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Constructions of Female Selves in Adolescent Fiction: Makeovers as Metonym

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'A makeover is Cher's biggest thrill in life: it gives her a sense of control in a world so chaotic.'
(Dion in *Clueless*, 1995)

The characteristic concern of adolescent fictions with the production or possibility of subjectivity entails a narrative focus on personal growth or maturation in the context of relationships between the self and others, and the self and the world. Narrative structures tend to represent the emergence of subjectivity as a development of a central character's ability to *express* self-recognition or agency. My concern in this paper is with the semiotics of a particular form this takes in adolescent fiction, the *makeover*, and that as a specialised form of feminine discourse which operates in highly comparable ways in everyday popular culture and literary fictions. In order to explore some links between magazines for teenage girls and adolescent fiction, I will draw my examples from the contemporary Australian scene, though the phenomenon obviously extends far beyond that in time and place.

An important aspect of the makeover is that it is physical and visible, and is most often, though not always, an effect produced when other people act upon the focused body. In examining this effect in both magazines and novels a crucial distinction is that made by Judith Butler between *expression* and *performativeness* in the production of (gendered) selves (Butler 1990, pp.134-41). On the one hand is 'a substantial model of identity', that is, identity as stable or a locus of agency (Butler, p.141). This is an assumption about grounded identities which is virtually universal in literature for children and young adults, and, I suggest, underlies the notion of self-production in teen magazines. On the other hand, Butler adduces the concept of 'constructed identity', that is, identity as the performance of attributes which are 'a constituted social temporality' (p.141). In other words, identity is generated within time and place and imitates 'the ideal of a substantial ground of identity' by the process of repetition. If we apply Butler's distinction to magazines and fiction, we would conclude that performativeness is consistently passed off as expression, and in rare cases where performativeness is identified as such it functions to disclose a destructive deficiency in subjectivity. Butler's specific concern was

heterosexual gendering, and I have here broadened the application of her distinction, though of course makeovers are heavily implicated in gendering and cannot elude it when used to signify more general issues of subjectivity. Nevertheless, adolescent fiction is wary about the possibility of discarding the substantial model of identity and so, implicitly equating a performative concept of subjectivity with nihilism, usually adheres to (neo-)humanistic conceptualisations of the subject. Hence it is not unusual to find fiction which places expression and performativeness in dialogic relationship, but moves toward privileging the former. At the core of the makeover metonym lies a balance between contingency and possibility, but worked through in the context of what Abel, Hirsch and Langland identified as the prevailing patterns of female growth in fiction, namely, the development of a value system defined in terms of community and empathy, and the process of awakening (1983, pp.9-12). In adolescent fiction, however, these patterns still tend to be folded back into the primary goals of a *Bildungsroman* hero: 'to realize the physical, intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual capacities inherent in his [now her] personality' (Abel, Hirsch and Langland, p.5). By realizing the physical, or exterior body, in specific ways, the makeover metonymically expresses a character's unfolding interiority — the intellectual, emotional, and so on. But when the fictions represent a character whose subjectivity is 'merely' performative, as I will argue below in regard to Philippa Burne's *Fishnets*, that character is apt to be radically alienated and possibly tragic.

The paradigmatic exemplar for makeovers is Cinderella, and just as Perrault's Cinderella is transformed from kitchen girl to courtly lady by the intervention of a fairy godmother, so too a modern Cinderella can undergo transformation under the guidance or supervision of her peers, or by a process of self-refashioning. When this has a positive outcome — that is, when it demonstrates that the pumpkin is really rather more of a princess — it doesn't just indicate that physical attractiveness is a social construct produced upon a body which is treated as an inscriptive surface, but also reaches towards affirming the more abstract insight that self-identity is defined by how an individual is valued by others. In this way, the

makeover functions as *metonymy*, that is, a signifying device in which a part of something stands for the whole by means of an overlap of literal and figurative functions — in other words, it means what it says but signifies something else as well (Stephens 1992, pp.248-49). The transformed body thus also acts as a sign. Semiotically, the makeover in teen fiction is most frequently a central metonym of growth, either because it demonstrates to the character concerned that she can transform her life and thus realize her full potential, or because it constitutes a wrong movement which comes to be identified as such.

