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Productions of the body: Embodiment in contemporary drama and performance

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Productions of the Body: Embodiment in Contemporary Drama and Performance

By

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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"Productions of the body" refers both to produced plays which are "about" the body and to the ideological production of "the body" and of bodies (as well as to the bodily production of ideologies). Embodied performance can be the ideal place to study constructions of the body. The charismatic, live body onstage seems to promise a full presence -- a promise it cannot fulfill, because the body onstage is inherently other than/to itself. The plays I examine -- Othello, The Blacks, Funnyhouse of a Negro, spell #7, M. Butterfly, and the performance pieces of Karen Finley -- exploit the otherness inherent in live performance to (re-)present the social construction and performative re-creation inherent in all body-identities. In particular, I discuss the ways in which these plays show race and gender to be fashioned, performed, and "made up," not only onstage, but in "real" life as well. Yet these plays also insist on the need to invoke "real," "present," and "natural" bodies in the political arena. All of these plays, even as they make explicit the theatricality and textuality which produce the body-as-other, still residually promise a body prior to and directing its production. This promise of a body which cannot be represented and perhaps cannot be "had" at all, remains, for me, a promise as well as an object of suspicion. This dissertation aims to make the ideologies and occlusions which underwrite this promise as explicit as possible, and yet to preserve and clarify its necessity.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Casting Suspicions

The art of acting operates on the assumption that in any man there is, indeed, an everyman. At the same time that performers are depicting the thousand and one faces of humanity, they are also showing us how much alike we are under the skin. For all the debates it has provoked, the current push in the theater for nontraditional casting is really saying nothing more. If the talent and insight are there, black should be able to play white, young play old, even female play male. And vice versa.


If I tell an audience "I'm Vietnamese" and they want to see me that way, they will.... Changing our appearance is what we do as actors.

-- Jonathan Pryce
I thought the yellow-face days of Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu were dead.

-- David Henry Hwang³

What is "the current push in the theater for nontraditional casting" saying? Who is speaking in/for this "push"? To whom is it speaking? And who else is listening? Could it be saying things it doesn't mean to say? David Richards' own words in his review, asserting that nontraditional casting "is really saying nothing more" than "how much alike we are under the skin," seem to be saying much more than he intends, and to produce effects that he doesn't acknowledge.

This dissertation was written at a time when nontraditional castings were speaking loudly, and saying many things to many people in many discourses, including the discourse of literary theory and the discourse of Broadway megahits. If nothing more, this dissertation attempts to listen to and hold a dialogue with several discourses of nontraditional casting, and to observe the tensions and confluences among these several discourses. In this introductory chapter, I attempt to locate myself within perhaps the most traditional tension in drama studies, that between theory and practice, a tension both artificial and operative. I also find myself in a tension between theories of the practice of performed embodiment in "everyday" or "real" life and theories of the practice of performed embodiment on a formal stage. This chapter enacts, through its structure, a reification of the two as distinct and even antagonistic: I look in part I at "embodiment" and "performativity" in contemporary theory; then, after a distinct binarizing II, I look at the way this discourse fails to address the politics played out in the racial castings of the Broadway show Miss Saigon. This structure reflects the schizophrenia engendered by writing on Dramatic Performance in an English Literature department. But some of the schizophrenia about what "the body" and its castings are saying seems to me not only
unavoidable, but crucial and productive. What the schizophrenia of embodiment produces and how it is produced is the subject I only begin to broach in this dissertation.

I

The word "embodiment" decks out both ends of the word "body" with two supplementary morphemes. If the original body is a noun, solid in its thing-ness, the prefix "em-" enacts a transformation on it as it does to the act in "enact," the power in "empower," the slave in "enslave," the tomb in "entomb," the _amour_ in "enamour": the prefix verbifies the noun. The "em-" changes the solid, originary body into a verb which points toward a body which is only a body after it has been acted upon, after something else has been embodied. The body is no longer solid and originary. Similarly, the suffix "-ment" acts on verbs to turn them into nouns, as in "bewilderment," "treatment," "adjustment." The verb "body" is not used, but the phrase "body forth" has been used. When something "bodies forth" something else, the body is no longer primal and prior but secondary, a result and not a cause of the action that the verb performs. The supplementary affixes make the body supplementary, and a pointer towards a prior "cause" which acted on the body to produce the body-effect.

Just as the term "embodiment" both centers on the body and supplements (and supplants) it, so do embodied performances. Embodiments in their most challengingly outrageous forms not only defamiliarize (or, in Brechtian terms, "alienate," make strange) the ways in which bodies are represented, but call into question the very priority of "the body" over its embodiments. One of post-marxist/post-structuralist theory's most salient contributions to contemporary drama criticism is the concept that "the body" is itself produced, that the seemingly self-evident notion of a body as prior to and extricable from all ideological/cultural/political effects is itself a production of these effects. This production occurs through "writing" and "theatrical" media, and produces a dialectic
between what I think of as the body and "the body"; the terms of the dialectic could also be thought of as a signifying body and a signified body, or a body-as-sign and a body-as-referent (or body-itself, body-as-thing, body-as-thing-in-itself). On the one hand is the highly mediated, civilized, politicized, adulterated body: the only body to which we have direct access. On the other hand is the "pure body" to which this signifying body points: the idealized, inaccessible body beyond or before all sociocultural mediation, a body which is often posited discursively as occupying the place of the real. Though some post-structuralists would discount the reality of the body-itself entirely, post-structuralist body politics at their best, I would suggest, do not simply challenge the priority that the signified body currently has over the signifying body; rather they plunge into the pleasures and pains of a dialectic without hierarchy between the two terms, without cause and effect, and at the same time without the possibility of synthesis or aufhebung. In positing the drama of embodiment as the site of the (re)production of ideologies, such drama criticism does not simply posit ideology as a producer of "the body," but recognizes instead the radical unresolvability between the two models: the body as produced, and the body as producer. In the drama of embodiment, the subject of my study, ideologies are both produced by and producing bodies — at least to the extent that models of causality are useful here.

To pursue the latter model even more rigorously, productions of the body might better read productions of "the body" — that is, productions of the idea of "the body" as being beyond production, as being natural, fully self-present, originary. In this third model, both the body-as-sign and the notion of the body-beyond-signification to which the body-as-sign points, are not prior to, but are substantiated by, are re-produced again and again by, theatrical (and other) productions.

My strategy of dealing in several coexisting bodily models is necessary in order to avoid two traps. On the one hand, to treat the body as a bottom-line foundation which escapes cultural inscription is to remask a "technology of the body" or "political economy' of the
body" under the heading of Nature, in complicity with those very technologies (whether or not this complicity is intended or conscious). I am committed to the belief that our most intimate experiences of our bodies are mediated by "ideology" in Althusser's sense of the term, or by "writing" in Derrida's sense of that term. On the other hand, to situate the body as an ideological/linguistic effect is to reassert the cause-effect fallacy which post-marxist theory at its best has striven to overcome; and worse, it would be to appropriate the body in a move reproducing those of ideological state apparatuses in their crudest forms. The dialectics of the body and "the body" (or the body as real referent which signifies and the body as signifying effect or prefabricated realness) seem very abstract in theory, and indeed are often invisible, but can also be played out in very concrete and politically fraught arenas, such as in very basic decisions about casting a part. So it is at this point that I would like to look more specifically at some of the ideological technologies producing bodies, in order to understand the difference between the humanist argument that "we're all the same under our skins" and the post-marxist/ post-colonial argument that the trope of skin as surface, posed against an under-the-skin self, is itself a function of an ideologically-specific and power-embedded discourse.

*

One of the most fundamental "facts" about our bodies in this culture is our race. In the post-L.A. riot 1990's, the question "are you a racist?" is often asked and anxiously denied, but the authenticity of the category of race, particularly the "black" and "white" races (the very polarity with which race in America is generally understood should already begin to delegitimate it) often goes unquestioned. Frantz Fanon, in Black Skin, White Masks discusses painfully how blackness is lived as a fundamental fact inscribed on black skin, but he also asserts that "[t]he Negro is not. Any more than the white man." Henry Louis Gates suggests, similarly, that "[b]lackness exists, but 'only' as a function of its signifiers." Fanon and Gates suggest the ways in which races are constantly being
produced and reproduced. Races don't come naturally, inherent in the skin or genes, but are theatrical and textual effects which are then internalized and felt as natural. For Gates, blackness is not a signified, but a Signifyin(g), a style of representation performed so skillfully as to become natural:

The Black Arts movement's grand gesture was to make of the trope of blackness a trope of presence. That movement willéd it to be, however, a transcendent presence.... In literature, blackness is produced in the text only through a complex process of signification. There can be no transcendent blackness, for it cannot and does not exist beyond manifestations of it in specific figures.9

For Gates, "blackness" cannot conjure up texts; rather texts (Parker's music, Ellison's fictions, Romare Bearden's collages, etc.) conjure up "blackness." If "blackness" is a trope made present through signification, so is "whiteness." Both blackness and whiteness, as they are reproduced in daily acts and utterances, speeches and puns, gestures and body language, often depend on their opposing other for self-reification.

In chapter two I will discuss this polarizing tendency and the anxiety to construct and categorize blackness and whiteness in the text of Othello as well as in many productions of the play. In particular, casting choices for the characters Othello and Desdemona vex the contemporary stage with politically fraught issues. The sex, race, and body type of the actor playing Desdemona bespeak usually inadvertent theorizations about the relation of "the body" to femininity. Likewise I try to show how the race of the actor playing Othello, and the race he "makes himself up" to be, bring into play the multiple "facts" that make up the overdetermined category of "race," such as skin color, heritage, "attitude," dialect and speech "acts." Race and gender are fashioned, performed, and "made up" not only when a boy plays Desdemona and a white man plays Othello, as on the Elizabethan stage, but also in more "realistic" contemporary castings.
In chapter three I continue an exploration of the determinants of race through the works of several contemporary playwrights who reverse the "blackface" tradition of minstrelsy to challenge the ontology of race. These plays both threaten and promise to expose the true-black-under-the-mask. This feared and longed for "true" blackness which cannot be embodied is conceived of variously as primitive, as primal, as the unconscious, as the body itself, and as the return of the repressed. But (as these and similar plays bring out, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously), this ebony-black blackness is not prior to, but a creation of the white-black racist binary, and can no more exclude whiteness than whiteness can exclude blackness. The plays I consider in chapter three -- Jean Genet's The Blacks, Adrienne Kennedy's Funnyhouse of a Negro, and ntozake shange's spell #7 -- go beyond the ontology of race to look at the politics (as well as the psychology) of race. (This is not to say that the ontologizing of race is not political; indeed I will argue that that is precisely what it is.) These powerful and painful plays all dramatize the way the masks of race become internalized and naturalized. So predominant and powerfully resilient are these masks that attempts to protest them often become only more subtle and unwitting ways of wearing them. Both race and racism materialize through performance and repetition, but at the same time they are experienced as very real, natural, and primary. These three plays dramatize both the performativity and the primacy of the races of characters, actors, playwrights, and spectators.

One of the "races" that often gets excluded when the term is used in U.S. contexts, which generally imply black-white tensions, has a whole discourse of reproductive technologies of its own: "Orientalism." (I mean to capitalize this term in the spirit of parody. That is, I aim by capitalizing the term to call attention to it and to mock the Seriousness with which academics (and others) have traditionally endowed the term as a scholarly category. In essence, I am "quoting" the term in, I hope, a Brechtian manner, or
putting it under erasure even as I invoke it. The same holds for "the East," "the West,"
"Asian," "Euro-American," "the Orient," "the Occident," etc. The self-mockery of the
capital may -- with my blessings -- flow over onto all "proper" names of geographical
regions and people.) My understanding of Orientalism is fundamentally indebted to
Edward Said, to whose study Orientalism I refer every time I use the term. To Said,
"Orientalism" involves a network of interlocking and reinforcing phenomena. Orientalism
was/is, first, a field of academic study. Secondly, the Orient acted as the Other or opposite
of the Occident -- indeed the putative presence of "the Orient" is what made the Occident the
Occident. Thirdly, Orientalism was/is an institution for Western dominance over the
Orient. Orientalism became a discourse for producing, classifying, and having authority
over the East. In a suggestive paradoxical dialectic of self and other, Said perceived that
"European culture" -- in particular British and French and, in the twentieth-century,
American -- "gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort
of surrogate and even underground self." To do so, these European cultures saw
themselves as European Culture and subsumed every culture and subculture to the east of
some undeclared Mediterranean point, The East. Indeed, I would argue (as Said does not),
"Eastern Culture" (or "Western Culture") does not pre-exist its classification as such, not
even as "eastern culture(s)" (or "western cultures"). Like the often-invoked primal black
body and the primary African identity, the Orient "is not an inert fact of nature," which is
simply there, prior to signification. To claim that it has become Orientalized by "the
West" through force and power is not to deny the "brute reality" of customs, cultures,
nations, lives, histories in the geographical regions which have come to be known as "the
east." Finally, Orientalism (at its best) is not a false mythology lying about the true East,
but a power-embedded discourse: that is, a hegemony. As a hegemony (rather than an
oppressive regime) it may come to be lived as truth. That is, "Orientalism" may never exist
as such, except as reified by the term; instead, there are many competing and contradictory
micropolitical, intimately lived instances of Orientalist technologies. Yet the concept of "Orientalism," fictional though it may be, crucially opens up a discourse for understanding intercultural power distributions from which the historical development of Western drama has been far from immune.

In chapter four I will look at some interactions between theater and Orientalism. Said at points metaphorically casts Orientalism as a stage, a frame which invites Western appropriating and fetishizing gazes, at the simultaneously reified "East"; through such metaphorical casting Said simultaneously reifies "Orientalism." Chapter four "looks" not only at the theatricality inherent in Said's conception of Orientalism (or Said's "antitheatrical prejudice"), but also at the Orientalism at the heart of much "Western" modern theater theory, in particular that of Artaud and of Brecht, whose notions of Balinese and Chinese acting figure prominently in their theoretical work. Furthermore, I look at the powerful grasp that Orientalism has on bodies and social structures -- a grasp which endlessly reproduces itself even amidst attempts to escape it. In particular, I look at David Henry Hwang's M. Butterfly, a play which, even as it condemns Orientalism, may end up reproducing it.

The Orientalist gaze, which fetishizes and reifies "the East," bears striking structural similarities to another powerful social formation: the male gaze, or more generally, in Teresa de Lauretis' term, "technologies of gender."¹ ⁴ If the Orientalist gaze poses itself against and thereby produces "the East," the male gaze produces by posing itself against "femininity." In Laura Mulvey's now-classic formulation in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the scopic image of certain classic Hollywood films is seen through the "gaze" of a male character from whose point of view the narrative evolves. A male viewer of the film identifies with the male narrator and sees in the woman-as-spectacle an image of castration; the image of her "lack" phallicizes his opposing look. The visual pleasure which
the image of the woman gives the male narrator and viewer interrupts the narrative, but also authorizes it by confirming its claims to phallic meaning. While Mulvey's formulations have been contested from all sides\(^1\) 5 -- in chapter four I look in particular at Kaja Silverman's revisions -- her article and the debates it has produced remain particularly valuable to me for calling attention irrevocably to the genderedness of the politics of looking. Her exposure of the male looker's dependence on the castrated female spectacle for the achievement of phallicity also exposes his vulnerability to the disruptions of the spectacle and the empowerment of the female spectacle as spectacle.

Like the Orientalist gaze, the male gaze cannot easily be eradicated; attempts to do so often end up reconstituting these gazes. Much of contemporary feminist and queer theater testifies to the resilience of the male heterosexist gaze. Karen Finley's work, for me, provides a particularly informative paradigm. In chapter five I look at Finley's use of theatrical "shock treatments" to defamiliarize the disciplining of women's bodies with respect to size, consumption, and sexuality. The NEA's final denial of Finley's grant, although it was approved by the arts council, was instigated by a column in the New York Times in which Rowland Evans and Robert Novak labelled Finley a "chocolate-smeared young woman."\(^1\) 6 In a letter to the editor, Finley counters that she smears chocolate on her body as "a symbol of women being treated like dirt" (elsewhere she says "like shit"), and that her work actually "speaks out against sexual violence, degradation of women, incest and homophobia."\(^1\) 7 Finley attempts to embody feminist theory even as she unleashes feminist guerilla theater. In doing so, Finley dramatizes her own entrapment in a paradox common to much Performance Art and theater: even as she makes explicit the theatricality and textuality which construct the body-as-other, she still residually promises a body prior to "writing." Finley has become infamous, for instance, for "playing with food": painting herself with egg yolks, smearing yams or chocolate frosting on her naked body, adding layers of alfalfa sprouts and candy hearts. Through her images of cultural
bulimia, she enacts a double-bind many women face: by "swallowing" patriarchal ideology, we may find ourselves consumed by it; yet attempting to rebel against it may be both destructive to the individual rebel and ultimately re-incorporated within that very ideology. Without solving them, Finley dramatically clarifies the double binds inherent in feminist positions grounded in a body-identity politics. Furthermore, "seeming" to abuse and violate her own body during a performance, Finley vividly dramatizes the violence, both physical and metaphorical, that technologies of patriarchy may do to women's bodies. However, she does so by referring to a purely personal, apolitical, bottom-line body, and may thereby ultimately confirm the body/ideology polarizations which give texts and ideologies their power.

If the categories of "black," "Asian," and "female" are fictional, are "made up," contemporary politics, such as those dramatized in the Miss Saigon controversy, may dictate that these identities act as if they were real. The studies of the various technologies of body-identities discussed above suggest that while these identities are by no means inevitable or anatomically destined, the appearance of their inevitability abets social systems which privilege certain identities and bodies over others. But the dismantling of biological determinism can also be used to abet the same social systems of unequal power distribution based on body type. How can theater, then, demystify body-identities without merely allowing those of the already-privileged identities a guilt-free way to appropriate what power there is in the "others"?

II

In the summer of 1990, when I first began to conceive of a dissertation on the problematics of "embodiment" in contemporary theater, two influences were impossible to ignore; they began to lay out for me two poles of my project. One was Judith Butler's
work on gender trouble, which was new, and hot, and gave a shot in the arm to the dreary and depressing debate between biological essentialism and social constructivism. I was more than halfway seduced by Butler's brilliant exfoliations of the performativity of gender, of how gender is performatively constituted and can be performatively and playfully deconstructed. I was not alone in being seduced by Butler's heady, seemingly liberatory theory; by winter the MLA was teeming with papers on gender performativity. These papers were often written by scholars far afield from theater studies, who may never have given theater a thought before -- or may have deemed it regressive (a common bias against theater in literature departments). Tropes of the "theatricality" and "performativity" of body identities (gender, race, and sexuality are only the most obvious) became appropriated by every major "cutting edge" discourse already involved in the essentialist/constructivist debate, from feminist theory to queer theory to post-colonial studies to cultural studies. For those of us in theater studies, Butler's restructuring of the debate confirmed our suspicions that theater offers the most challenging and probing site for the study of productions of the body. Embodied media can offer the most intensified promise that gender and racial identities arise seamlessly from inside the body. When embodied media show the seemingly whole bodies onstage to be un-whole, or "dialectical," the belatedness and never-complete presence of "the body" becomes more poignant dramatically than through media which never promised full presences in the first place. That's why theater, while often, for economic reasons, the most ideologically conservative of the arts, has the potential to be the most ideological radical, subversive, and dangerous.

At the same time, in "the theater" itself, a controversy developed around the casting of the character called "the Engineer" in the multimillion-dollar musical Miss Saigon, scheduled to appear on Broadway in the fall. The Engineer, a Eurasian character (half-French, half-Vietnamese), was played in London by Jonathan Pryce, a Caucasian actor. (In early performances, Pryce used "a prosthetic device on his eyes to suggest a more
Asian look," but later abandoned it.\textsuperscript{19} Actors' Equity, the American actor's theater union, denied permission for the English Pryce to play the lead in the U.S. (which they could have permitted on the basis of special star status) because the union "cannot appear to condone the casting of a Caucasian actor in the role of a Eurasian."\textsuperscript{20} Equity's policy encourages nontraditional casting when race is "not germane" to the role. When race is germane, and when the mode of the production is Realistic, however, Equity's policy is to audition people of the character's race before resorting to "blackface," "whiteface," "yellowface," etc. Equity's statement explained that "nontraditional casting was never intended to be used to diminish opportunities for ethnic actors to play ethnic roles."\textsuperscript{21} Or as Ellen Holly, an African-American actor, eloquently explains, while we all may long for an ideal world in which anyone can play any role, there is "a long and profoundly frustrating history in America in which, decade after decade, the ideal world we all long for has functioned so that whites are free to play everything under the sun while black, Hispanic and Asian actors are not only restricted to their own category, but forced to surrender roles in their own category that a white desires."\textsuperscript{22} If racial identities are performatively constituted and malleable, not destined by skin color, racial identities are nevertheless lived as absolutes in economic and political venues, which can't just be either theorized or humanized away. And so for me, neither the politics nor the more philosophical theory of casting can be considered in isolation.

At any rate, after weeks of controversy and threats by producer Cameron Mackintosh to withdraw his show, Equity reversed its decision. Jonathan Pryce's Engineer on the Broadway Miss Saigon received mostly rave reviews.

Pryce's comment, in the midst of the controversy, that the theater itself is about making audiences believe that a non-Vietnamese actor is Vietnamese, was made in response to the letters written to Actor's Equity by David Henry Hwang and B.D. Wong, playwright and co-star, respectively, of M. Butterfly. Posed against Wong's complaint of Pryce's
"yellowface," Pryce offers his own interpretation of the politics of impersonation in *M. Butterfly*:

The other irony [Wong] fails to realize after acting in [*M. Butterfly*] is just what it was about -- role playing and duplicity. A man dressed as a woman who existed in a relationship because the other man saw what he wanted to see. It's like the theater itself. If I tell an audience 'I'm Vietnamese' and they want to see me that way, they will. Obviously, *M. Butterfly* was not a learning experience for him.

Just how obvious it is that what Pryce learned from *M. Butterfly* differs radically from what I learned will be seen in chapter four. For now, suffice it to say: I find it incredible that any audience member could miss *M. Butterfly*’s critique of "the other man [seeing] what he wanted to see," and of the Orientalism and phallocentrism which enabled him to do so. That is, for me, *M. Butterfly*, as well as the casting controversy over *Miss Saigon*, dramatize how deeply embedded power and resistance are in the creation of bodily illusions, in "the theater itself." If I am being inordinately hostile to Pryce here, it's because what I perceive as his willful blindness to the power investments embedded in Broadway-style transvestism (both his own and Wong's) really gets under my skin.

Three years later, with the *Miss Saigon* controversy "resolved," David Richards, a powerful *New York Times* reviewer, wrote a piece on Carlyle Brown's new play *The African Company Presents Richard III* at the Arena Stage in Washington. A few lines from this review got "under the skin" so much for me that I have included them as my first headnote. The common humanist belief that we are all basically the same under the skin depends on two bodily tropes: that skin is a transparent metonym for race (that is, that race resides in the skin), and that "self" resides in some non-physical interior of the body, not in the body's surfaces. In this model, "race" is superficial and incidental to "self," whereas "talent" and "insight" belong to the "self," not to the "body." Obviously, I am deeply suspicious of this belief in the separability of the self and body -- and suspicious, most
immediately, because of whom the argument serves. In a review of a play about African-Americans' struggles to play (white) Shakespearean roles, and thereby gain legitimacy as serious artists (in a culture where "Shakespeare" acts as a signifier of "high art"), Richards sympathizes with The African Company's struggles. Historically, at the time this company was acting, and even, sometimes, currently, the argument that we are all "much alike under the skin" was used strategically to empower people of color in a racist society to enter realms of white power. But Richards quickly switches contexts to the present, when the argument that we're all the same underneath is more often used to avoid acknowledging the presence of racism, and to disempower body-identity politics, such as black, Asian-American, women's, or gay coalitions. Posing as a leftie who wants to empower the culturally disempowered (black play white, female play male), Richards' concluding sentence fragment ("And vice versa") essentially dis-poses its preceding sentences. This sentence fragment, coming after a series of compound or complex sentences, gets all the emphasis, the charisma, the bite. The gratuitous "vice versa," irrelevant to The African Company's situation, disposes of any recognition that white male culture, in theatrical representation as elsewhere, has a long history of subsuming and normalizing racial and gender difference (even as it (re)produces these differences). Already in the first sentence of this quotation, the assumption that "man" and "everyman" unproblematically metonymize every human person, in a sentence which asserts that we're all the same, seems to me tautological at best.

Butler's argument was never this humanist one -- indeed, hers is anti-humanist -- but the question of whom it serves is equally pressing. I am by no means arguing that Butler's own investments are suspect. But the alacrity and profusion of appropriations of her argument by others worry me, and cause me to situate my discussion of plays in this dissertation as much in social, economic and ideological contexts as in current theoretical models. (I look more at Butler's work proper in chapter four.) In discussing the Miss
Saigon controversy, it's crucial to note, as Butlerians would, the process by which sexual and racial identities, and even the very categories of such identities, may be performatively posited, and posited so persuasively as to seem a reality prior to performance. Hence the performing of performativity threatens to derealize body-identities. But this threat may ultimately unmask -- more powerfully than it does "the body's" ontological belatedness -- the deep stakes that people place in the body's reality. I want as much as possible to note the stakes placed in the body's reality, particularly at the level of the concrete and local politics -- the minute sites of power and resistance -- which are also being negotiated in every performance production. At issue in the Miss Saigon case were not only the nature of acting -- the ability to represent a character's body on an often quite different actor's body -- but also the political structures which produce and reproduce bodily differences such as "race." The Miss Saigon controversy serves as a stark reminder that casting and building a character are not only arts but political acts taking place within socioeconomic contexts.

The Miss Saigon controversy is about the control of representation of bodies: Which bodies get to be represented? By whom? Alongside these questions lies the ontological question of what "the body" is. (Is it natural, a part of nature? If so, then what makes some bodies "unnatural"? Why are some bodies deemed more natural than others? How is the body civilized? Which characteristics are fundamental, which produced? and must these questions about the "nature" of the body be either/or binarisms?) The essentialist/constructivist debate is well known; and is important but impossible to resolve. Alongside it we need to ask: whom does each position serve, and in what context?

The Miss Saigon controversy and, more generally, controversies around nontraditional casting and "color blind" casting, crystallize many contemporary controversies and anxieties concerning, on a more superficial level, the relations between equal opportunity
and "quotas," between equality and ethno-cultural difference; and on an underlying level, the relations between bodies and representation, and between signifying bodies and the signified bodies to which the signifying bodies point.

Supporters of a white actor playing a Eurasian (in a play which patronizingly exploits Asians) say that the nature of acting means embracing and embodying differences, racial or otherwise. They would turn my position (that given our theater history of blackface minstrelsy and our cultural climate of racism, characters of color ought, if possible, to be played by actors of color) into the reductive and dangerous assertion that an actor can only play a character of his/her own race because race is a bottom-line, untranscendable body-identity. What I wish to emphasize instead is that casting choices always have (often unconscious) political motivations and effects. Furthermore, when American and particularly Broadway theaters are extremely resistant to casting actors of Asian descent in Caucasian roles (so that the unemployment rate among Asian-American actors is even higher than the notoriously high rate among American actors generally), it seems to me irresponsible and unethical to advocate that yet another white actor play an Asian role. My theoretical belief in the constructedness of race can easily be appropriated to support racist practices. Speaking within a racist and ethnocentric social structure, one may need to adopt a strategic use of essentialism, which one must nevertheless continually check against so as not to normalize it.

For my purposes here, and as an introduction to my discussion of the casting of Othello in chapter two, I am particularly interested in the way defenders of the white Jonathan Pryce acting in the role of a French-Vietnamese man point towards, among other roles, the precedent of white Othellos. Newsweek, in obvious opposition to the Actor's Equity ruling that "the Eurasian character must be played by an Asian," sarcastically lists "a few other noteworthy performances" which, "[u]sing the same basic racial standard set forth with the 'Miss Saigon' ruling,... would never have made the state or screen." First on this
list is "Laurence Olivier as Othello." Richard Corliss of *Time* offers the observation that "[i]n Shakespeare's day, Othello was acted by whites -- and Olivier played the Moor in blackface in the 1960s ... The point, then as now, was that stage and screen are places of sublime pretense where audiences can make believe that any actor is perfect for the role." Robert Brustein of *The New Republic* complains that "Equity's concept of 'non-traditional casting' is "a disguised form of reverse racism, selectively color blind only when considering the casting of Caucasian roles." He offers as a self-evident argument for his case that "Equity's reasoning would have retroactively blocked some of the greatest performances of our time (Olivier's Othello, Mirella Freni's Butterfly) as well as some of the most colorful (Peter Lore's Mr. Moto, Warner Oland's Charlie Chan, Marlon Brando's Zapata) for the sake of placating minority groups" (my emphasis). This, after protest leader David Henry Hwang's public statements that "I thought the yellow-face days of Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu were dead." Brustein's article, complaining that whites should be able to keep their rights to appropriate the few roles of people of color, is, ironically, entitled "Lighten Up, America." These articles take as a given the rightness of the white Olivier as a black Othello, in order to argue that the body of the representor is distinct from the body of the represented -- that is, that the actor's body (as opposed to the character's body) does not count in the meaning of the performance. But of course it does, as some of the most creative and effective casting choices -- nontraditional self-conscious casting -- demonstrate. Some forms of experimental castings could potentially present radical challenges to the body's ontology. But what forms? One could, after all, do a "race trouble" reading of Jonathan Pryce's Engineer: Pryce's performance of "Asianness," alienated by the actor's whiteness, shows race to be a construct. But Pryce's performance, as is the case with many cross-dressed or cross-raced performances, hardly seems to produce such a reading on its own initiative. How can a Butlerian or Brechtian-
cast theater of racial- and gender-dismantling keep from degenerating into a usurpation by one body-identity of the right to represent an other?

For starters, what if Pryce played the Eurasian Engineer without applying Asianizing make-up of any kind? In Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, a white male actor plays a black African male servant to a very British, very Victorian, very white master in colonial Africa. With no dark make-up or other cosmetic attempt to look Negroid, the white actor steps forward to introduce himself:

My skin is black, but oh my soul is white.
I hate my tribe. My master is my light.
I only live for him. As you can see,
What white men want is what I want to be.29

This mock-heroic couplet sets up skin color and soul color as parallel. But the two occupy different ontological levels. "My soul is white." How can souls have a color? No, the image is metaphorical? But what does it mean that the soul, whose function is to be that which is not bodily, is conceptually grounded in a bodily image? The meaning of "my skin is black" is tricky enough. We see very well that the actor's skin is not black. Do we make ourselves "color blind" and pretend that it is? But *Cloud Nine* self-consciously satirizes colonialist racial relations; while the character Joshua poignantly longs to become something he can never biologically become, "Churchill" or "the play" tells us (quite angrily) that Joshua's barriers are not biologically predetermined but ideologically constructed. The less "blind" and more conscious we are of Joshua's many colors, and the more we can conceive of his body dialectically, the more painful and pleasurable the irony becomes. Concomitantly, the "Betty" character, the ultimate delicate feminine Victorian lady, is played by a man. She introduces herself with:

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.\textsuperscript{3 0}

Churchill has said that in rehearsals for the New York production of \textit{Cloud Nine}, she at one point "forgot" that the actor playing Betty was a man, although he was wearing jeans and had a beard.\textsuperscript{3 1} I have seen three different productions of the play, and in each case the actors charmed me into intermittently "forgetting" that they were "really" male -- and I was ashamed to discover that in myself which made me jolt back to remembrance just when Betty seemed on the verge of kissing male characters/actors.\textsuperscript{3 2} But if the ultimate female is best played by a man -- in \textit{M. Butterfly}, the transvestite "Song" says that in the Peking Opera, women's roles are played by men because "only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act."\textsuperscript{3 3} -- if the character/actor who seems to exude femininity from every pore of her body "really" exudes femininity from every pore of \textit{his} body, then a body is not what it is, or is not only what it is, but is also otherwise, informed by otherness.

Yet, in general, market forces steer casting choices away from a deliberate, self-critical "gestic principle"\textsuperscript{3 4} (of which I see ironic nontraditional casting as an important example) and towards unconscious reinforcements of current hegemonic reifications of race, gender, and sexuality. Commercial theater has shown a disturbing "resistance to non-traditional casting."\textsuperscript{3 5} Even when such theaters do employ actors unconventional by color, age, body type, or physical disability, the "blind" of commercial "color blind" productions often describes more a blindness to their recuperation of racist, ageist, sexist, etc. stereotypes than a blindness to the stereotypes themselves. In a recent Alley Theater production in Houston, a black actor was included in the traditionally all-white \textit{As You Like It}, and I commend such an inclusion. But did they have to make him Charles the Wrestler, and turn that character into a (Mike Tyson-like?) inarticulate dumb brute who flexed his muscles and grunted, with wild hair, wild eyes, yellow and red war-paint smeared on his face, the primal African of white nightmares?
A more hopeful kind of "color blind casting," I feel, is being developed in the late Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival, notably in the recent Richard III starring Denzel Washington and the 1973 King Lear with James Earl Jones (both black actors without white make-up).\(^3\)\(^6\) (Unfortunately, reporters and reviewers cite these examples as exact and equal opposites to, and therefore justifications of, white Othellos, Gandhis, gurus, Kings of Siam, and Franco-Vietnamese hustlers.) A better alternative to traditional or "blind" casting is, to my mind, non-traditional but color conscious casting. In a 1985 production of Comedy of Errors at the Hippodrome State Theater in Gainesville, Florida, the twin brothers Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse were played by a black actor and a white actor.\(^3\)\(^7\) This self-reflexive humor poked fun both at the theatrical convention of twins, parted at birth, reuniting within the two hours' traffic on the stage, and at our conventions of associating actors' bodies with characters' bodies where color is concerned, even as we willfully blind ourselves to other differences between the bodies of actors and characters. While such dramatic self-mockery may be less adaptable to tragedy, other experiments with the casting of Othello seem to me promising. The RSC's Othello at Stratford-upon-Avon included two black actors, a male playing Othello and a female playing Bianca.\(^3\)\(^8\) The skin color of this non-traditional black Bianca contradicts her very name, and makes the equation of "fair" and white manifest. The presence of a black Bianca may, at least potentially, make the "fair" epithets, with which Desdemona is lauded, more audible. (A black Desdemona would do so even more effectively.) Finally, through her disturbing dis-unity of colors, this black Bianca embodies the cooperation of racism, classism, and sexism in a self-reproducing ideology which associates blackness, labor, sexuality, and the female body. More, through an assertive presenting of black women, she makes visible the cultural e-race-ure of racism, sexism, and classism -- an erasure the presentation of which is the subject of my next two chapters.
I would like to see, then, along with Richard Schechner, the "opening [up of] a much wider gap -- a possibly playful and subversive space -- between representers and represented" in order to alienate for audiences their own unconscious acquiescence to systems of codes for identifying race and gender.39 But such performance experiments would also have to continually explore the local and specific sites at which systems of race and gender codes operate, and to ask whom these systems are serving at which moments -- and whom the alienations of these systems are serving, and at which moments. Above all, such experiments with dis-embodying embodiments must take into account the intense spectatorial desire for real bodies, fully present.

As for Miss Saigon, I would advocate first of all that, staying within the realism-dictated casting, the U.S. soldiers should be represented by a significant proportion of African-American actors. The all-white soldiership with which the show opened in London is hardly realistic, and was only partially rectified in the Broadway production.40 I wonder if the love story would play the same if the male lead, Kim's lover Chris, were an African-American man played by an African-American actor? Beyond realism, though, what if Chris were played by an Asian-American actor? or the Engineer by an Asian woman? or Kim, the mythified and exoticized Madame Butterfly revision, by a man? The latter might produce an M. Butterfly. But Jonathan Pryce's reading of the lesson of M. Butterfly suggests that even the most deliberate, self-conscious, and sarcastic cross-casings can become martyrs to their own strategies when up against the powerful spectatorial desire to re-reify body-identities.

The following study is not an attempt to present a comprehensive or representative overview of embodiment in contemporary performance. Rather, I look at selected Euro-American theaters with a U.S. prejudice -- and this prejudice will of course be a severe
limit to my study. Furthermore, my lack of access to certain important performances, being as they were either before my time or beyond my means, is indeed a sorely felt limitation, and one which fundamentally informs my presentation. Within these limitations, I hope to explore productions of "the body" as well as theatrical destabilizations of this "body," without ever losing sight of both the political uses and psychological appeals of the promise of a real body behind all the masks, underneath all the make-up, and prior to all play-texts.

6 See especially Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1976). Derrida's sense of "writing" is as much exemplified as explicated throughout Of Grammatology, and hence it's difficult to point to
any particular page. For a cogent, concise treatment of Derrida's "writing," Spivak's introduction pp. 1xix-1xx are particularly helpful.


9Gates, 236-7.


11Said, 3.

12Said, 4.

13Said, 6-7.


15Particularly her psychoanalytic mappings of sadism and masochism onto look and spectacle, her inattention to female spectators, her erasure of the possibilities of viewer identification with the woman-as-spectacle and of sexual desire for the male narrator, and her conflation of look and gaze.


19Witchel.


21Rothstein, p. C16.

23 Richards admirably refers to age discrimination in the theater here. Still vastly overlooked in the usual accounts of the "Big Three" of bodily identity (race, gender, and sexuality), age discrimination is as alive and well in the theater as elsewhere.


28 Equity has argued in response to the charges of "reverse discrimination" that non-traditional casting was created to give minority actors equal opportunity to roles for which the race or gender are not essential to the character, and that "nontraditional casting was never intended to be used to diminish opportunities for ethnic actors to play ethnic roles." Alan Eisenberg, executive secretary of Equity, said that he did not feel that a white actor playing Othello "would be very acceptable in 1990." The late Colleen Dewhurst, then president of Equity, added that "It's not censorship because it wouldn't have been censoring for us to ask for the stopping of the minstrel show." See Mervyn Rothstein, "Union Won't Allow White Actor To Play a Eurasian on Broadway," The New York Times, 8 Aug. 1990, C16.


30 Cloud Nine, 251.


32 The three sets of productions and actors are:

• Michael Washington as Betty. Ed Muth, dir. The Ensemble Theatre, Houston. Sept. 6-Oct. 4, 1990. In this production, Betty was played by a black man, which gave added punch to many lines, including Clive's references to the "dark element" in the fairest of women.


34The term, of course, is Brecht's. He describes the "socially significant gest" thus: "The epic theatre is chiefly interested in the attitudes which people adopt towards one another, wherever they are socio-historically significant (typical). It works out scenes where people adopt attitudes of such a sort that the social laws under which they are acting spring into sight ... Human behavior is shown as alterable; man himself [sic] as dependent on certain political and economic factors and at the same time as capable of altering them.... In short, the spectator is given the chance to criticize human behavior from a social point of view, and the scene is played as a piece of history. The idea is that the spectator should be put in a position where he [sic] can make comparisons about everything that influences the way in which human beings behave. This means, from the aesthetic point of view, that the actors' social gest becomes particularly important. The arts have to begin paying attention to the gest.... The gestic principle takes over, as it were, from the principle of imitation." In Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) p. 86.


David Finkle writes, in a commentary on the London production (*The Village Voice*, 21 Aug. 1990, p. 86), that "what had really bothered me most when I sat through Miss Saigon was the casting of the actor-singers playing the American soldiers in this reworking of Madame Butterfly. Not one of them was black. ... I am beginning to wonder this: If the production team didn't think it was important to have a significant percentage of blacks represented on stage in order to give some approximation of what the American presence in Vietnam looked like, then how crucial has it been to these people to strive for accuracy of racial type at all when it isn't absolutely necessary, artistic ability or no artistic ability? ... The word around New York is that blacks were to be hired for the local Saigon cast, but is that simply because those casting knew they couldn't have done otherwise and gotten away with it? ..."
CHAPTER TWO

Othello's Darker Cast:
Making Up Blackness and Femininity

"I shall never make you black," [Edwin Booth] said one morning. "When I take your hand I shall have a corner of my drapery in my hand. That will protect you."

I am bound to say that I thought of Mr. Booth's "protection" with some yearning the next week when I played Desdemona to Henry's [Irving's] Othello. Before he had done with me I was nearly as black as he.

--Ellen Terry, The Story of my Life

In the first performance of Othello, a white man played the black Othello and a boy the woman Desdemona. Since then, performances of Othello have displayed multiple variations on cross-dressing and casting against race. These variations uncannily mirror the multiple and self-contradictory body-identities of characters within the play. The hybridized body onstage — a cross of genders and races, a fusion (or confusion) of actor and character — becomes emblematic of disunities within the character him- or herself.

On the one hand, the fictional character (whom we regard as "real") presents the body as primary and subsumed, the property and the originary motivator of the "character" of the character. On the other hand the actor's body stands nakedly apparent, displaying the signifying characteristics of bodies — such as race and gender — as patently "made up."
The doubleness of stage-characters thus parallels a doubleness in "actual" human subjects; Othello "merely" capitalizes on this fact. The play stages in its very substance paradoxes with which contemporary thought is increasingly concerned: race and gender as both natural and naturalized; the meanings of "the body" as defined by social others as well as by the "body itself"; femininity as stemming both from a female body and from a maleness which opposes (and depends on) it; blackness as both a pigmentation of the hair and skin and as a difference from whiteness, which in turn requires blackness to declare itself primary. In England, 1604, when the first performances of Othello took place, these issues were perhaps even more germane, though at a different level of reflection: race was in the process of definition, gender was in the process of redefinition, and class was in or on the verge of revolution. Both the text of Othello and its performances throughout the centuries suggest the mechanisms by which capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy were constructing themselves -- constructing themselves onto bodies, and then offering bodies as the producers of these social systems.

I

From the moment of its opening, Othello dramatizes the imbrication of economic structures and class distinctions in racial and gender classifications. These classifications both serve and are engendered by the economic base. The first explanation Iago gives Roderigo and the audience/readers for his hatred of Othello is the latter's negation of Iago's "price" and "place":

... three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Oft capp'd to him; and by the faith of man,
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place.

(1.1.8-11)
While economic gain overtly motivates Iago — the play opens with Roderigo's complaint that Iago has "had my purse / As if the strings were thine" (1.1.2-3) — Iago's complaints focus on social hierarchies, class antagonisms, and master-slave hostilities. Indeed, the acts and figures of *service* are obsessional motifs of the play. The word and its cognates are used 17 times by Othello and Iago alone.

Iago is by no means the oppressed worker rising up in good marxist revolt against the system which oppresses him. Rather, he buys into this oppressive system, and displaces his own class exploitation onto race and onto other "honest knaves." Though he protests a system in which

\[
\text{Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave,} \\
\text{That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,} \\
\text{Wears out his time much like his master's ass,} \\
\text{For nought but provender, and when he's old, cashier'd,} \\
\]

(1.1.45-8)

Iago's alternative entails bifurcating himself into both servant and master of himself. He internalizes the social divisions of the system by identifying with and then replacing his master: "I follow him to serve my turn upon him" (1.1.42). Iago (the servant) will serve himself (the master), like those "others" who "keep yet their hearts attending on themselves". He has been servant long enough; it's "his turn" to be master. While he uses the class system to subvert his own exploitation, he wants to maintain, "thrive by," and master the system. In serving his master he will master his master; he plots not to subvert but to reverse and conserve the master-slave set-up. Iago asserts that his service to "the Moor" is a service to himself: "In following him, I follow but myself" (1.1.58). In the above quotations, servant and master share—or vie for—the same subject and object positions. While Iago's statement that "were I the Moor, I would not be Iago" asserts a mutual exclusion between the positions of "the Moor" and Iago, the latter's method of
attaining the former's place involves being temporarily both the Moor and Iago -- and hence neither. Iago occupies many mutually exclusive positions at once--subversive and conservative, servant and master, "I" and "the Moor." Hence "I am not what I am" (1.1.65). Stephen Greenblatt points out that while this line is generally heard and read as "I am not what I seem," it denotes a much more radical internal division or non-identity with himself.7 This anguish of internal division, in which a character sees him or herself as occupying two different positions which cannot possibly coexist, emerges increasingly in character after character in the course of Othello, as the guarantors of meaning become increasingly unreliable.

Iago serves his turn on Othello in part by turning Othello's class into a racial issue. In representing Othello to Brabantio, Iago and Roderigo equate dark skin and sub-knavery; Desdemona's marriage into blackness is a fall into the knave class. Roderigo briefly Brabantio on his daughter's elopement in broad and hasty terms, yet incongruously takes two lines out of 20 (120-139) to point out that Desdemona was "Transported with no worse nor better guard, / But with a knave of common hire, a gondolier" (124-5). Desdemona, in "tying her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes" to the "gross clasps of a lascivious Moor" has made a "gross revolt." The repetition of "gross" from l. 126 to l. 134 enlarges the "large," "coarse," "general," and "monstrous" elopement from a local conflict between Desdemona and Brabantio to a larger revolt against the state.8 Brabantio feels this too:

The duke himself,
Or any of my brothers of the state,
Cannot but feel this wrong, as 'twere their own.
For if such actions may have passage free,
Bondslaves, and pagans, shall our statesmen be.

(1.2.95-99)
This revolt is doubly or triply gross; it is a revolt against patriarchal authority by an upperclass daughter, a threat to the aristocratic system separating bondslaves and statesmen, and a defiance of the right of the white Christian "brothers of the state" to dominate pagans.9 "Bondslaves" and "pagans" seem to Brabantio's mind to be generically linked. Roderigo and Iago present their spread of racism as a kind of service, a duty of their class. They tell Brabantio that "we come to do you service" (1.1.109-10) by telling Brabantio that his "daughter, and the Moor, are now making the beast with two backs" (1.1.115-7). They render the service of rhetorical reduction by first metonymizing the range of interchange between Desdemona and Othello -- sexual, social, textual, theatrical, erotic, exotic, empathic, personal, political--to sexuality, then metonymizing or reducing the range of sexuality (kissing, caressing, fondling, etc.) to sexual intercourse, and finally figuring this sexual intercourse as something that bestializes.

Brabantio's immediate reaction, on its most literal level, does not contest Iago's degradation of miscegenation, but rather reasserts class hierarchies.

BRABANTIO Thou art a villain.
IAGO You are a senator.

(1.1.118)

This exchange has prompted much critical and editorial puzzlement. For example, Norman Sanders suggest that

There are two ways of delivering this line: (1) with Iago suppressing some uncomplimentary name on the tip of his tongue and substituting 'senator'; (2) with ironical politeness, thus casting doubt on the dignity of Brabantio's position.10

It seems to me that a third alternative to implied ellipsis or ironical politeness is utter simplicity. A simple reassurance that social positions remain intact may enlist Brabantio in Iago's displacement of his socio-economic revolt onto Othello's racial revolt.
Othello's class position at the start of the play is undefined, indeed a bit "wheeling". At the beginning of 1.2, Othello defends his right to Desdemona not because of their love for each other, but because of "my services, which I have done the signiory" and because "I fetch my life and being / From men of royal siege" (1.2.18,21-2). Othello is both at the heart of the Venetian state—a general and soon-to-be acting governor of occupied Cyprus—and an outsider, a Moor. He is both a servant to the signory, and royalty. Othello, like North Africans in Elizabethan / Jacobean England when Shakespeare wrote the play, begins the play multi-classed, or classless. It will be Iago's task to classify him, to make him, by the end of the play, clearly a slave.

Iago also classifies Othello's race. Othello is most likely a dark-skinned man from North Africa, but Iago makes the Moor "the Moor" and his dark skin "dark."¹¹ The words "black" and its cognates, and images of blackening, are used metaphorically throughout the play in ways that become increasingly inextricable from literal references to the "black" or "fair" body. Harry Levin and others have discussed the play's black/white imagery, which builds on the convention of blackness connoting evil and the devil, whiteness goodness and angels.¹² Tellingly, these traits are often mentioned together, as in Emilia's "O, the more angel she, / And you the blacker devil!" (5.2.131-2), Iago's "when devils will their blackest sins put on, / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows" (2.3.342-3) and "So will I turn her virtue into pitch" (2.3.351), or Othello's "my name, that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd and black / As mine own face" (3.3.392-4). These instances of what Karen Newman terms "rhetorical miscegenation" imply that fairness depends on blackness, and vice versa.¹³ The construction of Desdemona as the embodiment of fairness and idealized femininity depends intimately on the construction of Othello as the embodiment of blackness and barbarism. Indeed, while the work "black" and its cognates occur only 11 times in the
Folio text of *Othello* (almost always in morally loaded and obtrusive contexts), "fair" and its cognates appear at least 21 times, generally as seemingly innocent and unobtrusive epithets for Desdemona. I would suggest that a major part of the social work of setting up skin color in the unconscious as a moral signifier is played out not in the obvious attention to Othello's blackness, but in the barely noticed but steadfast praise of fairness. ("Literal" references to the body's color, themselves, are by no means neutral or objective. Why should skin above all the multitude of internal and external bodily attributes be singled out so excessively, indeed obsessively, as a sign of character? And why subsume the multitude of Othello's physical, ethnic, religious, ideological differences (and similarities) under the visual image of skin pigmentation?) Othello's color is created, a found object for the Venetian social structure to position and sign its name to. For though Othello's color and ethnicity are very real, they mean very differently in different cultural communities. *Othello* is in part the education of Othello to the Venetian meaning of blackness, even as those meanings, at the beginning already present in metaphorical contexts, attach themselves to Othello's body.

And educated Othello becomes. When he first begins to distrust Desdemona, he begins to see his own visage in the minds of Europeans. At first he says, almost in wonderment that his skin color could be the cause:

> Haply, for I am black,

> And have not those soft parts of conversation

> That chamberers have, or for I am declin'd

> Into the vale of years,—yet that's not much--

> She's gone, I am abus'd, and my relief

> Must be to loathe her \( (3.3. 263-8) \)

Very shortly colorization is no longer one possibility among many but the cause, and no longer conjecture but proof. The lines quoted above, which simultaneously befoul
Othello and befair Desdemona, also betray Othello's consent to the moral loading of color in the context of the lines immediately preceding them:

By the world,
I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;
I think that thou art just, and think thou art not;
I'll have some proof: my name, that was as fresh
As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd, and black
As mine own face

(3.3.389-94)

The imagery of black and white complexions follows immediately in response to the call for proof. If part of Othello's tragedy and anguish is, as Cavell suggests, his inability to live in a state of uncertainty without absolute grounds of knowledge, particularly self-knowledge, color gives him a way to secure his belief. If he doubts Desdemona, all he has to do is look at his face. This slippage of fair and foul, foul and fair occurs between texts as well as characters. These lines are absent entirely from Q1; F speaks of "My name" (following a period after "proofè") whereas Q2 speaks of "her name" (following a colon after "proofè")

The variation between F and Q2 may be an unconscious underwriting, on the part of an anonymous editor, of Othello's substantiation of his own name through Desdemona's name. Her name is his name.

Meanwhile, the other grounding of his self-uncertainty, which grounding Othello needs increasingly to hold onto even as it indicts him, is his own black face. Othello's recognition of his blackness unconsciously subsumes all the mythological baggage that goes with it; he summons up vengeance with "Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell" (3.3.454; my emphasis).

Even after he has killed Desdemona, her whiteness indicts him:

Now: how dost thou look now? O ill-starr'd wench,
Pale as thy smock, when we shall meet at count,
This look of thine will hurl me from heaven,
And fiends will snatch at it (5.2.273-6)

Desdemona's paleness makes Othello the blacker devil. Othello has fully internalized the notion that white embodies heaven, dark embodies hell. That Desdemona, who seemed to be fair outside and foul inside, turns out to be all white, and that Othello, whose name was as fresh and white as the moon although his face was black, turns out to be hell material, only confirms Othello's faith in the art of telling the mind's construction on the face.

Some of the most effective work of constructing Othello's mind based on his black face occurs quite undeliberately and unconsciously, and sometimes out of attempts to do just the opposite. Desdemona, trying to account for her love for Othello, says "I saw Othello's visage in his mind" (1.3. 252). Many critics have pointed out the implicit racism in Desdemona's intended assertion of the irrelevance of race to her love. They would read the line as "I saw Othello's visage in his mind." This reading accords well with a white stage-Othello who may seem black on the outside but is really white on the inside. Skin color, when it is dark, is something external and "made up." But at the same time, skin color, when white, is internal, and implicitly the normative or "true" color. But the line could also be read, as Cavell suggests, as "I saw Othello's visage in his mind," as in, I saw what his blackness means to Othello, what his facial features look like to him, the royal bone structure and years of servitude and command etched onto them, which the Venetians do not see but cover over with their own meanings. In the first reading, Desdemona projects Venetian values onto Othello's visage in discounting that visage. In the second reading, Desdemona steps outside the ideology in which she was raised and enters Othello's. The first colonizes Othello's mind, and appropriates his visage; the seconds grants him a subjectivity and a difference which is not an opposition. The first sets up simple polarities between white and black and between mind and body
(indeed between white mind and black body). The second destabilizes these polarities; it suggests that all of these terms change meaning with changing contexts, that neither mind nor body is more basic than the other, and that indeed the two signify for and against each other. But is it possible to sustain, or even achieve, the second type of empathetic understanding? It seems to me that empathy and projection are necessarily intertwined, even when we love the other as much as or more than ourselves; even when—especially when—we love the other so much we feel, at moments, one with them. Not only will Desdemona oscillate between these two responses to Othello's otherness throughout the play, but he will similarly oscillate in his reaction to her female otherness.

Racism persists in the most intimate relations of love between lovers of different (and the same) races because it exists in the most intimate structures of our language and signifying systems. Often it catches us most in our lightest moments, in jokes, for example, when we let our guards down. In 2.1, when Desdemona lands on Cyprus after the storm and waits anxiously to learn if her husband has survived, she asks Iago for some "merry" rhymes about herself to take her mind off her worries. After Iago praises her for being "fair and wise," Desdemona asks for a rhyming couplet on the woman who is "black and witty." Following that, she asks "how if fair and foolish." Finally, when the only combination remaining is black and foolish, Desdemona asks of "her that's foul and foolish." By implication, "black" is synonymous with "foul." Desdemona calls Iago's aphorisms "old fond paradoxes to make fools laugh i' the alehouse," and critics often feel the same. But these aphorisms also lay bare, in statements so obvious as to be overlooked, the cooperation and cooptation of racism and misogyny:

If she be fair and wise, fairness and wit;
The one's for use, the other using it (129-30)
If she be black, and thereto have a wit,
She'll find a white, that shall her blackness hit. (132-3)

She never yet was foolish, that was fair,
For even her folly help'd her, to an heir (136-7)

There's none so foul, and foolish thereunto,
But does foul pranks, which fair and wise ones do (141-2)

Even as these epigrams claim cynically that fairness and blackness are alike sexually prolific, they reinstate chastity and fairness as the highest attributes of a woman.

Throughout Othello, praises of Desdemona's fairness abound, and silently accuse Othello of foulness. Perhaps most disturbing is when Othello himself praises Desdemona's fairness. We have seen how Othello unconsciously internalizes the language associating blackness and foulness. His praise of Desdemona's fairness accuses himself. Before he ever calls her by her name, Othello refers to Desdemona as "this fair lady" (1.3.125). When Othello lists Desdemona's virtues, "fair" comes first:

'tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well;
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous (3.3.187-90)

Yet in spite of this disavowal, saying his wife is fair makes Othello, if not jealous, then certainly vulnerable to hints that Desdemona may no longer delight to look on him. But instead of questioning the unfair associations between fairness and virtue, blackness and foulness, he continues to buy into the language of racism and to alienate himself. He laments his loss of Desdemona, whom he eulogizes as "a fine woman, a fair woman, a
sweet woman!" (4.1.174-5), as if "fine," "fair," and "sweet" were contiguous attributes on a chain of feminine virtues. The more naturalized fairness as a sign of purity becomes, the more it polarizes as diametrical opposites of fairness both Othello's blackness and Desdemona's alleged difference from her apparent fairness. Her bodily fairness now signifies both Othello's foulness and her own. Her fairness now signifies its opposite:

O thou black weed, why art so lovely fair?

