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Stefka Georgieva Mihaylova

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Abstract

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Stefka Georgieva Mihaylova

This dissertation examines performance and textual techniques used by American and British artists to provoke discussion about the politics of viewing. I theorize a model of spectatorship which exposes the race and gender symbolism of actors' and spectators' bodies and its effects on meaning-making in the performer-spectator encounter. In contrast to other models of feminist and radical spectatorship influenced by Brecht, which analyze race and gender as material economic and social relations, this model also considers their affective dimensions and alerts spectators to the cultural beliefs and prejudices that influence viewing. My analysis brings together two theoretically disparate concepts, commonly regarded as incompatible: the Brechtian *gestus*, a distancing device which calls attention to the economic motivation of representation; and the psychoanalytic concept of *abjection*, an emotionally-charged instance in which established paradigms of knowledge fail, revealing the cultural contingency of meaning. By accounting for the symbolic, non-material aspects of race and gender, my case studies contest the premise on which Brechtian theatre and social realism predicate critical intervention: the assumption that a spectator can observe the stage objectively from a position external to representation. Countering this assumption, the performances I analyze show how spectators are positioned as socially-situated participants, which initiates dialogue on the ethics of viewing. I draw on political theories of democratic contestation and feminist standpoint theories which account for the effects of imagination and affect on social interactions. The case studies include works by Suzan-Lori Parks, Sarah Kane, and Forced Entertainment, and the Upstream Theatre.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In Act I of Caryl Churchill's landmark Brechtian feminist play Cloud 9 (1979), Betty, the wife of British colonial official Clive, breaks the fourth wall and addresses the audience:

Betty I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life
Is to be what he looks for in a wife.
I am a man's creation as you see,
And what men want is what I want to be.[1]

The stage directions specify that Betty is to be played by a male actor. Thus her statement "I am a man's creation as you see" gestically exposes the distinction between actor and character, and at the same time argues that gender norms are social constructs, not nature. The actor's statement "as you see" conveys Brecht's modernist assumption that though representation and reality may overlap, they are essentially distinct. In Act II, the represented time shifts abruptly from the Victorian period to the late-1970s, but only twenty-five years have elapsed for the characters. This shift, Elin Diamond comments, alerts spectators to the ways in which their own preconceptions of dramatic conventions – in this instance, an expectation that fictional time should advance in a linear and logical fashion – inform their acts of looking.[2] Seeing truthfully is presented as contingent upon spectators' ability to reflect on such expectations. In the context of the play, the power of dramatic conventions is comparable to the power of gender norms; seeing these norms truthfully implies seeing them *as* norms: as socially-contingent, not as universally

[1] Caryl Churchill, Cloud Nine (New York: Routledge, 1995) 4.
[2] Elin Diamond, "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras," Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 95-96.

valid. At the end of the play, a liberated modern-time Betty comes to terms with her oppressed Victorian self. Diamond deems this optimistic ending counter-critical: turning historicist critique into "ahistorical romance."[3] But to me, the ending is expressive of the same faith in spectators' desire for truth and knowledge that underlies Brecht's own plays.

By the time Churchill wrote Far Away (2000), two decades after Cloud 9, her faith in spectators seems to have dwindled. Rather than an expression of a desire for truth, spectatorship in Far Away is presented as the effect of meticulous training in selective social blindness. The play opens with a conversation between Joan, a pre-teen girl, and her aunt Harper. Joan cannot sleep. She was already in bed, she tells her aunt, when she heard someone outside scream. It must have been an owl, Harper says. Joan, however, thought it was a person. Trying to figure out who screamed, she went through the window and onto a tree outside it from where she saw her uncle and a number of strange people do something incomprehensible. Her uncle was having a party with his friends, Harper suggests. But then Joan admits that she got off the tree limb and walked into the yard. She heard people crying in a lorry, and in the shed, and saw blood on the ground. Confronted by this new information, Harper changes her story. There was no party. Joan's uncle was busy helping people escape from an evil persecutor. Then, Joan wonders, why was uncle hitting them? Why did he hit one of the children with a metal stick? Why was there so much blood? Harper is momentarily at a loss, but then comes up with an explanation. One of the people was a traitor, and the stricken child was the child of that traitor. Joan accepts this story and agrees to support her uncle's noble cause by helping Harper clean the yard in the morning.

The dialogue stages the intricate mechanisms of discursive manipulation in oppressive political regimes, also explored by Churchill in Softcops (1984) and Vinegar Tom (1976). "It was dark," Harper says, challenging the truthfulness of Joan's account. "Yes," Joan responds,

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[3] Diamond, "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity," 98.

“but I did see.” “Now what did you imagine you saw in the dark?” Harper counters.[4] By the end of the scene, Joan willingly surrenders her own knowledge for Harper’s appealing interpretation. The negotiation over what Joan saw and what it stood for also implicitly comments on realist spectatorship, mimicking viewers’ suspension of disbelief and the creation of belief in the theatrical illusion.

Acts II and III show the outcomes of such trained blindness. In Act II, a grown-up Joan designs spectacular hats intended to adorn the heads of prisoners who march towards their death in a grotesque parody of a fashion parade. It is a pity they burn the hats with the bodies, Joan tells a fellow designer. Crucially, the spectator that Joan represents is not an innocent victim of illusion but willingly turns a blind eye to atrocity, refusing the responsibility that seeing through illusion would entail. In Act III, the characters pay the price for their passive complicity with illusion. A war has begun, forging brief and fantastic alliances. The cats and the French fight against the Latvian pigs and the dentists. No one and nothing is left neutral. Distinctions between reality and illusion have collapsed into a disorienting nightmare.

Considered together, the two plays illustrate a shift in the concept of radical spectatorship in British and American theatre practice and scholarship at the turn of the twenty-first century: from Brechtian and social realist models, assuming that reality and representation are essentially distinct, to a yet undefined model accounting for the postmodern insistence on the contingency of this distinction. Strongly influenced by Marxist-materialist theories, Brechtian theatre (exemplified by Cloud 9) reveals to spectators the apparatus of representation. The premise of this theatrical method is that if spectators become familiar with representational mechanisms they will be more capable of distinguishing ideological illusions from reality. Far Away, by

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[4] Churchill, Far Away (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2001)13.

contrast, addresses contemporary theatre artists' attempts to account for the ways in which
spectators' social attitudes and their previous knowledge of theatrical conventions inform the production of meaning during a theatrical encounter; especially the ways in which such attitudes and knowledge may obstruct critical viewing.

Drawing on scripts and performances by British and American artists, this dissertation investigates textual and performance strategies that these artists have adopted to expose spectators' contributions to the meanings created during the theatrical encounter. My analysis focuses particularly on strategies that alert spectators to the gendered and racial politics of their viewing practices. One major strategy, recurring through my case studies, is the juxtaposition of social realist and Brechtian conventions (which hold the promise of clarifying social hierarchies) with techniques intentionally obstructing meaning and communication in performance. I propose that this paradoxical juxtaposition reveals the limits of social realism and Brechtian theatre for representing the complexity of gender and race, as relations which are at once material and affective.

In the performances I will be analyzing, the artists simultaneously use elements of the Brechtian and social-realist mise-en-scènes and critique their underlying gender and racial philosophies. In this manner, these performances address the changing meaning of radical resistance in late-capitalist societies. Specifically, these performances draw attention to the ways in which the increasing diversity of social actors and the growing sophistication of the mass media expose distinctions between reality and representation as provisional and politically-motivated. Indirectly engaging with fears that insistence upon the contingency of such distinctions may result in disabling relativism,[5] the artists intentionally blur the

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[5] Such fears have been voiced by numerous critics of postmodernism. For instance, Terry Eagleton argues that if cultural relativism is assumed to mean that different cultures "are wholly self-validating and mutually

phenomenological distinction between reality and representation during the theatrical encounter; this critical tool exposes how the racial and gender symbolism of actors' and spectators' bodies informs acts of viewing. As a result, the Brechtian concept of objective viewing is replaced by a concept of spectatorship as a situated and embodied practice. The theatrical encounter becomes a democratic dialogue about social hierarchies.

I discuss the changing understanding of radical spectatorship as part of a larger shift in theories of knowledge in critical thinking from Marxist-materialist theories, which strongly influenced radical theatre in the 1970s and 1980s, to theories that emphasize the dependence of knowledge on representational conventions. A schematic overview of this shift emphasizes two transitional moments: from the modern liberal individual to the modern Marxist subject, and from the Marxist subject to the situated postmodern subject. According to feminist standpoint theorist Nancy Hartsock, Marxist theory radically critiques the western liberal subject of knowledge. Incorporating the Cartesian mind/body split, the liberal subject is a disembodied observer, studying the world from an allegedly neutral, hence universal, position. Marxist theory rejects the possibility of a neutral position, emphasizing the relationship between a subject's economic position and knowledge.[6] Yet classical Marxism retains the belief that knowledge can be objective, privileging as objective the position of the economically-oppressed. The shift from

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incommensurable," these cultures would not be able to find any common ground; hence, they would be unable to communicate. See Terry Eagleton, The Illusions of Postmodernism (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996) 124. According to Stewart Sim, "one of the problems we are left with when we dispense with grand narratives, or central authorities of any kind, is how to construct value judgments that others will accept as just and reasonable." Stuart Sim, "Postmodernism and Philosophy," The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 8. Lloyd Spencer further writes that the combination of postmodernism's spirit of dissent and postmodernism's rejection of value judgments sometimes leads to unproductive nihilism. Lloyd Spencer, "Postmodernism, Modernity, and the Tradition of Dissent," The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 145-46. In a recently published book, political economist Guido Giacomo Preparata contends that postmodernism's focus on difference corporate capitalism, globalization, and the hegemony of the conservative right in western societies. Guido Giacomo Preparata, The Ideology of Tyranny: Bataille, Foucault, and the Postmodern Corruption of Political Dissent (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 216.

[6] Nancy C. Hartsock, "Comment on Hekman's 'Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited': Truth or Justice?" Signs 22.2 (1997): 369.

the Marxist subject to the postmodern situated subject is based on several major arguments

against Marxist theories of knowledge: that not any social difference (of gender, sexuality, race, or ethnicity) can be reduced to class distinction; that the position of the socially-victimized is not necessarily objective; and, most importantly, that knowledge is not a direct reflection of a subject's social basis.[7] In the postmodern rethinking of classical Marxist theory, representational conventions are not simple tools used willfully by social subjects; instead these conventions simultaneously enable and limit a subject's social interactions.

Churchill's Far Away stages a dystopian vision related to this shift, famously articulated in Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation, probing the possibility for critical thinking in a society lacking absolute criteria for distinguishing between reality and representation. To Baudrillard, the blurring of reality and its representations in late capitalist societies derives not so much from a capacity to create perfect copies of reality, but from western subjects' desire for coherent stories. As a result, the linear, realist conventions of the mass media become invested with truthfulness and objectivity, masking and eventually substituting the complexity and logical inconsistencies of events and phenomena.[8] The representation of reality is reduced to a single "legitimate" code. For instance, only occurrences whose representation adheres to the mass media conventions get registered as events in the public sphere.[9] In Far Away, the conversation about the fantastic fashionable hats, obscuring the destruction of human bodies, illustrates the violent outcomes of the desire for coherent stories. In its production of the play, the Next Theatre, based in Evanston, Illinois, gestically exposed the violence of simulation, creating a visual

[7] See Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis. "Standpoint Theory, Situated Knowledge and the Situated Imagination." Feminist Theory 3.3 (2002): 315-19.
[8] Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press) 47-48, 81-82.
[9] Baudrillard, 82.

contrast between the colorful hats and the prisoners' pale, dull-looking faces and bodies
covered in gray loose clothes.[10]

Feminist materialist theatre scholarship has been acutely aware of the dangers of reducing "legitimate" representation to a singular code. Hence, neither Brechtian theatre, social realism, or any other theatrical convention has been unconditionally proclaimed as inherently feminist or non-feminist. Instead, Elin Diamond and Patricia Schroeder, for instance, insist on analyzing the particular circumstances in which specific representational conventions may enable or obstruct feminist interventions.[11] Nonetheless, in my view, the postmodern contestation that objective knowledge is impossible and the shift from the Brechtian faith in the possibility of progressive change to dystopian scenarios have caused a crisis in the understanding of radical and feminist theatre. Critical reactions to the wave of shocking plays in Britain at the turn of the twenty-first century, with which Far Away has also been associated,[12] illuminate the stakes of this crisis particularly well.

Variously referred to as "in-yer-face theatre," "new brutalism," or "theatre of urban ennui," the only feature that these plays share is the bold staging of violent imagery, including rape, murder, mutilation, and drug abuse, testing the limits of spectators' comfort and sense of propriety. Politically and formally diverse, these plays do not fit into pre-existing concepts of radical or feminist theatre, yet they have provoked questions about how the meaning of feminist and radical theatre changed in the 1990s. Represented most famously by Sarah Kane's Blasted (1995) and Mark Ravenhill's Shopping and Fucking (1996), "in-yer-face theatre" started in

[10] Far Away, by Caryl Churchill, dir. Lisa Portes, perf. Karen Aldridge, Wendy Robie, and Dan Kuhlman, Next Theatre, Evanston, 18 Feb. 2004.
[11] Elin Diamond's Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); and Patricia Schroeder's The Feminist Possibilities of Dramatic Realism (London: Associated University Press, 1996).
[12] See Michael Billington, interview with Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics, and Academics, eds. Mireia Aragay, Hildegard Klein, Enric Monforte, and Pilar Zozaya (Hondills, Basingstoke, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 115.

Britain, but critics have included in it works by both British and American dramatists, all of which, however, premiered in Britain.[13] Many critics view the plays as expressive of young people's protest against the consumerist cultural mainstream and the domination of right-wing politics, but these critics are also uncertain how to qualify the plays politically.[14] While Dan Rebellato and Ken Urban describe the trend as "escapist" and "nihilist," they hurry to explain that these epithets do not imply that the plays are apolitical or reactionary.[15] Drawing on a leftist tradition of radical theatre dominated by Bertolt Brecht's Marxist-materialist dramaturgy, critics argue that the lack of clear ideological signposts and the frequently dystopian resolutions of in-yer-face plays prevent them from being radical.[16] The same considerations have deterred feminist scholars from identifying women-authored dystopian scripts as feminist, including Far Away.[17] Additionally, as various previously absent or underrepresented groups have claimed the British and American theatre stages, the established concepts of "radical" and "feminist" theatre, tied to a western intellectual and performance history, have become unsatisfactory. Scholars have questioned the implications of applying these terms to non-western, non-white artists.[18] As a result, scholars have felt much more comfortable stating what radical and feminist theatres are *not* rather than what they are. The trouble is that the criteria for what is *not* radical or *not* feminist derive from the same theories of radical and feminist theatre – associated with the Brechtian and

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[13] Plays by American playwrights include Tracy Letts's Killer Joe (1995) and Naomi Wallace's (1993) The War Boys (1993). See, Aleks Sierz, In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).
[14] Mireia Aragay, Enric Monforte, and Pilar Zozaya, introduction, British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics, and Academics, eds. Mireia Aragay, Hildegard Klein, Enric Monforte, and Pilar Zozaya (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) x.
[15] Dan Rebelatto, interview with Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, British Theatre of the 1990s, 161-62; and Ken Urban, "Towards a Theory of Cruel Britannia: Coolness, Cruelty, and the 'Nineties," New Theatre Quarterly 20.4 (2004): 363.
[16] See Urban, ibid.
[17] See, for instance, Janelle Reinelt, "Navigating Postfeminism: Writing Out of the Box," Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory, eds. Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris (Houndmills, Basingstoke, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 24, 27.
[18] Recently, these arguments have been revisited in Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris, eds. Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory; and Lynette Goddard, Staging Black Feminisms: Identity, Politics, Performance (Houndmills, Basingstoke, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

social-realist traditions – whose capacity to account for artists' and spectators' growing diversity has been questioned.

Film scholar Judith Mayne, who observes a similar impasse in film scholarship, argues that this impasse derives from the fallacious assumption that viewing positions are either radical or conservative. This assumption, Mayne continues, wrongly presents spectators' relationship to a story as transparent and disregards the various emotional histories that spectators bring to the cinema hall which make identification with fictional characters, or lack thereof, an immensely complex process. Additionally, this assumption fails to consider the degree of ideological interpellation without which understanding a film would be impossible. As a result, mainstream representational conventions appear as monolithic frameworks capable of overdetermining spectators' individual responses.[19] To resolve this impasse, Mayne proposes rethinking representational conventions in terms of the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy: as a set of loosely-defined frames (or, as Mayne prefers to call them, scenarios) for meaning-making which simultaneously enable and limit a number of spectatorial interpretations.[20]

Likewise, I think of the Brechtian and social-realist mise-en-scènes as loosely-defined scenarios, enabling multiple responses. Drawing on theatre reviews and spectators' letters about the 1995 and 2001 productions of Sarah Kane's Blasted in London and the New York (2001) and Chicago (2003) and productions of Suzan-Lori Parks's play Topdog/Underdog, I show that spectators' perceptions of theatrical conventions do not depend on these conventions alone but also on the ways in which actors' specific uses of conventions intersect with spectators' cultural histories. I demonstrate that spectators' affective investments in representation (particularly racial and gender representation), deriving from these histories, may override artists' invitations

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[19] Judith Mayne "Paradoxes of Spectatorship," Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995) 168, 171.
[20] Mayne, 167.

for a distanced, analytical approach to the theatrical performance. Hence, I argue that feminist and radical theatres need a method for making spectators aware of how socially-shared affective histories inform their relationship to theatrical representation. Next, I outline specific strategies that, in my view, may help foreground these affective histories by looking at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre's production of Venus (1996) by Suzan-Lori Parks, a performance of Soul of a Clone (2004) at the Chopin Theatre in Chicago, devised by the St. Louis-based Upstream Theatre, and First Night (2001) by the British radical group Forced Entertainment. By imposing fictional roles on the spectators, suspending spectators on a cusp between two or more performer-spectator contracts (for instance between a realist and an epic contract), and by creating multiple foci of vision, these three case studies emphasize the contingent social positioning of spectators, and especially the way in which spectators' and actors' embodiments of gender and racial categories influence the meanings created in the theatrical encounter. Drawing on a range of twentieth century theories of the relationship between race, gender and representation, I propose that the strategies displayed in these three studies illuminate and supplement a crucial lack in Brecht's Marxist dramaturgy: its failure to account for the affective symbolism of spectators' gendered and racialized bodies. Finally, I demonstrate how theatre and performance artists emphasize the racial and gender symbolism of their own bodies in order to counter theatre and art journalists' blindness to the racial and gendered politics of representation.

My case studies are not the only examples that help theorize the crisis in the definitions of radical and feminist theatre representation and the shifting attention to the racial and gender politics of viewing, which I have been observing. The reason that I have selected these particular plays and productions is that all of them have provoked lively critical debates on the politics of representation, evidenced in multiple critical reviews, scholarly articles, and letters by spectators.

Kane's Blasted and Forced Entertainment's First Night questioned the limit of shock as a strategy for critical distancing. Parks's Venus and Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's Behzti (2005), which I discuss in chapter four, probed their spectators' openness, or lack thereof, to a critical engagement with racial politics. Parks's apparently realist Topdog/Underdog (an exception, at first sight, from her commitment to formal experimentation) revives the feminist and critical-race debates on the critical limits of realism: does realism normalize negative stereotypes? As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, these debates have helped illuminate viewers' implicit expectations of productions which, through specific themes in the text and elements of the staging, signal to them a radical or feminist intent, whether or not such intent actually informed a production. Likewise, the theories of race, gender, and representation on which I have drawn to theorize a model of critical spectatorship are not the only theories that help articulate such a model. The specific theories and concepts with which I am engaging – Virginia Woolf's "split consciousness," W.E.B. Du Bois's "double consciousness" and his theory of art as propaganda, the Black Art Movement's inquiries into race and visual representation, and Henry Louis Gates's theory of Signifyin' [sic] – have been suggested by the artists and/ or other participants in the critical debates that my case studies have provoked. Also, though I frequently use the expressions "Brechtian theory" and "Brechtian theatre" as, I engage specifically with the American and British artistic and scholarly interpretations of Brecht's dramaturgical and production methods. In my third chapter, I account for the significant variations in these interpretations and contribute my own.

By foregrounding the racial and gender aspects of spectatorship and by refusing to construct a unified and presumably objective ideal viewing position, my case studies exceed the Marxist framework of Brechtian and social-realist radical theatre. I propose that their approaches

to spectators are better understood in terms of Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek's theory of democratic contestation and Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis's theory of situated imagination. I view the concept of dialogue in these theories – variously expressed by terms such as translation, witnessing, democratic contestation, or democratic dialogue – as an attempt to give a positive definition to the epistemological, artistic, social, and economic developments which have been loosely summarized under the label "postmodernism." Complicating Habermas's influential theory of the public sphere as a field of interaction among rational individuals, these theorists propose that the non-material aspects of communication, particularly imagination and affect, are crucial to articulating a non-totalitarian vision of social dialogue.[21]

Butler, Laclau, and Žižek start from the premise that the New Right has distorted the objectives of identity politics by representing the social issues that groups such as gay men, lesbian women, African American heterosexual women, etc. confront as particular to each group, unrelated to one another or to the larger macroeconomic and macropolitical system. This ideological move, Žižek contends, prevents such groups from unifying around shared demands.[22] The concept of dialogue that they theorize explores the possibility for such unification. According to Laclau, the success of such dialogue depends on the ability of specifically-situated participants, for instance African American lesbian women, to identify viable signifiers, such as "justice," "opportunity," and "human rights," that would make their demands recognizable to people who identify differently. What makes certain signifiers viable at particular historical moments is not that the participants unified around them necessarily agree upon their

[21] Butler, Laclau, and Žižek explicitly distinguish themselves from Habermas's theory of the public sphere, which they find rationalist and universalist. See Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, introduction, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left (London: Verso, 2000) 3.

[22] Slavoj Žižek, The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology (London and New York: Verso, 1999) 203-04, 356.

contents. By contrast, democratic dialogue entails the continuing contestation not only of such signifiers, but also of the larger frame of culturally-specific rules of meaning-making that define some social positions as "universally"-meaningful and legitimate, others as marginally-acceptable, and yet others as threatening the social. What makes certain signifiers viable, then, is participants' emotional investment in such signifiers, which renders these signifiers worthy of contestation.[23]

Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis similarly explore how differentially situated social participants initiate dialogues and articulate shared objectives, paying specific attention to the political effects of social imagination: the culturally-shared beliefs and attitudes which inform interactions among hierarchically positioned social participants. Drawing on a range of theorists, including Donna Haraway, Cornelius Castoriadis, Spinoza, and others, they define imagination not as an individual act but as a socially-situated faculty that "constructs as well as transforms, challenges and supersedes both existing knowledge and social reality."[24] Importantly, they view imagination as an embodied act, "the experience of other bodies together with our own."[25]

Both theories underscore that acts of knowledge are always contingent upon the political implications of the gendered and racialized bodies of the participating social subjects, and predicate radical intervention not upon the outcome of contestation but upon the tensions produced by the different, and perhaps conflicting, paradigms of meaning that the variously-positioned participants bring to the table. In this way, they try to avoid teleology.

In the performances that I analyze, theatre, race, and the body are presented as contestable signifiers. The artists purposefully confuse, shame, and enrage spectators, calling

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[23] Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, "Questions," Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, 5; Laclau, "Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics." 69-70.
[24] Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 315.
[25] Ibid., 323.

attention to the emotional investments that make such signifiers appear truthful and stable.
Spectators are invited to reflect on the ways in which their own embodiments of social categories, such as gender and race, and their previous knowledge of theatrical conventions influence their acts of viewing.

In her essay "Notes for a Radical Democratic Theatre," Janelle Reinelt starts exploring the possible intersections between theatre and theories of democratic contestation.[26] Her primary purpose, in my reading, is finding ways to overcome the containment-subversion binary into which materialist scholarship frequently falls. Drawing on these theories, she proposes thinking of spectators as a community of citizens, drawn together not by their coinciding political views but by their interest in discussing common topics from a range of possible positions. Reinelt limits the concept of the spectator-citizen to community theatres and to explicitly politicized performance events such as "the NEA four:" the decision of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1990 to veto the grants of performance artists Karen Finley, Tim Miller, Holly Hughes, and John Fleck. Disagreeing with the NEA's claims that their performances were obscene, feminist scholars argued that the artists were punished for the explicit homoeroticism in their works.[27] Considering such cases through theories of democratic contestation, Reinelt writes that, however unpleasant conservative positions may be to liberal scholars these positions are integral to a democratic art discourse. Anna Deavere Smith's ethnographic performances are held as an example of how theatre may display difference without the false pretense of objectivity.

I also use these theories to illuminate aesthetic choices in performance, particularly those choices that bear upon the spectator's position vis-à-vis the representation on stage. To explain

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[26] Janelle Reinelt, "Notes for a Democratic Theatre: Productive Crises and the Challenge of Indeterminacy," Staging Resistance: Essays on Political Theater, eds. Jeanne Colleran and Jenny S. Spenser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998) 283-98.
[27] See Lynda Hart, Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) xii, 89-90.

the difference between the Brechtian mise-en-scène and the spectator-performer relationship
in the theatre of democratic contestation, I combine two theoretically-disparate strategies, commonly regarded as incompatible: Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic concept of the abject, which she uses to theorize how social subjects' affective investments in representation define the cultural limits of meaning, and Brecht's materialist gestus, a distancing device used to enable spectators to see the theatrical and ideological mechanisms at work, constructing politically-invested realities. Whereas gestus promises a degree of freedom from ideological illusions, the theory of abjection emphasizes how emotional investment in specific social norms and representational conventions sustains their power even as one understands that these norms and conventions are constructed. The abject is as central to the model that I am theorizing as gestus is to Brechtian theatre. Drawing on Kristeva's previously neglected description of abjection as a moment of spectatorship, I define as *abject* representational strategies that lay bare spectators' affective investments in specific conventions of looking, and the racial and gender politics of such investments.

Distinctions between aesthetics and politics are, in theory, only made for purposes of analysis. In practice, however, such distinctions are sometimes incorrectly taken as absolute, and then used as a yardstick for artists' political perspectives. Lack of an explicit social message in a performance piece or a focus on formal experimentation frequently results in postmodern plays' perception as politically conservative. Richard Walsh, for example, differentiates among three categories of radical theatre.

- In the first one, the practice of a theatre group becomes an exemplary metaphor for the community as a whole; the process of theatre creation is presented as a model for the community's life.

- The second category includes theatre groups that arise from specific political contexts, and their aesthetics follows from their politics.
- The third concerns theatre practices where individualism regains currency and aesthetics obscures politics. Such theatre, Walsh writes, is "an exploration of the encounter between the theatrical medium and the individual perceiving mind."[28]

Walsh's categorization does not seem particularly useful. For example, the practice of feminist theatre collectives of the 1970s and 1980s created ideal models for female communities; hence this practice falls within Walsh's first category. At the same time, these groups emerged from the specific political context of second-wave feminism, and the question of feminist aesthetics was central to their practice; hence, the work of feminist theatre collectives belongs to Walsh's second category as well. Brecht's dialectical theatre, too, emerged from a specific political context, that of the Marxist political movements of the first half of the twentieth century, and strives to develop an aesthetic inspired by Marxism. However, Sean Carney has argued that unlike "orthodox" class analysis, Brechtian theory is much more concerned with a possibility of "a Marxist ethic of the individual."[29] Brecht's interest in individuals' choices, though presented within the larger context of economic and social relations, bridges Walsh's second and third categories. The trouble with the third category, on the other hand, is the assumption that the emphasis on aesthetics and the individual perceiving mind necessarily masks the politics of the theatrical encounter.

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[28] Richard Walsh, Radical Theatre of the Sixties and the Seventies (Keele, England: British Association for American Studies, 1993) 5.
[29] Sean Carney, Brecht and Critical Theory: Dialectics and Contemporary Aesthetics (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 24.

My particular understanding of the relationship between politics and aesthetics is influenced by Russ Castronovo's reading of Du Bois's theory of art as propaganda. Castronovo proposes that aesthetics "concerns the forms that politics takes."[30] For instance, a consideration of aesthetics would complicate Reinelt's analysis of Anna Deavere Smith's performances, especially the legitimacy of Smith's role as a social mediator. Would she be more or less successful in this role if she were not as light-skinned as she is?[31]

I also argue that the strategies of spectatorship in these case studies are feminist. By defining them as feminist I underscore the theoretical affinity between them and feminist critiques of representation since the 1970s. I demonstrate how these strategies supplement feminist theories of visual conventions, such as Laura Mulvey's concept of the gaze and bell hook's theory of race, gender, and critical spectatorship, as well as feminist critiques of the textual conventions of realism and Brechtian epic theatre. I am also calling these strategies feminist because they try to draw spectators' attention to the ways in which the cultural signification of spectators' bodies – simultaneously material and imagined, defined by racial, gender, and sexual politics – informs spectators' social interactions. I identify these strategies as feminist even when the contents of the theatrical encounter do not specifically refer to women. This is a risky decision.

In her recently published study Staging Black Feminisms, Lynette Goddard approaches the question of black feminist aesthetics. Though she does not come up with a singular definition, it appears from her analysis that the components of this aesthetics include non-realist representational conventions or at least "modified" realism, a content that critiques racial

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[30] Russ Castronovo, "Beauty along the Color Line: Lynching, Aesthetics, and the *Crisis*." PMLA 121.5 (2006): 1457.
[31] I am indebted for this insight to Sandra Richards who discussed the significance of Smith's appearance with me in an informal conversation.

and gender exclusion, and the inclusion of women at all levels of theatrical production.[32] All plays discussed in the book have been authored by women. The concept of feminist aesthetics, as I read it in Goddard's study – a combination of specific gender organization of theatrical labor, critique of dominant representational conventions, and a content emphasizing women's discrimination – overlaps with the views exposed in Karen Laughlin and Catherine Schuler's 1995 collection Theatre and Feminist Aesthetics.[33] Certainly, numerous plays authored and produced by women support this concept, and so do Goddard's case studies. Yet this is not the only concept of feminist aesthetics in contemporary feminist theatre scholarship. Reinelt, for instance, has asked on at least two occasions whether feminist texts need to coincide with a feminist thematic content. She has argued, for instance, that even though Caryl Churchill's Softcops does not include a single female character, the play is feminist. The absence of women, she writes, reinforces the critique of patriarchy in the text. "Women do not have to be represented on stage for a gender critique to take place or for a feminist politics to underlie the dramaturgy," Reinelt concludes.[34] In her essay, "Navigating Postfeminism" (2006), she continues to probe the range of the concept "feminist text," without, however, offering a definitive answer.[35] I have chosen to follow Reinelt's alternative concept rather than the more established one supported by Goddard's study, because I find the former especially productive. By discussing as feminist performances that neither focus on women's issues, narrowly defined, nor are authored solely by women, I am testing the range of feminist aesthetics as well.

Riskier still, I discuss in feminist terms not only performances whose authors do not define themselves as feminist, but also authors who specifically resist this definition, such as

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[32] Goddard, 39-54.
[33] Karen Laughlin and Catherine Schuler, eds., Theatre and Feminist Aesthetics (London: Associated University Presses, 1995).
[34] Janelle Reinelt, After Brecht: British Epic Theatre (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 96.
[35] Janelle Reinelt, "Navigating Postfeminism," 17-33.

Sarah Kane. Though I agree with the ethical concerns that Reinelt and others have expressed on this issue, I do not think that these concerns have always been productive. For instance, in Staging Black Feminisms, Goddard quotes black British director Yvonne Brewster's objections to the term feminist. "I came from a very strong West Indian background, and in the West Indies the word 'feminism' has a really hollow ring, simply because it's a matriarchal society," Brewster says. "So, entering a European or British situation, one finds the feminist concept a bit difficult. It's hard to understand what all the fuss is about."[36] Goddard, then, contrasts Brewster's statement with the decision of the Theatre of Black Women to define itself "black feminist" in order to show its affinity to other artistic and political feminist practices. I find the juxtaposition of these two views effective because it emphasizes the open signification of the term "feminist." What bothers me, however, is that Goddard, most likely led by ethical considerations, does not ask Brewster what she means by "matriarchal" and what exactly she understands "feminist" to mean. Does "matriarchal" mean that women control politics and economic wealth in the West Indies? Is it easier and more common for women in that region to be theatre directors than it is in Europe, or specifically in Britain? True, feminism is a western concept, but Brewster, too, is creating theatre within a western public sphere. Besides, simply dropping the term feminist does not resolve hierarchies among women. I am trying to use the term with full awareness of its multiple meanings, not prescriptively.

With few exceptions, my case studies are plays and performances that took place in purpose-built theatre venues. Much materialist theatre scholarship has fruitfully pointed out that such productions comprise a very small part of theatrical performance, and that their customary middle- and upper-middle class, mostly white audiences render them unlikely sites of

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[36] Quoted in Goddard, 42.

radical intervention. Baz Kershaw, for instance, argues that the funding mechanisms of theatre in purpose-built venues make them dependent upon the representatives of the political status quo. He writes that the spatial semiotics of the auditorium, including the conventional division between physically passive spectators and active performers, and the typical location of the theatre venues in the economically-rich city areas perpetuate the dominant cultural and social ideologies, and subvert any radical intent that the artists may have.[37] Elin Diamond warns against such rigid distinctions between performances in purpose-built theatre and performances in less conventional venues. Yet she also points out that the dominant traditions of western theatre, such as realism, try to cancel the cultural and historical specificity of the actor's body, dissimulating this specificity under make-up, costume, and acting style, so that the actor's body may coincide as closely as possible with that of the character and create "a seamless (i.e. ahistorical, apolitical) illusionism."[38] In the same vein, Sue-Ellen Case contends that, in order to foreground the racial and sexual specificity of both performers' and spectators' bodies, the context of reception may need to be removed altogether, as in those Brechtian *Lehrstücke* (learning plays) which cancelled the distinction between stage and auditorium. Rather than use professional actors, these events, staged in factories and other places not specifically intended for theatrical performances, involved the people attending in various fictional stories. Afterwards, the attendees-turned-actors discussed the political lessons of those stories they had just helped come alive.[39]

I find all these arguments legitimate, yet, like Diamond, I disagree with the presumption that there is something inherently non-radical in performances in purpose-built venues or in the physical separation between spectators and performers. Neither do I believe that the elimination

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[37] Baz Kershaw, The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard (London: Routledge, 1999) 29-56.
[38] Elin Diamond, Unmaking Mimesis, 84-85.
[39] Sue-Ellen Case, The Domain-Matrix: Performing Lesbian at the End of Print Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 109.

of these conventions necessarily radicalizes spectatorship. What would prevent a

performance in a factory or prison from becoming the new fashionable commodity? As Philip Auslander notes, the overwhelming presence of the electronic media in daily life of late-capitalist societies has invested the "liveness" of performance with consumerist appeal.[40]

Kershaw writes that he chose on-site performances as case studies for his theory of radical theatre not because he believes that sites outside theatre auditoriums are inherently radical or immune to commodification, but because he finds that such sites convey more visibly the "pathologies" of contemporary western societies, their consumerism and conformism.[41] Yet he does not explain in any detail why and how these "pathologies" are more visible at such sites. In my reading, his insistence on a "contrastive link" between "the [conservative] limits of theatre" and "the [subversive] excesses of performance" reproduces the modernist reality-illusion binary despite his critiques of exactly that. The weakness of his model stems from his refusal to consider the opposite relationship: the limits of performance and the excesses of theatre. In other words, he inadvertently repeats the assumption, which Mayne critiques, that viewing positions can be either radical or complicit with dominant ideologies.[42] As a result, he presents theatre in purpose-built venues as a monolithic framework. I demonstrate, by contrast, that my case studies address the specificity of spectators' sexually- and racially-marked bodies, and invite a dialogue about social hierarchies *within* purpose-built theatre by foregrounding its semiotics and making this available for discussion.

My analysis draws on Ric Knowles's materialist semiotics, without repeating his procedures exactly. Knowles's method renders explicit the interactions among *performance text* (playtext, acting, set), *conditions of production* (social context, funding, rehearsal process), and

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[40] Philip Auslander, Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture (New York: Routledge, 1999) 7.
[41] Kershaw, 16.
[42] Mayne, 168.

conditions of reception (publicity, reviews, social context), and takes into account the degree of personal investment that inevitably interferes with studies of spectatorship.[43] Like Knowles, I read closely the semiotics of performance spaces, including both the physical positions of spectators and performers and the theatre building's cultural symbolism: a mainstream venue, a small fringe theatre, or a non-conventional performance space. Like Knowles, too, I draw primarily on local reviews, trying to clarify reviewers' specific cultural positions. Knowles, however, writes primarily about productions that he has seen himself and sometimes followed in several locations. My evidence, by contrast, also includes videotapes and sound recordings, though in some cases only journalistic and scholarly textual descriptions of specific productions. Also, my feminist inquiry into aesthetics frequently leads my discussion in directions which Knowles does not explore. For instance, when I analyze responses to a production, I am particularly interested in the *forms* that reception takes – a journalistic review in the press or a protest in the streets – and on the gender and racial implications of these forms.

Chapter two, "Failures of Translation: Sarah Kane's and Suzan-Lori Parks's Radical Formalism," discusses how the tension between realist and epic elements in Kane's Blasted and Parks' Topdog/Underdog produces an illusion of suspending context and a seeming withdrawal into aesthetic mediation. Drawing on Baudrillard's insights about the ways in which the mass media have changed the meaning of political resistance, I argue that Parks's and Kane's formalist-looking approaches convey a feminist and critical-race critique of the mass media and of foundational historical narratives, such as Abraham Lincoln's role in Emancipation. The uncritical acceptance of cultural scripts, whether they come from the mass media or from mainstream historical narratives, are shown to be productive of social violence. The social displacement resulting from gender and racial inequality is positively reformulated as a critical

[43] Ric Knowles, Reading the Material Theatre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 9-23.

device which interrupts the disabling effects of received narratives. Theatre journalists found the mixture of realist and non-realist elements in the plays unmotivated and confusing. Conversely, I read the tension between these elements as a strategy recreating for spectators the critical experience of displacement dramatized in the scripts. Looking at theatrical productions of the plays and at journalistic responses to these productions, I demonstrate how critics' conflation of social-realist and Brechtian conventions with the concept of radical theatre obscured Kane's and Parks's analyses of gender and race.

Chapter three, "Theatre as a Practice of Democratic Contestation," similarly analyses strategies for displacing spectators from the stable viewing positions that Brechtian and social realist theatre typically create. My analysis focuses on productions of Park's play Venus, Soul of a Clone by the St. Louis-based Upstream Theatre, and First Night by the radical British theatre group Forced Entertainment. Unlike the case studies in chapter one, these case studies displace the ideal realist or Brechtian spectator through manipulating performance conventions rather than textual conventions. Confusing, embarrassing, and angering their spectators, the artists illuminate the limits of Brecht's dramaturgy for theatrical representations of race and gender. In contrast to Brecht's modernist insistence on clarity and to his attempts to reveal reality "as it truly is," these performances purposefully confuse the phenomenological distinctions between the theatrical fiction on stage and the auditorium as a location of reality, mimicking the effects of the mass media and the mechanisms of social stereotyping. Reading these performances in terms of theories of democratic contestation and feminist standpoint-theory, I propose a model for radical theatre as a practice of democratic dialogue. Elucidating the implications of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection for spectatorship, I describe their central principle – placing

spectators on a cusp between reality and fiction or between representational conventions – as critical abjection.

While chapters two and three focus on the strategies that artists adopt to address their target spectators, resulting in the construction of an ideal viewer, chapter four, "Whose Performance Is It, Anyway? Performed Criticism as a Feminist Strategy," examines the aesthetics of reception via the responses of actual spectators. Engaging with feminist analyses of text and performance as gendered mediums and with the gendered history of theatre journalism, I explore the politics of theatre journalism as a *textual* response to a *performance* medium. I look at embodied responses to theatre and theatre journalism: Carolee Schneemann's Interior Scroll (1975, 1977); the street protests of the male Sikh community in Birmingham, UK, against the staging of Behzti (Disnonour) (2005), by female playwright Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti; the Guerilla Girl's theatre activism (1985 to present), and Forced Entertainment's Showtime (1996). By drawing attention to the symbolism of gender and race, these artists contest the modernist, Cartesian bias in art reviewing.

