



UNMARKED

the politics of performance

Peggy Phelan



'From Mapplethorpe to Stoppard, from *Paris Is Burning* to *Operation Rescue*, Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked* seeks the performative and political limits of the given-to-be-seen, where hegemony wavers and subjectivity can be reimagined. An exciting, vastly intelligent, and moving study of the ethics of the visible.

Elin Diamond, Rutgers University

Unmarked is a controversial analysis of the fraught relation between political and representational visibility in contemporary culture. Written from and for the Left, *Unmarked* rethinks the claims of visibility politics through a feminist psychoanalytic examination of specific performance texts — including photography, painting, film, theatre and anti-abortion-demonstrations.

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Against Being Right

and for the ones who have shattered

shattered blind

blind alice's looking glass

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7

The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.

The pressures brought to bear on performance to succumb to the laws of the reproductive economy are enormous. For only rarely in this culture is the "now" to which performance addresses its deepest questions valued. (This is why the now is supplemented and buttressed by the documenting camera, the video archive.) Performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as "different." The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present.

The other arts, especially painting and photography, are drawn increasingly toward performance. The French-born artist Sophie Calle, for example, has photographed the galleries of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Several valuable paintings were stolen from the museum in 1990. Calle interviewed various visitors and members of the museum staff, asking them to describe the stolen paintings. She then transcribed these texts and placed them next to the photographs of the galleries. Her work suggests that the descriptions and memories of the paintings constitute their continuing "presence," despite the absence of the paintings themselves. Calle gestures toward a notion of the interactive exchange between the art object and the viewer. While such exchanges are often recorded as the stated goals of museums and galleries, the institutional effect of the gallery often seems to put the masterpiece under house arrest, controlling all conflicting and unprofessional commentary about it. The speech act of memory and description (Austin's constative utterance) becomes a performative expression

when Calle places these commentaries within the representation of the museum. The descriptions fill in, and thus supplement (add to, defer, and displace) the stolen paintings. The fact that these descriptions vary considerably – even at times wildly – only lends credence to the fact that the interaction between the art object and the spectator is, essentially, performative – and therefore resistant to the claims of validity and accuracy endemic to the discourse of reproduction. While the art historian of painting must ask if the reproduction is accurate and clear, Calle asks where seeing and memory forget the object itself and enter the subject's own set of personal meanings and associations. Further her work suggests that the forgetting (or stealing) of the object is a fundamental energy of its descriptive recovering. The description itself does not reproduce the object, it rather helps us to restage and restate the effort to remember what is lost. The descriptions remind us how loss acquires meaning and generates recovery – not only of and for the object, but for the one who remembers. The disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered.

For her contribution to the *Dislocations* show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1991, Calle used the same idea but this time she asked curators, guards, and restorers to describe paintings that were on loan from the permanent collection. She also asked them to draw small pictures of their memories of the paintings. She then arranged the texts and pictures according to the exact dimensions of the circulating paintings and placed them on the wall where the actual paintings usually hang. Calle calls her piece *Ghosts*, and as the visitor discovers Calle's work spread throughout the museum, it is as if Calle's own eye is following and tracking the viewer as she makes her way through the museum.¹ Moreover, Calle's work seems to disappear because it is dispersed throughout the "permanent collection" – a collection which circulates despite its "permanence." Calle's artistic contribution is a kind of self-concealment in which she offers the words of others about other works of art under her own artistic signature. By making visible her attempt to offer what she does not have, what cannot be seen, Calle subverts the goal of museum display. She exposes what the museum does not have and cannot offer and uses that absence to generate her own work. By placing memories in the place of paintings, Calle asks that the ghosts of memory be seen as equivalent to "the permanent collection" of "great works." One senses that if she asked the same people over and over about the same paintings, each time they would describe a slightly different painting. In this sense, Calle demonstrates the performative quality of all seeing.

I

Performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive. It is this quality which makes performance the runt of the litter of contemporary art. Performance clogs the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the circulation of capital. Perhaps nowhere was the affinity between the ideology of capitalism and art made more manifest than in the debates about the funding policies for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).² Targeting both photography and performance art, conservative politicians sought to prevent endorsing the "real" bodies implicated and made visible by these art forms.

Performance implicates the real through the presence of living bodies. In performance art spectatorship there is an element of consumption: there are no left-overs, the gazing spectator must try to take everything in. Without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility – in a maniacally charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control. Performance resists the balanced circulations of finance. It saves nothing; it only spends. While photography is vulnerable to charges of counterfeiting and copying, performance art is vulnerable to charges of valuelessness and emptiness. Performance indicates the possibility of revaluing that emptiness; this potential revaluation gives performance art its distinctive oppositional edge.³

To attempt to write about the undocumented event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself. Just as quantum physics discovered that macro-instruments cannot measure microscopic particles without transforming those particles, so too must performance critics realize that the labor to write about performance (and thus to "preserve" it) is also a labor that fundamentally alters the event. It does no good, however, to simply refuse to write about performance because of this inescapable transformation. The challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance for writing is to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself. The act of writing toward disappearance, rather than the act of writing toward preservation, must remember that the after-effect of disappearance is the experience of subjectivity itself.

This is the project of Roland Barthes in both *Camera Lucida* and *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. It is also his project in *Empire of Signs*, but in this book he takes the memory of a city in which he no longer is, a city from which he disappears, as the motivation for the search for a disappearing performative writing. The trace left by that script is the meeting-point of a mutual disappearance; shared subjectivity is possible for Barthes because two people can recognize the same Impossible. To live for a love whose goal is to share the Impossible is both a humbling

project and an exceedingly ambitious one, for it seeks to find connection only in that which is no longer there. Memory. Sight. Love. It must involve a full seeing of the Other's absence (the ambitious part), a seeing which also entails the acknowledgment of the Other's presence (the humbling part). For to acknowledge the Other's (always partial) presence is to acknowledge one's own (always partial) absence.

In the field of linguistics, the performative speech act shares with the ontology of performance the inability to be reproduced or repeated. "Being an individual and historical act, a performative utterance cannot be repeated. Each reproduction is a new act performed by someone who is qualified. Otherwise, the reproduction of the performative utterance by someone else necessarily transforms it into a constative utterance."⁴

Writing, an activity which relies on the reproduction of the Same (the three letters *cat* will repeatedly signify the four-legged furry animal with whiskers) for the production of meaning, can broach the frame of performance but cannot mimic an art that is nonreproductive. The mimicry of speech and writing, the strange process by which we put words in each other's mouths and others' words in our own, relies on a substitutional economy in which equivalencies are assumed and re-established. Performance refuses this system of exchange and resists the circulatory economy fundamental to it. Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward. Writing about it necessarily cancels the "tracelessness" inaugurated within this performative promise. Performance's independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength. But buffeted by the encroaching ideologies of capital and reproduction, it frequently devalues this strength. Writing about performance often, unwittingly, encourages this weakness and falls in behind the drive of the document/ary. Performance's challenge to writing is to discover a way for repeated words to become performative utterances, rather than, as Benveniste warned, constative utterances.

The distinction between performative and constative utterances was proposed by J. L. Austin in *How To Do Things With Words*.⁵ Austin argued that speech had both a constative element (describing things in the world) and a performative element (to say something is to *do* or make something, e.g. "I promise," "I bet," "I beg"). Performative speech acts refer only to themselves, they *enact* the activity the speech signifies. For Derrida, performative writing promises fidelity only to the utterance of the promise: I promise to utter this promise.⁶ The performative is important to Derrida precisely because it displays language's independence from the referent outside of itself. Thus, for Derrida the performative enacts the now of writing in the present time.⁷

Tania Modleski has rehearsed Derrida's relation to Austin and argues

that "feminist critical writing is simultaneously performative and utopian" ("Some Functions": 15). That is, feminist critical writing is an enactment of belief in a better future; the act of writing brings that future closer.⁸ Modleski goes further too and says that women's relation to the performative mode of writing and speech is especially intense because women are not assured the luxury of making linguistic promises within phallogocentrism, since all too often she is what is promised. Commenting on Shoshana Felman's account of the "scandal of the speaking body," a scandal Felman elucidates through a reading of Molière's *Dom Juan*, Modleski argues that the scandal has different affects and effects for women than for men. "[T]he real, historical scandal to which feminism addresses itself is surely not to be equated with the writer at the center of discourse, but the woman who remains outside of it, not with the 'speaking body,' but with the 'mute body'" (ibid.: 19). Feminist critical writing, Modleski argues, "works toward a time when the traditionally mute body, 'the mother,' will be given the same access to 'the names' – language and speech – that men have enjoyed" (ibid.: 15).

If Modleski is accurate in suggesting that the opposition for feminists who write is between the "speaking bodies" of men and the "mute bodies" of women, for performance the opposition is between "the body in pleasure" and, to invoke the title of Elaine Scarry's book, "the body in pain." In moving from the grammar of words to the grammar of the body, one moves from the realm of metaphor to the realm of metonymy. For performance art itself however, the referent is always the agonizingly relevant body of the performer. Metaphor works to secure a vertical hierarchy of value and is reproductive; it works by erasing dissimilarity and negating difference; it turns two into one. Metonymy is additive and associative; it works to secure a horizontal axis of contiguity and displacement. "The kettle is boiling" is a sentence which assumes that water is contiguous with the kettle. The point is not that the kettle is like water (as in the metaphorical love is like a rose), but rather the kettle is boiling because the water inside the kettle is. In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of "presence." But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else – dance, movement, sound, character, "art." As we discovered in relation to Cindy Sherman's self-portraits, the very effort to make the female body appear involves the addition of something other than "the body." That "addition" becomes the object of the spectator's gaze, in much the way the supplement functions to secure and displace the fixed meaning of the (floating) signifier. Just as her body remains unseen as "in itself it really is," so too does the sign fail to reproduce the referent. Performance uses the performer's body to pose a question about the inability to secure the

relation between subjectivity and the body *per se*; performance uses the body to frame the lack of Being promised by and through the body – that which cannot appear without a supplement.

In employing the body metonymically, performance is capable of resisting the reproduction of metaphor, and the metaphor I'm most keenly interested in resisting is the metaphor of gender, a metaphor which upholds the vertical hierarchy of value through systematic marking of the positive and the negative. In order to enact this marking, the metaphor of gender presupposes unified bodies which are biologically different. More specifically, these unified bodies are different in "one" aspect of the body, that is to say, difference is located in the genitals.

As MacCannell points out about Lacan's story of the "laws of urinary segregation" (*Ecrits*: 151), same sex bathrooms are social institutions which further the metaphorical work of hiding gender/genital difference. The genitals themselves are forever hidden within metaphor, and metaphor, as a "cultural worker," continually converts difference into the Same. The joined task of metaphor and culture is to reproduce itself; it accomplishes this by turning two (or more) into one.⁹ By valuing one gender and marking it (with the phallus) culture reproduces one sex and one gender, the hommo-sexual.

If this is true then women should simply disappear – but they don't. Or do they? If women are not reproduced within metaphor or culture, how do they survive? If it is a question of survival, why would white women (apparently visible cultural workers) participate in the reproduction of their own negation? What aspects of the bodies and languages of women remain outside metaphor and inside the historical real? Or to put it somewhat differently, how do women reproduce and represent themselves within the figures and metaphors of hommo-sexual representation and culture? Are they perhaps surviving in another (auto)reproductive system?

