste Kearney states, "the connection between adolescence and masculinity has been cemented through the repeated discursive displacement and abjection of femininity" (Kearney 6). Adolescence in American has traditionally been gendered masculine and the goals of a typical girl have been geared toward heterosexuality, procreation, and attracting male attention (as seen through all of Hughes films).

In this limited scope there is little room for the female adolescent to express individuality, and the main thrust of girlhood as seen through traditional forms of media

is blatantly governed by a patriarchal, adultist society. Hughes's films clarify this notion, revealing that the girl has no definitive adolescent experience. As de Vaney discusses, there is a certain slippage that exists where she is either a child or a mother, infantile or a caretaker, with no room to fully explore any other kind of roles (209). Hughes's adolescent female characters are either treated like babies, under complete control of their fathers, or they must take care of themselves due to a neglectful mother, thus absorbing and preparing for the rest of their lives. This is seen through the lack of depiction of exploration and experimentation of adolescent sexuality, assuaging the real tension girl youth undergoes through maturation.

Media often shows the differences between girls and boys, and fails to show the similarities thus perpetuating opposition between the sexes. Jacobson subverts this notion by having male characters exhibit emotions and share experiences that have often been mislabeled and stamped as being bound to the feminine. One example of this occurs when Jane is talking to Ryan about the manner in which he lost his virginity. He speaks about how emotionally attached he was to this girl, and how after he lost his virginity to her, she would not give him the time of day. Instances like this mark yet another integral distinction in the work of Jacobson. Adolescence has traditionally been a time in youth where individuals are positioned to grow and develop their respective identities. This response helps to clarify and counteract the notion that girls should solely focus on love, and gain romance in order to fully mature. For girls love is traditionally tied to maturation. "While boys traditionally use acts of separation to develop identify, girls traditionally use acts of attachment" (Thompson 42). Essentially the mainstay of feminine adolescent has consisted of co-opting another (male) identity.

After comparing the copious amount of differences, there exist few similarities between John Hughes's oeuvre and Sarah Jacobson's *Mary Jane*. What can be highlighted through this realization is the difference in experiences. Hughes attempted to construct a standardized model of girl's attraction to boys and patriarchal limitations while Jacobson showed that there are other ways to come-of-age. These ways are centered on community, shared experience, openness, emotion, and ultimately expansive ways to interact with individuals and learn about the surrounding world. Though they both can be viewed as portrayals of teen life, one is more girl positive/oriented, while one imparts an old fashioned sensibility that should have been abandoned in the 80s, but instead has grown to be injected with hyperbolized images of frat boys looking to score.

The distinction between Jacobson and Hughes lies within their antithetical approaches to conveying knowledge. Jacobson has an expansive quality whereas Hughes preaches oppositional, constrictive stipulations. Jacobson tirelessly attempted to give girls an accurate representation of discovering and exploring sexuality, as Jacobson states, "there's so much power that comes from being in control of your sexuality and knowing how it works." Whereas Hughes perpetuated the unrealistic portrayal which rely heavily upon stereotypes and neoconservative ideals, furthering limitation.

The pluralistic overarching goals of *Mary Jane* are representative of the desires of Sarah Jacobson in general, an impetus fueled by the actualization of democratization. The film acts as a reaction to those of the 1980s, which showed a particular representation of coming of age, but was communicated as universal (as discussed previously through different tropes and standardizing tactics which act to normalize the characters). The incorporation of images that have been standardized through the teen film vehicle, or as

Jacobson labels, "the fake Molly Ringwald scenes" (Making Mary Jane), serve as a point of reference, opening new ways to think about the polarity that exists between sexual experience vs. sexual representation. Though it will take more than one film to counteract the romanticized stereotypes and patriarchal discourses conveyed by mainstream Hollywood, Jacobson's attempt is an important one, and perhaps one day there will be a variety of perspectives within the mainstream Hollywood output.

Sarah Flying High

A Conclusion

"Jigsaw Youth, the misunderstood seeking to understand other people's reality. Making mistakes... making mistakes... making mistakes... making mistakes... feeling something. Knowing you will never see the puzzle put all together but trying anyways cuz each fucking piece really matters" ----Kathleen Hanna

Make what you will of the pages that precede and follow. This is not a constrictive exercise in ascribing meaning or definition. This is an open exposition attempting to communicate inestimable possibility. Meaningful films do not die with their creator; meaningful work does not disappear. I personally do not wish to restrict, but to inform. In doing so I have communicated everything I know about Sarah Jacobson in an open fashion. There is an abundant wealth of information that follows this section,

enough information to piece together different fragments of a life, yielding an individualized perspective. I have attempted to retell certain stories from her life that warrant recognition, stories showing why her work is aesthetically and politically valuable. Ultimately, the thread that links the life and art of Sarah Jacobson is creative expression and determination by any and all means. Not allowing the monolithic, patriarchal barriers that act to hinder creative expression, by alternatively using the voice of the disenfranchised to speak for a group of marginalized subordinated culture, Jacobson's efforts are invaluable. If Jacobson's mentality of activated creativity is taken to heart and applied to the limited world of women within film production, the results could be truly subversive.

Each of her major works (*I Was a Teenage Serial Killer, Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*) is an exercise in alternative forms of representation, empowerment through expression. In her films, she is not attempting hostile take over, or the smiting of all menacing mainstream depiction. Instead she suggests through her work that other perspectives exist, perspectives possessing the same, if not more, amount of legitimacy as mainstream depictions, yet for one reason or another, perspectives that are obscured. Once again there is a corresponding link to her feelings about filmmaking and feminism, which in turn acts to bind her work to a certain of pluralism of experience. Overall, Jacobson's communicative expressions relate to a plethora of feminine experience that cannot be limited by an exacted style, only expressed through different outlets, through specified forms. There is no one style that unifies the work of Sarah Jacobson, accordingly the spectator cannot view one of her films and say definitively this is (or is not) a work by Sarah Jacobson. Through a certain transcription of her experience

mediated via the moving image her work has no identifiable stamp. Though as argued before, the mark of the maker is ever present (linking her films to other types of counter-hegemonic forms of cultural production) it is not an exclusive mark. In evaluating her work, there is no one specific style that can be appropriated and produced by future filmmakers to come; rather the emotional content and unstoppable determination are elements worth furthering.

There is a limitless range of possibility through the re-evaluation and re-appropriation of this inter- and extra-textual purview. For Sarah Jacobson, filmmaking was irrevocably an expression of validation, a way of accurately portraying experiences that have traditionally been misrepresented, or not represented at all within the mainstream. The ineffable character of Jacobson's work has a certain eternal quality. Even though she was not able to acquire mainstream success, her films have the potential to be re-evaluated by generations to come, inspiring new work through her legacy. Therefore, the emotional evocation and decentralization of gender oppression communicated by Sarah Jacobson's films is not lost in the murky depths of what could have been, but a positive facet in the lineage of what can be.

Appendix A:
A Conversation with Sam Green[9]

Alana Moskowitz: Do you remember the first time you met Sarah?

Sam Green: Yeah, definitely. In 1997 I had made this movie, *The Rainbow Man*, and I had gone to journalism school here at UC Berkley and kind of made this weird film about this guy, and I didn't know what to do with it or anything like that. I had this teacher in journalism school named Marlon Riggs, and so I knew a little bit about non-tradition documentary film but not too much. So I made this weird movie and I submitted it to Sundance, and it got in. I had never been to a film festival, and I got in, and I didn't know what to do so I went to the Film Arts Foundation, they had a night, like 'Sundance film festival what to expect', and I met this weird girl and her mom there and they were totally armed and ready, they had there plan they were super sophisticated. So we met at this thing and I was charmed and intrigued by them, they knew so much more than me, and so we saw each other at the festival and that was fun. Then afterwards I was hanging out with Sarah because we became friends and I was like, "what do I do with this movie?" she was like "why don't you book a tour". And I was like "huh," you know, and so she kind of clued me in. This is one of the reasons I have a huge gratitude toward Sarah. She pointed out this whole underground film world to me which I had no idea, I didn't know anything about and in some ways she helped to build, there were other people who did it too but it was taking the music model and applying it to film. Which in film really hasn't been done.

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[9] This Conversation took place in San Franscico, January 9th, 2009.

AM: Where did you tour the film?

SG: We went to Seattle, Olympia, Portland, and I think one other place. It was just this great drive down the coast, we had tons of fun and we even made some money, which is amazing. There's nothing better than making a movie and showing it to people. With independent film there was this huge thing about like getting distribution, and kind of like being part of being part of the indie world, but that whole thing is like make a movie, give it to somebody else, never be part of the process, and that's totally lame. The funnest thing is to do a show and get 20 bucks. Way better than to make a movie and never be apart of any show and never make any money anyways.

AM: Did you use that model for any of your other films?

SG: Definitely for *The Weather Underground*, touring and had the same experience, I mean I'd much rather do a show with a hundred people there than have it be on TV and have like ten thousand people watch it in between while they are channel surfing.

AM: Who came up with the idea to do a documentary about the Fabulous Stains?

SG: It was Sarah's idea, she was like a huge freak with *The Stains* and I didn't even know about *The Stains*. She didn't really know how to make a documentary at that point. And so somehow we kind of just like started to collaborate on it, we got in some fights.

AM: What about?

SG: Just like at first it was kinda like I was helping her why are we splitting the money, this is like my thing, but then once we started editing she realized like I knew how to make a documentary and she didn't, then it became more of a half and half thing. Sarah's like somebody she fought with people, she was a cantankerous person, but in the end I was supper happy with what we made. Like we fought a lot but it ended up being good,

like I like to collaborate with people and almost everything I've made that's been a collaboration has been better than what I would make alone. I remember one funny thing with *The Stains* was we were in Lou Adler's house, the director this huge mansion over looking in LA and we were going through these photos and there was something on the news. Like a shooting in a school in Colorado but it was weird we were there while Columbine was happening. So I always have this memory, but anyway *The Stains* came from her.

AM: Were there any other fights?

SG: There was one part, that we fought over a lot where what's her name (Nancy Dowd) was talking about you know she had a really hard time with the movie, she was talking about being sexually harassed after the camera guy grabbed her boob. But I was always like, "Sarah can we cut this out?" She was always like "NOOOO! This has to stay". After awhile I realized for her it was that was an important part of like, the difficulty of being a female director, which she definitely dealt with and I did not. So for me it was like we gotta cut something like lets cut the boob story but for her it was really important.

AM: What did you end up cutting?

SG: We cut some other stuff and we kept that cause she really wouldn't give on that and that was good I mean, looking back I'm happy and she was right.

AM: So that came out in 2000, right?

SG: I think so I've lost a little track of that but yeah, whatever year Columbine happened

AM: The film was recently released widely on DVD, did the documentary have anything to do with its release?

SG: Well Sarah's like advisory of it, I mean basically she was like a one-woman publicity machine for that movie and any cult status it has is really Sarah just totally over and over again just pumping it up.

AM: It's entire cult status?

SG: No, I mean it is a legitimate cult thing but a lot of it came from her. I mean there were some people who had seen it on Night Flight or whatever but most people knew about it from her. And Rhino Records who put it out, gave some money this year to the Sarah Jacobson Grant to acknowledge that this wouldn't be coming out without her. Do you mind if I babble for a little?

AM: No that's fine

SG: Sarah's like her promotion thing was so funny like I am like pretty shy about those kinds of things its not easy for me to talk about myself so much, but Sarah was incredible. I would hang out with her and when you hang out with someone you like go around town and you have like lots of conversations with different people. She would just say the same thing over and over again like "yeah me and my mom got into Sundance," I'd be like "Sarah you've said that seven times in a row, I've heard you do the same rant", but the cool thing was she would do it for other people too, she was always like "oh this is my friend Sam and you gotta see his movie, its so good". So she was like a promoter of many things not just herself so it wasn't just like total narcissism.