The Conclusion returns to the relationship between radical and feminist theatre, addressing the argument that when feminist strategies become parts of the broader practices of radical theatre, feminist strategies become formalized and deprived of their original political significance.

Chapter Two

Failures of Translation: Sarah Kane's and Suzan-Lori Parks's Radical Formalism

Sarah Kane's and Suzan-Lori Parks's critiques of gender and racial violence in Blasted (1995) and Topdog/Underdog (2001) have attracted the attention of scholars of radical and feminist theatre. However, these scholars have noted that the plays digress in major ways from the influential Brechtian and social realist approaches to radical representation. These approaches encourage spectators to see through ideological illusions and oppose social inequality by offering them clear moral and ideological signposts and imagining positive solutions to injustice. Many critics felt that Blasted and Topdog did not fulfill these criteria. In a recent article, Janelle Reinelt, for instance, writes that despite Kane and Parks's critiques of gender and racial oppression, the dystopian endings of their plays make her uncertain whether or not the plays can be described as feminist.[1] Reviewers and scholars have also written that the combination of realist and non-realist narrative strategies in both plays frustrates spectators' need for coherence and logical motivation and offers them no guidelines for understanding and evaluating the plays' violent acts. Therefore, they conclude, the plays cannot be radical.[2] Conversely, Elaine Aston finds instances of such "broken realism" in many plays by women of the 1990s but cautions against interpreting "broken realism" as non-feminist or non-radical. Perhaps, she suggests, this narrative approach indicates a different understanding of radical intervention.[3]

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[1] Janelle Reinelt, "Navigating Postfeminism," 24-29.
[2] Stephen Daldry, interview with Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, British Theatre of the 1990s, 9; Ken Urban, "Towards a Theory of Cruel Britannia," 363.
[3] Elaine Aston, "Bad Girls and Sick Boys," Feminist Futures, 84-85.

This chapter engages with the critical reception of Blasted and Topdog/Underdog in order to analyze the implications of their narrative approaches for feminist and radical critiques of representation. Specifically, Kane and Parks examine the relationship between representational conventions and gender and racial difference in the mass media and history, as two discourses which construct spectators' perceptions of reality and inform their criteria of stage realism. I argue that, by frustrating expectations for narrative coherence and logical motivation, the tension between realist and tragic elements in Blasted and between realist and epic elements in Topdog/Underdog attempts to place spectators in a mimetic position of social displacement, encouraging them to reflect on the relationship between representational conventions and social hierarchies. Hence, like Aston, I view Parks's and Kane's "broken realism" as contributing to feminist artists' and scholars' continuing reflection on the capacity of realist and Brechtian approaches to represent social others without assimilating social difference into the conventions of western representation.[4] At the same time, Kane and Parks's suspension of narrative coherence and logical causality bears affinity with formalist techniques of estrangement. Unlike Brechtian estrangement which temporarily suspends narrative coherence and logical causality in order to let spectators see, through Marxist analysis, a "true," Marxist-materialist, logic previously obscured by bourgeois ideology, formalist estrangement can but usually does not support such an explicitly political, activist agenda. Moreover, some western formalists have deliberately downplayed the political implications of their analysis, leading many feminist and radical materialist scholars to declare all formalism antithetical to materialist

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[4] Patricia Schroeder studies the feminist critical engagements with dramatic realism in Patricia Schroeder, The Feminist Possibilities of Dramatic Realism. Elin Diamond offers a critique of realism and a feminist reformulation of Brechtian epic dramaturgy in Unmaking Mimesis, 3-39, 43-55.

analysis.[5] I suggest, by contrast, that this formalist suspension is integral to the playwrights'

critiques of gender and racial representational politics in their scripts, but fails in performance.

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When Sarah Kane's Blasted opened in January 1995 at the Royal Court Theatre in London, the play's violent imagery propelled spectators from the auditorium. Blasted opens with the one-room set typical of much realist drama. In an expensive hotel room in Leeds, the sexist and racist tabloid journalist Ian and his one-time girlfriend Cate – mentally delayed and prone to fits – engage in a vicious power struggle. When the characters awake the following morning, they find themselves in the midst of a war which destroys not only the hotel room but also all recognizable reality. Raped and blinded by a soldier, Ian dies, but his body continues to experience hunger. The play ends in a surreal space between life and death, where Cate feeds the undead Ian a sausage which she has obtained by prostituting herself to a soldier.

Though many reviewers associated the war in the play with the Bosnian war, which was still going on at the time of the play's first production, the shift from the realist setting of the first scene to the surreal space at the end also made them question this association. The lack of a clear frame of reference, they complained, rendered the violent scenes gratuitous. What did the play mean?[6] By 2001, when Blasted was revived, it had been redefined as a harbinger of a new theatrical sensibility, which critic Aleks Sierz suggestively named "in-yer-face" theatre.

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[5] See for instance, Amelia Jones's feminist critique of formalist visual art criticism in Amelia Jones, "The 'Sexual Politics' of The Dinner Party: A Critical Context," Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* in Feminist Art History, ed. Amelia Jones (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in association with the University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996) 87-88. See also Anthony G. Medici, "The Restless Ghost of New Criticism," rev. of The New Criticism and Contemporary Literary Theory: Connections and Continuities, eds. William J. Spurlin and Michael Fisher, Style 31.4 (1997): 760-73; and Karen O'Kane, "Before the New Criticism: Modernism and the Nashville Group," Mississippi Quarterly 51.4 (1998): 683-97.

[6] Mike Ellison and Alex Bellos, "Blasted: a Deeply Moral and Compassionate Piece of Theatre or Simply a Disgusting Feast of Filth," rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Guardian 22 Jan. 1995: 22; Charles Spencer, "Awful Shock," rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Daily Telegraph 20 Jan. 1995: n. pag.; and Paul Taylor, "Courting Disaster," rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Independent 20 Jan. 1995: 27.

Reviewers Michael Billington and Paul Taylor, who had vociferously rejected the first

production, still disliked the violent imagery and found it lacking structure, but had come to appreciate the play's "unflinching, uncompromising power," gallows humor, bold experimentation with the theatrical conventions,[7] and its "strange element of hope."[8]

The major factor accounting for the reviewers' turnabout seems to have been the intervention of acclaimed playwrights Caryl Churchill, David Edgar, and Edward Bond, who saw the play as hopeful and redemptive and praised Kane's masterfully-frugal writing.[9] Prompted by their authoritative defense, theatre journalists remembered numerous episodes in British theatre history in which artists confronted spectators with representations of extreme violence. Blasted and the host of violent plays that shortly followed its first production were compared to Jacobean drama and to plays from the second half of the twentieth century, such as John Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956), Edward Bond's Saved (1968), and Howard Brenton's Romans in Britain (1980).[10] Initially, these plays put their spectators' sense of propriety to a severe test, yet they were admitted to the dramatic canon. Seen in these terms, Blasted became comfortingly familiar. Nonetheless, many remained convinced that the play offered no clear referential connection between the fictional reality it depicted and spectators' extra-theatrical realities; hence, Kane's angry protest against sexism and racism could not transform into actual social critique.[11]

My own reading of the ambiguous referential connection between the fictional and extra-theatrical realities in Blasted is informed by reviewer Sarah Hemming's intriguing stance on this

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[7] Charles Spencer, "Admirably Repulsive," rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Daily Telegraph 5 April 2001: 24.
[8] Michael Billington, rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Guardian 5 April 2001: 16.
[9] See Carole Woddis, "Taking a Blasting," rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Herald, 24 Jan. 1995: 20; and Katie Watson-Smyth, "Tutor Steps In as 'Powerful' Play is Blasted by Critics," rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Birmingham Post 21 Jan. 1995: n. pag.
[10] Sierz, In-Yer-Face Theatre, 3-35.
[11] Daldry, interview with Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, 9; Urban, 363.

issue. Though Hemming supports the view that Blasted did not accomplish its critical objectives, she also proposes that Kane "neither glamorizes violence, nor renders it acceptable by placing it in its context; in fact her play is a bold attempt to deal with it neat."[12] From a historicist perspective, Hemming's suggestion that contextualization may normalize violence, rather than grant insight into its causes, is counterintuitive. However, considered in view of Baudrillard's critique of the mass media's control over the production of reality, her suggestion becomes more compelling. If we accept Baudrillard's contention that the public perceives as events only those occurrences whose representation complies with the mass media's conventions,[13] then the mass media also crucially influence our understanding of context (as a relationship between events). Like Hemming, then, I read the lack of a clear frame of reference in the play as integral to Kane's engagement with violence, particularly her exposure of the mass media's complicity with sexism and racism.

In an interview in which Kane addressed reviewers' responses, she established a complex relationship between Blasted and the media, and situated this relationship in the context of the Bosnian crisis. Implicitly, this interview also presents the play's conception as an act of feminist spectatorship.

> I wanted to write a play about a man and a woman in a hotel room, and … a complete power imbalance which resulted in a rape. I'd been doing it for a few days and I switched on the news one night… and there was a very old woman's face in Srebrenica just weeping and looking into the camera and saying – please, please, somebody help us' … I thought this is absolutely terrible and I am writing this ridiculous play about two people in a room…. So I thought, 'What could possibly be the connection between a common

[12] Sarah Hemming, "Blasted by Violence," rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Financial Times 23 Jan. 1995, 15.
[13] Baudrillard, 81-82.

> rape in a Leeds hotel room and what's happening in Bosnia?' … 'one is the seed and the other is the tree.'… the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peace-time civilization.[14]

Viewed as a young woman's response to an old woman's plea, the act of writing Blasted, I contend, is a feminist act of witnessing, regardless of Kane's reluctance to be described as a feminist or even a woman writer. Kane's insistence on the connection between sexual violence ("a common rape in Leeds") and war reinforces the feminist politics of this act. Television enables her response to the woman from Srebrenica; yet the play departs from television's documentary, context-specific mode of representation, implying doubts about the medium's capacity to respond effectively to the woman's suffering. Instead, Kane strategically provides specific references (to the place of action, the characters' ethnicity, and their age) at certain points in the script and withdraws such references at other points, challenging the common-sense assumption that the mass media's contextual specificity implies objectivity, especially where the represented subject is a cultural other. The live embodiment of suffering on stage questions the capacity of the televised image to convey the terror of war.

Kane reserves referential specificity for the British characters of Blasted and for the first two scenes, which are realistically rendered. The stage directions in the script specify that Ian is forty-five, Welsh-born, but speaks with a Leeds accent, because he has lived in Leeds for a long time. Cate is twenty-one, speaks with a lower-class South London accent, and stutters when under pressure.[15] Kane insisted that the casting should realistically represent the age difference

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[14] qtd. in Graham Saunders, "'Out Vile Jelly:' Sarah Kane's 'Blasted' and Shakespeare's 'King Lear,'" New Theatre Quarterly 20.1 (2004): 71.
[15] Sarah Kane, Blasted, in Complete Plays (London: Methuen Drama, 2001) 3.

between the two characters.[16] The script also says the first scenes take place in a hotel in

Leeds, "but so expensive that it could be anywhere in the world."[17] This ambiguous description anticipates the script's departure from realism to an allegory larger than life by the end of the play; however, Ian's derisive comments about "Pakis" and "wogs" and Cate and Ian's conversations about a soccer match between Manchester United and Liverpool locate these scenes in Britain. There is no doubt, then, that the violence that these scenes portray, culminating in Ian's rape of an unconscious Cate during one of her seizures, is set in Britain.

At the end of the second scene, the chamber-drama scenario falls apart, as Ian and Cate become aware of the war that has been raging outside. Cate runs away from Ian, leaving through the bathroom window; a soldier, searching for food, breaks into the room. In a disconcerting exchange, the soldier alternately eats, threatens Ian, and tells him about his girlfriend who has been raped, blinded, and killed by the enemy. The room is then destroyed by a bomb explosion.

Unlike Cate and Ian, the Soldier's identity is unspecified. The script prescribes no accent or nationality to him, and none of the reviews I could find describes him in ethnic or national terms. We only know that he is foreign because he tells Ian that he has never heard of Wales.[18] What does this different approach to the characters imply? In an early draft, Kane makes explicit references to the ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia. The soldier, who is called Vladek (a Slavic name), asks Ian: "English shit. Why did you recognize Croatia? ... This is a Serbian town now."[19] Defining the soldier as Serbian, however, could have easily reinforced the negative stereotypes about the Serbs that circulated in the mainstream British press when Kane was working on the play. An analysis of the coverage of the Bosnian crisis, published in the

[16] Graham Saunders, Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) 26.
[17] Blasted, ibid.
[18] Blasted, 41.
[19] qtd. in Saunders, Love Me or Kill Me, 53.

European Journal of Communications, states that the British mainstream press, including papers such as the Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, and The Independent, described NATO's involvement in the conflict in terms of "military humanism," intended to curb the Serbian "terror" against the "innocent" Bosnian population. At the same time, the press downplayed the victims that the Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian civilian populations suffered as a result of NATO's "peace bombs."[20] By making the Soldier generically foreign and the other two characters specifically British, Kane attempted to go beyond the familiar east-west pattern, whereby the west typically stands for allegedly universal democratic values, which the east fails to fulfill. By symbolically presenting war as the effect of a British man's violence against a young, mentally-disabled woman, she invited spectators to witness the "war" in their own cities.

I read the visceral images of violence in the play as another strategy of Kane's critique of the media: a controversial, yet idealistic attempt to make spectators experience the suffering of the *other*, not voyeuristically but as companions. When the Soldier learns that Ian is a journalist, the Soldier asks Ian to write about the atrocities that he (the Soldier) has committed. "At home, I am clean," the soldier says. "Like it never happened. Tell them you saw me." But to Ian the soldier's story is not newsworthy.

> **Ian** I do other stuff. Shootings and rapes and kids getting fiddled by queer priests and schoolteachers. Not soldiers screwing each other for a patch of land. It has to be … [original ellipsis] personal. Your girlfriend, she is a story. Soft and clean. Not you. Filthy like the wogs…. Why bring you to light?"[21]

Ian's rejection confronts spectators with Baudriallard's insight that, rather than *cover* events as they occur, the media in fact *produce* events out of certain occurrences only.[22] By contrasting the

[20] Stig A. Nohrstedt, Sophia Kaitatzi-Whitlock, Rune Ottosen and Kristina Riegert, "From the Persian Gulf to Kosovo – War Journalism and Propaganda." European Journal of Communication 15.3 (2000): 383-404.
[21] Blasted, 48.

soldier's girlfriend's "newsworthy" suffering with the soldier's "uninteresting" acts of

violence, the passage makes explicit the gender politics underlying the media's construction of reality. To draw attention to the material consequences of this inevitably selective process, Kane juxtaposes Ian's media stories with the phenomenological reality of his suffering body. Failing to make Ian tell his story, the soldier rapes him, then sucks his eyes out and eats them. Ian pays with his masculinity for his refusal to witness. Meanwhile, the soldier cannot stop crying for his girlfriend.

Kane's stance on the relationship between violence and gender is conventional: aggression in Blasted is marked as masculine, while care and tolerance are feminine attributes. Yet the conversation about "Pakis" and "wogs" draws attention to the whiteness of Ian's body. Ian's failure to seduce Cate and his sickness suggest that his body is physically imperfect. Finally, the scene in which the Soldier rapes Ian presents Ian's body as physically vulnerable and feminizes it. Hence, Ian's body strikingly diverges from the normative construct of the western male body as abstract and universal. Even before the Soldier rapes Ian, depriving his body of the normative symbolic status attached to western masculinity, Ian fails to accede to this status, as in the following exchange with Cate early in the play.

Ian Don't like your clothes.

Cate (*Looks down at her clothes.*)

Ian You look like a lesbos.

Cate What's that?

Ian Don't look very attractive, that's all.

Cate Oh. (*She continues to eat.*) Don't like your clothes either.

Ian (*Looks down at his clothes. Then gets up, takes them all off and stands in front*

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[22] Baudrillard, 81-82.

of her, naked.) Put your mouth on me.

Cate (*Stares. Then bursts out laughing.*)

Ian No? Fine. Because I stink?

Cate (*Laughs even more.*)

Ian *attempts to dress, but fumbles with embarrassment. He gathers his clothes and goes into the bathroom where he dresses.*

Cate *eats, and giggles over the sandwiches.*[23]

In a comic reversal of Laura Mulvey's well-known scenario, masculinity rather than femininity becomes the object of the spectator's gaze. Likewise, the Soldier rapes Ian on stage, in full view of the audience. Cate, by contrast, is never subject to such utter exposure. In fact, Kane harshly critiqued the Hamburg production of Blasted for exposing Cate naked on stage after Ian raped her.[24] By placing the ravished, white, male, western body in the spotlight, Kane demonstrated her awareness of representational hierarchies, just as she did when she chose not to present the soldier as specifically Serbian (as in the earlier script) at a time when a Serbian character could have easily evoked negative connotations among British spectators.

The shift from a realist to non-realist narrative in the script, too, is inseparable from Kane's engagement with representational politics. It is also inherent to the connection that she sees between "a rape in Leeds" and "a war in Bosnia," as this symbolic connection exceeds the historical causality which realist narratives try to reproduce mimetically. While reviewers of the first production described this shift as abrupt and, hence, meaningless, the script starts preparing the reader for the shift long before it happens. Scene one, in which Ian harasses Cate in the hotel room, supposedly transpires in one day. Scene two, in which the Soldier breaks in, starts "very

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[23] Kane, Blasted, 7-8.
[24] Saunders, Love Me or Kill Me, 138.

early the following morning”[25] and also seems to transpire in one day. Yet scene one ends

with “the sound of spring rain,” while scene two ends with “the sound of summer rain.”[26] An entire season has elapsed. Likewise, scene three, in which the soldier rapes and blinds Ian, ends with autumn rain, and scene four, in which Cate comes back carrying an unknown woman’s baby, ends with winter rain. The seemingly realist events are proceeding in a non-realist time frame, of which the characters seem to be unaware. As I will demonstrate, the production was not successful at conveying this divergence from the realist mise-en-scène until the scene where the dead Ian was suddenly reanimated. Pointing out the citation of tragic conventions in the play – Ian’s blinding and his liminal, undead state in the last scene – Sean Carney describes this non-realist time frame as tragic.[27] Additionally, Kane implicitly marks this time frame as feminine.

Ian’s “awakening” in a state between life and death in the last scene has been ironically prefigured in the first scene where Cate talks about her fits, having just recovered from one:

> **Ian** Thought you were dead.
>
> **Cate** [I] Suppose that’s what it’s like.
>
> **Ian** Don’t do it again, fucking scared me.
>
> **Cate** Don’t know much about it, I just go. Feels like I’m away for minutes or months sometimes, then I come back just where I was…
>
> **Ian** Can’t stand it.
>
> **Cate** What?
>
> **Ian** Death. Not being.
>
> **Cate** You fall asleep and then you wake up.[28]

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[25] Blasted, 24.
[26] Blasted, 24, 39.
[27] Sean Carney, “The Tragedy of History in Sarah Kane’s Blasted,” Theatre Survey 46.2 (2005): 275-296.
[28] Blasted, 10.

In the last scene, Ian "awakes" in the surreal space of Cate's fits, where all referential

connections with a social reality are broken. In this "other" space, he remains reduced to a pitiful state – blind, stuck between the floorboards of the destroyed hotel room, and between death and life. His body continues to have a life of its own: to get hungry and to defecate. Cate feeds Ian the leftovers of her meal, which she has obtained by selling herself to another soldier. Ian's words "Thank you" conclude the play.

Kane constructs an implicit opposition between the mass media as a masculine, linear discourse and theatre as a non-linear, feminine discursive space. To the extent that the tension between the two discourses parallels the tension between the realist and the non-realist narrative strategies in the scripts, these strategies, too, appear to be marked as masculine and feminine respectively. Hence, Kane's work with these strategies links together her critiques of the mass media, especially the mass media's representation of cultural others, and of male violence against women. In view of this interpretation, Kane's stance on realism in Blasted is cultural feminist and so, like her stance on gender and violence, more conservative than the feminist materialist readings of realism. Though materialist feminists, such as Patricia Schroeder, acknowledge the historical connection between realism and a masculine, western liberal philosophy of individualism, they assert that realist narrative conventions can be used without necessarily reproducing this philosophy. The cultural feminist position, by contrast, sees the connection between realism and masculine liberalism as insuperable.[29] Regardless of Kane's conservatism, however, the brief analysis of the intersections between violence, gender, ethnicity, and media representation in the script demonstrates that Kane does in fact provide ideological and moral signposts for evaluating the violence in the play. Ironically, her advocacy for the

[29] See Schroeder, 22, 39-43.

victims of violence failed to come across in performance. Like her character, the tabloid

journalist, Kane was accused of pursuing sensationalism.

How is this discrepancy to be understood? Reviewers perceived the shift from realist to a non-realist narrative as abrupt, even though, as I demonstrated, the script systematically prepares readers for this shift. The reasons for this discrepancy should be looked for in the choices of the mise-en-scène. The changing journalistic reception of the play between the first production and the revival indicates that failure to grasp the significance of this shift and the specific staging of the suffering body, so important to Kane's critique of representational politics, were the major reasons why this critique was obscured in the first production. Arguably, the revival handled these issues better.

Billington and Sierz, two of the reviewers who berated the first production and praised the revival, attributed the revival's alleged success to the change of venue. The first production was staged at the Theatre Upstairs, the small studio space of the Royal Court Theatre. Theatre scholar Tracy Davis, who saw the 1995 production, said that the proximity between performers and spectators made the violent imagery overwhelming, even though this same proximity made the stage technology visible and divested the imagery of naturalism.[30] The second production, by contrast, was staged in the Royal Court's much larger proscenium venue. In Billington's view, the proscenium helped distance and frame the play, "so that it became possible to understand it without being offended and shocked by it."[31] Sierz agreed that the proscenium stage "ennobled the play" and "gave it greater depth and weight." Yet he did not think that the bigger distance between spectators and performers made the violence less shocking.[32] Similarly, reviewer Alistair Macauley reported that spectators of the revival left in droves, just as spectators did

[30] Tracy Davis, Conversation with author, October 2006.
[31] Michael Billington, interview with Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, British Theatre of the 1990s, 118-19.
[32] Aleks Sierz, interview with Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, British Theatre of the 1990s, 149-50.

when the play was first staged.[33] It is difficult to evaluate the effect of the proscenium based
on these opinions. If, as Sierz and Macauly testify, the revival was as shocking as the first production, was Billington able to understand the play better because of the proscenium? Or had his opinion changed because he had already read the script and seen plenty of shocking plays between 1995 and 2001? Perhaps he had also accepted the argument that violence in Blasted could be socially critical just as in Osborne, Bond, and Brenton. Finally, if the violence in the first production was overwhelming despite the visibility of the stage mechanisms, as Davis says, what exactly made it overwhelming?

Kane was surprised that the violent scenes were taken so literally. In an interview, she admitted that violence was purposefully shown as disgusting because she wanted to divest it of glamour. At the same time, she had thought that the tension between the realist and the non-naturalistic aspects of the mise-en-scène would have shown the violent scenes as theatrical, not realist.[34] It seems, however, that the production did not manage to convey this tension. Many reviews mention the rain falling between scenes and its increasing intensity, but do not associate it with a change of seasons. Most reviewers appear to have become aware of the play's departure from realism only in the last scene, when Ian, who has been dead for some time, suddenly revives, and the realist frame finally collapses entirely.

Rather than critically distance the audience, this scene provoked much confusion. The reason, I think, is that Ian's body – hungry and defecating – continued to behave and was treated by Cate just like a realist body, even as it was stuck in the floorboards, leaving spectators wondering how to react. Their response to an earlier scene in which Ian eats a dead baby seems

[33] Alastair Macauley, "Still Shocking after all this Years," rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Financial Times 17 May 2001: 18.
[34] Kane, interview with David Benedict, "Disgusting Violence? Actually, it's quite a Peaceful Play," Independent 22 Jan. 1995: 3.

to have been similarly dubious. Kane acknowledged that spectators' confusion astonished

her. The baby was represented by a roast chicken. "When you see it," Kane said, "he's clearly not eating the baby… This is a theatrical image."[35] In live performance, however, it is difficult to sustain the difference between a theatrical and a literal body when violence or eating is involved. As Staton Garner writes:

> Unlike the represented body in film, the body's living presence on stage asserts a physiological irreducibility that challenges the stability (and the separability) of representational levels. If the actor's body endows [the character] with its own mortality and a surrogate physicality, the character's suffering returns to charge the actor's body with physical and emotional duress; both fuse in a moment of suffering that is, like all simulation, both fictional and actual.[36]

Eating on stage similarly confounds the real and fictional on stage, when real food is used to represent food.

By the time James Macdonald directed Kane's third play Cleansed (1998), he and Kane had a new understanding of staging violence. In Cleansed, the entire mise-en-scène was highly-stylized and decidedly non-naturalistic. Streaming red ribbons stood for blood, as in Peking opera. When Grace, one of the characters, was severely beaten, the attackers remained unseen and only her body movements suggested that she was being hit. In a love scene, a sunflower suddenly grew onstage, and reviewers noted "a dream-like quality… which [was] absent in Blasted." In retrospect, Macdonald said that he would have directed Blasted differently.[37] In

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[35] Kane, interview with David Benedict.

[36] Stanton B. Garner, Jr., Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994) 44-45.

[37] James Christopher, "Rat with Hand Exits Stage Left," rev. of Cleansed, by Sarah Kane, Independent 6 May 1998: 6, 7.

other words, Macdonald suggested that the violent scenes in Cleansed were better mediated
aesthetically.

It is unclear, however, whether the infelicitous staging of the suffering body in Blasted and the failure to convey the tension between the realist and non-realist elements were indeed the reasons why Kane's moral and ideological critique became obscured. The evidence from the reviews is inconclusive because not all theatre journalists responded to the first production negatively. Patricia Holland, for instance, appreciated Kane's exposure of the connections between gender and violence and proposed that the real reason behind male critics' indignation may have been not so much the violent content as the fact that the playwright was a woman. Comparing stories on war and violence by male and female journalists, Holland argues that women are frequently characters of violent stories but rarely their writers. The idea that a woman can write about violence "does not sit easily with conventions of femininity."[38] John Peter reminded readers that many masterpieces of western theatre had at first appeared shocking to spectators, and that shock may tell more about spectators' rigidity rather than a play's quality.[39] Both he and Ruth James insisted that Blasted accurately described social violence, and that thoughtlessly condemning the play could contribute to the further trivialization of social ills.[40] Billington's and Sierz's change of heart confirm the major argument of Kane's defenders: that the play's effects depended not only on the formal elements of the mise-en-scène but also on expectations that spectators brought to the performance.

While the majority of the negative responses demanded that Kane should provide more context and complained that the succession of events in the play was not logically motivated, two reviewers indicated the theatrical traditions that motivated these demands. Jon Preece, an

[38] Patricia Holland, rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Independent 27 Jan. 1995: 25.
[39] John Peter, "Alive When Kicking," rev. of Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Sunday Times 29 Jan. 1995: 21.
[40] Ruth James, "Sex, Lies, and Tabloid Tales: Blasted by Sarah Kane," Socialist Review March 1995: n. pag.

aspiring screenwriter, commented on the 2001 production, comparing it to political theatre influenced by Brecht: "Blasted is a terrible play, no story … motiveless characters … British theatre groups 7:84 and Red Ladder … attracted and won audiences with vigorous and rewarding drama instead of browning off the very people who came to support them."[41] In a review entitled Killer Thriller Shows Blasted How to Do It, Jack Tinker compared Kane's play with Tracy Lett's Killer Joe, which ran at the Bush Theatre at the same time that Blasted ran at The Royal Court. Letts, Tinker writes, "focuses on … a specific and recognizable breed – the poor whites of America… and ruthlessly exploits it… [The play's] shocks and horrors spring legitimately from the characters, their background and their motivation… Ms. Kane, on the other hand, offers… scarcely a clue as to why her characters should behave as they do."[42] Preece conflates Brechtian theatre with social commentary and disregards the variety of theatrical approaches which 7:84 and Red Ladder have used to engage in social critique. Tinker's review, on the other hand, demonstrates the cultural bias in favor of realism. This bias has made various feminist critics treat realist theatre with suspicion and, according to Schroeder, sometimes hastily reject realism as inherently masculine.[43] Ian, the tabloid journalist and sexual predator, is a recognizable type, just like the stereotypical "poor whites of America." Perhaps, however, it is illogical for Tinker

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[41] Jon Preece, "Wretched," letter about Blasted, by Sarah Kane, Independent on Sunday 8 April 2001: 27. For evidence of Preece's screenwriting ambitions, see http://www.finaldraft.com/events-and-services/big-break/. The left-wing theatre company 7:84 was founded by playwright John McGrath in 1971 and presented throughout the UK. The name comes from a statistic published in The Economist in 1966, which stated that 7% of the population of Great Britain owned 84% of the country's wealth. In 1973, 7:84 split into two companies, one based in England, the other in Scotland. The English group closed in 1985, having lost its grant from The Art Council of Great Britain. The Scottish group continues its work to date. See Maria DiCenzo, The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain, 1968-1990: The Case of 7:84 (Scotland) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 81-85; and "7:84 Theatre Company Scotland," 6 Nov. 2007 <http://www.784theatre.com/>. Red Ladder, originally known as The Agitprop Street Players, was founded in 1968 in London. In 1976, the company moved to Leeds where it is still based at present. In the 1970s, the artists staged numerous plays on topical social issues, and devoted much effort to promoting the work of feminist socialist playwrights. During that decade, their target audiences included the working-class communities of Northern England and Scotland. In the 1980s, Red Ladder shifted their focus to youth audiences, though staging works by female playwrights still remains a priority. "The Changing Shapes of Red Ladder," 6 Nov. 2007 <http://www.redladder.co.uk/pdfs/CHANGING%20SHAPES%20_%20History.pdf.>
[42] Jack Tinker, "Killer Thriller Shows Blasted How to Do It," Daily Mail 27 Jan. 1995: 47.
[43] Schroeder, 20.

that a middle-class British character can be a rapist. Even more troubling is the assumption, underlying Tinker's comment, that poor white Americans are a homogenous group and that identity predetermines behavior.

Both the social realist and the Brechtian apporaches try to construct explicit parallels between the theatrical performances and the extra-theatrical social reality of their target spectators. The implicit hope informing these approaches is that, by comparing the two realities, the spectators will recognize the wrongs in their everyday lives and, perhaps, make efforts to correct them. Yet, as feminist critics have noted on numerous occasions, realism and Brechtian theatre (at least in their master versions) often fail to account for the fact that perceptions of extra-theatrical reality are constructed, and that these constructs are informed by gender, racial, and sexual norms.[44] Hence, when realist and Brechtian theatre aim to "correct" social norms, they are not always aware that the "correction" may reassert and naturalize a dominant concept of reality. The script of Blasted, by contrast, does not simply represent unpleasant aspects of British reality. Rather, the play attempts to stage the differences between the average spectators' presumably secure reality, on the one hand, and that of a mentally delayed female victim of abuse and of a character who has partaken in the horrors of war, on the other. These realities meet and clash but do not translate absolutely in one another's terms.

Staging the failure of communication between dominant and minority realities may appear *a priori* counterproductive to those feminists who equate the recognition of social difference with freedom of expression. Yet others have cautioned that freedom of expression may become counterproductive if it means translating the *other's* difference in the terms of the dominant culture without examining those terms. Thus literary scholar Shoshana Felman and psychiatrist Dori Laub, who study testimonies of Holocaust survivors and literary narratives

[44] Schroeder, 26; Diamond, 44-45.

describing wars, deadly epidemics, or other calamities, suggest that, to understand the stance
of the survivor, a listener who does not share the survivor's liminal experience needs to suspend his or her own paradigms of knowledge. In the act of communication, the established conventions of representation get reformulated so that they can integrate the liminality of the speaker's experience.[45] Judith Butler similarly contends that the tension between dominant and alternative paradigms of knowledge is more productive than their teleological fusion, as this tension illuminates blind spots in both paradigms.[46]

I see the tension between realist and tragic elements in Blasted as integral to an attempt to examine conservative notions of British identity and masculinity. Stretching and violating the conventions of realism, the script tries to convey the characters' varying lived realities. The play's dystopian ending situates middle-class Ian within such a different reality. Yet this tension was not optimally set up in the performance, and so many spectators, including Preece and Tinker, remained unaware of Kane's social critique.

Preece's critique of Blasted as "unbrechtian" also demonstrates the danger of uncritically applying old paradigms to new representational methods; despite her departure from the relationship between reality and fiction familiar from Brechtian epic theatre, Kane explicitly mentioned Brecht as one of the influences on the play. Graham Saunders found this statement perplexing, and guessed that Kane may have been referring to the structure of scene four where Ian, raped and blinded, agonizes in a series of tableaux.[47]

Darkness.

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[45] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Testimony : Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (New York: Routledge, 1992) 5.
[46] Judith Butler, "Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism," Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, 20-21.
[47] Saunders, Love Me or Kill Me, 62. Other major influences on Blasted, discussed by critics in addition to Look Back in Anger, Saved, and Romans in Britain, include Shakespeare's King Lear, Edward Bond's Lear, Beckett's Happy Day, and Sophocles's Oedipus King. See, Sanders, "'Out Vile Jelly:' Sarah Kane's 'Blasted' and Shakespeare's 'King Lear,'" 69-78; Carney, "The Tragedy of History in Sarah Kane's Blasted," 275-96.

Light.

Ian *masturbating…*

Darkness.

Light.

Ian *strangling himself….*

Darkness.

Light.

Ian *crying huge bloody tears…*[48]

Saunders associates these tableaux with Brechtian episodes. However, in contrast to the episodes of Brecht's epic plays, conceived as snapshots of social-economic relations, the tableaux in Blasted convey the collapse of known reality in the chaos of war.

The Brechtian play that is most likely to have influenced Blasted is, in my view, Baal (1923), which Brecht wrote prior to his Marxist, epic period. The infamous poet Baal breaks every bourgeois rule, causing the death of his closest friend and his closest friend's fiancée, until he is abandoned to die in an abject state: a predicament which he accepts with joy. Critics have read the play's defense of anti-social behavior as integral to the revolt against romanticism in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century, when Freudian psychoanalysis and Einstein's theory of relativity contested the enlightenment belief in the power of reason.[49] According to Ronald Speirs, the material social disintegration caused by World War I, still palpable when Baal

[48] Kane, Blasted, 59-60.
[49] Hans-Joachim Hahn, "From Individual to Ideology: The Crisis of Identity at the Turn of the Century," New German Studies 17.1 (1992-1993): 2.

was written, provided direct evidence for the unreliability of human reason.[50] Aesthetic withdrawal was a common response.[51] Marxist theory allows Brecht to reclaim the rational subject and to justify the utility of social intervention in his later work. Baal, however, simply opts out of an antisocial society. In Speirs's reading, the play tries to "envisage a life lived positively without the prop of faith or an ideal."[52]

It is not difficult to draw parallels between the intellectual and social contexts in which Baal and Blasted were written, as well as between their aesthetics and their dramatized scenarios. At the close of the twenty-first century, the crisis of enlightenment rationality deepened, as feminist and postcolonial scholars questioned its gender and racial politics. Outbursts of racist, sexist, and homophobic violence, still common in western democracies, caused many to doubt the power of reason. Aesthetically, too, the surreal, asocial space at the end of Blasted, where the broken Ian thanks Cate for her care, is reminiscent of Baal's last scene in which the protagonist happily contemplates the decay of his body in complete isolation from society. Additionally, Baal has an episodic structure which, like the scene of Ian's delirium, conveys the fragmentation of social reality. By contrast, in Brecht's later plays, episodes are organized around specific social relations. Ethically, however, Blasted is less scandalous than Baal, focusing on the plight of the male characters' victim and portraying his punishment and misery.

The confusion that Kane caused by declaring Brecht an influence on Blasted is indicative of a rather narrow notion of what constitutes Brecht's radicalism, limited to his Marxist work. Moreover, by dismissing Blasted for falling short of the standards of Brechtian (Marxist) theatre or social realism, Preece and Tinker represent these two methods not as tools for social critique,

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[50] Ronald Speirs, "Baal," Critical Essays on Bertolt Brecht, ed. Siegfried Mews (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1989) 19.
[51] Hahn, 3, 12; Tony Meech, "Brecht's Early Plays," The Cambridge Companion to Brecht, eds. Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 47.
[52] Speirs, 19.

but as the legitimating features of socially-sensitive theatre. By not even admitting the

possibility that Blasted, successfully or not, may be trying to come up with a third method, they contribute to the containment of expression under a singular code, which Baudrillard theorizes as central to simulation, and which underlies some feminists' (and my own) continuing distrust of realism and epic theatre. Responses to Kane's confusing representational approach, whatever its failures, effectively demonstrated how the allegedly critical conventions of realism and Brechtian theatre may be used counter-critically. Reviewers' responses to Parks's play Topdog provide another example of such counter-critical use.

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A comparison of reviewers' responses to Suzan-Lori Parks's Venus (1996) and her play Topdog/Underdog (2001) reveals a shift of opinions as intriguing as reviewers' turnabout between the premiere and the revival of Blasted. Parks's refusal to create a straightforwardly-positive image of the Hottentot Venus – a character loosely based on Saartje Baartman, a black African woman who was exposed as a curiosity at European fairs in the early nineteenth century – and the production's experimental mise-en-scène offended some African American critics, who accused Parks of repeating racist stereotypes, trying to appeal to a white audience, and to fit in a white avant-garde tradition.[53] The characters of Topdog/Underdog, underclass black brothers Lincoln and Booth, are based on racial stereotypes. Lincoln, a reformed hustler, works at an amusement park where he impersonates his namesake Abraham Lincoln for the fun-seeking visitors. Booth, an accomplished shoplifter, does not even think of getting a job. In their childhood, the brothers were abandoned by their irresponsible parents. Finally, Booth shoots Lincoln dead in their dingy one-room apartment, where porn magazines protrude from under the bed. This stereotypical portrayal remained largely unnoticed by reviewers. Instead, with few

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[53] I discuss the critical reception of Venus in detail in my next chapter.

exceptions, they focused on Parks's unexpected use of realist techniques, after she had vociferously defied realist drama for years, even as several reviewers found the ending – Booth shooting Lincoln dead – unmotivated and therefore unrealistic.[54]

Parks's engagement with realism in Topdog/Underdog situates the play within the ongoing debates over power and representation which have preoccupied African American practitioners and scholars for several decades. As in feminist theatre practice and scholarship, the decision to use realist conventions has entailed a choice between realism's accessibility to American audiences, on the one hand, and, on the other, the fear that realism perpetuates a white, masculinist ideology of individualism. In African American theatre history, both positions have enlisted authoritative defenders. While Alain Locke, Angelina Grimke, Lorraine Hansberry, and August Wilson saw realism as a tool to dismantle racial stereotypes, W.E.B. Du Bois and Amiri Baraka found it inadequate for their revolutionary agendas.[55]

Parks's work does not fit easily into either camp. In the 1990s, she declared that realism could not adequately represent the themes of her plays. Accordingly, she defines her dramatic personae as figures rather than as realist characters. In her essay "from Elements of Style," she describes the figure metaphorically, as someone who is "always alone," and who "will almost always take up residence in a corner."[56] I read this unusual formulation as a comment on African Americans' marginal social and symbolic status, which Parks attributes not only to the daily

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[54] Don Shewey, "This Time the Shock is her Turn toward Naturalism," rev. of Topdog/Underdog, by Susan-Lori Parks, at the Ambassador Theatre, New York Times 22 July 2001, sec. 2: 4; Tobby Young, "Charm Deficit," rev. of Topdog/Underdog, by Susan-Lori Parks, at the Royal Court, Spectator 30 August 2003: n. pag.; Robert Brustein, "On Theatre – A Homebody Godot," rev. of Topdog/Underdog, by Susan-Lori Parks, at the Ambassador Theatre, New Republic 13 May 2002, p. 25; Margo Jefferson, "The Feel of Real Life Working its Magic," rev. of Topdog/Underdog, by Susan-Lori Parks, at the Ambassador Theatre, New York Times 21 April 2002, sec. 2: 9.