"What founds our *gender economy* (division of the sexes and their mutual evaluation) is the exclusion of *the mother*, more specifically her body, more precisely yet, her *genitals*. These cannot, must not be *seen*" (original emphasis; MacCannell, *Figuring Lacan*: 106). The discursive and iconic "nothingness" of the Mother's genitals is what culture and metaphor cannot face. They must be effaced in order to allow the phallus to operate as that which always marks, values, and wounds. Castration is a response to this blindness to the mother's genitals. In "The Uncanny" Freud suggests that the fear of blindness is a displacement of the deeper fear of castration but surely it works the other way as well, or maybe even more strongly. Averting the eyes from the "nothing" of the mother's genitals is the blindness which fuels castration. This is the blindness of Oedipus. Is blindness necessary to the anti-Oedipus? To Electra? Does metonymy need blindness as keenly as metaphor does?

Cultural orders rely on the renunciation of conscious desire and pleasure and *promise* a reward for this renunciation. MacCannell refers to this as "the positive promise of castration" and locates it in the idea of "value" itself – the desire to be valued by the Other. (For Lacan, value is recognition by the Other.) The hope of becoming valued prompts the subject to make sacrifices, and especially to forgo conscious pleasure. This willingness to renounce pleasure implies that the Symbolic Order is moral and that the subject obeys an (inner) Law which affords the subject a veil of dignity. Why only the veil of dignity as against dignity itself? Because the fundamental Other (the one who governs "the other scene" which ghosts the conscious scene) is the Symbolic Mother. She is the Ideal Other for whom the subject wants to be dignified; but she cannot appear within the phallic representational economy which is predicated on the disappearance of her Being.¹⁰ The psychic subject performs for a phantom who allows the subject veils and curtains – rather than satisfaction.

Performance approaches the Real through resisting the metaphorical reduction of the two into the one. But in moving from the aims of metaphor, reproduction, and pleasure to those of metonymy, displacement, and pain, performance marks the body itself as loss. Performance is the attempt to value that which is nonreproductive, nonmetaphorical. This is enacted through the staging of the drama of misrecognition (twins, actors within characters enacting other characters, doubles, crimes, secrets, etc.) which sometimes produces the recognition of the desire to be seen *by* (and *within*) the other. Thus for the spectator the performance spectacle is itself a projection of the scenario in which her own desire takes place.

More specifically, a genre of performance art called "hardship art" or "ordeal art" attempts to invoke a distinction between presence and representation by using the singular body as a metonymy for the apparently nonreciprocal experience of pain. This performance calls witnesses to the singularity of the individual's death and asks the spectator to do the impossible – to share that death by rehearsing for it. (It is for this reason that performance shares a fundamental bond with ritual. The Catholic Mass, for example, is the ritualized performative promise to remember and to rehearse for the Other's death.) The promise evoked by this performance then is to learn to value what is lost, to learn not the meaning but the value of what cannot be reproduced or seen (again). It begins with the knowledge of its own failure, that it cannot *be* achieved.

II

Angelika Festa creates performance pieces in which she appears in order to disappear (Figure 24). Her appearance is always extraordinary: she

suspends herself from poles; she sits fully dressed in well-excavated graves attended by a fish; she stands still on a crowded corner of downtown New York (8th and Broadway) in a red rabbit suit holding two loaves of bread; wearing a mirror mask, a black, vaguely antiquarian dress, with hands and feet painted white, she holds a white bowl of fruit and stands on the side of a country road. The more dramatic the appearance, the more disturbing the disappearance. As performances which are contingent upon disappearance, Festa's work traces the passing of the woman's body from visibility to invisibility, and back again. What becomes apparent in these performances is the labor and pain of this endless and liminal passing.

In her 1987 performance called – appropriately – *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)*, at The Experimental Intermedia Foundation in New York, Festa literally hung suspended from a pole for twenty-four hours (Figure 25).¹¹ The performance took place between noon on Saturday May 30 and noon on Sunday 31. The pole was positioned between two wooden supports at about an 80° angle and Festa hung suspended from it, her body wrapped to the pole with white sheets, her face and weight leaning toward the floor. Her eyes were covered with silver tape and thus looked, in all senses, beyond the spectator. About two and a half feet from the bottom of the pole was a small black cushion which supported her bare feet. Her feet in turn were projected onto a screen behind her to the left in close-up. The projection enlarged them so much that they seemed to be as large as the rest of Festa's body. On a video monitor in front of Festa and to the left, a video tape loop of the embryology of a fish played continuously. Finally, on a smaller monitor facing Festa a time-elapsed video documenting the dance (re)played and re(in)flexed the entire performance.

The images of death, birth, and resurrection are visually overlaid; Festa's point is that they are philosophically (and mythologically) inseparable. The work is primarily a spectacle of pain; while I do not wish to minimize this aspect of the performance, I will begin by discussing some of the broad claims which frame *Untitled*. The performance seeks to display the lack of difference between some of Western metaphysics' tacit oppositions – birth and death, time and space, spectacle and secret. By suspending herself between two poles (two polarities), Festa's performances suggest that it is only within the space *between* oppositions that "a woman" can be represented. Such representation is, therefore and necessarily, extremely up-in-the-air, almost impossible to map or lay claim to. It is in a space in which there is no ground, a space in which (bare)feet cannot touch the ground.

The iconography of the performance is self-contradictory: each position is undermined by a succeeding one. Festa's wrapped body itself seems to evoke images of dead mummies and full cocoons. Reading the



Figure 24 Angelika Festa, *You Are Obsessive, Eat Something* (1984). (Photo: Claudine Ascher. Courtesy: Angelika Festa)

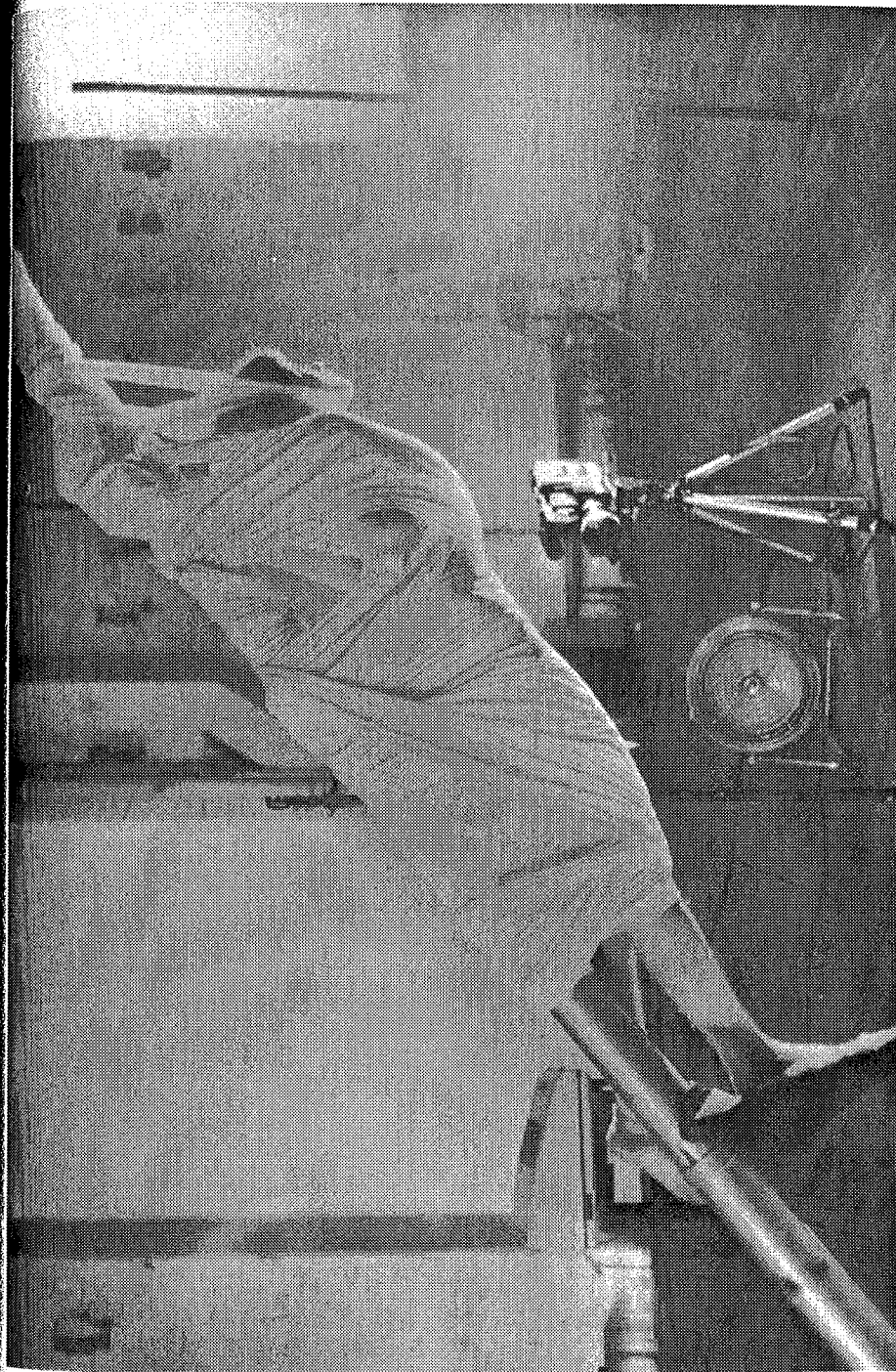


Figure 25 Angelika Festa, *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* (1987). (Photo: Hubert Hohn. Courtesy: Angelika Festa)

image one can say something like: the fecundity of the central image is an image of History-as-Death (the mummy) and Future-as-Unborn (the cocoon). The twenty-four-hour performance defines the Present (Festa's body) as that which continually suspends and thus prohibits the intrusive return of that death and the appealing possibility of that birth. The Present is that which can tolerate neither death nor birth but can only exist because of these two "originary" acts. Both are required for the Present to be present, for it to exist in the suspended animation between the Past and the Future.

But this truism is undercut by another part of the performance: the fish tape stops at precisely the moment the fish breaks out of the embryo; then the tape begins again. The tape thus revises the definition of History offered by the central image (History-as-Death). History is figured by the tape as an endless embryology whose import is not in the breaking out of – (the ubiquitous claim to historical "transformation") – but rather in the continual repetition of the cycle of that mutation which produces birth. ("Be fruitful and multiply" is wittily made literal by the repeated projection of the tape loop.)

The third image then undercuts the first two. The projected images of Festa's feet seem to be an half-ironic, half-devout allusion to the history of representations of the bloody feet of the crucified Christ (Figure 26). On the one hand, (one foot?) the projections are like photographic "details" of Mannerist paintings and on the other, they seem to "ground" the performance; because of their size they demand more of the spectator's attention. The spatial arrangement of the room – with Festa in the middle, the feet-screen behind her and to the left, the fish tape in front of her also on the left, and the time-elapsing mini-monitor directly in front of her and raised, forces the spectator constantly to look *away from* Festa's suspended body. In order to look at the projected feet, one has to look "beyond" Festa; in order to look at the fish embryo tape or the video monitor recording the performance itself, one has to turn one's back to her. That these projected images seem to be consumable while the center image is, as it were, a "blind" image, suggests that it is only through the second-order of *re/presentation* that we "see" anything. Festa's body (and particularly her eyes) is averted from the spectator's ability to comprehend, to see and thus to seize.