AM: Did you keep in touch with her after you finished *The Stains* documentary?

SG: Yeah I mean she still lived here and we were still pals, then she moved to New York.

AM: Did you remain in contact after she left San Francisco?

SG: Yeah yeah yeah. She moved to New York I saw a little less of her but we were still pals. She went through, are you interested in her personal life and stuff like that.

AM: Yeah totally.

SG: I think understanding someone as much as possible is a good idea. I mean I love doing research, and like nothing is unimportant and if you want I can tell you more about her personal life situation. (Sam asked me to turn of the recorder, then we resumed by talking about her move from SF to NY)

II

SG: I don't think it was necessarily that she outgrew underground stuff, but it was more like she was changing.

AM: In what ways specifically do you think she was changing?

SG: Well changing just in terms of, I think she wanted to go in a different direction professionally. She felt like she did stains and she had this script for sleaze and she wanted to do it as a real movie. Because also she was pissed, she saw all these people, like the *Clerks* guy, a lot of guy filmmakers, who it seemed very easy for. They make one stupid Sundance film and then they get millions of dollars to go make a movie. She was frustrated that that didn't happen and she had wanted it to happen. I kind of feel like she was like fuck this San Francisco underground shit, I am just gonna go to New York and work in TV and try to figure something out something new to do. Maybe that was it, San Francisco is a little cut off from the feature film world. So maybe she thought she would be closer to people who could make a movie happen. One thing I was really surprised about was after she passed away, Aaron (Zisman) have you met Aaron her boyfriend?

AM: No, Not yet.

SG: He is super and like a total fucking saint with Sarah. They got together shortly before she got sick, and it was a really wonderful connection. She had always been frustrated in love, then he just stuck with her totally through the whole cancer thing. But after she died he put together a DVD of stuff she made while she was in New York, which I didn't know anything about, like really good videos, like really good.

AM: What videos are on that?

SG: Like the *High School Reunion* one, like oh my god that video is really good. I had not really known that she was doing stuff in New York and she wasn't really getting it out there. It was like pre-youtube, and I don't think she really sent stuff out. But she was more creatively involved than I had thought at that time.

AM: And she taught too at the New School?

SG: Yeah she taught a class at the new school that's right.

AM: Have you seen her influence on other filmmakers?

SG: Yeah, she influenced me a lot in terms of distribution and about DIY, DIY distribution and the value of doing it yourself in terms of distribution. Its difficult to pinpoint her exactly, but she was a big part of and a big creative force in a moment of underground film kind of late 90s that affected a lot of different people that sort of rippled out. And there are a lot of people out there, like Miranda July is someone who I wouldn't say Sarah influenced her in this way or that way but there was a moment that Sarah was a big part of that inspired a lot of people. Matt McCormick is another person,. There are a number of people who kind of came out of that moment and who are still doing stuff. In some ways I feel like, Sarah was at the right place at the right time,

someone who as a teen had been influenced by a lot of musical stuff, a lot of Minneapolis, kind of like that like Husker Du and the Replacements.

AM: Like Babes in Toyland?

SG: Yeah, there's a whole musical influence and then kind of connected that to an underground film, like George Kuchar, John Waters, and then there's like that underground horror world, she sort of brought those two together in a way that in the mid 90s was pretty, like hadn't been done before.

AM: Yeah and then on top of that she was able to take that film and distribute it in a fashion that hadn't been done before, or very much, with station wagon productions.

SG: In some ways Station Wagon Productions is the perfect metaphor for what they were doing. This suburban thing, taking the band approach but going out and doing it a way that many people had done in the 60s, Kenneth Anger had done that. I mean a lot of people have done this DIY distribution model. But she also did like IndieWIRE, do you know IndieWIRE?

AM: Yeah.

SG: Those people loved Sarah, and she was pals with them right when they started, and they acknowledge that she coined the term 'indiewood'. She was that kind of person who was talking to a million different people. There has even been a lot written on 'connecty' people, people who make fads happen. So the fact that indieWIRE is now 10 years and she was right there at the begging is a reflection of her nature as a pretty cutting edge person in terms of all of this. That's the thing, she was just around when things started and now she's gone. She was very good pals with Laurie Barbero from Babes In

Toyland, she was like the drummer or something like that, and she wanted her to be in sleaze.

AM: Didn't Sarah want Sleaze to kind of be about Babes in Toyland?

SG: Yeah. She loved music. You know she did this funny thing maybe you have seen it, that music video. When the hype machine was happening they were kind of victims of their own success you know they over hyped it, because they were so good at it. She started getting music video jobs; I think Kim Gordon got her a music video job.

AM: For what band?

SG: Fluffy?

AM: Oh yeah I've seen that

SG: And it was like a totally disaster, Sarah hated this band. In a way it was like everything she was against, totally pre packaged fake girl rock group.

AM: I had no idea she didn't like them.

SG: She hated them! And they hated her.

AM: Really? Cause I read this interview at Fales, with Fluffy and one of the girls was talking about how I was a Teenage Serial killer was her favorite movie.

SG: That's so funny because Sarah said they were total bitches, who like ignored her and were mean to her maybe it was because Sarah wasn't cool. In a lot of ways she was truly cool, but if you're a super trendy person, these are like girl rock people, you'd look at Sarah and say she's lame, but you know like she wasn't. That may have been why she felt like they didn't like her. So that was a bad experience for her.

AM: How did she meet Kim Gordon?

SG: I don't know, but that's what I mean, she was an amazing schmoozer she knew tons of people. She was incredibly brave about just dealing with people and talking to people and very funny. And people really wanted to help her. Like, Nancy Dowd was really helpful to Sarah and liked her and read *Sleaze* a lot and helped her out. Somehow I never read it and she was always rewriting it but it never really took off.

AM: I wonder why it never took off.

SG: Yeah yeah, she was always changing it, it didn't seem like she had a concrete vision. She'd be like "ok it's not gonna be about the girls" and things like that. Have you read it?

AM: No not yet.

SG: I think part of it was her personal unsettled state after the Mary Jane experience died down.

AM: So that was pretty devastating for her, not getting her film picked up and commercially distributed?

SG: Not devastating but I do think it was frustrating. Frustrating is definitely the right word. The thing is she did tons and tons of screenings, her and Ruth went all over, but at the end of the day she wasn't satisfied with that. That she wanted more. Her experience with *Sleaze* further frustrated her. Nobody was giving her money to make it.

AM: So we already discussed a little about her influence on other filmmakers, in terms of a kind of rippling impact, but it seems like maybe she had just as much, or maybe more influence on like the larger picture of the film world. Maybe not creatively directly influential but in terms of like spreading the word, like terms of her writing and just traveling all over.

SG: Yeah well she was really into NYUFF, and CUFF Sarah was kind of key in both of them happening in terms of her work and her energy. There is a great guy who did the NYUFF, Ed Halter. Ed really was a great person who knew Sarah and understood where she was coming from. Ed did the Flaherty film seminar, its been going on for 50 years or something and every year there is a different curator and its documentary film and kind of like experimental documentary. A lot of people come like 200 people, academics and filmmakers, and it's at a college on the East coast and for a week you watch movies all day and night and discuss. The curator puts them together and there's usually a theme about five years ago Ed was the curator. He did a lot of underground stuff, all stuff that came out of this moment. Like have you heard of Helen stickler?

AM: Yeah.

SG: She made this movie *Stoked* a few years ago; it's a documentary about a professional skater who killed someone. It was actually at Sundance and it got picked up. Helen was someone was like a friend and rival of Sarah's. Sarah had like a love/hate relationship with Helen, but they are both similar figures in that Helen went to RISD. Have you seen *Andre the Giant*?

AM: Yeah.

SG: Yeah it's good. Shepard Fairey is a perfect example of the same world. I mean Shepard Fairey comes out of a kind of 90s underground punk art world, that Helen came out of and Sarah came out of, so its not an accident that Helen and Sarah were colleagues and ATG is in there, sense of irony and all that. So Helen is worth knowing about, just in terms of a contemporary who was influenced by Sarah and influenced Sarah. Helen had

been a stripper though and really like a girly girl, that was one thing that would get on Sarah's nerves, kind of girly girls who would work their girly girlness.

AM: Yeah I read this interesting conversation with Allison Anders, Tamra Davis, and Sarah that kind of talks about the same thing, kind of female aggression, or passive aggression, and the experience of trying to make films on any level as a woman.

SG: Both of them were kind of like mentors to Sarah. It was Tamra Davis who got her some gigs, maybe the Fluffy gig, both of them helped her out. They were good solid relationships. Then I wondered why they couldn't do more with her in terms of *Sleaze*. I think Tamra was very helpful, all those people saw Sarah as a real talented person who was dealing with the shitty male dominated film world. Someone who needed and deserved their help. So I think they were all kind of like mentors to her. After Sarah moved to New York she got involved with this group that it wasn't the Guerilla Girls, it was a similar type of thing doing something about men in the film world and Helen got involved too and Sarah was really pissed. She had to deal with Helen but Mary Harron was involved in that too, and she knew and liked Sarah. That was one of the last things Sarah was involved in, right before she got sick.

AM: Would it be ok if we spoke a little more about her influences, I know we talked a bit generally about George Kuchar, but what about some of the other people that may have influenced her?

SG: Yeah, Craig Baldwin is a real interesting guy; he lives here (in San Francisco). He is sort of like a legend of underground film a generation younger than George. You probably have heard of ATA, Artist Television Access?

AM: Yeah

SG: Craig lives there, and he has lived there forever and he's in his 50s. He is just like a loon but a total genius. He is sort of like a Sarah equivalent, but more from the 70/80s generation. He is a huge collector of old found footage films and makes his films like collages of old industrial film and shit like that. He took this trash/industrial music aesthetic and collided that with experimental film. So Sarah learned a lot, for anyone does experimental film in San Francisco, Craig is a real reference point and influence; she got a lot of her knowledge of experimental film and underground distribution through him.

AM: Directly?

SG: Yeah.

AM: How did they meet?

SG: Just being here. Other Cinema, like every Saturday night he does a program at ATA. It is always really good stuff, he's in touch with people all around the world, people send him stuff, so me and Sarah went to a lot of shows there. So Craig knows, he himself has toured his films all over the world. So he knows and is very helpful, and is like check out this place or go to this place, so she learned a lot from Craig and also Danny Plotnick. She gave a lot of props to him, because he's someone who is kind of older now and not making as many films but in the '90s he made a lot of films and had a lot of rock roots kind of like punk alternative music roots. He had done what she had done but before she had done it. Sarah kind of took what he was doing and did it a lot bigger and better. She was always really clear that she learned a lot from those two. Danny had somehow taught classes here and Sarah took some classes with him. His stuff was like funny goofy humor type stuff. So feel free to keep in touch. For me one thing that was really sad to see was

how people have forgotten, not that many really know who she is these days. So it's nice to have somebody who is interested.

AM: Yeah it's been really interesting doing all this research and talking to people, I've never really done anything like it.

SG: I love research cause anything I have done like the *Weather Underground* movie in a way, I always feel like you are kind of attracted to people who are some version of yourself on some level. You are interested in them because there is something about them that resonates with you. So Sarah was a very interesting person. Have you seen all her stuff?

AM: I think most of it; I don't think I have seen the one with the Mohawks, but I think that is it.

SG: You should talk to Aaron because I think he put together a DVD of all the littler things like that, and the *High School Reunion*. He has the Mohawk piece because it was him and Sarah, so he will be happy to give you a DVD or whatever. Yeah but I love Sarah, she was the one who told me to submit my film to the NYUFF. It used to be run by this guy, Todd Phillips, and I think that was also was Sarah was upset. Like he moved on from the festival and did *Old School*, but he did a documentary about GG Allin, do you know GG Allin?

AM: Just a little, I knew all these gross dudes who really liked him, so I never got into him.

SG: He was just this insane, insane 90s punk dude.