[55] See Eric Bergsen and William W. Demastes, "The Limits of African-American Political Realism: Baraka's *Dutchman* and Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*," Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition, ed. William W. Demastes (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1996) 218-222.

[56] See Suzan-Lori Parks, "from Elements of Style," The America Play and Other Works (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995) 8, 12.

practices of social stereotyping, but also to their exclusion from America's grand narratives.
These narratives, she claims, have placed African Americans in the position of a "fabricated absence;"[57] in other words, they have not been presented as history's active agents. Elsewhere, she has also said that even at the turn of the twenty-first century, African Americans are not considered individuals in the western liberal sense of the term, but are viewed as social types. Every black person is taken to stand for the entire race, and so "[t]hese are epic stakes."[58]

Parks's plays do not partake in the heroic grandeur of classic epic narratives such as The Iliad or Beowulf. Instead, she tells stories about slavery, lynching, and contemporary racism and sexism, exposing the violence that performance scholars Paul Gilroy and Harry Elam have described as the racist (and sexist) underside of western modernism.[59] Like epic heroes, the figures are larger than life. But while the classic epic hero (typically male) is the unquestionable representative of his community's values and dilemmas, Park's underclass dramatic personae are either negative social stereotypes or fail to be representative Americans because of their color. Hence, Parks's dramatic narratives may be seen as an ironic inversion of the classic definition of the epic.[60]

By contrasting the figures with realist characters, Parks also draws attention to the racial bias in the conceptualization of the liberal individual, the realist character's social referent. As a symbolic and as a social position, the (implicitly masculine) liberal individual is defined by his

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[57] Suzan-Lori Parks and Liz Diamond, interview with Steve Drukman, "Doo-a-diddly-dit-dit," The Drama Review 39.3 (1995): 67.
[58] Quoted in Jeannette R. Malkin, Memory Theatre and Post-Modern Drama (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) 156.
[59] Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 9; Harry J. Elam, Jr., "August Wilson, Doubling, Madness, and Modern African-American Drama," Modern Drama: Defining the Field, eds. Rick Knowles, Joanne Tompkins, and William B. Worthen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) 175.
[60] Works from varying historical periods and diverse artistic approaches have been defined as epic because they were felt to surpass the dimensions of realism and to undertake themes of historic magnitude. Epic characters represent social types and moral allegories. See Paul Merchant, The Epic (London: Methuen, 1986) 1.

ownership of his own body and the exercise of logical reasoning. According to Gilroy, being

a liberal individual is also contingent upon being "rooted" in a nation – a place which is simultaneously actual and imagined.[61] Parks's figures, on the other hand, are defined by the loss of ownership of their bodies and the loss of their mythical African origins. In her early play Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom (1989), the dystopic journey of the Middle Passage becomes the historical and symbolic referent for the dramatis personae's African American identity. "There are 2 cliffs. 2 cliffs where the Word was cleaved," a character named the Over-Seer says. "Half the Word has fallen away making 2 words and a space between. Those 2 words inscribe the Third Kingdom."[62] Alternately, in The America Play, Parks indicates the figures' marginal status by describing them as suspended between life and death. "Little Bram Prince Junior… Ten days wept over and buried and that boy comes back… Sits down tuh dinner and eats up everybody's food like he did when he was living."[63] Despite her thematic focus on race, however, Parks has been adamant that her work should not be categorized as black drama: a category which, according to Parks, assumes a narrow and prescriptive understanding of black aesthetics.[64] As a result, her experiments with form have provoked both appreciation and hostility.

In view of this conflicted history, it is unfortunate that reviews of Topdog focused on the aesthetic implications of Parks's use of realist elements but neglected its politics. In the only full-length scholarly article on the play to-date, Verna Foster defines Topdog as an experiment with realism. Referring implicitly to the feminist and critical-race debates, she argues that realism can

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[61] Gilroy, 19-20.
[62] Parks, Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom, in The America Play and Other Works, 55-56.
[63] Parks, The America Play, in The America Play and Other Works, 175. Original spelling.
[64] Parks, "An Equation for Black People Onstage," The America Play and Other Works (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995) 21. Most recently, she had again defended her right to experiment in an essay for Theatre Journal's "Forum on Black Theatre." Parks writes: "A black play does not exists./ Every play is a black play." "Im saying The Glass Menagerie is a black play… Cause the presence of the white suggests the presence of the black." Parks, "New Black Math," Theatre Journal 57 (2005): 577, 580.

be just as metatheatrical as other representational modes.[65] These assertions are true in principle. They indirectly support Schroeder's critique of materialist feminists' rejections of theatrical realism as performatively reasserting a dominant, masculine perception of reality. The materialist feminist argument, Schroeder writes, "assumes that audiences remain naïve to the representational apparatuses of realism."[66] "Given the materialist feminist emphasis on material conditions and shifting identities," she continues, "I find this creation of an unthinking and undefined monolithic spectator a serious logical contradiction."[67] Finally, drawing on Butler's theory of performativity – the stylized and inevitably imperfect repetitions of social norms – Schroeder asserts that uses of realism may exceed the implicitly masculine liberal ideology to which realism is historically related.[68] I agree with these arguments and find that the narrative strategies in Topdog/Underdog's script support them. Parks' use of realist elements in the play bears affinity with her critical citation of historical narratives in her earlier plays. William Worthen has proposed that by "citing" such narratives, Parks simultaneously acknowledges and questions their authority.[69] Similarly, I suggest that by citing realism in Topdog, Parks simultaneously acknowledges realism's authority on the American stage and questions its racial politics. Yet reviewers' omission of the two brothers' stereotypical characterization implies that, whereas the materialist scholars whom Schroeder critiques may have overestimated realism's ability to normalize stereotype, this normalizing ability is not to be underestimated. Schroeder justly notes that whether a spectator will watch naively or critically depends not on narrative structures alone but also on the material conditions of viewing ("In what space is the play being

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[65] Verna Foster, "Suzan-Lori Parks's Staging of the Lincoln Myth in The America Play and Topdog/Underdog," The Journal of American Theatre and Drama 17.3 (2005): 29.
[66] Schroeder, 28.
[67] Schroeder, 30.
[68] Schroeder, 39-41, 32.
[69] William B. Worthen, "Citing History: Textuality and Performativity in the Plays of Suzan-Lori Parks," Essays in Theatre/ Études théâtrales 18.1 (1999): 6

presented? How did the audience arrive there? … How much do the tickets cost? Is the neighborhood safe?"[70]). Yet reviewers' responses to Topdog/Underdog reveal the difficulty of reading or seeing citations of realism *as citations*, given that realism is the dominant representational mode to which theatre spectators are routinely exposed through film and television. These responses also suggest the need to consider the ways in which conditions of production, such as artists' training (for instance, the predominantly naturalist training of actors and directors in the US), may in fact counter the deconstructive uses of realism available in a script. Verna Foster's otherwise astute analysis itself demonstrates the power of even surface realism, such as Parks's, to limit spectators' critical thinking. In her article, Foster proposes that "the domestic focus explains Parks's choice of realism,"[71] as though the connection between a domestic set and realism were natural rather than conventional. In the pages that follow, I discuss Parks's engagement with the racial and gender politics of the master model of western realist theatre in the play's script. Drawing on the New York and Chicago productions, I analyze the reasons why this insightful engagement did not come through in performance.

Though the script of Topdog neither explicitly recommends nor discourages realist staging, it is easy to read a realist intention in Parks's description of the setting. In a "seedily furnished" room, containing a bed, a reclining chair, and two milk crates serving as a table, Booth, "a black man in his early 30s, practices his 3-card monte scam." As he practices, Booth imagines a busy street, lures naïve passersby into the scam, and finally, still in his imagination, runs away with the money from the police.[72] What we are watching, then, is a rehearsal of the three-monte scam. The metatheatrical allusions are reinforced when Booth's elder brother Lincoln comes in, wearing the costume of an Abraham Lincoln impersonator: an antique frock

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[70] Schroeder, 30.
[71] Foster, ibid.
[72] Suzan-Lori Parks, Topdog/Underdog (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2001) 5-6.

coat, a top hat, and a fake beard.[73] Soon after, we learn that Lincoln has taken a job at an amusement park, where the fun-seeking visitors are offered the pleasure of "shooting" at the President with a fake gun.

Parks's return to the story of Abraham Lincoln's assassination, which she previously explored in The America Play (1990), immediately sets up a rivalry between the play's domestic setting, commonly associated with realist drama, and the larger, epic narrative of the Civil War, the end of slavery, and Reconstruction. Lincoln was shot on April 14, 1865, during a performance of Tom Taylor's comedy Our American Cousin at the Ford Theatre in Washington DC: an event which exposed the connection between racial politics and theatre quite literally. Halfway though Act III, while spectators were laughing raucously at the lines of the ill-mannered protagonist, John Wilkes Booth, an actor and a Southern supremacist, shot Abraham Lincoln, who was watching the play from a box. Booth was not in the cast of the play, but his knowledge of the theatre building and of the script helped him choose a propitious moment to shoot and escape. Spectators were so engrossed in the play that when Booth jumped from Lincoln's box onto the stage they did not immediately realize that he was not in the cast.[74] In Parks's work, the spectators' momentary confusion between reality and fiction becomes a metaphor for the commodification of history. Just as spectators mistook Booth for an actor, because his act seemed to fit into the story enacted on stage, so may Lincoln be mistaken for an enlightened emancipator despite his defense of white supremacy, because his role of emancipator fits into a wish-fulfilling historical scenario. The reference to Lincoln's assassination, then, inscribes Topdog in Parks's larger inquiry into the relationship between history, representation, and social

[73] Parks, Topdog/Underdog, 6.
[74] Timothy S. Good, ed., We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1995) 56.

agency. In the published script, she gestures towards this inquiry even before the first scene, by including a quote from Emerson's essay "Circles:" "I am God in Nature;/ I am a weed by the wall."

In "Circles," and in other essays of the first series,[75] Emerson develops his philosophy of "radical individualism."[76] In "Self-Reliance," he defines the quintessential American as a private individual whose "life is for itself and not for a spectacle."[77] The lines which Parks quotes from "Circles" belong to a passage decrying the consequences of the uncritical adherence to the past. The slavish imitation of old ideals, Emerson insists, stunts the individual's capacity for growth and aspiration.[78] To be true to one's nature, a person should always experiment, seeking for the truth "with no Past on [one's] back."[79] According to Robert Weisbusch, by elevating the experience of the private American individual against the history of the Old World, Emerson confronted the popular idea that American culture was only an imitation of the original European intellectual accomplishments.[80] Emerson's individual, then, is constitutively founded on the modernist hierarchical distinctions between a copy and an original and between privacy and spectacle, reminiscent of the antitheatrical discourse of eighteenth-century puritan America.[81] In Topdog, Parks suggests that these distinctions are also constitutive of racial difference.

The lives of the black brothers Lincoln and Booth are defined by imitation.

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[75] The essays of the first series were published between 1841 and 1844, and include "History," "Self-reliance," "Compensation," "Spiritual Laws," "Love," "Friendship," "Prudence," "Heroism," "The Over-Soul," "Circles," "Intellect," and "Art." See, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays (Boston: Munroe, 1844).
[76] Charles E. Mitchell, Individualism and its Discontents: Appropriations of Emerson 1880-1950 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997) 8.
[77] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," Nature and Selected Essays, ed. Larzer Ziff (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) 180, 189. See also Emerson, "Circles," Nature and Selected Essays, 225.
[78] "Every action admits of being undone," he writes. "There is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning." Emerson, "Circles," 229.
[79] Ibid., 236.
[80] Robert Weisbusch, "Postcolonial Emerson and the Erasure of Europe," The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson, eds. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 194, 208.
[81] The antitheatrical attitudes in eighteenth-century America are discussed in Christopher Bigsby and Don B. Wilmeth, introduction, The Cambridge History of American Theatre: Volume One: Beginnings to 1870, eds. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 1-19.

Lincoln's desire for safe and honest work has reduced the once perfectly self-reliant hustler to an imitator of his glorified namesake. As in his rehearsal of the three-card monte scam, throughout the play Booth vicariously enacts his desires but is unable to accomplish them. In scene five, for instance, he literally sets the stage for the entry of Grace, a woman whom he hopes to marry. He cleans the room, changes the curtains, shoves his porn magazines under the bed, and converts the two milk crates into a romantic table for two, which he sets with an expensive shoplifted table cloth and silverware. However, Grace's grand entry does not take place. It is uncertain whether she even exists or whether the whole set-up has been intended solely for Lincoln, whom Booth repetitively tries to impress with displays of masculine prowess. Additionally, the treatment of space proposed in the script emphatically deprives the brothers of privacy. In the claustrophobic one-room apartment with no bathroom, the brothers are in each other's and the audience's view at all times. In scene four, Lincoln urinates in a plastic cup and in scene three Booth fiddles with condoms and waits for Lincoln to fall asleep in order to masturbate.

As in Kane's Blasted, in Topdog/Underdog Parks places masculinity rather than femininity in the spectator's gaze. Yet her choice to do so is further complicated by the history of racism, which has constructed the black body as hypersexual while depriving it of the positive symbolism of white masculinity and femininity. Parks skillfully draws attention to the interdependence between gender, race, and the permissible limits of visual representation. In Venus, her decision to comment on spectatorship by overexposing a black female body caused outrage. The explicit black male bodies in Topdog/Underdog, however, apparently offended no one.

But even though imitation and spectacle in the brothers' lives are shown to be

pervasive, they do not signify the end of critical reflection. Because he is black, Lincoln can never create a seamless enough representation of Honest Abe, and so he is paid less than a white person. Booth continually tries to reproduce Lincoln's deft handling of the cards, but the stage directions note that his movements remain "studied and awkward."[82] By no means a nihilist, Parks engages with imperfect imitations. In her black-Lincoln impersonations, race prevents imitation from turning into a simulacrum, and emphasizes the difference between a historical event and its narrations. Hence, the ability of race to show mimetic infelicity becomes a strategy for critical analysis.

Parks's approach to imitation bears affinity to Hortense Spillers's theory of race and subjecthood. Spillers argues that, to gain social agency, African Americans should understand race not as a fixed essence, but as a representational practice producing social hierarchies. Unlike the liberal individual who sees *him*self as a user of representation, yet essentially independent of it, the ideal African American subject theorized by Spillers is fully aware that social agency is both enabled and limited by the socially-shared rules of representation.[83] Spiller suggests that one may become aware of how representation works by taking on "a substitutive identity." [84] The act of donning a mask can defamiliarize the self and expose it as constructed rather than natural. In other words, Spillers proposes, like Parks, that imitation may be empowering.

Fearing that the amusement-park management may replace him with a more cost-effective white plastic doll, Lincoln tries to make his enactment more commercially attractive. Booth helps him rehearse his new moves. Suddenly, Lincoln grows anxious when Booth tells

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[82] Parks, Topdog/Underdog, 5.
[83] Hortense Spillers, Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 394-396.
[84] Spillers, 407.

him that his impersonation has started to look excessively realistic. "They dont want it looking too real," Lincoln says, "I'd scare the customers… People like their historical shit in a certain way. They like it to unfold the way they folded it up. Neatly like a book. Not raggedy and bloody and screaming… I am a brother playing Lincoln. It's a stretch for anyone's imagination."[85] His awareness that historical knowledge is dependent on representational conventions, and that these conventions are racially marked, enables Lincoln to transform imitation into an act of critical reflection. In an earlier scene, he rehearses alone, in his Honest Abe costume but barefoot and without makeup.[86] In the final scene, where he poses for a photo for the family album, his Honest-Abe costume is crumpled and the hastily smeared white make-up looks "more like war paint than whiteface."[87] Lincoln's image in rehearsal is a telling contrast to the polished image he has to present to his employers, who regularly check his appearance. By representing Lincoln's rehearsal rather than his performance of the President's death, and by focusing on the imperfections of his enactment, Parks exposes theatrical representation as labor – an

economic, as well as symbolic practice.

Lincoln's rehearsal is also a subtle commentary on the appeal of realist conventions. What could be the entertainment value of shooting Lincoln? Who or what is a customer shooting at? The Emancipator? The black actor? Theatre director and semiotician Anne Ubersfeld proposes that realism requires that theatrical representation should not look "too real."[88] This is the requirement that Kane violated by conflating the represented and the live actor's body in the

[85] Parks, Topdog, 50-51.
[86] Parks, Topdog, 35.
[87] Parks, Topdog/Underdog, 89-90.
[88] Anne Ubersfeld, Reading Theatre, trans. Frank Collins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 25-27.

violent scenes. When fulfilled, this requirement situates spectators at a non-committal distance.[89] If what we see onstage is not real, why bother about whether or not it is politically correct? Like Baudrillard, Parks asserts that spectacle can subsume reality, not because the two are indistinguishable, but because the presumably complicit spectators desire them to be indistinguishable, striving for the pleasurable coherence and the imaginary freedom from responsibility that simulation offers.[90] The ending of the play, where the realist and the epic plots converge, further reinforces this commentary. Booth shoots Lincoln, as both plots dictate he should, but the shooting is too clearly predetermined and inescapable to provide closure. As a result, spectators' assumed desire for coherence is brought to the foreground, inviting reflection on the politics of the seamless narratives that it produces. Parks, thereby, insistently deconstructs the analogy between realist coherence and truth. The inevitable gap between her non-realist black Lincolns (in both Topdog/Underdog and The America Play) and the President's white image dramatizes Abraham Lincoln's failure to live up to his glorious image of emancipator, because of his controversial opinions about race. The black Lincolns truthfully represent this failure.

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If black Lincoln's profession is so implausible from a realist standpoint, and if his profession and the brothers' names immediately refer to a major episode of American history, then why did the reviewers of the New York production claim that the play was or should have been realist? The New York production, directed by George C. Wolf, opened at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre on 26 July 2001, with Jeffrey Wright as Lincoln and Don Cheadle as Booth, and then moved to the Ambassador Theatre on Broadway in April 2002. According to reviewers, the

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Baudrillard, 48.

only significant change was that Mos Def replaced Don Cheadle. In both spaces, reviewers

qualified the acting as non-realist. Una Chaudhuri, who reviewed the production at the Public Theatre, wrote that "the extraordinary inventive performance styles … fulfilled and far exceeded the terms of psychological realism."[91] Theatre journalist Charles Isherwood, who saw the play at the Ambassador, praised the "neo-vaudevillian routines." "The actors," he wrote, "virtually dance their roles."[92] But even though many commented on the masterful alternation between naturalist and stylized acting, Una Chaudhuri is the only reviewer who found the play's move beyond realism effective. Most reviews described the production as realist or as realism gone wrong. Irene Backalenick qualified Topdog/Underdog as a strictly realist social-issue play.[93] According to Isherwood, Lincoln's profession as impersonator seemed preposterous in the "essentially naturalist play." Booth's frustration was unnaturally extreme and the ending felt superimposed.[94] Robert Brustein and Margo Jefferson also thought that the ending did not logically follow the events of the narrative.[95]

To a large extent, the set design of the New York production contributed to the feeling that the play should be realist. The performance of Aug. 30, 2001, which I saw on video at the Billy Rose Collection, shows a gritty room typical of kitchen-sink realism. The performance ended with the sound of police cars, not indicated in the script. By contrast, the set of the Chicago production, which I saw at the Steppenwolf Theatre in October 2003, emphasized the play's non-realist elements.[96] The apartment's door was attached to the floor but not to walls. Hence, it shook and threatened to collapse every time it was slammed. An enormous chain-link

[91] Una Chaudhuri, rev. of Topdog/Underdog by Suzan-Lori Parks, Theatre Journal 54.2 (2002): 289-291.
[92] Charles Isherwood, rev. of Topdog/Underdog, by Suzan-Lori Parks, Variety April 15 2003: 36.
[93] Irene Backalenick, rev. of Topdog/Underdog, by Suzan-Lori Parks, Back Stage 43.21 (May 24, 2002): 48.
[94] Isherwood, ibid.
[95] Brustein, "On Theatre – A Homebody Godot," 25; Jefferson, "The Feel of Real Life Working its Magic," 9.
[96] Topdog/Underdog, by Suzan-Lori Parks, dir. Amy Morton, perf. K. Todd Freeman (Booth) and David Rayney (Lincoln), Steppenwolf Theatre, Chicago, 2 Oct., 2003.

fence surrounded the stage. In an interview, designer Loy Arcenas explained that the fence was intended to give the set "a prison-like quality." The deep-red wallpaper, affixed to a couple of detached panels representing the apartment's walls, was supposed to reflect "the passions of the play," and convey "a sense of the timelessness of the mythic." The symbolic setting tried to reflect Parks's language, "so beautiful and so heightened, very much like poetry."[97] Admittedly, all artists who worked on the production had made conscious efforts not to conflate what at first glanced appeared to be a "family drama" with naturalistic performance conventions.[98]

Whether because Chicago reviewers had appreciated this effort, or because they were already familiar with the text (published two years earlier upon earning a Pulitzer prize), they discussed the ways in which the play foreshadowed its own ending.[99] Hedy Weiss of the Chicago Sun-Times wrote that the brothers were fighting two wars – their own family war and white men's Civil War. To Weiss, the interrelation of these two conflicts was the gist of the play.[100] At the same time, at the performance I attended, spectators voiced complaints in the intermission similar to those of many New York reviewers. I heard several spectators say that the stage design felt "wrong" and the acting was at times "exaggerated." It is possible that the powerful American tradition of realist family drama, imbued in the Steppenwolf house style, had prompted those spectators to expect a realist play despite the acting and the set.

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[97] Loy Arcenas, interview with Curt Columbus, Backstage: An Insider's Guide to What's inside Steppenwolf 1 (2003-2004): 6-7.

[98] Curt Columbus, Backstage: An Insider's Guide to What's inside Steppenwolf 1 (2003-2004): 6.

[99] Kevin Heckman, "Top-Notch Acting Dominates Topdog/Underdog," rev. of Topdog/Underdog, by Suzan-Lori Parks, Performink Online Oct. 10, 2003, www.performink.com/Archives/reviewroundup/2003/10-10ReviewRoundup.html. See also the reviews by Albert Williams, from The Reader, and by Michael Phillips, from The Tribune, posted on the same web page.

[100] Hedy Weiss, "Brothers Lincoln and Booth Battle in 'Topdog,' rev. of Topdog/Underdog, by Suzan-Lori Parks, at the Steppenwolf Theatre, Chicago Sun-Times 22 Sept. 2003: 50.

Parks has developed her own stylistic strategies to signal her departure from realism: the "rest" and the "spell." She defines the rest as a pause, a breather, and a place for transition. The spell, marked in the script by the vertical sequence of the figure's name, is "an elongated and heightened *(Rest)*… where the figures experience their pure true simple state."[101] Since the figures are defined as roles and players, the spells should be instances of metatheatrical reflection in which the figures draw attention to their non-realist, presentational status.[102] Additionally, the spells break the continuity of the story on the page. By referring to them as elongated pauses, Parks suggests that they also indicate a change in the established pace of the performance.

In their spells, Booth and Lincoln could employ Brechtian alienation techniques to underscore the black actor's imperfect approximation of their white counterparts, for instance by showing well-known portraits of the historical Lincoln and Booth. In this way they would visually juxtapose the realist and the epic layers of the script. To emphasize the play's inquiry into imitation and reality, in one of the spells interspersing the brothers' argument about "what's real and what ain't," the actors could briefly don masks that copy their own features as accurately as possible. The spells thus could interrupt the expectations for a realist characterization. Parks lets directors fill the spells as "they best see fit,"[103] but in Topdog/Underdog, as well as in other performances of her work that I have seen, the spells were omitted. In turn, in Topdog/Underdog this omission reinforced the linearity of the narrative and downplayed the non-realist elements.

In more abstract terms, the omission of the spells also downplays Parks's critique of historiography. As in The America Play, history in Topdog/Underdog is reduced to a theme park;

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[101] Parks, Topdog/Underdog, 2.

[102] In her analysis of Parks's play Venus, Jennifer Johung suggests that in her spells Venus engages in critical reflection by "represent[ing] her own representation." Jennifer Johung, "Figuring the 'Spells'/Spelling the Figures: Suzan-Lori Parks's 'Scene of Love (?)'," Theatre Journal 58 (2006): 46.

[103] Topdog/Underdog, 2.

the event of Abraham Lincoln's death is continually replayed as a farce. Lincoln's

monologue, in which he tells Booth that people only like their history represented in specific ways, makes Parks's critique explicit. Told from a singular point of view, which claims to be definitive, history cannot be empowering and, hence, it is useless. However, becoming aware of the ways in which history is told, i.e. of how representational conventions influence the construction of historical narratives, is empowering. The spells – moments which expose representation *as* representation – create conditions for such awareness. The question that needs to be solved is how to encourage this awareness not only in the process of reading but also in the course of a performance.

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From a broader theoretical perspective, Parks's spells and rest and the tensions that she and Kane set up between the realist and non-realist narrative strategies in Topdog/Underdog and Blasted fit into a larger feminist and radical project: slowing down reading and viewing in order to draw attention to the cultural politics of representation. This project is based in the shared notion that representing the *other* in terms of a culture's established representational conventions may reduce the *other* to a lower-quality version of the self. The feminist critiques of realism and Brechtian dramaturgy, and Felman and Laub's insistence (which Butler also shares) that understanding an *other* entails a revision of the self's own cultural paradigms, comprise a range of responses to this notion. I find that Lynda Hart's critique of analogical thinking clarifies the stakes especially well.

Hart states that drawing analogies between practices in the dominant culture and those in a minority subculture is frequently a useful procedure; avoiding all comparisons between

hierarchically-positioned practices may lead to relativism, making political intervention extremely difficult.[104] Hart here follows the same logic that underlies Schroeder's support for feminist playwrights' use of realism, despite the possibility that such uses may co-opt their feminist perspectives into the dominant masculine symbolic. However, Hart continues, "analogies can [also] lead to the crudest of comparisons, more often than not based on an economy of the visible/visual that reifies hierarchies."[105] To illustrate this point, Hart refers to the 1980s feminist contention over lesbian sadomasochism, whereby the National Organization for Women passed a resolution condemning lesbian sadomasochism as oppressive and obscene. "Analogical thinking," Hart contends, "is the staple of feminist arguments against sadomasochism … Take your pick: sadomasochism *looks like* and therefore *is like* – Slavery, the Holocaust, Heterosexist Patriarchy."[106] According to Hart, these analogies mistakenly apply a heteronormative perspective to a non-heteronormative practice.[107] The potential assimilative power of visual analogies raises the same question which I have raised in my reading of Schroeder. How shall feminist heterosexual "viewers" of lesbian sadomasochism be alerted to the heteronormativity underlying their perception? How shall spectators inured to realist conventions be made to see citations of such conventions *as citations*?

Parks's fables about the black Lincoln impersonators, as incorrect but paradoxically truthful copies of the Founding Father, expose the pitfalls of analogical thinking. Her method in Topdog/Underdog – simultaneously using realist conventions and trying to display them as conventions by juxtaposing them with epic techniques – exemplifies the feminist tactical uses of realism. However, reviewers' reception of the New York production as realist or as failed

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[104] Lynda Hart, Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Masochism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 84.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., emphasis added.
[107] Ibid., 26-7.

realism demonstrates how the performative power of representational conventions may override such tactical uses. Because Topdog/Underdog uses techniques of psychological realism, it was perceived *as* psychological realism, creating a veneer of pseudo-psychological motivation to the brothers' fraught relationship and obscuring their stereotypical racial characterization.

Kane, on the other hand, responds to the pitfalls of analogy by pushing realism's cultural logic to an extreme. Reviewers argued that the war in Blasted did not follow logically from the events of the first scene. Yet within the concept of the relationship between self and other that I read in the play, a war begins in scene two *because* Ian rapes Cate in scene one. The connection does not follow the rules of realist causality, but this does not mean that it is in principle illogical. Rather, the connection between rape in Leeds and ethnic cleansing in Srebrenica, as presented in Blasted, exceeds the (western) cultural limits of realism. The scandalous implication of this connection is that there is nothing culturally-specific that makes the British self less prone to violence than the Balkan other; they are not different enough.

In other words, I view the interruptions of logical causality and the referential ambiguities, not only in Blasted and Topdog but throughout Kane and Parks's plays, as suggestive of a principle of aesthetic distancing different from the Brechtian dialectical principle of estrangement in his epic plays. Whereas Blasted signals this difference through implicit references to the non-epic Brechtian play Baal, Parks's departure from epic estrangement becomes clear through a comparison of Brecht's and her own use of footnotes, as in The America Play. According to Brecht, "Footnotes, and the habit of turning back in order to check a point, need to be introduced in playwriting, too." In performance, he explains, texts on screen, commenting on the action on stage, may serve as footnotes, helping spectators not to become

"carried away" by the theatrical illusion.[108] Hence, for Brecht, footnotes, as all other devices of aesthetic distancing that he theorizes, aim to produce clarity, to distinguish truthful reality from its false, ideologically-motivated appearances. By contrast, Parks's footnotes in The America Play defy clarity. Some of her footnotes function conventionally, providing factual information about Abraham Lincoln's death and dictionary definitions of literary terms. Other footnotes, however, refer readers to the unpublished work of the Foundling Father, a character in the play, or clarify that the information shared about another fictional character is hearsay.[109] In the context of the play's commentary on the politics of historiography, the juxtaposition of factual and fictional footnotes raises questions about the extent to which historians may keep fact and fiction separate. According to Jennifer Johung, Parks's spells similarly defy logical clarity; their open definition renders them "an interpretative conundrum" that artists and readers need to resolve.[110]

As devices of aesthetic distancing, referential ambiguity and interrupting logical causality are not new. Parks's and Kane's uses of these devices, their respective critiques of historical narratives and social norms, and their interest in formal experimentation render their approaches akin to the controversial practices of Russian formalism: a method of textual and visual analysis that privileges aesthetics and downplays the importance of social context.

In the period between the two World Wars, Russian formalists and artists of the historical avant-garde employed referential ambiguity and tried to suspend realist causality in order to counter analogical thinking. By placing familiar objects in unfamiliar contexts, they tried to intercept the habitual perception of everyday objects and practices, hoping that in this way these

[108] Bertolt Brecht, Brecht on Theatre: the Development of an Aesthetic, ed. John Willett (1957, New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) 44.
[109] Parks, The America Play, 168, 182.
[110] Johung, 41.

objects and practices would be seen as if for the first time, and their presumably unique essences would be made explicit.[111] From a materialist standpoint, I would say that the practices of formalist estrangement (*ostranienie*) performatively *produced* everyday objects' uniqueness.

Though *ostranenie* has sometimes been used as a device for social critique,[112] the formalists' interest in aesthetics was part of a mostly metaphysical pursuit, as exemplified by Baal's idealistic search for life beyond social norms.[113] The Russian formalist procedure of bracketing off social context, as allegedly obscuring art's uniqueness, and the implicit sexism and racism of other critical methods which similarly privilege aesthetics over social contexts, such as Clement Greenberg's and Michael Fried's visual-art criticism and the American New Criticism, have made materialist scholars suspicious of all formalist approaches.[114] The trouble with this generalized suspicion towards formalism is that it neglects the differing political contexts in which all these formalists practiced their methods.

In the context of the increasingly constraining-totalitarian regime in Soviet Russia, the formalist suspension of context, however critically-limiting it may appear from a materialist standpoint, was a strategy of resistance. According to Svetlana Boym, to the original formalists, the strategy of estrangement was not only an aesthetic device but also a metaphor for spiritual exile, for feeling homeless at home. This spiritual homelessness was perceived as a constitutive condition of philosophical reflection; the philosopher was always, in a sense, a misfit. By the late-1920s, metaphorical exile would transform into political isolation, as the Soviet

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[111] Viktor Sklovsky, "Art as Technique," Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) 3-24; Silvija Jestovic explores the engagement of Russian and German theatre avant-garde artists with formalist theoretical approaches in Theatre of Estrangement: Theatre, Practice, Ideology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

[112] Jestrovic, 26.

[113] On the influence of Russian avant-garde art and formalism on Brecht, see Jestrovic 92-117.

[114] Amelia Jones analyzes the sexual politics of formalist visual art criticism in Amelia Jones, "The 'Sexual Politics' of The Dinner Party: A Critical Context," 87-88. For critiques of the racial and gender politics of American New Criticism, see Anthony G. Medici, "The Restless Ghost of New Criticism," 760-73; and Karen O'Kane, "Before the New Criticism: Modernism and the Nashville Group," 683-97.

authorities accused the formalists of anti-communism.[115] The accusation, in my view, was not unfounded. As the totalitarian regime imposed one single acceptable narrative of history, discussing literary works within the cultural moments of their emergence or reception became an exercise into reaffirming this official narrative. The formalist suspension of contextual reference was perceived as a challenge to this narrative. The founding formalist Victor Shklovsky was forced to denounce formalism publicly.

As I have demonstrated in my analysis of the scripts of Blasted and Topdog, Parks and Kane do not in fact refuse to provide contextual and ideological frames. Rather, their uses of referential ambiguity and departures from realist causality (both formalist staples) invite reflection on how such frames are produced and selected as signposts to facilitate meaning-making. Moreover, I see their formalisms as responding to a Baudrillardian perception that, in our contemporary media-dominated societies, contextualization may have lost critical value; not unlike the perception of the futility of contextualization which shaped Russian formalism. At the same time, Parks's and Kane's formalisms are also tied to reflections on the place of theatre among other representational media, especially television and film.

Indeed, many of Parks's and Kane's artistic statements bring formalism to mind. In her essay "from the Elements of Style," whose title alone already suggests formalists' meticulous attention to the structure of representational media, Parks writes: "[Contemporary theatre is] so intended to produce some reaction of sorts, to discuss some issue, the play-as-wrapping-paper-version-of-hot-newspaper-headline… so uninterested in the craft of writing… so uninterested in the marvel of the live body onstage." In contrast to this perceived trend, Parks strives to rediscover the specificity of theatre; to create theatre "that is not 'poor film' or 'cheap TV' but an

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[115] Svetlana Boym, "Estrangement as a lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky," Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Durham, Duke University Press, 1998) 244, 249.

art so specific and strange in its examination of the human condition."[116] She has also stated that her plays, while written for the stage, are addressed as much to readers as to spectators, and that her scripts are complete works even before they have been staged. Adhering to the formalist assertion of the primacy of the art work, she warns readers against searching for an authorial agenda "behind or underneath the text, or behind the production."[117] Liz Diamond, who has directed several of Parks's plays, confirms the importance of reading Parks's texts very closely. Talking about her work on The America Play, Diamond says that "unlike traditional 'psychological' American acting training, *there is no code outside of what's on the page*."[118] I do not think that Diamond's statement or Parks's warnings against looking for an authorial agenda should be taken literally. Rather, I read them as expressive of Parks's protest against hasty generalization, particularly her resistance to the fixed expectations that, in her view, critics have of her work as the work of a black playwright.[119]

Kane was similarly interested in the effects of artists' formal aesthetic choices on the production of meanings in the auditorium.[120] Her controversial attempt to show violence "repulsive as it is" by breaking the realist framework reflects Russian formalists' belief that the "essence" of a phenomenon or an object can be grasped only through aesthetic estrangement. In Blasted, she tried to show the "true essence" of violence, by replacing its trivializing mass-media representations with a novel, distinctly theatrical perspective. In Cleansed, she continued to search for the specificity of the theatrical medium. Kane said she wanted to write the play in such a way "that it could never be turned into a film – it could never be shot for television; it could

[116] Parks, "from Elements of Style," 6.
[117] Parks and Diamond, "Doo-a-diddly-dit-dit," 60-61.
[118] Ibid., 70.
[119] Parks, "An Equation for Black People On Stage," 19-22. See also, Parks, "New Black Math," 576-83.
[120] Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, "Sarah Kane," Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting (London: Methuen Drama, 1997) 131.

never be turned into a novel. The only thing that could ever be done with it was it could be staged."[121] James Macdonald noted that in Cleansed Kane "remove[d] the psychological signposts and social geography that you get in the Great British play."[122] His remark reinforces the formalist distinction of "the work itself" versus context in Kane's own comments.

Parks's and Kane's pursuits of the specificity of the theatrical medium may be interpreted as manifestations of the anxieties about the rivalry between live performance and the electronic media that Philip Auslander ascribes to contemporary theatre artists and scholars. According to Auslander, the mass media have influenced live performance both aesthetically and economically: by encouraging realist, linear plots, as in television, and by making theatre compete for spectators with television and film.[123] But I suggest that their formalism should be understood in relation to Baudrillard's broader use of mediatization – the unification of expression under a singular code – and to his fear that this process severely limits the possibility of critical intervention.

Counter-intuitively, Baudrillard contends that the misguided pursuit of fact, coherence, and objectivity, which we associate with the linear narratives typical of the mass media, in fact, limits our understanding of social and historical issues. Social events and processes, whether historical or contemporary, are rarely free from passion and partiality, Baudrillard observes. Hence, trying to exclude passion and partiality from narratives about such events is wrong-headed. The age of history, he writes, is also the age of the novel, not of allegedly objective mediums such as photography.[124] In other words, the mediation of the past through the aesthetic conventions of a specific fictional genre openly declares that the knowledge this narrative creates

[121] Quoted in Saunders, 'Love Me or Kill Me', 87.
[122] In James Christopher, rev. of Cleansed, 7.
[123] Auslander, Liveness, 6.
[124] Baudrillard, 47.

is partial, not objective. In view of this argument, Parks's and Kane's insistence on the specificity of the theatrical medium and their refusal of referential clarity may be seen as analogous to the function that Baudrillard ascribes to the novel: as strategies to foreground partiality and resist the objective fallacy.

Baudrillard also writes that the overproduction of information in compliance with a singular mainstream code creates a false freedom of expression. Seemingly, everyone, however marginally positioned, has the opportunity to express her point of view. However, the unified mechanisms of representation attenuate the subversive potential of any viewpoint, and so the notion of freedom of expression becomes vacuous. Hence, a passive refusal of meaning, a voluntary alienation from a social contract that has lost meaning, no matter how limited the effectiveness of such refusal may be, becomes a legitimate strategy of resistance.[125]

Cultural critics Saidiya Hartman and Lee Edelman elaborate on Baudrillard's view of refusing meaning as a strategy of resistance from the respective perspectives of critical-race and queer theories. Hartman suggests that an analytical focus on race often turns blackness into a vehicle for white self-refection and may aggravate the degrading visibility of African Americans rather than empower them. Therefore, she insists on respecting minorities' "right of obscurity." Aesthetically, she proposes, the right of obscurity may translate into resistance to clarity. During slavery, the opacity of slave songs "enabled something in excess of the orchestrated amusements" designed to please the plantation masters.[126] In the same vein, Edelman suggests, projects for minorities' social recognition and freedom of expression need to be accompanied by a counter-project of radically refusing the social terms of the majority. Realistically speaking, Edelman specifies, such a radical project of refusal is impossible. Yet it emphasizes the need to

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[125] Baudrillard, 85-86.
[126] Saidiya V. Hartman, Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 34-36.

resist the status quo's power to cancel the subversiveness of minority demands at the same time as it formally acknowledges them.[127] In summary, these critics usefully point out that, under specific circumstances, critical strategies and policies adopted in the name of liberalism and equality may become counterproductive or even tools of assimilation.

I do not think that the "implosion of meaning" in late-capitalist societies, to use Baudrillard's term, renders radical intervention so extremely difficult; in the next chapter, I analyze theatrical instances of radical intervention *enabled* by the postmodern threats to meaning that Baudrillard decries. Yet Baudrillard's, Hartman's, and Edelman's provocative arguments about refusing meaning as a strategy of resisting normativity allow a helpful perspective on Parks's and Kane's uses of referential ambiguity and on their departure from the Brechtian and social realist contracts commonly associated with the possibility for feminist and radical expression. Parks's black Lincolns metaphorically expose the reduction of race to a vehicle for white self-reflection. Kane's refusal to describe violence as the domain of the ethnic *other* resists the same possible effect. Their formalist strategies are not indicative of apolitical withdrawal into aesthetics. Rather, I see these strategies as motivated by insights into the possible disciplining effects of desires for objectivity and coherence, expression and recognition.

