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A

Performative Pain: Building Culture on the Bodies of Actors and Artists

by

Marla Carlson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2002

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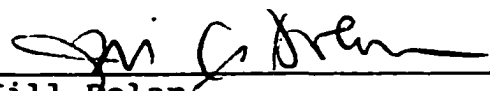
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Abstract

Performative Pain: Building Culture on the Bodies of Actors and Artists

by

Marla Carlson

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This cross-historical study examines the performance of physical suffering as a means employed by social groups to create or to remake culture. I argue against a special status for pain as “incommunicable” or “transcendent,” claims that could as well be made for any variety of sensory experience, and set out the reasons that Elaine Scarry’s work on “the body in pain” is not a good enough foundation for understanding embodied performances—or even experiences—of pain. I use concepts from language theory to analyze pain and pain behavior in a communicative context, relying particularly upon J.L. Austin, Paul Grice, and M.M. Bakhtin.

The plays and other performances that I consider cannot be fully understood without asking why particular characters suffer on stage, and why the episodes of suffering are placed at particular points in the narrative. Some of these performances can be safely read as evidence of the way a culture wanted to remember itself; other, more marginal works, are of interest as attempts to challenge and perhaps to change a society. I trace the mapping of pain onto the problem of creating community in Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* and Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*; the theatre of protest and

resistance created during periods of extreme repression within postcolonial regimes, focusing especially on Griselda Gambaro's *Antígona Furiosa* and *The Island*, by Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona, and the relation to global culture of plays created in response to repression within a specific local context; Hrotsvit's tenth-century virgin-martyr dramas, which work to contain and neutralize a potentially subversive energy by configuring martyrdom as a species of ordeal; the saint play as a culture-building mechanism thoroughly imbricated with other late-medieval performances of spectacular suffering, reading *Le Geu Saint Denis* together with the public executions described by an anonymous bourgeois of Paris during the first half of the fifteenth century; and the framing of self-inflicted pain as art in the 1970s and 1990s by body artists such as Gina Pane, Marina Abramović, Fakir Musafar, Bob Flanagan, and Ron Athey, and Orlan.

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Pain, Performativity, and Social Memory

The unique feature of pain is not that it is inexpressible or radically unshareable. Pain is unique because it creates an urgent need to communicate things to which no one is eager to listen. Knowledge of the listener's reluctance in turn produces a reticence in the sufferer to speak of things that cause discomfort. Yet we do speak and listen—sometimes wishing we could turn away, at other times fascinated. Not only that, we stage and watch spectacles that feature the body in pain: illness dramas, martyrdoms, plays about torture, actual tortures in the guise of plays, self-inflicted pain presented as conceptual art. The types of pain vary, as do the types of presentation.

My thesis is that aesthetic performances of bodily pain are more meaningfully analyzed as acts of communication than as representations. Discourse analysis provides a better “tool set” than most literary theory for determining how a culture's conception of pain affects spectator response and how performances of pain function to make culture. I conceive of culture not as a static “thing” but as a process by which communities imagine themselves through time, inscribing, eliding, and reshaping facets of social experience in order to produce particular versions of social memory. Reader response theory does provide some useful approaches to this process but does not adequately account for the materiality of either the performing or the perceiving bodies. I propose that speech act theory is well suited to analyzing spectator reception.

Although Elaine Scarry provides a working foundation for current inquiry into the cultural uses of pain,¹ I challenge the usefulness of that foundation for the study of performance. My selection of examples is informed by Scarry's assertions about torture, the body, and the voice. At both the start and the finish, I consider pain apart

¹Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Page references will be given within parentheses in the text.

from interpersonal violence. I begin with illness dramas and end with performances in which artists present self-inflicted pain as art. In between, I analyze theatre created in response to certain of the twentieth-century terrorist regimes about which Scarry writes. In order to evaluate her model of torture, I turn to medieval examples that pre-date Cartesian dualism and the Enlightenment and are therefore shaped by conceptions of the body and pain that are radically different from modern ideas. I look at an example from the tenth century, when judicial torment had a different structure, and an example from the early fifteenth century, after the transition from ordeal to torture but before the development of the nation-state.

My study examples are thus drawn from a wide variety of cultures and times, according to their usefulness in raising questions and exploring possible answers. I do not provide a comprehensive history of pain in performance, nor do I perform an intensive analysis of a unified body of work. My purpose in choosing examples from various time periods is not to establish stark differences between them or to chart a historical development but, rather, to see more clearly by varying my own historical distance from my objects of study—much in the way that studying a second language helps me to understand the grammatical structure of my first. But I do not generalize from these examples except with respect to methodology. Taking a similar approach to other examples from other periods will very likely lead to different conclusions about the function of pain—in fact, in *no* case did I find what I expected when I started work on a chapter.

The questions that I ask are deceptively simple: Why perform pain? Why watch such a performance? Why this type of pain at this particular time? I ask these questions with respect to both actual and simulated physical pain, with the caveat that pain cannot really be separated into mental and physical categories or even components. The material body cannot be pried apart from the body image, but I do not consider the

second in the absence of the first. I am interested in bodily performance; that is, not verbal descriptions but actions, not pain as a theme or symbol, not representations of the body in society, but actual bodies. I look only at work intended to be performed by live human beings within an aesthetic or aestheticized framework, excluding social performance, film, puppet theatre, and virtual reality. My central focus is spectator response to the body in pain. I am interested in the messages that are received, the mechanics of reception, and the multiplicity of interpretations.

This introductory chapter explains my assumptions and methods of analysis. I set out (1) the reasons that Scarry's work on "the body in pain" is not a good enough foundation for understanding embodied performances—or even experiences—of pain; (2) concepts from language theory that I use to analyze pain and pain behavior in a communicative context; (3) the sense in which pain behavior is technically performative; (4) the relation between performative pain and social memory; (5) the grounding of spectator response in phenomenology; and (6) the ethical questions raised by making a spectacle of suffering.

Pain as a Category of Experience

At the heart of Scarry's argument is the proposition that pain is essentially incommunicable. If she's right, then pain constitutes the limit case for any study of communication. I argue that claims about the unrepresentable nature of pain and its status as a special sort of sensation are far from self-evident. Doesn't *any* real sensation transcend representation? What makes pain different?

Scarry takes Virginia Woolf as her authority on the relation between pain and language: "English, which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear, has no words for the shiver and the headache . . . The merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare and Keats to speak for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a

pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.”² The same passage is quoted by Melzack and Wall, the scientists who formulated the gate-control theory of pain in the mid-1960s. Before discussing what they make of it, I offer the following counter-example:

My pain is a screech against an open, ripped, upside down sky. And the sky is my head, jagged and tearing, tearing, tearing. Sometimes I think it's on backwards because my teeth are in the wrong place. How can your own teeth gnash your own temple otherwise? The same way your temple is a fist all doubled up to really smash you with those steel knuckles, first icy cold, then fire hot; then flashes out in tough, ragged mandarin nails to scrape that same spot over and over. And there's a bruise—blue and purple and blood red—in the back of your eye. Your ear is being ripped off and the blood isn't blood but fire, stabbing in centimeter by centimeter down the back of your neck. And your neck fights back. It wants to be the sky so it sends the lightning back boxerlike in stiff jabs and explosion punches. Your teeth erupt and pelt you in the face; your ear bursts open and pastes itself against your eye; your eye recoils and shoots out through your temple and the blades and the whistles and the symbols and the blackboard chalk and the bombs and the jets all go off at the same time in a piercing scream. Then the rocket attached to the electric drill attached to the razors zooms down exactly on target to the temple. And a minute has passed.³

²Virginia Woolf, “On Being Ill,” in *Collected Essays*, Vol. 4 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 194, quoted by Scarry (3); also quoted by Ronald Melzack and Patrick Wall, *The Challenge of Pain*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 56.

³A 42-year-old woman's description of the headaches from which she has suffered for a decade, as quoted in D. E. Bresler and R. Trubo, *Free Yourself from Pain* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), quoted by Valerie Gray Hardcastle, *The Myth of Pain* (Cambridge, MA:

This chronic-headache sufferer finds plenty of English words to describe her pain. The description is not succinct, but neither is Shakespeare or Virginia Woolf always succinct. I quote it in its entirety partly because it achieves its effect by accumulating images and also to illustrate the reluctance/reticence phenomenon I mentioned at the outset: I found myself worried that readers would think, “enough of this—we got the point,” and wondered whether I should edit the extract.

Melzack and Wall propose that language runs dry not because words to describe pain do not exist but because one has little opportunity to use them. Moreover, the words often seem absurd.⁴ One has little opportunity to use pain words not because one has little experience of pain, but because one assumes—correctly or not—that no one wants to hear them. Woolf goes on to discuss this very difficulty, and concludes (wrongly, I think) that sympathy would bring the world to a standstill. If people listened to suffering,

adding in imagination other pains to their own, buildings would cease to rise; roads would peter out into grassy tracks; there would be an end of music and of painting; one great sigh alone would rise to Heaven, and the only attitudes for men and women would be those of horror and despair.⁵

I will return to this point. Before discussing the factors that make pain unique, I want to address three of Scarry’s most frequently cited claims about pain:

(1) Physical pain—“unlike any other state of consciousness—has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it,

Bradford/MIT Press, 1999), 9.

⁴Melzack and Wall, *Challenge of Pain*, 57. See 60–69 for a discussion of the McGill Pain Questionnaire, a language-based tool for both quantitative and qualitative pain measurement developed by Melzack and S. W. Torgerson in the early 1970s.

⁵Woolf, “On Being Ill,” 195.

more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language” (5). Am I cold, hot, sleepy, exhilarated *for* something? Like pain, these sensations all have causes but no objects.

(2) Pain actively destroys language:

To witness the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language; but conversely, to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language and projects the facts of sentience into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself. (6)

This eloquent writing serves Scarry’s unquestionably valuable discussions of torture and war; however, I have several objections. What is the difference between witnessing extreme pain and extreme pleasure? When I taste something delicious, I am likely to first say “mmmmm” and then, perhaps, to describe it. The absurdities to which wine lovers commit themselves illustrate the inadequacy of descriptive language. When I experience extreme amusement, I laugh, I do not describe. And does someone witnessing an orgasm also see the destruction of language, and its rebirth if the sensation should be described?

Scarry claims that extreme pain produces a reversion to the pre-linguistic developmental state of the innocent baby or the savage. But babies are born into language even if they cannot use it, and savages exist only from the perspective of the colonizer. Cries and groans belong to the paralinguistic realm of communication that persists alongside language to convey emotion and nuance and to clarify the meaning of verbal utterances. Cries, like sentences, can be inarticulate or eloquent. Scarry’s hierarchical view of communication, which privileges the word and relegates the sound and the gesture to a prior evolutionary stage, is inappropriate for performance/theatre studies. Furthermore, Scarry’s contention that pain destroys language entails a dualistic

conception of the body and its sensations as something that must be transcended—as that which is expelled in order to define consciousness. In other words, consciousness is that which is *not* physical. Pain insists on its physicality. So pain is incompatible with transcendence.⁶ But language does not require transcendence, nor does consciousness. And pain is never merely physical; that is, it never exists in isolation from the mind.

(3) To the individual experiencing it, great pain is “overwhelmingly present, more emphatically real than any other human experience,” and yet this experience is nearly invisible to anyone else (51). The idea that pain cannot be communicated has an experiential basis in the fact that one can only imagine, not feel, the pain of another. The pain felt by someone else is never the same as one’s own, in spite of sympathy and empathy. But the same is true for any sensation, emotion, or mental state. No sensation can be shared or fully communicated. All are nearly invisible. Other varieties of sensory experience can be (and have been) used to discuss mimesis, the incommensurability of experience, and the mind/body problem, yet pain is singled out over and over again as an especially profound philosophical problem.⁷ Descartes uses the correspondence of pain to physical harm to explain how “I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit.”⁸ Pain pervades

⁶This is, in fact, the view of pain that Woolf develops in “On Being Ill.”

⁷Hardcastle provides a useful chart and summary of philosophical positions. See *Myth of Pain*, 93-96. Also see Katherine J. Morris, “Pain, Injury and First/Third-Person Asymmetry,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56.1 (1996): 125-36. Morris challenges the model that we have a different knowledge of our own pain than of someone else’s, whereas our knowledge of injury is symmetrical. She suggests that a richer mind/body picture can eliminate both the asymmetry and the apparent inadequacies of natural language descriptions of pain phenomena.

⁸René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy” (Sixth Meditation, 1641), trans. John Cottingham, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 56.

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.⁹ Daniel Dennett imagines the attempt to create a computer that could feel pain in order to illustrate the limits of artificial intelligence. He argues that while artificial thought might well prove limitless, mental features *like pain* are recalcitrant to simulation.¹⁰

What might explain the persistent focus on pain? Melzack and Wall propose that the reason definitions of "pain" are circular and unsatisfactory is that the word "represents a *category* of experiences, signifying a multitude of different, unique experiences having different causes and characterized by different qualities varying along a number of sensory and affective dimensions."¹¹ In other words, pain differs from other sensory experiences because it is not a single sensation. For this reason, pain and pleasure are generally defined through opposition to one another and by listing synonyms. The category "pain" is distinguished from "pleasure" by its aversiveness.

I propose that pain seems different from other types of sensation because (1) the *other* person's pain tends to put an end to communication from the receptive end, and (2) the person in pain has a need to communicate unlike that produced by any other sensation. In the case of acute pain, normal discourse is temporarily disrupted by the pursuit of relief. In the case of chronic pain, the sufferer tends to become absorbed in the pain. Customary behavior patterns can be altered beyond recognition, and one feels like one has lost the other to pain. The person may still communicate, obsessively even, about the *pain*—but this is so unlike what one was accustomed to that the person communicating no longer seems to be the same person. Communication often ends

⁹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3d ed. ([Oxford]: Basil Blackwell & Mott, Ltd., 1958). Wittgenstein's references to pain are too numerous to cite individually.

¹⁰Daniel C. Dennett, "Why You Can't Make a Computer That Feels Pain," in *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (Montgomery, VT: Bradford Books, 1978), 190-229.

¹¹Melzack and Wall, *Challenge of Pain*, 71.

because recipients cannot tolerate the messages that are being sent. I have felt helpless because I could do nothing to alleviate the suffering of a loved one and at the same time been reluctant to imagine the sensations he endured, thereby rendering his pain “incommunicable” from my end rather than his. Furthermore, pain differs from other sensations precisely because of the urgency that it lends to communication. One would be hard pressed to imagine a situation in which someone felt compelled to communicate pleasure in order to put an end to the sensation. A person in pain not only asks for tangible help but also gains a measure of relief by talking. For example, Arthur Kleinman relates his experience during medical school with a young burn victim who suffered terribly during her daily debridement. In the face of her screams and pleading, he finally asked her to describe her experience. The treatment did not change, but as she began to talk about her pain during the sessions she became more able to tolerate them and stopped fighting the medical team.¹²

Roy Porter, one of the few to disagree with Scarry, accuses her of a “rarified elitism” for claiming that the essence of pain is inexpressible. He argues that this claim “is surely contradicted by the actual accounts of pain (which, far from being ‘inexpressible’, are often expressed with exactitude and eloquence) that ordinary people in the past have left us in great abundance.”¹³ Consider Antonin Artaud, whose suffering drives him to communicate that for which rational language is inadequate: “If I am a poet or an actor it is not in order to write or recite poems but to live them. When I recite a poem I don’t do it to be applauded but to feel the bodies of men and women, I

¹²Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), xi-xii. Didier Anzieu, also discussing burn victims, calls this a “bath of words” that replaces the damaged skin as container and map of the self. *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 203-09.

¹³Roy Porter, “History of the Body,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 209.

said *bodies*, tremble and turn in unison with my own . . .”¹⁴ Although Artaud is far from “normal” with respect to either pain or communication, I believe that his remarkable writing provides convincing evidence that pain does *not* obliterate consciousness.

Given the position that pain *is* communicated, the next step is to ask how the communication is accomplished. Philosophy of language provides useful tools for analyzing the ways in which meaning is made and also lays the foundation for my understanding of pain as *performative*. I will use “performative” here not as the adjectival form of “performance” but in the more restricted technical sense that it has in speech act theory. In other words, in calling an event performative, I always mean more than “part of a theatrical performance.”

Pain as Language

Pain is commonly read as a sign of injury or disease; in other words, pain sends the messages “something is wrong” and “fix it.” A pain thus represents a disorder and, as a form of communication with the consciousness of the sufferer, has a meaning. Pain is more complex than this, but modern theories of pain (both scientific and “folk”) are built upon this foundation. To explore the ways in which pain’s messages are received, I begin with the distinction made by H. Paul Grice between natural and non-natural meaning. Natural meaning, or *meaning_N*, operates by direct causation. Grice uses the

¹⁴Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, trans. H. Weaver (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988 [1976]), 452. I thank Paul Rae for drawing my attention to this passage in connection with Scarry, although he considers Artaud an exception proving the rule (because Artaud transforms “what is normally an obliteration of the world into a keenly felt sharing of its properties”). Paul Rae, “Operating Theatre, Medicine Shows: Medicalized Bodies in Performance,” M.A. thesis, University of Warwick, 2000, 13.

example: “Those spots mean measles.”¹⁵ Non-natural meaning, or *meaning_{NN}*, includes communicative intent, which comes in two parts: (1) a speaker intends an utterance to have a particular effect on a recipient, and (2) the speaker expects to achieve the intended effect simply by the recipient recognizing the intention.¹⁶ Grice’s example is: “Those three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that the bus is full.”¹⁷

A pain-related version of *meaning_N* would be: “This sharp pain in my ankle means_N an injury.” Already causation is less straightforward than the connection between spots and measles. The injury might be a sprain or a break, which can be distinguished only on the basis of related symptoms and X rays. Common-sense assumptions become unsettled by more complicated forms of pain; for instance: “The tenderness in your left arm means_N heart trouble.” Heart patients learn to read the arm-pain sign properly, but it is not easily understood as a case of direct causation. Left-arm tenderness occurs just before an attack of angina pectoris and persists through the attack, but the arm is not injured or diseased. Angina is caused when the heart must contract strongly in order to push blood through constricted coronary arteries, but inadequate blood flow does not supply enough sugars and oxygen to the heart muscle. When this occurs, a feeling of tightness around the chest is followed by pains that shoot down the left arm. Because of the way they develop in the embryo, the heart and the arm are both innervated by the upper thoracic segments of the spinal cord. The left side of the heart is much larger than the right, and the left side of the spinal cord has more tissue to innervate—this is why heart pain is referred to the left arm rather than the

¹⁵H. Paul Grice, “Meaning” (1957), in *Philosophical Logic*, ed. P. F. Strawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 39. Because “natural” is such a loaded term, I use the designation “*meaning_N*,” although Grice does not.

¹⁶Grice, “Meaning,” 45. See also Stephen Levinson, *Pragmatics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 16.

¹⁷Grice, “Meaning,” 40.

right. To say that the arm pain is *referred* does not mean that it is not “real,” however. Although there is no injury to the arm, both it and the heart send nerve impulses that converge in spinal cells. The summation of pain signals from multiple sources increases the pain. If the arm pain is blocked by anesthetizing the brachial plexus, the chest pain is more difficult to trigger.¹⁸ Left-arm tenderness therefore means_N an impending angina attack through complex but direct causation.

For some other forms of pain, direct causation is *presumed* but not fully understood by medical science. In reflex sympathetic dystrophy syndrome (RSDS), pain continues to worsen without ongoing damage to explain it. Although this type of pain usually has a traumatic origin such as a gunshot wound, it can also occur without apparent injury. The constant burning pain that characterizes RSDS can be exacerbated by normally innocuous stimuli such as the touch of clothing, a loud noise, an emotional disturbance, or anything that produces a startle reflex. Peripheral nerve surgery or blocking rarely helps, but increasing activity tolerance in order to restore normal proprioceptive input is beneficial, and interventions in the sympathetic nervous system—normally uninvolved in pain sensations—are the most frequently successful form of cure or relief.¹⁹ In cases such as this, pain is not a symptom but is, itself, the disorder. Pain disorders may have psychological components but are not “all in the head”—in other words, the pain is not a symptom of neurosis—and causation operates in multiple directions. Physicians and researchers presume that even a complex and

¹⁸Melzack and Wall, *Challenge of Pain*, 120-21, 125-26.

¹⁹National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, “NINDS Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Information Page,” <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/health_and_medical/disorders/reflex_sympathetic_dystrophy.htm> (1 July 2001), cited 12 August 2001; RSDSA, “Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Association Of America,” <<http://www.rds.org/contents.htm>> (27 July 2001), cited 12 August 2001; Melzack and Wall, *Challenge of Pain*, 86-92, citing S. Weir Mitchell, *Injuries of Nerves and Their Consequences* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1872), 292-96. RSDS is a variant of causalgia, a disorder first described by Mitchell during the American Civil War.

poorly understood syndrome such as RSDS means_N something, however, and that they will eventually discover more precise chains of causation. Communicative intent does not figure in the meaning of such pain—at least, according to current medical thought.²⁰

Meaning_{NN} is the primary modality for pain *behavior*, some (but not all) of which is intended to communicate the existence of pain. Another of Grice's examples is useful here:

If I frown spontaneously, in the course of ordinary events, someone looking at me may well treat the frown as a natural sign of displeasure. But if I frown deliberately (to convey my displeasure), an onlooker may be expected, provided he recognizes my intention, *still* to conclude that I am displeased. Ought we not then to say, since it could not be expected to make any difference to the onlooker's reaction whether he regards my frown as spontaneous or as intended to be informative, that my frown (deliberate) does *not* mean_{NN} anything? I think this difficulty can be met; for though in general a deliberate frown may have the same effect (as regards inducing belief in my displeasure) as a spontaneous frown, it can be expected to have the same effect only *provided* the audience takes it as intended to convey displeasure.²¹

In other words, the deliberate frown means_{NN} displeasure and the spontaneous frown means_N the same thing. The recipient interprets the behavior based upon an assumption

²⁰See Jean E. Jackson, "'After a While No One Believes You': Real and Unreal Pain," in *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective*, ed. Mary-Jo Good et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 139-40, for a good discussion of chronic pain and pain centers. In *The Myth of Pain*, Valerie Gray Hardcastle presents a thorough argument that "psychogenic" pains do not differ materially from other pains that have an *obvious* physical cause. Psychoanalytic theory presumes that in some cases pain itself (as opposed to pain behavior) has a meaning_{NN} on the basis of subconscious or unconscious communicative intent. With the help of the analyst, the patient comes to understand that the sore throat means_{NN} repressed grief rather than meaning_N a viral infection.

²¹Grice, "Meaning," 44-45.

about the frowner's intentionality, although the frowner knows the difference between the two *types* of meaning and the recipient may not.

The line between direct causation and communicative intent is fuzzy for pain behavior. A reflexive withdrawal from a painful stimulus means_N pain. Does the grimace that accompanies the withdrawal also mean_N pain? According to Grice's formula, it means_N if it is involuntary but means_{NN} if it is intentionally produced in order to communicate. The observer of the grimace makes the assumptions required to interpret it. This withdrawal and grimace are more troublesome than most pain behaviors: they may not be communicative acts at all. Because I am concerned with the communication rather than epistemology, I can leave these aside. In the long run, I am concerned with performances that are framed as performances, for which spectators are liable to attribute intentionality to accidental details. I turn once again to Grice, who asserts that we rely upon the *cooperative principle* in order to make sense of communication. That is, we assume that people engage in conversations cooperatively, with the aim of being understood. When an utterance seems not to make superficial sense, we make the assumptions necessary to interpret it as being in fact cooperative. If we are drenched by a sudden downpour and you say, "Lovely weather we're having!" then I interpret your utterance as meaning_{NN} the opposite of its literal meaning. Grice calls this sort of assumption a *conversational implicature*.²² When we encounter an unconventional utterance or behavior, we read it against convention to find a potentially implicated meaning. We then test that implicature against the context to see if it works. We often make mistakes, of course, when meanings are ambiguous or when we engage with members of other discourse communities who play by different rules. Throughout

²²H. Paul Grice, "Logic and Conversation" (1975), in *Basic Topics in the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Robert M. Harnish (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994), 57-73. "Implicate" and "implicature" are technical terms introduced by Grice to add intentionality to the conventional meanings of "imply" and "implication." Implicatures are always "intended to be recognized as having been intended." Levinson, *Pragmatics*, 101-103.

this dissertation, I read performances of pain against differing conventions within specific historical contexts in order to evaluate possible implicatures.

Implicatures are at work with gestural communication as well. If I reach for the knee of a new acquaintance and he jerks his knee away, I understand his gesture to implicate that I was too intimate. If I reach for my husband's knee and he jerks his knee away, I understand his gesture to implicate that the knee hurts. Consequently, I expect that touching his other knee would meet with a different response. In either case I might be wrong: my husband might be angry with me and the new acquaintance might be in pain. But right or wrong, my previous experience leads me to make assumptions about the communicative intent of my companion's gesture and, thus, its meaning_{NN}. Either of them might accompany the gesture with a grimace or a stern look in order to communicate more clearly—and he might speak.

Pain must be performed in order to be recognized, and the primary form of pain behavior is speech. The desire for precise descriptions of pain has increased over the last thirty years along with the complexity of pain theory, the specificity and multiplicity of treatments, and the incidence of chronic pain complaints. It is no accident that Ronald Melzack was instrumental to both the McGill Pain Questionnaire and gate-control theory. More precise descriptions are required for more sophisticated diagnosis and, thus, more effective treatment. Precision about pain was not an issue in the ancient world or even 200 years ago. Chronic pain provides particularly good examples of the way pain behavior functions as a language, because its physical markers are often not readily apparent and patients must learn to display or to hide them as required.²³ I do not mean to imply that if pain is not performed properly, in accord with convention, it does not exist. On the contrary, pain still exists in the

²³Paul E. Brodwin, "Symptoms and Social Performance: The Case of Diane Reden," in *Pain as Human Experience*, 77-99.

absence of recognizable signals. The absence of intelligible pain signals constitutes one type of pain behavior that fails to conform to the standards of a particular discourse community—the medical profession, for example, who must rely upon behavior for diagnosis. Such absence conforms to the conventions established in other situations. A grimace or any other pain behavior would be out of place in a ballet performance, for example.

Language is not the only pain behavior, of course. One study of facial actions found that four movements were typical of pain: “brow-lowering, orbit tightening, levator contraction and eye closure.”²⁴ Another study found that subjects were very successful at masking pain. When they attempted to do so, the only expression that could be detected was a decrease in blinking and a tightening of the eyelids. Those who faked pain also blinked less often, however, lending support to the theory that infrequent blinking has less to do with pain than with the cognitive activity involved in following an instruction to pretend. The fakers used all the same indications as those who were really in pain, but some were intensified.²⁵ Fortunately, I do not have to resolve the question whether the facial expression of pain is innate or learned behavior.²⁶ On the one hand, the proposition that emotions are innate and their

²⁴Kenneth M. Prkachin, “The Consistency of Facial Expressions of Pain: A Comparison Across Modalities,” in *What the Face Reveals: Basic and Applied Studies of Spontaneous Expression Using the Facial Action Coding System (FACS)*, ed. Paul Ekman and Erika L. Rosenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 192.

²⁵Kenneth D. Craig, Susan A. Hyde, and Christopher J. Patrick, “Genuine, Suppressed, and Faked Facial Behavior during Exacerbation of Chronic Low Back Pain,” in *What the Face Reveals*, 172-74. The increased incidence of lip pull during faking indicates the social complexity of pain behavior. The action is more characteristic of smiling than of pain, and may have been related to embarrassment or amusement.

²⁶Charles Darwin, Silvan Tomkins, and Paul Ekman all maintain that emotions and their expression are universal. Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Ray Birdwhistell argue that the expressions are not. For the argument that physical expressions are a system of learned communication and are, like verbal language, culturally specific, see Ray. L. Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970). For the argument that they are universal, and a summary of the historical debate between the two positions, see Paul Ekman, “Afterword: Universality of

expression universal does not require the conclusion that the *meaning* of pain behavior or pain sensation is independent of culture. Melzack and Wall point out that the pain process does not begin with the stimulation of pain receptors. “Rather, stimulation produces neural signals that enter an active nervous system that (in the adult organism) is already the substrate of past experience, culture, anticipation, anxiety, and so forth.”²⁷ On the other hand, if the nonverbal expression of pain and other emotions is learned behavior, most of the learning takes place subconsciously and variations—if they exist—are subtle. Beyond that, I am concerned here with performance and reception within shared discourse communities, meaning that all participants have a common set of verbal and nonverbal behavioral conventions.

If I lower my brow, narrow my eyes, raise my cheeks, and then after several seconds close my eyes, you very likely perceive me to be bravely enduring pain to which I must finally surrender. If I step on something sharp and pull my foot away, you perceive a reflexive withdrawal from a painful stimulus. If I walk on broken glass with my brow lowered and eyes narrowed, you perceive me to be undergoing a painful ordeal. If I walk on broken glass with a neutral countenance, you perceive me to have in some way mastered my pain: perhaps I control my facial expression or transcend the sensation. Those witnessing pain behavior try to make sense of it, using what they understand to be normal. In other words, they rely upon cultural norms with respect to pain behavior, which are bound up with their culture’s conception of pain. Variations in those norms and concepts are in turn bound up with the cultural use of painful

Emotional Expression? A Personal History of the Dispute,” in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), 3d ed. (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 363-93. The theory that the expression of emotions is universal rests on the assumption that the emotions themselves are universal. I began this project convinced by Birdwhistell but developed reservations after reading Ekman’s summary of the argument.

²⁷Melzack and Wall, *Challenge of Pain*, 100.

performances. Such performances have a role in constituting the culture within which they occur.

Performativity

Speech act theory, developed by J. L. Austin and John Searle, begins by assimilating language use to behavior (hence, speech *act*) and taking the utterance as its unit of analysis rather than the word or sentence. Aside from the value of speech act theory in and of itself, this shift is the groundwork for pragmatics—language usage—as a field of linguistic study.²⁸ In other words, the speech act lets context into meaning. Wittgenstein opens the same door in the *Philosophical Investigations* with the concept “meaning is use.” Although neither published the relevant writings at the time, both Wittgenstein and Austin worked out these ideas independently of one another in the 1930s in reaction to the dominant position of logical positivism that if a sentence cannot be verified, it is meaningless.²⁹ Austin uses the term *constative* for utterances that make claims about the world that can be evaluated for truth and considers a thing to be true if it corresponds to reality. Another type of utterance, the *performative*, can fail or succeed but is neither true nor false.

Austin argues that performatives have meaning although they cannot be evaluated for truth. To utter a performative is to do something, not to refer to something. Explicit performatives, such as “I promise” or “I apologize,” name the action that they perform. Implicit performatives require more interpretation but can generally be reduced to explicit formulae. All performative sentences can be evaluated

²⁸J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). See Levinson, *Pragmatics*, 5-34, for a comprehensive definition of pragmatics and discussion of basic concepts.

²⁹See Levinson, *Pragmatics*, 227.

for felicity conditions. For example, “I now pronounce you man and wife” is infelicitous if the person making the utterance has no civil or religious authority and is differently infelicitous in most of the United States if pronounced with respect to a non-heterosexual couple. In some cases, a gesture can be considered a performative utterance: in the seventeenth century, one could throw down a gauntlet or utter “I challenge you to a duel,” either of which is infelicitous in twenty-first-century America (even though it is quite likely to be understood) because dueling is no longer a conventional means of dispute resolution. A performative utterance must be done right, must be properly intended, and must be taken up by its recipient. Performativity takes into account convention, intention, and reception—but not representation.

A few decades after Austin turned some words into actions rather than representations, thereby opening a space within language theory for non-referential meaning, Judith Butler assimilated behaviors to language, pushing out the edges of the no-truth space opened by Austin. She says, “The body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time.”³⁰ Every performance of gender is performative (in Austin’s sense) rather than being representational, because there is no truth to which it could correspond: “Because there is neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all.”³¹ Butler remains interested in systems of communication as well as in structures of phenomena. By defining “gender identity” as “a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo,” Butler (like Austin) includes convention, intention, and reception

³⁰Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” in *Performing Feminisms*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 274. See also *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

³¹Butler, “Performative Acts,” 273.

in her conception of performativity.³² These subsidiary terms drop out of later discourse by other theorists for whom the “performative” becomes anything which does not reproduce or represent the real.³³ Like Butler, I am concerned here with performative acts, including but not limited to utterances. I am interested in the ways in which screams, cries, groans, contortions, and grimaces are received by audiences and in the relation between these paralinguistic signs and their various verbal frameworks.

I propose that pain behaviors are best understood as performative acts in Austin’s sense. As I discussed earlier, whereas pain itself means_N injury or disease, pain behavior has meaning_{NN} because it communicates pain—and usually much more. In some cases—such as malingering—pain behavior can be evaluated for truth conditions—but only in terms of its meaning_N. In other words, if pain behavior means_N that pain is present, then it is true; if not, it is a lie. But to evaluate most pain behavior as true or false is counter-productive. For example, doubting the veracity of pain reports produces psychological distress that is then interpreted as the source of “psychogenic” pain. I suggest that evaluating the performative force of pain behaviors is potentially more useful.

Pain and Communities

Pain experience, which includes both pain and pain behavior, occurs within the realm of social relations and helps to shape those relations. Pain experience also shapes culture—chronic pain syndromes have been doing so over the course of the last thirty

³²Butler, “Performative Acts,” 271. For Butler’s later work on the performative effect of hate speech and physical actions that can be construed as such, see “Burning Acts—Injurious Speech,” in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 197-227; “Sovereign Performatives in the Contemporary Scene of Utterance,” *Critical Inquiry* 23.2 (1997): 350-77.

³³For a fully worked-out argument, see Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked* (London: Routledge, 1993). For the development of performative writing out of this conception of performativity, see Phelan, *Mourning Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

years; however, social pain behaviors are outside the proper scope of this project. The performances with which I am concerned take place within the aesthetic framework of the theatre or the art gallery but are densely interwoven with other cultural performances of pain. They are both easier to read, by virtue of explicit framing devices, and harder, because referential transparency can obscure performative effect. For example, many of the plays that I discuss depict torture and are performed within societies that practice torture. The plays have been evaluated as “mirrors” of the societies (or even of human nature). But what do the depiction and the practice *do*? Do they perform the same actions, or different ones?

I am more concerned with reception than with performance. Who is watching the pain, what do they make of it and how, and what does the experience of watching make of *them*? The primary thread through my various discussions considers each audience to constitute an imagined community. By audience I mean various spectators upon various occasions, not all present at once, and never homogeneous. I borrow the concept of imagined community from Benedict Anderson, who defines “nation” as “an imagined political community . . . both inherently limited and sovereign.” The community is *imagined* because most of its members have no face-to-face contact but must imagine their communion; *limited* because some portion of humanity is understood to exist outside the nation; *sovereign* because it is not directly under hierarchical authority, whether religious or otherwise; and a *community* because it is “conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”³⁴

The communities at issue in this project are not always sovereign. In many cases the community of spectators is a *political* community, but not usually a nation. I concentrate on performances that occurred both before and after the period during

³⁴Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2d ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 15-16.

which “nation” was the most meaningful imagined political community.³⁵ I look at imagined communities of spectators that are sometimes larger than nations, at other times smaller, and that often cross political boundaries. Anderson’s concept of imagined community is useful in delineating the relation between spectators who have face-to-face contact with particular performances of pain but not necessarily with one another. In each case that I consider, the community of spectators has some reason (aside from being in the audience) to imagine itself as being distinguished from other people, and the distinction is not based on personal contact, ties of kinship, or a clearly defined social network.

I begin, in Chapter Two, with plays that stage episodes of extreme physical suffering due to illness rather than violence for spectators at the *apparent* end of a social crisis. The citizens of fifth-century Athens for whom *Philoctetes* was first performed were just beginning to recover from a long crisis in leadership during which they had temporarily abandoned democracy. The audience for Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* in the 1990s was not coextensive with the nation “America,” nor was it exactly the gay nation that Kushner wanted to bring into being—although that would have been an ideal example of performative force. Like the Athenians, the urban liberals who saw the first full American productions in Los Angeles and New York during the first Clinton administration entertained the hope that their imagined community was re-ascendant.

Audiences for the postcolonial “torture” plays that I discuss in Chapter Three understood their spectatorship as an act of opposition to repressive governments (or more amorphous social forces conceived of as equally repressive). The central

³⁵See Lesley Johnson, “Imagining Communities: Medieval and Modern,” in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson, and Alan V. Murray (Leeds: Leeds Studies in English, 1995), 1-20, for a corrective to Anderson with respect to the medieval period.

examples are two versions of *Antigone*, one from Argentina and the other from South Africa. I question the extent to which ethical impulses are co-opted by the very structures of representation used to engage spectators in the theatrical event. Does *compassion* for theatrical suffering waste potential *passion* against injustice? This objection against theatre is at least as old as Book III of Augustine's *Confessions*.³⁶ I discuss the difference between local and global audiences for these plays, and question the types of imagined community that they constitute.

Returning to pre-modern examples provides a more bounded—although not uniform—audience. In Chapter Four, I posit three hypothetical audiences for Hrotsvit's tenth-century virgin-martyr plays. I discuss the ways in which spectator response to the tormented martyr's pain-free body might have served the project of imperial expansion under Otto the Great. The spectators in this case very likely formed a *real* community, but constituted the central power of a very large imagined political community. The group of spectators upon which I focus in Chapter Five was also sharply delineated but was less powerful: the citizens of Paris in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. This community occupied a troubled position in the process of turning France into a "nation" fitting Anderson's definition. I propose multiple models for spectator response to public executions and saint plays in Paris during various phases of the Hundred Years' War.

Finally, in Chapter Six I consider possible responses to self-harm that was performed as conceptual art in the 1970s and the 1990s. The spectators for body art constituted an international imagined community with amorphous boundaries, comprising the conceptual art establishment. Body art practices attempted to challenge

³⁶See the discussion in Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 52-55.

and to change society from its margins. I examine their impact, actual and potential, and their changing relation to mainstream culture.

Imagined communities are constituted through processes of remembering and forgetting. As Anderson points out, national histories insistently remind us of the conflicts that we must forget in order to imagine ourselves as unified nations—but the reminders reconstruct the conflicts. For example, histories of the United States remember a “civil” war rather than a war between states; English histories remember William the Conqueror without the qualifier “of the English” to remind them of *who* was conquered; and nationalism is thought of as a European phenomenon although it began, in fact, in the Americas. Anderson says, “All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives.”³⁷ Patrick Geary suggests that the chain of causation works in the other direction—that forgetting makes change possible.³⁸ Social memory is created not only by means of written histories but by all cultural products, including performances—which are themselves remembered, forgotten, and reconstructed.

Paul Connerton says that “experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past” and that “images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order.” He further argues that both images and knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by means of performative ceremonies that owe their efficacy to the existence of common bodily habits. Such habits are acquired through culture’s

³⁷Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 204. The essay “Memory and Forgetting” is new to the second edition.

³⁸Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 28. I discuss Geary at greater length in Chapter Four.

“incorporating practices.”³⁹ Elizabeth Grosz says, “the body, or rather, bodies, cannot be adequately understood as ahistorical, precultural, or natural objects in any simple way; they are not only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature itself.”⁴⁰ Performances such as those I consider here participate in the constitution of bodies. At the same time, the culturally-specific bodies of spectators must be taken into account in analyzing the performances. The performative force of pain can best be understood by imagining the meaning_{NN} attributed to such performances by spectators. The co-existence of multiple meanings must be taken into consideration along with the context of performance.

Spectator Response

Using speech act theory to examine spectator response opens up an alternative frame for analysis centered on reception and the conventions according to which behaviors are interpreted. Performatives depend upon the attribution of intentionality to the performer, and Grice helps to clarify the workings of that process. If I grimace involuntarily, then I do not *perform* in this sense because I don’t mean_{NN} anything by my grimace—providing, of course, that you perceive my grimace to be involuntary. If you believe that I grimaced on purpose, then you mistakenly read a meaning_{NN} into my behavior. If someone puts me on a platform and causes me to grimace by poking me with a sharp stick, then you attribute an intention to the person causing my grimace. If I grimace in the course of a play in which I act the part of someone poked with a sharp stick, then you attribute an intention to various persons whom you consider to have

³⁹Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2-5.

⁴⁰Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), x.

produced my grimace. These persons most likely include the playwright and quite possibly the director. Whether you attribute any intention to me other than to embody the character depends upon your theory of acting—and this is not the place to go into what that might entail.

I cannot give a fully worked-out theory of spectator response here, but a generalized sketch helps to ground my discussion of particular performances. To begin with, all experience is embodied, and the imaginative structures of understanding that make thinking possible have a bodily basis. Mark Johnson says that these structures, which he calls image schemata, “typically depend upon the nature of the human body, especially on our perceptual capacities and motor skills.”⁴¹ Bodily *absence* is one such structure, and as such provides a perceptual ground for the concept of a disembodied “mind.” Drew Leder says that the ways in which one’s own body is absent from one’s perceptual field include *focal disappearance*, where the organ of perception or experience cannot itself be perceived, and *background disappearance*, where bodily fields recede into support or irrelevance, along with what Leder calls *dys-appearance*, the sensation of abnormal presence brought about by pain or pleasure.⁴²

I propose that empathic dys-appearance is a fundamental component of spectator response to the body in pain. This might be simply a heightened and uncomfortable physical awareness, a tingling or ache, or actually painful sensations. Although the pain (and other bodily sensations) experienced or simulated by a performer cannot be *shared*

⁴¹Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xi.

⁴²Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 26-27, 92. The foundation for both Grosz and Leder is Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work in phenomenology, esp. *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962); *Visible and Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

by spectators, all spectators have an embodied experience of the world that includes disappearance and dys-appearance.

Actors know what pain looks like and have no great difficulty performing it. Spectators easily recognize it. Even unconventional performances rely upon the spectator's embodied knowledge of the world. For example, body artists tend to present their pain actions without pain behavior. Even so, certain actions are coded as being painful and body artists *manipulate* these codes. Lynda Hart points out that when Bob Flanagan (who I discuss in Chapter Six) nailed his scrotum to a board, it *didn't hurt*. But the spectators assumed that it did and responded to an imagined pain. And Flanagan *knew* that they thought it hurt. In fact, he reported performing the same action in private, where *he* was the only spectator, because even to him it looked painful.⁴³ Consider also the infamous series of photos by Rudolf Schwarzkogler depicting a penis amputation, which were widely interpreted as documentation of the artist's fatal self-mutilation. The images are so evocative that I find it difficult not to see pain, in spite of my knowledge that the photos are staged.⁴⁴

Spectators often foreclose unpleasant physiological responses by focusing elsewhere—on the mechanics of presentation, for example, or upon the question of how much of the action is real—or by engaging in a search for meaning_{NN}. The distractions are a source of spectatorial pleasure in their own right. A response to disturbing

⁴³Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sodomasochism (Between Men—Between Women)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 143.

⁴⁴Schwarzkogler's action, staged in 1965-66, is reproduced in *Body*, ed. Jill Beaulieu and Anthony Bond (Melbourne: Bookman Schwartz, 1997), 57; and in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979*, ed. Russell Ferguson (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 185-87. See also *Brus, Muehl, Nitsch, Schwarzkogler: Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, ed. and trans. Malcolm Green in collaboration with the artists (London: Atlas Press, 1999). Robert Hughes initiated the American version of the myth in *Time Magazine* in 1972; it was repeated by Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 2; and debunked by Kristine Stiles, "Performance and Its Objects," *Arts Magazine* 65.3 (1990): 35-47.

material may also be masked at the moment of performance and then return as a sort of phantom in the moments before falling asleep, in dreams, or in watching another performance. Although experience has a bodily basis, it is also shaped by cognition.

Grosz proposes the Möbius strip as a model for subjectivity:

Bodies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives. The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another.⁴⁵

In order to understand spectator response to the body in pain, one must also understand the spectator's conception of pain—including its place in law, religion, and medicine. The suffering of a medieval Christian martyr has a sweetness and is welcomed. The twentieth-century political martyr may be willing to suffer for a just cause but cannot welcome the suffering in the same way. The spectator's bodily experience, belief structure, and psychological profile all color the ways in which either the medieval or the modern martyrdom is received, whether the event is real or simulated.

With respect to disturbing body art actions, Lea Vergine says,

The spectator is forced to repeat psychic experiences that he has already lived through in the past, to reactivate old conflicts. The projections that he is instinctually incapable of not performing render him at one and the same time the victim and the performer of what is happening in front of his eyes. His neuroses charge the "scenes" with an *additional* meaning

⁴⁵Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, xii.

and *another* importance that are thus superimposed upon the events that the artists have already subjected to metamorphosis.⁴⁶

In other words, when looking at a performance of pain, one very likely experiences some sort of personal resonance independent of the event's dramatic or conceptual framework. Attempts to pinpoint precisely the nature of this resonance are certain to fail, because the reactivated psychic experiences are complex, layered, and specific to the individual spectator. In addition, the resonance is not necessarily literal, but more likely produced through the play of associations (both conscious and unconscious).

In addition to this sort of private meaning, spectators typically rely upon past experience in reading social pain behavior in order to interpret that which is framed as art. A personal example illustrates not only the interpretive practice, but also the power that performances of pain have to re-make the lifeworld of those who suffer and those who witness suffering. When my husband complains to his doctor about the pain in his knee, the doctor conducts various sorts of examination (including referral to an orthopedist) to determine the meaning_N of the pain. When he can discover no physical damage, he concludes that the pain does not mean_N anything; therefore, it must have some meaning_{NN} which is outside the boundaries of his practice. My husband gradually learns to perform his pain more intelligibly—and also to make more careful choices with respect to his audience.⁴⁷ I am included in that audience, and as we travel through diagnoses from “nothing wrong” to “RSDS,” my changing knowledge moves me gradually into a new discourse community with respect to this sort of pain.

⁴⁶Lea Vergine, *Body Art and Performance: The Body as Language* (Milan: Skira Editore, 2000), 16.

⁴⁷These lessons are pervasive in the literature on chronic pain. See Arthur Kleinman, “Pain and Resistance: The Delegitimation and Relegitimation of Local Worlds,” in *Pain as Human Experience*, 169-97. The refusal by doctors to hear what “problem” patients have to tell them is a prime example of the way in which *recipients* block pain communication.

I had been in the “audience” for chronic and mysterious pain before when a friend, like my husband, communicated at great length, verbally and nonverbally, about her pain. She eventually disappeared from my lifeworld, but not until I had watched my disappearance from hers as her pain became more and more absorbing. Similarly, the breach long ago between my world and that of my father began in his pain episodes and was only finalized by death. I suggest that, for the witness, the experience of one’s own disappearance from the world of the person in pain can be intolerable and accounts for our readiness to shut down communication from the receptive end.

But pain in art is qualitatively different from the pain in life: watching the central character in *Wit* suffer through stage-four ovarian cancer and experimental chemotherapy is radically different from witnessing the suffering of either a loved one or a stranger.⁴⁸ The appeal of *Wit* for me is that it allowed me to reclaim part of the pain-watching experience without having the communicative process shut down. In the theatre, the spectator remains part of the same world as the actor not only during the pain episodes, but even after death. The fact that theatrical pain is simulated is beside the point. Even if real pain is experienced during a performance, as is the case with the body and endurance art events that I discuss in Chapter Six, the artist creates the context and structures the event as a communicative act.⁴⁹ But the meaning_{NN} of the act depends upon the spectator and includes the spectator’s assumptions about the communicative intent of the artist, the actor, the playwright, or whoever is thought to be communicating.

⁴⁸Margaret Edson, *Wit*, dir. Derek Anson Jones, with Kathleen Chalfant, Union Square Theatre, New York, 16 December 1998.

⁴⁹Paul Rae points out that the excessive nature of certain performances of suffering “solicits the audience to commit, as the performers are doing, to the absolute undergoing of the experience.” *Operating Theatre*. Rae is discussing the work of Goat Island, an ensemble based in Chicago.

Especially in the case of chronic pain, both the pain and the pain behavior typically acquire *performative* force by bringing about changes in social relationships.⁵⁰ Larger-scale performances of pain bring about changes in societies.

The Uses of Suffering

Anthropologists Arthur and Joan Kleinman argue that the appropriation of images of suffering by the news media and advertising industry thins out experience, desensitizes those who view such images, and lessens our capacity for effective action.⁵¹ Their central example is the Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph taken by Kevin Carter of “a vulture perching near a little girl in the Sudan who has collapsed from hunger.”⁵² The photograph has been reprinted many times, often in order to gain support for programs that aid refugees. The Kleinmans take due note of the value of this image and others like it but raise the question of Carter’s complicity with the girl’s suffering and likely death. Why didn’t he help her? He watched for twenty minutes, hoping that the vulture would spread its wings, and then chased the bird away after taking the picture. He was deeply upset but did nothing for the child. These details were made public in an obituary and a longer article following Carter’s suicide a few months after the Pulitzer was awarded.

The Kleinmans point out that the horror of Carter’s work as a photojournalist gives depth to his experience of suffering, but the girl remains one-dimensional. Among other effects, the image and the story reinforce “first-world” superiority and the idea

⁵⁰Brodwin, “Symptoms and Social Performance,” 92-93.

⁵¹Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, “The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times,” *Daedalus* 125.1 (1996): 1-24.

⁵²Description from a *New York Times* advertisement congratulating the newspaper for its Pulitzers, 13 April 1994, quoted in Kleinman, “Appeal of Experience,” 4. The photo was originally published in the *Times* on 26 March 1993.

that no local solutions exist for problems in Africa. Furthermore, the Kleinmans note that “Watching and reading about suffering, especially suffering that exists somewhere else, has . . . become a form of entertainment.” Viewers and readers are “overwhelmed by the sheer number of atrocities. There is too much to see, and there appears to be too much to do anything about.”⁵³ The Kleinmans criticize popular culture and the news media. Similar critiques can be directed towards the theatre—I mentioned Augustine earlier, but he is not alone.

Before turning to particular performances of pain, I want to lay out the theoretical groundwork for conceiving of an ethical basis for the spectator’s (perhaps pleasurable) engagement with pain, the very aversiveness of which is central to this engagement. Emmanuel Levinas says that suffering is essentially passive and is perhaps the essence of passivity, because suffering is not “*the performance of an act of consciousness*” but “a submission” to that from which consciousness strains unsuccessfully to turn away.⁵⁴ In this, it differs from other sensations: passivity is different from receptivity. “Suffering is a pure undergoing” (157). This passivity *is* evil, and it reduces the human being to thing-ness because there is no freedom from the undergoing, no agency, no choice. In the active opposition to consciousness that constitutes the passivity of this undergoing, suffering is intrinsically useless or “for nothing” (158).

For the sufferer, though, pain can take on meaning and stop being useless. For example, the pain of disease can be thought of as the body’s sign of damage, which compels one to seek a cure, or suffering can be understood as a God-given ordeal that

⁵³Kleinman, “Appeal of Experience,” 8-9.

⁵⁴Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” trans. Richard Cohen, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 157; orig. pub. “La Souffrance inutile,” *Giornale di Metafisica* 4 (1982), 13-26. Further page references to this essay will be included parenthetically within the text.

will result in spiritual improvement. In common parlance, suffering “builds character.” The concept of spiritually useful pain, which I discuss in Chapter Five, forms the foundation of modern penal sanctions intended to reform those perceived as enemies of society. Yet the evil that inheres in the power to inflict pain is obvious—indeed, it is with such suffering that I am concerned in Chapter Three. Levinas argues for an end to the concept of “theodicy”—that is, an end to explanations of divine justice that make sense of evil. To be more precise, in “Useless Suffering” he argues for an end to moral theories that justify the suffering of others. Theodicy makes suffering comprehensible and bearable by subordinating it to “the metaphysical finality envisaged by faith or by a belief in progress” (159-61). But the Nazi extermination of European Jews, among other twentieth-century atrocities, “renders impossible and odious every proposal and every thought which would explain it by the sins of those who have suffered or are dead” (153). After Auschwitz, there is no ethical way to make sense of the suffering of another person.

Suffering does, however, produce a call for aid—“a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh”—and this move from consciousness into the “inter-human” is the source of the ethical perspective on suffering with which Levinas is concerned. The Holocaust entails for the Jewish people an imperative to remain faithful, because renunciation “would amount to finishing the criminal enterprise of National-Socialism, which aimed at the annihilation of Israel and the forgetting of the ethical message of the Bible,” and also entails a broader ethical imperative to cultivate compassion. Levinas asks, “Is humanity, in its indifference, going to abandon the world to useless suffering, leaving it to the political fatality—or the drifting—of the blind forces which inflict misfortune on the weak and conquered, and which spare the conquerors, whom the wicked must join?” (164). The alternative is to suffer *for* the suffering of the other, to find meaning

in *my own* suffering while refusing to justify that of the other, to accept responsibility for the other without requiring reciprocity.

In addition to my theoretical and methodological aims for this project, I am concerned with my own response to the suffering around me and to the commodification of that suffering. In place of a choice between voyeuristic titillation and empathic immobilization, I propose a dialog between these positions.

The Suffering Body and Utopia: *Angels in America* and *Philoctetes*

Right now, the nearest thing to a Theater of Utopia I can imagine would be to sit in some local coliseum, say the Felt Forum, surrounded by my friends; down in the arena, the judges of the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals—the Cincinnati killer-clown-judges who just ruled that homosexuals aren't an identifiable class deserving of constitutionally-protected rights—are naked, chained, and being fed, one by one, to ravening, slathering wolverines; at the show's finale the wolverines chow down on the carcass of Newt Gingrich, a postprandial digestive.¹

When asked to “describe a utopian theater project and the utopian context within which it could be created and experienced,” playwright Tony Kushner describes a revival of the Roman gladiatorial spectacle, where he could watch right-wing ideologues torn to pieces by wild beasts.² In this chapter, I trace the way in which Kushner’s use of physical suffering in *Angels in America* instantiates this vision of theatrical utopia. Of particular interest is how and why Kushner makes do without the wolverines and moves his spectators away from a position of total antipathy towards the victims. My inquiry proceeds by way of a detour through Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, which presents a simpler mapping of pain onto the problem of creating community. Each play makes use of a visceral revulsion against the messy pain of illness physically presented on stage. The revulsion is played out within the dramatic frame, along with the pain. In focusing on these plays’ moments of suffering, I do not mean to imply that these are their most significant moments. But neither play can be fully understood without asking why particular characters suffer on stage, and why the episodes of suffering are placed at particular points in the narrative. I argue that both *Philoctetes* and *Angels in America*

¹Tony Kushner, “The Theater of Utopia,” *Theater* 26.1 (1995): 10.

²In response to a dystopic identity crisis seemingly produced by the falling away from past ideals, the editors of this double issue of *Theater* solicited utopian visions from “a group of theater practitioners with an energetic vision of the future.” Erika Munk and Tom Sellar, “Up Front: An Invitation to Utopia,” *Theater* 26.1 (1995): 5, 6.

make strategic use of the bodily performance of pain to construct an exceptionally inclusive utopia. In neither case is the utopia presented as a perfect world; rather, it shows a form of social organization preferable to the social crisis in which the spectators find themselves enmeshed.