Both of these possibilities — the transformative and the cautionary — are implicit in the makeovers which appear as a standard item in teen girls' magazines, as is also their metonymic potential. Although one of the functions of such a page is oblique advertising (for hair-care products, for example), it draws on a semiotic of the face belonging to widely recognised modern codes of representation. As Mary Ann Doane argues when discussing the significance of the close-up of the female face in film, the face is

that bodily part not accessible to the subject's own gaze (or accessible only as a virtual image in a mirror) — hence its over-representation as the instance of subjectivity. But the face is not taken in at a glance — it already problematises the notion of a pure surface since it points to an interior, a depth. The face is the most readable space of the body.
(1991, p.47)

How these assumptions are at work in a makeover is fairly obvious: a paradigmatic example from *Girlfriend* (August 1996, p.85) articulates the objective as a disclosure of what is always already there, rather like an old-fashioned content-and-theme reading of a novel. Hence the language of the 'Before' panel refers to a state of potentiality: 'Natural colour [of hair] needs boosting. Eyebrows lack definition. Eyes need enhancing'. In the step-by-step account of the makeover process occurs: 'accentuate [Fiona's] delicate face'; 'making way for a deep, rich red tone'; 'attention' is drawn to her eyes, 'her best feature'; the eye area is 'opened up' and 'defined', and as a result her eyes 'sparkle'. A significant moment is played out on

the page, as the essential Fiona is revealed. The revealing is done, however, with minimal intervention, and this is a recurrent motif in teen magazine makeovers. While the agent who effects the transformation is often named, the question of who controls agency is masked by the discourse of 'nature disclosed'.

The Fiona-makeover instantiates the underlying makeover schema more fully than many other examples do, though a second example, from *Dolly* magazine (October 1998, p.119), goes still further in actualising another sub-schematic slot, which appears regularly in *Dolly* versions of the schema: a small, subtle element of concealment. This is still, however, within the context of a desired outcome defined in terms of the simple and the natural: Veronica 'wanted something quick and simple, that looked natural', though of course *looking* natural isn't the same as *being* natural. The idea of concealment enters through the language used in the description of the application of the base, in a word-set consisting of 'cover', 'concealer' and 'camouflage'. At the same time, the language stresses that both the need for disguise and the action taken to meet that need are both, again, minimal. Veronica's skin, after all, is 'close to perfect': her 'blemishes' are 'minor', and only a 'small amount' of concealer is required. In the following paragraphs, dealing with the treatment of individual facial details, the most frequently repeated word is *natural*, reinforced by the near-synonym 'healthy, fresh'. Features are, once again, defined and opened, but now there's also some stress on concealing the presence of the make-up, so there are also references to blending, smudging and softening. The language is highly conventional and formulaic, and a comparison with a Makeover-page from about eighteen months earlier (April 1997, p.66), written by the same writer, yields up the same vocabulary whereby the natural is defined and the art concealed, so that the repetition over time and across different magazines does point to a strong performative element in the genre. The earlier example gives still more emphasis to the natural by contrasting it with a rejected possibility: 'Renée wanted a natural look that emphasised her great features, without making her feel and look like she'd caked on a stack of make-up'. Underlying all three of these magazine makeovers is a simple assumption

about the relationship between production of an external appearance and the authentic, substantial self. To 'stack on a cake of make-up' would render the 'real' Fiona or Veronica or Reneé unseeable, and therefore unreadable. Here, in a not particularly oblique way, surfaces the cautionary element of the makeover, because to render the process of inscription too visible would redefine its function as something which merely plays on a surface. In other words, the makeovers in *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* are grounded in a particular concept of subjectivity which assumes that the self is not merely a surface, but is rather what lies hidden beneath, the individual's inferred interiority. Thus what appears inscribed on the body's surface functions as a pointer to the depths within.