The failure to see the eye/I locates Festa's suspended body for the spectator. The spectator's inability to meet the eye *defines* the other's body as lost; the pain of this loss is underlined by the corollary recognition that the represented body is so manifestly and painfully there, for both Festa and the spectator. Festa cannot see her body because her eyes are taped shut; the spectator cannot see Festa and must gaze instead at the wrapped shell of a lost eyeless body. As with Wallace Stevens: "The

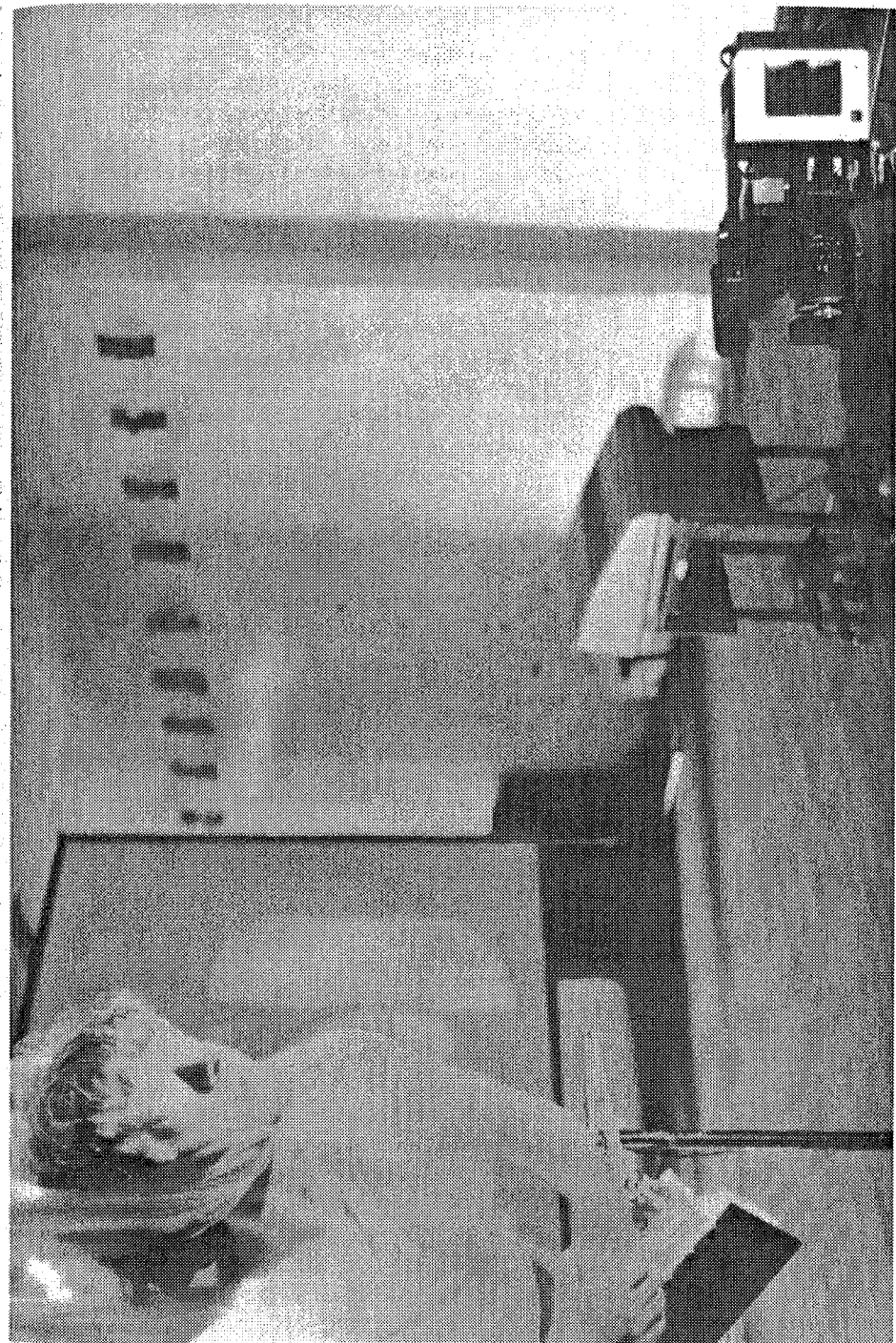


Figure 26 Angelika Festa, *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* (1987). (Photo: Hubert Hohn. Courtesy: Angelika Festa)

body is no body to be seen/But is an eye that studies its black lid" – and its back lid – the Nietzschean *hinterfrage* (Stevens, "Stars at Tallapoosa").

What is the back question for women? Back against the wall. Back off. Back out. About face. Lorna Simpson's photography has recently raised the question of the relation between the about face and the black face. In *Guarded Conditions*, for example, Simpson reassembles the polaroid fragmented images of a black woman's body (Figure 27). Her back faces the viewer; because the images are segmented in three sections vertically and repeated serially in six horizontal panels, the effort to see her without effacing her is made impossible. While Simpson's work is overtly about the documentary tradition of photography, a tradition which has strong ties to the discourse and techniques of criminality, in *Guarded Conditions* she also poses a deeper psychoanalytic response to the violence of perception itself. At the bottom of the image march these words: "Sex Attacks/Skin Attacks/Sex Attacks/Skin Attacks." Racial and sexual violence are an integral part of seeing the African-American woman. Her response to a perception which seeks her disappearance or her containment within the discursive frames of criminality or pathology, is to turn her back. In the middle of her back, the woman clenches her fists and repeats the pose of Mapplethorpe's male model in *Leland Richard* (1980), discussed in chapter 2. Whereas for Mapplethorpe the model's clenched fist is a gesture toward self-imaging (his fist is like Mapplethorpe's holding the time-release shutter), in Simpson's work, the fist is a response to the sexual and racial attacks indexed as the very ground upon which her image rests. As in the work of Festa, the effort to read the image of the represented woman's body in Simpson's photography requires a bilingual approach to word and image, to what can and cannot be seen. The back registers the effacement of the subject within a linguistic and visual field which requires her to be either the Same or the containable, ever fixed, Other. To attack that, Simpson suggests, we need to see and to read other/wise.

Sight is both an image and a word; the gaze is possible both because of the enunciations of articulate eyes and because the subject finds a position to see within the optics and grammar of language. In denying this position to the spectator Festa and Simpson also stop the usual enunciative claims of the critic. While the gaze fosters what Lacan calls "the belong to me aspect so reminiscent of property" (*Four Fundamental Concepts*: 81) and leads the looker to desire mastery of the image, the pain inscribed in Festa's performance makes the viewer feel masterless. In Simpson's work, the "belong to me aspect" of the documentary tradition – and the narrative of mastery integral to it – is far too close to the "belong to me aspect" of slavery, domestic work, and the history of sexual labor to be greeted with anything other than a fist, a turned back,

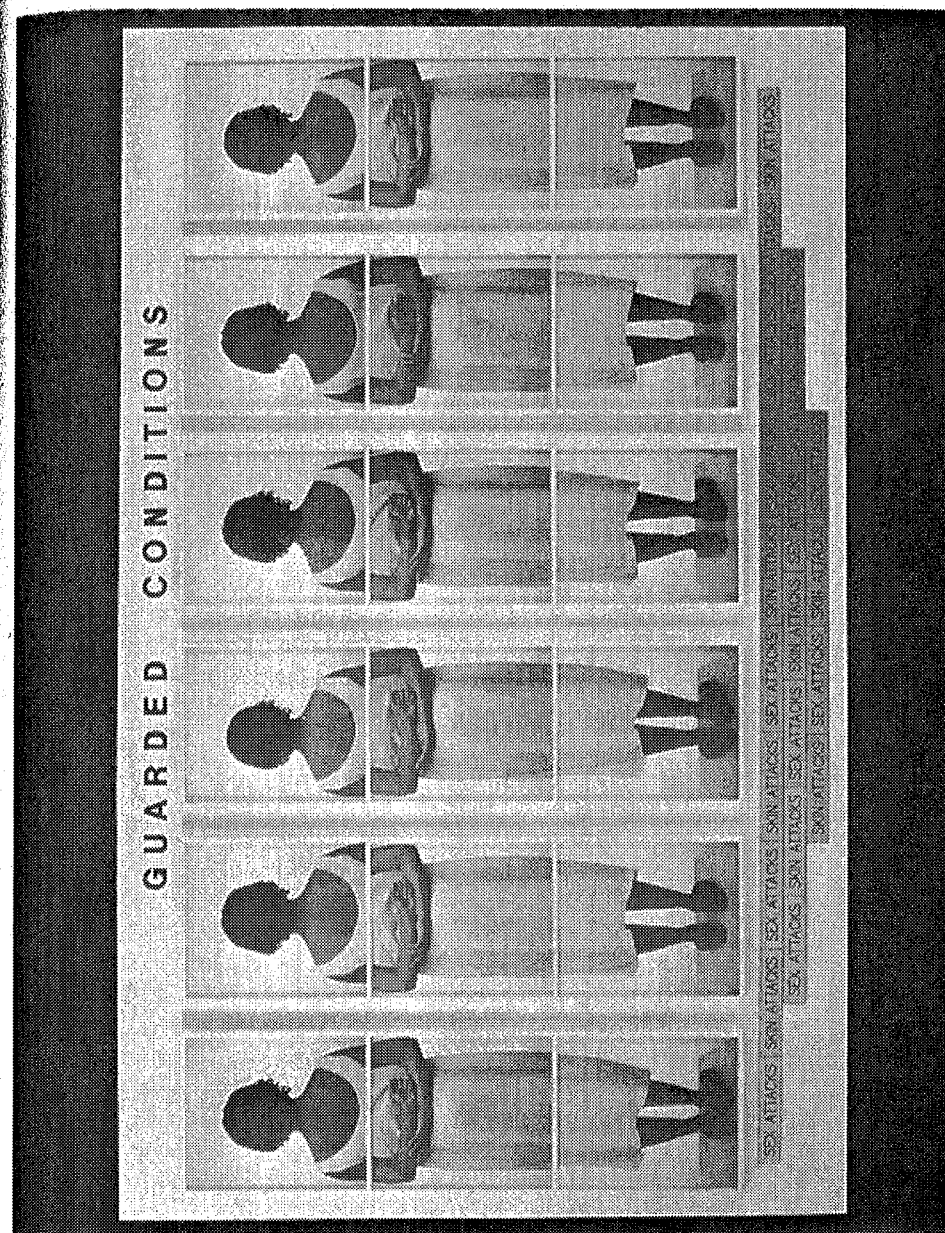


Figure 27 Lorna Simpson, *Guarded Conditions* (1989). (Photo: Sean Kelly, New York. Courtesy: Josh Baer Gallery, New York)

and an awareness of her own "guarded condition" within visual representation.¹²

Unmoored from the traditional position of authority guaranteed by the conventions of address operative in the documentary tradition of the photograph, a tradition which functions to assure that the given to be seen *belongs* to the field of knowledge of the one who looks, Simpson's photographs call for a form of reading based on fragments, serialization, and the acknowledgment that what is shown is not what one wants to see. In this loss of security, the spectator feels an inner splitting between the spectacle of pain she witnesses but cannot locate and the inner pain she cannot express. But she also feels relief to recognize the historical Real which is not displayed but is nonetheless conveyed within Simpson's work.