Thou smell'st so sweet, that the sense aches at thee,

Would thou hadst ne'er been born! (4.2.69-71)

Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,

Made to write 'whore' on? (70-1)

Othello complies with a system which makes fairness and blackness seem grounded in bodies, yet which abstracts these qualities from individual bodies so as to condemn these bodies. The ideal of whiteness kills both the dark-skinned man who seems to physicalize its opposite, and the white woman given the social responsibility of bearing on her body the sight and site of white supremacy. Othello consecrates the ideal to the extent that he kills the woman it implicitly condemns as its polar opposite, but suffocates or strangles her so as not to "scar that whiter skin of hers than snow, / And smooth, as monumental alabaster" (5.2.4-5). These lines come from Othello's famous "put out the light " speech at the beginning of the final scene:

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,

Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars:

It is the cause, yet I'll not shed her blood,

Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow

And smooth, as monumental alabaster;

Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
After exalting her white, smooth skin, Othello says "yet she must die;" the way he presents the evidence for his "cause," though, suggests "therefore she must die." She must die because of her ideally white skin. Though Othello consciously denies racial anxieties and proclaims himself rather to be representing the (white) Venetian patriarchy, he punishes her in part for representing the system of morally loaded racial classifications so unfair to him.¹⁸

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There is nothing natural and inevitable about racial classifications; they require hard work, extensive repetitions, and meticulous surveillance to produce and maintain, and this discursive reproduction is accomplished even when -- especially when -- unseen and unintended by those of us who write and utter them. Similar to the emphatic repetitions of "black" and "white," metaphors which both drum the moral significations of race into our unconsciousness through language and deaden the metaphors and our sensitivity to them, structures of naming can imperceptibly inject racism into seemingly innocent or even empathetic exchanges. Iago makes the Moor "the Moor," in part, by naming him so. Throughout the first two scenes, "Othello" is never named as such, but only as "the Moor," "his Moorship," or more derogatory references to his geographical origins or to those physical characteristics specifically different from Caucasian ("the thick-lips"). Though Othello is hotly discussed in the first two scenes, his name is unspoken until 1.3.48 when the Duke calls him "valiant Othello." This renaming of Othello is politically strategic; it is vital for the Duke to reclassify his general when the enemy Turks are invading Cyprus. "Valiant" emphasizes Othello's military prowess, and the individualized name Othello makes the man a familiar of the Venetian state, and not a foreigner like "the Turk." Throughout 1.3, the Duke--himself identified only by his function to the state--almost consistently calls Othello "Othello." Other characters oscillate among "Othello," "the Moor," and "the general." Iago finds it expedient to emphasize the
otherness and non-individuality of Othello; he reduces Othello to a body which in a few specific ways differs from the bodies of the Venetian brothers of the state. The Duke finds it more expedient to name Othello an insider to Venice and (hence) an individual. Desdemona first calls her husband "the Moor my lord" (1.3.189). This phrase encapsulates Othello's bifurcated position as other and brother to the Venetian patriarchy. The full title of Shakespeare's play is "The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice." In "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark" and "Cymbeline King of Britaine," the epithet following the protagonist's proper name identifies his social position and political occupation. But Othello's political occupation as Venetian general does not coincide with his social position as the Moor. "Prince of Denmark" and "King of Britaine" are unambiguously informative epithets. "The Moor of Venice" is an oxymoron; it suggests a person of North Africa of Venice. "Othello, the Moor of Venice" identifies Othello's essential non-identity, his ambiguously multiple entitlements. Nor does it identify Othello as either "the general" or "a Moor," but as "the Moor." "Of Venice" suggests both from Venice and possessed by Venice, Venice's Moor. The play's full title enacts in miniature Othello's displacement from a seemingly individualized subjectivity to an embodiment of Moorishness.

The reduction of the individual body to a sign (e.g. "blackness") which is posed as a pure referent, the body-itself, denies individuality to the individual. "The Moor" stands for all Moors. The Turkish people, similarly, are repeatedly synecdoched as "the Turk." In Act One scene three, all three major patriarchs present—1 Senator (lines 20,22,27), Brabantio (210), and the Duke (221)—reduce the entire Turkish government and navy to "the Turk." Othello is the only one who pluralizes "the Ottomites" (234). Ironically, in this scene, Othello, the general, is sent to fight "the general enemy Ottoman" (49). This hint of equation between "general" and "Ottoman" reinforces the Venetian senators' compulsion to simplify Turks to "the Turk," and the plurality of ethnicities,
genders, races, and class peopling the Ottoman Empire to one "general enemy." Norman Sanders annotates "general" as "universal (because anti-Christian)" 9. Othello, a man of many similarities to and differences from those around him, comes to act as "the general," universal pagan.

Act One, underneath its idealization of Othello, frames him as "the Turk"--the alien, the invader, the pagan thief. In 1.2, Othello expects Brabantio and his mob to arrive; instead Cassio and officers approach to bring Othello to the Duke for instructions on the upcoming battle. Just as Othello prepares to go with Cassio, Brabantio and officers arrive to bring Othello to the Duke as a "foul thief." 1.3 opens with a confusion of reports and messages concerning the size and location of the Turks, so distressingly changeable in their wills. As the Senators discuss "the Turk," enter "the Moor." After the Duke and Senators hear the argument of Othello, Brabantio, and Desdemona, and the Duke advises Brabantio to accept his fate smilingly, Brabantio counters with

So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile,

We lose it not so long as we can smile; (210-11)

In Brabantio's sarcastic analogy, Brabantio corresponds to "us," the Venetian brothers of the state; Desdemona aligns with Cyprus, both of whom have been "beguil'd" (66) by "the Turk" / "the Moor". By this analogy, Othello the Turk is going to Cyprus to fight himself. Brabantio's shunning of the Moor has less to do with his being specifically a Moor than with his being a non-European, a "general enemy."

There are no Turks per se in Othello. The Turks never arrive at Cyprus, but are deus ex machina swept away by a tempest magically appearing as if conjured by Prospero. "The Turk," nevertheless, hovers the outskirts of Venice and Cyprus in the Venetian discourse as a sign of disorder, chaos, anarchy, untruth, un-Venetian activities. Othello himself, allying himself with the Christian Venetians, adopts this semantic use of the pagan Turks. He shames the brawling Cassio and Montano with:
Are we turn'd Turks, and to ourselves do that
Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?

For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl (2.3.161-3)

By calling the discord Turkish, even though done by Venetians, Othello conserves and even confirms the Venetian bestialization of Turks, and negates the violence within the Venetians. "Turks" clearly no longer refers to other people but to a self-destructive violence within the Venetian character which needs to be cast out. Like Othello, the other Venetians are both "Christian" and "barbarous." Unlike Othello, they can cast off the "barbarian" in them for (i.e. in exchange for) Christian shame. Othello, though he tries to play the Christian, can never step outside of his role of other within the Venetian syntax.

Iago, particularly, exploits the symbology of Orientalism. Invoking racism to displace class frustration, Iago makes "the Moor" appear as eastern, exotic, superstitious, irrational, and primitive as possible. Painting his difference from Othello, he introduces into Brabantio's mind the idea that Othello has used witchcraft to charm Desdemona. Brabantio takes up this idea, and it spreads to Othello and other characters. Iago himself charms with his tongue. He can subtly plant an image which then flourishes unconsciously on the lips of all around him. In orientalizing Othello as a conjurer and charmer, then, Iago makes himself into a mirror-image of the image he is making; he conjures up the image of Othello as conjurer. Not that Iago is the real witch, the embodiment of evil in this play, as the critical tradition of Coleridge and Bradley would have it, but rather that Iago's mirroring of the occultist activity he describes should call into question his whole orientalist enterprise. Iago's witchcraft means he crafts witches. But Iago is not alone. He succeeds so well because he plays on receptive sites already present in the Venetian ideology. Ideologies themselves work like Brabantio's fantasized drugs or charms, working on a human being without that human being's conscious awareness of their presence.
Othello, orientalized as general enemy Ottomite not only by Iago and the Senators but also by himself and by the structure of the play, begins as uncomposed as the news of the Turkish fleet. The Duke laments of these reports at the start of 1.3 that "There is no composition in these news, / That gives them credit" (1-2). "Composition" is most frequently annotated as something like "consistency." What gives credit to an identity is its being composed as an identity, as a unity. It's not so much the single point of unity itself, to which all the signs point, as that all these signs converge, which makes the entity legitimate. Othello seems to comprehend this when, himself about to be apprehended by Brabantio's officers, offers himself as a set of unidirectional signs:

... I must be found:

My parts, my title, and my perfect soul,

Shall manifest me rightly (1.2.30-32)

One often thinks of parts (body parts and roles in plays) as manifestations; but for Othello, even his "perfect soul" is a manifestation of some more basic "me." But what is this "me," if not the sum of parts and title, or even soul? And is the "I" who "must be found" the same as the "me" to be manifested? I would suggest that Othello acutely feels the unfoundedness of his "I." His parts, title, "soul," visage, occupation point in as many different directions as the stories he tells Desdemona. Privileged by gender and occupation, marginalized by race and ethnicity, his class entirely undefined, he lacks a single composition. His identity resembles the pastiche of adventures he dilates to Desdemona. This lack of composition makes him vulnerable to the simplicity of Iago's classifications. He needs an identity; "I must be found."

It's not that the Venetians possess the stable "I" which Othello lacks, but that Othello's lack is more manifest(able). His extreme internal division, his non-identity with himself, echoes Iago's. Standing apart from and practically jumping out of the "high music" are lines which are extremely simple grammatically, but which conceptually put their subjects
under erasure. Desdemona's "My lord is not my lord" (3.4.121), in its context, implies My lord is not behaving today as his past behaviors gave me grounds to expect him to behave. But it harkens back to one of the most haunting lines of the play, Iago's "I am not what I am." And these recall those other lines which haunt, lines which seem never to be quite explained away by the language of appearance vs. reality:

Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago (1.1.57)

That's he that was Othello; here I am. (5.2.285)

When this last line is spoken (by whom? "Othello"? "the Moor"? "the general"? "he"? "I"?), "Othello" is no longer identical to "I." Has Othello's "I" been found? Or does "Othello" now believe what Iago and others have been catechizing, that his "I" is more "the Moor" than "Othello"? His found "I," then, would be a found object already present in orientalizing, xenophobic, colonizing Venice, and naturalized onto Othello's body through references to skin color. Othello's identity, though, seems to me more poignantly lost than ever. Throughout the play, Othello's response to Iago's "poison"—Iago's attempts to marginalize and degrade Othello—is to alienate himself. He tells Iago to "leave me, Iago" (3.3.244), and Desdemona "To leave me but a little to myself" (3.3.86). I read these in a strong, self-alienated sense, in which Othello graspingly pleads to hold onto the little left of himself. He pleads "Leave me, Iago;" strip away my parts, my title, my occupation, my wife, but leave me with at least a sense of a core identity.

But this remnant of identity is not to be. Othello occupies a nominal position which classifies its nouns into subjects or objects and as first, second, or third person. Within Venetian ideology, he both achieves a subject-ive "I" and becomes a subjected "him." This is Althusser's formulation for how ideology works to make its subjects feel most subjective when they are most subjected. Hence people may enthusiastically support a system which oppresses them. In Othello the internal divisions are more visible and
audible as his very syntax betrays itself. Othello enacts the self-divisions necessary to the workings of Venetian ideology -- and hence perpetuates it.

But Othello is trying to occupy a subject-position (itself inherently objectifying) in an ideology which acts upon the east as its object. Othello does not question -- and even strongly supports-- the system which orientalizes; the orientalizing of the Turks empowers him as Venetian general. The Orientalizing of himself -- and even his self-orientalizing -- may to some extent actually empower him.

In his representation of his "travel's history" to Desdemona, and in his re-presentation of this representation before the Senate, Othello exoticizes his adventures, and by identification, exoticizes himself. He begins before the Senate in formal, general, and latinate multisyllabic language:

Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field;
Of hair-breadth scapes i'th'imminent deadly breach;
Of being taken by the insolent foe;
And sold to slavery, and my redemption thence,
And with it all my travel's history:
Wherein of antres vast, and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks and hills, whose heads touch heaven,
It was my hint to speak, such was the process: (1.3.134-142)

This is all broad and general, and Senate-like in diction. But just when we think he is closing up his narrative ("such was the process"), he seems to get into it, and adds three more lines, after the seemingly final summation, as if he couldn't bear to leave them out:

And of the Cannibals, that each other eat;
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders
Instead of an unnamed "insolent foe," we get here particularized bodies. Instead of the rhetorically ornate but viscerally empty "disastrous chances" and "moving accidents," we are suddenly faced with the blunt "that each other eat." It is this latter image that seems most to incite the auditors of the story to defensiveness and identification, and to fear and delight. Certainly Othello identifies with Desdemona in his representation of her "inclination" towards "this to hear" (the "this" to which Desdemona "would . . . seriously incline" to hear seems to refer to the entire story, but most specifically to the last three lines immediately preceding the "this"); Desdemona would "with a greedy ear / Devour up my discourse" (149-50). In Othello's discourse, Desdemona enact on Othello -- or on his discourse--the cannibalism he describes; she cannibalizes his discourse of cannibalism.

In between these bouts of auditory cannibalism, "the house-affairs would call her thence," and she would oscillate between "feminine" domesticity and "masculine" danger. Her retreats into domesticity increase the otherness and the attractions of Othello's worldly adventures, and at the same time increase her desire for them and identification with them. I will consider Desdemona's relation to Othello below; for now, I want simply to point out how, even if Othello wants to or thinks he does stand in opposition to the cast of deadly foes, cannibals, and anthropophagi, his reading of Desdemona's reading of him reflects (on) her identification of him with his "opponents," as well as her identification with him through his opponents:

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd,

And I lov'd her that she did pity them.

Not "she loved me for having passed the dangers," nor quite "she loved the dangers." The main clauses of these lines are "she loved me . . . and I loved her." And yet these two chiasmic assertions can't quite stand on their own without being qualified by otherness.
Their loves for each other are based on both identification with and polar attractions to each other, and on both fear and delight.

When Brabantio says that Othello is "a thing . . . to fear, not to delight," he takes as given that fear and delight are mutually exclusive, rather than potentially generative of each other. But in embodying both the Venetian state and its other, Othello stages at the site of his own body the battle between two forces which mutually try to exclude each other. In his final moments he returns to the kind of self-dramatization which re-enacts, in its complex weave of oppositions and identifications. When Othello says "I took by the throat the circumcised dog / And smote him thus" (5.2.356-7), the "I" who stabs "him" stabs also "I." Othello dramatizes through suicide his internal divisions as both "Turk" (Oriental) and "Christian," both pagan and civilized, both black and white, both "base" and noble; and in doing so he enacts on his body the contradictions of the culture he has assimilated.

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In the headnote to this chapter, Ellen Terry's need to protect her Desdemona from the dark stains of Henry Irving's Othello re-enacts the complex way in which racism and misogyny re-enforce each other within the play. As in the case of racism, misogyny (and its concomitant idealization of women) succeeds so effectively because it imposes abstractions onto a woman's body and then posits this body as the natural progenitor of the abstractions. At the same time, the embodiments these women thereby acquire both conflict with and create the women's "own" bodies. Many characters of the play, male and female, anxiously feminize females; they charge the anatomically female body with social significance, and teach this female body to adopt these significations as its own. We have seen how the steady stream of "fair" epithets act to make Desdemona fair, to cast her into the role of fair maiden.
Likewise, in the structure of the play, the meanings of the female figure appear before the body does. Before Desdemona appears onstage, she is already represented as the embodiment of femininity. We hear from Brabantio that she is "a maid, so tender, fair, and happy" (1.2.66) and

A maiden never bold of spirit,
So still and quiet, that her motion
Blush'd at her self (1.3.94-6)

Brabantio seems to contradict himself; how can her "spirit" be so serene and at the same time blush at her "motion"? (And note, in the midst of Brabantio's assertions of Desdemona's complete lack of sexuality, are the sexually charged words "spirit" and "motion"). Brabantio avoids contradiction by attributing her blushes to nature, and classifying that in herself at which she blushes as "against all rules of nature." Her motion is not her self but other to her self. Brabantio classifies her "boldness," and specifically attraction to someone so different in years, country, and credit, as a product of witchcraft, and in the process of protecting Desdemona from unnatural blackening he naturalizes racism:

and she, in spite of nature,
Of years, of country, credit, everything,
To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on?
It is a judgement main'd and most imperfect,
That will confess perfection so would err
Against all rules of nature, and must be driven
To find out practices of cunning hell
Why this should be; I therefore vouch again,
That with some mixtures powerful o'er the blood,
Or with some dram conjur'd to this effect,
He wrought upon her.  

(1.3.96-106)

For the Brabantios of Venice, Desdemona's erring from the feminine ideal condemns Othello as a witch.

The feminine paragon, and in particular the idealized body of the Venetian lady, is used as both the ultimate symbol and verification of nature and the ultimate legitimator and guarantor of social stability. Othello says of Desdemona "Excellent wretch, perdition catch my soul, / But I do love thee, and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again." (3.3.91-3). If Desdemona orientalizes Othello, Othello feminizes Desdemona. If he embodies for her the promise of adventure, exoticism, entropic nature ("rough quarries, rocks and hills, whose heads touch heaven"), and all that stands against her enforced domesticity, she embodies for him the Love which keeps Othello from disorder. Such a mystification of woman both abstracts women into social meanings and insists on the physical presence of their bodies. Women's bodies, like "dark" bodies, are social bodies. Their bodies become highly sexualized even as this sexuality is denied. On the one hand, Cassio figures the sexual union of Othello and Desdemona as the redemption of "us".2 3

Great Jove, Othello guard,

And swell his sail with thine own powerful breath,
That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,
And swiftly come to Desdemona's arms,
Give renew'd fire to our extincted spirits,
And bring all Cyprus comfort.  

(2.1.77-82)

Othello and Desdemona, as the saviours of "us," are both the paragons of "us" and other to "us." Desdemona's sexuality, with Othello's, becomes highly charged with social significance. It will fertilize the super-civilized Venetians. On the other hand, Edward Snow and Stephen Greenblatt show how Desdemona's virginity symbolizes the
intactness of Christian patriarchy, while her loss of virginity, even within a "legitimate" marriage, points to a large-scale social transgression. The anxieties which Iago plays on, Snow and Greenblatt suggest, are not (or are not only) the jealousy and shame of knowing one's wife to be sexually active with another man, but (on a more unconscious level) the sin of sexually arousing and deflowering one's own wife. Iago asks Othello "where's that palace, whereinto foul things / Sometimes intrude not?" (3.3.141-2).

Remember that in his witty rhymes, he has already set up his adjective "foul" to signify simultaneously "black", sinful, sexually transgressive, and ugly. Othello's penetration of Desdemona engenders, in Othello's Christianized mind, disorder and bestiality, and he becomes an easy prey to Iago's metaphors of Desdemona's darkened, blackened, befouled condition.

Socially marginalized groups in Othello -- women, cultural aliens, working classes-- locate their own marginalization and that of others on bodies. Instead of contesting a social system which naturalizes various forms of oppression onto the body and then mystifies the body as the originary progenitor of its semantic functions, they support and re-enforce this system. "Femininity" becomes a way to enforce class as well and racial inequalities. The Duke sends Othello to Cyprus even though a capable governor, Montano, is already there, because "opinion, a sovereign mistress of effects, throws a more safer voice on" Othello (1.3.224-6). The noble lady, or "sovereign mistress," personifies opinion. Not only does femininity stand for patriarchal stability, but individual women bear the figurations of the class levels of the men associated with them. Women bear the names, or reputations, of men. Iago works on Othello not only by leading Othello to mistrust Desdemona of adultery but by loading adultery with social significance. "Good name in man and woman's dear, my lord," Iago catechizes Othello, "Is the immediate jewel of our souls" (3.3.156-7). (Again, the textual shifting of shifters ("our soules": Q1, "their Soules": F; "our soules": Q2) mimics both the dependence of the
patriarchal class/gender system on women's complicity in it, and the continual slippage of women's subjectedness into subjectionhood. Women are both the signifying jewels of male possession, the groundings of their souls, and the possessors of souls grounded in man's good name. Desdemona is many times in the play figured as a jewel. Brabantio calls her "jewel" (1.3.195). Othello compares her to the pearl thrown away by "the base Indian/Iudean," and he values his world with Desdemona, or perhaps Desdemona herself, more than "one entire and perfect chrysolite" (5.2.146). Desdemona is, in a sense, Othello's good name and immediate jewel. In this scene, the imagery of "robbing" recurs over several hundred lines, and in the process the object robbed slips from "good name" to Desdemona (3.3.339-486). Desdemona is the embodiment of Othello's good name; his (and her) social positions are dramatized and effected through her sexual positions. When she seemingly strays from the "general" to "the general camp" (3.3.346), she deprives Othello of his military position, and he feels his "occupation" gone.

Sometimes the most damaging forms of objectification come in the form of praise. This is the case with Othello's eulogy:

    nay, had she been true,

    If heaven would make me such another world,

    Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,

    I'd not have sold her for it.  (5.2.144-7)

What Othello says in praise of Desdemona bewhores her; although he denies that he would sell her, his language figures her as a purchase, a thing to be treasured or sold. Like Desdemona's handkerchief whose "pattern" Cassio wants "taken out," Desdemona's inert, sleeping body is the "cunning pattern of excelling nature" (5.2.11). Her body is a work of art and a work of nature; something represented which represents. It serves as a pattern, paragon, or paradigm.
But that other pattern, the handkerchief, changes owners as it is handed down from class to class. It passes from the divinely touched sibyl to Othello’s royal parents to the aristocratic household of Brabantio and Desdemona to the waiting woman and ensign to the courtesan, marking as well as destabilizing the system of ownership on which class demarcations are based. Carol Thomas Neely sees the handkerchief as “a symbol of woman’s civilizing power,” a power whose source is “in women’s intuitive knowledge [that] enables them to use and control sexuality.” It follows for her that “the handkerchief then represents sexuality controlled by chastity.” I share Neely’s desire for readings that empower women rather than hammer home their subordination. But in this case it is critical to see that “woman’s civilizing power” or women’s “sexuality controlled by chastity” are themselves symbols which may actually disempower women. If the handkerchief symbolizes women’s “power,” it is a power effected through their objectification. To the extent that the handkerchief does represent a disembodied “women’s power” or women’s sexuality — or even Desdemona’s body — it represents more the representationality of power, sexuality, and the body. The objects of symbolization are themselves symbols, and symbols whose meaning changes. In Neely’s own discourse the handkerchief’s meaning slides from women’s power to women’s knowledge to women’s sexuality: whatever power it endows women with is obviously a very contingent one. When the handkerchief leaves Desdemona’s hand, it shifts from empowering to indicting her. Newman calls the handkerchief “a snowballing signifier,” which, as it passes from hand to hand, “accumulates myriad associations and meanings.”

The way Desdemona’s body and Desdemona’s handkerchief change meaning as they change context makes vulnerable the “owners” who depend on them for social ratification. Desdemona’s right to “ownership” of her own body is figured through her
ownership of her handkerchief (the sign of her possession) and her right to hand it to others:

IAGO  But if I give my wife a handkerchief--

OTHELLO  What then?

IAGO  Why then 'tis hers, my lord, and being hers,

She may, I think, bestow't on any man.

OTHELLO  She is protectress of her honour too,

May she give that?

IAGO  Her honour is an essence that's not seen,

They have it very oft that have it not:

But for the handkerchief-- (4.1.10-18)

Iago directs Othello back from honor, "an essence that's not seen," to the visible handkerchief, and from Desdemona to her ocularly provable sexual actions. At this time in England, "a woman's legal right to hold and dispose of her own property was limited to what she could specifically lay claim to in a marriage contract."² ⁶ Is a woman's body property? If so, may she bestow it on any man, as Bianca allegedly does? Bianca, as Iago matter-of-factly puts it, is "A housewife that by selling her desires / Buys herself bread and clothes" (4.1.94-5). Characters seem to be scandalized by her selling of her body. But perhaps what appals them most is that she owns her body at all, that she so openly declares it an object for barter, and hence that she boldly dramatizes the commodification of women, a commodification whose existence yet simultaneous invisibility are necessary for both patriarchal and class conservation.

The Venetians condemn Bianca for commodifying her body, but the "traffic in women" is not simply a criminal fluke specific to Othello and Iago, but a basis of patriarchy.² ⁷ Even the ultimate Good Father of the play, so un-individualized a representative of the patriarchal "brothers of the state" that he is simply called "the Duke,"
doesn't question Brabantio's shaping of his grief over the loss of Desdemona in the language of robbery. Rather, in his aphoristic heroic couplets ("The robb'd that smiles, steals something from the thief, / He robs himself, that spends a bootless grief" (1.3.208-9)), he even shares Brabantio's imagery of property theft. Both Desdemona and Bianca function as objectified commodities.

Indeed, different as Desdemona and Bianca are, they are by no means polar opposites, as many characters of the play, including Desdemona, and especially Emilia, would have it. Bianca's name sets her up for a comparison with Desdemona. While Desdemona is continually hailed as "fair," Bianca is the one whose name means "white." Structurally, too, Bianca and Desdemona occupy similar positions. Both, as they appear onstage, seem to be committed to monogamy (Bianca onstage is absolutely faithful to and doting on Cassio), but both are labelled whores. As Desdemona and Bianca never appear onstage simultaneously, it is a personal fantasy of mine to cast the same actor in both parts. (This would demand only one dauntingly fast costume change.) At any rate, when Iago asks Cassio about Bianca, Othello thinks Cassio is talking about Desdemona, so that in Iago's staged charade, Bianca in a sense does play Desdemona. The structure of the play at several points places Desdemona in the position of prostitute. Cassio's "suit" to Emilia, "that she will to virtuous Desdemona / Procure me some access" (3.1.34-6), structures Emilia as procurer and Desdemona as prostitute. Iago encourages Roderigo by assuring him "thou shalt enjoy [Desdemona]; therefore make money" (1.3.358-9); here Iago acts as pimp, Desdemona stands as whore, and Roderigo is the john. And of course in the "brothel" scene (4.2) Othello calls Emilia procurer to Desdemona. While the Q1 version of Othello's account of Desdemona's response to his stories -- "She gaue me for my paines a world of sighes" (I,iii,159) -- is nearly always chosen by editors and dramaturgs, F reads "She gaue me for my paines a world of kisses." Desdemona's
exchange of sexual favors for other goods is more subtle than Bianca's but insistently repeated by the structure of *Othello*.

Desdemona insists on her absolute difference from the prostitution Bianca comes to represent:

I cannot say 'whore':

It does abhor me now I speak the word (4.2.163-4)

Desdemona's play on whore/abhor undermines her denial. If merely speaking the word "whore" makes her one, if whorenness is transmitted through language, if the subject speaking becomes the object spoken without ever actually engaging in "unauthorized" sex, then prostitution has as much to do with one's position within the Venetian social syntax as with physically acting it out.

More interesting to me than the differences between Desdemona and Bianca are the ways in which Desdemona and Bianca differ from Emilia. Emilia, the other woman of the play, midway between the leisured class and the working class, provides interesting commentaries on the sexual class-ification of women. Often hailed as "feminist" or "proto-feminist," Emilia nevertheless rigidly abhors Bianca's working-class sexuality. In the "willow scene," 4.3, when Desdemona asks Emilia if women really do "abuse their husbands / In such gross kind," the abuse seems at first to be adultery. But when Desdemona asks "Wouldst thou do such a deed, for all the world?," and Emilia takes Desdemona's idiomatic expression literally with "The world is a huge thing, it is a great price, / For a small vice" (61-9), the gross deed in question seems to be sex in exchange for material payment. The issues are muddled since the "deed" involves the exchange of adulterous sexual intercourse for payment, but Emilia sees no absolute wrong with either "wrong." It is rather a matter of material level than of principle:

... marry, I would not do such a thing for a joint-ring; nor for measures of lawn, nor for gowns, or petticoats, nor caps, nor any petty exhibition; but, for the whole
world? 'ud's pity, who would not make her husband a cuckold, to make him a monarch? (71-5)

Though Emilia conflates prostitution and promiscuity, she implies here that prostitution accompanied by a generous enough material recompense is superior to promiscuity with no or only petty recompense. Emilia soon switches to verse to complain how husbands do abuse their wives in such gross kind, and to assert that wives have sense like their husbands; "they see, and smell, / And have their palates both for sweet, and sour, / As husbands have (4.3.93-6). What I find more interesting in this scene than Emilia's assertion of equal opportunity for extramarital affairs, though, is Emilia's demystification of sexuality. While she acknowledges that female sexuality for pay and pleasure is "a wrong i' the world," it is only a wrong in the world immediately before them, not in any absolute sense; "and having the world for your labour, 'tis a wrong in your own world, and you might quickly make it right" (4.3.79-82). In another world, the wrong might just as easily be a right. Under the protection of self-derision, these throwaway quips offer some of the most radical statements about sexuality in this play: it's not that big a deal. Bigger than measures of lawn, gowns, petticoats, or caps, or any petty exhibition, but much smaller than "the whole world." It can be very sweet and very sour, but why should it signify the state of the world?

Emilia lists petty items which she scorns as improper motives for whoring but in exchange for which some women, such as perhaps Bianca, do need to labor; this listing points to one answer to why a society would endow sexuality with such a heavy burden of signification. In addition to producing gender hierarchies, sexual codes are instrumental in engendering and maintaining class hierarchies. Although Emilia has indicated her own inclination towards adultery with material reimbursement, she embraces the standards of fair virgin princess when confronted with Bianca:
EMILIA  Fie, fie upon thee, strumpet!

BIANCA  I am no strumpet, but of life as honest  

    As you, that thus abuse me.

EMILIA    As I? faugh, fie upon thee!  (5.1.120-2)

Bianca seems genuinely outraged and taken aback; and indeed, from what we see  
onstage, Bianca is more "honest" -- more submissive and monogamous with her man --  
than Emilia. Still, this later treatment of Bianca does not nullify Emilia's earlier  
demystification of monogamy and sexuality. Sexuality, Emilia both implies and  
dramatizes, acts as a disciplinary mechanism in a Foucauldian sense. Class, race, and  
gender are defined and focused at the site of sexuality.

These three terms of classification may be defined simultaneously. Every act of sexual  
intercourse described in the play is heterosexual and man-on-top. The sexual act  
emblematizes social position. The many references to Desdemona's being "topped" take  
for granted that Desdemona will always be "on the bottom," that to be on the bottom in  
the sex act is to be dominated, and that power structures played out in sexual symbolism  
are unproblematically identical with social power structures. And since a husband's  
social position is defined by his wife's sexual positions, the topping of Desdemona  
signifies the topping of her lord and master. When Iago conjures up the image of "an old  
black ram / ... tuppin [sometimes emended to "tapping" ] [Brabantio's] white ewe" (  
1.1.88-9), Brabantio, as if hearing "you" for "ewe," sees himself being topped. Iago's  
 wonderfully efficient image of Brabantio's "daughter covered with a Barbary horse"  
objectifies the bodies of both Desdemona and Othello as signs of social revolt, equates  
Desdemona's being sexually active as necessarily being subordinated, and envisages  
Othello's body as both bestial and barbaric. Later Iago evokes in Othello's mind the  
image of watching the image of one's own topping. When Othello asks for "ocular  
proof," Iago complies with this image:
Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on,
Behold her topp'd? (3.3.401-2)

Othello clings to this image, and endows Cassio with the active subject position: "Cassio did top her" (5.2.137). This line is Othello's justification for his murder of Desdemona. Not she was a whore, she actively engaged in an adulterous affair, she copulated, but Cassio did top her. The intercourse, for which not Desdemona but her body becomes medium and sign, occurs between two men. Cassio did top Othello via Desdemona's body. I would imagine the image of Desdemona on top, or some other yet more aberrant position, would be even more unsettling to Desdemona's lords, as would lesbian acts between, say, Desdemona and Emilia, but at any rate these images do not, could not even occur to Othello's patriarchs, nor, probably, to Desdemona, Emilia, or even Bianca. That the sexual body is so fraught with social meaning that it becomes almost a co-requisite of social rank underwrites Iago's suspicion that both Cassio and Othello have cuckolded him. (The very notion of a man's being cuckolded suggests that adultery is in effect an act done by one man to another.) Iago offers adultery as a motive for his hate, but in the play his hate and feelings of humiliation come first, and Emilia's adultery is offered as an afterthought, as if his feeling of humiliation is simply embodied in and associatively linked with his images of cuckoldling. Furthermore, Emilia nowhere figures in his images of her adulterous acts:

I hate the Moor,
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He's done my office (1.3.384-6)

I do suspect the lustful Moor
Hath leap'd into my seat (2.1.290-1)
(For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too) (2.1.302)

These images, smacking strongly of latent homosexual fantasies and newly ironizing Emilia's complaint that Venetian husbands "pour our treasures into foreign laps" (4.3.88), figure cuckoldry as one man's usurpation of another's patriarchal privilege. Iago takes this view to the extreme in his conflation of military and missionary positions, as in his comment that "it is thought that 'twixt my sheets / [Othello has] done my office."

Snow and Stallybrass both persuasively argue that what the men of Othello fear most is women's bodies, particularly women's sexually aroused and active bodies, which are allied with the "monstrous." I would argue further that what the men of Othello fear most about women's bodies is that these bodies are not only bodies -- physical and too solid -- but also socio-linguistic signs which can slide off of one referent and onto to another.

Characters may unconsciously conflate the dual directions in which bodies point: on the one hand, toward social meanings within the Venetian/Elizabethan significatory system, and on the other hand toward a postulated "body itself" outside of all signification. Characters may also consciously deny the conflation and insist that the body-itself is no postulate but something they tangibly experience. Othello proclaims, more to convince himself than anyone else, that

It is not words that shakes me thus.

Pish! Noses, ears and lips. (4.1.41-2)

Othello deliberately blinds himself to the embeddedness of noses, ears, and lips in discursivity. But the very extraction of noses, ears and lips from their contexts on "whole" bodies, and their association in his mind with the ejaculation "Pish!," already belies Othello's assertion of the separability of these body parts. Iago, too, poses a radical distinction between the body and its contextual significations. When Cassio laments his loss of reputation, Iago sneers "I thought you had receiv'd some bodily
wound, there is more of sense in that than in reputation" (2.3.258-60)² ⁹. Posing as great
demystifier of social codes, Iago also, and simultaneously, strengthens the ideology of
which social codes are its most blatant and detectable components; by empowering the
distinction between bodies and socio-linguistic codes, Iago enables the slippage of real
bodies into figures of speech, and the simultaneous inscription onto bodies of seemingly
non-physical ideology. Tellingly, Iago asserts the distinction between the physical sense
of pain and a sense of honor through a pun on "sense." Puns work by two or more
referents of different logical sense sharing a common oral/aural sense. In spite of the
difference of logical "sense," the two referents nevertheless rub up against each other, and
one meaning subtly slips into another. The very existence of a pun at the heart of Iago's
distinction between bodily and social senses, then, serves to belie the distinction.

Othello's and Iago's use of book and play metaphors, as well as other metaphors of
media of representation, crop up to point to what is most "the truth" or prior to
representation, and crop up to impose a structure when boundaries are most blurred.
Othello calls Desdemona a whore in such a way as to preserve the ideal of feminine
fairness which sanctifies masculine power. He does so by figuring Desdemona's body as
a blank white book upon which her transgression is written:

Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,
Made to write 'whore' upon?  (4.2.73-4)

Writing and having sex, both significatory acts, here share the same signifier. Othello
posits (at least) two bodies: Desdemona's adulterous body, the one he will kill, and her
"real," original, uninscribed body. On the one hand his metaphor sets up the latter body,
his ideal Desdemona, as preceding representation, writing, or enactment. But he figures
the pre-figured body as itself not devoid of meaning but already signifying fairness. I
have tried to show how fairness and its opposites are anxiously constructed and
indoctrinated ideological codes. Othello complies with the positing of them as belonging
to a body-itself which precedes all representation. But this body-itself can only be "had," or at least referred to, mediately. The vehicle which Othello uses to posit it could hardly be more textually inflected. Othello's metaphor of the body as paper from a book which is then written on, further enforces a temporal model of textual representation -- that there is a referent which comes first and precedes writing (or a pure body which precedes sexual penetration). Othello's metaphor makes no reference to such a referent; that which comes before writing is already a medium of writing. Even the ideal body before representation is conceived of from a representational model and then posited retrospectively.

Is this "body-itself" only represented in a representational model from which it, itself, stands apart -- or is it inextricable from, if not the very stuff of (even the product of), representation? To ask this question is already to assume the representing figure / pre-representational referent binarism which, I'm trying tentatively to argue, is inadequate to the complex web of subjects and subjectivities, psyches, ideologies, and bodies. Iago, trying to convince Roderigo that Iago's outward behavior to Othello covers a very different interior motive -- that Iago is not what he seems -- also offers a more radical blurring of the outward/interior binarism:

For when my outward action does demonstrate
The native act, and figure of my heart,
In complement extern, 'tis not long after,
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve,

For doves to peck at: I am not what I am. (1.1.61-5)

I have discussed this final statement in reference to a character's radical and "native" non-identity with(in) him- or herself. This non-identity corresponds with the "native" theatricality and textuality of one's "innermost" being. In positing a diametrical opposition between outward action and inward heart, which opposition Iago opposes to a
seamless (or seemless) continuity between outward and inward, Iago figures the inward heart in the terms of the outward figure. In the act of asserting an absolute distinction between his action and the "native act" of his heart, Iago figures even his heart as innately act and figure, dramatically and rhetorically inflected. Other critics have pointed out that Iago is all show and act, and only showing and acting, down to his core. I've been trying to suggest, though, that this is not just true of Iago, but of everyone in the play (and probably of more than a few readers and audience members), nor is the innate representationality of the heart an erratum, characteristic of a villain to be cast out, but a condition of possibility for the conception of selfhood and the ability to become a subject within a society. We sense our bodies, learn to divide them into components of skin color, motion, comportment, height, weight, and shape (etc.), and experience them as autonomous, within a socio-linguistic context. We are not what we are, or not only what we are, because our selves are themselves already acts and figures.

II

Othello is notorious for captivating audiences. In its power to compel us to believe with all our hearts in its illusions, it re-enacts, beyond the framework of the play, the fictive constructions within it. Re-presentations of the play -- in illustrations and paintings, in theatrical performances, on film, in reviews, in actors' and directors' notebooks, in promotional campaigns, in critical essays, dissertations, and classrooms -- are situated within their own ideological contexts. I am interested in the ways productions of Othello over the past couple centuries often reproduce and/or reinvent race/class/sex/gender systems strikingly similar to those within the text. I'm particularly interested in contemporary efforts to recast Othello's gynephobically-inflected racism.30

That productions of Othello again and again recast the racism and sexism which the play also critiques, can be seen in the very casting of the lead roles. It is not until the
latter half of this century that Othello has been played by a black actor in mixed casts with any regularity. Previously, the part of Othello was played by a white actor in blackface. "Othello's" blackness was carefully studied, constructed, "made up" -- applied so realistically as to make it seem the most primary, native attribute of his body.

Make-up, of course, is risky business, in part because it rubs off, as the Ellen Terry anecdote so strikingly illustrates. Not only does make-up rub off of its wearer to show what's "really" underneath, but it rubs off onto those in contact with the wearer, and rubs off onto and into the actor her/himself. An important aspect of cosmetics is to make us seem other than we are -- or, according to some advertisements, to make us be other than we are. Make-up makes attributes which are applied look and feel natural. In this way it functions as both metonym and metaphor for ideological productions of the body. Foucault argues that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, apparati of power are most powerful when they become intimate, invisible, and inescapable, and produce, rather than simply repress, the individual subjectivity of some body. "Make-up" rubs off not only as a secondary, belated substance but as the very stuff which makes us up to be who we are.

And since our identities are often none too rigidly stable, and some of our identities are unwholesomely loose, we are vulnerable to such rubbing-off. This is one of the many reasons why I find so fascinating Ellen Terry's recollection of being both protected from and besmirched with the Othello-actor's black make-up. Terry's experiences while acting Desdemona repeat Desdemona's experiences with uncanny coincidence. The more Terry and Desdemona make physical contact with Othello, the more they themselves become blackened. As I pointed out above, Karen Newman suggests that miscegenation is a cultural "aporia" reflected in Othello. I agree that miscegenation is an aporia, but it materializes throughout the play, most vividly in the final image of the bed tragically loaded with Othello, dead, upon Desdemona's dead body. But another cultural aporia --
that of black women -- does not appear onstage or in the text of Othello. A black woman in early modern English performances almost always embodied unredeemable evil, lust, malice, and bestiality. But her appearance was rare indeed; black women were for the most part conspicuously absent from English Renaissance representation (and continue for the most part to be so). Henry Irving's rubbing make-up threatens to manifest not only the whiteness under the black make-up of "the Moor" but also the even more unspeakable "Mooress" and her viscous slippage onto and into the divine Desdemona.

How does a white actor seem to be what he is not, a non-white character? Does the actor "become" black or Arabic (as some critics and actors, such as Edmund Kean, envision him)? Impersonating a character, does the actor enter the person of the character? Does the actor become the character, so that he is and is not what he is? To whom does his body belong, Othello or Edmund Kean? Is the actor's body a flag and sign of the character, a sign which is indeed but sign? Or is the actor's body also the character's body to which it refers? We know that when Othello stabs himself, Edmund Kean lives on. Doesn't he? Marvin Rosenberg relates this story:

The effort needed to create such an image was tremendous, physically as well as emotionally, marked by 'convulsed motion of the hands... involuntary swellings of the veins of the forehead.' After one performance a friend found him in the dressing room 'stretched out on a sofa, retching violently and throwing up blood. His face half washed: one side deadly pale and the other a deep copper colour.' It was not easy to be Othello.

Who was throwing up blood -- Othello or Kean, the made up half or the "real" half? Whose veins of the forehead swelled?

The image of the Janus-like bifurcated face, "one side deadly pale and the other a deep copper colour," emblematizes the internal divisions or non-identities within Othello's make-up. His blackness is as contingent and ephemeral as greasepaint. On the one hand
the half-made-up face suggests the "black on the outside, white on the inside" oreo (to use an egregiously anachronistic slang) evoked in the Duke's "Your son-in-law is far more fair than black" and possibly even Desdemona's "I saw Othello's visage in his mind." On the other hand, the image suggests that the made-up blackness is a white creation.

Both black and white actors have treated Othello's blackness as a white creation (just as, I've tried to suggest, Desdemona's femininity/fairness is a male creation). Indeed, an actor's "building" of a character pronounces the constructedness of the character. Metaphors of the "insides" and "outsides" of bodies often crop up when an actor discusses "building a character." Laurence Olivier puts it thus:

Usually in finding a character, I'm afraid I do it from the outside in. I know modern thinking decrees that you should do it from the very inside out, and that may be right, but it's not my way. I paint a portrait of the man in my mind's eye as if I were oil-painting it and say, 'That's the man.'

Olivier may take pains to become a character from the outside in, but his visualization of that character comes from his insides out, from his "mind," his "subconscious." When he describes his visualization of Othello for the 1963 production, it is so infused with both Olivier's interior and "Othello's" interior that I cannot tell which of the three came first, or indeed which is which:

I was beginning to know how I should look: very strong. He should stand as a strong man stands, with a sort of ease, straight-backed, straight-necked, relaxed as a lion. I was certain that he had to be very graceful. I was sure that when he killed in battle, he did it with absolute beauty.

Othello has to have a dark, black, violet, velvet bass voice.
A walk . . . I needed a walk. I must relax my feet . . . Walk with poise. . . . I should walk like a soft black leopard. Sensuous. He should grow from the earth, the rich brown earth, warmed by the sun. I took off my shoes and then my socks. Barefoot, I felt the movement come to me. Slowly it came: lithe, dignified and sensual. Lilting, yet positive.36

"Inside" and "outside" (like stereotypical image and reality) turn into each other; like the surfaces of a Mobius strip, interior surface becomes exterior surface, and that which is most inside the knot is also surface. In Olivier's conception of Othello, black surface is black interior; the interior is the exterior:

Black . . . I had to be black. I had to feel black down to my soul. I had to look out from a black man's world. Not one of repression, for Othello would have felt superior to the white man. If I peeled my skin, underneath would be another layer of black skin. I was to be beautiful. Quite beautiful.37

Unlike Brechtian theater, in which an actor displays his or her difference from the character he or she plays, Othello is almost universally played, in twentieth-century performances, in a highly realistic, Stanislavskian style: the actor is the character. Both Brechtian and Stanislavskian conceptions have their ironies. In a Brechtian play, I prefer to read the difference of the actor's body from the character's body as a satiric display that the attributes of our bodies and characters which seem most natural and inevitable are themselves ideological constructs and could potentially be quite otherwise than what they are. But Brechtian acting also encourages the inference of a "real" body underneath and prior to the ideologically inscribed body. One critic, for example, reads in the techniques of cross-gendered casting and dressing a visual tip-off to the disparity between socially conditioned roles and the "natural self."38 Conversely, in the Stanislavskian acting to which Olivier here implicitly subscribes, at least partially, in spite of his assertions
otherwise (he feels that Othello "was not a role of which I would be able to rid myself of when I took off my makeup"39, and experiences "moments when I think I am Othello, when I am convinced I am black"40), one could read the suggestion that the seemingly black-to-the-core Othello is nevertheless white "underneath." In this regard, I am half-tempted to read cynically Olivier's paradoxical description of himself as both inhabited by Othello and in control of Othello, both intoxicated with the power Othello's blackness gives him, and in charge of Othello's blackness. Olivier breathes into and inspires Othello, not Othello Olivier; Olivier is not possessed by, but possesses Othello (in a voice which sounds disturbingly Iago-like):

I am . . . I am, I . . . I am Othello . . . but Olivier is in charge. The actor is in control. The actor breathes into the nostrils of the character and the character comes to life. For this moment in my time, Othello is my character -- he's mine. He belongs to no one else; he belongs to me. When I sigh, he sighs. When I laugh, he laughs. When I cry, he cries.

Remember, do not show them the complete iceberg. Do not scratch behind their ears. Keep them there, riveted, until you decide to let them go. Hold them in the palm of your hand. Your pink palm. How pink it seems when framed with black. . . .41

In spite of Olivier's insistence that Olivier is in charge, in spite of his insistence that ultimate control lies in his pink (read: Caucasian) palm, his shifting use of nouns and pronouns betrays a confusion of subjects. The "I" which is "I" is also "Othello." The man in charge may be "I," but he is also he, "Olivier," "the actor." This actor (in the second paragraph) talks to himself, gives himself directions in the second person imperative mood, as if directing another. In spite of my cynical cast of mind -- and in spite of Olivier's blatant orientalizing of the Moor, whom he figures as primitive, bestial, growing from the earth -- I find myself seduced by this orgy of merging and emerging
identities, charmed and disarmed by Olivier's excitement, pride, love, engulfment in his new blackness. Olivier's description sucks me into its gorgeous racism. I quote the following passage at length, as I have those above, because I find it so sensuous as it slowly evinces my complicity:

Black all over my body, Max Factor 2880, then a lighter brown, then Negro No. 2, a stronger brown. Brown on black to give a rich mahogany. Then the great trick: that glorious half-yard of chiffon with which I polished myself all over until I shone. Pancake makeup looks powdery, and when you sweat it is apt if you're not careful to break out in little rivulets, but if you use this wonderful bit of chiffon, it gleams a smooth ebony. The lips blueberry, the tight curled wig, the white of the eyes, whiter than ever, and the black, black sheen that covered my flesh and bones, glistening in the dressing-room lights.\textsuperscript{42}

While exoticizing Othello, Olivier's narcissistic, almost auto-erotic rub-down borders curiously on transvestism, with its play of chiffon and blueberry lipstick. This conflation of cross-dressing and crossing races seems to me to encourage a readerly empathy. Those of us, black and white, who are committed to an opposition to racism, may nevertheless continually find strong strains of Orientalism in ourselves, which the sensuously exotic blackness of Olivier's Othello plays/preys upon.

Erotic attraction, which often \textit{feels} absolutely instinctual, individual, biologically driven, nevertheless sees through ideologically colored glasses. Shakespeare's Othello generally (Rymer excepted\textsuperscript{4 3}) evokes audience sympathy and support for its ill-starred lovers. Othello and Desdemona kiss, a black man and white woman kiss. We are touched, we feel warm with their kisses. Except that a black man and white woman do not kiss; rather, a black character and white character "fictionally" kiss while a white man and a white woman physically kiss. And when a black actor and a white actor kiss? Suddenly a touching fiction seems dramatically different, materialized. At least it did
when, in the 1940's, a black actor, Paul Robeson, played Othello on Broadway (with an otherwise white cast). Uta Hagen, who played Desdemona, recalls

I remember when Paul Robeson bent down for the first time to kiss his Desdemona, there was a thrill of excitement in the theatre. No black actor, believe it or not, had ever kissed a white actress on the American stage before that time. While it is not literally true that no black actor had ever kissed a white actress on an American stage previously, many theater-goers were seeing such an image for the first time. The sight shocked many viewers. Errol Hill cites viewers' responses to photographic reproductions of the sight which apparently poisons sight and should best be hid:

When Life magazine published a picture spread of Robeson's Othello, it engendered harsh letters to the editor denouncing the production in terms that exposed the virulence of antiblack feeling in certain parts of the country. A South Carolina reader, for instance, wrote: 'The time is not ripe, if ever, for the actual social mingling of the two races. Such pictures, in my humble opinion, have a tendency to create in some Negroes a longing for something that cannot be theirs and can only lead to a feeling of frustration.' From Kentucky, another correspondent was not concerned with the merits of the production but with 'the horrible, indelible, undeniable and terrifying fact that there are white men with so little respect for themselves that they would cause to be printed the picture of a Negro man with his arm around a white woman in a love scene.

For the reader from Kentucky, as for other viewers within and without the play, sexuality serves as the ultimate signifier of social relations between men. The reader doesn't express concern with black men's or black and white woman's respect for themselves; clearly, it is white men who are being topped. Nor is the love between Desdemona and Othello spoken of in the words of the text a point of contention here, but
rather that love embodied. Perhaps it is not even the (textual) intercourse between Desdemona and Othello that seems so transgressive to the Kentucky reader, but the bodily contact between black and white actors. The body acts as and represents a bottom line.

Even an actor who is black without greasepaint puts on and plays blackness when he plays Othello. Blackness to a twentieth-century African-American means something quite different than blackness to a Moor in Venice (or London) in the sixteenth century. Othello's blackness is other to a contemporary black actor, as it is to a white actor. But not as other, or not in the same way. At any rate, I would suggest, in spite of the "blind casting" project -- which I support -- the color of the actor makes a big difference to the meaning of the performance, however "realistic" the acting and make-up are. Especially at a play like Othello, where miscegenation is such a hot topic, where characters fear and delight in, exoticize and eroticize Othello's blackness, where references to blackness and fairness abound with brainwashing frequency, where the body is seen as source, sign, and mask of the acts and figures of the heart -- at such a play, how can audience members of any race "blind" themselves to the actor's race? Even if they consciously attempt to "blind" themselves, they will be conscious of the imperative to see selectively, and will see what they are not supposed to see in order not to see it. A black character kissing a white character means one thing if both actors are "really" white, quite another if one is not. Othello dramatizes the making-meaning of color, especially in relation to sexuality, and the anxieties caused when a black man does the office of a white. I like to believe that reading and attending to Othello's color anxieties, as well as its class, gender, and sexual anxieties, will make audiences of all races more alert to and critical of their own ideological anxieties, even as I recognize that historically, the circumstances of production of Othello have all too often merely re-enacted the same anxieties and reinforced the very prejudices displayed within it.


3 We have very scant record of the first performances of *Othello*, which most probably took place in 1604. The "boy" playing Desdemona was perhaps well into adolescence or beyond. A record from a 1610 performance of *Othello* at Oxford reports that Desdemona drew tears from the audience. See Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Othello: The Search for the Identity of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona by Three Centuries of Actors and Critics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), p. 9,1.

4 For two excellent studies of the political, social and theatrical constructions of race in Europe during the Shakespearean era, see Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987) and Eldred Jones, *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama*


The terms in quotations are among the many definitions of "gross" offered by the OED (Vol IV, 1901, pp. 445-6). "Gross," like "serve" and its cognates, is another obsessively reiterated word, used at least 8 times in Othello, usually in connection with sexual/racial aberration. (Oxford Shakespeare Concordances, Othello: A Concordance to the Text of the First Folio (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971) p. 117.)

Greenblatt's article offers an interesting New Historicist approach to the colonialist mode of improvisation in Othello.

Sanders, p.61 note to line 117

Jones and Barthelemy discuss in detail nonspecific or multivalent denotations of the term "Moor" for Renaissance inhabitants of England, as well as their inability to discern, or their imprecise and arbitrary differentiation of, the vast range of complexions of Africans. See especially Barthelemy pp. 6-17 for a detailed and interesting discussion of the social implications of the etymological derivations of the word "Moor."


Newman, p. 144.


"thy hollow cell, Qq; the hollow hell, F."

Cavell paraphrases that Desdemona "saw his visage as he sees it, that she understands his blackness as he understands it, as the expression (or in his word, his manifestation) of
his mind—which is not overlooking it. Then how does he understand it? ... As the color of a romantic hero. For he, as he was and is, manifested by his parts, his title, and his "perfect soul" (I,i,31), is the hero of the tales of romance he tells, some ones of which he wooed and won Desdemona with, others of which he will die upon. It is accordingly the color of one of enchanted powers and of magical protection, but above all it is the color of one of purity, of a perfect soul." See Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 129-30. While I find many highly interesting observations and conjectures in Cavell's article, I differ with him in my focus. He, too, observes "Desdemona's power to confirm [Othello's] image of himself," but Cavell does not see this "power" as gendered -- or colored. Rather it is an example of a more general philosophical speculation that "the integrity of my (human, finite) existence may depend on the fact and on the idea of another being's existence, and on the possibility of proving that existence ..." (p. 127). I am interested in observing and questioning that the human being proving his integrity tends largely to be male, and the grounder of his existence female.

18Newman (p. 145) offers an alternative view: "The emphasis in *Othello* on Desdemona's fairness and purity, "that whiter skin of hers than snow / And smooth as monumental alabaster" (V.ii.4-5), and the idealization of fair female beauty it implies -- the entire apparatus of Petrarchanism -- is usually said to point up the contrast between Desdemona and Othello. But I want to argue to the contrary that femininity is not opposed to blackness and monstrosity, as white is to black, but identified with the monstrous, an identification that makes miscegenation doubly fearful. The play is structured around a cultural aporia, miscegenation." But since, as I go on to argue, characters of *Othello* polarize Desdemona's difference from the ideal of white femininity into the antithesis of the ideal, and hence figure her deviation as a monstrosity and a blackening (while still maintaining the equation of ideal aristocratic femininity and
fairness), my difference from Newman's view, and hers from the "usual" critical approach to the relationship between fairness and blackness in Othello, are not the "contrasting" opposites she presents them as.