The subjectivity implied in such contexts is, needless to say, a heavily gendered one, and in the play of surface and depth throughout any issue of a teen magazine, surface is likely to predominate, or such is the conclusion that could be extracted from Schirato and Yell's study of the production of gender in an issue of *Dolly*. The imbrication of bodily inscription and social inscription in these magazines interpellates both readers and subjects represented on the page within social formations fairly particularly nuanced for class and culture. In the October 1998 issue of *Dolly* another feature article deals with the onset of the summer-induced desire for bikini-wearing (pp.42-46). Beginning with the premise that there are four bodily morphologies — the cone, the pear, the hourglass and the rectangle — the article instructs its readers in ways to constitute each of these shapes as a body appropriately inscribed within the parameters of limited difference. Each of the four pages follows the same formula, with small variations: a checklist, so readers can identify their body type; sample exercises to maintain the shape (implicitly in its slimmest version, even when a full-bodied Kate Winslet is offered as the prime example of 'the hourglass' and described as 'A real girl with a real shape!'); and tips about what should or should not be worn. What is very evident in all this is that within a different bodily sphere the magazine is replicating the ideology of the makeover. That is, starting off with the assumption that there is a 'natural' body with a range of morphologies, it promptly recontextualises this within

what Elizabeth Grosz has referred to as 'cultural forms of body, which ... conform to social norms' (1994, p.143). Grosz points out that 'there must be some shortfall of nature in order to make possible the augmentation of nature' (p.143), and makes a distinction, very pertinent to my concern in this paper, between identifying conformity to cultural patterns or stereotypes and examining which particular ones are used and with what effect. The distinction becomes especially important in a consideration of the function of makeovers in narrative fiction targeting a teenage, female audience.

As a story element, a makeover occurs as two broad types. It can be a specific incident which functions as a turning-point, and thus is often a pivotal moment within a *bildungsroman* type of structure. As a turning-point, it can function positively or negatively, by disclosing or occluding the subject's presumed innate personality. I refer to this type as the 'Cinderella-makeover'. Second, there are extended makeovers which are carried out as a project, and are coterminous with the text's story-time, whether as the main or a subsidiary narrative strand. These in turn are of two kinds: the first is the self-inscribed makeover, whereby the character involved does the job by herself, unaided, and slips further and further into narcissism as she produces an inauthentic self. Examples are Carol Jones's, *Real Girls* (1992), Margaret Pearce's, *The Look of Love* (*Dolly Fiction*, #1, 1988); and Catherine Jinks's, *This Way Out* (1991). The last mentioned contrasts the main character's failed attempt to reconstitute herself with a friend's ironically successful production of body image through *anorexia nervosa*. The second type of extended makeover follows the pattern established by Jane Austen's *Emma*, replayed in the film *Clueless* (1995), in which the principal character attempts to make over another female textually constituted as a social inferior. *Emma* is a consistent intertext, if not pretext, for such makeovers, and I accordingly refer to them as 'Emma-makeovers'. These narratives characteristically expose the intervention as high-handed and misguided, and their outcomes pivot on a twist of effect: there is an affirmation of the 'Harriet' character's authentic and essential self, a return to a 'natural' (but always socially constituted) subjectivity; and the main character herself

has experienced a makeover 'of the soul', as Cher puts it in *Clueless*. *Emma*-makeovers are thus not only overtly conservative in their assumptions about essential selves but also socially conservative in their connection of subjectivity and class.

Carol Jones's *Goddess of Cool*, an example of the *Emma*-makeover, offers one of the more obvious uses of magazine makeovers as intertext, though such uses also tend to distance themselves from such affiliations by treating them ironically. *Goddess of Cool* is narrated by May Kim, the least likeable and most arrogant of the novel's characters, and the one most in need of a makeover of the soul — which she duly experiences in an access of self-knowledge every bit as humiliating as *Emma*'s. The novel pivots on a bet, which leads the 'Bimbettes' — a clique of sophisticated girls, headed by May Kim — to try to make over the socially inferior Serena, described as the most 'desperate' girl in their class, so she can get a date with a boy with 'street cred' for the school dance. Serena's 'shortfalls of nature' are manifold — she is depicted as over-weight, graceless, inarticulate and socially inept, an effect accentuated by the strategy of focalising her through May Kim's caustic and solipsistic voice. The novel presents the makeover as a production of a new self, emphasising how Serena is to be redefined so that she sloughs off traits marked as lower class (dress style and speech forms in particular) and conforms to cultural patterns identifiably middle class. Other pre-texts cited from time to time within the novel which underpin the pattern of social transformation are the stories of Cinderella and Eliza Doolittle, the latter important because it foreshadows a twist at the end. The program is schematically set out on page 53:

SERENA'S MAKEOVER REGIMEN

masterminded by
The Bimbettes
 produced by
The Bimbettes
 starring
The Bimbettes
 and
Serena

New hairstyle (action: Rose)
 Facial (action: Denny)
 Diet plan (action: May Kim, Stella)
 Wardrobe consultation
 (action: Rose, May Kim, Stella)
 Grooming and deportment (action: Rose, May Kim)
 Communication skills A.K.A. how to chat up boys
 (action: Amira, Denny)
 Shopping trip (action: everyone)

Foregrounding the social *performance* of bodily inscription in this way, the novel foreshadows its failure to have an effect on its target object. Because adolescent fiction almost invariably focuses on the production of subjectivity as a process of growth and development of the self, any narrative focus which treats the self as a surface without reference to what lies within becomes reflexively marked as a wrong movement. Thus the performance begins finally to unravel once the team reaches Stage 7 of the 'Makeover Regimen':

Serena pirouetted before the mirror in her finery. It would have taken more than a Mode fashion stylist to turn Serena into a princess. Even a fairy godmother would have needed a photo retoucher, but Rose had done a good job ...

The deep rose colour of the low-necked, long-sleeved tunic top Rose had selected gave Serena's pale face a healthy glow and its long lines camouflaged those unsightly bulges. It was teamed with a pair of plain black leggings with a small embroidered design in gold thread just above the ankle to match the gold buttons down the front of the tunic. The outfit's simplicity suited Serena.

.....
'Well, what do you think, Serena?' I asked again. Serena's eyes were still rivetted to her reflection. 'I think ... I think I don't look like me. I don't feel right. I feel sort of ...'
Goddess of Cool, p.116

Phrases such as 'gave Serena's pale face a healthy glow ... camouflaged those unsightly bulges ... simplicity suited Serena' draw directly on the register of magazine makeovers — the key terms are all used in the 'Veronica'

example. One of the central discursive strategies of both *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* is that they actively engage in the production of a female community, whereby its members do not do things *to* other girls and women, but do things *with* them, in mutually supportive ways. May Kim's failure to behave in this way is a marker of her failure as a human being, encapsulated in this example in the way in which she looks at Serena. After all, a makeover is deeply involved not just in how it is perceived, but how the body is looked at. As the references to the 'Mode fashion stylist' and 'photo retoucher' signal, May Kim is looking at Serena as if she is a photograph in a magazine. She produces her as surface, and denies any innate being, whereas Serena, in her verbally inarticulate fashion, recognises that her subjectivity has been split so that signifier and signified have become disjunctive, or, in other words, that performance has occluded expression.

May Kim loses her bet, though Serena does make it to the dance, but as the 'essential' Serena: not perfectly dressed, and partnered by a boy from her own social stratum (that is, without 'street cred' or dress sense), rather heavily-handedly named Allan Doolittle, in case readers miss the link back to *Pygmalion*. More importantly, the rest of the *Bimbettes* have shifted their attitude and engage with her as a fellow member of a female community. May Kim, already subject to refashioning by events in the novel's second narrative strand (in which she has to come to terms with her own and her family's history as refugees), follows suit. In contrast to *Emma*, then, where the makeover rebounds on the agent while the object returns to her former self, the *Emma*-makeover in teen fiction produces community. The *Emmas* develop genuine affection for the *Harriets*, a point nicely made in an earlier example of the genre, Jenny Pausacker's *Nobody's Perfect* (Dolly Fiction, #22, written as 'Jay Francis').

Goddess of Cool clearly exemplifies how the idea of the makeover points to the way such novels construct a dialogic relationship between on the one hand the high culture *bildungsroman* and on the other hand popular culture romance. In this novel the two are practically separated into the two plot strands, though the film *Clueless* also reminds us that *Emma* itself can be subjected to reading as a popular romantic costume drama. The

tendency for adolescent fiction to produce hybrid cultural narratives is also evident in other novels employing the makeover-metonymy, though it is now more readily visible in their tendency to deploy character stereotypes schematically, as in Maureen McCarthy's *Queen Kat*, *Carmel and St Jude Get a Life*, Jenny Pausacker's *What Are Ya?*, or Philippa Burne's *Fishnets*. The metonymic functions of makeovers in the last two of these might, I think, encourage readers not to treat them as novels about characters, but as novels about ideas. Important as that may be, however, it is an issue which is tangential to my concern in this paper.