The use of illness within dramatic narrative has most often been approached thematically by asking what moral quality or social force the illness represents. Even while arguing against such readings, Susan Sontag provides cogent examples in *Illness as Metaphor*. In the cultural imaginary of the nineteenth century, for instance, tuberculosis served to make concrete the combination of passion with deprivation and resignation. Thus, in *La Bohème*, Mimi suffers in a garret, while in *La Dame aux camélias*, Marguerite Gautier remains internally “a waif” although her circumstances are luxurious. Both live for love and die as a consequence of renunciation.³ The two plays at the center of my discussion can be (and have been) read in this manner. The putrid, festering snakebite nursed for nine years by the hero of *Philoctetes* has been read as a symbol for the corrosive anger which must be overcome in order for the Greeks to win the Trojan War. Although one might well expect the real and continuing presence of the disease in our lives to mitigate against reading the AIDS-related agonies in *Angels in America* metaphorically (especially in view of the eagerness of the religious right to embrace such interpretations), it has been identified as belonging to

³Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978), 15, 24. See also Susan Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989); Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). Gilman’s overall thesis is that images of disease represent chaos and dissolution, that we project our own fear of dissolution outward onto the Other, and see an Other who is diseased (1-3). The primary object of study is madness, with a final chapter on “Seeing the AIDS Patient.”

the “illness as metaphor” genre.⁴ Metaphorical interpretations cannot be eliminated from my discussion of the plays, but they are of peripheral interest.

Influenced by Sontag’s argument against metaphor, another approach begins with the recognition that the suffering of illness is not only performed according to a culture’s understanding of disease and injury, but also participates in the construction of that culture. As Arthur Kleinman puts it, embodied values serve to internalize social control and to materialize political ideology. These are turned into “corporeal feelings and physiological needs”—including but not limited to the pain and suffering of illness—which are culturally specific.⁵ Writers working within this critical framework argue that art and literature can enrich biomedicine. In *The Culture of Pain*, for example, David Morris devotes much of a chapter to *Philoctetes* in order to show what can be *made* of suffering. He argues that tragedy “takes as its main social function an extended meditation on human pain and suffering” and insists that “what we call ‘being’ cannot be understood apart from the body.”⁶ Morris views pain as the explicit subject of *Philoctetes* and suggests that doctors (and others) who deal with chronic pain would do well to heed *Philoctetes*’ reminder that some kinds of suffering cannot be comprehended but only witnessed and respected.⁷ Without denying the usefulness of

⁴Christopher Hitchens, *Angels in America* (review), *Vanity Fair* 56, March 1993, 72. See also Bruce Weber, *Angels in America* (review), *New York Times Magazine*, April 25, 1993, 28-31. Even if one does not read AIDS as a metaphor for spiritual and political decline, the moral positioning of Kushner’s characters is visible in their response to pain. The plays’ gay Republicans, Joe Pitt and Roy Cohn, wince and grimace but “tough it out,” while Prior Walter openly owns both his suffering and his sexuality and performs them with flair. Joe’s ulcer pain comes out of the closet just before he does, while Roy’s pain is amply enacted but stays closeted.

⁵Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 13. See also A.W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁶David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 246-48.

⁷*Ibid.*, 254-55.

such lessons, I note that this approach once again turns suffering into a transcendent phenomenon by lifting the dramatic illness out of its sociohistorical and its *theatrical* context.

Here, I approach illness dramas as blueprints for theatrical events and ask how episodes of suffering work to direct the viewer's attention and produce certain responses. These two very different plays both use pain to involve the spectator emotionally in the possible world on stage and to make her a virtual member of a utopic community within that world. Utopia, which is imagined as an alternate to reality, would seem to be at the opposite pole from ideology, which legitimates the existing order of things; however, to imagine a utopia requires imagining an alternative ideology.⁸ Utopic representations themselves proceed by means of interpellation, a concept delineated by Louis Althusser. Using Marx's early definition of ideology as "the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group,"⁹ Althusser proposes that ideology "has a material existence" because it is always realized in the actions of individuals. These actions are inserted in practices that are governed by rituals. Ideology produces subjects, but itself has no existence except in those subjects. "The category of subject is constitutive of all ideology," but only "*insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects.*"¹⁰ Ideology operates by "interpellating" or hailing individuals as subjects. Althusser uses the example of a police officer calling out, "Hey, you there!" in the street. Upon hearing this call, an individual recognizes that the call is

⁸For the relation of utopia to ideology, see Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 269-314, esp. 310.

⁹Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation) (January-April 1969)," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), 149.

¹⁰Althusser, "Ideology," 153-60, emphasis in the original.

addressed to her and turns around—thus becoming a subject within ideology. Although Althusser's example is sequential and has, in that sense, a "plot," ideology itself is plotless and timeless. Ideology is eternal in the same sense as the unconscious: not that it exists independent of time and history, but that it exists across time, without exception. Although ideology creates subjects through the process of interpellation, "individuals are *always-already* interpellated by ideology as subjects."¹¹ In other words, no individual exists outside of or exempt from ideology. I will argue that the episodes of physical suffering in *Philoctetes* and *Angels in America* hail the spectator as a compassionate witness, effectively interpellating her as a subject within the alternative ideology created on stage.

The existing order that ideology legitimates must be destroyed, or at least left behind temporally or spatially, in order for the utopia to exist.¹² While utopian communities are planned in reaction to the existing social order, with the intention that this plan be put into practice, the literary utopia presents social criticism in the form of an alternative society without seriously implying that it should come to pass. The utopic vision serves as a corrective, hopefully inspiring changes to particular features of the current lifeworld. Literary utopia is equally well placed in the past or the future, encompassing pastoral, primitivism, nostalgia for a lost Golden Age, and science fiction.¹³ Dragan Klaić points out that a theatrical utopia can never be speculative or

¹¹Althusser, "Ideology," 162-64, emphasis in the original.

¹²Utopia can be distinguished by place rather than by time. Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) was a harmonious state located on the periphery of the known world. See Dragan Klaić, *The Plot of the Future: Utopia and Dystopia in Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 29-30; Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 20-28. In *Ideology and Utopia*, Karl Mannheim selected noncongruence as the primary feature of utopia; however, Ricoeur argues that "what characterizes utopia is not an inability to be actualized but a claim to shatter," or "the capacity to break through the thickness of reality." Ricoeur, *Lectures*, 309.

¹³Krishan Kumar points out that utopic literature describes "the best (or in anti-utopia, the worst) society not as an abstract ideal, and not simply as a satirical foil to the existing society, but as a society in full operation in which we are invited vicariously to participate." *Utopia and*

predictive in the same way as utopic literature or even film, because the fictional world of fantasy exists as a functioning, physically concrete world on stage.¹⁴ Even when the dramatic time frame is placed in the future, the actors and other elements of performance are actually present. I would argue, however, that as a space of play the theatre is inherently utopian or dystopian. The theatre always serves as a space to put bodies together and imagine their situations and relations differently.

The critically neglected functions of the pain episodes in *Philoctetes* and *Angels in America* are (1) to interpellate the spectator as an imaginary “citizen” of the utopia on stage and (2) to work out the problem of incorporating those who refuse to belong. The extreme suffering in these plays evokes a response in the spectator. I need not posit a uniform response from all potential audience members in order to make this argument. One might expect a complex and changing response from any individual, with elements including pity, revulsion, horror, even empathic pain. Given an adequate production and a receptive spectator, the suffering enacted on stage serves to pull the spectator into the fictional world regardless of the particular response elicited. Pain engages the spectator’s kinesthetic and emotional faculties, even if these *might* at other times take a back seat to cognitive reception.¹⁵ Within the dramatic frame, Roy Cohn and Philoctetes are grotesque figures who refuse to join the utopian culture that lays claim to them or, to use Althusser’s formulation, they refuse to respond appropriately when hailed. But the changing behavior of a key figure—Belize in *Angels in America*, Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes*—guides the spectator towards creating an imaginary space

Anti-Utopia, 25.

¹⁴Klaić, *Plot of the Future*, 46. See also Alice Rayner, *Comic Persuasion: Moral Structure in British Comedy from Shakespeare to Stoppard* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 5-23, for an analysis of comedy using a utopic/dystopic schemata.

¹⁵For the relation of emotional engagement to cognitive understanding in Greek tragedy, see Ismene Lada, “Emotion and Meaning in Tragic Performance,” *Tragedy and The Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*, ed. M.S. Silk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 397-413.

for the recalcitrant sufferer. By the end of the play, he is understood to belong in spite of himself, and the group is able to think of itself as inclusionary without changing in order to accommodate the exile. Most importantly, the spectator is able to imagine the group in this way. Because the multiple utopic threads running through *Angels in America* are easily seen, I begin there. I then turn to *Philoctetes* because its structural deployment of suffering is simpler. Finally, I use models drawn from my analysis of *Philoctetes* to explore Roy Cohn's suffering in *Angels in America*.

Angels and Utopia

Kushner fills *Angels in America* with failed utopias, dystopias, and counterutopias (that is, utopias that are imagined in reaction to, and as commenting upon, utopias that are perceived to have failed). Descriptions of Heaven as a version of San Francisco are emblematic, ambiguously utopic or dystopic. When Roy asks what he'll find in the afterworld, his nurse Belize describes:

Big city, overgrown with weeds, but flowering weeds. On every corner a wrecking crew and something new and crooked going up catty-corner to that. Windows missing in every edifice like broken teeth, fierce gusts of gritty wind, and a gray high sky full of ravens. . . . Piles of trash, but lapidary like rubies and obsidian, and diamond-colored cowspit streamers in the wind. And voting booths. . . . And everyone in Balenciaga gowns with red corsages, and big dance palaces full of music and lights and racial impurity and gender confusion. . . . And all the deities are creole, mulatto, brown as the mouths of rivers. . . . Race, taste, and history finally overcome. And you ain't there.¹⁶

¹⁶Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1996), 76. Further page references will be included parenthetically in the text, prefaced with the numeral 2. Page references to *Angels in America, Part One*:

Roy is caught up in the vision but mistakes it for Hell.

The audience has already heard the Angel tell Prior Walter, “Heaven is a city Much Like San Francisco,” not only in appearance but in subjection to “The Threat of Seismic Catastrophe” ever since God abandoned it on April 18, 1906. Human progress and migration entranced and unsettled God, who sailed off on voyages of discovery in imitation of man, “his least creation.” The Angel summons Prior Walter to lead humanity to stasis: “*YOU HAVE DRIVEN HIM AWAY! YOU MUST STOP MOVING!*” (2:42-44). Just as Belize’s Heaven looks like Hell to Roy, this Paradise functions as a dystopia for Prior. The “prophet” chooses to return to his AIDS-related infections, to his lesions, to his hurting leg, protein in his urine, a butt chapped from diarrhea, to shitting blood, to a life of pain where he’s been deserted by his lover, rather than to dwell in the static bureaucracy of heaven.¹⁷ He tells the Angel that people live through even worse and still want to stay alive. At this level, the suffering of Kushner’s characters provides the spectator with a model for courage in the face of adversity—the kind of lesson that David Morris finds in *Philoctetes*.

Heaven is far from the only utopia in *Angels in America*, however. On the beach, Louis Ironson describes a pre-AIDS Golden Age to Joe Pitt: “There used to be guys in the dunes even when it snowed. Nothing deterred us from the task at hand. . . . Exploration. Across an unmapped terrain. The body of the homosexual human male. Here, or the Ramble, or the scrub pines on Fire Island, or the St. Mark’s Baths” (2:69). In contrast with this exuberant promiscuity, the romantic couple is thoroughly dystopic. Joe leaves his wife Harper, and Louis leaves Prior, but the affair between Joe and Louis fails as well, and the play strongly suggests that affectionate bonds are more

Millennium Approaches (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993) will be prefaced with the numeral 1. Stage directions will be quoted as they are printed in the text, in italics.

¹⁷See 1:39 for the list of pains; 2:44-46 for heaven.

durable than passionate ones. Kushner's *perestroika* (reorganization) results in a social grouping more workable than any dyad: Prior, Belize, Louis, and Hannah Pitt (Joe's mother) face the audience together in the epilogue, people who love and care for one another without bonds of blood or legal sanction, without exclusivity (and implicitly without sexual relations).

On a more topical level, Kushner sets the characters' various struggles with illness and relationships against the background of Ronald Reagan's utopian rhetoric, thereby framing that background as dystopic. In an early scene, Joe says to his wife: "America has rediscovered itself. Its sacred position among nations. And people aren't ashamed of that like they used to be. This is a great thing. The truth restored. Law restored. That's what President Reagan has done . . ." (1:26).¹⁸ The Pitts are Mormons who have reversed their religion's historical journey to utopia, leaving Salt Lake City for New York City.¹⁹

America itself is presented as a failed utopia. Kushner's "gay fantasia on national themes" begins with the nostalgia of those who left the Old World and are now leaving this one: Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz eulogizes Louis's grandmother, who carried the old world "on her back across the ocean," bringing to America the "clay of some Litvak shtetl" and the "air of the steppes" (1:10). America is thus introduced as no-place, an *outopos*. The America described by the Rabbi is not a real world, not a

¹⁸This testament to 1980s Republican utopia comes immediately before Joe's first meeting with Louis, and one line through the plays traces his journey out of the closet. The journey has its pain markers—both pain and politics are thoroughly interwoven with their developing sexual relationship. During a second and more open flirtation with Louis, Joe winces and slugs Pepto-Bismol for an ulcer. The scene takes place in front of the courthouse where he writes opinions for a conservative judge, and his reluctance to go back inside reads (to the audience, if not to the character) as a germ of discomfort with his politics as well as the more obvious, growing discomfort with heterosexuality. The relationship ends in pain and politics as well, with Joe beating Louis up as they fight about those opinions (2:106-11).

¹⁹For a discussion of changing sex roles and utopian communities in the nineteenth century, see Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias—the Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

culture, but a “melting pot where nothing melted.” Still, the *outopos* is also a *eutopos*, or good place: implicit in the story of the grandmother’s “Great Voyage” is the fact that she could *live* in America, free of pogroms. Within the eulogy, the formlessness of America increases until even the negative construction of America as not-Europe is gone. “Pretty soon . . . all the old ones will be dead” (1:11). In the opening scene, then, Kushner clears the stage for a new world.

Kathleen Chalfant’s cross-gender performance as the Rabbi is followed by Ron Leibman as Roy Cohn, “conduct[ing] business with great energy, impatience and sensual abandon: gesticulating, shouting, cajoling, crooning, playing the phone, receiver and hold button with virtuosity and love” (1:11).²⁰ A review of the earlier production at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles refers to Leibman’s “oversized but appropriately ecstatic amorality” and says that if the set “had more scenery, Leibman would be chewing it.”²¹ A less enthusiastic critic noted that the character was written and played as a familiar theatrical type, attributing to the “doomed and unrepentant villain . . . the same irresistible showbiz glamour as a live elephant.”²² At the same time that these opening scenes lay the groundwork for an exploration of America and gay citizenship, they make it clear that the production will indeed be “actor-driven,” as Kushner explicitly recommends (1:5). Grounded in these *tour de force* performances, even without its flying angel, the “fabulous” theatricality of Kushner’s play is capable of providing the sort of utopic experience that Richard Dyer

²⁰My observations are based on the work of actors Ron Leibman as Roy Cohn, David Marshall Grant as Joe Pitt, Stephen Spinella as Prior Walter, and Jeffrey Wright as Belize. Tony Kushner, “Angels in America,” Dir. George C. Wolfe, New York: Walter Kerr Theatre, 1995 (Theatre on Film and Tape archive of the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library).

²¹Linda Winer, “An Epic of Outrage, Healing and Hope,” *New York Newsday*, 13 November 1992, 63.

²²Thomas M. Disch, “Can Kushner’s ‘Angels’ Really be Immortal?” *Daily News*, 8 December 1993, 48.

locates in musical films. Dyer argues that utopian potential exists not so much in models provided by entertainment but in the feelings produced by their non-representational elements such as “colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork,” all of which give him the experience of “what utopia would feel like.”²³ I argue that an actor’s incarnation of his character’s suffering can also—perhaps surprisingly—enable a spectator to experience utopian feelings.

Although pain may serve to isolate the sufferer in daily life (*pace* Scarry), aesthetic and punitive uses of pain *also* create bonds.²⁴ One of Kushner’s explicit aims is to remake America, the imaginary nation, as a queer nation.²⁵ Dramatically, AIDS produces the suffering bodies around which characters *and* spectators bond. Indeed, David Román describes *Angels in America* as an opportunity for “gay men in the midst of plague . . . to continue to interrogate what it means to be part of a community in these difficult times.”²⁶ For him, to attend the opening night in Los Angeles on

²³Richard Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 273. In addition to its thematic treatment of utopia and its utopic theatricality, the Broadway production of *Angels in America* was widely perceived as economically utopic. See, for example, David Savran, “Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How *Angels in America* Reconstructs the Nation,” in *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, ed. Deborah Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 13 (orig. pub. *Theatre Journal* 47 [May 1995]: 207-27); David Román, “November 1, 1992: AIDS/*Angels in America*,” in Geis and Kruger, 51; Alex Roe, “Letter from San Francisco,” *TheaterWeek*, 15 July 1991, 41; Laurie Winer, “Not Ready for the Rialto,” *Wall Street Journal*, 24 February 1993, A12; Janelle Reinelt, “Notes on *Angels in America* as American Epic Theater,” in Geis and Kruger, 237.

²⁴Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Mitchell Merback suggests that the late-medieval body in pain was *not* a sign of alienation and isolation, but of intersubjective bonds formed by empathy. Suffering could produce *communitas*—far from being a “world-destroying” force in Elaine Scarry’s terms, the infliction of pain created a world. Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 20. See further discussion in Chapter Five.

²⁵As Ron Scapp suggests, “*Angels in America* is an attempt to extend the political imagination of Americans through fantasy”—a fantasy in which gay men are fully recognized citizens. “The Vehicle of Democracy: Fantasies Toward a (Queer) Nation,” in Geis and Kruger, 93. See also Savran, “Ambivalence,” 13-39; Allen J. Frantzen, “Prior to the Normans: Anglo-Saxons in *Angels in America*,” in Geis and Kruger, 147.

²⁶Román, “November 1, 1992,” 42.

November 1, 1992, on the eve of the presidential election that ended the Reagan/Bush years, “was to participate in a public ritual of hope.”²⁷ At that particular point in American history, Román saw “a shift from the utopic to the possible” in “Prior Walter’s journey with AIDS, from his fear and despair in *Millennium Approaches* to his newfound power in *Perestroika*.”²⁸

Like Román, I was most drawn to Prior, and it seems safe to assume that many spectators were similarly attracted. Not only does Prior suffer severe AIDS-related pain on stage, the ugliness of his illness frightens his lover Louis into deserting him (just as the Greeks desert Philoctetes). The illness is introduced with the characters, establishing from the start that in this relationship the sick partner must take the caretaker role, because the healthy partner is so frightened by the illness. “K.S., baby. Lesion number one. Lookit. The wine-dark kiss of the angel of death,” Prior jokes (1:21).²⁹ Louis then confides to the Rabbi that he fears his “neo-Hegelian positivist sense of constant historical progress towards happiness or perfection or something” might make it impossible to “incorporate sickness into his sense of how things are supposed to go. Maybe vomit . . . and sores and disease . . . really frighten him” (1:25). Soon thereafter he is found by Joe, crying in the men’s room of the Brooklyn Federal Court of Appeals, and his desertion is underway. Although Prior’s bodily experience grows more important, throughout the first act of *Millennium Approaches*

²⁷Ibid., 52.

²⁸Ibid., 53.

²⁹Spinella’s performance is not theatrically expansive like Leibman’s and Chalfant’s in the earlier scenes. Both he and Joe Mantello play in a more “natural” register, as do the other actors in general (including Chalfant when she plays Hannah Pitt). Their acting skill is not made visible alongside their characters but appears seamless. The *character* Prior Walter is theatrically expansive, however, and this adds another texture to the theatrical experience. Although both the *character* and the historical *person* Roy Cohn are also theatrically expansive (Ross Posnock calls Cohn “a monstrous brat whose pugnacity was as histrionic as everything else about him”), Leibman’s performance seems to me significantly “larger” than Spinella’s. See Ross Posnock, “Roy Cohn in America,” *Raritan* 13.3 (1994), 64.

the focus remains on anticipatory suffering for both Louis and Prior. In the beginning, Louis's feelings are brought forward first, and the physical manifestations of Prior's AIDS are mentioned rather than shown: "I don't think there's any uninfected part of me. My heart is pumping polluted blood. I feel dirty" (1:34). "My leg hurts. There's protein in my urine, . . . My butt is chapped from diarrhea and yesterday I shat blood" (1:39).

After intermission, Prior's suffering moves powerfully into the physical register: Act Two finds him on the floor in the middle of the night, unable to breathe, with a high fever, screaming not to touch his leg when Louis tries to help him stand, begging him not to call the ambulance, shitting blood while Louis makes the call, and finally fainting. From this point forward, though, Prior's physical suffering moves gradually into the background. When he reappears a few scenes later, and Belize makes his first appearance in Prior's hospital room, the pain is understood and will from this point forward remain visible in Spinella's bearing and gestures but will never be performed quite so insistently. It is also understood by this point that Louis has jumped ship. Generalizing from my own experience, the pain episodes not only create sympathy for Prior and promote identification with him, but also distance the spectator from Louis and ensure that he does not occupy the play's moral center. I react differently to Prior's pain than Louis does, although I can admit to having reacted badly to the *real* pain and suffering of loved ones on occasion. This is one form of utopic feeling produced by the play: I respond with compassion and the desire to stay with Prior through his illness. My response most closely mirrors Belize, former drag-queen, former lover of Prior, the play's sole African-American "trapped in a world of white

people” (2:91), now nurse to both Prior and Roy.³⁰ I will return to Belize’s role in the final section of this chapter, when I discuss Roy’s suffering.

Prior’s pain moves into the foreground once again in Act Four of *Perestroika* (although its intensity does not match that seen earlier), first with an attack of respiratory trouble after he refuses to reconcile with Louis (2:83). A short time later, Prior follows Joe to the Mormon Visitor Center, where Hannah is working, and becomes so ill that she takes him to the hospital in a cab (2:98). Because she is drawn in by his suffering, Hannah is detached from her son and his wife and bonded to Prior.³¹ As Harper suggests in the final act, good things are created when people leave something bad, not when they imagine how the world should be: “I’ve finally found the secret of all that Mormon energy. Devastation. That’s what makes people migrate, build things” (2:119). In other words, Hannah’s compassion for Prior’s suffering pushes her past a significant barrier—again, this can be read as a lesson about the uses of pain. Hannah’s transformation might constitute a model for a conservative spectator, although for many others there is no significant barrier to sympathy for Prior. The same is not the case, however, for the play’s other primary sufferer. Kushner uses Roy Cohn to create a worst-case scenario: in remaking America to give gay men full citizenship, how can he accommodate a man who not only insists to the end of his life on remaining in the closet, but also actively works against Kushner’s utopic liberal pluralism?

³⁰Framji Minwalla discusses Belize as the ethical center of the play. He notes the “blankness” of the character and argues that it’s important that this most transgressive persona is *not* marginal to the plays’ moral exploration, although he is incidental to the plot. “When Girls Collide: Considering Race in *Angels in America*,” in Geis and Kruger, 104-05. Savran notes that Belize’s rebuke to Louis, “you’re ambivalent about everything” could well be addressed by a “conscientious” spectator to the play itself. “Ambivalence,” 24, quoting 1:95.

³¹As a Mormon, Hannah is well positioned to explain prophecies and angels. She is also the only character other than Prior to be visited with an angelic orgasm.

Kushner saw the commission by Eureka Theater's Oskar Eustis and Tony Taccone in 1986 as a good opportunity to write a play about being gay. Cohn, by whom he was fascinated as a child, had just died, and Kushner enjoyed Cohn's death. He says, "The incredible fact is that this monster died of AIDS . . . getting outed by *biology* is a pretty remarkable thing."³² But he was jolted out of his complacent enjoyment by an article equating Cohn's political and sexual corruption.³³ Michael Cadden identifies this book review by Robert Sherrill in the *Nation* as typical of the gleeful "pinklisting" that Cohn's death occasioned in the liberal press. This homophobic and heterosexist phenomenon bore a closer resemblance to the blacklists that Cohn helped produce as chief counsel to Senator Joseph McCarthy than to any pinklist intended to foster community pride.³⁴

Cadden calls Roy "the Satanic catalyst of the piece," who "forc[es] crises of identity and identification in many of the men who surround him."³⁵ Savran identifies

³²Linda Winer, "Playwright of the Apocalypse," *New York Newsday*, 1 November 1992, 13. In order to keep the dramatic figure distinct from the historical figure, I will refer to the latter as "Cohn," and use first names for all of Kushner's characters, including "Roy."

³³Arthur Lubow, "Tony Kushner's Paradise Lost," *New Yorker*, 30 November 1992, 60.

³⁴Michael Cadden, "Strange Angel: The Pinklisting of Roy Cohn," in Geis and Kruger, 79-82. Even scholarly writing about Cohn and *Angels in America* too easily falls into the trap of rejoicing in the metaphorical ramifications of his illness without regard for the implications for other AIDS sufferers. Tying Cohn's moral character to his bodily ailment suggests that all sufferers are in some way responsible for their illnesses—just the line of thinking that Sontag argues against in *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors*. For example, an otherwise thoughtful article discussing Cohn's "corporealization of the law" is littered with alternating references to disease and perversion. See James R. Quinn, "Corpus Juris Tertium: Redemptive Jurisprudence in *Angels in America*," *Theatre Journal* 48 (1996): 79-90. Quinn likens Cohn's corrupt legal practice to "an incipient cancer" that constitutes "a diseased version of the norm," as is his "ailing regard for truth and sickly abuse of procedure" (82). Cohn is guilty of a "perverted indeterminacy" (83), and "the corrupt, diseased, tumorous nature of Cohn's lawyering also has important textual and thematic links with the physical infection and ensuing 'corruption' of Cohn's flesh and blood with AIDS" (85).

³⁵Cadden, "Strange Angel," 84. Quinn notes that Cohn is not only Satanic, appearing "like a fallen prophet at the end of the world," but also Christlike, "in that he brings a new, or successor, law that is supposed to supplant a former law"—although the new law brought by Cohn is as corrupt as that which it was intended to replace. "Corpus Juris Tertium," 86.

him as “the embodiment and guarantor of dystopia,” the polar opposite of Prior, “the character who must endure the most agony” and thus serves as the play’s “vehicle of hope and redemption” and “the prophet who foresees a new age.”³⁶ As Savran points out, this opposition is one of the many oxymorons in *Angels in America* “by which the unimaginable allows itself to be imagined.”³⁷ Kushner explicitly grounds his angel of history in Walter Benjamin’s conception of utopia and dystopia, suggesting that they are inextricably bound up together. As Klaić writes, “Utopia is the deeper, disguised infrastructure of dystopia, the hidden premise of dystopian vision, and dystopia has become in our times a *via negativa* to express utopian strivings.”³⁸ I argue that, as a dystopic figure, Roy ensures that utopia does not simply reverse the existing order. If Kushner’s utopian re-vision of a queer America can include even Roy, then it is a true improvement. As Kushner noted in the program for the London production, “The ironies surrounding [Cohn’s] death engendered a great deal of homophobic commentary, and among gay men and lesbians considerable introspection. How broad, how embracing was our sense of community? Did it encompass an implacable foe like Roy?”³⁹

Roy embodies a kind of right-wing, individualistic American amorality that is, for the play’s presumed audience, dystopic. This is the portion of the character closest

³⁶Savran, “Ambivalence,” 17-18.

³⁷Ibid., 19. For a cogent treatment of the dialectic in *Angels in America* between apocalyptic and progressive views of history, see Matthew Wilson Smith, “*Angels in America*: A Progressive Apocalypse,” *Theater* 29.3 (1999): 153-65. Smith argues that the structure of the plays is utopian, with a series of breakdowns often leading to surprising reintegrations (163-64).

³⁸Klaić, *Plot of the Future*, 4.

³⁹Program of the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain for *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes. Part One: Millennium Approaches* (British premiere at the Cottesloe Theatre, January 1992), quoted in Cadden, “Strange Angel,” 83.

to Cohn, the historical figure.⁴⁰ But Kushner also has Roy articulate a vision of himself and his power that resembles—albeit in an ironically skewed form—Judith Butler’s conception of performative gender identity.⁴¹ Because he rejects the *implicit* meanings of the term “homosexual,” he rejects the term itself. He tells his doctor that it’s a label for “men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a pissant antidiscrimination bill through City Council. Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout” (1:45). Interestingly enough, Prior makes much the same assessment of what it means to be gay. After the funeral of “a major NYC drag-and-style queen,” he says to Belize, “That ludicrous spectacle in there, just a parody of the funeral of someone who *really* counted. We don’t; faggots; we’re just a bad dream the real world is having, and the real world’s waking up” (2:34). Roy claims an identity determined not by who he has sex with, but by “who will pick up the phone when I call, who owes me favors.” Because he can pick up the phone and within five minutes reach not merely the President (Reagan), but the President’s *wife*, he cannot be a homosexual: he is “a heterosexual man . . . who fucks around with guys” (1:45-46). Roy’s utopic vision is the quintessentially American dream to seize control of categories and to define himself. Kushner maintains an ironic stance with respect to Roy’s power, however, and that irony is lodged squarely in the body. Roy thinks he can define his own illness (as liver cancer), but the doctor tells him, “you can call it any damn thing you want, Roy, but what it boils down to is very bad news” (1:46). Roy vehemently dis-identifies himself as a homosexual, boldly claiming that his sexual practices are entirely beside the point. Yet those very practices are understood—by

⁴⁰For an insightful discussion of the historical Roy Cohn and dramatic figures created by Kushner, Ron Vawter, and the Chicago physical theatre group Goat Island, see Stephen J. Bottoms, “Restaging Roy: Citizen Cohn and the Search for Xanadu,” *Theatre Journal* 48 (1996): 157-84. See also Posnock, “Roy Cohn in America.”

⁴¹See Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” in *Performing Feminisms*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 270-82.

everyone *except* Roy—to have resulted in HIV infection. Kushner uses Roy’s AIDS-related suffering to grant him queer citizenship rather than just “pinklisting” and demonizing the man. My reading of Roy’s suffering in *Angels in America* is informed by the use of pain to reintegrate Philoctetes; thus, I turn now to the earlier play.

Philoctetes’ Pain

Many elements of the story were familiar to Sophocles’ audience when his *Philoctetes* took first prize at the City Dionysia in 409 B.C.E. Philoctetes was mentioned briefly in the *Iliad*, and summaries written in the first century C.E. show that he figured more importantly in the *Little Iliad* and the *Cypria*. Aeschylus had dramatized the story, and Euripides’ version was produced in 431.⁴² To give a brief “life history” based on these materials: Only Philoctetes would light a funeral pyre to end the suffering of Heracles, who was in agony from the poisoned cloak of Glauke. In return, he received the hero’s bow and a supply of arrows dipped in the Hydra’s venom. He willingly joined the Greek forces journeying to Troy but was bitten by a serpent guarding the shrine of a cthonic deity, Chryse. The unhealing wound produced an unbearable stench, so Philoctetes was abandoned on Lemnos, and the Greeks sailed on to Troy. Now, after nine years of war, they’ve learned that Philoctetes and the bow are essential to victory. Sophocles’ audience can safely be assumed to know this background story.

Sophocles makes it explicit that Odysseus is personally responsible for leaving Philoctetes behind and begins with the problem: how can Philoctetes be brought to Troy by the very man who abandoned him on Lemnos nine years earlier? Sophocles’ primary

⁴²Dio Chrysostom summarizes the *Little Iliad* and the *Cypria* in *Oration* 52, and the plays by Aeschylus and Euripides in *Oration* 59. T.B.L. Webster, introduction to Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 3. Sophocles also wrote a *Philoctetes at Troy*. See Dana Sutton, *The Lost Sophocles* (Boston: University Press of America, 1984), 104.

innovations are to make Lemnos an uninhabited island and to introduce Neoptolemus as the agent through whom Odysseus tries to trick Philoctetes into boarding a ship bound for Troy.⁴³ The opening exchange between Odysseus and Neoptolemus sets up a conflict between persuasion or force (the methods preferred by Neoptolemus) and trickery (Odysseus' favored method of operation).⁴⁴ Odysseus first establishes that Lemnos is an "untrodden" isle, "nor inhabited"; second, that Neoptolemus is the son of Achilles, whose nobility is emphasized; third, that he personally abandoned Philoctetes in this place long ago because the wounded man's uncontrolled howling made proper sacrifice impossible (1-10).⁴⁵ In the first ten lines of the play, Sophocles establishes location and *dramatis personae*, makes clear his innovations, and also introduces the problem that pain constitutes for obligation. That is, in the past Philoctetes' suffering was an obstacle to the Greek mission to Troy. While many commentators have viewed

⁴³See the illuminating discussion by Peter W. Rose, "Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the Teachings of the Sophists," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 80 (1976): 49-105. Rose argues that Sophocles' innovations function to juxtapose the three stages of human social development as the sophists conceived of it: first, the presocial struggle to survive in a hostile environment, represented by Philoctetes alone on Lemnos; second, the social contract or compact between men, which develops spontaneously between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus; and third, the education in rhetoric and political science of those who aspire to power in a democratic society, represented by Odysseus. See also Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization* (Oberlin College, 1981), 292-327.

⁴⁴Citations to *Philoctetes* will be given by line number within the text. Unless otherwise noted, quotations will be taken from Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, in *Greek Tragedies*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 43-106. I also consulted and will quote from *Philoctetes*, ed. T.B.L. Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); and *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments: Part IV, The Philoctetes*, trans. Sir Richard C. Jebb (Amsterdam: Servio-Publishers, 1962). The standard interpretation of the prologue is that it establishes Neoptolemus as honest and noble, and agreeing only reluctantly to use Odysseus' methods. These characteristics show him to be a true heir to Achilles. See James C. Hogan, *A Commentary on the Plays of Sophocles* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 313. Webster identifies the stress on Achilles' nobility as an instruction to the audience that Neoptolemus' lineage is the key to his behavior (66 n.3).

⁴⁵According to Jebb, silence was required for sacrifice in ancient Greece. All who were present were sprinkled with consecrated water, silence was proclaimed, and then the offering began. Jebb, 7 n. 8ff.

this as an excuse,⁴⁶ I suggest taking Odysseus' words at face value, which makes the problem posed by unseemly suffering both real and disruptive. Late in the game, however, the Greeks discover that they cannot do without unseemly suffering and must return to Lemnos to retrieve the sufferer. During the course of the play, Neoptolemus comes to terms with suffering. I argue that this enables him to take his proper place in the sack of Troy and provides a model for young aristocratic citizens in the audience.

Odysseus sends Neoptolemus first to investigate Philoctetes' cave, providing an opportunity to describe its contents and, by doing so, to create a repulsive mental picture of his habitat for the audience. Verbal description picks out items that would be too small to be seen properly in the amphitheatre: a bed of leaves, a badly made wooden cup, and pus-soaked rags (31-39). Neoptolemus utters two interjections of disgust when he sees the rags and then describes them (38). Verbal description also guides spectator reception: the first items representing Philoctetes are described as being uncivilized and even disgusting. He has not overcome his surroundings any more than he was able to overcome his pain at the shrine of Chryse. If anything, Philoctetes has made his environment worse than it might be. Odysseus has just described the cave as he remembers it: two openings with resting places in the sunshine and a cool breeze inside that aids sleep in the summer (16-20).⁴⁷ These contrasting descriptions make the natural landscape more attractive than its human inhabitant. Carola Greengard points out the many literary precedents helping to prepare the way for a "wild man," one of

⁴⁶Ivan M. Linforth even suggests that Odysseus is ashamed of his part in abandoning Philoctetes. Linforth, "Philoctetes: The Play and the Man," *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 15.3 (1956): 98.

⁴⁷Webster says that Odysseus describes it "like a house-agent, implying that its desirability mitigated his cruelty" (68 n.16); David B. Robinson concurs in this assessment. Robinson, "Topics in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Classical Quarterly* 19 (1969): 37. Commenting on the disdain of other critics for the character, Hogan says, "Friendless Odysseus." Hogan, *Commentary*, 314.

the most important being the Cyclops who is blinded and tricked in *The Odyssey*.⁴⁸ The spectator is well prepared to find Philoctetes grotesque and repulsive.

Odysseus now introduces the need for cunning or trickery to beguile Philoctetes as well as the imperative to obey orders (50-85). Neoptolemus must tell the false story provided him by Odysseus, even though it goes against his honest nature.

Paradoxically, he is to show himself a true son of Achilles by temporary mendacity.

Neoptolemus argues first for force, then persuasion, rather than deceit. Odysseus explains why neither alternative can succeed. Only now does Neoptolemus learn that he alone is not sufficient for victory at Troy, but that Philoctetes' bow is also necessary. The audience is reminded of both requirements. In the prologue, then, Sophocles has introduced characters, location, and background, and established the conflict between ethics and duty. Odysseus has persuaded Neoptolemus to go along with a deceitful plan because one must go against nature or inbred character in order to accomplish that which is necessary (one's destiny).⁴⁹ Put in terms of the military utopia to which I will return later, during battle a young man must disregard the demands of family line or *oikos* and serve the needs of the *polis* and his fellow hoplite warriors.

The entrance of the chorus of Neoptolemus' sailors moves the focus to Philoctetes' suffering and away from the need to capture him.⁵⁰ When Neoptolemus

⁴⁸Carola Greengard, *Theatre in Crisis: Sophocles' Reconstruction of Genre and Politics in Philoctetes* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1987), 37-39.

⁴⁹Martha Nussbaum provides a lucid discussion of the ethical positions represented by Odysseus and Philoctetes, and the movement of Neoptolemus from one to the other. She finds particular value in the opposition of two words for "must," *chrē* and *dei*. Odysseus characteristically uses the "objective" form, *dei*, to express obligation due to a state of affairs with no regard for an agent's subjective consent. Philoctetes uses *chrē*, thus emphasizing not only the importance of the action but also the fact that it is *his* action. Neoptolemus shifts from the objective to the subjective term immediately after Philoctetes' attack of pain. Nussbaum, "Consequences and Character in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Philosophy and Literature* 1 (Fall 1976): 25-53, esp. 29-30, 46, citing S. Bernadete, "*Chrē* and *Dei* in Plato and Others," *Glotta* 43 (1965): 297.

⁵⁰As noted by Jebb, 31.

instructs the sailors that they can be of use later, they proceed to express pity for Philoctetes' suffering and loneliness. They marvel that the gods can bring such desolation so capriciously. Neoptolemus replies that the suffering was not capricious but was necessary so that Philoctetes would not bring his infallible arrows to Troy any earlier than this (191-200). The chorus sings of Philoctetes' agony, and Neoptolemus speaks sensibly and calmly.⁵¹ Immediately after Neoptolemus' justification, the chorus describes the sound of Philoctetes' agonized entrance—his cries announce his presence, giving the characters onstage and the audience time for anticipation and reinforcing the importance of his suffering as well.⁵² Philoctetes is overjoyed to see his visitors' Greek clothing. Because they remain silent, he asks them to speak, and not to shrink away in fear—to react with pity rather than terror. This could be due to his awareness of his own condition, but a stronger reading would be that Neoptolemus and the chorus are silent and horrified by the sight of him, and that he responds to their nonverbal reaction to him.⁵³ Neoptolemus identifies himself and his companions as Greeks after an initial silence, but I see no reason for that silence to imply hesitation rather than repulsion. Why should one assume that Philoctetes misinterprets the reason for their silence, rather than considering the implications of his correct assessment? Why not assume that, rather than showing something about Neoptolemus' psychological state, the structure of the opening exchange between these two characters functions to show what

⁵¹See Webster, 79; Linforth, "Philoctetes: The Play and the Man," 106-07. Linforth says that Neoptolemus is troubled but pushes aside his scruples here, which I see as an anachronistic reading-in of psychological subtext.

⁵²A lengthy debate has been carried on between those critics who think that Philoctetes enters from within his cave, having entered it by the second (offstage) mouth (see Webster, 80) and those who believe that both mouths are visible onstage and that Philoctetes enters up the parados (see Robinson, "Topics"; see also J.F. Davidson, "The Cave of Philoctetes," *Mnemosyne* 43.3/4 (1990): 307-15). There seems to be general agreement that he is heard long before he is seen. Some critics think that his cries can be heard; some, that the cries exist at this point only in the description by the chorus and thus in the imagination of the spectator.

⁵³Webster says: "Neoptolemus hesitates at the thought of deceiving such a pitiable figure" (86), but I see nothing in the text to support such an interpretation.

the audience needs to know about Philoctetes: that he still loves Greece, even though he hates the Atreidae and Odysseus; that he is lonely and abject; that he expects to be recognized and remembered by those who abandoned him. Just as importantly, Neoptolemus' reluctance and pretended lack of knowledge (he feigns ignorance of Philoctetes' identity and history) motivate Philoctetes' long description of his abandonment, his miserable life on the island, and the occasional visitors who refused to take him home (254-316). He stresses his suffering, his bitter anger at those who abandoned him to it, and ends with the wish that they should suffer as he has.

Pretending to share Philoctetes' anger at the Atreidae and Odysseus, Neoptolemus establishes a bond of friendship and prepares to bring Philoctetes aboard for what the latter thinks is a voyage to his home. In addition to its role in the plot, Neoptolemus' lie works together with his extended account of which Greeks are now dead (everyone good) and which remain alive (only the bad), to sketch a military dystopia to which Philoctetes *cannot* belong. Philoctetes is thus established as a good Greek, whose anger is justified. Yet because the audience is aware that Neoptolemus is lying, Philoctetes' perspective can co-exist with a conventional esteem for Odysseus and the Atreidae as cultural heroes.⁵⁴

Just as they are ready to leave, however, Philoctetes suffers a three-phase attack of his sickness: the dialogue indicates that he stops suddenly, "in silence transfixed" (731). Neoptolemus describes what's happening, as Philoctetes alternately cries out and claims that nothing is wrong. He finally gives up trying to hide the pain, says "I am being devoured" (745, Webster tr.), and begs to have his heel cut off. He explains that

⁵⁴Any ancient spectator could reasonably be expected to know both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and to make comparisons. Segal points out that the uninhabited island setting is reminiscent of the "seascapes of Homer, and especially of Achilles' solitary beach in *Iliad* 1.349-50," but that the resemblance "suggests an ironic negation of the heroic world." *Tragedy and Civilization*, 323. Greengard argues persuasively for reading Philoctetes against the hero of the *Odyssey* as well. She identifies the *Odyssey* as the prototype for the romance genre and points out the many parallels with the *Philoctetes*. *Theatre in Crisis*, 63-66.

the sickness comes to him at intervals, when it is not “wandering in other places,” asks Neoptolemus not to be afraid, and entreats him to stay through the attack. Philoctetes hands over the bow and asks Neoptolemus to guard it until the pain lessens, noting that he will then fall asleep for a time (762-74). What deceit failed to accomplish, pain has brought about: Neoptolemus now holds the bow, the object of his “hunt.”

During a second wave of pain (782-807), Philoctetes begs Neoptolemus to throw him into the volcano on Lemnos, duplicating the favor he performed for Heracles—that is, facilitating death by fire.

Death, death, how is it that I can call on you
always, day in, day out, and you cannot come to me?
Boy, my good boy, take up this body of mine
and burn it on what they call the Lemnian fire.
I had the resolution once to do this for another,
the son of Zeus, and so obtained the arms
that you now hold. (799-803)

If Neoptolemus were to comply with the request, he would gain the bow by the same means as Philoctetes did. He can easily keep it, of course, whether or not he burns Philoctetes.

The second attack wanes immediately after this request, and Neoptolemus remains silent. In reply to Philoctetes’ “What do you say? What do you say? Nothing? Where are you, boy?” Neoptolemus answers, “I have been in pain for you; I have been in sorrow for your pain” (803-06). Neoptolemus’ silence is generally read as evidence of a moral dilemma. Jebb’s note is typical: “A genuine pity for the sufferer is beginning to move him; and he knows that, if the plot succeeds, this wretched man will be carried

to the place which he most dreads.”⁵⁵ In my opinion, the arguments go too far in assigning modern responses to characters in Greek tragedy and to fifth-century Athenian spectators.

The text itself provides evidence against automatic spectator sympathy for Philoctetes. The moment I have just described is Neoptolemus’ first expression of compassion. Up to this point, pity has been restricted to the chorus of sailors who accompany him. In the *parados*, they shift focus to Philoctetes’ suffering, when Neoptolemus and Odysseus have been concerned only with the need to capture him by guile. Then during the first episode, the chorus repeatedly express pity for Philoctetes, while Neoptolemus concentrates on his pretended anger. The sincerity of the chorus’ sympathy has been debated (to a slightly lesser extent than that of Neoptolemus),⁵⁶ but whether it is real or false is immaterial to my argument: structurally, it prepares the way for Philoctetes to be taken aboard *this* time, when he never has been in the past. In describing his nine years of misery on Lemnos, Philoctetes says that ships have stopped on the island, and *no one* would take him away with them (300-12). He begins his entreaty to be taken home by saying, “I know that there is horrible discomfort in having me on board” (474-75). The care devoted to the issue shows that rescuing the “wild man” cannot be taken for granted, but must be carefully prepared—for the audience, as well as for Philoctetes.

⁵⁵Jebb, 131 n. 804f. Like many other critics, David Morris locates the drama’s center in the transformation of Neoptolemus, and argues that this episode is the key. *Culture of Pain*, 252-53. Critical debate on *Philoctetes* has centered on the question, when does Neoptolemus stop lying? William Calder III stands alone in answering “never,” taking the position that Neoptolemus’ pity and his “ethical” transformation are part of his deception. “Sophoclean Apologia: *Philoctetes*,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 12.2 (1971): 153-74. If he’s right, then most modern interpreters have been deceived along with Philoctetes.

⁵⁶See, e.g., Rose, “*Philoctetes* and the Sophists,” 71 n.51, 75; also Linforth, “The Play and the Man,” 127-130.

I suggest that to expose this howling, stinking man on Lemnos would not have seemed out of the ordinary within a society that practiced infanticide and had rigid strictures regarding ritual pollution. In describing his own actions, Odysseus employs the word used for exposing unwanted babies.⁵⁷ Morris compares Philoctetes' "inner nobility" to that evidenced by the "heroic contours of [Laocoön's] suffering,"⁵⁸ but as Nigel Spivey so persuasively argues with reference to Romantic and post-Romantic discussion of the Laocoön, reading a modern sympathy for suffering onto the classical text may well be in opposition to the classical spectator's reception. Spivey points out that within the context of a 100-line fragment of Sophocles' dramatic version of the myth, Laocoön "gets what he deserves" and is thus *not* an appropriate target for pity as Aristotle understood it.⁵⁹ I will return to Aristotle. Plato takes a much harsher stance with respect to pity and to pain itself. In the *Republic*, Socrates argues against prolonging life by an intensive medical regime that makes it impossible to do any work,⁶⁰ and Philoctetes figures in the *Iliad* precisely as a leader unable to do his job

⁵⁷Webster, 67 n.5. On the pollution of death, see Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Families in Classical and Hellenistic Greece: Representations and Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 105-08. For a broader consideration of pollution, relying on evidence from structural anthropology, see Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), esp. 235-56.

⁵⁸Morris, *Culture of Pain*, 251.

⁵⁹Nigel Spivey, "The Depiction of Suffering in Classical Art: The Audition of Laocoön's Scream," *Apollo* (July 1998): 6-7, citing R.C. Jebb and A.C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), 38-47. The statue is known to have adorned the Esquiline Palace of the Emperor Titus around 80 A.D., and the Elder Pliny provides the only extant contemporary response to it. In the *Natural History*, Book 36, Chapter 37, he expresses astonishment that the Laocoön group was carved from a single block of marble (which is, in fact, not the case). Pliny has nothing to say about suffering. For the foundational discussion, see Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön* (1766), ed. and trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962). Spivey argues that the sculpture is rightly understood as a product of the same Roman culture that enjoyed gladiatorial contests and staged executions as mythological enactments. Given this context, he concludes that "no ancient vicariously winced at Laocoön's plight" (8).

⁶⁰Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, 2d ed., revised by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), Book III, lines 405a-08.

because of his ailment. He commanded seven ships and was “skilled in the bow’s work,”

Yet he himself lay apart in the island, suffering strong pains,
in Lemnos the sacrosanct, where the sons of the Achaeans had left him
in agony from the sore bite of the wicked water snake.
There he lay apart in his pain; yet soon the Argives
beside their ships were to remember lord Philoktetes.⁶¹

His men long for their leader but are put in order by a substitute in his absence. Joe Park Poe calls Philoctetes attractive and sympathetic—a “good enough” hero, unlike others in Sophocles’ non-Theban plays.⁶² I propose that Philoctetes is neither attractive nor *easily* sympathetic, but grotesque (a characterization Poe reserves for Ajax). To apply this term anachronistically requires careful definition. “Grotesque” originated as a Renaissance description of ancient phenomena. In late sixteenth-century Italy, the term designated a style of painting deemed appropriate for grottos, featuring the combination of animal and human forms. The plausible conjecture is that ancient chambers (grottos) excavated during the Renaissance were decorated in this manner. From this origin, the conception of the grotesque soon grew to include exaggeration and the combination of incongruent elements, with a generally ludicrous result.⁶³ Wolfgang Kayser points out that the combination can as easily be sinister as ridiculous

⁶¹*The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), Book II, line 724.

⁶²Joe Park Poe, “Heroism and Divine Justice in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*,” *Mnemosyne Supplementum* 34 (1974): 4, 6.

⁶³*Oxford English Dictionary*, Compact Edition.

and describes the grotesque as a structure that “presupposes that the categories which apply to our world view become inapplicable.”⁶⁴

The particular grotesquerie that interests me is Philoctetes’ suffering. The source of his wound, a snakebite, seems at first glance to belong to the familiar world. By contrast, Heracles (Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*) is poisoned by a magic cloak and Cassandra (Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*) is swept by the pain of divine prophecy—both forms of suffering that belong squarely in the world of myth. David Morris says,

His pain is more like our pain. Philoctetes in this sense embodies the everyday suffering that lies in wait not on an epic battlefield but concealed in a common domestic accident or hidden in the recesses of our own flesh. It is less the gods than our own vulnerable bodies, so the story suggests, that decree our isolation and suffering.⁶⁵

I disagree with his conclusion, however. Philoctetes’ wound only *seems* mundane, and only at first. The wound will not heal, yet unlike gangrene it remains localized. There has been no change for better or worse in nine years. To assimilate Philoctetes’ suffering to the modern experience of chronic pain may provide useful insights with respect to the latter phenomenon, but it does little to help understand the play as a fifth-century theatrical event. The pain produced by the snakebite is grotesque in the sense of being exaggerated, bigger than life, and it not only reduces the hero to a barely human existence, it also renders him vulnerable to those whom he perceives as enemies. Philoctetes himself is grotesque in the sense of being a mixture: Segal sees him as a

⁶⁴Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966; orig. pub. Indiana University Press, 1963), 21, 185.

⁶⁵Morris, *Culture of Pain*, 249.

combination of man and savage animal, while Greengard describes him as both wild man and aristocrat.⁶⁶

Rather than attributing a psychological depth to Sophocles' characters, I want to examine the surface of Philoctetes' very theatrical illness. The reactions of Neoptolemus and the chorus are made visible by their own words and actions but are also described by Philoctetes. I propose reading his descriptions as accurate, rather than assuming that he is an innocent dupe. Consider the following:

- (1) His response to the initial silence of his Greek visitors is, "Do not shrink from me in fear, or be scared by my wild looks" (Jebb tr., 225).
- (2) When his pain first begins, and he gives up the effort to hide it, he begs Neoptolemus not to be frightened into abandoning him (758).
- (3) As the second attack builds, he begs Neoptolemus not to flee (782).
- (4) Now, when Neoptolemus breaks his silence and says he has been suffering with Philoctetes, the latter first assures him that the pain goes away as quickly as it comes, then entreats him (at length) not to leave (807-13).

If Philoctetes is right, then Neoptolemus and the chorus—and the spectator—are horrified by his agony.⁶⁷ For Aristotle, pity and terror (along with anger) comprise the

⁶⁶Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization*, 292-300; Greengard, *Theatre in Crisis*, 38. Greengard analyzes Sophocles' genre mixing as well as Philoctetes' hybrid nature. She points out that "most of the surviving 'tragedies' of Sophocles and Euripides from the last two decades of the fifth century do not seem to obey the constraints of earlier Athenian tragedy. This disruption of the genre's form—at times in the direction of violent melodrama, at times in the direction of comedy or romance—is intimately bound to the radical changes in social and political ideologies that were being shaped in the last period of the Peloponnesian Wars era" (13). In addition to elements of comic structure, Greengard identifies an "understructure" typical of romance: an "island castaway with a magical instrument who experiences a symbolic rebirth, a miraculous cure and a restoration to an ailing society that is itself cured through the hero's magical potency" (34). She thinks that the original audience would have recognized motifs from comedy and romance that are easily overlooked by modern scholars who fail to see past the play's tragic reworking of epic material (35). See also Edmund Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 273.

⁶⁷Thomas M. Falkner is one of the few modern critics to note that Philoctetes' entrance is "a frightening and repulsive sight." "Containing Tragedy: Rhetoric and Self-Representation in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Classical Antiquity* 17.1 (1998): 28.

painful emotions, and the fundamental difference between the two is distance. If the cause of (painful) *pathos* is too close, one feels terror rather than pity. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle illustrates this point with the story of a man who does not weep when his son is led off to be executed but does weep when his old friend meets the same end. He explains that because the father-son relationship is so close, the man feels his son's terror as his own.⁶⁸

Moral dilemmas aside, during his silence Neoptolemus comes dangerously close to Philoctetes' suffering. He promises to stay, and the final attack of pain begins. Neoptolemus finds it necessary to restrain the delirious Philoctetes until he calms down,⁶⁹ then he describes the climax of the attack as Philoctetes falls asleep: "The sweat is soaking all his body over, and a black flux of blood and matter has broken out of his foot" (823-24). If any moment is likely to produce visceral disgust, even a shudder of horror, this is it. What effect might this have on a spectator? In particular, I am concerned with the blurring of boundaries between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes. Most of the information provided about either character comes through the utterances of the other. Up to this point, however, Philoctetes has acted out his pain—the text is full of cries. Here, at the height of his agony, Neoptolemus carries the burden of representation as Philoctetes lapses into unconsciousness. The sweat and the eruption of bloody pus cannot be seen on stage, of course, and so they must be described. But that the effect for the spectator is a transfer of pain is borne out by what transpires.

⁶⁸Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: a Theory of Civic Discourse*, ed. and trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Book II, lines 8.1386a18ff; also see Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 101 n.53a4.

⁶⁹Robinson suggests that Philoctetes tries to break away in order to hurl himself off the cliff, as it is clear he attempts to do later. "Topics," 41. Jennifer Clarke Kosak points out that the handshake by which Neoptolemus swears to remain with Philoctetes is the first physical contact between them, following a refusal of therapeutic touch offered earlier, and that it changes quickly into a grip of restraint. "Therapeutic Touch and Sophokles' *Philoctetes*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 99 (1999): 126-27.