19 Sanders, p. 70.

I use the term "Orientalism" as developed by Edward Said. Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). I will refer to Said's study further below, and discuss it in more detail in chapter 4 (where I will look in particular at his anti-theatrical analogy of the Orientalist view of "the East" as a theater).

21 See, for example, Ridley p. 21.

22 In Said's view, "Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 2). By objectifying "the East," by making the East "the East." Western thinkers, rulers, and speakers make the West "the West": "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self (p. 3). Further, "Orientalism . . . is knowledge of the Orient that places things Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing" (p. 41). As object of the West, the East is not even a solid, present object; "in discussions of the Orient, the Orient is all absence, whereas one feels the Orientalist and what he says as presence; yet we must not forget that the Orientalist's presence is enabled by the Orient's effective absence" (208). Though Said concentrates on Western colonialist studies of Islam rather than Africa, his unfolding of the Orientalist's tendencies to generalize the particulars of different cultures east of him or herself into a "general enemy" or general other, to objectify that general other, to classify it, project onto it, exalt it, and negate it, all bear on the ways in which the various Venetians act on the Moor, the Turk, the Barbarian, the Indian, the Judean in this play. Said says that "in Shakespeare's Othello (that 'abuser of the world'), the Orient and
Islam are always represented as outsiders having a special role to play inside Europe" (p. 71).

23Actually, Cassio is not a Venetian but a Florentine, which Iago does not fail to point out. Nevertheless, his inclusion in the Italian "us" goes generally uncontested.

24Neely, p. 228-9.

25Newman, p. 156.

26Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 195.


28For a study of women acting as signs of homosocial relations "between men" in a later period of English history, which has strongly influenced my thinking here, see Eve Sedgwick, Between Men (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

29I have here chosen F's "of sence" over Q1's "offence." Ridley has selected the latter for the Arden Edition. At any rate, Iago's conflation -- through the accident of textual deviation -- of sense and offence, seems to me uncannily in keeping with his pose as demystifier of bodies, whose more subtle re-mystification enables his plot.

30This section of this chapter by no means presents a theatrical history of Othello productions. A reader interested in such a historical overview may want to refer to Rosenberg, The Masks of Othello, an ambitious overview up to 1960. Some of the more recent productions of Othello on stage and film are covered in Martin L. Wine, Othello: Text and Performance (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London: MacMillan, 1984) p. 42-80. For an excellent overview of productions of Shakespeare, especially Othello, with black actors, and an extensive bibliography, see Errol Hill. Shakespeare in

31Barthelemy, pp. 123-146.


34ibid.


36On Acting, pp. 153-5.

37ibid., p. 153.


39On Acting, p. 151

40ibid., p. 158

41ibid., p. 159

42ibid., pp. 158-9.

43Thomas Rymer, one of the earliest literary critics of Shakespeare, admires some of the "burlesk," "humour and ramble of Comical Wit," "shew and . . . Mimickry to divert the spectators," but finds that "the tragical part is plainly none other than a Bloody Farce, without salt or savour." Rymer's racism and classicism are integral to his standards for dramatic tragedy. He continually refers to Othello as a "Black-amoor," and says of Desdemona that "[n]o woman bred out of a Pig-stye cou'd talk so meanly." Rymer, from A Short View of Tragedy (1693); Rpt. Shakespeare: Othello: A Casebook, ed. John Wain (London and Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1971), p. 48. 41.

45 Shakespeare in Sable, p. 129. The letters quoted are from Life, September 21, 1942, pp. 8-11.
CHAPTER THREE

Casting Spells: Jean Genet's *The Blacks*, Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, and Ntozake Shange's *spell #7*

Since the racial drama is played out in the open, the black man has no time to 'make it unconscious.' The white man, on the other hand, succeeds in doing so to a certain extent, because a new element appears: guilt. The Negro's inferiority or superiority complex or his feeling of equality is conscious. These feelings forever chill him. They make his drama.

--- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

In May 1989 I went to see Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* at The Ensemble, a Houston theater group devoted to producing plays by, for, and about African-Americans. I was the only white person in the audience, among mostly black women. It felt strange, particularly given Shange's play, which so strongly makes the racial drama conscious, and which alienates white guilt and the white gaze. For me, moments of feeling absolutely white, and hated. Moments of "forgetting" I'm white, in total identification with the ladies of (rainbow) colors. Then the lights come on and I'm white again. Feeling like reaching out to these women, sisters for two hours of emotional uplift and drainage. Feeling absolutely different from them . . . Then afterward, feeling scared walking in the dark to my car, parked across the street in the unlit Planned Parenthood lot. After all, it was a "bad" neighborhood . . .
It's a racial drama that gets played over and over again, on personal and political stages. large and small. I planned and wrote most of this chapter during a period of the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, rioting in Crown Heights, the Thomas Confirmation hearings, David Duke's bid for the Louisiana governorship, and Leonard Jeffries' media-grabbing presentation of scholarship refueling black anti-semitism, and, most recently, the beating of Rodney King, the verdict exonerating his beaters, and the aftermath of riots. All of these incidents pulled at my divided loyalties and identities as a white Jewish-atheist woman opposed to sexism, antisemitism, and racism. All of these incidents threatened to, in Fanon's terms, make the racial drama conscious to white spectators, but demonstrated also the power of white guilt to make the racial drama unconscious, even when it may be undeniable to black viewers. In this chapter I try to thematize the technologies of race underwriting racial dramas, technologies which will themselves inevitably mediate my reading, conscript my "white gaze."

The most conventional symbol of drama is the mask. The U.S. racial drama has been played out with literal and metaphoric masks and stage make-up. Jean Genet, Adrienne Kennedy, and ntozake shange, whose plays I discuss in this chapter, all develop the motif of skin as mask or as anti-mask, as they re-figure that master-trope of racist figures, the black-faced minstrel, as well as his complementary ominous underside. Perhaps the first innately American theatrical form is minstrelsy. Never too far from the smiling, Stepin Fetchit-type interlocutor is the stereotype of the primal, wild, heart-of-darkness African man always ready to rape the pure white antebellum southern lady. These images still haunt American dramatic embodiments, explicitly so in The Blacks, Funnyhouse of a Negro, and spell #7.² (The Blacks was written by a Frenchman and had its premiere in France, but had a much greater run on Broadway a few years later. Furthermore, Genet was highly interested in and influenced by U.S. racial activism, particularly that of the Black Panthers.) For the white playwright Jean Genet, reversing the minstrel tradition evokes the
masochistic pleasure of white guilt. For the "black" Adrienne Kennedy, minstrel reversals -- to the extent that they are possible -- bring fear and pain. For the black ntozake shange, manipulating the blackface trope is potentially ludic, even liberatory. Combining incantations and demystifications of "blackness" (and, at least implicitly, of "whiteness"), these plays refuse to take "race" as a given, even as they dramatize the impossibility of this refusal. At the same time, as they put "race" under erasure, they spotlight the priority of the races of playwright, actors, directors, producers, and audience, to every embodied production.

Jean Genet's The Blacks (Les Nègres)

A brief plot outline of The Blacks will make evident both Genet's refusal to take race -- any race -- as a given, as well as his devious pleasure in ferreting out and dis-playing the inherent theatricality of racial identities. Onstage, The Blacks presents a play-within-a-play -- or rather, a play-within-a-play-within-a-play. In the play most within, the "Negroes" ritualistically re-enact, before a "white" "Court," the rape and murder of a "white" woman by a "black" man. The "white Court" then travels to the "black jungle" to seek revenge. The "Court," however, is played by "black actors" (or black actors playing black actors) in White Masks. Masking goes beyond individual characters; the performance itself is a mask. The onstage "diverisement" (as Newport News/ Ville de Saint-Nazaire calls it in the French version) diverts the audience (or rather, "the audience") from another act taking place beyond the wings: the Negroes' execution of a traitor and the simultaneous rise to power of a new leader. After this "offstage" drama is disclosed, the "Court" -- the Governor, the Judge, the Missionary, the Valet, and the Queen -- ceremoniously "die." The Court exits to Hell, stage right, while the Negroes exit stage left, leaving behind Village, who performed the rapist-murderer, and Virtue, a prostitute. The two are in love. Virtue challenges Village to invent new kinds of flirting, love-making, and love which have
not yet become as cliché-encrusted as a (white) man's winding his fingers through his (white) lover's long golden hair. The backdrop rises, and all of the "Negroes" appear without their masks. "Hand in hand, Village and Virtue walk toward them, thus turning their backs to the audience. The curtain is drawn." (128).

In the American Grove Press edition of The Blacks, before readers encounter any of these characters or events, we find the dedication page. Under "To Abdallah" we read:

One evening an actor asked me to write a play for an all-black cast. But what exactly is a black? First of all, what's his color? (3)

Before Genet can "write a play for an all-black cast," he must ask what it means to be "a black," and what "black" means. Is "black" innate? Is it internal? Is it worn on the skin like a mask? Is it a made-up role? A biological fact? A symbol? A metaphor or metonym? Is one born black? Does one achieve blackness? Is a black actor an actor first, and does he or she enact blackness? Or is he or she black first, before the acting starts? Is the all-black cast to be a group of actors all of whom are black, or a group of black actors whose blackness is all-black, pure, untainted by whiteness? And what is "whiteness"?

These questions, and the many more implied by Genet's two simple questions about the color of a black, precede all racially-marked bodies involved in The Blacks: bodies of the playwright, of the actors, of the characters, of the spectators. On the page directly following the dedication, Genet "repeat[s]" what he has not yet said: this play is "written . . . by a white man" and "intended for a white audience" (4). Genet feels that these "white" specifications repeat the "black" specifications of the previous page; the recognition of the "black" race implies that of the "white" race simultaneously, in that one race is not recognized as such except in opposition to another. White producers and white spectatorship seem to be implicit in the idea of a black spectacle. Furthermore, the white audience -- or rather, the whiteness of the audience -- is as much a player in The Blacks as the black(ness of the) actors. So salient is the structure of white spectators gazing at the
spectacle of black actors to this production of color, that Genet will go to all lengths to achieve it:

... if, which is unlikely, [The Blacks] is ever performed before a black audience, then a white person, male or female, should be invited every evening. The organizer of the show should welcome him formally, dress him in ceremonial costume and lead him to his seat, preferably in the front row of the orchestra. The actors will play for him. A spotlight should be focused upon this symbolic white throughout the performance. (4)

The symbolic presence of a white onlooker is more important than the presence of a real white person. (But what is a "real white person"? First of all, what is her or his color?) The literal foregrounding and spotlighting of the token white foreshadows a play which foregrounds and spotlights skin color.

In doing so, Genet exaggerates the black-white dialectic into absurdity. After he specifies that at least one white spectator must be present, Genet continues:

But what if no white person accepted? Then let white masks be distributed to the black spectators as they enter the theater. And if the blacks refuse the masks, then let a dummy be used.

Although Genet prefers and anticipates white spectators, he presents white masks or mannequins to be viable substitutes. Much of The Blacks suggests that skin is itself a mask in two contradictory senses: it implies a preceding and controlling subject, and it precedes and controls the subject. The actor wears the mask, but the mask also wears the actor. Traditionally, of course, masks have been used in theater not only physically and ritually but rhetorically, as tropes of a false surface covering a true identity. Genet's masks at times work this way. Each actor playing a member of the Court is conspicuously black under the mask:
The mask is worn in such a way that the audience sees a black band all around it, and even the actor's kinky hair. (8)

The image of white power is created and supported by black characters embodied by black actors (and prescribed by a white writer); whiteness is defined in opposition to blackness. The white skin or white mask covers over its own dependence on blackness (just as, on a social level, European and American monuments rarely acknowledge the black slave labor and disproportionately black minimum-wage underclass that build and mop and polish those monuments). When Diouf plays Village's white female victim, Snow delineates this reading of the image: "behind the mask of a cornered White is a poor trembling Negro" (58). Snow's traditional use of the trope of mask-as-false-surface suggests that White power is a false illusion, and that underneath we are all the thing itself, a poor trembling Negro. But the many masks of The Blacks also suggest that the thing itself, that "poor trembling Negro," is itself a mask. "Black" folks wear black masks. A mask need not hide a true identity behind it; instead, the mask may make the underlying identity recognizable to itself, even as it encourages that identity to claim its distinctness from the mask.

Genet's "Negroes" exaggerate the mask-ness of their black skin by making it even blacker. If members of "the Court" create whiteness, "the Negroes" make up their blackness both with soot mixed with saliva and with language games. They apply black make-up to perform before the white Court and the white spectators:

As you see, ladies and gentlemen, just as you have your lilies and roses, so we -- in order to serve you -- shall use our beautiful, shiny black make-up. It is Mr. Deodatus Village who gathers the smoke-black and Mrs. Felicity Trollopp Pardon who thins it out in our saliva. These ladies help her. We embellish ourselves so as to please you. You are white. And spectators. This evening we shall perform for you... (10)
Even their method of making their make-up is part of the blackface. Their crude charcoal and spit, contrasting with whites' flowers, are organic properties which show the races they encode to be social and theatrical manufactures. Archibald's description of the application of blackface plays off of and ridicules the binarism of white civility vs. black primitivism. Archibald's ridicule goes further: white spectators are pleased by blacks, perhaps want to see blacks only when they are deep-black, soot-black. In fact, the whiteness of the whites is a product of the blacking-up of the blacks. The fact that "you are white" comes only after "the blacks" make themselves contrastingly black. ("The blacks" are likewise not "black" before they make themselves "black.") Throughout the play, as in this speech, almost every reference to blackness is immediately contiguous to a reference to whiteness, and vice versa. The references are tellingly asymmetrical. As whites adorn themselves with flowers, blacks adorn themselves with black make-up. As blacks make themselves black, whites are pleased -- and are white. Furthermore, their characterization as white immediately produces their characterization as spectators, as if "spectators" is the next unit along a chain of connotations. As whites are spectators, blacks are performers . . . And what blacks perform is blackness, which makes whites white. The classificatory system circles in a tautological loop which never centers on reality -- or rather, the loop of tautological performance becomes reality. The black make-up becomes black skin, that which makes blacks up, and makes them up to be black. This is of course not to deny the organic reality of skin color, but to suggest how skin color becomes perceptible, and to suggest further that to white audiences blackness seems more produced than whiteness, the "null" race.

In the previous chapter, I cited Laurence Olivier's exoticization of blackness as he makes himself up to be Othello. I stated there that I find his description extremely uncomfortable, because it is both so pleasurable to me and so obviously steeped in racism. Olivier's description, delivered "straight" and with the best of intentions to be sympathetic
to Othello's blackness, is repeated almost verbatim, but as an obvious parody, in The  

Blacks. Here is Olivier:

Black ... I had to be black. I had to feel black down to my soul. I had to look  
out from a black man's world. Not one of repression, for Othello would have felt  
superior to the white man. If I peeled my skin, underneath would be another  
layer of black skin. I was to be beautiful. Quite beautiful.³

Compare this passage to one delivered by Archibald to Village. Already blackened onstage  
one, Village is blackened even further in order to perform the "rape" and "murder" of a  
"white woman" before "the Court." Archibald directs Village to play blackness itself:

I order you to be black to your very veins. Pump black blood through them. Let  
Africa circulate in them. Let Negroes negrify themselves. (52)

Both scenes of "blacking up" involve the application of both external and internal masks --  
masks which will then be worn as innate, bodily realities. "Let Negroes negrify  
themselves" ("Que les Nègres se nègrent," 66); this self-contradiction and/or tautological  
order encapsulates and generates a whole complex of questions about race. If "negrify"  
means "to make (into a) Negro," then what are "Negroes" before they "negrify themselves"  
? Can these pre-"Negroes" ever resist "negrifying" themselves -- and if so, what are they  
then? Maybe the "negrification" is unavoidable (as is "caucasification"). Maybe the pre-  
"Negro" can only be posited in retrospect after the "negrification" has occurred. The  
construction of the sentence implies that Negroes pre-exist and are agents of their own  
negrifying. Which comes first, the Negroes or the negrification? Or is such a causal  
structure even relevant to racial identity?

Olivier "negrifies" himself into a noble savage; Village, under Archibald's direction, will  
"negrify" himself as the other side of the stereotype:

Let Negroes negrify themselves. Let them persist to the point of madness in what  
they're condemned to be, in their ebony, in their odor, in their yellow eyes. in
their cannibal tastes. Let them not be content with eating Whites, but let them
cook each other as well. Let them invent recipes for shin-bones, knee-caps,
calves, thick lips, everything. Let them invent unknown sauces. Let them invent
hiccoughs, belches and farts that'll give out a deleterious jazz. Let them invent a
criminal painting and dancing. Negroes, if they change toward us, let it not be
out of indulgence, but terror. (52)

Negroes will invent and stage a primitivism and savagery which comes after and is created
by and demanded by whiteness and civility. Archibald's description plays off the
stereotype of primitive jungle-dwellers as creatures of the body prior to social codes. But
the seemingly artless bodily primitivism -- the black body untainted by civilization -- the
cannibalism, the odor, hiccoughs, belching, farting, dancing -- are inverted in the society
of "white" spectactorship according to the highly theatrical codes of colonialism, racism and
artistic representation. This notion of Blackness Itself -- the ebony black African savage,
one with nature, endowed with animal instincts unfettered by conscience or reason -- is
created belatedly by a nostalgic civilization. The (white) Valet finds the Negroes
"exquisitely spontaneous. They have a strange beauty. Their flesh is weightier . . ." (19).

We know from Village's comments on his performance just before the Valet's intrusion
that Village is carefully pacing his performance, is modulating when "to speed up or draw
out [his] recital and [his] performance" (18), and is adjusting his sighs for the greatest
effect. The appearance of spontaneity is craftily cultivated. The Valet, speaking "very
affectedly," makes the unspontaneous (indeed highly prescribed) observation that Negroes
are spontaneous. The observation, as well as the pronouncing of it, is affected by a
tradition of negrification so pervasive that "blacks" and "whites" can no longer see each
other outside of its codes.

The stereotype of "darkness itself" is not always expressly derogatory (at least not
"intentionally" derogatory), and not always propagated by whites (or by blacks in the
service of supreme white pleasure). It is also an ideal which "blacks" create for themselves. The search of contemporary African-Americans for their African roots, for example, can be a powerful source of pride, connectedness, and liberation from white ideology -- when the Africanness sought is truly other to, not merely the opposite of, "the White Man" or "the Man" (to use the African-American synecdoche). When African primitivism is affected in order to shake off the "American" half of "African-American" (a method hopelessly counterproductive to its aim), when African traditions are exoticized and performed as refutations or even negations of white cultural forms, then the reconstructed Africanism complements and compliments white society. Similarly the performance of savagery in some forms of black militancy, while it threatens individual white people, actually serves and justifies white supremacy. Felicity performs similar self-Africanizing rituals when she plays a jungle dweller whom the Court must punish for Village's crime:

Beyond that shattered darkness, which was splintered into millions of Blacks who dropped to the jungle, we were Darkness in person. Not the darkness which is absence of light, but the kindly and terrible Mother who contains light and deeds. (105)

Felicity's desire to incarnate Mother Africa residing in an unshattered darkness, to be not only dark but Darkness in person, to embody an abstract and disembodied essence, demands that she put on a mask, an African mask, not take one off. Felicity's proud image of "Darkness in person" is, as she goes on to tell the Queen, created as a negation -- almost a photographic negative -- of white ideals:

Look, Madam. Here it comes, the darkness you were clamoring for, and her sons as well. They're her escort of crimes. To you, black was the color of priests and undertakers and orphans. But everything is changing. Whatever is gentle and kind and good and tender will be black. Milk will be black, sugar, rice, the sky, doves, hope. will be black. So will the opera to which we shall go.
blacks that we are, in black Rolls Royces to hail black kings, to hear brass bands
beneath chandeliers of black crystal . . . (105-6)

While this vision of black supremacy reverses and parodies white supremacist values, it
fails to change -- indeed it reinforces, albeit parodically -- the reduction of identity and of
heritage to skin colors, the reduction of skin colors to black and white (and the blindness to
all those races for whom both of these two categories are inapplicable), the assignment of
values to these colors, and the pervasion of these racialized values into all aspects of life.
To say that in a system of black supremacy milk will be black is to reinforce a link between
white milk (a nutritive good) and white supremacy. Earlier, Felicity summons up a similar
personification of Africa:

Are you there, Africa with the bulging chest and oblong thigh? Sulking Africa,
wart of iron, in the fire, Africa of the millions of royal slaves, deported
Africa, drifting continent, are you there? Slowly you vanish, you withdraw into
the past, into the tales of castaways, colonial museums, the works of scholars,
but I call you back this evening to attend a secret revel. (77)

This embodying of Africa on the one hand offers a liberation from being a display for white
colonialist gaze, but on the other hand can only be accessed through such a gaze. It is a
primitivism constructed belatedly, a conception of Africa as a unified whole which black
Africans have possessed only in the contrasting presence of white non-Africans.4

Skin color in The Blacks is a mask, but a mask which becomes internalized by the
characters who wear it. When skin color becomes race, it becomes not just a mask but a
role. Just as Genet literalizes the maskness of skin, he emphasizes the roleness of racial
roles. The Court, in their absurd white masks, are clearly not individualized characters but
rather both symbols of power and commedia dell'arte-like stock characters. They are
clovens in a "clown show" or "clownerie," as Genet spells out in the play's subtitle. Their
lack of names -- except as Queen, Judge, Missionary, Valet, and Governor -- emphasizes
the stockiness of these stock characters. But "the Negroes," who do have names, are also stock, mask-like figures. They absurdly combine and caricature the grotesque traditions of minstrelsy and of colonialist Heart-of-Darkness fantasies. The names of the blacks are stock minstrel names, either emphasizing a Sambo-like buffoon ("Bobo") or an absurd self-aggrandizement (Deodatus, Archibald Wellington, Augusta). Other names invoke a minstrel humor in being obvious misnomers: Snow, Felicity Trollop Pardon, Virtue Secret-rose.⁵ Many of these names, or variants of them, appear in historical records of minstrel performances.⁶ (The one "white" woman named is "Marie," the "victim" in the play-within-the-play. Her name, recalling both Christ's mother and Mary Magdalene, suggests the classic Madonna/whore role into which Woman is endlessly cast -- as does the name of Virtue-the-Prostitute.

The pitting of the Whites and the Blacks against each other caricatures stock black-and-white reductiveness. Throughout the play, Felicity and the Queen face off, the former embodying a type of Mother Africa, the latter "the lily-white Queen of the West" (44). While Felicity refers to derogatory stock traits of blacks -- their odors, farting, and "Nostrils, enormous conches, glory of [her] race, sunless shafts, tunnels, yawning grottoes where sniffing battalions lie at rest!" (46) --the Queen regurgitates a string of "Western" clichés:

... angel of the flaming sword, virgins of the Parthenon, stained-glass of Chartres, Lord Byron, Chopin, French cooking, the Unknown Soldier, Tyrolean songs, Aristotelian principles, heroic couplets, poppies, sunflowers, a touch of coquetry, vicarage gardens...(47)

Both women, in enumerating the stock roles of their cultures even as they embody these roles, call attention to the roleness of the roles rather than simply to those roles themselves. Similarly, the conspicuous display of props for "Marie" -- the blond wig, carnival mask, pink wool and knitting needles, and white gloves, all of which, in Roger Blin's
production, were visible from the start of the play (53-4) -- together metonymize the virgin white woman without even her bodily presence. The actor comes to a conspicuously prior role. While the presence of her body is crucial to the rape-and-murder ritual, this bodily presence is symbolic only, eerily disembodied, the crime strictly impersonal and prescribed.

The prescribedness of the various roles and plays within The Blacks is repeatedly spotlighted both by the stilted, dispassionate acting style and the conspicuous writtenness and predominance of the script(s). For starters the play is artificially framed within the music of Mozart. At the beginning, the Negroes incongruously dance around a catafalque and hum a Mozart minuet. The final tableau echoes the beginning, with the blacks, no longer dancing, around catafalque against the sound of a patently inappropriate minuet from Don Giovanni. This musical frame, so alien to the black militant anger underlying the play, "frames" the stereotypes so politely enacted as props of a dying white power.

Within The Blacks "proper," too, digs at pretentious theatricality, particularly the play's own, proliferate. To make Village's "dark criminal" recital unmistakably a recital. Archibald reiterates the scriptedness and non-spontaneity of the re-enactment by pointedly admonishing "No hysteria. This isn't a revival meeting, it's a ceremony" (56). (This sarcastic admonition also comments on differences among traditional African-American and white forms of Christian worship.) Even more directly pointing at the patent prescription and theatricality of their self-performances, when Virtue avers that Village should have enacted the murder onstage, Bobo metadramatically pronounces "Greek tragedy, my dear, decorum. The ultimate gesture is performed off-stage" (84). Such theatrically self-conscious commentary recurs regularly. These metadramatic interjections and flag-waving show-business bits audaciously name and denature racial stereotypes which may otherwise be considered too incendiary to stage.
Genet, in his introduction, delineates his ventriloquistic projection of his (white) script into the black actors' bodies; throughout the play, he continues to use stilted, hyper-euphemistic language to alienate the white supremacist ideology therein both from himself and from the black actors and characters. Such is the case when Archibald coaches Village to use racist circumlocutions for the word "father":

ARCHIBALD ... : Your father? Sir, don't use that word again! There was a shade of tenderness in your voice as you uttered it.

VILLAGE: And what do you suggest I call the male who knocked up the negress who gave birth to me?

ARCHIBALD: Dammit, do the best you can. Invent -- if not words, then phrases that cut you off rather than bind you. (26)

Village will uphold the stereotype of the brutish savage, but will play it out so as to alienate it from himself. By advertising this strategy, Archibald pre-negates every future stereotypically brutish statement. Hyper-theatrical diction is used as a weapon for rebellion.

Genet's militant sarcasm literalizes racial prescriptions. Within the first few minutes of the play, the Governor rehearses his death speech by conspicuously holding a physical script in his hand (13). Later, when Diouf tries to effect a non-violent reconciliation between blacks and whites, Archibald repeats "violently" that Diouf is wasting his time "since our speeches are set down in the script" (29). The establishment of the predominance of a script and of theatrical conventions is vital to the rape-and-murder ritual enacted upon compulsion in the play-within-the-play. The audience sees both the ritual's artifice and its frightening reality, both its prescribedness and its present power, both the subjection of the actors to an already written script and their agency, their potential to some extent to change the script or at least to differ with/from it. Indeed, by alienating the pre-script, by hyper-theatricalizing conventions of gesture and speech, by unmasking
social masks, and by investigating the forms of theatricality inherent in all racial roles and embodiments, *The Blacks* refuses to allow its audience *unconsciously* to re-enact the same scenario. We must now acknowledge who or what it is which these performances serve.

Valerie Smith acutely posits the duplicity of these performed myths as follows:

Myths of black male and female sexual appetitiveness were constructed to enable certain white men during slavery to exert their rights over the bodies of black men and white and black women. The image of sexually inexhaustible black men was used to police relations between black men and white women and invoked in order to justify violence against black men. The myth of the promiscuity of slave women allowed white men to rape them and claim ownership of their offspring with impunity.... [D]uring the period from Reconstruction through World War II, accusations of interracial rape were used to legitimate lynching, a form of random, mob violence, connected routinely to the alleged rape of a white woman by a black man, even when no evidence of sexual assault existed.... [There emerged] a cultural narrative in which the rape of a frail white victim by a savage black male must be avenged by the chivalry of her white male protectors....instances of interracial rape constitute sites of struggle between black and white men that allow privileged white men to exercise their property rights over the bodies of white women... [while] black women represent the most vulnerable and least visible victims of rape....

If these "myths of black male and female sexual appetitiveness" empower white men, their appropriation in the spirit of reversal and revenge may empower some black male playwrights. A few years after *The Blacks* appeared in New York in 1961, a plethora of plays by militant African-American playwrights began to recommend and/or re-enact the rape of white women by black men as a symbolic gesture. This symbolic rape ritual, and caustic reversals and deviations of it, in such plays as Ed Bullins' *The Taking of Miss Janie*
and LeRoi Jones' Dutchman, The Slave, and The Toilet, aimed for a symbolic reversal of the lynchings of black men still being enacted onstage and in the flesh. These KKK-style hate-crimes were often not only ignored but also perpetrated by law enforcers (as they still are today -- most visibly in the recent videotaped beating of Rodney King by members of the LA police). Sometimes the lynchings involved actual castrations as well as other kinds of dismemberment. At any rate, actual lynchings as well as the implied threat of future lynching effected a symbolic disempowerment, emasculation, and castration of black men. In this context, the need for black men to symbolically reclaim their virility, and to reverse the roles of the metaphor of sado-masochistic sex, makes a kind of "sense." But by failing to refute abusive heterosexual intercourse as an appropriate metaphor for racial domination, by leaving intact the equations of masculinity with domination and of femininity with submission, these retaliatory plays empower the objectionable sexual metaphor and serve white supremacy as well as white patriarchy. LeRoi Jones/ Amiri Baraka, particularly, makes me personally angry as he subordinates (my) gender oppression to (his) racial oppression. In fact, he even denies my gender oppression even as he perpetuates it. Embodying the myth of the black rapist in his plays, Baraka plays on my fears and vulnerability as a woman, and forces me to participate more strongly in a racist cultural psyche. I resent him for forcing me to feel my own embodiment, to play the white woman, to be racist.

Baraka's paradigm justifies white fears of black power: give blacks a little power and all havoc, rape and murder break loose. The rape of one white woman by one black man justifies, demands, a hundred lynchings. The white woman as symbol of a sublime transcendent white culture is strengthened, an actual white woman is brutally victimized in the transaction between white men and black men, actual white women are further disempowered by their own fears of being raped and their dependence on men for
protection, and black women are once again left out, unseen, in this ritual which forces racial conflict into visibility.

Genet, who supported the Black Panthers, a form of black militancy even more extreme than that of Baraka, nevertheless suggests in The Blacks that black men raping white women actually serve and are underwritten (and pre-written) by white patriarchal supremacy. The Blacks avers that the rape-and-murder ritual *pleases* the white spectators (ostensibly the Court). Blacks playing out ritual hate rapes and/or murders of white women may very well be venting and ventriloquizing white fantasies, fantasies which spring from and assuage white guilt. The white Court of institutionalized racism in The Blacks, however, is not merely pleased by, but depends on, highly visible and visceral forms of black criminality. When it appears that the "catafalque" is fake and contains no corpse, the Judge pleads for any corpse by any means: "one corpse, two, a battalion, a drove of corpses, we'll pile them on high if that's what we need to avenge ourselves. But no corpse at all -- why that could kill us" (99). All the Judge and Court "need is two arms, two legs to break, a neck to put into the noose, and [their] justice is satisfied" for "[i]f a man's a man, a Negro's a Negro" (109). Village corroborates: "it doesn't much matter who [plays out the ritual]. As everyone knows, the Whites can hardly distinguish one Negro from another" (53). (Likewise, the Negroes can hardly distinguish one white from another; indeed the ritual effects the subordination of all other differences into a dominant black / white racial opposition.) Genet's characters baldly state motivations which are generally subtextual and unstated. Indeed, the enactors of a racial and racializing ritual may sincerely believe themselves to be acting in good faith according to the laws of an objective universal justice ("It is the cause"). Concepts of justice often appear to the individuals practicing them (within given specific judicial and penal systems) to be absolutely self-evident and natural. Furthermore, individuals enacting a given ritual may not see it as a ritual at all, and may see none of the symbolic significance to the act which Genet has his
characters articulate, often in spite of and unbeknownst to themselves. Thus, in a passage which sounds to my ears uncannily close to the artfully ingenuous tone of David Duke's campaign speeches, Genet caricatures the Judge's belief that he practices a disinterested, apolitical system of justice:

No, one can't hold all of Africa responsible for the death of a white woman. Nevertheless, there's no denying the fact that one of you is guilty, and we've made the journey for the purpose of bringing him to trial. According to our statutes -- naturally. (98)

That "naturally" both signals most sarcastically the Judge's bad faith and suggests that the Judge may feel himself acting in good faith, according to the laws of nature. Institutionalized racism erases its own institutionalization to appear as nature, as justice. But Genet won't let such blindness off the hook. In the next few lines he goes in for the kill as he has the Judge say:

He killed out of hatred. Hatred of the color white. That was tantamount to killing our entire race and killing us till doomsday. (98)

So much for not holding all of Africa responsible.

"In exchange for a crime," the Queen states, the Court is "bringing the criminal pardon and absolution" (102). But the absolution to the Blacks comes not from pardon but from the purity of hate which they play out. This pure hate is crucial to the ritual. Repeatedly Snow and Felicity worry that Village loved the woman he bumped off, or that there was a touch of desire in his hatred. But on the other side of hatred is fascination, the seduction of the forbidden. (The going term, popularized by Spike Lee's film, is "Jungle Fever.") The Queen, too, has the fever; at her end, she says "(to Archibald, admiringly): How well you hate! (A pause.) How I have loved! And now, I die -- I must confess -- choked by my desire for a Big Black Buck" (124). The statement "How well you hate!" seems to bring forth its opposite, "How I have loved!," to fill the void of the pause. Consummate hate
provokes awe and desire. You and I, hate and love, counterbalance each other across a common nodal point. But this sharing and loving in no way transcend the dehumanization of their "opposites."9

On the other side of the nodal point, Village protests too much at the accusations made by Felicity and Snow that he desires the woman he rapes. He thereby confesses to his own "jungle fever," a tangled knot of fascination and hatred, of eroticization and rape of the other. Like Othello, The Blacks suggests that fear of the racial other is inextricable from delight, and that eroticization and exoticization of that other are as complicit in the reproduction of racism (and sexism) as is hatred of the other. Both plays theatricalize the inherent theatricality of racial roles: both the marvelous and the monstrous other are already prescribed *dramatis personae* into which one individual casts another (or casts oneself). Furthermore, both plays sexualize racial differences in an image of violent copulation between a black male and white female.

Unlike Othello, The Blacks frustrates all hopes that love can develop out of a mutual recognition of differences which are not oppositions. I like to think that an attraction to someone of another race and/or ethnicity can stimulate such questions as: What is black or white, Oriental, Occidental, Hispanic, . . . ? What are their (skin) colors, first of all? What do these complexions signify? And how do they signify? What are the links between signs and referents? Is skin color a fact, a metonym, a metaphor? A mask? If it is a mask, does the mask precede its player? Is there anything under the mask? Is the myth that a true self lies under a false mask itself yet another mask? I like to think that these questions begin to demystify racial oppositions into more complicated differences. (But can one conceive of differences without resorting ultimately to oppositional structures?) The Blacks parodies my hopes in the figure of Diouf, who pleads the Blacks for a more harmonious interaction with the whites:
DIOUF: ... I'd like the ceremony to involve us, not in hatred ...

THE NEGROES (ironically, and in a dismal voice): ... but in love!

DIOUF: If it's possible, ladies and gentlemen.

THE MISSIONARY: ... to involve you, above all, in your love of us. (31)

The Missionary's response undercuts Diouf's idealism by equating harmony between blacks and whites with black submission to white domination.

For Genet, my desire to go from ritual to romance is yet one more absurd romanticization. In The Blacks, the "rape" is clearly -- or contradictorily -- established as both a rape and not a rape, both a violation and a consensual, mutually pleasurable seduction. The Mask boasts that Village's thighs fascinate "her," offers him rum and invites him into "her" bedroom. But Village then abstracts himself from "a Negro" into "a marketful of slaves, all sticking out their tongues" (74). Pluralizing himself in this image, he figures his act as not just rape, but gang rape. It is even more a gang rape in that Archibald, Bobo and Snow follow Village into the bedroom "in a procession, softly clapping their hands and stamping their feet" (74-5). Village even pauses to make sure the onlookers in the auditorium are following him. And of course we are -- and are not; because we do not see the act in the bedroom, it becomes all the more colorful to the mind's eye. The ambiguity of the "rape" ritual as both rape and not-rape (and both murder and not-murder) can be read at least doubly: It blames the female victim for her rape by representing her as a seductress who really wanted it anyway. And yet, like Brabantio when told his daughter was coupling with the Moor, it erases the possibility of interracial love or attraction. Rape and murder, The Blacks suggests, are the only see-able interactions between blacks and whites.

Yet The Blacks simultaneously gestures towards alternate scenarios. While the play-within-the-play theatricalizes the role-ness of all racial roles and the predominance of a prior script to which there is no outside-script, the presences of a play ontologically outside the
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If rituals and theatricality seem to engulf every attempt to subvert them, if all relationships between and within races, and indeed the very notion of "race," seem to be always already prescripted and staged, is there any outside-theater? Can we go beyond the Big Black Buck, the white princess, the Sambo, the Queen, the Judge, and the lot? While there is an outside (of sorts) to the individual play The Blacks, there may be no outside to the theatrical phenomena such as acting, making-up, building a character, learning how to be primitive, etc. So the references to the real lives of Village, Virtue, Archibald, Bobo,
Felicity and the others may ring false. Archibald, for example, tells white viewers that "when we leave this stage, we are involved in your life. I am a cook, this lady is a sewing-maid, this gentleman is a medical student, this gentleman is a curate at St. Anne's, this lady . . . skip it. Tonight, our sole concern will be to entertain you. So we have killed this white woman. There she lies" (14). White viewers "know" that the black actors are, in "real life," no more a cook, sewing-maid, medical student, curate, etc. than the catafalque is occupied by a "real" corpse of a white woman. (In fact, as viewers learn, the catafalque is empty.) White viewers of the American production "knew" that James Earl Jones, Roscoe Lee Browne, Louis Gossett, Cicely Tyson, and the rest of the cast were not cooks and sewing ladies playing black actors playing Negro savages, but black actors playing cooks and sewing-maids playing black actors playing Negro savages.

Nevertheless, the continuous references to many simultaneous ontological levels suggests that ontology itself is theatrically constituted, that "reality" is recognizable as such only in opposition to "fiction." Even the most realistic acting style is a style (Method Acting is a method); and even improvisation relies on set types and codified gestures. But even though theatricality can never be avoided (movements for the free expression of the inner self have involved some of the most theatrical posturings), some characters and acts can show other parts and scenarios to be not only plays but plays-within-plays-within- . . . In other words, even if reality-effects were theatrically constituted, there still remain inalienable differences between theatrically-constituted realities and bald-faced lies. In The Blacks, Newport News's news of the "offstage" execution of a Negro traitor provides such an ontological critique of the onstage ritual. All the other "Negroes" wear evening clothes except for Newport News, the emissary from the "real" drama, who is barefooted and wears a woolen sweater. The woolen sweater and even the bare feet are as much costumes bearing encoded meanings as are the evening suits and dresses. The bare feet, for example, signify or represent, but do not present an intimacy with nature untainted by
civilization: the noble savage, or the savage downright, once again. Then again (especially if the sweater is a color other than black or white), Newport News's costume breaks out of the exaggerated black-and-white motif which is artificially maintained on so many levels in this play, and to which the "black tie" dress of the other black men visually contribute, albeit satirically. Newport News's costume, then, gestures toward a less artificially black-and-white political struggle. This struggle is over both visual images and the bodies which embody these images -- both over the images of white power and over the whites in power. Newport News explains that the blacks aim "not only to corrode and dissolve the idea they'd like us to have of them" but also to "fight them in their actual persons, in their flesh and blood" (112). The other onstage blacks have been "present only for display" (112). Another exchange between Newport News and Archibald similarly spotlights the different ontological levels of onstage and offstage (and off-offstage) dramas. Archibald interrogates Newport News on the traitor's guilt so anxiously because, Archibald explains, 

... it's a matter of judging and probably sentencing and executing a Negro. That's a serious affair. It's no longer a matter of staging a performance. The man we're holding and for whom we're responsible is a real man. He moves, he chews, he coughs, he trembles. In a little while, he'll be killed... it's a matter of living blood, hot, supple, reeking blood, of blood that bleeds... (82)

The "real man" offstage has both more and less physical presence than the onstage characters performed by real actors. The audience "knows" that there is no traitor in the wings who is "really" executed offstage simultaneous to Diouf's symbolic execution onstage. The effect of an absolutely real act devoid of play-acting is a product of play-acting; in this case, "reality" is dramatically constituted. At the same time, however, the on-stage gesture toward an offstage reality within the theater also gestures toward yet another offstage reality outside of the theater, where killings mirror the onstage caricatured rituals but are performed on real people of flesh and hot, supple blood. This reality both
re-enacts the ritual scripts and roles of racial relations and is no longer only "a matter of staging a performance."

There are also other theatrical gestures toward other actual acts which do not re-enact the same racially-cast rape and murder scenario as that represented onstage. For example we learn that "in real life" Virtue is a black "whore" for "White customers." Virtue reminds us that "Every brothel has its negress" and that "this evening's ceremony will affect [her] far less than the one [she] perform[s] ten times a day" (38). Whereas black women are left out of the onstage ritual in which white women figure as signifiers in the establishment of power relationships between white men and black men, black women "in real life" are exploited and humiliated "ten times a day." The (white, male) customer - (black, female) prostitute relationship, so prevalent offstage and unrepresented onstage as well as in other media (including TV and newspapers), metonymizes colonialist and phallocratic relationships invisible to the "white gaze." (Even less visible and/or representable may be intra-racial rape.)

Perhaps even more unrepresentable yet to a white gaze is a love between two blacks, especially a love that is not prescribed and formulaic. It is remarkable in itself that the white playwright writing for a white audience in 1958 insists on representing -- or at least on pointing toward -- a black woman's experience in the figure of Virtue, especially since he casts suspicion on the identity of "the black woman" even as he gives her experience legitimacy. But Genet goes further: in what some have called uncharacteristic sentimentality, Genet ends the play with the fragile possibility of authentic love between Virtue and Village. The very possibility of this love is extremely threatening to the Court. When Village declares to Virtue: "Our color isn't a wine stain that blotches a face, our face isn't a jackal that devours those it looks at. [...] I'm handsome, you're beautiful, and we love each other!" (43), the Governor says "We've got to stop them. Right away" (44). Their creation of love is neither an escape from racial body-politics nor a liberatory return to
the natural body. At first they can only conceive of a "love" between them as the opposite of the white heterosexual "love" typified by the idealization of a woman in white (such as the woman played by Diouf). Archibald tells Village that Negroes and performers can't "know love" (39), therefore Village must hate Virtue. Village tries: "I know not whether you are beautiful, but you are Africa, oh monumental night, and I hate you. I hate you for filling my black eyes with sweetness. I hate you for making me thrust you from me, for making me hate you" (37). This (black) "hate" both arises as a dialectical opposite of (white) love, and is tautological ("I hate you ... for making me hate you"). It seems that there is no escape from binary oppositions: if not love then hate; if not white then black; if not performers then spectators.

But spectators are as much a part of the performance -- are themselves performers -- as hate is love, and white black. As abstract absolutes, hate and love, fear and delight, black and white, spectacle and spectator, are mutually constitutive. When Village and Virtue want to live outside the "clown show", that hybrid of morality play and minstrelsy, Archibald sends the lovers "out" into "the audience." Actually, "Archibald, Bobo, Diouf, Snow and Felicity turn away and, holding their faces in their hands, move off, when suddenly nine or ten white masks suddenly appear about the Court" (41). If Village and Virtue won't play black roles of hatred, if they insist on playing lovers, then. Archibald commands, they must "discolor [them]selves" and "be spectators" -- that is, "if they'll [the white spectators, will] have you" (40). Virtue and Village can never be absolutely alone as two people who love each other. For love is a political matter; it is always under surveillance, if not external then internalized. The white masks which appear, representations of a Panopticon-like White Gaze, are empty; the White Gaze is always present for Virtue and Village, even when individual white onlookers aren't. The Benthamite Panopticon functions even when no-one is in the tower; the structure of surveillance remains intact. Like the mannequin to be seated in the audience if no white
spectators attend, the empty white masks are symbolic presences. Masks are generally used by performers, not spectators. The onstage appearance of white masks which mirror the offstage audience suggests that white spectatorship is always a player in the performance whether or not it is embodied.

Village and Virtue, however, want to live outside of this performance. Yet when Virtue first tries to leave the stock roles of minstrelsy-in-the-heart-of-darkness played by Archibald and company, she falls immediately into white roles and white clichés. Ventriloquizing the Queen "as if in a state of somnambulism," Virtue recites: "... I am white, it's milk that denotes me, it's the lily, the dove, quicklime and the clear conscience, it's Poland with its eagle and snow! [...] except that a bit of shade remained in my armpits ..." (45). This underlying shade, which is neither black nor white, echoes Village's earlier characterization of Virtue and himself as "the shadow, or the dark interior, of luminous creatures" who move "along the edges of the world, out of bounds" (36). Village and Virtue go on to attempt to break out of dead white expressions of love. But to exactly reverse a white mythology into a black one is also to ventriloquize white discourse:

VIRTUE: ... I was already in bed, with your image. Other girls may guard the image of their beloved in their heart or eyes. Yours was between my teeth. I would bite into it ...

VILLAGE: In the morning, I would proudly display the marks of your bites. (120)

Are Virtue and Village breaking out of white love clichés? Virtue's violent biting certainly does violence to the ideal of virtuous, lily-white, gentle femininity. But it may perpetuate white myths of the black primitivism. Furthermore, the ontological level of this exchange is unclear. It is just before -- and may even be played as simultaneous with -- the assassination of "the Court." Are Village and Virtue performing for an onstage audience? If so, is this audience black or white (or outside of this dialectic)? Are they performing for
themselves, out of the pleasure of improvisation? Is this performance solely for the white offstage audience? Are Village and Virtue masking themselves? With the removal of white spectators from the stage, can Virtue and Village improvise a way to love which neither invokes ideals of white femininity and masculinity (as well as heterosexuality) nor sets itself in opposition to these ideals? A love which stands outside of binary racial and gender roles? Perhaps a more immediate question is, can a white playwright invent and represent such a relationship? And if so, given a theater with black actors and white spectators, can these spectators see such a love, or will their own racial and gender assumptions always engulf the stage?

Every play and performance I consider in this study presents powerful shake-ups to existing body-politics, but is much weaker in presenting alternatives. Genet leaves us not with a vision of black love outside of a white gaze (impossible for him to do so), but only a skeptical hope for such a loving relationship:

**VILLAGE:** But if I take your hands in mine? If I put my arms around your shoulders -- let me -- if I hug you?

**VIRTUE:** All men are like you: they imitate. Can't you invent something else?

**VILLAGE:** For you I could invent anything: fruits, brighter words. a two-wheeled wheelbarrow, cherries without pits, a bed for three, a needle that doesn't prick. But gestures of love, that's harder . . . still, if you really want me to . . .

**VIRTUE:** I'll help you. At least, there's one sure thing: you won't be able to wind your fingers in my long golden hair . . .

*The black backdrop rises. All the Negroes -- including those who constituted the Court and who are without their masks -- are standing about a white-draped catafalque like the one seen at the beginning of the play.* Opening measures of the
minuet from Don Giovanni. Hand in hand, Village and Virtue walk toward them, thus turning their backs to the audience. The curtain is drawn.)

THE END

This closing dialogue may not denaturalize the use of heterosexual coupling as a figure for other political set-ups; rather, it potentially denaturalizes the classic choreography within this gesture of the man putting his arms around the woman. Furthermore, this closing dialogue exploits the traditional figurative use of heterosexual romance to suggest once again the co-imbrication of gender and racial systems of power and to suggest the immensity of the task of reinventing love, given how tightly and surreptitiously old political systems cling to rhetorical figures, and through them to emotions and objects (fruits, words, wheelbarrows, cherries, beds, needles, love). Virtue does not suggest that there is a real (hetero)sexuality prior to false choreography; she does not ask that Village step out of the cliché-ridden choreography to return to real-and-natural love-making movements. She asks, rather, that Village "invent something else." The solution to imitation is not "truth" but invention -- invention which denaturalizes prior truths and indeed the notion of "truth" itself. Village's list of inventions suggests a general sense that things can be very different than they are. The specific images that he uses (all steeped in well-worn codes of sexual connotations), however, do not radically depart from the rhetorical figures of the old regime, but rather decenter these figures, most obviously in the pitless cherries. The two-wheeled wheelbarrow visualizes a shifting of the center of gravity and a redistribution of weight. The final two images decenter heterosexuality even within their context in a heterosexual courtship (in which the man brings gifts to the woman). The extra room in "a bed for three" would be superfluous for a man-woman binary coupling. The needle that pricks is a well-worn cliché for sexual penetration and embodies a phallocentric sex/gender system in which a man leaves a mark on the woman and in which the sexual act involves pain and violence. "Needles that don't prick" might metonymize a love-making without
pain and violence, even if this figure does continue to metonymize the sexual acts of men and women in the pointed instrument of the men. These rhetorical figures suggest how deeply entwined sex/gender and race systems are, as well as how resistant they are to change. (As in the "Fuck Racism" T-shirts I recently saw, worn by an all-male black rap group.) Gestures of love may be so deeply naturalized as to be impossible either to purge, alienate, or disempower, even when the physical objects, such as needles, beds for two, and long golden hair are altered.

That Virtue will help Village to re-choreograph love, and that they take their way "hand in hand" like Adam and Eve at the end of Paradise Lost, presents an almost Utopian image of mutuality and rebirth; that they turn their backs to the audience suggests, finally, a turn away from a performance before a white audience and toward one before a black audience, or perhaps even toward non-performance (is there such a thing?). The actors playing "the Court" have removed their masks; have they also removed the external and internalized white gazes from their self-presentations? On the other hand, the intrusion of the "opening measures of the minuet from Don Giovanni," a classic of European art, ambiguates the hope of eradication of the white gaze and of the black-white dialectic. Perhaps such a hoped-for performance can only occur offstage, outside of a play written by a white man and intended for a white audience. My reading of the allusion to Paradise Lost into the final image may itself metonymize the impossibility, at this point in history, for a white reader/viewer to see a non-white performance -- even when she is committed to the struggles to change the current system of race and power, to denaturalize and destabilize this system, and to look at black representation so long excluded from white-dominated media representations and arenas of knowledge.

Jean Genet speaks "as a white" playwright. I speak "as a white" reader. Speaking "as a white," I try, like Genet, both to acknowledge that my identity and the ways I experience, see, hear, think, are fundamentally informed by my race and the meanings it has in my
culture, and to highlight the arbitrariness and performativity of these meanings. The "as" in "as a white" would then reflect both "from the (limited, biased) position of one who is white," and "as if I were a white," where the "as" is the "like or as" of similes. In asking "what exactly is a black," and in examining my own fears and resistances to asking, much less answering, such a question honestly, I am inevitably asking simultaneously "what is a white" -- and discovering only overdetermined and at the same time tautological answers to this question: a white is someone who plays the role of a white. Genet's The Blacks does not present "real" blacks, or even the possibility of "real" blacks, but rather presents white mythologizing and eroticizing of "the Negro," and the mechanisms which encourage "blacks" to perform this role before a white gaze. The Blacks examines white mythology, how this mythology may mask its whiteness and its mythical character both to "blacks" and to "whites."\textsuperscript{10}

Adrienne Kennedy's Funnyhouse of a Negro

The Blacks binarizes black and white into absurdity, but is unable to do more than gesture toward "the shade" operating between the two terms of the dialectic (and perhaps created by them). In Funnyhouse of a Negro, however, the distinction between "black" and "white" "identities" are already unhinged before the play ever begins. Unlike the "all-black cast" of The Blacks, the protagonist of Funnyhouse perceives herself to be "black" but not "all-black." In representing her "own" "black female identity," Kennedy moves into an area otherwise almost entirely repressed from dramatic representation: a conscious acknowledgement of "mixed ancestry."
Funnyhouse itself exhibits a mixed ancestry of European, North American, African, and African-American forms and styles. The characters come from myths of British colonialism (Queen Victoria Regina, the Duchess of Hapsburg), Christianity (Jesus), U. S. antebellum gothic,¹¹ and Ghanaian figures (the Man/ Patrice Lumumba). Even the play's "plot," or plotlessness, reflects Western European surrealism, modernist dismay at mythic discontinuities, postmodern ontological mazes, absurdist non sequitors, African-American gospel traditions and speaking-in-tongues, and African chants and masks. (The ebony masks, indeed, may allude both to African traditions and to Picasso's modernist borrowings of African traditions.¹²)

Funnyhouse is as resistant to plot summary as is The Blacks. To represent the "plot" is to try to account for the strange "characters" and "set." The play takes place mostly in the room/mind of the main character(s), Sarah. Other characters in the play -- the Duchess, Queen, Jesus, and Patrice Lumumba -- are also "herselves." The cast of characters does not identify The Mother as "one of ourselves," but she occupies as powerful a site in Sarah's Imaginary as any mother or other encountered in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Two other characters, white, are Sarah's landlady and Sarah's boyfriend Raymond, who are also listed as "Funnyhouse Lady" and "Funnyhouse Man." The play opens with the Duchess and Victoria discussing the knocking which recurs throughout the play; this knocking signals the return of the ebony-black father, who "raped" Sarah's very light-skinned black mother to produce the brown-skinned Sarah. Sarah discusses her fear and hatred of the black father and of blackness, and her desire to be lighter. She resents her "kinky" hair. All of Sarah's "selves" lose their hair in patches during the play. The landlady tells the audience that Sarah's father "hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba was murdered" but that Sarah insists instead that she "bludgeoned his head with an ebony skull" (8). Funnyman and Duchess then discuss the father as a Christian missionary in the African jungle. The father/ Patrice Lumumba next appears and tells the
audience of his dreams to save his race. The Duchess and Jesus go bald. The landlady recounts Sarah's cruelty to her father at their last meeting, her inability to forgive him for being black. Jesus says he will go to the jungle to kill the black man. The climactic scene takes place in the jungle, to which place all herselfs have journeyed. With nimbuises on their heads, they speak and chant in repeated variations about the jungle-black father who "keeps returning forever, returning and returning" (21). In a succession of quick images the audience sees a statue of Queen Victoria "of astonishing repulsive whiteness." then the father rushing upon Sarah, then the hanging figure of Sarah simultaneous with the laughing landlady. The landlady says that Sarah has hung herself, as her father had in the past. Raymond says Sarah's father never hung himself; rather he is alive and well and living in the city with a white whore; "Her father is a nigger who eats his meals on a white glass table" (23).

I hope, in attempting to summarize the "plot," I have both aided readers of this chapter who have not read or seen Funnyhouse, and at the same time dramatized the irrelevance of "plot" to the play's design. Even more than The Blacks and spell#7, Funnyhouse resists sequence. Instead, it structures itself on repetition, indeed compulsive repetition. Incongruous doublings and repetitions reinforce each other as the two powerful forces structuring Funnyhouse. The trope of the funnyhouse, for Kennedy, represents the confusions experienced by racially mixed African-Americans attentive to both their African and their American, as well as to their African-American and European, heritages. Indeed, much of Funnyhouse was created, physically, on a ship to Europe and then to West Africa; most of the play was composed on the waters between the two continents. The play, then, is "founded" in groundlessness, alienation, errancy, transience, and multiplicity.\footnote{13}

Whether or not Kennedy had actually read or seen The Blacks at the time of composition, Funnyhouse uncannily repeats and repeats with a difference many of the predominant images and motifs of The Blacks: masks and role-playing, black-face
reversals and extreme black-and-white coloration, hair obsessions, the rape ritual, the trek to the jungle and the heart-of-darkness. But, as in *The Blacks*, even as the play strives to binarize elements and characters into black and white, it resists binarization. Black-and-whiteness acts as a mask; on the one hand, these polar colors (or non-colors) cover over a prior, more complicated system of coloration, and on the other hand, the black-or-white binary helps to create resistances to itself, resistances which involve, in part, the belated positing of more colorful psychic hues prior to black and white.