Among the several makeovers incorporated in *What Are Ya?* is a sharply observed example of a self-inscribed *Cinderella*-makeover. Barb, one of the principal female characters, preparing for a date on which she expects to lose her virginity, transforms herself into an overtly sexualised body in a parody of production of the self within female community: 'Two-coloured tights, Silvana's best shoes, Debbie's off-the-shoulder dress with her huge green leather belt and a really artistic make-up job' (pp.64-65). Although she has borrowed items of clothing from friends (and even added a beaded bag belonging to her grandmother), she has shaped herself as a performance of a particular social image in discord with her interior stage of being — to be looked at but not seen. That her friends are named signifies their absence, and points to the dominance of performativeness over expression at this moment in the novel.

Shortly after *What Are Ya?* was published in 1987, the contrast between performativeness and expression was the story focus of the first volume of the 'Dolly Fiction' series, Margaret Pearce's *The Look of Love* (1988), an extended, self-inscribed makeover. This treats the genre rather moralistically, as the main character, Clarinda (whose name is a rough anagram of 'Cinderella'), diverts her intelligence from scholastic work to researching modes of bodily inscription — that is, using magazines about fashion and make-up as texts for self-corporealisation. This handling of story and theme is particularly interesting given the close association of the early volumes of the series with its sponsor, *Dolly* magazine. Considered as an extended reading of a *Dolly*

make-over page (even the cover points toward that text-type), *The Look of Love* confirms the privileging of the expression of a natural, authentic self over various versions of 'caking on a stack of make-up', or self-erasure. A further variation of the self-inscribed Cinderella-makeover calculated to produce a negative outcome is a makeover effected professionally: a good example is Janey's transformation in Lanagan's *Touching Earth Lightly* (1996, pp.71-73), where her attempt to assume another identity is shortly followed by her brutal murder. The relationship between makeover and murder is not causal, but symbolic of a failure to produce an agential subjectivity.

In contrast to these self-inscribed makeovers, Carmel's makeover in *Queen Kat, Carmel and St Jude Get a Life* is paradigmatic of the makeover which most fully expresses the awakening of an interior selfhood. Significantly, it is performed by Jude, Carmel's best friend, and Cynthia, Jude's mother. It is a rather long scene, but needs to be considered in full:

Cynthia had two large old trunks, and an enormous heavy cupboard, all full-to-bursting with different bits and pieces. The three of us pulled the stuff on, wrapped it around each other, and pranced around like show ponies. I didn't even feel self-conscious when I told them I would wear my simple everyday outfit. But when, towards the end of the afternoon, Cynthia dragged out an evening top that she thought might interest me, I suddenly clammed up with shyness. Even before I tried it on I knew I loved it.

It was a black, finely knitted, clinging thing with a narrow band of tiny bright pink and red beading around the wide neckline. It was long and loose with three-quarter-length sleeves, and had a stylish night-time feel to it, despite being quite simple. [Carmel puts it on. . .]

'What do you think.' I asked, hoping like mad that I was right in thinking it looked good. It fitted closely around my breasts and shoulders and hung loose to my hips in the most flattering way. 'Oh, it's perfect,' [Cynthia] said, 'absolutely perfect.' Jude came in from the other room and

clapped her hands in glee.

'Fantastic,' she glowed. 'You look stunning.' Cynthia dived into her handbag and pulled out a deep-red lipstick.

'No!' I said, edging away. Enough was enough. I didn't even want to try it. 'It's too strong and bright. I only ever wear clear gloss . . .' But she insisted, making me stand there and open my mouth, drawing it on me herself. *With the lipstick on, my face took on a totally different look. I stared at myself in disbelief. I looked brazen, as though I knew exactly who I was and what I wanted.*

Over the next couple of hours, in between cups of tea and jokes, the two of them proceeded to do up my eyes and roll my hair up into a soft bun secured with one of Cynthia's tortoise-shell clips.