As the reviews of Blasted and Topdog demonstrate, Kane's and Parks's manipulations of realism exposed the intertexts and expectations that spectators, especially reviewers, drew upon to make sense of their plays. There is no indication, however, that the Royal Court production of Blasted or the Public Theatre's production of Topdog intended to produce such exposure, and reviewers did not feel compelled to reflect upon the implications of the intertexts and expectations that they brought to the performance. Rather, the efforts to include Blasted in an already established canon of radical theatre which defied norms of middle-class propriety, and

[127] Lee Edelman, "Ever After: History, Negativity, and the Social," The South Atlantic Quarterly 106.3 (2007): 473.

the unchecked acceptance of Topdog's realism suggest a concern about the continuity of established conventions, not a desire to see "anew."

The question that remains to be resolved, then, is how spectators can be made aware not simply that they are contributing to a performance's signification, but also of the politics of their contributions. My next chapter discusses three productions which, in my view, manage to accomplish this. Like Blasted and Topdog, they frustrate spectators' expectations by manipulating referential frameworks and the distinctions between the fictional, realistic, and literal. At the same time, they create strategies to confront spectators' desire for coherence *in the course of the performance*, enabling a discussion of the politics of looking.

Finally, I would like to return to Reinelt's question: are Blasted and Topdog feminist (and/or radical) texts? Drawing on Luce Irigaray and Elin Diamond, Kim Solga defines patriarchal mimesis, a major theme in feminist theatre work, as the "demand that mimetic copies correspond directly to their models, pointing to the absolute truth, the irrevocability, of the model's cultural primacy."[128] In addition to making gender and race central to their discussions of violence, Blasted and Topdog participate in the feminist contestation of patriarchal mimesis by exposing the effects of realism's primacy in their media-dominated societies. Hence, they are feminist despite their pessimistic resolutions. Through the discussions they provoked, they indirectly demonstrated that established notions of radical or feminist theatre may start functioning as criteria for what qualifies as "radical" or "feminist" theatre. If scholarship and reviewing start using the established traditions of feminist and radical theatre in this manner, they inadvertently repeat the operations of patriarchal mimesis: the requirement that a model should reproduce itself.

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[128] Kim Solga, "Rape's Metatheatrical Return: Rehearsing Sexual Violence among the Early Moderns," Theatre Journal 58 (2006): 61.

Chapter Three

Viewers in Distress: Theatre as a Practice of Democratic Contestation

Who Can Smoke in Brecht's Smoker's Theatre?

> Bursting out of the underground stations, eager to become as 'wax' in the magicians' hands, grown-up men, their resolution proved in the struggle for existence, rush to the box office. They hand in their hat in the cloakroom, and with it they hand their normal behavior: the attitudes of 'everyday life.' Once out of the cloakroom, they take their seats with the bearing of kings… Can we persuade them to get out their cigars?[1]

Brecht's ideas for a smoker's theatre, which reappear throughout his writing, envision spectators who enjoy cigars, drinks, and food during the performance, as if watching a boxing match. As illustrated in the above quote (from his essay on opera), Brecht hoped that the personal pleasure of smoking would vie with the pleasure of absorption in the theatrical illusion. "I even think," he wrote elsewhere, "that in a Shakespearean production one man in the stalls with a cigar could bring about the downfall of Western art."[2] The image of the rowdy boxing fans smoking their cigars urges digression from the socially-acceptable behavior in mainstream theatre, seen as a bourgeois cultural institution. The notion that spectators' physical involvement in performance, through smoking or through interactive participation as co-performers, may enable them to resist cultural ideology has made Brecht's theories appealing to scholars committed to exploring the gendered and racial politics of representation, even as they have

[1] Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, 39.
[2] Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, 8.

critiqued his general blindness towards gender and racial hierarchies.[3] Who, then, can be a
spectator in the smoker's theatre?

Looking into New York theatres at the close of the nineteenth century and into the cinema halls of early twentieth-century Chicago, Dorothy Chansky and Jacqueline Stewart tell different stories of spectatorial pleasure. By 1890, Chansky writes, attempts to limit smoking and drinking in theatres claiming respectability created a distinction between legitimate theatre, open to increasingly large numbers of female spectators, and less sophisticated stage entertainments. Men who found this newly-imposed respectability restrictive could also see the "racier, less domesticated, or more interactive" minstrel and leg shows without risking their reputations.[4] At the same time, the popular press abounded with criticism of female spectators, ridiculing women's presumed inability to understand theatre and their general behavior during performances, including their indulgence in fattening foods.[5] Stewart writes that, at the time of the Great Black Migration from the rural south to the industrialized north, "in Chicago, many blacks sought to patronize downtown [movie] theatres, but they were frequently sold tickets in segregated sections or ushered to seats far away from white viewers… Offensive odor [was the] reason usually given… Negroes who were deemed to be 'well-mannered' were the ones who quietly accepted seats away from whites or otherwise remained inconspicuous."[6] Black spectators' undisciplined" working-class bodies, Stewart writes, prevented them from

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[3] See, for instance, Case, The Domain-Matrix, 109-10; Fredric Jameson, Brecht and Method (London and New York: Verso, 1998) 173-74; Diamond, Unmaking Mimesis, 52-53; and Min Tian, "Alienation Effect for Whom? Brecht's (Mis)interpretation of the Classical Chinese Theatre," Asian Theatre Journal 14.2 (1997): 200-22.
[4] Dorothy Chansky, Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004) 109.
[5] Chansky, 113.
[6] Jacqueline Stewart, "Negroes Laughing at Themselves? Black Spectatorship and the Performance of Urban Modernity," Critical Inquiry 29 (2003): 670-71.

pleasurable absorption into the cinematic narrative, creating instead a "disjunctive" viewing
experience.[7]

Chansky and Stewart simultaneously confirm and complicate Brecht's insight that a spectator's shift of attention from the dramatic or film narrative to the spectator's own body may prevent unthinking absorption, demonstrating that in the specific American contexts of their narratives, absorption and bodily pleasure may be exclusive privileges. In addition to emphasizing the need to historicize Brecht's smoker's theatre, their accounts indirectly clarify the limits of Brecht's spectatorship theory, suggesting that this German modernist theory may be unable to account for the specific cultural symbolism of spectators' gendered and racialized bodies.

The three case studies in this chapter – Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks, Soul of a Clone by the St. Louis-based Upstream Theatre, and First Night by the British group Forced Entertainment – create a spectatorship approach that situates the (white) average spectator in a position similar to Stewart's notion of disjunctive viewing. By intentionally shaming, embarrassing, and offending their viewers, the artists draw attention to the way in which spectators' knowledge of theatrical conventions, their social attitudes, and their own embodiments of gender and racial categories inform the meanings created in the theatrical encounter. Spectators' assumed desire for linear, coherent plots is made explicit, inviting reflection on the political implications of such desire. Despite their dedication to Brecht's project for socially-engaged theatre and despite using his techniques, they invert Brecht's major premises: the distinctions between extra-theatrical reality and the theatrical fiction, and between self and role. The instability of these distinctions becomes the enabling principle of their radical critiques. Juxtaposing Brecht's modern spectatorship theory with theories of race and gender as visual social relations, simultaneously

[7] Stewart, 667-68.

affective and economic, I argue that the emphasis on the symbolism of the body in my case studies surpasses Brecht's Marxist framework. I propose that their approach to spectatorship is better articulated in terms of Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek's theory of democratic contestation, Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval'Davis' theory of situated imagination, and Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. All three theories account for the affective, as well as material, aspects of embodied subjects' social interactions.

Race, Gender, and Critical Detachment in Venus by Suzan-Lori Parks

Parks's play about the transformation of the South African woman Saartjie Baartman into the Hottentot Venus is a meditation on the gendered and racial politics of spectatorship and knowledge. A native of the Khoi-San tribe, Baartman drew marveling crowds at fairs in nineteenth-century England and France. Nineteenth-century naturalists were among the most enthusiastic viewers. Baartman's exposed buttocks, excessively large by European standards, were the fascinating focus of the display. Parks lifts the mask of the Hottentot Venus only to reveal a gaping hole. Though the exhibitions of the Venus were documented in some detail, little is known about the person Saartjie Baartman. As Parks demonstrates, the Venus Hottentot is a theatrical persona produced through the overlap of several performance spaces: the fair booth, the anatomical theatre, the conference hall, and the museum. In the play, the erasure of Baartman's life story and its replacement by the European-made image of the Hottentot become a metaphor for social stereotyping.

When Venus opened at the Yale Repertory Theatre on March 28, 1996, it immediately provoked a heated debate, which only intensified when the play moved to the Joseph Papp Public Theatre in New York. In a padded costume suggestive of Baartman's large buttocks, African

American actress Adina Porter licked chocolates which fairgoers threw in her cage, let them

poke and grope her buttocks, and laughed raucously and inappropriately, enacting not so much the historical Baartman as a racist stereotype of African American women.[8] A bright, blinking red light sometimes made the stage difficult to see. While some saw Venus as a critique of spectatorship and praised Parks for showing how "the onlookers' fantasies" produce racial stereotypes,[9] many critics and spectators denounced the play as racist and sexist. In The New York Amsterdam News – a newspaper with large African American readership – art critic Abiola Sinclair wrote:

> The exploitation of Saartjie Baartman currently going on at the Public Theatre is almost as bad as the exploitation she received in real life… Did they mean to insult us? … [The director Richard] Foreman gave us glaring lights shining in our eyes … I could barely see some of the scenes… The purpose? ... The man who seduced Venus from South Africa was played by a woman [Sandra Shipley]. The purpose? ... When given [chocolates], rather than put the pieces into her mouth she wets her fingers and circles the chocolates, putting what's collected on her fingers into her mouth… A monkey could easily handle such a task… And the so-called love affair with the Baron Docteur is perhaps coming from the dreams of Suzan L. Parks, rather than history.

Baartman's representation as "a full-blown accomplice in what was being done to her," Sinclair concludes, could only be "some stupid invention of a white director and a sellout playwright."[10] Theatre scholar Jean Young, who critiqued the production in very similar terms, was

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[8] Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks, dir. Richard Foreman, perf. Adina Porter, Mel Johnson Jr., Peter Francis James, and Sandra Shipley, Joseph Papp Public Theatre, New York, 9 May, 1996, videotape, Billy Rose Theatre collection, New York Public Library.

[9] See Alexis Greene, Theatre Week 20 May, 1996: 54.

[10] Abiola Sinclair, "Notes on 'Venus,'" rev. of Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks, at the Public Theatre, New York Amsterdam News 4 May, 1996: 22.

especially displeased that an African American actor (Peter Francis James) performed as the

Baron Docteur, who seduces and then dissects the Venus. This casting choice, Young argued, suggested that "black men are the primary exploiters of black women."[11] Other critics applauded Parks's divergence from "the black victim play" but noted that, "without the corrective reality" of historical knowledge about Baartman, reading Parks's complex character "becomes a frustrating task."[12] Still others read Brechtian intentions in the choice of the Venus's costume and in the gender and racial cross-casting, but their awareness of the distinction between character and actor, and costume and body did not produce critical distance. "Though your brain tells you that this [the actress's buttocks] is padding, albeit of an artful sort, the effect is disturbing… You cannot help but imagine the humiliation of such forced exposure and display in the flesh,"[13] Alexis Greene wrote. Harry Elam and Alice Rayner similarly remarked that "[t]he butt clearly did not belong to the actress, but it nonetheless gave the effect of total exposure."[14]

I read this range of critical responses as reflective of Parks's and Foreman's dual spectatorship tactic: combining Brechtian distancing strategies with strategies implicating the spectator as a racist and sexist voyeur. In her published script, Parks indicates her engagement with gender and critical-race critiques of representation by including references to Masculin-Féminin (1966), a film by Brechtian director Jean-Luc Godard which cites the last scene of Amiri Baraka's 1964 play Dutchman, and to feminist writer Virginia Woolf's novel Between the Acts (1941), whose plot evolves around a theatrical performance. Prompted by these references,

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[11] Jean Young, "The Re-Objectification and Re-Commodification of Saartjie Baartman in Suzan-Lori Parks's 'Venus,'" African American Review 31.4 (1997): 703.

[12] See Michael Feingold, "Carnival Knowledge," rev. of Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks, Village Voice 14 May, 1996: 81; and Irene Backalenick, "'Venus' Plays Yale Rep before Going Public," rev. of Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks, Westport News, 27 March, 1996: 31.

[13] Greene, ibid.

[14] Harry J. Elam Jr. and Alice Rayner, "Body Parts: Between Story and Spectacle in *Venus* by Suzan-Lori Parks," Staging Resistance: Essays on Political Theatre, eds. Jeanne Colleran and Jenny S. Spencer (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001) 271.

I compare Brecht's modernist theory of spectatorship and knowledge with theories of gender and racial politics of representation in order to theorize Parks's innovative approach to spectatorship.

Venus begins with an array of Brechtian strategies. The actors face the audience and announce their roles. A "chorus of spectators" on stage breaks the fourth wall and invites the spectators in the auditorium to see the astounding Hottentot. At the same time, the Venus keeps revolving "counterclockwise," offering different perspectives on her padded buttocks. At the end of the scene, the Negro Resurrectionist, a chorus figure, sums up Baartman's story, from her apparently willing arrival in Europe, through her performances at fairs, to the post-mortem display of her dissected genitalia in the Musée de l'homme in Paris.[15] The subsequent scenes are Brecht-like episodes, each illustrating the racism of a social practice. In an early scene, the Venus displays her body in her fair booth. Her manager, the Mother Showman, kicks her and invites the leering visitors to touch her. Later on, the Venus poses for the chorus of anatomists in a medical lecture hall. While her lover the Baron Docteur measures her body, the anatomists masturbate.

The seamless transition of the leering chorus of spectators into a chorus of masturbating anatomists casts theatre and science as allies in racist stereotyping. The play-within-the-play, the melodrama "For the Love of Venus," reinforces the connection between them. In this melodrama, a young woman, the Bride-to-Be, dresses up as the Hottentot to satisfy her fiancé's desire for an exotic escapade. Having gained his love, she reveals her true identity which is, of course, white. In several scenes, the Baron Docteur is shown as the melodrama's sole spectator. Nineteenth-century science and theatre, the juxtaposition implies, were equally guilty of racist voyeurism.

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[15] Parks, Venus (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1997) 1-9.

When the Baron eventually becomes the Venus's lover, the images of scientists, spectator, and lover become superimposed. The various relationships between the Venus and the Europeans –
scientific, judicial, theatrical, or intimate – become unified in a single scenario: an encounter between a male observer and a racialized female object.

Richard Foreman, director and designer of the play's first production, emphasized this conflation through choices in the set design. In scene fourteen, for instance, the Baron Docteur and the Venus had a conversation lying in a vertically-positioned bed, which fully exposed the actors to the spectators in the auditorium. In the script, scene nineteen, entitled "A Scene of Love," consists only of spells:

The Venus

The Baron Docteur

The Venus

The Baron Docteur.[16]

In Foreman's rendition, the Venus was enclosed in a wire cage – the same cage that was her fairbooth earlier in the performance – from which she stretched her arms out to the Baron Docteur while he stood looking at her longingly.[17] Foreman's designs in these scenes reinforce the same point about race and privacy which was later raised in productions of Topdog/Underdog: that historically, the right to privacy has been mostly a white, male, upper-class privilege.

Elaborating on the idea of race as an effect of visual objectification, in several scenes Parks represents the Venus as an embodiment of racist fantasies: greedy and materialistic,

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[16] Parks, Venus, 80.
[17] Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks, dir. Richard Foreman.

sensual and immoral. In other scenes, however, Parks counters these fantasies, depicting the Venus as a woman with a capacity for learning (as in scene twelve, where the Baron demonstrates to his fellow anatomists that the Venus has mastered two languages in a few months), yet defenseless in a foreign culture. Gestically juxtaposed, these two perspectives on the Venus draw a distinction between the fantasized Venus and Baartman's lost life story.

In Brechtian fashion, Parks historicizes Baartman's theatrical transformation by inscribing it in a larger network of economic exchange. In scene three, for instance, the Venus tells the "brief history of chocolate." In the nineteenth century, she says, "the *cacao* bean, once used as money, becomes an exotic beverage. The Spanish were known to die for their chocolate. In the New World, they were also known to kill for it."[18] The Venus, thereby, inscribes her arrival in Europe in the system of colonial trade, which transformed her, like it transformed chocolate, into an exotic commodity.

Another scene draws spectators' attention to similar networks of oppression in their contemporary reality. The African girl, who is to become the Venus Hottentot, has just reached England with her white manager and dreams of becoming a rich and famous dancer. The Chorus of the 8 human wonders speaks:

> She looks like shes fresh off the boat.
>
> She looks like shes about to cry…
>
> I remember my first day here.
>
> I didnt know which end was up.
>
> And I had jet lag to boot.[19]

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[18] Parks, Venus, 155.
[19] Parks, Venus, 19. Original spelling.

The anachronistic reference to airplane travel suggests that the scene is a Brechtian fable,
commenting on contemporary human trafficking. At the end of the twentieth century, when the play was first performed, numerous young women and men from impoverished countries fell prey to prostitution, lured by job advertisements offering employment as dancers in countries with prospering economies. Within the US, too, young women dreaming of Hollywood fame traveled to Los Angeles where they ended up in pornographic films.

The play's unusual treatment of time also shifts the focus to the spectators' present. While the events in Venus, develop chronologically overall, from the Hottentot's arrival to her death, the scenes are numbered in reverse order. The first scene following the overture is numbered 31, the last is numbered 1. In the Public Theatre's production, the Negro Resurrectionist announced the number of each scene, before the scene took place. In my reading, this countdown calls spectators to action. Having seen the play and understood how stereotyping works, spectators, ideally, will no longer have the excuse to ignore the mechanisms of stereotyping in their daily lives.

Reviewers who complained that Parks did not provide "corrective reality," by which they meant that Parks failed to tell Baartman's "true" story, not only missed Parks's Brechtian historicization of Baartman's display but also misunderstood the play's historiographic stance. The little available evidence about Baartman's life in Africa reveals that she was a servant in a Dutch household and that she most likely went to Europe of her own will. It is unclear whether or not she understood the implications of the job offered to her, or whether or not she was smart, naïve, or profiteering. By (unsuccessfully) trying to fill in the gaps in Baartman's pre-European story, Sinclair and Young inadvertently obscure the loss of this story, which, like the loss of black Americans' African past in the course of the middle passage, is a recurrent tragic theme in

Parks's work. Moreover, by implicitly insisting that this story should only be told within a victim-victimizer narrative, they attempt to cover up its absence with a Baudrillardian simulacrum.

Reflecting the Venus's dual characterization in the script as victimized *and* complicit in her victimization, the production depicted her as a white, male voyeuristic fantasy and, at the same time, attempted to show this fantasy *as* fantasy. The gestic set design in the two love scenes (the vertical bed and the wire cage), and the cross-gender and cross-racial casting undermined the usual conflation of blackness, femininity, and victimization, on the one hand, and whiteness, masculinity, and aggression, on the other. Despite these distancing choices, neither Parks's script nor Foreman's production constructs a detached, safe viewing position. As in the scene where the Venus and the Docteur lie in the vertical bed displaying intimacy in public, throughout the production spectators were implicated in voyeurism. At the same time, they were encouraged to consider critically the social effects of voyeurism. This complex approach to spectators culminates in the play's unusual intermission.

According to theatre director and theoretician Anne Ubersfeld, the intermission "obliges the spectator to come back to a two-fold reality:" the reality of the spectator's life beyond the theatre, and that of the social, historical, and cultural events and phenomena referenced by the performance.[20] In the intermission, the fictional story that has been evolving on the stage can be critically compared to this two-fold reality. In Venus, the intermission functions both conventionally as a break and, at the same time, is treated as another scene. During the "intermission" at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre, the Baron Docteur stood behind a podium and presented findings from the Venus's dissection. While he read, spectators could hear the Venus reciting lines from the "For the Love of Venus:"

[20] Ubersfeld, 14.

The Venus: My love for you, My love, is artificial

Fabricated much like this epistle.

Constructed with mans finest powrs [*sic*]

Will last through the days and the year and the hours.[21]

By juxtaposing the discourses of the play-within-the-play and of anatomical theatre, the intermission again drew attention to the collaboration of science and theatre in the creation of the Venus. This juxtaposition foregrounded the collaboration which occurs between spectators and performers in the theatre, even when spectators appear to be passive onlookers. Accompanied by funereal music, the lecture/intermission was also an act of commemoration. Throughout, the Baron Docteur spoke in an insecure voice, as though choked by tears. Spectators who chose to attend to the intermission scene were addressed as fellow naturalists and mourners, and the auditorium simultaneously transformed into the Anatomical Theatre of Tübingen and a funeral hall.[22]

While the viewing position in realist theatre is semiotically marked as private, despite the presence of other viewers, the lit-up auditorium and the roles offered to the spectators in Venus rendered this position public, as in Brechtian theatre. However, even when spectators are offered fictional roles in Brechtian theatre, as in the participatory *Lehrstücke*, this happens with their prior knowledge and consent.[23] In Venus, by contrast, the intermission unexpectedly changed the spectator-performer contract. Without warning, spectators were drawn out of their anonymity into open collaboration. As fellow naturalists, spectators became complicit with the anatomical

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[21] Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks, dir. Richard Foreman. The spelling of the poem is the original spelling from the published script. See Parks, Venus, 94.

[22] At the production at the Olney Theatre Center in Olney, Maryland, the Baron Docteur's lecture was broadcast over speakers "into the entire theatre complex," so that even spectators who had chosen to leave the auditorium and take a break could hear it. See Mary Carole McCauley, "Parks keeps 'Venus' Alive through the Break. The Play Continues during the Intermission," rev. of Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks, The Baltimore Sun 25 August, 2004: n. pag.

[23] On the *Lehrstücke*, see Brecht on Theatre, 77-81, 57-62.

dismembering of Baartman; positioned as mourners, they were invited to re-member the person displaced in the fictional role of the Venus Hottentot.

Critics of various productions reported that the unusual intermission caused considerable confusion and displeasure, which was only exceeded by the extreme unease that spectators apparently felt at the sight of the Venus's physical humiliation in the scenes where the chorus of spectators kicks and pokes her, despite the artists' efforts to foreground the representational mechanisms in these scenes. Parks and Foreman could perhaps have avoided these effects, and much scathing criticism, had they had a conventional intermission, *told* about the Venus's humiliation rather than *shown* it on stage, and cast a white actor in the role of the Baron Docteur. Yet, as the reviews demonstrate, the choices that they made provoked a fruitful debate about the racial and gender politics of representation on the US stages. The script's references to Godard and Woolf indicate that Parks's involvement in this debate was not incidental. Rather, her dual spectatorship approach – using Brechtian strategies, yet not allowing spectators analytical detachment – is integral to a systematic investigation of spectatorship as a gendered and racial practice.

The published script of Venus starts with two quotes. The first, "Le travail humain/ Ressucite les choses/ D'entre les mortes" ("The work of humans raises things from the dead"), appears on a frame between two episodes of Masculin-féminin. The second, "'You don't believe in history,' said William," comes from Between the Acts. On the surface, the quotes refer to the historical past. Additionally, both Godard's film and Woolf's novel are preoccupied with spectators' responses to visual events. The quotes, therefore, imply the close connection between historiography and spectatorship, integral both to Parks's work and to Brechtian theory. Yet, at the same time that Maculin-Féminin and the theatrical performance in Between the Acts employ

Brechtian distancing strategies, they also critique distanced viewing and alternate these

strategies with techniques that implicate the viewer into the politics of representation, just as Venus does.

Framed by the failed romance between Paul and Isabelle, Godard's film about "the children of Marx and Coca-Cola" is a Brechtian fable which draws a parallel between political passivity and social injustice. Inspired by Marxist ideas, Paul uselessly protests against the war in Vietnam, while Isabelle divides her time between her fledgling career as a rock singer and styling her hair. An early scene in a bathroom includes an eight-minute shot in which Isabelle combs her hair in front of a mirror while discussing with Paul the possibility of sleeping with him. The slowness of action and the concentration on routine daily activities, as in this episode, are a major narrative technique throughout the movie, withholding from spectators the pleasures of linearity and suspense familiar in mainstream cinema. Throughout the film, Paul and Isabelle become accidental witnesses to a number of violent events. In a café, a man and a woman start a noisy argument. The man rushes out with their child; the woman follows and shoots him. "Shut the door!" Paul calls after the woman.[24] In another episode, a nondescript looking man asks Paul for matches and walks off with the whole box. Paul follows him to retrieve his box and, when he comes back, we learn that he has seen the man set himself on fire in protest against the war in Vietnam. In both scenes, the camera focuses not on the incident but on Paul's off-hand response. We never learn what happens next. The mundane story of Paul and Isabelle goes on.

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[24] Masculin-féminin: 15 faits précis, dir. Jean-Luc Godard, perf. Jean Pierre Leaud, Chantal Goya, Marlene Jobert, Brigitte Bardot, Michel Debord, and Catherine-Isabelle Duport (Paris: Argos Films and Stockholm: Svensk Filmindustri Sandrews, 1996), videotape (Irvington: Criterion Collection and Chicago: Home Vision Entertainment, 2005). All subsequent citations have been taken from this videotape.

Later, the same technique, whereby an emotional climax is disabled by shifting the

focus onto the listless onlookers, is used in an episode engaging specifically with racial violence. Riding on the Paris Metro, Paul witnesses the climax of Amiri Baraka's play Dutchman, first performed in 1964, two years before the release of Masculin-fééminin. In Godard's version, French cinema icon Brigitte Bardot impersonates the white seductress Lula, who stabs to death the young and educated African American Clay as they ride together on the subway. Unlike in Dutchman, however, the white seductress in Godard's film interacts with two black men, possibly Algerians or natives of another French colony. While one of them pronounces Clay's scornful speech against whites, the other watches passively. The camera moves between the quarreling duo and the other white passengers, who try hard not to notice the conflict. Only Paul sees that the woman is getting ready to shoot, but his attempt to stop her comes a second too late. We hear the shot, then we see the subway train riding on, and the scene cuts abruptly. In the next scene, Isabelle and one of her girlfriends discuss skin products in front of a bathroom mirror. "Skin is very important for me,' Isabelle's friend says. "It defines people's contacts with each other." The racial violence and the lack of meaningful contact among people of different races and genders get displaced by cosmetic concerns. Skin becomes a seemingly ahistorical commodity.

Preventing an emotional climax in Brecht typically invites analysis of the social and economic context framing the event. Godard, however, comments on a kind of emotional detachment which masks an onlooker's reluctance to bear witness for the victimized social other. This escapist, non-committal detachment, he argues, trivializes violence.[25] Paul's failure to communicate the incident on the subway is a poignant comment on the trivialization of

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[25] Russ Castronovo's reading of a witness's reports on lynching, confirms Godard's insight. "As the bonfire rose and the mutilation of the lynched corpse entailed ritualistic dismemberment, shock and outrage were harder to come by.

racial violence in France, in the period following North Africa's decolonization. After some
ineffective attempts to limit racist outbursts between 1959 and 1961, the French government adopted a firm line on racial politics: "there was too little racism in France to merit legislation."[26] Paul's detachment in the subway episode, like the detachment of the unreliable surrogate spectators in Venus, draws a connection between racism and the inability of the dominantly-positioned viewer to identify across racial and gender differences. To Parks and Godard alike, race is the outcome of a failed encounter with the other.

Parks's reference to Between the Acts, on the other hand, signals her concern with women's alienation from the cultural establishment. Throughout the novel, Woolf underscores that reality and representation are gendered concepts. For the patriarch Mr. Oliver, the books in his "country gentleman's library" signify "the treasured lifeblood of immortal spirits."[27] Conversely, his daughter-in-law Isa, trapped in domesticity, finds no "remedy" in Keats, Shelley, Yeats, or Donne. According to Woolf, women's marginal position within the dominant culture induces "splitting off of consciousness": a mode of being that can be both debilitating and empowering.[28] Finding language ineffective, Isa tries to communicate through manipulating silence. Similarly, when the Venus tries to tell her own story, she only manages to repeat the normative narrative of her arrival in Europe. Like Isa's silences, Parks's opaque spells and rests provide the only possibility for non-alienated expression, an expression beyond language. It is a double-edged solution: while women's refusal of normative representation may prevent them from perpetuating the status quo, this refusal may also deepen their isolation. The alternative,

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Aesthetic disinterest – the sign of mature reflection and appreciation – literally makes for a lethal performance." Russ Castronovo, "Beauty along the Color Line," 1452.

[26] See Erik Bleich, Race Politics in Britain and France: Ideas and Policy Making since the 1960s (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 129.

[27] Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts (1941; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002) 63. My emphasis.

[28] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1929) 101; Qtd. in Tracy Seeley, "(Un)weaving the Shroud of the Fathers: 'A Woman's Sentence' in Between the Acts," Critical Matrix 7.1 (1993): 83.

Woolf implies, is to make all spectators experience women's split consciousness and,

thereby become aware of the contingency of their viewing positions. In a sense, the novel's entire plot is driven by this implicit project, culminating in a feminist staging of a Brechtian performance.

Between the Acts is loosely structured around a theatrical pageant, presenting the history of Britain from the beginnings to the spectators' present. Hidden from view, the pageant's lesbian director Miss La Trobe "work[s] like a *nigger*"[29] to give her audience a Brechtian position of control. In turn, her astute spectators maintain a critically-doubled vision. Throughout the performance, they comment on the cost of the production and on the casting choices, and carefully negotiate the phenomenological distinctions between the fictional stories told on stage and their own reality. Is this the beginning, they ask, or are actors making final adjustments to the set? Is this the prologue or the first scene?[30] Yet, during the final act, Miss La Trobe, like Parks in the intermission of Venus, abruptly departs from the already-established contract of performer-spectator exchange. The actors come forth, holding mirrors in their hands, and return spectators' images in fragments, demoting spectators from controlling observers to the actors' captives and metaphorically demonstrating that spectators are never observing representation from a neutral position. Earlier, Miss La Trobe has suggested that the final act intends "to expose" spectators, "to douche them with present time: reality."[31] It is the reality of women's cultural displacement.

Of course, contextualizing Venus within the representational politics of Godard's and Woolf's works is only available to the readers of the script. But if Parks's commitment to gender and critical-race analysis could be made equally explicit in performance, then perhaps her and

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[29] Woolf, Between the Acts, 81. My emphasis.
[30] Ibid., 42.
[31] Ibid., 96.

Foreman's controversial decision to present the Venus as an embodiment of a racial stereotype would be considered more carefully. In performance, the crucial device conveying Parks's critical-race and feminist perspectives is the play-within-the-play "For the Love of Venus." Four interspersed scenes show the Baron Docteur as the play-within-the-play's only spectator. At the same time, the Venus, standing to the side, watches the Baron Docteur watch. In the first two scenes, the Bride-to-Be tries to tempt the Young Man with exotic goods from the colonies: coffee, tea, and chocolate, but he would have none.[32] In the third scene, the Young Man declares his desire for the Hottentot Venus. In the last, the Bride-to-Be dresses up as the Hottentot Venus. In the end, having regained his fiancée's affection, she discloses her true, white self. [33] These scenes literally stage the Venus as an outsider to representation, observing, from the side, a white male's desire for exotic strangeness, and learning (in the terms of a feminist contemporary with Woolf) the complex *masquerade* of femininity and race.[34] In a subsequent scene, the Venus is shown in the Baron's house, dreaming of money and social status, and bossing an imaginary servant girl around.[35] In this scene, she practices what she learned at the theatre: a performance of white femininity. The Negro Resurrectionist also attends the play. Astutely, he watches not from the side but from a seat in the auditorium, just like the Baron Docteur. Hence, through this act of spectatorship, the Negro Resurrectionist tries to accede to the privileges of white masculinity. The stage directions describe the Negro Resurrectionist as a reluctant spectator.[36] But in the end, like the Baron Docteur, he betrays the Venus and sells her corpse to the anatomist. Like the Venus, he, too, has learned that power and money constitute

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[32] Parks, Venus, 25-27, 38-39.
[33] Ibid., 48-49, 153-54.
[34] See Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," The Inner World and Joan Rivière: Collected Papers, 1920-1958, ed. Athol Hughes (1929; London and New York: Karnac Books, 1991) 90-101.
[35] Ibid., 135.
[36] Ibid., 121.

whiteness. Together, these metatheatrical scenes, like Miss La Trobe's mirrors, return the

question about the politics of spectatorship to the viewers in the auditorium: how do you look and to what ends? At the same time, both the Venus's dream of whiteness and the Negro Resurrectionist's act of white spectatorship metaphorically warn against romanticizing displaced positions as inherently critical and emphasize the attraction that the cultural establishment may hold over those whom it marginalizes.

Unfortunately, many reviewers seem to have overlooked the importance of the play-within-the play. For instance, Robert Brustein suggested that "the play needs editing (the play-within-a play can easily go)."[37] The play-within-the play's significance could be emphasized in performance by making a reference to the practices of segregated seating in US theatre auditoria in the nineteenth-century. According to theatre scholar Susan Manning, it appears that, in the US, "integrated seating did not become the norm until after World War II." Until then, African American spectators typically sat in the top balcony, which led to the expression "nigger heaven."[38] In the Yale Repertory Theatre's production, the Baron Docteur and the Negro Resurrectionist watched "For the Love of Venus" from box seats elevated above stage right and stage left, made accessible through ladders.[39] Perhaps if one of the boxes had been designated for "Negro" spectators, and then the Negro Resurrectionist were shown to watch from the "white" box, the political significance of his act could have been conveyed more clearly in performance. Of course, Manning discusses an American practice of segregation, and the Venus's story technically takes place in Europe, yet Venus is an American play, commenting on American racial and gender practices; hence, a reference to a "nigger heaven" would not be unjustified.

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[37] Robert Brustein, rev. of Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks, New Republic 20 May 1996: 29.

[38] Susan Manning, Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) xvi, 224.

[39] Venus, by Suzan-Lori Parks, dir. Richard Foreman.

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Considered in terms of Woolf's and Godard's shared concern about social others and their suspicion of aesthetic distance, Parks's dual spectatorship tactic reopens the issue of the applicability of Brecht's method to theatrical encounters defined by gender and racial politics. Feminist and other materialist scholars have studied this issue insightfully and in much detail. My decision to address it again stems from the critical reception of Parks and Forman's portrayal of the Venus, which, I believe, illuminates a yet unresolved aspect of Brecht's theory of spectatorship. Specifically, the mismatch between Elam, Rayner, and Greene's recognition of the play's Brechtian strategies and their failure to see the humiliated black female body from a Brechtian distanced position suggests the difficulty of divesting the actor's body of its racial and gender symbolism and transforming it into a Brechtian sign.

My use of the term "symbolism" derives from political theorist Hanna Pitkin's analysis of symbolization. Pitkin defines the symbol as an instance of representation in which emotional investment abolishes the analytical distinction between the signifier and the signified, familiar from formalist linguistics. "Rather than a source of information," she writes, "the symbol seems to be… an object of feelings… for what it represents." Because of the emotional investments in a symbol, what happens to a symbol is seen "as happening to its referent as well."[40] For instance, the public act of burning a national flag cannot acquire political significance unless this flag is perceived as a symbol of a nation rather than as a sign for a country. The response to a symbol is not logical, as it depends "more on training and habit than on learning and understanding."[41] Symbolization, then, accounts for representation's performative function. In the case of Parks and Foreman's production, spectators' shared knowledge of a history of racial and gender

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[40] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "'Standing For:' Symbolic Representation," The Concept of Representation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) 99.
[41] Pitkin, 100-105.

discrimination made many feel that the Venus should not have been negatively represented

or physically over-exposed. Parks's transgression of this taboo reflects an insight into the ethics of critical distancing and, in doing so, reveals the embodied subject of Brecht's spectatorship theory.

The implicit critique of liberal individualism that materialist scholars have read in some of Brecht's texts is one of the two major reasons for Brecht's continuing authority among them, the other being the usefulness of Brecht's method for exposing gender and race as historically-defined, social-economic relations rather than naturally-predetermined essences.[42] Brecht's critique of subjectivity goes hand in hand with an attempt to interrupt symbolization, in Pitkin's terms, particularly the symbolism of the suffering body, by showing symbolization's long-term effects. In The Measures Taken (1930), for instance, he presents the individual's alleged uniqueness and the respect for individual suffering as bourgeois ideological illusions. In the play, a young revolutionary's compassion for individual people's plights jeopardizes his comrades' struggle for universal equality. "But you must not fall prey to pity," the comrades insist.[43] The suffering body, mandating immediate help for the individual sufferer, obscures the larger objectives of the revolution. Elsewhere, the comrades again proclaim the individual's unimportance, stating "We had to efface our personal features" and "You are nameless and without a past, empty pages on which the revolution may write its instructions."[44] In the end, having understood the dangerous effects of individuality, the young revolutionary consents to be thrown into a lime pit so that his comrades can safely fulfill their mission. Brecht's earlier play

[42] See, for instance, Diamond, Unmaking Mimesis, 52; and Alisa Solomon, "Materialist Girl: *The Good Person of Szechwan* and Making Gender Strange," Redressing the Canon: Essays on Theatre and Gender (London: Routledge, 1997) 70-94. Loren Kruger discusses the applications of Brecht's theory to economic analysis of race in performance in Post-Imperial Brecht: Politics and Performance, East and South (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 215-80.
[43] Bertolt Brecht, The Measures Taken, in The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke, trans. Carl R. Mueller (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001) 14.
[44] Brecht, The Measures Taken, 12.

Man Equals Man (1926), in which the porter Galy Gay seemingly effortlessly abandons his

previous identity and becomes a soldier of the British army, also proposes that people are not unique individuals but replaceable social units, even though colonialism rather than a communist imperative renders Galy Gay exchangeable.

This recurring thesis leads Janelle Reinelt to conclude that "the implicit theory of the subject in Brecht's work is the subject-in-process, crisscrossed by the contradictions of competing practices," and that, therefore, this theory is akin to the concept of the subject in materialist feminist theory.[45] In the same vein, Elin Diamond writes that "in Brecht agency does not signal the return to the old intentional subject – no coherent ego's intentions 'saturate' (Derrida's term) a given context. The character is never the focal point of the Brechtian stage, but rather the always dissimulated historical conditions that keep her from choosing and changing."[46] Like these feminist scholars, Sean Carney reads in the Brechtian concept of alienation "an entire theory of socialization [and] subject-formation"[47] which demonstrates to the subject that her perception of herself as an individual with a free will is an illusion. By inducing historical perception, the *Verfremdungseffekt* renders the subject aware of the extent to which her presumably free choices have been shaped by the larger (capitalist) economic and symbolic structures of the society in which she lives. At the same time, Carney continues, this very awareness enables her "to wrest a kernel of freedom" from these structures.[48] Though I find these arguments persuasive, I also find that they present Brecht's stance on subjecthood as more unified than it actually is and do not distinguish between the subject-positions of his characters and that of his ideal spectator.

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[45] Janelle Reinelt, "Rethinking Brecht: Deconstruction, Feminism, and the Politics of Form," Essays on Brecht: Brecht Yearbook 15, ed. Marc Silberman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990) 103, 106.
[46] Elin Diamond, Unmaking Mimesis, 47.
[47] Carney, Brecht and Critical Theory, 14-15.
[48] Carney, ibid., 21.

For instance, in Man Equals Man, Galy Gay and the British soldier become interchangeable not only because colonialism discourages individualism, but also because of Galy Gay's own irrational choices. The implication is that the Brechtian spectator, judging these irrational choices from her distanced perspective, will be able, in similar circumstances, to choose rationally. Thus Man Equals Man appears to confirm Carney's conclusion that in Brechtian theory individual choice is limited, but possible. Brecht's revision of his *Lehrstück* He Who Says Yes (1930), following the play's controversial reception, also reinforces the value of individual choice.