The black and white binary manifests itself not only in metaphorical masks but, as in *The Blacks*, in literal masks as well. Masks abound in and structure *Funnyhouse*, perhaps to an even greater extent than in *The Blacks*. In the first image of the play that an audience sees, "[b]efore the closed Curtain  A WOMAN in a white nightgown walks across the Stage carrying before her a bald head" (2). Against the background of the white nightgown and the "white satin Curtain of a cheap material and a ghastly white, a material that brings to mind the interior of a cheap casket," the Woman's hair, "wild, straight and black and fall[ing] to her waist," becomes strikingly prominent. The juxtaposition of this wild hair with the decapitated bald head foregrounds hair (both its presence and absence) as a major signifier of *Funnyhouse*.

Interestingly, the race of neither the woman nor the bald head is specified in the stage directions. This absence is even more conspicuous given that the title of the play would immediately sensitize both readers and viewers to racial identity. Readers and viewers learn from other characters later in the play that this woman is the very light-skinned black mother of the (presumably eponymous) "Negro," Sarah. In contrast to the very white fabrics of the nightgown and curtains, and to the very black hair of the woman, her race is not clearly either white or black; even calling her a "very light-skinned black" woman, as I have just done, imposes an inadequate classification upon her. Like *The Blacks*, *Funnyhouse* asks "what is a black?", "what is a white?"; but while *The Blacks* asks these
questions in looking at the black-white binary system operating in full force, Funnyhouse asks these questions at sites where the system breaks down, especially in the figure of the mulatto or "yellow-skinned" individual, or the individual of "mixed ancestry." Kennedy, in her stage directions, never classifies the race of this mother in her own disembodied authorial voice, but only in the embodied voices of her characters -- Duchess, Victoria, the landlady, Jesus, Sarah.

Readers of the play still do not know the race of the head that the Mother carries. Is the decapitated head a replica of the mother's own ("yellow")? Of Sarah's ("brown")? Of Patrice Lumumba's or the father's ("black")? If the bald head is white or very black, or if it is male, it may even more pointedly isolate race and gender as sites of difference which the play obsessively reflects upon. Or, if the head is "identical" to the woman's, it introduces the trope of duplication in a play of duplicity run amok, in which it is impossible to determine which is the "original" or "authentic" or "true," and which the mask. This bald head acts as a mask to the woman who holds it in that, even though her own head is completely exposed, the bald head "before her" mediates and precedes our perceptions of her. The woman (along with the bald head she carries before her) similarly acts as a mask to the play, which carries her before it. A mask not only presents a pre-formed representing surface, but also and simultaneously reifies surface/ depth or outside/ inside or appearance/ reality or falsehood/ truth binaries. This somnambulatory pre-amble across the stage foreshadows the play's impervious indeterminacies: the woman's dream-like state before the curtain may suggest that everything behind it is her dream -- or nightmare. But it is not only a curtain of sleep, but also of entombment -- it is "ghastly white, a material that brings to mind the interior of a cheap casket, parts of it are frayed and look as if it has been gnawed by rats" (2) -- so that it pre-presents the play as a buried past returning to haunt, or as a psychic past unsuccessfully repressed. Even if everything behind the curtain is the mother's dream, it is a dream which grounds her/ her daughter's experience of reality. The
mother's preamble before the curtain sets off the behind-the-curtain as its double, both more and less authentic than itself. The behind-the-curtain is established as the site of the past by the mother's present figure preceding it. Or is the mother a false front, a figure from the past haunting the play's present? Which is real -- the before-the-curtain, or the behind-the-curtain?

This preambulatory figure is a false front in another way. Kennedy has elsewhere cited plays such as Thornton Wilder's Our Town and particularly Tennessee Williams The Glass Menagerie as major influences on her.14 The stage manager and Tom, respectively, perform the traditional roles of such figures who have a privileged ontological status, generate the play, and mediate between it and the audience. They are the trustworthy characters; we count on them to deliver the truth. Not so with this mother-and-bald-head duo, which misleads us -- or rather, which arouses and at the same time denies our hunger for authenticity.

Behind the curtain we find two women -- "Queen Victorian Regina" and the "Duchess of Hapsburg," according to the stage directions -- who have no immediately clear relation to the head-and-woman who have/has just exited. Though they have their backs to the audience in this scene, so that we do not recognize them as "white" until later scenes, these two characters seem almost a direct quotation of The Blacks's Court. Each actor playing a member of the latter Court "is a masked Negro whose mask represents the face of a white person. The mask is worn in such a way that the audience sees a wide black band all around it, and even the actor's kinky hair" (8). The Royalty in Funnyhouse

are dressed in royal gowns of white, a white similar to the white of the Curtain, the material cheap satin. Their headpieces are white and of a net that falls over their faces. From beneath both their headpieces springs a headful of wild kinky hair. ... They look exactly alike and will wear masks or be made up to appear a whitish yellow. It is an alabaster face, the skin drawn tightly over the high
cheekbones, great dark eyes that seem gouged out of the head, a high forehead, a full red mouth and a head of frizzy hair. If the characters do not wear a mask then the face must be highly powdered and possess a hard expressionless quality and a stillness as in the face of death. (2-3)

The exaggerated whiteness of these women already prefigure the very black father figure. Had the characters been played by "white" actors "underneath," their whiteness wouldn't be so pointed. Similarly, the "unnatural BLACKNESS" of most of the stage makes the "strong white LIGHT" of the Queen's chamber "unreal and ugly." But again, the more "pure" or polar these characters' whiteness, the more its dependence on the immediate co-presence of blackness -- a "presence" which is tautological, as it achieves its presence in opposition to whiteness.

As with the players of the Court in The Blacks, the "wild kinky hair" in direct opposition to the starkly white masks baldly proclaims the falsity of the role-playing. These characters are "black" on the "inside," "white" on the "outside." A reversal of the blackness of the Othellos represented by the white actors Kean, Olivier, etc., we find here whiteness as a black creation. But these characters challenge the priority of whiteness or blackness, as well as the validity of these categories. Furthermore, readers "know" from the cast of Characters that "Sarah" precedes the Duchess and the Queen, who are each "one of herselfs" (1). Furthermore, "Sarah" is listed as "Negro-Sarah." Immediately identifying her as the eponymous character, that "Negro," bound so tightly with a hyphen to her more individualizing surname, also precedes that individuality. We "know" that Sarah is black, and that the blackness underneath the white masks of the Duchess and Queen is Sarah's blackness. And yet, not only is Sarah part white inside (genetically, psychologically) and white/black (also "brown" or "yellow") on the outside, but the Queen and Duchess, who are white on the outside and black on the inside are Sarah's "insides." entombed in her psyche. While a reader would know which "self" is the most authentic, a
spectator does not for a long time, if at all, receive any clear indication. Are either the Queen or the Duchess the eponymous "Negro" whose "Funnyhouse" the play is? The characters' masks, and the characters-as-masks, complicate any sense of what is mask, what is real. In retrospect and belatedly (and most of the understanding and classifying in this play occurs this way), spectators understand the Duchess and the Queen to be, in some sense, "white." The first view we see of these selves of Negro-Sarah," though, presents the black backsides of white characters. That is, from the start, the "Negro" is figured as an un-decode-able combination of contradictory racial signs of indeterminate priority or supremacy: a funnyhouse of racial signals, with no exit.

At the sound of knocking (a sound to recur throughout the play) Victoria and Duchess, in the first spoken words of the play, discuss what every character of the play obsessively discusses: the return of the father from the jungle:

VICTORIA. (Listening to the knocking.) It is my father. He is arriving again for the night. ... He comes through the jungle to find me. He never tires of his journey.

DUCHESS. How dare he enter the castle, he who is the darkest of them all, the darkest one? My mother looked like a white woman, hair as straight as any white woman's. And at least I am yellow, but he is black, the blackest one of them all. I hoped he was dead. Yet he still comes through the jungle to find me.

(The KNOCKING is louder.)

The father is the repressed who cannot be completely eradicated, and whose recurrent return gives the play the structure of repetition compulsion. This black man is already at least doubly a repetition of figures outside the play: he repeats the role of black rapist played by Village in The Blacks and recurrent in North American cultural myths from KKK propaganda to Black Militant plays of the 1960s, from the 1988 Bush campaign's use of
Willie Horton to mass fears of "wilding" generated by media coverage of the "Central Park Jogger" trial. But he is also Patrice Lumumba. Furthermore, at his first physical appearance halfway through the play, "Patrice Lumumba" (as "he" is listed in the cast of characters) already at least doubly repeats signals within the play: not only does character after character repeatedly discuss him, and especially discuss the way he hauntingly "keeps returning forever, coming back ever and keeps coming back forever" (3-4), but he is almost an exact negative image of the first image of the play. Just as the mother always appears carrying the mask-like bald head, the man always appears carrying an "ebony mask" (7). While the mother is always dressed in a white nightgown, Lumumba/ the Man/ the father is always described as a "black" or "dark" figure. Furthermore, his "head appears to be split in two with blood and tissue in eyes" (7). This macabre allusion to Patrice Lumumba's death also encapsulates this figure's dramatically split personality: both Christian missionary and African primitive, both Sarah and Sarah's father, both dead and alive. A head split in two flattens both sides of the head to masks. All of these masks both emphasize the falsity of racial roles and spotlight their primacy to any self-identity.

Funnyhouse's repeated references to the black man's act of raping the light-skinned woman themselves repeat Western European myths we have encountered before in this study. In her first lines of the play, the Duchess synopsizes this metanarrative of ritual rape:

> How dare he enter the castle of Queen Victoria Regina, Monarch of England? It is because of him that my mother died. The wild black beast put his hands on her.
>
She died. (3)

Similarly, Venetians in Othello repeatedly cast socio-sexual complexities into this simple ideological plot. Many of the Venetians, and even, at moments, Othello, can only understand the relation between Othello and Desdemona as one of rape or of prostitution. When Iago first reports to Brabantio the news of the elopement in the imagery of this racist
ideological metanarrative, Brabantio states "[t]his accident is not unlike my dream" (1.1.142). That this metanarrative is figured so often as a dream or nightmare suggests that it operates not only at political, but also at deeply entrenched neurotic sites. In *Funnyhouse*, too, the narrative of the black father raping the light mother is a dream, residing in the deepest chambers of Sarah's psyche. The mother at the opening, which we later learn to be part of Sarah's dream (the Duchess says she awakens "shaken by nightmares of [her] mother" (10)), herself seems to be dreaming and sleep-walking. The next scene takes place in a chamber predominated by a "dark monumental bed resembling an ebony tomb;" overhead fly "great black RAVENS," conventional birds of ill omen, evil, and death, particularly in gothic phantasmagoria. Perhaps even more menacing, "[o]n the white pillow of [Victoria's] bed is a dark, indistinguishable object" (2). Not unlike the dark bed itself, amidst the strong white light of center-stage; not unlike the dark accident of Brabantio's dream; not unlike the black figure of Othello at the end of *Othello*, as he lies across the white figure of Desdemona on her white-wedding-sheeted bed.

This indistinguishable dark object on the white pillow, conjuring up a sense of the dark core at the heart of whiteness, that which whites most fear and by most fearing become whites -- is eventually identified as hair. Hair loss is repeatedly linked with being raped ("the wild black beast raped me and now my skull is shining;" 4). All the characters in *Funnyhouse* move back and forth along a stream of associations between rape (the black act on the white bed), hair loss (the black spot on the white pillow), health loss, loss of sanity, and death (alternatively represented as something very black and very white). The "alabaster face" masking both the Duchess and the Queen, like Desdemona's "smooth, as monumental alabaster" skin (5.2.5), connote at once unnatural whiteness and death. This conjunction of associations suggests that the ideal of whiteness is achieved only through the ritual sacrifice of white women (and erasure of black women). Like in *The Blacks*, the center-stage bed is also a casket, and the scenes acted around it resemble funeral rites.
Unlike *The Blacks*, the rape ritual does not "occur" during the performance of *Funnyhouse*; rather the rape is always in the past and always returning, always a threat for the future. In *The Blacks*, the rape occurs at least symbolically in the temporal present, but occurs offstage. Both rapes become all the more immediate for being simultaneously not-present and present. By not being pinned down to a specific time, place, and person, these interracial rapes are generalized onto all white women of all times. Both plays on the one hand connect the symbolic (and physical) rape of a white woman with the imminent death (but also reinforcement) of white supremacy. In *The Blacks*, the rape propels the members of "the Court" to "the jungle," where they meet their death. In *Funnyhouse*, the mother and all of Sarah's "white" selves -- Duchess, Queen, Jesus -- lose their hair and their sanity, and Sarah "herself" seemingly commits suicide in response to the rape. In *Funnyhouse*, as in *The Blacks*, the rape myth serves both as the climax of black-white relations and as the foundation of these relations and of the very binary itself. It is what makes these white women white, and gives birth to whiteness as a concept -- and again and again reproduces the concepts of whiteness and blackness. (This is also the case in *The Blacks*, where Diouf-Marie crosses from the "colored" lower regions of the stage to the "whites only" balcony at the moment when he is "raped" as a white woman.) Furthermore, rape in both plays spurs the retributive trip of whites into the jungle -- a trip which ritually enacts a symbolic and retrospective positing of the ebony black body at the origin of black racial identity.

*Funnyhouse* repeats, but hauntingly repeats, tropes of the racially motivated (and motivating) rape ritual and the primal black jungle from *The Blacks* and/or metanarratives of a Euro-American "political Unconscious." Whereas Genet takes up these tropes and metanarratives in a distanced, alienating satire, Kennedy seems not so much to delegitimate them as to dramatize their power. Indeed, it is this repetitiveness, this virus-paced replication in host psyches, which gives these mythemes such power. The jungle,
repeatedly cited (and constituted via repetition) as the origin of blackness, the "heart of
darkness," unfolds as the un-original site of concentrated repetitions, the heart of
repetitions of representations of darkness. In this jungle, all the major strands of dialogue
which make the black father black are "repeated several times" and spoken "repeatedly at
various times in a chant" (21). The obsessional themes of the father knocking, his
blackness in opposition to the mother's whiteness, the rape, the ebony masks, Sarah's
fantasy of bludgeoning him to death, his plea of forgiveness for being black, all recur again
and again in the jungle. But while the jungle has all along been posited as the origin of all
those images of blackness, the "selves" must most frenetically conjure up primal blackness
when they reach it. This jungle seems more like a psychic space -- the "id," the
"repressed" or the "Imaginary" -- than a geographical one:

In the jungle, RED SUN, FLYING THINGS, wild black grass. The effect of the
jungle is that it, unlike the other scenes, is over the entire stage. In time this is the
longest scene in the play and is played the slowest, as the slow, almost standstill
stages of a dream. By lighting the desired effect would be -- suddenly the jungle
has overgrown the chambers and all the other places with a violence and a dark
brightness, a grim yellowness. (20)

This scene seems to come from the palette of Henri Rousseau, from gothic traditions, and
perhaps from Grimms' fairy tales (as well as from private nightmares), rather than from
observations of any actual jungle that Kennedy may have seen in her trip to Ghana. The
wild black grass recalls the wild black hair, the "unmistakably Negro kinky hair" which
Sarah sees as a "defect." Her selves lose this "glaring Negroid feature" after the rape
which symbolically lightens them. Here this wild black grass luxuriates. Yet even this
heart of blackness is not absolutely dark but a "dark brightness, a grim yellowness."
"Yellowness" in this play suggests both the ghostly whiteness of Victoria's statue, so old
and white that it's yellow, and the derogatory term for "mulatta" (itself a derogatory term).
If this "jungle" is the site of the psyche, then the psyche, like the jungle, achieves its status as origin and core of the "self" belatedly, by the obsessive reproductions of signals positing its originariness. The core self is just other people and other images, repeated often enough to become not only naturalized, but made to precede all repetitions.

It is no accident, then, that a play about the power of racial myths would be structured on a repetition compulsion; indeed, repetition compulsion is the aesthetic -- or anaesthetic -- par excellence of racism. But repetition in never exact; in Funnyhouse, repetition with a difference is not only a means for psychic, even brainwashing reproductions of racism, but also an alienating revelation of aporia, internal differences and disruption, cracks in the front of self-identity. In the following passage, the Duchess repeatedly states that her father is of African descent. But she says so in different ways:

He is an African who lives in the jungle. He is an African who has always lived in the jungle. Yes, he is a nigger who is an African who is a missionary teacher and is now dedicating his life to the erection of a mission in the middle of the jungle. He is a black man. (9)

"He is an African" sounds factual, but the stereotypical "jungle" sounds suspiciously fantastical, Rousseau-esque (reminiscent both of Henri Rousseau's wild black jungle-men and of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's primitive innocents prior to civilization). Not "a jungle," much less a specifically named jungle, but "the jungle," the site which contains the uncontainable, which exists everywhere danger is. A region of the self. To say that he "has always lived in the jungle" crosses over from biography to myth. One could read "he has lived in the jungle for his whole life," but the sense of "he has lived in the jungle forever" also hovers. He is a trope, an embodiment of the jungle, which is itself a metaphor for an imagined space beyond whiteness. Later the black father becomes even less an individual human being. The Duchess says consecutively "Hide me here so the nigger will not find me" and "Hide me here so the jungle will not find me" (9-10). "The
nigger" and "the jungle" occupy the same syntagmatic position in her psyche. And, even more explicitly, "He is the wilderness" (10) and "He is a black man and the wilderness" (11). Embedding the slippage among the different types of men and the "jungle" in repeated phrases, the Duchess both conflates the variable terms and accents their non-identity as well as the racism operating in her e-race-ure of differences. Dehumanizing black men, the Duchess uses their bodies as embodiments of a dark repressed. Deliberate repetition with a difference, then, can be a strategic aesthetic for presenting the way race and racism are internalized, while simultaneously externalizing such an internalization. For Kennedy, this strategic aesthetic theatricalizes, simultaneously, indoctrination through repetition and alienation through difference.

The Duchess, a European "self" of the African-American Sarah, speaks a white racism which some blacks also internalize and struggle internally against. The object of the Duchess's discourse is either an African/ nigger/ black man or a missionary teacher/ colonizer of the former. These possibilities cannot co-exist, and do co-exist, in the Duchess's schizophrenic representation. Her discourse slips easily along a chain of signifiers, from "African" to "the jungle" to "a nigger" to "an African" to "a missionary teacher" to "a black man." On the one hand this slippage presents these terms as synonyms; on the other hand, it opens itself up to the differences among these terms. The Duchess's discourse, then, floodlights a slippage that may occur in a white American cultural unconscious and become internalized even by individuals who try consciously to resist it. But this passage is spoken by a white figure on behalf of a black (as well as vice versa). It is a passage repeated with variations by every character in the play of every "color" -- "black," "brown," "yellow," and "white." The colors of the "selves" speaking both are and are not relevant to the words they speak. Not only does the multiracial cast of selves transfer racist stereotypes, but the repetitions of racist discourse are the very means by which Sarah simultaneously obtains her race (or her racial self) and becomes alienated.
from it -- and alienated from her "self(ves)", fragmented into mutually exclusive characteristics dispersed among many races.

Repetitions across monologues, like repetitions within monologues, perform similar paradoxical effects, both blurring and emphasizing differences, both indoctrinating through repetition and alienating through difference. Selves constitute themselves through repetition of other selves. Internalizing white cultural denigrations of Negro identity, NEGRO tries to evacuate this Negro identity and become a bearer of white signifiers:

As for myself I long to become even a more pallid Negro than I am now; pallid like Negroes on the covers of American Negro magazines; soulless, educated and irreligious. I want to possess no moral value, particularly value as to my being. I want not to be. I ask nothing except anonymity. I am an English major, as my mother was when she went to school in Atlanta. My father majored in social work. I am graduated from a city college and have occasional work in libraries, but mostly spend my days preoccupied with the placement and geometric position of words on paper. I write poetry filling white page after white page with imitations of Edith Sitwell. It is my dream to live in rooms with European antiques and my Queen Victoria, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books, a piano, oriental carpets and to eat my meals on a white glass table. I will visit my friends' apartments which will contain books, photographs of Roman ruins, pianos and oriental carpets. My friends will be white. (5-6)

Repeating the complexions of images on magazines, reproducing her light mother's education, imitating the quintessentially British Edith Sitwell, redecorating her rooms with the European and Orientalist interior decorations of her white friends, Sarah amasses a(n) (non-)identity out of the dictates of others.

But if the Negro-Sarah self of the speaking subject of the funnyhouse is a selfless self, the MAN-self (and indeed the collection of selves) is/are many selves, none of which is a
"true" self, but all of which are replicas of mythic racial paradigms: "self" is just other people. MAN presents himself as simultaneously at least two (other) people:

I am a nigger of two generations. I am Patrice Lumumba. I am a nigger of two generations. I am the black shadow that haunted my mother's conception. I belong to the generation born at the turn of the century and the generation born before the depression. ... My nigger father majored in social work, so did my mother. I am a student and have occasional work in libraries. But mostly I spend my vile days preoccupied with the placement and geometric position of words on paper. I write poetry filling white page after white page with imitations of Sitwell. It is my vile dream to live in rooms with European antiques and my statue of Queen Victoria, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books, a piano and oriental carpets and to eat my meals on a white glass table....My friends will be white. I need them as an embankment to keep me from reflecting too much upon the fact that I am Patrice Lumumba who haunted my mother's conception. They are necessary for me to maintain recognition against myself.... (12)

The impossibility of ever being present at one's mother's conception (one's mother's being conceived by her parents? one's being conceived in the womb of one's mother?) spotlights the recurrent, indeed compulsively repeated motif of reproduction and regeneration in the most literal sense. Because Sarah sees herself as a product of a rape which is also an act of miscegenation, her very existence repeatedly signifies a past trauma, an originary trauma which may have been created belatedly by her to account for her repetition compulsion. For Sarah, then, racial and gender conflicts are signified and repeated by her very existence. Defensively repeating the trauma to mitigate it, she also reifies it.

As in The Blacks, the rape of a white woman by a dark man is a fetishistic myth, an ideological state apparatus which itself reproduces and reinforces racism (and sexism), a "true" ritual, and a screen obfuscating other understandings of race and of the complex
reproductions of race and racism. Unlike The Blacks, Funnyhouse (re)presents the product of "miscegenation" and theatricalizes the poignant irreconcilability of mixed ancestries, identities, myths. Within the dominant rape myth, Sarah is herself a return of the repressed; she represents (to herself) black violation of whiteness. Kennedy shows the effects of this myth not only on white men, white women, and black men, but also on black women, or rather on a particular black woman, who is torn among multiple identifications. Like Genet, Kennedy shows not only the poignancy and endless reproductions of this myth, but shows also the means of reproduction to be in both black and white hands, but predominantly in white. In The Blacks, while the onstage actors, directors, and the playwrights are "black," the offstage audience and playwright, as Genet so baldly spotlights, are white. In Funnyhouse, the offstage playwright is black, but the play itself invalidates both the terms "black" and "white," as it presents an individual as genetically and psychically a mixture of races, traditions, and cultural myths. The racially pure Snow White and ebony black figures may powerfully haunt and define one's racial identity, but they are not themselves real.

And yet these myths are real -- or realized -- for we take part in a culture which reifies and binarizes "black" and "white" as bodily truths. Even as Funnyhouse deconstructs this binary system, it shows the system to be in the service of those who go under the sign of "white." Within the play, the funnyhouse of black and white mythologies is directed and supervised by the white Raymond ("Funnyhouse Man") and Sarah's white landlady ("Funnyhouse Lady"). While conspicuously black actors play Sarah's "white" "selves" (the Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, and perhaps the "yellow" Jesus), the Funnyhouse Lady and Man are played by white actors. Not only was the "real" theater of Funnyhouse's original performance owned by a white man and the play produced and directed by white men, but the playing area within the play is also owned and controlled by whites. Sarah says of the places of performance that "the rooms are my rooms … the
places where myselfs exist" (7). But it is the landlady, not Sarah, who owns these rooms.

Mrs. Conrad and Raymond also "own" the narrative, or at least act very proprietary in relation to it, as they mediate between "herselves" and the audience. In a scene with the Duchess (8-11), Raymond selectively dispenses vision and insight. He opens and closes "a prop of blinds" behind which "are mirrors and when the blinds are opened and closed by Raymond this is revealed" (8-9). Like Iago, Raymond is a Venetian blinder, controlling when both the Duchess and the audience can see themselves, and creating disjunctions and distortions in their self-images. Audiences may identify him, like Iago, as the artist figure (he is "dressed ... in attire suggesting an artist," 9), "a poet" (6), and director; audiences may even identify with him. Though neither sympathetic nor sympathizing characters, Raymond and the landlady gain audience respect as the sane figures, partly by labelling Sarah as simply insane, by shutting out her more complex psychic vision:

LANDLADY. ... I tell her: Sarah, honey, the man hung himself. It's not your blame. But, no, she stares at me: No, Mrs. Conrad, he did not hang himself, that is only the way they understand it, they do, but the truth is that I bludgeoned his head with an ebony skull that he carries about with him. Wherever he goes, he carries black masks and heads.

She's suffering so till her hair has fallen out. But then she did always hide herself in that room with the walls of books and her statue. I always did know she thought she was somebody else, a queen or something, somebody else. (8)

Both the landlady's two monologues put "herselves"'s imagistic motifs into chronological, logical narrative. I found myself, upon my first reading of this play -- actually, upon my first several readings -- turning to the landlady's monologues with relief, for some sort of sense, some way to escape the twists and turns of Sarah's endless disorientation. Yet
when I force myself to attempt to inhabit Sarah's disorientations, the landlady's monologues seem grossly inadequate to Sarah's experience.

Raymond and the landlady not only reduce and discount Sarah's stories and selves, they also close the play off by discrediting them in the most patronizing of ways. I quote the quick-moving ending at length:

_The Negro SARAH is standing perfectly still, we hear the KNOCKING, the LIGHTS come on quickly, her FATHER'S black figure with bludgeoned hands rushes upon her, the LIGHT GOES BLACK and we see her hanging in the room._

_LIGHTS come on the laughing LANDLADY. And at the same time remain on the hanging figure of the NEGRO._

_LANDLADY. The poor bitch has hung herself. (FUNNYMAN RAYMOND appears from his room at the commotion.) The poor bitch has hung herself._

_RAYMOND. (Observing her hanging figure.) She was a funny little liar._

_LANDLADY. (Informing him.) Her father hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba died._

_RAYMOND. Her father never hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba was murdered. I know the man. He is a doctor, married to a white whore. He lives in the city in rooms with European antiques, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books and oriental carpets. Her father is a nigger who eats his meals on a white glass table._

_END (22-3)
The two white characters of the play, Raymond and the landlady, not only have the final words, but also function as the dispensers of truth. They (seem to) give "the real story." It is they who control our interpretation.

That is, if we let them. For we also know that whether or not Sarah does have a father who lives out white codes, the father to Sarah's racial identity is a mythic black man who frightens and fascinates her. Furthermore, much as the play encourages audience trust in and identification with the Funnyhouse Lady and Man, it also confounds that trust. With the opening appearance of the Mother, we have seen, the play begins a pattern of encouraging and frustrating trust. For viewers without access to a written cast of characters, the maze of frustrated identifications becomes even more confounding. The cast of characters lists "Negro-Sarah" first, and subsequent characters as "one of themselves"; "Negro-Sarah" would appear to be the originary/authentic self. But, given that three of "herselves" appear before she does and speak close variations of her own speech, how does an audience tell that Sarah has priority over her other selves? Perhaps the only clue, ironically, is her disclosure of her failure to order herselfs:

I try to give myselfs a logical relationship but that too is a lie. For relationships was one of my last religions. I clung loyally to the lie of relationships, again and again seeking to establish a connection between my characters. Jesus is Victoria's son. Mother loved my father before her hair fell out. A loving relationship exists between myself and Queen Victoria, a love between myself and Jesus but they are lies. (7)

Sarah only gains priority to her other selves by trying and failing to order them, and by representing her disorder to us. Sarah, then, forces the audience into assigning authenticity. She teaches an alternative aesthetic to that of Raymond and the landlady. Sarah's spectatorial aesthetic is one of decentered, disordered identification -- identification which is also multiplication of selfhood.
As viewers are forced actively to seek the subject of the play and the object of identification, as *Funnyhouse* discourages even as it encourages faith in the white characters' dispensation of narrative "truth," the play simultaneously spotlights the races of characters and audience and encourages (and frustrates) identifications across race. Kennedy does not give a clear indication in her stage directions, as does Genet, of the racial make-up of the audience. In interviews, however, she states that "the theater is segregated enough" and that she "write[s] for a total audience:" interviewer Wolfgang Binder concludes that Kennedy "herself aimed at a desegregated public." She writes plays "to break through barriers." Kennedy does not like the labels "Black writer" or "woman writer," "never wanted to identify totally with women playwrights or Black playwrights or anybody," is "totally opposed to women's theater," and "would never tell a Black student to write for Blacks alone, especially nowadays." This racially mixed audience is apt for an investigation of racially mixed selfhood (or selves and hood). I would imagine that viewers of all races would identify with characters of all races and racial orientations in this play in which "black" and "white" are masks. As a white reader who has not seen the play performed, I feel much more empathy for Sarah than for her two white interpreters.

But this play also refuses to let me forget that characters' racial masks are always worn or carried, and that they precede selves. While Kennedy refuses the categories "black playwright" and "woman playwright," she characterizes herself as a "black woman" who is "an off-Broadway playwright." The play refuses to let me forget that I am "a white reader" even as it breaks down the barriers of this fictional but operative category. Both the ebony mask of Patrice Lumumba and the white masks (behind which "wild kinky hair" flares) of the Queen and Duchess dramatize both the irrelevance and ungroundedness of racial identity to the body and the predominance and inescapability of one's race. Of any race. For Sarah externalizes interactions with white folks in ways that continually redirect me to the whiteness of my own mask, stance, and gaze. Sarah's repetition of her need for
white friends as "a stark fortress against recognition of [her]self" (6) or as "an embankment … to maintain recognition against [her]self" (13) baldly reminds me that no matter how much I identify with Sarah and herselfs, I do so as a white friend and fortress: a mask, not a window or mirror. Sarah's foremost friend is Raymond, whose character and relation to Sarah sound startlingly familiar to me:

I would like to lie and say I love Raymond. But I do not. He is a poet and is Jewish. He is very interested in Negroes. (6)

Raymond closes off and appropriates the play, claiming the last words for himself. Does my interest in texts of people of color perform a similar act?

At a recent MLA session on Kennedy,18 Paul Jackson argued that while Kennedy's images partook of American transcendentalist and European Absurdist traditions, one can best trace these images "to their African origin." The very notion of an origin, a resting place, a priority, a ground, seemed to me alien to Kennedy's work. And yet I hesitated to raise my hand in the discussion period, not only because I was a graduate student facing five professors all of whose work I had long known and admired, but also because I was white and three out of five of the panelists, including Jackson, were black. And while Kennedy's work, for me, breaks down the binary black and white barriers, it was clear to me that for Jackson at least, Kennedy's plays do not work in this way, but rather confirm a pan-African identity, and do so powerfully. I wanted to ask Johnson, though, why he posited the conjuration of an African Eden as an origin, or as more originary than the European, European-American, and African-American imageries. But my asking such a question in that structural context would further re-reify the racial binarism.

In the end, I did ask Jackson about his sense of ethnic ontologies in Kennedy's work. I asked, because it seemed to me that Kennedy herself dares to de-authorize all claims to ethnic onto-genesis. In *Funnyhouse*, the myth of an African Eden, the dream repeatedly conjured up by the Man "to walk in Genesis and save the race … to return to Africa, find
revelation in the midst of golden savannas, nim and white frankopenny trees, white stallions roaming under a blue sky, ... [to] walk with a white dove and heal the race, heal the misery, take [it] off the cross" (14), is as much encoded by Western Christian texts as is the nightmare of the wild, wicked, heart-of-darkness Africa. Jackson felt that Kennedy puts European, European-American, North American, African, and African-American identities into de-hierarchizing play, her evocation of an African imagistic origin may be more powerful than its self-destabilization -- whereas I was bent on making Kennedy a postmodernist. I felt a tension in the room: who was I, white, to take away Kennedy's Africanness. "Is there any doubt who Kennedy is?", respondent Betty Jean Jones asked me. "Yes," I answered, "I think that doubt is precisely the core of Kennedy's work, and that's why I find it so disturbing and powerful." I realized too late that Jones' question was rhetorical, and angry, and that my views on Kennedy's ontology were specific to me. I realized also that to many of the people at the session, even to myself at this point, I was a Raymond to Kennedy's Sarah, a Jewish white liberal "very interested in Negroes," and speaking as if from a firm position of knowingness about their instability.

Kennedy offers the possibility of a different kind of textual criticism: that of racially ambiguous, multiple, sometimes painfully contradictory identifications which never settle. But Raymond's mode of reading/interpreting/commenting, which supersedes the former mode, warns me how quickly my identifications can turn into reduction and appropriation. However performatively constituted the black-white racial binary is, however much it is a product of compulsive repetitions of a mythic, perhaps belatedly posited trauma, and however exclusive and even false it is, its power is also very real.
ntozake shange's spell #7

For Kennedy's protagonist(s) in Funnyhouse of a Negro, a pure black identity is impossible. Writing 15 or so years later, ntozake shange presents characters for whom black identity is palpable and solid, but also a product of continual improvisation and revision. Funnyhouse's "main" character is multiple in that "herself" is played by many actors, all irreconcilable fragments of an ontologically labyrinthine mind. In spell #7, characters are multiple in that each actor-character plays many parts and improvises many characters, which roles are clearly demarcated as alternate realities. While Funnyhouse's self-multiplicity is alarming and even paralyzing, spell #7's self-multiplicity is positive, a potential agent of liberation.

Kennedy writes from ethnically mixed heritages and from points of break-down of racial classifications, as well as from multiple points within operating structures of racial classification, but claims no position as final. She writes, furthermore, for an equally multi-cultural audience. shange writes as a black playwright for an all-black cast and a black audience. That is, shange assumes a black female stance as a given, just as Genet assumes his identity as a white man is a given, an identity which he cannot step outside of. Both playwrights question racial identity, yet both assume (opposite) racial identities prior to questioning them and from which to question them.

spell #7 foregrounds race -- starting with the race of each audience member -- as the primary "fact" of self, one experienced as immediate, irreducible, and absolute. In the Ensemble's production of shange's for colored girls... which I recollected at the beginning of this chapter, the physical presence and racial composition of the audience became a part of the meaning (or signifying) of the play. In spell #7, shange shifts her terms somewhat; the subtitle for this play is "geechee jibara quik / magic trance manual for / technologically stressed / third world people." Both plays explicitly exclude me, as a white woman. Even our gender cannot be a point of commonality; the understanding of the category "woman"
differs radically among races and ethnicities. The earlier play is "for colored girls," the latter "for ... third world people." A spectator's experience of this play is very different according to whether that spectator is black, white, or some other unspecified or mixed "third world" race. In my reading of spell #7, I want to expand my sense of the "white gaze," which The Blacks makes palpable and which Funnyhouse further alienates. In addition, I want to consider the problematics of a "black gaze," a gaze which Genet and Kennedy tentatively posit, but which change confidently reifies and plays to.

If The Blacks and Funnyhouse parade white masks, spell #7 stages black masks; all three plays delve into the overdetermined character of race (which is "made up" of skin, kinship, "attitude," body language, speech acts, vernacular, etc.), and spotlight its performativity. Even the physical fact of skin can be a role, a mask, as well as an irreducible fact. spell #7 continues this investigation of the at least dual nature of skin. change seems both to present race as grounded in skin (with skin as a bottom line), and to celebrate the performance of race. But performed racial roles can also be destructive, and can seep into one's person so subtly, surreptitiously, and deeply that they may seem not only inextricable but also natural.

Like The Blacks, spell #7 presents the theater as a medium, metaphor, and metonym for productions of race in the social arena at large. The characters who gather in eli's bar, where they tell stories and improvise better roles, are themselves struggling actors, dancers, and writers. Again, emphasizing the performativity of the characters peopling the stage, those characters are played by actors who are played by other actors. Any sense of the "true nature" of the bodies onstage is doubly and even triply removed. The roles these actors of color improvise in eli's bar are roles that seem more honest and fulfilling to them than the ones they play for pay, but roles which they are denied in contemporary theater / society. (Casting in U.S. theater has altered slightly but not radically since 1979; social
casting, in spite of affirmative action, has probably become more racially striated in the past 12 years.) The actors in spell #7 openly discuss their lack of roles:

lily

they say i'm too light to work/ but when i asked him what he meant/ he said i didn't actually look black. but/ i said/ my mama knows i'm black & my daddy/ damn sure knows i'm black/ & he is the only one who has a problem thinking i'm black/ i said so let me play a white girl/ i'm a classically trained actress & i need the work & i can do it/ he said that wdnt be very ethical of him. can you imagine that shit/ not ethical (47)

Like the blacks in The Blacks, who have to put on darker make-up to play blacks, lily is not believable -- or is perhaps all too believable and threatening -- when she can't fit neatly into the carefully reproduced black-white binarism. Though lily implies that she can play both black and white, she also says that she is black but can play a white girl. Light skin does not make her less black. But while blackness is not a role to her in the way that Whiteness is, the part of the ebony-black character she has tried out for would almost certainly be a white role (that is, a white construction of blackness which polarizes and reifies Whiteness and blackness as such). Of course, the "ethical" and the "natural" are quite different; I want to make it clear that while I am ethically committed to both "color blind" and (preferably) color conscious non-traditional casting (that is, while I feel it is unethical not to cast lily as a white girl), I also want to question the fundamental premises of assigning race in the first place. The limit cases in which race is difficult to assign, and/or in which two or more factors in race's overdetermined make-up conflict, may provide points of departure from the destructively (and falsely) dualistic definition of race as it is (often) currently lived in this country.

Earlier, when lily laments the dearth of roles for blacks, her friends "signify upon" her:

lily

i wish i cd get just one decent part
lou
say as lady macbeth or mother courage

eli
how the hell is she gonna play lady macbeth and macbeth's a white dude? (13-14)
Their exclusion from classical starring roles keeps "third world" actors subordinated and relatively invisible. But this exchange carries further import. eli doesn't say that lily can't play lady macbeth because lady macbeth is white, but rather because macbeth is white; the wording of his rhetorical question foregrounds the taboo on miscegenation. Yet, in another light, eli's question may not be rhetorical: how would a black actress play lady macbeth with a white actor playing a white macbeth? or with a non-white actor playing a white macbeth? What would be the semiotics of a black lady macbeth — or a black Juliet, Rosalind, or Desdemona? Such a challenge to traditional casting might demand both completely new aesthetics of acting and impinge on social roles. At the very least, it would make a financial difference in lily's life, and would increase the employability of other actors of color.

The example of "mother courage" is metadramatically pointed; n 1980, the Public theater produced shange's adaptation of Brecht's Mother Courage for a black cast.² ⁰ For the most part, however, actors of color are relegated to certain reductive roles: the whore, the hoodlum, the mammy, the house nigger:

well/ i got offered another whore part downtown (45)

... if that director asks me to play it any blacker/ i'm gonna have to do it in a mammy dress (14)

... i'm not playing the fool or the black buck pimp circus (44)
Beyond the theater, too, people of color are only visible when cast in certain roles:
we all know that we/ actually dont exist unless we play football or basketball or baseball or soccer/ pélé/ see they still import a strong niggah to earn money. (46)

The figure of unemployed black actors is strikingly common in plays by black writers. Many black plays, in addition, poke fun -- but bitter, angry fun -- at theatrical stereotyping of blacks. The types of roles that black actors like those in eli's bar do have to play are parodied, for example, in George C. Wolfe's *The Colored Museum.* In this "museum" we find such "exhibits" as "Cookin' with Aunt Ethel" (an Aunt Jemima figure), "The Gospel According to Miss Roj" (a drag queen), "Lala's Opening" (about a black female cabaret singer who affects a French accent and represses her roots), and "The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play" (which, ironically, parodies both Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and shange's *for colored girls...*). In "Chaos in Belleville," the play-within-the-play of Alice Childress's *Trouble in Mind,* we find a noble slave tragically lynched and the accepting grief of his Uncle Tom father and mammy mother. In film, too we find similar virulent parodies of stereotypes. Robert Townsend's *Hollywood Shuffle* hilariously sends up the butler, drug dealer, gang member, and Eddie-Murphy-imitation roles, among others, while film critic Donald Bogle foregrounds his critique of these types in the very title of his study *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films.* alec -- and shange -- plead against these type roles "im an actor not a stereotype" (44-5).

All these figures are subsumed under that master-trope, the minstrel, represented in spell #7 by lou at the beginning, but even more oppressively and immutably by the giant black-face mask that looms overhead. lou, like Archibald in *The Blacks,* is a kind of master-of-ceremonies as well as a black magician -- an African-American and a practitioner of black magic. I will defer my discussion of the ambiguity and possible liberatory subversiveness of his black magic until later in this chapter. For now I want merely to note his initial appearance below the mask:
... lou, the magician, enters. he is dressed in the traditional costume of Mr. Interlocutor: tuxedo, bow-tie, top hat festooned with all kinds of whatnots that are obviously meant for good luck, he does a few catchy "soft-shoe" steps & begins singing a traditional version of a black play song (7)

Like the performers in Genet's play, lou submits with a vengeance to the tradition of minstrelsy. In for colored girls..., in which each lady of the cast of characters dresses in one of the colors of the rainbow, costumes represent differences and varieties among "colored girls." In the minstrel's black-and-white tuxedo materializes the very powerful ideology of racism which, however artificial and performative, is lived as an irreducible racial binary. Minstrelsy presents the extreme form both of the performativity of the racial construct and of its painfully oppressive reality for those who must embody it. In the minstrel tradition, originally white men blacked up; later, black performers too put on the black-face and black character of the foolish minstrel. In the previous chapter I considered the black-face approach of many white actors to Othello as a metonym for the racism both in the society within Othello and in the social systems of the actors. In spell #7, the black-faced black performer metonymizes the material hold this humiliating figure has on African-Americans.

Out of a job but horrified by "denigrating" roles, actor alec says to bettina "i cd always black up again & do minstrel work/ wd that make you happy?," to which bettina replies "there is nothin niggardly abt a decent job. work is honorable/ work!" (46). Economic gain only comes to blacks when they assume certain degrading roles. When someone needs money badly enough, he or she may not only perform the part but also justify the act to him- or herself as "honorable work!" Minstrelsy represents racial stereotypes which are patently false but so omnipresent that they are experienced as real. So prevalent, indeed, are these roles that every time I read this exchange between alec and bettina, I start at the word "niggardly," even though this word has no etymological link to
the homophonic "niggeredly" that I see/hear. My mind's leap from "niggard" to "nigger" may well reveal a latent (or even patent) racism in me, but I've also been told by many of my dark-skinned friends (African, African-American, Indian, and Pakistani) that they cannot help but perceive the word "niggard" as derogatory, whatever its etymology. The racism which names the "nigger" infiltrates all signifiers which cross its path, in a sort of pathological free play of signification. Shange, of course, is not the first to exploit in rebellion this homophonic pair. The word "niggard" seems hardly likely to be a commonly used word in Bettina's vernacular, so that Shange's putting this word in Bettina's mouth is somewhat of a cheap shot on Shange's part. But a cheap shot in the way that the minstrel images are cheap: unwilling to refresh racism with new anti-racist cleverness, Shange shows instead how a person may unknowingly speak, in the words of others, a self-destructive racist ideology, even as that person thinks she is acting in self-preservation. (On the other end of the rhetorical spectrum may be blacks' own use of the word "nigger," in affectionate tenderness and in pride, among themselves. This usage signifies upon the racist use of the word by re-appropriating it, in much the same way that gay activists, particularly Queer Nation, have appropriated the terms "gay" and "queer," as well as the pink triangle used to designate queers in Nazi Germany.)

Shange's deliberate placement of the word "niggardly" makes audience members of all races aware of the ready slippage of racist content from signifier to signifier. But the deliberateness of Shange's use of signifiers is also liberating, for it changes the signifieds. "Nigger" goes from signifying a scorned member of a scorned race to signifying the racism of the speaker. Similarly, Shange's deliberate use of the blackface mask liberates this mask in part from its original meaning of African-American oppression; it now signifies African-American rebellion and power. I say in part because it's still, to the characters in the play, a painful, powerful reminder of the history -- and presence -- of minstrelsy demanded by a white "denigrating" gaze. But in Shange's play the deliberately placed and predominant
mask takes on additional significations to the audience members (though differentially according to their races as well as political sympathies). The mask re-presents to the characters the demand to embody it. But to the audience, the mask which looms so oppressively is unmistakably empty -- unmistakably a mask only, with nothing behind it. It presents its own absence. There's nobody (no body) behind the mask. And if for the characters the mask represents a white gaze, for me, as I imagine myself in a predominantly black audience with the giant blackface mask staring me down from the stage, the mask represents a black gaze looking back at me, a black gaze looking back at my white gaze, at the whiteness of my gaze which I always necessarily bear despite my political sympathies. The black masks jerk me into (re)cognition of racially-inflected gazes, and of the irreducibility and symbolic power of skin color, even as the mask simultaneously theatricalizes the made-up-ness of the irreducibility of skin.

Shange's opening stage directions present the mask as a gripping image, and one predominant to the play's audience:

there is a huge black-face mask hanging from the ceiling of the theater as the audience enters. in a way the show has already begun, for the members of the audience must integrate this grotesque, larger than life misrepresentation of life into their pre-show chatter. slowly the house lights fade, but the mask looms even larger in the darkness. (7)

Though Shange doesn't here specify the racial composition of the audience, it seems to me that this "grotesque" black-face must exaggerate -- and binarize -- racial consciousness among the audience. (At least among white and African-American spectators. Friends of mine from Asia and South America tell me that they feel highly conflicted in such situations. Highly complex hierarchies, divisions, and convergences exist among different "people of color," despite the unity implied by the phrase.)
shange's opening stage directions demand further unpacking. As the audience enters, "the show has already begun"; it does not begin with the entrance of the evening's audience, but is (always already) prior to the audience. The mask largely signifies this priority of the show over the audience. As in The Blacks, the audience is part of the play for several reasons. The visual images that spectators present, particularly images of skin color, become part of the theatrical spectacle. In addition, audience chatter becomes part of the play's dialogue, and is directed and manipulated by the stage spectacle. Raising race consciousness and self-consciousness, the stage spectacle looks/gazes back at the spectators. The specific verb shange uses to signify how the audience acts on the mask is "integrate" -- a loaded word, particularly in the context of black-white relations in North America. Furthermore, the curious word "integrate" has "double-voiced" properties in the sense of Derrida's "différance" and "pharmakon," and Henry Louis Gates's "Signifyin(g)." "Integrate" integrates into itself two opposite meanings: a) to create a unity b) to combine distinct units, each with its own integrity. Unlike the terms "synthesis" or "aufhebung" of Hegel's dialectics, "Integration," at least in contemporary popular usage in the U.S., with its failed mass busing projects to desegregate schools, fails to suggest a combination greater than the sum of its parts; it suggests, rather, the resistance of the parts to assimilation. Naming a unity "integration" ironically emphasizes its internal disunities. This "double-voiced" word is etymologically linked with "integrity," a word crucial to spell #7, whose characters refer several times to artistic and racial "integrity." The "integrity" the characters achieve gestures towards wholeness but carries with it the sign of its parts. The characters in spell #7 strive for unified selfhood, but find their selves fragmented into multiple parts, roles, texts, and bodies.

shange says both that "the show has already begun" and that spectators must "integrate" the mask "into their pre-show chatter." This audience-mask interaction which occurs with house lights up -- is it "show" or "pre-show"? This seeming inconsistency or contradiction
is part of a pattern of spell #7, in which two dialectical opposites continuously conflict without relève or aufhebung. In like patterns, shange plays out the dialectics of "whole" and "parts," of "integrated" (in a rainbow-like coalition) and "separated into black and white." "subject" and "subjected," and "deliberate racist stereotype" and "liberation from racist stereotype." spell #7 both presents the mask as opposed to a true "black" identity prior to show, and presents the mask as prior to and the basis of any and all "black" and "white" identities.

What does it mean for an audience to "integrate" the minstrel mask into their chatter? Do they comment on it? Does it comment on their chatter, as it appears larger than their lives? Do they discuss the mask's legacy, the history of minstrelsy, the white supremacy it paradoxically evokes by its ebony-blackness? Does it interrupt their chatter? Do they try to ignore it politely or pretend not to notice it, and if so does it nevertheless impinge on their chatter (just as racism acts subtly and unconsciously in people who think of themselves as "color-blind")? With the house lights still up, every member of the audience can be clearly seen. Do they look at each other to see how to (re)act? Traditional theater, ironically, creates the illusion that the audience does not act, that it somehow looks without acting. But "in this place where magic is," the theatrical spectacle disillusions; it challenges the audience to see its actions, to see that looking is itself an act, and one which is complicit with (even when also resistant to) the object viewed.

Because the mask is prior to the viewers, the object viewed, and the act of viewing, this mask also represents the inevitable mediation involved in looking (and in hearing, reading, etc.). A perceiver can never have direct access to the thing perceived; the latter is only apprehended through a mask of cognitive manoeuvres (which can be called "language" or "the Symbolic" or "ideology" or "cultural hegemony"). Particularly so when the object of perception is human. While the mask is a "misrepresentation of life," it is also "larger than life"; whatever the "life" is that the mask misrepresents can only be apprehended through
the overarching mask. Even after the house lights are lowered, the audience's sense of invisibility may be intruded upon by the spectacle of the black mask, which magically "looms even larger in the darkness." Furthermore, though the mask is raised during most of the performance, it is lowered during intermission, throughout which it "remains visible" (32-3). The audience is never set free, under the illusion that they are free of the mask. It (its gaze) is always there among the audience. As I "see it," the mask divides the audience according to race, specifically alienates a "white gaze" and a "black gaze," alienates them from each other, which turns the white gaze back on itself for white viewers, and for black viewers "who fell so easily into [lou's] hands and who were so aroused by the way the black-faced figures 'sang n danced'" (9). To black spectators, then, the black-face mask may signify (upon) their oppression (and possibly their complicity in this oppression); to the white spectators, the mask may signify their oppressing, which may make them try defensively to separate themselves from other white oppressors (to say I'm not responsible for lynch mobs, I'm not natalie's "white girl" who wakes up glad she's not black). Or the mask may represent black rage. I will look a little later at the possibilities of a black gaze at black spectacles liberated from the power dynamics implicit in interracial gazes -- a black gaze which is complicit instead with improvising black aesthetics and black selves. For now I want to look further at the white gaze alienated by the gigantic mask, at the role of white looker as seen and performed by the onstage African-American actor-characters, and at the reactionary and revisionary impulses these exchanges of looks may provoke (and do provoke in me).

alec wonders why "none of us ever got no apology from no white folks about not been considered human beings" (46). To alec, the (general) invisibility of black oppression is directly linked to the visibility of black oppression to white eyes in a few limited, specific, and highly spectacular representations:
someone told me "roots" was the way white folks worked out their guilt/ the success of "roots" is the way white folks assuaged their consciences/ i dont know this/ this is what i waz told. i dont get any pleasure from nobody watchin me trying to be a slave i once waz/ who got away/ when we all know they had an emancipation proclamation/ that the civil war waz not fought over us. (46)

As unlike Brecht as change is in her lyricism and her evocations of moments of elation, liberation, harmony, she is very like him in refusing to allow "white folks" to "[work] out their guilt" and to "[assuage] their consciences." White folks should get no pleasure from watching black folks suffer -- instead, white folks should feel guilt, pain, and anger, anger at both reductive racial roles and at themselves. When alec asks for an apology from "all the white people/ immigrants & invaders/ conquistadors & relatives of london debtors from georgia" he enigmatically excludes "poets & painters/ ... women & lovers of beauty."

Nevertheless, in spite of his specifications of differences among white folks, he goes on to collapse all white folks into the figure of the white man:

i am talkin abt that proverbial white person who is usually a man who just/ turns yr body around/ looks at yr teeth & yr ass/ who feels yr calves & back/ & agrees on a price. (46)

In protesting whites' reduction of blacks, alec partially reduces whites to one proverbial type. And while he is right that all whites in this country -- immigrants and established, rich and poor -- benefit from white supremacy in ways of which they are usually not even conscious, I feel stung, as well as guilty, as well as anxious to apologize, as well as worried that my guilt feelings somehow make me feel different from other white folks and keep me from feeling even guiltier. For me, spell #7 activates and alienates "white guilt."

At the same time as a white self-awareness is critically provoked, so also is black self-awareness, particularly by lou. lou gradually educates the audience of "technologically stressed third world people" to other, multiple kinds of looking which neither appropriate
nor consume the performing subject. Such impossible looks could only come about by magic -- black magic. It is precisely a spell of interactive, supportive, nonpolarizing looking which lou tries to cast, simultaneously and necessarily changing both spectacle and spectator.

Like the huge mask, the "black magic" signifies (upon) multiple political stances, and in multiple tones. On one hand, lou the minstrel-magician at the opening seems rather unproblematically to repeat the figure of the simple, superstitious, buffoonish southern Negro unenlightened (and unlightened) by white science -- a figure which appears in, for example, Huck Finn's Jim. lou enters singing a minstrel song of "10 lil picaninnies" (7) and attributes his "irregular behavior" to the fact that his father used to be a magician but retired when lou's third-grade friend "asked to be made white/ on the spot" (7). lou's father then packed up, "cuz/ colored chirren believin in magic/ wuz becomin politically dangerous for the race" (7-8). This ambiguous statement is at least double-voiced, perhaps triple- or quadruple-voiced. Did the father pack up out of frustration that in spite of all his efforts to conjure up black pride in a black race, black children still bought into white supremacist ideology? Or was his frustration over the irreducibility of skin? Perhaps he was ashamed to call himself a magician when he couldn't even "improve" the lot of his race -- that is, perhaps he, too, bought into white supremacist ideology, a charge now made by contemporary African-Americans against earlier white-pleasing black entertainers, particularly African-American minstrels. Was it "dangerous" for "colored chirren" to believe in "black magic" or to believe they could be made white? and for which race was it "dangerous." and in what way dangerous?

lou takes the dangerous potential of this magic and does a bit of Signifyin(g) on it; he slides the "white magic" formula "now you see it/ now you don't" into a black vernacular:

... the reason i'm so peculiar's

cuz i been studyin up on my daddy's technique
& everything i do is magic these days
& it's very colored/ very now you see it/ now you
dont mess wit me (8)
lou's "black magic" conjures up black pride and black aesthetics. lou "easies the audience
into acceptance of his appearance & the mask (his father, the ancestors, our magic)" (8)
only to make the audience fall that much harder when he condemns their complicity in
minstrelsy. But lou's bit is not an entirely liberating black magic trick for the cast, who
enter "in tattered fieldhand garb, blackface, and the countenance of stepan fetchit when he
was frightened" (8). Their repetition of the Stepin Fetchit routine and the "series of steps
that identify every period of afro-american entertainment" which they subsequently perform
(9), are not exclusively a corrosive parody of the minstrel tradition, but also a compulsive
repetition of a painful act. The parody simultaneously delegitimizes, critiques,
reappropriates, revives, and reinforces its object. shange has written that the performance
of the minstrel show in spell #7 "made me cry the first times i danced in it/ for the same
reasons i had included it. the minstrel may be 'banned' as racist/ but the minstrel is more
powerful in his deformities than our alleged rejection of him/ for every night we wd be
grandly applauded … & after … our true visions & rigors [were] laid bare/ down from the
ceiling comes the huge minstrel face/ laughing at all of us for having been so game/ we
believed we cd escape his powers" (xiii). No simple liberation from the minstrel. But
lou's black magic is not that simple. The spell that he had cast on the cast just before they
"sang n danced," spell #7, redirects the third-grader's wish to be white into a wish not to
be white:
… aint no colored magician in his right mind
gonna make you white
i mean
this is blk magic
you lookin at
& i'm fixin you up good/ fixin you up good & colored
& you gonna be colored all yr life
& you gonna love it/ bein colored/ all yr life/ colored & love it
love it/ bein colored. SPELL #7! (8)

The "minstrel sequence" which the cast then performs, and which includes washboard percussion, "acrobats, comedians, tap-dancers, calindy dancers, cotton club choruses, apollo theatre du-wop groups" and bert williams bows are not simply white-created minstrel "lies." Many of these forms of performance, like minstrelsy, are double-voiced, and may speak differently to whites and blacks. Furthermore, these sub-genres of performance are simultaneously forms of an African-American aesthetic tradition developed under oppression by individuals trying to create art -- and joy -- under intolerable circumstances, and signs of and complicit in oppression and intolerable circumstances.