In Festa's work, a similar splitting occurs. *Untitled* is an elaborate pun on the notion of women's strength. The "labor" of the performance alludes to the labor of the delivery room – and the white sheets and red headdress are puns on the colors of the birthing process – the white light in the center of pain and the red blood which tears open that light.¹³ The projected feet wryly raise the issue of the fetishized female body – the part (erotically) substituted for the w/whole – which the performance as a whole – seeks to confront. As one tries to find a way to read this suspended and yet completely controlled and confined body, images of other women tied up flood one's eyes. Images as absurdly comic as the damsel Nell tied to the railroad ties waiting for Dudley Doright to beat the clock and save her, and as harrowing as the traditional burning of martyrs and witches, coexist with more common images of women tied to white hospital beds in the name of "curing hysteria," force-feeding anorexics, or whatever medical malaise by which women have been painfully dominated and by which we continue to be perversely enthralled.

The austere minimalism of this piece (complete silence, one performer, no overt action), actually incites the spectator toward list-making of this type. The lists become dizzyingly similar until one finds it almost impossible to distinguish between Nell screaming on the railroad tracks and the hysteric screaming in the hospital. The riddle is as much about figuring out how they became separated as about how Festa puts them back together.

The anorexic who is obsessed by the image of a slender self, Nell who is the epitome of cross-cutting neck-wrenching cartoon drama, the martyr and witch whose public hanging/burning is dramatized as a lesson in moral certitude – either on the part of the victim-martyr or on the part of the witch's executioner – are each defined in terms of what they are not – healthy, heroic, or legitimately powerful. That these terms are themselves slippery, radically subjective, and historically malleable

emphasizes the importance of the maintenance of a fluid and relative perceptual power. These images re-enact the subjective and inventive perception which defines *The Fall* more profoundly than the fertile ground which the story usually insists is the significant loss. The image of the woman is without property; she is groundless. But since she is "not all," that is not all there is to the story. Emphasizing the importance of perceptual transformation which accompanied the loss of prime real estate in the Garden, Festa's work implicitly underlines this clause – "The eyes of both of them were opened" (*Genesis* 3, 7) – as the most compelling consequence detailed in this narrative of origin.

The belief that perception can be made endlessly new is one of the fundamental drives of all visual arts. But in most theatre, the *opposition* between watching and doing is broken down; the distinction is often made to seem ethically immaterial.¹⁴ Festa, whose eyes are covered with tape throughout the performance, questions the traditional complicity of this visual exchange. Her eyes are completely averted and the more one tries to "see" her the more one realizes that "seeing her" requires that one be seen. In all of these images there is a peculiar sense in which their drama hinges absolutely on the sense of seeing oneself and of being seen as Other. Unlike Rainer's film *The Man Who Envied Women* in which the female protagonist cannot be seen, here the female protagonist cannot see. In the absence of that customary visual exchange, the spectator can see only her own desire to be seen. The satisfaction of desire in this spectacle is thwarted perpetually because Festa is so busy conferring with some region of her own embryology that she cannot participate in her half of the exchange; the spectator has to play both parts – she has to become the spectator of her own performance because Festa will not fulfill the invitation her performance issues. In this sense, Festa's work operates on the other side of the same continuum as Rainer's. Whereas in the film Trisha becomes a kind of spectator, here the spectator becomes a kind of performer.

But while Festa successfully eliminates the ethical complicity between watching and doing associated with most theatre, she does not create an ethically neutral performance. Festa's body is displayed in a completely private (in the sense of enclosed) manner in a public spectacle. She becomes a kind of sacrificial object completely vulnerable to the spectator's gaze. As I watch Festa's exhaustion and pain, I feel cannibalistic, awful, guilty, "sick." But after a while another more complicated response emerges. There is something almost obscenely arrogant in Festa's invitation to this display. It is manifest in the "imitative" aspect of her allusions to Christ's resurrection and his bloody feet, and latently present in the endurance she demands of both her spectator and herself.

This arrogance, which she freely acknowledges and makes blatantly obvious, in some senses, "cancels" my cannibalism. While all this addition and subtraction is going on in my accountant-eyes, I begin to realize that this too is superficial. The performance resides somewhere else – somewhere in the reckoning itself and not at all in the sums and differences of our difficult relationship to it. But this thought does not allow me to completely or easily inhabit a land of equality or democracy, although I believe that is part of what is intended. I feel instead the terribly oppressive physical, psychic, and visual cost of this exchange. If Festa's work can be seen as a hypothesis about the possibility of human communication, it is an uncompromising one. There is no meeting-place here in which one can escape the imposing shadow of those (bloody) feet: if History is figured in the tape loop as a repetitious birth cycle, the Future is figured as an unrelenting cycle of death. Where e. e. cummings writes: "we can never be born enough," Festa counters: "we can never die sufficiently enough." This sense of the ubiquitousness of death and dying is not completely oppressive, however (although at times it comes close to that) – because the performance also insists on the possibility of resurrection. By making death multiple and repetitious, Festa also makes it less absolute – and implicitly, less sacred – not so much the exclusive province of the gods.

My hesitation about this aspect of Festa's work stems not from the latent romance of death (that's common enough), but rather from her apparent belief (or perhaps "faith" is a better word) that this suspension/surrender of her own ego can be accomplished in a performance. It is this belief/faith which makes Festa's work so extravagantly literal. Festa's piece is contingent upon the possibility of creating a narrative which reverses the narrative direction of *The Fall*; beginning with the post-lapsarian second-order of Representation, Festa's *Untitled* attempts to give birth – through an intense process of physical and mental labor – to a direct and unmediated Presentation-of-Presence. That this Presence is registered through the body of a woman *in pain* is the one concession Festa makes to the pervasiveness (and the persuasiveness) of post-lapsarian perception and Being. Enormously and stunningly ambitious, Festa's performances leave both the spectator and the performer so exhausted that one cannot help but wonder if the pleasure of presence and plenitude is worth having if this is the only way to achieve it.

In the spectacle of endurance, discipline, and semi-madness that this work evokes, an inversion of the characteristic paradigms of performative exchange occurs. In the spectacle of fatigue, endurance, and depletion, Festa asks the spectator to undergo first a parallel movement and then an opposite one. The spectator's second "performance" is a movement of accretion, excess, and the recognition of the plenitude of

one's physical freedom in contrast to the confinement and pain of the performer's displayed body.

III

In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault argues that "the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know" (*Sexuality*: 64). He is describing the power-knowledge fulcrum which sustains the Roman Catholic confessional, but as with most of Foucault's work, it resonates in other areas as well.

As a description of the power relationships operative in many forms of performance Foucault's observation suggests the degree to which the silent spectator dominates and controls the exchange. (As Dustin Hoffman made so clear in *Tootsie*, the performer is always in the female position in relation to power.) Women and performers, more often than not, are "scripted" to "sell" or "confess" something to someone who is in the position to buy or forgive.

Much Western theatre evokes desire based upon and stimulated by the inequality between performer and spectator – and by the (potential) domination of the silent spectator. That this model of desire is apparently so compatible with (traditional accounts of) "male" desire is no accident.¹⁵ But more centrally this account of desire between speaker/performer and listener/spectator reveals how dependent these positions are upon visibility and a coherent point of view. A visible and easily located point of view provides the spectator with a stable point upon which to turn on the machinery of projection, identification, and (inevitable) objectification. Performers and their critics must begin to redesign this stable set of assumptions about the positions of the theatrical exchange.

The question raised by Festa's work is the extent to which interest in visual or psychic aversion signals an interest in refusing to participate in a representational economy at all. By virtue of having spectators she accepts at least the initial dualism necessary to all exchange. But Festa's performances are so profoundly "solo" pieces that this work is obviously not "a solution" to the problem of women's representation.

Festa addresses the female spectator; her work does not speak about men, but rather about the loss and grief attendant upon the recognition of the chasm between presence and re-presentation. By taking the notion that women are not visible within the dominant narratives of history and the contemporary customs of performance literally, Festa prompts new considerations about the central "absence" integral to the representation of women in patriarchy. Part of the function of women's

absence is to perpetuate and maintain the presence of male desire as desire – as unsatisfied quest. Since the female body and the female character cannot be “staged” or “seen” within representational mediums without challenging the hegemony of male desire, it can be effective politically and aesthetically to deny representing the female body (imagistically, psychically). The belief, the leap of faith, is that this denial will bring about a new form of representation itself (I’m thinking only half jokingly of the sex strike in *Lysistrata*: no sex till the war ends). Festa’s performance work underlines the suspension of the female body between the polarities of presence and absence, and insists that “the woman” can exist only *between* these categories of analysis.

Redesigning the relationship between self and other, subject and object, sound and image, man and woman, spectator and performer, is enormously difficult. More difficult still is withdrawing from representation altogether. I am not advocating that kind of retreat or hoping for that kind of silence (since that is the position assigned to women in language with such ease). The task, in other words, is to make counterfeit the currency of our representational economy – not by refusing to participate in it at all, but rather by making work in which the costs of women’s perpetual aversion are clearly measured. Such forms of accounting might begin to interfere with the structure of hommo-sexual desire which informs most forms of representation.

IV

Behind the fact of hommo-sexual desire and representation the question of the link between representation and reproduction remains. This question can be re-posed by returning to Austin’s contention that a performative utterance cannot be reproduced or represented.

For Lacan, the inauguration of language is simultaneous with the inauguration of desire, a desire which is always painful because it cannot be satisfied. The potential mitigation of this pain is also dependent upon language; one must seek a cure from the wound of words *in* other words – in the words of the other, in the promise of what Stevens calls “the completely answering voice” (“The Sail of Ulysses,” in *The Palm at the End*: 389). But this mitigation of pain is always deferred by the *promise* of relief (Austin’s performative), as against relief itself, because the other’s words substitute for other words in an endless *mise-en-abyme* of metaphorical exchange. Thus the linguistic economy, like the financial economy, is a ledger of substitutions, in which addition and subtraction (the plus and the minus) accord value to the “right” words at the right time. One is always offering what one does not have because what one wants is what one does not have – and for Lacan, “feelings are always reciprocal,” if never “equal.”¹⁶ Exchanging what one does not

have for what one desires (and therefore does not have) puts us in the realm of the negative and the possibility of what Felman calls “radical negativity” (*The Literary Speech Act*: 143).

While feminist theorists have been repeatedly cautioned about becoming stuck in what Sue-Ellen Case describes as “the negative stasis of what cannot be seen,” I think radical negativity is valuable, in part because it resists reproduction.¹⁷ Felman remarks: “radical negativity is what constitutes in fact the *analytic* or *performative* dimension of thought: at once what *makes it an act*” (original emphases; *ibid.*: 143). As an act, the performance of negativity does not make a claim to truth or accuracy. Performance seeks a kind of psychic and political efficacy, which is to say, performance makes a claim about the Real-impossible. As such, the performative utterances of negativity cannot be absorbed by history because their affects/effects, like the constative utterances about stolen paintings which Sophie Calle turns into performatives by framing them in the gallery, are always changing, varied and resolutely unstatic objects. “*What history cannot assimilate,*” Felman argues, “*is thus the implicitly analytical dimension of all radical or fecund thoughts, of all new theories: the ‘force’ of their ‘performance’ (always somewhat subversive) and their ‘residual smile’ (always somewhere self-subversive)*” (original emphases; *ibid.*).

The residual smile is the place of play within performance and within theory. Within play the failure to meet, the impossibility of understanding, is comic rather than tragic. The stakes are lower, as the saying goes. Within the relatively determined limits of theory, the stakes are low indeed.

Or are they?