AM: He was in bands?

SG: He had his own thing, like GG Allin and The Murder Junkies. He was completely like a Sid vicious person but for real, insanely self-destructive. Anyway Todd Phillips made a documentary about GG Allin, and nobody would show it so he started the NYUFF, in probably like 1995. In 1997, when I showed the *Rainbowman* and Sarah helped me out a lot, and Ed had taken over. In a lot of ways Ed was important in terms of this scene and this scene coming together. Matt McCormick is somebody who came out of this world and me and Sarah met Matt on this tour she did with me. We were in Portland and this guy came up to us and was like "hey I make movies too, can I give you a DVD?" and it turned out to be Matt who is still somebody who makes great stuff. He made a really amazing movie with Miranda July, Self-Conscious Art of Graffiti Removal, it's really good. So like Ed is somebody who brought all these people together through his curating and also his writing. I had this period with Sarah where we were hanging out all over the world it was fun. We hung out in Amsterdam, she was life off touring Europe, and I was there for a film festival. LA, New York, it was really a great time. There are these two guys from LA who do this crazy video called Animal Charm, that's what they call themselves. I met them through Sarah; Sarah was one of these people who was great at putting you in touch with people. I can think like 10 maybe 15 people I met through her. I used to go to Yoga with Ruth; we would go to Yoga classes together.

AM: Do you still go to Yoga?

SG: Sometimes, but Ruth was really into it. They were such a weird, like living with your mom, it's funny cause it's like the cool thing about Sarah was that it was so not underground. To be like working with your mom. So she was like cool enough to not be cool, which I liked.

AM: Do you also know her sister?

SG: Yeah. She's pretty straight though. But funny, they are a funny match.

AM: Cool, is there anything else you would like to contribute about Sarah?

SG: She would definitely be interested in her own placement in terms of pop culture and underground culture and her role in that. Or like her position in that, I think that she is a significant person not like a hugely famous person but someone who… but I think Sarah would want you to understand her personal life as well and maybe that wouldn't be like part of what you publicize or whatever but I know that she would know that the art she made and what she was about came out of her own personal life and her own personal experience.

Appendix B:
A Conversation with George Kuchar[10]

Alana Moskowitz: Do you remember the first time you met Sarah?

George Kuchar: Yeah it was at Bard College. She picked me up, I took the train from New York I was invited to show films at Bard and she was the taxi driver. She picked me up by the car and she took me to the place and she was very nice and talkative and then I had my show and afterward some of the faculty and her we went into the cafeteria and we ate and I remember having poppers. And I enjoyed it very much. In fact I had brought my camera and I have her on camera, I have her on video tape during that dinner. And then she decided to jump ship, and decided to come to the Art Institute (in San Francisco). And she called up and at that time she was riding a bicycle. And I said ok lets go eat so we went to the US café she had her bicycle and she was going to bring it into the restaurant but they told her "no you can't bring it into the restaurant". So she was more of a Midwestern type girl and out of sync with the so-called California thing, like don't bring your bicycle into the restaurant.

AM: Was she out of sync in any other kind of ways?

GK: Yeah many ways. She was like larger than the other students, not only in size bulk, some people considered her the cavewoman, because she had aggressive kind of mass. Her dresses were long, pioneer women dresses and then big boots or shoes. But she was she actually started making movies and I was her adviser and she had made one movie where the whole film was scratched. It either got scratched in the printer-- it was ruined

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[10] This Conversation took place in San Franscico, January 9th, 2009.

some how. She got it out of the lab and it had giant scratches in it. And she showed it me and said "I have to throw it away" and I said no, all you gotta do is design another sequence that has big lines running through it and make it look like it's a motif.

AM: Was that for *Serial Killer*?

GK: I think so, I told her that if you incorporate those lines visually in another scene, like put them on a wall or something then maybe it will look like its part of the project that was planned. She did that and it worked. And then one of her other teachers who was into avant garde film who would normally I think would reject her somebody who wouldn't pay any attention to her because she's not making avant garde pictures would not be interested but actually she championed her and helped her along.

AM: Do you know what professor that was?

GK: Yeah that would have been Janice Lipzin. She sort of championed her instead of not paying any attention to her. And Sarah would go on and charge through and keep on making her movies no matter what. You know she wanted to make pictures and nothing stopped her.

AM: What classes was she in?

GK: We had a production class and at that time we made a picture, which was about 2 women who wanted to get, careers one wanted to be a singer and one I guess they both wanted to go into show biz. One became a model and the other became an opera singer. Sarah worked on the crew of that picture and at that time we did second and third unit shoots I would bring my camera from home and then the students would use the cameras at school and she shot a sequence discussing the biography or background of one of the fake characters. She went into a classroom and became like sort of like a teacher and had

somebody shoot her delivering kind of like a monologue on this person. And at that time she was making friends with some of the students.

AM: Did she generally get along with the other students?

GK: She did in a way, but some of them I think found her somewhat aggressive or something. Some teacher would say something that got on her nerves she would come right out and say something to it and you know they would think that she was disruptive. Maybe like a bit of a troublemaker, some people you know. But I always found her straightforwardness very important in movie making, that's how you finish a picture. But some other classes that were more involved with you know like talking like dialogue, and lectures may have found her opinionated and overbearing in certain areas. She would come out and charge at something she didn't like.

AM: Did you keep in touch with her after she left San Francisco?

GK: Yeah, she got out of school and she was making a feature film the *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore.* And she would call me up every one in a while as she was editing and on Market Street over one of these big theaters. She rented space and would edit her picture and would call me and say "will you come take a look I got a question about this or that" and she would play me the footage but the place was hard to get any coffee so I would be there and there would be no coffee you know I would have no coffee but I would look at the footage and give her comments but she had definite ideas. Some of my comments were not really necessary because she had definite ideas. But I did give her feedback but she pretty much knew what she wanted.

AM: So she wouldn't take into consideration much or your feedback?

GK: She would, she would but I knew she was strong enough to go on her own and she knew when to not pay any attention to me at all. I was even in the movie I played a professor.

AM: What was the atmosphere of the set like?

GK: It was a comfortable set. She was not a dictatorial megalomaniac it was comfortable and I met some of the other crewmembers and they had adjusted to her personality. And she would come over the house and she wound up in a couple of my movies. Diary videos.

AM: Which ones?

GK: She was in, I forget the names already, but a bunch of them occasionally she would pop in and appear. And then we went over to her house one time, Same Green was there and a guy who does these sex tapes and also photos of fetish work, Charles Gatewood. She had a luncheon at her house he was there and Jack Stevenson who writes books, "Fleshpot", writes books about the underground. I was there one afternoon, she prepared a nice little meal. She was social and getting into the film scene she was kind of like a vital element and then she would appear in different festivals. She had a problem with her father, something had happened in the past with her father that perhaps turned her into a-- she was very wary of certain things politicized because of what had happened with her father. It was of a sexual nature. He's still alive, she saw him at a festival. I was there and he showed up and everything seemed ok, he might have had mental problems. I don't know. You know her mother was one of her big champions, when she had a show of the *Mary Jane* at the venue a couple blocks from her the mother came with pail and a bucket to clean the theater.

AM: Yeah I haven't had the opportunity to speak with Ruth yet, but I am going to try to this month.

GK: Where is she living now?

AM: In Delaware, I think, in Wilmington, which is good because I am from Pennsylvania so it is really close to me.

GK: Do you like scrapple?

AM: I don't think I've ever had scrapple.

GK: I like scrapple but I don't eat it much. So her mother was a big champion of her movies.

AM: Yeah it's really great that she had that kind of support. Did you attend any of her screenings in the area, I know you also had screenings together in other places too, like Minneapolis and Chicago is that right?

GK: Yeah it was, the Chicago film festival, I was there when her picture showed.

AM: Were you screening something that year as well?

GK: Yeah, I had a movie in there, I forget what it was though. They gave me an award.

AM: What award?

GK: It looked like a sewer cover from a manhole; it was an underground filmmaking award. And she was there with her movie (*Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*) and her whole cast was there. She used a guy, he was very nice looking, an actor her mother had a crush on him. Chris Enright, he's the star of *Mary Jane*, he's in LA, he's interested in acting and he had a lot of he was good looking, he had a nice screen presence and he was serious about acting. She used him in the picture. She always liked the way I used him, because since I got to meet him I would put him in class movies. She thought he was

used best in my movies, in her movies he was ok but never played up the sort of the sexual kind of magnetism he had. He was one of the big stars and her mother liked him very much thought he was kind of a knock-out of a man. Then she worked with her mother (in San Francisco). I would occasionally see them on the street. I finally got to hear a good version of the film, cause there is a lot of dialogue and you know a 16mm print. Sometimes when you go to these movies you cant really hear the dialogue, finally I heard a very good version that was played in a movie theater in New York, it was a professional movie theater except that the ceiling had water damage and certain seats you couldn't sit in cause the ceiling was kind of caving in.

AM: Do you remember which theater that was?

GK: I can't remember. I finally heard the picture and it's a very good picture. I went to the screening and she was there and she talked afterwards she was very happy that it was being shown in a professional movie theater and stuff.

AM: Did you stay in touch with her after she finished *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*?

GK: Yeah, I would go New York and it looked like everything was going well with her. She had got a job with Oprah, and she liked it at Oprah's company. She never met Oprah but she worked on her television network on cable. I forget what it was called.

AM: Oxygen I think.

GK: Yeah that's it. She seemed to be enjoying it and she would tell me she was doing that and not saying anything bad about Oprah but she never met her. Then she got an editing job, cause she got herself a boyfriend, I didn't met him. She seemed happy. I met one another one maybe, they seemed nice, they looked like punk rock singers or

something. People that work with the band, they fit in good with her cause they had that kind of style of dress. And then she was working on Broadway around 42nd street or something and she invited me to the office where she was editing, she was editing a video. I don't know what it was for, for some television show. She seemed happy, she had gotten an apartment, she had a boyfriend, everything was ok. I was happy for her.

AM: Was that the last time you saw her?

GK: Yeah. But she was in a couple of my films like the diaries, she would come over to the house, we would talk about things this and that.

AM: In so many of her more publicized pieces she talks about how you were her mentor. How do you think you directly influenced her filmmaking?

GK: Maybe, it would be nice, but she was strong on her own. In other words I might have been somebody who, I dunno was supportive.

AM: That seems to be something that was lacking from her experience at Bard.

GK: Yeah, I got a call one time from one of the people at Bard one of the administrators, they said "oh you got her. How's that working out?" there was this kind of suspicion, and I said "oh she's great, she's fitting in and she's working real good", and they were like "she is?" you know like in other words there seems to have been some sort of problem over at Bard, which is possibly something I had mentioned before. Like in some of the classes.

AM: Yeah Bard is very much into the more avant garde practices of filmmaking.

GK: Yeah also the fact of her aggressiveness when she felt that something was not right in certain areas she would come right out with it, you know what I mean? That kind of thing. Since my class was a production class it is sort of aggressive in it's own way

because we are all dealing with one another. Not that we are at each other's throats but it's like, "let's do this," "hey you wanna set up these lights?" that kind of environment, she would foster in, rather than sitting and people coming up with little statements here and there. That atmosphere is kind of creepy, where this is outright confronting in the way that you are making things.

AM: Yeah so it makes a lot of sense that San Francisco would work a lot better in terms of lifestyle and creative productivity.

GK: For my class you know it worked out for her.

AM: Did she run into any troubles with other professors?

GK: Not that I know of. No, she might have been selective in who she was choosing and stuff but she never expressed any bad words about any of the other teachers. At that time there were more teachers than there are now. But Lipzin really championed her, and I of course, and then when she would have her review, she was producing stuff and she would have the power and the goal to charge ahead. I'm not sure if some of the other cast members, as I said I would go there and there wouldn't be a cup of coffee you know it was hard to get a cup of coffee. I think that some of the other members of the cast knew that she was ruthless, that she would charge ahead, like almost like an elephant stampede to get the picture done. She was very concentrated, therefore the little amenities and things like that were dropped to the side. But on the set everything was fine and she enjoyed people. Is she well thought of now at Bard?