The hamming, black-n-white dances, then, are ambiguous both as to ethnicity, race, authorship and agency, as well as to the tone, which could be playful, painful, sarcastic, even militant. These dances are both signs of blackness (or signs of the absence of blackness) and signs of black protest of white signs of blackness. The masks and the dances both pander to and condemn white gazes -- while they speak very differently to black audiences who can see and hear their Signifyin(g) upon -- or playing rhetorical tricks with and on -- white black figures. The black mask not only represents an image of the minstrel but represents its non-presence through the very blatancy of the mask's emptiness. loulou the rhetorical trickster figure reformulates white magic formulas of now you see it/ now you don't and of washing an Ethiop white into the black vernacular formulas "dont mess wit me" and "be colored and love it."

The very status of black magic in this play is a refiguring of the black magic and black primal essence as these tropes appear in white traditions. In the previous chapter 1
discussed the way the Venetians figured Othello's complexion and his winning of Desdemona as signs of primal bestiality and witchcraft. Eugene O'Neill's The Emperor Jones expressionistically pits the African-American Brutus Jones, rounded out from the minstrel tradition, against satanic, primal, black magicians of the West Indies. The latter characteristics seem to be projections of Jones's own fears and guilt over having economically exploited the West Indian natives. (This play, then, presents a microcosm of the American exploitation of natives in lands worldwide.) In Genet's The Blacks, Archibald and company parody and reject the lie of black magic which the whites project onto the blacks and then fear as truth. In spell #7 the white "black magic" is neither true nor false -- rather, it is appropriated by blacks, "negrified," and "dressed up."

Even the title immediately suggests the revisionary, creative and creating impulse of this play. The first thing a reader has to negotiate whether that reader reads from the Penguin Plays edition or off of a playbill, is the small "s," followed by the un-spelled-out number sign and number seven. While the play plays with the trope of spells, the title plays with the meaning of "spell." It can be read as a command which defies itself (by not spelling out "#7" as "number seven"). The title talks b(1)ack to white traditions of (en)title(ment). (As soon as I began writing about this play I had to make decisions about change's spellings in my own text. Would I capitalize where she doesn't? To do that would be to edit out her Signifyin(g). To adapt my own critical writing to change's spelling seems to me, paradoxically, a more serious form of appropriation, one inappropriate to the kind of dialogue I am trying to set up with spell #7. I have chosen to keep each of our aesthetics of spelling distinct, "integrated" in tension. These "mistaken" crossovers, too, seem to me important.) "spell #7," paradoxically, suggests to me not only belligerence in not playing by the spelling rules of "proper" English, but also humility. Characters of the play have only partially come (through invention) to voice and to selfhood. Their names and their i's are far too fragile and tentative. too marginal to mainstream (white) forms of recognition, to
be writ large. Their humble spellings provoke me to question why I have so
presumptuously taken for granted my own titles, names, and I's. The title too is informal.
graftlike, and reminds me of the recipes found in shange's novel Sassafrass, Cypress &
Indigo. The whole play is, in a sense, a recipe for making "colored" folks "be colored all
yr life" and "love it/ bein colored."

Like lou's "spell" ("and you gonna be colored all yr life/ and you gonna love it/ being
colored/ all yr life"), "spell #7" not only makes "colored" folks love being "colored," but
also makes "colored" folks "be colored," makes them "be colored." Neither essentializing
blackness as a presence prior to representation, nor representing it as entirely performance.
entirely theatrical artifice and therefore not real, spell #7 both mystifies and demystifies
blackness by conjuring it up onstage. shange shows the invention of real black identity to
be a strategy for personal and political survival, as well as an occasion for joy, a "serious
celebration, like church/ like home" (52). Conjuring one's self up, dressing and making
up, improvisatory play -- not the roles which are improvised, but the playing of them --
have long collaborated in a black aesthetic. If there is a black essence, or an essential
"black magic," it is in the continual play of mystifying demystifying so characteristic of
blues and jazz improvisatory jamming, Signifying(g), playing the dozens, etc. On the one
hand, shange's stage directions say that at eli's bar, the "minstrels" are "free to be
themselves , to reveal secrets, fantasies, nightmares, or hope" (13, my emphasis). The
words I have emphasized suggest a selfhood prior to repression and oppression. But, on
the other hand, the way they "be themselves" is to perform their selves -- their many
selves. eli's bar is a place where the actor-characters can try on and develop new roles,
built up new characters. eli calls what goes on here, in "my city/ my theater/ my bar/ ... my poems," the "construction of myself" (12, my emphasis). Deborah Geis has noted the
ambivalent nature of masking in spell #7; just as the giant minstrel face also suggests an
African voodoo mask, so to the monologues and group pieces "provide both mirrors and
alternatives for the various "selves" they create under pressure from a society governed by white values and images.\textsuperscript{27} Change's characters, then, according to Geis, become universal without being stereotypes. I would suggest that "masks" and "characters" are also not easily isolable; while some masks are outright lies, others are lies which become internalized, sometimes with a twist, others yet are roles for which the labels "lie" and "truth" are irrelevant, and which change meaning as they change embodies and directors. Other masks yet are potential selves or partial selves.

In this spirit the entire cast of characters, in an extraordinary moment of multi-style dance (17-20), celebrate the African-American aesthetic of "dressing up" as self-assertion: "we dress up," they say, in order "to be as lovely as we really are/ so we strut and reggae" (18). "Who we are" and "dressing up" are the same thing, the same act. While some costumes and theatrical elements (such as minstrel costumes) are false, misrepresentations, others are true representations which become real and true in the process of being theatricalized and/or performed. Performance not only pre-forms identity, but is identity. Style and fashion are particularly crucial to "self-fashioning." Whether it be contemporary "latino chic/ ... rasta-fare outer space funk suits" or, from an earlier generation, "them fox furs & stacked heels/ the diamonds & marie antionette wigs" (19), these colorful dress-up performances become productions of color. They both enact and produce the style of people of color, and "show the world/ we gotta corner on the color" (20). Costuming oneself is a way of fabricating the self and of presenting the self to oneself and to others. Performance of the self makes the self present / presents the self: "we fill up where we at" (18).

African-American style assumes a particularly playful and luxurious form in lily's dreams of her hair. Many black women writers have presented hair as a major signifier of the self. We have seen the overwhelming power of hair as an Imaginary site of racial and sexual anxieties in \textit{Funnyhouse of a Negro}, as well as the conspicuous "wild kinky hair"
sticking out of white masks in both Funnyhouse and The Blacks. Hair, a seemingly natural, irreducibly physical thing, is fraught with ideology. African-American women's attempts to straighten, lighten, iron, and retexture their hair is a sign of mainstream North American culture's invalidation of the beauty of African-American bodies. lily re-comb(ines) her hair with an entirely new ideology; it now becomes a sign of beauty of many colors:

my hair'll grow pomegranates & soil/ rich as round the aswan/ i wake in my bed to bananas/ avocados/ collard greens/ the tramps' latest disco hit/ fresh croissant/ pouilly fuissé/ ishmael reed's essays/ charlotte carter's stories/ all stream from my hair. (27)

In bricolage fashion, lily's multi-text(ured) hair borrows from Indian, West Indian, African-American "soul", and French cuisines, from disco music and postmodern African-American literature. lily claims herself by playing a character who styles her own hair.

In one of the most liberatory scenes of the play, maxine and ross together claim themselves by improvising a great role in fay (21-3). fay is such a great role to play because she is neither saint (or selfless mammy or all-suffering slave) nor slut, neither depraved nor darkly exotic, but "a whole lotta woman/ wit that special brooklyn bottom strut," "a gd clean woman/ ... burstin with pride and enthusiasm" and "flirtin wit hope" who just wants to "have [her] a goooooooood ol time." For maxine, fay is neither a mask or role nor a true self, but a potential self and a wished-for role. As the improvisatory scene dissolves away, she engages in the following exchange:

maxine (rises & hugs ross)

aw ross/ when am i gonna get a chance to feel somethin like that/ i got into this business cuz i wanted to feel things all the time/ & all they want me to do is put my leg in my face/ smile/ &
lily
you better knock on some wood/ maxine/ at least yr workin

bettina
& at least yr not playin a whore/ if some other woman comes in here & tells me
she's playin a whore/ i think i might kill her

eli
you'd kill her so you cd say/ oh dahlia died & i know all her lines (23)

Like Alice Childress in Trouble in Mind, shange not only writes a play which protests the
lack of fully rounded roles and the handful of whore or mammy roles for black actors, and
protests the economic forces which propel black actors to keep playing these roles, but in
the process of protesting she creates new, psychologically complex and challenging roles.
These roles are not yet main characters; they are still fleeting and improvisatory, for the
dominant social system producing for-profit theater does not yet give them full play or full
pay. The dividing of the "fay" role between ross and maxine, narrative and embodiment,
past and present tense, and verbal and visual elements, ambiguously suggests both a
positive collaboration (collaboration among people of color across genders, collaboration
of all the senses and theatrical elements), and a more disturbing sense of still unhealed
splits and divisions plaguing people of color in North America. shange deals honestly and
painfully with both senses of collaboratively improvised and bricolage-like characters.

Act II (which expands from Act I's presentation almost exclusively of African-
Americans to include other people of color, particularly Hispanics and West Indians, in
North America), articulates the "strange schizophrenic condition" to which someone "from
there" who has come "here" is subjected:
when the japanese red army invaded san juan/ they poisoned the papaya with portuguese. i eat a lotta papaya. last week/ i developed a strange schizophrenic condition/ with 4 manifest personalities: one spoke english & understood nothing/ one spoke french & had access to the world/ one spoke spanish & voted against statehood for puerto rico/ one spoke portuguese. "eu nao falor ingles antao y voce"/
i dont speak english anymore/ & you? (34)

This passage suggests both a solidarity among people of color, the ideal of multi-
culturalism as unity in diversity, and a more painful sense of being torn apart in ways which might delight an over-zealous deconstructive postmodernist but are often experienced by uprooted individuals as mental illness. (Furthermore, people of color may be torn apart from each other; spell #7 goes on to unfold a scene of African-American male exploitation of women "from there." Tears occur among as well as within people of color in post- and neo-colonialist lands.) lou suggests similar self-divisions:

... lately i leave my self in all the wrong hands/

... in this place where magic stays
you can let yrself in or out
but when you leave yrself at home/ burglars & daylight thieves
pounce on you & sell yr skin/ at cut-rates on tenth avenue (27)

"my self" spells out (or, in performances, pronounces) the disconnection of "myself." and the "i" who leaves my self is distinct from the "my self" he leaves. (That's not even to speak of the other "wrong hands" he's left in). Similarly "you," "yrself" and "yr skin" are all quite separate entities outside of eli's safely segregated bar -- and that separateness is experienced as fear and pain, not as possibility.

In this same monologue, however, lou suggests an aesthetic which plays up divisions of selves and senses into a positive:
in this place where magic always asks for me
i discovered a lot of other people who talk without mouths
who listen to what you say/ by watchin yr jewelry dance (27)

shange says in her preface that the African-American aesthetic as she sees it involves not exclusively written and spoken text but more importantly music, dance, movement. lou begins to suggest a black gaze which understands these divisions and collaborations. People who have long been invisible and voiceless to the mainstream white gaze can "talk without mouths," but with movement, dance, dressing up, costume jewelry, etc. It is this aesthetic to which spell #7 plays. It is a play of rhythms, movements, gestures, and colors. Not pre-verbal or pre-symbolic in the sense of Kristeva semiotique, spell #7 rocks with symbolic, anti-verbal anti-English black movement. For shange, the dominance of the text in American theater excludes African-American aesthetics developed in a history of enforced illiteracy and exclusion from printed media. To a spectator educated in African-American performance, ideological content resounds in rhythm, movement, and color.

This potential "black gaze," never fully realized but always peeking through this play, is perhaps stated most clearly in stage directions which describe the interaction between lily and bettina, but could be speaking to the acting style of all shange's plays. When lily describes her hair-brushing fantasies (which will cause lou to remind us that all the characters' "thoughts are not benign. they are not safe from what they remember or imagine" (27)), shange notes

the rest of the company is not aware of lily's private thoughts. only bettina
responds to lily, but as a partner in fantasy, not as a voyeur (25)

"As a partner in fantasy, not as a voyeur." This is an ideal gaze which I would like to see occurring across, as well as within, races (and genders, as I will explore more specifically in the next two chapters). shange does not present interracial visual partnership as a possibility; even within races, collaboration without power hierarchies, and without
binarization into producers and consumers of the performance, only occurs in spells, in temporary, unexpected moments. spell #7 is about an aesthetic of black embodying, and about an aesthetic of black looking as not voyeurism but partnership. In this aesthetic, the looker participates bodily in the creation of the spectacle.

This aesthetic of collaborative fantasy-making, which lou/shange calls "spell #7," creates a vision of black liberation, with an emphasis on the act of creation. In a highly graphic image, becoming colored is as simple as removing the "shadows" cast by minstrelsy:

finally moved to tear off their "shadows," all but two of the company leave with their true faces bared to the audience. dahlia has, as if by some magical cause, shed not only her mask, but also her hideous overalls & picaninny-buckwheat wig, to reveal a finely laced unitard/ the body of a modern dancer. she throws her mask to alec, who tosses it away. (11)

The embodiment of blackness seems to lie in wait, fully formed, under hideous white black masks. But that which is "under" the mask has developed in relation to the mask. alec's double-voiced assertion that their "dreams draw blood from old sores" (11) says both that their dreams obtain their raw materials, their life-blood, from a heritage of oppression, and that their dreams wound the sores which had so made them smart. But this also suggests that their dreams, too, are painful, and revive painful memories and old hurts. As soon as alec removes his smiling minstrel mask and articulates his anger, he faces the threat of a lynching by an angry white mob (9-11), which may be real or "merely" in his imagination. natalie and alec's dreams of giving birth to "myself," in a pregnancy steeped in African-American folk traditions and superstitions and self-determination, ends in the mother's post-partem infanticide. "without the protection of blackface," these characters must (re)create their selves (9, my emphasis). Their "true faces" are both "bared" and "bare." lou ends the play with this "spell":
crackers are born with the right to be
alive/ i'm making ours up right here
in yr face;/ & we gonna be
colored & love it (52)

To whom does this "ours" refer -- to the African-American characters? to the African-American component of the audience? to the entire audience? To whom does "yr" refer -- crackers in or out of the audience? the entire audience? the characters? lou seems to be making up the validation of black lives in front of characters and audience, here and now, and saying the insult "in your face" to the "crackers" who would stop him. He seems also to be making up the black face (as opposed to the "black-face") as reason in itself to be alive; the reason to be alive is written "in your face," you African-Americans.

lou's/shange's deliberate use of the loaded words "making ... up" in the third to last lines of the play is a bit unnerving, especially as it precedes and perhaps evokes the reappearance of the black-face mask. "making up" and "blacking up" can be extremely destructive or extremely constructive, depending on who controls the representation and who receives it.

lou's final phrase, the refrain of spell #7, "we gonna be/ colored and love it" suggest an African-American reappropriation of the term "colored." "The "gonna be" perhaps suggests that "colored" is something they are not yet, but something they will create, earn, and become. But there is also a strong reading of "be": We're not just gonna be colored, we're not just gonna be colored; we're gonna be colored. Being colored is a state of being of continuous self-improvisation, jamming, rigging, talking b(l)ack, Signifyin(g), "satirically celebrating," manipulating masks, playing roles, and playing rhetorical and visual tricks.

Act I ends with the return of the mask after "sue-jean's" murder of "myself." and after eli's comment that "sometimes i really cant write/ sometimes i cant even talk" (32). As soon as the players stop playing, writing, righting, making up, the minstrel mask
descends. But behind the censoring minstrel mask lie impulses to self-destruction as well as self-creation. In the final extended monologue of Act II, Maxine says that she buys gold from South Africa whenever people of color hurt each other. This time when the mask descends, the cast, rather than silencing itself, continues to sing "colored and love it being colored." The final percepts of the audience are split between eyes and ears:

 blackout/but the minstrel mask remains visible. the company is singing "colored & love it being colored" as audience exits (52)

With the specter of the mask always hanging overhead, characters must continue to assertively make up and perform themselves, or at least to make up and perform their own masks, in order to be themselves, and to keep from being made up and masked over from without.

**

This chapter has been the most difficult for me to write. It provoked more anxieties, insecurities, and guilt than any other, and (yet), ironically, replicated in me symptoms of the racially-inflected hysteria, schizophrenia, and repetitions compulsions suffered by characters of the plays I discuss within it. Fundamentally I have tried to suggest, in this chapter, how powerful and widely-felt is the compulsion to repeat signs of racism, how difficult but urgent are attempts to manipulate and disrupt racist repetitions and representations.

I end as I began, with a gesture I find reiterated among many whites, particularly white women, who write about black literature: with an apology and an admission of fear. I begin and end with my white guilt, for like it or not, that guilt is basic to my experience and understanding of "race." My guilt is particularly acute because not only do I benefit from a system of racial oppression which I have been highly trained not to see, but because I also
question, in this chapter, the validity of the categories "black" and "white," and of the binarism -- itself a binarism which is enacted around me (and which I enact) every day to my benefit. Paradoxically, the more I question the integrity of these body-identities, the more acutely and absolutely "white" I feel. This paradox is also not a paradox; for the more I question the claim to racial identity as a pre-social, bodily fact, the more aware I become of the power of the social to naturalize body-identities and then to hide the process of naturalization. In earlier generations white privilege may have been best conserved by whites' insisting on a "white" identity; in this context, the relevant strategy for blacks in the black movement was to question the validity of race. But the politics have again shifted. It may now empower whites more now to disavow notions of race (and therefore of "quotas," for example), and empower blacks more to insist on black identity (and on the racism that still pervades). At this point in history in the U.S., whites trying to deconstruct the notion of "race" may actually serve racism.

One of my greatest struggles in writing about writing by people of color is to participate in without appropriating their work. Like Sarah's comment about the white, Jewish Raymond's interest in Negroses, natalie asserts that

    after all gertrude stein wanted to know abt the black women/ alice adams wrote
    thinking abt billie/ joyce carol oates has three different black characters all with the
    same name/ i guess cuz we are underdeveloped individuals or cuz we are all the
    same/

I cannot help but react defensively to these comments (to play a Bill Clinton to natalie's Sister Souljah) and to ask if there are any alternatives. White female writers are condemned for writing about black women. Would it be better not to write about them, not to want "to know about the black women"? Should I not write about the plays and playwrights and performances of people of color? Wouldn't it be more racist not to?
At some point, Natalie's monologue, which begins "jocularly," becomes painful. After her final jabs at white women --

i'm still in my house having flung my hair-do for the last time/ what with having to take 20 valium a day/ to consider the ERA/ & all the men in the world/ & my ignorance of the world/ it is overwhelming.

-- Natalie concludes, without transition, and without a clearly demarcated change in the speaking "i,"

i'm so glad i'm colored. boy i cd wake up in the morning & think abt anything. i can remember emmett till & not haveta smile at anybody.

In response to Natalie's monologue, I react in self-defense, subordinating her pain to mine. Maxine, in contrast, is "compelled to speak by Natalie's pain." My inter-racial "viewing" of this play responds most powerfully to masks and with masks. But Maxine's intra-racial gaze marks the possibility of another response: interaction, without the protection of reactionary masks of blackness and whiteness. It is a gaze palpable to me only through my failure to present it.

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4 In her study Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1990), Marianna Torgovnick investigates some of the tropes forming the basic vocabulary and grammar of "Primitivist discourse, a discourse fundamental to the Western sense of self and Other." Some of these tropes are: "Primitives are like children, the tropes say. Primitives are our untamed selves, our id forces -- libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies. Primitives are free. Primitives exist at the 'lowest cultural levels'; we occupy the 'highest' ... " For all such tropes, "the primitive" is defined in opposition to the present -- in opposition. that is, to a simultaneously constructed notion of the present. "The real secret of the primitive in this century has often been the same secret as always: the primitive can be -- has been, will be (?) -- whatever Euro-Americans want it to be. It tells us what we want it to tell us." But this process of projection bounces back onto Euro-American observers: "Euro-Americans begin as controlling subject, using tropes to describe the primitive Other. But they sometimes end by adopting the tropes in their perception of self.... For Euro-Americans, then, to study the primitive brings us always back to ourselves, which we reveal in the act of defining the Other." (Citations are from pages 8, 9, and 11.)

common, but "a classical and literary style also flourished. More blacks were whimsically
dubbed Caesar than perhaps any other classical name. Also popular were Cato, Pompey,
Jupiter, and Nero. Females were called Diana, Dido, Phoebe, and Venus" [Augusta].
Slaves were also named for geographical sites and locations [Village, Newport News],
spontaneous responses, occupation or skill, and popular Revolutionary and other military
leaders [Archibald Wellington]. Very commonly, names showed an aggressive and/or
ironic humor [Alas, Augusta Snow, Felicity Trollop Pardon, Virtue Secret-rose]. See
Sambo, pp. 30-33.

6Gary D. Engle, in This Grotesque Essence: Plays from the American Minstrel Stage
(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1978) anthologizes many of the most popular extant
minstrel scripts. Characters in these scripts include "Miss Dinah Rose (a fascinating
wench)" (2); "Dinah Primrose" (30); "Augustus Nicety" (104).

7Valerie Smith, "Split Affinities: The Case of Interracial Rape" in Conflicts in Feminism,
I am also indebted to Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "'The Mind That Burns in Each Body':
Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review

8Dir. Gene Frankel, pro. Sidney Bernstein, George Edgar, and André Gregory, with
Roscoe Lee Browne, James Earl Jones, Cynthia Belgrave, Louis Gossett, Ethel Aylor,
Cicely Tyson, Maya Angelou, and Charles Gordone, St. Mark's Playhouse, New York, 4
May 1961.

9Critics of Spike Lee's film contest that it upholds the mythology of the Big Black Buck
and White Princess, and that it finds curiosity about these myths to be the only reason
blacks and whites may be attracted to each other -- in short, that it reduces all interracial
love to "jungle fever." Whether or not this is a just charge in the film's case, The Blacks
certainly presents the "jungle fever" mythology to be so imposing as to preclude any other kinds of loving across race.


I sympathize with the anger of Lorraine Hansberry and of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka that a white should tell them their blackness is performatively constructed. Especially at this point in history in America, there is a definite political utility to claiming and proclaiming race as a bodily bottom line to identity. But, overdetermined as race is, this political strategy may become counterproductive and/or dishonest if it is not combined with one which refuses to take race as a given and which, prior to writing a play for an "all-
black cast," must write a play which asks the (unanswerable) questions: What is a black actor? What is a white playwright? What is a white audience? What is black and white?

11Herbert Blau reads Kennedy's work as obsessive dramas of a dying American Dream "so fractured ... that it looks surreal or gothic." For Blau, what "really moves in memory, past the barbarousness of the jungle and the tawdry religious colonizing, is the royalty and elegance of a remembered (white) past, garnered from literature, inscribed on black skin. The poignancy comes from the double irony that the present fantasizing of the Negro is not the present fantasy of the white, but retrograde, as if inscribed not by white history but the romance of white history, the interminable bastardizing of the dream." Blau, "The American Dream in American Gothic: The Plays of Sam Shepard and Adrienne Kennedy" in The Eye of Prey: Subversions of the Postmodern (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987): 43, 61.

12Torgovnick acutely discusses the neo-colonialism often implicit in the decolonizing intentions of modernist and postmodernist artists and exhibitors. "The imperial tendency entered the art world quite early in its attention to primitive objects. 'You don't need the masterpiece to get the idea,' Picasso is reported to have said after his first visits to the Musée d'Ethnographie at the Trocadéro in Paris; the Westerner could enter a cluttered display and cleverly pick out its 'best' and 'worst' pieces" (82). Implicit in Picasso's borrowings from the ethnographic artifacts he viewed were a whole baggage of Western myths and tropes of primitivism: "Continuing and expanding an older tradition of including blacks as signs of sensuality, paintings of the modern movement like Manet's Olympia and Picasso's Les demoiselles d'Avignon had used blacks and African masks in connection with debased sexuality, especially the depiction of prostitution and brothel life. Is it an accident that these two paintings -- linking nonwhites, women, and sex for sale -- have become icons of modern art?" (99). While Western exhibitors tend to display African masks as "disembodied heads, floating against neutral colored backgrounds, like art in the
museum as jewelry store" (a tendency Kennedy mimics in *Funnyhouse*). "the masks would not be disembodied in their cultural contexts." The masks, which often connote metaphors of decapitation when re-implanted in their new Western contexts, would, in their previous contexts, have been "worn by men, in full costume, in dances." The gender-specificity of the mask-wearers is not unrelated to Kennedy's play. "The female masks, sometimes accompanied by false breasts, would also have been worn by men. While the contemporary Western notions of transvestitism cannot easily be imported onto the various African mask-wearers, such notions gave added attraction to African masks for Western borrowers who often conflate "the primitive" with "the female." Hence "the crossing between male and female was, for some moderns and postmoderns, a significant lure of African art" (116-117).

13Philip Kolin sees the funnyhouse motif as a surrealistic image of the dehumanizingly cramped quarters of "the scarred cityscape of New York." For Kolin, *Funnyhouse* is above all a "play of urban alienation." See Kolin, "From the Zoo to the Funnyhouse: A Comparison of Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* with Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*" in *Theatre Southwest* (April 1989): 9,10.


15*MELUS* Interview, pp. 108, 100.

16*MELUS*, p. 108.


18Margaret Wilkerson, chair. "Adrienne Kennedy: Reconfiguring the Subject" (a special session, #359). Panelists included Paul Jackson, "Kennedy's Travelers in the American

19Chela Sandoval, in her article "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World" (Genders 10 (Spring 1991): 1-24) argues that "third world women" may well have a different gender than white Euro-American women, that "one's race, culture, or class often denies comfortable or easy access to either category [male or female], that the interactions between social categories produce other genders within the social hierarchy." Titles and motifs of "third world feminist" works such as Ain't I a Woman, The Third Woman, The Woman Warrior, Sister Outsider, and All the Blacks Are Men, All the Women Are White, But Some of Us Are Brave reflect "signs of a lived experience of difference" from white female experience in the United States. These works "call for the recognition of a new category for social identity," an "in-between space" or "third gender category" (4-5).


22 Alice Childress, Trouble in Mind in Black Theater: A 20th Century Collection of the Work of its Best Playwrights ed. Lindsay Patterson (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company) 135-174. Both Kennedy and shange cite Childress as a major influence on their development as playwrights.

23(New York: Crossroad/Continuum)

24I use this word because "denigrating" itself embeds a basic racism. Both "denigrate" and "Negro" come from the same latin root nigrum, niger, black. That the word "denigrate" is
no longer generally recognized as a cognate of "Negro" metonymizes the subtle slippage of racism into areas of life seemingly devoid of racially-inflected context.

I defer my discussion of the "look" and the "gaze" until chapter four.

The latter is a term to which I react violently; I believe that one cannot in good faith and in practice achieve a willful blindness to race without also willfully blinding oneself to racism. And why should one want to blind oneself to race in the first place?

CHAPTER FOUR

Orienting Theater/ Theatricalizing Orientalism: 
David Henry Hwang's M. Butterfly

ASIAN FEMALE DESIRED
Something about an oriental F
this affectionate WM 43 adores.
lets get to know each other • 4986

ASIAN OR ORIENTAL F
Everyone thinks you have it all.
Only you know something is missing
This creative SWM might just be
the answer. Let's talk! • 5348

... 
ASIAN WIFE WANTED, SWM, 44
Green eyes, muscular, healthy, Ivy,
Masters, MENSA. Seek gentle, petite
Asian woman for long term relationship.
• 4611

--- The Personals!

The Undoing of Madame Butterfly

In 1904 Giacomo Puccini's Madame Butterfly was first performed. This opera, which itself underwent many rewritings, was already based on a history of rewritings when it first appeared. The libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica is based on the play by David Belasco, which is based on a 1898 magazine story by John Luther Long, which itself was written in a climate of operatic Orientalism inspired by Pierre Loti's 1887 Madame Chrysanthème. Puccini revised his opera at least 5 times between 1904-6. Since then Madame Butterfly has been performed all over the world in many forms and styles. In 1988 David Henry Hwang radically rewrote, criticized, parodied, modernized, and cross-dressed the Puccini opera in his M. Butterfly. The Hwang play takes place for the most part in China in the 1960s which, as "a deconstructivist Madame Butterfly,"2 aims to critique the Butterfly mythology underlying the French and American presence in Vietnam.
Just after the creation of *M. Butterfly*, the musical *Miss Saigon* appeared in London. This musical translates *Madama Butterfly* to Saigon during the Vietnam war, without necessarily transforming the opera's ideology. In addition to these literally staged representations, the Butterfly myth is continually dramatized in interpersonal relationships, international politics, American movies, the high fashion industry, marxist theater writings, rock music, high modernist poetry. But most especially, this fascinating figure of the delicate ultra-femme Oriental woman is *dramatic*; she can be parodied, camped up, modernized, post-modernized, deconstructed, but always she must be re-embodied and re-enacted.

The story of the Japanese girl who sacrifices herself for an American cad seems to be marked by an uncanny repetition compulsion. Why do playwrights return to this story again and again? The repetition compulsion of the plot is further re-marked by a repetition of the Orientalism and (hetero)sexism within it. Each of the works listed above holds the potential for a harsh critique of Orientalist ideology in particular, and each playwright, I believe, aims with the best of intentions to bring Orientalism to consciousness and to work to abolish it. Yet each subconsciously re-enacts the very Orientalism it critiques. Each repetition erases its predecessor's critique of Orientalism, and critiques the Orientalism of that predecessor, only to find its own critique erased by its successor. Why does the theatrical medium, in particular, repeatedly resist and repeatedly recuperate Orientalism? Why the uncanny affinity between theatricality and Orientalism?

From its first appearance on, critics have noted the "theatricality" of productions of *Madame Butterfly*. This term "theatricality" takes away even as it gives; offered as a compliment, it also seems to condemn its subject for lack of seriousness, cheapness, superficiality, and pandering to the groundlings. *Miss Saigon*, too, has been widely noted for its "theatricality," "spectacle," and "show business" as well. Speaking of the "harrowing image" of the onstage helicopter in *Miss Saigon*, William A. Henry III of *Time* magazine deems that "[w]hile special effects generally promote escapism rather than
emotion, the scenes of the hasty and haphazardly callous U.S. retreat from Saigon reduced many in last week's opening-night audience to tears. Variety calls the show "a high-gloss production of narrative pace, fluency, power and visual impact that should assure big business for a long time to come." As an example of "spectacle satire" is offered the vintage Cadillac that is wheeled onstage.4 Jack Kroll of Newsweek calls Miss Saigon an "extravaganza" and "the triumph of the international, industrialized, high-tech musical." This show attracts "millions of theatergoers eager to wallow in the wonders of wizard set designer John Napier and the crafty craftsmanship of composer Claude-Michel Schonberg and librettist Alain Boublil (with English lyrics by Richard Maltby Jr.)" Producer Cameron Mackintosh also exhibits "knock-'em-dead showmanship." Miss Saigon has an "outer layer of technical flash that adorns an inner conventionality." This latter comment, apparently, is made in praise, for Kroll adds that "[t]hose who sneer at such effects as the onstage helicopter and the giant statue of Ho Chi Minh "are theater party poopers missing the fun of physical spectacle when it's brilliantly done."5 Frank Rich of The New York Times lauds Jonathan Pryce's "electrifying performance" which "jolts the show into the realms of dark magic."6 All these reviewers seem to suggest or to state (as Jack Kroll does) that Miss Saigon's extravagance, excess, spectacle, and showmanship are of a piece with, and even make up for, the play's "inner conventionality," cultural and gender stereotypes, and sedulously watered-down, inoffensive political critique.

M. Butterfly, which I will focus on in this chapter, also "theatricalizes" an encounter between a "Western" government employee and his "Eastern" object of love, as well as "theatricalizing" a critique of Madame Butterfly and its reproductions of Orientalism. M. Butterfly premiered at the National Theatre in Washington, D.C. on February 10, 19887, and went on to the Eugene O'Neill Theatre on Broadway on March 20, 1988. Almost every reviewer of these two productions notes M. Butterfly's theatricality. Hwang himself praises the play's director John Dexter for being "bold in the uses of theatricality" (97).
Jack Kroll of Newsweek, who gives the play a quite negative review (though he likes Miss Saigon), finds the play to be "theatrical gamesmanship masquerading as a profound play of ideas," while "John Lithgow gives a performance of extravagant theatricality."8 William A. Henry III of Time finds in M. Butterfly a "dazzling spectacle, full of ritual."9 Edith Oliver of the New Yorker wonders "at times if it wasn't too elaborate -- the script itself is so theatrical it would probably play on a bare stage," but finds the production "effective."10 In one of the most thoughtful reviews I've come across, Gerald Weales of Commonweal finds the play "a highly theatrical work displaying familiar Hwang devices and themes in a blend that unintentionally asks whether Hwang is a serious dramatist or a show-biz magician." Weales deems the ending image of the play to be 

a wonderfully theatrical moment and it is possible that this scene -- along with the Chinese opera battle, Liling's transformation, Wong's strip scene -- will stay with the audience longer than the awful irony of the end and the implicit rejection of sexual and racial myths that it embodies. Which brings us back to the question in the first paragraph and the hope that seriousness and show business are not mutually exclusive.11

I will return to this final image and to the ambivalent effectiveness of M. Butterfly's retraction of Madame Butterfly. For now, though, I want to consider the assumption implicitly made by many of these reviewers and explicitly questioned (though partially reaffirmed) by Weales: that theatricality and serious political critique (especially of reductive binary stereotypes) frustrate each other. Some critics have theorized that theatricality is so threatening (and provokes as antitheatrical prejudice in defense) because it is anti-foundationalist, suggesting that there are no essences prior to appearances, and that identities are radically changeable and made up. Since many important critiques of Orientalism and sexism begin by delegitimizing notions of Oriental and female essences, I want to think through ways in which theatricality and political analysis can work together.
Yet I also want to heed (through the example of Edward Said's *Orientalism*) the bearing that a history of antitheatrical prejudices has on contemporary critiques of Orientalism and sexism. I want as well to think through my own pro- and anti-theatrical prejudices in response to *M. Butterfly*’s theatrical politics.

On March 8, 1991, I went to see the touring production of *M. Butterfly* at Jones Hall in Houston, Texas. Directed by Stuart Ostrow and starring Philip Anglim as Rene Gallimard and A. Mapa as Song Liling, the production was indeed highly "theatrical" in ways I will discuss below. I went into the theater having established and written part of the theoretical speculations on the seeming danger posed by *M. Butterfly*’s "theatricality," and the relations between theatricality, Orientalism, and sexism. I hypothesized that antitheatricalism mystifies and reifies "truth," "identity" and "the body," which it poses as opposites of the theater. These mystifications are complicit with those which legitimate racial and gender prejudices, for example, their notions of "the Oriental mind" or "the female body." I was happy with my speculations, which allowed me to appreciate theatricality in a politically responsible way. I went to Jones hall, then, not as a student of literature (English departments are notorious among theater departments for their antitheatrical prejudices) but as a student and lover of theater. However, my experience in the audience and particularly of the audience at Jones Hall, and the resolute streak of antitheatricalism it "unmasked" in myself (to speak within antitheatrical discourse) made me demystify the utopia of theatricality which I had conjured up as that place resistant to all mystifications. Theatricality can be a remarkably effective tool of demystification, but it can be an equally effective mystifier. There is nothing inherently politically correct (or incorrect) about theater; the very profligacy which antitheatricalists accuse it of and which theatricalists celebrate, makes it faithful to neither party, to no cause.

This chapter focuses on the antitheatrical prejudice and its intimate relationships with Orientalism, patriarchy, gynephobia, and homophobia. I will suggest that "theatricality" as
the term is used above, Orientalism, phallocentrism, gynephobia, homophobia, and even
gender and racial identities thrive on the essentialization of "the body" and of the "identity"
generated from and embodied by it. But "theatricality" understood in alternative ways,
ways for which the binarisms truth / illusion and real life / theater are inappropriate and are
indeed "dismantled" (again an anti-theatrical image), can de-essentialize "the body," can
show it to be a constructed concept -- local, non-inevitable, and highly unreliable as a
grounding for other discursive systems. That is, theatricality can show "the body" to be
itself radically theatrical, performative, and (pre)scripted, and (yet) as "real" as can be.
Below I will look more closely at some of Edward Said's representations of "Orientalism."
specifically his representation (indeed condemnation) of Orientalism's "theatricality." I will
then look at Brecht's and Artaud's radical rethinkings of antibourgeois theatricality,
rethinkings which themselves are "staged" at crucial points on "Oriental" (and partially
Orientalist) theaters. I will then consider at length M. Butterfly's play of Orientalism,
patriarchy, and anti-theatricality, a play which both critiques these discourses and re-
empowers them and does so through highly Brechtian techniques (banners, social gestic
music, self-quoting as an A-effect) as well as such self-mocking ultra-
theatricalizations of gender as strip-tease, transvestism and camp. But first I want to think
about the meanings (and menaces) of "theatricality" and of "theatrical" embodiments of
gender and race.

"Theatricality" and its Doubles

What makes drama and the performing arts different from any other literary medium,
even from film, is their presentation of live bodies. Bodies on film are never fully present,
for they come to us from somewhere and sometime else, and carry with them the mark of
their absence. By contrast, at their most romanticized, the present bodies of the stage seem
to be "full presences" which guarantee ontological grounding to the ideological roles they
embody. Puccini's Cio-Cio-San, for example, makes ideal femininity and Asianness seem absolutely real, physical, natural. At the same time, this full embodied ideal is compromised and fragmented from all sides. The diva playing Madama Butterfly is often not of Asian descent. Even if she is, she is not Madama Butterfly, nor is she a born Asian or a born woman. We must continually perform our gender and racial identities so as to constitute them, to become them, and to give the appearance (even or especially to ourselves) that these identities are pure, whole, and natural. But identities can never be perfectly embodied; there are always cracks and seams. Embodied media can offer the most intensified promise that gender and racial identities arise seamlessly from inside the body. When embodied media show the seemingly whole bodies onstage to be not all of a piece (to be, indeed, in bits and pieces), the belatedness and never-complete presence of "the body" becomes more poignant dramatically then through media which never promised full presences in the first place.

In her recent articles "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" and "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse," and in her book Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, Judith Butler repeatedly posits that identities are radically theatrical and performative, constituted by repeated poses, postures, acts and gestures. For Butler, "theatricality" is a phenomenon of daily life and is indeed the phenomenon by which exteriority becomes interior identity. Butler's work focuses on gender identity in particular, but could apply, with modifications, to racial, ethnic, and other identities as well. Butler asserts that a gender is by no means a transcultural or transhistorical identity, or even an identity stable within a given culture, climate, or even body, but rather "an identity tenuously constituted in time -- an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body . . . " Through repetition, the performance of gender is legitimated, much like ritual social drama.
gendered acts that one performs are not self-generated (indeed, the acts generate the "self"): rather "gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again."17 To posit the radical performativity and imitative exteriority of gender, and to recognize the intense political and social pressures under which gender is performed, is not to deny agency to the performer, but only to denaturalize subjectivity: "Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives."18 Butler posits "individual" "agency," but this agency and this individuality are constituted through and in performance; they do not precede or direct it. The ideal of an innate, coherent identity, indeed, is an effect of performance which erases its own performativity: "acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body . . . . That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality."19 More simply, "genders reality is performative which means . . . that it is real only to the extent that it is performed."20

Butler finds in various forms of gender parody such as transvestism and masquerade the explicit subversion of the notion of an ontological bodily grounding of gender. Though the contexts and receptions of onstage performances differ significantly from those of "real life" performances -- Butler herself suggests that "the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence"21 -- both performances threaten to reveal the groundlessness of genders and identities. An elaborate system of defenses against this threat, a system which Jonas Barish calls "the antitheatrical prejudice," attempts to ward it off by positing a new core truth and dismissing self-deconstructive performances as
"imitation." "falsehood." "superficiality." "theatricality." "mere performance." The history of antitheatrical prejudices attests to the urgency of ideological forces to reconstitute ontological foundations, and to redefine performativity and theatricality so as conceptually to exile them to positions exterior to subjectivity.

Barish's *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* chronicles centuries of (primarily European) meanings of "theatricality" posited by "antitheatricalists." Barish notes that "with infrequent exceptions, terms borrowed from the theater -- *theatrical*, *operatic*, *melodramatic*, *stagey*, etc. -- tend to be hostile or belittling." as do expressions such as "acting, play acting, playing up to, putting on an act, putting on a performance, making a scene, making a spectacle of oneself, playing to the gallery, and so forth." Barish calls the phenomenon of antitheatrical prejudice "worldwide," though he looks primarily at the tradition from the Greek Plato and Aristotle, through Romans and early Roman Christians (especially St. Augustine), Medieval European religious tracts, English Puritan sermonizing pamphlets, Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France with special attention to Rousseau, nineteenth-century British novelists, Nietzsche in Germany, and, in the twentieth-century, Yvor Winters and the antitheatrical theaters of Pirandello, Beckett, Brecht, Artaud, and Grotowski. From within his European bias, Barish deems that the antitheatrical prejudice "is one to which our whole species seems in some measure prone. Looked at more attentively, it comes to appear a kind of ontological malaise, a condition inseparable from our beings, which we can no more discard than we can shed our skins." (Here Barish ironically posits an ontological malaise at the foundations of human nature in response to the anti-foundationalism of theatricality. He thereby dramatizes the difficulty of responding to a critique of foundationalism without positing a new foundation.)

The history of antitheatricalism since Plato and Aristotle fluctuates between on the one hand defining theatricality as the artificial simulation of reality (theatricality as mimesis).
and on the other hand defining theatricality as reality itself in exaggerated, desubtilized forms (theatricality as exhibitionism). Beyond imitating reality or being reality, theatricality is particularly dangerous to some antitheatricalists because it can create reality. Theatrical theater can stir up in the people's hearts desires, passions, lusts, discontents, and hostilities which they did not have prior to the theater event. (This charge is currently being made specifically in regard to pornographic materials and violence on television.) Theater (especially "theatrical" theater) may be radically discontinuous from reality, or it may be dependent on and imitative of reality, or it may precede and direct a reality dependent on it. All three models nevertheless posit a reality or essence in contradistinction to theatriality.

Barish points out that "[t]he word theatrical itself seems not to have acquired its overtones of exhibitionism until recently." For Stanislavsky in the 1930s, at a time when high modernism was calling on the artist to "make it new," theatricality meant both exhibiting oneself and doing so in old, conventional (therefore unrealistic, according to Stanislavsky) ways. "It means 'false,' 'perfunctory,' 'dead,' and 'mechanical.' the enemy of everything 'live,' 'true,' 'genuine,' 'real,' 'human,' 'creative,' and 'natural.' Theatrical is the word one uses to describe the actor who is aiming merely to amuse his [or her] audience, or who practices his [or her] craft only to feed his own narcissism." Stanislavsky teaches the actor "to shun 'the theatre in the theatre,' to curb his [or her] own driving exhibitionism." A similar animus against narcissistic artifice prompted "Puritan apologists" to "wax clamorous over the offense to nature involved in incorrect dress and the use of cosmetics." For pamphleteer William Perkins, dressing correctly according to the gender and class convention is not external and theatrical but central to our essence: dress "may no more be tampered with than that essence itself." It is when conventions are tampered with that dress becomes costume -- external and theatrical. "Players are evil
because they try to substitute a self of their own contriving for the one given them by God. ¹²⁹ Players challenge the authority, and even the existence, of "God" or "essence."

Self-presentation has not always and universally been regarded as cheap, second-rate, or even avoidable. Contemporaneous with the Puritan antitheatrical pamphleteers appeared what Stephen Greenblatt calls "Renaissance Self-fashioning," the sense that one can construct or fashion one's "self" through such theatrical media as fashion, costume, postures and poses, dialogue, discourse, and dialect. Similarly, contemporaneous with Romanticism's shunning of self-presentation and the "belief in an absolute sincerity which speaks directly from the soul, a pure expressiveness that knows nothing of the presence of others" are "the posturings of a Chateaubriand, a Heine, or a Byron" and, slightly later, the theatrical dandyism and flamboyance of Baudelaire and Oscar Wilde.³⁰

More commonly, however, the prejudice goes against dandyism and flamboyance. against effeminacy and "flaunting it." Antitheatricality (particularly the animus against immodest exhibitionism, transvestism and masquerade) and antifeminism share a long history of intimacy. Does the exaltation of women's appearances in a pro-theatrical spirit oppose or partake of antitheatricalism's antifeminism? Why is the image of femininity regarded as inherently theatrical, and theatricality as inherently feminine?

Barish finds that "prejudice against the theater coupled with prejudice against women, especially beautiful, ornamental, and seductive women" to be "a long-lasting motif" in the tradition of antitheatricality that he studies.³¹ As social systems legitimate themselves by reifying social roles into immutable bodily essences, an individual's changing of his/her body or playing of a social role inconsistent with his/her body type may expose the self-effacing reifications. One of the most salient systems of social roles in practically every human culture is what Gayle Rubin calls the "sex/gender system."³² In order to maximize its reproducibility, a culture assigns certain roles and characteristics to sperm carriers, and certain other roles and characteristics to egg-and-womb carriers. (To do so is already to
categorize "the body" in certain non-inevitable ways according to fetishized reproductive functions.) These binarizing assignations for "men" and "women" present themselves and are experienced as entirely natural and inalienable. Even when environmental, technological, demographic, and medicinal conditions change and specific gender roles become obsolete, they may still be experienced as absolute. The social system has grounded itself in large part on the facticity of two (and only two) genders. Renewing the tradition of the Roman Tertullian, who deplored the specular display of women\textsuperscript{3 3}. William Prynne's gargantuan 1633 pamphlet \textit{Histriomastix} deplores such activities as "that effeminate mixt Dancing, Dicing, Stage-playes, lascivious Pictures, wanton Fashions. Face-painting, Health-drinking, Long haire, Love-lockes, Periwigs. womens curling. pouldring and cutting of their haire, Bone-fires, New-yeares-gifts. May-games. amorous Pastoralls. lascivious effeminate Musicke, excessive laughter . . ."\textsuperscript{3 4} The word "effeminate," twice repeated, seems of itself to connote disgrace. Mixed dancing, in which men come into contact with women, contaminates men with feminineness, as does sexuality and lascivious music. Other forms of altering one's (gender) identity by altering one's image threatens to dismantle the sex/gender system. Indeed, all experimentation with the bodily grounding of the gender binary must be banned. Barish chronicles multiple examples of this highly disparaged linkage of theatricality with female images, costumes, and roles, and prostitution, for example in pre-revolutionary China,\textsuperscript{3 5} in early Christian Rome,\textsuperscript{3 6} and in Rousseau's writings.\textsuperscript{3 7} In \textit{M. Butterfly}, the unsympathetic character Comrade Chin, a normative if not normalizing voice, remarks "Actors. I think they're all weirdos. My mother tells me actors are like gamblers or prostitutes or -- " (48). The ellipsis, which implies a category of people too alien and perverse to be spoken, indict actors more than if the list had been completed.

Theatricality, understood as excessive show, as imitating the inimitable, can manipulate manifestations so as show how they produce their own prior grounding essences. of which
they are then imitations. Theatricalizing femininity makes the gender assumption, that two different kinds of human bodies with distinct reproduction capacities physiologically motivate specific gender and sex roles, seem a farce.\textsuperscript{38} Theatricalizing other forms of otherness can similarly alienate a social system’s major tropes of self-legitimation. Different forms of otherness play different roles in relation to a dominant social system, but the threat they pose -- of theatricalizing that system's well-hidden groundlessness or innate theatricality -- resemble each other. (They often do not recognize the resemblance. Some Jewish cultures are extremely patriarchal and even gynophobic as well as antitheatrical; theaters have variously and notoriously propagated antisemitism and antifeminism, and many female cultures and sub-sculptures, including feminist groups, who may earnestly train themselves to become consciously aware of the power structures they enact, have variously been antisemitic and antitheatrical, as well as classist, racist, ageist, etc.) Said's Orientalism and Hwang's \textit{M. Butterfly} investigate "the Orient" as other to "the Occident," and play up links among theatricality (in the antitheatricalist's sense), Orientalism, and (hetero)sexism.

\textit{Orientalism's Orientalist Stage}

As the title of this chapter suggests, Orientalism lies at the heart not only of "Western" theater dramatizing "the East," but also of at the heart of "Western" theater's self-understanding, at least in two of the major forms of modern Euro-American theater.

\textit{Madame Butterfly}, \textit{Miss Saigon}, and \textit{M. Butterfly} all testify to what Edward Said calls the "seductive degradation of knowledge"\textsuperscript{39} and the perverse power of Orientalism to re-emerge in seemingly innocuous or even anti-Orientalist forms. It seems to me, though, writing twelve years after the first publication of \textit{Orientalism}, during which time Said's critique has moved from the margins to the center of most humanities and social science
departments, that we ought not to neglect the pockets of resistance which pop up even among and within the most recuperative strains of East-West binarization and of homogenizing Eastern mystification. Said's readings from Orientalist texts unfortunately tend to flatten those texts' self-critiquing potentialities, their textual eccentricities, their fascinating internal contradictions and aporia, their intriguing rhetorical constructions, images, metaphors, synecdoches, etc. into uni-dimensional homogeneous images of the homogenizing Orientalist. Said, in some ways and at some moments, Orientalizes -- or Occidentalizes -- the Orientalist, and thereby testifies to his central thesis of the resiliently recuperative power of Orientalism to branch out into seemingly liberatory critical colonies.

The study of recuperations of and resistances to Orientalism within Said's own discourse would in itself be a fascinating endeavor. For now I am interested in the intimate relationships, as identified and produced by Said, between Orientalism and theatricality, and between Orientalism and embodiment. Said figures Orientalism's view of the Orient (especially as Orientalism existed around the time of Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt) as a "class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing," and as "the live province, the laboratory, [and] the theater." Of all these, Orientalism's view of the Orient as a theater seems most damning to Said. Not only does the tradition of representing the Asian as exotic, irrational, feminine Other to Attic masculine rationality date back to the origins of Western Theater, to "Aeschylus's The Persians, the earliest Athenian play extant" and to "The Bacchae of Euripides, the very last one extant," but Orientalism itself is a theatrical phenomenon, at least in Said's figurations of it:

the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to
Europe. An Orientalist is but the particular specialist in knowledge for which Europe at large is responsible, in the way that an audience is historically and culturally responsible for (and responsive to) dramas technically put together by the dramatist.44

This explicit characterization of Orientalism implicitly characterizes the theater as transparent, univocal, homogenizing, conservative, superficially titillating, pandering to popular beliefs, and ultimately false. In only one case does Said's Orientalist source introduce the theater metaphor.45 In all others, Said cites a long passage which he then makes suspect by translating it into theatrical terms. As an example, after citing Fourier's memory of the European reception of the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, Said summarizes the passage as a "dramatic . . . coup de theatre."46 The culturally received antitheatrical prejudice not only goes unquestioned but becomes a condition of possibility for his condemnation of Orientalism. Perhaps because of this existing prejudice against theater, Said brings it in when it is not particularly apt. For example, Said states that "[t]he Orientalist stage, as I have been calling it, becomes a system of moral and epistemological rigor."47 Given that Said is here describing Orientalism as a system of textual cross-references within itself, it seems more appropriate to me to figure Orientalism as textual rather than theatrical.

In his all too brief reading of The Persians and The Bacchae, Said does not bring out the moments when "Attic" characters come face to face with their own "Asianness" -- that is, with their displacements of irrationality, disorder, frenzy, mania, passion, loss of control and self-government, and self-alienation onto "Asians." Instead, he reduces these plays to their two Orientalist themes: the division into two geographical entities, one of which represents the other; and "the motif of the Orient as insinuating danger" in which "[r]ationality is undermined by Eastern excesses."48 I would suggest, however, that theater (The Bacchae as a notable example) may break down the simple binarism not only
between us (the West) and them (the East) but also between us (the audience) and them (the stage).

In a quotation cited above, Said acknowledges that the audience is as responsible as the dramatist for the iconography that appears on the (Orientalist) stage (which then hides its input and masquerades as Other to the audience); for the most part, however, he omits mentioning the ways stage and audience interact. Indeed, to designate the boundary-making of Orientalist "knowledge," he gratuitously adds in an adjective to speak of the "dramatic boundaries" drawn by imaginative geography.49 Said perceives Orientalism's drama to be primarily visual, where the audience/Orientalist as gazer controls, objectifies, and surveys (in a Foucauldian sense) the Orient. The historical consciousness of the Orientalist "is dramatic: learning can be arranged on a stage set . . . where its totality can be readily surveyed."50 The tableau historique of the Orientalist (Sacy and Dacier as examples here) "exteriorizes the form of Orientalist knowledge and its features. . . Knowledge was essentially the making visible of material, and the aim of a tableau was the construction of a sort of Benthamite Panopticon. Scholarly discipline was therefore a specific technology of power . . .."51 Orientalism produced a "need for the scholar-historian to confront, almost in the manner of an audience seeing a dramatic event unfold, . . . the different, the strange, the distant."52 But, I would ask, what about when the audience discovers that the distant is also here, and that the different is not opposite, but complementary, or even similar to (and a ground for) the self? Said asserts that "what the Orientalist does is to confirm the Orient in his readers' eyes; he neither tries nor wants to unsettle already firm convictions,"53 and Said implicitly assumes that the theater does the same. But, as I shall discuss below, both Artaud and Brecht -- arguably in Orientalist modes -- conceive of theaters on which the stage assaults the audience's consciousness, defamiliarizes familiar notions, forces it to rethink and re-feel comfortable assumptions, and unties it from itself.
The Orienting of Brechtian and Artaudian Theaters

Said objects to the unquestioned authority of master Orientalist texts. His call for a refusal to let any magnum opus slip into the status of truth, his call to his readers to challenge, to pry into, to read deliberately against the grain of, and to historicize all Orientalist texts, share much with Artaud's injunction "No More Masterpieces."54 Artaud objects to "the idea of a detached art, of poetry as a charm which exists only to distract our leisure."55 In rhetoric very similar to Said's, Artaud asserts that "the idolatry of fixed masterpieces . . . is one of the aspects of bourgeois conformism." Theater is now "an inferior art" and a "popular distraction," which pats the spectators on the back rather than kicking them up the ass. "The public is not shown a valid spectacle;" it "is no longer shown anything but the mirror of itself." The current theater, further, places "the spectacle on one side, the public on the other."56 Artaud proposes, in opposition, a "theater of cruelty" which works and plays directly on and in the body of the spectator. The "theater of cruelty" means a theater difficult and cruel for myself first of all."57 Artaud "propose[s] then a theater in which violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theater as by a whirlwind of higher forces."58 In this theater, "the spectator is in the center and the spectacle surrounds him [sic]."59 Artaud "propose[s] to return through the theater to an idea of the physical knowledge of images and the means of inducing trances . . . ."60 Artaud's Theater of Cruelty conducts spectators " . . . by means of their organisms to an apprehension of the subtlest notions."61 Said's model of the theater reductively binarizes spectator and spectacle, life and stage, truth and illusion, us and them. Artaud's theater seeks to assault these comfortable binarisms which found both anti-theatricality and Orientalism.