Just after Philoctetes awakes, Neoptolemus utters a cry that echoes the other man's cries of pain—he is in agony because he can no longer bear to lie (just as Philoctetes tried but failed to conceal the pain of his illness) (895-914). Winnington-Ingram and Knox both note the correspondence but distinguish Neoptolemus' mental anguish from Philoctetes' physical pain.⁷⁰ Given Aristotle's understanding of *pathos*, I suggest that no such clear distinction can be made. For Aristotle, *pathos* is a movement of the soul, with a physical component: the shudder of terror, the tears of pity. He has no word for abstract, disembodied emotion.⁷¹ Modern translators often introduce a distinction not present in the Greek in order to make Aristotle comprehensible. According to Roselyne Rey, in both the *Iliad* and the *Philoctetes*, there is a complete overlap in words used for physical and for moral pain (or for pain and suffering). The words are *algos* and *odunè* in Sophocles, with the addition of *pèma* in Homer.⁷² Segal points out that “the pain, *algos*, which [Philoctetes] feels refers both to inward, emotional state and to physical suffering. *Algos* alternates between the two meanings throughout the play, and in at least one passage includes both dimensions (339-40).”⁷³ Although its source is not an injury to his own body, Neoptolemus' pain should not be understood as an abstraction with no bodily involvement. The spectators see the suffering of both men, which takes different forms because the causes differ. The

⁷⁰R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 288; Bernard M.W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 132.

⁷¹See *Poetics*, ed. Janko, “Glossary,” 206.

⁷²Roselyne Rey, *The History of Pain*, trans. Louise Elliott Wallace, J.A. Cadden, S.W. Cadden (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 12, 14, citing for a precise study M. Martinez-Hernandez, *Las esfera semantico-conceptual del dolor en Sofocles*, Universidad Complutense (Madrid, 1981).

⁷³Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization*, 316.

theatrical event thus includes a bond created by suffering in addition to the bond of friendship created in the dramatic narrative.

Neoptolemus' suffering leads him to reveal the truth: that his purpose all along has been to bring Philoctetes to Troy. To summarize the rest of the action very briefly, in the third episode (865-1080), Neoptolemus and Odysseus leave with the bow, once again abandoning Philoctetes—but he is even worse off than before, since the bow was his means of getting food. As Philoctetes puts it, he will now become food for the birds he has eaten. The kommos (1081-1217) is devoted to his misery, his anger, and his wish to die. In the exodus (1218-1471), Neoptolemus comes back, returns the bow, and still failing to persuade Philoctetes to sail to Troy, agrees to take him home.

Rather than winning Philoctetes to the Greek cause by force, trickery, or persuasion, Neoptolemus has established a bond of friendship, with the result that Neoptolemus as well as Philoctetes will refuse to play his part in the Trojan War. This first, "false" ending to the play would leave both heroes incapacitated. Contrary to modern interpretations, this is *not* a good thing and a fifth-century audience would be unlikely to perceive it as such. Destiny *is* character in tragedy, and Sophocles' heroes are made to fit what they must do in the end. Philoctetes must go on to kill Paris at Troy. Neoptolemus must kill Priam at the altar of Zeus, execute Polyxena, and throw the child Astyanax to his death.⁷⁴ By suffering *with* Philoctetes, Neoptolemus has overcome terror. He must still learn from Heracles to act *in spite of* compassion.

⁷⁴Calder points out that all other versions of Neoptolemus portray him as "an especially pitiless, bloodthirsty fighter." "Sophoclean Apologia," 168. Like Calder, Jan Kott argues that the morally educable young man envisioned by so many critics exists only in their reading. He reverses the assessment, and argues that Neoptolemus is "a young man who is devoured by ambition and whose one unchanging trait is instability." *The Eating of the Gods*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski and Edward J. Czerwinski (New York: Random House, 1973), 178. He goes on to provide a vivid summary of Neoptolemus' "heroic" acts, citing Euripides' *Hecuba*, 521ff, trans. William Arrowsmith, in *Euripides III, The Complete Greek Tragedies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) and *The Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. C. Day Lewis (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 62.

Heracles' older bond of friendship with Philoctetes, also forged by suffering, immediately brings this most reluctant man back into place, to do his part and fulfill his destiny with no further questions. As Winnington-Ingram puts it, Heracles in effect tells Philoctetes that he makes too much of his pains. They are ultimately a source of glory (1421-22).⁷⁵ When Heracles orders him to Troy, Philoctetes agrees at once to go.

The *deus ex machina* resolution does far more than make the play conform to mytho-historical necessity.⁷⁶ How can it be understood, and what relation does it bear to the earlier transformation of Neoptolemus through suffering? I will explore some answers to this question at a higher level before returning to my consideration of utopia, the spectator, and the role of suffering. I begin by discussing the play's historical resonance with (1) changing methods of warfare and (2) the social instability of late fifth-century Athens. In the course of this discussion, I sketch out the historical context within which *Philoctetes* was performed. I argue, however, that although direct historical references are intriguing, they can provide only partial explanations. I then return to pain and utopia, and finally circle back to *Angels in America*.

Philoctetes in Context

I suggest that the play's first ending raises the question: if order is not maintained on the basis of aristocratic hierarchy, relying upon absolute obedience, how is society to function? A provisional solution is provided by the bond between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, who will act in the best interests of one another because their interests are mutual. The centrality of friendship is evident in the name:

⁷⁵See Winnington-Ingram, *Interpretation*, 301.

⁷⁶Margarete Bieber (among others) says that Euripides uses the prologue and the *deus ex machina* to bring alterations in the action back into line with the myths on which his plays are based, and that Sophocles borrows this structure for *Philoctetes*. *The History of the Greek and Roman Theatre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), 30.

philo/ktetes means “possessor of a friend (or ally).”⁷⁷ And friendship is contrasted with hierarchical relations. The bond between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus is forged in opposition to Odysseus, who has been seen as a representative of hierarchical, authoritarian rule because he earlier abandoned Philoctetes on the orders of the Atreidae and now insists that Neoptolemus must also follow orders. Peter Rose, for one, argues that “the very worth of the commonality as embodied in Odysseus and the Atreidae is very much in question.”⁷⁸ He describes “an initially negative image of the society in whose interest Odysseus claims to act,” built on a foundation of “selfish individualism, hypocrisy, and brutality.” In Rose’s reading, Philoctetes is opposite the state, which is “cast in the image of a brutal tyrant,” and most particularly the Greek army, “characterized almost exclusively as an entity that gives orders.”⁷⁹ Yet persuasive as this argument is, the military dystopia described by Rose is the society that both men rejoin in the end.

Furthermore, the friends may work against the interests of society at large, a predicament that had long disturbed the Athenian *polis*. Since the death of Pericles in 428, two competing forms of political organization had existed in Athens. The old form was based upon the friendship group (*philoî*) as a means of exercising influence, grounding the Athenian democracy securely in aristocratic social structures. The new form was to make an appeal, as an individual, to the entire *demos*. During the 420s, the rise to power of demagogues such as Cleon, who repudiated his *philoî* and professed a bond to the people as a whole, drove some men back towards oligarchy and others away from political engagement. W. Robert Connor argues that this withdrawal of

⁷⁷Greengard, *Theatre in Crisis*, 62.

⁷⁸Rose, “*Philoctetes* and the Sophists,” 80f. See also Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization*, 328-30.

⁷⁹Rose, “*Philoctetes* and the Sophists,” 92, 94.

Athenians from political life undermined the stability of the democracy, and Greengard further argues that this problem structures *Philoctetes*.⁸⁰ Greengard argues that Sophocles uses confusion, reversals, and broken down communications, together with the surprising reversal effected by the *deus ex machina*, to confound generic expectations and thereby create for the spectator an uncertainty similar to that present in Athens in 409.⁸¹ *Philoctetes* thus produces in the spectator a desire for resolution and social cohesion, which is provided within the dramatic framework by the *deus ex machina* and would hopefully be provided within the Athenian *polis* by men with the aristocratic *physis* required for leadership as well as proper respect for the gods and the ability to work together to govern the city. The Athens of 409, when war had continued intermittently for more than 20 years and victory very likely seemed close at hand (a situation I will address shortly), bore a strong resemblance to Troy at the end of nine years of fighting. The question whether to fight or to wait was crucial throughout the Peloponnesian Wars. For example, Pericles refused to engage in hoplite battle when Sparta first attacked in 431. Instead, the Athenians—including farmers, who abandoned their land—remained inside the city walls and sent the navy out to do battle. The point of this initially effective strategy was *not* to fight until necessary and propitious.⁸² Many fruitless battles had been fought at Troy, but those who were needed for final victory were kept aside either by youth or by the providence of the gods. Neoptolemus

⁸⁰W. Robert Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 175-97; Greengard, *Theatre in Crisis*, 6-7. Connor cites the comic utopian, agrarian fantasies of Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, *Birds*, and *Peace*. In each of these plays, a private solution is sought for a properly social problem. He also discusses the turning away from public life in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, *Ion*, and *Orestes*.

⁸¹Greengard, *Theatre in Crisis*, 11. Greengard believes that in the estimation of Sophocles and his contemporary, Thucydides, Athens "had fallen prey to an internal threat of dire significance: the failure of the citizens' faith in reasonable political solutions and the concomitant retreat from the political arena of the young men trained and qualified . . . to become political leaders" (6-7).

⁸²Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 34.

explicitly tells the chorus that the point of Philoctetes' wound was to keep him from coming to Troy too early (191-200).

Both the *Iliad* and *Philoctetes* treat events in the mythic past, but their treatment of these events is shaped by their present culture and serves at least in part to work out problems facing that culture. In the epic, Achilles refuses to fight, as do Philoctetes and Neoptolemus in the tragedy. Although Achilles' participation is essential to winning the war, he is important as an *individual* hero, whereas Neoptolemus and Philoctetes must fight like two lions who hunt together and keep watch over one another (1436-37). I suggest that training for hoplite warfare provides an important model for their relationship and for the transformation of Neoptolemus. As Elaine Scarry notes, new developments in weapons technology produce changes in the form and degree of soldiers' bodily participation in battle.⁸³ The *Iliad* may have been composed as early as 750, when archaeological evidence indicates that hoplite armor was only beginning to appear. Prior to this time (that is, from 1200-800), battle was waged by warriors on horseback who dismounted and hurled javelins at one another.⁸⁴ Beginning sometime between 725 and 650, these individual heroes were replaced by a phalanx of heavily armed soldiers. The central innovation was the *hoplon*, a lightweight, circular wooden shield covered with a thin layer of bronze.⁸⁵ The *hoplon* was of little use for isolated duels or free-ranging skirmishes; it covered the left side of the soldier holding it and the

⁸³Scarry, *Body in Pain*, 151, taking particular note of the democratizing introduction of guns to feudal Japan, making the samurai swordsman obsolete, just as the crossbow in medieval Europe eliminated a class of knights. In Homer, dying in battle is a necessary evil. By the mid-seventh century, it had become not only good but desirable. Sarah B. Pomeroy, Stanley M. Burstein, Walter Donlan, and Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 105, citing poems by Tyrtaeus of Sparta and Callinus of Ephesus.

⁸⁴Hanson, *Western Way of War*, 41, 27.

⁸⁵See Pomeroy, et al., *Ancient Greece*, 103-06. For a more detailed discussion of the evidence available, see Hanson, *Western Way of War*, 40-51.

right side of the man next to him, and its effectiveness was inextricably bound up with the phalanx formation. The hoplite wore roughly 70 pounds of armor and held his place in a tightly packed phalanx, normally eight rows deep. The most experienced and reliable soldiers were placed in the front and the back for battles that were terrifying and brief. Opposing phalanxes charged at one another and collided. The ranks in front first jabbed with long spears and then slashed with short swords. The job of the ranks in the rear was to push those in the front against the enemy. Very little military drill was required for hoplite battle, but courage and reliable bonds to one's fighting companions were taxed heavily.⁸⁶ As John Winkler puts it, "One cannot send untrained and unknown men to fight in the close array of a hoplite phalanx: one would not trust one's own battle safety to men in the same line who might be untrained fools or Thebans."⁸⁷

From the mid-seventh to the mid-fifth centuries, the ferocious but contained hoplite battle served to settle conflicts between Greek city-states. This form of warfare remained the norm throughout the fifth century and well into the fourth, even as warfare continued to change, enabling Sophocles to use the Greek (hoplite) army as a utopian society, well ordered, disciplined, every member absolutely reliable.⁸⁸ As my

⁸⁶Hanson, *Western Way of War*, 28, 31-32.

⁸⁷John J. Winkler, "The Ephebes' Song: *Tragōidia* and *Polis*," in *Nothing to do with Dionysos?: Athenian Drama in its Social Context*, ed. John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 26.

⁸⁸While hoplite warfare remained a norm, it no longer constituted the only normal practice. By the late fifth century, the tactics used by the ephebes during their training as hoplite soldiers were being adopted for regular battle; these included trickery and ambush, the latter sometimes undertaken at night. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the Ephebia," in *Myth and Tragedy*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 162-63. In 408, Alcibiades used collaborators inside Selymbria and Byzantium to bring the Athenian army inside the cities at night. See Donald Kagan, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 281-83. Vidal-Naquet says that the hoplite was more and more replaced by the mercenary during the fourth century (162-63). Hanson says, "The rapid growth of auxiliary troops and siegecraft in the . . . fourth century . . . ensured that battle thereafter would be relentless rather than episodic, expanded rather than confined, a new opportunity for the victor to seek not a benign humiliation but often

discussion of Philoctetes' pain episodes has shown, shared suffering forges the bonds between men that hold this utopia together. By witnessing Philoctetes' agony, Neoptolemus is transformed not into a gentle humanist, as some would see him,⁸⁹ but into a cooperative soldier suited to hoplite warfare. As such, he provides a model for the *ephebe* in the audience at the City Dionysia, who must serve the needs of the *polis* and his fellow hoplite warriors during battle without considering either the enemy's suffering or the demands of his own family line.⁹⁰ In contrast, Odysseus and Heracles have been seen (along with Achilles) as representatives of the old order of aristocratic warrior. This contrast, based on changes in warfare that had only begun when the *Iliad* was composed, provides a persuasive model for the transformation of Neoptolemus but not for that of Philoctetes.

Philoctetes, another old-fashioned hero, is essential to the new order but must adapt if he is to be useful.⁹¹ Yet as John Peradotto points out, Philoctetes' "adaptation" can be accomplished only through divine intervention, and it "completely overturns the outcome of the credible logic of character development and interaction" established up

the unconditional surrender and subjugation of the defeated." *Western Way of War*, 5.

⁸⁹Many critics argue that the bow's return signals Neoptolemus' recovered nobility. Segal, for example, says that his new relation to the bow "proves him the son of Achilles, an Achilles purged of his divisive and solitary spirit." *Tragedy and Civilization*, 320. Morris sees him transformed "from a deferential youth, noble but inexperienced and unsure, into a mature young hero whose generosity of spirit now seems as evident as his noble body." *Culture of Pain*, 253.

⁹⁰Relying primarily on fourth-century sources, Winkler suggests that ephebes (young men of the Athenian upper classes engaged in military training) constituted the tragic Chorus, and that their dances in rectangular formation echoed the military drill that they also performed in the theatre of Dionysus. He proposes that the spectator was intended to view tragedy from the ephebes' perspective. "Ephebes' Song," 42-58. Whatever their role in the theatrical events, ephebes would have been present at the City Dionysia and served as an example of mutual reliance and cooperation. On Neoptolemus as a liminal figure and the play as an initiation drama, see also Ismene Lada-Richards, "Neoptolemus and the Bow: Ritual *Thea* and Theatrical Vision in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 117 (1997): 179-83; Vidal-Naquet, "Philoctetes and Ephebia."

⁹¹See for example Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization*, 328-361.

through this point.⁹² This transformation becomes more legible if it is read against a backdrop of social upheaval. Greengard is correct that the Athenian *polis* was badly in need of social cohesion and capable leadership in the years following the defeat of the Sicilian expedition in 413, when the Athenians had lost tens of thousands of men and had accomplished nothing.⁹³ War and plague had reduced the male population to less than half of what it had been in 431, and the public treasury was reduced by 90%. More than 20,000 slaves had been lost, and the mines could not be worked because the Spartans had established a fort at Decelea. The leading *strategoi* (generals) had either been killed or exiled, and the remaining demagogues who had supported the expedition were in disrepute. Kagan notes that the Athenians believed that men in their prime could not be trusted to provide “prudent, cautious, moderate leadership,” and that it was necessary to seek it in an earlier generation. A group of ten *proboulai* were appointed, all of them over 40 years old and Sophocles among them.⁹⁴

By May of 411, extremists in favor of oligarchy (led by Peisander and Phrynichus) had Athens under a reign of terror. At their instigation, the *proboulai* and 20 additional *syngrapheis* voted to install an oligarchy of Four Hundred (411-404).⁹⁵ Pay for public service was limited to military duty, and unpaid service was restricted to those of the hoplite class or higher. While this measure would concentrate funds on the

⁹²John Peradotto, “Interrogating the Canon, Deposing the Tyrannus,” 1994, <<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/TAPA/peradotto.html>> , n.23, cited 10 September 1999.

⁹³Donald Kagan, *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 306-10. For a relatively brief overview of the Peloponnesian Wars, see Pomeroy, et al., *Ancient Greece*, 287-329.

⁹⁴Sophocles was in his 80s. The other *proboulus* who is identified was Hagnon, the son of Nicias, who was in his 60s. Kagan, *Fall of Athenian Empire*, 1-7. The following historical overview is based on this source, and further page citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁹⁵In Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, 1419a, Sophocles admits to voting for them although it was a wicked thing to do, because “there was nothing to do that was better.” See Kagan, 145-46, citing M.H. Jameson, *Historia* 20 (1971): 541-68. Calder makes much of the passage in Aristotle, and reads *Philoctetes* as an apology for this vote. See “Sophoclean Apologia.”

war effort, it also disenfranchised the thetes who manned the warships. The fleet was stationed on Samos, where an oligarchic coup the following month failed due to a democratic counter-coup (169-72). From this point forward, two “Athenian” governments existed: the oligarchy in Athens and the democracy on Samos. By late summer, the Athenian grain supply was in jeopardy. The exiled Alcibiades was recalled to Samos and elected *strategos* (176-78). The moderates in Athens were beginning to suspect that the fortifications being constructed there were intended to allow the enemy *in*. The evidence strongly implies that the extremists had arranged to give up Athens in order to save themselves. Phrynichus was assassinated, the fortifications were destroyed (191-99), and the Four Hundred were deposed. They had ruled for less than four months. Power was now vested in an oligarchy of Five Thousand—a conventional figure for the number of the hoplite class; there may in fact have been more than 10,000. This government lasted from September 411 until June or July 410, but very little is known about it. Although the continued political disenfranchisement of the thetes seems to be the main difference between the new broad oligarchy and the old democracy (201-05), their importance was recognized. To reconcile with the fleet at Samos, the Five Thousand recalled Alcibiades and the other exiles; however, Alcibiades did not in fact return to Athens until 407 (206). The moderate leaders of the new regime, although they had been leaders of the Four Hundred as well, tried and condemned the extremists among their former colleagues. Some (Peisander, for example) escaped to Sparta. Others were executed. The corpse of Phrynichus was tried, exhumed, and removed from Athens (207-10).

The military situation turned around sometime between March and May of 410. A spectacular victory by the Athenian fleet at Cyzicus drove Sparta out of the Hellespont (237-46). Spartan morale was damaged, the Athenian food supply assured, and the Athenians were able to begin collecting a duty on merchant ships passing

through the Bosphorus. Then in late June, full democracy was restored in Athens—but there is no evidence to suggest how and why (252). Pay for public service (an essential component of the political rights of the lower classes) was restored in 410, the *diobelia* was introduced to provide the very poor with the necessities, and tribute quotas were restored in the empire (258-59). A rash of accusations against former members of the Four Hundred and anyone associated with them led to trials and punishments but no mass executions. In the spring of 409, the killers of Phrynichus were publicly honored (257). An oath to safeguard democracy was to be sworn over an unblemished sacrifice before the next festival of Dionysus (256):

I will do my best to kill by word and by deed, by my vote and by my hand, anyone who overthrows the Athenian democracy, holds office under an undemocratic regime, or seeks to establish a tyranny either for himself or for someone else. If anyone else kills such a person, I will consider him clean in the eyes of gods and spirits.⁹⁶

This loyalty oath was first sworn prior to the festival at which *Philoctetes* was staged.

The play ends with the social cohesion desired in Athens as the Peloponnesian Wars dragged on, and a preference for the old ways was evident in the explicit return to old laws and forms of government. The Four Hundred had characterized their rule as a restoration of the Golden Age of Solon, Draco, and Kleisthenes. As Pomeroy puts it, “if old men [such as Sophocles and the other *proboulai*] made good advisers, dead men

⁹⁶Andokides, *On the Mysteries*, 97, quoted in Pomeroy, et al., *Ancient Greece*, 315. See also Barry S. Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens: Ideology and Society in the Era of the Peloponnesian War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 187-99, with bibliography. The oath is part of Andokides’ defense at a trial resulting from a dispute over a woman (and the inheritance she brought). Lysias 6: *Against Andokides* is thought by most scholars to have actually been written on the occasion, although perhaps as a pamphlet rather than as a speech (188). Andokides was notorious for his part in the desecration of the *hermae* and parodying of the Mysteries. He was arrested and informed on his fellow *hetaireiai*—allegedly on family as well as friends, perhaps even including his father. As a result, he was not prosecuted, much less executed or forcibly exiled (189-90). He was barred from the temples and the agora, however, and went into exile. He tried unsuccessfully to return to Athens in 411 under the oligarchy, and again a year or two later. He did not succeed until the amnesty of 403.

were even better.”⁹⁷ And after the restoration of democracy, the Athenians explicitly returned to the laws of Solon and Draco.⁹⁸ At the same time, they must have recognized that those old ways must be adapted to new conditions—for one thing, warfare would never again consist only of border conflicts settled by hoplite clashes. Without accepting a straightforward symbolic reading, one can easily see *Philoctetes* as a figure for old, neglected, and badly damaged forms of social organization: honor, guilelessness, and friendship, all of which must be restored in order to heal Athens—and Athens must be healed in order to fulfill its destiny. Although Sophocles leaves *Philoctetes* in pain, spectators would have known that legend has him healed at Troy.

By 409, many spectators most likely felt that the city was, as Kagan puts it, “recovered from defeat and despair and capable of remarkable efforts and astonishing success” (254). That Sparta finally won the war in 404 and installed the Thirty Tyrants in Athens had numerous causes, many of which were external to Athens and none of which would have been evident in 409. I suggest that the play’s miraculous reconciliation can be accepted because of the emotional preparation provided by *Philoctetes*’ pain episodes. The theatrical experience in turn helps to prepare Athenians to accept reconciliation with diverse elements—not necessarily those resembling *Philoctetes*—and to pursue *their* divinely ordained destiny. In the fall of 409, when the Athenian *strategoi* resumed military activities (after an eighteen-month hiatus), that is what they appeared to be doing. The performance of *Philoctetes* the previous spring may well have helped move them towards their seeming recovery.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Pomeroy, et al., *Ancient Greece*, 314.

⁹⁸Kagan, *Fall of Athenian Empire*, 256.

⁹⁹For the City Dionysia as a preparation for military excursions, see Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1992), 16; Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 2d ed., rev. John Gould and D.M. Lewis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 58-59.

Reluctant Angels

I return now to the other grotesque central to my discussion, Kushner's version of Roy Cohn. His AIDS diagnosis closes Act One of *Millennium Approaches*; Act Two opens with Prior's big pain scene. Roy's attempt to define himself and his disease (as a "heterosexual man . . . who fucks around with guys" and has "liver cancer") is thus juxtaposed against the helpless pain-racked body produced by that disease. That the bodies belong to different characters is almost beside the point here; in terms of Roy's trajectory through *Angels in America*, the body consistently wins the self-definition contest.

Although Roy does attempt to use his disease to manipulate other characters, the maneuvers are always verbal rather than physical. In his first scene, he offers Joe Pitt a job with the Justice Department in Washington as "Associate Assistant Something Big. Internal Affairs, heart of the woods, something nice with clout" (1:15). Joe's reservations initially revolve around his wife. A few scenes after his diagnosis, Roy tries out a fatherly role. When this fails to persuade Joe to take the job, he plays the disease card: "I'm dying, Joe. Cancer" (1:58). Just two scenes later, as he and a colleague, Martin Heller, try to bully Joe into becoming a Washington "Royboy," Roy has begun to grimace and clutch at his shoulder, but never misses a beat or acknowledges the pain to Joe. He does use it to demonstrate interpersonal power, however, by demanding a massage from Martin. Joe thus gets to see Roy receiving bodily services from "Ed [Meese]'s man. And Ed's Reagan's man. So Martin's Reagan's man" (1:68), which implicitly makes Roy nearly presidential in the pecking order. The political seduction fails during this scene because Roy's ethics (or lack of them) become apparent to Joe, who comes to understand that he's expected to work against Roy's disbarment.

When Roy finally says, “I’m sick. They smell I’m weak. They want blood this time. I must have eyes in Justice. In Justice you will protect me” (1:68), he does *not* give any bodily performance of pain to elicit sympathy. And in their next scene together, when Joe turns down the job, Roy “*has made a considerable effort to look well . . . [but] hasn’t succeeded much*” (1:106). He flaunts his power, bragging that he “pleaded till [he] wept to put [Ethel Rosenberg] in the [electric] chair” and then flatly denying the cancer he mentioned in the earlier scene. “I’m in perfect health. There’s not a goddam thing wrong with me” (1:108-09). Roy explicitly refrains from using his suffering to manipulate Joe. “*When Joe has gone, Roy doubles over in great pain, which he’s been hiding throughout the scene*” (110). The pain is present for the sake of the audience. In order to elucidate the function of that pain, I examine Belize’s response to Roy, much as I earlier discussed the reactions of Louis and Hannah to Prior’s suffering. The responses of dramatic figures to pain episodes provide both negative and positive models for spectator response, although they can never be entirely determinate.

Belize takes care of Roy under duress, and their interactions are a highly entertaining power struggle. Roy is admitted to the hospital early in *Perestroika*. In his first scene with Belize, he says “*I hurt*,” but refuses painkillers so that he can remain alert: “Pain’s . . . nothing, pain’s life” (2:23-24). His attempts to intimidate and alienate Belize are both habitual behavior and a form of testing. When they do not work, a foundation of respect seems to be established, and Roy displays fear for the first time. “Oh forchristsake. Whatta I gotta do? Beg? I don’t want to be alone” (2:24). In return for the fear, Belize dispenses solid medical advice “*with great effort and distaste*” (2:25). The scene establishes Belize as Roy’s equal, not only because he has medical knowledge and wields power (“I can make it feel like I just hooked you up to a bag of Liquid Drano” [2:23]), but also because he consistently matches Roy in conversation. His exit line for this scene devastates Roy’s earlier self-definition: asked

why he's helping in spite of his hatred, Belize says "Consider it solidarity. One faggot to another" (2:27).

The struggle never ends, however. Roy gives up some of his private AZT stash only after Belize finally matches his racial epithets in a scene where Roy is often interrupted by spasms of pain (2:57). His steady increase in pain behavior does not seem engineered to create *simple* sympathy in the spectator, because if anything he becomes even more horrible in his dealings with other characters. The audience can continue to enjoy his "irresistible showbiz glamour" as a "doomed and unrepentant villain,"¹⁰⁰ as well as his interplay with Belize. Spectators also have the option articulated by the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg: "all I can do is take pleasure in your misery. Hoping I'd get to see you die more terrible than I did" (2:113). Structurally, Ethel accompanies Roy's physical suffering. She first appears during the spasm Roy was holding off while Joe refused the job, and she is present more and more as he gets closer to death. Yet it is not his physical suffering that Ethel savors; it is his disbarment. She enjoys the fact that his death is worse than hers, but it's because he is "dying in shit, . . . defeated" (2:113), not because he is in pain. And although she savors her political triumph, he proceeds to trick her into singing to comfort him. The theatrical triumph is his, with the wonderfully bad joke, "I just wanted to see if I could finally, finally make Ethel Rosenberg sing!" (2:114).

In the end, Belize leads the spectator along with Louis and Ethel through a transition in attitude. He says, "He was a terrible person. He died a hard death. So maybe A queen can forgive her vanquished foe. It isn't easy, it's the hardest thing. Forgiveness. Which is maybe where love and justice finally meet" (2:122). Coached by the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, Louis says Kaddish for Roy, ending in "you

¹⁰⁰Disch, "Can Kushner's 'Angels' Really be Immortal?"

sonofabitch" (2:123). Belize and Ethel create an opening in Kushner's utopia for Roy, whether he likes it or not.

What should one make of the forgiveness and *communitas* wrought by pain in *Angels in America*? Kushner has suggested that "AIDS and ACT UP helped destroy the factionalism that has plagued the left—the sort of, 'I'm more oppressed than you, and your oppression has nothing to do with me.' It's all life and death in AIDS politics, so people saw they couldn't afford the barriers."¹⁰¹ Abolition of barriers is not without controversy, however. In criticizing what he calls the "dangerously assimilationist" rhetoric of community building, Leo Bersani sees the success of *Angels in America* as evidence of "how ready and anxious America is to see and hear about gays—provided we reassure America how familiar, how morally sincere, and particularly in the case of Kushner's work, how innocuously full of significance we can be."¹⁰² Charles McNulty argues that Kushner abandons the wisdom and clarity of vision established in the pain-racked scenes of *Millennium Approaches*, and ends *Perestroika* on "a Broadway upnote," allowing "celestial shenanigans peppered with *Wizard of Oz* insight" to eclipse the earlier brutal, graphic conviction that AIDS is central to twentieth-century history, and that "in order for a society to free itself to move in a more utopian direction, the fundamental inescapability of the aggrieved past must be vigilantly acknowledged."¹⁰³ So is forgiveness inescapably assimilationist?

I return to Aristotle to help illuminate the *perestroika* wrought by Belize. Aristotle identifies anger, terror, and pity as the three painful emotions, and defines

¹⁰¹Winer, "Playwright of the Apocalypse," 20.

¹⁰²Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 69. Bersani calls the play "muddled and pretentious."

¹⁰³Charles McNulty, "Angels in America: Tony Kushner's Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Modern Drama* (Spring 1996): 93, 95. McNulty provides a good analysis of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, so central to *Angels in America*, as does Savran.

anger (*orge*) as the “desire, accompanied by [mental and physical] distress, for conspicuous retaliation because of a conspicuous slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near to one.”¹⁰⁴ Anger always has a specific object, and the hope of retaliation (which creates a kind of image or *fantasia*, like a dream) produces a kind of pleasure. The imagined retaliation must be possible. Hatred (or enmity) can be produced by anger: “Now anger comes from things that affect a person directly, but enmity also from what is not directed against himself”—for instance, we will hate a person for being a particular kind of person, even if we have experienced no personal injury. Anger may pass; hatred will not. “Painful actions [. . .] are all perceived by the senses, but the greatest evils—injustice and thoughtlessness—are least perceived; for the presence of evil causes no pain. Anger is also accompanied by pain [. . .], but hate is not accompanied by pain; for the angry person is himself pained, the one who hates is not” (1382a). The forgiveness that Belize advocates does not require Louis or the spectator to stop hating Roy Cohn, only to give up the *fantasia* of retaliation.

Ethel has been personally injured, and as a specter enjoys retaliation even though she has no hand in it. But she is dead. Those who remain alive in the world must find a way to move forward without even the certainty provided by anger. This problem frames *Perestroika*, which begins with the suggestion of the World’s Oldest Living Bolshevik that without *theory* it is not safe to move ahead (2:13). The angels’ plan to lure God back by producing stasis is one solution to the predicament. I presume that, given Kushner’s interest in Marx, a return to Marxist theory after the fall of the Soviet states would constitute a similar standstill. He votes, along with Prior, for “more life,” and the utopia repeatedly presented in *Angels in America* is a kind of anti-utopian acceptance of the messy world. Whether it is in fact possible to combine such

¹⁰⁴Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 1378a.

acceptance with activism remains to be seen. Classical Athens is easier to assess than 1990s America. Like the Athenians in 409, Kushner's audience of urban liberals in the mid-1990s were at the *apparent* end of a social crisis. Watching *Angels in America* in Los Angeles or New York during the first Clinton administration provided a utopic contrast to the Reagan/Bush dystopia of the 1980s. One can only hope that the return of Republicans to the White House in 2000 does not portend the equivalent of Sparta's eventual victory over Athens.

Postcolonial Martyr Plays: Performing Torture

In this chapter, I focus on the theatre of protest and resistance created during periods of extreme repression within postcolonial regimes. Specifically, I address the question whether the representation of torture on stage *necessarily* redoubles the violation of the victim. I begin by examining the ethical traps inherent in staging torture and look at some theatrical strategies for outmaneuvering the voyeuristic impulse: first, providing a model for effective action; second, pushing the violence beyond culturally accepted norms; and third, redirecting visual pleasure from the suffering of the character to the performer's virtuosity. Then I discuss the relation to global culture of plays created in response to repression within a specific local context.

Protest or Pornography?

Recent theorists, including Vivian Patraka and Diana Taylor, take as an axiom Susan Sontag's assertion that the convincing simulation of atrocity runs the risk of "making the audience passive, reinforcing witless stereotypes, confirming distance and creating fascination," and that "the display of atrocity . . . risks being tacitly pornographic."¹ Taylor goes on to argue that theatre is particularly susceptible to this sort of tacit (and often enough unintentional) pornographic effect because (1) it represents pain in order to create pleasure, as Aristotle said; and (2) it "tends to establish [a] (false) complicity between the victimizer and the victim" because the actor

¹Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980), 139. Sontag is discussing films about fascism and the Holocaust in the first case; in the second, photographic evidence more generally. While the difference between live performance and film must be acknowledged, it cannot be addressed within the scope of this dissertation. I am concerned here with the uses made of Sontag's position by two theatre scholars, neither of whom really address this issue.

who plays the victim “is actually onstage by choice; the real victim is not.”² Therefore, any representation of atrocity poses an ethical and aesthetic problem: in setting out to construct a moral condemnation, the artist risks producing a fascination with violence.³ Patraka adds that “the danger of passive fascination is only compounded by the presence of live bodies on stage.”⁴

Both Diana Taylor and Marguerite Feitlowitz begin their books about Argentina’s “dirty war” by describing their own reactions to Eduardo Pavlovsky’s *Paso de dos* (1990), and I turn to their critique in order to lay out the proposition that torture on stage is morally suspect.⁵ Feitlowitz mentions that the artists who created this “dance of death” (described by the playwright as a “love story” between HE, a torturer, and SHE, his victim) saw it as an homage to those who disappeared during the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (Process of National Reorganization) or “Proceso” instituted by the military junta when it seized power in 1976. By 1983, when Argentina returned to democratic government in the wake of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands debacle, the word *desaparecido* (disappeared) had been added to both local and global vocabularies to designate the Argentine civilians who had been abducted,

²Diana Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 122, citing Aristotle, *Poetics*, 6. See also Anthony Kubiak, *Stages of Terror: Terrorism, Ideology, and Coercion as Theatre History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 158.

³Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 120-24.

⁴Vivian Patraka, *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 19.

⁵Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). *Paso de dos* was produced shortly before Argentine President Carlos Menem exonerated military officers who faced trial for human rights violations. He then pardoned those who had already been sentenced. Marguerite Feitlowitz, “A Dance of Death: Eduardo Pavlovsky’s *Paso de dos*,” *The Drama Review* 35.2 (1991): 60. See also Martin Edwin Anderson, *Dossier Secreto: Argentina’s Desaparecidos and the Myth of the “Dirty War”* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 318-19. Pavlovsky’s collected plays are published in Spanish in the two-volume *Teatro Completo* (Buenos Aires: Atuel, 1997).

tortured, and murdered. The estimates vary from 9,000 to 30,000, depending upon their sources. Every Thursday at 3:30 since 1977, at grave personal risk, Argentine mothers had walked around the Plaza de Mayo, white kerchiefs on their heads, wearing or carrying pictures of their missing children.⁶ The Madres of the Plaza de Mayo now protested and boycotted *Paso de dos*, feeling betrayed as well as put off by its salaciousness. Feitlowitz understood their response, but not that of other Argentine spectators. She wondered why the play was sold out and receiving ovations.⁷

During the rehearsal process, director Laura Yusem had turned Pavlovsky's two-person dialogue into a play for three actors: Pavlovsky as HE, Susana Evans as the physical SHE, and Stella Galazzi as the voice of SHE. Galazzi sat in the bleachers with the audience, while Pavlovsky and Evans simulated sex and violence in a pool of mud. HE is a "torturer who falls in love with his victim, who desperately needs his victim to name him, to furnish him with an identity," while SHE is complicit through her "extreme, though involuntary, sexual pleasure."⁸ At the play's end, HE strangled SHE and then wrapped her naked, muddy body in the dress she had been wearing. As the lights faded on the torturer, standing at attention like a monument over the dead body of his victim, the voice of SHE continued to speak from the audience: "I'm never going to make you a HERO. [. . .] I'm not going to name you . . ."⁹

Feitlowitz reacted very strongly to the production, first with "a kind of shell shock after so much violence. And then revulsion at the aesthetized brutality and

⁶See Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 183-207 for a historical overview and analysis of the Madres.

⁷Feitlowitz, *Lexicon of Terror*, 3-4.

⁸Feitlowitz, "Dance of Death," 61.

⁹Quoted in Feitlowitz, "Dance of Death," 63.

exhibitionism.”¹⁰ In an interview that she published in *The Drama Review*, Feitlowitz and her interlocutors reiterate opposing interpretations and never seem to approach an understanding of one another. On the one hand, Feitlowitz cannot reconcile Pavlovsky’s personal politics, which she has admired, with the violent destruction of a woman’s body. On the other hand, the artists insist that to show is not to condone, and that the woman’s *voice* lives on. Although the split between voice and body was initially made for technical reasons, the resonance with accounts by those who have survived torture is profound.¹¹ Taylor points out that victim narratives often exhibit the positive value of a body/mind split as a way to separate the “self” from the torture to which the body is subjected.¹² In other words, the victim isolates the pain as belonging to the body, and splits it off from the essential self. Although Taylor recognizes the split between body and voice as a survival strategy in some instances, she sees the split

¹⁰Feitlowitz, “Dance of Death,” 64.

¹¹The doubling of the woman’s character came about because the action made Evans unable to say her lines. Feitlowitz, “Dance of Death,” 68.

¹²Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 161. Taylor discusses Alicia Partnoy’s use of linguistic distance in *The Little School*: after beginning in the first person, she shifts into third-person narrative at the point when her torture begins. Partnoy “remembers” her detention as if she were watching a movie. Taylor says, “It is as if the ‘I’ telling the story could no longer, or could no longer *bear to*, connect with the ‘I’ who lived it. That distancing, part of a survival strategy, protects against direct access to the past, which becomes recoverable in and through representation” (168). Partnoy, a university student with a nine-month-old daughter, was abducted in 1977 and held in *La Escuelita* (the Little School) for three and a half months, then in another camp for a month and a half longer. She was then “reappeared” to a visible jail, where she remained until she was released and forced to leave Argentina in 1979. She has no idea why she survived.

The shifting of narrative voice in Partnoy’s memoir is much more complicated than what Taylor describes, however. Not only does she write in both the first and third person about her own experience, she also writes in the first person about other *desaparecidos* who were with her at *La Escuelita*. Alicia Partnoy, *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival in Argentina* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1986). See also Amy Kaminsky, *Reading the Body Politic: Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 49. Kaminsky points out that *The Little School* is “a product of United States feminist publishing”—the publisher of Annie Sprinkle’s *Post-Porn Modernist*, interestingly enough. At the time Kaminsky wrote, it had not been published in Spanish anywhere.

in *Paso de dos* as a purely misogynist device: the lofty, disembodied *Patria* is split off from the “corporeal, dispensable woman.”¹³

Making her critique more explicit, Taylor says that another play by Pavlovsky, *El señor Galíndez*, eroticizes (and in no way demystifies) torture, even though it is intended as a denunciation. The title character is a Godot-like figure; however, unlike Beckett’s Didi and Gogo, the two professional torturers on stage do not wait in vain but receive various communications by telephone. An apprentice arrives. After some initial intimidation, he is inducted into the torturers’ fellowship by terrorizing and preparing to torture two prostitutes. Taylor objects that although *Galíndez* “situates the violence against the feminine body squarely within the context of nation-building,” it uses the same rhetorical strategy as Argentina’s military junta, “pretending that misogyny is incidental, rather than fundamental.”¹⁴ She believes that exposing a young woman’s naked and restrained body during the preparations for torture serves to engage and position the spectator as “connoisseur.” Taylor argues that the play erases the woman, by using her body as a surface upon which to read the male narrative of torture. Because Argentine culture is homosocial but not homosexual, bonding must be “channeled through the female body.” Taylor says, “The play focuses events so that political torture (which is not depicted onstage) is considered real and important, while the torture of naked women (which is depicted onstage) is not the ‘real’ thing and is

¹³Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 4. Both Taylor and Feitlowitz encountered difficulties in Argentina when they objected that Pavlovsky’s work was misogynistic. Taylor recounts that she was silenced by those who felt that a North American feminist could not possibly understand and had no right to criticize. Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 17-27. Yusem dismissed her as a “Yanqui feminist” in front of two hundred people. Pavlovsky defended his play in a private interview.

¹⁴Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 173.

hardly worth noting.”¹⁵ The naked female body is positioned to mediate between Pavlovsky and the (male) spectator, both of whom are also placed in the torturer’s position with respect to that body (in other words, outside its pain). According to Taylor, the (female) victim is doubly violated in both of these plays by Pavlovsky: within the narrative frame she is tortured, but she is at the same time displayed on stage as an object of erotic fascination.

Both Taylor and Feitlowitz take the position that women are degraded and brutalized in pornography and similarly explicit representations of sexuality. Like much early writing against pornography by feminists, their arguments take for granted that women are the sole objects of pornography and men its sole consumers, taking no account of variety or genre—for example, pornography created for gay and lesbian consumers, or sadomasochistic pornography with a male “bottom” and female dominatrix.¹⁶ Less easily discounted is their assumption that explicit representations of sexuality have a formative effect on real-world behaviors. In other words, pornography creates an artifact that continues to exist and to “do,” along with a structure of production and consumption. Leaving aside simplistic concerns with the similar proclivity of actor and viewer to perform certain acts, Catherine MacKinnon focuses on

¹⁵Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 178, 180-82. She also objects to the play’s womb-like setting—the play takes place in a small room reached via a hole in the floor—rather than in a “masculine” space like an office. As instances of the latter, she mentions Gambaro’s *The Camp* and the “Auschwitz” section of Peter Barnes’ *Laughter!*, both of which I discuss later in this chapter.

¹⁶For more nuanced discussions of pornography by feminist theorists, see Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (New York: Grove Press, 1996); Linda S. Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

the action performed by the pornographic representation itself—that is, silencing and disempowering those whom it represents and thus interpellates.¹⁷

To illustrate the mechanics of pornographic interpellation, I turn to a well-known text upon which Taylor relies. Susanne Kappeler argues for seeing the victim in any pornographic scenario as representing a *class* of victims. On that basis, the victim's rights are violated even if she participates voluntarily or doesn't really exist. Kappeler argues that pornography (like racial violence) is made by white men for other white men, within a power structure controlled by white men. At all points in this structure, the rights of white men are protected by being positioned as universal "human" rights, and the victims are particularized so that they cease to be members of a class; therefore, their rights disappear.¹⁸ Kappeler begins her book with the case of a black worker tortured and killed by a white farmer in Namibia in 1984,¹⁹ focusing on the photos that served as evidence in the case. The victim was forced to pose as a SWAPO supporter for a photo snapped by one of the farmer's guests, with the farmer holding him by a heavy neck chain and smiling into the camera. Kappeler notes that if a woman were substituted, the photo would be fairly typical pornography, with no changes necessary in the position of men either on camera or behind it.²⁰ Although Kappeler analyzes the torture as a performance that requires an audience (the farmer's friends), she does *not* analyze the mediation of her evidence by news media. Kappeler's analysis of

¹⁷For a cogent discussion of MacKinnon's position, see Frances Ferguson, "Pornography: The Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 21.3 (1995): 670-95, citing in particular Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Only Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). For a discussion of interpellation, see Chapter Two.

¹⁸Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1986), 15-18.

¹⁹She relies upon the report by Aslak Arlus and Ole Bernt Froshaug, "A Murder in Namibia," *The Guardian Weekly*, 8 January 1984, 7.

²⁰Kappeler, *Pornography of Representation*, 5-7.

representational practices suffers from her failure to take into account the fact that multiple uses are possible for an image. Who created the photos she saw, and for whose eyes? What response were they intended to evoke? How are the photos actually put to use in *The Guardian Weekly* and in her book? Kappeler exploits the horror of the Namibian torture photos for polemical ends. Like the pornographer, she erases the particularity of the victim or even of the class of victims he might represent.

As Judith Butler suggests, the construction of pornography as an injurious speech act depends upon an unequivocal attribution of (single) meaning to the utterance,²¹—an interpretive strategy that I argue against throughout this dissertation, proposing instead multivalent models for spectator response to the body in pain and asking the sorts of questions that Kappeler fails to ask about the photograph. Indeed, to consider the staging of bodily pain a *performative* act in the technical sense assumes that cultures and their artifacts, including such transient artifacts as performances, have just the sort of reciprocal effect upon one another that Kappeler decries.²²

Seductive Suffering

The critique of Pavlovsky that I have summarized above raises more questions than it answers. In order to evaluate the problem, I turn to a female Argentine playwright whose work is admired by both Taylor and Feitlowitz. Griselda Gambaro's

²¹Judith Butler, "Sovereign Performatives in the Contemporary Scene of Utterance," *Critical Inquiry* 23.2 (1997): 364.

²²For a discussion of performativity, see Chapter One. The term "pornography" has become so metaphorically overextended that it gets applied to any variety of spectacle that is disapproved of, from the news to zoos. A parallel evacuation of meaning can be seen for "torture," as the legal definition became less pertinent during the nineteenth century and the term's generalized and figurative uses proliferated. See Edward Peters, *Torture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 148-55. I stipulate a narrow definition for both terms. Pornography's etymological source in "writing about prostitutes" hints at its performative effect; that is, both prostitution and pornography aim to generate sexual excitation and release—not the primary aim of any performance that I discuss in this dissertation.

The Camp (*El Campo*, 1967) provides a salient point of comparison because it uses the physical suffering and humiliation of Emma to assimilate Martin into the camp's culture. The title could equally well refer to a retreat in the country, a military camp, or a concentration camp. The stage setting is also ambiguous, a "*room with shiny white walls*," office furniture on one side of the room, one door leading to the offstage interior and another to the exterior, and a window.²³ In order to make clear the structural importance of the ambiguity that is so well established even before the action begins, I will discuss the beginning and ending of *The Camp* first, and then return to Emma's body at its center.

Before Emma enters, Gambaro uses a power struggle between Martin and his new employer, Franco, to position the spectator as judge or detective. Franco's precise identity, the exact nature of the institution for which Martin has come to work, and the historical period are all kept ambiguous. Because Franco wears a Gestapo uniform, his entrance seems to situate the action in Nazi Germany; however, the dialogue soon makes it clear that the uniform is unexpected. Franco simply "likes" it, and calls attention to Martin's astonished reaction as if daring him to object to this exercise of personal taste. At the same time, he emphasizes his own harmlessness and complains about the unfair impression that the uniform creates (51-57). The spectator is left to wonder whether Franco flaunts the appearance of being a concentration camp commandant in order to foreclose any question about whether he is one. In other words, is the function of ostentation to conceal? Taylor points out that the theatricality of situations dramatized by Gambaro is what makes the scenario of victimization

²³Griselda Gambaro, *The Camp* (1967), in *Voices of Change in the Spanish American Theatre*, ed. and trans. William Oliver (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 50-103. For the Spanish texts of Gambaro's collected plays, see *Teatro*, 5 vols. (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1985-1991). Page references to the English translation will be given parenthetically within the text, but I retain the name "Franco" for the sake of its historical associations rather than using Oliver's Anglicized "Frank."

possible, because it signals to the victims “that the visible threat is not ‘real,’” and that the “juxtaposition or ‘binding’ of the innocuous and the dangerous” serves to disarm the spectators as well as those who are victimized within the dramatic frame, by “hiding what is threatening behind what is harmless.”²⁴

Much of the struggle between Martin and Franco is carried out at an overtly physical level. After drawing attention to his uniform several times, Franco proceeds to remove it as aggressively as he wore it. He objects to the heat and first takes off the jacket, apologizing for the informality, and then his boots. After he has put his feet up on the desk and wiggled them under Martin’s nose, the socks also come off (57-58). Martin’s gum chewing is a provocation to which Franco finally puts an end (52-53), and he repeatedly pushes Martin’s overcoat onto the floor (55). But Franco’s gradual domination of Martin during this first scene seems to bear no direct relation to his uniform. Indeed, the initial stage direction specifies that “*there seems to be nothing threatening about his demeanor*” (51), and he is superficially polite and self-effacing. Franco’s power derives from his apparent knowledge. Gambaro specifies an ambiguous sound score that neither Martin nor the spectator can completely decode. The play opens with “*the gabble of children, mixed strangely with harsh and authoritative orders. . . . Beneath this sound there seems to exist a kind of groan that drags itself out subterraneously. It almost seems an illusion*” (51). When Martin pushes an intercom button on the otherwise-bare desk, “*we hear a bit of soporific, well-scrubbed music.*” When he pushes the button again, both the “canned” and the “outside” sounds stop. Then comes the sound of “*someone running down the corridor outside and a voice somewhere between fury and laughter screams: ‘Run! But not that way, not that way!’*” followed by “*the barking and growling of fierce dogs, as though they were attacking*

²⁴Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 101, 103.

someone" (51). The door to the corridor opens briefly, but when Martin re-opens it a moment later he sees nothing.

The sounds indicate a vague menace outside the room, but the business with the intercom raises the possibility that some or all of them may "unreal." All of these sounds have occurred just before Franco's initial entrance, and the ambiguity increases during his power struggle with Martin. When the sounds of children, orders, and groans start up again, Franco pushes the intercom button and says, "I want those kids to shut up." The sounds stop (52). Do they stop because he turned off the sound track? Or were they made by "real" children, who were quieted by the person to whom he spoke via intercom? Then a "peasant song" is heard from outside. Franco talks about the peasants who pass by under the window on their way "out into the country, into the fields, out of tradition, just to sing," and pass by again five minutes later, on their way back, because "with all the machines nowadays, working is as easy as farting" (55-56). Martin can see no one when he looks out the window, even when he opens it wide and the sound gets louder. Franco continues to talk about the peasants as if they are "real," although the song stops when he touches the intercom. The song is heard again, and Franco describes "them" as he looks out the window but says, "They've gone," when Martin comes to look (although the song continues) (59). Although Franco seemed to turn the song off before, his degree of control remains in question because he has not been seen to turn it on again; however, it is clear that he understands the situation and that Martin does not—nor does the spectator.

The impression that some sort of independent activity exists offstage is reinforced by the introduction of smell at just this point. Martin notices "something strange" that Franco describes as "a garbage dump. Sometimes it catches fire. The children make bonfires." Martin complains that it "smells of burnt meat," and Franco agrees. "A dead dog in the garbage . . . a cat . . . children are cruel. Sometimes they're

not even dead” (59). The spectator would now strongly suspect that something unpleasant is going on outside and be trying to sort out the clues: children, orders, groans, songs, burning flesh. Which sounds are manufactured, and which are being covered up? The smell can’t be manufactured, can it? The spectator can hear all the sounds that Martin hears but most likely *cannot* smell anything. She must discriminate between the confusing but ominous sounds that she hears, Franco’s description of unseen sights, and Martin’s description of unsmelt smells. Her sense of hearing is thus multiply unreliable. Soon after the smell is discussed, the dogs begin barking “fiercely,” followed by “*a noise as of a short circuit of high voltage.*” Franco runs to the door and looks outside, but he closes it to prevent Martin from seeing. He says, laughing, “It’s the children! My! Oh, my! They’re shouting again! Look at them climb up the fences! They’re hanging by their feet! What shouts!” (59). He could be describing children at play, but the spectator cannot help imagining (as Martin implicitly does) that children tried to escape, were chased by dogs, and have been killed by an electrified fence.

One cannot help assuming that the burning flesh is human, and that Martin has (perhaps unwittingly) come to work at a concentration camp. There are fewer and fewer signs to contradict the assumption. Emma looks like a concentration camp inmate, head shaved, wearing a gray prison smock (62). When she gives a “concert” in the second act, part of the onstage audience are dressed as Gestapo officers and the rest are “*a group of prisoners, skin and bone, real inmates of a concentration camp. They wear the characteristic uniforms and old, worn-out shoes*” (76). All that Gambaro makes explicit, however, is that the setting is *not* Nazi Germany. Early in the first scene Franco discusses Vietnam, establishing a time period contemporary with the time at which the play was written (53). He also mentions Americans and Russians as if they are elsewhere, thus making it easy to assume (but not requiring) that the play takes

place in Argentina. Like the spectator, Martin is often reminded of past atrocities; however, the naivete of his remembering establishes that the spectator is more perceptive than he is. After looking at a child's drawing, he says "I saw a photograph once . . . of children . . . being led to a . . ." (57). He later tells Emma that she looks "like someone who's escaped from a . . ." and then "*halts, surprised, as though he had not realized until that moment that she appears to be an inmate of a concentration camp*" (65). The spectator is left to fill in the details. Like Franco, who knows which sounds are real, the spectator knows more than Martin.

Nina Molinaro reads *The Camp* as a theatrical version of the panopticon, a prison in which each inmate can be observed at all times, first imagined by Jeremy Bentham and then theoretically elaborated by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. Like the panopticon, *The Camp* "enforces the epistemological difference between visibility and invisibility" and gives the spectator a choice between two positions: superior to Martin, or inferior to Franco.²⁵ The two are similar, but not the same, and neither spectator position coincides precisely with either character. Knowledge seems to confer power over another character, but the spectator's knowledge does not, of course, translate into this sort of power. The spectator remains powerless. And although the spectator can never gain full knowledge of what is real and what is not in this play, she does have an ever-increasing power to distinguish right from wrong. Franco manipulates both Martin and Emma and inflicts pain on both of them. But he then seems to relinquish that power abruptly. Franco rescinds Martin's contract for failure to create order in a mass of unrelated papers, sends him away, and insists that he take Emma along (91-94). Martin, who has been thoroughly intimidated in the intervening scenes (which I will discuss shortly), is astonished that they can leave. But when they

²⁵Nina L. Molinaro, "Discipline and Drama: Panoptic Theatre and Griselda Gambaro's *El campo*," *Latin American Theatre Review* 29.2 (1996): 31. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

return to Martin's home, his family is not there, and Emma's suitcase holds only another gray prison smock. Soon an "official" and his assistants enter, subdue Martin with an injection, and prepare to brand his forearm—a mark that Emma already bears (94-103).