AM: Yeah sure, maybe actually it might depend on who you talk to.

GK: Did she graduate from there?

AM: No she transferred out in '91 to San Francisco.

GK: I think this was good for her, coming out here. She met a lot of people, there was a good guy Johnny, who was it, who gave her good reviews, I forget. They had some of the local papers, they would print articles about her, like 'Queen of the Underground'. She seemed to be ok, I hope this is helpful.

AM: This is so helpful, thank you so much for sitting down and talking with me, I really appreciate it.

GK: Oh yeah, yeah. I wish I could remember one of the movies she was in, one of my diaries. Did you ever meet her?

AM: No

GK: Ok, I am trying to remember the movies she was in, it might have been a Christmas picture.

AM: One of your films that she was in?

GK: Yeah, she was in a diary, I can look for that. She's in it talking about *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*, I gotta remember the name of the picture. She was in Sundance you know, she went to Sundance and she liked meeting the big filmmakers like Tarantino. She liked him. I got a picture here of her with Roger Ebert, have you seen that?

AM: No I haven't.

GK: I'll find that. She was always happy to be in videos, she's actually in a bunch of diaries. (showing a picture) That's her at some festival.

AM: Oh cool with John Waters too.

GK: Yeah she enjoyed mingling. Have you met Sam (Green) before?

AM: No I've never met him before, I am actually going over to interview him this afternoon. Is there anything else you would like to share about Sarah?

GK: That's probably about it I think, have you talked to any of her stars?

AM: No I haven't.

GK: They are still around, I used to see one guy in the street all the time. Chris Enright he went down to LA, I don't know how he's doing down there. He was trying to get into acting, gained weight, he may have gotten into something else you know. She used to show a lot, at a couple blocks away, at the Other Cinema, which is ATA, Artist Television Access, you know that place?

AM: I've heard of it but I've never been there.

GK: It's a couple of block away. That's where she played *Mary Jane* when her mom came in with the bucket. That place can be pretty ratty.

Appendix C:
A Conversation with Peggy Ahwesh[11]

Conversation With Peggy Ahwesh: February 18th, 2009.
(Initially Peggy did not what to be recorded, so this is taken mid-conversation)

Peggy Ahwesh: She never liked me much; I do know that she sort of dissed me to other people. Because people would tell me "you know Sarah dissing you," so I kept my distance a bit because she was so aggressive, we were never super friendly. She was always really agitated, and super aggressive.

Alana Moskowitz: What do you think caused her aggression?

PA: Had something to with her background and her family and her goals, she thought Bard was lame and then she was out of here.

AM: It's interesting because reading so much about her you would think she would look for a type of ally in a female filmmaker or professor.

PA: It's not like we had a fight or something, it's like I came to show my work and she was like "who is this uppity woman who thinks she can teach here?" When I came to Bard it was 1990, and I was introduced, Adolfas was the chair, and I was introduced as the first woman to be hired to teach film production. So I remember feeling at the time that that was a lot of responsibility. I can't screw up, and I felt that. There was a moment of transition to have a women be a teacher. Now we have a lot of women teachers, it's cool. It was a dramatic moment and she was not supportive. Jen Reeves was, Jen was a year younger I think, Jen graduated in 93. So maybe she was in the same class, I remember distinctly they were the responses. Jen made a point to say to me, "you know

[11] This Conversation took place in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, February 18th, 2009.

your films are pretty good, you got really rough treatment when you came for your talk and I am glad you got hired".

AM: Was it only Sarah who was treating you roughly when you came for your talk?

PA: That's all I remember, there might have been one other person maybe one of her cronies who were saying mean things to me, I cant quite remember who that person was. John (Pruitt) might remember, John and Peter (Hutton) were both there. It was odd.

AM: It seems like kind of disrespectful, I can't really imagine a student reacting in similar manner. She later took a production class with you, right? How was that experience?

PA: Later when she wanted to take a class with me I thought it was strange, there's a lot of Bard students, so you do not necessarily teach every student in the department. I am not sure why she wanted to take that production class. I actually just found the movie that I think she is in from the class.

AM: I would love to see that.

PA: Yeah I just found it. It's a student production that she's in. It's called *The Have-Alls*, like 'Have' dash 'Alls'. Like the people that have all as oppose to the people that don't have anything. We shot it in Manor (a dorm at Bard College) and it's like a 45 minute synch-sound film. It was a very elaborate production and its kind of an upstairs/ downstairs thing so you have these rich people having a party, it's during a nuclear war, and they all have gas masks on. They are drinking these cocktails of smoke, I forget how they made these cocktails. It's about this guy, Roy who is the main character ,and he is in this wheelchair, and he is like the patriarch of the group and he is in the wheelchair. But then there are these people in the kitchen who are like, the kitchen help. I cant remember,

see I have a terrible memory, I am bad at this. I think there were people in the kitchen and Sarah was one of them, cutting up vegetables and stuff. I have it, you can see it sometime.

AM: That would be great.

PA: I am going to try to transfer it to video sometime. I am pretty sure that was that production. I have a still, I have a picture of her, in the scene with this apron on and some other people in the shot, I'll see if I can find the picture.

AM: How was the experience of having her in your class?

PA: She took the class and nothing really bad happened. I was careful because I was the teacher, I was careful not to be unfair. I tried to be objective and not unfair.

AM: Was that a challenge?

PA: Not really, not so much. But then later I heard she was dissing me.

AM: How was she dissing you?

PA: She came back to Bard and did a show when Greta Snider was teaching here.

AM: I never knew Greta Snider taught here.

PA: She taught here for a year. Cause I was on leave, and Sarah came back that year and did a program at Bard. But I was on leave so I wasn't here for that. But then she stayed at my house with Greta. What I heard from Greta was she was dissing you while she was at your house. This is what they told me.

AM: That's rough.

PA: So I was really never super friendly with her. And I actually never saw her feature.

AM: Did you see any of her other films?

PA: I think I did see *Serial Killer*, but I can't remember. She didn't make that much work because she died so young. How did she get uterine cancer, can't you get operated on for that?

AM: I think the problem was that they caught it too late, and there was nothing that could really be done at that point…(Brief break in the conversation)

AM: Did she get along with the other students in the class?

PA: She was pretty abrasive, there was a core of people who were very excited during the production, she wasn't one of them. Well you know she was very unhappy at Bard and then she left to go study with Kuchar I think. Did you talk to him?

AM: Yeah last month.

PA: Did they get along?

AM: Yes they were very close, George was kind of a mentor to Sarah. Do you have anything else you would like to share in regard to your relationship with Sarah?

PA: It could have been I time in her life, where it could have been anybody who was me, and she would have been like "fuck you". I never really took it that personally, because she didn't know me.

AM; Yeah, how could you really take it personally?

PA: Yeah I think I was just someone who represented something. I was this woman who wasn't really making the kinds of films that she wanted to make. She was only really ever invested in and all about what she was going to be doing. I wasn't part of her package. And Kuchar was more of a kind of underground kind of guy, I made this more theoretical stuff about sexuality, it sits differently with people.

AM: Yeah she was definitely more into the kind of straightforward narrative type of filmmaking.

PA: Yeah maybe she thought the whole Bard thing was too arty.

AM: Yeah at that point in her life it seems like it was kind of hard for her to digest anything that was grounded in the avant-garde, or more theoretically based.

PA: Right, that was the sense I got. But what did she say to Ed about why she didn't like me, or why she didn't like Bard?

AM: Well she didn't like Bard because she found it too based in studying avant-garde, and she felt discounted because she was more invested in narrative. Like her favorite film was *Desperately Seeking Susan* and I guess she felt that Bard was not the right place for her to make films that were more based in that sort of vein. Also she felt out of place because she didn't like worship certain figures from the avant-garde like Stan Brakhage and she felt like everyone else at Bard kind of did. So I guess she kind of felt left out or out of place in a sense.

PA: Kind of hard to find a professor that worships *Desperately Seeking Susan*, but whatever. See these things are really, when you're in your early 20s, and maybe you are, there's a way where if you can't find someone who also loves *Desperately Seeking Susan*, you just feel like you're displaced. So she felt very displaced. But it's interesting because Jen Reeves is so theorized, and kind of the epitome of the more theory based filmmaking. She was a double major, she also majored in gender studies along with film. They are some kind of weird bookends to that graduating class.

AM: What has Jen Reeves done? The name is so familiar; I think I saw one of her films in class, like a very kind of colorful, psychedelic piece.

PA: She makes a lot of art films, like hand painted films. She also makes these weird sex movies. She made *Darling International.* And she made a feature about a woman who is a writer who can't leave her apartment, it's kind of about the Iraq war. It's a really lovely film I forget the title. Black and white, and she made a couple movies about women and mental health, she's had a lot of issues, so she has made a couple narratives about that. She's got a broad range she's not just a Brakhage kind of thing---

AM: Worshipper. Well thanks so much for talking with me, I really appreciate it. Is there anything else you would like to share?

PA: I think that's probably it. I have not thought about her in awhile so I would be curious to read about her and to catch up on her legacy. Because I know after she graduated she did a lot of work with Oxygen. And I will have that movie transferred to video and make sure you see it. It's funny cause I do have this image, and I will see if I can find it, there is a guy suspended from the ceiling with fake angel wings and then there is a woman sitting under him, and Sarah is off to the side cutting vegetables. That's the image and maybe you can use that for something.

Appendix D:
A Conversation with John Pruitt[12]

Alana Moskowitz: Do you remember the first time you met Sarah?

John Pruitt: The very first time. I don't remember the first time. I would say one of the first serious encounters, must have been parents weekend (at Bard College). Her parents came up, her parents talked a lot about how proud they were of her and how gifted they thought she was, and they hoped everything was going to work out ok. I think they were also aware that Sarah already had her goals in mind, she knew exactly what she wanted to do, and their concern was whether Bard was really going to help her be a filmmaker, be the artist she wanted to be. Otherwise I had her in my yearlong film history course, which was a big course; there were about 45 students. She did ok, she wasn't one of the best students but she wasn't one of the worst.

AM: What kind of student was she?

JP: I think she got a B, both semesters. She was a good student she was not an outstanding student and again I think the thing that was in her way in the course was it was her own films and the films that she found most interesting, she was not that open to studying the history of film. She already had an idea of what kind of films interested her, and she thought the films that interested her were the films that would help her make her own films. So it wasn't that she was really that open at that point to looking at different films.

AM: And you didn't go over any of the kind of films that really interested her?

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[12] This Conversation took place in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY November, 2008.

JP: You mean with her?

AM: I mean in the course.

JP: Well it was a general history of film, so we started with silent films, really old films, I don't remember in detail any real conversations with her while she was taking the course. I think she kind of stayed in the back, it was 45 students.

AM: So it was more a straight lecture course?

JP: Yeah a big lecture class, so I don't remember any long conversations about the films, or the course.

AM: Were you on her moderation board?

JP: I don't think so, I am almost sure I wasn't.

AM: What we were talking about last time was how I read in a few articles that the film department had secret meetings trying to keep her out based on her type of over-enthusiasm, and you were saying that those claims were completely bogus.

JP: Yeah we would never, I mean there definitely was some tension, I don't know, the more of the tension and the bad feelings were on her end of things but no. And I even told her this, I mean later she came back I think Gretchen Hogue brought her back, and I said Sarah we were always behind everything you wanted to do. She was kind of grateful for me saying that I remember, she just got it into her head that somehow we didn't like her work or that we weren't sensitive, that the production faculty was not sensitive to the type of film she wanted to make. We don't prescribe what kind of films students can make, you know they can make narrative or documentary, we had that long conversation with Ed. It's true, sometimes when students have a particular thing they want to do and they have to do this film exercises which are not narrative the get anxious and they feel like

the intro lessons are getting in the way of their work, so she felt a little bit of that. She did have a lot of energy, it is often that our best filmmakers do have a lot of energy; there is also a certain kind of selfishness, sometimes too. So tensions emerge, sometimes with our best filmmakers, there's always a little tension. She took it worse than a lot of other students.