The performance of theory, the act of moving the “as if” into the indicative “is,” like the act of moving descriptions of paintings into the frames of the stolen or lent canvases, is to replot the relation between perceiver and object, between self and other. In substituting the subject’s memory of the object for the object itself, Calle begins to redesign the order of the museum and the representational field. Institutions whose only function is to preserve and honor objects – traditional museums, archives, banks, and to some degree, universities – are intimately involved in the reproduction of the sterilizing binaries of self/other, possession/dispossession, men/women which are increasingly inadequate formulas for representation. These binaries and their institutional upholders fail to account for that which cannot appear between these tight “equations” but which nonetheless inform them.

These institutions must invent an economy not based on preservation but one which is answerable to the consequences of disappearance. The savings and loan institutions in the US have lost the customer’s belief in the promise of security. Museums whose collections include objects

taken/purchased/obtained from cultures who are now asking (and expecting) their return must confront the legacy of their appropriative history in a much more nuanced and complex way than currently prevails. Finally, universities whose domain is the reproduction of knowledge must re-view the theoretical enterprise by which the object surveyed is reproduced as property with (theoretical) value.

Afterword: notes on hope – for my students

The uncertainty principle fundamental to physics is based on the failure of the empirical to secure the real. *Fort. Da.* Testing for the quantum is a hazard of probabilities if not fortunes, best guesses of events before and after the leap. The measurement of the quantum's movement in time/space cannot be securely repeated within the logic of empirical representation. (Nor can the boson's, the quark's, or the gluon's.) Like performance, the quantum cannot be preserved, recalled, measured, and evaluated by recourse to representation's insurance policies. Always insecure, the nervous system of matter is reflected in the nervous condition of psychic being.¹

Performance art usually occurs in the suspension between the "real" physical matter of "the performing body" and the psychic experience of what it is to be embodied. Like a rickety bridge swaying under too much weight, performance keeps one anchor on the side of the corporeal (the body Real) and one on the side of the psychic Real. Performance boldly and precariously declares that Being is performed (and made temporarily visible) in that suspended in-between.²

Performance commentators tend to open their critical cameras and set up their tripods on one side or the other – the "physical" readers are usually trained in movement analysis and/or history, and the "psychic" readers are usually trained in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (although rarely in practice). Perhaps it would be worthwhile to experiment with the possibility of a different notion of the relation between these two camps. It might be fruitful to take the body as always both psychic and material/physical: this would necessitate a combined critical methodology. One could employ both physics and psychoanalysis to read the body's movements and paralytic pauses.

But before one can speak of a psychoanalytic physics or a physics of psychoanalysis one must first recognize how each system "proves" the impossibility of seizing the Real. At the risk of redundancy: this is not to say that the real does not exist. It does. But it is to say that it cannot be seen, arrested, fixed with the "slower" I/eye. "Love's interpretation

exists only in the afterwards." Within psychoanalysis, this impossible-to-seize-real complicates the notion of the symptom. The symptom's meaning emerges in relation to the psychoanalytic dialogue: it is not so much that the dialogue produces the symptom's meaning, but rather the dialogue creates a stage upon which the symptom's meaning can be amplified. This amplification distorts the sound the symptom makes – but it does provide a hearing. (There is no "pure" hearing without distortion anywhere, any time.) Lacan summarizes the point of Freud's career by remarking that "Freud took it upon himself to show us there are illnesses which speak" ("Intervention in Transference": 94). All symptoms, like all words, are metaphors, substitutes for unportable things. Sometimes particular metaphors are loudly obvious, other times they appear to be transparent, fully representative of the real they seek to convey. The meaning of a word/symptom is not, and cannot be, singular or stable: the meaning changes according to the context in which it appears and speaks. Symptoms like words are repetitious, undecidable, resistant to singular interpretations. The self-reproducing symptom creates a permeable and fluid set of meanings.

The hysterical symptom does not carry this meaning with it, but the meaning is lent to it, welded on to it, as it were; and in every instance the meaning can be a different one, according to the nature of the suppressed thoughts which are struggling for expression.

(Sigmund Freud, *Dora*: 57)

The symptom, then, is an interpretation, a substitutive metaphor, written within the syntax of a physical body, with which the patient explains herself to herself. She then submits her interpretation of the symptom by performing and re-enacting it for the doctor. When Freud describes *Dora's* hysterical symptoms, he remarks that *Dora's* body lays hold of the symptom to create an utterance of its own. That utterance, however, is heard fully for the "first" time within the drama of Freud's script. It would not or could not "speak" to Herr K. in the way that it spoke to Freud. In the same way that the quantum "jumps" when it is observed, the symptom undergoes a transformation when the counter-transference is activated. In the sociality of the production of meaning, words and symptoms mutate as they pass across the thresholds housing us in different bodies, separate selves. That mutation solicits a diagnosis from the other.

When patients speak of "dreaming for the doctor," they point to the way in which the psychoanalytic dialogue generates particular "data." The enabling assumption of psychoanalysis, the leap of faith which makes it possible, is that such data are always already there, unmarked but powerfully defining. The talking cure can be said to "heal" the

utterances it produces. The "healing" comes through re-marking and re-making the symptoms. There is no such thing as a symptomless body, no such thing as a nonmetaphorical language. The "cure" readjusts and realigns the patient's interpretation of the symptoms, but it does not eliminate all symptoms. The symptomatic utterance created within the psychoanalytic dialogue is heard within the terms of that discourse. (Part of the power of symptoms, the energy that keeps them active, comes from their repression. Once amplified, they change.) Outside of that room, the symptom produces other utterances – expressions that are not vulnerable or susceptible (depending on one's perspective) to that healing.

This is worth pausing over because it points to the limits and possibilities of my own critical methodology. The idea that Operation Rescue's political ambitions and performance ideology can be adequately explained by a psychoanalytic reading of the visibility of paternity strains credulity. I am well aware of this. Nonetheless, a political analysis of Operation Rescue that ignores or overlooks the psychoanalytic displacements involved in the struggle for reproductive rights, is also inadequate. As a symptom of the fraught relations between men and women within cultural production and reproduction, the performances of Operation Rescue are repetitious signs whose meanings shift and merge according to "the suppressed thoughts which are struggling for expression" in an uncertain political, legal, economic, sexual, and psychic field. While the excellent work of Faye Ginsburg, Kristin Luker, Lawrence Tribe, Susan Faludi, and Rosalind Petchesky, has addressed and defined the political, legal, and economic struggle operative in the abortion debates, relatively little attention has been given to offering psychoanalytic analyses.

This is not surprising. The debate is so politically and legally urgent that one hesitates to bother spending energy and time creating something with apparently so little direct utility value. The ideology of reproduction informs critical work no less than it informs sociality. Theory and practice should commingle and reproduce a coherent practice. (When two become one, who is the one they become?) The notion that fetal imagery functions as a way of masking the new visibility of paternity hardly helps one protect the crumbling legal protection of *Roe v. Wade*. Nor does it provide a way of stopping Randall Terry's quest to become a radical reformer of moral life. Both of these things need to be done. However, it would be naive to suppose that these political goals can be straightforwardly achieved. Soaked through with ambivalence and uncertainty, the legal quagmire that constitutes reproductive rights in the United States reflects the immense disjuncture between the concept of a continuous body, which is enacted within the very image of a visibly pregnant woman, and a legal and psychic discourse dedicated

to defining separations, distinguishing split subjects, and settling schisms. This yawning incoherence, which is simultaneously psychic and philosophical as Patricia Williams has powerfully argued, will continue to trouble the political realization of reproductive rights while it remains unmarked. My psychoanalytic reading of *Operation Rescue* is an attempt to mark the obscured power of unmarked reproductive visibility of men.

For the sake of clarity: the uncertainty at the heart of the abortion debates does not stem from hesitation about the legal right to abortion. "The Gallup Poll reports that nearly eight out of ten Americans have supported legal abortion since 1975" (Faludi, *Backlash*: 532). Rather uncertainty emerges because one feels the inadequacy of the join between "real" visibly pregnant women and legal and psychic representations of resolutely singular and/or split subjects. The fear is that if the gap is so large here, the join between what is real and what is representational must be enormous everywhere. In an effort to suture it back together, we fiddle and poke and tinker with legal contracts, psychic symptoms, political platforms, moral issues. These fiddlings distract us from the central failure of discursive representation – the illegibility of the materiality of a pregnant body within a visual economy which everywhere marks the boundary between self and other. Embodied in and by what is and is not one body, the visibly pregnant woman makes the possibility of a continuous subject/ivity real. This possibility is everywhere repressed by the institutional arrangements of law, medicine, and politics – all of which presuppose singular social subjects as the foundational units of their discursive economics. (They assume fluency in singularity rather than sociality.) Those who are working for reproductive rights and those who work against them also presuppose this framework. I fear that in accepting this notion of the subject, without also continually re-marking it, we accept the symptoms that it (re)produces. Psychoanalytic readings of the symptoms of anxiety, in this case the performances of *Operation Rescue*, can perhaps be used as an impetus to reanimate (certainly not replace) political movements. Or so I hope.

The failure of discursive, legal, and psychic representation to convey a continuous subject points as well to the limitations of visibility politics as a way to secure political power for the under-represented. All human subjects, not only visibly pregnant women, are continuous. Identities continue across and exceed the political and discursive boundaries of sexual preference, racial markings, age, physical abilities, economic class and so on. It serves certain interests, however, to insist that selves are distinguishable from others and that these distinctions have separate names – many of these "new" names are cobbled together with hyphens and dashes – marks indicating the suspension that new/old "identities"

are asked to straddle. The visibly pregnant woman embodies the literal swelling of that proliferating hyphen. This is why she is, always already, an unresolved figure which Law continually recalculates: is the hyphen a positive or a negative? Does one add or subtract? Is she a double subject or a half-subject? (Who controls her other half?)

The debate over abortion rights is an extreme example of the violent struggle that comes from our continuing commitment to categories of isolation, separation, and division. In order to conceive of the continuous subject we need to return to the schism between the real and the representational, the lacuna between body and being.

Nothing in *Unmarked* escapes the anxiety raised by the gap between the discursive construct "the body" and the affective experience of embodiment. To entertain psychoanalysis as fully as I do here is to accept a certain fiction of the Real. Yet I want to believe that something of what I "really mean" is conveyed by the marks I make all over these pages. I actively repress my knowledge of the hole in the signifier: I know very well but just the same. (Kafka: "I write to forget.") The paradox of this book – a series of marks about the possible virtues of being unmarked – might be a fruitful one. The argument cannot be made in writing for in recording it I destroy precisely what I want to affirm. *Fort. Da*. The leap of the quantum. The undocumentable performance. But the failure to "make" the argument (to re-produce it) does not, I hope, entirely invalidate its appeal. I hope instead that it challenges the means by which the logical success of arguments are judged. My wager is that a combined methodology of psychics and psychoanalysis is and will be fundamental to that logical re-evaluation. For physics and psychoanalysis can teach political ideology the generative powers of doubt and uncertainty.

Psychoanalysis has always been troubled by the body, continuous and split. (In fact, psychoanalysis can be said to be the science of body trouble, a hypothesis about the trouble of bodies living with and in "souls" – this is the embodied psychic subject which psychoanalysis interprets.) Freud, in seeing the patient's body as a screen which he could read, also saw that screen as a mirror of his own body. There is no apprehension of the body of the other without a corresponding (re)vision of one's own. These revisions constitute the energetic force of sexual/textual/commodity desire. Transference for Freud was a restaging of the patient's role in his or her earlier primary relationships. In mapping the transference, counter-transference is activated: Freud sees the patient's history in terms of his own. The doctor's counter-transference re-enacts his primary relation with someone other than the patient, and the patient's transference re-enacts something of his or hers with someone other than the doctor. The re-enactment staged with the psychoanalytic session is a *mise-en-abyme* of never previously existing relations. To para-

phrase Paul Simon, post-psychoanalytically, these are the days of metaphors and substitutes.