And yet Artaud himself borrows from Orientalist discourse. Consider the latter two quotations in their full sentences:
I propose to return through the theater to an idea of the physical knowledge of images and the means of inducing trances, as in Chinese medicine which knows over the entire extent of the human anatomy, at what points to puncture in order to regulate the subtlest functions.\textsuperscript{62}

If music affects snakes, it is not on account of the spiritual notions it offers them, but because snakes are long and coil their length upon the earth, because their bodies touch the earth at almost every point; and because the musical vibrations which are communicated to the earth affect them like a very subtle very long massage; and I propose to treat the spectators like the snakecharmer's subjects and conduct them by means of their organisms to an apprehension of the subtlest notions.\textsuperscript{63}

Snakecharming has long been an Orientalist metonym of Eastern occultism.\textsuperscript{64} and Chinese acupuncture was also generally considered to be occultist magic in 1930s France. Artaud clearly grants them validity, even reverence. I believe, though, that Artaud reveres Eastern icons precisely because they are Other, or (in his word) "double" to Western cliches. These Eastern icons retain, to a Frenchman who doesn't fully know their codes, an aura of mystery, magic. Artaud posits this aura as a lost essence of Occidental theater as well. Oriental theater, for Artaud, is both the opposite and the lost origin of Occidental theater. This Orientalist grounding of the Theater of Cruelty is most blatant in Artaud's essays "On the Balinese Theater" and "Oriental and Occidental Theater."

Artaud begins "On the Balinese Theater" by immediately stating his topic: "[t]he spectacle of the Balinese theater."\textsuperscript{65} Not "the Balinese theater" but the "spectacle of the Balinese theater;" we can understand Artaud's phrase as referring to the visual elements of the Balinese theater, or to the wondrous miracle of the Balinese theater, or to Artaud's representation of Balinese theater. This "spectacle" of Balinese theater is rhetorically
opposed to, prioritized over, and offered as the savior of "the Occident" in an opening paragraph which encapsulates the essay:

The spectacle of the Balinese theater, which draws upon dance, song, pantomime -- and a little of the theater as we understand it in the Occident -- restores the theater, by means of ceremonies of indubitable age and well-tried efficacy, to its original destiny which it presents as a combination of all these elements fused together in a perspective of hallucination and fear.\(^6\)

The Balinese theater, which by the end of the essay will silently become "Oriental theater," represents an oxymoronic "original destiny" for theater; it stands for both the origin and the end of (Occidental) theater. This theater is so spectacular for Artaud, I believe, partly because he forecloses its textuality in advance, partly because he doesn't know the codes for reading it, partly because it's new to him. That's why it can be both classical ("of indubitable age and well-tried efficacy") and satisfy his injunction for "no more masterpieces." The "perspective of hallucination and fear" it offers, like its "spectacle," emphasizes Artaud's experience of this theater speculatively above all. This sounds, at this point, similar to Said's belief that "the Occident" places "the Orient" as a stage to be looked at and sees it as a sign of its own lack. This, in turn, recalls the work of feminist film theorists of the past fifteen years, which asserts that in certain films, a female spectacle connotes to-be-looked-at-ness to a male spectator. The gender and racial politics of the gaze coalesce in Said's suggestion that "the Western" spectator feminizes "the Eastern" spectacle. The feminine, the Orient are lacks which connote fullness. Artaud's Orientalist looks at the Balinese spectacle partake of this paradox: on the one hand, the spectacle is a thing itself, an absolute full presence; on the other hand, it is a sign -- or signifier -- of such a presence which is yet elsewhere. The Balinese spectacle is both language and not language.
Artaud continually refers to Balinese theatrical elements as "signs" -- but signs which also make present on stage that which they signify. They are "a marvelous complex of pure stage images." "inventing a language of gesture to be developed in space, a language without meaning except in the circumstances of the stage." That which they signify is "a superior and prescribed Life." "thoughts as it were in a pure state." These "Balinese productions take shape at the very heart of matter, life, reality" and thereby "extirpate from the mind of the onlooker all idea of pretense, of cheap imitations of reality." Balinese "spiritual signs have a precise meaning which strikes us only intuitively but with enough violence to make useless any translation into logical discursive language." I would suggest that the Balinese "sign language of spiritual gestures" seem to embody and materialize metaphysical presence precisely because they are other and unreadable to Artaud. They seem both to precede language and to transcend language because they employ a language -- a set of codes and conventions -- which Artaud doesn't know. He never considers what the Balinese theater means to its Balinese participants. Artaud cites "the battle between Arjuna and the Dragon" as being dramatically atextual, "beyond situations and words;" he seems oblivious to the deep embeddedness of this spectacle in a text for anyone who studies the Mahabharata, a canonical Sanskrit "masterpiece." Like Hwang's Gallimard, and like the Orientalists which Said deplores, Artaud chooses to see "the Orient" as spectacle, not hear its languages and texts. This blinding allows him to see spectacles of "the Orient" as both signifiers and signifieds, signs which embody that "something umbilical, larval" which they signify.

At the same time, and contradictorily, Artaud seems uncannily on the edge of awareness of his own Orientalizing. He clearly formulates the endlessly absent presence endlessly pointed toward and indeed reified; the spiritual presence of Oriental theater, he recognizes, is simultaneously created and absented. Artaud, in short, outlines the ritual othering of the other continually re-enacted by Orientalism, patriarchy, racism, xenophobia, and
antitheatricalism. Artaud reiterates that Balinese theater elements are signs belonging to language -- though an other language. Balinese theater presents "the sense of a new physical language, based upon signs and no longer upon words."\(^7\) This language is a universal language, "that sort of theatrical language foreign to every spoken tongue, a language in which an overwhelming stage experience seems to be communicated, in comparison with which our productions depending exclusively upon dialogue seem like so much stuttering."\(^5\) If these signs present spirit, they are nevertheless not themselves spirit but "spiritual signs;"\(^6\) they "communicate" an overwhelming stage experience, but are not themselves that experience. They are "matter as revelation"\(^7\) which give the "impression of a superior and prescribed Life;"\(^8\) not that which they reveal itself nor that superior and prescribed Life itself. The reiteration of visual qualifiers emphasize that the signs are always signs. Artaud seizes on the graphic image of actors as "veritable living, moving hieroglyphs." "[T]he hieratic quality of the costumes gives each actor a double body and a double set of limbs -- and the dancer bundled into his costume seems to be nothing more than his own effigy."\(^9\) Artaud's hieroglyphs reverse the hierarchy of body and representation; the "mask" becomes independent of and prior to the body of the actor which "embodies" it. The disregard for the human, local, not-full, culturally specific actor's body in favor of its effigy, however, abets Artaud's Orientalist generalizations and appropriations. Artaud's theater of cruelty, in its mystification of extreme psychic pain and its quest to transcend the local, facilitates the erasure of localized pain. Said analogizes that the figures of the Orient in Orientalism discourse "are to the actual Orient . . . as stylized costumes are to the characters in a play." Orientalist discourse "at one and the same time . . . characterize(s) the Orient as alien and . . . incorporate(s) it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are for Europe, and only for Europe."\(^0\)

I referred earlier to Artaud's positing of the theater as representation of "thoughts as it were in a pure state." In a sense I pulled this phrase out of context, but in another sense I
believe this phrase to be struggling against and contradicting its context (consistent with Artaud's extreme and radical inconsistencies throughout his writing, and which make his writing so rigorous, challenging, and painful). Here is the full paragraph:

In the performances of the Balinese theater the mind has the feeling that conception at first stumbled against gesture, gained its footing in the midst of a whole ferment of visual or sonorous images, thoughts as it were in a pure state. To put it briefly and more clearly, something akin to the musical state must have existed for this mise en scène where everything that is a conception of the mind is only a pretext, a virtuality whose double has produced this intense stage poetry, this many-hued spatial language.81

The double meaning of "pretext," which suggests that conceptions of the mind are both a false front and a pre-existing text, encapsulates Artaud's double conception of theatrical signs. Simultaneous with the notion of a theater signifying thoughts which precede signification is the suggestion that the language of theater, its musical and spectatorial signs, precede thoughts of the mind. Theatrical signs produce the "virtuality" which simultaneously produces or seems to produce "this many-hued spatial language" and this theatrical music. Indeed Artaud makes clear that "the sound itself is only the nostalgic representation of something else."82 He goes on to affirm the priority of this something else as "a sort of magic state where sensations have become so subtle that they are a pleasure for the spirit to frequent." Nevertheless, his representation of theatrical sound as a "nostalgic representation" displays the very nostalgia for presence which Said speaks of when he says that Orientalists posit in "the East" precisely the (sign of) an unattainable but full, spiritual, absolute ontological grounding for which they long. Thus in "Oriental and Occidental Theater" Artaud finds that "[t]rue expression hides what it makes manifest. It sets the mind in opposition to the real void of nature by creating in reaction a kind of fullness in thought. . . . All powerful feeling produces in us the idea of the void."83 Said
expresses a similar notion sarcastically, in an explicit critique of Orientalism: "in discussions of the Orient, the Orient is all absence, whereas one feels the Orientalist and what he says as presence; yet we must not forget that the Orientalist's presence is enabled by the Orient's effective absence."  

In "On the Balinese Theater" Artaud first introduces his important polysemic term "double." The Oriental theater is a double to the Occidental theater, and the image of the Balinese actor is also double to that actor. Artaud claims that "in the human as in the superhuman the Orientals are more than a match for us in matters of reality."  

"Match." like "double," has at least a double meaning. It can mean an identical half of a pair, a mirror image, a complementary marriage partner, or an opponent as in a wrestling match or tennis match. Orientalism and antitheatricalism thrive by creating doubles (such as the East as a double to the West, theater as a double to life) which can slip easily from opposites to identical halves (or "better halves"). Said comments that "the Orient was always in the position both of outsider and of incorporated weak partner for the West."  

Artaud both conforms to this conflation of the various functions of doubles, and simultaneously deconflates them; neither the conflation nor the deconflation ultimately prevails. Artaud both makes Oriental theater a vehicle for ontological grounding and spotlights his process of doing so. He thereby dramatizes both the inexorability and the impossibility of the Orientalist quest.

Shocking the audience into consciousness as a primary aim of theater also impassions Brecht. Of what the audience becomes conscious differs greatly between Artaud and Brecht; for Artaud, consciousness of body-spirit, whereas for Brecht, consciousness of socioeconomic forces. (These might not be so different; the sudden understanding that what seems most interior and bodily is also social and exterior may be experienced as a spiritual revelation.) David Hwang perceives his own writing to be more like Brecht than
any other playwright who influenced him, and *M. Butterfly* to be his most Brechtian play. Many of the play’s elements, such as the graphic banners, signs, and legends, the kurogo who change the set in full view of the audience, the sliding screens, the lack of any independent interiority to any of the characters, and the awareness of every character of being looked at, can all be categorized as either Brechtian or Asian theater techniques. Interestingly, in a major essay, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," Brecht turns to Chinese acting, which in his description appears quite similar to the Balinese theater of Artaud’s description, yet which he invokes in support of a radically different vision of theater.

Said’s theatrical metaphors assume that the (Orientalist) spectator sees only the spectacle and does not see him/herself seeing the spectacle. Brecht clearly argues for a theater of self-aware spectatorship, which he sees in the Chinese theater (as presented "by Mei Lanfang’s company in Moscow in spring 1935") The spectator becomes part of the spectacle. Conversely, the actor is also a spectator. Thus "[a]bove all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched." The Chinese "artist observes himself." Artaud speaks of the Balinese actor as a double to his image, as "his own effigy." Brecht speaks of the Chinese actor’s observation of his image as the "alienation effect" ("Verfremdungseffekt"). While Artaud believes that the actor is subordinate to, perhaps even uncomprehending of, the character-mask he bears on his body, Brecht believes that the character is subordinate to the actor, who comments critically on the character and encourages the audience to do the same. "The artist’s object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work. As a result everything put forward by him has a touch of the amazing. Everyday things are thereby raised above the level of the obvious and automatic." The actor defamiliarizes the spectacle, and causes to-be-looked-at-ness to be looked at. The audience
identifies with the actor's looking and, in looking at the actor, looks at the act of looking. Potentially, then, the spectator sees the usually invisible social politics of looking, as well as the significances of other social "gests" onstage.

Like Artaud, Brecht both self-consciously and unconsciously performs selected Orientalist techniques. Like Artaud's one-step expansion from certain forms of Balinese theater to "Oriental theater" and from some historically specific European theaters to "Occidental theater," Brecht generalizes from Mei Lan-fang's theater to "Chinese theater" and then to "Asiatic theater" and from naturalistic acting to "Western acting." Brecht makes clear in his opening sentence of "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" that he is using the example of the alienation effects in traditional Chinese theater as a mirror to confirm his own projected consciousness-raising theater. He admits that this one element of Chinese theater "cannot very well be exported" nor can it be easily extracted out of context; yet he nevertheless does appropriate it and encourages us "to realize that the Chinese actor's A-effect is a transportable piece of technique: a conception that can be prised loose from the Chinese theatre." A "piece of technique like Chinese acting's A-effect" aids "those who need such a technique for quite definite social purposes." Brecht makes clear that Chinese "alienation" does not historicize, but that it can be -- indeed, has already been -- used by the German epic theater to historicize the events portrayed. But if the very motivation for invoking the A-effect is that "everything must be seen from a social point of view," why does Brecht choose not his own historically specific social point of view, but rather the example of a generalized Chinese acting to introduce the A-effect?

Interestingly, both Artaud and Brecht introduce the most fundamental (and most famous) terms of their projected theaters, the "double" and the "A-effect," respectively, in relation to "Oriental theater." These terms are discursively legitimated on the foundations of their pre-existence and full presence in other primitive and pre-discursive theaters.
Said indicts Orientalism by silently assuming an antitheatricalism which aligns theatricality with wanton reductiveness, cosmetic superficiality, and ultimately falsity. His theoretical apparatus is not inherently antitheatrical; Said perceives Orientalism not as a system of lies "masking" reality but as a system of discourse which produces and reifies "the Orient" as a subject. However, Said occasionally lapses into diatribes against the lies of Orientalist myth-makers. These more reductive moments tend often to coincide with Said's use of theatrical metaphors, with which he "masks" his own reductiveness; Said's characterization of theater as an inherently reductive and reducing medium is itself reductive. Furthermore, Said challenges Orientalism's characterization of "the Orient" as a prostitute, but relies on a tradition of antitheatricalism which characterizes the stage as prostitution. Nor does Said question the misogynistic/patriarchal abhorrence of prostitution itself.

Conversely, Brecht and Artaud expand definitions of theater, but do so partially through Orientalist discourse. If Said uses the theater as a figure for misrepresentations of the Orient, Brecht and Artaud use the Orient as a figure for theaters' truths. Both Brecht and Artaud complicate theaters' "double" as being neither a "reality" which is the opposite of theater nor as simply another theater (as might a metadramatic metanarrative of all the world as a stage). Yet both theater theorists need to hold on rhetorically to an Orient as the site of "real" or "true" (as well as primitive and mystic) theater. Furthermore, the Orient enters the theoretical writings of both Brecht and Artaud when they challenge the embodying of the body onstage and indeed when they deconstruct the surface/depth binarism of the theatrical event. In challenging the antitheatricality of Said's challenges to Orientalism (at least in my readings of them), they reconfirm theatricality's ability, in its inextricable mystification and demystification of the spectacle, both to construct and to combat Orientalism, often simultaneously.
Going to the Theater

It was at this point, after I'd been thinking through these relations among anti-theatricality, antifeminism, and Orientalism, that I went to see M. Butterfly at Jones Hall. I was sorting in my head through the disparate but recurrent themes of looking and spectatorship as modes of gender and racial performativity, of the function of the spectator/spectacle binarism in ratifying other binarisms, and of the role of the body onstage as a ratifier of "reality" prior to the stage and of genders and races prior to performances. But it's one thing to think and write about a rather disembodied, abstract concept of embodiment; it's quite another thing to play the role of spectator, to experience it at the site of my body. In short, it's easier to dispel the anti-theatrical prejudice outside of the theater. I have never been to a Broadway show, nor had I been to touring productions of Broadway hits. Not only can I not afford the $40 ticket (up to $100 in some Broadway theaters) but I prefer small theaters (often in converted showcases or warehouses) and low-budget, makeshift productions. At Jones Hall I came face to face with my own anti-Broadway-ism. While I've been accusing anti-theatricalism of complicity with Orientalism and antifeminism, it seemed to me that this theatricality was also and differently complicit.

Out in the multiple lobbies of Jones Hall, vendors sold overpriced programs, T-shirts, and sweatshirts. One could buy alcoholic beverages, which many theater-goers were sipping, or coffees and sodas for $1.25. But mostly the lobby was about clothes. Men in Armani-like suits (I wondered how they'd feel about Gallimard saying in regard to Song's Armani slacks that Song dresses like a pimp). Women in black and red. Lots of black and red. Lots of little black dresses and miniskirts among the younger women, long silks and velvet among the elder women. My own black miniskirt, which had seemed so ostentatious at home, was quite plebeian here. I felt like an observer of another class, but only knew how to see that class through ageist and sexist eyes. Both men and women
wore jewelry (I didn't). One woman looked my body up and down, then gave me a look which let me know I was disqualified from the fashion show. With that one look, I was classed and gendered. To everyone else, I was more or less invisible, though someone did ask me if I was a reporter. In the auditorium, I watched bodies making their way to their seats, the half-lights playing up their jewels against the black fabrics, their black-and-red costumes matching the black-and-red set by Eiko Ishioka. (I read the quite elegant set as an ironic reproduction of the color-coded exoticism found in so many American Chinese restaurants, which authenticate themselves to American eyes with red, gold, and black decor. But the black and red of the audience's costumes seemed not to ironize themselves, at least not consciously.) They'd stand as long as they could in front of their seats, making negligible adjustments to their sweaters or jackets, to be seen for those extra seconds before the rows of seats swallowed them up. An elderly couple took their seats behind me. The volume of their voices announced that at least one of them was hard of hearing. The woman wore a mink stole and a diamond necklace. Many large diamonds end-to-end. The stole must have felt sticky in this Houston heat and humidity. "Oh, look at the set. Isn't that precious!" She lifted binoculars to her eyes. I felt nervous and angry. "The whole thing is a big display of wealth." I thought, and then remembered reading the same accusation in one of Barish's quotations from a Puritan antitheatricalist pamphlet.  

When Song dropped his briefs, the mink woman caught her breath and said "Oh my goodness." A woman beside me put her binoculars to her eyes. To make sure it was the real thing?

The production was indeed theatrical and spectacular. Seeing it just after the implementation of the official cease-fire of the Persian Gulf war, the play was to me particularly indicting of Allied imperialist politics. This production of M. Butterfly was potentially radically insulting to the audience, critical as it was of U.S. ethnocentric racism so blatant in U.S. media representations of Arabs during the war. The production was.
well, potentially critical of compulsory heterosexuality, and homoerotic even as it questioned the gender and sex identities which make the labels hetero- and homo-sexual intelligible. It was also potentially the exact opposite. I listened to comments in the lobby where the crowd bottlenecked on its way to the underground parking garage. "When I heard the story, I didn't see how it could have happened. But that actor really did look like a woman." "I like it even better than Grand Hotel." One woman did say "I'm going to be thinking about that play for several weeks."

Away from the theater, I would like to erase my hostile and phobic reactions from memory, irrationally strong though they were at the time. I am quite ashamed, but even more saddened by my own antitheatrical and particularly anti-audience prejudices run rampant, especially since they took on such ageist and sexist casts -- and saddened as well by a production which, by its very success, smoothness, and seemingly effortless theatricality, may have defeated itself. The richness of the costumes, set, and props, emblamatized particularly by the giant silk scarf-like curtain emblazoned with a flowery butterfly, congratulated the audience on its own wealth. But I want now to check my highly emotive frustrations and snobbery by critically thinking through various elements of narrative and of stage spectacle which make M. Butterfly read doubly as a "deconstructivist" and reconstructive Madame Butterfly.

M. Butterfly

Hwang sees himself as trying, in M. Butterfly, "to link imperialism, racism and sexism."98 This play, a contemporary "Epic Theater" in its attempt to historicize personal and international imperialist politics, takes on the daunting task of combining a critique of sexism and heterosexism, a critique of the antitheatrical prejudice, and a critique of Orientalism. Furthermore, it theatricalizes these critiques in sometimes quite Brechtian
ways. *M. Butterfly*, then, is a critical test for the critiques of Butler, Barish, Said, Brecht, and film theorists of the gaze. Below I will discuss the ways in which *M. Butterfly* both exposes the theater's processes of embodiment whereby the theater produces a "natural" body which precedes and stands outside of theatricality, and reasserts the naturalness of this body. *M. Butterfly* both recuperates and resists the essentialized bodies on which Orientalism and sexism depend. It is important to attend (as I shall try to do below) to both the reconstitution of racism and misogyny of which some critics have accused *M. Butterfly*, as well as to its moments of potential for radical alienation and subversion of these discursive systems, as they occur in the plot, titles, narrators, blocking, image and spectacles, casting and costume.

The plot of *M. Butterfly* both inverts and conserves Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. Briefly, Rene Gallimard, a French diplomat in China around the time of the Vietnam War, serves as *M. Butterfly*'s double of Pinkerton and himself a fan of Puccini's opera. Gallimard falls in love with Song Liling, a Chinese Opera Diva, whom he first sees performing the role of Madame Butterfly and whom he casts in this role in "real life." In what seems to be a reversal, Gallimard eventually learns that Song is not only a spy for China but also a man. Back in Paris in Gallimard's imagination, Song proves irrefutably that he is a man by exposing her penis. This exposure psychologically castrates Gallimard, while Song's crossover to the West propels his lover easterly. Song appears as a man in Western clothes, Gallimard makes himself up into an Oriental women, who then commits suicide. *M. Butterfly*, then, both replays *Madame Butterfly*'s final tableau of the self-sacrificing Asian woman dead before the surviving Western cad, and inverts this tableau in that the man in Armani slacks is played by a Chinese actor of woman's parts while the Japanese woman is played by a French man.

To what extent does this basic reversal of *Madame Butterfly* merely recast its roles to preserve its central mythology? To what extent does this reversal dismantle the Butterfly
mythology itself? Hwang has formulated this basic reversal, the "spine" or "back" or "arc" of his play, as:

the Frenchman fantasizes that he is Pinkerton and his lover is Butterfly. By the end of the piece, he realizes that it is he who has been Butterfly, in that the Frenchman has been duped by love: the Chinese spy, who exploited that love is therefore the real Pinkerton. (96)

This formulation reflects the ambiguity of the reversal. On the one hand, if the Chinese spy is "the real Pinkerton," then the binarisms remain intact: one party exploits love, the other is duped by it; one is "masculine", the other "feminine;" one "Western," one "Eastern." The players merely took on the wrong roles, ones that were not natural to them. M. Butterfly does not offer us an alternative to binary thinking. On the other hand, the play hints that such an alternative might be possible and desirable. And its detachment of bodily ground from essence (women's genitalia from "Woman," white skin from "Caucasian" or "Western") is a first step towards a nonbinary alternative. If the role of western man is not, after all, natural to the western man, if the Easterner plays his Easternness and performs femininity more convincingly and realistically than masculinity, then Westernness.

Easternness, masculinity, and femininity become denaturalized, or alienated, from the bodies which seem to ground them. The drives and essences of bodies can no longer be seen as references separate from and preceding social signification; rather the drives and essences of bodies - the bodies themselves -- may be produced and directed by the social sign systems (such as Orientalism and sexism) which legitimate themselves through the very references to the real they create.

The title of the play, "M. Butterfly," similarly negotiates this paradox. It has the potentially subversive, potentially conservative ring of identifying a man by his more powerful wife's name -- for example, introducing Denis Thatcher as "Mr. Margaret Thatcher." This title reverses the gender/power axis which dictates that a woman gets her
identity through her husband and that he has more power than she. "Mr. Margaret Thatcher" suggests that even among the most conservative leaders of a conservative, patriarchal, compulsorily heterosexual, white supremacist, imperialist ideology, the "man" of a couple gets his identity through and in juxtaposition with the "woman." Of course, the title "Mr. Margaret Thatcher" would probably engender not a revolution but simply mild embarrassment. What remains intact is the neatly binarized heterosexual couple as a naturalized unit of identity, in which one half of the unit names and dominates the other half, and one half resides in the public, the other in the private sphere. "M. Butterfly" similarly names a man through his relationship to a woman. In the Puccini opera, Cio-Cio-San is presumably given the English name Butterfly because of her delicate Oriental fragility. The title "M. Butterfly" gives back to the Western Monsieur his "own" name created for the Eastern Woman; her identity as Eastern Woman always already comes from him, as his identity as Western Man does from her. (The name "David Henry Hwang" which also appears on book covers and playbills more subtly intermingles the Western "David Henry" with the Eastern "Hwang." ) Interestingly, in his "afterword," Hwang includes his wife, "Ophelia," in the naming of his play; she deemed his original title "Monsieur Butterfly" as "too obvious" and suggested that Hwang "abbreviate in the French fashion. Hence M. Butterfly, far more mysterious and ambiguous was the result" (96). The name Butterfly suggests, for Pinkerton and for Gallimard, Oriental mysteriousness. Now "M." also signifies mysteriousness, but mysteriousness "after the French fashion." Hwang's discussion of the title augments its already suggestive ethnic ambiguity. But the radical gender ambiguity within the single figure of the title as well as the possible homosexuality to which it points are somewhat militated against by Hwang's obtrusive autobiographical insistence that that title was generated by both himself and his wife. The dedication page of the book form of the script prominently displays the dedication "To Ophelia." I know nothing about Hwang's wife, but this dedication textually names yet
another fragile, suicidal woman of Western high culture, a woman whose self-sacrifice is repeatedly depicted onstage and in paintings as beautiful. Furthermore, the prominent display of heterosexual dedication checks in advance the homoerotics of the pages behind it. Whatever Hwang's intentions, the dedication also relegates the homoerotics to Gallimard and "them," and not the "us" of the heterosexual coupling of himself and his wife. The cover, title and dedication pages throw gender and ethnic roles into alienating play. But this play is also disciplined and checks itself against the "free play" which it threatens to become.

Throughout the reversing relationship between Song and Gallimard, the basic binary heterosexual coupling with its roles of dominant Western Man (possessing the phallus, the look, and language) and of the submissive Eastern Woman (lacking, silent, and to-be-looked-at) are repeatedly re-improvised and re-embodied. In all of Act 1 and the start of Act 2, Gallimard is in charge of the narrative. From his prison cell, he directs what the audience sees and hears, which takes place "in his mind," and only he addresses the audience directly. At the end of 2.3, Song breaks out of the fictive boundaries of the narrative by showing that she is aware of being looked at by the audience, the "they" who must "understand the story" (47). In the next scene, Song talks directly to her audience for the first time, and momentarily takes control of the narrative, language, and the spectacle. But this in no way reverses the gender/power axis, for a few lines later Song reveals herself to be a man. In gaining look and language, Song is phallicized; the equation of femininity with castration, lack, and to-be-looked-at-ness remains.

Up through 2.6, Gallimard has established the lower-level area of the stage, below the ramp and downstage (closest to the audience), as his domain, where he mediates between audience and stage spectacle. The ramp and the cage-like box downstage left are the stage-on-the-stage, where Song performs Madame Butterfly, and where the pin-up girl strips. As Song becomes increasingly masculinized, she moves increasingly off the
ramp, out of the cage, and onto the center stage region; simultaneously, Gallimard moves increasingly off center and upstage. At the start of 2.7, Song paces downstage while Gallimard kneels upstage, blocked partially by a screen, as Song has previously been. Song has moved physically into the region of narrative and representational control, Gallimard into the region of ignorance and submission to narrative forces. But again, Song moves spatially from the place of representee into that of representor in the process of verbally asserting his/her biological maleness, inability to bear a child him/herself, and possession of a conspicuously unexposed penis. Meanwhile Gallimard, fearing he is impotent, depends on Song to restore to him his male potency by bearing him a child. Despite the trading of roles, then, the roles of patriarchal psychology themselves remain intact. Femininity remains equated with castration, disempowerment, and objectification before a (male) gaze; the penis and phallus are conflated as the possessor of the penis gains access to language and the look which masquerades as the gaze.

Another such plot "reversal" concerns the equation of shame with femininity and Easternness. Early in the play, Gallimard swells with pride in the triumphant moment when he receives the letter from Song saying she has given Gallimard her shame. By Act 3, a gloating Song in men's briefs and "Armani slacks" asks Gallimard to "throw away [his] pride" (90). In the scene immediately following, Gallimard completes Song's reversal of a change to western male costume by making and dressing himself up as an Oriental woman. Again, the players change, the binarized, heterosexual roles, such as the femaleness of being shamed and the maleness of shaming, remain the same.

Just after remarking on his wife's collaboration in the generation of the play's title, Hwang mentions that though he had originally planned on writing a musical play, it "had become a straight play" (because he didn't want to be "hampered by the lengthy process of collaboration;" 96). I would suggest that the play is "straight" not only because it is non-musical, but also because its potential for radically calling compulsory heterosexuality into
question becomes mitigated by the conservative binary reversals. While Hwang wanted to do "a deconstructivist Madame Butterfly" (95), the basic reversal which structures his play is also reconstructive. Moments of homo- or auto-eroticism are never represented as such; when the "female" partner becomes more masculine, the other becomes complementarily feminine to equal but opposite degrees. The play is also "straight" in that its potential for campiness and kinkiness has been straightened out. The final moments, when Gallimard makes himself a woman, could have been ridiculously hilarious in the Charles Ludlam tradition; the production I saw offered a vision of tragic pathos.

Vision in M. Butterfly bears further "inspection," for it, too, partakes of the ambiguities of parody or subversive mimicry. Specularity is another aspect of theatricality which M. Butterfly stages so as to critique, to exploit, and to entrap its audiences into self-recognition. M. Butterfly invites and stages almost cinematic looks and gazes, and anatomizes their gender politics in the tradition of Laura Mulvey.102 Early and explicitly in the play, Hwang links the pleasure of looking "[n]ot with lust--no, with power" (10). When he looks at "girlie" magazines, his "skin is hot, but [his] penis is soft" (11). We look, as we look at Gallimard looking, at first the "pin-up girl in a sexy negligee, her back to us" (10) under special lighting in the stage-left cage as she moves to "Love Duet" music, and then later at Song disrobing under the same sound and lighting specials (25). Indeed, Gallimard comes to know Song specularly, as an image. Gallimard's preferred media are visual, not aural. On first attending Song's performance, he realizes that he'd "never before enjoyed opera" because in other performances, "the voice is everything." Not so with Song Liling; "here was a Butterfly with little or no voice -- but she had the grace, the delicacy . . . " (15). Many reviewers of the Washington and Broadway productions of M. Butterfly (with B.D. Wong as Song) complain that Wong's soprano is not even the "decent" voice called for in Hwang's stage directions (15). But that hardly matters. Gallimard is not interested in the singing of Madame Butterfly, but in seeing Madame
Butterfly; not in "artistic performance" but in image (the latter of which, unrecognized by Gallimard, is also an artistic performance). In the touring production I saw, I cannot recall A. Mapa's Song ever singing more than three (metonymic) notes at a time (though he dances at length to the Madame Butterfly arias and performs an even lengthier non-oral acrobatic spectacle at the Chinese opera house). Nor does Song/Mapa need to sing. In ironic contrast to her name, Song is for Gallimard a visual image. Song later harshly condemns Gallimard's subordination of voice to image as an "international rape mentality" which believes that "[h]er mouth says no, but her eyes say yes" (83). Nor does Gallimard even listen to what "her eyes say," but rather projects his own desires onto her image and then erases the projection.

If Gallimard prefers sight to sound, he also prefers it to tactile feeling. From his prison cell, Gallimard imagines parties all over the world in which well-dressed party-goers in chic parlors laugh at Gallimard's mistaking of Song's gender identity, laugh at his claims that "it was dark . . . and she was very modest!", and ask "So -- what? He never touched her with his hands?" (3). Perhaps touching "her" with his hands would not ultimately have signified "her" sex; to Gallimard, the "truth" of sex is a visual phenomenon. Though he perhaps knows or suspects for years that Song "is" a man, he never quite believes it until she drops her briefs and exposes her naked penis to his view (88). At this point, the image of Song's penis becomes all-significant and irrefutable, the ultimate signifier of a transcendental signified.

In Laura Mulvey's now-classic formulation in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the scopic image of certain classic Hollywood films is seen through the "gaze" -- or rather, as I shall explain, the "look" -- of a male character from whose point of view the narrative evolves. A male viewer of the film identifies with the male narrator and sees in the woman-as-spectacle an image of castration; the image of her "lack" phallicizes his opposing look. The visual pleasure which the image of the woman gives the male narrator and
viewer interrupts the narrative, but also authorizes it by confirming its claims to phallic meaning. While Mulvey's formulations (particularly her psychoanalytic mappings of sadism and masochism onto look and spectacle, her inattention to female spectators, her erasure of the possibilities of viewer identification with the woman-as-spectacle and of sexual desire for the male narrator, and her conflation of look and gaze) have been contested from all sides, her article and the debates it has produced remain particularly valuable to me for calling attention irrevocably to the genderedness of the politics of looking. Her exposure of the male looker's dependence on the castrated female spectacle for the achievement of phallicity also exposes his vulnerability to the disruptions of the spectacle and the empowerment of the female spectacle as spectacle. Because Gallimard remains resolutely in a visual realm binarized into the one who looks and possesses the phallus on the one hand and the one who lacks and is looked at on the other hand, Song's exposure of his penis does not subvert the binarism but rather causes Gallimard to revert to the opposite castrated position within it.

Gallimard remains within, rather than calling into question, the gender politics of gazing: What about audiences? When Song brings Comrade Chin onstage against Gallimard's wishes in order to reveal that he, Song, is "really" a man, Gallimard asks his audiences "Please -- try to understand it from my point of view" (47). In a sense we do. Hwang plants questions about Song's sex at the beginning of the play which motivate the narrative. Along the way he slowly answers the question: How can a man believe another man to be a woman through 20 years of sexual relations? Hwang teases us with the ambiguity of Song's sex and the nature of the sexual relations between Song and Gallimard. As we wonder: Is she really a man? and/or Does she have a penis? lack a vagina? If so, how did they engage in sexual intercourse? (We know they engaged in some form of penetration in addition to fellatio, because Song claims to have been impregnated.) These teasing questions, planted continually throughout the narrative.
suggest that the "truth" of Song's sex and of sexuality are the sites where full meaning resides. The bodies of Gallimard and especially Song are the narrative's bottom lines. Song's exposure of his penis occurs at the climax of the narrative, when the truth is laid bare -- in a court of law at that. Furthermore, nudity is still a rare and "sensational" phenomenon on Broadway, and created waves of discomfort among the Houston audience of which I was a member, even though A. Mapa quite discreetly exposed only his naked back and buttocks to full view. His penis he kept teasingly covered by holding his hand loosely over it or crossing his legs and tilting the downstage knee upwards when he sat down. *M. Butterfly* augments the existing mythology of nudity as a special and sacred realm outside of the theater which even theater must respect and leave untouched. Song's (or Wong's or Mapa's) penis functions as a visual and irrevocable disruption to the narrative, and as the ultimate answer to the narrative's questions.

But there are other ways of "looking at" *M. Butterfly's* spectacle. Laura Mulvey's analysis of the look, she emphasizes, applies specifically to certain instances of classic Hollywood cinema. Kaja Silverman, in an analysis via Lacan of the look in Fassbinder's films, conceptualizes the look and the gaze quite differently. In "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image," Silverman suggests that identity "necessitates the internalization of a series of things which are in the first instance external." Lacan designates as "the gaze" those external "mirrors" or "actual looks" which give an image of coherent subjectivity to the subject-in-progress. To become a subject is to internalize the gaze (or the being-gazed-at) without admitting of the internalization -- that is, without admitting along with the gaze the fact of its prior exteriority. Any act or work of art which insists on the gaze's exteriority disrupts the "self." In *M. Butterfly*, Marc, Gallimard's buddy as an adolescent, embodies (for Gallimard) the socially sanctioned and sanctioning gaze, which seems not to emerge from a fixed point or body, but to come from all sides. Gallimard hears Marc's "voice everywhere
now. Even in the midst of work." Marc even more explicitly explains "That's because I'm watching you -- all the time" (32). Marc is, in a sense, an ideological mark -- a mark of imperialist politics, patriarchy, and compulsory heterosexuality -- which incessantly remarks (on) Gallimard.

But though, says Silverman, a character or subject may masquerade as the gaze, s/he can never possess the gaze, but only looks. While the gaze is the capacity to be looked at by other socially constituted subjects, "it is by no means coterminous with any individual viewer, or group of viewers." The gaze is more like the viewability of the prisoner in the Benthamite Panopticon 106 than the view of any specific apprehensible spectator. Furthermore, Lacan "situates the gaze outside the voyeuristic transaction, a transaction within which the eye would seem most to aspire to a transcendental status." Indeed, "it is at precisely that moment when the eye is placed to the keyhole that it is likeliest to find itself subordinated to the gaze." The look carries a libidinal component; the gaze does not. Hence "if the gaze always exceeds the look, the look might also be said to exceed the gaze, to carry a libidinal supplement which subordinates it, in turn, to a scopic subordination. The gaze, in other words, remains outside desire, the look stubbornly within." 107 In many classic Hollywood films, the male voyeur's look is cloaked under the gaze, but film theorists ought not to conflate the two. In M. Butterfly, while Gallimard transfers onto Marc all the attributes of the gaze, the audience may see Marc as a local, rather powerless source of a look. (In the touring production, Brian Reddy's Marc, with his prominent beer belly, shiny bald head, and unkempt graying hair, contrasted pointedly, for me, from American pop culture's ideals of macho potency.) Appearing as a ghost in a nightcap (24) or as a "double" of a French embassy bureaucrat working under Gallimard (32), Mark is clearly a projection of Gallimard's childhood memories and desires for authorization; Marc embodies for Gallimard the phallic authority which Gallimard seeks in order to fulfill his sense of lack. But for me as a spectator, Marc seemed another spectator, a local and
distinctly unattractive looker; when he leered at the audience, especially, Marc was blatantly a voyeur and no gaze(r).

Silverman values Fassbinder's films because they resolutely deconflate look and gaze. He goes so far at times as to suggest an equation between "look" and "lack." . . . His films oblige the look to acknowledge itself not only as a carrier of libido, but as a signifier of castration. They refuse to cover over the void which is at the core of subjectivity, a void which gives rise not only to anxiety, but to desire.¹⁰⁸

Rather than focussing attention on the spectacle, Fassbinder focuses on the look. This mimicry which turns the look back on itself "also suggests its inability both to reach and to subjugate its object, and so inverts the usual scopic paradigm."¹⁰⁹ The relationship between the look and the gaze can be compared with that between the penis and phallus in Lacanian psychology. Both look and penis support the gaze and the phallus, respectively. The penis may masquerade as the phallus by eliding its internalization of exterior phallic attributions. Analogously, "unlike the gaze, the look foregrounds the desiring subjectivity of the figure from whom it issues, a subjectivity which rests upon lack, whether or not that lack is acknowledged."¹¹⁰ Lacan "repeatedly locates lack at the level of the eye, defining castration as the alterity of the gaze. . . . [and] thus extends castration to the male as well as the female subject."¹¹¹ A challenge to the arts which look and which look at looking, such as film and theater, is to conceptualize "a look which would acknowledge its lack rather than seeking to deny it" -- "a look which, rather than locating castration definitively elsewhere, becomes itself the locus of insufficiency."¹¹² De-phallicizing penises and "de-gazing" looks may potentially incite subjects to "look at" the very lacks upon which their subjectivities are built.

To the extent that Song's/Wong's/Mapa's penis reflects back on the look and the looker, it exposes to the audience members their own membership in the arena of looking, and disrupts the comfortable fiction that we inhabit the all-seeing, anonymous darkened space
of the privileged gaze, "which comes from all sides." Rather, to the extent that it shocks, Wong's aggressive exposure disrupts the fictive gaze of the audience by provoking individual anxieties over nudity to emerge. In its essentializing appeal to the body as bottom line, the image de-essentializes the viewing audience. Potentially it reveals audience members not as gazing but as lookers who lack precisely because we look (and look because we lack). When the pin-up girl stripped and later when Song stripped, the audience to which I belonged momentarily dissolved into individuals. Some felt unimpressed by the nudity, some got off on it, some read it as a sarcastic critique of voyeurism, some found it a gratuitous fetishization of the naked body, some felt morally offended by the immodesty, some couldn't understand what the fuss was all about. The spectators murmured among themselves, trying to negotiate their own positions. Those who put binoculars to their eyes, or those who, missing the dialogue, peered and strained to catch sight of Mapa's penis, and who blushed to do so, must at least momentarily have asked themselves why they were looking, and what that ocular proof would endow them with which they were currently lacking.

But while the audience members become lookers at M. Butterfly's spectacle, they also become looks in relation to the play's gaze (or the play's masquerade as the gaze). Although I have suggested that Marc is most dephallicized when he looks libidinally at the women in the audience, the opposite is also true. At Jones Hall, the women singled out giggled an indecipherable mixture of, possibly, nervousness, surprise, shame, pleasure, displeasure. As other people around them and farther back in the auditorium caught on to Marc's stage business, a general, more generic and warm laughter drowned out the targeted women's giggles. Leering, winking, and miming kisses at women in the front rows, Marc genders the spectators, and genders spectatorship. Turning the look differentially back on the looking audience, he shatters the anonymity and emphasizes the specular complicity of the audience -- but does so in a way that preserves the gendered politics of
specularity. Marc singles out and turns the spotlight on women, stage-whispering "hello beautiful." While the female spectators become spectacles, the male spectators transfer their look from stage spectacle to audience spectacle. Male looking and female to-be-looked-at-ness become part of the play and are validated by the play. It is possible for female spectators who, like me, were not specifically looked at to look at the male spectators looking at the female spectacles. This look at gendered looking may, in part, denaturalize and dephallicize the male look for the female lookers looking at it -- and this, too, is part of the strategy of Marc's bit. Even so, women in the audience not looked at nevertheless almost certainly feel, as I felt, compromised in their looking, divided in mutually exclusive gendered ways, and reminded both of their vulnerability as women to being looked at and of the guilty crossing over of sexes (and betrayal of their own sex) in their act of looking.

A woman, of course, may take pleasure in being looked at. Her manipulation of the look directed at her body-as-spectacle may, in addition, empower her in certain ways. Indeed, Song as a woman can "spy on" Gallimard because she manipulates the spectacle of herself. By willfully giving Gallimard the look which she helps him to masquerade as the gaze, she gains power and makes him vulnerable. Of course, Song is not a "real" woman (or is she? Are penis, vagina, breasts the (only) bottom-line "reality" of sex?); her powerful manipulation of the gaze cannot be entirely separated from her "ultimate" maleness. The play does not present any "real" woman who empowers herself by manipulating her self-spectacle. Two of the handful of critical articles in literary journals on M. Butterfly harshly condemn the play because it does not present real women or real Asians, but only caricaturing stereotypes. While I sympathize with these objections, the categories not only of "women" and "Asians," but also of the "the real," on which these objections depend, are themselves put into ironic quotation marks by Hwang's play. The play renders conspicuous the suspect grounding of identity and reality in the body. There
are no Asians or women in these plays, but rather the caricature of the Western compulsion to embody Asianness and femaleness. Moy charges Hwang with presenting a "disfigured stereotype," a "disfigured transvestite," "disfigured Chinese characters," of whose true Asianness is left only "disfigured traces" which are "Laughable and grossly disfigured."

Since stereotypes are propagated when they are figured, embodied, naturalized onto "the body," a "disfigured stereotype" may be a useful strategy for combatting the stereotype. Still, Moy's compulsive repetition of the word "disfigured" and the ambiguity of that word points to a disturbing doubleness in Hwang's de-butterflying of Cio-Cio-San. Hwang himself recognizes that "Butterfly runs the risk of indulging the sin [the oppression of women through the fetishization of the ideal of woman] it condemns, like violent movies that are supposedly antiviolence," but feels he ultimately overcomes this "sin," or at least makes it "much more interesting," by "oppress[ing] a woman who actually is a man."

Does the play erase women or does it erase the idea of "women"? And, in either case, is the empowerment which may come to some particularly privileged "women" by taking charge of their self-spectacles cause for celebration, as Silverman (and perhaps Hwang?) seems to suggest? To my mind, the compulsoriness of gendered looking is ultimately disempowering (for women) when it validates making a spectacle of a woman whether or not she chooses to be one.

The reverse situation, a woman's looking at a man, also may or may not destabilize gender politics. Consider for example the speculations on the penis delivered by Renee, the Danish female student whom Gallimard meets at an embassy party and with whom he subsequently has a casual affair. In Renee's lengthy musings on the smallness of actual "weenies" and the male anxiety and competition this smallness provokes (54-6), Renee may defeat her own argument by devoting so much attention to the already overrated "weenies." As Suzanne Kehde has suggested, Renee's discursive rejection of Phallocentrism still centers on the phallus -- or at least the penis. Her parody goes both
ways: in parroting the mystifications of the penis, Renee, like the play itself, both
demystifies and remystifies it.

On the other hand, what Renee says made a lot of sense to me when I read it; it struck
me as a rather crude form of, say, Luce Irigaray's or Jane Gallop's strategic humorous
demystification of the phallus.118 Renee's linking of the "Western" colonialist view of "the
East" with the "Male" colonialist view of "the Female" -- a view dependent on the
mystification of certain body parts and pigments -- had always struck me not only as quite
smart, but also as speaking for Hwang as well. In the touring production, however, Linda
Pennington portrayed Renee as an unmitigated bimbo. Her whining Valley-girl tone (not a
hint of Danish in it) made everything she said laughable. Unlike Gallimard, the character
of Renee was over-acted even for a caricature, so that when Gallimard dismisses her as a
"schoolgirl who would question the role of the penis in modern society" (58), Gallimard
becomes the normative, authorial voice. So much for the looking or gazing woman as a
defamiliarizing agent who can parodically detach the penis from its phallic aspirations.

On yet another hand, Renee's insistence on the non-phallic puniness of the physical
penis may have made some men in the audience squirm. What makes drama and the
performing arts different from any other literary or visual medium, even from film, is their
presentation of live bodies. Bodies on film are never fully present, for they come to us
from somewhere and sometime else, and carry with them the conspicuous mark of their
absence. By contrast, at their most romanticized, the present bodies of the stage seem to be
"full presences" which guarantee ontological grounding to the ideological roles they
embody. We must continually perform our gender and racial identities so as to constitute
them, to become them, and to give the appearance (even or especially to ourselves) that
these identities are pure, whole, and natural. But identities can never be perfectly
embodied; there are always cracks and seams. Embodied media can offer the most
intensified promise that gender and racial identities arise seamlessly from inside the body.
When embodied media show the seemingly whole bodies onstage to be not all of a piece (to be, indeed, in bits and pieces), the belatedness and never-complete presence of "the body" becomes more poignant dramatically than through media which never promised full presences in the first place.

Renee's comments and Marc's bit spotlight gendered looking and gazing in ways impossible to label as self-conscious or unintentional, parodic or "straight." If we read the politics of gazing in M. Butterfly "straight," it ultimately conserves through reiteration the genderings and Orientalizings of the gaze, the look, and the spectacle. But if we read the play as parody, then it potentially enables the "inversion,"19 if not subversion, of these genderings. Casting and costume, in relation to the looks of the characters and of the audience as well as to the other elements of theater treated above, flirt with, play on, and tease out the radical unmotivatedness and acausality of the links among "anatomical bodies," gender roles, gender identities, erotic roles, and erotic identities as well as racial / cultural roles and identities. These various roles and identities, and even bodies on which they seem to coalesce, when disrupted from their conventional line-up and re-aligned, both appear ridiculous and potentially point to the foundationlessness of their normative alignments. The presumption that a body grounds roles, genders, and identities may turn out to be just that: a presumption, an assumption which must be made before "the body" appears as such. The antitheatrical prejudice, like the Orientalist and misogynist essentializations of bodies, posits a grounding presence ("body," "truth," "reality"), underlying the theatrical representation. To question this grounding presence through exaggerated and self-referential theatricality, gender codes, and racist stereotypes, points to collusions between antitheatricality and body/identity politics, even as this questioning destabilizes both ends of the collusion at their common "ground."

Such, at least, is Judith Butler's belief. Earlier, I introduced Butler's assertions of the radical performativity of (gender) identity. Butler pursues the answers to the questions
"Are there forms of repetition that do not constitute a simple imitation, reproduction, and hence, consolidation of the law...?"; "Which possibilities of doing gender repeat and displace through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation the very constructs by which they are mobilized?"; "What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?". Butler suggests that homosexual relationships which seem to repeat heterosexual structures, such as lesbian butch - femme relationships -- or, perhaps, the gay male white - "Rice Queen" relationships that Hwang alludes to (98) -- as well as certain straight repetitions such as masquerade may well be the inevitable site of the denaturalization and mobilization of gender categories. The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy. The parodic repetition of 'the original,'... reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original.

While Butler believes that heterosexuality and homosexuality are not radically distinct and that "there are structures of psychic homosexuality within heterosexual relations, and structures of psychic heterosexuality within gay and lesbian sexuality and relationships," she asserts that "the heterosexual contract is an impossible ideal, a 'fetish'..." Consequently heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy. Indeed, I would offer this insight into heterosexuality as both a compulsory system and an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself, as an alternative gay/lesbian perspective.
Gender identity parodies not only imitate normative heterosexual gender identities but show these identities to be themselves imitations without an original. For Butler, the displacement of the binary of original/copy (like the displacements of other binaries such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, Same/Other) provokes laughter. She catalogues several such laughs: the "explosive laughter" of Foucault at the Same/Other and hetero/homo distinctions, the excessive laughter of Bataille which escapes the economy of Hegelian dialectics, and "the laugh of Medusa" of Hélène Cixous at the phallogocentric mappings of the Same/Other dialectic.\textsuperscript{1,2,5} Similarly, for the spectator of gender parody, the "loss of the sense of 'the normal' . . . can be its own occasion of laughter."\textsuperscript{1,2,6}

Several observations on Butler's stylistics bear comment. I find Butler's assertions of the continuous performativity and repetitiveness of gender to be extremely useful. Interestingly, Butler's writing style in making these assertions also employs continuous performativity and repetitiveness. She does few close readings of specific acts and gestures of gendering, nor does she "prove" her assertions -- indeed, a proof would depend on the very epistemological grounding in fact against which she is arguing. Her mode of argumentation, then, consists of repeated assertions that repeated performances of gender give gender the appearance of established coherence and facticity. The repetitions and accumulation of Butler's assertions about the foundationlessness of the "facticity" of gender also gives these assertions the appearance of facticity -- and appearance not in contrast to "reality," but rather appearance as a making intelligible and convincing of an idea previously invisible or unthinkable.

Butler cannot prove the "truth" of her assertions that identities are not provable, are neither true nor false but only performed. Nor does Butler proffer her assertions about the identitylessness of identity from a position of identity. Referring to the agency concluding Gender Trouble, "Butler" argues that "her" "I" does not precede the grammatical structures which create discrete identities by naming them as nouns or pronouns. "Butler" comments:
"I" deploy the grammar that governs the genre of the philosophical conclusion. 
but note that it is the grammar itself that deploys and enables this "I," even as the 
"I" that insists itself here repeats, redeploy, and -- as the critics will determine -- 
contests the philosophical grammar by which it is both enabled and restricted.¹²⁷

(146)

Interestingly, Butler rarely repeats and redeploy her "I" in her writings. Rather, her prose 
is strangely disembodied, devoiced. While I understand and agree with her invalidation of 
her "I" and of any "I," and of the body as the seat of individual subjectivity, I deploy my 
own "I," and even represent my body, rather more than the norm for critical writing. This 
is my way of both masquerading and parodying the notion that the subject which writes is 
not only consistent and identifiable, but also disembodied and objectively rational. My "I"s 
are quite incongruous both stylistically and ideologically; the "I" that reads M. Butterfly is 
quite different from the "I" that goes to the theater. In the theater, the "I" watching people 
in the lobby differs radically from the "I" watching the play. Butler's avoidance of the "I" 
adodges the issue somewhat, for she, like me, must live within the fiction of an "I" which is 
always falling apart and re-emerging.

A more effective strategy of Butler's is her incessant argumentation through questions 
rather than statements. Most dramatically, she ends Gender Trouble not with a conclusion, 
but with a question: "What other local strategies for engaging the 'unnatural' might lead to 
the denaturalization of gender as such?"¹²⁸ This question is both "sincere" (it challenges 
the reader to find local strategies, a challenge I have taken up in investigating embodiments 
of the Butterfly mythology) and rhetorical (Butler refers to her recommendation of an 
exaggerated, self-referential, parodic or pastiche-like theatricalization of gender conventions 
as a political strategy to subvert compulsory gender classifications).

Kaja Silverman also seems to hold out the possibility of subversive parodies, 
mimicries, masquerades, and self-quotings (a surprisingly Brechtian echo). Since, Lacan
suggests, "it is no more possible to be seen than to see ourselves without the intervention of representation" (which representation Lacan calls "screen" or "mask" or -- with perhaps a nod to Artaud -- "double"), the human subject can also "play" with the gaze "through the manipulation of the screen, a possibility which is clearly predicated upon a prior understanding of what it means to be imbricated within the field of vision."¹²⁹ Since it is at the "screen" and not the gaze that the subject constitutes his or her subjectivity, it may be possible to change the subject, including oneself, by changing cultural representations which make up the screen; "it might be possible for a subject who knows his or her necessary specularity to put 'quotes' around the screen through an Irigarayan mimicry, or even to hold out before him or herself a different screen, one which does not so much abolish as challenge what, taking a necessary license with Lacan's formulation by insisting upon its ideological grounding, I will call the dominant cultural screens."¹³⁰ Since in looking we are always ourselves being "photographed" by the gaze, the subject is generally both spectacle and spectator:

Moreover, although our look can never function as the gaze for ourselves, it can have that function for others, even at the moment that we assume the status of object for them. Exhibitionism unsettles because it threatens to expose the duplicity inherent in every subject, and every object -- to reveal the subject's dependence for definition upon the image / screen, and his / her capacity for being at the same time within the picture, and the point of light for another subject.¹³¹

By exhibiting the lack within the look and the exteriority upon which interiority is founded, a "self"-quoting exhibiting spectacle can demystify the "self," denaturalize identity.