AM: Yeah a few sources I read said she was completely ostracized because her favorite movie was *Desperately Seeking Susan*, which is really contrary to what this department primarily teaches which is that of the avant garde and Stan Brakhage. Do you think that she did not get the proper attention from the department because her investment in film was so much more based on narrative rather than the avant-garde?

JP: I wasn't a production teacher, all I can say is that we have had students interested in narrative before, she wasn't the first, she wasn't the first by a long shot. It's true there's nobody on the faculty that, maybe they like that film, I don't know, I haven't seen that film in a long-time, desperately seeking Susan. I mean it's true there was nobody on the faculty that would have thought of Susan Sidelman as one of her or his heroes. So maybe she took that badly. I think the faculty did have a sense that she was kind of a difficult student, that there would be some tensions, she wasn't easy, but not in a bad sense. I think I even remember, I think Adolfas was the narrative person who traditionally would take a student like Sarah under his wing. That would be the place a student interested in the things she does would find a mentor.

AM: Did that happen?

JP: I wonder if it did or didn't. Have you ever heard anyone mention Adolfas in your sources?

AM: Yeah he was in one of the films she made at Bard (*Road Movie or What I Learned in a Buick Station Wagon*).

JP: Adolfas maybe will remember better than I will. But I think he would have been the kind of go to person for a student like Sarah. It was Adolfas who brought George Kuchar, and for all I know he could have been the one to set it up for her to go to San Francisco. Something clicked, she really liked his work and there was some kind of lunchtime conversation where Kuchar was shooting, just something clicked. She said "I'm going to San Francisco". But she passed moderation, I looked up the record, as far as I know she was accepted, if we were going to kick her out we would have failed her at moderation.

AM: So there is no validity in the previous statement about secret meetings to kick her out based on her enthusiasm?

JP: We would never do that, professors don't do that.

AM: Maybe the production staff?

JP: We would never do that. We have had much more difficult students, professors just don't do things like that. First of all we passed her in moderation. Second of all, the truth of it is, is there was always some tension. She didn't take criticism very easily. A lot of times with really good artists they are a little bit selfish, they're work is the most interesting thing. They are not interested in their fellow students work. She was a little bit like that. It was difficult, but she wasn't the first one by a long shot. And she had a lot of energy and she did work. The bottom line for the production faculty is we don't care what kind of film you make as long as you are doing stuff, and she was doing stuff. She

had ideas, she loved filmmaking and she worked at it, I mean who's going to complain about that.

AM: In your personal opinion why do you think things didn't work out for her and Bard?

JP: Because Bard is not an art school. It's an art school in one sense, in that we have practicing arts, students make art here for their senior project and their course work but they also have to take other courses. There is a strict liberal arts regiment, and you have to take math courses and science courses and she was passed that. She already knew what she wanted to do; everything else was in her way. So going out to San Francisco was A, getting to work with someone, she felt George Kuchar's aesthetic was closer to what she wanted to do. Secondly she didn't have to do the liberal arts thing anymore, she was making films she was doing what she wanted to do. Also it was an urban environment, I assume the world of San Francisco probably appealed to her rather than being up in the woods. She was in a city with other artists so she had an instant artist community which you don't have here it's more of a student community, and it worked out, she was happy.

AM: Were you aware of any of her social interactions here at Bard, any insight into those, or were your experiences with her purely of an academic nature?

JP: The student side, it was a long time ago. I honestly don't remember. The one time there was anytime time of personal discussion was with her parents, they were concerned about her fitting in and things working out.

AM: Was this her first year or her second year?

JP: This was her first year. Then there was a little bit of a discussion around the time of her moderation and her leaving. As I remember I was trying to convince her that all this

Anti-Sarah Jacobson stuff wasn't really there. I was happy when she came back later, she had kind of cooled down, and I think she realized at that point that there had been tension and she wasn't happy but it isn't like we were out to get her or anything like that.

AM: So you are saying she was the one who created all this drama, and maybe exaggerated certain circumstances?

JP: Well she was young; when you are young you tend to be more sensitive and more defensive, so I think she made more out of the tensions than she had to. But again that's not that unusual, we've had that happen with other filmmakers too. We deal with young people. But she stood out; nobody would have ever forgotten her that's for sure. She was a character.

AM: What were the characteristics that made her stand out? Was it just that she was difficult, what else kind of set her apart from other students?

JP: Very headstrong, very determined, very set in what she wanted to do, the kinds of films she wanted to make. Somewhat loud, somewhat always talking about herself. Feeling somewhat superior to Bard, in the sense that it wasn't so much is she was going to measure up to bard, it was if Bard was going to measure up to her. I think from day one, as I remember, there were always doubts. I think she had gone to a special art school or something.

AM: Yeah, I think she was in a few different programs, but I think she went to a regular high school.

JP: She was very proud of something as I remember, in a way she was like 'you're lucky I'm here', kind of attitude.

AM: She was able to get in upper level production classes while she was here right?

JP: Let me look that up, as I remember there was only a total of four film classes she took.

AM: Production courses?

JP: Two if I remember correctly, one with Peggy (Anwesh), one with Peter (Hutton).

AM: In her interview with Ed (Halter) she was talking about an encounter she had with Peggy where Peggy cried.

JP: You'll have to talk to Peggy about that. There was a famous incident, if she was there for that, that would have been interesting. Peggy was someone she could have worked with better. Maybe they were too much alike.

AM: Well she in the interview said she saw Peggy's film and it really upset her, and she went ballistic.

JP: Right, I didn't realize, I had forgotten that she was one of the people. That was a pretty amazing incident, we hadn't hired Peggy yet, and Peggy showed a couple of her early super 8 films. She showed films that are very hard to deal with. She didn't know Bard that well, she thought Bard had these really sophisticated art students so I have to show them something challenging. She showed these films that a couple students did get really upset by, you know they get under your skin. I had forgotten maybe Sarah was one of the students who spoke up; there were a couple of students.

AM: In the interview she said she was the first one, and then everybody kind of went with her comments and basically attacked Peggy.

JP: That is possible.

AM: Which is interesting because she said in some of her interviews that the same exact thing would happen to her. She would show work and one student would say

something negative and then other students would take that kind of negativity and roll with it.

JP: Well that's possible. I wasn't in that class. It is possible that part of the tension was with her and the other students. She couldn't really, I don't know how personal it gets I don't teach production. It could be that people didn't like her and they would take it out on her films. It is certainly possibly. Anyway, yes Peggy was so upset. She got attacked and she thought that we would never hire her. (on the computer) What year did she-?

AM: I think she was here '89-'91

JP: Did she say she was able to take advanced production classes or was that other people?

AM:I think it was her in some interviews, she said she got into production courses her first year. She also said when she got to san Francisco she was able to teach older students skills she learned at Bard.

JP: That's interesting. I don't know why I can't go back far enough in the files, I found her before. I found her record. Let me just see. It looks like she was able to take intro to filmmaking in the second semester of her freshman year, so she's right about that. She was able to take that early, a semester ahead of time. She had Peggy twice.

AM: Interesting she doesn't really talk at all about Peggy in what I have read. And I have read a lot about her time at Bard, it's just in that one interview Ed gave me.

JP: She took a course in fiction writing, she took a few classes in psychology she was interested in psychology for obvious reasons. That might be interesting to talk to her professors. It might be interesting to see what comes up in terms of her own psychology, which is usually why students take psychology. It might be hard to track down those

professors. Her advisor was Adolfas, she moderated in the spring of '91. I just vaguely think if she had stayed at Bard she would have been working with Adolfas. Just trying to see if there is anything else I can get out of this. It's not the worlds greatest system.

AM: Is there anything else you would like to share about Sarah and her time here at Bard?

JP: Well as I said she came back, got a good audience for her film, it seemed like a really successful show. If the students gave her a hard time I could see that.

AM: But you never witnessed it first hand?

JP: No. The Peggy incident was a pretty memorable incident. It's funny I didn't remember her as one of the students who spoke up. Peggy might have a better memory. It was a long time ago, almost 20 years. What year did she die?

AM: 2004.

JP: You could try to figure out who some of her fellow students were in the department.

AM: Does the department have some of her moderation films?

JP: No, we don't keep moderation films. I will ask Peter Gadsby how kosher it is to go back and maybe open up some of her files. I will make a request

Appendix E:
A Conversation with Aaron Zisman[13]

Alana Moskowitz: Do you remember the first time you met Sarah?

Aaron Zisman: I think I remember the first time. I was a cameraman for this company Heavy, during the dot com bust in 2000, and they were launching this network called Much Music USA which is now Fuse, it's like an MTV channel. I had been working there as a PA/Cameraperson for like 6 months and then they finally had some ideas for shows and they were bringing in producers. And saran they brought in as a producer, she did a couple different shows but mostly I think they brought her on to do a show called Tastemaker. Which was a show with kids talking about music, usually like pop music that they had music videos for, using it as a way to kind of cut in pop music videos they had.

AM: How old were the kids being interviewed?

AZ: There was no budget so you had like the actors, like I wanna get famous type sort of like teenagers or 20-somethings, theater and performance people who found the ads on like listings. This was digital cable when only a few people had digital cable. So it was like Long Island kids, Jersey kids, city kids, and whoever else wanted to come. So I met her because they brought her (Sarah) in as one of the producers and I had been working on stuff for the channel for a few months. Her and one other guy were the two producers they brought in, so that's when I first met her. I was a camera man and she ended up

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[13] This Conversation took place in Brooklyn, NY March 4th, 2009.

using me as her camera man for a lot of her segments that she was shooting and that's how I got to know her.

AM: Did you always get along with her?

AZ: Yeah, more or less.

AM: How long were you both at that job for?

AZ: (laughs) The week she got laid off she had left this leather jacket in the office, like in the closet. She called me up and told me to bring it, you know asked me to drop it off for her cause she had just been laid off and didn't want to come in.

AM: Did you both get laid off?

AZ: Well I ended up getting laid off like 3 months later. At the time they were changing the shows around so they got rid of the producers but they kept the PA/Camera-people around for a few more months. But I brought the jacket to her and we sort of like hooked up and that was kind of the start of our relationship.

AM: Do you know what she did professionally after she got laid off from Much Music?

AZ: That was like 2002; we started going our like may 2002 like a week after she got laid off, essentially. So she was laid off in may then I got laid off during my West coast vacation in August, I think like 3 months later. She was pitching shows, she had her script, she was writing, like Friday nights were her writing nights, she didn't drink she was in Alanon.

AM: What's that?

AZ: Alanon is like for family member of alcoholics. AA is like if you're an alcoholic and alanon on is like if you come from a family with a alcoholic. It's a place where you can

sort of like talk to other people, it's sort of similar to AA. She was in a couple of programs; I think she was like at that phase of her life. Like she came out of San Fransisco like art school punk rock thing, she was doing the whole film festival circuit where everyone was partying and drinking and she was coming to the flip side. Like "no, I wanna clean out, I'm 30 years old I'm an adult now," kind of thing.

AM: Do you think part of that was focusing more on her professional projects rather than jumping into another film?

AZ: Yeah, basically *Serial Killer* she did at San Francisco Art Institute, I think it was like her senior thesis project kind of thing, and it caught on in the festival circuit. She used that and was really good at the marketing end of things, she got enough money together to do *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore* and did that in San Francisco and then I think her and her mom went to Sundance. And I think she came out to New York almost the same time I did because I remember we were talking about that, so I think she came out here in like the fall of 2000.