The mutual performances of these absences constitute our only possible relations with one another, inside and outside the psychoanalytic room. While the psychoanalytic dialogue is "about" the two people physically present in the room, it is also, more profoundly, about the relationship each has with the phantom bodies who will not quit the room. They cannot quit the room for they are "in" the bodies of those sitting in the room. The work of the transference "goes on invisibly behind the progress of the treatment, and [its] effects are 'not susceptible to definite proof'" (Lacan, citing Freud's *Dora*, in his "Intervention in Transference": 102).

The phantom Real emerges in the negative or "failed" transference of *Dora*. It is not coincidental that this phantom emerges in a psychoanalytic dialogue dedicated to elucidating the relation between hysteria and female sexuality. What is the phantom of her body, for him? Is her body more vulnerable to ghosts than his? Or is it merely that he houses his ghosts in her body? Or is it that all bodies are reluctant ghosts of other bodies?

In his essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud suggests that the subject responds to loss by internalizing the lost other. The incorporation of the lost other both disavows the loss and deepens the grief. Judith Butler has recently argued that this incorporation happens across genders – in other words, when the girl child "loses" the beloved father she incorporates him. After this internalization, her own gender can no longer be self-identical, but is rather "doubled." It is the same for boys and mothers ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination": 26–7). Our "own" body, then, is the one we have and the history of the ones we've lost. Our body is both internal and external; invisible and visible; sick and well; living and dead. Noncontinuous, full of jerks and rears, the body moves, like an awkward dancer trying to partner someone she can never see or lay hold of.³

Within the radical contingency of this psychic and material Real, subjectivity is performed. This subjectivity is encoded as always already gendered. And always already more insecure for and about women. Representation functions to make gender, and sexual difference more generally, secure and securely singular – which is to say, masculine. (She ghosts him.) Representation tries to overlook the discontinuity between subjectivity and the gendered, sexual body, and attempts to suture the gap between subjectivity and the Real. The common desire to look to representation to confirm one's reality is never satisfied; for representation cannot reproduce the Real. This keeps us looking – and keeps us hoping. And so we are, most of the time, kept. More particularly, we are kept suspended between the depressing loop of dis-

appointment and the aspiring arc of hope. (We shall return to this roller-coaster shortly.)

It is not enough, however, to notice this suspension as part of the "psychopathology of everyday life." For some bodies are always more secure than others. The institutionalized forces of misogyny, racism, and economic injustice (to rehearse just the short list) register real effects across different bodies. The means of propping up and recognizing the corpo-Real are unequally distributed. So some bodies become *apparently* more valuable legally, psychically "healthier," aesthetically more appealing, and seemingly more Real than other bodies. The particular bodies which appear to matter more change across history, class, race, age, aesthetics, and gender (again, a short list of variables).

Overlooking the absolute contingency of the Real has been a hallmark of Western politics and epistemology. This strategic ignorance has made it habitually possible for Western power-knowledge to perform a distinctively acquisitive role in the script of history. The consequences of this acquisitive posture are profound at both the micro and macro levels of the encounter between self and other. These encounters are the "atoms" which constitute power-knowledge. To restage these performances it is necessary to turn more directly to the scenario of the classroom.

I

How can one create a performative pedagogy in the West which refuses the acquisitive model of power-knowledge operative everywhere in institutions of "higher learning"? How can one invent a pedagogy for disappearance and loss and not for acquisition and control? How can one teach the generative power of misunderstanding in a way they will (almost) understand? And who are "they" anyway?

The pedagogical class, like any performance event, is a collaboration. Each person is part of the group and each a part from it. Collectively the class creates "a piece." The piece is a statement about each one's relation – political, psychic, performative, affective, geographical, economic, physical, aural – to the animation of "the material." In the mutual making of the class, the sociality of performance is manifest. There is always at least one who makes the doing and always at least one who makes the looking, at least for a moment. Communication cannot escape this binary. But it must continually be provoked out of its fixity: the static positions in the binary must be mobilized and made continually to disappear. In the performance of that disappearance, the interpretation of power changes. Less monolithic, more local, and in perpetual motion, a continually performed power can be the "subject" of pedagogical discourse. The new relations which emerge "after" the sources of power

are multiply enacted (after the counter-transference is made conscious, after the means of measurement are acknowledged) risk becoming new monoliths themselves. Therefore, these moments of clarity must also disappear, which they do effortlessly because the overwhelming tendency of power is to obscure itself. The point is to demonstrate how new relations continually emerge by making the sources of power evaporate and re-emerge, elsewhere.⁴

These relations are not, and can no longer be, anchored on a notion of "understanding." They must rather be founded on the recognition of the impossibility of such "true seeing." Pedagogy must involve training in the patient acceptance of the perpetual failure of in/sight.

The widespread belief in the possibility of understanding has committed us, however unwittingly, to a concomitant narrative of betrayal, disappointment, and rage. Expecting understanding and always failing to feel and see it, we accuse the other of inadequacy, of blindness, of neglect. The acceleration of ethnic and racial violence may be due in part to the misplaced desire to believe in the (false) promise of understanding. It is perhaps past time that we begin to attempt to see the inevitability of misunderstanding as generative and hopeful, as opportunities for conversation (and maybe a little further down the line for comedy as well), rather than as a betrayal of a promise. Or to put it slightly differently, perhaps the best possibility for "understanding" racial, sexual, and ethnic difference lies in the *active* acceptance of the inevitability of misunderstanding.

Misunderstanding as a political and pedagogical telos can be a dangerous proposition, for it invites the belligerent refusal to learn or move at all. This is not what I am arguing for. *It is in the attempt to walk (and live) on the rickety bridge between self and other – and not the attempt to arrive at one side or the other – that we discover real hope.* That walk is our always suspended performance – in the classroom, in the political field, in relation to one another and to ourselves. The inevitability of our failure to remain walking *on* the bridge (when the storms come we keep rushing for the deceptive "safety" of one side or the other) guarantees only the necessity of hope.

He sits there again in our class. Sullen. Eyes downcast. He says he doesn't have any, no more hope, not any more. Not now. It's all gone to hell – the little time, the infected body, the imploding space. Sometimes he yells at us and sometimes we just look at him with nothing to say. He makes things – videos, poems, letters – that explain in meticulous detail why he has had to leave Hope. Like the familiar stories of beseeching lovers narrating their past, his story, history, is full of lies, lacunae, sutured narratives. It's all composite – a strange autobiographical fairy tale. It repeats in an exact fashion all the conventions of traditional Romance – his youth, her seduction, his dreams, her abrupt betrayals,

his warnings to her, her indifference to them. But still he clung to Hope. He did not know what the alternative was. So he loved and he loved and he loved some more. And she teased him – threw him high in the air and listened to the sound of his laughter breaking across the sky.

Sometimes she caught him in the soft down of her expansive lap, other times she watched him fall hard onto the unyielding cement ground. Once she threw him so high he thought he was free – unbounded, beautiful, a form of ecstasy. He tasted the air rushing around him and he smelled the very top of a forest of fir trees, and he felt the strange nothingness of the bottom of a pale cloud. He was, at last, deliriously happy, in a state of bliss. And as he tumbled down so full of gratitude and love and wonder at his own ability to see and feel and smell such an exquisite array of sensations he thought of all the questions he would put to her, how he would ask her why the nothingness of the cloud felt, of all things, tender; why the pocket of air above the fir trees felt damp and the air between the clouds so dry. He was busy thinking of all he would tell her and all he would ask her. He was preoccupied with feeling how his lungs were screaming and how his throat was full of half-formed words so he hardly noticed how fast he was falling. And this time when she did not catch him when he fell, his body shattered in a thousand pieces and he lay there on the cement for a very long time. After the doctors came and the stitches were stitched and the bones were set and the medications given, she returned. She offered him her breast to succor him, but he would not, not this time, take it. So she offered him her stories but her words were like dry pellets that would not enter his newly non-porous body. They fell next to him but could not slide through his ear. So she offered him her silence, but to him it was a deafening din. He told her to go. He told her he had to recover without her. As he waited and watched his body's health return, he resolved to strengthen his will to live without her.

When we first met, now a long time ago, it was clear that none of us bothered at all about the Truth. We banked everything on the interpretative possibilities offered by the constructions of his/stories. ("Love's interpretation exists only in the afterwards" – in this Afterword?) We agreed we would be safe as long as we did not allow him to cast us in the role of Hope. No, we would be the stitching inside his lip and not the one who threw him in the air.

But we live in a city full of fainting buildings. Like Victorian women with tight corsets the buildings swoon in the late afternoon. At tea-time, they tumble down. So we study the instability of architecture, the failure of brick and board to remain vertical bone. Beneath these city streets abandoned postal tubes sit rotting. Pneumatic bodies wheezing with memories of the days fat letters sped through them. We research every scrap of information we can find about them. The severed connection,

the broken line. Did the tubes ever burst with too many letters, too many words, whizzing through their pneumatic bodies? Why were they abandoned? Did the words become too heavy to carry? The post traveled thirty miles per hour below the streets and now the letters (if they arrive at all) lumber across the street surface at eight miles per hour (Willensky and White, *AIA Guide to New York*: 901). Abandoning the tubes, the post, the phone, the electronic mail materializes and vanishes screen to screen and the fax reproduces itself across telephone lines (fiber optics? textured seeing?). But he ignores all these possibilities, trusts nothing but himself, and hand delivers his letters to us. They always arrive, palm to palm. In his time.

His letters burn our eyes. Not so much because of what is in them, but for what is left out. As they burn, the light changes and we pretend we are fishermen hauling in that netted light, hand over hand. In order to write them, what does he have to pretend to be? A Venetian scribe in the days of Ficino? Looking for "the body of life," in the alchemist's cure – pure knowledge mixed with occult chemicals? A man out of time. Words looking for the right response/dent.

His letters are like stage directions for a play that has not been written. We cannot decipher them. He performs them for us. We watch intently and then try to say what we saw. The conversation goes round and round the fear like an abandoned merry-go-round with the motor running. Together we change the letters, make them ours, no longer the "original" ones he offered as condensations of other letters, someone else's plays. Once the letters are our own, we generate other interpretative possibilities. Sometimes we laugh. And sometimes when it all seems overwhelming we sit for a long time saying nothing.

And in this silent space he re-enacts his decision to abandon Hope. We no longer even pretend to be the stitching in his lip. We know we are no longer safe. We too have now lost Hope. But his vitality demands that we perform Hope, so that his rejection can confirm his strength. We take the part required and give him what we no longer have. We hand him our lost Hope (open palms) and in seeing our loss he finds a reflection of his own. We give him what none of us has. We search for other interpretations, other parts to play in his/story, his drama, the one still unwritten, but by now thoroughly blocked.

Progressive critics who worry so loudly and strenuously about "appropriation" forget that sometimes one *wants* certain terrible things to be appropriated. The absolute limit of appropriation is death; murderers appropriate life but they cannot take death away from one's suddenly and dismayingly singular body. Old stories, old scripts. Wanting only not to live the moment, the fact, of death. His. Each our own. The endless repetition of the always failed refusal of that moment

is the wound theology tries to recuperate and historiography tries to salve.