He Who Says Yes develops along the same lines as The Measures Taken. A young boy joins a dangerous expedition in the mountains in order to find a remedy for his sick mother. On the way, the boy himself gets sick and, following an ancient rule, agrees to be hurled over a precipice so that he will not hinder his comrades' mission. As in The Measures Taken, He Who Says Yes suggests that compassion for an individual's distress may serve the status quo by deflecting attention from the systemic reasons underlying human suffering: the capitalist order which produces suffering bodies through unfair exploitation and lack of access to medication. In other words, the two plays attempt to engage spectators in what Tracy Davis calls an act of theatricality, "the enabling effects of active dissociation… or self-reflexivity in standing aside from the suffering of the righteous to name and thus bring into being the self-possession of a critical stance."[49] Yet, neither play managed to encourage active dissociation. The Measures Taken stirred controversy, provoking suspicions that Brecht may have been supportive of authoritarian rule.[50] Likewise, the resolution of He Who Says Yes deeply disturbed a group of

[49] Tracy Davis, "Theatricality and Civil Society," Theatricality, eds. Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 153.
[50] See Roswitha Mueller, "Learning for the New Society: the *Lehrstück*," The Cambridge Companion to Brecht, eds. Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 89.

school children who were the play's first audience.[51] In response, Brecht wrote another short play, He Who Says No (1930), recommending that the two should be performed together whenever possible. In this second play, the sick boy refuses to sacrifice himself for the sake of his mother, maintaining that self-sacrifice is not always meaningful. His comrades accept his reasoning and all return to the village, "toward calumny/ toward ridicule… /None more cowardly than his neighbor."[52] Unlike in Man Equals Man, individual choice in He Who Says Yes and He Who Says No is a matter of personal preference rather than of rational consideration. The comrades' acceptance of the boy's decision renders the play truly utopian and, at the same time, restores the possibility of free will and the power of intentionality.

The epic plays Mother Courage (1941) and The Good Person of Szechwan (1943) complicate the idea of choice based on either reason or preference. The characters Mother Courage and Shen Te face dilemmas that oppose pragmatic reason and human compassion, as in The Measures Taken. They may either show compassion and be ruined, or stick with ruthless pragmatism and survive. Both plays drive home the message that "free choice" under capitalism is only an illusion.

Finally, Galileo, another epic play, puts a particularly interesting spin on the issue of choice. Facing death for his experiments that the inquisition deems "heretic," and unwilling to give up the pleasures of the body, particularly the pleasure of food, Galileo denounces his discoveries. Meeting Galileo years after the denouncement, his former student Andrea accuses him of thwarting the progress of science. On receiving the news of Galileo's recantation, Andrea says, Descartes abandoned his own study of the properties of light. But Andreas turns out to be wrong. Escaping the supervision of the clergy, whose prisoner Galileo remains until his death, he

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[51] Mueller, 91.
[52] Brecht, He Who Says No, The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke, 79.

manages to restore his "Discorsi" and continue his experiments secretly, every night. His
fear of torture and his enjoyment of earthly pleasures have enabled him to make a revolutionary contribution to science. In other words, his love for the pleasures of the body, rather than rational choice or personal preference, enables him to resist oppression at least in part and in secret.

Together, these five plays reveal that Brecht continually returned to the question of the character's subjecthood and agency throughout his work, without formulating a definitive answer. At first glance, the question of the spectator's agency in Brecht's theory appears to be even more complex. The ideal Brechtian spectator identifies, in turns, with the character and with the actor, who simultaneously embodies and comments on the character. It is a hierarchical process of identification. No matter how absorbing the character's story may be, the actor's critical interpretation holds primacy. At the same time, the gestic mise-en-scène – whereby the elements of performance (music, movement, text, costume, set) do not complement one another to create a semblance of reality, but emphasize their separate functions – continually reminds the spectator that she is watching a theatrical performance. Hence, no matter how the characters' freedom is defined – by their ability to make rational decisions, their ethical preference, or their economic and social circumstances – the ideal spectator holds a position semiotically marked as external to representation, from which she evaluates characters' possibilities for freedom in view of the characters' specific conditions. The ideal spectator's position thus creates an illusion of objective viewing. The reason why this model spectator has been appealing to materialist theatre scholars, nonetheless, is that at least in certain scenarios, as in Brecht's project for a smoker's theatre, the spectator's bodily practices become central to critical viewing.

Because the body intersects so crucially with Brecht's idea of analytical viewing – the suffering body undermines his distancing strategies, yet the body experiencing pleasure enables

critique – it is necessary to consider whose bodies they are. Brecht's notes on the smoker's

theatre, comparing the smoking spectator to a boxing fan, suggest that the critically-enabling body is a working-class body, unconstrained by bourgeois rules. In his reading of Galileo, Frederic Jameson similarly proposes that the resisting body in Brecht's plays is the body of the oppressed, without describing this body in terms of class. To Jameson, Brecht's treatment of bodily pleasure is integral to his materialist approach. Characters such as Galileo and Mother Courage, he writes, are unwilling to let go of these pleasures, just because the authorities or moral idealism require it, regardless of any prospects of reward. Brecht thus stages "a desperate contradiction… between body and soul" and so also between idealism and materialism.[53]

Yet, as I proposed at the beginning of the chapter, by comparing Brecht's smoking spectator with historical accounts of African American and female spectatorship, the smoking spectator's body appears to be not only working-class but also white and male. The bodily experiences of Brecht's characters are similarly constrained by race and gender. The Russian agitators in The Measure Taken insist that their young Chinese comrade should withdraw his sympathy from the suffering Chinese coolie. They do not even consider the possibility that the Chinese comrade's attitude to the coolie may be influenced by his particular cultural knowledge, not only by communist doctrines. These doctrines are supposed to apply equally to all cultural contexts. Mother Courage pays for her pursuit of pleasure with the lives of her children. Shen Te, who has been able to gain some power by masking as a man, finds herself on the brink of ruin when, after submitting to bodily pleasures, gets pregnant and thus becomes less able to perform her life-saving masquerade as her pregnancy advances. Shen Te's "unreliable" female body betrays her.

[53] Jameson, 124.

Replacing Brecht's smoking spectator with a chorus of masturbating spectators,

Parks effectively stages the racial and gender politics underlying the pleasures of aesthetic distance. In doing so, she partakes of a complex intellectual and artistic genealogy which contests the modernist concept of objective knowledge and viewing and, instead, investigates how the shared fantasies through which social members try to make sense of the social *other* inform both economic relations and positions of knowledge and viewing. In other words, while Brecht's dialectical approach aligns with classical Marxism, Park's concern with the symbolism of racial and gender difference aligns her with a critical tradition of feminist and critical-race thought. Even before the poststructuralist turn of the 1980s, theorists of gender and race, such as Joan Rivière, Frantz Fanon, and Octave Mannoni, whose work is roughly contemporary with Brecht's evolving dramaturgy and, in Fanon's case, critically engages with Marxist thought, proposed that identity is performatively produced and analyzed the role of shared fantasies and affective investments in social interaction.

In a well-known scene from Black Skin, White Masks (1952), a white male child sees a black man in the street and screams "Look a Negro! … Mama, see the Negro! I am frightened."[54] This scene conceptualizes race not as an essential property of the body but as an outcome of a visual interaction between hierarchically positioned social participants. Race is performatively enforced upon the black man so that the little boy may have proof of his own whiteness. In Ann Pellegrini's astute reading, race in Fanon is an ideological discourse, which "claims and incorporates the body as its truth effect."[55]

While not underestimating Fanon's importance, Christopher Lane argues that Fanon's account of race is rather rigidly reciprocal, "for it locks Europeans in a category of sameness and

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[54] Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (1952; New York: Grove Press, 1967) 112.

[55] Ann Pellegrini, Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race (New York: Routledge, 1997) 102.

fixes the colonized as Europe's 'Other.'"[56] Lane proposes that Octave Mannoni's concept of the "imagoes," contemporary with Fanon's own writings, usefully complicates Fanon's idea of race as an intersubjective relationship. The imagoes – projections of culturally-defined attitudes and perceptions that mediate encounters between social others – counter "the seductive fallacy that our apprehension of other people is transparent, direct," and undermine "any notion of perfect symmetry between [the colonizer] and the colonized, making clear that each refers first to a mental image."[57] Mannoni's concept of the imagoes anticipates Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis's notion of situated imagination as a set of culturally-shared attitudes and perceptions that mediate social dialogue.

Finally, in "Womanliness as a Masquerade," (1929) Rivière, similarly to Fanon and Mannoni, describes femininity not as an essence but as a mask which a woman assumes to negotiate power relations in male-dominated societies. The woman Rivière describes is a professionally-accomplished, white American of the late-1920s, who compensates for her "unfeminine" intellectual achievements by behaving in an overtly feminine manner, seeking men's reassurance and protection. The idea that this woman's performances of femininity serve to cover up her actual, masculine identification implies that gender performance and gender identification need not coincide. "The reader may ask… where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade,'" Rivière continues. "My suggestion is… [that] they are the same thing."[58] At the same time, individual performances of masquerade signify differently because of the specific historical and affective histories of the masquerading women. The woman whom Rivière discusses has a recurring dream of being alone in a house when an African

[56] Christopher Lane, "Psychoanalysis and Colonialism Redux: Why Mannoni's 'Prospero Complex' Still Haunts Us," Journal of Modern Literature 25.3-4 (2002): 129.
[57] Lane, 136.
[58] Rivière, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," 90-101.

American man comes in intending to rape her, but she seduces him with feminine allure and
pretense of helplessness. In the dream, the woman's ultimate goal is to turn the man over to the authorities. Rivière specifies that the woman grew up in a Southern State.[59] Viewed in the historical context of the late-1920s, when lynching and various milder forms of racism were common in the US, this woman's performance of femininity turns out to be inseparable from racial politics. The lack of coincidence between gender performance and gender identification in Rivière's case study, and the simultaneous identification with whiteness revealed in a dream (i.e. not immediately accessible to the viewers of the woman's performance), like Mannoni's concept of the imagoes, implies a lack of transparency in gender and racial relations that renders their discussion within a rationalist framework insufficient.

Juxtaposed with Brecht's spectatorship model, these theories contest its rationalist premise and teleological, causal movement from illusion to enlightenment. Because both spectators' and actors' bodies are inscribed in gender and racial politics, spectators cannot assume a position external to representation. Inevitably, their own embodiments of race, gender, sexuality, and class situate them economically and emotionally vis à vis the theatrical representation, in ways which are impossible to fully predict.

Brecht was only tangentially concerned with the way embodiment particularizes viewing. Even the particularity he ascribes to the smoking spectator's working-class body does not translate into a situated viewing position because, implicitly, this is the "correct" viewing position in terms of his model, in the same way in which, to him, Marxist analysis equals objective knowledge. By contrast, artists who felt constrained on account of their gender and/or race sought for strategies that would convey the relationship between embodiment and knowledge. Here, I will briefly discuss three examples of the way particular artists and/or

[59] Rivière, 93.

theorists addressed this relationship. These include W.E.B. Du Bois's theory of art as propaganda and his concept of double consciousness, which bears theoretical affinity to Woolf's split consciousness despite their different historical contexts; the Black Art Movement's experiments with the racial politics of spectatorship as in Ed Bullin's The Theme is Blackness (1966) and Amiri Baraka's Slave Ship (1967); and, finally, Henry Louis Gates's concept of Signifying' as a practice of cultural resistance.[60]

My choice of these particular examples is motivated by Parks's own work and the critical responses it has provoked. In addition to citing Woolf in the published script of Venus, Parks indirectly cites Baraka's Dutchman through citing Masculin-Féminin which included Dutchman's final scene. Sinclair's and other African Americans' unfavorable reviews of Venus as racist are at least in part informed by the influential cultural-separatist trend in the Black Arts Movement to which both Baraka and Bulling subscribed. In turn, this trend inherited major ideas of Du Bois's writings on art and race. Sinclair, for instance, has written numerous essays on African American art of the 1960s and 1970s and upholds playwright August Wilson as the successor of this nationalistic tradition.[61] Indeed, at the 1996 annual convention of the Theatre and Communications' Group, held several months after Venus opened, Wilson stated that the separatism of the Black Art's Movement should become a standard for contemporary African American theatre.[62] According to Sinclair and Young, Parks tragically failed to meet this standard. By contrast, I see continuity between her work and the artists of the Black Art's

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[60] Gates capitalizes the word, to mark orthographically the distinction between African American and dominant cultural practices.
[61] See, for instance, Klytus Smith and Abiola Sinclair, eds., The Harlem Cultural/Political Movements 1960-1970 (New York: Gumbs and Thomas Publishers, Inc. 1995). See also Abiola Sinclair, "Black Aesthetic: A Conversation with Playwright August Wilson," Conversations with August Wilson, eds. Jackson R. Bryer and Mary C. Hartig (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006) 90-100.
[62] His conference address was later published in August Wilson, The Ground on which I Stand (London: Nick Hern, 2001). I discuss his address in detail in my next chapter.

Movement, which is manifest in their shared interest in the relationship between racial identity and visual representation, and in their evolving thinking on what constitutes black aesthetics. The recurring tropes of critical doubling in their approaches and their engagement with Marxism from an African American standpoint illuminate both Brecht's implicit racial politics and Parks's own theatrical contribution. Finally, Gates' Signifying, as a practice which thwarts teleological thinking, further elucidates Parks's dual approach to spectatorship.

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Du Bois's definition of blackness as a historically-constructed mode of social being, which he names "double consciousness," constitutes an important paradigm shift in thinking about race.[63] Similar to Virginia Woolf's non-essentialist definition of femininity as "split consciousness," double consciousness describes the discrepancy between the western modernist ideology of progress, based on logical reasoning, and the reality of racial segregation. The contradiction between the project of African American enfranchisement and the rampant racism of the post-Civil War US was a concrete manifestation of this discrepancy. When Du Bois first used the term double consciousness, in the Souls of Black Folk, he defined it as a debilitating condition: an irreconcilable "twoness" caused by looking at oneself through a hostile white look.[64] Yet, in his later essay "The Souls of White Folk," double consciousness becomes productive of a critical stance.

> Of them [white folk] I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. Not as a foreigner do I come, for I am native, not foreign,

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[63] See, for instance, Anthony Appia, "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race," "Race," Writing and Difference, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986) 22; Rutledge Dennis, "W.E.B. Du Bois's Concept of Double Consciousness," Race and Ethnicity: Comparative and Theoretical Approaches, eds. John Stone and Rutledge Dennis (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 13-27.

[64] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," The Souls of Black Folk, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., intr. Arnold Rampersad (1903; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 3.

> bone of their thought and flesh of their language. Mine is not the knowledge of the traveler… Nor yet is my knowledge that which servants have of masters, or mass of class, or capitalist of artisan. Rather I see these souls undressed and from the back and side.[65]

In sharp contrast to the modernist master narrative, which strives to create an "objective" position external to representation, double consciousness represents an avowedly partial stance. This stance is defined culturally (native, not foreign, yet also not white), and economically. Significantly, it is critically-enabling *because of*, not despite, its partiality. By asserting that partiality may have critical potential, Du Bois, like Woolf, anticipates feminist and critical-race trends in the poststructuralist turn, particularly the feminist standpoint theories. Indeed, although gender is not a salient category in his writing, and although he frequently collapses *man* with *individual* and *human*, in several essays he argues that it would be impossible to fulfill the modernist enlightenment project without alleviating the plight of black women and without acknowledging their unique contributions to a humane and enlightened society.[66]

Critical partiality informs Du Bois's reading of Marxism as well. For instance, he maintains that the different histories of the white and black working classes and the continuing rivalry between them require that Marxist social theories should be modified when applied to racial discrimination. Diverging from the Marxist suspicion of the bourgeoisie, he defines the black bourgeoisie as the class that expresses "in word and work the aspirations of all black folk for emancipation."[67] His attitude to history, too, is more complex than that of classical Marxists. As in Brecht, history in Du Bois can be empowering. This motivates his attempts to record the

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[65] W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk," The Seventh Son: The Thought and Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, ed. Julius Lester, vol. 1, (New York: Vintage Books, 1971) 486-87.

[66] The most famous of these essays is "The Damnation of Women," in The Seventh Son, vol. 1, 511-526. See also "The Black Mother," The Seventh Son, vol. 2, 43; and "On the Meaning on Progress," The Souls of Black Folk, 30-36.

[67] See Du Bois, "Marxism and the Negro Problem," The Seventh Son: vol. 2, 295. See also Du Bois, "Karl Marx and the Negro," The Seventh Son, vol. 1, 289-293; Du Bois, "The Negro and Radical Thought," The Seventh Son, vol. 2, 261-265.

unacknowledged accomplishments of black women and men. But, as in Parks, history can also be disabling. The middle passage, slavery, and lynching are, after all, at the root of African-Americans' irreconcilable "twoness."

In Du Bois's theory of art, partiality assumes the form of propaganda. His notion of propaganda is unexpectedly flexible. Propaganda, he explains, refers to art's capacity for progressive social intervention, and should not be conflated with narrow-minded political bias. "I do not care for any art that is not used for propaganda," he writes. "But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent."[68] Accordingly, he is careful to expose political bias not only in work by white artists, but also in work by African Americans. Thus, in "The Negro and the American Stage," he critiques the overwhelming tendency among back playwrights to present African Americans solely in a positive light. An artist who dares to break with this flawed trend, he reflects, "will come through scarred and perhaps a little embittered, certainly astonished at the almost universal misrepresentations of his motives and aims."[69] This observation strongly resonates with Parks's own assertion that there is no singular black aesthetics. The persistent opposition against representing African Americans in any other way but positively, as in Sinclair's and Young's reviews, demonstrates the continuing effects of racism on the reception of African Americans' theatrical representations, and raises questions about the contemporary failures of America's enfranchisement projects.

Yet, despite Du Bois's care to give propaganda a wide definition, many African American artists and intellectuals, most famously Alain Locke, found his theory restrictive. The plays that Du Bois produced with KRIGWA (the Crisis Guild of Writer's and Actors' Little Negro Theatre) did not help his cause, as many black playwrights and critics deemed them

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[68] Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," The Seventh Son, vol. 2, 319.
[69] Du Bois, "The Negro and the American Stage," The Seventh Son, vol. 2, 311-12.

aesthetically-uninventive and formulaic.[70] It also seems that, even though Du Bois was presciently aware of the politics of representation, he did not yet fully understand the various levels on which these politics worked. For instance, while his art theory addresses questions of art production, he appears unaware of the politics of reception. In “The Colored Audience,” a rare text focusing on spectatorship, he reproaches African American spectators for laughing at inappropriate moments during a performance of Othello, concluding that they are unable to appreciate “good” drama. To Brecht, such laughter would have probably conveyed the critical irreverence that he sought to encourage in his smoker’s theatre. But Brecht’s membership in the German ethnic majority gave him a freedom to critique mainstream European culture that the racially-marked Du Bois did not have. Not yet grasping the concept of “good” drama as contingent on cultural (including racial) politics, Du Bois’s position on proper audience behavior made him complicit with the disciplining practices of the mainstream.

The history of the Black Arts Movement, by contrast, gives evidence of African American artists’ increasing attention to the disciplining power of spectatorial conventions. The visual experiments in Baraka’s Slave Ship and Bullin’s The Theme is Blackness demonstrate that concerns with spectators’ contribution to the meanings of a performance became paramount. In Bullin’s piece, an actor addressed the audience and announced that “the theme of today’s performance is blackness.” Immediately after that, the stage and the auditorium were submerged

[70] Besides Alain Locke, playwright Eulalie Spence, whose award-winning play Fool’s Errand was produced by KRIGWA in 1927, also denounced propaganda art, arguing for the power of entertainment to draw people together. See Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, A History of African American Theatre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 217, 223. According to critic Russ Castronovo, the true aesthetic potential of Du Bois’s art theory is, therefore, not to be sought for in his theatrical work, but in the monthly journal the Crisis, which Du Bois edited. Setting articles about black artistic accomplishments against reports on lynching, Du Bois gestically commented on racist statements about black inferiority and white refinement. Castronovo suggests that Du Bois was not aware of the aesthetic innovation that he forged in the Crisis. See Castronovo, "Beauty along the Color Line,” 1449.

in darkness, exposing the reliance of racism on vision.[71] The 1969 production of Baraka's Slave Ship at the Chelsea Theatre similarly denied spectators the uninterrupted pleasurable viewing typical of mainstream realist theatre. Spectators were "assaulted" with smells and violent sound; bright strobe light alternated with extended periods of darkness.[72] By alternately allowing a view of the stage and the unexpectedly obscuring visibility, these two artists also denied viewers the detached position of Brecht's epic performances. The blinking red light which Foreman used in the mise-en-scène of Venus, and which so frustrated some spectators,[73] does not directly refer to Bullin's and Baraka's visual experiments. Yet this light may be interpreted as serving the same function: commenting on the excessive visibility historically enforced upon African Americans, especially African American women.

Despite the inherent danger of generalizing the diverse trends of the Black Arts Movement, scholars agree that (like Du Bois and like Parks) the Movement's representatives were not interested in the strictly materialist interpretations of history. Instead, as in Slave Ship, they tapped the unifying power of historical memory (the subjective experiences of history) to involve spectators in emotional, quasi-religious communication with the actors.[74] Similarly, Adrienne Kennedy's expressionistic staging of racism's affective impact on African Americans' self-perception conveys her interest in cultural memory rather than factual historical narratives. Yet her explicit use of European aesthetic models and her focus on black women's emotional

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[71] Mike Sell, Avant-Garde Performance & the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings, Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005) 247.
[72] Sell, 248.
[73] Sinclair, "Notes on 'Venus;'" In a letter to the New York Times, spectator Murray Berdick complains that the "inexplicable features of the production," such as the "lights in the audience's eyes," test spectator's endurance, rather than communicate "the playwright's message." See Murray Berdick, letter to the editor, New York Times 12 May, 1996: 54.
[74] James Edward Smethurst, The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalisms in the 1960s and 1970s (Chapelhill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 77-78.

relationship to racial hierarchies placed her apart from the nationalistic, male-centered trend
in the Black Arts Movement.

Parks, who has acknowledged Adrienne Kennedy's theatre as a major influence on her own work,[75] holds a similarly ambivalent position towards the legacy of the Black Arts Movement. Parks's disagreement with black nationalistic politics and with projects for unified aesthetics sets her apart from this legacy, even as she shares its interest in historical memory and in the visual implications of racism. Rather, her engagement with blackness from multiple cultural perspectives (for instance, referring to Baraka's Dutchman by citing the French movie Masculin-Féminin) and her purposeful manipulation of clarity and ambiguity align her method with Gates's theory of Signifyin.' In contrast to the separatist trend in the Black Arts Movement, upheld by some of Parks's critics, this theory proposes that the (white) mainstream cultural aesthetic may be subverted parodically from within.

Like double consciousness, Signifyin' defines race as a cultural practice rather than an essence and undermines the importance that the dominant modernist thinking attaches to linear expression and logical causality. A strong example of intercultural translation, Gates's theory brings together African philosophies of language, which present the mastery of ambiguous expression as a source of social power, with Saussure's formalist principle of the inevitable slippage between the signifier and the signified. Locating Saussure in a context of racial confrontation, Gates claims that this slippage stems from the cultural unconscious of a language: those aspects of communication which prevent it from becoming linear and transparent.

[75] Suzan-Lori Parks and Liz Diamon, "Doo-a-diddly-dit-dit," 72.

Signifyin' – a tactic of repetition with a difference – brings this cultural unconscious to the foreground.[76]

Gates's examples of Signifyin' include African and African American legends and folk tales in which the mastery of ambiguity enables a seemingly weak participant to gain ascendance over a physically strong adversary. Failure to recognize ambiguity and instead taking the adversary's message at face value brings about defeat.[77] In Gates's optimistic reading, Signifyin' is a powerful act of self-definition whereby a community of remarkably self-conscious [African American] speakers managed to "colonize" the white English idiom "by an act of will."[78] Yet his examples suggest that Signifyin' grants only limited agency. Enabled by sheer physical advantage, the antagonist strikes back in the end.

Insofar as Signifyin' dramatizes "the confusion… between the literal and the figurative,"[79] Parks's elaboration on Brecht in Venus constitutes an act of Signifyin.' The symbolism (or, in Gate's terms, the cultural unconscious) of the black body, historically constructed through practices such as lynching and physical exposure at the slave market, exceeded the analytical premise of Brecht's epic theatre. At the same time, the reception of Venus demonstrated the intentional fallacy of Gates's theory. Those who perceived Park's critique of stereotyping as an act of stereotyping may have misread her intentions. Yet they correctly read the stereotype's performative function: its ability to perpetuate discrimination. The symbolism of blackness – forged in a history of racial violence – overrode the attempts to

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[76] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 49-51.
[77] Ibid., 55-58.
[78] Ibid., 47.
[79] Ibid., 55.

represent race as a construct. Commenting on the formative impact of this violent history, Parks wryly remarked: “History is time that won’t quit.”[80]

Viewed in the context of this varied genealogy, Parks’ approach to representation is truly *post*modern. Her approach is simultaneously in dialogue with feminist and critical-race critiques of the modernist master-narrative of progress contemporaneous with modernism and with postmodern arguments affirming the contingency (rather than relativity) of narratives of the past and perceptions of the present. The historical past and the present realities that her work addresses are sites of continuing negotiation among differentially positioned embodied participants. The affective aspects of embodiment deny absolute objectivity to any position.

Between the Scientist’s Gaze and the Animal’s Eyes: Soul of a Clone (2005) by the Upstream Theatre

On May 8, 2005, a friend and I went to the Chicago off-Loop Chopin Theatre to see Soul of a Clone: the inaugural production of the Upstream Theatre. Based in St. Louis, the Upstream Theatre aims to encourage dialogue among the city’s diverse cultural communities and to bring an international perspective to its theatre scene.[81] For instance, the Upstream’s play Alma en venta/ Soul on Sale (2006), written and directed by Philip Boehm, encouraged intercultural collaboration by involving artists of various nationalities and ethnicities in the production process. Iranian musician Farshid Soltanshahi created the sound design. The set design included artwork by Mexican muralists José and Jaime Barragán, props included a mask by American artist of Puerto Rican descent Inez Guzmán, paintings by Fabio Rodríguez of the Dominican Republic and by American Sarah Paulsen. A substantial portion of the audience at the opening-

[80] Parks, “from Elements of Style,” 15.
[81] Upstream Theatre, “Mission Statement,” 24 May, 2007, <http://www.upstreamtheater.org/mission.asp>.

night on April 21, 2006, which I also attended, consisted of immigrants from Central and South America. Similarly, the Chopin, managed by Zygmunt Dyrkacz, a one-time biologist turned theatre producer, and his wife Lela Headd, envisions theatre as "a public square: a place where people gather for discussion."[82] To this end, it hosts a variety of artistic and non-artistic events including theatre performances, film festivals, poetry presentations, and public lectures.

On May 8, the proscenium stage at the Chopin, where we expected to see Soul of a Clone, was equipped with a podium, a white presentation board, a cello, and a music stand. We had just taken our seats when a woman in a red dress came on stage and presented herself as the Chopin's manager Lela Headd. She said that she was pleased to introduce the day's speaker in the Chopin lecture series, anthropologist Dr. Crickwatson. A man in a formal suit jacket and sturdy hiking shoes stepped behind the podium. Immediately, there was a stir in the auditorium. A number of spectators, including ourselves, wondered whether we were in the right performance space. The Chopin has two such spaces and frequently hosts talks on topical issues, so the performance for which we had come could have been in the other auditorium. Meanwhile, the speaker greeted the audience and announced that his talk had been inspired by recently discovered film footage of St. Louis in the 1920s, which showed Fritz, the ape who acquired human intellect, shattering major theories of evolution. Fritz's grandson Zeke, the scholar concluded, would present the footage.

Everyone in the auditorium remained seated. In fact, Lela Headd's introduction and Crickwatson's address were listed in the playbill, which also included playwright Philip Boehm's translation of Franz Kafka's story about the fantastic ape turned human, "A Report to

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[82] Zygmunt Dyrkacz, interview with the author, Chopin Theatre, Chicago, 8 April, 2006. When I went to the Chopin theatre to talk to Dyrkacz, he invited me to attend a lecture on the clash between America's Christian values and its expansionist politics, which was taking place there the same morning. The lecture was attended by the congregation of the Holy Trinity Church, neighboring the Chopin. Dyrkacz is determined that the Chopin should not be aligned with any singular politics. Typically, if the venue hosts a play on abortion rights, it will also include a post-show discussion or another event where opponents of abortion may voice their arguments.

an Academy" (1917). Judging from spectators' whispering about whether to stay or leave,

my friend and I were not the only ones who had not read the playbill before Headd spoke.[83] Some spectators could have seen through the ruse as soon as they heard the anthropologist's name: a compound of the names of Francis Crick and James D. Watson, the molecular biologists whose groundbreaking work on the structure of the DNA molecule became the basis for the Human Genome Project. For me, the reference to Kafka's character was the revealing moment. But for those who did not immediately recognize this reference, Zeke was an incredible enough character to signal that what we were attending was not a scientific lecture.

Zeke (Nicholas Tamarkin) stepped behind the podium and, citing the opening of Kafka's story, began: "Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, fellow fellows of this Institute! It is a great honor to be invited to speak at this center of study, this Mecca of research, this cauldron of cogitation."[84] Having briefly summarized Kafka's plot, he continued:

> If only my grandfather [the ape turned human] — whom I hope at least some of you remember – could be here with us... he would appreciate the significance [of] … the fact that I have been invited to speak to you today. (Sighs. Pause. Leaves podium.) But let's be honest: you and I both know he wasn't really my grandfather… for the simple reason that I … am now and always will be – and today I no longer mumble when I say it – a clone.

We were indeed in the right place for the performance and, more than that, like the

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[83] In an interview, Philip Boehm, who wrote the script and directed the production, said that the confusion had been intentionally sought and worked even better at the site of the original production – the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center – where Sam Fiorello, the Center's Chief Operating Officer and Senior Vice president, introduced Dr. Crickwatson. Philip Boehm, interview with the author, 22 April 2006, St. Louis.

[84] Quotes have been taken either from the electronically published excerpt of the play, or from the videotape of a performance at the Donald Danforth Center in Saint Louis. See, Philip Boehm, from Soul of a Clone, Words without Borders: The Online Magazine for International Literature 2005, 24 May 2007. http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article.php?lab=Zeke>; Soul of a Clone, dir. Philip Boehm, perf. Nicholas Tamarkin, Micheal Dee, Sam Fiorello, and cellist Natasha Rubinstein, Donald Danfort Plant Scienece Center, Saint Louis, 9 Febr. 2005, videotape, Upstream Theatre Collection.

spectators in the intermission of Venus, we were invited to perform as objective scientists.
It was a high-brow role and one that was hard to live up to. The numerous scientific, historical, and literary intertexts of Zeke's monologue constructed an ideal spectator with encyclopedic knowledge.

During the performance, the spectator-performer contract shifted abruptly several more times, making us uncertain about what we were attending (a play, a lecture, or a concert) and whether it was time to leave, or whether the performance was still going on. Together with the multiple intertexts, these shifts, leaving us confused, repeatedly undermined our chances of assuming the proposed role of "objective scientists." In this section, I demonstrate how the production's recycling of textual narratives and spectatorship conventions presented the project of cloning as a version of the western quest for a perfect body, freed from the unpredictability of the flesh. The unusual character – a clone not of a human, but of an exceptionally evolved ape – alluded to this quests' implicit racism. The parallel recycling of spectatorship conventions implicated theatre in this quest, suggesting a connection between the politics of knowledge paradigms and the politics of viewing conventions. The resulting ambiguity, like Parks's surrogate spectators and unusual intermission, mimetically recreated for the mostly white spectators the displaced, and potentially critical, position historically occupied by women and by men marked by color, ethnicity, or class.

Kafka's short story, the major intertext of Soul of a Clone, is itself a satire of the western quest for perfection, implicating performance in the racist practices of western scientific discourse. Captured by the Carl Hagenbeck Circus Company on the Gold Coast, and constrained in a narrow cage on a ship, the ape Fritz, the narrator of this first-*person* (?) narrative, realized that to escape captivity he had to become as human as possible. Diligently, he began mastering

distinctly human skills: smoking a pipe and drinking whisky from the bottle. His efforts culminated in the pronouncement of an articulate hello. In recognition of his evolutionary leap, Fritz was placed in a variety show, rather than a cage at the zoo, until finally he gained a role in the most exclusive of performance genres: the scholarly lecture in an academic hall.

"A Report to an Academy" has been read as a commentary on anti-semitism.[85] Yet in the context of an American theatrical production, the image of Fritz constrained on a ship from Africa evokes the Middle Passage. The "found" film footage of the 1904 World Fair, or possibly, as Zeke suggests, of a 1920s reenactment of that fair, evokes the western modernist master narrative of progress. In combination, the two narratives gestically expose western modernity's racial politics. In the footage, Fritz smokes a cigar with dainty gestures, poses in the uniform of a navy officer, and marvels at the scientific and architectural wonders of St. Louis. In other shots, however, we see him playing the banjo, swinging on a tree, and messily stuffing a banana into his mouth. In yet another episode, he takes a walk along a railway track, which leads him to a circus fair booth. A poster on the booth advertises a theatrical performance: "The Invisible Man."[86] The juxtaposition between the railway track, a symbol of modernization, and the circus booth creates a vivid image for the sense of alienation that Du Bois termed "double consciousness." Walking along the tracks, but not riding on the train, Fritz, no longer animal, but not yet human, gets to a performance about racism.

The other intertexts broaden the scope of Zeke's critique of modernity. "Hath not a clone a heart?" Zeke asks, referencing the Jewish character in The Merchant of Venice. "If you prick us, do we not bleed? And if you deny our soul, will our heart not break?" On another occasion, suddenly and seemingly against his will, his speech gets interrupted by a quote from

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[85] See, for instance, Jay Geller, "Of Mice and Mensa: Anti-Semitism and the Jewish Genius," The Centennial Review 38.2 (1994): 361-85.

[86] The footage was made by filmographer Christine Murray.

Richard III: "And I have no delight to pass away the time unless to spy my shadow in the sun and descant on my own deformity." By making Zeke an involuntary speaker for a Jewish character and for a disabled character, Boehm simultaneously connects the project of cloning to earlier projects for racial purity and confronts contemporary spectators with the immediate political questions that cloning has raised. What kinds of bodies will be deemed suitable for cloning? If reporogenetics succeeds in reducing disability, will the remaining disabled people face even harsher discrimination than they are facing now? Cloning, Zeke suggests ironically, does hold a promise of freedom; not freedom from discrimination based on color of disability, but the freedom of consumption.

> **Zeke** Instead of [freedom] we have the mock suffrage of the supermarket aisle with thirty-seven brands of mouthwash and fifty-nine kinds of decongestant… where children are equipped with tiny carts the minute they can toddle; presumably the first step in our ongoing evolution of *homo consumptis*, characterized by a forward-leaning, cart-pushing posture, barcode-scanning eyes, and tastes that change less with the seasons and more with fluctuations in price.

By linking cloning to consumption and purchasing power, the play reinforces the suggestion that cloning will aggravate, rather than alleviate, existing social disparity.

Zeke the Clone, the universal consumer, was impersonated by a white actor (Nicholas Tamarkin), who several times throughout the performance drew attention to his less than perfect body, accruing fat around the waist. The white male body was thus marked as fleshy and specific, rather than presented as an ideal, universal standard. To the extent that social privilege in the US is still strongly connected with whiteness, this casting choice was factually accurate.

Additionally, having a white actor embody the heir of an ape simultaneously countered and

called attention to the racist association between animality and blackness.

At the same time, despite its attention to the semiotics of the body, especially the white male body, Boehm's text does not raise one of the most pressing questions that cloning has provoked: how would cloning effect women's control of their bodies, particularly of their reproductive abilities?[87] It is an intriguing omission because Kafka's text does imply a connection between gender roles and scientific progress:

> **Fritz** If I come home late after a banquet, a scientific society, or a friendly evening at someone's house, a small, half-trained chimpanzee is waiting for me and I have my pleasure with her in the manner of apes. I don't wish to see her by day, as her eyes have the insanity of the befuddled half-tamed animal, which I alone can recognize, and which I cannot bear.[88]

This ironic passage confirms the success of Fritz's evolutionary leap. Having mastered the skill of drawing the gendered mind/body distinction within is own species, Fritz is now truly a western individual.

Addressing this passage in Soul's script would have enhanced the play's critique of modernity's exclusionary practices. Yet, even though there is no mention of this passage in the script, the production's approach to spectatorial conventions called attention to the arbitrariness

[87] See Margrit Shildrick, "Genetics, Normativity, and Ethics: Some Bioethical Concerns," Feminist Theory 5.2 (2004): 154; and Celia Dean-Drummond, The Ethics of Nature (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 125.

[88] Franz Kafka, "A Report to an Academy," trans. Philip Boehm, Words Without Borders: The Online Magazine for International Literature 2005, 24 May 2007. <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article.php?lab=AReportToAnAcademy;> In an email, Boehm wrote that had the play been an adaptation of Kafka's short story and had the play's central character been the ape turned human, he would have included this passage. Zeke's "rant," however, does not go in this direction. Philip Boehm, "Re: More Questions on Soul of a Clone," e-mail to author, 25 May 2007.

of the distinction between the arguably masculine clarity of viewing and the female ape's allegedly befuddled look in Kafka's text.

Forcing spectators to negotiate our viewing positions (as listeners at a lecture or spectators of a play), the ambiguous beginning of the performance made explicit an unspoken contract between spectators and performers. This contract entails the ways in which the two parties draw distinctions between reality and fiction. For instance, a realist performance contract presumes clear signaling of the beginning and end of the play, usually done by darkening the lights; spectators are expected to be silent, as if they were not present. In Soul, this implicit contract was exposed on two more occasions. Towards the end of his monologue, Zeke suggested that the ability to listen, rather than the ability to speak, gave a human (and perhaps a clone) a soul. His monologue then gave way to a cello performance by Natasha Rubinstein: Bach's second suite in D minor. The concert completed the range of the possible positions which spectators and performers can assume in regard to the reality/fiction distinction. Lela Headd, who introduced Dr. Crickwatson at the outset, held a threshold position between the fictional theatrical narrative and the reality of the theatrical event. She could have been the manager, as she stated, or she could have impersonated a manager. Dr. Crickwatson's position was similarly ambiguous until he spoke about the miracle of Fritz's evolution. Zeke was unambiguously a fictional character from the start. The cello performer again shifted the balance between fiction and real. Rubinstein was undoubtedly an actual musician, but also a character in the play, along with Zeke, Dr. Crickwatson, and Lela Headd. It would have been impossible for a spectator with little understanding of classical music, such as me, to distinguish between her display of professional musical skill and her impersonation of a musician, even if such a distinction had been intended.

Immediately following Zeke's statement that listening was the act of the soul, Rubinstein's musical performance appeared like a suitable conclusion to the play. Hence, when she stopped playing, and we applauded her, some spectators stood up to leave and started talking. At this point, Tamarkin came on stage again and, in character, started another brief monologue. All resumed their seats.

Zeke My name is Zeke. As in Ezekiel. (Quoting or reading.) 'And the Lord carried me out in a spirit, and set me down in the midst of the valley, and it was full of bones...and they were very dry. And the bones came together, bone to bone, and there were sinews upon them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them from above…

But this was still not the end of the performance. After Zeke stopped speaking, Rubinstein resumed playing, performing the coda of the suite. The end of the performance, then, was as ambiguous as the beginning, keeping spectators uncertain how to respond. By giving us the role of academy members, the artists promised us the scientist's objective look. In fact, however, they placed us in the position of the "befuddled animal," trained rather too well in the conventions of mainstream spectatorship. The pleasure of viewing depended upon embracing the shifting relationship between the real and fictional, as phenomenological experiences, throughout the performance.

Like Parks's atypical intermission and her disconcerting use of racial and gender stereotypes, the unstable spectator-performer relationship in Soul was a risky choice. The artists took a chance that they might offend and lose their audience. My friend was one of several people around me who entertained the idea of leaving, finding the experience too confusing or even insulting. But I found the artists' approach integral to their vision of theatre as a place for

intercultural interactions and public discussion. In the previous chapter, I quoted Felman and Laub's argument that understanding a cultural or social other entails becoming aware of how cultural conventions inform our perception of reality.[89] The shifting spectator-performer contract created the conditions for such awareness.