Commentators have discussed the invasive transformation of home to prison, which seems to anticipate the "dirty war" that provides the context for later plays such as *Paso de dos* and *Antígona Furiosa*.²⁶ Less notice has been taken of the inversion of knowledge/power relations in the final scene of *The Camp*. As long as they remain in the camp, Martin repeatedly asks Emma for the truth, and she provides ludicrously innocuous explanations. He notices the identification mark on her forearm, and she explains that her father had her marked as a small child because she was always getting lost. When asked whether it hurt, she replies "Not a bit. I was so little. And it's not a tattoo! It's ink, indelible ink!" (65-66). During their final scene in the camp, Emma describes the sounds of dogs and machine guns outside as a fox hunt, while Martin suspects that prisoners are being allowed to "escape" in order to serve as prey (87-90).

In Martin's home, however, Emma senses dangers that Martin glosses over. He finds explanations for the absence of his family, suggesting that his brothers have "run off to play" although Emma asks "(terrified): Have they disappeared?" (95). At the sound of barking outside, she says, "I hoped I would never run into another dog, anywhere, not on any street, not even the graves . . ." But Martin explains "*in a kind of fury*" that "These dogs don't bite, they're dumb dogs. They don't know how to take orders" (96-97). Now *he* provides the innocuous explanation. In her only explicit

²⁶See Molinaro, "Discipline and Drama," 37; Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 120; David William Foster, "The Texture of Dramatic Action in the Plays of Griselda Gambaro," *Hispanic Journal* 1.2 (1980): 62. Although *The Camp* was written before clandestine concentration camps became a feature of Argentine politics, the regime of Carlos Oganía was extraordinarily repressive, from the 1966 coup until its demise after the Montoneros executed former president Uramburu in 1970. See David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 346-57.

reference to the horrors that she has been through, Emma describes being chased by dogs after getting off a train where “there were so many people. Some of them were hungry, or thirsty, or they were trying to relieve themselves . . . and the children, all squeezed together like sardines in a can.” She ran, but was jumped on and bitten by “an enormous dog” (98). But she tells the story while Martin is in the kitchen getting tea. I propose that Emma does not need to tell Martin about this experience because he is now fully assimilated into the terrorist culture for which she works. Her suffering has accomplished that objective; however, because the spectators may still have the capacity to resist, she must still suffer for them.

Gambaro initially describes the “*anguish and desperation of [Emma’s] appearance,*” which are contradicted by her “*gestures and attitudes of a lady dressed in a party gown*” who “*speaks in a worldly and sophisticated manner.*” She “*lurches in*” during in the play’s second scene “*as though she had been pushed in,*” and “*stands by the door, frightened and defensive.*” But as soon as Martin sees her, “*she straightens up and smiles. She makes a terrible effort, as though she were about to act a role*” (62). Her subsequent behavior contradicts her appearance, but it comports with her claim to be a concert pianist and also with Franco’s earlier description of the “lady” that he invited just for Martin. He wanted to provide something pleasant “after a hard day’s work, among unfamiliar people, far from home”—that is, “Venus, a frivolous element” (61). Emma proceeds to be graciously welcoming, to flirt, to show her legs. But Martin responds only negatively to her sexual overtures. He finds the contrast between her behavior and her appearance grotesque, as may the spectator.

I have thus far left out the most painful features of Gambaro’s description. In addition to the prison smock and shaved head, the palm of Emma’s right hand “*is marked by a livid wound,*” her face bears “*the ravages of long suffering,*” and she is tormented by itching all over her body (62). As she smiles and talks “*with artificial and*

mannered high spirits,” she begins to scratch. The action begins “*surreptitiously,*” but gradually gains “*increasing desperation*” and grows “*frenzied.*” She offers a series of explanations: that she lay down in the grass to rest on the way home from an all-night ball, got eczema from the dog, or is irritated by an increased blood flow due to her excitement (62-67). Because she touches herself constantly, the scratching draws attention to her body but eliminates from that attention any potential for thoughtless spectatorial pleasure.

Emma does seduce Martin, but the seduction is schizoid. He pities her and repeatedly asks what’s wrong with her. When he grabs her arm to stop the scratching, he sees the identification mark. He “ *rubs her arm sadly*” and says “You’re marked.” Sexualizing his compassion, she “*sidles up to him seductively,*” and says “*(with a seductive smile)* It would be so nice if I could please you. *(She rubs against his body)*” (66). Martin is so disturbed by her behavior that he announces his intention to leave. On its own, this interaction seems to illustrate the commonplace use of sexuality as a distraction from unpleasantness, and both Martin and the spectator might be congratulated for withstanding it. Because Emma’s behavior is so grotesque, however, there is no temptation. I suggest that the sexual seduction is a screen for the real seduction by means of compassion, and functions in much the same way as the ostentatious Gestapo costume. The screen covers *and* it makes visible. I will return to these functions after examining the devices through which compassion is invoked.

Martin does not leave after Emma “fails” to please him because Franco returns, “*once more impeccably dressed in his Gestapo uniform*” (68). The scene becomes both more theatrical and more “real,” as Franco “directs” Emma’s performance. He commands her to please Martin, “worries” about whether her hand will be in condition to play in time for the concert she is to give for “a very small, select group of friends,” but then seems pleased to see that the hand is “covered with little bugs” (73). Emma’s

attempts at seduction become more and more desperate as Franco alternatively praises her, reprimands Martin, commands her, and cajoles him. Taylor links Emma's frustrated attempt to seduce Martin to the practice of "family torture" that was to become all too familiar in the Southern Cone during the 1970s. To rape, brutalize, and kill a woman in front of her husband and children was considered more effective than to torture the man who was ostensibly the "target." In the theatricalized world of the "dirty war," as in *The Camp*, the "female body is seen as providing entry into the male psyche."²⁷ Interestingly enough, Taylor praises Gambaro's duplication of this structure, whereas she objects to Pavlovsky's. Although I am sure there are *many* differences between the plays to account for her different reactions, including the fact that Emma is not stripped, Gambaro's use of the suffering female body seems to me equally unconsidered with respect to feminist challenges to misogyny. The ending of this scene, for example, makes the analogy with "family torture" very tenuous.

Martin seems finally to be pushed into making a choice of either joining Franco and hurting Emma himself, or cooperating with the "seduction," which by this point is a patent sham, in order to protect Emma. After she exposes her breasts and begs, "Please say yes. It's only for a moment. And I'm not sick. As for my hand, it . . . (*She tries to hide it.*) Why, they just look at me and they . . . (*She smiles.*) They . . ."

Martin still wants to find out who "they" are and how Emma is being hurt. He grabs her face and demands, "Who?" But she encourages him to squeeze harder, and Franco is gleeful. They have gotten Martin to add injury to insult: he has not only humiliated Emma by rejecting her, he has also inflicted physical pain. A spectator might well believe at this point that Martin is being trained for a job like Franco's, and that he will soon appear in a Nazi uniform. But Martin stops at once. The scene ends with Franco rhythmically cracking his whip against the floor and Emma screaming as if she is being

²⁷Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 128-29.

hit. Franco is again behaving as though this were a harmless game. When he begs Emma, “Please, a little more,” one is not certain whether he wants permission to continue beating the floor or whether he wants her to continue speaking about their long friendship. The spectator now cannot be *entirely* sure that this is not a classic sadomasochistic relationship, with the suffering woman in charge of the scenario.²⁸ Like Martin, the spectator is trying to find out the truth.

The scene that follows is the play’s most spectacular, and the one most written about. Emma gives a concert for an onstage audience of prisoners and Gestapo officers, as I mentioned earlier, with Franco conducting the entire event. Emma’s grotesque appearance and physical suffering are again pushed into the foreground. She enters “*wearing a ridiculous wig on her shaved head and drags a satin train that has been sewn on clumsily to her gray prison frock*” (76). Franco nonchalantly steps on the train, pulling it off, and knocks off the wig. When Emma sits down to play, Franco puts a dark liquid onto some cotton and swabs her all over, which intensifies the itching that seemed until then to have subsided. The piano—from which sounds emerged while it was tuned at the opening of the scene—is silent. She finally plays “*with grand gestures while she imitates with her voice Chopin’s ‘Polonaise’*” (83). The prisoners call for an encore, but then they drown out her voice by humming.

Much note has been taken of the performances that Emma “puts on” within the dramatic frame, first as seductive hostess and then as the star on a grotesque concert stage. But no one seems to notice that the actress playing Emma must *be* an actor of the quality to which Emma pretends, perhaps even a “star.” Any spectator watching her perform *as* Emma, through all the levels of Emma’s performances within the play, must respond to the actor. I will focus on this issue later, but suggest for now that the way in

²⁸See, e.g., Williams, *Hard Core*, 214.

which this play highlights the actor's virtuosity goes a long way towards overshadowing its regressive gender positions.

Throughout the concert, Martin tries to end Emma's humiliation and is forcibly restrained by the Gestapo, while Emma continues to deny her torment (81-84). But even at the beginning of the scene, he is performing too. Shortly after Emma's entrance, Franco says, "You haven't greeted her," and Martin replies, "*very tense*: You told me not to move." Then when told to pay his respects, Martin crosses to Emma, whose "*false smile*" is "*replaced by a look of enormous sadness*" as they "*look at each other in silence*." I must note that, even here, it is only Emma's suffering that has the power to draw him closer. When he "*finally kisses her on the cheek*" (76-77), it seems that Martin has become another Emma, rather than another Franco. Their similarity increases during the concert. While the prisoners imitate Emma at the height of her scratching, for example, the Gestapo officers surround Martin.

One of them scratches his cheek with a finger. Martin brushes his hand away, but then the other three surround him as well. The fourth officer approaches Martin with both hands extended and scratches his face.

When we see Martin's face again, it is all bloody. All this is executed almost tenderly and without violence. (79-80)

By the time the scene ends, Franco can smell "the children burning dogs again," and both Emma and Martin are crying on the floor (85).

I agree with Jean Franco that the play uses "the overall sexual politics of sadomasochism" to illuminate "the state's manipulation of the erotic in order to secure obedient subjects."²⁹ I do not agree with her emphasis on "the social construction of the feminine position," however. To assume that pornography always and only degrades and objectifies women is to oversimplify not only pornography but all representations

²⁹Jean Franco, "Self-Destructing Heroines," *Minnesota Review* 22 (1984): 110.

of sadomasochism (to say nothing of its practices). The ur-masochist is, after all, male.³⁰ If Emma, the only female character, represents the feminine position, then Martin is feminized by becoming a performer and a victim. Unlike Emma, however, his resistance to this position is unambiguous, and his performance offers no spectacular theatricality as compensation. Furthermore, the “manipulation of the erotic” must be examined more closely. As Taylor points out (approvingly), Gambaro never sexualizes the relationship between Martin and Emma.³¹ The manipulative machinery highlighted by *The Camp* is not sexuality, but sympathy. The inept sexual seduction is a transparent mask for the frighteningly effective seduction by means of suffering.

In *The Camp*, as in *Angels in America* and *Philoctetes*, the body in pain serves to interpellate a reluctant character into an onstage community—in this case, a dystopia rather than a utopia. Although Martin can be compared to Belize and Neoptolemus, he provides an *anti*-model for spectator response. David William Foster argues that Martin illustrates the pointless ineptitude of “humanitarian” compassion. Martin’s feelings only serve to trap him within the structure of power that pervades both public and private space. Foster calls the branding of Martin at the end of the play “perhaps the most repugnantly effective adherence in Latin American theatre to Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*” because its very “gratuitousness . . . underscores the deprivation of emotional release for the audience.” By offering “no working out of the message of redemption,” the play encourages the spectator to look for a way to step outside existing power structures in order to take action.³² Emma performs for Martin, winning his sympathy, but they *both* perform for the audience. Martin’s compassion for Emma is a model for the spectator’s compassion for both Emma and Martin. The only result is

³⁰See Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism, Coldness, and Cruelty* (New York: Zone, 1989).

³¹Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 128.

³²Foster, “Texture of Dramatic Action,” 62-65.

a false sense of hope that is dashed by the play's ending. If the play's distancing mechanisms work, then, the spectator recognizes compassion as a trap and refuses to be rendered passive by fascinating fascism.

Although this interpretation is persuasive, it does not take into account the pervasive ambiguity that shapes *The Camp*. As I mentioned earlier, the spectator can never fully decode either Emma's behavior or the offstage sounds; however, the spectator always knows more than Martin does. The mounting evidence that both Emma and Martin are "real" victims culminates in the branding of Martin by agents of the *sociedad anónima* (both "corporation" and "anonymous society") that owns the "camp." Therefore, the spectator was "right" to feel compassion for them both. Molinaro points out that this puts the spectator into a "Franco" position with respect to knowledge.³³ This manipulation of the spectator's will to knowledge is subtle in comparison to the play's manipulation of sympathy, however, and I think it likely to produce a vague sense of disgust at being right, at feeling anything.

Testing the Spectator

Gambaro is one of a number of playwrights who have used the suffering of characters to challenge their audience's capacity to respond, pushing the onstage violence past what many spectators can tolerate. She has said that she now thinks that her *Information for Foreigners* (*Información para extranjeros*, 1971) may be too violent to stage as written.³⁴ To provide some points of comparison, I preface my discussion of this play with a glimpse at work by Peter Barnes, Sarah Kane, and Franz Xaver Kroetz.

³³Molinaro, "Discipline and Drama," 33-36.

³⁴Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 133.

Barnes begins his two-part *Laughter!* (1978) with the reign of Ivan the Terrible, who created “the first centralized, multi-national State in the West,”³⁵ and ends with the mass production of human suffering and death by the Nazis. Ivan tries to depict himself as “tortured” by the burden of power; however, the man being impaled on a stake upstage sets off the emptiness of his protestations, as do his own actions: several times he drives his staff through a minion’s foot, and he bludgeons his own son to death when the latter makes a grab for the crown. The truly horrendous actions of “Tsar” contrast with their slapstick presentation, and “Auschwitz” replays the contrast in a different key. Office workers joke about the hardships they must endure as citizens of a country waging war, while they catalog both supplies for the crematoria and the humans burnt in them using denatured combinations of numbers and letters. Bernard Dukore notes that the jokes of these “innocent” functionaries produce empathy, which is enhanced by dramatic conflict with the character Gottleb, who is a better Nazi than Hitler.³⁶ When Gottleb finally confronts the workers with an image of the human death that is their real product, they attempt to engage the audience in a sing-along rendition of “This is a brotherhood of man” (409)—the original, from the 1961 Broadway musical *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, puts it differently: “*There* is a brotherhood of man.”³⁷

The “Epilogue” of *Laughter!* features “Bimko and Bieberman,” the “Boffo Boys of Birkenau” dancing to the tune of “On the Sunny Side of the Street” and telling terrible jokes as they die in the gas chamber. For example,

³⁵Peter Barnes, *Laughter!* in *Collected Plays* (London: Heinemann, 1981), 367.

³⁶Bernard Frank Dukore, *Barnestorm: The Plays of Peter Barnes* (New York: Garland, 1995), 44.

³⁷I thank Judith Milhous for pointing out this small but significant change in wording.

The Campo Foreman kept hitting me with a rubber truncheon yesterday—*hit, hit, hit*. I said, “You hitting me for a joke or on purpose?” “On purpose!” he yelled. *Hit, hit, hit*. “Good,” I said, “because such jokes I don’t like.” (410)

Asked whether audiences laughed at such jokes, Barnes replied, “On the good nights, they didn’t.”³⁸ According to Patraha, the play demonstrates the way in which laughter makes the spectator complicit with characters. An “Author” figure actually makes this polemical statement during a prologue: “laughter only confuses and corrupts” and is “an ally of tyrants” because it “softens our hatred” and provides “an excuse to change nothing” (343). As an illustration of the way in which laughter “diverts attention away from engagement with important issues,” the Author is subjected to slapstick mishaps, beginning with a pie in the face, a squirting boutonniere, and falling trousers.³⁹

This does *not* entirely account for the effect of humor in Barnes’ play, which more likely challenges spectators to laugh, just as it challenges them to react appropriately to the suffering on stage. Dukore points out that *Laughter!* makes spectators laugh and at the same time shows them why they should not.⁴⁰ The point of both the violence and the jokes seems to be that there *is* no appropriate response to atrocity, and Barnes attempts to make this evident by short-circuiting and “making strange” through extremity the means by which cultures tolerate the intolerable. He reports that audiences in London responded not with laughter, but with palpable hatred.⁴¹

³⁸Dukore, *Barnestorm*, 47.

³⁹Patraha, *Spectacular Suffering*, 30.

⁴⁰Dukore, *Barnestorm*, 40-41.

⁴¹Mark Bly and Doug Wagner, “Theater of the Extreme: An Interview with Peter Barnes,” *Theater* 12.2 (1981): 45.

When Sarah Kane's *Blasted* opened at London's Royal Court theatre in 1995, the vituperation from the British press was comparable to that which greeted Edward Bond's *Saved* thirty years earlier. One critic, for example, repeated his assessment that the play suffered from a lack of connection to any larger social context.⁴² The run sold out, perhaps abetted by the resulting notoriety but undoubtedly owing precisely to its resonance with multiple social contexts. No alert spectator in 1995 could avoid making a connection to contemporary "ethnic cleansing" and systematic rape in Bosnia. At the same time, setting the play in Leeds rather than Bosnia makes the connections to IRA terrorism in Britain and domestic violence impossible to ignore. Kane says, "*Blasted* raised the question 'What does a common rape in Leeds have to do with mass rape as a war weapon in Bosnia?' and the answer appeared to be 'Quite a lot'."⁴³ Tom Sellar sees the play as an indictment of the way that violence operates within social structures as a *product* of social hierarchies. He suggests that the hostility of the press may have had something to do with the fact that the central character, Ian, is a 45-year-old white journalist.⁴⁴

Blasted includes a dazzling array of suffering over the course of two days in a hotel room. Although Ian inflicts some pain on others, he embodies most of the suffering that is actually staged (rather than described). During the first half of the play, he keeps busy with self-inflicted pain. Although he has lost one lung and knows that the

⁴²Tom Sellar, "Truth and Dare: Sarah Kane's *Blasted*," *Theater* 27.1 (1996): 31. This issue of *Theater* also includes the text of *Blasted*. Parenthetical page citations within my discussion refer to Sarah Kane, *Blasted & Phaedra's Love* (London: Methuen Drama, 1996). The most notorious feature of *Saved* is the stoning to death of a baby by a group of young men, including the baby's father. I do not discuss this seminal piece of stage violence because no suffering is actually enacted. The "baby" is presumed to occupy the carriage onstage but is not visible during this incident.

⁴³Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Methuen, 1997), 131.

⁴⁴Sellar, "Truth and Dare," 32, citing the observation of Carl Miller in the *Independent* that one would expect "a group of men in comfortable shoes" to respond unfavorably to this play. Kane makes the same point in the Stephenson and Langridge interview, 130.

other is diseased, he drinks gin and smokes between coughing fits. His morning drink brings on an attack of pain that “looks very much as if he is dying” (23), but he lights a cigarette as soon as it subsides. Later, he is raped by the soldier who forces his way into the room. The soldier then sucks out and eats Ian’s eyes and blows out his own brains (between scenes). The soldier’s corpse remains onstage, where the starving and blinded Ian hugs it for comfort. Ian finally eats the corpse of a baby that his 21-year-old companion Cate tried to rescue from the violence outside.

Most of the play’s abundant sexual activity involves pain. Although Ian has brought Cate to the hotel room for the weekend, and they were previously intimate, she is no longer willing to have intercourse with him. He attempts to coerce her through sympathy for his suffering. But his illness is not a sufficient incentive, so he “*appears to be in considerable pain*” and complains, “Don’t give me a hard-on if you’re not going to finish me off. . . . If I don’t come my cock aches.” Because Cate apologizes but remains adamant, he grabs her hand and uses it to masturbate “*until he comes with some genuine pain*” (41-42). Both the desire and the relief are painful. Ian is later fellated (and bitten) by Cate—apparently paying him back for cunnilingus that drew blood the previous night (between scenes). He also masturbates, defecates, and urinates on stage, uses a wide array of racial slurs to refer to the unseen room service waiter, and rapes Cate while she is unconscious.

Like Gambaro’s Martin, Cate provides an ambivalent model for spectator response to Ian. She claims to have come to the hotel because she feels sorry for him, but his behavior seems calculated to undercut any *spectator* sympathy that his suffering might invoke. The fact that Cate stutters and has fits when subjected to stress seems to explain (without justifying) Ian’s assumption that she is mentally deficient. She does indeed seem fragile during the first half of the play, leading one to anticipate her victimization with a kind of nausea. But she escapes from Ian through the bathroom

window just before the soldier arrives, and she then returns twice. The first time, she brings the baby that a mother has handed her on the street, and she helplessly holds it until it dies. When she returns at the end of the play, bloody from the sex that she has traded for food and drink, she has become the play's only effectual agent.

The soldier, who is present (alive, that is) only when Cate is not, might be seen as a mechanism for the revenge of the weak and oppressed (represented by Cate) upon those with power (Ian). More important for the spectator, however, is the challenge that he poses to Ian as a journalist. He describes the rapes and other atrocities that he has committed in the course of war and challenges Ian to write about them. "Doing to them what they done to us, what good is that? At home I'm clean. Like it never happened. Tell them you saw me" (46). When Ian refuses to accept this task as his "business," he is destroyed. Kane thus implies a choice for the spectator between morally responsible action and the violent destruction that she stages. Like Gambaro and Barnes, she challenges the spectator to find an appropriate response to intolerable actions.

Kane's work is notably similar to the early plays of Franz Xaver Kroetz. *Men's Business* (*Männersache*, 1971), for example, chronicles the sad "love" affair of Otto, a laborer, and Martha, a butcher.⁴⁵ As is typical of his plays about Bavarian workers, Kroetz's characters speak "an abstraction of lower-class speech," inarticulate and impoverished. Their culture supplies them with only this "pre-fabricated language," and their inability to make it their own allows them to disclaim responsibility for their utterances.⁴⁶ In this play, "men's business" is used as an explicit reference to the girly magazine that Otto brings with him on an early visit to Martha's butcher shop; however, Otto's implicit business is to bolster his manliness by deprecating

⁴⁵Franz Xaver Kroetz, "Men's Business," trans. Michael Roloff and Carl Weber, in *Farmyard & Four Other Plays* (New York: Urizen Books, 1976), 77-99.

⁴⁶Jeanette R. Malkin, "Verbal Politics in Handke and Kroetz," *Modern Drama* 33.3 (1990): 365, 370-72.

Martha—particularly her appearance. Otto insists that Martha prove her love for him by shooting her dog. Finally, Martha and Otto shoot each other repeatedly. The script calls for them to pass the rifle back and forth, with three hits apiece, until Martha “*falls down face forward and remains lying there rigidly*,” at which point Otto says, “You give up?” (99).

The emotional violence inflicted with every utterance is far worse, in its absolute ordinariness, than either the accusation that Martha prefers to be sexually gratified by her dog or the shooting. Christopher Innes argues that *Men’s Business* “verges on prurience” because the characters’ behavior is not credible. He considers the shooting death and Otto’s accusation to be “too alien to our experience, too near to pornographic fantasy to be taken on any but a symbolic level.”⁴⁷ For the 1972 production in Darmstadt, the actors and director rearranged the scenes, placing the shooting first and using puppets or masks, so that it prefigured the emotional violence. Otto and Martha thus ended the play together. Kroetz was at first angry, but later “agreed that the violence and cruelty of the ending were counterproductive in helping to understand the problems presented.”⁴⁸

Although Kroetz prohibited further productions of *Men’s Business*, he rewrote the text “to make it more accessible to the reader.”⁴⁹ He has reworked this play twice, first as *A Man, A Dictionary* (*Ein Mann ein Wörterbuch*) and then as *Through the Leaves* (*Wer durchs Laub geht*, 1976). In revising the material, Kroetz eliminated both the shooting and the dog’s death, and he gradually increased the characters’ ability to express themselves verbally. He made Martha more articulate and self-assured. She

⁴⁷Christopher Innes, *Modern German Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 227.

⁴⁸Richard W. Blevins, *Franz Xaver Kroetz: The Emergence of a Political Playwright* (New York: P. Lang, 1983), 46-47.

⁴⁹Kroetz, “Men’s Business,” 77.

keeps a diary in *A Man, A Dictionary*, proudly shares her writing with Otto, and near the end of the play has written a poem. *Through the Leaves* includes entries from the diary between scenes. In both versions, Otto makes a rudimentary show of his feelings by insisting that Martha protect her eyes in front of a sunlamp. I prefer Kroetz's harsh original. By breaking out of the hyper-realistic mode established by earlier scenes, the extraordinarily violent resolution of *Men's Business* highlights the ordinary verbal violence in a way that his realistic resolutions of the situation do not.

Kroetz's failure of confidence in the violence that he once wanted to put on stage brings me back to Gambaro, who wrote *Information for Foreigners* between 1971 and 1973, kept it hidden, and then smuggled it out of the country when she fled in 1977. Samizdat copies circulated in Europe during the years she lived in Barcelona, but she refused to permit productions because she worried about the safety of family members who remained in Argentina. She returned to Argentina in 1980, but to date the play has not been produced there. There have been readings of Feitlowitz's translation in the United States.⁵⁰ I will summarize the staging that Gambaro describes and discuss the audience experience such a staging would create; however, like *Men's Business*, this play is encountered as a text and the audience experience is created in the imagination of its readers.

The play is meant to be staged in "*a spacious, residential house, preferably two stories, with corridors and empty rooms, some of which interconnect*" (69), or in a theatre space that can be configured to approximate such a house. Guides with

⁵⁰Marguerite Feitlowitz, "Crisis, Terror, Disappearance: The Theatre of Griselda Gambaro," in Griselda Gambaro, *Information for Foreigners*, trans. and ed. Marguerite Feitlowitz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992). This volume includes Feitlowitz's translation of *Information for Foreigners*, which I will cite parenthetically within the text. The first reading was presented at the Americas Society, and excerpts were performed for a conference at Montclair State College in New Jersey (vii). To give an idea of the political atmosphere during the period when *Information for Foreigners* was written, Martin Anderson calls the years 1970-73 a kind of "laboratory" for the "dirty war." The first clandestine camp (*La Escuelita*) was established in 1975. *Dossier Secreto*, 135.

flashlights divide the audience into groups and lead them through darkened passageways, up and down staircases, sometimes getting lost or finding a door locked. The play's twenty scenes of abduction and torture take place in various rooms, their order depending upon the route taken by each Guide. Scenes are presumably repeated for different groups, requiring a carefully worked-out plan in order to coordinate the appearance of certain actors in different locations and the repeated return of each group to certain rooms.

The script follows a single group, which is meant to encounter another group in the corridor at some points. Their Guide appears to make mistakes, claims to have entered the wrong room, admonishes the performers, or apologizes for inept performances. At the end of Scene 6, having said that he was leading them to see the remains of martyred Christians in the catacombs, he begins to kick and trample a canvas-covered form in the corner (88). A second Guide rushes the spectators out of the room and takes over for the rest of the tour. He does his job with more authority and also takes an active part in some scenes.

As in *The Camp*, Gambaro uses theatricality to create distance. For example, she specifies that the cries of the "pupil" being subjected to ever-increasing electric shock by his "teacher" are "*always in a parrot-voice, stereotyped like those of someone who, as a joke, coarsely imitates moans, groans, and pain*" (79). This behavior seems to indicate that the pain is faked, and spectators might well be familiar with this famous experiment.⁵¹ Many other scenes of violence include instructions for outlandish makeup and stylized, "bad" acting. For one abduction, the performers "*act very broadly, a little like marionettes*" with a "*grossly exaggerated*" tone (92); for another, the acting is

⁵¹The Milgram experiment, performed in Germany and the United States in the 1960s, was presented to those who participated as a test of punishment as a learning tool. In fact, Milgram wanted to find out how far people would go in hurting others out of obedience to authority. A majority proved willing to administer what they thought were lethal shocks. See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

described as “*crude, infantile, and exaggerated*” (112). In some scenes, the actors are costumed as children and play exaggeratedly violent but traditional children’s games that are juxtaposed with police actions (116-17, 121-23), and theatre rehearsals appear to be taking place in a number of other rooms. Early on, the group is prevented from entering a locked room where an actor is rehearsing (71-72). When this happens again, the second Guide brings them through another entrance to secretly watch a rehearsal of *Othello*. When the actor playing Othello is arrested for murdering Desdemona, the police intervention blurs the boundary between the play and the rehearsal within it of another play (118-21).

Not all of the scenes are safely theatricalized. In one room to which the group keeps returning, a young woman is dripping wet and terrified. The *lack* of acting instructions imply that her scenes are to be well played. The dialogue implies (but clearly) that between these visits she is subjected to the *submarino*—that is, she is repeatedly held under water, to a point just short of drowning. When she is first encountered, the scene includes a solicitous Man who asks questions and draws her attention to a gun that he leaves with her. Later, the second Guide takes over the implicit invitations to suicide, but he is less solicitous. He ridicules her, slaps her bottom, puts his hand up her dress. She never speaks. Other incidents are given no narrative context whatsoever and no theatrical device frames them, suggesting that their violence is executed realistically and is unmarked as performance. Screams without scenes echo in the corridors. “Spectators” are attacked without warning, or step into the action as attackers. A spectator would have to trust that these incidents are scripted and that the participants are actors—precisely the sort of trust that Gambaro challenges at every turn. As Rosalea Postma notes, the spectators are disoriented by their inability

to “see or comprehend the total space” in which they are enclosed, or to get an overview of the fragmented dramatic action.⁵²

Taylor argues that the environmental staging of *Information for Foreigners* effectively duplicates the disorienting theatricality of late twentieth-century terrorism, which “allows the authorities as well as the audience to deny the reality of what we see with our own eyes.”⁵³ Yet, if the play is staged, the naked bodies of “victims” are materially present and a spectator might stumble over one in the dark. Gambaro thus destroys the distance that is essential to voyeuristic pleasure.⁵⁴ I would argue, however, that she manipulates a combination of distance and proximity to disorient and perhaps even to anger the spectator. The “foreigners” of the title refers in part to excerpts from articles that actually appeared in the Argentine press, read by the Guides with the prefatory identification “Explanation: For Foreigners.” The patent falsity of press reports turned Argentine citizens into foreigners in their own country, whether they ignored the growth of state terrorism or not, as Feitlowitz suggests.⁵⁵ Gambaro’s play recreates for a spectator the confusion brought about by not knowing what to believe and creates a desire to see through all staging devices. *Information for Foreigners* activates the same will to knowledge as *The Camp*, but here the knowledge confers no power and there is no tenable model for spectator response.

Taylor argues that, like Emma’s seduction of Martin, *Information for Foreigners* binds together “sexually charged” images with “annihilating violence, and that spectators will want to turn away in order to avoid feeling like “peeping children at

⁵²Rosalea Postma, “Space and Spectator in the Theatre of Griselda Gambaro: *Información para extranjeros*,” *Latin American Theatre Review* 14.1 (1980): 37-38.

⁵³Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 136.

⁵⁴Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 140.

⁵⁵Feitlowitz, “Crisis, Terror, Disappearance,” 6.

keyholes, like voyeurs, like perverts.”⁵⁶ Terrorism relies on this aversive reaction. Indeed, the purpose of state terrorism is to produce this aversion and ensure that the public, terrorized by disappearing civilians and reappearing corpses, does not look closely at the operations of the government. Theatre such as Gambaro’s can help the spectator learn to see and, hopefully, to react appropriately—with action rather than cathartic emotion. If audiences turn away from atrocity, they “are no longer in any position to understand or combat it.” If they look but identify too strongly with the victim, they might be disheartened and disempowered.⁵⁷

Like Kroetz, Gambaro appears to have retreated from a drama that she finds too violent. Sarah Kane, in contrast, considered it “crucial to chronicle and commit to memory events never experienced—in order to avoid them happening.”⁵⁸ During the years after Gambaro wrote *Information for Foreigners*, however, many of those who would be in her Argentine audience *did* experience precisely the sort of events that she would now be reluctant to stage. Avoidance is no longer a possibility, and the play now has a different valence. Kroetz must face a different issue. The Bavarian underclass did not come to see his plays, and his audience of intellectuals *could not* experience the inarticulate degradation of his characters. The potential for “prurient” exploitation is a direct product of the economic inequities that he wanted to address. Performance context cannot be left out of the ethics of representing bodily pain on stage, and I will return to this issue after presenting other solutions to the problem.

⁵⁶Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 141.

⁵⁷Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 143.

⁵⁸Stephenson and Langridge, *Rage and Reason*, 133.

Presenting a Model of Effective Action

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Mĩcere Githae Mũgo use martyrdom to enhance the impact of a positive model for action. *The Trial of Dedan Kĩmathi* (1976) romanticizes the suffering of its eponymous male hero in the fight against colonial rule. The torture episodes in this play occur in semidarkness so that they are more fully heard than seen, and they serve to enhance Kĩmathi's heroism. The authors describe the play as "an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement."⁵⁹ Defining "good" theatre as that which gives courage to the people and helps them in the struggle for liberation, Ngũgĩ and Mũgo do not settle for protest but, rather, structure the play to provide a model for effective action. After roughly sketching out the play's context of production, I will describe its structure and then discuss its use of pain.

Ngũgĩ and Mũgo had first conceived in 1971 of a collaborative project celebrating a hero of the Kenyan anticolonial struggle and had begun their research on Kĩmathi in 1974 (Introduction). The play was to premiere in Nairobi during a UNESCO conference in 1976 and then to represent Kenyan theatre at the Second World Black and African Festival of the Arts in Lagos, Nigeria in 1977.⁶⁰ The story line was paralleled by the producers' struggle to book it into the Kenya National Theatre, a colonial bastion of European culture that was built in 1952—the year the Mau Mau rebellion began. The play incorporates Mau Mau patriotic songs and dances, providing

⁵⁹Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Mĩcere Githae Mũgo, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (London: Heinemann, 1976). Further citations to the play or to the unpaginated introduction will be given parenthetically within the text.

⁶⁰Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space," *The Drama Review* 41.3 (1997): 14.

new cultural symbols more vital for Kenya's African spectators than the French ballet and American musical with which they competed for the space. Kĩmathi, formerly a primary school teacher and accountant, led the guerrillas from 1952 until his capture in 1956. He was executed in 1957, six years before Kenya won its independence. Ngũgĩ points out that, in this context, the play's affiliation with the "culture and aesthetics of resistance developed by the Mau Mau activists as they fought in the mountains, as they resisted in prison and concentration camps and villages; and as they called out for a new Kenya and a new Africa" was of equal importance with its celebration of Mau Mau heroism.⁶¹

The play opens with a moment from Kĩmathi's trial by the colonial government. Twice, a white judge reads the charge against him—possession of a firearm—and asks him to plead. He does not respond (3). After a blackout, the First Movement begins with the song of peasants, whose "*voices combine aggression with firm determination.*" The same actors then stage a "*flashback of Black people's History*":

*A shot in the air. Overwhelming darkness. Drums and voices fall silent.
Through the silence cuts the chilling scream of a person, followed by
groans and more screams.
Whiplashes are heard falling on human skins. Another loud, agonizing
scream. Abrupt silence. (4)*

Three pantomimed scenes from the history of the slave trade are followed by an "*angry procession of defiant blacks, chanting anti-imperialist slogans through songs and thunderous shouts*" (5). The remainder of the play repeats this structure: first, a picture of the Kenyan people's oppression is drawn; next, details and layers are added to make it more vivid; finally, the people's efforts to resist shine through more intensely, even as their suffering grows.

⁶¹Ngũgĩ, "Enactments of Power," 18.

After the preliminary pantomime, the First Movement introduces the framing story of a female Mau Mau fighter who is trying to rescue Kĩmathi from jail. She recruits a Boy and a Girl to help her and teaches them to resist the forces of oppression that cause them to fight over scraps rather than working together for their rights and freedom (6-22).

The Second Movement again presents the courtroom scene with which the play opened, this time going on to include Kĩmathi's response. He refuses to enter any plea, because to do so would grant legitimacy to a justice that silences the poor and the hungry (26). Four real "trials" follow, contrasting with the sham trial in the courtroom and reminiscent of the temptations of Christ. Kĩmathi is visited in his cell first by a colonial official; second, by a delegation of bankers; and third, by an African business executive, a politician, and a priest. Then the official returns, and when this fourth confrontation escalates, Kĩmathi is tortured. In between the scenes of Kĩmathi's heroic resistance to these trials is threaded the developing solidarity of the Boy and the Girl as they grow to understand the fight against oppression (22-58).

The Third Movement brings the Boy and Girl back together with the Woman, who now explains the rebellion for which their experience has shown them (and the spectator) the need. A flashback shows Kĩmathi in the forest with other guerrillas at an earlier stage in the revolution, meting out punishment to captured enemies and showing ill-advised lenience towards a group of traitors that includes his own brother. Then a final return to the courtroom brings the two story lines together: the Woman enters and is arrested, Kĩmathi is sentenced to death, and the Boy and Girl open fire in an attempt to rescue him. The courtroom struggle is not resolved but ends in another abrupt blackout, followed by "*a mighty crowd of workers and peasants at the centre of which are Boy and Girl, singing a thunderous freedom song*" (84). The absence of plot resolution suggests that the death of Kĩmathi and the two children is of less importance

than their heroic actions and that the immediate effect of those actions is irrelevant. The important thing is that the fight continued and that their actions contributed to an eventual victory.

As the final celebration of the people gets underway, the First Soldier joins in. This figure has appeared intermittently throughout the play, in the First Movement reluctant to follow orders and arrest villagers for interrogation, and then in the Second Movement admonishing his comrade not to “rough-up” Kĩmathi on the way to the torture chamber. Like Belize in *Angels in America* or Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes*, the First Soldier serves as a model for spectator response. Unlike the “model” figures I discussed in Chapter Two, however, he remains peripheral to the story line (although with appropriate casting and direction, he need not be peripheral to the performance event).

To examine the pain to which both the First Soldier and the spectator respond, I turn to the four trials that Kĩmathi goes through in his jail cell. The first trial is initiated by the white colonial official who had earlier appeared as judge in the courtroom scene. He flatters Kĩmathi and reasons with him, hoping that a guilty plea will demoralize the guerrillas who are still at large (32-36), but the temptation is weak. Left alone again, Kĩmathi is refreshed by a group of dancers “*performing a sequence of dances by different peoples of Kenya*” (37). The entrance of a “colonial governor” turns all of their dances into “*one of fear and humiliation,*” but Kĩmathi’s exhortation brings them back with a “*militant dance*” (37). During the second trial, a European and an Indian banker extol the virtues of economic development, while the African banker who accompanies them merely nods in agreement. Again, the trial is tied to the Kenyan people by means of pantomime: in the background appear “*Coolies and Swahilis building the Railway. They are driven away by Nandi warriors led by Koitalel*” (39). Again, Kĩmathi’s position and his resistance remain firm. The third trial appears to be

more tempting, as two Africans, an executive and a politician, try to convince him that their war is already won (44-48). Recognizing their complicity, he throws them out and then argues down a priest who tries to shift his focus away from the material struggle at hand (48-51).

During the fourth trial, the white official returns and pretends to interrogate Kĩmathi. He demands to know the location of another guerrilla leader. Enraged by Kĩmathi's resistance, he strikes the chained prisoner *"again and again, using hands, legs, gun and swearing as he strikes"* (55). As Kĩmathi is led off to the torture chamber, the First Soldier whispers to a comrade who is roughing up the prisoner, "Are you a human being? What are you doing this for?" The Second Soldier *"turns angrily as if to respond"* but stops the roughing up (56). The violence is thus shown *not* to be inevitable, and even those complicit with the colonial authority and directly under its control are shown to have choices. The torturer then prepares for his task, *"ceremoniously fold[ing] up his shirt sleeves and feel[ing] an enormous whip with tremendous appetite."* Others *"remove Kĩmathi's shirt roughly and lay him on the floor, still fettered."* But as the whip is raised, *"lights go off and the audience only hear noise from the torture chamber."*

Perhaps the torture is staged off-scene because pain and violence seem to be more vivid when theatrical means are used to create them in the spectator's imagination than when they are actually represented on stage. The staging device also serves to maintain an explicit connection between the hero's suffering and that of the people. Dim lights come up gradually, and the mime of black history from the First Movement is repeated *"against the torturing behind the scene. There should be as much harmony as possible between the action on the visible stage and the goings on in the torture chamber"* (56). Then as the scene ends, Kĩmathi is seen again: *"Blood-stained, shirt torn,"* he *"emerges from the torture chamber kicked, pushed from behind. He can*

hardly walk. He falls on his hands and feet." The soldiers stand in a group, "*holding some of the instruments of torture*"—but the "*human soldier*" stands apart from them, "*slightly hiding his face in shame*" (57). Although "*broken in body*," Kĩmathi speaks eloquently, ending with "Our people will never surrender!" (58). In this play, the martyr and his suffering are admirable because they are vital to an *effective* struggle against oppression.

The Trial of Dedan Kĩmathi was written after the armed struggle, to celebrate success and to support the Kenyan people during the long process of building a postcolonial nation. The plays to which I devote the rest of this chapter were also written in postcolonial cultures, a longer time after independence but during periods of acute crisis.

Antigone's Bodies: Redirecting Visual Pleasure

Antigone is a female martyr who follows a morally superior course of action and is put to death by a tyrant. As such, she is a handy screen for comparing ideologies. George Steiner notes that modern enthusiasm for Sophocles' *Antigone* began with the "irruption of the political into the private" in the decades following the French Revolution.⁶² He traces from Kant through Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Heidegger the problem of the alienated subject ("Man") struggling to come to terms with the object—which is the entire world of experience, the state of nature from which Rousseau postulated Man's fall. Man's very power (of rational understanding, colonial domination, technological progress) depends upon his skill at objectifying the world of experience. Yet Man feels alone. Possible solutions to "the axiom of aloneness" are the cult of friendship and "apocalyptic eroticism," but neither is fully satisfactory. Far

⁶²George Steiner, *Antigones: How the Antigone Legend Has Endured* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 3-10.

better is Antigone, who incarnates Woman as *sister*.⁶³ She transcends object-hood and can thus be perceived as another subject.⁶⁴

Hegel analyzed the play's dialectic between divine law and human law, or between *oikos* (the family, or private responsibilities) and *polis* (the city, or public duty).⁶⁵ When this dialectic is dramatized, Woman slips between the realms, sometimes fighting for the *oikos* against a repressive regime and at other times signifying the *polis* over which men fight one another. The Romantic idealization of Antigone that made her so popular in the nineteenth century provides a model for female masochism (or at least passive acceptance of suffering, to be borne by means of spiritual transcendence), and male sadism (or at least the willingness to ignore the pain of the female victim and read larger issues over her body). Like the torture victim discussed by Taylor, the heroine in most treatments of the Antigone legend focuses a problem, but she (as a female individual) is elided. As a model of heroic but ineffectual action, the figure of

⁶³See Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5-6, for the distinction between "Woman" and "women." De Lauretis defines *Woman* as "the term that designates at once the vanishing point of our culture's fictions of itself and the condition of the discourse in which the fictions are represented," and *women* as "the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain."

For the argument that Woman in Greek tragedy reflects the concerns of men and functions within a given narrative to complicate and/or resolve a problem important to the dominant (male) social group, see Helene P. Foley, "The Conception of Women in Athenian Drama," in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (London: Gordon and Breach, 1982), 127-68; Froma Zeitlin, "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama," *Representations* 11 (1985): 63-94. Zeitlin argues that no matter how important the female characters may be to a tragedy, the "self that is really at stake is to be identified with the male, while the woman is assigned the role of the radical other." Even a character like Clytemnestra or Medea, who seems to articulate the problems of women's subordinate social position, is "designed primarily for exploring the male project of selfhood in the larger world as these impinge upon men's claims to knowledge, power, freedom, and self-sufficiency" (66-67).

⁶⁴Steiner, *Antigones*, 12-17.

⁶⁵See G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). Later treatments of the legend internalized "divine law" and turned it into "conscience." See also Heidi M. Ravven, "Has Hegel Anything to Say to Feminists?" *Owl of Minerva* 19.2 (1988): 150, for the argument that Hegel saw the *polis* and the *oikos* as "parallel and analogous social systems."

Antigone is well suited to help to maintain the status quo. As Steiner says, “Antigone belongs, hauntingly but safely, to the idiom of the ideal.”⁶⁶ Antigone’s actions (unlike those of Dedan Kĩmathi) produce no long-term changes, they are simply *right*.

Antigone has been romanticized and fetishized, but has she been (or can she be) used to build a model of effective action?

Modern playwrights engaged with social struggle have tried various strategies to create a resistant Antigone. Diana Taylor points out that, although the story has been popular in Latin American drama, Polynices is usually the hero.⁶⁷ In a 1959 Slovenian version, Dominik Smole removes Antigone from the stage entirely.⁶⁸ Puerto Rican playwright Luis Rafael Sánchez places her in jail throughout the play, in a Latin American dictatorship.⁶⁹ Both playwrights interrogate the cultural use value of the Antigone figure and show her to be victimized and exploited by everyone, including their versions of Haemon and Ismene. Importantly, nearly all Antigone plays follow Sophocles in leaving the Antigone on stage untouched—aside from, perhaps, a twist of the arm. Her suffering and death are created in the spectator’s imagination. In Sánchez, for example, although she is understood to have been raped with a bottle and otherwise tortured between scenes, the stage action includes only threats.

⁶⁶Steiner, *Antigones*, 10.

⁶⁷Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 285 n.21. Taylor discusses other Latin American versions in *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 131.

⁶⁸Dominik Smole, *Antigone*, trans. Harry Leeming (Ljubljana: Drustvo slovenskih pisateljev, 1988).

⁶⁹I thank Gloria Waldman for providing me with a typescript of this play. The Billy Rose Theatre collection of the New York Public Library has the promptbook for a production by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, 17 May 1972. See Luis Rafael Sánchez, *The Passion of Antígona Pérez*, trans. Charles Pilditch (New York: Studio Duplicating Service, 1972).

A different solution is presented by Gambaro's *Antígona Furiosa* and by *The Island*, by Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona.⁷⁰ Both plays stage victimization in ways that disrupt the structure of representation criticized by Taylor. Their overt theatricality has the potential to "avoid the perils" of simulated atrocity and thus "clarify events without neutralizing the unbelievability of their horrific violence and brutality," a solution proposed by Patraaka.⁷¹ While the actors' bodily representation of physical suffering is not strictly identical with the role of "Antigone," their very embodiment of pain helps to undercut the potential for relegating the victim to the realm of the ideal. Because both plays foreground the actor's skill and athletic exertion in representing the victim's pain, the spectator is likely to respond not only to the martyr, but also to the actor, empowered by his or her creative contribution to the theatrical event. Heightened awareness of the actor's work makes it more difficult to maintain a masochistic or sadistic identification with characters.

First, I describe the ways in which these two plays focus spectator attention on the actor's body, as distinct from the character's. Second, I address the importance of refusing to give the tyrant a body of his own. Finally—although this theme runs throughout my discussion—I show how the plays are bound up with the cultures that produced them. Specifically, I examine the way in which Fugard/Kani/Ntshona and Gambaro translate Antigone's burial of her brother into stage business *and* local culture. These theatrical moments participate in two very different cultural moments. In South Africa, before the Soweto uprisings, as social freedoms are being eliminated in order to preserve apartheid, Antigone's brave gesture is turned into an insidious

⁷⁰Griselda Gambaro, *Antígona Furiosa* (1986), in *Information for Foreigners*, 133-59; Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona, *The Island* (1973), in *Statements* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1986), 46-77. Further page citations to these editions of the play texts and their stage directions will be included within the text in parentheses.

⁷¹Patraaka, *Spectacular Suffering*, 19.

torture. But “buried alive” in prison, Winston says, ‘Remember me. I can still speak.’ And in Argentina, when the Proceso has ended, during the society’s failed reckoning, the bodiless *desaparecidos* are entombed in the survivors. Antígona says, ‘We will remember. You cannot get rid of us. Admit what you did and give us the bodies of our dead.’

Both plays use text directly from translations of Sophocles. Both *may* be set in a prison (in Laura Yusem’s production, Antígona never left her pyramidal cage; however, the locale is ambiguous and, as I will discuss later, this staging device is not strictly necessary). Both use a limited number of actors and staging conventions familiar from the “experimental” theatre, with minimal set and props, a generalized locale, and dance or mime that abstractly represents violence. The published texts contain extensive stage directions, and when I describe the staging, I use these to take the viewpoint of a spectator at the production I imagine. But neither play can be fully understood without reference to the culture in which it was created and, more specifically, the use of bodily pain in that culture: both plays respond directly to political detention and torture as social practices.

The Island was developed in 1973 through a process of improvisation by actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona. The play was a companion piece to *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, which had been performed in Port Elizabeth and generated an invitation for a world tour.⁷² Playwright Athol Fugard set tasks and scripted the play in collaboration with the actors, leaving room for improvisation within performances. He was inspired by Polish director Jerzy Grotowski to create with and from the actors of the Serpent

⁷²See Loren Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics Since 1910* (London: Routledge, 1999), 156–61, for a discussion of *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*.

Theatre (a practice from which he soon retreated).⁷³ *The Island* began as a restricted space improvisation. The actors were working outdoors on a blanket and began halving it. When finally they ended up with only enough space for their four feet, they were reminded of Robben Island, the notorious South African penal colony. The *Antigone* story came into it later, when they reached an impasse in their work because they were so emotionally involved with the material. Using a classical story was a way to give themselves some distance from the piece.⁷⁴

When Kani joined the company in 1965, his first role was Haemon in Sophocles' *Antigone*. He replaced the actor Norman Ntshinga (a company founder), who was accused of supporting the outlawed African National Congress and sent to Robben Island. Much of the play's prison material comes from Ntshinga's experience: he did, in fact, perform a version of *Antigone* for fellow prisoners while Kani was playing his role outside.⁷⁵ When Ntshinga was released after two years, he carried stories to Kani and Ntshona. Other information came from company member Welcome

⁷³See Elenore Lester, "I am in Despair About South Africa," *New York Times*, 1 December 1974, D5; Mary Benson, "Athol Fugard and 'One Little Corner of the World,'" *yale/theater* 4.1 (1973): 60; Dennis Walder, *Athol Fugard* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 82. Walder says that Fugard was inspired by notes that Barney Simon and Mary Benson took at Grotowski's lectures in New York, and by the newly published *Towards a Poor Theatre*.

⁷⁴"'Art Is Life and Life Is Art': An Interview with John Kani and Winston Ntshona of the Serpent Players from South Africa," *UFAHAMU: Journal of the African Activist Association* (Los Angeles) 6.2 (1976): 17, 18.

⁷⁵Ntshinga was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. An incident at his trial was the inspiration for *The Coat*: an elderly man who had just been sentenced recognized Ntshinga's wife (May Magada, who was also a member of the company) and gave her his coat, which was his only possession, to take to his family with the message, "Wait for me. I'll be back." Athol Fugard, *Notebooks: 1960-1977* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1983), 123-27 (for the trial), 135-43 (for the development of the piece and its performance for a white theatre appreciation group). See also Walder, *Athol Fugard*, 28-31, 74-95; Robert Wahls, "Tony Around the World," *Sunday News*, 20 April 1975, 8. For conditions on Robben Island, see also Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1994), 296-304, 333-444. Mandela was incarcerated on Robben Island for a fortnight in 1962, and then from 1964 until 1982. Interestingly enough, Mandela mentions playing Creon in one of the prisoners' annual Christmas-time theatricals (397). Unlike Ntshinga, he was apparently too important to be tortured, and another informant tells Fugard that the "big" boys were "strictly isolated from the other prisoners." *Notebooks*, 145.

Durur, who returned from Robben Island in 1966. For example, Durur described the transport of prisoners to the Island and the work teams, and Ntshinga told of his work *span* (team) being beaten as they ran back to their cells, then tending to one another's wounds—experiences that were used for the opening scene of *The Island*, which I will describe later in more detail. The use of senseless but exhausting labor as torture (being given a bucket and told to empty the sea, or being told to uproot a tree) and the prisoners' devices for maintaining morale (giving a parodic “weather report and news bulletin” or telling stories in a cinematic form) also came from Ntshinga's stories, as did the difficulty of taking leave when a prisoner was released. Ntshinga's young cellmate told him, “you'll forget us. . . . But don't worry, we'll never forget you.”⁷⁶ The play is thus on many levels created out of the actors' experience.

This is the opening scene: The stage is empty except for the actors, some blankets and sleeping mats, a bucket and tin cups, and a rag. In dim light, the actors mime digging. Then each pushes an (invisible) wheelbarrow across the stage and dumps its contents where the other man was digging. The mime continues in silence, meaningless for the audience for the time being, and pointedly meaningless (in a different sense) for the “prisoners.” We can admire the actors' labor on several levels: we admire their mime, including the “squeaking wheel” that eventually enables us to imagine a wheelbarrow; the real sweat that enables us to see exhaustion under the punishing sun; the duration of the scene that enables us to imagine it as a segment of a much longer day. We work to understand their action, begun with a siren and ended with a whistle. “*They stop digging and come together, standing side by side as they are handcuffed together and shackled at the ankles.* [But there is no one on stage *doing* this,

⁷⁶Fugard, *Notebooks*, 145, 150-54, 176-77, 210-11. For Fugard's first sketch (in 1970, just prior to his inspiration by Grotowski) of a play based on Ntshinga's experiences, see 185-86; for his outline (still without any relation to *Antigone*), 212. He committed to a collaboration with Kani and Ntshona in 1972, just five weeks before their performance date at The Space for the as-yet-unwritten play that became *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* (201-02).

and there are no shackles.] *Another whistle. They start to run . . . John mumbling a prayer, Winston muttering a rhythm for their three-legged run*" (47).⁷⁷ Again we admire the actors, the ordeal through which they put themselves, the skill with which they maintain the wrist and ankle contact while running in place. Our admiration continues as they are beaten by their invisible guard: the way they receive the imagined blows, show us the "bad blow" to Winston's eye and John's sprained ankle, the eventual removal of the shackles, being searched, finally lurching into their cell.

Having shown the violence, they now show the pain and anger. Significantly, they show their brotherhood at the same time. First John tries to clean Winston's eye—using his urine. Winston's anger builds during this episode, until he begins to yell for the guard. (This is the first explicit information that we have to locate the men in *prison*—in the script, that is. Advance information would contribute a great deal to the understanding of *actual* spectators. Because Robben Island was the only island prison in South Africa, and so many political prisoners were held there, the title alone would identify the locale. If it had been explicitly named, the play could not have been performed.⁷⁸) John tries to quiet Winston even while ministering to his injury. Then the roles reverse: Winston notices blood on John's ear and tends to it. Only after they have aided one another and then begun to clean themselves do they describe the scene that we have just watched, so that we finally understand the nature of the torment. They were each digging a hole in the beach, then filling in the other man's hole. Antigone's

⁷⁷I'm referring to the *characters* John and Winston—the actors use their own names. But the distinction is important, and I'll use last names when referring to the actors.

⁷⁸In response to the repeated call for more "content" by an African-American interlocutor who criticizes the play for not particularizing the background of the prisoners, Kani finally says that if they called the play *Robben Island* or made any explicit reference to the penal colony, "you would have read in the *New York Times* one paragraph of what happened to us. And you would only march from UCLA down to the mayor's office and tomorrow you would be back in your nice comfortable seat and that's the end of it. And this is the way the outside world ever participates in the struggle in Africa." "Art is Life," 15.

bold, defiant burial of her brother has been transposed into torture: the task is the opposite of self-directed, and the sand is burying the labor of each man's fellow prisoner. But it does not bury their solidarity.