AM: Where did you move from?

AZ: I went to art school in Rhode Island and my parents live in Rockland County, which is like the suburbs like 10 miles from the George Washington bridge.

AM: You went to RISD?

AZ: Yeah. I went to art school at RISD so I was in providence, I was in like campus housing then I moved back in with my parents after I graduated and started doing like freelance video work. When I moved to New York I was in Queens then I moved to Bushwick in 2001. So I was living in Bushwick in this loft with my brother and a friend

from back home when I was going out with Sarah at first, actually the whole time I was going out with Sarah.

AM: Where was she living?

AZ: She lived Chelsea, she lived on 16th between 8th and 9th.

AM: Did she live there the entire time you knew her?

AZ: Yeah, well when she got sick like in the last year or so, she had like a third floor walk up, it just with everything going on she couldn't get up the stairs very easily so she moved to a place that had an elevator. Also it was a little bigger so that way there was enough space for like her sister and her mom and me to be there.

AM: Do you know how she chose her professional projects?

AZ: George Kuchar was kind of like her mentor in San Francisco, and I think at one point she told me she got a DV camera, like everything before was like film and video, DV was this big deal because you could get a Mac and finalcut for like 2,000 bucks and do what used to cost you like a 60,000$ editing system. So she was shooting a bunch, she got a DV camera pretty early on when the DV cameras came out, and she was shooting a bunch of stuff. I think she also had a lot of writing on the Internet with the film festival stuff in the late 90s, sort of like what now is blogging. She was sort of like really into the zines, the whole punk rock zines and then she was like writing I think for film threat I think it was.

AM: And like IndieWIRE?

AZ: Yeah, cause she was touring with her film and she was kind of like this young feminist filmmaker so she was always writing stuff up about her crazy experiences traveling with her film, and her mom, and all that.

AM: Did you ever discuss the creative projects she was working on while you two were together, like *Sleaze*?

AZ: Yeah she had *Sleaze* and I think she another like Freakazoid.

AM: Freakathon?

AZ: Yeah, *Sleaz*e was the one she was trying to get made I think she was talking to (Producer) Andrea Sperling. Like she had this one producer in New York who she had signed some contract with him and he was supposed to try to get some funding to get the film off the ground. I think he had 2 years and basically nothing happened. Right as that sort of finished was when she was diagnosed with the cancer. I think she had sort of finished, she had done *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*, she had toured with it. She sort of was like, from what I understood she moved to New York cause she wanted to get her career, she hadn't really made money with the films. I think she was trying to stabilize herself career wise, and also all the films she had done were sort of like DIY, you get your friends you use your friends apartments and rooftops, that kind of thing. I think she was burned out on that, because she cashed in a lot of favors with friends and there was never enough money so I think she was really hoping like she could get a real budget and pay people and not have to be…

AM: Was she trying to maybe make some new friends with more kind of profession connections?

AZ: Yeah she was a big networker. She was very into that. Like I hide in my hoodie, but she was very outgoing at like social events and stuff. She taught at the New School, I think it was like independent film producing and I remember one class she takes like everyone from the class out to a bar and I think they have to get like ten business cards

from people as an assignment. You're supposed to meet people. That was like what she was kind of known for in the festival circuit, she was really good at it, she had her t-shirts and was always talking up her stuff.

AM: Who's idea was it to do the Mohawk piece?

AZ: Well the Mohawk piece didn't get done yet. When she was getting the chemo her hair started falling out and I don't know if it was my idea but I was like I will shave a Mohawk too you know if your hair is falling out I'll shave a Mohawk too. So we gave each other Mohawks and we videotaped it. I think in the interviews, when people were interviewing her when she was sick and stuff, I mean it happened so fast the whole cancer thing. At first her oncologist, her cancer doctor, for the first month, he was the lead oncologist at St. Vincent's Hospital, and he was like on vacation or out of town. For some random reason when she was diagnosed the doctor they had assigned her was just gone. It was a combination of we didn't know what it meant to have cancer, she was like 31 when she was first diagnosed, and she had stage 4 which meant it had spread to her pelvic bones. If it's stage 4 that's pretty advanced, and she was just determined that she wasn't going to let cancer get her. I think stuff like the *True Love Mohawk*, like do you remember there was that big blackout in 2003 and we were at her apartment and it was just us actually and we videotaped, she had her little video camera. It was basically just home video footage that we had shot. At one point we were like yeah we'll make something out of it. I have some of those tapes, Ruth may have some of those tapes, I've been trying to put so many other pieces together that I haven't really gone through the tapes. I think relatively soon I will though, I finally have my computer set up for video editing. So there is no *True Love Mohawk* film yet but I think someday. Yeah and it was

like for a couple of years I just didn't want to go through those tapes and I am trying to put my shit back together too. It wasn't like a big film idea, she had like one boyfriend for a couple months but other than that it was a bunch of random, nothing long term and I think she was really happy to be in a relationship that she felt good about. She had a hard time in high school and stuff, I mean with her dad and you've probably heard a lot of it. The film was also a way of getting off the topic that she had cancer and being like I'm a filmmaker and I wanna make shit and I'm going to get through this.

AM: So were you her first long-term partner?

AZ: When I was going out with her, a couple of months after I started going out with her, there was some dude who ended up over-dosing on heroin a couple months after I met her. He was from San Francisco I never met him or saw him, but I guess she had been with him for like two or three months, not particularly long. But that was a guy who lasted a little bit more than a few weeks or whatever. I guess in a way I was like yeah her first long term sort of thing. We were a couple months past the one-year mark when we found out she had cancer.

AM: How did you find out she had cancer, were you just going in for a routine screening?

AZ: I guess it started, I think it was May of 2003, or something like that. My friend Brett, I had gone to RISD with him, was getting married in North Carolina, we flew down for the wedding and she had this soreness in her hip and she had this huge hard luggage suitcase thing. At the end of the trip we were coming back from the airport and she was like "I can't carrying anything" and I remember we got into this mini argument kind of thing and I was like, "look I'm carrying like 4 bags," you know and that was the first time

she was really in pain. Before there had been a little pain but now there was this pain and it wasn't really going away. She had health insurance so she had gone to a primary care doctor, and the doctor was like, "you've pulled a muscle, go to a physical care specialist." That summer, 2003, she was going nuts, she didn't know if it was psychological, she was kind of processing a lot of emotional and mental stuff. It got worse and eventually Ruth, Sarah's mom came up, and they pushed to have all these tests done, and the finally did a biopsy, and the biopsy is when they found out what it was.

AM: What types of things was she emotionally processing?

AZ: It was weird because it was my first relationship really, and she was a bit older. At the time she was like 31 and I was 24 or 25, she was like 6 years older than me. We were a couple; we had arguments and that kind of shit. She didn't have to really hide or she trusted me, she had never really had that. She was sort of coming into this different spot. She got to the San Francisco Art Institute, she had all this bullshit with her father and growing up in the Midwest and all that kind of stuff. She did *Serial Killer,* then she did *Mary Jane* and she was hanging out with all her punk rock arty San Francisco friends. She joined Alonon but I don't she was an alcoholic. I remember at one point she told me, she went to see some band play in San Francisco with her friend Beth, who I think was like the punk rock girl (Erika) in *Mary Jane.* Some shit went down and people were getting drunk, and some girl broke a bottle on her head or something.

AM: On Sarah's head?

AZ: Yeah it's all coming out, I think Beth was there and the girl was like the girlfriend of one of the guys in the band that was playing some punk show or something like that. The fight broke out and her head got gashed open and her friend Beth, who was one of her

best friends at the time, sided with the other girl or the band or something. She ended up being at the hospital by herself, I think this was after *Mary Jane* and everything. She told me that story once or twice and I remember that story being like the reason she was like, "I gotta stop drinking and I gotta get out of San Francisco, and I gotta straighten my shit out," like that kind of thing. Also Beth was one of her closest friends in San Francisco and then that happened.

AM: That's so wild, I wonder why she didn't have her back.

AZ: I don't know, I know at that point Sarah was drinking that night. This was San Francisco, before I met her, by the time I met her, I mean I met her through work so when I met her she wasn't drinking. She was totally clean, as far as drinking and drugs and stuff at that point. I think whatever happened in that event made her be like I'm cleaning up and I think she had done the whole cycle of getting what you can out of touring your films and getting everything out of that. I think she needed to make some money, for so many people New York is the place to go, it's like the center of punk rock and the downtown art scene.

AM: Did you and her go to a lot of shows together?

AZ: We saw a lot of shows, you know punk, indie rock.

AM: What were some of your favorite shows?

AZ: We saw Detroit Cobras I remember that was like a cool show, we saw The Breeders and that was the day I got laid off and Kim Deal Called me out and said I was a drummer. It was so funny, two friends that I met later were at that show and they were like you were that guy. We saw Sonic Youth at Central Park for free, that was the thing we were both at this music network, and really into music, I mean the majority of those CDs over

there are from Sarah (points to a bookshelf filled with CDs), and Lee, her sister has the other half of her CDs. The records, a huge chunk of the records over there are from Sarah too. She was a music person. Yeah we definitely saw a lot of shows.

AM: What other types of things would you do besides going to shows?

AZ: She could get into all the press screenings. I remember one of the first press screenings we saw was that Wilco documentary; it was the one about Yankee Hotel Foxtrot the black and white one. Then we saw *Spirit* that animated horse movie.

AM: I don't know that one.

AZ: It was really bad; it was like this bad animated feature length movie about horses it came out in like 2001 or something. It was sort of this stupid movie she had a free press pass to, and she kind of enjoyed it, it was really silly shit.

AM: Do you have anything else you would like to share about Sarah?

AZ: I think she would be happy that someone is memorializing her story will get out there, because that was always something that was important. I think she was coming into a real transition time. She was coming up in Riot Grrrl, Kathleen Hanna, the start of the internet, the DIY scene, filmmaking went from expensive, shooting on film to anybody with a home video camera can make a movie. She was really at that turning point, ahead of the curve. *Teenage Serial Killer*, when she would talk about that I think she was really coming to terms with stuff with her dad, I don't know. How much do you know and how much do you want to know?

AM: I mean I don't know the specifics; all I know is that she had a type of abusive relationship with her father.

AZ: Yeah, from what I understand with her father, for the most part he was verbally abusive. Growing up he would kind of yell at Sarah and Lee and Ruth and Sarah called him a rager. I don't think he hit them but he would get angry and sort of yell at them and Sarah was also very confrontational. Like if you threw something in her face she'd throw it right back at you. I think when she was touring, when she was figure out what college to go, to she went to Bard for a bit. I think when she was traveling around with her father, her father I think whipped out his hard-on or something and I don't think anything happened but it totally fucked with her I mean obviously. I think *Serial Killer*, from what she told me, she said she had blocked out those memories, then when she was at art school and away from her family and all the crap she grew up in that stuff started to come back in. That was part of the whole *Serial Killer* thing, she was really angry with her father and the film was a way of exercising that and coming to terms with that. And then *Mary Jane* was hugely based on her experience growing up in high in Minneapolis, almost like autobiographical like some of the details she told me and stuff. So she had done the kind of art school San Francisco punk rock thing, she was always writing huge amounts and really into pop culture and into movies, *Repo Man* she totally loved. I think she was trying to figure out what the next piece was. *Sleaze* was sort of her girl punk rock movie, she was coming to this place where she had bounced around a lot when the films took off with the whole festival circuit but then at the end of that it's like "oh I gotta make a living and figure out how to pay my bills".

AM: So she kind of grew up a little through the process her DIY endeavors?