'I can't look like this,' I said into Cynthia's bedroom mirror, excited by the transformation, but scared witless too.

'Yes you can!' Jude and Cynthia yelled together and then fell about me, laughing with delight.

'You can! You can!'

'You look really vampy!' Cynthia sighed, popping the lipstick into my little bag and patting it so that I'd notice.

Queen Kat, Carmel and St Jude Get a Life, pp. 139-40

The process here is most distant from the magazine makeover, though the paragraph devoted to describing the 'evening top' evokes another kind of magazine discourse. Even though Carmel experiences a major change of appearance, two key considerations control what happens so there can be no doubt that what is expressed is Carmel's inner beauty. First, it is a paradigmatic example of a makeover framed by female community — the crucial garment is borrowed from Cynthia's collection, and the two women adorn, pamper and approve Carmel's body; second, the change in appearance suggests a potential for Carmel to develop a stronger and more confident subjectivity, a potential expressed here in the register contrast between 'brazen' and looking 'as though I knew exactly who I was and what I wanted': as Carmel's reading of her own image

swiftly passes from performative to expressive interpretation, the text affirms a possibility of being and becoming not hitherto available to her.

Queen Kat, Carmel and St Jude Get a Life also yields an inversion of the *Cinderella*-makeover. The three principal characters are schematically constructed to maximise cultural distinctions—ethnicity, class, religious belief, the diverse ways each is gendered as female—and these social formations in turn shape the balance between contingency and possibility. Kat and Carmel's lives in the country define one another's, and these in turn define Jude's townish being as complicated by the otherness of her non-Anglo appearance. There are possibilities for moving up and down this cultural hierarchy, though there's a fairly clear suggestion that to move 'up' into Kat's socialite world is to enter a culture where being is somehow inauthentic. To find her own authentic self, Kat has to move down. Because the discourse is structured according to familiar cultural categories, readers will inevitably deploy those categories in order to decipher the significances of relationships, events and actions, including makeovers. Kat's cultural trajectories are coded by how she dresses—her initial movement away from her class-produced subjectivity (clearly marked as performative) is toward another version of inauthenticity. A pivotal moment occurs when she is arrested and charged with drug possession. At the time of the arrest she is dressed in a way she describes as 'very weird, but classy weird', but which the text codes as crass, vulgar, little better than Jules' request for her to wear 'tight little hot pants ... an iridescent pink see-through chiffon blouse and one of those hot silver-spangled bras underneath' (p.330). In contrast, her movement towards a greater authenticity begins when she takes some food out to Carmel's family:

I finished my lunch and went to change. Instinctively I found my oldest trousers, a man's, shirt and a moth-eaten jumper of Dad's over the top. I pulled my hair straight back from my face, pinned it into a tight little bun and pulled out my gold earrings. I'm not quite sure why.
(p. 365)

The framing by 'Instinctively ... I'm not quite sure why'

insists that readers interpret the action, but doesn't determine what that interpretation will be, though within reference to the makeover genre it is easy to recognise that in order to give expression to the natural (code for an authentic, substantial self) the princess must transform herself into a cinder-lass. The text is assuming that readers will be able to fill the gap by deploying familiar cultural categories and so decipher the meaning.

Perhaps the most striking use of the makeover metonym in recent fiction is in Philippa Burne's *Fishnets*, a novel in which the main character, Sophie, is a fragmented subjectivity, a space needing to be filled and cohered. Her obsession with self-inscribed makeovers functions as a sequence of sites in which the narrative traces her trajectory through mental instability to final breakdown (although the novel ends on a note of ambiguity, the more convincing reading is that Sophie has slipped completely into insanity). Here is a symptomatic example from early in the novel:

Sophie takes out the photographs of the flat: the furniture, paintings, the view, the dinner set and wine glasses. And photographs of herself. Sophie at Sally's. She checks the list one final time. It is all here. All she needs. She surveys the things spread out on the floor — surrounding her. She props a photograph of Sally next to the mirror and begins. Blusher, mascara, eyeliner, lipstick and scent. Perfect. Bra and knickers and stockings and shoes. Perfect. And finally, the outer layer — skirt and shirt and jacket and earrings. In front of the mirror — blemishes smoothed, fat disappeared, height increased. Sophie pulls at the clothes, getting it right. Her hair is wrong. She frowns, shakes her head and puts on a hat. I am Sally
Fishnets, pp.29-30