On the pages here, there are several deaths. Deaths in theory. And Real-deaths. Venus Xtravaganza died; she was murdered in "real life." Her death is recorded and discussed in Livingston's film *Paris*; I use it for a theoretical point. Sex and death. Her death generates the tension in *Paris*, and fuels my concluding argument. The people who loved Venus could rightly object to such appropriation. (Even if you didn't love her, you could object.) Surely her life had more value than the punctuation of a filmic commentary, had more value than Livingston's record. The demands of representation, the laws of the current Western genre of knowing, require an endless list of objects – human and otherwise – to acquire as our own. And when we submit to this law, as even here I have and do, we forfeit a certain claim to the purely ethical. Robert Lowell: "[M]y eyes have seen what my hand did." And what we live with instead is the uncertainty of the ethical. *Fort. Da.* (We take his letters and make them our own. We try to hold him to us as if to erase Hope's brutal dropping. But every embrace reminds him of the one he missed. And knowing all of this changes nothing.)

Radiology reports of the "chronic" cancer, the recurring illness, the incurable disease, are always only tentatively clear. There is no such thing as permanent remission. Every three months another test. We have only begun to approach writing these bodies – the ones hanging on our bones like shabby coats, too big to be warm, too warm to be comfortable, too comfortable to be alert in.⁵ The uncertainty of this body challenges the fundamental binary of Western culture – the living and the dead. But this binary is itself crumbling. Legislatively, psychically, and emotionally, we are beginning to face the uncertainty of our notion of when and how the body lives and dies, who does and does not inhabit it, who can and cannot speak for it when it is beyond the comforting amplifications of metaphor. Pure symptom, sometimes the body's Being insists on an end to interpretative possibilities. And so sometimes the body goes. Disappears. But the witness remains. Formerly mute objects become articulate. The old shirt recalls the riot of color he provoked in her face. The coffee cup with the broken handle hums a w/holy different hymn. The performance of grief reanimates the symptoms of his life, animate and disappearing, material and visible.

When David Wojnarowicz speaks of the pre-invented world, he refers to the world that sees us before we grasp it.⁶ In that seeing we become trans/fixed. To abandon the pre-invented world totally is Impossible. But to move toward a vision in which such abandonment might be a regular possibility, like an airplane flight leaving Bombay and arriving in London, is worthwhile. Hand over hand hauling in the netted light, the holes in the representational, the holes in the visible. "Have you a match

for my two?" "Go fish." The rules of this game are well known: one person wins the game and the others lose it. But if we say that symmetry emerges in the mutual acknowledgment of its impossibility we could maybe play the game differently. This time, let's play without the cards. Without the dealer. Just us, the cloth and the table. (The green station wagon is long gone: the family has a different body. The auto/mobiles still travel, but the silences exist in denser cartographies.)

He continues to come. We imagine the cards. We write the letters; we read the books, this book. Nothing changes. And we begin to see that everything is, therefore, different. We continue to meet. We change the titles of our card games and keep playing. Hope keeps throwing us up and dropping us down. The time keeps moving and promising us new histories and we keep reproducing the same collapsing cities.

We perform Hope but we do not perhaps believe enough in her any longer. What would it take to *be* her rather than (merely?) enact her, resist her, flirt with her? Maybe he can reject us so endlessly because we make it easy for him? What would it take to rewrite his/story? Invent a different city? Discover stronger bones?

Perhaps Yvonne Rainer's notion of a filmic architecture could be reinvigorated for performance. Non-possessable, fluid, full of uncertain architecture, and temporary sets, performance's relation to the Real is as precarious and as temporary as the Guerrilla Girls' fading posters barely legible under other scraps of paper. Performance's potency comes from its temporariness, it's "one time only" life. The ontology of performance maps a gateway across a different order of production and reproduction. It suggests that matter (and the Real) is created out of nothing – "the nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (Wallace Stevens). This reproduction works according to the invisible calculus of multiple offerings of what one does not have. This then as a coda, a prolegomenon for another book, other words, other eyes. This then in Hope, the hope we fake and perform and the hope we thereby make and have. Hope's power is measured in this faking. Each performance registers how much we want to believe what we know we see is not all we really have, all we really are. That negation reveals the generative possibility of the "not all" that keeps us hoping. Maybe next time I'll love/be/loved; maybe next time I'll write a better book; maybe next time my I will see.

ONE VERSION OF ANOTHER HIS/TORY

Begin with a repetition:

"For physics and psychoanalysis can teach political ideology the generative powers of doubt and uncertainty."

Offer paradigmatic example:

When Anita Hill tangled with the Senate during the Clarence Thomas

confirmation hearings in Fall 1991, she explained that she wound up in Washington DC after saying that she would "neither confirm nor deny" her knowledge of rumors that Thomas had "tolerated or participated in" sexually harassing behavior during the time they worked together at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the 1970s. She was asked by a Senate aide if she would "neither confirm nor deny" her knowledge of the allegations or of the behavior. She indicated it was the behavior. The subsequent hearings and extensive media coverage were a lopsided attempt to discover if various people could confirm or deny her allegations about Thomas. On the asymmetrical stage constructed to hear Hill's carefully worded story, distortion and static sufficient enough to mute her sounds allowed the Senate to confirm Thomas as a Supreme Court Justice.⁷

Offer interpretation of paradigmatic example:

The power of Hill's initial decision to say she would neither confirm nor deny her knowledge of Thomas' behavior was enormous. The provocation of the doubt raised by her refusal to declare her knowledge of his innocence was overwhelming and potentially historically transforming. The "leak" to the press created a rupture in the smooth reproduction and transformation of *homo-sexual* power, however fleetingly. In the gap revealed in that leaking rupture, the unmarked frame of political power was thrown into high relief. Suddenly all the world seemed to see that white men with economic privilege run things – and more importantly, that this may not be the only possible way to run things. Articulate, self-assured, and thoroughly sincere, Anita Hill's performance made it stunningly clear how thoroughly unusual it was to hear *anyone* in Washington, let alone an African-American woman, speak with conviction, care, and force.

Link example with larger point:

Hill's appearance in Washington radically questioned and punctured the unmarked power of normative whiteness and masculinity in a way that Thomas' first round of confirmation hearings only tentatively and glancingly approached. The asymmetry of power operative between Thomas, who was her boss at the time under discussion, and Hill, was mirrored in the structure of the hearings and the rules of evidence and argument admitted there. Hill could not have "won" within the terms of the pre-existing rules of discursive power in either context. But she could and did illustrate the pervasiveness of those structural asymmetries in our experience of dominant power. She performed and recalled the pain these asymmetries engender – in the moment and over time.

Draw conclusion:

The real relationship between Hill and Thomas in the early 1980s will never be re-presented. The "truth" of their relation can neither be confirmed nor denied (within the existing rules of interpretative

"proof"). Like the relation which adheres between the real and the representational, something which can neither be confirmed nor denied, can nonetheless be convincing and "true." The uncertainty created by this logic is immensely powerful. It suggests another way of thinking about the relation between representation and the real.

The New Right continues to assert a causal relation between representation and real behavior. For example, Jesse Helms argued that a photograph of men in leather jackets kissing encourages viewers to become homosexual (see Phelan, "Money Talks, Again"). The Left must deny such crude readings of the relation between the real and the representational. Even as this causal reading is denied, however, the Left must confirm some link between representation and the real. Both the Right and the Left believe that transforming representation brings about changes in the real. While the Left must deny the causal logic the Right wants to assert, it cannot and should not deny all links between the real and the representational. The Left must develop a way of talking about the way that representation and the real are related that does not lead to the simple logic of cause and effect, to a simple notion of mimetic resemblance which so quickly becomes "me-ism." (If my imagistic-like is not represented the work is limited and not "about" me.)

In the provocation of Hill's refusal to confirm or deny her knowledge, an asymmetrical hearing was constructed to produce either denial or confirmation. But interestingly enough, the hearings may have only been a public witnessing of the gap between legal rules of proof and the logic of belief. While the hearings illustrated the provocation of a refusal to confirm or deny, they also made visible the limits of the methodology by which "proof" is made visible.

Similarly, those concerned with understanding the relation between the real and the representational must also recognize that our failing eyes may be insufficient organs for measuring the terms and meanings of the transformative alchemy between them. The transformative possibilities of the Real, we may have to trust, while unable to be fully confirmed within the field of the visible (or the empirical), cannot be permanently denied. It is in doubt. That's why we must keep performing and transforming the interpretations of this relation. Doubt may be the best guarantee of real presence. *Fort. Da*. The generation and reproduction of this doubt may be the most significant achievement of the unmarked performance of the Real.

Notes

1 BROKEN SYMMETRIES: MEMORY, SIGHT, LOVE

- 1 Julia Kristeva, "Ellipsis on Dread and the Specular Seduction," quoted in Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*: 141.
- 2 The best discussion of Lacanian doubt can be found in Joan Copjec, "Vampires, Breast-Feeding and Anxiety."
- 3 The two most relevant meditations on the contemporary legal real in the United States are Jane Gaines' fascinating essay, "Dead Ringer: Jacqueline Onassis and the Look-alike" which examines a case of a model, Barbara Reynolds, who appears in an ad for Christian Dior. The model's "art" is her ability to look like Onassis. Onassis sued Dior and the ad agency for using her image without permission. Gaines formulates the questions raised by this case in terms of the "right" to appropriate/exploit/protect what both Onassis and Reynolds already own – their image. Patricia Williams' provocative book *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* examines the legal real in terms of the historical force of racist marks defining citizenry. While there are serious problems with Williams' work as "legal theory," hers is an extraordinarily enabling book. Williams reimagines the categories and interests by which the legal real is constituted and maintained.
- 4 The best essay on feminism and the theatrical real is Elin Diamond's "Mimesis, Mimicry and the True-Real." She re-reads Irigaray's re-reading of Plato and suggests that there is no original without a notion of a mimetic copy – including the "original" Mother. Lynda Hill's "Staging Hurston's Life and Work" considers the tricky politics of race and representation in relation to Zora Neale Hurston's attempt to reproduce "authentic folk" community and contemporary drama's attempt to restage the story of her life and work "authentically."
- 5 The best discussion of the Lacanian Real can be found in *October* 58: "Rendering the Real A Special Issue," guest editor Parveen Adams. Also see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Throughout this book, the Lacanian Real shall be distinguished from other versions of the real by use of the upper-case R.
- 6 In the vast library of autobiographical criticism see Phillip Lejeune, *On Autobiography* and Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (eds), *Life/Lines*, for preliminary discussions of how the real defines the autobiographical.
- 7 Slavoj Žižek tells the tale of the reception of *Rashomon* (1950). Kurosawa's film was hailed as the "classic" Japanese film throughout the United States and Europe and won the 1951 Golden Lion in Venice. But it failed terribly in