Additionally, the confusion that this shifting contract caused mimetically repeats the blurring of distinctions, previously taught as objective and biologically-grounded, resulting from recent studies of the genome. These studies have demonstrated, for instance, that animals and humans are more alike than previously thought. Humans and chimpanzees, for instance, have turned out to have 97% the same genes. "So great is the overlap," Margaret Shildrick writes, "that there have been recent reports of bioscientists seeking to recategorize chimpanzees as *genus homo*, thus legitimizing the erosion of discursively created distinctions."[90] Geneticists also insist that "at the genetic level there is more variation between two individuals in the same population than between populations and that there is no biological basis for 'race.'"[91] As Shildrick notes, the blurring of these distinctions strikes at the fundaments of the western cultural imaginary.[92] In other words, these scientific developments concur with the materialist argument that racial difference and the animal/human distinction are discursively constructed. In turn, the western scientist's discursive position of objectivity, predicated on the scientist's assumed ability to remain external to nature, its object of study, becomes untenable.[93] Drawing on Donna Haraway's feminist concept of the cyborg – a body which does not strive for purity but, suspended between binary categories such as human-animal, male-female, human-machine,

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[89] Felman and Laub, 5.
[90] Shildrick, 154.
[91] Jonathan Kahn, "Race in a Bottle," Scientific American 297.2 (2007): 43.
[92] Shildrick, 159.
[93] See Sue-Ellen Case, Performing Science and the Virtual (New York and London: Routledge, 2007) 10; and Shildrick 156-57.

exposes the contingency of these categories[94] – Shildrick maintains that the collapsing of distinctions between animals and humans and between races appear scandalous only within a masculine scientific discourse. A feminist perspective on science, by contrast, embraces the blurring of distinctions and explores their political potential.[95] As a clone of an ape, Zeke is in fact a cyborg. His body, simultaneously animal and technological, becomes a symbol for the contingency of the politically-charged distinctions between ability and disability, racial difference, and humanity and animality. The shifting spectator-performer contract phenomenologically reproduced for spectators reporgenetics' challenge to the western scientific imaginary.

Like Venus, Soul of a Clone alerted spectators to the contingency of viewing on theatrical conventions and, by linking these conventions to the critique of modernity in the script, raised questions about the politics and ethics of viewing. Whereas Parks, Foreman, and Adina Porter's controversial approach to the Venus's characterization demonstrated the affective power of the black female body, tied to a history of racist and sexist oppression, Boehm and Tamarkin emphasized the specificity of the white male body. Inscribing this body in a politically-flawed and culturally-specific, western narrative of progress and drawing attention to the actor's body's imperfections, they drew attention to the illusory universality of whiteness and masculinity. Yet Boehm's production did not explicitly engage with the semiotics of spectators' bodies. Though embodiment was the focus of the script, spectatorship, as defined by the production, remained a matter of the mind. My last case study complements Soul of a Clone's approach to spectators by shifting the negotiation between reality and fiction onto spectators' own bodies.

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[94] Donna J. Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinventions of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991) 180-81.
[95] Shildrick, 162-63.

Walking in a poor imitation of fashion models, sporting ill-fitting suits, bright lycra dresses, shiny make-up, and noisy high-heels, seven performers stand in line, facing the audience in the semi-lit auditorium with strained, exaggerated smiles.[96] A performer runs backstage, returns dragging another performer by the neck, and forces him to speak in a microphone. The 'victim' welcomes the audience in English, French, German, Italian, Greek, and Russian, in a voice expressing pain and discomfort. In the mean time, the "torturer" is bending the victim's arm and holding his neck tight. "Stop it, I don't know any more," the "victim" pleads. The other actors invite the spectators to laugh at the "victim." After all, everything on stage is done for the spectators' entertainment.

In the second scene, spectators face the consequences of their complicity. Blindfolded, the actors imitate fortune-telling psychics. The predictions walk an uneasy line between the offensive and the facetious. "There is a very great sense of loss in the auditorium," an actress begins. Another actress continues: "Somebody lost a father… a mother? Perhaps somebody read about a death in a newspaper." The psychological distance between the stage and the auditorium shrinks as the actors' address becomes more specific:

> Somewhere in the back… I sense a deep well of bitterness and despair.
>
> Somewhere in the front, I sense joy and happiness.
>
> Somewhere in the middle, there is an overwhelming sense of indifference.

Spectators applaud the last suggestion the loudest, enjoying the concession that they may be uninvolved: the freedom of detachment. But their enjoyment is short-lived: "I'm sensing a very sore penis," an actor speaks. "Just to let you know, Sir, it's a lot more serious than you think."

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[96] First Night, by Forced Entertainment, perf. Robin Arthur, Jerry Killick, Richard Lowdon, Claire Marshall, Cathy Nadan, Terry O'Conner, John Rowley, and K. Michael Weaver, dir. Tim Etchells, The Place, London, 5 Dec. 2001, videotape.

The actress in blue continues: "There is someone with us tonight… who has a teenage daughter. She is giving you great cause for concern with her attitudes, her friends. Well, don't worry; she will be dead by Christmas." The actress in yellow then takes the black band off her eyes and starts pointing at specific spectators predicting their deaths: kidney failure, suicide, breast cancer, car crash, old age, etc.

The two scenes are part of First Night, a performance by a British theatre group with the revealing name Forced Entertainment. Robin Arthur, Clair Marshall, Cathy Naden, Terry O'Conner, designer Richard Lowdon, and director-writer Tim Etchells started their work together in 1984 in Sheffield, just as the city was experiencing the worst effects of the decline in the coal mining industry. Identifying creatively with the city's economic collapse, the group set out to turn the signs of impoverishment into theatre, performing in costumes bought in thrift stores and using objects found in the garbage as props.

The company creates theatre through a non-hierarchical process. While Tim Etchells bears responsibility for shaping the scripts, all performers create each show together through a lengthy process of improvisation, negotiation, and rehearsal. This process extends to the community of spectators in multiple ways: from involving local bands, amateur or professional, and performing in neighborhood pubs, to creating connections with individual viewers. Spectators' emails are always responded to and their comments sometimes make it into the next show. Despite their recent success throughout Western Europe and North America, the actors have remained committed to their original working-class audiences.

On their part, spectators have demonstrated unfailing support for the group, which is all the more impressive given that attacking, shaming, and offending viewers in subtle and not so subtle ways is one of the group's key strategies. In 1994, when the Arts Council of England

withdrew the group's funding, dismissing its work as aesthetically lacking, spectators kept writing letters and calling the Arts Council until funding was restored. Hence, spectators interfered in a direct way in the politics of representation, fulfilling a major objective of radical theatre ever since Brecht.

Unlike Brechtian theatre, however, and even more decisively than Venus and Soul of a Clone, Forced Entertainment, throughout their work, explore fantasy and affect not only as a means of escapism but also as a source of agency. For instance, their show Nights in This City (1995) took spectators on a bus tour around Sheffield, which included not only conventional tourist sites such as the town hall but also places not typically associated with tourism, such as bus depots, car parks, and run-down areas. The actors impersonated unreliable tour guides – drunk and forgetful – who reinvented the sights' history "on the go," mixing fact and fiction.[97] According to Tim Etchells, this was an attempt to make spectators question opposites such as center and periphery, legitimate and illegitimate; to reveal the different histories that construct urban space, "the official historical, the personal, the mythical, and the imaginary;" and to make spectators aware of their own contribution to the city's complex semiotics.[98] First Night similarly explores the dual function of fantasy – its illusory and its enabling effects – by exposing the reality/fiction distinction as provisional. The stage in First Night feels uncomfortably real; spectators are offered nightmarish roles.

Shortly after the fortune-telling scene, the actors stand in line again, each holding a cardboard square containing a letter of the word W-E-L-C-O-M-E. Taking turns to greet the

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[97] Forced Entertainment with Sheffield Theatres, Nights in This City: a Coach Trip to Another World, performed in Sheffield, 16-22 May, 1995. <http://www.forcedentertainment.com/?lid=362>, 31 May 2007.

[98] Tim Etchells, Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 80.

audience, they declare that they feel very happy to be on stage tonight. But soon the optimistic mood dwindles. "I'd like to say that some of our personal lives are in tatters," an actress says. "But," she continues, "you don't want to hear about this, do you?" "There we are: spread out in a line for your enjoyment," another actor adds. The actors, thereby, expose the process of suspending disbelief central to realist theatre. In turn, the ideologically-proper body that an actor typically assumes in mainstream theatre – a body expected to leave its personal history off-stage – becomes visible as such. The 'torture'-'victim' scene similarly threatens to destroy theatrical illusionism. The torturer handles the victim roughly enough to suggest that the actor impersonating the victim may experience actual pain, and so the scene can only remain comic if spectators actively sustain their belief that this pain is enacted.

By contrast, the fortune-telling scene simultaneously draws attention to the symbolic (non-material) aspect of spectators' bodies and, in this way, suspends spectators between reality and fiction. When a spectator is pointed out as a victim of breast cancer, will she consider this a fictional possibility: a role offered to her by the actress? Or will already existing fears prompt her to misrecognize herself as a real recipient of the false prediction? The personalized address strips spectators of their anonymity and forces them to decide whether or not to identify with the roles offered to them.

To Tracy Davis, such moments exemplify dramatic license. In the collision between the dominant conventions of address and the actual address in the fortune-telling scene, spectators' suspension of disbelief is made explicit and turned into conscious work.[99] Like the "welcome" scene, the fortune-telling scene compels spectators to actively produce disbelief. Failing to do so would be disastrous. If spectators come to believe that the actors' personal lives are indeed "in

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[99] Tracy C. Davis, "'Do you Believe in Fairies:' The Hiss of Dramatic License," Theatre Journal 57.1 (2005): 57-58.

tatters," spectators will have to bear the guilt of their expectation to be entertained, no matter what. Likewise, believing the "fortune-tellers" would mean accepting the pains of paranoia.

Another scene examines the suspension of disbelief as a social practice beyond theatre and urges reflection on its implications. The performers stand in line again, each holding a letter of the word ILLUSION. The actress holding the first L speaks.

> Ladies and Gentlemen, while you are with us tonight, we'd like to ask you to forget about the outside world completely. Try not to think about anything outside of this room. Anything at all. Try to forget about cars and meetings, cigarettes and road accidents. Try to forget about births and deaths, and funerals… Try not to think about chemical warfare, chemotherapy… corruption… and blood on toilet seats.

In the meantime, the actress in blue starts clearing her throat, props up her letter (the second "I" in ILLUSION) on the leg of the performer holding the S, goes off stage, and comes back with a bottle of water from which she starts drinking. While the speaker goes on, 'encouraging' spectators to forget about "dysfunctional families… discrimination, and difference," the actress in blue sits on the floor, blows her nose, lies down, propping up her letter on her belly, and closes her eyes as if sleeping. Gradually, all performers, except for the actress speaking, start moving around, bring in coffee, drink it, clear away the coffee cups, and engage in conversations on the side, while the speaker talks about "people begging for their lives and people begging… communication breakdowns, diplomatic breakdowns, and racial tensions, and letter bombs, and hatred, and religious wars, and torture, and neglect."

Bringing conventionally "off-stage" actions on stage is a technique which Brecht used in his adaptation of Antigone (1948). In Brecht's production, the actors never left the stage physically but, when not performing their fictional roles, sat on long benches at the back of the

stage. Showing actors out of character was meant to prevent spectators from thinking that they had been "transported to the scene of history."[100] By contrast, in the ILLUSION scene, the actors drinking coffee and engaging in seemingly unrelated conversations are not out of character. They are, in fact, acting. By purposefully not listening, they perform acts of social indifference towards the private displeasures and public ills on the speaker's endless list. In this way, they suggest that escapist forgetting – of people begging for their lives, diplomatic breakdowns, and discrimination – is integral to our social lives. As the actors abandon their places in the line, the word ILLUSION crumbles in front of the spectators' eyes.

By engaging in multiple simultaneous actions, while the actress in blue keeps speaking, the actors make spectators actively choose where to focus their attention and for how long. Will they discern the pressing social issues on speaker's list, intermixed with trivial inconveniences? Will they acknowledge the seriousness of these issues despite the monotony of the speaker's presentation? Or will they repeat the indifference and boredom performed by the other actors?

On a larger plane, the scene's refusal of a singular visual focus is tied to the materialist critiques of modernity's pursuit of objectivity and its implications for theater spectatorship. Theatre scholar David Wiles, for instance, has proposed a historical connection between the developments of western discourses of objective knowledge and the emergence of theatrical techniques for focalizing the spectator's look, such as the proscenium arch.[101] Sue-Ellen Case elaborates on this connection, arguing that practices of visual focalization convey an exceptionally masculine perspective on representation.[102] As a result of such critiques, radical theatre has attempted to deconstruct the focalizing effect of the proscenium arch. In Environmental Theatre, Richard Schechner argues that a multiple focus assigns to spectators,

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[100] Brecht on Theatre, 212
[101] David Wiles, A Short History of Western Performance Space (New York and London: Routledge, 2003) 7.
[102] Case, Performing Science and the Virtual, 71.

rather than to the actors, the task of putting together a coherent story from the images on stage. “The goal is neither anarchy, nor rigidity, but extreme flexibility yielding harmonious combinations – a kind of intellectual-sensory kaleidoscope.”[103] Even though the multiple foci of attention in the ILLUSION scene can hardly be described in terms of “harmonious combinations,” or “intellectual-sensory” pleasure, their use, in both Schechner and Forced Entertainment, opposes the focalization techniques that Wiles and Case find central to a Cartesian visual epistemology in western theatre history. By dispersing focus, the ILLUSION scene refuses to reproduce the fallacy of objective viewing and instead emphasizes the situatedness and partiality of the spectator’s look. The actors’ bodies, impersonating indifference, assume the function of Miss La Trobe’s mirrors.

In the end, First Night’s final scene explicitly connects the group’s approach toward spectatorship to social politics. The actors come on stage again and start applauding. They tell spectators to give themselves “a jolly good pat on the back,” because they are “quite simply, the best audience [that the actors] have ever played to:” “morally superior,” “ethically pure,” and “politically spotless.” “There aren’t any criminals here tonight, are there,” the actors continue. “There are no wife beaters here… no homophobes, no racists.” The actors, Etchell explains, insist on the very real possibility that “individual members of the auditorium perhaps are wife-beaters, racists, and homophobes.”[104] By now no one seems to be surprised when the niceties gradually slip into rudeness: “You’ve made me feel like putting a knife to my throat… a gun to your heads,” the actress in yellow erupts. “She says it every night, ladies and gentlemen,” an actor adds apologetically, reminding the audience that this is, after all, a theatrical performance.

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[103] Richard Schechner, "Six Axioms for Environmental Theatre," Environmental Theatre. (1973; New York and London: Applause, 1994) xxx, vii.
[104] Tim Etchells, “A Six-Thousand-and-Forty-Seven-Word Manifesto in Three Parts with Three Interludes,” Live: Art and Performance, ed. Adrian Heathfield, (New York: Routledge, 2004) 214.

Performance or not, the spectators laughed at the pains of the victim in the first scene and at the many humiliations that the actors had to bear in subsequent scenes. In this way, they became complicit with the torturer's role, justifying, in turn, the actress's rage.

First Night uses techniques that combine Parks's attention to the symbolism of the body and the Upstream Theatre's emphasis on spectators' dependence on performance conventions. The fortune-telling scene demonstrates that bodies are always simultaneously fantasized and real, even when they are not marked by racist and sexist stereotypes. The uncertain boundary between reality and fiction – Are there really racists and wife-beaters in the auditorium? Is someone really going to be a victim of cancer and suicide? What does theatre make me escape from? – places spectators in a situated position, similar to that described in Du Bois's and Woolf's descriptions of double or split consciousness.

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Refusing to ground critical viewing in a point of reality, yet addressing spectators as politically-accountable, these three performances radically challenge perceptions of political theatre, dominated by Brechtian and social-realist approaches to spectatorship. Placed on a cusp between two or more performer-spectator contracts, spectators, ideally, become aware that the reality-fiction distinction is contingent and can start exploring the political significance of the specific ways in which this distinction is drawn. The approach towards spectatorship in these performances bears affinity with Baz Kershaw's definition of radical performance: one that positions viewers on the threshold between modern and postmodern paradigms of knowledge.[105] The model spectator that this definition constructs is aware that although all knowledge is partial, social injustice is not a relative notion. In contrast to Kershaw, however, I argue that the

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[105] Kershaw, 12, 17.

semiotics of the purpose-built venue is integral to a radical approach. Moreover, by engaging
with this semiotics, these performances elucidate blind spots in Kershaw's own method.

The success of Kershaw's model depends upon spectators' ability to perceive the modern and the postmodern as paradigms in tension, rather than as hierarchically-positioned paradigms. To the extent that the modernist paradigm aligns illusion with theatrical fiction, and predicates critical intervention on the possibility of separating reality from fiction, it is crucial that Kershaw's model should prevent the establishment of a reality-illusion binary. By rejecting the possibility that theatre in purpose-built venues can be radical, Kershaw restores this binary.

To avoid such binary thinking, Judith Mayne revises materialist theories of spectatorship in terms of Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bernard Pontalis's psychoanalytic concept of fantasy, defined as a mise-en-scène for intersubjective interactions. A set of loosely-defined frames of meaning-making, fantasy enables the production of multiple, yet not indefinite, meanings and identifications.[106] In Laplanche and Pontalis, as in Freud whose concept of "original fantasy" they rethink, original fantasies are tied to an individual's sexual identification.[107] As the fantasy is a largely unconscious structure, and so non-transparent in terms of rational causal thinking, sexual identification, too, is non-transparent in the same sense. Mayne draws on this idea to critique the conflation between "literal gender and address" in theories of film spectatorship and gender. It is fallacious to assume, she writes, "that if the film addresses its subjects as male, then it is the male viewer who is thus addressed."[108] Literary Scholar Anne Cheng proposed that Laplanche and Pontalis's concept of fantasy implies, likewise, a slippage between racial

[106] According to psychoanalytic theorists Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bernard Pontalis, "fantasy… is not the object of desire, but its setting." See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bernard Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," Formations of Fantasy, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London and New York: Menthuen, 1986) 26. It is Mayne who uses "mise-en-scène" rather than 'setting' in describing their theory. See Mayne, 167.
[107] The term original refers to the fact that these unconscious fantasies provide "solutions" to major enigmas confronting the individual, such as, Laplanche and Pontalis propose, the origin of sexual difference. See Laplanche and Pontalis, 19; Mayne, 166;
[108] Mayne, 167.

identification and racial performance.[109] Ignoring the range of possible identifications and

assuming that the majority of actual viewers will align their positions with the ideal spectator, Mayne writes, makes any position departing from the ideal appear radical.[110]

The failure to account for a range of possible identifications is apparent not only in Kershaw's unwillingness to admit any likelihood of radical spectatorship in purpose-built, mainstream theatres, but also in two of the most influential theories of spectatorship as a gendered and racialized practice. Thus, Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" does not admit the possibility of passive male identification; i.e. that a male spectator could identify with the passive female movie character.[111] Neither does bell hook's theory of film spectatorship as a gendered and racialized practice admit that a black male spectator may identify with a passive white woman on screen. hooks notes that "while every black woman [she] talked to was aware of racism, that awareness did not automatically correspond to politicization."[112] Yet she cannot explain *why* this happens, because she assumes that every black woman will necessarily watch *as* a black woman, i.e. from a rather rigidly-defined black, feminine position.

By alternating Brechtian distancing strategies with strategies which thwart critical distance and make understanding difficult, my case studies gesture towards the inevitable degree of non-transparency in viewers' relationship to representation and engage specifically with the lack of transparency related to the symbolic effects of the gendered and racially-marked body in the theatrical encounter. Additionally, as in Mayne's essay, the three performances approach the semiotics of the theatrical encounter in a purpose-built venue not as an overdetermining

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[109] Anne Anlin Cheng, The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 119-22.
[110] Mayne, 168, 171.
[111] On Mulvey's omission of this possibility and on homosexual identification in film spectatorships, see Rona J. Berenstein, "Spectatorship as Drag: The Act of Viewing and the Classic Horror Cinema," Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film, 231-69.
[112] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader, eds. Reina Lewis and Sarah Mills (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) 218.

apparatus, but as a scenario with multiple entries. While they reveal the appeal of the ideal viewing position in the conventional (realist) theatrical encounter – the tacit knowledge that spectators will not be confronted with the ethical implications of their acts of viewing – they also demonstrate that this is not the only possible position. Suspending spectators between two fictions – the dramatic plot and the socially-shared fiction commonly referred to as reality – these performances produce a temporary, situated position of radical critique. Because no element of the theatrical encounter, not even the spectator's body, is allowed to become a site of objective reality, this model does not allow for a teleological movement from illusion to truth. At the same time, because the conditions of the conventional encounter are critically cited rather than completely abolished, they function as a frame of reference that prevents analysis from slipping into relativity.

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The emphasis on the symbolism of the body in these performances and on the ways in which this symbolism influences the performer-spectator exchange surpasses the Marxist framework of Brechtian theatre. Hence, their approach to spectatorship is better understood in terms of Butler, Laclau, and Žižek's theory of democratic contestation, and Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval Davis's feminist theory of situated imagination, both of which try to account for the role of non-material factors, such as imagination and affect, in social dialogue.

These theorists present democratic dialogue as an exchange between differentially-situated participants, none of whom holds a privileged relationship to knowledge. In the course of such dialogue, the implicit, culturally-specific rules of meaning-making on which the various participants base their arguments – i.e. what counts as a logical and/or legitimate argument and

under what circumstances – are brought to the foreground and their validity is examined.[113]
For instance, the feminist and postcolonial contestations of realism demonstrate how the modern ideology of liberal individualism underlies realism, and examines the validity of that ideology in terms of gender, race, and class.

Also, the concept of contestation entails making a decision about whether to try to modify and expand certain rules of meaning-making beyond their original ideological significance, or whether these rules should be rejected altogether. Thus, Butler argues against gay and lesbian marriage. Though demands for gay and lesbian marriage expose and contest the normative heterosexuality of the institution of marriage, she writes, gay and lesbian subjects who seek marriage reinforce the power of the state to regulate personal relationships. Butler concludes that striving to "occupy the dominant norm, in order to produce an internal subversion of its terms," is not always politically effective, and "sometimes it is important to refuse its terms."[114]

The feminist and African American contestations of realism and Brechtian aesthetic revolve along the same difficult choice: weighing the benefits of these approaches – such as their familiarity to wide groups of spectators – against the danger of reinforcing the power of a western, white, and masculine ideology. In other words, such difficult decisions emphasize the power of a norm – whether it is realism or marriage – to expand just enough so that it neutralizes the contesting position. Kershaw's concern about the ability of purpose-built theatres, as part of the cultural status quo, to cancel radical intent follows the same logic. What weakens his position is not this legitimate concern but his decision to leave performances in purpose-built venues out of his discussion altogether.

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[113] Butler, "Restaging the Universal," 13,14.
[114] Butler, "Competing Universalities," Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, 176-77.

All five theorists raise the question of what holds together the communication among the variously situated participants. Laclau, drawing on Pitkin, proposes that the success of democratic dialogue depends on the ability of an individual subject or group, articulating a political demand, to identify symbolically-charged signifiers that would make the demand recognizable to large numbers of people. Du Bois, for instance, makes his claim for racial equality in the name of progress, a signifier that made his demand recognizable to a number of activist groups in the Progressive Era. Woolf made her demand for the inclusion of women in the name of civilization. "Truth," "enlightenment," and "justice" typically function as such signifiers, too. Laclau refers to such signifiers as "empty universals": while they secure the formal coherence of dialogue, their own symbolic contents differ for the parties involved. Hence, the meaning of these signifiers is also being renegotiated in the act of contestation.[115] Likewise, Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis speak of "common values,"[116] a concept that they borrow from the notion of "quasi-universals" which Suzan Hekman, another standpoint theorist of the 1990s, uses in her revision of earlier standpoint theories.[117] Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis do not specify what common values mean precisely, but Hekman defines her "quasi-universals" similarly to Laclau's empty universals: as signifiers which are recognizable to variously-positioned participants, but that also signify differently enough to these participants so that they cannot constitute a metanarrative.[118] In turn, the participants in the act become *subjects*. As in Lacanian psychoanalysis, which is an important intertext to the theory of democratic contestation,

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[115] Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, "Questions," 5; Ernesto Laclau, "Identity and Hegemony," 69-70.
[116] Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 328.
[117] Suzan Hekman, "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited," Signs 22.2 (1997): 359.
[118] Hekman, 362.

subjecthood is not a pre-existing category. Instead, it is the moment when a participant becomes aware of the conventions that regulate social membership.[119]

These thinkers depart most distinctively from earlier Marxist political theories in their emphasis on imagination and affect in the process of democratic dialogue. According to Laclau, social subjects' affective investments in specific signifiers render these signifiers suitable to function as empty universals in specific circumstances.[120] Stoetzler and Yuval Davis propose that social imagination, which, they insist, is an embodied act, is what enables social subjects to go beyond their proper identity distinctions. [121] They do not give any specific example of such an act and its function in the context of a particular social dialogue. I, however, consider spectators' reactions to the Brechtian strategy in Venus such an example. The symbolic history of race, as a lived, embodied social category, complicated the Brechtian invitation for analytical detachment.

The elusiveness of imagination and affect makes it difficult to predict the outcome of democratic dialogues. Additionally, Butler, Laclau, and Žižek provide no absolute criteria and prescribe no specific conditions under which the refusal of normative terms would be more efficient than subversively claiming a norm. Finally, because the signifiers organizing a dialogue (the empty universals) are being contested at the same time as they are being used, their validity and effectiveness are necessarily provisional. As a result, the choice of such signifiers, as well as the decision to subvert a norm from within or to abandon it altogether, becomes contingent, to a degree, on a leap of faith. Therefore, to Laclau and Hekman such decisions are ethical rather than rational.[122]

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[119] Butler, "Restaging the Universal," 20.
[120] Laclau, "Identity and Hegemony," 69-70.
[121] Žižek, "Holding the Place," Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, 326.
[122] See Žižek, "Da capo senza fine," Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, 258; Laclau, On Populist Reason (London and New York: Verso, 2005) 73-74; and Hekman, 362.

According to Hekman, the assertion of an ethically-based dialogue changes the rules of philosophical argumentation.[123] In feminist theory, in particular, the transition from rationality to ethics attempts to resolve the tension between the antifoundationalist bent in feminist epistemology and the inevitably teleological projects of feminist activism. This transition implies, for instance, that the right to make claims as a woman in the name of other women should be guaranteed, at the same time that the category "woman" continues to be contested.[124] The shift from rational to ethical argumentation, then, is a strategy of making do, emphasizing contingency and contesting teleological thinking.

The performances that I have analyzed in this chapter similarly use the conventions of mainstream realist theatre as an "empty universal," drawing attention to the reality-fiction binary as a major component of meaning-making in western theatre and western epistemology, and rendering it available for contestation. Theatrical conventions of viewing become exposed as conventions of knowledge; hence, spectators are addressed as an epistemic community. Also, by demonstrating how the reality/fiction distinction bears upon perceptions of the body, these performances invite spectators to reflect on the ways in which their embodiment of social categories such as gender and race informs their social encounters. Alternatively, the confusion caused by the abrupt changes of spectator-performer contracts, the embarrassing attention given to spectators' or performers' physicality, and the moments of political incorrectness may simply put off spectators or acquire an entertainment appeal without stimulating political reflection. In most cases, the artists let spectators use their own discretion in order to detect the political meanings in these performances, rather than spell these meanings out, as Brechtian and social-realist performances frequently do. In this way, the artists avoid teleology.

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[123] See Hekman, ibid.
[124] See Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference (New York: Routledge, 1989), 36-37.

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Insofar as gestus reveals the material motivation of representation but not its affective contingency, it cannot adequately describe these performances' method. Instead, I suggest that their critical strategies – the shifting performer-spectator contract, the reversal of the conventional locations of "reality" and "fiction," the dispersed focus, and the emphasis on spectators' own signifying bodies – are better summarized by Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. The abject, as I read it, describes the critical principle of the theatre of democratic contestation, in the same way that gestus describes the major principle of Brecht's Marxist theatre.

In her influential essay Powers of Horror (1982), Kristeva offers three different but related definitions of the abject: epistemological, social, and phenomenological. The first describes the abject as a rupture in the culturally-specific rules of representation, which exposes the distinction between two established categories as socially constructed.[125] Racial and gender encounters are the typical sites of such ruptures.[126] Thus, the historical encounter between black Africans brought to slavery and white European Americans became a site where the latter negotiated the limits of whiteness, perceived as a metonymy for humanity. Blackness, in turn, became a metonym for animality. Abjection is the experience of these precarious limits as a crisis of meaning. If I am not sufficiently different from an animal, the logic goes, then perhaps I am not human. Embodying this limit against their will, black Africans became the material "proof" presenting this fantasized limit as natural. Thus, they pacified western ontological fears and, at the same time, provided justification for slavery.

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[125] Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4-7.
[126] Kristeva explores the abject particularly in terms of anti-Semitism. See Kristeva, 174-88.

Kristeva defines the process of abjection – differentiating oneself from the border position – as a precondition of social "*mimesis*."[127] In other words, before one is able to claim her sameness with the social norm, one needs to declare her difference from the norm's abject limit. In Bodies that Matter, Butler draws on this definition of abjection to describe the acts of constitutive exclusion that accompany the establishment of gender norms.[128] In her collaboration with Laclau and Žižek, she defines democratic contestation as a redefinition of the social, caused by the return of the excluded in the realm of the social.[129] To Kristeva, on the other hand, the process of abjection and the return of the abject are not only social, but also aesthetic phenomena. Undertaking a feminist critique of Freudian psychoanalysis, which relates meaning-making to the figure of the father, Kristeva proposes that before humans start participating in meaning-making in this way, they have to reject an earlier mode of signification, which she associates with the figure of the mother. This suppressed signification continually returns and, by haunting and disrupting normative rules of representation, informs the creation of art.[130]

Kristeva's aesthetic of abjection is politically controversial. Even though she relates artistic mimesis to the mother's body, her examples of abjection are mostly the literary works of male European modernist writers: Dostoyevski, Joyce, Artaud, Proust, and Céline.[131] Additionally, the connection that she draws between art and the mother's body, as well as between the female body and phenomenological experiences of disgust, triggered critiques that Kristeva's theory was essentialist and unoriginal.[132] At the same time, her theory also influenced a tradition of female body performance in the 1980s and 1990s in the US and Britain.

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[127] Kristeva, 13, italics in the original.
[128] Judith Butler, Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex", (New York nd London: Routledge: 1993) 3.
[129] Butler, "Restaging the Universal," 9.
[130] Kristeva 13-17.
[131] Kristeva does not discuss Artaud in terms of performance.
[132] See Rosalind Krauss, "'Informe' without Conclusion," October 78 (1996): 89-105; Winfred Menninghaus, "Abject Mother (Kristeva), Abject Art, and the Convergence of Disgust, Truth, and the Real," Disgust: Theory and

According to art historian Christina Ross, Kristeva's theory consolidated a reaction

against the textual model of culture promoted by poststructuralist theories based on philosophies of language. The theory of abjection, Ross writes, enabled performance artists to present the female body not as a fixed essence but as a source of signification. The abject in these performances became primarily a trope of "bodily estrangement." Kristeva herself supported this application of her theory by giving her approval to the Whitney Museum's 1993 exhibition "Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art."[133]

Theatre scholar Nicholas Ridout explores the connections between this theory and theatrical performance. In his recent book Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems, he uses the notion of abjection to discuss actors' experience of stage fright and draws attention to Kristeva's own usage of theatrical metaphors in her definition of abjection. "It is thus not cleanliness or lack of health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order," Kristeva writes. "The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior."[134] "Who are these people?" Ridout asks. "They sound remarkably like stock types… They are theatrical types, and the theatrical is the borderline composite that makes us sick."[135]

In Ross's and Ridout's works, the abject is fruitfully used to describe the *performer's* critical strategies or affective experience. However, in one of her examples of abjection, Kristeva also describes it specifically as an aspect of the *spectator's* participation in performance.

History of a Strong Sensation, trans. Howard Eiland and Joel Golb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003) 365-401.

[133] Kristeva refers to this exhibition in Julia Kristeva, The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis, trans. Jeanine Herman, vol. 1 (1996; New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 10-11.

[134] Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 4.

[135] Nicholas Ridout, Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 63-68.

> In the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children's shoes… something I have already seen elsewhere, under a Christmas tree, for instance… The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death… interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things.[136]

There is nothing inherently disgusting in this setting. The disintegrating, leaking bodies, commonly associated with the phenomenological experience of abjection, are absent from the scene. Rather, a conventional mise-en-scène clashes with the spectator's cultural (situated) memory and starts signifying in unexpected ways. A western spectator goes to the museum seeking, perhaps, enlightenment and finds herself not in the position of an objective observer, but involved in an affective experience of history, a moment of split consciousness. All three definitions of the abject converge in this performance. Phenomenologically, it is an experience of disorientation; epistemologically, it draws attention to a dominant concept of history as factual knowledge and source of enlightenment; socially, it condemns Nazi crimes. As in Venus's intermission, Soul of a Clone's shifting address to spectators, and First Night's fortune-telling scene, Kristeva's Holocaust museum example describes the unexpected subversion of an already established aesthetic contract. As in First Night where the suggestion that the actor may really be experiencing pain threatens to strip the stage of illusion, or in Venus when the character's humiliation suddenly appears too real, the mise-en-scène in Kristeva's museum seems to be utterly realistic (just a collection of shoes). The work of imagination and the responsibility of meaning are left to the spectators.

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[136] Kristeva, 4.

Chapter Four

Whose Performance is it, anyway? Performed Criticism as a Feminist Strategy

In 1975 Carolee Schneemann performed Interior Scroll at the feminist festival "Women Here and Now," in a church in East Hampton, Long Island. Facing the audience, Schneemann outlined the contours of her naked body in paint, then climbed onto a table and read from her book Cézanne, She Was a Great Painter. Afterwards, she dropped the book and, standing with her legs apart, started unfolding a paper scroll from her vagina. The text on the scroll described the difficulties encountered by the female artist in a masculine-biased art world. "Be prepared," Schneemann read, "to have… your intentions distorted/ the simplest relationship in your thoughts twisted…/ if you are a woman…/ they will almost never believe you really did it…/ they will deny your sexuality or your work."[1] Schneemann performed the piece again in 1977 at the Telluride Film Festival in Colorado. Standing on a small proscenium stage, she outlined her body with mud. This time the scroll contained a dialogue in verse between two filmmakers, a woman and a man. In the dialogue, the male filmmaker asks the female filmmaker not to make men look at her films. Men cannot bear "the personal clatter/ the persistence of feelings/… the painterly mess/… the primitive techniques" in a woman's work. In response, the female filmmaker comments: "I saw my failings were worthy/ of dismissal I'd be buried/ alive my works lost…"[2]

More than twenty years after Schneemann's performance, the Guerilla Girls, a feminist activist group addressing women's discrimination in the arts, went into the washrooms of several New York theatres whose 1997-1998 seasons did not include any plays by women. With the help

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[1] Carolee Schneemann, Imaging her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002) 156-157.
[2] Ibid., 159-160.

of male supporters, they put up stickers that read: "In this theatre the taking of photographs, the use of a recording device, and the production of plays by women is strictly prohibited." In several interviews given about this action, the Guerrilla Girls concealed their faces and identities under their infamous gorilla masks and the names of female artists from the past: Aphra Behn, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Gertrude Stein, and others.[3]

Another five years later, sociologists Susan Jonas and Suzanne Bennett conducted a study on the status of women in US theatre, commissioned by the Fund for Women Artists. The theatres included in the study were all members of the Theatre Communications Group, and their production seasons were listed in the *American Theatre* magazine. Jonas and Bennett established that, despite the considerable critical acclaim that women artists received in the late-1990s, only 17% of the plays produced during the 2001-02 season were written by women. Theatre journalism's bias in favor of work by men was identified as a major factor accounting for this small number, along with lack of mentorship and poor knowledge of the tradition of female playwriting prior to the twentieth century.[4]

In the scene of welcome in First Night, Forced Entertainment reminded spectators of their fleshy, sexual bodies, which mainstream realist theatre frequently marks as semiotically invisible, in order to draw attention to the gendered and racial politics of viewing. Similarly, Schneeman's juxtaposition of the art critic's text and the artist's body, and the Guerilla Girls' use of theatres' washrooms as sites for their critical intervention, draw attention to the gendered politics of artistic production and reception. This chapter continues analyzing how spectators' embodiment

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[3] Guerrilla Girls on Tour, interview with Raphie Frank and Mindy Bond, Gothamist 17 Mar. 2005, 24 Jan. 2007, <http://www.gothamist.com/archives/2005/03/17/guerrilla_girls_on_tour.php>; The Guerilla Girls, "Parody and Parity," interview with Alisa Solomon, Theater 29.2 (1999): 45-55; The Guerilla Girls, "Guerrilla Girls Make 'Gorilla' Warfare on the Local New York Theatre Scene," interview with Simi Horowitz, Backstage 5 Mar. 1999, 5-7.

[4] Susan Jonas and Suzanne Bennett, "Report on the Status of Women: A Limited Engagement?" The Fund for Women Artists Jan. 2002, 22 Jan. 2007, < http://www.womenarts.org/advocacy/WomenCountNYSCAReport.htm>.

of gender categories informs their acts of viewing, but focuses on the relationship between

performers and a specific group of spectators: theatre journalists.

Unlike the average theatregoer, the theatre journalist is not anonymous; the political bent of the journal for which he or she writes influences his or her own viewing position. By creating and publishing written documents of their experience of a performance, theatre journalists shape the future of a production in distinct ways. While there is no direct relationship between reviewing and individual spectators' appreciation of a show, reviews influence theatre managers' decisions on the production's duration, the decisions of theatre funding organizations who use reviews as evidence of artistic excellence, and the work of performance historians who use them as evidence of reception.[5] From a materialist standpoint, the tangible effects of reviewing would require that theatre journalists clarify the position from which they write. As I demonstrate, however, few of those who review theatre for mainstream periodicals feel compelled to do so. Rather, they justify their judgments by referring to seemingly apolitical aesthetic criteria.

Drawing on Schneeman's and the Guerilla Girls' performances, as well as on Showtime (1996) by Forced Entertainment, I discuss how these artists confront theatre journalists with the impossibility of reviewing from a politically-neutral position. One recurring strategy that the artists have adopted is turning critical reviews into scripts for embodied, theatrical performances. This strategy draws attention to the bodies behind reviewers' texts and, like the spectatorship techniques that I analyze in the previous chapter, exposes viewing as a situated act.

To examine the significance of the artists' embodied responses to theatre journalism, I borrow the term "performed criticism" from Gay Gibson Cima's groundbreaking study of white

[5] On the impact of reviewing on theatre production, see Robert Brustein, "Himalaya Criticism: A Speech to the American Theatre Critics Association," Theatre 32.1 (2002): 77; Chris Coleman, "Low Expectations," Theatre 32.1 (2002): 82-3; David Roberts, "Shakespeare, Theatre Criticism, and the Acting Tradition," Shakespeare Quarterly 53.3 (2002): 360.

and African American women who commented upon culture, society, and politics in

eighteenth-century America.[6] Cima's term comprises both textual critical interventions, such as poetry, pamphlets and journalism, and interventions in embodied genres, such as lectures and sermons. By calling all of them "performances," she emphasizes the performative function of language (*pace* J.L. Austin), as well as the cultural conventions, or "scripts," on which those interventions drew. I use the term more narrowly, denoting as "performed criticism" only embodied critiques. In this way, I address current feminist debates on text and performance as two distinct media of knowledge. Art scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, for instance, maintain that, within the western public sphere, the association of the text with the mind and of performance with the body has marked text and performance as gendered and hierarchically unequal.[7] I engage with their argument by exploring the politics of theatre journalism as a *textual* response to a *performance* medium. I propose that by responding to reviewers' printed critiques with embodied performances, my case studies contest a still powerful convention of art journalism, historically gendered as masculine and based on the humanist values of individualism and enlightenment rationality.

