

editor's letter



When it comes to pop, everyone has an opinion. I remember my mother admonishing me as a kid for reading *Babysitter's Club* books: "Bubble gum for the brain!" she said. But then the same year scientists declared: "Bubble gum helps you concentrate!" What's a girl to think?

Popularity popping, bubbles bursting, it's no wonder that for years bubble gum and popular culture have gone hand in hand. You can chew it up without even thinking about it; it inflates; it deflates; and then it can be quickly replaced when it loses its flavor. But if it's so tasteless, why do we keep buying it in packs? As Andy Warhol said, "I love Los Angeles. I love Hollywood. They're beautiful. Everybody's plastic, but I love plastic. I want to be plastic."

And we all love plastic; that's the point. As Eddie Van Halen observes, "The word 'pop' is simply short for popular. It means that people like it." Formal definitions of "pop" are often violent—"a blow, knock," "a short abrupt sound of explosion," "a shot with a firearm"—but certainly none of them imply vapidness. Popular culture, like bubble gum, comes in many flavors, and where one person finds blandness, another may discover stimulation. We are constantly disproving the stereotype that popular culture can't be a vehicle for provocative and compelling ideas—anyone growing up in the last couple decades can attest to their Madonna, Benetton, WNBA, and *Sex and the City*-laden lives. As Naomi Klein, author of *No Logo*, muses, "When Nike says, 'Just Do It,' that's a message of empowerment. Why aren't the rest of us speaking to young people in a voice of inspiration?"

This issue of *iris* speaks out of our own inspiration in the bubbly infusion that titillates our minds, communicates our ideas, and builds our identities. Pop comes at us from every direction: television, movies, sports, music, magazines, newspapers, literature, billboards, supermarkets, and the Internet. The diversity of our content in this issue tries to represent this. "Lesbian Chic" explores the rapidly changing place of lesbians in popular television, while "Jessica Simpson Changed My Life" takes an intimate look at three generations of women whose lives have been shaped by female pop stars. "Cult of the Body Beautiful" and "Girl Power Goes to the Beach" both examine the powerful presence of women's bodies in popular culture—the former through media obsession with female athletes' T&A, the latter by getting deep and dirty into the *Girls Gone Wild* franchise. In printed pop, "The Stupid Tent" investigates the landscape of contemporary literature and finds its heroines lacking, while "Mommie Dearest" wonders whether there have always been this many celebrity moms, or if the tabloids are just baby-crazy. And on the Hollywood front, "A Note on the Romantic Comedy Rights of Women" demands that women of color be allowed frivolous love affairs, too. This issue of *iris* also includes fantastic interviews with comedian Shazia Mirza, and with third wave activists and authors Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (*Manifesta*, 2000; *Grassroots*, 2005), as well as three columns written by captivating feminist activists.

While we know that it's impossible to cover everything, we do want this issue of *iris* to at least convey that pop culture can be powerful and provocative—a small saccharin explosion in our everyday lives. Hopefully you will find something in this issue that is just your flavor.