The primary focus of the story line is their relationship and the tension generated when John's ten-year sentence is reduced so that only three months remain. Winston will remain to serve a life sentence, and the two men work through John's jubilation, Winston's resentment, their anger at the injustice of the situation, and their helplessness. Finally, portions of Sophocles' *Antigone*, which they have been rehearsing and arguing over, are inserted as a play within the play. John speaks Creon's lines but never takes on his character (a point to which I will return). When Winston speaks as Antigone, the parallels between her situation and his own are unmistakable, and for the final lines of the play he speaks for himself although he uses the character's words:

[Tearing off his wig and confronting the audience as Winston, not Antigone.]

Gods of our Fathers! My Land! My Home!

Time waits no longer. I go now to my living death, because I honoured those things to which honour belongs. (77)

Performances of *The Island* actualize the remembering that John promises to Winston in the text: although many "Antigones" remained in effect "buried alive" at Robben Island, they were not unheard and unmourned.

Burial has an entirely different significance in Argentina, where many thousands of Argentineans have been denied the opportunity to bury and mourn their dead—denied even the certainty that those who are missing *are* dead. Gambaro wrote *Antígona Furiosa* in 1986, three years after the end of the "dirty war" and a year after

the Trial of the Generals—which amounted to little more than a slap on the wrist.⁷⁹ She connects Antígona's pain directly to the invisible death that surrounds her. The play begins and ends with Antígona hanged on the bars of a cage that keeps her visible to but separate from the two male characters. Coryphaeus ("Chorus leader") and Antinoüs ("hostile thought" or "contradictory") sit at a café table. Coryphaeus generally takes the Creon role when it must be taken; Antinoüs is often confused by what's going on. These two are in a different world and see different things than Antígona does. But the staging gives physical form to a perceptual separation rather than establishing physical location. The two men are not torturers or even jailers, although they carry the taint of both; rather, they personify what Taylor calls the "passivity and cynicism" of those Argentines who remained blind to the terror of the "dirty war."⁸⁰

Taylor describes the junta's effective campaign of "percepticide." On the one hand, people were abducted in full view of the public and "disappeared"; on the other, mutilated bodies were dumped in the street. Martin Anderson describes the standard *modus operandi* for an abduction:

In most instances, the government security forces ordered a "free zone" from the corresponding police commissaires, so they could carry out their work unmolested. If they kidnapped a victim at night in his or her own home, armed commandos surrounded the entire block, entered the dwelling by force, terrorized parents and children, often gagging them, and obliged them to watch as they overpowered their prey. Often the victim was brutally beaten, a hood placed roughly over his or her head, before being dragged off to a waiting car or truck, usually without

⁷⁹Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 208; Anderson, *Dossier Secreto*, 9-11.

⁸⁰Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 210.

license plates. The rest of the commando group might then sack the home or loot what they could carry.⁸¹

Taylor argues that the “triumph of the atrocity” was that it forced people to look away.⁸² As I argued with respect to the extreme violence of plays such as Gambaro’s *Information for Foreigners*, one compelling reason to stage torture is to reverse percepticide. The theatrical event necessarily entails the permission to *see*, even if one is offended by the spectacle.

On top of the visible but “unseen” violence in Argentina during the Proceso, the camps where *desaparecidos* were held and tortured were part of the everyday landscape. The people whom Feitlowitz interviewed in the mid-1990s “dwelt obsessively on the disjunction that ‘everything was different everything was the same.’”⁸³ In a suburb of Buenos Aires, for example, the Mansión Seré was known as “The House of Terror” to its neighbors, who heard screams and shooting there during the night.⁸⁴ In a different suburb, prisoners were held at COTI Martínez, where the military’s activities were flaunted and the resulting terror exploited. Feitlowitz quotes the following account given to CONADEP:

At night the searchlights were beamed in all directions. Firing could be heard from morning to night . . . Heart-rending cries could also be heard, leading one to assume that the prisoners there were undergoing torture. Large boxes and coffins were often brought out of the buildings,

⁸¹Anderson, *Dossier Secreto*, 11-12.

⁸²Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 122-23.

⁸³The *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons) or “CONADEP” has identified 341 camps. Feitlowitz, *Lexicon of Terror*, 163.

⁸⁴Feitlowitz, *Lexicon of Terror*, 166-67, citing *El Diario del Juicio* 3, 11 June 1985, 74-75; *Nunca más: The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986), 140-41.

as well as mutilated remains in polythene bags. We lived under constant stress, as though we ourselves were also prisoners.⁸⁵

Not all of the camps were so obvious. One was located in the basement of the Sub-Prefecture of the Federal Police in a Buenos Aires neighborhood. Prisoners could hear the sounds and at a certain time of the afternoon could see the shadows of normal life on the street outside.⁸⁶ Another was underneath the Galerías Pacífico, a department store that had “epitomized leisure and luxury” in the 1970s, and was “famous for its splendid frescoes.” The camp, which was active from 1977-81, took advantage of “a two-tiered basement with direct, discreet access to the street” and acoustics that “blotted out sound.”⁸⁷ As Feitlowitz puts it, shoppers “couldn’t hear the screams of those being tortured in the basement. One was oblivious to the fifteen tiny cells, whose walls were marked with the desperate graffiti of those who were murdered there.”⁸⁸ And percepticide is effective well past the actual period during which atrocities are carried out. Those who survived were often blindfolded during torture, so that they cannot now recognize their tormentors. As many Argentines told Feitlowitz, “You never know who you’re sitting next to” on a bus or subway. “That normal-looking man, well, God only knows what he might have done.”⁸⁹

The action of Gambaro’s play begins with Antígona’s return to life. She removes the noose from her neck and sings Ophelia’s lament—“He is dead and gone, lady...” (137)—as the two men joke about rules, about the unburied. They pretend to be the “living dead.” Taylor points out the markers of death in Ophelia’s song—turf

⁸⁵*Nunca más*, 152, quoted in Feitlowitz, *Lexicon of Terror*, 167.

⁸⁶Feitlowitz, *Lexicon of Terror*, 165-66.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 269 n. 1.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 171.

and stone—and the absence of such markers for the disappeared.⁹⁰ The two men tell Sophocles' story of brother killing brother in a power struggle, but they react to Antigona as if she's crazy, with statements such as "Such grieving can only come to grief" (139) and "Remembering the dead is like grinding water with a mortar and pestle—useless" (140). She stops trying to communicate with them. We hear the sounds of a battle that Antigona first watches, then dances. This is Gambaro's description: she *"falls to the ground, hitting her legs, rolling from one side to the other, in a rhythm that builds in a paroxysmic crescendo, as though she endures the suffering of battle in her own flesh"* (139).

Antigona finds her brother's corpse, represented by a shroud only, and *"throws herself on him, with her own body covering him from head to toe"* (141). She tries to breath life back into the absent corpse. Although she fails in material terms, the "Creons" have failed as well because, as she asserts, "The living are the great sepulchre of the dead!" (142). The bodies of the *desaparecidos* cannot receive proper burial, but they are entombed and memorialized within the bodies of those who survive. As long as they are remembered, they have not been destroyed. During another segment, Antigona rises and falls repeatedly: *"Antigona walks among her dead, in a strange gait in which she falls and recovers, falls and recovers."* She says, "Corpses! Corpses! I walk on the dead. The dead surround me. Caress me . . . embrace me . . . Ask me . . . What?" (140). As in Argentina for so long, the dead are not always visible, yet they are omnipresent. As one of the founders of the Madres del Plaza de Mayo, Hebe de Bonafini, says, "Our children are ... with us in all that we do."⁹¹ As I mentioned earlier, the Madres began in 1977 the weekly protests that continue to this day. A significant number of these women have themselves disappeared. The

⁹⁰Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 211.

⁹¹Quoted in Feitlowitz, *Lexicon of Terror*, 250.

performer's dance is a metaphor for the grief and anger of the nation, but that very grief must be understood as solidly grounded in the physical pain of those who were abducted and tortured during the Proceso. And sometimes the bodies of *desaparecidos* are overwhelmingly tangible, lending additional resonance to this scene. In 1985, for example, Elena Corbin recalled in court that the ground was thick with corpses in the cemetery near Córdoba where she searched for the body of her only son in 1979. She and her husband "began to step on craniums and femurs lying at the surface" of the earth, and a worker in the graveyard said that it was his task "to watch over the bodies at night, as neighborhood dogs came to eat them."⁹²

Taylor notes that Antígona's circular movements in this dance recall the Thursday morning processions of the Madres and points out that civil wars are fought between men, on and for the body of the feminine motherland;⁹³ however, I think it would be impossible to see the woman on stage as strictly figural. Her agonized thrashing resonates too strongly with the suffering of the *desaparecido* subjected to the junta's favored form of torture: the electric cattle prod or *picana*, invented in Argentina in 1930, applied while the prisoner was strapped down on a metal table known as a *parrilla* (named for the traditional grill used to cook meat in Argentina). Antonia Horacio Miño Retamozo says, "Your body jumps around a lot on the *parrilla*, at least as much as the straps permit. It gets twisted around, shakes, tries to escape contact with the . . . electric prod."⁹⁴

Antígona's dance of pain mediates between men, embodying their struggle, and warns against the struggle's brutal impact on real bodies. I must note the similarity to the display of suffering female bodies in *Paso de dos* and *El señor Galíndez*. Yet Taylor

⁹²Anderson, *Dossier Secreto*, 15.

⁹³Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 217.

⁹⁴CONADEP file no. 3721, quoted in Feitlowitz, *Lexicon of Terror*, 57.

objects to Pavlovsky and lauds Gambaro. The performers' agency and physical virtuosity, which I have been discussing, cannot provide a fully adequate explanation for this difference in response. Director Laura Yusem made a large contribution to the staging of *Antígona Furiosa*, and Bettina Muraña, the dancer who played Antígona, very likely did so as well. But Yusem also directed *Paso de dos*, and like Muraña, Susana Evans is a trained dancer. The two performers can reasonably be supposed to have made comparable contributions to the staging of the respective plays. I propose that the fact that there is no man hurting (or pretending to hurt) Antígona has even more impact on spectator response than the framing *fabula* or the fact that Muraña remains clothed.

In both *The Island* and *Antígona Furiosa*, what's absent from the stage may be as important as what's present. In *The Island* only the victims (two political prisoners) are embodied. The locus of power and wrongful victimization (along with sadistic pleasure) is not mystified or made ambiguous, but is relegated to the background. The actors mime blows inflicted by their guard, but no actor ever embodies him. The warden is referred to and is understood to be in the audience for the prisoners' performance of *Antigone* but does not appear. Finally, John speaks Creon's lines as an actor in the play within the play but never takes on his character in the way that Winston "becomes" Antigone. Gambaro's representation of pain is more abstract (closer to dance than to pantomime), but she also refuses a solid embodiment for the locus of power. Creon is represented by a polyester shell comprising a torso, helmet, and arms. At times the shell is worn, and Coryphaeus takes on the character of Creon. At other times, it is "*held up like a shield*" or "*manipulated like a marionette*," eventually "*abandoned in an old wheelbarrow*" (135).⁹⁵ But Creon's *role* cannot be

⁹⁵The script does not clearly indicate *when* the shell is be abandoned, or how it is treated at particular moments.

entirely abandoned—as Foucault reiterates throughout his writing, power is always present, and structures resistance to as well as complicity with the dominant social group.⁹⁶ Foucault himself tends to personify power, granting it a *metaphorical* body.⁹⁷ By rendering power's body a carapace to be taken on and off, *Antígona Furiosa* moves in the direction of returning power to its proper place as a changing property of social relations. I will discuss this device further.

By rendering the warden and the guards invisible, *The Island* depersonalizes the entire South African social system and focuses on oppression's effects on the bodies of the two prisoners. On this level, the play can be seen as a prime example of *protest theatre*, which “depicts a situation of oppression . . . to the oppressor, with a view of appealing to his or her conscience.” By giving primary focus to the shifting power relation between the two prisoners, however, and by foregrounding the virtuosity of the performer/creators, the play also gains the capacity to function as *theatre for resistance*, which has “the overt aims of rallying and mobilizing the oppressed to fight against oppression.”⁹⁸ The specific action performed by a theatrical event depends upon the audience for whom it is performed. Fugard, for example, distinguishes between the “‘horror and fascination’ of white audiences and the engaged but matter-of-fact interaction of black audiences with the stage representation of their daily life.”⁹⁹ Yet as

⁹⁶See, for example, Foucault, *Discipline and Punish; Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon, et al. (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980).

⁹⁷See the critique in David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 138; Peter Spierenburg, “Four Centuries of Prison History: Punishment, Suffering, the Body, and Power,” in *Institutions of Confinement: Hospitals, Asylums, and Prisons in Western Europe*, ed. Norbert Finzsch and Robert Jütte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 28-29.

⁹⁸For the distinction, see Zakes Mda, “Theater and Reconciliation in South Africa,” *Theater* 25.3 (1995), 40-41. See also the discussion in Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 155.

⁹⁹Cited in Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 171.

Ian Steadman argues, the aim of a particular theatrical practice does not entirely determine its effect on spectators.¹⁰⁰ Kruger points out that some resistance theatre was “met with indifference by [the] township audiences” that it intended to mobilize and by enthusiasm at venues identified with protest theatre, such as the Market in Johannesburg.¹⁰¹

The position which I have been examining, that the representation of torture (and atrocity in general) easily becomes quasi-pornographic, is paralleled by the concern of critics in South Africa that “the display of apartheid before metropolitan spectators at home and abroad, who were separated by race or class privilege from the oppression portrayed on stage, may have nourished those spectators’ sense of moral outrage while allowing them to forget their implication in apartheid.”¹⁰² Until quite recently, Euro-American critics of Fugard tended to stress the “universal” qualities of *The Island*. Stephen Holden, for example, understood from the play “that some kind of servitude is an essential condition of life and that a salvation of sorts is to be found only in political and spiritual solidarity with others.”¹⁰³ Dennis Walder said that “the play suggests that men may survive the most intolerable conditions if they are able to discover and articulate a meaning for their suffering.”¹⁰⁴ Fugard himself provides support for such readings, describing *The Island* in his diary as a dialogue between Hopelessness and Hope.¹⁰⁵ Ntshona, in contrast, described the “cultural cloak with

¹⁰⁰Ian Steadman, “Theatre Beyond Apartheid,” *Research in African Literatures* 22.3 (1991): 82, cited in Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 155.

¹⁰¹Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 155.

¹⁰²Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 171.

¹⁰³Stephen Holden, *New York Times*, 10 August 1988, 17, cited in Stephen Gray, ed., *File on Fugard* (London: Methuen, 1991), 51-52.

¹⁰⁴Walder, *Athol Fugard*, 76.

¹⁰⁵Fugard, *Notebooks*, 206.

which we have wrapped our plays” as a means to avoid censorship (or, very likely, much worse sanctions).¹⁰⁶ Argentine spectators were also accustomed to decoding oblique but pointed references. During the years of the Proceso, a dramatic framework drawn from myth had often been used to create distance and circumvent censorship—the very description that Ntshona gave.¹⁰⁷ Because the contemporary referents were well understood by spectators, Gambaro did not need to directly mention the *desaparecidos* and the protests of the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo.

Both *Antígona Furiosa* and *The Island* are thoroughly complicit with their local cultures—and I use “complicit” *because* it’s such a loaded term, but I use it here in the more neutral sense explicated by Barbara Eckstein, going back to the root meaning, “folded together.” Eckstein notes that some political fiction is able to draw “the reader, who has a desire to choose a side or to remain aloof . . . into a web of complicity in which her desires are exposed as contributing to the political conflict and suffering that the fiction addresses.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, the complicity of a theatrical event can lead one to uncover the strands of one’s own complicity. With *Paso de dos*, for example, Pavlovsky was clearly interested in examining his own complicity with violence in spite of his personal pacifism. He viewed playing the role of a torturer as a personal catharsis and a chance to examine something that he “could have been, but didn’t want to be.”¹⁰⁹ Given that he is a practicing psychoanalyst, this is hardly a surprising interest, and he

¹⁰⁶C. Gerald Fraser, “Two Actors Find a Universality in ‘Sizwe,’” *New York Times*, 1 April 1975, 3. Kani’s explanation that they purposely used as much humor as possible in order to “hit the master as he turns his face or is rolling on the floor laughing” is a more apt description of the tactic used in *Sizwe Banzi*.

¹⁰⁷See Jean Graham Jones, *Exorcising History: Argentine Theater Under Dictatorship* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 77.

¹⁰⁸Barbara J. Eckstein, *The Language of Fiction in a World of Pain: Reading Politics as Paradox* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 32-35.

¹⁰⁹Feitlowitz, “Dance of Death,” 71.

expresses the desire to facilitate a similar awareness for the spectator: "In my art, I am not interested in clarity, but ambiguity. I want the spectator to feel a certain confusion, for him to be unsure of what he's seeing. Identifying with a character is the first step to complicity"¹¹⁰—a word that he uses in its more familiar, entirely negative sense. Taylor and Feitlowitz did indeed refuse to identify with Pavlovsky's torturer, which was the spectator position into which they felt pushed. Feitlowitz felt that "the setup effectively made us complicit with HE. There we are, in a dark, constricted space, passively watching and listening as yet another torturer tells us his story. Passively watching highly eroticized murder."¹¹¹

In addition to providing a reversal of the percepticide effected by state terrorism, watching a representation of torture is an opportunity to become aware of the ways in which one is folded into a world where such things happen. This is more easily seen when the theatrical event employs some distancing device, as do many of the plays that I discuss in this chapter. But even with psychological realism, the actor is perceived alongside the character. As a spectator, I respond to both *and* to the dialogue between them. I might empathetically share the victim's pain and cry. I might feel nauseous. I might be kinesthetically excited by the performer's work. I might feel powerful. And I might be sexually aroused by any or all of these things, which I can feel simultaneously. As Foster points out in his discussion of *The Camp*, feelings are ineffectual and may in fact work to trap one within an abhorrent power structure. But I can also examine my feelings.

Wendy Steiner argues that images that make the spectator uncomfortable, such as Robert Mapplethorpe's or Sally Mann's photos, can cause one to become aware of one's own response and to examine it. The same could be true for the erotic violence of

¹¹⁰Feitlowitz, "Dance of Death," 70.

¹¹¹Ibid., 65.

Paso de dos, the shooting of *Men's Business*, the atrocities of *Blasted*, or any of the performances of pain that I have discussed. Steiner says,

What art *can* do, and do very well, is show us the relation between what we respond to and what we are, between our pleasure and our principles. As a result, it inevitably relates us to other people whose pleasures and principles either do or do not coincide with our own. Comparing one's pleasures with others' makes one compare ideologies.¹¹²

Response to the actor's body, including but not limited to sexual arousal, has the potential to create this sort of self-aware complicity for the spectator. In the case of the two *Antigone* plays upon which I have focused, to examine my response necessarily entails looking at the plays within a global context.

Moving from Local to Global Context

One can hardly ignore the global context for *The Island*, which received only a single performance at a members-only theatre in Cape Town before the tour to London and New York for which it was created, and was not written down until after the tour.¹¹³ During an discussion between the actors and the African Activist Association at UCLA, Americans faulted the play for not particularizing the background of the prisoners—they wanted to understand more about the social situation. Kani responded that the audience in South Africa understood in certain ways “the things we imply, like in gestures, like in sweat, like in movement of the eyes and ears, like the whole use of the body which is so relevant and has a language of its own at home,” and that he and Ntshona refused to “prostitute the work in trying to fit it into different societies we

¹¹²Wendy Steiner, *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in an Age of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 59.

¹¹³John F. Burns, “Two Tony Winners Act in Legal Twilight in South Africa,” *New York Times*, 11 July 1977, 33; Walder, *Athol Fugard*, 77.

[would] be going through.” He said “we could not get rid of the truth of how the thing was devised and open it up because now we’re in a free country.”¹¹⁴

Because there was little specific “information” about South Africa in *The Island*, their interlocutor felt that what the American audience saw amounted to

two human beings living in a capsule on the moon, separate from the world. . . . Not only was the middle class, the upper class of predominantly white-America sitting there being entertained, there is not even a small amount of informative educational process to that audience because it’s the same whisky-drinking people who don’t give a damn about South Africa, who support Gulf Oil and everything that works to suppress Blacks in South Africa. There they sit being entertained by two South Africans as if they are separate human beings from the moon.¹¹⁵

One might well ask, can this be avoided? When the theatre of resistance goes on tour, can it provide anything more than entertainment at the expense of the suffering of “Others”?

The tour had an undeniable impact on the lives and careers of Kani and Ntshona. The fact that they had to be registered as “household employees” of Fugard in order to tour, or even to travel to Fugard’s home in South Africa, was widely reported during the tour and helped to raise British and American awareness of pass laws—as did the subject of *Sizwe Bansi*, of course.¹¹⁶ During the tour they were careful to represent themselves as artists, not only insisting upon the right to that identity that their country’s pass laws denied them, but also mindful that news reports would be

¹¹⁴“Art is Life,” 7.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁶See, for example, Robert Wahls, “Tony Around the World,” *Sunday News*, 20 April 1975, 8; John Engstrom, “These Cries For Help,” *London Observer*, 15 February 1981, 35.

reprinted in South Africa. The actors shared a Tony award for Best Actor and returned to South Africa with international acclaim that troubled but could not eliminate the restrictions to which they were subjected. They could tour and they could visit Fugard, but then they returned to life in what Ntshona called “a nightmare.” Kani called Fugard’s sympathy “nothing else but an extension of the imagination. Our suffering is the essence of our life.”¹¹⁷

Kani and Ntshona could “play” Antigone’s situation in South Africa as long as they were careful to code it as a play. When the underlying seriousness came through, they were arrested. They spent fifteen days in solitary confinement for derogatory references to the acceptance of independence by the Transkei region (which was seen as an acceptance of apartheid). The New York theatre community demonstrated for their release at the South African Consulate.¹¹⁸ Given the earlier incarceration of actors Norman Ntshinga and Welcome Durur at Robben Island, it seems safe to assume that their enhanced status did bring Kani and Ntshona some protection—although this could be wishful thinking on my part as an American reader of the American press.

The various ways in which my body responds to the spectacle of suffering helps me remember that I *don’t* stand outside. As a liberal American, however, I can still feel separate from and superior to those who would build a society by hurting other people. When John Conroy set out to find out “how an ordinary person becomes a torturer, . . . what happens to torture victims, . . . why torturers are rarely punished, and . . . how torturing societies justify their acts,” many people asked him whether he planned to visit “nations well-known for their use of torture.” They implied that “torture was

¹¹⁷Henry Kamm, “Freed Actors Resume War on Apartheid,” *New York Times*, 27 October 1976, 5.

¹¹⁸John F. Burns, “Transkei Sets Terms to Free Detained Actors,” *New York Times*, 14 October 1976, L3; “Two Black Actors to be Tried for Transkei Remarks,” *New York Times*, 16 October 1976, 3; Jay Barney, “Ntshona and Kani Are Set Free,” *Backstage*, 5 November 1976, 36; Kamm, “Freed Actors Resume War on Apartheid.”

something done in some backward civilization by the barely human and certainly ignorant.”¹¹⁹ For “developed” nations that disclaim torture and punishment (whatever the true situation may be), the practices have become evidence for classifying other societies as “underdeveloped.”¹²⁰ I must admit to having naively believed at an earlier point in this project that I was gaining a significantly cross-cultural scope by including texts from South Africa and Argentina. I soon became aware that the use of torture by these two countries is thoroughly interwoven with their ties to Western Europe. Both regimes were directly concerned to protect foreign investment during their most repressive periods, and their anti-Communist rhetoric reassured investors and government officials in the United States and Europe.

“First-world” complicity with torture in South Africa and Argentina has a long history. Judicial torture was imported by European colonists, who at first subjected both Europeans and natives to it, but eventually restricted its application to the indigenous population. The Dutch brought torture to South Africa in 1652, believing that it was necessary in order to produce confession. Torture was abolished in South Africa with the English conquest in 1797 and was abolished in Holland in 1798. When South Africa became independent in 1961, torture did not return *quite* immediately, but was clearly in use by 1964. Edward Peters describes independent South Africa (under apartheid) as “the extreme of colonialism, an independent colonial state with a dominant population of colonizers who re-introduced a practice that had, in the law and

¹¹⁹John Conroy, *Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People: The Dynamics of Torture* (New York: Knopf, 2000), ix, xi. His study focuses on three recent cases: one from Northern Ireland, one from Israel, and one from Chicago.

¹²⁰Nacuñan Sáez, “Torture: A Discourse on Practice,” in *Tattoo, Torture, Mutilation, and Adornment: The Denaturalization of the Body in Culture and Text*, ed. Frances E. Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 129.

in general report, ended during an earlier stage of colonization.”¹²¹ Similarly, the Spanish colonists brought the Inquisition with them to Argentina in the sixteenth century, as part of an imperial system of which the “most basic principle was the exploitation of indigenous peoples by a white elite through tribute institutions.”¹²² The very Plaza de Mayo where the Madres protest was the site for public punishment and also the location where the implements of torture were burned when torture was abolished in 1813 (three years after independence).¹²³

For most North American spectators in the twenty-first century, however, the Buenos Aires of 1986 could not serve as a background against which to watch *Antígona Furiosa*. Taylor points out that although plays about the Holocaust refer to past atrocities and can therefore be accused of desecrating the events, the “theatre of crisis” by playwrights such as Gambaro is written in the present as an urgent warning.¹²⁴ The question with which I end this chapter, then, is what happens when the plays of theatre of crisis are restaged a decade or more later, particularly when they are staged by “first-world” theatres? When I set out to direct *Antígona Furiosa*, I was concerned that too tight a focus on the Argentine context would run the danger of staging a play about a Latin American “them,” thus creating a false sense of distance (and perhaps superiority) for those of us in the United States. I attempted to re-frame

¹²¹Peters, *Torture*, 135-36; Albie Sachs, *Justice in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 24-31.

¹²²Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, xxv.

¹²³See Feitlowitz, *Lexicon of Terror*, 162-63.

¹²⁴Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis*, 122.

the play in order to interrogate the ways in which North Americans are folded into the world of the “dirty war.”¹²⁵

In order to stress the proximity and familiarity of the staged reality, I eliminated Antígona’s cage and abandoned the juxtaposition of separate realities on stage. I seated the audience in chairs around the perimeter of a small black-box theatre and created four “stations” in front of the corner pillars, flush with the front row of seats. I also abandoned the binary gender opposition in Gambaro’s text, because to make the only victim a woman *and* the only woman a victim reinforces cultural topoi that I prefer to work against. In addition, neither a reproduction *nor* a critique of Argentine culture would further an examination of *my* complicity. I added a fourth actor and further destabilized Gambaro’s already fluid distribution of Sophocles’ characters among the performers. Each actor played Antígona at least once, all played her tormentors, all but one played Creon, and they all stepped outside of the roles to observe. Each actor had a “self” persona to which she or he reverted when not playing one of Sophocles’ characters. Sometimes the “self” was a concerned observer, trying to make sense out of the situation; at other times, a cynic who taunted Antígona.

The actors were in place when the house opened. One station was a “café” with a table and two chairs, where Carmelina sorted through a bag of costume jewelry. Milton read the newspaper in front of another pillar. The Creon effigy, which I made of rice paper lacquered over a wire framework, was suspended a few feet in front of him. Diagonally opposite was the Antígona station, where a table held all of the objects that this character would use during the course of the play. Ming-Jay was “hanging” from a

¹²⁵The production was presented by the Active Theatre Group, run by students in the Ph.D. program in Theatre Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center, 16-18 November 2000, with actors Carmelina Cartei, Ming-Jay Chang, Milton Loayza, and Jill Stephenson. Melissa Gaspar designed the lighting, and Marcel van Rootselaar, the sound. I thank Marguerite Feitlowitz for permission to stage her translation. In addition, Milton Loayza and Jean Graham Jones provided invaluable assistance with the Spanish text.

noose attached to the pillar behind this table. Jill was running a slide projector in front of the fourth pillar.

I was particularly interested in the position of the observer who tries to understand a situation in which she does not have to be actively involved. I established a metatheatrical framework in order to explore different possibilities for engagement with a story of martyrdom. For example, Jill began as an observer, first projecting slides of the victims of many wars and then watching the opening scene. She was drawn in to join the battle dance and then “tried on” all of the available roles. She spoke a few lines as Antígona, was the first to put on the effigy for a scene as Creon (with Milton as Antígona), played Haemon to Carmelina’s Creon, and in between had scenes as her “self.” She finally chose to remain in character as Antígona for the last third of the play. Ming-Jay, who began as Ophelia/Antígona, soon became an observer but in the end returned to the Antígona role with Jill, and they divided her final lines. Carmelina and Milton taunted Antígona at the beginning. Then Carmelina took on Antígona’s overwrought early scenes, passed through Creon, and returned to the cynical “self” with which she began. After a brief turn as Antígona, Milton stepped more and more frequently into Creon’s shell, until he eventually took on the character without using this device. But like Carmelina and Ming-Jay, he ended the play as he began it. These three duplicated the circular structure of the original staging. By having Jill choose the “victim” position, however, I hoped to suggest both that the pattern need not endlessly reiterate and, because the “observer” station was unoccupied at the end, that one cannot remain uninvolved.

A third area of “transculturation” was the movement. I discussed the battle dance earlier, in which Antígona rolls from side to side on the floor, “*as though she endures the suffering of battle in her own flesh*” (139), and noted that a spectator familiar with the use of *picana* and *parrilla* in Argentina during the “dirty war” would

very likely see this as the thrashing of a woman being tortured. Another spectator, with less knowledge about torture techniques, might see an abstract expression of suffering by a woman in a cage. Only a spectator very well versed in Sophocles would have been likely to draw much connection to the choral ode from *Antigone* that describes Polynices' attack on Thebes, from which the following passage is drawn:

The captains stationed at seven gates
fought with seven and left behind
their brazen arms as an offering
to Zeus, who is turner of battle.
All but those wretches, sons of one man,
one mother's sons, who sent their spears
each against each and found the share
of a common death together.¹²⁶

In keeping with my desire *not* to use a woman's body to represent the Patria, I choreographed this dance for all four performers, using a vocabulary of body positions from the war photographs that were projected while the audience took their seats. In order to maintain a direct connection to the physical suffering of battle, the slides and the dance focused on bodies being shot, falling, struggling to rise, collapsing, and lying dead. Consistent with Gambaro's and Yusem's refusal to embody the tyrant, I cropped the soldiers who fired the shots out of the photos and did not use them as a source for movement. In other words, we did not act out any battles or moments of conflict, but showed only the impact of war on human bodies.

Ming-Jay handed similar photos mounted on small cards to spectators as he sang "He is dead and gone . . ." at the beginning of the play, in the manner that Ophelia

¹²⁶Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Elizabeth Wyckoff, in *Greek Tragedies*, vol. 1, ed. David Grene and Richmond Latimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), lines 141-48.

hands flowers to the members of the court when she sings this lament for her father. During the final scenes, Jill placed a photo with each of seven small effigies that she used in an obsessive burial ritual. I hoped that these visual elements, together with a director's note, would make clear the cultural referents that an Argentine audience would have easily seen in Yusem's more abstract staging. By using photos from many wars in different parts of the world, I intended to broaden but not to generalize the context. In other words, the pain of torture and battle is global because it occurs in many different local contexts and because none of these local cultures are isolated from international political and economic forces, but *not* because it is a universal and unchangeable facet of human experience.

The two perspectives on Argentine torture identified by Nancuñan Sáez are useful in evaluating my efforts. The *dramatic* perspective, which I was trying to avoid, positions observers as "powerless spectators in an exemplary 'theater of cruelty'" staged by "imperfect, immature political systems, prone to fluctuate between anarchy and authoritarianism," with the only protection to be found in "Anglo-Saxon style democracy." I took a *global* perspective, according to which "totalitarianism in the Third World is . . . an integral part of a global system that concentrates power and resources in some countries by depriving other countries of their own wealth and autonomy." Although the global perspective is "inspired by a sincere solidarity with the cause of the oppressed," Sáez argues that it retains an element of paternalism. Both the global and the domestic perspectives fail to account for the fact that torture is counter-productive: "it inspires in the direct victims and in the general population the courage to face it and to denounce it."¹²⁷

The plays that I have discussed in this chapter are all instances of just this sort of courageous denunciation. They are understood in particular ways within their local

¹²⁷Sáez, "Torture: A Discourse on Practice," 127-28, 139.

culture and at the time that they are written. For their original audiences, they have the potential to counter the state's attempted percepticide. Both temporal and geographical distance alter the performative effects of these plays' suffering bodies. They deserve careful, thoughtful, transculturation.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by analyzing the claim that representations of torture run the danger of producing titillation that outweighs other, more ethically desirable, responses. A dread of exploiting the suffering of torture victims has persisted underneath my discussion of staging devices and dramatic structures, along with the Brechtian imperative that theatre should inspire its audience to action rather than purging them of uncomfortable emotions.

The artists and theorists whom I have discussed in this chapter all performed in response to the suffering of others. They did so thoughtfully, compassionately, and with care for the way in which their performances would be received. Yet no artist (or theorist) has complete control over the way in which a performance will be put to use. The most surprising artifacts and events can, for example, produce sexual arousal and be cultivated as fetishes. To refrain from staging suffering in response to suffering, out of fear that one's audience will respond with sadistic pleasure, would be a victory for the engineers of atrocity. One's audience—or even a single member of one's audience—might also respond with a heightened sense of responsibility.

Painless Suffering: Hrotsvit's Virgin Martyrs¹

In Chapter Three, I discussed the ways in which various postcolonial regimes use pain when they perceive themselves to be threatened, and how theatre artists engage with the suffering in their cultures. I now go back to earlier phases in the process: in this chapter, to a period of imperial expansion in the tenth century; in the next, to a time of national consolidation in the fifteenth. My choices are necessarily informed by the theoretical approaches that I bring to them. To truly move outside of one's own time and place may be impossible; nevertheless, if one attempts to examine both the strangeness and the familiarity of other periods, then one might at least see one's own world more clearly. Modern theoretical approaches to the body in performance are valuable tools for understanding medieval culture, provided they are used with careful regard for the historical context of the phenomena being studied. At the same time, medieval performances of suffering are of particular interest for modern cultural studies precisely because the historical distance makes it possible to imagine a wider variety of responses to the spectacle of physical suffering than were one to consider only modern stagings of the body in pain.

Although pain may have some pre-cultural components, and certain facets of a suffering individual's experience may be comprehensible across cultures and historical periods, the performative use of pain unquestionably changes over time. I therefore avoid the modern terms "masochistic" and "sadistic" in these chapters. The literary models for sadism and masochism are historically specific, composed as social critique

¹This chapter was published under the title "Impassive Bodies: Hrotsvit Stages Martyrdom," in *Theatre Journal* 50 (1998): 473-88, and was earlier presented at the Ninth Colloquium of the Société Internationale pour l'Étude du Théâtre Médiéval in Odense, Denmark, in August 1998, and at the interdisciplinary arts conference "Subject to Desire: Refiguring the Body," State University of New York, New Paltz, November 1997.

by the Marquis de Sade and by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch well after the period at issue.² Psychoanalytic approaches to literary theory and aesthetics built upon these models imply enduring mental structures and thus pose the danger of leveling sociohistorical differences.

All approaches possess similar shortcomings, of course. When feminists began to evaluate the dramas written by Hrotsvit that are the topic of this chapter, they tended to hear “the strong voice of Gandersheim”³ speaking from the literary wilderness of the tenth century, and to listen for a story about women’s experience. This approach supported the important project of revising the dramatic canon to include previously neglected (and even derided) female writers.⁴ Katharina Wilson, for example, identifies a typological transfer of ideals, expectations, and accomplishments from a male to a female context, tracing the typology through Hrotsvit’s prefatory epistles and legends as well as the dramas, and analyzing the structural relationships among the various texts.⁵ Sue-Ellen Case assimilates Gandersheim to a modern separatist collective and argues persuasively for seeing Hrotsvit as the first woman to revise dramatic roles for

²Quite apart from de Sade’s *influence*, his writings represent a historical revolution in the social role of the body in pain, in part *because* they coincide with the abolition of torture. When torture disappears from judicial processes, pain comes to have a different private meaning. See Edward Peters, *Torture*, expanded ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

³This is Hrotsvit’s play on her name. See Katharina M. Wilson, *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: The Ethics of Authorial Stance* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), 146–47. I adopt Wilson’s spelling rather than the alternatives, which include Hrosvitha, Hrotswitha, and other variations.

⁴See Sydney Janet Kaplan, “Varieties of Feminist Criticism,” in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Green and Coppélia Kahn (London: Methuen, 1985), 37–58. See also Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), especially 1–18 for the distinction between liberal, cultural, and materialist feminist approaches; and 19–21 for the relation of feminism to the canon.

⁵See the introduction to *The Plays of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, trans. Katharina Wilson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), esp. xxi. Page references to the dramas and prefaces from this translation are included parenthetically in the text.

women.⁶ More recently, Barbara Gold (like Case, whom she repeatedly cites) assumes that Hrotsvit's plays were performed for an audience of nuns within Gandersheim. Gold asserts that Hrotsvit wrote with this audience in mind, and that she and they "identified" with the characters and with one another.⁷ Case and Gold imagine a context for Hrotsvit and locate a voice appropriate to that context. While their analyses make valuable contributions to the project of reassessing the work of early women writers, they unfortunately dehistoricize both the dramatist and her dramas.⁸ Because the tenth century is a low point for the production of original literature or even the copying of manuscripts, Hrotsvit is all too easily interpreted as if she lived in the twelfth century.⁹ I argue that an understanding of Ottonian imperial history is essential in order to lift Hrotsvit out of a generically imagined "Middle Ages" and place her within a specific context.

⁶Sue-Ellen Case, "Re-Viewing Hrotsvit," *Theatre Journal* 35 (1983): 536.

⁷Barbara K. Gold, "Hrotswitha Writes Herself: Clamor Validus Gandersheimensis," in *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*, ed. Barbara Gold, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 57. For models of spectator response including identification, see Chapter Five.

⁸Case notes the importance of semiotics and reception theory for understanding the relation of any drama to social conventions and social consciousness (533), but her concern remains with twentieth-century reception and signification. Gold does note the importance of cultural context in understanding Hrotsvit, but her essay does not inquire very deeply into what that context might have been. Although Gold's command of the critical literature is superb, she cites only two works for historical background on the tenth century: Eleanor Shipley Duckett, *Death and Life in the Tenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967); and R. S. Lopez, *The Tenth Century* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1959). For a summary of the sparse biographical details to be gleaned from Hrotsvit's dedicatory epistles and epics, see Wilson, "Appendix: Hrotsvit and the Ottonian Renaissance," in *Ethics of Authorial Stance*, 145-58. Wilson positions Hrotsvit within the context of tenth-century rhetorical and poetic traditions but does not take into account the areas of cultural history that I address here.

⁹Along with Hrotsvit, extant historical writings from the 960s include Liudprand of Cremona, Ruotger of Cologne, Widukind of Corvey, and Adalbert of St. Maximin. See Timothy Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages c. 800-1056* (London: Longman, 1991), 249. Aside from the quite significant trait of having their works persist, Reuter considers these authors to be linked by "their interest in the past (in most cases, the very recent past) and their willingness to reflect on their own place in it and that of their contemporaries."

We can learn a great deal about Hrotsvit's dramas if we think of them not as self-expression but as acts of communicative exchange. Gold wants to find Hrotsvit, the individual, and she looks for this woman in the texts she wrote.¹⁰ Rather than reading back through Hrotsvit's various textual masks in search of an authentic and unified authorial self, I ask why these masks were chosen and what they might have accomplished. What cultural work might have been performed in tenth-century Saxony by Hrotsvit's staging of martyrdom? Twentieth-century writings on torture, terror, and representation are largely inadequate to explain this staging, because Hrotsvit does not stage the body in pain. When she places the tormented body at center stage, what the pagans intend as *torture* is translated into *ordeal*.¹¹ What does this translation accomplish?

I argue that by configuring martyrdom as a species of ordeal, Hrotsvit's dramas work to contain and neutralize a potentially subversive energy. In these plays, as in ordeal, the body displays signs of divine intervention, but these signs cannot be interpreted without proper exegesis. The very ambiguity of the signs makes them particularly valuable in support of social solidarity. Martyrdom appears to locate power in passivity or weakness, and the ability to withstand pain could be construed as a victory for the belief system of the individual who suffers under tyranny. Yet the dominant social group typically employs just such an apparent inversion of power in order to maintain bonds of solidarity with the subordinate, whose cooperation is

¹⁰Gold maintains "if we read both the personal narratives and dramas together, we receive from Hrotswitha what might be called an autobiography" (45).

¹¹In order to keep *torture* (the infliction of bodily pain with the goal of producing "true" speech, such as recantation or confession) distinct from *ordeal* (the manifestation of truth, usually interpreted as God's will, by means of bodily signs), I use the term *torment* for the actions that constitute torture or ordeal.

essential.¹² Hrotsvit makes an ideal agent of covert persuasion, since she belongs to two groups upon whose compliance the Ottonian empire depended: the church and ruling-class women. Later in this chapter I discuss at length the importance of her relation with the second group, mostly disregarded by previous considerations of her work. I argue that Hrotsvit's staging of pain-free martyrdom ultimately serves Otto's interests and propose three "target" audiences. The following discussion of tenth-century cultural reading practices with respect to bodies and events provides the groundwork necessary to imagine the response of any such audience.

Reading Bodies in Ottonian Culture

In the tenth century, Saxony was on the frontier of a Christian Europe that had been fragmented since the end of the Carolingian empire. The imperial project of Otto the Great entailed an internal consolidation of power as well as expansion to the east by means of conquest and conversion. In this kind of borderland, ritual was an especially important means to communicate ideas and sentiments. Ritual also served to direct attention to crucial events and to control public reception of them.¹³ To cement alliances, warriors prayed together, swore oaths, and sang certain portions of the liturgy before battle. Ritual gestures were taken very seriously and could in turn have serious consequences, as the following story told by Widukind of Corvey illustrates: a Saxon noble named Wichmann was defeated in battle and needed to "give his hands" as a vassal in order to surrender. Because the Slavs who defeated him were his social inferiors, he refused to perform the gesture. They sent for their lord so that Wichmann could surrender to him. In the meantime the fighting continued, and Wichmann was

¹²See Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, *Social Semiotics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 58-59.

¹³Karl Leyser, *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1994), 194-95.

killed. Karl Leyser notes that such incidents are strikingly present in turn-of-the-millennium chronicles by both Widukind and Theitmar of Merseburg, yet they were largely absent from Carolingian histories.¹⁴ Otto himself made good use of ritual communication. In 937, he required each participant in a rebellion led by Duke Eberhard of Franconia to carry a dog for a great distance as penance, after which he gave them presents. Leyser concludes that by virtue of this “piece of theatre,” Otto’s rule over Saxony was strengthened, nobility was warned against rebellion, and those who were punished “won identity as a result, set themselves off from the mass of unknown warriors.”¹⁵ At Steel in 938, Otto ordered a ritual combat for the explicit purpose of avoiding public debate.¹⁶ In 967, he directly recommended trial by battle (duel)—a form of joint ordeal—to resolve property disputes in Italy, because the authenticity of documents was in question and too many false oaths were being sworn.¹⁷

Ordeal was a special kind of ritual performance by means of which a dramatic—and violent—gesture could demonstrate guilt or vindicate innocence. Ordeal requires a belief in immanent justice: that God is involved in the material world to such a degree that he will make the truth manifest in the human body.¹⁸ During its heyday (roughly 800 to 1200), the ordeal was especially popular to resolve disputes about paternity and inheritance, crimes of stealth, and charges of adultery—all cases where the facts might not be visible but resolution was of great importance to the parties.¹⁹

¹⁴Leyser, *Communications and Power*, 191-92.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁶Peter Brown, “Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change,” *Daedalus* 104.2 (1975): 149, n.31.

¹⁷Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 105.

¹⁸Peters, *Torture*, 42.

¹⁹Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 17-21.

Later writers arguing against ordeal complained that the outcome was inherently ambiguous and open to manipulation by the participants. For example, after a participant grasped the red hot iron, normal healing of the hand was a sign of God's judgment *for* the participant; however, the hand was unbandaged and "read" after three days, a period likely to leave the condition of such a wound as open to interpretation as an inkblot.²⁰ Judicial combat could have surprisingly ambiguous results as well. In the case of duels fought on islands, the combatants fought alone, under the eye of God, so that death was read as a divine judgment cut off from any temporal connection. Yet in 979, when one Waldo died during such a duel on an island in the Elbe, he could still be considered the victor. Before he died, his opponent Gero had already said that he couldn't go on fighting. As a result, Gero was held to have lost and was beheaded.²¹

Prior to the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, ordeal was a central component of judicial procedure.²² An injured party was responsible for bringing his case before the appropriate authorities. If both the accuser and the accused were oath-worthy, each would swear an oath as to the truth of the charges. (I should mention that women were not oath-worthy—a male relative would swear for a woman. On the other hand, a woman's body could be depended upon to reveal the truth even if her voice could not. She was *ordeal*-worthy.) Witnesses were called to support the worthiness of the parties, rather than to testify about matters of fact. In a case where the accused couldn't produce sufficient witnesses, s/he could be subjected to the ordeal. After 1215, inquisition took the place of accusation, confession rather than the bodily sign became the "queen of

²⁰Brown: "Society and the Supernatural," 139, citing Petrus Cantor, *Verbum abbreviatum*, chap. 78; also cited and discussed by Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000-1215*, revised ed. (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), 18-19. These complaints should not, of course, be assumed to reflect tenth-century views.

²¹Leyser, *Communications and Power*, 209-10.

²²The following summarizes Peters, *Torture*, 41.

proofs,” and the use of torment shifted from ordeal to torture. I discuss the transition and late-medieval uses of torment at length in Chapter Five. Prior to this shift, ordeal was the road to truth when a party’s oath was not sufficient, but anyone might *offer* to undergo an ordeal. (Of course, such an offer might be made as the result of considerable pressure in a case where an uncertain outcome couldn’t be tolerated.)²³ In a deadlock, offering to undergo an ordeal heightened the atmosphere and at the same time removed the issue from its immediate context. In the end, the spectacle not only resolved the conflict and contained its energy but also made a lasting imprint on the public memory.²⁴

Whether the textual evidence for ordeal and other forms of ritual gesture tells us more about social practices, about the way Ottonian culture wished to be memorialized, or about what the eleventh century chose to remember, we can safely assume that Hrotsvit lived and wrote in a culture accustomed to reading bodily signs as evidence of divine intervention in the world.²⁵ Throughout Hrotsvit’s dramas, as in ordeal, events are taken for signs and outward appearance necessarily reveals virtue. I discuss her two stagings of martyrdom, each of which centers on a family group of three Christian virgins in imperial Rome.

²³Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 31-33.

²⁴Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 14; Brown, “Society and the Supernatural,” 138. For the paradigm used by both see Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

²⁵For an analysis of “virtue made visible” and its role in tenth-century charismatic pedagogy, see C. Steven Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideas in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 76-117. Brun, whom I will discuss later, is Jaeger’s central example.

Reading Hrotsvit's Tormented Bodies

In *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agape, Chionia, and Hirena*, beauty is a transparent sign of virtue. The play (also known as *Dulcitius*) begins with an ironic contrast: the pagan Emperor Diocletian manifests the rage and madness that he attributes to the virgins, while they remain impassive. The girls' bodies function as foci of desire but are themselves free from desire. By contrast, the non-Christian men are represented as desiring subjects, which also means that they are *subject to* their bodies. Diocletian wants to direct the disposal of the girls in marriage. Governor Dulcitius wants to use and possess them himself, and his desire produces his downfall. After he is blackened in the kitchen by making love to the pots and pans that he mistakes for the virgins, Agape observes that now Dulcitius's body corresponds to his mind (42).²⁶ On the other side of the balance, although the physical beauty of the girls is a visible manifestation of their virtue, pagan interpreters misread it as a sign of commodity exchange value, beginning with Diocletian's demand that the girls bring offerings to the Roman gods *in order* to be married well (the last thing they'd want!) (37). But while the signs can be misread, Christian virtue cannot be *degraded*. When Dulcitius orders Agape, Chionia, and Hirena stripped for display, their clothes magically adhere to their bodies and cannot be removed (43). Hirena, threatened with sexual degradation in a brothel, retorts: "Lust deserves punishment, but forced compliance the crown; neither is one considered guilty,/ unless the soul consents freely" (46). All the same, God prevents her body from being defiled, and although Agape and Chionia are thrown into a fire and their souls depart at once, their physical bodies remain unharmed. Death is not a sign of pagan power but of God's grace, and at the final Resurrection, the martyr's beautiful body will again serve as the proper sign of the pure soul. In this

²⁶On the Christian symbolism of *Dulcitius*, see Sandro Sticca, "Hrotswitha's *Dulcitius* and Christian Symbolism," *Mediaeval Studies* 32 (1970): 108-27. The transformation of Dulcitius shows that the Devil cannot remain concealed.

play, the body—and in particular, its sexual properties—focuses the conflict between Christian female and pagan male.

In *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Fides, Spes, and Karitas* (also known as *Sapientia*), Hrotsvit shifts the power struggle from the body to the voice. Although the Emperor Hadrian is overcome by the girls' beauty and wants to "mollify them first with flattering speech" (127), they are never positioned as tenable objects for male sexual desire. Far to the contrary: as the play opens, Hadrian is informed that these Christian women have managed to effect an unthought-of disruption in pagan Rome: wives are alienated and will no longer eat or sleep with men (126). In this play, however, the martyrs' bodies are not miraculously protected from harm. Hadrian orders the following torments for the daughters of Sapientia (Wisdom): Fides (Faith) is flogged by twelve centurions, then her nipples are cut off, she is thrown on a hot grill, and she swims in a pot of boiling wax and pitch. She feels no pain. Triumphant, she is beheaded (136-38). With the first girl dead, the pagans turn to Spes (Hope). As with her sister, the beating merely exhausts those who administer it, so Hadrian orders her "suspended in mid-air and torn to pieces with claws so that when her bowels have been severed/ and her bones have been bared,/ cracking, limb by limb, she dies." But she doesn't die—yet. Instead, her lacerated flesh gives off a wonderful fragrance (140-41). She is also thrown into a pot, this time with oil and fat added to the hot wax and pitch. Rather than harming her, the mixture bursts the bronze pot and kills the servants. The Romans give up and cut off her head. The youngest girl, Karitas (Charity), is taken away to be hung on a rack and lashed, then thrown into a furnace that has been heated for three nights and days (144). As might be predicted, she comes through unscathed and her head must be lopped off as well.

These girls are under attack because they persist in speaking as Christians. They will neither be quiet nor will they praise pagan gods (with either word or action).

Because Hadrian sees Christianity as a threat to the social order, he has Sapiientia arrested. He hopes to bring about a recantation but is willing to stop her subversion at any cost. After persuasion, threats, and detention fail to produce a change, Hadrian takes the advice of Antiochus: “let them be killed so that their rebellious mother may be tormented all the more acutely by their pain” (135). Sapiientia is thus positioned as the ultimate target of these torments. Both Hadrian’s aims and his methods are familiar from modern accounts of torture: he seeks to inflict monstrous pain; he describes each torture in advance (a variant of “showing the instruments”); and he forces his primary victim to watch the torture of family members. Although he never succeeds, Hadrian aims to produce pagan speech from the Christians, whom he would free if they consented to praise the Roman gods. By the end, Karitas would need only to say the words “Great Diana” in order to be spared.

Hrotsvit repeats a single dramatic pattern for the two oldest daughters: First Hadrian describes a torture, often with verbal support from his advisor Antiochus. Then the girl—presumably while undergoing the torment—re-describes it, stressing her freedom from pain. After several such exchanges, Hadrian orders death by beheading. A lengthy leave-taking between the martyr and her family separates his order from her death, minimizing the dramatic impact of his speech even though the girl is indeed killed. Sapiientia witnesses Hadrian’s fruitless attempts to produce pain. Within the text, this is played out as a contest over representation. In each case, the girl’s description overwrites the emperor’s.

The pattern is compressed for the third girl and includes Hadrian’s explicit instruction to carry out the torments offstage. Hadrian again prescribes lashing. Antiochus, rather than the martyr, voices certainty that it will have no effect. Hadrian responds with a second measure (burning), after which the girl herself asserts that she will feel no pain. Unlike her sisters, she makes this assertion in advance of the

torments. Events are then reported by Antiochus after they have occurred and before Karitas returns to the scene for her death. In this case, the pagans give up the battle of words at the outset and lose faith in their methods. They also inflict greater harm upon themselves with each successive martyrdom. For example, when Fides swims happily in the fiery pot, the pagans are unharmed. Later, the mixture into which they put Spes kills the servants. Finally, while Karitas sings hymns in the furnace accompanied by angels, the flame explodes and burns five thousand men. The Christians, in contrast, maintain their faith and their power of speech. Earthly death is for them the route to eternal life—a reward, not a punishment. Not only do they impassively assert their Christian faith throughout, but their tormented bodies continue to manifest God’s grace, culminating in a blessed death. Significantly, they feel no pain, and this is what makes possible their translation of torture into ordeal. Because they don’t experience pain, the girls don’t simply *endure* but are protected from torture. One might say that the torture does produce true speech: but not in the way that the pagans intend, and the truth is not what they believe. In Hrotsvit’s version of martyrdom, God appropriates the voice of the torturer.

Elaine Scarry delineates a structural opposition between body and the voice in modern torture. The torturer reduces the scope of the victim’s consciousness until nothing remains but the body in pain, thereby destroying her world and forcing her to accept his world in its place. Ideally (from the torturer’s point of view), the victim’s recantation or confession affirms that the torturer’s version of reality is true. In this sense, as Scarry points out, the torturer aims to appropriate the victim’s voice. Even without such “true” speech, the victim’s scream, grimace, or other sign of pain serves as an alternative form of speech acknowledging the superior power of the torturer. But anyone who gives voice to the victim, who gives an accurate account of the pain, can project the image of the sufferer’s subjective experience out into the world. At the very

least, Scarry sees this as a mitigation of torture.²⁷ Extending this line of reasoning, staging the body in pain brings the victim's suffering into public: to make a spectacle of suffering is to honor it. Does Hrotsvit's staging of martyrdom in Ottonian culture effect this sort of subversive remediation?

Sapientia can be read as an allegory that uses separate dramatic figures to manifest the Christian virtues: Wisdom remains steadfast through brutal attacks on Faith, Hope, and Charity—as do the virtues themselves. In the drama's devotional ending, a contented Sapientia prays on her daughters' graves for a quick release from the “fettters of [her] earthly body” (149). Her prayer ties the martyrdom of Fides, Spes, and Karitas to that of Christ. From this perspective, the play seems to anticipate later morality plays such as *Wisdom*, *Mankind*, and *The Castle of Perseverance*. Yet a dramatist creates figures and events to be embodied, and does so within a cultural and historical context that includes reading practices, a particular understanding of causation, and knowledge of real-world events and their action upon real bodies that exist in time and space. Hrotsvit's plays might have been fully staged in the tenth century, at Gandersheim or at court. They might have been read aloud with the roles distributed but not fully enacted. They might have been read silently, in solitude. The question has been widely debated.²⁸ For reasons of scope, I intend to sidestep the performance issue by taking the position that even a solitary reader can imagine a

²⁷Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 45-51. For those who survive torture in the modern world, the ability to resist commonly includes not only a powerful belief system but also a psychological splitting off of the essential self from bodily experience, as discussed in Chapter Three. To presume that the Christian faith enabled the fourth-century martyr to employ similar tactics, or that Hrotsvit and her tenth-century contemporaries would have understood this to occur, is to anachronistically rely upon a conception of psychology as something internal to and contained by the individual body.