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The origins of theatre journalism in England, as distinct from the broader activity of dramatic and performance criticism, are typically followed back to the early-1700s when Richard Steele and Joseph Addison started publishing literary judgments in The Tatler and The Spectator.[8] David Roberts, however, suggests that the ideological origins of reviewing should be traced even further back to the "1660s post-linguistic politics whereby (official) language

[6] Gay Gibson Cima, Early American Women Critics: Performance, Religion, Race (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[7] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002) 1-5.
[8] Irving Wardle, Theatre Criticism (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 13-14.

became linear, rational, and capable of conveying the perceptions of an educated individual

mind."[9] From the beginning, the politics of reviewing were distinctly gendered. A number of women authors wrote in various literary genres at the time when The Spectator was published, but Addison and Steele routinely ignored both women's work and the specific interests of their female readers. Though female readers asked the two editors to recommend readings specifically for them, their requests were never acknowledged.[10] A few decades later, William Hazlitt, whose work served as a model for many generations of theatre reviewers, wrote: "I am a great admirer of the female muses of the present day… Mrs. Hannah More is another celebrated modern poetess… She has written a great deal which I have never read."[11] Yet women's works in England were not always treated with disdain. Throughout the Romantic period, many male reviewers were in fact eager to acknowledge women's literary and dramatic talent, especially following the Licensing Act of 1737 which limited the overt political content in drama. According to Greg Kucich, the censor's rigorous control rendered unlikely the publication and staging of explicitly political, hence "unfeminine" and "perverse," texts by women. Yet, in most cases, male reviewers moderated their praise for female authors with stern critiques of perceived stylistic and structural weaknesses, frequently attributed to the playwrights' gender.[12] Another reason for Romantic critics' interest in female authors may have been the patronage and

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[9] Roberts, "Shakespeare, Theatre Criticism," 350.
[10] Eve Tavor Bannet, "Haywood's Spectator and the Female World," Fair Philosopher: Eliza Haywood and *the Female Spectator*, eds. Lynn Marie Wright and Donald J. Newman (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006) 86.
[11] William Hazlitt, Lectures on the English Poets, ed. Catherine MacDonald MacLean (London: Dent: 1967) 146-47. Quoted in Greg Kucich, "Reviewing Women in British Romantic Theatre," Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840, ed. Catherine Burroughs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 50-51.
[12] Kucich, 50-51.

mentorship that influential actor-managers, most notably David Garrick, extended to a number of female playwrights at the time, including Hannah Cowley, Hannah More, and others.[13]

It is difficult to estimate the number of female reviewers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; in both Britain and the US women journalists often wrote anonymously, aware that their opinions could be dismissed if they used their real names.[14] Additionally, both women and men used male or female pseudonyms, depending on the specific audiences they were targeting and on the cultural conventions which regulated credibility. In the early 1700s male and female editors contemporary to Addison and Steele often adopted feminine editorial personae as a rhetorical strategy to claim political impartiality. As women did not participate in party politics, political impartiality was regarded as a feminine attribute.[15] According to Ros Ballaster, "by appropriating the stereotypically female activities of 'tattling' and 'spectating' to a male sphere … Addison and Steele functionally revalue impartiality as male." Building on Ballaster's argument, Marcie Frank suggests that the posture of impartiality enabled Addison and Steele to separate literary-critical discourse from social and political agendas.[16] Defining impartiality narrowly – as not aligning one's journalistic stance with party politics – allowed them to present the journalist as simultaneously impartial and individual.

In the Romantic period, impartiality was no longer regarded as specifically feminine. Nonetheless, women journalists sometimes used their own names or female pseudonyms

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[13] On the effects of actors-managers' patronage of female playwrights, see Ellen Donkin, Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London 1776-1829 (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
[14] See Meghan Clarke, Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain 1880-1905 (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005) 124; Cima, Early American Women Critics, 8-9
[15] See Tedra Ossel, "Tattling Women in the Public Sphere: Rhetorical Femininity and the English Essay Periodical," Eighteenth-Century Studies 38.2 (2005): 285,283.
[16] Ross Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer, and Sandra Hebron, Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity, and the Woman's Magazine (London: Macmillan, 1991): 39-40, quoted in Marcie Frank, Gender, Theatre, and the Origins of Criticism: From Dryden to Manley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 12; Frank, ibid.

strategically, trying to benefit from the period's preoccupation with morality and politeness.

These traits, codified as feminine, also facilitated female playwrights' access to the stage. British playwright, novelist, and critic Frances Brooke, editor of the provocatively titled weekly Old Maid, by Mary Singleton, Spinster, proposed a moral reform of the stage by "a little court of female criticism" that would oppose "all stage offences against sense and decency."[17] Elizabeth Inchbald, perhaps Britain's most acclaimed female theatre critic of the eighteenth century, wrote that good drama was morally-refined, and advised dramatists to avoid "bawdry" as well as "anything 'low' – vulgar characters or slapstick humor."[18] Eighteenth-century American female theatre reviewers and playwrights, in turn, described their texts as "lessons of morality."[19] However, in contexts where a masculine persona was more suitable to facilitate intervention in the public sphere, women would assume rhetorical masculinity. In Britain and the US alike, female journalists used the rhetoric of civic humanism and patriotism, marked as masculine, to claim independence of judgment on non-domestic issues, contributing to the impression that patriotism and humanism, too, were ideals beyond party politics.[20] The trouble with these rhetorical strategies is that their performative power easily overrules their users' intentions; female journalists' conservative print personas have sometimes been mistaken for their actual political views.[21] Moreover, the various tactics that male and female journalists devised to present their critical positions as apolitical (equated with representative) affirmed the

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[17] K.J.H. Berland, "Frances Brooke and David Garrick," Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 20 (1990): 218-19.

[18] Katharine M. Rogers, "Britain's First Woman Drama Critic: Elizabeth Inchbald," Curtain Calls: British and America Women and the Theatre, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991) 284.

[19] Cima, Early American Women Critics, 116-17.

[20] Min Wild, "'Prodigious Wisdom:' Civic Humanism in Frances Brooke's *Old Maid*," Women's Writing 5.3 (1998): 423; Cima, Early American Women Critics, 4-6

[21] According to Kathryn King, for instance, the conservative rhetoric that journalist Eliza Haywood used in *The Female Spectator* has led scholars to underestimate Haywood's contribution to the history of women journalism. Drawing on other writing by Haywood, King suggests that Haywood's actual political views were less conservative. See Kathryn R. King, "Patriot or Opportunist? Eliza Haywood and the Politics of *The Female Spectator*," Fair

illusion that apolitical criticism was possible and worthy of emulation.

Yet, while cultural conventions generally limited female journalists' field of influence and tested their ingenuity, many female critics had an advantage that some of their more influential male colleagues lacked: first-hand experience of theatre-making. British writer Eliza Haywood, editor of the Female Spectator, had been an actress before she became a novelist and a publisher. Inchbald was both a playwright and an actress. Her journal entries reveal that she routinely observed spectators' reactions from the wings and used this feedback in her own playwriting. Her reviews, too, evaluated not only the literary merit of plays but also their effectiveness in performance. She was always mindful of how actors' talent contributed to the success of a play.[22] Inchbald's critical expertise was publicly recognized in 1805, when the publisher Thomas Norton Longman invited her to write the critical prefaces to a collection of 125 plays, popular on the London stages at the time. But Longman's invitation was unusual. Even some of Inchbald's male admirers were critical of it, finding that it was "unfeminine" for a lady "to place herself in the seat of judgment."[23] Other female reviewers faced consequences far more serious than a reprimand. In 1756, Frances Brooke jeopardized her entire playwriting career upon publishing a review of Garrick's performance as King Lear, which was not to Garrick's liking. None of the major London playhouses would produce her work until after Garrick's death in 1779.[24]

During the Victorian period, the perception that the practice of journalism impaired women's morality was widely shared. Yet, in the 1880s and 1890s, the number of periodicals

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Philosopher: Eliza Haywood and *The Female Spectator*, eds. Lynn Marie Wright and Donald J. Newman (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press) 108.

[22] Donkin, 114; Marvin Carlson, "Elizabeth Inchbald: A Romantic Critic in Her Theatrical Culture," Women in British Romantic Theatre, ed. Catherine Burroughs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 217.

[23] Rogers, 288.

[24] Donkin, 41-56.

intended for female readers increased and many mainstream periodicals introduced "ladies' columns," creating a new niche for female journalists in Britain. At that time, more women started reviewing art exhibitions, but female theatre journalists remained very few.[25] While art exhibitions opened during the day,[26] nineteenth-century theatrical performance started in the evening and ended late at night. Theatre reviewers composed their texts immediately after that, "when proper women were sleeping."[27] The few female journalists who wrote for the socialist press could perhaps partially offset the risk to their reputation. Unlike the mainstream press which was increasingly dominated by profit concerns, the radical press was seen to be driven by moral causes. Moreover, Cima writes, socialist women "were *expected* to judge mainstream cultural performances."[28] Less is known about the practices of late nineteenth-century American female theatre reviewers. However, Cima suggests that more women reviewed theatre in the US than in Britain, because social and arts reporting, including theatre reporting, were typically assigned to "unpracticed" journalists.[29]

There has been no consistent study of female theatre or art reviewers in the first half of the twentieth century, but the little information I have found suggests that, as in earlier periods, they were vastly outnumbered by male reviewers. Art historian Meaghan Clarke notes that, as art writing became more established and professionalized at the turn of the twentieth century, female art reviewers became less prominent.[30] In his study of British theatre after World War II, Dominic Shellard describes Penelope Gilliatt's theatre and film reviews for the Observer in the

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[25] Clarke, 14-15.
[26] Clarke, 18.
[27] Gay Gibson Cima, "'To Be Public as a Genius and Private as a Woman:' the Critical Framing of Nineteenth-Century British Women Playwrights," Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain, eds. Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 43-44.
[28] Cima, "'To Be Public as a Genius and Private as a Woman,'" 40.
[29] Cima, "'To Be Public as a Genius and Private as a Woman,'" 45.
[30] Clarke, 15, 159.

1960s as a notable breakthrough in a male-dominated profession.[31] In an article outlining the tendencies in theatre journalism in New York throughout the twentieth century, Rachel Shteir mentions no female reviewers in the period before World War II and only four in the 1950s and 1960s: Mary McCarthy, Susan Sontag, Elizabeth Hardwick, and Erika Munk. Shteir specifies that their presence was a rare exception to the gender politics of the profession.[32]

Though women had occasionally critiqued these politics before,[33] the gender bias in reviewing became radically challenged in the 1980s when the increasing numbers of female playwrights and women's theatre collectives, as well as the feminist scholarly project for revising masculine paradigms of knowledge, foregrounded the necessity for specifically feminist theatre journalism. The very premise of art journalism – the critic's independence of judgment – came under question.

The belief that an individual critical opinion is apolitical and, therefore, representative continues to underlie the reviewing practices of many present-day theatre journalists, and not only those writing for mainstream periodicals. In a 2002 essay, Jonathan Kalb, who has published reviews and criticism in both mainstream and academic journals, including The Village Voice, The New York Times, Theater, and Theatre Journal, asserts, with deliberate provocation, that "criticism is a talent… either one is a critic or one isn't." He defines theatre

[31] Dominic Shellard, British Theatre Since The War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 144; Gilliatt's reviews have been collected in Penelope Gilliatt, Unholy Fools: Wits, Comics, Disturbers of the Peace: Film and Theatre (New York: The Viking Press, 1973).
[32] Rachel Shteir, "Notes on New York Theatre Criticism," Theater 35.3 (2005): 79, 84.
[33] Feminist journalist Harriet Martineau described theatre journalists as "'a small established corps of men undertaking to pronounce on works in regard to each one of which the reviewer is, probably, less competent than the author… failure to perceive this, made the great Review a receptacle of unjust judgments.'" Cima, "'To be Public as a Genius and Private as a Woman,'" 42.

journalism as "bringing unfamiliar ideas to a general audience, connecting a demanding art to a reluctant public" by providing "objective and informed commentary."[34] London-based Irving Wardle, who regularly writes for The Independent and The Evening Standard, similarly describes the theatre journalist as a representative speaker, illuminating ideas for a general audience. "When a reviewer does succeed in finding the right words for something that has been vaguely hovering in the public mind, he creates satisfaction all around."[35] Wardle warns that, to keep his critical independence intact, the reviewer should abstain from attending rehearsals. The artists, he writes, "may say nothing to influence your opinion, but after a couple of weeks with these lovely people it is unthinkable to return to your solitary room and dismiss their efforts in a crisp 500 words."[36] His warning conveys the humanist assumption that evaluating representation from a position external to it is not only possible but desirable. Paradoxically, it turns out that, to increase participation in critical aesthetic discourse, the theatre journalist has to maintain a position of critical solitude.

Inchbald's and Brooke's stories vividly demonstrate that the rhetorical place of a speaker who is simultaneously independent and representative of a general public was not open to female reviewers of the past. The feminist journalist of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries does not even try to assume this place. By their self-definition as feminists, these journalists have already stated that their reviewing is not apolitical. Additionally, many feminist reviewers have become closely associated with women's theatre groups, seeing the constructive criticism of female artists as their primary task. Hence, they have broken Wardle's rule of non-involvement, supposed to preserve objectivity, and dismissed "objectivity" as a desirable critical position. One

[34] Jonathan Kalb, "The Death (and Life) of American Theatre Criticism: Advice to the Young Critic," Theater 33.1 (2002): 51, 55, 46.
[35] Wardle, 9.
[36] Wardle, 9-10.

major challenge that feminist journalists have faced derives from their responsibility to two audiences: the feminist theatre community and a larger group of spectators who may or may not share its politics. Feminist scholar Jill Dolan discussed this challenge in her 1988 study The Feminist Spectator as Critic:

> Precarious feminist theatre and performance groups need favorable documentation of their work to persuade funding organizations and audiences to continue their support. The feminist critic who writes frankly of a feminist production's problems risks a certain ostracism from the creative community. In the spirit of progress, however, it seems necessary to point out the limitations of even the most well-intentioned feminist work … and to institute a dialogue that resonates beyond the confines of an insular feminist community.[37]

In her 1981 book Carry on, Understudies, British feminist scholar and playwright Michelene Wandor, who also writes reviews for the press, expressed the same dilemma.[38] This dilemma continually reminds the feminist reviewer of her/his situated position and of the consequences that her/his critical acts entail, preempting any illusions of humanist objectivity.

In 1994, reviewers' responses to Sarah Daniels's play The Madness of Esme and Shaz clearly divided along gender lines, reviving the debate on the politics of theatre journalism in Britain. The Financial Times' critic Andrew George described the encounter between the formerly-estranged Christian conservative Esme and her disturbed lesbian niece Shaz as "a good dish which stays too long on the table; it starts hot and goes cold."[39] The play, which argues

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[37] Jill Dolan, The Feminist Spectator as Critic (Ann Arbor and London: U-M-I Research Press, 1988) 120.
[38] Michelene Wandor, Carry on Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics, 2nd ed. (1981, London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986) 119.
[39] Andrew St. George, rev. of The Madness of Esme and Shaz, by Sarah Daniels, Financial Times 23 Feb. 1994: 19.

powerfully that women will not improve their social positions unless they consciously support each other, was dismissed by Nicholas de Jongh of the Evening Standard as "pretty and witty but beside the point." Benedict Nightingale of the Times and Neil Smith of What's On complained to readers that the play offers nothing to men.[40] Meanwhile the run was extended in response to popular demand. The play was a box-office success.[41] Spectators' previous familiarity with Daniels' work, the number of subscribers to The Royal Court Theatre, and the positive reviews of the play by female journalists may have contributed to this outcome.

The recurring pattern of a gender divide in the journalistic reception of Daniels's work,[42] as well as the coincidence of Esme and Shaz's run with Caryl Churchill's The Skriker at the Cottesloe (the studio space of the National Theatre) compelled feminist theatre journalists to evaluate the situation of women's theatre after two decades of feminist activism and scholarship. In an article for The Guardian, Claire Armitstead argued that "the creeping conservatism" of the 1990s continued to constrict female theatre artists. The reception of women-written and women-produced work in the 1970s and 1980s had suggested that in the 1990s women's theatre would achieve success on the mainstream stages. But as Churchill's and Daniels' plays demonstrated, women's theatre in 1994 was still relegated to smaller studio theatre spaces.[43] Productions in marginalized venues could influence their reception unfavorably. Thomas Winship, editor of the Boston Globe, writes that few journalists give smaller-venue performances the word-length they deserve.[44] Carole Woddis, possibly the most influential feminist theatre journalist covering the contemporary London stage, saw the response to Daniels' work as symptomatic of the

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[40] Quoted in David Benedict, "Notices," rev. of The Madness of Esme and Shaz, by Sarah Daniels, Independent 2 March 1994: 27. Benedict is among the few male journalists who recognize the male prejudice towards the play.
[41] Ibid.
[42] See Elaine Aston, "Daniels in the Lions Den: Sarah Daniels and the British Backlash," Theatre Journal 47.3 (1995): 393-403.
[43] Claire Armitstead, "Nostalgia for the Future: Can Women's Theatre Regain the High-Ground it Once Occupied?" Guardian 22 Feb. 1994: 6.
[44] "Theatre – the Media," Critics and the Arts, panel discussion, Nieman Reports 46.3 (1992): 21.

conventional premise and practice of theatre journalism. To Woddis, the theatre review reflects "a wildly shifting collection of influences – susceptibility to seeing a minority voice honored… sensitivity to time and place, tiredness, personal worries, political and class affiliations, not to mention gender affiliations." More often than not, however, male and female journalists alike disregard the precarious conditions of reviewing and assume an omnipotent voice, writing to unspoken conventions "settled long ago by the male rules of logic, reason, and objectivity."[45] In The New Statesman and Society, Betty Caplan decried the lack of support for lesbian playwrights. Lesbian aesthetics, she wrote, "remains pretty crude and raw," because lesbian theatre was an emergent form. Hence, it could be nurtured only by critics "to whom the work can speak more meaningfully and personally."[46] To Caplan, these nurturing critics were certainly not the majority of theatre journalists, whom she described elsewhere as "a pretty homogeneous bunch: white, male, Oxbridge, middle-class."[47] Her evaluation of lesbian playwrights' work as "crude and raw" unwittingly reinforces the dominant aesthetic criteria. Yet the need for a network of supportive reviewers, which she indicates, is crucial not only to a playwright's success as defined by such criteria but also to their redefinition.

In the US, the findings in Jonas and Bennett's report initiated a series of discussions on the possible ways of redressing the disparity between male and female playwrights. These discussions also emphasized the importance of journalists' advocacy for female playwrights. Linda Winer of Newsday noted that "after twenty years on the job," she was still the only female first-night reviewer writing for a daily paper in New York.[48]

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[45] Carole Woddis, "Feminism and the Theatre Critic," Women: A Cultural Review 5.2 (1994): 195.
[46] Betty Caplan, "Shocking Men in the Stalls," New Statesman & Society 29 April 1994: 34.
[47] Betty Caplan, "Speaking in Tongues," New Statesman &Society 4 June 1993: 32.
[48] Jonas and Bennett, 6.

These debates clearly implicate traditional, humanist theatre journalism in the difficulties encountered by female playwrights. Nonetheless, it is worth taking a second look at mainstream reviewers' humanism, because some of its most established practitioners, familiar with poststructuralist arguments and supportive of female playwrights, still insist on humanism's progressive value. Of those, Kalb's defense of humanism is particularly intriguing. Drawing both on his reviewing practice and his experience as faculty in the NYU Performance Studies Department, he situates his humanist position in a broader debate of how to study and write about theatre.

Kalb asserts that the humanist critic's elitist stance is expressive not of arrogance, but of conscious resistance to the denigration of art and to the political passivity encouraged by the mass media. "In the age of TV and Video," he writes, "theatre is a proudly elitist medium." Its elitism regresses to arrogance only when uninformed critics write about drama from an all-knowing position. Such cases, he admits, are unfortunately numerous.[49] Kalb's second argument addresses the effect of poststructuralist theories on theatre scholarship, which, he claims, have provoked scholars to hastily dismantle the canon without accounting for its appeal. He is especially critical of the poststructuralist ban against generalization. In his view, this ban results in rhetorically weak writing, lacking in passion. Feminists, too, must generalize from their position as feminists if they want to write persuasive reviews.[50] In a speech addressed to students of dramatic criticism, Kalb advises the future reviewers:

> Be female, at least sometimes … Obviously, this will come easier to those of you who happen to be women, but not being female is no excuse for never thinking about it … More women need to get involved in the field, and more men need to tap their repressed

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[49] Jonathan Kalb, "The Critic as Humanist," Play by Play: Theater Essays and Reviews 1993-2002 (New York: Limelight Editions, 2003) 34-35.

[50] Ibid., 36-37.

> female sympathies … I suspect our male critics … have not always totally understood the work of innovative female artists.[51]

Kalb's appeal to "be female" bears striking resemblance to the founding moment of the humanist tradition of journalism: Addison and Steele's re-gendering of impartiality as male. Despite the ironic effect of this resemblance, his attempt to draw a parallel between elitism and feminist criticism, presenting both as critical stances against political passivity, appears motivated by genuine desire to support women's work. Yet his failure to see the link between the appeal of the canon, mainstream critics' elitism, and their misunderstanding of "innovative female artists" allows him to present the appreciation of women's plays as simply a matter of good will.

Richard Walsh's discussion of Marsha Norman's Pulitzer-winning play 'night, Mother (1987) indirectly foregrounds the weakness in Kalb's argument. In his book on radical theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, Walsh praises 'night, Mother for satisfying "the establishment's… demand for universalism without negating the specificity of the female perspective." Immediately afterwards, he observes that "despite its exclusive focus upon the drama of a mother-daughter relationship, 'night, Mother was not perceived as a feminist play."[52] This comment inadvertently points out what Kalb seems to overlook: traditional journalists' fear that a female position may turn out to be feminist, and so threaten the establishment's self-professed universalism. Not incidentally, attempts to generalize from a feminist position are routinely dismissed as preachy.[53] Moreover, Jonas and Bennett's report establishes that female playwrights are less produced than

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[51] Ibid., 56.
[52] Walsh, 38.
[53] See Lara Shalson, "Creating Community, Constructing Criticism: The Women's One World Festival 1980-1981," Theatre Topics 15.2 (2005): 237.

male playwrights, even when they write realist plays with Aristotelian plots, do not write from a feminist position, and do not want to be categorized as women playwrights.[54]

In contrast to Kalb, the influential reviewer and artistic director Robert Brustein, who has written highly of Churchill's, Suzan-Lori Parks's, and Susan Sontag's plays, rejects any hint that mainstream critics cannot adequately evaluate gender- and race-specific work. According to Brustein, such claims "carve off and separate specific sexes, races, and what have you from the human race."[55] Elsewhere, he implies that theatre scholars' "fashionable theories and political ideologies" have a share in this unnecessary discrimination.[56] Brustein's polemical statement should not be evaluated apart from its context: his famous confrontation with August Wilson over Wilson's address to the 1996 National Conference of the Theatre Communications' Group.

In his address, entitled "The Ground on which I Stand," Wilson bemoaned the lack of funding for African American theatres. According to him, art-funding organizations preferred to support productions of black plays in mainstream venues and encouraged color-blind casting in plays from the western canon. Wilson denounced these practices as assimilationist and imperialist, arguing that they solidified the western canon's aesthetic authority. Instead, he demanded support for powerful African American theatres, which would perpetuate the cultural politics of the Black Arts Movement.[57] In this same address, Wilson singled out Brustein as a cultural imperialist, citing Brustein's critique of art foundations' tendency to let sociological rather than aesthetic criteria define their funding policies.[58]

Brustein, who was not present at the address, confronted Wilson in the press and in a face-to-face meeting at Town Hall in New York, moderated by Anna Deavere Smith. The

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[54] Jonas and Bennett, 4.
[55] "The Institutional Theater," Critics & the Arts, panel discussion, Nieman Reports 46.3 (1992): 14.
[56] Brustein, "Himalaya Criticism," 73.
[57] August Wilson, The Ground on which I Stand, 29, 13.
[58] Wilson, 23-25.

confrontation prompted not only Brustein, but also African American scholar Henry Louis Gates, to remind Wilson of the impossibility of pure art or culture. Brustein asked rhetorically why mainstream organizations should fund African American cultural separatism, and reminded Wilson that his own plays followed Aristotelian conventions and were produced in mainstream venues, including Broadway.[59] Gates wrote of the inconvenient fact that the Black Arts Movement was funded by powerful organizations such as the Ford Foundation.[60] Reviewer Margo Jefferson remarked that the debate left the impression that European Americans and African Americans were "the only two groups living in North America," or at least the only two groups whose cultural rights merited discussion."[61]

For all its weak points, Wilson's address forced Brustein to acknowledge that social participants are embodied participants, an aspect that humanism downplays. "Where is the common ground in the horrors of lynching? Where is the common ground in the aim of a policeman's bullet? Where is the common ground in the hull or the deck of a slave ship with its refreshments of air and expanse?" Wilson asked, contesting Brustein's humanist position.[62] Further on, he used food as a metaphor for cultural difference. "In our culinary history," he said, "[African Americans] have learned to make do with the feet and ears and tails and intestines of the pig rather than the loin and the ham and the bacon… But we [African Americans and European Americans] share a common experience with the pig as opposed to say Muslims and Jews, who do not share that experience."[63] What about black Muslims or reformed Jews,

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[59] Robert Brustein, "Subsidized Separatism," New Republic 19 Aug. 1996: 40.
[60] Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Chitlin Circuit," African American Performance and Theatre History, eds. Harry J. Elam, Jr. and David Krasner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 137.
[61] Margot Jefferson, "Oratory vs. Really Talking about Culture," New York Times 4 Feb. 1997: C11.
[62] Wilson, 26.
[63] Wilson, 27.

Brustein replied, bringing attention to the diversity within race. It is an "'ethnographic fallacy' that one writer's cultural experiences can represent a whole social category," he said. On this ground, he contested Wilson's accusation that African American artists and playwrights who participate in color-blind casting and present their work in theatres with mixed audiences are "cross-over" artists, "slanting their material for white consumption."[64]

Brustein, however, elides the appeal of Black Nationalism. According to feminist scholar bell hooks, supporters of Black Nationalism identified with the movement's call for black self-definition because they saw self-definition as a way to resist the commodification of racial difference in white mainstream culture.[65] Wilson saw color-blind casting as an instance of such commodification. Wilson saw color-blind casting as an instance of such commodification. Besides, separatism in the Black Arts movement did not boil down to unthinking negation of white western art. Rather, it was a rethinking of this art in view of the racial social and cultural politics of the 1960s.[66] Artistic separatism has been similarly instrumental to female playwrights and theatre collectives trying to forge an identity different from the normative images of femininity.

Missing from their confrontation – but consistent with both the masculinist legacy of the Black Arts Movement and the male bias in humanism – is a discussion of African American female playwrights. These women's work, Jonas and Bennett write, is even less frequently produced than that of white female playwrights. Yet a particular female playwright, barely acknowledged, haunts Wilson and Brustein's exchange. Suzan-Lori Parks has been recognized as the target of Wilson's disparaging remark about "cross-over" artists. Removed from the

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[64] Wilson, 33.
[65] bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End Press, 1992) 33.
[66] This reading of black artistic separatism has been eloquently articulated in James Edward Smethurst's study The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

spotlight, she was drawn into one of the conventional dilemmas that black women have had
to face upon entering the public sphere: the pressure to choose their allegiances between blackness and femininity; their bodies becoming the site on which the limits of femininity and race are drawn.[67]

Brustein briefly mentioned Parks in his defense of black artists working in mainstream theatres. The value of her work, he wrote, stemmed from her ability to address the entire human race from her situated perspective as an African American woman.[68] I agree with Brustein on this point. I would only add that the value of Parks's work, however this value may be defined, is the joint accomplishment of her own effort and the support she received from agencies invested in developing new theatre talent, such as the feminist organization Women's Projects and Productions, Inc. which co-commissioned her play Venus (1996). Countering Brustein's complaint that contemporary art criticism overlooks the importance of aesthetics in favor of politics, Parks's prominence exemplifies the importance of politically motivated collaboration.

Recently, another theatre debate brought to the fore the bodies obscured by humanism and, at the same time, illustrated humanism's appeal. In December 2004, violent protests by the Birmingham Sikh community closed down the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's production of Behzti (Dishonor) by female playwright Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, herself a Sikh. The play was still in rehearsal when Sikh leaders became aware of a point in the plot which they found particularly offensive: a religious leader rapes a young woman in the Sikh temple. Sikh representatives stated that they accepted Bhatti's critique of religious hypocrisy. However, they were adamant that the rape scene should happen anywhere but in the temple; perhaps in a Sikh community center. The playwright, supported by director Janet Steel, also of Indian origin, agreed to make some cuts,

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[67] See, for instance, hooks, ibid., 89.
[68] Brustein, "Subsidized Separatism," 41.

but refused to change the setting of the rape scene. Behzti opened on Wednesday, December 15, while groups of Sikhs protested peacefully outside the theatre. By Saturday, December 18, the number of protesters grew to about four hundred, and some of them broke into the theatre, smashing windows and damaging equipment. The theatre was evacuated. The playwright received death threats and went into hiding.[69]

Sikh leaders condemned the violence, claiming that their religion advocated gender equality. The play, they said, should have only been amended, not cancelled.[70] In the debates that followed, the participants astutely deployed the discourses of multiculturalism and humanism. Jasdev Singh Rai, director of a Sikh Human Rights Group, stated that "freedoms are never absolute, least of all in multicultural, multiracial societies where responsibilities to coexist must limit them." Unqualified assertions of free speech, Rai warned, masked the lingering legacy of colonialism.[71] Theatre artists countered that the Sikh leaders evoked multiculturalism as a way to control artistic freedoms. "A play written by an Asian is not necessarily an Asian play. As a writer, one hopes that it will transcend religion, class, and culture. The faces in it may be brown but the experiences are universal,"[72] playwright Ash Kotak wrote. His words echo Suzan-Lori Parks' protest against being confined to a singular black aesthetic. Bhatti also said that her play discussed universal subjects, not particular to the Sikh community.[73]

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[69] Commission for Racial Equality, "Resolving Tensions around Behzti," 20 Feb. 2007, http://www.cre.gov.uk/about/sci/casestudy6_behzti.html >; Janet Steel, "Shame in Birmingham," Index on Censorship 2 (2005): 121-23.
[70] Tania Branigan, "Tale of Rape at the Temple Sparks Riot at the Theatre," Guardian Unlimited 20 Dec. 2004, 20 Feb. 2007, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1377285,00.html>.
[71] Jasdev Sigh Rai, "Behind Behzti," Guardian Unlimited 17 Jan. 2005, 20 Feb. 2007, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1391895,00.html>.
[72] Ash Kotak, "Not in Our Gurdwaras: My Generation of Writers Has Reason to Provoke," Guardian Unlimited 21 Dec. 2004, 20 Feb. 2007, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1377942,00.html>.
[73] Commission for Racial Equality, ibid.

Despite Rai's assertions that Sikhism advocated gender equality, universalism, rather than multiculturalism, became equated with women's rights. Not only were the playwright and the director women, but so were the majority of spectators. The protesters, on the other hand, were predominantly men.[74] Playwright David Edgar pointed out that Behzti was "one of a growing number of plays… by young Asian women… about the conflict between faith and institutional religion."[75] Race-equality activist Darcus Howe reminded the public of the sexual abuse and honor killings in the Asian communities in Britain, and harshly critiqued the Birmingham Rep for involving religious representatives in the rehearsal process and for canceling the play. "It is not freedom of speech that is at stake here," he wrote. "It is literally a question of life and death for many Asian women."[76] Ironically, just as Rai had feared, the conflict was assimilated into a colonial script. As the theatre and the protesters divided along gender lines, Bhatti's white male supporters presented her as a subjugated eastern woman who needed to be saved from masculine oppression in her non-white community. Though few protesters were unruly and many of the advocates of free speech were less than objective in presenting this freedom as an absolute value, the confrontation also (re)produced a binary between the "violent" bodies of the play's opponents and the "rational" texts of its supporters, evoking the mind/body hierarchy of western critical thought.

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In the history of western theatre, the mind/body hierarchy is manifest in the long-standing prejudice against performance. Consider Hazlitt. In his essay "On Criticism," in Table Talk

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[74] See David Edgar, "Theatre Community Defends 'Courageous' Birmingham Rep," Guardian Unlimited 21 Dec. 2004, 20 Feb. 2007, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1377973,00.html>; "City Play Row Police Backed," Birmingham Post Mail 5 Nov. 2005: n.pag.
[75] Edgar, ibid.
[76] Darcus Howe, "The Issue at Birmingham Rep wasn't Freedom of Speech, but Asian Women's Right to Life," New Statesman 10 January, 2005: 21.

(1821-1822), Hazlitt wrote that the critic's task was to elucidate the essence of the dramatic text, in order to help the *reader* of drama appreciate the complexity of human life that this text represents. He worried that the theatrical performance simplified the text's complexity and made the spectator passive and dependent on concrete choices, such as casting and setting. By contrast, the reader's active imagination was independent of time and setting.[77] A reviewer, who signed correspondence "Corinna" and whom historians believe to have been Eliza Haywood, warned that the actors' talent could embellish a play so much that no judgments could be made about its qualities before it had gained a reputation with readers.[78] To Elizabeth Inchbald, too, the reader of drama had a critical advantage that the spectator lacked.[79]

Like the mind/body binary, the debate about the merits of text and performance was also gendered. Drawing on reviews of plays by women, Kucich suggests that male reviewers were especially anxious of the effects that staging women's plays could have on spectators. As many female playwrights were also actresses, the concerns about decency provoked by the presence of female bodies on stage reflected on women's texts as well. Also, while male authors were viewed as addressing readers from a non-gendered position, the works of female dramatists were seen as indistinguishable from their gendered identity.[80]

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[77] In Janet Ruth Heller, Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt and the Reader of Drama (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1990) 99-102.

[78] Constance Clark, "Critical Remarks on the Four Taking Plays of This Season by Corinna, a Country Parson's Wife," Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theatre, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991) 297.

[79] Inchbald writes, "An auditor deluded into pity by the inimitable acting of a Mrs. Siddons and a Mr. Kemble ... weeps with her; sighs with him; and conceives them to be a most amiable, if unfortunate, pair. But a reader, blessed with the common reflection which a reading should give, calls the husband a very silly man, and the wife a very imprudent woman: and as a man without sense, and a woman without prudence, degrade both the masculine and the feminine character, the punishment of the author is rather expected with impatience, than lamented as severe." See Elizabeth Inchbald, ed., The British Theatre; or, a Collection of Plays, which are Acted at the Theatres Royal, Drury-Lane, Covent-Garden, and Haymarket, vol. 14 (London: Longman, Hurts, and Rees, 1808) 3-4. Cited in Carlson, 219.

[80] Kucich, 59-61.

The fear that performance threatened independent thinking survived well into the twentieth century, influencing both theatre theory and critical thinking in general. According to Shannon Jackson, theatre did not fit comfortably within either formalist or poststructuralist paradigms. In late modernism, when the formalist autonomy of the work was the norm, theatre did not qualify as high art because the meanings of the theatrical performance were too dependent on its larger context of production and reception. But when the linguistic turn made open-ended signification the rule, theatre's reliance on live bodies was perceived as too constraining. In the academy, the text/performance binary influenced notions of how theatre should be studied, producing a split between drama, as a sub-field of literature, and theatre, as a fine arts subject.[81]

In theatre journalism, the effect of the text, as a medium for conveying knowledge about performance, has only rarely been discussed. In 1990, Wardle wrote:

> You have only to hear the squeakily preserved voice of Ellen Terry, or see the remaining footage of Johnson Forbes Robertson's *Hamlet*, a dignified middle-aged gentleman picking his way along a boulder-strewn seashore with the anxiety of one who has missed his bus to the office, to realize that mechanical reproduction can never capture the perceptions of the contemporary spectator.[82]

Wardle acknowledges that most present-day theatre journalists do not understand the complexity of the actor's work. "I can think of no front-rank English critic … who has made his living as an actor. By contrast, there are several who have written successful plays; and the shared condition … gives them a basic foothold in the playwright's world. They have no such foothold in the world of an actor." But to him this is not really a weakness, because, he says, even though

[81] Shannon Jackson, Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 116.
[82] Wardle, 12.

reviewers cannot analyze what actors do, they can describe what they do.[83] Wardle's perception of the superiority of textual evidence is based on the incorrect assumption that description is a neutral procedure. His disdain for visual and audio documentation closes down the variety of interpretations that spectators could have upon seeing even a low-quoality videotape, mediated by the camera-operator's viewpoint.

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Though Carolee Schneemann is not a theatre actress, Interior Scroll provides important insights into the history I have outlined. Schneemann's performances not only expose the gendered hierarchy between text and performance in reviewing and anticipate the feminist contestation of art-journalistic practices; the reception history of Interior Scroll is equally significant because it reveals feminist scholars' changing awareness of the text-performance dynamic.

In the spirit of radical feminism, Schneemann sought a "vulvic space" in Interior Scroll: a representational strategy countering the "traditionally 'phallic' symbolism" of western art. To develop this strategy, she thought of the vagina as "a sculptural form [and] architectural referent," but also as "the source of sacred knowledge, ecstasy … transformation."[84] Like Judy Chicago's vulvic imagery in The Dinner Party (1979),[85] the centrality of the vagina in Interior Scroll proved so controversial that Schneemann's materialist critique of the impact of gender on art practices was largely neglected. Amelia Jones explains that in the 1960s and 1970s, under the influence of formalism, works such as Interior Scroll and The Dinner Party were dismissed because they gestured beyond "art proper" to the realms of the social and the political. The

[83] Wardle, 96-97.
[84] Carolee Schneemann, More than Meat Joy, ed. Bruce MacPherson (New Paltz, N.Y.: Documentext, 1979) 234.
[85] Chicago's installation consisted of three big tables forming together an equilateral triangle, with thirteen place settings on each side. The vagina-shaped plates were the most controversial aspect of the installation.

leading art critic Clement Greenberg defined modernist art as art that is abstract, not figural (representational).[86] Conversely, feminist artists, seeking to create an iconography of the female experience (a cultural feminist notion), returned to figural representation. As the linguistic turn gained authority in the 1980s, poststructuralist feminists critiqued the concept of shared female experience, deriving from women's shared biology, as essentialist. Feminist visual and performance art of the 1970s, including The Dinner Party and Interior Scroll, was rejected as expressive of that concept. The materialist critique of art production and reception in Schneemann's and Chicago's works was overlooked once again.[87]

Feminist visual and performance art of the 1970s was reevaluated in the 1990s, as feminist scholars rethought the gender and sexual implications of the linguistic turn. According to Sue-Ellen Case, the linguistic turn supported feminist scholars' attampts to dissolve the connection between the female body and essentialism by replacing the fleshy body with a textualized body – the body as a sign. This textualized body, Case contends, became almost indistinguishable from the mind. Hence, the linguistic turn repeated the Cartesian emphasis on the priority of the intellect.[88] Behind the "textualization" of the flesh, Case (*pace* Sagri Dhairyam) reads the perennial masculine unease with the female body: "'the monstrously feminized body's sensual evocations of smell, fluid, and hidden vaginal spaces.'"[89] What was once regarded as a fraught relationship between the materialist critique of art practices and the centrality of female

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[86] Amelia Jones, "The 'Sexual Politics' of The Dinner Party: A Critical Context," 87; Amelia Jones, Body Art: Performing the Subject (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 5.
[87] Schneider discusses this reductive view of Schneemann's work and emphasizes it materialist aspects in Rebecca Schneider, The Explicit Body in Performance (London and New York: Routledge, 1997): 32-37. For a discussion of male critical responses to Schneemann's work, see Kathy O'Dell, "Fluxus Femininus," TDR 41.1 (Spring 1997): 43-60. For a detailed analysis of feminist and non-feminist responses to The Dinner Party, see Jones, "The "Sexual Politics' of The Dinner Party."
[88] Case, The Domain-Matrix, 107.
[89] Sagri Dhairyam, quoted in Case, 37.

sexual imagery in Schneemann's and Chicago's works has been reconsidered as productive tension, disclosing "the ideological assumptions that motivate critical thought."[90]

In view of this reception history and of the gendered history of journalism, Interior Scroll is particularly important. In Schneemann's performance, the female critic reenters the public sphere bodily, like the early American critics in Cima's study who offered critiques at the marketplace. Yet those critics, just like the female journalists at that time, had to invent complex strategies to justify their interventions: presenting them, for instance, as acts of divine revelation.[91] Schneemann, by contrast, asserts her right to critique not *despite* but *because of* her female body. The live female body, simultaneously fleshy and non-essentialist, is reformulated as a condition of knowledge, rather than as a deterrent to critical thinking or as essentialized experience.