While I am attracted to the ideologically subversive potentialities of parody, pastiche, travesty, transvestism, mimicry, masquerade, "self"-quoting, and exhibitionism held out by Butler and Silverman, I am also skeptical of the effectiveness of these forms of "play" to disrupt ontological groundings of gender and race. For example, I agree with Butler that
there is no place to stand outside the system of gender binarisms from which to contest it, and that the system must be subverted from within. But I also worry that within the specific contexts in which parodies occur lie the means to re-reify the bodies which are being destabilized -- and indeed the assurance of re-reification may precede and enable the parody of the previous reification. The ending moments of M. Butterfly, and its final tableau, comprise one such specific context in which I would like to test out the viability of parody.

What are the spectators's reactions to the spectacle of gender's radical theatricality? Butler understands the spectacular response to the travesty of binarisms of gender and sexual preference to be one of laughter, in Foucault's case "explosive laughter." Within M. Butterfly, Gallimard's reactions to the spectacle of Madame Song's penis is a laughter very much like sobbing:

Song drops his briefs. He is naked. Sound cue out. Slowly, we and Song come to the realization that what we had thought to be Gallimard's sobbing is actually his laughter. (88)

At the sight of a penis on his ideal woman, Rene concludes immediately that he has been "an idiot" and that "[o]f course" Song is "a man!" (88). Gallimard finds it "ridiculously funny that [he has] wasted so much time on just a man!" (88). The laughter and ridiculousness are for Gallimard not the recognition that the gender binarism is itself arbitrary and fictional and at times highly inadequate, but the sudden understanding that what he took for true was just another theatrical illusion. ("Tonight, I've finally learned to tell fantasy from reality. And, knowing the difference, I choose fantasy" (90).) Gallimard turns to the illusion (of the ideal "Asian" "woman") and away from the truth (of the "male" "body" before him) so as to preserve the binarisms of illusion/truth, female/male, Asian/Caucasian -- and heteroeroticism/homoeroticism. When Song, who was a female within her acts of love with Gallimard, turns out not to be a "true female," Gallimard does
not question the "truth" of gender or of sex, certainly not of bodies themselves, but sees
Song's maleness as his "true self" and his/her femaleness as "a perfect lie" (89). For
Gallimard, femaleness and maleness cannot coexist, nor can docility and power, nor can
the sight of a man and the feel of Butterfly. Gallimard insists on retaining the grounding of
gender in the body. When Gallimard perceives that Song has "let" his/her performed
femaleness "fall to the ground" (89), the (body-as-) ground itself has not fallen. The
important critical charge that "real women" do not appear in M. Butterfly also falls into the
body-as-ground faith -- a faith I find dangerous both in the observance and in the breach.
In an MLA convention talk, Suzanne Kehde observed that, similarly, in Renee's lengthy
musings on the smallness of actual "weenies" and the male anxiety and competition this
smallness provokes (54-6), Renee defeats her own argument by devoting so much attention
to these already overrated "weenies."1 3 2 Parodying the mystifications of the penis, Renee,
like Hwang, both demystifies and remystifies it. Renee's de-mystification /
remystification, nevertheless, differs radically from Renee Gallimard's mystification /
remystification of the body as the seat of gender.

Song tries to expose Gallimard's binary gender classifications as restrictive of the ways
bodies and genders can be experienced. After Gallimard's assertion that Song is "just a
man," Song has Gallimard feel the skin he has experienced for twenty years as female. But
Gallimard illogically ascribes the skin he now feels to another body, not Song's. He tells
Song that he feels not your face, your cheek, your hair, but the "curve of her face, the
softness of her cheek, her hair against the back of my hand..." (89). Interestingly,
Gallimard divides and directs the senses of seeing and touching onto different genders, so
as to preserve the bodily groundings of each. Whereas the male look saw in female to-be-
looked-at-ness a confirmation of the conflation of lack of a penis with lack of subjectivity,
femaleness itself (for Gallimard) cannot be seen (except as a lack), but only felt. When
Gallimard learns that Song "has" a penis, Gallimard says "Look at you! You're a man!"
(88). Like in Freud's theorization of the castration complex, the recognition of the penis is a visual one. But in looking at Song's penis, which Gallimard conflates with Song's definitive maleness, Gallimard gives the look back to the male Song, who ends the play looking up at the spectacle that Gallimard has become. The look remains male, while the body of Song that Gallimard experiences through touching is a female one. Gallimard illogically maintains two separate Song-bodies grounding two separate sexes. The exposure of the slippage of one sex-role "effect" onto an inappropriate bodily "ground" only spurs Gallimard to correct and re-instate the bodily grounding of genders through recourse to the binary language of cause and effect, truth and lies.

Song both appeals to and resists this language. S/he tries to teach Gallimard to see him/her dialectically, as simultaneously a Chinese man and "your Butterfly," simultaneously the body with the visible penis and the body which is a woman to the touch, simultaneously "me" and "a part" (89), "real" and "your fantasy" (90). Yet Song, too, prioritizes one term of each dialectic. "So--you never really loved me?," he asks, "Only when I was playing a part?" (89). The "only" assigned to "playing a part" not only contrasts "me" and "a part" but makes "me" more important. The language of underlying, of grounding, itself "underlies" or "grounds" these hierarchized binarisms, even when Song would subvert them:

I'm your Butterfly. Under the robes, beneath everything, it was always me.

Now, open your eyes and admit it -- you adore me. (89)

On the one hand, Song ambiguates the "me" under the robes as both prick and Butterfly at once, and subverts the one-body, one-identity axiom. On the other hand, his/her metaphor does not allow for surface and depth to coexist: robes are false, fantasy, playing a part, female; underneath is true, reality, me, male. Two separate, mutually exclusive ontological levels. Yet Song, in her final moments onstage, speaks of himself as a woman. Though s/he has previously objected to the "just" in Gallimard's "just a man," she now calls him
just a man whereas she'd hoped he'd "become something more. More like... a woman" (90). Referring to men, Song refers to "them." These men are all alike in believing a set of conventional performances to be the essence of a core femininity:

Men. You're like the rest of them. It's all in the way we dress, and make up our faces, and bat our eyelashes. You really have so little imagination! (90)

Does this "we" refer to "we women"? Or "we men who play women"? Or perhaps "we human beings who play our genders?" -- that is, who have genders by repeatedly performing gender gestures?

For Gallimard, consciousness of the performativity of the performance spoils its allure. Both his and Song's adherence to the metaphor of surface and depth allows him to choose fantasy and imagination over Song's body, which is "as real as a hamburger" (90). It allows him to envision an Orient where, "deep within its almond eyes, there are still women. Women willing to sacrifice themselves for the love of a man. Even a man whose love is completely without worth." (92). The truth of his own Butterfly-like love is that "underneath it all" his lover was a man (92). True sex lies underneath. In his fantasy, Gallimard regrounds femininity and Asianness in a body -- ultimately his own body. The essence of femininity and Asianness is "deep within."

Hwang's final words of his "afterword" suggest that sex as demarcated by the genitalia is the most basic feature of identity. Hwang uses the failure of sexual knowledge as a metaphor for imperialist politics: "the myths of the East, the myths of the West, the myths of men, and the myths of women -- these have so saturated our consciousness that truthful contact between nations and lovers can only be the result of heroic effort.... This is why, after twenty years, [the French diplomat] had learned nothing at all about his lover, not even the truth of his sex" (100). This final word (quite literally the bottom line of the play-text) authorizes the view that anatomy is primary to identity. But the most radical moments of the play suggest an alternate view. Perhaps the most scandalous moment comes when
the judge repeatedly asks Song whether or not Gallimard knew Song was a man. Song finally answers "You know, Your Honor, I never asked" (83). More incredible to the judge and jury than Gallimard's believing Song to be a woman may be his not knowing Song's "true" sex. Most scandalous may be the idea that they could have a relationship highly embedded in gender roles without gender truths underneath.

Gallimard, finally, sorts through and insists on sexes and genders; he tells Song that he, Gallimard, has been "a man who loved a woman created by a man" (90). His final creation of himself as a woman paradoxically conspires with his need to keep the categories of man and woman distinct (though his strategy, enacted, may be hopelessly counterproductive). He cannot allow that he was a man who loved a man, or that he was a woman-man who loved a woman-man, or even that a Caucasian male ("Caucasian" and "male" being for him redundant) could be the submissive subject of a Japanese/Chinese female role (also redundant). When he finds himself in such a submissive role, he must compulsively gender it female. When Gallimard thought he played the man and looked at Madame Song, he saw in her his "own" masculinity reflected back to him. Now when Song plays the man, Gallimard "could look in the mirror and see nothing but . . . a woman" (92). To reground essences in the only body left onstage -- "his" "own" -- he must show us and himself the performative processes of embodiment, of "making up," putting on wig and kimono, assuming a seppuka position. Rene's masculinity and his Caucasianness, further, have been as much made-up and fabricated as his femininity; his male clothes are as much a costume as his kimono. He offers us a bodily image as ground for his new feminine performance: Love has "rearranged the very lines on [his] face" as those of a woman (92). But of course we have just seen him "make up his face." This female body comes after the conventional ideal of female bodies. (Similarly, Song's Armani slacks and his use of his penis as a (stage) prop, a weapon, and a bottom line signifier succeed conventional ideas of what it means to be a man.) We need not read the final spectacle of
Gallimard as (only) a man dressed as a woman, or as (only) a man who is "really" a woman. We may read both ways at once -- and/or we may read the spectacle as a parody of the role/true self binarism. We may read Gallimard's gender role transitions as dramatizations of the temporality and performativity of gender, sex, and sexuality. We may also read them as theatricalizations of the radically dialectical, if not multiple, character of all body-identities.

At a session of the 1990 MLA entitled "The Fiction of Masculinity: Images of Men in Modern Literature," a discussion following Suzanne Kehde's paper "Unveiling the Prick: The (De)Construction of (Western) Masculinity in David Henry Wang's [sic] M. Butterfly" (which I referred to earlier) sorted through the meanings of the final image of Gallimard. A questioner insistently read the image as one of a Caucasian man dead and an Asian man alive: a reversal of Madame Butterfly, of sorts. Kehde conversely read the image as that of a dead Asian woman survived by a Westernized man, in line with the patriarchal white supremacist tradition of Madame Butterfly. Both parties were unable to come to a consensus; the discussion ended in an unsealable division between two mutually exclusive coexistent readings (not an unusual nor unhealthy phenomenon at MLA discussion sessions). Both readings, among others, are "true," but neither is inherent to and univocally motivated by the image. "Gallimard" calls himself "Rene Gallimard -- also known as Madame Butterfly" (93) -- and these, his final words, become a double, painfully parodic signature to his final act, a signature which cancels the very function of a signature as the guarantor of identity. The parody of the gender "identity" may or may not be recognized by Gallimard, or by its audiences. In either case, the fictionality of identity, gender, and race is not experienced by Gallimard with the implosive, ebullient laughter Butler foresees, but experienced with pain and fear. Butler offers us a vision of a dizzying plethora of possibilities for play which become possible once bodies, genders, identities are denaturalized. In my experience, rare moments of near-cognition or recognition of the
radical belatedness and multiply invaded nonboundaries of "my" body and "my" "me" have been moments of terror—and of impossibility. Simultaneous with every decentering has been the immediate unconscious construction of new centers. While I like to fantasize that Gallimard and Song could have chosen to laugh and to play multiple genders and races without staking a claim to any one, I know that I have repeatedly failed to do so despite repeated active attempts and fantasies—and failed, at times, almost with relief. No wonder other audiences, too, repeatedly erase M. Butterfly's parody and preserve the ideal being parodied.

**Madame Butterfly Returns**

The Butterfly myth continues its repetition compulsion. Currently plans are underway for a movie of M. Butterfly. Miss Saigon opened on Broadway on April 11, 1991, at the 1,752-seat Broadway Theater. This production, costing $10 million to mount, has broken the record for advance ticket sales at $35 million. Now, two years later, it continues its run. And behind these two plays, Madame Butterfly continues to be a much beloved and performed opera. Within and beyond these productions, mystifications of Asian and female bodies continue to be critiqued—and repeated. These mystifications are particularly dangerous when they exclude those "actual" human beings living under the labels "Asian" and "female" from positions of control over the specular representations of their bodies which perpetuate those mystifications.

While Orientalism and phallocentrism insistently repeat themselves in ever new dramatic forms, the compulsion repeatedly to put these myths to rest seems just as insistent and dramatic. Take the protest staged over Miss Saigon's casting of Jonathan Pryce, a Caucasian actor, in a EurAsian role, which I discussed in my introductory chapter. While the play itself harshly critiques the American military for leaving behind the homeless
Vietnamese, the circumstances of production left behind Asian actors and turned to a European for the role of a part-Vietnamese character. Interestingly, when producer Cameron Mackintosh tried to bring the show to Broadway, Actor's Equity's decision to protest his casting was spurred by a letter from B. D. Wong and backed by David Hwang. I favor their side of this difficult issue, which argues that while any actor can play any role regardless of body type, in practice Asian actors are given little opportunity to play any role (and are systematically excluded from Caucasian roles because they're too Asian-looking), and so should at least be given priority for Asian roles. (I would add that the visual presence of Asian actors onstage, in Asian and especially in Caucasian roles, may defamiliarize these roles in politically and dramatically effective ways.) But while I side with Hwang, Wong, and Actor's Equity, I worry that this policy will become a remystification of the Asian body and Asian cultural identity. Remystifications tend phoenix-like to arise out of demystifications.

Since Equity "lost" and Mackintosh has taken Miss Saigon to Broadway, other positive protests against Miss Saigon's Orientalism and misogyny are also taking place. For example, when the Lambda Legal Defense and Education fund and New York's Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center chose to sponsor Miss Saigon as a fund-raiser, two Asian lesbian and gay groups -- Asian lesbians of the East Coast and Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York -- called for a boycott and picket. The latter two groups "claim that Miss Saigon is a blatantly racist and sexist play which portrays Asians in stereotypical roles, celebrates colonialism and trivializes the Vietnam War," and object to Cameron Mackintosh's casting of non-Asian Americans in the two lead roles. By boycotting and picketing, these groups use the "racist" and "sexist" play to stage a very theatrical protest of institutionalized racism and sexism, even within American lesbian and gay communities. Hwang also directly discusses these prejudices within gay communities in the form of "Rice Queens" (98) and indirectly critiques them in his condemning dramatization in M.
Butterfly of the "Yellow Fever" of the Butterfly myth. Just as antitheatrical prejudices generally become most vociferous when the theater thrives,\textsuperscript{136} theatrical protests of racism and sexism may become most vociferous simultaneous with a racist and sexist theater "megahit." The repetition compulsion characteristic of the Butterfly drama is also characteristic of protests against it.

From the compulsion to repeat, Freud deduced a death drive beyond the pleasure principle.\textsuperscript{137} The repetitions of the Butterfly myth endlessly aim to end the myth and even to return to a primordial time before the myth. Yet the repetitions also endlessly recreate the myth. If one end of the teleology of (anti)theatrically-constituted racism and sexism -- the origin -- is inaccessible (and perhaps never was), the other end is also unreachable. Like the equilibrium of life and death drives which Freud represents himself as discovering through investigating the repetition compulsion, the Butterfly myth, that embodiment of Orientalism and male domination, continually poses a dramatic equilibrium of little deaths and resurrections.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Specifically, these ads come from The Village Voice, June 9, 1992, p. 143. But they could have come from any number of places.
\item \textsuperscript{2}David Henry Hwang, "afterword," M. Butterfly. (New York: New American Library, 1988), p. 95. All further quotations from this text will henceforth be enclosed within parentheses within the "body" of my "own" text.
\item \textsuperscript{3}William A. Henry III. "Dream Turned Nightmare: Miss Saigon," Time, October 2, 1989, 94.
\item \textsuperscript{4}Variety, Sept. 27, 1989, 104,106
\end{itemize}
8 Jack Kroll, Newsweek, April 4, 1988, 75.
10 Edith Oliver, New Yorker, April 4, 1988, 72.
15 "Performative Acts," p. 519
19 Gender Trouble, p. 136.
23 Barish, p.1.
24 Barish, p. 2.
25 Barish, p. 156.
26 Barish, p. 156-7.
27 Barish, p. 92.
28 Barish, p. 92.
29 Barish, p. 93.
30 Barish, p. 326.
31 Barish, p. 50.
33 Barish, p. 50.
34 Barish, p. 85.
35 Barish, p. 2.
36 Barish, p. 42-3.
37 Barish, pp. 262, 282-3.
38 Unfortunately, Barish does not look at pro- or anti-theatrical writings written by women, nor at other methods by which women have tried, through theatricality, to parody, alienate, reconcile, or circumvent the theatrical/antitheatrical binarism. Sue-Ellen Case's provocative Feminism and Theatre (Houndmills: Macmillian, 1988) can serve as a supplement to Barish's study.
41 Said, p. 41.
42 Said, p. 43.
43 Said, p. 56.
44 Said, p. 63.

46 Said, p. 85.

47 Said, p. 67.

48 Said, p. 57.

49 Said, p. 73.

50 Said, p. 126.

51 Said, p. 127.

52 Said, p. 137.

53 Said, p. 65.


55 Artaud, p. 77.

56 Artaud, p. 76.

57 Artaud, p. 79.

58 Artaud, p. 82-3.

59 Artaud, p. 81. This "him" suggests a lack of gender awareness which silently erases female spectators and implicitly posits maleness as the standard for the theater to strive for. We see this silent gynephobia in the ending to a quotation cited above: "This idea of a detached art, of poetry as a charm which exists only to distract our leisure, is a decadent idea and an unmistakable symptom of our power to castrate" (77, my emphasis).

60 Artaud, p. 80.
61 Artaud, p. 81.
62 Artaud, p. 80.
63 Artaud, p. 81.
64 Said has sarcastically chosen for the cover of the paperback version of Orientalism, a detail of Jean-Leon Gerome's painting The Snake Charmer. This painting serves as a metonym for the phenomenon of Orientalism, but visually, the title of Said's book seems to stand as a label specifically for the depiction of snake charming directly under it.
65 Artaud, p. 53.
66 Artaud, p. 53.
67 Artaud, p. 61.
68 Artaud, p. 62.
69 Artaud, p. 60.
70 Artaud, p. 54.
71 Artaud, p. 66.
72 Artaud, p. 67.
73 Artaud, p. 64.
74 Artaud, p. 54.
75 Artaud, p. 57.
76 Artaud, p. 54.
77 Artaud, p. 59.
78 Artaud, p. 58.
79 Artaud, p. 58.
80 Said, pp. 71-2.
81 Artaud, p. 62-3.
82 Artaud, p. 63.
83 Artaud, p. 77.
84 Said, p. 208.

85 Artaud, p. 54-5.

86 Said, p. 208.


89 Brecht, p. 99.

90 Brecht, pp. 91-2. In this case, the use of exclusively masculine pronoun to refer to the actor accurately describes the situation of traditional Chinese acting, where male actors play male and female roles (a crucial fact in M. Butterfly). Elsewhere, Brecht also refers to the actor as "he," thereby foreclosing what may have led to an important "look" at the genderedness of spectatorship.

91 Brecht, p. 92.

92 Brecht, p. 92.

93 Brecht, p. 91.

94 Brecht, p. 95.

95 Brecht, p. 96.

96 Brecht, p. 98.

97 From Prynne's Histriomastix, Barish cites, "Those Playes which are usually acted and frequented in over-costly effeminate, strange, meretricious, lust-exciting apparell, are questionlesse unseemely, yea unlawfull unto Christians." (p. 86).

98 In Savran, p. 127.

As the reader will have noticed, I play with the gender of the pronouns referring to Song. I realize this is barely a start in denaturalizing the gender binarism and the dictum that one must choose one gender and stick to it. I believe that if the gender binarism is ever to be rigorously challenged, linguistic markers of gender (such as "he" and "she") must be denaturalized and indeed impeached.

I'm deviating slightly from Hwang's published stage directions to follow the set and blocking of the touring production which I saw. I did not see the Broadway production.


Silverman, p. 56.


Silverman, p. 59.

Silverman, p. 60.

Silverman, p. 62.

Silverman, p. 71, my emphasis.
111 Silverman, pp. 79-80.

112 Silverman, p. 80.


115 Moy, pp. 54-5.

116 In Savran, p. 128.


119 I place this term in quotation marks to mark its signification in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a scientific theory of homosexuality.

120 *Gender Trouble*, p. 31-2

121 *Gender Trouble*, p. 31.

122 *Gender Trouble*, 121

123 *Gender Trouble*, 122

124 *Gender Trouble*, p. 122.

125 *Gender Trouble*, 102-3.

126 *Gender Trouble*, p. 138.
127 Gender Trouble, p. 146.
128 Gender Trouble, p. 149
129 Silverman, p. 75.
130 Silverman, p. 75.
131 Silverman, p. 76.
133 This is the title as it appeared in the PMLA program. (PMLA Vol. 105, No. 6 (November 1990) p. 1285.
135 Outweek, February 27, 1991
136 Barish, p. 191.
CHAPTER FIVE

Revolting Women, Consuming Women:
Karen Finley and the Economy of Possession

SCHaecNER: What does it mean that The Constant State of Desire's getting printed in TDR with this interview and some pictures?

FINLEY: Well, I'm just really, really happy about it because I got some horrible reviews on the piece, and I felt extremely depressed. I felt completely misunderstood, that I had no place to take my work. I wanted to get a legitimacy so I could be doing runs somewhere. I hope that a lot of people who have theatre spaces or who are in organizations that sponsor theatre will say, "Oh, wow, it's in TDR, maybe it is OK."

SCHaecNER: You want it to be rebellious, subversive, and OK.

-- Karen Finley, in an interview with Richard Schechner¹

How long have you been attached to your misery?
As long as I've had these big fat thighs....

--- Karen Finley, "Quotes from a Hysterical Female"²
A woman's agony over her fat thighs dramatizes the minuteness and at the same time the thoroughness with which bodies are produced. Agonizing over fat thighs may be dismissed as trivial, as a pampered white bourgeois problem divorced from political reality. It is not trivial in its proportions -- in the 1980's United States, with a $37 billion diet industry, perhaps 120,000 young women had anorexia nervosa at any one time, and 1 to 3 million women binged and purged at least once a week. Among college women, the most "at risk" group, about 1 in 100 have had clinical anorexia nervosa and from 5 to 19 percent exhibit major symptoms of bulimia. But in spite of, or perhaps because of, the vastness and minuteness of its effects, body-size obsessions are almost compulsively dismissed as trivial, not worthy of the study one might accord to other psycho-social technologies of the flesh -- Augustinian body-soul dualization, for example, or the allegedly universal Freudian Oedipus complex. And although weight and body-image obsessions may seem to be feminist issues -- at least 90% of all anorexics and bulimics are female, and the percentage is probably much higher -- a feminist who takes eating disorders and obsessions seriously does so at the risk of pathologizing women. Indeed, eating and eating disorders are an embarrassment to many feminists -- and yet many feminists themselves struggle daily with their weight. Sometimes they may not see this struggle as political; or, if they do, they may call it "false consciousness" even though they may find they cannot escape it. My own recalcitrant obsession with food and with my body-size (even after I became politicized by a feminist discourse which allows me to contextualize it and to understand it as in many ways an unwitting collusion with patriarchy), and the agonies of so many feminist friends I care about deeply, do not let me dismiss women's struggles with their figures, or their struggles through their figures with the figurativity of their bodies. Those of us who see our body-images as complicit in a cultural gynephobia may long to peel away this "false" body-image and reach our "real" bodies, our "real" appetites. Within our inability to realize this longing we live out the
radical figurativity of our figures. This chapter looks through the example of eating and eating disorders at productions of women's bodies, and at the uncanny mimicry of these productions in women's performance art, particularly that of Karen Finley. Finley's mimicry, indeed, is so consummate, that she mimics as well the ambiguity of women's roles in the productions of their bodies -- roles which range indeterminately from revolt to active parody passive acquiescence (or perhaps from "rebellious" to "subversive" to "OK.")

The circumstances leading to the withdrawing of Karen Finley's NEA grant re-enact the trivializing of women's most intimate, micro-political attempts at self-reduction and regulation. The homophobia inherent in the furor over the NEA funding connected with the works of Mapplethorpe and Serrano has been widely discussed, as has the continuation of this extremist homophobia with the defunding of the other three of the NEA Four, the way-out queer acts of John Fleck, Holly Hughes, and Tim Miller. But what of Karen Finley? Although Finley, herself openly "straight" (or at least married to a man), advocates gay rights in her acts, such advocacy is only a small part of her performance time. The bulk of Finley's acts is spent dramatizing the sadism of "romantic" heterosexual practices, compulsory (and compulsive) heterosexuality's ravages on female bodies and female persons, and the phantasmagoria of a capitalist consumerism run amok, even invading our bodies. Finley's assaults on heterosexuality -- at times reductive, often hilarious, almost always "cruel" in the Artaudian sense -- may be more threatening to the nostalgia for good family values than Mapplethorpe's glistening homoerotic body-images or Holly Hughes' campy lesbian double-entendres.

Yet when Finley was first singled out -- in a Washington Post article by Evans and Novak -- as an example of NEA profligacy with taxpayers' dollars, she was classified not as a lesbian, a man-hating woman, a communist, an anarchist, or even a slut, but as a "nude, chocolate-smeared young woman." As if the epithet "chocolate-smeared" self-
evidently indicated triviality or lack of quality. Many of the subsequent defenses of Finley adopt the strategy of suggesting that she's dramatizing more than women's traumas with food, with eating, with becoming too large, with consuming and being consumed. Such defenses argue that food symbolizes (rather than metonymizes) other (i.e. more important) issues. I would not want to refute such readings of Finley's performances. I want to argue in this chapter, though, that Finley's attention to the traumas of consuming women, and to women's "literal" obsessions with their "literal" figures, are reasons enough to respect her act -- and to fund it. A handful of contemporary feminists have begun to explore the figures of consuming women, and at their extreme, of anorexics, bulimics, and compulsive overeaters. Finley's performance work, at least in my limited access to it through texts, reviews and interviews, seems to me to present eating disorders (and other female-gendered anxiety disorders) with excruciating honesty, in all their grossness, their physicality, their despair, their revolting power.

For the purpose of initiating a discussion here, I will present Finley's performance work as stemming from at least two major "bodies" of work, feminist theater and performance art. The entrance of feminism into the art world challenged not only content but also aesthetic form and structure -- perhaps above all to the larger structure of gendered consumption and marketing of art. Performance art, which developed contemporaneously, also strove to challenge the consumability and marketability of art, to undermine the stage-audience and body-script binarisms of commercial theater, and to emphasize presence (or its absence), often through Artaudian cruelty. These two strands did not develop independent of each other (though in some cases they have been, to my mind, far too independent of and even antagonistic to each other) but I will briefly schematize them separately before exploring their confluences.
In addition to feminist theater and performance art, there is a third major "performance" context for Finley's work: the performance acts of hysteria, anorexia, and bulimia. These "performances" challenge the limits of performance art's desire to fuse life and art. They present in a sense a flip side, or perhaps mirror image, of self-proclaimed performance art pieces; yet in another way the two are each other's doubles.

Embodying Women

An early impulse of "first wave" feminism in the arts (an impulse that has carried on into the second and even third waves)1 pushed to alienate women's bodies from their entombment in layers of patriarchal tropism and to "present" women's bodies and experiences "as they really are." As a strategic use of essentialism, this impulse was crucial in enabling later more complicated critiques both of patriarchy and of the very notion of "patriarchy" (as a real, monolithic, expungeable entity). Such strategic essentialism is still politically useful in performances such as the NOW March on Washington and WHAM and WAC activities.12 First wave women's theaters performed a useful function as gadflies to their social context, but were limited in the varieties of women's theater represented, and in defining women's bodies and selves as implicitly white, straight, and middle class. Yet first wave women's theater also vitally enabled such a critique of itself: ironically, in seeking to present real women divorced from "false" representations and "distorted" body-images, women's theaters opened up the range of see-able representations and imageries of female figures.

Sondra Segal and Roberta Sklar's manifesto for the Women's Experimental Theater is perhaps representative of this "first wave." Since the 1970's, the WET has sought to create and perform theater "that draws on the specific experience of women" and that develops "experimental methods of acting to articulate women's lives," and to do so "not according
to the male model, but from their own experience and knowledge." Reflecting Segal and Sklar's call for representations of women's experiences and women's bodies, many female playwrights focused on "women's issues" with a new honesty. Such a movement continued on into the "second waves." In Adrienne Kennedy's one-act play *A Lesson in Dead Language*, for example, young girls in a parochial (and patriarchal) school are socialized to Christian and patriarchal meanings of blood. At the end of the play, when they all stand up, they have blood stains on the backs of their skirts. In Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, the young Kit has also just begun to menstruate. At one point she sticks her finger under her skirt, then tastes her blood. Like the ending of Kennedy's play, Kit's gesture narrativizes an adolescent girl's socialization into shame and distrust of towards her body. In doing so, Kennedy and Churchill may implicitly posit for the girl a prior time of less socialized, less inhibited, more natural curiosity about her body. But Kennedy's and Churchill's potential essentialism is strategic; nostalgia towards a pre-socialized childhood effects an alienation of social taboos on menstruation. When Kit's gesture draws comments from grossed-out members of the audience, it foregrounds their own gynecophobic assumptions, especially as this gesture occurs in juxtaposition with the main character's discussion of her loathing of her capacity to get pregnant and her reproductive system. (Marlene, as a shrewd businesswoman, proudly feels that she "has balls.") In Louise Page's *Tissue*, the "tissue" of this richly ambiguous title is that most fetishized of female tissues, the breast. In this play, however, the breast is cancerous (even smells foul) and must be removed. Through the point of view of the woman with breast cancer, we experience the anxieties surrounding its removal within a culture which socializes women to see even themselves through a male gaze. *Tissue* presents not an outside to this gaze, but an act of struggle against and within it.

Menstruation, vaginas, breasts, in all these plays are presented from women's points of view, but these points of view are always conscious of a judging male gaze and a
patriarchal system of consumption always threatening to appropriate their bodily functions. "Real" women experience their bodies in relation to internalized and external male audiences. For that reason, many women playwrights and performers feel that before they can create representations of autonomous female body parts, they must foreground and alienate the androcentricity inscribed in viewership as most of us know it -- an androcentricity often unrecognized and sometimes vociferously denied when it is pointed out. Breasts are perhaps most difficult to disengage from an implied male spectatorial consumer of them. In 1968 Valie Export constructed an apparatus to try to both circumvent and foreground the male gaze at the site of her breasts. In "Touch Cinema" she strapped a box over her naked chest. The side of the box facing the "spectator" was cut out, and a curtain hung over it. A "spectator" could put his/her hands into the "screen" to feel Export's breasts, but he/she would be forced simultaneously to look into Export's eyes.\textsuperscript{16} "Audiences" or "spectators" -- perhaps "feelers" would be the word -- do not "see" (by feeling) breasts as they really are; rather, they experience breasts in a new way which spotlights the old. In doing so, Export objectifies her body, but on her own terms, in a way which gives her a gaze, or at least a look, back at her touchers. Yet even this attempt to defetishize breasts may end up refetishizing them, simply by directing attention so intently on them. Likewise Karen Finley, in \textit{The Constant State of Desire}, does a bit where she fills her Victorian-style brassiere with jello, then walks around shaking her "breasts." It's a comic bit which draws loud laughter from her nightclub-going audience. Do they also see in it a critique of the kind of mammary fetishization so common in nightclubs and "titty bars," and so poignantly embodied in women who stuff their bras or, more dramatically, surgically receive breast implants even at the risk of contracting cancer? And do they see in Finley's jello-jiggling a castigation of just how ridiculous breast fetishization is? Or do they enjoy the act as a clever new kind of striptease?\textsuperscript{17} Women face tough obstacles in trying to integrate breasts and vaginas into a bodily whole. The struggles of
playwrights and performers against a fetishizing and anatomizing gaze dramatize the resilience of that gaze, its power to incorporate resistance to it back into itself.

Even lesbian performances of the female body, or representations of lesbian "desire," occur in the face of patriarchal figurations. This heterosexist surveillance occurs in crude forms, such as refusal of funding or even outright proscriptions of all homoerotic representations (as in the attempted stipulation on NEA contracts). But the subtler forms are more difficult to fight. While Split Britches' Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver have developed butch-femme camp into a sophisticated form of social criticism, many critics have argued that the butch-femme aesthetic is itself a re-enactment of heterosexual patriarchal structures. Other critics counter that it is a subversive mimicry of heterosexual patriarchal structures, while yet others argue that it is an entirely different, woman-centered form, and that critics' insistence on its recuperation of heterosexist patriarchy springs from their own.

Caught within a heterosexist and phallocentric gaze, a viewer may not even be able to see lesbianism. Hélène Cixous' Portrait of Dora powerfully presents both a male heterosexist (Freudian) gaze at the figure of Dora, and at least the possibility of an alternative female desirous (Doric) gaze at female figures. In Cixous' play, the latter gaze cannot escape its cooptation by the former, which labels the latter undecipherable, uninterpretable, hence irrational, hysterical; so that gynocentric gazes and desires under patriarchal power may experience themselves as oppositional and hysterical. This view, to which I will return further below, suggests that through hysteria we may glimpse alternatives to phallogocentrism. Nevertheless, hysteria is a confirmation of a woman's enmeshment in patriarchy, not a flight from it; hysteria only makes "sense" within -- and in reaction against -- male heterosexual conscription of female desires, energies, and bodies into limited figurations. Furthermore, many feminists protest, as I will discuss below, that
the valorizing of hysteria may only reconfirm antifeminist figurations of women as naturally and inevitably irrational, in need of (male) therapeutic intervention.

Hence, it seems, it is no accident that the word "figure" connotes rhetorical tropism as well as woman's bodies, particularly an ideal female body that women must anxiously discipline themselves into (as in "watching one's figure" by dieting). Helena Michie suggests that women's bodies act not only as metaphors for other things, but as metaphors for metaphoricity, figures of figurativity itself. Ironically, Michie claims, contemporary feminist writers who want to disengage female figures from figurativity may themselves fall back into it. "For these feminist critics and others, the body is at once the most literal ground of female experience and a metaphor for its very literalness." Feminist attempts to literalize the female body, to remove it from its imbrication in figuration, ironically refigure the female body and valorize the figuration of the female body. The body cannot be represented literally, though the impulse to do so is urgent in breaking through patriarchal codes of femininity (such as "ladylike anorexia"):

What exists on the other side of the mirror can only be a mirror image; obsession with eating and hunger is as harmful to the body as starvation, attention to different parts of the body is still fetishization, metaphors for literalness are still metaphors. Feminist writers necessarily live and write at the center of a paradox; they are using patriarchal language to destroy patriarchy and the language it produces. To identify this paradox is not to recommend silence or stasis, but to identify conflict and contradiction as a potential source of energy.

In trying to control their figures, as I will explore below, women discover and enact, even as they may try to escape, the fundamental figurativity of their bodies. Still, feminist re-embodiments of hysteria and other attempts to re-present women's bodies and desires present the hope, at times even the promise, of real women's bodies, which may
nevertheless be themselves impossible to present, perhaps even impossible to extricate from patriarchy. Many women's plays and performances suggest, however, that though this promise of real, pre-patriarchalized women's bodies may itself be a phallogocentric construct, it is not only highly useful but emotionally necessary for women as (long as) we live within male-privileging ideologies.

Shocking Theater

Like women's art, much of the performance art of the 1960s and '70s focused on the body, both its presence and its absence, its "natural state" and its technologizations. Performance art of the 1980s and '90s has expanded in many directions: toward the pyrotechnical, toward the political, toward the psychological, toward the pleasure of the pose, and toward increasingly raw bodies. Many performance pieces display a confluence of postmodern aesthetics, deconstructive philosophies, and activist body politics. And like women's art, performance art often finds itself simultaneously deconstructing, demystifying, exploiting, proliferating, and even fetishizing conventional codes and means of bodily representation.

To break through aesthetic codes long since ossified into clichés, to blur the categories of "art" and "life," to de-position the viewing subject -- these are some of the most recognizable trends in performance art. Resolutely setting themselves against the art market with its fetishization of the finished, saleable product, and against theater's logocentric fetishization of the written text, artists attempted to make unsaleable, unproducible, unsafe art by performing (at the site of) their bodies. But this turn to the body in a gesture of rejection of bourgeois consumerism runs the risks of mystifying the body and bodily presence. Philip Auslander argues that much performance work -- with that of the Wooster Group as a salient example -- is "a critique of presence in which the charismatic
performance is accompanied by its own deconstruction. Still, he grants, the Group runs the risk of allowing charisma to win out over deconstruction. The dialectic between mystifying and demystifying presence, particularly the bodily presence of the performer, is a paradox played out in every work I read in this study. This paradox may perhaps inhere in all performance -- indeed, what makes live performance (as opposed to film) most interesting to me is the paradox that the more present "the body" seems to be, the more acutely its absence may be felt -- but performance artists dive headfirst into it.

Josette Féral, in her article "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified" -- one of the earliest theorizations of performance art's deconstruction of the subject through "hyper-embodiment" -- suggests that "the performer works with his body the way a painter does with his canvas. He explores it, manipulates it, paints it, covers it, uncovers it, freezes it, moves it, cuts it, isolates it, and speaks to it as if it were a foreign object." The body is not just the subject of performance or even the medium of performance; the body "becomes part of the performance to such an extent that it cannot be distinguished from it. It is the performance." If the body seems to be mystified, this effect is accomplished not through illusionism but through its anatomization and literalization:

Performances as a phenomenon [are] worked through by the death drive: ... the experience of a body wounded, dismembered, mutilated, and cut up ..., a body belonging to a fully accepted lesionism.

The body is cut up not in order to negate it, but in order to bring it back to life in each of its parts which have, each one, become an independent whole. ... Instead of atrophying, the body is therefore enriched by all the part-objects that make it up and whose richness the subject learns to discover in the course of the performance. These part-objects are privileged, isolated, and magnified by the performer as he studies their workings and mechanisms, and explores their
under-side, thereby presenting the spectators with an experience in vitro and in slow motion of what usually takes place on stage.\textsuperscript{25} By fragmenting the body into so many entities, Féral argues, performance art disrupts that symbolic structure, the subject, which is founded upon a unitary body. Performance "demystifies the subject on stage: the subject's being is simultaneously exploded into part-objects and condensed in each of those objects, which have themselves become independent entities, each being simultaneously a margin and a centre."\textsuperscript{26} This argument has its own powerful inner logic, but in demystifying the subject, Féral remystifies (or posits in performance art the remystification of) the body and bodily desires. In performance, the "body is made conspicuous: a body in pieces, fragmented and yet one, a body perceived and rendered as a place of desire, displacement, and fluctuation, a body the performance conceives of as repressed and tries to free -- even at the cost of greater violence."\textsuperscript{27} The performer "is a source of production and displacement. Having become the point of passage for energy flows -- gestural, vocal, libidinal, etc. -- that traverse him without ever standing still in a fixed meaning or representation, he plays at putting those flows to work and seizing networks. The gestures that he carries out lead to nothing if not to the flow of desire that sets them in motion."\textsuperscript{28} Féral allies body/desire/the Imaginary/performance as opposed to the subject/repression of desire/the Symbolic/theatricality. For her, the first set of terms is ontologically prior to the second. Performance "brings emotional flows and symbolic objects into a destabilized zone -- the body, space -- into an infrasymbolic zone."\textsuperscript{29} Not only do the body and the performance space comprise an "infrasymbolic zone" for Féral, but performance "appears as a primary process lacking teleology."\textsuperscript{30}

Féral refers to "the performer" always with masculine pronouns. This is telling. For a rupture of the male subject may indeed be a radical event. The rupture of the female subject, however, is already the status quo, especially for women in theater, where the
production of a unified female subject is a rare event indeed. Hélène Cixous goes so far as to say that

It is always necessary for a woman to die in order for the play to begin. Only when she has disappeared can the curtain go up; she is relegated to repression, to the grave, the asylum, oblivion and silence. When she does make an appearance, she is doomed, ostracized or in a waiting-room. She is loved only when absent or abused, a phantom or a fascinating abyss. Outside and also beside herself. That is why I stopped going to the theatre; it was like going to my own funeral, and it does not produce a living woman or (and this is no accident) her body or even her unconscious.31

If classic mainstream theater, like classic Hollywood film, has frustrated female subjectivity and simultaneously fetishized female bodies (as in Mulvey's argument), then what women may need at this point, in the context of current socio-political configurations, is to demystify "the body" (particularly the female figure) and to experiment with imagining -- and claiming -- themselves as subjects.

Féral celebrates the effect of performance in peculiar terms:

Once this exploration of the body, and therefore of the subject, has been completed, and once certain repressions have been brought to light, objectified, and represented, they are frozen under the gaze of the spectator, who appropriates them as a form of knowledge. This leaves the performer free to go on to new acts and new performances.32

The performer's freedom hardly seems to follow from the freezing gaze of the spectator; this gaze, in fact, may prescribe or conscript the appearance of repressions. Furthermore, in this passage, the freezing gaze of the spectator, which fixes on, explores, objectifies, and anatomizes the body of the performer, sounds almost as if it could have been lifted from Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure." If looks could kill, this gaze kills women into art,
brings about what Cixous calls "the horror of the murder scene which is at the origin of all cultural productions."³³

Cixous, interestingly, proposes for the birth of women in theater a strategy which looks more like Féral's disrupting of the subject through prioritizing and valorizing "desire." In her short manifesto-like proposal for women's theater, "Aller a la Mer," Cixous posits the nineteenth-century hysteric as an exemplary figure of such a strategy. Cixous' Dora may act as the theatrical equivalent to contemporary women performance artists such as Karen Finley. Because of this parallel, the debate between Cixous and Catherine Clément on the hysteric spectacle is itself a productively destabilizing performance.

If the patriarchal stage and world leave woman "outside and also behind herself," Cixous makes this alienation her strength. Beside or outside or beyond or behind herself, she subverts as well as conserves the theater-patriarchy by performing multiply. Such a woman makes every "real" an "as," which can be played on or cast off. Here Cixous' paradigmatic figure is not the laboring mother but the hysterical daughter. Cixous refers to her 1972 play Portrait of Dora as a "first step." In this play, Dora's hysteria, her multiplicity, her acting up, potentially if not actually subvert the patriarchal scenario. The "woman who stays beyond the bounds of prohibition, experiencing herself as many, the totality of those she has been, could have been or wants to be, moving ever more slowly, more quickly than herself, anticipating herself" (547-8) rejuvenates the theater, refigures it as a site of female presence. This hysterical theater would center itself not on the death of women, but on the birth -- or birthing -- of women.

But does this rejuvenation make patriarchal theater stronger, or make it new, different? This question is pivotal in The Newly Born Woman, which Cixous co-wrote with Catherine Clément, 1975.³⁴ Both Cixous and Clément see hysteria as inherently theatrical
and spectacular. For Cixous, the hysteric performs her multiplicity, her bisexuality, outside of "the spurious Phallocentric Performing Theater" (85). For Cixous,

[...]his power to be errant is strength; it is also what makes her vulnerable to those who champion the Selfsame, acknowledgment, and attribution. No matter how submissive and docile she may be in relation to the masculine order, she still remains the threatening possibility of savagery, the unknown quantity on the household whole. (91)

For Clément, too, the hysteric is a dramatically disruptive figure, a "spectacle of femininity in crisis" (9). She is a spectacle of what must be excluded in the construction of patriarchal femininity; her "body is transformed into a theater of forgotten scenes" (5). But hysterics are ultimately conservative, if temporarily disruptive:

This feminine role, the role of sorceress, of hysteric, is ambiguous, antiestablishment, and conservative at the same time. Antiestablishment because the symptoms -- the attacks -- revolt and shake up the public, the group, the men, the others to whom they are exhibited... Every hysteric ends up inuring others to her symptoms, and the family closes around her again, whether she is curable or incurable. (5)

For Cixous as well as for Clément, the hysteric is both conservative and antiestablishment; but for Cixous, the antiestablishment strand overwhelms the conservative strand. Cixous' representative hysteric, Dora, is

the one who resists the system, the one who cannot stand that the family and society are founded on the body of women, on bodies despised, rejected ... . And this girl -- like all hysterics, deprived of the possibility of saying directly what she perceived ... still had the strength to make it known. It is the nuclear example of women's power to protest. ... [Such women] have spoken so effectively that it bursts the family into pieces. (154)
Clément says "no" to to such bursting into pieces. Hysteria "introduces dissention, but it doesn't explode anything at all; it doesn't disperse the bourgeois family, which also exists only through its dissension ... It is when there is a crossing over to the symbolic act that it doesn't shut up again" (156).

Jane Gallop, in her reading of La Jeune Née in her book The Daughter's Seduction, argues that through publication, specifically through the publishing of "des femmes," Cixous brings the hysteria of Dora into the symbolic realm. The Newly Born Woman has been a crucial text for academic feminists; if the institutionalization of feminism in U.S. academic humanities is a radical disruptive change in the substance of knowledge and not just a surface adaptive alteration, then the hysteria of Cixous' writing has indeed been a major force in symbolic change.

But there is more. It is not just a matter of Symbolic or Imaginary; the question of the Real creeps back in. Clément says that hysteria's upheaval

is metaphoric , yes -- a metaphor of the impossible, of the ideal and dreamed of totality, yes, but ... "that bursts the family into pieces," no. It mimics, it metaphorizes destruction, but the family reconstitutes itself around it. (155)

Clément implies that Cixous uses Dora metaphorically, as a figure for the feminine, for women, whereas Clément wants to look at the materiality -- at the reality -- of individual hysterics' lives. Cixous, too, says she sees Dora as "the name of a certain force, which makes the little circus [the patriarchal family structure] not work anymore" (157).

Does Cixous use the figure of the hysteric as metaphor? Perhaps the hysteric uses herself -- consciously or unconsciously -- as metaphor. If she makes of her body a theater of forgotten scenes, then it is always other than itself. Cixous' Dora is a woman "who cannot be tamed, the poetic body, the true 'mistress' of the Signifier" (95). She adulterates, makes of her body a poem, a text, a sign challenging the ontological reality of the body-itself. In questioning the Real, though, does Cixous' Dora not also make "the
real" necessary? Does that which gets excluded, the returning repressed, become the new real challenging the old real in Cixous' paradigm? Is a new reality of the body reified as soon as an old one is toppled?

For me, when posing "mentally ill" women as metaphor, force, figuration, one must not leave out the materiality of the disease -- nor its signifying potential as a lived trope. Cixous figures the hysteric experience as extremely bodily; the hysteric bombards Mosaic law "with their carnal, passionate body-words, ... with their inaudible thundering denunciations" (95). She speaks through her body, through "Exclamation, cry, breathlessness, yell, cough, vomit, music" (94). It is now time for women who have "functioned 'within' man's discourse" to take our cue from Dora,


to displace this 'within,' explode it, overturn it, grab it, make it hers, take it in, take it into her women's mouth, bite its tongue with her women's teeth, make up her own tongue to get inside of it. And you will see how easily she will well up, from this 'within' where she was hidden and dormant, to the lips where her foams will overflow. (95-6)

Cixous' luxurious prose makes even gorging, even vomiting, beautiful, sensuous, and meaningful. A hysteric or binging-purging woman dramatically metaphorizes -- embodies? -- the seizure and revulsion of patriarchal power. But women living within a seemingly (to them) compulsory hysterical or bulimic performance may not experience their bodies as theaters of feminist protest and female recovery, but as prisonhouses. Jane Gallop suggests that the question of whether hysteria is a theater of feminist protest or a prisonhouse is a question of time, of whether one sees hysteria as over or on-going. In practice, "hysterics" are no longer recognized as such; and while it would be far too simple to propose that a complex of anxieties and ideological contradictions once expressed by women in hysteria may now be expressed in today's available cultural vocabularies of anorexia nervosa and bulimia, there are striking parallels in the situatedness of both
disorders within their ideological backdrops. Both sets of disorders can be read both as caricatures of cultural ideals of femininity and as overdetermined and misdirected protests.³⁸

Performance artist Valie Export sees anorexia as the paradigm of female selfhood in post-modernity and as the consummate piece of performance work in its demystification of desires and bodies. In her 1984 article "The Real and Its Double: The Body"³⁹ Export presents anorexia as an inherently theatrical stance and one subversive of patriarchy. In her performance art and film works Export attempts to dislodge "the body" by defamiliarizing its representations. She exports the foundational female body. The leaders in this new theater of disembodiment, for Export, have been anorexics and hysteric, women whose "mental illnesses" circulate around body-images (or "the body" and its images"). Mental illnesses are "deconstruction of this female body" and hence belong to "the strategies of female insurrections" (10). In the "great feminine forms of rebellion, such as hysteria and anorexia," the woman "has already made a fiction out of her body" (22,23). "In anorexia we see the strongest feminine rejection of the body, which doesn't, however, mean a rejection of the feminine, but rather the rejection of the masculine identification of the feminine with the female body" (23). The rejection of the body in female mental illness, the aesthetics of disembodiment, are highly theatrical strategies, as Export suggest in her use of theater metaphors: "[t]he real body becomes a stage for simulation in the hysterical drama" (23). The posing of anorexia and hysteria as dramas goes beyond metaphor, for the dramas are not only staged but lived. To hysteric and anorexic -- and to Export -- the body appears as accomplice of the real and of power. Disembodiment, the dissolution of the body, is the triumph over the reality principle and over representation. ... In the denial of the body we recognize the denial of the real because it is a real of the masculine power or of phallic mother. The actual double of the real is the body, anorexia teaches us. Its fight against the body is a fight
against the real that represents the power of the man. The insistence of women on the body as their property, their real, not only contradicts the experiences of the highest feminine forms of representation like hysteria and anorexia, and contradicts the experiences represented in feminine artworks, but also consolidates the power of the real, the power of the masculine culture.... The desertion of the body as a double of the real belongs to the internal logic of subversion... (23-4)

In their disembodifyings or excessive embodyings, hysterics and anorexics embody (or disembodify) the only truly emancipating strategies for women's theater.

I would argue, or at least hope, that theatricalizing the body's predicament may unsettle its situation in the real. But how self-conscious are hysteria and anorexia in their "insurrections"? Is the hysteric or anorexic speaking through her body, or are cultural aporia and contradictions speaking through her, unbeknownst to her and even in her attempts to conform to them? Furthermore, there is another catch -- which Export seems to take more lightly than I do -- and with this catch "the insistence of women on the body as their property, their real" comes flooding back in for me:

That anorexia ultimately leads to death, to the extinction of the body, only indicates that the anorexic woman prefers the disembodiment of the body to a disembodiment/ forfeiture of the spirit and of language. Before her Self is disembodied in the body, she prefers to disembodify herself.40

The ultimate disembodiment, death, hardly seems to me to be "the triumph over the reality principle and over representation. In fact, this ultimate disembodiment seems to me also the ultimate embodiment, inextricable from the reality principle and representation.

And yet I want hesitantly to concur with Export's suggestion that anorexia is the ultimate deconstructor of women's bodies as well as women's selves, and that playwrights and artists, particularly performance artists, would do well to take their cue form anorexics.
It is not simply a matter of embracing the anorexic as subject matter -- though this is interestingly done by such artists as Pam Gems (in the character of Vi in *Dusa, Fish, Stas, and Vi*), Tina Howe (the artist Agnes Vaag in *Museum*, Elizabeth Barrow Colt in *The Art of Dining*, Mags in *Painting Churches*), and Vanalyne Green ("Trick or Drink"). Export advocates even more the embracing of the hysterical or anorexic's formal strategy of simultaneous self-assertion and self-denial, simultaneous possession and self-possession, to bring forth the network of discourses which conscript female figures. I want to turn briefly, then, to a consideration of the spectacles of anorexic and bulimic performances before coming, at last, to the problematic value of Karen Finley's ranting, food-smeared figures of possession and protest.

**Consuming Women**

Eating disorders, highly culture- and gender-specific illnesses, can be read as enacting and embodying many cultural conflicts about female power, control and self-control, and consumption. Above all a figure of paradoxes, the anorexic body incarnates double-binds in which many contemporary women in consumerist economies find themselves. In cultures in which anxieties surrounding consumption abound and in which the female figure is fetishized as the primary object of consumption (and likewise consuming is troped as a male activity), but in which females are also offered the possibility of entering traditionally masculine sites of consumption, pubescent girls on the verge of taking on female figures may find their emerging women's bodies as sites of irreconcilable desires. For some girls and women, anorexia becomes a way to compromise among demands to consume and to be consumed, to have power and to be powerless. Internalizing and obeying the patriarchal mandate that women be small and powerless, anorexics gain an inordinate power by making themselves a spectacle of martyrdom and self-denial. The
power that anorexics gain, however, is simultaneously a powerlessness in the face of obsession. On the other hand, bulimics, rejecting the mandate that women deny themselves sensual pleasures, consume tremendous amounts of food, only to find themselves consumed by a decidedly unpleasurable obsession-compulsion. Most depressing, treatments of these illnesses often re-inscribe ever more firmly the ideologies which these illnesses can be read to protest. Susie Orbach, a feminist therapist of anorectic women, argues that most therapies for anorexics assume that grown-up femininity for healthy women is unproblematic, hence

[The anorectic's refusal to accept her culturally defined role is seen to be per se pathological, not an extremely complicated response to a confusing social identity.... [Practitioners] become enmeshed in a paradox, for on the one hand they describe the anorectic as weak and childish, and on the other hand they experience her as a crafty, strong and unyielding opponent. Trying to reconcile their view of her as childlike with her relentless pursuit of incomprehensible aims, they end up involved in what can only be described as a struggle for power over who is to control the individual woman's body.... In failing to comprehend the thrust behind anorexia, compulsive eating and bulimia, practitioners throw up their arms in despair or mechanically 'treat' the sufferer as though she were at best an oddity, at worst an offending object. In trying to get her to eat and to become the 'right size' they negate her protest. They unwittingly deny the meaning of her symptom and in so doing contribute to its perpetuation.41

An adequate treatment of eating disorders would have to listen to their languages, their uses of tropes and counter-tropes. And it would seek a productive, rather than merely self-destructive, way to subvert a masculinist economy effectively from within. (Such a form of subversion as is also being sought by the very women performers discussed above.) Anorexia and bulimia are appropriating the vocabulary of their culture with regard to
women, consumption, and body size, and thereby denaturalizing it; but this denaturalized, inapposite vocabulary is all to easily reappropriated and renaturalized back into the hegemonic ideology, which thereby becomes reinforced.

How are we to read the spectacle of anorexia? For spectacle it is. Kim Chernin, a feminist therapist and former bulimarexic, observes that the illness "has a distinctly exhibitionistic quality"; and Orbach writes that "[a]norexia is a spectacular and dramatic symptom," that "[o]n meeting an anorectic woman one is confronted with the spectacle of a woman who is starving herself of food." I want to consider briefly the readings of the spectacle of eating disorders by several exemplary feminist therapists and thinkers.