²⁸For recent treatments, see David Wiles, “Hrosvitha of Gandersheim: The Performance of Her Plays in the Tenth Century,” *Theatre History Studies* 19 (1999): 133-50; Gold, “Hrotswitha Writes Herself”; and sources cited therein.

staging, and I won't distinguish between the real and the imagined body on stage. By "reading," I mean any process of reception and interpretation, and I will use the terms "reader" and "spectator" as equivalents. In any event, Hrotsvit's use of Hadrian, a historical figure, situates the drama in time and space, implying a connection to bodies as they exist in the material world even though some figures can be read allegorically. Without entirely rejecting allegory, I propose alternative readings that take into account three possible audiences: first, the canonesses at Gandersheim; second, the (male) Ottonian rulers; and third, female members of the ruling families. I believe that all three audiences are plausible, and that the readings can co-exist and be variously contained within one another. After all, any spectator can also imagine the interpretation of a different spectator.

Hypothetical audience 1: the canonesses. If Hrotsvit's plays were indeed read (or staged) at Gandersheim, how could this community of women interpret her picture of horrifying but painless bodily torment? At first glance, I might suggest the following message: "Be faithful and endure anything you're subjected to; God is on your side and will protect you." Yet nothing suggests that a canoness or even a consecrated nun was subjected to much unpleasantness at Gandersheim. Hrotsvit did not write about her own experience. She modeled her six plays on the comedies of Roman playwright Terence (c. 195-159 B.C.E).²⁹ Terence's comedies were themselves imitations of Menander and Apollodorus, with plots revolving around the love affairs of young men with courtesans or with seemingly inappropriate (poor) young women who turn out in the end to be

²⁹Hrotsvit defends her choice in a preface: "Many Catholics one may find,/ and we are also guilty of charges of this kind,/ who for the beauty of their eloquent style,/ prefer the uselessness of pagan guile/ to the usefulness of sacred scripture. There are also others, who, devoted to sacred readings and scorning the works of other pagans, yet frequently read Terence's fiction,/ and as they delight in the sweetness of his style and diction,/ they are stained by learning of wicked things in his depiction./ Therefore I, the strong voice of Gandersheim, have not refused to imitate him in writing/ whom others honor in reading,/ so that in that selfsame form of composition in which the shameless acts of lascivious women were phrased/ the laudable chastity of sacred virgins be praised/ within the limits of my little talent" (3).

appropriate (wealthy) after all, so that the father's opposition to marriage is overcome. On the one hand, the choice of Terence as a model is not surprising. Latin was learned by reading classical texts and Terence, admired for his style, continued to be read, copied, and illuminated throughout the medieval period.³⁰ On the other hand, although Hrotsvit might want to substitute virtuous Christians for lascivious pagans, why did she choose to make them Christian virgins martyred in imperial Rome?

I find one plausible answer in Augustine, who explains in *The City of God* that although both the good and the wicked suffer, they (and their suffering) are different. Good men are tested and purified by suffering, whereas bad men are ruined by it. In Augustine's words, "Stir a cesspit, and a foul stench arises: stir a perfume, and a delightful fragrance ascends. But the movement is the same."³¹ The primary reason for God to punish the good as well as the bad is that the good also (although to a lesser degree) love this temporal life rather than despising it. If they despised it, they would not be afraid to reform others even if they were endangered by doing so.

³⁰Although Peter Dronke considers Hrotsvit's prefatory reference to many Catholics reading Terence a joke, the evidence is against him. *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 70. The plays of Terence exist in a variety of manuscripts copied during the ninth and tenth centuries. Terence was available in illustrated manuscripts, while Plautus and Seneca were not. In copying, the composition of the manuscript might be changed somewhat, but the basic content would not. The manuscript would begin with an illustration of a cabinet of masks. Each scene in the play would be illustrated, and each character identified. For examples, see Leslie Webber Jones and C.K. Morey, *The Miniatures of the Manuscripts of Terence Prior to the Thirteenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1930-31). For a recent treatment of Hrotsvit's relation to her sources, see Carole E. Newlands, "Hrotswitha's Debt to Terence," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 116 (1986): 369-91. See also Julia Bolton Holloway, "Slaves and Princes: Terence Through Time," in *The Influence of the Classical World on Medieval Literature, Architecture, Music, and Culture*, ed. Fidel Fajardo-Acosta (Lewiston: Mellen, 1992), 34-53. Holloway demonstrates "the continuing reception, appropriation and subversion" of Terence in both monastery and court, to teach not only Latin but also "humanity and humility" (34). Finally, for a reassessment of scholarship on Terence and Roman theatre, see Holt N. Parker, "Plautus vs. Terence: Audience and Popularity Re-Examined," *American Journal of Philology* 117 (1996): 585-617.

³¹St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 1.9, trans. Henry Bettenson as *The City of God* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 14.

Freedom from pain thus signifies the martyr's purity, and a play about the painless torment of Roman virgins could serve to direct women within a relatively porous religious enclosure away from worldly concerns. There is every reason to think that Gandersheim was particularly susceptible to temporal distraction because of its close relation to the ruling family. Gerberga, the abbess of Gandersheim at the time Hrotsvit wrote, was the niece of Brun and Otto. She was succeeded by Sophia, the daughter of Otto II and Theophanu.³² As a Christian speaking to other Christian women, perhaps Hrotsvit chose *female* martyrs in order to position her spectator all the more effectively through identification. If I imagine this to be the case, I can still argue against reading Hrotsvit's rehabilitation of female weakness as the utterance of a proto-feminist, resistant voice. The meaning of martyrdom in these dramas is controlled by its location within a pagan regime, and I can argue further that Hrotsvit depicts oppressive gender roles and relations within a decadent Roman empire precisely so that her spectator will contrast them with the relatively powerful position of women in the ascendant Ottonian empire. Karl Leyser says that women were accorded authority and respect in the political, social, and especially in the ecclesiastic spheres. They commissioned many of the illuminated manuscripts and processional crosses created during this period.³³ Both Leyser and Jo Ann McNamara note that for some tenth-century Saxon families, the historical record consists primarily of "the lavish religious foundations of their womenfolk."³⁴ I will return to the issue, but for the time being

³²See Wilson, *Ethics of Authorial Stance*, 150; Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 188-90. Claims for a Byzantine influence on Gandersheim are intriguing, but Sophia would have arrived at Gandersheim slightly later than the period during which Hrotsvit wrote.

³³Karl Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 49-50.

³⁴Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, 56; McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 181.

suggest that Hrotsvit's depiction of gender oppression in a pagan culture would serve to reinforce the female spectator's preference for the Christian world.

Hypothetical audience 2: the rulers. Nothing proves that Hrotsvit's plays remained within the convent. Peter Dronke maintains that Hrotsvit addressed the preface to her dramas to Archbishop Brun of Cologne, the younger brother of Otto I.³⁵ He goes on to suggest that the plays of Terence and later of Hrotsvit were read aloud at court, with distribution of parts. How might Brun—or Otto himself, for that matter—view Hrotsvit's picture of martyrdom? Under Brun, the church became an integral administrative agency of the empire, in what C. Stephen Jaeger calls the "imperial church system."³⁶ Brun's influence was not limited to the appointment of bishops, although this was an important function. As archbishop he had military as well as ecclesiastic power, and after his crucial assistance to Otto in suppressing an intra-dynastic rebellion, Brun became archduke of Lotharingia as well. Timothy Reuter sees this as an anomaly deriving not from the power of the episcopate but from Brun's position as Otto's younger brother, noting that this combination of clerical and secular power didn't become common until the early eleventh century. Finally, although Otto II, the only legitimate son of Otto the Great, was elected king and crowned in 961 and became co-emperor in 967, he had no real independent power while his father lived. While Otto I spent roughly 963-73 south of the Alps, the empire was maintained in Saxony by Brun together with his (and Otto's) mother Mathilda and Otto's illegitimate son, Archbishop William of Mainz.³⁷

This empire was explicitly modeled on Rome, and like Rome had to manage internal power struggles while expanding its borders. Unlike their pagan predecessors,

³⁵Dronke, *Women Writers*, 57.

³⁶Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 43.

³⁷Reuter, *Germany*, 155-159.

the Christian emperors practiced forcible conversion. The inhabitants of any conquered region could convert or lose their heads—a situation uncomfortably close to that in which Sapientia's daughters find themselves. The vital difference, of course, is the nature of the regime in which they are martyred. What happens to the message when their martyrdom is *represented* inside a *just*, Christian empire? Should the Christian emperor (or his right-hand man) compare his actions to those of his unjust, pagan predecessors? Although I think the question needs to be asked, I find nothing to justify this interpretation. Hrotsvit draws no parallel between the Roman treatment of Christians and the Ottonian conversion of conquered pagans. A much more likely implication is that if Otto were *unjust*, God would grant the same sort of resistant triumph to the Slavs as he granted the Christians in Rome. This construction matches the pattern Leyser identifies in the *Res Gestae Saxonicae* by Hrotsvit's contemporary, Widukind of Corvey: "At great crises and in desperate situations it was God who saved Otto I from his enemies and gave him victory against all odds, but Widukind also dwelt on the king's iron nerve and unshakable resolve."³⁸ To push this reading even further, each battle becomes an ordeal with victory a manifestation of divine favor. If the vanquished suffer pain, this serves as an equally clear sign of their wickedness.

Although this reading supports Otto and/or Brun as Hrotsvit's ideal spectator, it seems unlikely that they would need her reassurance. On the other hand, they would benefit greatly from the reception of such a message by other members of the aristocracy whom we could reasonably expect to be present at court. The empire faced constant threats from within. Leyser says, "Between 938 and 1002 all the major upheavals in the homeland of the Saxon dynasty had one common characteristic: disaffected nobles with very few exceptions rose only when a member of the royal

³⁸Leyser, *Communications and Power*, 27.

house equally resentful collected and led them.”³⁹ For the ruling family, Hrotsvit’s dramas function along with ordeal and other forms of ritual gesture to construct social memory. The absence of pain on the part of Hrotsvit’s stage martyrs supports a system of signification vital to the Ottonian imperial project, a system wherein military victory is a sign of divine favor. Within this system, each unsuccessful rebellion could be read as further evidence that God was with the emperor (and his surrogates).

Hypothetical audience 3: powerful women. Whether the plays were staged in the court or the convent, however, *female* members of the aristocracy would be present. There is general agreement that upper-class status can be assumed for Hrotsvit by virtue of her presence at Gandersheim, a house for aristocratic women founded in 852 by the great-grandfather of Otto the Great.⁴⁰ Marriage and religious houses for women were important tools for imperial expansion and consolidation. New wealth came into East Saxony during the Ottonian period in the form of tribute, gifts, plunder, and silver mining, all due to the conquest of Slav lands. Saxon women often enough outlived not only their husbands but their sons as well.⁴¹ Although inheritance laws generally favored men, a surviving wife might well end up with more land than her husband had possessed, and she could protect an estate from claims of *co-heredes* by founding a religious house.⁴² The emperor typically protected the abbess and granted her essential

³⁹Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, 29.

⁴⁰Excerpts from Hrotsvit’s own history of Gandersheim are included in Marcelle Thiébaux, *Writings of Medieval Women*, 2d ed. (New York: Garland, 1987), 212-18. Also see Wilson, *Ethics of Authorial Stance*, 149; McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 188. For general information about canonesses in the tenth century, including references to Gandersheim, see McNamara, 176-201; and Heinrich Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century: Mentalities and Social Orders*, trans. Peter Geary (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. 223-30. For more focus on Gandersheim but less focus on the life of a canoness, see Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, 55-70.

⁴¹See Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, 52-63; Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century*, 82-85.

⁴²At least 36 foundations for women were established between 919 and 1024. More convents than monasteries were established, concentrated in secure regions rather than in border lands. Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, 64. Similar convents were already in place in the West. See Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the*

sovereignty over her monastery, and the property then passed to him upon her death. Along with their many other functions, religious foundations moved land ownership from the aristocracy to the emperor and the bishops.⁴³ While Otto's rule was anything but peaceful on any front, internal conflicts were strongly linked to disagreements within his own family over rights and properties. There were thus good reasons to make sure the emperor's kinswomen either married or remained chaste in accordance with his interests. As McNamara puts it:

The Saxon emperors energetically tried to control the dispersal of land and power to the aristocracy. To diminish struggles over his inheritance, Otto I married off only one daughter and made the other one an abbess. Similarly, all but one of Otto II's daughters were made nuns and granddaughters followed the same pattern. Unlike Charlemagne in the previous century, whose unmarried daughters remained in his palace to make embarrassing liaisons with various courtiers, the German emperors made the celibacy of their daughters a positive advantage by employing them to administer the proprietary church system.⁴⁴

The importance of women such as the Empresses Mathilda, Adelheid, and Theophanu in Ottonian texts (and not only those written by Hrotsvit) can cover over their function as objects of exchange, necessary to cement alliances, and as agents in the transfer of power and land to the emperor. Inheritance practices made aristocratic women a

First Millennium (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 66-67.

⁴³Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, 68-70; McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 185. Property could also pass to the church if an unmarried woman lived in the household of a male clerical relative—presumably this would happen in the case of a widow without sons who lived with her brother after the death of her husband (Leyser, 61).

⁴⁴McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 185.

potentially divisive force that needed to be kept under control within the court and within the church hierarchy for the sake of imperial consolidation.

The borders between convent and court were somewhat fluid. Gerberga and her successor, Sophia, were members of the ruling family. The Empress Mathilda, who was a member of the ruling triumvirate during the ten-year absence of Otto the Great, founded her own convent. Abbesses and canonesses were typically the unmarried daughters and widowed mothers of the nobility. Ruling class women would have been frequent visitors to Gandersheim, and it is quite possible the canonesses could have visited the court as well. Because Gandersheim did not practice Benedictine rule, the residents were not subject to strict claustration. We might expect the canonesses at Gandersheim to enjoy the three distinctions insisted upon by those at Nivelles, who fought against Benedictine rule in 877:

First, they performed a variety of public liturgical and charitable services, which freed them from strict claustration, though they accepted a degree of enclosure for the sake of security. Second, they did not take permanent vows of chastity and could leave and get married. Finally, they did not take vows of poverty or common property, retaining the right to their own wealth, though they entrusted its administration to the monastery's advocate or to a relative or friend to avoid distraction with worldly affairs. They had their own dwellings within the walls of the monastery, either in the form of small houses or private apartments, and they employed servants.⁴⁵

For such women, who could read in Hrotsvit's staging of martyrdom any or all of the messages that I've proposed thus far, the reading practices reinforced by rituals such as

⁴⁵McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 179, citing F. Maasen, ed., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Concilia*, vol. I (Hannover, 1893-1906).

ordeal add another message, equally useful: “Do what the imperial church tells you to do, because the church knows what God means.”

Conclusion

The appropriation of Hrotsvit’s work for ideological projects typically operates by restricting her to a single voice. The goal of Conrad Celtis, who discovered the Emmeram-Munich codex in 1494, was to advance nascent German culture. Because Hrotsvit served him as cultural ammunition against Renaissance Italy, later scholars have viewed Celtis with suspicion, even raising the hypothesis that he forged the manuscript.⁴⁶ In the twentieth century, Hrotsvit was increasingly read as the first *woman* playwright rather than the first *German* dramatist. Particular attention was paid to her gendered references to her intellect: “You judged me to have a little portion of literary knowledge, whose subtlety far surpasses my woman’s intellect” (4), and “the Giver of my talent all the more justly be praised through me,/ the more limited the female intellect is believed to be” (5). Peter Dronke claims that Hrotsvit here “says little of what she really means and means almost nothing of what she says.” He says that her “elusive defence for having turned to Terence” is “deliberately misleading,” a piece of “literary coquetry” skillfully designed to command respect for her viewpoint.⁴⁷ Dronke not only reads against the surface of the text, he also reinscribes a diminution of Hrotsvit’s work by using the gender-loaded term “coquetry.” Surprisingly enough, feminist critics generally accept Dronke’s judgment that Hrotsvit lies and seem never to consider taking her at her word. What if she does mean what she says? Heinrich Fichtenau maintains that “hidden meaning” is conceptually alien to tenth-century

⁴⁶Wilson, *Ethics of Authorial Stance*, 107; see also xxx.

⁴⁷Dronke, *Women Writers*, 69, 72.

“man,” who sees no distinction between inner being and outward behavior.⁴⁸ Is it safe to assume that hidden meaning and duplicity were a way of life for tenth-century woman?

Barbara Gold argues that, by virtue of their gender, Hrotsvit and other women throughout history have learned to subvert and reread texts as a matter of course.⁴⁹ Dronke, Gold, and others make claims for a “real” and resistant voice concealed beneath Hrotsvit’s rhetorical surface. They overlook the mechanisms by which that voice is contained and re-inscribed by the patriarchal (and colonial) discourse to which it speaks. Furthermore, double-voicing must be distinguished from lying. In modeling her dramas on Terence, Hrotsvit claims to use his style for her own quite different purposes. She “talks back” not only to Terence, but to Augustine and other patristic writers as well. Her dedicatory epistles and prefaces fit Bakhtin’s description of internally polemical discourse that “literally cringes in the presence or the anticipation of someone else’s word, reply, objection.”⁵⁰ “Digs” and “barbed words” are characteristic of this kind of speech, along with “all self-deprecating overblown speech that repudiates itself in advance, speech with a thousand reservations, concessions, loopholes and the like.” Hrotsvit’s dramatic discourse is also “double-voiced” in

⁴⁸Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century*, 4.

⁴⁹Gold, “Hrotswitha Writes Herself,” 69 n.83. Gold cites Edwin Ardener’s influential essay, “Belief and the Problem of Women.” Shirley Ardener summarizes the core of the argument: “because the arena of public discourse tends to be characteristically male-dominated and the appropriate language registers have been “encoded” by males, women may be at a disadvantage when wishing to express matters of peculiar concern to them. Unless their views are presented in a form acceptable to men, and to women brought up in the male idiom, they will not be given a proper hearing.” *Perceiving Women* (London: Malaby Press Ltd., 1975), vii-ix.

⁵⁰M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems in Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 196.

Bakhtin's sense: it is directed not only toward its referential objects, but also toward someone else's discourse.⁵¹ This polemical relation to patristic discourse is hidden:

The other's thought does not personally make its way inside the discourse, but is only reflected in it, determining its tone and its meaning. One word acutely senses alongside it someone else's word speaking about the same object, and this awareness determines its structure.⁵²

I agree that the "strong voice of Gandersheim" cannot speak directly but will always be mediated by the discourse within which it is contained. Acknowledging that mediation, however, does not support the conclusion that Hrotsvit's proto-feminist voice is simply hidden beneath a false surface. Hrotsvit probably does mean what she says in her prefaces, but that's not *all* that she means. Rather than looking for an authentic voice, I suggest that feminists approaching early women writers such as Hrotsvit pay more attention to historical context and to the positions that a text might occupy within that context.

One can readily conceive of Hrotsvit as engaged in the active reconstruction of the past, or the construction of an alternative past. She chronicled the life of Otto the Great, her dramas reworked Terence in combination with early Roman martyrology, and she defended the value of her revised legends of saints even when she became aware that some of her sources were apocryphal. Patrick Geary sees the period around the turn of the first millennium (roughly 950-1050) as in many ways more concerned with selective *forgetting* than with remembering, because forgetting makes change

⁵¹Ibid., 185.

⁵²Ibid., 196.

possible: Arnold of Regensburg used the image of a “mental clearing of the forest.”⁵³

Geary gives two primary reasons that so few manuscripts remain:

First, the sparse evidence of documentation quite likely comes from a different understanding of the purposes and uses of writing and the relationship between text, action, and object rather than from a lack of writing. Second, . . . the paucity of evidence at our disposal today is the result of losses of written evidence, much of which is attributable to decisions made in the eleventh century about the utility of the masses of written material inherited from previous centuries.⁵⁴

Women are central to Geary’s discussion of memory in the tenth century both as they are remembered and for the role they played as specialists in memory preservation and in dying. In those texts that have survived from the tenth century, he identifies a functional contrast between the Capetian queens, who represent danger, and Ottonian empresses, who represent stability and continuity.⁵⁵ He suggests that the relative silence in the West (as compared to Saxony) about women’s role as bridge between the living and the dead “may indicate an active desire to forget. Women were the primary rivals of the reformed monastic tradition in the domain of memory.”⁵⁶ The *image* of that bridge was burned in the eleventh century. And Hrotsvit’s dramas, with their virgin martyrs seen through the eyes of an Ottonian upper-class woman, were “lost” until the beginning of the fifteenth century, when they became a tool for German nationalism.

The Terentian dramas that served as Hrotsvit’s model also teach something useful about the negotiation of authority between fathers and sons (for example, both

⁵³Geary, *Phantoms*, 29.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 51-52, 5.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 73.

Adelphoe and *Heautontimoronus*) and the fulfillment of desire by means of its concealment (especially *Eunuchus*)—lessons of great practical value for the Ottonian empire. As John Henderson suggests, Terence's texts had long been used to teach "in ways that precluded learning from them what they teach about teaching," and their structure was ideally suited to serve "the naturalization of a society's tacit covenant about what it has determined not to know."⁵⁷ As Terence helped to produce the Roman empire, Hrotsvit furthered the Ottonian.

The bodies that Hrotsvit places on stage, like the words with which she introduces them, face in multiple directions. They face (and, for the spectator, are shadowed by) the prostitutes of Terentian drama, the martyrs of the *Golden Legend*, and women of the Saxon aristocracy. Clearly, they are placed within the discourse of Christian doctrine. For twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers, they can also take up an important position within feminist discourse. My readings of Hrotsvit's tormented bodies demonstrate, however, that what looks like subversion to a twentieth-century feminist can just as easily be read as a model for covert coercion designed to benefit those in power. Unlike twentieth-century dramatists who depict torture, Hrotsvit does *not* stage the body in pain. She makes it quite explicit that her virgins are protected from the experience of bodily pain. By erasing pain from her representation of martyrdom, *Hrotsvit* appropriates the voice of the victim to serve as a sign of the imperial church's power, and her dramatization of *passive* female triumph serves to reinforce male strength in action. Her tormented bodies cannot be properly positioned within twenty-first-century discourse about the body in pain without an understanding of the tenth-century practice of trial by ordeal.

⁵⁷John Henderson, "Entertaining Arguments: Terence *Adelphoe*," in *Post-Structuralist Classics*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (New York: Routledge, 1988), 193.

Saints and Sinners in Late-Medieval Paris¹

*Symbols are matters of relationships which must in some way be publicly recognized and remembered—they are not absolutes, but function entirely within social life.*²

*Trembling, sweating, resisting, gesturing, crying, ejaculating blood, spilling its contents and then falling silent, the maimed body of the condemned spoke an arresting language of pain that spectators understood not as an unfortunate by-product of the performance of justice, but as a portentous source of information.*³

In this chapter, I examine the saint play as a culture-building mechanism thoroughly imbricated with other late-medieval performances of spectacular suffering. I begin by discussing the changing understanding of pain within law and religion during this period, and the concomitant transformation of performative suffering. Next, I analyze some of the public executions described by an anonymous bourgeois of Paris during the first half of the fifteenth century, each of which concentrates and makes visible the social forces operating in Paris during three phases of a civil war. At the end of the war, France emerged as a nation unified under one king, whose power became absolute. Although the development of that power has been carefully studied, its foundation in performances of suffering during these unsettled years is less well understood. In order to establish their role in building that foundation, I place these

¹A portion of this chapter was published under the title “Spectator Response to Images of Violence: Seeing Apollonia” in *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 27 (forthcoming 2001), and was earlier presented at the meeting of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education in Washington, D.C., August 2000, and at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds, July 1999. Another section was presented at the Tenth Colloquium of the Société Internationale pour l’Étude du Théâtre Médiéval in Groningen, July 2001.

²Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 260.

³Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 15.

executions first among other performances of stability; next, among liminal rituals. I then read stability and liminality against one another.

Having established the social nexus within which saint plays were performed, I turn to a well-known image of Saint Apollonia in order to develop various models for spectator response to the saint's body in pain. I argue that a late-medieval spectator might have experienced a vicarious sense of power or helplessness and explored the cultural usefulness of such responses, and could also have engaged dialogically in self-examination or become aware of gaps in ideology. In the course of this discussion, I consider the hypothetical late-medieval spectator's gender. Next, I switch the gender of the saint. After discussing differences between male and female hagiography, I summarize a dramatization of the martyrdom of Saint Denis, the patron saint of France. Finally, I use the models developed during my discussion of Apollonia to develop hypothetical responses to the Saint Denis play.

Pain in the Late Middle Ages

The cultural uses of pain had shifted during the later Middle Ages from what I discussed in Chapter Four. Physical torment remained an important component of justice, but its purpose changed. Feudal society had been organized as a system of reciprocal, contractual relations, and the ritual framework for ordeal positioned its *human* participants as social equals. When no other resolution satisfied all parties to a dispute, God was asked to resolve it by means of a bodily sign.⁴ During the twelfth century, a criminal justice system based on inquisition rather than accusation appeared. Torture was now inflicted to produce a confession, so that the body subserved the voice rather than being itself read for signs of truth. Because the judge who determined the

⁴See Talal Asad, "Notes on Body, Pain and Truth in Medieval Christian Ritual," *Economy and Society* 12.3 (1983): 294-95; Esther Cohen, "Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages," *Science in Context* 8 (1995): 55.

truthfulness of the confession was set above the one being judged, and his judgment could in turn be superseded, it has been argued that the transition from ordeal to torture facilitates the development of hierarchical authority.⁵

Cohen describes the transition from ordeal to torture as part of a broader transition from an oral and gestural culture to a literate culture. The ordeal was gradually replaced by the speech formula, a kind of verbal gesture wherein the proper form of the utterance was more significant than the intention behind it. By the late fourteenth century, confession, sentence, and pardon were valid only if they had been written down. Comparing this arrangement with the tenth-century practice of resorting to ordeal in the face of false oaths and faulty records shows the extent to which the status of the word had been enhanced. The growing insistence on the validity of court records, which became the basis for subsequent rulings, gave more control to the judge, and advocates were needed to interpret between laymen and the judiciary. As the fifteenth century drew closer, lawyers and judges were increasingly professional, and neither the trial nor the torture that facilitated it were conducted in public.⁶ Spectacular suffering was now reserved for sentencing and execution. While voluntary confession would (at least in theory) preclude torture, it would very likely be followed by public punishment, which (unlike public ordeal) presupposes subordination.⁷ The retribution exacted by individuals within feudal society was taken over by the newly organized

⁵Asad, "Body, Pain, and Truth," 298. See also Pieter Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2-4. Spierenburg points out that territorial principalities emerged during the same period as inquisitional justice.

⁶See Esther Cohen, *The Crossroads of Justice* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 67-71; Spierenburg, *Spectacle*, 8. For a parallel development towards textual authority in the process of canonization during the early thirteenth century, see André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (1981), trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 45-51.

⁷Spierenburg points out that subordination is what distinguishes punishment from vengeance or feud. *Spectacle*, 2-4.

state, a process that began in the twelfth century and had become fully established by the early sixteenth.⁸ In order for this system of justice to be effective, however, the public had to feel involved and adequately avenged.⁹ The church played a key role in casting the spectator as a participant in the execution of justice.

There was still no clear distinction between secular and religious rituals during the later Middle Ages, although the role of the clergy changed after the Fourth Lateran Council.¹⁰ Among the many intimately connected changes codified in 1215 were a prohibition against clerical participation in ordeal (which contributed to its demise) and annual confession and communion for all Christians, which helped lay the foundation for a conception of spiritually useful pain.¹¹ Prior to the sixth century, both confession and penance had been public spectacles that could be undergone only once. Repeated sin was punished with permanent expulsion from the Christian community. By the ninth century, the practice of private confession had become widespread and physical penance less severe. Then as the concept of expiation in Purgatory took hold, penitential pain took on a newly “medicinal” role as a treatment that restored the sinner to spiritual health and forestalled much greater suffering in the afterlife.¹² Late medieval penitential practices do not support the assumption that medieval people were less sensitive to pain, or that spiritual understanding enabled them to accept it calmly. Suffering was a part of daily life, but it was viewed with horror. The miracle

⁸Spierenburg, *Spectacle*, 12.

⁹Merback, *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 132-37.

¹⁰Cohen, *Crossroads*, 182-83. See also Merback, *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 19.

¹¹See Asad, “Body, Pain and Truth,” 294-95, 321; Cohen, *Crossroads*, 56.

¹²See Asad, “Body, Pain and Truth,” 300-07. For the history of confession and penance, see also James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 152-69. For the usefulness of pain, see also Merback, *Thief, Cross and Wheel*, 152-55. For purgatory, see Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

collections hold ample evidence that people feared surgical pain and sought the intervention of saints as an alternative. For example, Apollonia, whose teeth were destroyed during her martyrdom, was invoked against toothache. Although there was no very effective anesthesia, and many surgeons argued that the available soporifics were too dangerous to use, physicians sought to alleviate suffering. They viewed pain as a guide to proper diagnosis, not a means of treatment, and the analgesic properties of plants had been known and cultivated since antiquity.¹³

Cohen traces three basic conceptions of pain within medieval Christianity: *impassivity*, the ability to tolerate pain; *impassibility*, the ability to transcend pain entirely; and *philopassianism*, the positive valuation of pain.¹⁴ Impassivity had been cultivated by the Stoics and was later given a Christian emphasis that reached its heyday during the high Middle Ages. Pain itself was understood as an entirely negative and degrading phenomenon, associated (by virtue of its role as punishment for Eve's original sin) with those who labored—in other words, lower-class men and all women (except virgins). By the later Middle Ages, impassivity no longer served as a sign of nobility. Even kings cried out in pain and showed other emotions as well.¹⁵ Impassibility was introduced by the early Christian martyrs—in contrast to Christ, whose suffering on the cross was the sign of his humanity. The bodies of Hrotsvit's martyrs, which I discussed in Chapter Four, are clearly depicted as impassible. Thomas

¹³Cohen, "Pain in the Later Middle Ages," 66-69; Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand: Man and Wound in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

¹⁴The following summarizes Cohen, "Pain in the Later Middle Ages," 52-61.

¹⁵Elizabeth Lalou points out that much more public weeping is reported in late-medieval than in early-modern texts. "Les Tortures dans Les Mystères: Théâtre et réalité," *Medieval English Theatre* 16 (1994): 41. Whether this reflects more than a change in literary convention is difficult to determine, but at the very least it indicates a changing valuation of the behavior described.

Aquinas refined the concept in the thirteenth century; henceforth, it was understood that saints were exempt from physical suffering.¹⁶ In this they resembled prelapsarian and heavenly beings, and were distinct from living human beings.

Cohen argues that a concept of spiritually useful pain was entirely absent from Western culture up through the early Middle Ages; however, because the concept has roots in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, no simple correlation with fourteenth-century plagues, wars, and famines can be maintained. In the twelfth century, theologians began to take the view that the *individual* could begin the purgation of sins during life by voluntarily bearing pain in imitation of Christ and therefore lessen his or her suffering after death. Beginning in the thirteenth century, mystics increasingly sought to identify with the physical sensations of Christ as the “man of suffering.” As a component of affective spirituality, ordinary Christian laity cultivated “compassionate vision,” a mode of response for which both the Virgin Mary and Saint Francis served as models.¹⁷ Mary’s maternal love for Christ caused her to suffer with him, making her into a likeness of him. In the contemporary world, Francis conformed to Christ to such an extent that he experienced stigmata in 1224, and the then-novel phenomenon was made public when he died two years later.¹⁸

¹⁶The conception of “living saints” developed around the same time. Until the late eleventh century, only those who had been martyred at least a century earlier were considered saints. See Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 21-25.

¹⁷Cohen, *Crossroads*, 150. Representations of Christ up to this time most often depicted him as the ruler of the world, and the few early images of the crucifixion that exist do not portray his suffering. See Cohen, “Pain in the Later Middle Ages,” 58; Merback, *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 57-66; Nigel Spivey, “Christ and the Art of Agony,” *History Today* 49.8 (1999): [online edition, n.p.].

¹⁸See Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, 146; Merback, *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 151. See also Karma Lochrie, “The Language of Transgression: Body, Flesh, and Word in Mystical Discourse,” in *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 117; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 129-54.

In summary, a widespread desire to imitate Christ developed in tandem with the rise of inquisitional justice.¹⁹ Merback argues that the practice of compassionate vision also shaped the collective emotional experience of spectacular punishments, and that the execution of a repentant criminal provided a model for contemplation closely tied to Passion iconography.²⁰ I will return to Merback's argument after evaluating the painful processions described by an anonymous bourgeois of Paris between 1405 and 1449.²¹

Interpreting Texts: The Journal of a Parisian Bourgeois

Given the extreme difficulty of sorting out "real" historical events from the conventions according to which they are recorded, however, I begin by asking why the *text* portrays things as it does.²² The Parisian people are its collective protagonist, and the journal prominently features their suffering in many guises. Prices and taxes are recorded in great detail, along with periodic food shortages. The impact of the Hundred Years' War with England (1337-1453), combined with struggles between the Burgundian and Armagnac factions within France, is abundantly clear.²³

¹⁹Cohen, "Pain in the Later Middle Ages," 64.

²⁰Merback, *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 143-45, 152.

²¹*A Parisian Journal*, ed. and trans. Janet Shirley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968). Page references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text, with the notation *PJ*, and I will refer to the author as "the Bourgeois." I also consulted the French edition, *Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris 1405-1449*, ed. Alexandre Tuetey (Paris: Champion, 1881).

²²See Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 4, for a lucid discussion of the similar historiographic challenge presented by hagiography.

²³For a historical overview of the period, see Jacques Le Goff, *L'État et les Pouvoirs* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 127-80; C.T. Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War, c. 1300-c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. 141-44, for a discussion of France and nationhood. See also David Nicholas, *The Evolution of the Medieval World: Society, Government and Thought in Europe, 312-1500* (London: Longman, 1992), 399-499; J.R.S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Susan Reynolds, "The Historiography of the Medieval State," in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley (London: Routledge, 1997), 117-38; Claude Gauvard, "Le Royaume de France au XVe Siècle," in *Art et Société en France au XVe Siècle*, ed.

Like the quotidian suffering of law-abiding Parisians, spectacular executions support the implicitly polemical design of this text. As they illustrate the character of each successive government, they justify Parisian acquiescence to English rule from 1420-36 and at the same time establish steadfast loyalty to the French crown. The text falls roughly into three periods: (1) During the troubled reign of Charles VI, processional suffering contributes to social order, while Armagnac rebels commit disorderly mayhem. (2) There are some improvements under English rule, but the proper order of things is disrupted. (3) During a gradual return to peace, Paris is left to fend for itself by Charles VII, who remains alienated from his nation's leading city. The Parisians are shown to support each ruler in succession, creating an overall portrait of citizens who desire the orderly rule of law without unbearable taxation.

Part 1: the contrast between Burgundian and Armagnac executions. To establish the norm against which all that follows can be compared, I include two of the many executions that create a picture of Charles VI surrounded by traitors, both within his household and at a distance. Charles had become king at age 12, with his uncles as regents. As an adult he suffered from periodic madness, enabling the various uncles and other advisors to engage in a prolonged struggle for control of the government. Like many subsequent analysts, the Bourgeois blames French infighting for English successes. On 7 October 1409, Jean de Montaigu, Grand Master of the King's household, was arrested by the Provost of Paris, Pierre des Essarts. Implicated as an Armagnac partisan, he was

put into a cart, *wearing his own colours*: an outer coat of red and white, hood the same, one stocking red and the other white, and gilt spurs. His hands were tied in front of him, holding a wooden cross. He was perched up in the cart like this and taken with two trumpeters before him

Christiane Prigent (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1999), 21-30.

to the Halles. There they cut his head off and afterwards his body was taken to the Paris gallows and hung up as high as it would go, in its shirt and hose and gilt spurs. (*PJ* 31, emphasis added)

His body remained on the gallows for nearly three years (*PJ* 69). Two years after de Montaigu's execution, Colinet du Puisieux "sold" the bridge to St. Cloud to the Armagnac confederates. After the Burgundian faction re-took that town, 12 November 1411,

[Puisieux] and six others were brought to the Halles in Paris; he was on a plank higher up in the cart than the rest, with a wooden cross in his hands, *dressed as he had been when captured, as a priest*. He was taken on to the scaffold like this, stripped naked, and beheaded, he and five of the others. The sixth was hanged, as he was not one of their evil confederacy. This Colinet, the false traitor, was dismembered, his four limbs hung up one over each of the chief gates of Paris, his body on the gallows in a sack, and their heads stuck up on six spears in the Halles, like false traitors that they were. (*PJ* 59-60, emphasis added)

These executions are typical for the period. The traitors are of the noble class and have betrayed King Charles VI and the Duke of Burgundy. The means of conveyance, the contrite pose, the clothing as a sign of identity (real or assumed), the punishment, and the disposition of the corpse are all formulaic.

In contrast to the ceremonious execution of noble traitors by the Burgundian rulers of Paris, reports of Armagnac mayhem in the countryside are sprinkled through this portion of the journal. In the villages around St. Denis in 1411, for example, "they hanged people up by the thumbs or the feet, they killed or took for ransom, they raped women, and started fires" (*PJ* 55). Peace between the factions in August 1413 brought the Armagnacs into power in Paris and a temporary end to the executions. The bodies

of those executed as traitors were taken down and buried in consecrated ground, to the consternation of the Bourgeois (*PJ* 80-81). In the case of Pierre des Essarts, whom I will discuss later, the corpse had been hanging for less than two months.

The so-called peace also brought oppression, and the Bourgeois justifies riots in 1418 by describing an Armagnac plot to drown all the women of Paris in sacks. Those “confederates” not slaughtered by the mob were driven from Paris (*PJ* 112-19, 125-30). The Bourgeois’ final assessment is that the rioters “martyred more people than the ancient enemies of Christianity did, . . . But their cruelty was not comparable, God knows, to that of the confederates, and that is why the people rose up against them” (*PJ* 125-26). The Armagnacs in particular, but also the English, are repeatedly compared to Saracens and to tyrants such as Diocletian. (I must note that the Bourgeois casts no aspersions on the Dauphin, who escaped with his Armagnac supporters; therefore, the ground is left clear for reconciliation after his return as King Charles VII in 1437.)

Armagnac executions are a near inverse of those described in Paris, and by 1420 such incidents explicitly justify the need to negotiate with the English (*PJ* 149-50). For a concentrated “Armagnac” flavor, consider the atrocities described on the occasion of the English conquest of Meaux in 1422. An incident in 1420 is offered as clear proof that the town’s Armagnac tyrant, the Bastard of Vauru, was “a crueller man than ever Nero or anyone else was.” He captured a young working man, tortured him, and demanded an unreasonable ransom from the man’s pregnant wife. When she arrived late with the money, de Vauru “pitilessly drowned or hanged” several other peasants in front of the exhausted woman, took her money, and only then revealed that her husband had already been hanged. Because her outburst of grief annoyed the tyrant, he had her beaten and then dragged to the elm tree where he hung his victims.

He had her tied to it and bound and all her clothes cut off short so that she was naked as far as her navel, an inhuman thing to do! Above her

hung four score or a hundred men, some up, some down, and the feet of those hanging lower down brushed against her head when the wind stirred them. This frightened her so that she could not stand and the cords round her arms cut into her flesh. The poor exhausted girl wept and moaned. Night fell whilst she was in this pitiable distress; she groaned and cried uncontrollably, like one whose suffering is more than she can endure. When she thought about the dreadful place where she was, so terrifying to human nature, she began to grieve and sob all over again, saying, “Oh God, will this awful suffering never stop?” She shouted so loud and so long that the people in the city could hear her plainly, but none of them would have dared to go and get her away; they would have been killed. In all this pain and crying, the pains of childbirth took her, partly because of her anguished shouting, partly because of the cold wind which attacked her on all sides. Her pains came faster and faster; she shrieked so loud that the wolves which used to go there for corpses heard her; they went straight to the noise she was making and attacked her, especially her poor naked belly—they opened it with their cruel teeth, pulled out the child in pieces and tore the rest of her body to bits. (*PJ* 174-75)

The unpredictability of events, along with the undeserving victim and the emphasis on her suffering, sharply distinguishes the *disorderly* violence of the Armagnac faction from the ritualized executions carried out by the Burgundians. In addition, the relation between the nobility and the common people who witness their exercise of power could

hardly be more different.²⁴ One type of killing seems to create order; the other, to destroy it.

Part 2: malformed ceremonies during English rule. During the regency of the Duke of Bedford, Paris appears to experience a kind of hybrid violence, with executions that adhere to the established ceremonial form but also disrupt it. In 1428, for example, an execution was botched by haste and upward social mobility:

On December 15th an esquire called Sauvage de Fremainville was captured by force in the castle of l'Isle Adam . . . He was quickly bound and put on a horse, *hatless*, his hands and feet tied, and so taken to Bagnolet where the Regent was, who at once ordered that they should go and hang him immediately, without delay, and *without hearing his defence*—they were very much afraid he would be rescued, for he was of very great lineage. So he was brought to the gallows, accompanied by the Provost of Paris and several other men, also by one Pierre Baillé, *originally a shoemaker's boy in Paris, then tipstaff, then Receiver of Paris, and now Grand Treasurer of Maine*. This Pierre Baillé, *when Le Sauvage wanted to make his confession, refused to let him live so long* but made him climb the ladder at once and climbed two or three steps up after him, shouting at him. Le Sauvage did not reply to his liking, so this Pierre gave him a great blow with a stick and gave the hangman five or six too, because he was talking to him about his soul's salvation. The hangman, seeing Baillé's ill will, was afraid he might do something worse to him, and so, being frightened, hurried more than he ought to

²⁴The extreme depravity of the violence described here calls to mind the crimes attributed to Gilles de Rais, the Marshal of France who fought for Charles VII alongside Jeanne D'Arc. See Georges Bataille, *The Trial of Gilles de Rais*, trans. Richard Robinson (Los Angeles: Amok, 1991). I cannot even begin to weigh propaganda against fact, but the problem is fascinating.

have done and hanged Le Sauvage; but because of his haste the rope broke or came undone and the condemned man fell and broke his back and one leg. Yet he had to climb up again, suffering as he was, and was hanged and strangled. (*PJ* 221-22, emphasis added)

The prisoner is not properly attired, has no trial, and is not allowed to confess.

Moreover, both he and the executioner suffer pain that is not a proper part of the punishment.

Ordinary Parisians are shown to suffer at all times, but they are worse off when neither the English nor the Duke of Burgundy are in Paris to protect them. During most of the English period, the Bourgeois focuses on the progress of the war and on hardships due both to natural disasters and to being cut off from the French countryside. As though they had behaved well up to this point, the depredations of English troops in the villages around Paris are described only *immediately* before the troops of King Charles (no longer referred to as the Dauphin) retake the city in 1436.

Part 3: spectacles of French disorder. After Paris is returned to France, ceremony is lost—perhaps because the nobility are no longer being executed. English prisoners brought from Pontoise present a “sad spectacle” in 1441 as they are taken back out of Paris, “coupled together two and two with very strong rope, just like hounds being led out to the hunt, and their captors riding tall horses which went very fast. The prisoners had no hoods, all bareheaded, each wearing some wretched rag, most often without shoes and hose—everything, in fact, had been taken from them but their underpants” (*PJ* 345). The prisoners who cannot pay their ransom are drowned “with no more compunction than if they had been dogs” (*PJ* 346). The final executions mentioned by the Bourgeois (in 1449) are “beggars, thieves, and murderers . . . who confessed, by torture or otherwise, that they had stolen children; they had put out the eyes of one, cut off others’ legs, of others again the feet, and done many other dreadful

things" (*PJ* 369).²⁵ Those who were formerly the "Armagnac confederates" are now the rightful French rulers, and they execute rightfully; however, the public ritual described thirty years earlier is now absent from the text.

Throughout the *Parisian Journal*, the masses endure physical hardship in the hopes of producing a more stable kingdom. On notable occasions, their endurance is voluntary as they participate in a ritual. While Charles VI besieged Bourges in 1412, for example, the citizens of Paris supported him with a series of processions "arranged by common consent." The Bourgeois describes more than twenty of "the most touching processions that anyone had ever seen in living memory," reiterating many times that the people were barefoot and that each carried a candle. Relics were carried in some of the processions, the eucharist in some, various masses were sung, and the participation of various clergy is mentioned along with the tears and devotion of everyone involved (*PJ* 62).

Regular ceremonial processions held in accordance with the religious calendar were another sign of stability, and Guy Thompson argues that they helped to keep a propensity to riot in check during periods of unrest.²⁶ The disruption of such processions was, then, a countersign. During periods of danger, for example, processions which normally led to a church outside the city gates were cut short, although the regular route was followed as far as possible. The Bourgeois describes a more subtle disruption. On 26 May 1427, the Duke of Bedford (the English regent)

²⁵The chaotic social performance of suffering can also serve to reinforce, by contrast, the well-ordered society. In late-medieval dramas, beggars are objects for derision. They use their infirmities—and suffering—as a means of livelihood, and the drama frames them in such a way as to mitigate *against* compassion. Legal records and chronicles show a concern with faking maladies and with mutilating children in order to train them as beggars. See Bronislaw Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 192-201; Lalou, "Les Tortures dans les Mystères," 37-50.

²⁶Guy Llewelyn Thompson, *Paris and Its People Under English Rule: the Anglo-Burgundian Regime, 1420-1436* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 195.

splashed mud on the procession to Montmartre as he rode in the opposite direction (*PJ* 213).²⁷ In general, however, the English appear to have made good political use of such processions. They celebrated the (fortuitous) birth of Henry VI on Christmas Eve in 1421, for example, and scheduled royal entries for Advent Sunday (first in 1420 for Henry V, who was accompanied by Charles VI and the Duke of Burgundy after the Treaty of Troyes, and then in 1431 for Henry VI).²⁸ To commemorate his victory in Normandy, Charles VII added secular elements to existing local festivals that paid homage to a number of different saints who worked anti-English miracles, but connections to the Anglo-Burgundian government had tainted both Paris and Saint Denis.²⁹ In the *Parisian Journal*, all forces *except* the nobility appear to be working to normalize life after Paris is reunited with France, while both the rapacious nobility and real wolves continue to prey on the people in and around the city. Indeed, the suffering of Parisians seems to constitute the stable ground upon which governments rest.

The Bourgeois makes the same complaint against the royal entry of Charles VII as he had against Henry VI: contrary to custom, no pardons were granted, and no alms were distributed (*PJ* 273-75, 319-21).³⁰ Cities in Northern Europe had begun to welcome the king with dramatic pageantry in the late fourteenth century.³¹ The Parisian royal entry began outside the city, where the king was greeted by a procession of

²⁷See Thompson, *Paris and Its People*, 182.

²⁸See Thompson, *Paris and Its People*, 179-98.

²⁹Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late Medieval France*, trans. Susan Ross Huston, ed. Fredric L. Cheyette (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 126-151.

³⁰See the discussion in Lawrence M. Bryant, *The King and the City in the Parisian Royal Entry Ceremony: Politics, Ritual and Art in the Renaissance* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1986), 25-27.

³¹Gordon Kipling, *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 6, 11.

citizens dressed to make their identity and station apparent (as were those going to their execution). The procession entered Paris through the Saint Denis gate, where a pageant welcomed the king, and then moved to an entertainment organized by the Hôtel de Ville at the Ponceau Fountain. Next, the Confraternity of the Passion presented a pantomime or tableau vivant in front of the Hospital of the Trinity. The procession then passed through the Painters' Gate, where political harmony was the theme. As the king progressed through the commercial center of Paris, guild pageants were staged at stations including the Hospital of Saint Catherine, the Church of the Sepulcher, the Great Butchery of Paris, and the Châtelet (where the *basoche*, the law clerks' guild, took charge of the presentation).³²

Fifteenth-century Parisian processions to the gallows often reversed the path used in royal entries, both traveling along the rue Saint Denis.³³ Prisoners were usually pulled in a cart or dragged on a hurdle rather than moving under their own power, and the procession included acts of contrition and public recantation. Cohen says that the typical criminal procession began at the prison, often moved to the site of the crime, and from there to the Place de Grève (for the beheading of a nobleman) or to a gibbet outside the city walls for a commoner's hanging. The nobleman's head also ended up on display at the gibbet, and his limbs might be displayed at the city gates—all of which were seen in incidents from the *Parisian Journal* that I cited earlier.³⁴ Like a royal

³²For a detailed discussion, see Bryant, *King and City*. See also Bernard Guenée and Françoise Lehoux, *Les Entrées Royales Françaises de 1328 à 1515* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1968). For the entry of Henry VI, see also Thompson, *Paris and Its People*, 199-205; Lawrence M. Bryant, "Configurations of the Community in Late Medieval Spectacles," in *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3-33.

³³See Esther Cohen, "Symbols of Culpability and the Universal Language of Justice: The Ritual of Public Executions in Late Medieval Europe," *History of European Ideas* 11 (1989): 409; Merback, *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 138.

³⁴Cohen, *Crossroads*, 187-90, citing Jacques Hillairet, *Gibets, piloris et cachots de vieux Paris* (Paris: Editions Minuit, 1956), 15-29, for places of execution in Paris.

entry, an execution is a rite of passage. Both king and criminal can be seen as “liminal” subjects; that is, they are between states, separated from society under a previous identity, but not yet reintegrated as that which they will become.³⁵ The king and the city use the ritual procession to redefine their relationship, and variations in the ceremony during this period show what sorts of issues were at stake.³⁶ Whereas the king is ceremonially recognized as such during the royal entry, the criminal is divested of all insignia of his social identity. Stripping, whipping and even mutilation all contribute to performative shame and loss of identity.³⁷

Until the late fourteenth century, criminals were denied confession and shriving, and the bodies were left under the gallows after prolonged hanging. The criminal was thus excluded from the Christian community even in the afterlife.³⁸ By the end of the century, however, execution had become a ritual of expulsion and *reincorporation*. The change began with a struggle over clerical immunity. Two clerks who had been wrongly executed were reintegrated into the community with an inverse ceremony. The corpses were taken down from the gallows after hanging for many months, then taken in procession with the provost guilty of their death proclaiming his misdeed, and at last

³⁵For the execution as a liminal ritual, see Cohen, *Crossroads*, 79, citing Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York, 1978), 249-50. Cohen argues that the liminal offender, like the world-upside-down, strengthens and emphasizes hierarchy and order by providing an image of its opposite (79-83). For the relation of the royal entry to coronation, see Bryant, *King and City*, 225 and *passim*. The Parisian entry occurred after the coronation, except in the case of Henry VI's dual regency; however, even that entry marked a change in the city's relationship to the new king.

³⁶These variations are outside the scope of my project, but Bryant, Kipling, and Thompson all discuss them at length. See also Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450-1650* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1984), 3-19.

³⁷See, for example, the execution in 1398 of two Augustinian monks who were brought to Paris to cure Charles VI, but were accused of having bewitched him. During the procession, they were invested with and then stripped of all accoutrements of identity, beginning with the clerical. Cohen, *Crossroads*, 184-86. Cohen points out that the mutilations were carried out quickly and were not ritualized (166), and argues against reading prurience into the stripping of a prisoner (97).

³⁸Cohen, *Crossroads*, 195.

ceremoniously buried.³⁹ The post-mortem reintegration that was first granted to these mistakenly executed clerics was gradually extended to all Christians, with the theme of Christ's death as a criminal among thieves as a prominent feature of efforts in favor of gallows confession. Additional religious ceremonies of penitence were eventually introduced, changing the character of the spectacle. Through confession and absolution, the criminal was rehumanized and reintegrated into the community. Confession at the foot of the gallows thus served as salvation for the criminal *and* as spectacular evidence of God's grace and power.⁴⁰ But how might this evidence have served fifteenth-century Paris?

Spierenburg argues that public executions restored public order and made the power of the state visible.⁴¹ If public authority wants to use a set of symbols, it needs to be sure that they will be understood, as Cohen points out. Public punishment thus shared recognizable forms all over Europe. Thieves were hung and murderers beheaded; heretics, witches, and sodomites were burned; traitors were drowned; counterfeiters were supposed to be boiled; and those women who were not burned were buried alive. Those in power arranged the spectacles and called upon crowds to witness and thereby legitimate their exercise of power.⁴² But even if the means of death conformed to a clear symbolic code, the execution was a complex performative act. Cohen points out that its secular and spiritual messages often conflicted, and Merback identifies three competing narratives in "dynamic confrontation"—one constructed by

³⁹Cohen, *Crossroads*, 183.

⁴⁰Cohen, *Crossroads*, 195-99. Merback argues that the "good death" of a murderer could, for the community, cancel out his victim's unprepared death. *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 146.

⁴¹Spierenburg, *Spectacle*, 200-07. Spierenburg ties public execution directly to the instability of the state, arguing that public punishments faded away as the modern nation-state grew more secure. See also Cohen, *Crossroads*, 182.

⁴²Cohen, *Crossroads*, 157, 160, 166, 191.

secular authorities, another by the people, and a third by the church.⁴³ Chroniclers stress the importance of spectators—many of them—as an active component of the events. Public reaction ranged from tears to bloodthirsty shouts and was anticipated by the authorities who designed an execution—but not always correctly. The need for ceremonial reversal was surely not anticipated by those who executed the two clerks mentioned earlier. Last-minute reprieves and popular rescues were possible, adding a degree of suspense, and an unmarried man could be spared death at the gallows by a woman willing to marry him.⁴⁴

Nor was the performance itself always orderly. Jody Enders points out that the executed prisoner sometimes refused to play his role and that the spectators were upon occasion “forced to invent their own pathos when the victim failed to provide it.”⁴⁵ She cites an execution described by the Bourgeois that will be my focus for the rest of this section of the chapter. Like the royal entry, the execution is a dialogue between *multiple parties* (or a *polylogue*), and the execution of the Provost of Paris, Pierre des Essarts, was clearly a forum for negotiating power relations. Des Essarts was implicated in an Armagnac conspiracy shortly before the “peace” of 1413. After several months’ imprisonment,

On 1st July 1413 the Provost was dragged on a hurdle from the Palais to the Heaumerie or thereabouts and then made to sit on a bench in a cart, holding a wooden cross in his hand. He wore a black slashed outer coat furred with marten skins, white hose and black slippers on his feet. Thus

⁴³Cohen, *Crossroads*, 181-83; Merback, *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 132-37.

⁴⁴See Cohen, *Crossroads*, 193-94. See *PJ* 245 for an example. Miraculous rescues from execution also provide evidence of a persistent belief in immanent justice. See Michael Goodich, ed., *Other Middle Ages: Witnesses at the Margins of Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 42-57.