AZ: Yeah and also she was trying to figure out what she wanted to do and where she fit in. She was really happy about being in a relationship and that's why I think she wanted

to write this script about, I think it was about a magician and a tightrope walker. And she had just gotten these films for research, which I haven't even seen. She sort of wanted to do a love story, she had some quote, she wanted to make movies where girls don't get beat up, aren't subservient to men, that kind of thing. The *Serial Killer* stuff was really this primal thing, and whatever she did next would be kind of different, she was in a different headspace, a different part of her life, different stuff going on. I think Playboy had asked her to write an erotic short story somehow, there was something weird, you know she was doing TV stuff, really into pop culture, she had done the internet stuff in the 90s with the film festivals. She was moving into some new space, and living in New York is expensive and she didn't want to do a film where she burned all her bridges because everyone was working for free and working crazy hours and that kind of thing. If the cancer thing hadn't been in the picture, I dunno I remember when we were going out she wasn't drinking or anything. I had my friends who I'd meet up with, so like Friday nights were her writing nights, she would stay in and write and work on her script. Usually Saturday night/Sunday we would hang out she was very kind of like (regimented?) she had her writing night, she had her Alonon, she was big into Alonon and I never thought she was an alcoholic, I think she just wanted to get away, you know put that stuff kind of behind her. The crazy drinking, she could get really angry too, at times, and I don't know if that happened while she was drinking or not, because I never really saw her drunk at all. If the cancer hadn't been there, there would have been some new phase coming through and I'm not sure what that would be.

Appendix F:
A Conversation with Ruth Jacobson[14]

(initially we looked at some pictures on Ruth's computer)

Ruth Jacobson: The Walker Arts center is where Sarah interned and they showed *Serial Killer*, I was a tour guide there for 13 years. She eventually came back and showed *Mary Jane*. I love Modern Art and Sarah loved Modern Art and Lee loves Modern Art and none of my friends love Modern Art. We were coming back to show *Mary Jane* and this is 1997.

Alana Moskowitz: Do you know what years she interned there for?

RJ: I think it was 1987. (Looking at her resume) She graduated high school in 1989, was at Bard from 89-91, San Francisco Art Institute from 91-93. She graduated on the Dean's list. You know I just got a call last week from Kristin Calabrese; she was the star of *Serial Killer* and asked me if I had any copies of *Mary Jane* and *Serial Killer*, so 15 years. (While looking through photographs) So this is Lee, she does photography, she was one of the photographers, and so this is her on the set taking pictures for *Mary Jane*. In the film there is a scene where there are the happy faces. This was a collection given to her by Ben Geffen, a guy she had a crush on while she was in high school, who she was crazy about. He eventually gave her these, and the entire collection of smiley faces is actually at Fales. I gave it to them. (looking at a flyer for Mary Jane) I don't remember

[14] This Conversation took place in Wilmington, Delaware February 21st, 2009.

who did this, but we used to change the name down here at the bottom from city to city. She wrote the film while she was at Bard.

AM: It was a book first right?

RJ: It was a book first but she wrote it on her computer, it was first called Popcorn. She wrote it at Bard in the morning at 2 am in the morning.

AM: Really, did she write it all in one sitting?

RJ: I don't think, so she wasn't fast like that. She liked to stay up late. So she wrote it when she was 18 and filmed it after college. After it was finished she submitted it to festivals. And then it got into Sundance, and after that they didn't buy it, so she said, "let's distribute it ourselves". So we did and we used these flyers. She shot the film herself, she edited it herself. This is Sarah and I waiting for the plane to go to Sundance in 1997. It was actually amazing that it got into Sundance because it was the lowest or the second lowest budgeted film to get in that year. And here is a picture of Sarah and Robert Redford; he had us all to lunch. He had all the directors and the producers, and I was the producer. I took Sarah to Sundance when she was in college, before she made the film. And we would stand in line and people would say "who are you" and I would say "my daughter is a filmmaker" and they would say "oh" like they could care less. And then we came back 5 years later and all of a sudden we had a film so people would pay more attention, people are strange. Eugene Hernandez--

AM: He runs IndieWIRE right?

RJ: He is IndieWIRE, when we were in Sundance he was sleeping on my floor. We rented this great big condo and everyone was sleeping on the floor.

AM: Do you know how Eugene and Sarah met?

RJ: No, you could call Eugene, do you want his phone number?

AM: Sure

RJ: So this is Sarah in Israel, she went to the Alexander Muss program in Israel.

AM: What's that?

RJ: It's a kind of high-powered program for gifted kids. She was a good student (in high school) like A's and B's, but when she came back she got straight A's. They really taught her to think and they taught her to debate.

AM: When did she take part in the program?

RJ: This was in 1988.

AM: She graduated from High School too with honors right?

RJ: Yes.

AM: I read that she also was suspended 5 times, is that right?

RJ: (laughs) I think it was 3 times.

AM: Do you remember what the suspensions were for?

RJ: One of them was for delivering a pizza to her math class.

This is a picture of her with Brandon Sexton (*Welcome To the Dollhouse*). We got to the airport and the plane that was supposed to take us to Sundance was not late, it was cancelled. So this is us, hanging out and waiting.

AM: How long did you have to wait?

RJ: Till the afternoon. So it didn't have a good beginning and then when she went to go show her film at Sundance there were always technical problems. Here is Sarah and Sam (Green) in Amsterdam. What Sarah wanted done was first she wanted to be cremated, which we did which you're not supposed to do if you're Jewish and she wanted her ashes

scattered over Amsterdam. When she was there showing her film she thought it was so cool cause you would go into a café and hear a rock band, cause next to film Sarah loved music more than anything. You would have a rock band and then you'd show your film and Sarah thought that was such a cool combination. In this country it's more sterile. She must have had some great adventures plus smoking marijuana was legal. So she wants her ashes scattered, imagine trying to get that through customs, I have the ashes upstairs so I don't know what to do. I told Lee she's gonna have to do it cause I am not doing it. The Dobey in Austin Texas was the first regular theater, not a college, to show *Mary Jane*. They wouldn't show it in a regular theater, so we showed it at ATA in San Francisco, because Sarah and I are really fabulous marketers there were lines that went for blocks of people trying to get in. After Landmark Theaters, they put it in Opera Plaza, she was pissed they hadn't done it first. This is our house in San Francisco, I had a two bedroom, it was a house it had two levels and I was in one bedroom and I used the other bedroom for our office, and Sarah was downstairs and she had two rooms and it was the first time she lived in more than a studio.

AM: When was this?

RJ: In 1995 or '96, cause it was hard to find a place to live in San Francisco. So I had lived with her in her studio sleeping on the floor or on a futon for three months and eventually I rented my own place. So she lived downstairs in kind of a separate space and it was the first time she had a washer and dryer. So she was thrilled. Sarah met Molly Ringwald in 1998 at the USA Film Festival. I am not sure what she was there for; you could look it up on the Internet. Here is Cinema Village, when she got into New York. She was so excited to finally get into New York. Usually you go to New York first but

she went to New York last, she thought she would build more interest that way. There were about 55 theaters we screened at between colleges and everything; it was unheard of for anyone to distribute a film individually like that. People say to me "well how did you do it" cause I was the one who booked it.

AM: How did you do it?

RJ: I would call them up and say I have this film, *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore* and it was at the Sundance film festival, that was the seller, that was the hook, and would they be interested in showing it. Then they would say, well send a copy. So we did. Then we would follow through, we were really good at following through. We would just call them and keep calling them until they said no, and we could only apply to theaters that show 16mm.

AM: How did you find these theaters or contacts?

RJ: I guess we just had a list, and we also had books on how to distribute your film. That wasn't hard. Sarah was able to pay for her food and a lot of other stuff by selling stuff. When she took the film around she would sell *Mary Jane* t-shirts and *Serial Killer* videos. And her company was called Station Wagon Productions. She had a blue Buick station wagon. This was the picture from her website, she had a website but then the guy who was running it let it go and we lost the URL, but a year or two later it didn't matter because there was Youtube so I just put all her stuff up on Youtube. This is Aaron (Zisman), this is a Halloween party and Sarah is an angel and he is a pimp. This is her with her cane, her cancer was diagnosed at the end of July and she lived till February so it wasn't very long. There's Sarah putting up posters, that's how we got everyone to come to everything.

AM: Did you have any trouble or difficulties while putting up flyers? I think I remember reading that there was a hefty fine once or twice.

RJ: Only in New York, the fine was $1,000. I don't know if this has anything to do with what you are doing but here are some pictures of Sarah as a baby. She always loved happy faces. She had one over her bed.

AM: Yeah I would be interested in knowing about what she was like when she was a kid.

RJ: When she was 4 we were walking down the steps in Connecticut and she didn't want to come, I was kind of pulling her a little bit. Finally I picked her up and took her to the car, and immediately she ran back. She wanted to do it herself without any help from me. And that was the beginning of the independence. Then when she was in preschool, before kindergarten they had a play for the parents and we came and we were singing and Sarah stepped forward like she had a solo and led the group, except she didn't have a solo. She could talk when she was 18 months old, her first word was exit. She loved Sesame Street, by the time she was 3 she was reading books. Her favorite books were, well not back then but later, were The Wizard of Oz. she read them all like 6 times, there were 13 of them. She also loved Harry potter as an adult. We asked in the school that they put her ahead because she was reading when she got to kindergarten and she knew all her numbers could do a little math. And they tested her and said she was really bright but she wouldn't be socially adjusted if we put her ahead. Well she never got socially adjusted anyway, by their standards. So she was precocious as a kid and when she was 12 or 13 she was part of a gifted program at Normandale Community College, a creative writing program. Sarah was always creative, always writing.

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RJ: These are the basic principles Sarah lived by (she holds up a plaque with numbered expressions): "Creativity is the natural order of life". And she believed in always being creative and she wrote these morning papers. Every morning 3 pages, for years and years because it stirs creativity. "As we open our creative channels to the creator many gentle but powerful changes are to be expected".

AM: Did she write these principles?

RJ: No, she didn't write them but she lived by them.

AM: Do you know who wrote them?

RJ: No

AM: Was she religious at all?

RJ: No, she wasn't. She was very Jewish in that she was ethnically Jewish but she wasn't religious.

AM: Was she Bat Mitzvah-ed?

RJ: Yes, she was. The rabbi who Bat Mitzvahed her turned out to be having a gay affair. And was caught by the police in some bookstore in downtown Minneapolis and he had kind of yelled at Sarah one time when she was like 15 or something. Not only was she not religious but also she was very cynical about religion. She loved to travel.

AM: You toured the film in Europe right?

RJ: Sarah did, I didn't go on that tour. I stayed home and took care of everything else but I am not always sure of the dates. I have them someone. She applied to all these film festivals all over the world and for some reason the Scandinavian arc, to England through

Scandinavia and Holland were the places, and each one invited her. I think it was Sweden and Amsterdam and London and Scotland and maybe Germany, Denmark each one invited her. She said 'mom should I go,' I said 'are you kidding of course go,' I mean why not. She got each one to give her something, one gave her the airfare, one gave her money for food, one bought her the airfare there on bought her the airfare back. She was able to do quite a European trip and it had quite an influence on her.

AM: How so?

RJ: She was very impressed by the ways in Holland. She thought they were much more progressive.

(While looking through a book of writings/pictures)

RJ: Laurie Barbero inspired her to write about *Sleaze* you know which is about bands.

AM: Do you know anything about her relationship with Helen Stickler? Sam Green was describing it as kind of love/hate.

RJ: I guess that's a good way to describe it. Are you able to record on the phone, you should talk to Lee she knew more about her personal relationships than I did.

AM: It's great that you're so organized.

RJ: That's why I was her producer.

AM: How exactly did that come about, you producing her films?

RJ: She had a lot of stormy relationships with other producers and they weren't really willing to stick around and not get paid. And she had no money, this film was made for $50,00. By the time she printed it and made all the copies. She laughed when I told her

that $50,000 sounds like a lot of money she laughed and said "mom, that's what most spend on the catering budget". She wanted to get it out, you know she was a real feminist, and she believed women could do whatever men could do and there was a lot of discrimination in Hollywood because 8 out of 10 directors, at the time she was doing it, were men and it was very hard for a woman to get a second film.