- otherwise noted, are from this essay.
- 4 See Laurence Tribe, *Abortion: the Clash of Absolutes*: 207.
 - 5 See Rosalind Petchesky, "Fetal Images: the Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction."
 - 6 Quoted in Faludi, *Backlash*: 421. In naming the fetus male, the Right participates in and perpetuates the idea that sons are more valuable than daughters.
 - 7 See Tribe, *Abortion: the Clash of Absolutes*: 235-7 for a discussion of the court's reluctance to impose state responsibility for child abuse, and its haste to provide fetal protection.
 - 8 For a detailed discussion of the connection between safe sex, safe spending, and performance see my essay "Money Talks, Again."
 - 9 It is worth noting that there are very real historical and political determinants that have fed the idea that abortion can be seen as a form of race/ethnic genocide. Just as the New Right has used alternating images of the innocent fetus and the mutilated fetus, the racial politics of the abortion rights campaign has been haunted by the specter of enforced sterilization. For a harrowing account of this history, see Angela Davis, "Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive Rights," in *Women, Race and Class*. The continuing failure to distinguish adequately the difference between being pro-abortion rights and pro-abortion has severely undermined the campaign for reproductive freedom. Currently, there is a serious danger that something akin to enforced abortion is occurring with HIV-infected pregnant women, particularly among the poor and non-white. For fuller treatment of the racial politics involved in reproductive technologies see Marlene Gerber Fried (ed.), *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement*.
 - 10 See Paul Sachdev (ed.), *International Handbook on Abortion*: 476.
 - 11 Alisa Solomon, "Oppression Theology": 35.
 - 12 The National Abortion Federation: 1436 U St, Suite 103, Washington, DC 20009. It should be noted that 267 is actually fewer incidents than the previous three years (1984-6) when 413 incidents were reported. But before 1987, there were no "blockades" and therefore no subsequent arrests for blockading.
 - 13 Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and tr. James Strachey, vol. 23: 113-14.
 - 14 Debbie Price, "Prince George's Paternity Court Delivers Results."
 - 15 See Lis Wiehl, "DNA Test Dooms Paternity Trials, Lawyers Say."
 - 16 *ibid.*
 - 17 Ruth Marcus, "States Can 'Presume' Husband is Child's Father."
 - 18 Quoted in *ibid.*
 - 19 In the Baby M. case, the marital family of the Sterns was valued over the biological claim of Mary Beth Whitehead, the surrogate mother. But interestingly, the judge did give Whitehead visitation rights. Visitation rights were not extended to Michael H. Thus the court's thinking seems to go like this: marital family with biological tie to child who wants child first priority; biological mother second claim; biological father third claim.
 - 20 Spatial limitations make it impossible for me to discuss fully the logic of the "consent" requirement in relation to parents, as against "fathers." In other words, while the biological father's permission to abort is not required, in the case of teenage pregnancy the consent of a parent, or a judicial *pater familias*, is required (see *Hodgson v. Minnesota* and *Ohio v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health* (1990)). In effect, the pregnant woman is still required to enter a public discussion about her reproduction - with the doctor; the teenager is required to enter a discussion with the doctor, a parent, or a judge. The potential

- interest in the abortifacient known as RU-486 is keen in part because eventually this has far greater potential to become a medical technology capable of restoring some privacy to the pregnant woman. (It is not yet private, however; the pill must be administered under a doctor's care and requires three visits to the doctor's office.) See Tribe (pp. 215-20) for a full discussion.
- 21 Randall Terry on video-taped interview with Julie Gustafson, October 1988; quoted in Ginsburg, "Saving America's Souls": 26.
 - 22 For a brilliant reading of law's inability to think of a continuous body see Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*.

7 THE ONTOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE: REPRESENTATION WITHOUT REPRODUCTION

- 1 This notion of following and tracking was a fundamental aspect of Calle's earlier performance pieces. See Jean Baudrillard *Suite Venitienne/Sophie Calle, Please Follow Me*, for documentation of Calle's surveillance of a stranger.
- 2 See my essays "Money Talks" and "Money Talks, Again" for a full elaboration.
- 3 Of course not all performance art has an oppositional edge. The ontological claims of performance art are what I am addressing here, and not the politics of ambition.
- 4 Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, quoted in Shoshana Felman, *The Literary Speech Act*: 21.
- 5 J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd edn. Derrida's rereading of Austin also comes from an interest in the performative element within language.
- 6 Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context."
- 7 See Felman, *The Literary Speech Act*, for a dazzling reading of Austin.
- 8 See my essay, "Reciting the Citation of Others" for a full discussion of Modleski's essay and performance.
- 9 Juliet MacCannell, *Figuring Lacan: Criticism and the Cultural Unconscious*, esp. pp. 90-117.
- 10 The disappearance of the Mother's Being also accounts for the (relative) success of the visibility of the anti-abortion groups. The smooth displacement of the image of the Mother to the hyper-visible image of the hitherto unseen fetus, is accomplished precisely because the Being of the Mother is what is always already excluded within representational economies. See Chapter 6 in this volume for further elaboration of this point.
- 11 Some of the description of this performance first appeared in my essay "Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism, and Performance."
- 12 For an excellent discussion of these guarded conditions in television, fiction, and critical theory for the African-American woman see Michele Wallace's *Invisibility Blues*.
- 13 Festa actually began the *Untitled* performance wearing a white rabbit head-dress, which is lighter and cooler than the red; she has on other occasions worn the red one and the themes of "red" and "white" are constant preoccupations of her work. The heat during *Untitled* (in the nineties) was intense enough that she was eventually persuaded to abandon the white headdress.
- 14 This is one of the reasons "shock" is such a limited aesthetic for theatre. It is hard to be shocked by one's own behavior/desire, although easy to be by someone else's.
- 15 In fact it may account for the intense male homoeroticism of so much of theatrical history.

- 16 Lacan, no citation, quoted in Felman, *The Literary Speech Act*: 29.
- 17 Sue-Ellen Case, "Introduction," in *Performing Feminisms*, ed. Case: 13. For other warnings about the negativity of feminist theory see: Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory"; Laura Kipnis, "Feminism: the Political Conscience of Post-modernism?"; in *Universal Abandon?*, ed. Ross; and Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane, "The Female Spectator: Contexts and Directions," *Camera Obscura* (20-21) May-September 1989.

8 AFTERWORD: NOTES ON HOPE

- 1 Michael Taussig has developed the concept of the nervous system, political terror, and mimesis in his collection of essays, *The Nervous System*.
- 2 Notions of "between-ness" and "liminality" are fundamental aspects of Richard Schechner's performance theory. In *Between Theater and Anthropology*, Schechner credits the late anthropologist Victor Turner's work on liminality as a foundational insight for his own subsequent understanding of the "points of contact" between ritual and performance art. My point here is somewhat different. While Schechner refers positively to the power of performance to "invent" the real, I am arguing that actually performance admits and tries to face the impossibility of seizing/seeing the real anywhere anytime. Please note that this is not to say that the real does not exist, for surely it does. But it is to say that it cannot be arrested, seen, or seized. Performance's inability to be captured or documented within the re-enactments promised by the copy is part of what makes it, per force, face the impossibility of seizing the Real. Schechner's argument and my own are compatible insofar as one accepts the idea that the real "invented" (or more precisely, rediscovered) by performance is the impossibility of its representation. Just as an individual cannot secure self-seeing, neither can the Real. It is only fair to note, however, that I believe most days Schechner himself would reject this claim of compatibility. He values performance's ability to invent new-Real; I value performance's admission of the impossibility of securing the Real.
- 3 This is partially because she cannot lay hold of herself either since the self-other dyad is itself both internal and external. Butler argues: "In my view, the self only becomes a self on the condition that it has suffered a separation (grammar fails us here, for the it only becomes differentiated through that separation), a loss which is *suspended* and provisionally resolved through a melancholic incorporation of some Other. That Other installed in the self thus establishes the permanent incapacity of that self to achieve self-identity; it is as if it were always already disrupted by that Other; the disruption of the Other at the heart of the self is the very condition of the self's possibility" (emphasis added; "Imitation and Gender Insubordination": 27). Here, as elsewhere with Butler, one can see the way in which she enfolds Lacan within Freud: her parenthetical remark is the anchoring point of Lacan's Mirror Phase - it is language which is the loss that makes Being a reflective possibility and that reflective "mirror" which castrates being from "just" Being. I emphasize her notion of "a loss which is suspended" only to stress that it is *the self* who is always already in loss and always already lost who is (endlessly) suspended.
- 4 It is not so much that alternative power systems are impossible to perform for more than a minute or two. But it is to underline how quickly hierarchies of power reassert themselves even in communities dedicated to dissolving hierarchies altogether. An organization with a progressive, egalitarian ideology such as ACT-UP faces power struggles not terribly dissimilar to the

struggles of Operation Rescue. It is a mistake, in other words, to assume that we have done with issues of power-knowledge when we invent and perform alternative communities. All of this discussion is indebted to Foucault's notion of power-knowledge.

- 5 A text such as William Styron's *Darkness Visible* is exactly not the thing I have in mind. He uses illnesses to establish the certainty of "bad medicine." And thus the integrity of his body is re-established by the "triumph" of its essential "goodness" over the badness of medical opinion. Allon White's extraordinary memoir, "Too Close to the Bone" comes close to the kind of "writing the body" I mean. Michael Lynch's "Last Onsets: Teaching with AIDS" and Eve Sedgwick's fascinating "A Poem is Being Written" have moments in which they find a way for writing to accept the uncertainty of the body's ontology. For Sedgwick that uncertainty is best expressed in the dis/junctures between secrets and sexual expressions, while for Lynch that uncertainty is most fully expressed in the desire to remain healthy while "understanding" the route of his disease - within his own body and within the social body of his classroom. But both Lynch and Sedgwick fall back from this task in order to achieve a more traditional "literary critical aim." They use their bodies to read literature and implicitly valorize literary texts above their physical performances in and through their own bodies. Natalie Kusz's *Road Song* faces the uncertainty of the body through mapping the loss of her eye, the death of her mother, and the landscape of Alaska. Taken together these four works (all written in the last five years) point to a significant rethinking of the relationship between words and the body. Each profoundly complicates the American (mis)translation of the notion of writing the body associated with French feminism.

These four texts, however, are dwarfed by the long and careful consideration of the relation between the body and the self most fully articulated in the works of African-American women writers. Beginning with Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slavegirl*, through the fiction of Nella Larsen, the "folk tales" of Zora Neale Hurston (best animated in *Spunk*), the autobiographies of Maya Angelou, the fiction of Toni Morrison, especially *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, the biomythography of Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, one can see a central preoccupation with questions of "ownership" and "maintenance" of a body that is and is not one's own. This preoccupation extends as well to several contemporary African-American women visual artists, especially Renee Green, Lorna Simpson, and Artis Lane. Green has made a multi-media installation directly inspired by Jacobs' narrative. Lane's most recent work is unusual for sculpture because she tries to mold the body as it is *emerging* into matter (and I intend the awkwardness of the present participle). While most sculpture of the body tries to "capture" it, Lane's tries to mirror the moment of the body's transit between conception and form, for both the model and the artist. On a beautiful bronze nude, for example, she may leave the ceramic mold visible. One of her most astonishing pieces, *Birth* (1988), is a "perfect" bronze: it displays a woman knees bent, feet flat, arms open and extended toward the floor, mouth open, neck taut, stomach swollen, with the head of a baby just poking out between her legs. See Lane's essay, "Emergence." It introduces a series of excellent reproductions of the sculptures.

- 6 See David Wojnarowicz, *Tongues of Flame*.
- 7 By "the asymmetrical stage" I mean the rules and composition of the Senate confirmation committee. Fourteen white men with histories of plagiarism, drunkenness, and influence peddling (again this is the short list), are prob-

ably not adequate judges of anyone's ability to serve on the Supreme Court, let alone are they able to deal equitably with the particularly difficult issues raised by Thomas' nomination.

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