The explicit connection between feminist critique and the female body in Interior Scroll makes Schneemann's critical position appear essentialist. This impression is reinforced by Schneemann's evocation of the myth of the goddess. Cultural feminists used this myth to claim that women were inherently creative. "Even if you are older than me," the female artist tells the male critic in Interior Scroll 2, "you are a monster I spawned/ you have slithered out of the excesses and vitality of the sixties…"[92] However, the citation of the goddess-myth is juxtaposed with a critique of mainstream art practice and criticism, which dismisses women's art and excludes it from art histories: "(I don't take the advice/ of men who only talk to/ themselves)/ PAY ATTENTION TO CRITICAL/ AND PRACTICAL FILM LANGUAGE/ IT EXISTS FOR AND IN ONLY/ ONE GENDER." This juxtaposition, Rebecca Schneider argues, renders

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[90] Jones, "The 'Sexual Politics' of The Dinner Party," 85.
[91] Cima, Early American Women Critics, 10.
[92] Schneemann, Imaging her Erotics, 159.

Schneemann's feminist position materialist, not cultural-feminist. Unlike the Mother Goddess, Schneemann's body spawns critique, not sacred life.[93]

I find Schneemann's position even more complex. Notions of "naturalness," "immediacy," and "maleness"[94] appear unqualified in her essays, and she does claim that woman's creativity is "inherent."[95] Therefore, if we read Interior Scroll in the context of Schneemann's essays, the female body she authors in her *text* veers toward essentialism. Yet the relationship between body and word in her *performance* engages dialectically with the materialist and the radical feminist approaches to the body, while allowing primacy to neither.

The relationship between Schneemann's body in Interior Scroll 2 and the scroll unfolding from her vagina may be read in a cultural-feminist fashion: as dramatizing the erasure of the "real" female body by a fictional but normative masculine text; but this is not the only possible reading. By outlining her body with paint in Interior Scroll 1 and with mud in Interior Scroll 2, Schneemann illustrates how the female body has been constructed through male appropriation, via the artistic convention of the nude. According to Schneider, in Schneemann's earlier work Eye/Body (1963), the artist reclaims the nude by becoming both the author and the object of her own artistic representation.[96] In Interior Scroll, Schneemann performs the same gesture of authorship. The feminist politics of her re-appropriation become clear through a comparison with the Anthropometries of French artist Yves Klein. Created between 1960 and 1962, these paintings are almost contemporary with Eye/Body.

[93] Schneider, 131-32. Schneider is responding to a particular critical essay by Elinor Fuchs, "Staging the Obscene Body," TDR 33.1 (1989): 33-58. In the essay, Fuchs quotes Schneemann's Eye/Body (1963) as representative of the essentialism of cultural feminism.
[94] For instance, she makes statements such as "the male need to differentiate is more extreme." Schneemann, Imaging her Erotics, 193.
[95] Schneemann, More than Meat Joy, 234.
[96] Schneider, 29.

Klein's Anthropometries comprise a series of images representing headless female bodies, typically blue. In the spirit of the avant-garde movements of the 1950s and 1960s, preoccupied with ideas of spontaneity and immediacy, the creation of the Anthropometries was frequently staged as a live performance in front of an audience, sometimes accompanied by live music. Klein covered his models in paint from the breasts to above the knees, and the models would then imprint their bodies on a canvas by wrapping themselves in it or by lying on it. With these imprints, Klein tried to accomplish representation as a real presence in contrast to conventional paintings of human figures which, in his view, generally denoted the absence of the model.[97] Even though the model's participation was central to these performances, Klein saw himself as the sole author of the imprints. "My brushes were alive and remote-controlled," he said of the women's bodies.[98] By claiming that the immediacy of the imprints would "impregnate" the viewers with sensibility, just as *he* "impregnated" the surface of the canvas,[99] Klein claimed authorship from a specifically masculine position. The "real presence" that he pursued was not that of the female body, as he claimed, but that of his "impregnating" act.

Schneemann does not perform an "unmediated," "truthful" body. Rather, when she strips and outlines her own naked body with paint or mud, and then locates it between this self-imposed frame and her texts about male criticism, she creates a tension between the body as an essence and the body as representation. This tension becomes a central theme of Interior Scroll. To succeed, Klein's act must persuade viewers to ignore the performing woman's contribution and perceive her only as Klein's tool. Conversely, Schneemann situates the performing female body as an active mediator of meaning.

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[97] Jean-Michel Ribettes, "Yves Klein and the War of the Jealous Gods," Yves Klein, eds. Olivier Berggruen, Max Hollein, and Ingrid Pfeiffer (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2004) 157.
[98] Yves Klein, quoted in Hans Pässler, "An Encounter with Yves Klein's Blue Universe," Yves Klein, 126.
[99] Nicole Root, "Precious Bodily Fluids," Yves Klein, 142.

Schneemann's focus on the vagina is integral to her reclamation of the female body, particularly to her critique of the female nude: a convention which feminist art scholars have denounced as fetishistic. In Amelia Jones's formulation, fetishistic representations of the female body conceal not woman's absence of male genitals but her possession of non-male genitals.[100] A comparison with Klein is useful again. It is revealing that Jean-Michel Ribettes interprets some of Klein's imprints as representing a penis penetrating a vagina. "The breast and torso somehow suggest the shadow of the testicles and the penis, while the thighs outline in close-up the lips of the penetrated vulva."[101] In Ribettes's reading, Klein lets the imprint of the female image have the vagina, but only if it is simultaneously penetrated by the penis. Schneemann, by contrast, makes the traditionally excluded vagina a central image.

From the perspective of Case's critique of the poststructuralist primacy of the text, Schneemann's treatment of the text in Interior Scroll 2 is especially interesting. On the one hand, the dialogue that Schneemann reads is a text, but even as a text the male perspective is not dominant because it is countered by the female artist's response. Yet the text is also an object, a coil. By turning the text into a concrete object, Schneemann denies its glorified status as an act of universal knowledge. The male critique is no longer a record of truth but a theatrical prop, a tool for creating illusion. In a broader sense, by objectifying the text, she interrupts the association between the text and the abstract (masculine) mind.

The changing scholarly evaluations of Interior Scroll are indicative of the extent to which the meanings of a performance depend on the knowledge and attitudes that spectators bring to it. Any assessment of Schneemann's strategies must, therefore, account for the composition of her audiences and the larger performance contexts. Schneeman's naked body signified differently in

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[100] Jones, Body Art, 3.
[101] Ribettes, 159.

Interior Scroll 1, where she presented to a largely female audience at a feminist festival, than in Interior Scroll 2, performed for the mixed-gender audience of an experimental film festival. Potentially, in the second case, Schneemann ran a higher danger of coming across spectators who would dismiss her performance as feminist preaching, or perhaps even reduce it to a titillating spectacle.

Schneemann's performance illustrates both the advantages and risks of visibility. Second-wave feminism, the context of Schneemann's work of the 1970s, set a high value on visibility as a strategy for claiming increased participation for women in the public sphere. However, in the three decades following Interior Scroll, feminists have become increasingly aware that women's visibility, though often empowering, is not universally effective. Performance scholar Peggy Phelan has argued that white, propertied men maintain their status not simply through their easier access to visual representation, but also through their right to refuse visibility. According to her, white men still enjoy the exclusive privilege of an abstract body, unconstrained by racial and gender marks.[102] The textual body of the humanist theatre journalist exemplifies this privilege. In the past, female journalists tried to claim this body by adopting the rhetoric of humanism and masculine personae. Though strategic, their attempts to claim the invisible humanist body have not necessarily entailed awareness and critique of this body's implicit masculinity. Alternately, the Guerilla Girls' art activism, demonstrates a specifically feminist approach to invisibility; crucially, this was not by assuming a textual mask but through performance.

In 1985, ten years after Schneemann performed Interior Scroll 1, the Guerrilla Girls, a group of female artists and women working in art galleries and museums, studied the ratio of male to female artists represented at major art galleries and the number of women included in art

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[102] Peggy Phelan, Unmarked: The Politics of Performance (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 10. See also, Gay Gibson Cima, "Black and Unmarked: Phyllis Wheatley, Mercy Otis Warren, and the Limits of Strategic Anonymity," Theatre Journal 52.4 (Dec. 2000): 466-67.

history textbooks. Their findings indirectly confirmed Schneemann's argument of a masculine bias against women's work. In contrast to the liberal 1970s, in the 1980s more people celebrated rampant consumerism and experienced a conservative political backlash. In these conditions, female artists remained severely underrepresented.[103] The Guerilla Girls realized that the period's intolerance of radical intervention, indicated and bolstered by the stereotype of the preachy feminazi, rendered ineffective the confrontational rhetoric of the 1970s. Hence, they decided to reinvent "the 'f' word" (feminism) and fight discrimination "with facts, humor, and fake fur."[104] Mimicry and building networks among women in the art world became their major tactics.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Guerilla Girls organized a series of actions mimicking the conventions of advertising. In 1985, having studied the art-criticism sections of major American periodicals, the Girls sent postcards to their editors and art critics. The postcards stated "these critics don't write enough about women artists," and listed the names of the culpable critics together with the percentage of articles in which they had discussed women's art between 1979 and 1985, relative to the entire number of reviews they had written within the same period.[105] In 1989 a poster stating that "Bus companies are more enlightened than NYC galleries," appeared on buses and billboards. The posters informed viewers that 49.2 % of bus drivers were women, while only 16% of the works exhibited in a total of 33 New York galleries were by female artists. By formulating their critical messages as humorous sound bites and masking them as advertising materials, the artists subverted the commercial genre of advertising from a technique

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[103] See Henry Sayre, The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) 86-87.

[104] Guerrilla Girls: Fighting Discrimination with Fact, Humor, and Fake Fir, 25 Jan. 2007, <http: www.guerrillagirls.com>; See also Anne Teresa Demo, "The Guerrilla Girls' Comic Politics of Subversion," Women's Studies in Communication 23.2 (2000): 135.

[105] The Guerrilla Girls, Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls (New York: Harpers Perennial, 1995) 37.

encouraging consumption into a critical tactic. By circulating these messages on buses and

billboards, they made them accessible to a wide variety of recipients, not only those who regularly attend museums.

On other occasions, as in the theatre-washroom actions, the artists targeted specific recipients. Also in 1989, major art collectors, whose collections did not include any works by white or non-white women or by male artists of color, received postcards which asked: "When racism and sexism are no longer fashionable, what will your art collection be worth?"[106] In 1999, following their theatre washrooms action, the Guerilla Girls sent out posters to artistic directors nationwide who were not producing plays by women. According to the posters, "There [was] a tragedy on Broadway and it [was] not Electra."[107] On many occasions, they received the statistical data quoted in their materials from female secretaries and managers in art galleries and theatres. Some of these women joined the group.[108]

The life-size rubber gorilla masks and the names of female artists from the past, which the Girls use in their public appearances, serve as protective disguise,[109] but this is just one of their functions. Besides the masks, the Guerilla Girls wear black clothes in public. On certain occasions, some of them have appeared in fishnet stockings and stiletto heels. In this latter case, the juxtaposition between the masks and fishnets lays bare stereotypes of femininity in a Brechtian fashion. By wearing the masks, the Guerilla Girls also try to challenge the celebrity cult and to emphasize the possibility for collective identity.[110] This last function, in my view, enables them to critically re-deploy the convention of the abstract masculine body identified by

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106 <http://www.guerrillagirls.com/posters/index.shtml>.
107 Guerrilla Girls on Tour, interview with Raphie Frank and Mindy Bond.
108 The Guerrilla Girls, Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls, 22.
109 Joel Schechter, Satiric Impersonations: from Aristophanes to the Guerrilla Girls, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994) 21, 25 Jan. 2007, <http://www.netlibrary.com/nlreader.dll?bookid=11591&filename=Page_21.html.>
110 Guerrilla Girls on Tour, interview with Raphie Frank and Mindy Bond.

feminist scholars. The Guerilla Girls' collectively-inhabited body does not discard gender and racial marks but weakens their constraints through playful citation. Whereas the fishnets and stiletto shoes cite stereotypes of femininity, the gorilla masks cite the racist perception of non-white people as less than human. A person of any gender, sexuality, or race, could be hiding under the mask. Thus, while the Girls' bodies emphatically perform femininity, they offer no "proof" that this performance coincides with "true nature." Hence, in their live actions, they produce femininity as simultaneously embodied and abstract. Even more than the masculine abstract body, this abstract feminine body is contingent upon hiding the body's actual sex. By contrast, some of the Guerrilla Girls' posters show nude female bodies below the gorilla masks, repeating Schneemann's suspension of the body between flesh and convention.

Cima writes that, by borrowing the legitimizing rhetoric and gestures of normative discourses such as humanism and patriotism, eighteenth-century female critics created "host bodies" – critically-enabling "zones in between embodiment and abstraction," which "can be collectively occupied."[111] Likewise, the body that the Guerrilla Girls create is citational and collectively occupied, yet it does not cite normative personhood. The conventions of passive ultra-femininity and racial inferiority that this body performs are sexist and racist, and are exposed as such. It is a postmodern body, which continually draws attention to the political significance of the gestures and rhetoric that it cites. Additionally, the Guerilla Girls offer their own bodies as hosts. As they adopt the names of female artists whose work has been neglected in art canons, and tell people about these women's works, the Guerilla Girls' bodies become transformed into an alternative archive. Thus they literally become bodies of knowledge, making explicit the gender bias in the allegedly gender-neutral normative art histories and claiming acknowledgement both for their predecessors' and for their own artistic achievements.

[111] Cima, Early American Women Critics, 4-6.

The stickers that the Guerilla Girls distributed in New York theatres skillfully drew spectators' attention to the convention of the abstract masculine body in theatre. The dominant genre of realism invites all spectators to don this body for the time of the performance by making their actual bodies invisible and immobile in the darkened auditorium. In contrast to realist conventions, viewers confronted by the stickers in the washrooms were addressed individually, rather than as a group. The individual address and the emphasis on the spectator's gender and his or her literally leaking, physical body in the bathrooms convey the feminist understanding that acts of viewing and knowledge are always situated and contingent upon the social status of one's body: white or non-white, male or female, disabled or healthy. The time slots in which spectators would have visited the bathrooms and seen the stickers – immediately before and after shows, and especially during intermissions – also contribute to the critical effects of the action. Confronting the stickers in the intermission may intervene in the complex cognitive process that, according to Ubersfeld, happens at this time: spectators evaluating what they have just seen in terms of their perceptions of reality and perhaps reexamining these perceptions as well.[112] The statement on the stickers invites spectators to question the gender politics of the performance, their concept of reality, and their own gendered position within this reality.

The Guerrilla Girls' actions have achieved some concrete results. Galleries that they have critiqued have started including women in their exhibitions more frequently. Following the stickers action, the Roundabout Theatre in New York, which was one of their targets, produced a play by a woman in their 1998-1999 season, though not in every subsequent season.[113] Following

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[112] Ubersfeld, 14. In my own experience as a theatergoer, I have seen such analysis happen in the women's bathrooms on multiple occasions. While waiting in line for a free bathroom stall, I have heard women clarify plot points and discuss the significance of design elements with their friends. When I saw Suzan-Lori Parks' Topdog/Underdog in the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago in 2003, I also witnessed a woman address the line collectively: "Well, ladies, what shall we make of the brothers' names Booth and Lincoln?"

[113] See Roundabout Theatre Company, <http://www.roundabouttheatre.org>.

their attacks on art critics, prominent New York critics wrote columns on female artists.
Some of them even credited the Guerrilla Girls.[114] Most importantly, the original Guerrilla Girls have inspired women across the United States and even abroad to found their own Guerrilla Girls groups and to fight against discrimination locally.[115] In 2001, a number of Guerrilla Girls who worked specifically on performance art and theatre formed their own separate group called The Guerrilla Girls on Tour. This itinerant group creates original feminist performances about women's history, and provides advocacy for white and non-white female artists and male artists of color.[116]

My last case study, while not specifically feminist, probes the hierarchy between text and performance by employing the same citational tactics as the Guerrilla Girls' actions. In a scene of Showtime (1996), Forced Entertainment targets reviewers' adamant passion for universal criteria of artistic excellence.[117] The scene responds to a specific review about the group's work. However, Showtime's temporal proximity to the debates on theatre journalism, propelled by the production of Daniel's Esme and Shaz in 1994, amplifies the scene's resonance. Compared to the Guerilla Girls' washroom action, Showtime provides important clues to the relative freedom with which women and men interfered in representational politics in the 1990s.

Like First Night, as soon as it starts Showtime lays bare the conventional separation between actor and viewer and invites reflection on its implications. A reluctant actor (Richard Lowdon), with real-looking dynamite fastened to his chest, begins to tell the spectators about the components of a good theatrical performance and warns them right away that the performance

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[114] Schechter, 22.
[115] Ibid., 32.
[116] Guerrilla Girls on Tour, interview with Raphie Frank and Mindy Bond.
[117] Showtime, by Forced Entertainment, dir. Tim Etchells, perf. Robin Arthur, Cathy Naden, Terry O'Connor, Richard Lowdon, and Claire Marshall, design. Richard Lowdon, light. Nigel Edwards, London: ICA, Dec. 1996; videotape. All quotes have been taken from this videotape.

they are now watching may not meet their expectations. “An audience,” he says, “likes to sit in the dark and watch other people do it. But if you paid your money for it, good luck to you.” Afterwards, he talks about the vicissitudes of performance, while another actor, looking for his costume, runs naked across the stage; and about the need to keep the stagehands as inconspicuous as possible, while the stagehands, in brightly-colored cardboard costumes, noisily move props around. Theatrical illusion is effortful, the episode demonstrates, and spectators need to know this. The clock fastened to the bomb ticks ominously throughout the actor’s talk.

In another episode, the relationship between actor and spectator is revisited, but this time the spectator that the actors address is the theatre critic. A dying criminal, his face concealed under a black stocking, is unmercifully interrogated over the criteria for “good” art. The judgment of art is thus parodically staged as a matter of life and death. The criminal, played by Robin Arthur, leans on a cardboard house, clutching his spilling intestines with trembling hands. He speaks unsteadily, confessing that making art which is not “good” is a crime indeed:

> The audience doesn’t pay good money to see a lot of shouting… they want to go to the bar after the show and say I got it, I understood what it was about, they don’t want to have to say oh you know, it’s whatever you want it to mean... they want to be transported to some delightful place, they want to see some realistic scenery, they want to be touched… they want some purpose, they want some resolution… Oh god, oh god, they don’t want this… a performance should try to bring people together not just rub their noses in the dirt.

The criminal’s spilling intestines are spaghetti in tomato sauce. Before starting his monologue, Arthur has opened the can in front of the spectators and has turned its contents onto his stomach. Even though the blood and intestines are obviously fake, spectators’ reactions caught on the tape

suggest real disgust. This is another version of the leaky body which, as in Interior Scroll, is explicitly theatrical. The text of Arthur's monologue was taken almost verbatim from a negative review of the company's previous show Hidden J (1994), by the Arts Council of England.[118] By turning the review into a character's speech which only makes sense in the context of the entire show, Forced Entertainment, like Schneemann, exposes criticism's dependence on a larger ideological script defining the normative criteria for "good" and "bad" art. Like the fake intestines and fake blood which still provoke disgust, the review, though not objective, produces real effects, especially if authored by a funding organization.

It should not be overlooked, however, how much easier it is for Forced Entertainment to confront the establishment represented by the reviewers than it is for Schneemann or the Guerrilla Girls. While Forced Entertainment proffers its critique to a wide audience from the stage of a conventional theatre venue, Schneemann addresses spectators who are self-selected as women and/or radical from spaces marked as non-conventional through their inclusion in feminist and radical art events. Hence, they are supposedly tolerant of her critique. The Guerrilla Girls, like Forced Entertainment, address audiences which could be politically-undefined, perhaps supportive, but are often openly hostile. They approach their audiences hiding behind masks or behind postcards and posters. They cannot assume center stage with impunity, as Robin Arthur does. Instead, they act in more marginal spaces: the theatres' washrooms or the streets. Even their access to these marginal spaces is restricted. In 2000, the Girls organized a street protest against the small number of women receiving Tony awards for their theatre work. They were forced to move from live action to posters and stickers because of a law forbidding protesters to hide their faces.[119]

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[118] Tim Etchells, "A Six-Thousand-and-Forty-Seven-Word Manifesto," 215.
[119] See Guerilla Girls on Tour, interview with Raphie Frank and Mindy Bond.

Forced Entertainment's use of the body, compared to Schneemann's or the Guerrilla Girls', also reveals specific gender-based constraints that female artists confront when they attempt to intervene in representation. The body in Showtime, simultaneously mimetic and repulsive, questions how distinctions between reality and representation are drawn, as Interior Scroll and the Girls' costumes also do. Again, it is much easier for Arthur to shed the fleshiness of his body. His chest is bare, but his gender remains unmarked.

Schneemann, the Guerilla Girls, and Forced Entertainments' performances add to the rich repertoire of strategies that female critics of earlier centuries employed to intervene in the public sphere. Like the female critics of the past, these contemporary artists contest major cultural assumptions and artistic conventions in the course of their interventions. Schneemann critiqued the masculine tradition of the female nude, creating a feminist nude. The Guerrilla Girls reformulated the commercial genre of advertising to critical ends. Schneemann's and Forced Entertainment's use of critical reviews as scripts challenged the reviewers' authority, presenting the meaning of art as an act of collaboration among artists, journalists, and all other spectators. These contemporary artists, however, contribute one major new concept to the history of performance critique that I outline: the live, fleshy body as a condition of critical thinking. This tactic radically opposes the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy which still informs western public participation. At the same time, Forced Entertainment's relative freedom from the restrictions of embodiment imposed on Schneemann and the Guerrilla Girls signals the continuing power of the established gender norms, inseparable from this dichotomy. Finally, by challenging reviewers' insistence on neutrality through performance, the artists put to the test the centuries-long argument that performance blocks critical thinking. Like the case studies I discussed in the previous chapters, these artists demonstrate that the value of performance as a medium of

knowledge stems precisely from its ability to debunk myths of neutrality by making explicit the gendered and racial positions from which social subjects approach one another. The Guerrilla Girls' and Schneemann's citation of these norms make them available for public contestation.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Has there been a crisis in feminist and radical theatre since the mid-1990s? Did dystopian plays such as Blasted (1995), Venus (1996), and Far Away (2000), which refused to follow the established Brechtian and social-realist rules, announce the end of critical thinking? Does Parks's refusal to identify as a black female playwright, Kane's reluctance to describe herself as a female playwright, or Churchill's departure from a "women's-issues" plot in Far Away, Serious Money, A Mouthful of Birds, and other plays convey desire to fit in presumably less marginalizing categories such as radical, political, or experimental theatre? Has the status quo mastered the tools of representation so well that artists' radical intent necessarily gets subdued? Throughout this dissertation I have insisted that there has been a shift in theatre artists' approaches to critical spectatorship, rather than a crisis. I suggested that seeing these plays as non-feminist and/or non-radical, despite artists' engagement with gender and racial politics, derives primarily from reviewers' and scholars' narrow definitions of feminist and radical theatre, especially from the frequent conflation of radical performance with social realism and Brechtian theatre.

Yet it would be hasty to dismiss perceptions of crisis altogether. The indirect conflict between August Wilson and Suzan-Lori Parks over Venus (which entailed, among other things, Parks's choice of an allegedly white experimental dramaturgy), Susan Jonas and Suzanne Bennett's troubling report revealing the continuing discrimination against female playwrights in New York mainstream theatres, the violent reactions to Behzti in Birmingham, and other such incidents not discussed here[1] suggest that representational hierarchies in American and British theatre of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries are still tied to gender, race, and

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[1] For instance, the conservative reaction against Terence McNally's Corpus Christi (1998) imagining Jesus Christ as homosexual. See June Schlueter, "American Drama of the 1990s On and Off-Broadway," A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama, ed. David Krasner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 514.

sexuality, as they were in earlier decades. The need for activism that these incidents demonstrate may be one reason why the conventions of social realism and Brechtian theatre, historically associated with activism, continue to inform criteria for evaluating performances commenting on social disparity, despite feminist and postcolonial critiques of the implicit whiteness and masculinity of the modernist paradigms of truth and subjecthood underlying these conventions. The social realist and Brechtian insistence on clarity, understood as explicit parallelism between the theatrical representation and spectators' shared realities, holds a promise of elucidating social ills and possibly mobilizing viewers to participate in their solutions.

Nonetheless, I prefer to speak of a shift rather than a crisis, for several reasons. The major reason is my disagreement with the implicit assumption that social realism and Brechtian theatre are inherently more efficient in exposing social ills than other representational modes. By contrast, I have proposed that this assumption has in fact obstructed some reviewers and scholars from seeing the feminist and radical potential in Blasted and Venus. Additionally, elevating social realism and Brechtian theatre from the status of representational conventions to the status of criteria for radicalism contradicts a major assertion in feminist and radical materialist scholarship: that the politics of these conventions are not inherent to the conventions themselves, but to their particular uses in specific performer-spectator encounters.

Following film scholar Judith Mayne, I have argued that the conflation between specific conventions, critical approaches (especially Marxist materialism), and types of venue (found rather than purpose-built spaces) with radical intervention is a manifestation of a larger tendency to distinguish between resistant and complicit viewing positions too strictly. This tendency ignores the degree of (conscious or unconscious) complicity with dominant ideologies necessary for understanding a performance and the phantasmatic aspects of spectatorship which thwart

attempts to describe it in absolute terms. Hence, I have identified a need for a theatre model that accounts for differentially-positioned spectators, makes explicit the relationship between viewing positions and theatrical conventions, and addresses spectators' and actors' reliance on theatrical conventions for making meaning, at the same time as these conventions may be critiqued. I have argued that viewing positions are informed by spectators' embodiment of social categories, such as race, gender, and class, as material (social-economic) and affective categories. Therefore, making explicit the imagined histories of spectators' and actors' bodies in the course of a performance is central to understanding a performance's politics.

In my second chapter, I have proposed that Parks's and Kane's divergence from realism and Brechtian theatre, perceived as failure to establish referential guidelines, in fact, engages with the limits of realist and Brechtian conventions for representing social difference. I have also argued that their uses of referential ambiguity address the postmodern anxiety that, in late-capitalist societies, our access to "social context" is inseparable from the mass media; hence, contextualization does not necessarily result in truthful knowledge. I have defined Parks and Kane's approaches to critical distancing as formalist because they have replaced Brechtian alienation with aesthetic distancing. Marxist-materialist criticism, influential in contemporary analyses of representation, has judged formalist methods as ineffective and/or complicit with a bourgeois stats quo. Yet reading Parks and Kane's formalism in terms of Baudrillard's critique of activism in media-dominated societies and in terms of critical-race and queer critiques of the assimilative powers of established representational conventions, I demonstrated that this formalism in fact aligns with feminist and critical-race concerns about the representation of social difference. Diverging from views of Blasted as a defeatist nightmare, I read Kane's breaks with linear causal narratives as a utopian, though ultimately aesthetically ineffective, attempt to

account for cultural difference in non-hierarchical terms. Similarly, I read Parks's spells and rests, defying linearity and causality, as expressive of her critique of the liberal individual: a symbolic and social position which has been historically inaccessible to African Americans. Looking at specific productions of Blasted and Topdog/Underdog, I suggested that the major reason why their engagement with otherness failed to come across was the productions' failure to develop mechanisms which would alert spectators to their reliance on previously-learned theatrical conventions and to the political implications of accepting such conventions as aesthetic and/or political norms.

In my third chapter, I expanded my critique of the conflation between specific conventions and radicalism, focusing on the limits of Brecht's Marxist-materialist model for representing racial and gender difference. Revealing how the culturally-shared affective attitudes towards blackness and femininity may obstruct Brecht's distancing techniques, I addressed the feminist and critical-race examinations of Brecht's implicit gender and racial ideology. In contrast to previous scholarship, which bases its analysis of the gender and racial politics of Brechtian theatre on Brecht's dramatic characters and on his concepts of theatrical production (acting style, design, etc.), I investigated the gender and racial positioning of Brecht's ideal spectator. Looking at how Brecht constructs this spectator in specific theoretical texts and scripts and comparing Brecht's distanced viewing with concepts of critical alienation in works by feminist and African American thinkers and artists, I showed that the body politics of Brecht's working-class spectator does not extend to women or to men of color. Consequently, I have argued that Brechtian theory needs to be rethought in terms of racial and gender differences, and that spectatorship analyses need to account for the imaginative gains of identifying across social differences.

Taking a materialist-semiotics approach to Venus, Soul of a Clone, and First Night, I outlined two major strategies that artists have used to expose the gender and racial politics of viewing. The first strategy entails enforcing fictional, explicitly racialized and gendered, roles on spectators, calling attention to their fleshy, yet also fantasized, bodies, which mainstream realist theatre tends to mark as semiotically invisible. The second strategy consists in removing spectators from the authoritative position of distanced observers, historically reserved for white male spectators, by creating multiple foci of vision and by placing spectators on a cusp between representational contracts. Reading these strategies in parallel with Butler, Laclau, and Žižek's political theory of democratic contestation, and Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis's theory of situated imagination, I have proposed that these performances replace the Brechtian objective spectator with a situated viewer.

My fourth chapter demonstrates how feminist and radical artists have similarly drawn attention to the spectator's fleshy, gendered and racialized, body in order to contest the allegedly neutral discursive position of mainstream theatre journalism. Performing criticism in male and in female theatre washrooms, masking critiques as advertising materials, and turning reviews into theatrical scripts in which the performer's body is "assaulted" by the reviewer's text, these artists have exposed the gendered politics of reviewing, its economic effects, and the historically hierarchical relationship between performers and the journalists in defining art's meaning.

In sum, the theatre of democratic contestation entails a double estrangement; it supplements Brecht's estrangement of the theatrical apparatus with an estrangement of the viewer's embodied self. These performances present the self as a role or a set of roles, not willfully chosen and manipulated, but also not entirely fixed, as in Butler's concept of gender as the effect of recurring social performances. Emphasizing the conceptual similarities between

Kristeva's and my case studies' analysis of the self's contingency on politically and economically motivated representational conventions and paradigms of knowledge, I described this double estrangement as an act of critical abjection.

In various ways, my examples suggest that by temporarily assuming a role different from the one perceived as the "self," a viewer's situated position may become explicit and, perhaps, shift. This idea is present not only in Venus, First Night, and Soul of a Clone, which propose specific roles to their spectators, but also in Cima's concept of the host bodies (women's assumption of textual and body rhetoric associated with social power in order to legitimize their critical interventions), and in Hortense Spillers's psychoanalytic argument that imitation may be empowering, which I saw applied in Topdog/Underdog. By seeing the self in terms of a role and by proposing that the assumption of a role may be productive of critical insights, these performances simultaneously exceed Brecht's Marxist-materialist philosophy and expose as exaggerated the postmodernist fear that if reality and representation can no longer be distinguished, social critique will become impossible. Conversely, I demonstrated that by deliberately blurring reality and representation – as in enforcing roles on spectators, or in performing critical reviews – these performances reveal instances of critical essentialism: for instance, the essentialist reduction of social difference to economic difference in Brecht or to a neutral point of view in mainstream journalism.

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Throughout the dissertation, I also argued that the theatre of democratic contestation is feminist. I see as feminist both the embrace of ontological uncertainty (about the limits of reality or humanity) in my case studies and the artists' exposure of viewing as always embodied. Hence, I define feminist performance not in terms of contents (traditionally based on women's issues)

but in terms of representational strategies. By suggesting that the notion of feminist theatre
exceeds thematic contents and the artists' gender identities, I have tried to confront the implicit assumption in contemporary theatre criticism that feminist theatre is a subcategory of radical theatre. This assumption is explicit in Dominic Shellard and Aleks Sierz's disagreement over the status of John Osborn's Look Back in Anger (1956) as an emblem of the radical turn in British playwriting in the 1950s. Shellard proposes that Shelagh Delaney's play A Taste of Honey (1957), which confronted spectators with questions about teenage motherhood, homophobia, and interracial sexual relationships, has a better claim for such status. Sierz resolutely rejects Shellard's revisionist gesture. Despite the many virtues of Delaney's play, he says, "she only wrote one, or two, and then disappeared… She wasn't actually a career playwright in the way that John Osborn, John Arden or Edward Bond obviously were."[2] To a feminist scholar, Delaney's relationship to the canon is far from obvious. Instead, a feminist analysis would start where Sierz ends: why *didn't* Delaney become a career playwright?

Conversely, thinking of radical theatre as a subcategory of feminist theatre is both counterintuitive and controversial. As Reinelt and Aston have noted, radical theatre frequently appropriates the formal innovations of feminist theatre and, in the process, divests them of their politics, reducing them to radical chic.[3] While I acknowledge the importance of this concern, I think that one way to counteract such appropriation and the hierarchical relationship between feminist and radical theatre is to emphasize specifically feminist contributions to radical theatre. I am offering the hypothesis that, in addition to rethinking feminist theatre in terms of spectatorship strategies, this may be done by systematically exploring the connections between feminist performance art and radical theatre. I have come to this idea while studying Sarah Kane

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[2] Aleks Sierz, Interview with Mireia Aragay and Pilar Zozaya, 140.
[3] Aston and Harris, eds., "Feminist Futures and the Possibilities of 'We'?" Feminist Futures? 10.

and Forced Entertainment's representational approaches. While neither of them defines their work as feminist, they have nonetheless declared indebtedness to feminist performance artists. Tim Etchells writes that the performances of feminist artist Bobby Baker have been a crucial influence on Forced Entertainment's search for a method of performer-spectator encounter which encourages a reflection on the ethics of looking.[4] In an interview, Kane said that she had been looking for a method of representation that would provoke the visceral spectatorial response that Kane experienced upon seeing Mona Hatoum's performance Corps Étranger (Foreign Body).[5] As I explain further in this conclusion, the connection that Kane suggests between her own work and Hatoum's may give critics important clues to Kane's representational politics.

In fact, feminist theatre scholars have already started commenting on the relationships between feminist theatre and feminist performance art. Diamond's Unmaking Mimesis, and Goddard's Staging Black Feminisms discuss both theatrical and performance art case studies. In both books the inclusion of performance art examples is justified by the shared political agenda of feminist performance art and feminist theatre. Yet no attention has been given to their varying artistic and philosophical genealogies. For example, Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker were trained as visual artists, while Kane and Etchell were trained as playwrights and actors. How does this different training inform their thinking about spectatorship? Additionally, while Brecht's theory of critical viewing was highly influential in visual art scholarship in the 1980s, it does not seem to have influenced ideas of radical representation as centrally as it did in theatre. For instance, art scholar Amelia Jones has suggested that art criticism drawing on Brecht narrows down and contains the concept of the radical within the rules of an inherently masculine

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[4] Tim Etchells, Certain Fragments, 18.
[5] "Drama with Balls," Guardian 20 Aug. 1998: 12.

modernist discourse.[6] A brief comparative look at the histories of Kane's and Hatoum's critical reception clarifies the difference.

Critical studies of Hatoum's sculptures, video art, and installations emphasize two recurring themes in her work: the vulnerability of the body to institutional violence and the relationship between the artwork and its viewers.[7] Scholars have also noticed that while in the late-1970s and throughout the 1980s Hatoum's work was issue-based and often displayed an explicitly feminist political bent, at the beginning of the 1990s her work became stripped of any specific references to ideological narratives or social causes. Instead, she started focusing on aesthetic estrangement, transforming familiar everyday commodities into strange and threatening objects.[8] For instance, her sculpture Incommunicado (1993) at first appears to be a metal baby cot. Yet the mattress has been replaced by a row of sharp steel wires that would cut deeply into flesh if a child were placed on them.[9] Her sculpture Doormat II (2000-01) represents a doormat made of hundreds of needles.[10] Hatoum insists that this shift should not be understood as a withdrawal from political critique. Rather, she has been trying "to articulate the political through the aesthetics of her work," rejecting the doctrine of aesthetic autonomy advocated by modernist art criticism.[11] According to art critic Nina Zimmer, by not offering an explicit referential frame, Hatoum's sculptures and installations lose their status of autonomous art *objects* and, instead, become triggers or settings for viewers' own interpretations and stories.[12]

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[6] Jones, Body Art, 25.
[7] Mona Hatoum, Mona Hatoum: Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall, (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 9.
[8] Ibid., 44, 9.
[9] Ibid., 6.
[10] Ibid., 30.
[11] Mona Hatoum, Interview with Janine Antoni, Mona Hatoum: Domestic Disturbance, ed. Laura Steward Heon, (North Adams: MASS MoCA, 2001) 19.
[12] Nina Zimmer, "Epiphanies of the Everyday – Materiality and Meaning in Mona Hatoum's Work," Mona Hatoum: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 71.

Corps Étranger (1994), the installation which Kane credited as the source of inspiration for her developing aesthetics, encloses the viewer within a white cylindrical wooden structure. Once inside, the viewer watches video footage of the interior organs and exterior surfaces of Hatoum's body, recorded with a medical endoscopic camera. The footage is projected on the floor of the installation, under the viewer's feet. By stepping on the projected images, Hatoum explains, the viewer becomes implicated into the objectification of the female body.[13] At the same time, the viewer becomes a captive of the image, because the viewer is denied distance from the represented image. Thus, the installation obstructs the mechanism of the gaze.[14] The ambiguous representation of the female body – simultaneously objectified and domineering – renders it a foreign body. From a materialist perspective, canceling the distance between representation and viewer implies canceling the possibility for critical thinking. Conversely, Jones suggests, as I have done, that by blurring the distinction between a performer's routine, social performance of her self and her artistic impersonations in the course of a performance, or between the viewer and representation, the artist emphasizes the contingency of viewing upon the culturally-specific representational conventions available to a spectator.[15]

It could be argued that Corps Étranger had a critical advantage over Blasted in that Corps Étranger did not include a live performer enacting physical suffering. Hatoum's installation thus avoided the danger of conflating represented and actual suffering that Garner describes. Conversely, Jones would consider the possibility for such conflation positive; in her view such conflation demonstrates that the performer's body cannot be a guarantee for the existence of

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[13] Mona Hatoum, Interview with Janine Antoni, 28-29.
[14] Mona Hatoum, Mona Hatoum: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 44, 48.
[15] Amelia Jones, Body Art: Performing the Subject, 2-9.

reality uncontaminated by representation.[16] In fact, Hatoum said in an interview that when in the 1990s she shifted from a performer-based to viewer-focused work, she was critiqued for not showing the spectacle of horror, but expecting viewers to imagine it for themselves.[17] In contrast to many of Kane's theatrically-trained critics, the art critics evaluating Hatoum's work interpreted the artist's decision to leave horror to spectators' imaginations as fear of being radical.

I expect, therefore, that comparing how radical theatre and feminist performance art have historically defined radical resistance may provide further insights into the gendered politics of spectatorship, as well as into the gendered politics of text and performance. Examining the relative scarcity of African American female performance artists, compared to African American theatre artists, may add to our understanding of the politics of racial representation. Comparing the different semiotics of the performer-spectator encounter in performance art and theatre may refine our tools of performance analysis.

[16] "I read body art as dissolving… metaphysical idealism." Jones, 37.
[17] Mona Hatoum, Interview with Janine Antoni, 28.

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