For Orbach, the spectacle of an anorectic spotlights the spectator, who is both deluged with pity and fear, and alienated:

To encounter an anorectic woman is to be confronted with turbulent and confusing feelings. These feelings can be so uncomfortable that one is inclined to try to distance oneself from the experience by various means. Unknowingly one moves into the role of the spectator. A sense of bewilderment, linked with a desire to understand, shortly turns to discomfort. One begins to look upon the anorectic and the anorexia comprehendingly. Compassion turns to fear and a wish for distance; a need to disassociate oneself from the painful sight. The anorectic is rarely engaged with, especially not about her experience of anorexia. Turning anorexia into an exotic state, with the attendant labelling and judging, substitutes for engagement. By these means a distance is created between oneself and the anorectic....Anguish and defiance combine in the most curious way to make the observer passive and motionless in response. There is a simultaneous desire to retreat and move in closer. The conflict renders one immobile.

The spectacle of self-starvation puts the spectator in an impossible position: s/he can not identify with, cannot subordinate, cannot classify, cannot consume the image. This
emaciated body says, if you gaze, it must be not for your pleasure, but for mine, on my terms. It is a spectacle of alienation, fascination, and revolt, but a body which can only be "known" as an incomprehensible and impenetrable otherness. Orbach suggests that the spectacle of an anorexic woman should be read with the attention that a theater critic gives to the more "legitimate" spectacles of the stage.

Chernin, interestingly, paints a quite different portrait of the way many women, dieting women (and most North American and many western European women do diet), perceive the spectacle of anorexia. Chernin offers this overheard exchange as example:

"I've heard about that illness, anorexia nervosa," the plump one is saying, "and I keep looking around for someone who has it. I want to go sit next to her. I think to myself, maybe I'll catch it. ..."

"Well," the other woman says to her, "I've felt the same way myself. One of my cousins used to throw food under the table when no one was looking. Finally, she got so thin they had to take her to the hospital. ... I always admired her." 4,5

Both responses of non-anorexic women to anorexic women -- extreme identification combined with heroicizing admiration, and extreme alienation and fear -- are common. The most important contributions of feminist "readers" of eating disorders is to suggest spectator positions in relation to anorexia which go beyond fear, revulsion, fascination, and heroicization. Feminist spectatorial positions afford a view as well to the other players on the stage and particularly to anorexia's backdrop.

Though eating disorders are extremely complex, multidetermined, even overdetermined,4,6 many feminist theorists want to stress the quite simple idea that self-starvation, compulsive eating, or compulsive purging are symptoms not just of an individual but of her culture, a culture not only obesophobic but also gynephobic. Hence Chernin and Orbach find in an eating disorder a political statement. For Chernin, the
anorexic can be compared to the "Hunger Artist" of Kafka's parable. From amidst an eating disorder's "tangled knot of self-destruction and obsession," women can find "the radical and healing knowledge that an eating disorder is a profoundly political act." Orbach likewise states lyrically that

Whenever woman's spirit has been threatened, she has taken the control of her body as an avenue of self-expression. The anorectic refusal of food is only the latest in a series of woman's attempts at self-assertion which at some point have descended directly upon her body. If woman's body is the site of her protest, then equally the body is the ground on which the attempt for control is fought.

Like Chernin's term "hunger artist," Orbach's term "hunger striker" may seem to heroicize the anorectic:

A woman who overrides her hunger and systematically refuses to eat is in effect on hunger strike. Like the hunger striker, the anorectic is starving, she is longing to eat, she is desperate for food. Like the hunger striker, she is in protest at her conditions. Like the hunger striker, she has taken as her weapon a refusal to eat. Like the suffragettes at the turn of the century in the United Kingdom or the political prisoners of the contemporary world, she is giving urgent voice to her protest. The hunger strike becomes the means of protest to draw attention to the illegitimacy of the jailer, the moral righteousness of the cause, or in her case, the necessity for action. She is driven to act in a dramatic and seemingly self-punishing way through the conviction that she jeopardizes her cause if she eats, just like the explicitly political prisoner. But unlike her fellow hunger strikers, she may not be able to articulate the basis of her cause. The hunger strike may be her only form of protest.... While she may not be able to talk directly about her cause, we can begin to decipher her language. The text we read is the
transformation of her body and her action of food refusal…. She expresses with her body what she is unable to tell us with words. (101-2)

The language of this statement to some extent implies that the hunger strike of an anorectic is an active and self-motivated one: the anorectic refuses to eat, she has taken a weapon, she expresses with her body. Other elements suggest a passivity, in which the anorectic is not subject but object of the strike: she does not protest but rather "is in protest"; she does not choose the hunger strike but rather "the hunger strike becomes the means of protest"; she "is driven to act." Above all, she does not speak but is deciphered. I feel, along with Orbach and many other feminist thinkers regarding eating disorders, that it is important to read anorexic body-texts, not dismiss them, not let them go to waste. But in perusing these bodies for meaning, meaning which we may be transferring onto them, are we not mimicking a male gaze which appropriates female spectacles? Orbach argues that "to see the anorectic's food refusal as a hunger strike is to begin the process of humanizing her actions."50 Definitely. But "humanizing" a woman who dramatically eludes so many common connotations of "humanness" may be more like an act of appropriating.

In Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease Joan Jacobs Brumberg takes my critique of Chernin and Orbach further. Brumberg's strong, historically rigorous Foucauldian reading of anorexia makes a space for itself within the extant body of feminist scholarship on this disease by charging "the popular feminist reading of anorexia nervosa" with the heroicization and "romanticization of anorexia nervosa."51 Orbach (whom Brumberg consistently misspells as "Ohrbach") is a particular target of critique. Some women (mis)understand Orbach's "declaration" that "fat is a feminist issue" to mean, Brumberg states, "that feminists should allow themselves to get fat, thereby repudiating both patriarchal and capitalist imperatives."52 Brumberg does not state who these "some" are; it is difficult for me to believe that anyone, after reading Fat is a Feminist Issue53, could see Orbach as advocating weight gain as a feminist protest and an
escape from patriarchal capitalism. (Rather, Orbach advocates that women transfer our
attention and energies from food and weight-control to more productive projects.) Even if
"some" do mistake Orbach's intentions and appropriate her declarations, do their
misreadings delegitimize Orbach's readings of eating disorders? "More recently,"
Brumberg continues,

some writers, in a well-intentioned but desperate attempt to dignify these all-too-
frequent disorders, have tried to transform anorexia nervosa into the
contemporary moral equivalent of the hunger strikes associated with early-
twentieth-century English suffragists such as Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst.54

At this point Brumberg footnotes Hunger Strike alone. Not only do "some writers" narrow
down to one, but Brumberg further reduces the specificity of that one writer's explorations
of anorexia as a multidetermined pathology to an inflated generalization on only a small
subset of determinants to say that "anorexia nervosa is painted as a young woman's protest
against the patriarchy -- that is, as a form of feminist politics."55 On the contrary; I read
Orbach to say that the feminist politics is in the reading of anorexia, not in the act of
starvation.

This debate between Orbach and Brumberg on anorexia's critique of patriarchy recalls
the one between Cixous and Clément on hysteria's critique. Indeed, Brumberg suggests
that this "contemporary feminist analysis has a literary analogue in the writing of academic
feminist critics on nineteenth-century women, medicine, and madness."56 Brumberg the
analyst and historian differentiates herself from such literary critics:

While I respect the contribution of feminist literary critics to our understanding of
the discourse that surrounded medical treatment in the nineteenth century, I am
disquieted by the tendency to equate all female mental disorders with political
protest. Certainly we need to acknowledge the relationship between sex-role
constraints and problematic behavior in women, but the madhouse is a somewhat
troubling site for establishing a female pantheon. To put it another way: as a 
feminist, I believe that the anorectic deserves our sympathy but not necessarily 
our veneration.\textsuperscript{57}

Brumberg's critique of the equation of pathology with protest spotlights the issue of 
conscious control, of (self-)possession:

Feminist insistence on thinking about anorexia nervosa as cultural protest leads to 
an interpretation of the disorder that overemphasizes the level of conscious control 
at the same time that it presents women and girls as hapless victims of an all-
powerful medical profession.... If the anorectic's food refusal is political in any 
way, it is a severely limited and infantile form of politics, directed primarily at 
parents (and self) and without any sense of allegiance to a larger collectivity.\textsuperscript{58}

Brumberg sarcastically adds that anoretics, "notoriously preoccupied with the self," are 
"not known for their sisterhood."\textsuperscript{59} To my mind, anorexia has both self-conscious (and 
self-willed) and unconscious elements; women with eating disorders are both controlling 
and controlled, both (self-)possessing and possessed, in the extreme. I would also argue 
that the anorectic critique of patriarchy and consumerism may be one which the anorectic 
herself is not conscious of; she may even consciously resist feminist politics of any kind. 
But mental illnesses can be unconscious protests; this paradox, and the self-contradictions 
embedded in it, are central to mental illness, indeed are what makes mental illnesses 
irrational. In her excellent article "Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the 
Crystallization of Culture," Susan Bordo sums up the paradoxes of anorexia's "protest" 
quite effectively:

It is indeed essential to recognize in this illness a dimension of protest against the 
limitations of the ideal of female domesticity... But we must recognize that the 
anorexic's 'protest,' like that of the classical hysterical symptom, is written on the 
bodies of anorexic women, and not embraced as a conscious politics, nor,
indeed, does it reflect any social or political understanding at all. Moreover, the symptoms themselves function to preclude the emergence of such an understanding: the idée fixe -- staying thin -- becomes at its farthest extreme so powerful as to render any other ideas or lifeprojects meaningless.... Paradoxically -- and often tragically -- these pathologies of female 'protest' (and we must include agoraphobia here, as well as hysteria and anorexia) actually function as if in collusion with the cultural conditions that produced them.... [Nevertheless] the anorexic ... is surely the most startling and stark illustration of how cavalier power relations are with respect to the motivations and goals of individuals, yet how deeply they are etched on our bodies, and how well our bodies serve them.60

It is this paradox of anorexia that interests me most in this chapter, particularly in relation to performing women, and particularly Karen Finley -- how, the more intensely an anorexic experiences herself as producing her own body according to her own will, the more she, her body, and her conception of "the body" may be produced.

Elspeth Probyn, in her article "The Anorexic Body," recasts into slightly different terms this debate over whether eating disorders and hysterias are protests or submissions, acts of self-possession or states of being absolutely possessed. Referring to Althusser's concept of ideological interpellation (to be improved by her Foucauldian model), Probyn reduces the claims of "some feminist writers" (again, Orbach is specified in particular) to saying that "anorexia is a perfectly normal (i.e. straightforward and even quite rational) reaction to the dominant interpellations for women in this society," that "we can explain away anorexia by merely invoking the spectre of discourses hailing and interpellating the female body."61 Probyn presents the counter-argument of "anorexia as an embodied moment of negotiation: as a site which shows up the articulations of discourse, the female body and power."

Demonstrating such a reading of anorexia in the case of the historical figure Sarah Jacob,
Probyn suggests that we "consider Sarah's starvation not as an act (thus implying some sort of free will) but as a negotiation of the particular discursive articulations within the apparatus," as "an embodied strategy that allowed her some small movement across the discourses of her time." The notion of "embodied strategies," somewhat akin to Foucault's of "technologies of the self," gives us "ways of conceptualizing practices (such as anorexia) that avoid the perils of a dichotomous argument of either strict interpellation or full human agency." Probyn poses the dichotomy, which she less successfully circumnavigates, as one between either full agency and subjectivity or full lack of agency and subjection to ideological discourses. Caught within the dichotomy, one resorts to the language of "acts," which to Probyn imply free will; outside the dichotomy, one speaks of "negotiations" which elude the simplistic concept of free will. That is, Probyn resorts to an antitheatrical dichotomizing of theater ("acts" -- simplistic, individualistic, and willful) and life ("negotiations" -- complex, systemic) in order to overcome another dichotomy, that between on the one hand heroicization of eating disorders and hysteria as acts of protest or on the other hand the scorning of these illnesses as dramatizations of women's complete interpellation into phallocentrism. Many contemporary women performance artists, however, resist this antitheatrical binarizing between "acts" and "negotiations," or between "theater" and "outside-theater." The theaters of these performances suggest, as do the theaters of the mentally ill, that there is no outside-theater. Not all theater, however, can be authenticated by the signature of a playwright writing from outside the performance.

For the remainder of this chapter, I want to look at the effects and effectiveness of Karen Finley's acts -- acts which, even as they are clearly "acts" involving "free will," declarify the meanings of both these terms. Performance art situates itself precisely in reaction to this tendency to dichotomize "theater" and "life," "acts" and "persons," "characters" created by actors and artists and those actors and artists "themselves." For many performance artists, and for Karen Finley especially, mental illnesses, particularly
those involving perversely atypical "body-images," are prime sites where acting and bodily being cannot be dichotomized. Finley takes literally Cixous' and Export's positing of hysteria and anorexia as models for women's theater to learn from as guerilla theater, as shock treatments gripping in their viscerality and in their painful paradoxes. While both Cixous and Export reject the dichotomizing of theater and outside-theater, they also resort to it to the extent that hysteric's anorexics, and bulimics are for them, in the end, metaphors of feminine protest. For Finley the vehicle and the tenor of the metaphor are one; she pushes these metaphoric revolting figures towards even further literalness and dramatic presence, to the point where things get really gross. If presenting real women is impossible, Finley takes another tack: by dramatizing the agony of disembodiment for women in its most visceral and bodily forms, she makes "the body," in its absence, most present.

Revolting Women

A Finley performance, I am told, is something to see. I have been unable to attend a Karen Finley live performance; my access to her work is almost exclusively through disembodied print media representations of her embodiments, including Finley's own. This is true of many Americans' receptions of Finley; ever since Evans and Novak singled her out as the embodiment of NEA grant profligacy, she has been represented and re-represented in newspaper article after newspaper article. The following discussion looks not at a Finley performance, but at its reverberations and uses among spectators, journalists, critics and reviewers. Art or obscenity, rebel or victim, subversion or regression, the Finley phenomenon seems to have struck at a nerve in U.S. patriarchal consumerism which, whatever strategies of dismissal, categorization, fetishization, or idolization Finley's representors employ, continues to smart.
Karen Finley's "body images" -- as re-imaged by spectators and by Finley herself in written media -- may seem almost bacchic as they jolt from ecstasy to destruction to the ecstasy of (self-)destruction. The Constant State of Desire starts with Finley reciting an image of violence:

She dreams. She dreams of strangling baby birds. Bluebirds, wrens and robins. And with her thumbs she pushes back on their small feathered necks, pushes back against their beaks till they snap like breaking twigs. (2)

Then, in the next moment, without transition, she is a bird:

She dreams. She dreams of being locked in a cage and singing loudly and off-key with her loved ones standing behind her, whispering very loudly, 'She has an ugly voice, doesn't she? She has an ugly voice.' ... (2)

Cixous celebrates a "hysterical" fluidity of subjectivity; Finley presents a series of fits and jerks from one "subjectivity" to another. These "subjectivities," however, are partially constituted by being subjected, in the Althusserian sense of being interpellated by ideological state apparatuses, even in their most intimate, "subjective" moments, as in the voices of family ISAs in "her" dreams.

... Oh leave it to the loved ones always to interfere with our dreams (2)

The subjecting of Finley's subjects also occurs in the psychotherapeutic ISAs which interpret dreams, to the extent that they prescribe dreams by determining which parts of dreams are important, such as dreams of falling and calling for help:

This dream was considered very important to the doctors. For in the past she had dreams of tortures, rapes and beatings where no sounds would come out at
all. She'd open up her mouth and move her lips but no sounds would come out at all. You know those dreams. You know those dreams. But she knew that these doctors were wrong. (3)

Finley's ensuing sketches -- dreams? fantasies? true, autobiographical texts? -- give us the sounds of rapes and beatings, the voices of the victims, of the perpetrators. She gives us voices and images not "considered very important by the doctors," not considered decent, not standard theatrical material. Voices like that of the female victim who blames her abuse on her insufficient desirability, a daughter whose father hung himself while masturbating to pictures of children and black stockings ("that ultimate erection"), the daughter (the same one?) who had an abortion after being raped by a member of her family whose name she protects. She ends this first series of body-images with:

And by now you can tell that I prefer talking about the fear of living, as opposed to the fear of dying. (5)

While the "I" is unclear -- is it Finley the performer, who finds fear of living more challenging and shocking to audiences? or one of her characters, who avoids facing fear of dying even more than fear of living? -- her epigram is a gauntlet thrown down.

Fear of living. Up to this point in a performance of Constant State a basket of colored Easter eggs has sat on the table. Finley now smashes the eggs in a plastic bag. During the next sketches -- "Enter Entrepreneur" (6-10) -- Finley will spread yellow egg yolk on her stripped body with a toy stuffed rabbit, then sprinkle glitter onto the egg yolk and adorn herself with paper boas. If these cheap, exaggerated boas both parody ostentatious displays of wealth and flirt with the phallic connotations of snakes posited by bad Freudian symbol-seekers, the boas also embody ways in which a women's ownership by a capitalist patriarchy may be camouflaged as -- or may also be -- class privilege. The entire image -- egg yolks, glittering sprinkles, boas, stuffed animals -- is even more ambiguously polysemic. A fascinating and indecipherable encoding of fertility (eggs) and childhood
innocence (stuffed animals), violation and rape, abuse and self-abuse, of the adornment and possession of women. Are women covered with their reproductive capacities? Forced an ideology of the beauties of being pregnable, of giving birth? Of being consumed and consumable in child-rearing? Can this image also be a ritualistic celebration of female reproductive capacities, as well as a protest of an ideology which uses these capacities to possess women? Which makes the ideology palatable to them by bribing them with trinkets (the decorative boas unmistakably phallic; women who possess may be the most possessed in our capitalist patriarchy.) This ritual seems almost religious, even as it denigrates Christianity's Easter conventions (and Christianity's idealization of selfless virgin-mothers). A secular crucifixion?

"I hate yellow," she says (the yellow of egg yolks? of smiley faces? the McDonald's arches? of traditional bourgeois kitchens? of the yellow wallpaper of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story? cowardice?); she forthwith launches into an offensive of the yuppie "with your new car, your new teeth, and your solid pastel lime green puke green pale pink apricot shirt that goes together with everything, catching sales as you go, with the Gap as your mascot" (6).

"I'll be your conscience," she says; the verbal images she creates seem to me as visceral, as shocking, as the eggs on her body, most notably in her infamous story of chocolate balls. She describes cutting off the balls of Wall Street traders, rolling them in her shit, then in a layer of melted Hershey's kisses:

...Then I roll the scrotum -- manure chocolate-coated balls -- into the fancy shiny paper. Now I go sell my chocolate eggs to Godiva or gourmet shops for one hundred dollars a pound. Oh, I get my revenge.... (10)

This image, one of her most controversial, exemplifies the Finley speciality: brilliantly reductive parody, coated with a vicious irony. Reductive in her vilifying of all yuppies as male, antifeminist, and rolling in dough, Finley nevertheless quite brilliantly frames, with
an artist's eye for the telling detail, certain icons of her culture which signify in ways of
which they themselves could hardly be aware. Godiva chocolates, for example, bear as
logo an image of Lady Godiva, that figure of legend who, ambiguously straddling female
rebellion and obeisance, met her husband's challenge to ride bareback through the streets.
Finley is often accused of blindly obeying Performance Art's prescription that female
performers remove their clothing onstage. Stripping, conventionally figured as liberation
and rebellion, is prefigured -- and prefigured perhaps by the very male gaze being
challenged. According to popular legend, Lady Godiva asked her husband, who was lord
of Coventry, to lessen the heavy taxes he imposed. He agreed to lessen the taxes if she
would horse-back ride naked through the streets. She did so, riding upon a white horse
and using her long hair to cover herself, but asked all the residents of Coventry to stay
indoors with their shutters closed. A lone tailor -- "Peeping Tom" -- looked and was struck
blind. Beyond this well-known popular legend, it's been suggested that this doubly divine
God-diva stems from earlier myths of fertility and renewal through female powers.64 But
Lady Godiva has been reduced to her husband's patronym, which in turn has become a
high-priced, consumable commodity. From a heroine to a commodity, from a rebel against
the constraints on women to an object contained in shiny wrappers and marketed, the
goddess-diva's commodification parallels the commodification of art which Finley is trying
to evade through the medium of performance. She particularly castigates yuppies who buy
art for its commodity value only. For Finley, the consumption of art and the consumption
of women are of a piece. When she smears herself with chocolate or yams and turns
herself into a vicious parodic edible woman, she makes of her body an artwork that can't
be bought and sold like a Godiva chocolate. But in this narrated, un-embodied image, she
proposes a reversal of the commodification of women by commodifying and consuming
male body parts. The allusion to Hershey's kisses as a means of violence presents a
linkage of love and physical abuse so common among wife-battery cases. Far fallen off
from her former divine powers, this nasty "High Priestess of the Dung Dy-nasty" covers the already shit-covered scrotum with melted Hersey's kisses because love -- the love of the Godiva chocolate world, the love which would prompt a man to present his lady with Godiva chocolates, the love in which romanticism coats misogyny -- is shit. Through these reversals of abuser and abused, of the eater and the eaten, the narrating persona "avenges" herself and other victims of crimes against women.

But if she gets her revenge, it's a highly circumscribed revenge. Feeling like she's been treated like shit and made to eat shit by male capitalists, she imagines making them eat her shit. Her revenge against phallocentrism is to cut off men's balls, essentially castrating them. But de-phallicizing individual men only re-phallicizes patriarchy by focussing on the male genitals as symbol of power. To cut off balls is to enorge their power, and first of all in her own mind. Does this persona recognize the irony of her "revenge"? Does Finley? Finley's persona turns the scrotum into eggs, and thus again re-fetishizes this symbol of female reproductive function, while making scrotum-into-eggs the ultimate emasculation. Revenge?

In Finley's most famous visual ritual she smears chocolate not on male scrotum but on her own body. During the "Why Can't This Veal Calf Walk?" act of We Keep Our Victims Ready, Finley smears chocolate frosting on her body, then sticks cake-decorator candy hearts on herself, then adds alfalfa sprouts, then tinsel. Finley's own annotation to this performance is, as she tells Andrea Juno in an interview in the "Angry Women" issue of Re/Search:

... I cover myself up in ways that I feel society covers up a woman -- as in the ritual where I put chocolate all over myself.... I use chocolate because it's a visual symbol that involves eating as well as basically being treated like shit ... so it works
on different levels. There are so many occasions where you go into a job or situation and you just have to eat the shit -- there's no other way out.

Then I stick little candy hearts (symbolizing "love") all over my body -- because after we've been treated like shit, then we're loved. And many times that's the only way people get love. Then I add the alfalfa sprouts (symbolizing sperm) because in a way it's all a big jack-off -- we're all being jerked off ... we're just something to jerk off onto, after the "love." Finally, I put tinsel on my body, because after going through all that, a woman still gets dressed up for dinner.

... In a way women are like Christmas trees ...

In this annotation, Finley refers to at least three agents. There is the victimized body (of "women") that gets things thrown and smeared on it. Then there is the hand doing the throwing and smearing, a hand which, in Finley's explanation, seems not to belong to the body being "shat" on. Finally there is the agency involved in representing, symbolizing, expressing -- an agency that guarantees that Finley is not really abusing herself. It's only a figure of speech. It's only art.

Except that it's not only art. It's not only in art that women feel the pulls of contradictory ideological fragments, that they play out different mutually destructive roles simultaneously. It's not only as art that women defile themselves. In 1987 a 15-year-old African-American female, Tawana Brawley, was found, after having disappeared for four days, with dog feces smeared on her body and racial slurs scrawled on her torso. She said she had been abducted and raped by six white men. A grand jury decided that she had fabricated her story. Perhaps we will never know whether or not Brawley's defilement was self-inflicted. Either way, the figure of Brawley embodies the double oppression/objectification of black women. Brawley is an extreme case of a long line of women who have either been defiled or defiled themselves, and for whom the distinction may be unclear. For a woman of color may read her double dispossession by white
patriarchy as a sign of her own defilement, may compulsively re-disfigure herself.

Brawley's image is exceptional only in that it made itself visible to a large number of people -- but visible only through its recantation.\(^{67}\)

Finley compares Brawley's performance and/or victimage with her own:

... in the ritual where I put chocolate all over myself [...] I could use real shit, but we know that happens already -- just read the news: Tawana Brawley was found covered with shit in a Hefty bag. I use chocolate because it's a visual symbol that involves eating as well as basically being treated like shit ...\(^{68}\)

Finley's performance is a kind of double-black-face; it allies her with people of color, but also appropriates their suffering. It is no coincidence that of the two, the white performer is the artist with the national endowment grant.\(^{69}\)

Finley points out too, though, her difference from Brawley. Brawley used "real shit," Finley uses chocolate. Unlike Brawley and unlike hysterics, bulimics, and anorexics, Finley clearly marks her act as "not real." Unlike Brawley but like hysterics and women with eating disorders, food is the most radically traumatic site through which bourgeois women continually re-enact patriarchal configurations which they might otherwise resist. Food is a trope -- but a trope lived in very real ways -- both of a women's internalizing of patriarchy and of being consumed by/into it.

In the "Refrigerator" section of "The Father in Us All" of Constant State, a little girl voices her first memory of her father

putting me into the refrigerator. He'd take off all of my clothes on my five-year-old body and I'd be naked sitting on that silver rack of the icebox. My feet and fingers would get into the piccalilli, they'd get into the mustard, the mayo. You wonder why I puke whenever I see condiments. Why I never enjoy my food. Gotta upchuck, gotta puke. (20)
Her father tells her he wants to play a game. The game goes like this:

He slap slap. He slap slap. I don't know this game. I don't want to play this game. Then he smiles wide. I hold on to my dollies more. Then he leans down to the vegetable bin, opens it and takes out the carrots, the celery, the zucchini, the cucumbers. Then he starts working on my little hole, my little little, hole. My little girl hole. Showing me 'what it's like to be a mama,' he says. Showing me 'what it's like to be a woman, to be loved. That's a Daddy's job,' he tells me. Working my little hole. (20)

Another voice, in "Why Can't This Veal Calf Walk?," cuts her "hole" because, in the face of verbal abuse by men, "I know I couldn't do anything to them/ so I'd do something to me." But when she cuts her hole, "it just [becomes] a bigger hole," instead of being "too big to fuck now," as she had hoped, she can now be fucked by all the men "at the same time" (131). Not unlike the anorexic, who starves away a woman's anatomically-destining body, only to find herself bound in the role of dependent daughter presided over by medical father figures. Or the hysterical who, trying to break out of suffocating strictures, finds herself reaffirming the "hysterization of women" which valorizes patriarchal control over women. Or the bulimic who, seeking comfort, freedom and release through food, finds herself bound ever more tightly within a prisonhouse of fear and debasement. Finley articulates this prisonhouse through the speaker(s) of "St. Valentine's Massacre":

I was afraid of being loved --
so I loved being hated
I was afraid of being wanted --
so I wanted to be abused

... I was afraid of not being in control --
so I lost control of my own life
I was afraid that I was worth nothing --
so I wasted my body to nothing
I was afraid of eating--
so I eat to my heart's content
...
and then I puke it all up
I take laxatives
and shit and shit and shit and shit
I'm afraid I shit a long time
for I'm nothing but shit
My life is worth nothing but shit. (116-17)

The melodrama and even prudery of these words may be laughable to the current theater-going palate of cool minimalism. But melodrama may be the essence of eating disorders and of other avenues through which women translate misogyny into self-punishment -- if melodrama can be understood as an intense and spectacular enactment on and in the body of individual and collective distresses. It seems to me not accidental that two language systems readily available to women are those of melodrama and of food, and that both complexes of codes exhibit a dualistic/ambiguous sado-masochistic pleasure. The shocking inextricability of pleasure and pain in some (self-)abused women is encapsulated in the red candy hearts which Finley throws on her chocolate-smeared body. The hearts, symbols of love and desire, may also suggest scabs, the remains of old wounds, or perhaps freshly bleeding hearts.

The sadomasochism of bodily self-punishment undermines suggestions of "revenge." In the "Sushi Party" section of "Quotes from a Hysterical Female" (a section subtitled "The Women Entertain the Average Ass Man"), the narrating "I" puts laxative-laced tuna in her vulva, and when the men "eat it up" they're "pooping all over the place, upchucking all
over the place" (48). But in performance, as "she" says this, "she" is smearing yams on "her own" body (the ambiguity of the images' source(s), the indeterminacy of the relationship between the narrator's voice and Finley's body, is precisely the point). Revenge looks a lot like self-abuse. Soon the narrating "I" becomes a man -- perhaps an Ass Man -- who tells us that "when things get real bad, real bad, dad, dad, I take a can of yams and I stick it up my granny's ass. She's such a fine granny to humiliate, she's such a fine granny to torture because she's a mute granny. She's my granny. Doesn't make a sound, Her eyes bug out like blue eyes on a rabbit, like some furry little animal" (57). The body smeared with yams also speaks of smearing yams; oppressors blend with self-oppressors, "revenge" and rebellion with re-infliction.

And in the middle of all this lingers the tantalizing question of Finley's relation to the self-oppressing rebellions and hysteric/bulimarexic strategies of her "characters." Is she herself a hysteric, or a sane artist critically reading the hysteric condition? And why is it so important to know which?

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Critical reception, both dismissive and favorable, overwhelmingly places Finley in the tradition of hysteric spectacle. Laura Jacobs' decidedly unfavorable review of her in The New Leader, for example, says Finley behaves "in the gulping hysteria of a tent-show follower about to see the light or faint." Even favorable reviewers see Finley's act and/or Finley herself as to some extent hysterical. Anthony Adler of the magazine Chicago, who sees her as coming near to serving the purpose for American culture that the goddess Kali does for Hindus (Adler calls Finley "Kali Incarnate"), describes a point in A Constant State of Desire in which "Finley goes completely mental -- screaming and whining and bellowing out her visions in rhythmic patterns that occasionally dissolve into stuttering or crooning
howls.... She seems possessed."\(^{71}\) An admiring Sally Banes of the *Village Voice* calls Finley's patter "manic and fragmented."\(^{72}\) *Voice* compatriot and Finley enthusiast C. Carr finds the performance artist's "raw quaking id" and "personalized primeval ooze" infectious; Carr's 1986 article "Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts" reports that Finley's "fuck-and-shit vocabulary draws shrieks, back-talk, occasional hysteria from the rowdy drunk crowds," that a "powerful charge of hysteria ran through the crowd," that among the spectators in Finley's "Kipper Kids" tour of Europe in 1981, no less than Rainer Werner Fassbinder was so "fascinated by the crowd's hysteria" that he returned to film it.\(^{73}\) "Hysteria" here connotes not aberrant disease but ecstatic transgression.

Finley herself characterizes herself as hysterical. Ironically or not -- or both ironically and not ironically -- she has entitled one of her pieces "Quotes from a Hysterical Female."

She describes her state in a performance as one of possession:

> I put myself into a state, ... so that things come in and out of me, I'm almost like a vehicle. And so when I'm talking it's just coming through me. ... sometimes I really believe I have other voices coming to me. So I open up to the voices ... The day of it I can't remember anything at all. I jitter, horrible smells come out of me. I smoke and I usually don't. And I never see the audience, I never know if they're there. I never perform for the audience ... I stay within this energy. I can have things happen to me up there, like pain ... \(^{74}\)

This hysterical, possessed state is also a bulimarexic state, as Finley describes her performance anxieties:

> ... when I'm talking it's just coming through me. And it's very exhausting. After I perform I have to vomit, my whole body shakes, I have to be picked up and sat down. It takes me about an hour before I stop shaking.... the day of it I do not eat from the night before. And what makes the strongest performance is if
I completely seclude myself, fast, and not take baths and stay in this certain state I get myself into.\textsuperscript{75}

Whether consciously or not -- again, the distinction is probably not operative -- Finley synchronizes her performance rhythms with the fast-binge-purge cycles of bulimic anorexics. The bulimarexia of Finley's performances seems the most threatening of all their (simulated) neuroses, even more undecidably transgressive/ regressive than hysteria. Finley, as she represents herself in the Schechner interview, seems to be taken over, possessed, by an outside force which makes her body -- its consumptions and purgations -- a medium for its articulation.

Finley's playing with food, more than any of her other forms of acting up -- her trances, rants, four-letter words -- seems to attract and to offend critical spectators. If "hysteric" can be positive, "bulimic" is only dismissive. Contradictorily, Finley's bulimaeethetics make her both impossible to ignore and vulnerable to dismissal. (A Wall Street Journal editorial, for example, after complaining that Finley's "bare breasts, covered in chocolate, hardly would qualify for more than a PG-13 rating," concludes, as if with self-congratulatory venom, "The only thing Ms. Finley teaches us to look at differently is chocolate icing.... And, I guess, alfalfa sprouts."\textsuperscript{76}) Perhaps the most dismissing, certainly the most damaging phrase summarizing Finely is the infamous Evans and Novak attack which precipitated the withdrawal of her NEA funding. Evans and Novak call her "chocolate-smeared".\textsuperscript{77} Being "chocolate-smeared," it seems, is proof positive of unseriousness, pettiness, childishness, offensiveness -- not qualities to be rewarded by tax-funded grants. Evans and Novak, of course, make no mention of the verbal text accompanying and playing off the repulsive visuals -- a text which complicates the reception of who this woman onstage is and what her chocolate-smeared body means.

To my mind, it is not simply a split between visual and verbal, but one between visceral and analytical, which is crucial in evaluating these performances. Finley's exegeses, both
in her onstage acts and in offstage interviews and letters, are generally somewhat simplistic (often reducing conflicts into good and bad parties, rich and poor, mainstream and marginal, yuppies and artists, porn and anti-porn, etc.); her visceral images, both those smeared onto the canvas of her body and those created through the language of her multi-voiced monologues, can be extremely complex, cogent, sympathetic and insightful of victims, oppressors, self-abusers, and deadheads alike. It is the multivalence of these images which to me pose the same kinds of challenges to interpretation as do "real" anorectic and hysterical body-performances.

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Like hysteric and bulimic performances and like anorexic bodies, Finley's body-performances are at once highly coded and radically uninterpretable. In a 1989 article on performance artists, Elinor Fuchs mentioned that in Finley's earlier work, the performance artist "abuse[d] herself." Finley's manager wrote back angrily in response to this comment "She has never 'abused' her body in any performance." To many who witnessed Finley smearing food on herself, these acts constitute self-abuse, whether or not they are "ironic." To others, the question of irony or agency matters in deciding what is self-abuse, what is self-conscious and subversive mimicry. In either case, the question of intention seems compulsively invoked among (re)viewers, if only to be dismissed as unanswerable or irrelevant. Anthony Adler of Chicago, for example, comments that "Finley has spent the last several years creating performance works in which -- intentionally or otherwise -- she incarnates a modern American version of Kali's destroyer aspect." This uncertainty about intentionality, and the need to mark it, is almost a regularity among reviewers and critics of Finley's work. This ambivalent intentionality seems even to be contagious, as when Jill Dolan writes: "Finley refuses to participate in the
rules of representation by objectifying herself. That "by" bears the articulatory insecurity of an anorexic or hysterical body. The context of Dolan's article suggests a reading of this sentence as saying "the rules of representation demand that a female performer objectify herself, but Finley refuses to partake in this self-objectification." But one could also read "Finley objectifies herself in performance, and this self-objectification is a strategy for escaping the rules of representation." Indeed, some critics have implied that (intentionally or otherwise) Finley objectifies herself in order to escape being objectified by others (or by "the rules of representation") — a strategy which may be as hopelessly self-defeating as those of anorexic, bulimic, and hysterical women. It may be that to objectify oneself is to empower oneself, to keep from entering into the cultural commodities exchange market. Or it may be that a woman's self-objectification refines and (post)modernizes more old-fashioned and less subtle forms of patriarchy.

I realize as I write this that the term "patriarchy" itself is old-fashioned in feminist theory -- but the premature obsolescence of the term worries me, and seems to parallel some of the more extreme forms of self-defeat dramatized in Finley's acts. Under the guise of women's choice, the term "patriarchy" becomes anachronistic, and is indeed scorned nowadays as reductive. This scorn for a perceived anachronism (and, more positively, this refusal to re-reify patriarchy by labelling it as such), however, may enable patriarchy to operate all the more smoothly, even within feminist theory (where it may operate not as a monolithic, hovering, easily recognizable form of power, but in pockets and local sites of diverse forms of gender-differentiated distributions of power — which become all the more invisible, of course, by escaping the label "patriarchal"). Women may hurl headlong into patriarchal control, even as they hurl headlong from it. An anorexic's starving away of the gender markers on her body which subject her to male gazing puts her under tighter medical-paternal surveillance. A bulimic may control her body's internalizations of food, and may control the visual spectacle her body makes, but becomes all the more consumed
by this need to control her body-image. Women with eating disorders seek control and lose it in gaining it; anorexics and bulimics feel both absolutely in control and absolutely out of control, controlled. Like these women's acts, a Finley performance is both immediately visceral and radically uninterpretable -- and overdetermined. Like these women, Finley resists the labels of "controlled" or "controlling," "possessed" or "self-possessed."

The New Republic's Luc Sante, for example, casts doubts on Finley's control of her imagery even as he commends much of her work, "crude" and "raw" though it may be. He diagnoses in Finley an aesthetic "fixation on scatology" which "seems compulsive rather than designed to shock; ... she sounds like someone afflicted with Tourette's syndrome." While Sante seems here to call into question Finley's agency, her ability to direct and control her acts and utterances, he ends by calling her work "seriously intended." Re-empowering Finley with a securing intentionality, however, avoids several issues still left out on the table: not only the issue of whether or not Finley secures and validates her work with a moral intentionality underneath all the obscenity and scatology, but other issues as well, issues shared by those faced with reading dramas of hysteria and anorexia/bulimia: Can an agent dispossessed of herself create important art without intending to? If we value performances which provoke rather than provide cultural analyses, then (why) is it still important, for the purposes of drama criticism, to distinguish between the neurosis and its simulations?

Finley's acts, utterances, and exclamations, in their almost schizophrenic inconsistencies, challenge viewers and readers with this very question. Sometimes Finley presents herself as the thing itself, the very spectacle of psychic and social disorder, rather than an analysis of such disorder. In one interview, Finley calls her language "a symptom" of her culture; in another interview, she explains why she does not rehearse any of her performances: "In the same way that one doesn't rehearse for having a baby or having sex
or falling in love, it's all inside me when I do it ... I don't need any revving up, those are all the feelings I walk around with every moment." Finley places her performances on the same ontological level as birthing, having sex, or falling in love (the latter three entities of which I would not necessarily place on the same level themselves -- but that's another matter). She presents herself as a symptom, a symptom through which we should read a culture as well as a critique of that culture. Like the Dada and surrealist traditions, which much of performance art recovers in a reaction against the tyranny of the script in contemporary theater, Finley offers the work of art -- her possessed body, her revolting body -- as the thing itself -- or rather, as both art and the thing itself, an untenable synthesis which undoes both the dialectic and the terms on either end. Her performance work incites a swirl of dialectics in reviews: Is it mania or art? hysterical and bulimic, or a study of hysteria and bulimia? Unconscious and compulsive or conscious protest? Is Finley possessed or self-possessed? controlled or controlling? medium or agent? object or subject? moral or immoral? "straight" or "bent"/ironic/subversive/perverse?

Above I referred to Finley's characterization of her language as symptomatic of her culture. But the larger quotation is more problematic. Refuting charges that her work is obscene and immoral, Finley says "I use a certain language that is a symptom of the violence of the culture ... If I talk about a woman being raped, I have to use the language of the perpetrators." One does not, of course, have to use the language of the perpetrators to protest a crime, and in fact many women protesting rape and male violence against women will strategically shun the language of the perpetrators and even develop a counter-language, a counter-aesthetics. Using the language of the perpetrators to protest it may, nevertheless, be an effective strategy; Finley's "have to" (like the charges of obscenity based solely on the visual and verbal vocabulary she uses) avoids the question of her effectiveness on the audience. Hysteria, anorexia, bulimia, agoraphobia, and other forms of self-abuse or self-disciplining, too, use the language of the perpetrators, but though
disruptive, these illnesses are also counter-productive and even conservative, even reactionary, in effect.

Appropriation is a favorite mode of transgression among postmodern performance artists. Jon Erickson notes, however, that appropriative strategies are themselves fraught with double binds. Karen Finley re-appropriates images of the female body from male pornographers' appropriations of female bodies: "Finley is indeed working to objectify herself, rather than allowing conventional patriarchal systems of signification to objectify her. Appropriation, then, is a self-objectification made from materials at hand within the culture, driven by inner subjective desire, whose twisted frown resists being returned to that culture as a depoliticized commodity." Nevertheless, "transgression" through appropriation "can be a martyr to its own effects":

... appropriative and transgressive acts are done less to stimulate dialogue than to increase alienation between groups, and to create a feeling of power among those who feel they have none. While transgression is used to undermine the power of hegemonic discourse through the appropriation and attempted devaluation of its images, that appropriation can then be reappropriated ironically into the hegemonic discourse one again.... Every appropriative/transgressive act is less a true subversion of hegemonic ideology, in the name of another ideal, than it is a challenge to that ideology to increase the scope of its power over such divergent ideals and their representations.86

Using the language of rapists to protest rape, the language of porn to be antiporn, Finley exploits the appropriability to which all cultural iconography is vulnerable. But this mimicry may fail not only in ways I have already discussed -- attempts to de-mystify often end up re-mystifying; for example, mocking male genitals as sites of phallic power, Finley still talks about and aggresses onto male genitals, thus confirming their impos(r)tance -- but her language may be re-appropriated by recipients unaware of, perversely resistant to, or
even willfully misreading her work, and by spectators who may want to see her stripping as sexy and/or liberatory to Finley, or who want to make it obscene and symbolic of decadent immoral artist.

Finley is most useful to me in expropriating many forms of women's body-image disturbances from a context in which the women themselves appear pathological to a context in which the ideologies producing these body-images appear pathological. She reappropriates eating disorders and bodily defilements (such as Tawana Brawley's) into the context of guerilla theater.

Finley, as Dolan has argued, protests patriarchal appropriations of women's bodies by appropriating their appropriations; but Finley wears these secondary appropriations -- her own re-objectification of her body -- with a difference (as well as a sameness). Her mimesis is also mimicry, also caricature. Like anorexics and bulimics, like hysterics and agoraphobics, Finley embodies male disciplinary control of female figures in images both absolutely literal or carnal, and highly figurative, ambiguous, and multivalent. Snatching male violence and female objectification out of context, Finley makes them appear all the more outrageous -- or does she renormalize them?

Ironically, her strategy of appropriation is infinitely playable; right-wingers pull her appropriated images back out of their new contexts and place them into yet newer contexts. Evans and Novak, for example, strip Mike Steele's quite positive Minneapolis Star-Tribune description of Finley down to her most literal acts: "'tough stuff ... she casually peels off her dress and pours gelatin into her bra ... slathers chocolate over her body ... sticks blobs of bean sprouts over her body and calls it sperm.'" (the ellipses are Evans and Novak's). Elided are words like "moving" and "heartfelt." Evans and Novak's stripping of Steele's article is a strip-tease; they titillate us with a provocative image, then slip in new contextual stimulations: Finley's solo exhibit becomes symbol of taxpayer-financed "outrageous" and "obscene" art, and is dismissed sarcastically as "'[t]ough stuff indeed." While all art is
vulnerable to such appropriations (including my appropriation here of pieces of the Evans and Novak article), performances which appropriate others' appropriations are particularly vulnerable to being caught in an infinite regress of appropriations. Finley makes an art of improper appropriations in the act of protesting appropriation. She is most useful to me in tapping into and spotlighting the way women's bodies are always already appropriated, violently so, and are continually being re-appropriated; hence she simultaneously delegitimizes any claim to the authentic, "proper," unappropriated female nature, and forces her enemies to re-enact their appropriative strategies, this time under the spotlight. More importantly, Finley forces the spotlight on revolting women as well as on technologies producing female figures.

Cixous and Clément stage a debate about hysteria: is it subversive or conservative? a diversion from meaningful protest, or itself a performance piece, acting out first of all against the strictures imposed on women not to act out, particularly not in such bodily explicit exhibitions? an assertion of subjectivity or a performance of subjection? And if the latter, is it a mimicry which can be read (or appropriated) as subversive irony? Or does it merely concentrate dissent enough to enable conservative forces to target it, close ranks around it, and (temporarily) quell it? Women with eating disorders provoke similar questions: is the anorexic/ bulimic/ bulimarexic a victim or a rebel? good daughter or bad daughter? Does her diminishing body comply with the mandate that women be small? Or does she reject the restrictions on women to the roles of breeder and object of heterosexual male desire? To my mind, all of these options are "true." I have tried to show that Finley's work is bound up in the same set of dialectics as these other dramas of the possession and consumption of female figures in Anglo-American consumerist ideology: are the bodies of Finley's work subjects or subjected objects, consumed or consuming, possessed or self-possessed, literal or metaphorical, porn or antiporn, art or real, art or trash? To me they
are, precariously, all of the above. This is why Finley's work is so impossible to judge, so
political, so dangerous, so vulnerable, so important.

I am not by any means saying that Finely "is" hysterical, anorectic, bulimic. But like
these illnesses, her work takes place at a site of extreme anxiety. The female figure is a site
where ideological productions of the body become dramatically spotlighted. Women's
attempts to maintain, control, reduce, and discipline their figures metonymize their
internalizations of ideological technologies of the self and of gender. At the same time,
women may experience their bodies as always already images for male consumption; they
may attempt to escape figurativity and consumability, and to regain their selves, by dis-
figuring their figures.

Eating itself becomes a figure for the internalization or incorporation into oneself of a
woman-consuming patriarchy. But eating disorders also dramatize the inescapability of the
figurativity of women's bodies. Revolting against the internalization of consumerist
patriarchy through emaciation or vomiting, a woman only re-objectifies her body as a
figure of revulsion. Far from escaping the patriarchal dictum to discipline (and punish)
female flesh, an anorectic or bulimic enacts it all the more, to the point of parody -- but also
of tragedy. She may disfigure her figure, but will not recover (will only re-cover) her
"body" (while all the more reifying it). And yet her tragic parody of female consumption
threatens patriarchy enough that weight-obsessions must be dismissed and trivialized.

Dumping chocolate, eggs, candy on her body, disfiguring herself, making herself a
consumable image, objectifying herself so that others cannot objectify her, railing about fat
thighs -- Karen Finley's effect on American cultural politics, furthermore, is that of the
hysteric's or anorexic's in the family structure. Like these diseases, Finley's performances
provoke the issue of audience response and meaning -- an issue always contestable but
generally subtle enough to be overlooked -- to a crisis point. Audience response to their
spectacles is the question in hysteria and anorexia. All too often in cases of treatment
historically (most notoriously with Freud's treatment of his hysterics, and especially Dora), instead of listening to and questioning these performances, instead of opening up to both extremes of their impossible dialectics, doctors have tried to shut up the symptoms, get them out of sight. This treatment is re-enacted -- almost mimicked -- in the treatment by Evans and Novak, Jesse Helms, Donald Wildmon, and Pat Robertson of Karen Finley (and her ilk). Delegitimize her spectacle, de-authorize it. Defund her. Shut her up. Make her go away.

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In post-defunding performances of Victims, Finley, before smearing chocolate on her nude body, gestures toward a chocolate cake with little flags on it, then sets fire to the flags. Oh, she gets her revenge. Like the other "revenge" of her acts, this "revenge" is highly circumscribed. In a sense it is utterly predictable. Burning a flag has become the most conventional code for rebellion in contemporary America; and because of its utter conventionality this act may ultimately re-codify and even re-sacralize the flag. Yet prescribed as her act is, she still does it. She burns American flags, and thereby is symbolically subversive, or at least symbolic of subversion. While the Clément in me wants to historicize this revolt, to emphasize its encodedness, the Cixous in me wants to heroicize it as a revolt nevertheless. Predictable as this act is, prescribed and childish, Finley still tells her censors, in effect, to eat shit.

***
But that's not how Finley ends *We Keep Our Victims Ready* -- not with a bang (nor with a whimper) but with something quite different from the shock treatments that have come before, something more like a whispered prayer. In an epilogue, Finley covers her chocolate-smeared litter-strewn body with a white sheet. She talks about "black sheep," and about AIDS victims and their survivors. The chocolate (which connoted dirt or shit, and hence the abuse some straight men may inflict on women or gay men physically and figuratively) seeps through the sheet, and now suggests dried blood stains on a white shroud. To some Christians, Finley's final image suggests a perverted contemporary Christ-as-AIDS victim. To me, when I first read of this image in the summer of 1991, it suggested an event which had just occurred in Houston as a part of the current anti-gay backlash: Paul Broussard, a Houston banker, had been beaten to death by a gang of teenage men on the 4th of July because they believed Broussard to be gay. (They were only doing the patriotic thing.) That event, the death of a particular "black sheep," still sticks to Finley's shrouded figure for me. No matter how socialized or constructed or performative bodies are, Finley's image seems to say, they are also very real. Or, in a more Finleyan idiom: Bodies bleed. Bodies die. And people still get beaten for being the wrong color or sexuality in the wrong place. And ten percent of anorectic women die from their disease -- until 1988, more Americans died each year of anorexia than of AIDS. And none of these diseases -- AIDS, anorexia, racism, homophobia -- gets the attention needed.

Theatrical embodiments, particularly those in contemporary performances, cast doubts on the belief in "real bodies." In academic circles, too, body-identity politics are often held to be theoretically untenable. In this study I have tried to focus on dramatic productions of bodies -- that is, on material performances which explore the ways in which bodies are produced. Yet this model of embodiment only makes sense in dialogue with the model of bodies as isolable from the social realm. The emaciated bodies of the ideologically-
embedded disease anorexia and the overtly political disease AIDS serve as checks to a too-easy dismissal of the fact that bodies are *experienced* as if they were absolutely real -- sometimes all too real. The desires of Dora for Frau K. in Cixous' play suggest, in a more positive way, the hope of real bodies, of bodies occupying the place of the Real, beyond or before the Symbolic. Indeed, it is a hope I find in all the plays I have studied here. The hope for real bodies which can be known not just through the pain of their disembodings.

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2Karen Finley, "Quotes from a Hysterical Female," in *Shock Treatment* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1990), p. 46. All quotations from Finley's performance pieces are from this text unless otherwise indicated.


6Gordon, 38.

7Székely, 33.

8Gordon, 32. It is important to note that there seems to be a recent acceleration in the occurrence of males with eating disorders, though the female-to-male ratio is still extremely large. See Arnold E. Andersen, ed., *Males with Eating Disorders* (New York: Brunner/Mazel Publishers, 1990).


11These "waves" are fictional aids for the purpose of narrativizing feminist movements. While it is important to understand the changes in feminism from the 1960's and 70's through the 80's and into the 90's, it's also important to recognize that each of these "waves" have been present throughout -- for example, both essentialism and de-essentialism have been inherent in feminism from its beginnings, and continue to be so. My use of the past tense in describing the "first wave" could just as well be changed to the present tense.


17 Forte argues that "... in Finley's case, being catapulted into a higher degree of visibility hastened her assimilation into a more commercial audience. In venues other than New York, beer-drinking fraternity boys came to see the naked woman shove yams up her ass and throw obscenities at the crowd. Her work became re-inscribed in the fetishistic process associated with strip-tease or live sex, and not at all the feminist or subversive strategy that theory might endorse" (234).


19 On the butch-femme debate, see Sue-Ellen Case, "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" and Kate Davy, "Constructing the Spectator: Reception, Context, and Address in Lesbian Performance."


21 Michie, 130.


24Féral, p. 173.
25Féral, p. 172.
26Féral, p. 178.
27Féral, p. 171.
28Féral, p. 174.
29Féral, p. 177.
30Féral, p. 177.
32Féral, p. 172.
34Cixous and Clément, La Jeune Née (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975); translated by Betsy Wing as The Newly Born Woman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). All citations are from Wing's translation unless otherwise indicated.
36I present this point more fully in "Anorexia as a Lived Trope: Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market" in Mosaic 24/3-4 (Summer/Fall 1991): 89-106.
37Gallop, 149.
40Export, 23.


Orbach, 97-8.

*Hunger Strike*, 97-8.


Crucial elements in the backdrop include: the Western platonic tradition dividing mind from body; the Augustinian distrust of the body; (Bordo); 18th and 19th century "secularization" and "medicalization of saintly starvation" (Brumberg) resulting in a medical surveillance of bodies and particularly a burgeoning array of disciplinary mechanisms around female flesh; the gender-inflection of surveillance such that female figures are fetishized under a male panoptic gaze; the 20th century heightening of consumer capitalism giving rise to a whole slew of "consumptive disorders" (Bordo); mother-daughter object-relations in infancy; and the vexed positions of female reproduction and female power in our culture. (These are just factors suggested by feminist cultural theorists, and does not even begin to include the endocrine imbalances suggested by medical doctors, the dysfunctional family dynamics suggested by more conventional American Freudian psychotherapists, and the rise in feminism suggested by pioneer Hilde Bruch.)

The *Obsession*, pp. 45-55. For further comparisons between Kafka's works and anorexic aesthetics, see Mark Anderson, "Anorexia and Modernism, or How I Learned to Diet in All Directions." *Discourse* 11.1: 28-41.

The *Hungry Self*, p. 92.

*Hunger Strike*, p. 19
50 Hunger Strike, 102.
51 Fasting Girls, 34, 36.
52 Fasting Girls, 36.
54 Fasting Girls, 36.
55 Fasting Girls, 35.
56 Fasting Girls, 35.
57 Fasting Girls, 35.
58 Fasting Girls, 36-7.
59 Fasting Girls, 37.
62 Probyn, 206.
63 Catherine Schuler, in her reading of Finley's "Hate Yellow," suggests: "Immersed in yellow, the socially constructed Woman accepts and even exults in the role of nurturer, but, for many women, yellow is the visual sign of oppression. Thus to "hate yellow," to hate pretty pastels and to prefer black is to reject the hegemonic traditions of patriarchy." ("Spectator Response and Comprehension: The Problem of Karen Finley's Constant State of Desire" in The Drama Review 36.1 (Spring 1990): 133-4. (Finley ridicules Schuler's reading of yellow in a subsequent letter to the editor.)
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86 Erickson, 235-6.

87 Dolan argues, in "Dynamics of Desire" (pp. 162-3), that Finley "appropriates the male perspective while maintaining the female gender ... Her aggressive denial of the power dynamics of legitimate sexuality — that is, heterosexuality, in which men are powerful and women are passive — angers male spectators ... Her refusal to play the game leaves the male spectator nowhere to place himself in relation to her performance. He can no longer maintain the position of the sexual subject who views the performer as a sexual object ... Finley has taken her body off this representational commodities market by refusing to appear as a consumable object."

88 Evans and Novak.


90 Erickson puts it succinctly: "[Flag-burnings] can be called acts of transgression against the sacred status of a symbol 'owned' by the people who pay it respect and even die for it. It is appropriated by those who read its symbolism differently; for them, instead of being a symbol of freedom, it is a symbol of oppression, and its desecration or destruction gives the protestor a personal sense of power, even if only to enrage the flag's defenders. To the protester, this act of devaluation is a symbolic striking at the heart of a system, similar to using a voodoo doll. To the flag's defenders, however, such an act only increases the
symbolic value the flag has had for them, and increases their desire to punish those for whom it is a sign of oppression." (p. 225)