Fishnets makes more overt use of teen magazines than do the other novels I've been referring to, listing several on the third page and depicting Sophie's use of one of them. As it quite serendipitously turns out, the novel's mixture

of reproduction and parody of magazine discourse evidently draws some of its elements from the same 1996 issue of *Girlfriend* in which the Fiona makeover appears (specifically, its 'Love & Life' and 'famous faces' pages), though the novel's construction of the discourse as a kind of postmodern addiction to surfaces is not strictly accurate — the discourse is rather harder to imitate or parody than some novelists expect, I think. The makeover described in the passage cited could not be further removed from Carmel's makeover in *Queen Kat*. Instead of disclosing an interior self, Sophie fashions what appears to be a disguise, an appropriation of someone else's surface. The discourse of the makeover implicit in the language of blemish and camouflage is framed within Sally's domestic ambience, evoked by photographs. Sally herself is there initially as a photograph and finally as an image overlaying Sophie's body. The interplay of presence and absence around the signifier *Sally* is matched by the same interplay around the signifier *Sophie*. The various items of clothing are not borrowed, as in *Queen Kat* or even *What Are Ya?*, but stolen. The reiterated perfection is not that perfection which Cynthia perceives in the match of evening top and Carmel's body, but an illusion perceived as perfection and constructing a surface which overtly inscribes Sophie as someone else, placing her own subjectivity under erasure. And subjectivity as ungrounded, or as absence, is further evoked by the reference to building up the image in 'layers', since they are layers from the surface up, inverting the assumption that layering begins at the surface and moves inward.

Burne's use of the makeover is very unusual because it has now become metonymic of absence. Sophie's traumatised personality, it is revealed, stems from the death by drowning of her younger sister, Chloe, several years earlier, and a sense that this has denied her any stable subject position. Its expression, though, is Sophie's desire to be subjectivated by other bodily images and hence by makeovers which deny interiority. This use of the metonym offers an extreme contrast with the more usual function over the past decade or so, which is, of course, to affirm that sense of innate, in-dwelling selfhood which is already an implicit ideological underpinning of the teen magazine makeover. At the same time, the linking of performative identity with behaviour designated

as socially and ethically deviant, and with eventual insanity, reinscribes the ideal of subjectivity as expression of a substantial self acting as a ground for choice and agency — the abiding ideal of adolescent fiction.

ENDNOTES

1. The point is playfully and metafictionally taken up in *Clueless*, as Cher prepares for the night to be spent with Christian. Not putting her trust in mirrors, she has Dion take a polaroid of her modelling possible outfits. The true reality is the visual image: this is Beverly Hills, and the young people fashion their lives in imitation of films.
2. 'Diet and exercise is all about being realistic about the size and shape you can achieve. Some girls are naturally thin, while others find it harder to keep their weight down' (*Dolly*, Oct. 1998, p.44).
3. *Goddess of Cool* is the third novel in a sequence, preceded by *Real Girls* (Port Melbourne, Mammoth, 1992) and *Sibs*. Both *Real Girls* and *Goddess of Cool* have an extended makeover as a central plot element, though in *Real Girls* it is self-inscribed.
4. Pausacker's contributions to the Dolly Fiction series also included a more explicit retelling of a Jane Austen novel: *First Impressions* (Dolly #11, 1988) is a cheeky transposition of *Pride and Prejudice* into teen romance genre.
5. See, for example, the review of *Fishnets* in *Viewpoint* 5, 3, 1997: 37, in which the novel is criticised for not being a first person narrated revelation of character. This reviewer seems not to understand the semiotic relationships between surfaces and interiors, or the key point that Sophie's subjectivity is effectively an absence reflected in fleeting surface images.

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John Stephens is Associate Professor in English at Macquarie University where his main teaching commitment is children's literature, but he also teaches and supervises postgraduate research in medieval studies, post-colonial literature, and discourse analysis. He is the author of *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, two books about discourse analysis and around sixty articles about children's (and other) literature, and is the co-author, with Robyn McCallum, of *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*. He is the current president of the International Research Society for Children's Literature.