⁴⁵Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 190.

he was taken to the Halles and his head was cut off and stuck up a good three feet higher than the others. (*PJ* 73)

So far, the description conforms to the formula that was typical for this period. The ending is orderly as well (with the exception of one vital detail which I will discuss shortly):

When he realized that he had got to die, he knelt down in front of the executioner, kissed a little silver figure that the executioner had round his neck, and forgave him his death very kindly. . . . Thus was Pierre des Essarts beheaded and his body was taken to the gallows and hanged as high up as it would go. (*PJ* 74)

Given these portions of the text, one can easily see two forces at work. First, the authorities (who may have used torture to produce a secular confession) impose the punishment. Theirs is the power to inflict pain and to expel the traitor. Even before that, they had the power to decide that he *was* a traitor. In this case, they have labeled as such the man in charge of Parisian security. Second, the church has the power to produce a spiritual confession during the execution spectacle, and thus to reintegrate the traitor. He still dies, but he returns to the Christian community, which is not clearly separable from the polity.

A third voice, that of the prisoner, is not always present in the records or in the analyses. Des Essarts is an exception. A remarkable coup is interposed between his formulaic pardon of the executioner and his death: "He asked all the lords that his deeds should not be proclaimed till after he was dead; this they agreed to." As Cohen demonstrates so thoroughly, the display of a prisoner's crimes was a preeminent component of the punishment ritual.⁴⁶ That des Essarts retained an unusual power even

⁴⁶The monks mentioned in note 37 not only confessed their misdeeds during their procession, but wore parchments upon which those crimes were inscribed. Cohen, *Crossroads*, 184-86.

in death is shown by this ability to exact concessions from those who executed him. Des Essarts was not fully shamed. Indeed, his very shamelessness is what I have thus far left out of the description. I have saved this portion of the text for last because it mixes his behavior together with that of the crowd. Like the secular authorities who condemn and the clerical, who absolve, des Essarts anticipates the response of spectators: "The astonishing thing was that he did nothing but laugh all the time from the moment he was tied to the hurdle till his death, just as he used to do in the time of his greatest majesty." The spectators, in turn, seem to carry out their customary performance with little regard for the event they see: "Most people thought his brain had turned, for everyone watching him was crying bitterly, weeping more miserably than you ever heard tell of for any man's death. And he laughed, he alone. He imagined that the people would prevent his death." Indeed, the Bourgeois has earlier mentioned that the Parisians loved des Essarts "because he defended the city so well" (*PJ* 52), and that "no Provost for a century past had been so well loved both by the King and by the people" (*PJ* 70).

Before considering the spectators, however, I want to look at the way in which the Bourgeois structures the event:

- (1) it begins with the formulaic means of conveyance, body position, significant clothing, and beheading;
- (2) the prisoner's inappropriate laughter is set in contrast to the crowd's appropriate misery;
- (3) the cause of the improper behavior is examined—that is, his enormous pride and bad faith;
- (4) realizing that he improperly assessed the people's attitude towards him, and that he *will* die, the prisoner performs the rituals of contrition that are expected of him; but

(5) he gets a final concession from *the lords*; and

(6) his death occurs according to custom.

The people here—as throughout the journal—behave as they should, whereas both the powerful prisoner and the lords who have sentenced him go against form. Viewed as a historical incident, this execution seems to hold more than the two meanings suggested by Merback for the convict’s suffering: that is, as a “visible *exemplum* of despair” if he refused to confess and show remorse; or as an example of the “good death” if he made his peace with God and prayed for forgiveness.⁴⁷ I will set out some possible meanings for the formulaic weeping of the crowd in contrast to the surprising behavior of the nobility.

Enders assumes that the spectators wept because they identified and commiserated with des Essarts. She argues that their behavior was based entirely upon their imaginary version of the event and was contradicted by the prisoner’s actual behavior. As a result, this incident “undermines Foucault’s appealing contention that the criminal on the scaffold attains moral dignity because spectators identify with him.”⁴⁸ Any dignity that he attained by this mechanism was certainly spurious; however, des Essarts managed an unusual preservation of dignity by having his crimes read out only *after* his death. He appears to have retained the upper hand in orchestrating his own execution.

The spectators need not have cried as a result of identification and commiseration, however. Some of them must have known, as did the Bourgeois, that the Provost “intended to betray the town and deliver it into the hands of its enemies, to commit very great and dreadful murders, and to rob and pillage the good inhabitants of

⁴⁷Merback, *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 19-20.

⁴⁸Enders, *Cruelty*, 191, citing Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 59-64.

the good town of Paris who loved him so loyally. There was nothing he ordered that they would not do if they could" (*PJ* 74). Spectators might well have wept bitterly because they were betrayed by one in whom they had placed their trust—who had been, even worse, in charge of justice. They might have wept at the spectacle of a man whom they had loved refusing to repent and being therefore denied a good death.

Furthermore, Armagnac sympathizers in the crowd—and there must have been some in Paris—might have cried to have been left more vulnerable to English attack by the execution of this Frenchman who had defended their city so well.

Spectators might also have felt reassured by playing their part in the ritual, even though the prisoner refused to play his. Merback argues for reading the late-medieval body in pain as a sign of the intersubjective bonds formed by empathy and suggests that the contemplation of suffering produced *communitas*. In other words, far from being a "world-destroying" force in Elaine Scarry's terms, the infliction of pain created a world.⁴⁹ The dissolution of boundaries implied by the notion of *communitas* need not be accepted in order to explain the world-making force of spectacular suffering, however. The execution ritual simultaneously erases and reinforces social differentiation, just as ceremonial inversions both mock and support the given social order.⁵⁰ Painful processions are different from devotional imagery in the extent to which the "spectators" perform for one another, for the criminal, and for the authorities. Some spectators might have wept because they were expected to, regardless of their personal sympathies. Their performance created a world *regardless* of the feelings of individual spectator/participants. During a period when Paris was violently divided, the proper

⁴⁹Merback, *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 19-20. See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁵⁰Clifford Flanigan, "Liminality, Carnival, and Social Structure: The Case of Late Medieval Drama," in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology*, ed. Kathleen Ashley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 42-63.

performance of the crowd at des Essarts' execution enhanced the *appearance* of unity. Perhaps at some moments the crowd was able to *perform* unity in the strict sense of performativity—that is, to bring it into being.⁵¹ I propose that it did so in the long run, in spite of the many violent reversals throughout this period.

As a ritual of expulsion, the execution confirms the boundaries of the community.⁵² When confession is added, the ritual also emphasizes integration and redemption. But the expulsion is not erased; rather, the criminal is excluded *and* reintegrated, and the community can imagine itself as both bounded and unified. In the end, reincorporation of the excluded criminal within the Christian community makes marginality and dissent less tenable for the secular community as well. The *Parisian Journal* describes life in a deeply divided city, and the text's many painful processions trace the contours of a violently changing community. The form of the execution changes along with the nature of the crime being punished, and both reflect the pressures to which the city was subjected. The executions themselves had a rhetorical function that cannot be fully sorted out from the rhetorical ends of the texts within which they are inscribed. Yet the inscription of suffering throughout the journal creates a vivid picture of its central position in the late-medieval social order, as does the martyrdom iconography to which I now turn.

Interpreting Pictures: Apollonia's Martyrdom

Jean Fouquet's miniature of the *Martyrdom of Saint Apollonia* (c. 1452-60) represents a moment repeated, with variations, over and over in late-medieval France: a crowd watches the torture of an individual who will soon be put to death. Similarly

⁵¹See Chapter One for a discussion of performativity.

⁵²For late-medieval rituals of exclusion, see Jelle Koopmans, *Le Théâtre des exclus au Moyen Age: Hérétiques, Sorcières et Marginaux* (Paris: Imago, 1997).

painful moments were simulated within the dramatic framework of most saint plays, such as the one which I will discuss later, and were actualized as part of public punishments, such as those recorded in the *Parisian Journal*. In this picture, two men pull taut the ropes binding a young woman to an inclined plank and another pulls her golden hair, while a fourth man yanks out her teeth with pliers nearly as long as her body.⁵³

Citing a late fourteenth-century *Passio* as well as Fouquet's illustration, Leslie Abend Callahan argues that Apollonia's torture became slow and cruel during the late Middle Ages, in contrast with the swift and violent tooth-breaking found in all versions of the story from the fourth century through the thirteenth-century *Legenda aurea*. Callahan calls this "an apparent shift in focus from the narration of events to the highlighting of one moment of physical pain and torment."⁵⁴ I will use this miniature to explore three models for response by late-medieval spectators to the theatrical saint's body in pain: objectification, identification, and dialogical engagement. I interpret each model within a fifteenth-century French context, always taking into account the hypothetical spectator's gender and thereby turning the three models into six.

Apollonia serves here as an exemplary virgin martyr, important as the focal point for a discussion of spectator response rather than for the particulars of her *vita* or

⁵³The miniature is now in the Musée Condé, Chantilly. For a color reproduction, see Jean Fouquet, *The Hours of Etienne Chevalier*, ed. Charles Sterling and Claude Schaefer, trans. Marianne Sinclair (New York: Braziller, 1971), plate 45. The miniature is also reproduced and discussed in Lionello Puppi, *Torment in Art: Pain, Violence, and Martyrdom*, trans. Jeremy Scott (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), plate 5, 76-77.

⁵⁴Leslie Abend Callahan, "The Torture of Saint Apollonia: Deconstructing Fouquet's Martyrdom Stage," *Studies in Iconography* 16 (1994): 119-38. Callahan argues convincingly that the miniature could as easily represent a real performance of public execution as a real performance of a saint play. The staging conventions were similar, especially with respect to the arrangement of the audience on scaffolds. She also makes a strong argument for the parallels between witches and saints.

a specific theatrical version.⁵⁵ The same issues of response pertain, for example, to the Saint Denis play which I will discuss later; however, the choice of Apollonia as a focal point provides an opportunity to look in a different way at a familiar image. Fouquet's miniature enjoys great popularity in theatre history texts and as a topic for debate among theatre historians and medievalists. In the most recent bout of critical sparring, Gordon Kipling argues that the event depicted by Fouquet is a Roman martyrdom re-enacted in a Roman theatre, and that the theatricality of this devotional image serves a homiletic purpose. In reply, Graham Runnalls defends the widespread use of this image as evidence of a medieval theatre in the round.⁵⁶ Although their articles are thorough and persuasive, they do not resolve the question of what the miniature represents. Regardless of whether the Apollonia miniature depicts a theatrical performance, however, a late-medieval viewer could *use* the image to play out various scenarios. As Mitchell Merback puts it, devotional imagery "furnished a literalized space for the imagination's deployment."⁵⁷ Spiritual guidebooks advocated a sort of imaginative exercise startlingly similar to the technique of "substitution" familiar to any twentieth-century Method actor: in meditating on the Passion, one was to imagine familiar people in the roles of Christ and other Passion "players," in order to fully enter into the

⁵⁵Although no dramatic manuscript survives, Graham Runnalls has discovered a *Mystère de Sainte Apolline* listed in the catalogue of a late-15th-c. bookseller in Tours. See Graham A. Runnalls, "The Catalogue of the Tours Book-Seller and Late Medieval French Drama," *Le Moyen Français* 11 (1982): 127, reprinted in *Etudes sur les Mystères* (Paris: Champion, 1998), chapter 18; "The Catalogue of the Tours Bookseller and Antoine Vêrard," *Pluteus* 2 (1984): 163-74.

⁵⁶Three essays were published in *Medieval English Theatre* 19 (1997): Gordon Kipling, "Theatre as Subject and Object in Fouquet's 'Martyrdom of St. Apollonia,'" 26-80; Graham Runnalls, "Jean Fouquet's 'Martyrdom of St. Apollonia' and the Medieval French Stage," 81-100; and Kipling, "Fouquet, St. Apollonia, and the Motives of the Miniaturist's Art: A Reply to Graham Runnalls," 101-20. Kipling, Runnalls, and Callahan all include extensive citations to the debate; therefore, they need not be repeated here.

⁵⁷Merback, *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 47.

experience.⁵⁸ A twelfth-century treatise recommended “that the meditator place himself as though actually present at the events, forming detailed pictures through the faculty of the imagination.”⁵⁹

I propose that the theatrical suffering at the center of late-medieval mystery plays persisted in the form of memory images that remained available for imaginative contemplation. My focus on the effect of saint plays upon those who watched them makes the miniature’s real-world referent a peripheral concern. What cultural work might a moment of extreme suffering such as that depicted by Fouquet perform, lingering in the memory of a late-medieval spectator after watching a saint play? The hypotheses that follow tease out different strands of spectator response and are not to be considered exclusive of one another; rather, a single spectator might respond in different ways at different times, or in more than one way simultaneously.

Model 1: the male spectator objectifies the saint. The erotics of power most widely found within modern critical discourse, beginning with feminist film theory, posits a male gaze resting upon a female body.⁶⁰ Robert Potter, for example, applies this model to the saint play and argues that the torture and death of the objectified female saint provides both redemption for the characters who survive and titillation for the spectator.⁶¹ The material that Potter examines *appears* to support a notion of the

⁵⁸Ibid., 45.

⁵⁹Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Texts and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 147, quoted in Enders, *Cruelty*, 187.

⁶⁰The theory of the “male gaze” as a basic cultural determinant was first formulated by Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18. Mulvey revised her position in “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*,” *Framework* 15-17 (1981): 12-15.

⁶¹Robert Potter, “Pornography and the Saints Play” (paper presented at the Ninth Colloquium of the Société Internationale pour l’Étude du Théâtre Médiéval, Odense, Denmark, 1998), <http://www.sdu.dk/hum/midlab/theatre/papers/Robert_Potter.html>. Potter models his argument on Diana Taylor’s analysis of modern Argentine drama. See the discussion of Taylor’s *Disappearing Acts* in Chapter Three. Potter does not discuss the female spectator or the male saint.

disenfranchised medieval woman subjected to the gaze of powerful men, both within and outside of the dramatic frame. He borrows from Jocelyn Wogan-Browne a typical profile for the life of a virgin martyr—and since it fits the version of Apollonia's life that is apparently represented by Fouquet, I will borrow it as well. The essential elements are a young, beautiful virgin, who is both wealthy and Christian, and a pagan male with power over her—sometimes the emperor or judge, but just as frequently her father. The story begins with the virgin's rejection of sexual advances, which leads to her torture:

The virgin is threatened, then incarcerated, stripped naked, publicly flogged, lacerated, burnt and boiled, and dismembered in some way, . . . Her conduct during all this remains impeccable, her ability to reason unimpaired, and, to the frustration of the tyrant, her bearing and her arguments frequently convert his attendant soldiery and populace whom he then has to martyr as well. Finally, when the virgin and God have displayed enough of God's supreme rule over the world, she concludes her passion by going to formal execution by beheading.⁶²

Potter takes account of the plot line and proposes that a medieval (male) spectator's response to a virgin-martyr drama would be much the same as a modern (male) viewer's response to a representation of a helpless, suffering woman.

The theory of the gaze, as developed by feminists arguing against pornography, presumes that spectators imagine themselves occupying the gender positions available within the pictured scenario. In Fouquet's miniature, Apollonia's suffering body constitutes the central focus for a crowd of onlookers. Two of her tormentors look at her, but the other two turn their gaze outward, inviting the vicarious participation of a

⁶²Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Saints' Lives and the Female Reader," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27 (1991): 314-15. This profile is not unique to late-medieval virgin-martyr narratives, but fits those dramatized by Hrotsvit equally well.

spectator who is presumed to be male, a surrogate for Etienne Chevalier, who commissioned the miniature. Brigitte Cazelles suggests that the pictorial composition positions the spectator within an imagined half-circle that mirrors the half-circle within the picture. She argues that this composition would *not* cause Chevalier (or his surrogates) to identify with Apollonia as victim, even if she is understood as the center of the picture and he is assumed to occupy the corresponding center of its mirror image. For one thing, her eyes are closed (a point to which I will return). Cazelles argues that viewers are interpellated as voyeurs or even as persecutors of the saint—that is, the work draws them into those particular subject positions.⁶³

But to be interpellated as a voyeur does not necessarily mean to experience a sense of power. Just the opposite can be true. Nell Gifford Martin argues that Passion iconography in the books of hours that came into use early in the thirteenth century created a disempowered spectator position. Over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Mary was moved out of the pictorial center to the foot of the cross. Martin says that these images emphasize the passivity of the viewers by inviting them to share Mary's helpless perspective. By the time the saint plays that we know of were being staged, therefore, the faithful were accustomed to being interpellated as "voyeurs who are bound to look—are required to look—and are fixed in a knowledge of helplessness."⁶⁴

In this interpretation, the helpless spectator is a model for the acquiescent subject. In other words, meditation upon the suffering of Christ, or of the (female) martyr imitating Christ, makes one more ready to accept the authority passed down

⁶³See Chapter Two for a discussion of interpellation.

⁶⁴Nell Gifford Martin, "Vision and Violence in Some Gothic Meditative Imagery," *Studies in Iconography* 17 (1996): 328, 335. This interpretation echoes recent work on the horror film. See Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

from God, to the king and the church, and on to every man in relation to women and children. In this way, the saint play participates in the ideological task of re-organizing France as a unified nation, as does the changing role of pain in the legal system that I discussed earlier. Furthermore, Jody Enders argues that “the medieval understanding of torture both enabled and encouraged the dramatic representation of violence as a means of coercing theatre audiences into accepting the various ‘truths’ enacted in mysteries, miracles, and even farces.”⁶⁵ Her argument is based on the Nietzschean claim that rhetoric initially developed in order to persuade people to be subject to laws—that is, willingly subjugated—without requiring the exercise of actual physical violence. In order to accomplish this, rhetoric makes use of virtual violence in order to inscribe the law on the memory; then it develops farther, in theatre, in the attempt to condition its target audiences to “*enjoy* being civilized.”⁶⁶ The objectified female saint can help the male spectator learn to *enjoy* feeling powerless. For example, Martha Easton suggests that the male viewer who idealizes the female martyr and contemplates her wounds suffers a kind of “spiritual lovesickness.” That male spectator sees the suffering victim as powerful and draws comfort from her pain; the female saint is thus superimposed upon imagery of Christians nursing from Christ’s wounds that was familiar during the later Middle Ages.⁶⁷

Model 2: the female spectator objectifies the saint. Wogan-Browne says that the hagiography from which she extracts the virgin-martyr profile was in fact aimed at

⁶⁵Enders, *Cruelty*, 4.

⁶⁶Enders, *Cruelty*, 162-66. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969).

⁶⁷Martha Easton, “Saint Agatha and the Sanctification of Sexual Violence,” *Studies in Iconography* 16 (1994): 94, 105, 108, 114 n.41. See also Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Clifford Davidson, “Sacred Blood and the Late Medieval Stage,” *Comparative Drama* 31.3 (1997): 436-58.

women and suggests ways in which it may have been used. She raises the possibility that the audience for what she calls a “diet of licensed ‘body-ripping’” might be “colluding with its own worst interests”⁶⁸—echoing, of course, more recent arguments about romance novels, or “bodice rippers.”⁶⁹ (Her conclusion is quite different, and I will return to it shortly.) A female spectator could conflate Apollonia with Christ as nurturing mother, as described in my first model, creating an image of maternal power that helps to cover over an actual lack of power for mothers and for women generally. She could also adopt the gaze of a male tormentor and perhaps experience a vicarious sense of empowerment in the face of her actual disempowerment—which might, in the end, reinforce the disempowerment. After all, one’s subject position need not depend upon corresponding gender, class, race, or any other characteristic. The apparent popularity in the 1990s of masochistic role-playing for men who occupy positions of power in their daily public lives suggests that *contrast* is a powerful motivation for taking on a vicarious subject position.⁷⁰ In fact, there is no reason to believe that a spectator takes on a singular or stable subject position. Without abandoning the possibilities raised by objectifying Apollonia, then, I turn to the implications of identifying with her.

Model 3: the female spectator identifies with the saint. As a model to be emulated, the saint occupies a very special position with respect to medieval social,

⁶⁸Wogan-Browne, “Saints’ Lives,” 316.

⁶⁹See the summary in Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sado-masochism (Between Men—Between Women)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 17. For the claim that female romance readers are complicit with the abject status of women under patriarchy, see Ann Douglas, “Soft Porn Culture,” *New Republic* 30 (1980): 25-29. For a counter-argument, see Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

⁷⁰See Anne McClintock, “Maid to Order: Commercial S/M and Gender Power,” in *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*, ed. Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 207-31; Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (New York: Grove Press, 1996).

political, and religious structures. The female saint may be subjected to violence, but she is *not* degraded—her torturers are. Both Elizabeth Lalou and Nerida Newbiggin point out that the serenity and faith of the martyrs are set in contrast with the comical frenzy of their tormentors.⁷¹ But even for a female spectator who identifies with Apollonia—eyes closed, powerless before the objectifying male gaze—meaning is not so simply established: there is room for oppositional or resistant reading. For example, Wogan-Browne suggests that the torments withstood by virgin martyrs served to augment strength of will for the twelfth- and thirteenth-century girls for whom the texts were written. Marriage developed as a sacrament during this period, meaning that the church took control of marriage away from the secular aristocracy and in doing so made the woman's consent "at least theoretically essential." Hagiographic convention set the terms within which a rejection of marriage could be effective. A reader might look at the life of a virgin martyr, see a critique of the conventions of courtly love, and find the message that Wogan-Browne picks out: "defy authority if it elides you . . . : you do not have to marry, and there is a legitimate career of consecrated virginity available to you with its own emotional and ethical satisfactions."⁷² Even if no choice lying outside of patriarchal structures is imagined for women, at least the possibility of choice is made explicit.

Model 4: the male spectator identifies with the saint. The male spectator can derive an enjoyment of, or at least acceptance of, powerlessness by imagining himself in the position of the tortured saint. This is similar to the helpless voyeurism I discussed in my first model. Identification with the saint does not, however, necessarily entail relinquishing power. As Linda Williams points out, in twentieth-century

⁷¹Nerida Newbiggin, "Agata, Apollonia and Other Martyred Virgins: Did Florentines Really See These Plays Performed?" *European Medieval Drama* 1 (1997): 89, 95; Lalou, "Les Tortures dans les Mystères," 44.

⁷²Wogan-Browne, "Saints' Lives," 316-23.

sadomasochistic pornography it is understood that “the suffering woman has arranged the scenario and has ultimate control of it.”⁷³ The tortured saint is also in control, suffering gladly for God. Perhaps vicariously sharing the martyr’s suffering makes it easier to exercise power without considering the suffering of the weak, because one is self-identified, emotionally experiencing, *as* a victim by virtue of one’s Christianity. Does an empathetic or masquerading engagement with the victim allow one to forget that one is a victimizer? This is one potential, complicitous response—and a sinister one at that.

Model 5: the male spectator engages dialogically with the saint. A medieval spectator might also respond like twentieth-century writer Robin Gorsline, who examines his own complicated erotic relation to the crucifixion and warns against over-identifying with the suffering of the crucified body, when one in fact occupies a position of power.⁷⁴ The notion of interpellation, which I examined earlier, construes the spectator as a passive recipient of ideology’s operations; however, reception can also be understood as a *productive* process engaged in by an active spectator. Rather than (or in addition to) objectifying or identifying with the saint, a spectator disturbed by the spectacle of suffering might try on multiple subject positions, using them to engage in self-examination. A male spectator in late-medieval France, for example, might ask: Am I a torturer? Am I perhaps one who sanctions persecution, directs it, or merely looks on? Am I a fool, showing contempt for that which I should revere? Do I enjoy that which I should abhor? An internal dialogue could take place not only during performance but also afterwards, when mental images similar to Fouquet’s miniature

⁷³Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 214. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism, Coldness, and Cruelty* (New York: Zone, 1989).

⁷⁴Robin Hawley Gorsline, “Facing the Body on the Cross: A Gay Man’s Reflections on Passion and Crucifixion,” in *Men’s Bodies, Men’s Gods: Male Identities in a (Post-)Christian Culture*, ed. Björn Krondorfer (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 138.

are recalled. *Any* source can evoke this sort of dialogical response—this is the sort of self-aware complicity that I discussed in Chapter Three. But I turn now to the dialogism built into the *Martyrdom of Saint Apollonia*; that is, the potential for a female spectator's erotic engagement with the suffering body to bring conflicting desires and injunctions into dialogue.

Model 6: the female spectator engages dialogically with the saint. There is a tension at the center of the saint play that can be illuminated by Karma Lochrie's discussion of mystical discourse. Lochrie sees the female mystic's imitation of Christ as "a dangerous and unsettling transgression" of late-medieval religious precepts because it "requires abjection through impurity and defilement."⁷⁵ From the beginning of the thirteenth century, as I mentioned earlier, Christ's physical suffering was increasingly emphasized as an emblem of his humanity. Lochrie discusses the difference between male and female imitation of Christ within affective spirituality, which began to replace contemplative and monastic models of devotion for laypersons in the later Middle Ages. Conceptual schemes evident in both medical and theological writing equated male with the spirit and female with the flesh. Lochrie argues for a distinction between the body and the flesh, however, noting that Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux both take from Saint Paul the concept of "flesh" as the entire, self-willed human being, separated by the Fall from the will of God. The role of reason is to bring the flesh back into conformity with God. Thus when a man imitates Christ's suffering, he humbles himself with an awareness of his inability to transcend the flesh. Purified by reason and regulated by grace, a carnal love for Christ can provide the means for restoring *man* to God—but what about woman? Is a woman's only option to valorize her status as flesh, reinforcing her exclusion from transcendence?⁷⁶ The religious woman is advised to

⁷⁵Lochrie, "Language of Transgression," 132-33.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 117-18, 120-23.

close off her body through chastity, silence, and actual enclosure. Lochrie says that “Christ’s wounds, far from signifying the perviousness of the female body, serve to remind women of the need to dam up their own vulnerable bodies.”⁷⁷ But the female mystic chooses a different path: she reaches toward purification and redemption through a process of abjection that reminds her of her great dissimilarity from Christ. She speaks, she cries, she starves and flagellates her body, she drinks the pus-filled water with which she has washed the feet of lepers.

Active emulation of the martyr’s suffering was guarded against, and warned against, in devotional literature intended for female ascetics—a relatively sure sign of its popularity.⁷⁸ Religious women were increasingly restricted, not only from founding and administering their own religious foundations (as they had done during the tenth and eleventh centuries), but even from dispensing charity. Jo Ann McNamara suggests that they turned to *spiritual* almsgiving: cloistered, silent, and dependent, they could give only their prayers and their voluntary suffering.⁷⁹ As Caroline Bynum argues, suffering was inflicted not in order to destroy or even to punish the body, but in order to comprehend the humanity of Christ at the moment of his dying. Both self-mortification and illness served as tools for fusing with Christ, and both merged with the ecstatic imagery of erotic union.⁸⁰ Apollonia, eyes shut, presents an emblem of the

⁷⁷Ibid., 127.

⁷⁸Wogan-Browne, “Saints’ Lives,” 315; Easton, “Saint Agatha,” 106-108; Jo Ann McNamara, “The Need to Give: Suffering and Female Sanctity in the Middle Ages,” in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 218.

⁷⁹McNamara, “Need to Give,” 199-221. See also Lochrie, “Language of Transgression,” 117.

⁸⁰Caroline Walker Bynum, “Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century,” in *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 131-34, orig. pub. *Women’s Studies* 11 (1984): 179-214. See also Asad, “Body, Pain and Truth,” 311, citing Michel Foucault’s discussion of texts by Cassian (c. 360-435), “Le combat de la chasteté,” *Communications* 35 (1982): 15-25. Asad says that the imitation of Christ was not the *only* point of suffering for medieval Christians, and that inflicting pain upon oneself does not strictly

closed, sealed body recommended by the church; the silent martyr thus models the silent woman, epitomized by the anchoress but also desirable within society at large. At the opposite extreme is the ecstatic, speaking, crying, and self-torturing female mystic, who exists “squarely within the taboo” (in Lochrie’s words). Even while Apollonia’s closed-off and inviolate body is shown center stage, the spectator can compassionately experience the pain of torment—and during this period compassion did not imply a desire to alleviate suffering; rather, it meant to suffer together with another person.⁸¹ The spectacle of torture, silently welcomed, thus presents both a warning against ecstasy and an opportunity to experience it. In the Bakhtinian terms that I introduced in Chapter Four, the silent martyr’s body is double-voiced, and neither voice is given the final word. Nor do they resolve into a dialectical synthesis.

Having imagined responses of both male and female spectators to the memory image of Apollonia’s tormented body at center stage, I now ask what difference it makes to place a male body in that position.

Male versus Female Saints

Some scholars have emphasized the differences between male and female hagiography. For example, underlying Nerida Newbigin’s analysis of fifteenth-century Florentine saint plays is the axiom that a “profound terror and hatred of female sexuality . . . and denial of female intellect . . . pervades the Judeo-Christian tradition”

require that the body be *despised*. Extrapolating from Foucault, Asad suggests that physical suffering grew to have a new role in the production of truth, “because the involuntary connection of the self with sensations, feelings, and desires required a constant labour of inspection and of *testing* of the body lest the soul be betrayed.”

⁸¹For the change in meaning during the eighteenth century, see Barbara Eckstein, *The Language of Fiction in a World of Pain: Reading Politics as Paradox* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 32 (citing the *Oxford English Dictionary*).

and is connected to a widespread imagining of mutilated female bodies.⁸² Newbigin points out that female saint plays include praise for the beauty of the martyr, and that lust figures in the plot as a motivation for her tormentors, whereas neither occurs in male saint plays from the same region and period.⁸³ I am not in a position to carry out a quantitative comparison, although I would be most interested in the results of such a study. The “sexualization” of male saints is not unheard of, however. As Robert Mills points out, in the *Mystère de Saint Sébastien*, both a female character and the saint’s pagan tormentor comment on his “grant beaulté” (great beauty), constituting him as an object of desire.⁸⁴ Male saints do not constitute the same sort of marriageable property as females, however, making a difference in emphasis unsurprising at first glance.

As I mentioned earlier, Wogan-Browne points out that religious justifications for rejecting marriage were the result of the church’s ascendancy during the high Middle Ages in a power struggle with the secular aristocracy.⁸⁵ Different pressures reshaped marriage and its meaning for women in late-medieval France. The rediscovered “Salic law,” invoked after the sons of Philip IV (the Fair) died without children, was emblematic of a pervasive late-medieval denigration of women and most relevant to the central theme of this chapter. Philip’s daughter Isabella was married to

⁸²Newbigin, “Martyred Virgins,” 87.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 88, 95. Newbigin says that, although the men may be stripped naked, they are not mutilated sexually and their appearance does not occasion comment. Of the texts that she considers, some of the male saint plays are known to have been performed, but there is no record of performance for the female saint plays. Furthermore, those for which performance evidence is available do not include torture sequences.

⁸⁴Robert Mills, “Visions of Excess: Pain, Pleasure and the Penal Imaginary in Late-Medieval Art and Culture,” Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2000, 167-68, citing *Le Mystère de Saint Sébastien*, ed. Léonard R. Mills (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1965), lines 498-501, 508-11, 5703-06. The chapter cited here will be forthcoming under the title “A Man is Being Beaten,” in *New Medieval Literatures 5* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2001/2); another, as “‘Whatever you do is a delight to me!’ Masculinity, Masochism and Queer Play in Representations of Male Martyrdom,” *Exemplaria*, 13.1 (Spring 2001).

⁸⁵See model 3 for spectator response to Apollonia.

Edward II of England, and establishing that the kingship could not pass through the female line prevented the accession of Edward III to the throne in France.⁸⁶ The Franciscan François de Meyronnes argued in 1322 that royalty is a *dignitas*, and that the Biblical treatment of priesthood was proof that *dignitas* was reserved for men; therefore, women must be excluded from royal succession.⁸⁷ Although the female saint is initially presented as chattel, those who would view her as such are pagans and are therefore shown to be wrong. Woman-as-chattel is thus simultaneously inscribed and devalued within a typical virgin-martyr narrative, which would seem to increase the culture's valuation of the religious alternative to marriage. That valuation remained ambivalent, however. As noted earlier, restrictions on the freedom of religious women paralleled those in the secular world.⁸⁸ More importantly, I think, the negative inscription of marriage in virgin-martyr narratives helped to reinforce a devaluation of women as property, to the disadvantage of real women who did marry. They were worth less than they had earlier been, because their inheritance rights were severely curtailed.

Iconographic evidence presents gender differences other than those found in narratives. When a male martyr is depicted naked, for example, his penis is not shown, whereas women's breasts are not only visible but are often the focus of the picture (and the torment). Easton sees this as evidence of a "preoccupation with women's bodies that is both religious and prurient," but also (paradoxically) as resulting from desexualization: Women were thought to attain a state of grace only by casting off or suppressing "physical and social indicators that are understood to be manifestations of

⁸⁶Nicholas, *Evolution of Medieval World*, 446-48.

⁸⁷Le Goff, *L'État et Les Pouvoirs*, 133.

⁸⁸See model 6 for spectator response to Apollonia, and McNamara, "Need to Give."

the female.”⁸⁹ As Newbiggin puts it, when the female body “that stands between [the virgin martyr] and the salvation of her soul, is mutilated beyond recognition, and the conflict between body and soul is removed, the saint speaks out with divine authority.”⁹⁰ As discussed in my sixth model, however, the woman/flesh equation is more complicated than this. Furthermore, as Mills points out, dramatized saints are both dissident and eloquent from the start regardless of their gender.⁹¹ He argues that both male and female saints are desexualized in iconography, making the removal of Saint Agatha’s or Saint Barbara’s breasts equivalent to the “not-showing” of a male saint’s penis. The saint, as an object of contemplation, gains liminality through androgyny. Moreover, Cohen argues that stripping before execution was the same for both genders and represented a loss of identity rather than a source of lascivious enjoyment.⁹² I will not argue for gender equality in late-medieval suffering, but do believe that too strong a binary focus makes it more difficult to clarify the multiple performative functions of spectacular suffering. The meaning of stripping and torment was different for a saint than for a criminal, but the two were not unrelated. As Saint Denis willingly removes his vestments before execution in the play to which I turn next, he explains that he is glad to strip because when the flesh is naked for God, then the soul is clothed in God, proud and ready:

⁸⁹Easton, “Saint Agatha,” 97-99, 102-03. Citing Carol Clover, Easton notes the parallel in modern slasher films, where the girl who eventually stops the attacker isn’t fully feminine and is thus not threatening to the viewers, who are primarily young and male. .

⁹⁰Newbiggin, “Martyred Virgins,” 87.

⁹¹Mills, “Visions of Excess,” 145-47. He goes on to argue that their eloquence under torment contradicts Elaine Scarry’s contention that pain destroys language.

⁹²Cohen, *Crossroads*, 96-99. See also Lalou, “Les Tortures dans les Mystères.” Enders notes the sexuality of the scourging scenes in Passion plays, in which Christ is first stripped. *Cruelty*, 122.

Il me plaist bien a despoullier
 Car quant la char est pour Dieu nue
 Lors est l'ame de Dieu vestue,
 Lors est elle cointe et paree.⁹³

Le Geu Saint Denis

The *Geu Saint Denis* is the fifth of six saint plays contained in manuscript 1131 of the Library of Saint Geneviève in Paris.⁹⁴ These six plays could be presented as a cycle or independently, and each has two possible endings: one that finishes with a traditional *Te Deum*, and an alternative ending that links it to the next play. They primarily relate the legends of the first Christian martyrs, and they all accentuate the role of St. Denis.⁹⁵ The late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century text is written in literary language, based on francien but containing many forms of regional dialect used

⁹³Bernard James Seubert, ed., *Le Geu Saint Denis du Manuscrit 1131 de la Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève de Paris* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1974), lines 976-79. Citations to this edition will be given by line number within the text. Where Enders has translated a passage during the course of her discussion in *The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty*, I include her translation in a footnote. Otherwise, the translations are mine.

⁹⁴The first four plays (*Le Martire Saint Estiene*, *La Convercion Saint Pol*, *La Conversion Saint Denis* and *Le Martire Saint Pere et Saint Pol*) are included in Graham A. Runnalls, ed., *Le Cycle de Mystères des Premiers Martyrs: du Manuscrit 1131 de la Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1976). For the sixth, see Clotilde Sennewaldt, ed., *Miracles de Madame Sainte Geneviève* (Frankfort a. Main: Moritz Dieterweg, 1937). The manuscript also contains a *Mystère de la Passion* composed during the fourteenth century. The fact that such a varied collection of mystery plays is found in a single manuscript has encouraged historians to view it as the repertoire of a confraternity. Runnalls thinks it unlikely that the manuscript was copied for the Confraternity of the Passion, but that a Sainte-Geneviève confraternity is more probable (7, 14-16).

⁹⁵Runnalls, *Cycle des Premiers Martyrs*, 8, 26-29. As an example of the devices linking the plays as a cycle, Runnalls notes the appearance of some characters across plays: when Domitian is made Emperor to replace Nero at the end of the *Martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul*, the scene has little importance for that play but does set the stage for *The Conversion of St. Denis*, which follows. Runnalls criticizes Seubert for not emphasizing the cyclical nature of the plays, arguing that the life of St. Denis is incomplete without the conversion play (9).

in northern France, and there are many geographical allusions to the Parisian region.⁹⁶ The play is somewhat earlier than the Fouquet miniature and roughly contemporary with the *Parisian Journal*, although there may well have been performances both before and after the manuscript was copied. In any event, the *Geu Saint Denis* would very likely have been performed in Paris at some point during the period at issue in this chapter.

Saint Denis is a conflation of three historical figures: first, the Bishop of Athens mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, XVII:32-34, who was martyred under Domitian and never left Greece; second, Denis the pseudo-Areopagite, who wrote mystical and theological texts in sixth-century Syria; and third, the Bishop of Paris, who converted the Gauls to Christianity during the third century and was martyred by Roman civil authorities.⁹⁷ Denis is the patron saint of France, and the abbey Saint-Denis lies just outside Paris. A *Life of Saint Denis* written by Abbot Hilduin of Saint-Denis in 835 merged the three figures and placed them all in the first century, which had the advantage of turning Denis into an apostle. Close ties between the abbey and the king made it impossible to contradict the conflation, which was maintained officially until 1722 in spite of all evidence to the contrary.⁹⁸ French kings had visions “proving” that Saint Denis was their guardian. He protected the king’s body from harm of any sort,

⁹⁶For Seubert, linguistic considerations suggest a date of composition in the last part of the fourteenth century. He believes that this play was written slightly later than the others in MS 1131 (69, 70). Runnalls thinks the plays were more likely composed in the first half of the fifteenth century, not long before the manuscript was copied. *Cycle des Premiers Martyrs*, 7, 10, 51-52. Lynette Muir notes that the *Miracles de Ste. Geneviève* from MS 1131 is very different from the martyr plays, and similar to *Le Mystère du Siège d’Orléans*, from the mid-fifteenth century. “The Saint Play in Medieval France,” in *The Saint Play in Medieval Europe*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1986), 133-37.

⁹⁷Runnalls, *Cycle des Premiers Martyrs*, 32-33.

⁹⁸Beaune, *Birth of an Ideology*, 23-32. In 1120, for example, Abelard was forced to retract his criticism.

whether wounds or illness, protected his soul as well, was with him at his death, and by the late Middle Ages helped him to escape not only Hell but even Purgatory.⁹⁹

After the conquest of Constantinople in 1204, what Beaune calls “competing bits of skeleton” were brought to France. Crusaders brought the body of Bishop Denis of Corinth to Rome, and Pope Innocent III hedged his bets: just in case the Denis who converted Gaul was *not* the apostle converted by Paul, he made sure that both bodies were safely lodged at the abbey Saint-Denis. But the Cistercian abbey of Longport, in competition with Saint-Denis for royal favor, had a head retrieved from Byzantium which was alleged to be that of Denis the Areopagite—meaning that he died in Greece, whether he had traveled to France or not. A new *Life and Works* was written at Saint-Denis around 1223-33, shoring up both the abbey and the monarchy, and another version was produced by Yves de Saint-Denis in 1317. In both instances the text was produced in the aftermath of a dynastic crisis.¹⁰⁰ After Longport was ruined (around 1350), Notre-Dame appeared as a new competitor with the claim to have the top of Denis’ skull. The dispute accelerated to the point that it was tried before the Parlement of Paris in 1410. According to Colette Beaune, “These clashes, replete with comic interludes (rival processions, reciprocal prohibitions on preaching) demonstrated that the memory of Saint Denis was slowly disassociating itself from the abbey and becoming firmly embedded in the Parisian landscape.”¹⁰¹ The *Geu Saint Denis* is set

⁹⁹Beaune, *Birth of an Ideology*, 21. Dagobert (623-39), Charles Martel ((714-41), Charlemagne (751-814), Charles the Bold (843-77), and Philip Augustus (1180-1223) all had such visions. Beaune provides a detailed analysis of the relation of Saint Denis to the Capetian kings, including their physical and spiritual health (35-36), visions (36-44), and royal death rites (44-46).

¹⁰⁰Beaune, *Birth of an Ideology*, 28-29. Miniatures from the 1317 version are reproduced in *Légende de Saint Denis: Reproduction des Miniatures du Manuscrit Original Présenté en 1317 au Roi Philippe le Long*, ed. Henry Martin (Paris: Champion, 1908).

¹⁰¹Beaune, *Birth of an Ideology*, 33. The monks of Saint-Denis, who were supported by Charles VI and his brother Louis, duke of Orléans, “pointed out that every version of the story of Saint Denis said that the saint had been decapitated; none claimed that the top of his skull

during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, and its early scenes of theological debate and conversion depict a Paris that is orderly but *dys*-ordered.¹⁰² As in the *Parisian Journal*, the people of Paris may sometimes be wrong, but ultimately they are not culpable. Furthermore, they can be converted to goodness, as illustrated by the play's sub-plots involving "*le plus noble bourgeois*" (c. 135) Lisbie and his wife Larcie. I will provide an overall summary before discussing specific points.

After the martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul, Denis leads a group of evangelists to France. Distributing the others to different cities, Denis takes Rustique and Eleuthere with him to Paris (1-94), where the citizens make jokes out of his doctrine, perhaps securing audience attention for the more serious theology to follow (95-178). Denis explains to Lisbie that false gods are worshiped because the one true God turns away from those with insufficient faith, leaving them open to the Devil's deceptions (205-34). Lisbie is convinced, but needs Denis to explain why this singular God is referred to by three names (235-318). The baptism of Lisbie, which follows, alarms the rest of the Parisians, who go after Denis as a mob with knives drawn. Finding that they don't dare to harm him, they flee (319-42).

Meanwhile back in Rome, Domitian demands the torment of all Christians, in particular the old man who poisons all of France ("i. viellart . . . Qui envenime toute France," 353, 356). His provost Fescennin sets off enthusiastically with his sergeants Menjumatin, Humebrouet, Hapelopin, and Masquebignet to make an example of Denis that will raise terror in others (343-74).¹⁰³ The Parisians whom they meet on the way to

had been removed."

¹⁰²I borrow the concept of dys-order from dys-appearance, as discussed in Chapter One.

¹⁰³These four also appear in the *Martyrdom of Saint Peter and Saint Paul*. Runnalls, *Cycle des Premiers Martyrs*, 28. For the sergeants' names as a melange of carnivalesque alimentary themes and stereotypes of social "types" considered to be dangerous, see Koopmans, *Théâtre des exclus*, 109-14.

Paris (those who fled in terror) repeat to Fescennin blasphemous (and surely amusing) *reductiae* of Denis' preaching:

Sire, il presche .i. Dieu a Paris
 Qui fait tous les monts et les vauls.
 Il va a cheval sans chevauls.
 Il fait; it defait tout ensemble.
 Il vit, il meurt; il sue, il tremble.
 Il pleure, il rit; il vueille et dort.
 Il est jeune et viex; foible et fort.
 Il fait d'un coq une poulete.
 Il joue des ars de Toulete.
 Ou je ne scay que ce puet estre. (388-405)

("Sir, he preaches one God in Paris who makes all the hills and dales. He goes on horseback without horses. He makes and unmakes all at once. He lives, he dies; he sweats, he shivers. He cries, he laughs; he watches and sleeps. He is young and old; weak and strong. He makes a cock into a hen. He practices black magic. I don't know what else this could be."¹⁰⁴) When the sergeants bring Denis and his companions before Fescennin, Denis effects a reverse transformation, turning all their comments and questions into opportunities to interject the word of God (407-60).

Lisbie is beheaded by the Romans after his wife Larcie denounces him (461-85). The three Christians are ordered to strip and are beaten with bloody rods ("*de courroies sanglantes*," c. 515), making the injury visible to spectators. They beat Denis for more than 20 lines (505-28), and then his companions for another five (534-39). Denis first draws an explicit parallel to the scourging of Christ:

¹⁰⁴The MS has "monls" in line 389, for which Seubert reads "monts," and "les ars de Toulete" makes use of Toledo's reputation as a center of sorcery.

Doulz Jhesucrist, je vous rens graces
 De cen quie vous plaist que les traces
 De vostre sainte passion
 Ont en mon corps impression. (518-21)¹⁰⁵

He then switches from prayer to direct address ("*Cy die au peuple*"), ensuring that the audience understands the lesson:

Bonnes gens, ne vous tristoiez
 Car par la paine temporele
 Vient la joye perpetuele.
 Prenez bon cuer et hardiece;
 Souffrez tous maulz a grant leece. (522-25)¹⁰⁶

On the surface, the actor playing Denis tells the spectators to suffer their own ills (which must be far less severe than those he enacts) without complaining, because pain in this world leads to joy in the next.

Denis and his two companions are clapped in irons (539-92) and thrown into prison—but for only 25 lines (593-618). They are brought out again for tortures that Runnalls argues would have looked much like what Fouquet depicts for Apollonia: each of the saints is stretched on an inclined plank called a *cheveau de fust* (627) or a *selete* (623) and tortured by the four *tirans*,¹⁰⁷ who joke about the pain they inflict, while

¹⁰⁵"Sweet Jesus Christ, I give you thanks for your willingness to have the traces of your holy Passion inscribed upon my body." Enders, *Cruelty*, 125.

¹⁰⁶"Good folk, don't be sad if you see me tormented because through earthly pain comes eternal gladness. Take strength and courage in your hearts, and suffer all pains in great joy." Enders, *Cruelty*, 173.

¹⁰⁷Runnalls, *Cycle des Premiers Martyrs*, 49. Extrapolating from the Fouquet miniature, Runnalls envisions a small playing area, full of actors, of whom many do not directly participate in the action. This area is surrounded by two levels of scaffolds, some of which hold spectators; others, mansions. He thus imagines a small theatre in the round, with spectators and actors in close proximity (50). Runnalls also notes the similarity between Fouquet's miniature of Apollonia and the scenic elements called for in the martyr plays in MS 1131. For depictions

Fescennin insists that his sergeants must hit harder because the Christians do nothing but laugh (“ilz ne font que rire,” 660). The beating continues for 30 lines, after which Denis is placed on a grill over a bed of fire (663-88), thrown to savage beasts that haven’t eaten for a week (690-714), put into a hot furnace (715-49), and finally crucified (750-95). In each case, Denis goes willingly to the torture, asks God to protect him, and remains unharmed. Frustrated, Fescennin has the three Christians returned to their prison, where the vestments of a priest, deacon, and subdeacon are waiting, along with an altar, chalice, and bread. Denis and his companions now prepare for their deaths. When they have dressed in the ceremonial garments, Jesus and three angels arrive and give them communion (839-91). The didascalie specifies that Larcie is nearby during this scene, after which she repents and announces her conversion (892-912). Fescennin has the Christians brought out and attempts one last time to convert them to his pagan religion (another conventional element); when this fails, he tells his sergeants to cut off their heads. Before the beheading, Jesus commissions two angels to take Denis’s body to Etrée.¹⁰⁸ Denis prays, then the sergeants chop off the heads: first Rustique, then Eleuthere, and finally Denis. Denis picks up his head, and the angels lead him forward singing “Gloria tibi domine,” before placing him under a blanket and leaving the playing area.¹⁰⁹ Larcie calls the sergeants “bad tyrants, bad pagans” and demands to know why they kill Christians, who have good law, true and whole, whereas theirs is bad and vain, false, disloyal, and damnable:

of the tortures, including the chevaux, see the *Légende Saint Denis*, ed. Martin.

¹⁰⁸The tenth of the *Miracles de Madame Sainte Geneviève* (in the play following this one in the manuscript) is the construction of a church at Etrée near the tomb of Saint Denis, the miraculous component of which is the overcoming of a shortage of lime. Runnalls, *Cycle des Premiers Martyrs*, 2-23, 26.

¹⁰⁹“*Lors saint Denis prenge sa teste entre sez mains et lez anges le meinent un pou avant en chantant: ‘Gloria tibi domini...’ puis le metent souz .i. couverteur et s’en revoisent*” (1041).

Mauvais tirans, mauvais paiens,
 Pour quoy tuez lez crestiens
 Qui ont bonne loy, vraie et saine?
 Mais la vostre est mauvaise et vaine,
 Fausse, desloyal et dampnable. (1042-46)

In response, they behead her. Then, frightened by the angelic hymns, the sergeants flee. Fescennin tells them to throw the bodies of the Christians into the Seine; however, the secretly-Christian bourgeoisie Catulle distracts them with food and drink and has her servants bury Rustique and Eleuthere while the Roman sergeants sleep off their over-indulgence (1078-1233).¹¹⁰ In their final scene, then, the sergeants' "alimentary" connection is put to good use.

In contrast to the sergeants, Saints Sencin and Anthonin (members of Denis's original company) ignore the well-laid table pointed out to them at an inn en route to Rome. When Denis sent this pair to preach in Meaux during an early scene, he also charged them to deliver an account of his acts and martyrdom. Anthonin falls ill, and Sencin must travel on alone. He pays the innkeeper handsomely to look after his companion and to give him reverent burial if he should die; however, the innkeeper robs Anthonin during his final moments and throws his body into a refuse pit. Jesus then sends Saint Michiel to Sencin, who returns and restores Anthonin to life by the power of Saint Denis (1234-1474). The dishonest innkeeper is frightened, repents of his wrongdoing, returns Anthonin's gold, and is converted.

I will now apply the models for spectator response developed in my discussion of *The Martyrdom of Saint Apollonia* in order to discover the types of cultural work *Le*

¹¹⁰In the 1317 version of his life, Denis carries his head to the village of Catulliacum and gives it to Catulla, who places the saint's body in a tomb near her home. Catulla is not yet a Christian, but is later baptized by Saint Rieule. The name of the village is eventually changed Saint-Denis, and the abbey is located there. *Légende Saint Denis*, ed. Martin, 18-20.

Geu Saint Denis might have performed in fifteenth-century Paris. The text is in many ways a richer source for such hypotheses, but for that reason I will be able to propose only a limited set of interpretations. I will not, for example, imagine the response of a non-Christian spectator. Although I organize these hypothetical responses according to the spectator's gender, my categorical containers should be understood to be even more "leaky" than those I used earlier.

Model 1: the male spectator objectifies the saint. Cazelles' proposition that a (male) viewer of the Apollonia miniature would most likely be interpellated as a voyeur is based upon pictorial composition, and the interpellation is presumed to work through encouraging the spectator to identify with those within the pictorial frame who watch or participate actively in the torment. In the Saint Denis play, the participants are the Roman authorities, and the voyeurs are Parisians, some anonymous and others given names.

The play provides strong incentives to dis-identify with the Romans. They are, to begin with, foreign. Robert Mills points out that a focus on gender can mask the other stereotypes brought into play during the typical martyrdom scenario. For example, Saint Barbara is painted by Master Franke as an upper class and emphatically white woman tormented by shabby brutes with "ethnic"—that is, Jewish—features.¹¹¹ The sergeants are carnivalesque figures, whose names bear alimentary connotations. Their gluttony is contrasted with the "Lenten" abstemiousness (or disinterest) of Sencin and Anthonin, and their dialogue provides a similar contrast with that of the saints.¹¹² Should the torments be considered "comic" scenes, as Enders suggests, because the sergeants joke while torturing?¹¹³ Koopmans argues that elements such as

¹¹¹Mills, "Vision of Excess," 154-55.

¹¹²Koopmans, *Théâtre des exclus*, 111.

¹¹³Enders, *Cruelty*, 179.

the banter during torture or the sergeants' later gluttony should not be considered interpolations of "comic realism," but as integral components of the mysteries. Like the "real" world of the Other in late-medieval society, the parodistic and profane dramatic worlds within the mysteries are constructed on the principle of inversion: they are anti-worlds that duplicate but invert God's world.¹¹⁴ This principle operates with crystalline clarity in the pagans' inversion of Denis's preaching, followed by his inversion of *their* rhetoric. The mysteries stage a conflict between good and evil, an opposition seen in the quotidian world between all that conforms to the social norm and is therefore good, because it accords with God's will, and that which escapes this norm and is therefore *not* good but its opposite.¹¹⁵

To make literal analogies with the situation in Paris during the early fifteenth century, the Romans might stand in for the English, most obviously, but supporters of either the Armagnac or Burgundian faction would very likely draw a connection to the opposition (regardless of who was in power at the time), because they are not the rightful rulers of the city. The pagan Parisians could be those who support the wrong side. The sergeants are distinguished from these anonymous Parisians by the degree to which they are culpable, however. In this play, harm is inflicted *only* by Roman authorities. When the Parisians attack Denis, they find themselves impotent—perhaps implying that the French enjoyed God's protection even before they converted.

Both of the groups that I have so far discussed are distinct from the named Parisians—that is, Lisbie, Larcie, and Catulle. These Christian characters (not identified as saints) suffer at the hands of the authorities (as do the saints). Earth thus appears to be an inversion of heaven, where those who suffer on earth will be

¹¹⁴Koopmans, *Théâtre des exclus*, 28. Koopmans further argues that the understanding of such scenes as "comic" rests upon modern sensibilities, as we know next to nothing about the relation between fear and humor for the medieval public (164).

¹¹⁵Koopmans, *Théâtre des exclus*, 27.

rewarded—the theme that Denis stresses throughout his torments. Lisbie and Larcie do not suffer, of course, but are swiftly beheaded. In contrast to the *Parisian Journal*, nothing is made of the suffering of the people—in fact, Denis explicitly instructs his audience to make nothing of pain in this world, aside from benefit in the next. Given the suffering caused by plague, famine, and roving bands of soldiers with no income other than plunder, to say nothing of the Hundred Years' War, late-medieval Parisians needed to make sense of a great deal of “ordinary” suffering.

A saint goes through much more, including archaic torments that are horrific. While Denis does appear to feel the blows that the audience see inflicted, because he reiterates the beneficial effects of pain, he does not suffer from the other tortures—all of which were, interestingly enough, outmoded forms of public punishment with which audiences would have been familiar only through iconography and theatre. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Parisians were unlikely to have seen anyone grilled, thrown to wild animals, baked in an oven, or crucified.¹¹⁶ To my eyes the archaic torments are not much worse than late-medieval punishments, such as the pregnant woman's death at the hands of the Bastard of Vauru (and the teeth of wolves) that I described earlier. Yet Lalou notes that one might expect spectators to respond differently to outmoded tortures than to those still familiar. Most salient, in her opinion, is the fact that torments and executions were opportunities for stage tricks and were appreciated as such.¹¹⁷ I do not wish to contest this point or to diminish its importance; however, an appreciation of special effects does not obliterate other responses to the incident being staged.