AM: It still is.

RJ: Right and her greatest fear was that she would never get a second film out. She didn't but of course she would have if she lived because she would have made these videos. Have you seen *Frozen River*?

AM: No I wanted to.

RJ: Yeah, Melissa Leo was nominated for an Academy Award and so it's around. It was done with a camera and then it was put on a computer and edited on the computer. So Sarah would have been doing that for sure. In fact every time I hear something like that I get, like, sick, why isn't Sarah here, why isn't she doing this.

AM: Do you think that was the primary reason *Sleaze* didn't get made, because she couldn't get the money together?

RJ: At the very end a woman named Andrea Sperling said that she would produce it. But it never came to be because Sarah didn't live. She also wrote a circus script called Freakathon, have you seen that one?

AM: No, what's it about?

RJ: That's on a disc I have, and she also wrote another one called Slut.

AM: Just called Slut?

RJ: Just called Slut. They (the Fales archive) don't have this stuff up because there are no access copies.

AM: So you became the producer kind of out of necessity?

RJ: Well I had just gotten divorced, I really didn't have anything much to do, it was 1994; I went to California in 1995. Sarah would call me all the time crying on the phone and say "Mom, this one's giving me trouble and that one's giving me trouble. What I am I going to do?" And I said, "how can I help you" and she said "you can come out here and produce the film". I got there and I thought it would be easy to get a place and to start working but it wasn't. Every time you went to a place there were 5 or 6 other people bidding on the place to rent and so I was living with Sarah in a studio sleeping on the floor. I sublet a place, I belonged to a Jewish renewal group out there and someone knew someone who was subletting a place for three months. I subleted the place and then we looked for a place and then we got a place in Bural Heights where we had an office and she had her own space. We were living together but we weren't living together. Which really worked out well because Sarah is so independent. We worked really well together, she had ideas and I had the follow through, it was really great.

AM: Do you think you would have produced *Sleaze* too?

RJ: No, that was the problem I wasn't crazy about it. Well there's this thing, do you know what golden showers are?

AM: Yeah.

RJ: I was like this is too much of like a teen thing.

AM: But *Mary Jane's Not A Virgin* Anymore was your kind of thing, its pretty teen-y?

RJ: Yeah I guess in that case I was just encouraging Sarah, the film world is really hard as you probably know.

AM: Well yeah but not from first hand experience, just from reading.

RJ: What was amazing was that she got a film made and then she distributed it, which is even more amazing, to so many places. She was an example of how people can keep going and keep pushing and not only was she making the film but she was reviewing films and she was writing articles about the film world.

AM: Did you tour the film with her?

RJ: Well she would tour it, and I would book it.

AM: You wouldn't take part in any of the touring?

RJ: Well sometimes, I went to Austin. But basically no, she went; I think she went alone so she would pick up guys.

AM: So she would go alone, with nobody else?

RJ: Well they would fly her out and then she would sleep at the colleges. Because she got into Sundance and Roger Ebert gave her a good review she was able to distribute the film. But then she left California to move to New York to work for Oprah Winfrey at Oxygen. Not directly for Oprah but for her company at Oxygen. She thought, wow it would be really great because it was all women but it turned out to be corporate. Dog eat dog you know.

AM: Do you know how long she worked at Oxygen for?

RJ: Not long, like under a year and then she worked for some other places, Much Music was the last one and that one Aaron knows about because that's where they met.

AM: Do you know much about her involvement with 50/50?

RJ: I have pictures of the poster that they put up. *(While looking at a handmade book Sarah made as a child)*

AM: How old was she when she made this book?

RJ: I think she was young I am looking for a date.

AM: So she was always very creative?

RJ: Yes always very creative. She could draw too.

AM: **So you always were really supportive of her creativity and independence.**

RJ: 1982 so she was 11. So 11 she must have been in the 6th grade. She was just so fascinated with The Wizard of Oz so we took she to a convention when she was younger. In Michigan, while we were there they had copies of first print Wizard of Oz books, kind of old things. Sarah bought some and before she moved from San Francisco to New York she sold them and I was just so upset because I just loved them. I wanted her to keep them, and then I got a picture from the Fales Archive and there were all these Oz books. So I wrote back and asked if Sarah had some books that I didn't know about, I thought I went through all her stuff, did she not sell all the books. So it was either Brent or Marvin, said "oh no they weren't Sarah's" but they knew that Sarah liked them so much that they put her shelf near the Oz shelf.

AM: How did they know that?

RJ: I guess I told them. And as I said there is one Wizard of Oz book but Frank Baum wrote many more and Sarah read all of them.

AM: Did she like the movie as well?

RJ: She watched it obsessively, every year she would watch it, it used to be on in March. So every year she would watch it.

AM: What do you think attracted her to The Wizard of Oz?

RJ: Because it was a moral world, and basically except for the wizard, it was a world of women. The Oz world. She was optimistic.

(Back to looking at pictures)

RJ: After she died they had a film festival in Switzerland and they flew Lee and I over and they showed *Mary Jane*. I am really glad you are doing this it is such a tribute to Sarah.

AM: Yeah it's a really exciting project, I've had a lot of fun going through her papers and everything. Do you know why Sarah chose Bard initially?

RJ: She went on a trip with her father and they looked at 4 or 5 schools and she thought Bard was the school.

AM: Do you remember the other schools she looked at?

RJ: Hampshire, Brown, and I don't remember the others. She didn't want anything too big but it turned out it was too rural. She was from a big city.

AM: She also taught at The New School, do you know how long she taught there for?

RJ: Up until she died just about. She taught there in 2003, the year she got sick. Her last job was VH1 where she did the 100 most this and the hundred most that. I can't remember exactly.

AM: How did she wind up working at VH1?

RJ: I guess she just got a job, somebody might have referred her, I moved away from San Francisco (to Delaware) in 1999 and Sarah moved to New York in 2000. So it was exciting to have her on the East. She led an interesting life. She made films, she wrote

about films, she was always into some project, I think a lot of reviews of *Mary Jane* talk about, it was kind of her persistence and her drive even more than the film, and she was way ahead of her time. After she died there was a memorial for her in NY, she died on Friday the Thirteen and in fact we just had a Friday the thirteenth. The memorial was held for her on a Sunday, so it was never in the paper it was just word of mouth. It was held, I can't remember the place but it was large, I think it held 150 people, it was full.

AM: Just from word of mouth?

RJ: Yes just from word of mouth, Kim Gordon, and what's his name her husband?

AM: Thurston Moore?

RJ: Yeah one of them, I think it was Thurston might have been there. Just so many people came, but half the people who would have come didn't know about it.

RJ: It's hard to believe that Leon Botstein is still at Bard.

AM: Yeah.

RJ: It seems like he's been there forever because he was there when Sarah was there.

AM: Yeah he has been there for a while, I think he started when he was like 27 as president right, really young. Did she make *Road Movie* while she was at Bard?

RJ: Yes. I have these boxes of photo albums that I am going to donate to the archive but I don't know who the people are. I didn't know the Bard people. (Picture of Sarah in a play). She was always in plays, she was an actress. Not after she went to college but before. We lived in a city called Edina, Minnesota and so competitive, the first time she tried out for a play she didn't get in and she was so heartbroken because she had gone to a drama camp. The synagogue had plays so she applied to that and she got in, so she was in all the synagogue plays and so was her sister.

AM: When did she start working at the movie theater, was that in high school?

RJ: Yes. Before she could drive because I would have to drive her over the local mall where the bus came, so when she was 15. And *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore* was the story of her working there, autobiography pretty much. There were so many interesting people, there were punks there, and there were guys who rode the skateboards, what are they called?

AM: Skaters?

RJ: Yeah skaters. And there were suburbanites and, just such a cross section of different kinds of people that she found so interesting.

AM: Do you remember any other extra curricular activities Sarah participated in high school, or was it basically just the movie theater and plays?

RJ: I can't really remember, I am trying to remember where her yearbook is; it must be at the archive.

AM: Did she have a lot of friends in high school?

RJ: The kids in high school were really snobby and they were Republicans, and Sarah was this liberal Democrat. She really didn't fit in.

AM: Was it primarily a Christian school?

RJ: Yes it was primarily a Christian school; well it was a public school. We moved there because we heard that it had the best school system, in the state, and that's why we moved there. But actually it really was kind of different than we had thought. The Minneapolis school system was filled with drugs and it had its problems, but she might have been better off at the Minneapolis school system because it was more liberal and open. But we had just moved there and didn't know that much about it. We had heard

Edina was such a good school system. Sarah would always say she wanted to thank me for sending her to Edina because it gave her something to rebel against, cause she had never rebelled her whole life.

AM: She never rebelled against you?

RJ: I guess her whole life was a rebellion, but she never got a tattoo or dyed her hair blue, all the things I could imagine, which now are more common but in those days weren't. (looking at a photograph) This is her working at uptown; they had to wear white shirts with black ties.

AM: Oh yeah just like the movie.

RJ: Yeah.

AM: So did she work at the movie theater till she went to college?

RJ: Yeah for 3 or 4 years. She was trying to get *Sleaze* made when she was sick; she was cutting out articles from magazines, pictures of whom she wanted the different people to resemble. She basically did that till she couldn't do anything anymore. So right till the end she was writing in journals and trying to get the character down so if anything happened to her people would know the kind of look that she wanted.

AM: Have you spoken to anyone about making the film out of the script and her materials?

RJ: No I haven't. What do you find the most interesting at the archive?

AM: I find it all pretty interesting, the one thing I keep going back to is an interview or a conversation between Sarah, Tamra Davis, and Allison Anders about the struggles of being a female filmmaker. I've read that a few times.

RJ: Tamra was one of her mentors and she helped give her money for Mary Jane. There were 3 people, Diana who was just a friend gave her I think 5,000. And then I think Tamra and Kim (Gordon) gave her 3,000 each. She met Tamra at a zine convention. You know who Tamra is married to?

AM: A Beastie Boy?

RJ: Yeah Mike D. Anyway so Tamra was a film director and she made films and she encouraged Sarah, and Allison Anders was more of an independent filmmaker, Tamra was more of a conventional filmmakers while Allison was more offbeat. So Sarah really looked up to Allison Anders, Tamra, and Kim Gordon. I sent Sarah's songs to Kim Gordon after she died but she never responded.

AM: Oh really?

RJ: Yeah I had a disc of all (Sarah's) music.

AM: Wonder why she didn't respond.

RJ: Probably just another person trying to solicit her.

AM: Yeah she is probably pretty busy I guess.

RJ: And Sarah's songs, do you have copies of those at the archive?

AM: I am not sure...what about her songs?

RJ: There is a list of all her songs with the words that I have on the computer.

AM: Did she write the music and the lyrics?

RJ: Yes.

AM: That's very impressive.

RJ: And she played the guitar. And she did comic books and she wrote scripts and she wrote books, did interviews. This is a picture of Diana (Mars) who gave money for *Mary Jane.*

AM: Diana Mars, she also worked on the comic book, Hardcorn, too?

RJ: Yeah I think you're right, I forgot about that, its good to have you around, you're studying it while as I kid of put this stuff aside for a few years. I just started to kind of look at this stuff again. It was hard.

AM: Yeah I bet.

RJ: I found working out helped me get over, well I've never actually gotten over it but working out kind of took my mind off things and it was a good outlet. So Sarah used to love yoga, and she used to do yoga at Integral Yoga in San Francisco and then she did it in New York, and even when she got sick she was trying to do yoga. But to get the big picture you should talk to Lee and Aaron. I talk to Lee almost every day, but now that she has a fulltime job it's a little harder. I talk to her while she is on her way to work, around 11:30 my time which is 8:30 her time, or when she is one her way home which is 6:30 her time, 9:30 my time. It used to be I could call her at anytime.

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