¹¹⁶Merback argues that, because crucifixion had been obsolete since the fifth century, “late medieval realist painters presented the sacred scene of the Crucifixion in terms of their own, but more importantly their *audience's* experiences with criminal justice rituals.” *Thief, Cross, and Wheel*, 21.

¹¹⁷Lalou, “Les Tortures dans les Mystères,” 43.

Finally, the various forms of enjoyment discussed in my first model for spectator response to Apollonia remain available for a male spectator watching the torment of a male saint. In particular, an erotic gaze is still possible, perhaps with an added subversive potential. Denis, the patron saint of France, is an authority figure. One might assume that a late-medieval spectator who has experienced some frustrations in life might derive a displaced satisfaction from the torment of such a figure—channeling, for example, hostility towards Charles VII, who did not like Paris and did nothing for the city or its inhabitants.

Model 2: the female spectator objectifies the saint. A woman might enjoy watching the punishment of powerful male even more than a male spectator would. The spectacle of a man being beaten can take on a flavor of vicarious revenge for a woman who is abused by her spouse.¹¹⁸ The punishment of Saint Denis might work even better for this purpose than the execution of a criminal, in the case where the woman's husband is a well-respected member of the community. She has no recourse against him, and perhaps she and her peers even think that she deserves the treatment she suffers. She can for a moment enjoy the spectacle of her husband's holy surrogate in pain, without even the ghost of a suggestion that she or anyone else would be right to punish her own worthy husband.

As I mentioned earlier, contrast appears to be a strong motivation for adopting a vicarious subject position. The late-medieval female spectator's great dissimilarity from Saint Denis might thus work as an incentive to adopt the torturer's gaze. She could, however, enjoy objectifying the saint without needing to identify with the Romans. The torments of a saint are exotic and facilitate an estrangement similar to what I experience when I look at medieval suffering or the suffering of those in "Other" cultures. The strangeness of their experience produces a sense of wonder, and compassion—that is, a

¹¹⁸I thank Mario Longtin for pointing this out to me, and for our discussion of the matter.

vicarious co-suffering. Perhaps the late-medieval spectator would desire that which Lisbie and Larcie receive within the dramatic framework—that is, a similar (if lesser) martyrdom. The spectator does not have to *really* desire punishment, however. She (or he) can experience the desire and the compassion while watching the play or the punishment, or while reading the *vita*, and then go about the business of daily life.

Model 3: the female spectator identifies with the saint. As I discussed earlier, for a female spectator to identify with a female saint does not entail her degradation, but that of her tormentors. To identify with a male saint might imply elevation: in control of the situation, suffering gladly for God, and ultimately in power regardless of the current circumstances, the saint is protected from the torments to which he is subjected. Through her desire to share the saint's experience, the female spectator might vicariously become the opposite of what she is. Perhaps her virtual empowerment is even greater than what might be available from watching a female saint, because she must cross a greater psychic distance in the process of identification.

Model 4: the male spectator identifies with the saint. The torments to which Denis is subjected were a conventional component of hagiography. Hrotsvit's martyred virgins, whom I discussed in Chapter Four, go through much the same series, as does the Host in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and the *Mistere de la Sainte Hostie*.¹¹⁹ The treatment of martyrdom in *Le Geu Saint Denis* is different in many respects from Hrotsvit's, however. In particular, the beating is handled differently from the other torments, from which Denis explicitly asks to be protected. Hrotsvit's virgins did not need to ask. As I mentioned earlier, the beating is the only torment that Denis appears to feel, and is also the only one (other than decapitation) that was still in common use. The audience for *Le Geu Saint Denis* had very likely seen hangings, beheadings,

¹¹⁹See Robert L.A. Clark and Claire Sponsler, "Othered Bodies: Radical Cross-Dressing in the *Mistere de la Sainte Hostie* and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29.1 (1999): 61-87, for a discussion of these two host-torture plays.

burnings, drownings, and live burial, and almost certainly would have seen people being beaten. Indeed, some may well have been beaten themselves. A spectator who had undergone the shame of public punishment could perhaps recover some self esteem by identifying with the beaten saint as one who suffers at the hands of unjust authorities.

Model 5: the male spectator engages dialogically with the saint. For a spectator who has been beaten and identifies with the saint on that basis, the play offers no model for response other than endurance. The Christians in *Le Geu Saint Denis* are vindicated, but exact no vengeance. The guilty are not punished, unlike the father of Saint Barbara, who is struck by lightning after he beheads his daughter; the soldiers killed when the wheel with which they were torturing Saint Catherine explodes; or the tormentor of the daughters of Sapientia in Hrotsvit's play, who are killed by the bursting pot of oil and exploding furnace. After denouncing her husband and causing his death, Larcie is converted and rewarded with a proper Christian decapitation. Even the sergeants are unharmed after they torture and behead Saint Denis; they merely flee the holy spectacle in distress, then get drunk and lose the bodies that they were charged to dump into the Seine. The spectator who has suffered public punishment might well compare himself unfavorably with Denis and his companions: "I'm not a saint, and those who beat me were right to do so." Denis serves as an example of extraordinary suffering, of which most spectators could be expected to fall short, and has divine protection from his torments. Both the events staged and his utterances remind the spectators of their own unworthiness.

Le Geu Saint Denis also differs from Hrotsvit's plays in that it includes bourgeois characters who provide different models with whom the bourgeoisie in the audience might be expected to compare themselves. Among the male characters, there is an opposition between learning through debate with Denis (Lisbie) or engaging in

specious banter (the other Parisians). The difference is instructive. Like the other Parisians, Lisbie begins by challenging Denis to explain why many gods are worshiped if only a single God exists; however, he then listens and accepts what he is told. His second question, how this singular God has three natures, is a request for clarification rather than a counter-argument. His fellow citizens respond with jokes rather than comprehension. A clever late-medieval spectator might be led to devalue his rhetorical facility, and to listen respectfully instead. A dialogical engagement with this play can thus be seen to promote unquestioning obedience to authority.

Model 6: the female spectator engages dialogically with the saint. Following some of the threads started by my earlier models, I first notice that a female spectator's great difference from the male saint might produce a greater sense of her unworthiness, as comparison with his torments makes her own suffering inconsequential. I also find rich models for bourgeois female behavior. Unlike the male innkeeper who robs Anthonin, Catulle behaves ethically. Like Catulle, Larcie obeys (without instruction) the true Christian authority after her conversion, in contrast to her pre-conversion complicity with a transient, secular authority. This message about authority can be easily read against the political turbulence made evident in the *Parisian Journal*. As Beaune points out, the late-medieval French thought of themselves as having replaced the Hebrews as God's Chosen People: they "believed their country was the best and most ardently faithful of all Christian kingdoms. . . . From it sprang saints, not heroes."¹²⁰ Louis IX, who ruled from 1226-70, had been canonized in 1297. Virtuous characters act in the best interests of France (and its king), regardless of temporary shifts in power.

The contrast between Larcie and Catulle is even more interesting than their similarity. Larcie is somewhat ridiculous because there is, after all, no need to stand up

¹²⁰Beaune, *Birth of an Ideology*, 19, 8.

for the saints: their martyrdom is what they most ardently desire. Quiet actions that ensure proper reverence, such as those for which Catulle provides a model, are better.

Conclusion

Perhaps a more wide-ranging study than I am able to undertake within the scope of this dissertation would provide support for the theory that spectacular suffering in public executions and saint plays established the authority of the state. The two texts upon which I have concentrated are surprisingly conciliatory, however, leaving many loopholes through which French people could be included as *French* regardless of earlier factional alliances.

The various forms of suffering and the political crises of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries produced a desire and a clearly visible need for a government that was both secure and just. One result was progress towards absolute monarchy. As Charles VII pulled France back together, those who might have in the past served as competition or as checks—the church, the nobility, and the cities—were willing to have their power subsumed under that of the ever more sacred monarchy.¹²¹ The executions that I have described support this perception and development. Saint plays have a perhaps more complicated relation to this structure. As I noted with respect to Hrotsvit's martyrs, they present an inverse situation: their martyrdom is inflicted by an unjust regime. The right of those in power to inflict such punishments is not thrown into question, and showing torments says nothing negative about the current authority. Denis was, after all, patron saint of the king, the kingdom, and the crown itself. Given

¹²¹See Le Goff, *L'État et Les Pouvoirs*, 149. For the establishment of stable bureaucratic apparatus, see Gauvard, "Le Royaume de France au XVe Siècle."

the presumption that the true French king is anointed by God, anyone who is punished by him would be justly punished.¹²²

If, as Koopmans suggests, mysteries were performed in order to “cajole” God,¹²³ perhaps performances of *Le Jeu Saint Denis* exhorted him to let Paris heal its wounds. Those who were involved in the Hundred Years’ War conceived of it as being fought to restore justice. Victory was given by God, and served as a sign that the cause was just, whereas defeat showed God’s *temporary* displeasure with social disorder and sinfulness.¹²⁴ The performance of *Le Jeu Saint Denis* demonstrated to God that France was indeed the most Christian of nations, forgiving and unified, and deserving of his grace.

¹²²Le Goff, *L'État et Les Pouvoirs*, 154.

¹²³Koopmans, *Théâtre des Exclus*. 25-26.

¹²⁴Allmand, *Hundred Years Wars*, 39-40, gives as examples English victories and French defeats. These interpretations of military outcomes (along with the miraculous rescues from the gallows that were mentioned earlier) provide evidence of a persistent belief in immanent justice even though legal processes had changed to de-emphasize God’s direct involvement in such matters.

Body Art: Looking at Real Pain

In this final chapter, I discuss the framing of self-inflicted pain as an art form in the late twentieth century. I begin with the first wave of painful body art in the 1970s, analyzing two artists in detail: first, Gina Pane, whose performances occurred only during this decade; second, Marina Abramović, who serves as a bridge between the 1970s and the 1990s and whose work has changed in telling ways. I then look at the second wave of pain art in the 1990s and its relation to an increasing interest in male masochism. I discuss performances of pain by Fakir Musafar, Bob Flanagan, and Ron Athey, and the mainstreaming of their work through documentary films. Finally, I address the radical challenge that Orlan poses by presenting the surgical alteration of her face as a work of art while denying the relevance of pain to her project.

I mention in passing some of the other artists who staged similarly painful events, but this chapter cannot provide a definitive history of body art. Many of the events that would be important for such a history did not involve pain, and I do not discuss them. Yet the history of body art is a critical component of spectator reception, because the relatively small audiences for the actions that I discuss would have been keenly interested in recent and concurrent art events and theories. Although actual bodily harm had sometimes been a feature of theatrical and theatricalized performance long before the 1970s,¹ the work with which I am concerned in this chapter began as part of a visual art movement in Europe, the Americas, and Japan shortly after World War II. Art historians trace varying genealogies, often ignoring earlier Futurist, Dada,

¹See, e.g., K. M. Coleman, "Fatal Charades: Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments," *Journal of Roman Studies* 80 (1990): 44-73; Jody Enders, "Medieval Snuff Drama," *Exemplaria* 10.1 (1998): 171-206.

Bauhaus, and Surrealist experiments.² They favor starting points in the early 1950s—Jackson Pollock’s action paintings, activities of the Gutai Group in Japan, and John Cage’s seminar at Black Mountain College—that put the artist’s bodily actions at the center of the work of art, as did Yves Klein’s use of nude female models as “living brushes” in 1960.³ The 1960s saw proto-feminist actions such as Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1964) and Shigeko Kubota’s *Vagina Painting* (1965), for which the artist squatted to paint with a brush strapped to her underpants—a witty rejoinder to the critical discourse generated around Pollock and Klein.⁴ The performers in Carolee Schneemann’s *Meat Joy* (1964) immersed themselves even more fully in their material, using paint as well as raw meat on one another.⁵ Around the same time, the Viennese Actionists (Hermann Nitsch, Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler) defiled and mutilated the body in order to treat it as just another material for art, with no greater inherent value than any other material.⁶ The boundaries between art, theatre, dance, and music events were blurry, with some practitioners working in multiple forms.

²As an exception, see RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art, 1909 to the Present* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1979).

³See Paul Schimmel, “Leap Into the Void: Performance and the Object,” in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979*, ed. Russell Ferguson (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 33-36, for a description, photos, and an assessment of the claim of “priority,” in particular with respect to the Gutai group in Japan. See also RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since the 60s* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 94-95; Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 86-90.

⁴See Kristine Stiles, “Between Water and Stone: Fluxus Performance: a Metaphysics of Acts,” in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, ed. Janet Jenkins (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993), 82; Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since the 1960s*, 128-29. See also Kathy O’Dell, “Fluxus Feminus,” *The Drama Review* 41.1 (1997): 43-60.

⁵Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings* (New Paltz, NY: Documentext, 1979), 62-87.

⁶See Brus, Muehl, Nitsch, Schwarzkogler: *Writings of the Vienna Actionists*, ed. and trans. Malcolm Green in collaboration with the artists (London: Atlas Press, 1999); Philip Ursprung, “‘Catholic Tastes’: Hurting and Healing the Body in Viennese Actionism in the 1960s,” in *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999), 138-52.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the number of artists staging body art actions increased and their work was increasingly politicized. The reawakened feminist movement and the student protest movement were instrumental forces, as was the presence of notable conceptual artists, such as Joseph Beuys, on art school faculties. Performance art, not only distinct from theatre and dance but eschewing their techniques, became an accepted part of higher education in the visual arts. Chris Burden, for example, spent five days in a locker as his thesis project at the University of California at Irvine in 1971.⁷ Live art could be shared on videotape for the first time. Artists knew—or at least knew about—one another and staged actions as comments on earlier actions. I already mentioned Kubota, but one must remember that male action artists also engaged in conversations with prior art practices. Inspired by Klein and the Actionists, for example, California artist Paul McCarthy painted with body parts in *Face Painting* (1972) and *Penis Painting* (1974). And the incidence of risk and bodily harm increased. To list just a few emblematic actions from the 1970s (in addition to those that I analyze here), Vito Acconci bit every portion of his body that he could reach; McCarthy walked barefoot through broken glass; Burden crawled on his belly through broken glass and had himself crucified on a Volkswagen, shot in the arm, and shocked by electrical current; and Valie Export rolled over glass, shocked herself with electrified wires, and cut into her cuticles with an Exacto knife.⁸

⁷See Schimmel, "Leap into the Void," 94. For all of Burden's work, see esp. Chris Burden, *A Twenty-Year Survey* (Newport Harbor, CA: Newport Harbor Museum of Art, 1988).

⁸Tapes of McCarthy's work were screened at Luhring Augustine, New York, 18 April to 22 May 1998. The broken glass in *Sailor's Meat/Deadly Journey* (1975) followed a wide variety of sexual and scatological actions with raw meat, hot dogs, mayonnaise, ketchup, and dildos. For good analyses of Burden and Acconci, see Jones, *Body Art*; Kathy O'Dell, *Contract With the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). For Export, see Roswitha Mueller, *Valie Export: Fragments of the Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

Although performance art of various types continued to develop, the painful content had diminished by the late 1970s. Individual artists moved on to other media such as film or returned to painting, sculpture, and assemblage. A new generation of art school graduates such as Karen Finley, whose presentation of pain, rage, and abjection is visceral but symbolic, had available a network of alternative performance spaces such as P.S. 122, the Kitchen, and Franklin Furnace in New York; Intersection for the Arts, 80 Langton Street, and the New Performance Gallery in San Francisco; and Highways in Los Angeles. These venues may have been “alternative,” but they constituted an establishment nonetheless. Performance art did not begin to make the transfer to Broadway until the 1990s, but ticket prices and production values rose steadily.

The mid-1990s brought a resurgence of painful art to New York, some new and some retrospective. 1995, for example, brought the exhibit *Endurance Art* to Exit Art/The First World and Ron Athey’s *Four Scenes from a Harsh Life* to P.S. 122, and Orlan’s plastic surgeries were catapulted into wider notoriety by the first Performance Studies conference at New York University.⁹ New York was not unique or even in the forefront. Athey was based in Los Angeles, where he had already presented his work. The same was true for Bob Flanagan, whose exhibition *Visiting Hours* had come to the New Museum in 1994. The French artist Orlan was already well known in Europe. In London, the Institute of Contemporary Art presented the *Rapture* series in 1995, with Orlan, Fakir Musafar, and Franko B, who had just made the transition from clubs to art venues.¹⁰ Painful and bloody performance remains a vital part of the live art scene in

⁹Orlan participated in a panel on “Gendering the Medical Body” that included a videotape of one of the surgeries and generated a furious discussion on an email listserv, excerpts of which were later published. See Richard Schechner, ed., “From perform-I: The Future in Retrospect,” *The Drama Review* 39.4 (1995): 137-41; Tanya Augsburg, “Collaboration within the Field,” *ibid.*, 166-72.

¹⁰See Patrick Cambell and Helen Spackman, “Surviving the Performance: An Interview with Franko B.,” *The Drama Review* 42.4 (1998): 67-74; Hannah Hurtzig, “Rituals of the Body (Interview with Lois Keidan),” *Ballett International/Tanz Aktuell*, June 1997, 40-42.

England, where female body artists such as Cathy MacGregor and Kira O'Reilly have emerged more recently.

Before analyzing specific examples of body art, I begin by examining the ways in which spectators encounter it; that is, not always or even primarily by attending live performances but also through photographs, videotapes, and descriptive and analytical texts.

Mediating Narratives

The performances with which I am concerned in this chapter bear a different relation to their traces than those I have considered up to this point, most obviously because no *dramatic* texts exist for them. Yet body art events are subject to various forms of textual mediation. One of the most influential "texts" is nonverbal: Reception is mediated by the juxtaposition of images in exhibitions or catalogs. For example, Anthony Bond places images documenting Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* (1975) and Pane's *Aktion Sentimentale* (1973) on the same page as Carolee Schneemann's *Up To and Including Her Limits* (1975).¹¹ In this case, the curator has placed images within a visual narrative that has the power to alter their meaning. The image of Schneemann *seems* to belong with the others: she is suspended naked by a rope and sling which are prominent in the picture, making it resemble a bondage ritual. Yet unlike the other two artists, Schneemann was never interested in pain. Her work has been angry and critical but is always affirmative with respect to her own body and to bodies in general. Schneemann performed unusual and perhaps shocking actions using her body, but they

¹¹Anthony Bond, "Embodying the Real," in *Body*, ed. Jill Beaulieu and Anthony Bond (Melbourne: Bookman Schwartz, 1997), 56.

are a far cry from self-mutilation.¹² Furthermore, the facing page holds Günter Brus' *Body Painting* (1964) and *Body Painting III* (1964-65), and Rudolf Schwarzkogler's *Aktion Wien* (1965-66). Brus is represented not only by the photo of an action but also by a drawing, whereas none of the three women is given space for work using a medium other than her body, although each of them created a considerable "body" of non-body work. In addition, the choice of images from the 1970s for the women and a decade earlier for the men gives a false impression of precedence: putting Schneemann's *Eye Body* (1963) together with Brus would have told quite a different story.

Catalogs often include critical essays as an optional accompaniment to images. The most "authoritative" form of written mediation is the artist's statement, which is now commonly available on the artist's website and has traditionally been distributed in press releases, posted in the gallery, and published in exhibition catalogs. As an illustration of the difficulty in proceeding very far without the artist's discursive framework, consider the suspension events performed by Stelarc (b. 1946) and by Fakir Musafar (b. Roland Loomis, 1930), photos of which are sufficiently similar that *Performing Arts Journal* identified Fakir as Stelarc when it printed photos from the *Endurance Art* exhibit.¹³ Both Fakir and Stelarc were inspired by rituals that were at one time practiced within Hindu and Native American cultures.¹⁴ Fakir first performed

¹²Performances and installations comprising *Up to and Including Her Limits* took place between 1973 and 1976. See Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy*, 224-33. For *Interior Scroll* (1975 and 1977), her most explicit feminist statement (and her most widely known action), she unwound out of her vagina a scroll from which she read the text beginning "I met a happy man/ a structuralist filmmaker" and ending "Oh No he said we think of you/ as a dancer" (234-39).

¹³"Endurance Art," *Performing Arts Journal* 54 (1996): 66-70.

¹⁴Interest in these rituals was widespread in the late 1960s. See, e.g., D.D. Kosambi, "Living Prehistory in India," *Scientific American* 216.2 (1967): 105-14. In 1969, the ritual cropped up in both film (*A Man Called Horse*) and theatre (Arthur Kopit's *Indians*). The *Scientific American* article is frequently cited in more recent work on pain. See, e.g., Valerie Gray Hardcastle, *The Myth of Pain* (Cambridge, Mass.: Bradford/MIT Press, 1999), 219n.2;

his version in the late 1960s and has continued to explore its possibilities. Like the other forms of “body play” in which he engages, Fakir’s piercings and suspensions are performed privately in a quest for erotic pleasure and an expansion of consciousness.¹⁵ Stelarc’s suspensions, which took place from the mid-1970s through the early 1980s, were intended to challenge the skin’s function as a boundary between the inner self and the world. He says, “I think metaphysically, in the past, we’ve considered the skin as surface, as interface. The skin has been a boundary for the soul, for the self, and simultaneously, a beginning to the world. Once technology stretches and pierces the skin, the skin as a barrier is erased.”¹⁶

Yet the artist’s conception of an event may be at odds with spectator response. Both Stelarc and Orlan deny the explanatory value of pain. Stelarc’s interventions serve to extend the body beyond its “natural” capacities, which he considers obsolete. Orlan’s surgical remakings of her face are “about” the tyranny of images rather than pain, and her face is in fact anesthetized. But the spectator cannot successfully imagine anesthesia. For many, the first visceral response to the sight of Stelarc suspended or to Orlan’s skin peeled back is empathic pain. As Mark Jones says about Stelarc’s suspensions, “Aware of the response within yourself, you feel your own senses amplify

David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 180-81.

¹⁵Rebecca McClean Novick, “Skin Deep: Interview with Fakir Musafar,” 1992, <<http://www.levity.com/mavericks/mus-int.htm>>, (cited 28 November 1998); Joseph W. Bean, “Magical Masochist: A Conversation with Fakir Musafar,” in *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, ed. Mark Thompson (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991), 307; *Modern Primitives: An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment and Ritual*, ed. Andrea Juno and V. Vale (San Francisco: Re/Search Press, 1989).

¹⁶Paolo Atzori and Kirk Woolford, “Extended Body: Interview with Stelarc,” n.d., <http://www.ctheory.com/a29-extended_body.html>, (cited 28 November 1998). Photos of Stelarc’s suspensions are also included in *Out of Actions*, 324-25.

with empathy, as if wanting to share the pain would help ease it for him.”¹⁷ Regardless of whether one finds the artist’s statement adequate, however, to be a member of the audience for conceptual art typically entails “consuming” the concepts behind the events, which have a significant audience that does not always witness the event—does not, in fact, necessarily see photos or videos. Word of mouth has a significant impact on its own. For example, what Marina Abramović heard in Yugoslavia about Chris Burden’s *Trans-fixed* (1972) was quite different from what actually took place:

What I heard . . . was that Burden crucified himself on a Volkswagen, that somebody drove the Volkswagen through Los Angeles, and that he was arrested. That was my image. When I talked to Burden and to the only three witnesses, I learned that only four people saw this piece. The story was that he was in a garage with a doctor who pulled the nails through and crucified him on the Volkswagen. Then the garage door was opened. The three friends pushed the car out of the garage, took the photograph, then put the car back into the garage.¹⁸

Yet the story that Abramović heard in Yugoslavia had a power for her independent of the event itself and influenced the challenges that she set herself.

Body art is most widely known through photos—the form in which I encountered it when I visited the *Endurance Art* exhibit in 1995, during my first year as a Ph.D. student. Neither my work in dance and physical theatre nor my recent

¹⁷Mark J. Jones, “Stelarc: Still Hanging Around,” 1995, <<http://www.cyberstage.org/archive/cstage12.stelrc.htm>>, (cited 28 November 1998). One should be cautious in generalizing from one’s own reactions, however. Some people report their initial response to be curiosity about the physics of the suspension process. Fakir answers that curiosity: If you use only two hooks through the flesh of the chest or the back, you can hang for 20-30 minutes before suffocating; however, hanging in a horizontal position with multiple piercings to distribute the weight makes it possible to hang for hours. See *Modern Primitives*, 36.

¹⁸Janet A. Kaplan, “Deeper and Deeper: Interview with Marina Abramović,” *Art Journal* 58.2 (1999): 14.

introduction to feminist performance theory prepared me for photos of Gina Pane lying on a metal bed frame over burning candles, Marina Abramović stabbing at her hand with a butcher knife, Fakir Musafar and Stelarc suspended from hooks through their skin, or Bob Flanagan driving a nail through his genitals.¹⁹ But as Lea Vergine says, “To reject these forms of expression is to feel their attraction, to feel the fascination of the ‘show’ and the ‘impulse to confess.’”²⁰ This chapter has grown out of my shock and puzzlement, as I tried to understand why artists did such things and why anyone watched. Most of the events that I discuss are as distant from me as the historical material in earlier chapters. I have been able to attend only one live performance of painful art: In 1997, I watched Sherman Fleming’s *Pretending to Be Rock* at SUNY New Paltz for an hour or so. A SUNY student who performed with Fleming was suspended in a harness over a small plastic pool. Fleming was on hands and knees in sand, wax dripping onto his bare back from a rack of candles suspended from the gallery ceiling. The performers endured in stillness as long as they could, with the only signs of discomfort their slight shifts of weight, recognizable as pain behavior by virtue of one’s own embodied experience. The lights were dim, and the spectators sat attentively on the floor surrounding the performers. Given the atmosphere and my past experience of looking at art in museums and galleries, I expected to contemplate this very quiet event and to be aware of my feelings. But there was too much action: Fleming’s assistant took care of the bits of flaming wax that fell from time to time and two photographers moved around in front of me, taking pictures constantly. To my surprise, the live event was mediated by its future as documentation.

¹⁹Images of the actions have been widely reproduced. In addition to the photos published in *PAJ*, see for example, *Out of Actions*; Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since the 60s*.

²⁰Lea Vergine, *Body Art and Performance: The Body as Language* (Milan: Skira Editore, 2000), 16.

Video documentation of body art has been neglected in comparison with photography, and I believe this is primarily because its analysts are art historians, trained to create and interpret visual narratives—in particular, the catalog essay, the gallery exhibit, and the two-projector slide lecture. Video is less easily incorporated within these familiar formats.²¹ For example, Kathy O'Dell argues that the photograph of Gina Pane's *Discours mou et mat* (Amsterdam, 1975) “gets the key point of the piece across” much more effectively than the video. O'Dell explicates this point: “that the ‘discours’ surrounding [the piece] needs to be as much about touch as vision, as much about the body as its image.”²² O'Dell's meaning is more coherent than the event, however. Furthermore, in describing the photo she mentions Pane's “strained heavy breathing” and the presence of an audience—elements that she can know only from the video.²³ The tape is not an attempt at “let the camera run” documentation, as O'Dell asserts. Pane composed her actions carefully for both the still and the video camera.²⁴ Even in the 1970s, some spectators watched Pane's actions on video because of space constraints.²⁵

²¹For a useful exception, see Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, “Real Bodies: Video in the 1990s,” *Art History* 20.2 (1997): 185-213.

²²Kathy O'Dell, “Toward a Theory of Performance Art: an Investigation of its Sites,” Ph.D. Diss., City University of New York Graduate Center, 1992, 182-83. For an abbreviated discussion of the tape and the photograph, see O'Dell, *Contract With the Skin*, 24-29. The photograph is included as Fig. 14 and is also published in Antje von Graevenitz, “Then and Now: Performance Art in Holland,” *Studio International* (July-August 1976): 52.

²³Videotapes of *Psyche* and *Discours mou et mat* are included in the archive of the gallery De Appel, now part of the research collection managed by MonteVideo/TBA in Amsterdam, where I watched them in July 2001.

²⁴For all her body art projects, Pane carefully directed the composition of photographs taken by Françoise Masson, then selected those that would be displayed. See Helena Kontová, “The Wound as a Sign: an Encounter with Gina Pane,” trans. Michael Moore, *Flash Art* 92-93 (October-November 1979): 37.

²⁵Effie Stephano and Gina Pane, “Performance of Concern,” *Art and Artists* 8 (April 1973): 24.

Counter-Anesthesia in the 1970s: Gina Pane

*The wound is the memory of the body; it memorizes its fragility, its pain, thus its "real" existence. It is a defense against the object and against the mental prosthesis.*²⁶

Pane was born in Italy in 1939 and moved to Paris as an art student in 1960. Increasingly skeptical about her role as an artist in society (like many of her contemporaries), she abandoned painting and sculpture in 1968 and spent the next two years engaged in solitary actions outdoors, culminating in a dangerous climb up a mountain of sand. She was compelled by the risk and the desire for her "spirit to be stronger, to prevail."²⁷ In 1970, Pane performed her first art action for spectators. Motivated by the death of a young heroin addict, she washed her hands in a bowl of hot chocolate and then dried them on a white towel. The accompanying text read: "Now that all was back in order, that his parents drank a cup of sweet hot chocolate the next morning, it would be his friends who would safeguard his fraternal traces." The spectators participated in various ways. For example, one boy in the audience was moved to drink some of the chocolate. This was the end of active audience participation for Pane, however. After this, "the public participated with their bodies but remained immobile. Their organs participated with my organs; there wasn't a need for physical manifestation" on the part of spectators.²⁸

Pane also made installations in protest against the Vietnam War and in 1971 brought together the two strands of physical risk and social commentary in *Non-Anesthetized Climb* (*Escalade non-anésthésée*). She propped up against her studio wall

²⁶Gina Pane, quoted in Ezio Quarantelli, "Travels with St. Francis," trans. Meg Shore, *Contemporanea* (November-December 1988): 45.

²⁷Quarantelli, "Travels with St. Francis," 44. See also Stephano, "Performance of Concern," 21; Kontová, "Wound as Sign," 36. Although interviews with Pane stress the solitude of her environmental actions, she was not strictly alone. Both Quarantelli and Kontová include photographs of the sand climb, with the title *2ème Projet du Silence*.

²⁸Stephano, "Performance of Concern," 21-22.

a framework of iron ladders with sharp protrusions on their rungs and climbed up and down barefoot until she reached her limit of endurance and was bleeding profusely (approximately 30 times). She wanted to show the destruction of mutual respect and trust by society's unthinking orientation towards goals. As a result of "the frenzy to get ahead," she said, "every gesture itself is inhuman and people's sensibilities are automatically anesthetized; they're no longer aware of the effects of their actions."²⁹

Over the following nine years, Pane staged complex and ambiguous events involving various types of self-harm. The central portion of the three-part *Nourriture—actualités télévisées—feu* (1971) provides a cogent example of her methods. Pane sat on the floor facing a television set and watched the evening news with a bright light bulb directly in front of her eyes, making the act of watching painful. The spectators (seated behind her) watched her, the bulb, and the news for twenty minutes. She reported their remarks: "'It's strange, we never felt or heard the news before. There's actually a war going on in Vietnam, unemployment everywhere, etc.' They admitted to assimilating the news that concerned them for the first time. . . . Until this moment, they were anesthetised in the face of world news."³⁰ Pane also repeatedly ate and vomited raw meat (the *Nourriture* portion), put out fires with her bare feet and hands (the *Feu* portion), and lay on a metal bed frame over burning candles (the *Conditioning* portion of *Autoportrait[s]*, 1973). In the course of a number of other actions (including *Discours mou et mat*, which I will discuss shortly, and *Psyche* [1974]) she cut herself with razor blades. After Pane was injured in 1980 while repeating an earlier performance, she focused on assemblages that at first included photographs of her earlier body actions and later increasing references to Christian

²⁹Ibid., 22. See also Quarantelli, "Travels with St. Francis," 45.

³⁰Stephano, "Performance of Concern," 22.

hagiography (with titles such as *Étude N.1 pour le martyre de St. Pierre* in 1985). She also taught performance and painting. Pane died in 1990.³¹

As I mentioned at the outset, Pane was not alone in presenting self-harm as art. Spectators for her *Psyche* and *Discours mou et mat* in Amsterdam during the mid-1970s might also attend performances by Export, Abramović, Burden, Acconci, and the Viennese Actionists.³² Many of these artists wanted to perform another culture into being. Like their contemporaries in other fields, they were optimistic about the power of a changed language to change perceptions and, furthermore, understood alterations in the perceived world to be substantive and lasting changes. Pane said that “man’s language no longer corresponded to his needs and attitudes” and that by returning to “primitive elements” such as “milk, fire, blood, and suffering,” she could “restore a vocabulary which can be universally understood.”³³ The development of a body language was Pane’s explicit project: “In the end it wasn’t the amount of pain which concerned me but the language of these signs. My real problem was constructing a language through this wound which became sign.”³⁴

Given the premise that to use any language for communication requires a sharing of codes by senders and receivers (in other words, a shared *competency*), how might Pane’s language of wounds be decoded? The following description of *Discours mou et mat* demonstrates the amount of work involved in such cryptography. The tape of this action focuses for its first two minutes on the objects in the gallery, providing a condensed version of the spectator’s experience, entering the gallery, anticipating,

³¹In addition to the sources already cited, see Kathy O’Dell, “Gina Pane,” in *Dictionary of Women Artists*, ed. Delia Gaze (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 1063–66.

³²See Von Graevenitz, “Then and Now,” 49–53, for an overview of body art in the Netherlands in the mid-1970s, mentioning many of these artists.

³³Stephano, “Performance of Concern,” 22.

³⁴Kontová, “Wound as Sign,” 36.

observing. Objects include two mirrors on the floor, one bearing the drawing of a face and the other, the word “alienation”; boxing gloves; a hanging ball; a tennis racket on a stool; two razor blades; binoculars; a naked woman lying on a black rug; a motorcycle with a rearview mirror. Pane enters and kneels behind the image mirror, playing padded cymbals that make no sound. She looks at herself and at the sound that cannot be heard. Pane’s stated objective of countering the spectator’s anesthesia suggests that the cymbals and dark glasses are an image of syn-anesthesia; that is, the opposite of synesthesia. For some spectators (and even more for those of us considering her works in retrospect), Pane’s use of the mirror here might well recall *Psyche*, which begins with five minutes spent drawing a lipstick face on a mirror, after which the artist makes cuts in the skin below each of her eyebrows with a razor blade. In this earlier action, Pane seems no more connected to her own skin than to the mirror, providing additional resonance for the word “alienation” on the second mirror here.

After a slide show that includes tennis and Pane’s face in dark glasses, she continues playing cymbals for awhile and then suddenly breaks the image mirror with her fist, smashing it a few times. The word mirror requires several blows before anything breaks. She goes on smashing mirrors and finally picks up a shard of glass. The mirror-smashing suggests a compulsion to destroy the self-image or the image that she doesn’t match, which may be a face but is not *her* reflection, and also an attempt to demolish alienation. The combination of the two mirrors and the silent cymbals suggests that Pane is destroying the forces that alienate her from her own sound and image.

After a blackout, Pane uses the tennis racket to bat the hanging ball, which occasionally rebounds against her forehead, while a disembodied voice on tape utters phrases about her mother’s body. Is the comfort denied by a distant and unavailable mother an obsessive thought that recurs like a slap in the face? Indeed, the Montevideo

website says that *Discours mou et mat* is concerned with ambivalence over alienation from the mother, represented by the naked woman next to whom Pane lies down at the end of the performance.³⁵ Pane goes on to hold a razor blade to her lower lip, make a small vertical cut, then cut her upper lip. She keeps cutting, touches the blade with her tongue and touches her bleeding mouth. The cuts to her mouth call to mind cutting out the tongue, suggesting an unspeakable anguish that must be expressed through mute gestures of what Pane calls “auto-aggression.”³⁶

The foregoing analysis is unavoidably colored by the performance events that I have witnessed, my research, my personal history, and changes in theoretical fashion during the intervening 25 years. Although the temporal distance did not exist for spectators in the 1970s, the other filters were in full operation. Pane’s actions produce an indeterminate resonance. Without some frame of reference, one cannot move beyond a personal response based on unconscious and inarticulate memories, conscious memories of adolescent despair, a desire to comfort her, awareness of the position of women in patriarchal society. During the 1970s, Pane used her own physical suffering to produce a kinesthetic response in the spectator, which she hoped would have cognitive and social repercussions. One problem with her efforts to counter the spectator’s anesthesia, which she recognized already in 1973, was that people grew increasingly hostile to her work: “Most spectators admit feeling the action the first time totally, the second time less, and the third time hardly at all.”³⁷ When she reached a wider public by performing in a gallery instead of her studio or a private residence, the

³⁵“Discours mou et mat,” n.d., <<http://cyclope.montevideo.nl/data/wl2848.html>>, (cited 3 September 2001).

³⁶Pane says that she used tennis playing in an earlier piece to “denounc[e] auto-aggression in favor of an activity that is universally satisfying”—that is, a game with known rules. Stephano, “Performance of Concern,” 23.

³⁷Stephano, “Performance of Concern,” 22.

visitors' log became "a lesson in porno-slander."³⁸ She interpreted the hostility as a defensive refusal to assimilate her language. (She did not acknowledge the obstacle that she created by attributing a socially-conditioned anesthesia to her spectators, thereby positioning herself as morally superior.)

Some spectators in the 1970s would have engaged in extended contemplation, read interviews with the artist, and been able to read across Pane's *oeuvre*, but expectations would have been quite different for many others. The influence of Fluxus events and Happenings would have led many spectators to approach any avant-garde art event with an expectation of active participation—if not in the event itself, in the making of meaning. In other words, they did not necessarily expect the performance to make sense or to cohere. Art could be "porous," to use Susan Sontag's term; that is, it could present material for the spectator to fill up with meaning.³⁹ Certainly the critics who engaged with this sort of work held themselves to a different standard than do the historians who discuss it now. For example, François Pluchart observed in 1978:

The wounds, burnings, lacerations of the blood vessels, and biological disorder that the artist inflicts on herself reveal and generate on the rebound in the spectator's mind a state of discomfort that allows him to apprehend a certain behaviour whose cause is at the same time revealed to him.⁴⁰

Pluchart did not deem it necessary to explain the cause or analyze the event; rather, he championed an artist whom he considered to be important. For a spectator who was receptive to Pane's work but not necessarily "prepared" with critical homework, to

³⁸Ibid., 26.

³⁹Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966).

⁴⁰François Pluchart, "Risk as a Practice of Thought," *Flash Art* 80-81 (February-April 1978): 40.

really *feel* something, to be shocked into a different sort of awareness and to be thereby differently sensitized to her lifeworld might have been enough. Cognitive access to the event was not always essential. Such a spectator could be reasonably satisfied by a heightened sense of immersion in the present moment, interpret pain as a guarantor of authenticity and take it as a synecdoche for experience.

One might also interpret *Discours mou et mat* as a feminist action, disregarding (or at least moving at a tangent to) Pane's stated intentions. When she performed this action in 1975, some of her countrywomen were grappling theoretically with "phallogocentrism"—that is, the problem posed for every woman by a language system which requires her to say "I," but at the same time reserves the "I" position for men. In order to operate in the symbolic realm (in other words, to speak), a woman must imagine herself to be male *or* imagine herself as men imagine her. Hélène Cixous proposed resistance by means of *écriture féminine*: "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies."⁴¹ Luce Irigaray's related solution was to *parler femme*—that is, to speak in such a way as to reproduce the doubleness of women's position within language systems and the fluidity of their libidinal energies.⁴² Body art provided yet another solution: to speak directly with the body, thereby speaking *outside*

⁴¹Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken, 1980), 259-60.

⁴² See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'Autre Femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974), trans. Gillian C. Gill as *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). See also Nelly Furman, "The Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle?," in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London: Methuen, 1985), 59-79; Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982); Ann Rosalind Jones, "Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine," in *Making a Difference*, 80-112.

of language.⁴³ During the 1980s, some feminist performance theorists understood this to be an inherent virtue of women's performance art.

Body art from the 1970s may have been read by some spectators at the time as making a strong feminist statement regardless of the artist's explicit conceptual framework. As the same work persists in memory and documentation long past the moment of performance, it is even more subject to reinterpretation. While it is tempting to read Gina Pane's actions through a feminist lens in 2001, the process of reinscription within new interpretive frameworks is perhaps best illustrated by Marina Abramović's much longer career.

Testing Limits in the 1970s: Marina Abramović:

When I went to Tibet and the Aborigines and I was also introduced to some Sufi rituals, I saw that all these cultures pushed the body to the physical extreme in order to make a mental jump, to eliminate the fear of death, the fear of pain and of all the bodily limitations we live with. We in Western society are so afraid. Performance was the form enabling me to jump to that other space and dimension.⁴⁴

Marina Abramović was born in Yugoslavia in 1946 and in 1975 moved to Amsterdam, which remains (along with Berlin) her primary residence. During the 1970s, she performed body art actions that tested her mental and physical limits. Her first performance, *Rhythm 10* (Edinburgh, 1973), was a variation on mumblety-peg.

⁴³See Catherine Elwes, "Floating Femininity: A Look at Performance Art by Women," in *Women's Images of Men*, ed. Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Morreau (London: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1985), 164; Jeanie Forte, "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism," *Theatre Journal* 40 (1988): 219, 226. See also Lucy Lippard, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: Women's Body Art," *Art in America* 64, May-June 1976, 73-80; Moira Roth, *The Amazing Decade: Women in Performance Art, 1970-1980* (Los Angeles: Astro Artz, 1983); Jeanie Forte, "Focus on the Body: Pain, Praxis and Pleasure in Feminist Performance," in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 251-69.

⁴⁴Johan Pijnappel, "Interview with Marina Abramović," in *Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy* (Amsterdam: DSU, 1990), 301, quoted by David Elliott, "Balkan Baroque," in *Marina Abramović: Objects, Performance, Video, and Sound*, ed. Chrissie Iles (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1995), 63.

Abramović rapidly stabbed a knife into the floor between her splayed fingers, changing knives each time she cut herself. When she had used all ten of the knives laid out in front of her, she re-played the tape upon which the sounds of her action were recorded, trying to match it and to cut herself at all the same moments.⁴⁵

For *Rhythm 5* (Belgrade, 1974), Abramović built a star on the floor, filled it with gasoline, cut her hair and nails, then lay down inside the star and had someone light it. After the fire removed all of the oxygen from the space where she was lying, audience members fortuitously noticed that she was unconscious and carried her out. Abramović says, “After this performance I ask myself how to use my body in and out of consciousness without interrupting the performance” (62-69). *Rhythm 2* took place in a Zagreb gallery in 1974. Abramović first took medication used to treat catatonia, which caused violent muscle contractions, and then medication used to calm down violent schizophrenics, which slowed her functioning so much that she passed out (70-75). For *Rhythm 4*, the same year in Milan, she knelt before a hot air blower, taking in as much air as possible (76-79). In neither of these 1974 events did her loss of consciousness end the performance. *Rhythm 0*, the same year in Naples, ended the project. Abramović placed 72 objects on a table and informed the audience that they could use the objects—including her—in any way they desired during the six hours for which the event was scheduled (80-93).

A mythology has grown up around body art in general, and Abramović’s actions in particular. Jan Debbaut discusses the sensation of having seen some of her performances without having done so, because they have been so much discussed: “the

⁴⁵Marina Abramović, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 1998), 56-61. Except where otherwise specified, all page citations to photos and artist’s statements refer to this source. McEvilley, “Serpent in the Stone,” in *Objects, Performance, Video, and Sound*, 45, gives a vivid description of Abramović performing *Rhythm 10* in Rome in 1973, with 20 knives. For earlier sound environments that led the artist to work directly with her body, see Chrissie Iles, “Cleaning the Mirror,” in *Objects, Performance, Video, and Sound*, 22-26.

performances apparently appealed so strongly to the imagination that you would remember them even if you hadn't seen them yourself."⁴⁶ Art historians invariably dramatize *Rhythm 0*, making Abramović heroic in her passive endurance. The accounts vary in interesting ways, and none quite fits the photo of a fully dressed Abramović awkwardly holding a gun pointed at her collarbone (83). Stories generally end with the loaded gun, after the removal of all her clothing—sometimes specifying that the clothes were cut off. Re-dressing is not mentioned. McEvelley describes the audience as a "random crowd brought in off the street, with some art world aficionados," implying that the dangerous spectators were those not "accustomed to performance art." He says the event ended when the "art world constituency rebelled against the aggressive outsiders."⁴⁷ Rescues are a familiar element in performance art narratives. Carolee Schneemann was choked by a man in the *Meat Joy* audience (1964) and rescued by "two middle-aged women," for example, and a spectator removed Valie Export's restraints in *I (Beat [It])* (1978), but no one provoked rescues to the extent that Abramović did.⁴⁸ The danger to which Abramović subjected herself functioned as an ordeal for her audience as well. Each spectator decided how long to watch as she suffered and when to intervene. This test of endurance might distinguish aficionados

⁴⁶Jan Debbaut, preface to *Ulay/Abramović: Performances 1976-1988* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1997), 7.

⁴⁷Thomas McEvelley, "Serpent," 46. In fact, Abramović is wearing pants in all of the photos, one of which shows a woman wiping Abramović's face (92). See also Elliott, "Balkan Baroque," 64; Goldberg, "Here and Now," in *Objects, Performance, Video, and Sound*, 11; Jan Debbaut, preface to *Ulay/Abramović*, 9, 12. The presumption that casual observers do not understand such performances and that they present a danger would seem like snobbery to me if I did not have personal experience of it. When I discovered Linda Montano blindfolded and shaking bells in the cafeteria shared by the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Goodman School of Drama, where I was a student in 1976, I couldn't understand what she was doing and felt compelled to provoke a reaction. I said things to her, to no effect, but finally caused her to turn and face the wall by touching her. I wouldn't have hurt her but was certainly hostile.

⁴⁸See Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy*, 194; Kristine Stiles, "Corpora Vilia, VALIE EXPORT's Body," in *Ob/De+Con(Struction)*, ed. Robert Fleck (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art and Design, 1999), 31.

(who are aware of the lengths to which Abramović would go) from uninitiated spectators; however, it is uncertain which group is more likely to intervene. Although stories about Abramović stress the danger in these events, they also provide evidence for spectators' radical willingness to intervene.

O'Dell interprets the structure of dangerous body art events as a foregrounding and test of the contracts by means of which societies function. These actions throw into relief the individual's responsibility for the social contract and the degree to which that contract could be renegotiated when those in power do not act in good faith or with reciprocity.⁴⁹ Such questioning was explicit in the audience participation experiments of the Living Theatre and the Performance Group. Pane implicitly questioned the social contract, but with no invitation to intervene in the event; rather, she hoped that her spectators would intervene in the social and political world. The primary difference between Pane and Abramović is that Pane remained clearly in control of her actions, however disturbing those actions might be, whereas Abramović's project of testing her limits required her to abandon control. Spectators in the 1970s may have understood Abramović to be testing the social contract, although I do not believe this is *implicated* by the artist.

The rhythm "research" provides an important background for *The Lips of Thomas* (Innsbruck, 1975), which included a number of elements either used in or proposed for earlier events. The star, the flames of which had taken all her oxygen in *Rhythm 5*, was here inscribed on her flesh; the drugs from *Rhythm 2*, transposed to a liter of wine. The artist's description follows:

I slowly eat 1 kilo of honey with a silver spoon.

I slowly drink 1 liter of red wine out of a crystal glass.

⁴⁹O'Dell, *Contract With the Skin*, 2. In my opinion, O'Dell's argument is best supported by certain of Burden's and Acconci's actions.

I break the glass with my right hand.

I cut a five-pointed star on my stomach with a razor blade.

I violently whip myself until I no longer feel any pain.

I lay down on a cross made of ice blocks.

The heat of a suspended heater pointed at my stomach causes the cut star to bleed.

The rest of my body begins to freeze.

I remain on the ice cross for 30 minutes until the public interrupts the piece by removing the ice blocks from underneath me.

Duration: 2 hours. (98-105)

Spectators in 1975 might be expected to have watched—and some of them, to have terminated—*The Lips of Thomas* with knowledge of Abramović's earlier rhythm series and other actions that she had performed during the same year (106-27): *Art Must Be Beautiful*. *Artist Must be Beautiful* (she brushed her hair simultaneously with a metal brush and metal comb until she hurt her face and damaged her hair); *Role Exchange* (on the occasion of her opening at De Appel, she exchanged places for four hours with an Amsterdam prostitute); *Freeing the Voice* (she lay on the floor with her head tilted back and screamed for three hours, stopping when she lost her voice); *Freeing the Memory* (she free associated until no more words came to her); *Freeing the Body* (she wrapped her head in a black scarf and moved to a drumbeat for eight hours, stopping when she collapsed).

Given the explicit feminist orientation of the first two 1975 actions, and the theme of a painful liberation from constraints and social conditioning in the other three, spectators might reasonably have read *The Lips of Thomas* as a ritual escape from a repressive culture. Beatrix Ruf notes that the piece “evoked the whole repertoire of inscriptions ubiquitous in the Communist Yugoslavia of the seventies, and in Marina

Abramović's family."⁵⁰ Her mother was an atheist and partisan, her father a communist, and both parents participated in the Revolution. Her maternal grandfather had been a Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, making her childhood a mixture of military discipline at home and religious life with her grandmother. The honey and wine were elements of Orthodox ritual; the star, a symbol of Yugoslavia's Communist regime. The Christian referents for the flagellation and the ice's cross shape are obvious. Like Pane, Abramović used her body to manifest sources of conflict and suffering that might otherwise be considered both individual and interior. These traces of enculturation were then available to the spectators to invest with personal significance. Ruf interprets the blood seeping from the star wound as "a manifestation of life realizing itself in this form shaped by religious and social imprintings, as an amorphous and liquefying medium," and concludes that by materially inscribing her body "with both orthodox and political emblems," Abramović negated "the transcendental 'reality' of such models."⁵¹

Yugoslavian spectators would have been likely to understand the symbolic connotations of the elements as Ruf does, perhaps have been able to identify the conflicting social forces to which they were subject and to envision their own means of escape. But the performance took place at a gallery in Austria, most likely for an international audience who would have known that the symbols were significant but for whom the precise referents may have been less important than the ritualistic aura. Erika Fischer-Lichte notes the similarity of this action to a scapegoat or initiation ritual but points out that cultures authorize certain people to perform "real" rituals, under very

⁵⁰Beatrix Ruf, "Wei wu Wei—Short Circuit, Pause, Paradox," in *Marina Abramović: Double Edge*, ed. Beatrix Ruf and Markus Landert (Sulgen, Switzerland: Verlag Niggli, 1996), 69. See also Bojana Pejić, "Being-in-the-Body: On the Spiritual in Marina Abramović's Art," in *Marina Abramović*, ed. Friedrich Meschede (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1993), 25-38.

⁵¹Ruf, "Wei wu Wei," 69.

specific circumstances. Like a performative utterance, a ritual must be done right, must be properly intended, and must be taken up by its recipient. Fischer-Lichte therefore asks whether something gives an artist the cultural authority to perform a ritual. She concludes that authority is granted by the performer's suffering, by her "endangered, violated body"—but stops short of accepting that such events are rituals.⁵² I agree with her assessment, but suspect that the notion of "ritual" derived from Arnold van Gennep via Victor Turner says more about nostalgic yearning for a unified social body on the part of modern (and post-modern) thinkers than about pre-modern cultural performances. Such yearnings were commonplace well into the 1970s within counter-cultural movements and are reasserted in the neo-tribalism of the 1990s among self-consciously subaltern groups, as I discuss later in this chapter. Some members of Abramović's audience in 1975 undoubtedly shared a desire for her ritual to be efficacious. For them, *The Lips of Thomas* may well have performed *communitas*; that is, brought it into being, in the same way that spectators at late-medieval executions in Paris performed social unity (as I propose in Chapter Five). The audience need not be actually unified in order for certain members to perceive it as being so. As was the case for Pane, there is ample room for both hostile rejection and boundary-dissolving approval in Abramović's audience.

The notion that the sharing of extreme bodily experiences could circumvent cultural boundaries had great currency in the 1960s and 1970s. To mention only the most prominent figures in theatrical theory, Antonin Artaud's conception that a "theatre of cruelty" could act directly upon the repressed unconscious, like a physical agent,

⁵²Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Performance Art and Ritual: Bodies in Performance," in *The Show and The Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 234-50. Fischer-Lichte analyses two other events as well, the *Second Action* of Hermann Nitsch's *Orgy Mystery Theatre* (1963) and Joseph Beuys' *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* (1973). Elliott mentions that Abramović met Beuys in Edinburgh in 1973 and then again in Belgrade, and worked for a short time with Nitsch. "Balkan Baroque," 60.

was equally influential in the visual arts.⁵³ Jerzy Grotowski thought that it was possible to strip away the accretions of culture through a *via negativa* that would enable the actor to make a “total gift of himself.” Grotowski proposed that attempting “to incarnate myth, putting on its ill-fitting skin” could bring us to “an experience of common human truth”—provided the confrontation and stripping away are brutal enough.⁵⁴ A psychic nakedness produced through confrontation with the human body in extremis appeared to be the only form of deep contact possible in the modern world.

Radical claims for the transformational power of phenomenological shifts meet with some skepticism in the 1990s, perhaps making a contractual interpretation of painful performances more palatable. Body artists have not entirely abandoned such claims, however. They persist in a changed guise.

Recontextualizing in the 1990s: Marina Abramović

*In the seventies, the theater was the enemy of performance artists. It was considered a fake, a staged experience. In the nineties now, my attitude has changed completely. On stage I would like to show various aspects of myself; the baroque of the theater is very similar to my own. The audience who now come to the theater to see my work see both a stage-play and a performance.*⁵⁵

Like the art historians who contribute to the voluminous documentation of Abramović's work, the artist has engaged in a re-evaluation. In the 1990s, she has not only created new and different performances, but also new memories of past events. The process illustrates the erasures and inscriptions through which social memory is created. The example that I will consider is Abramović's shift of focus from her own

⁵³See Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

⁵⁴Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 16, 23.

⁵⁵Beatrix Ruf and Hans-Peter von Däniken, “Marina Abramović in Conversation,” in *Double Edge*, 43.

experience to that of the audience. She now says, "I think if I had continued my work as it was going, at some point I would have been killed."⁵⁶ But she did not stop because she recognized the danger and made a mature decision for self-preservation; instead, her work changed because she met Uwe Laysiepen (Ulay), with whom she lived and worked from 1976 to 1988. Their work together included risk and pain, as had the solo work that each performed earlier, with an added focus on gender and relation.⁵⁷ She began to notice the effect of audience energy during *Expansion in Space* (1977), the first event for which they had a large audience. Ulay and Abramović ran and slammed their naked bodies into two moveable columns in a parking garage, and the energy from the public made Marina able to continue for 30 minutes after the columns stopped moving and Ulay left (158-61).

When the two artists separated after the *Great Wall Walk* (1988), Abramović began making objects that she considers catalysts for the audience. Dissatisfied with the "voyeuristic attitude" of spectators, she "created objects which enable the audience to have certain experiences."⁵⁸ For example, *Shoes for Departure* (1991) is a pair of hollowed-out amethyst crystals in which the viewer is supposed to stand.⁵⁹ More recently, Abramović taught week-long workshops that "train future artists not to see

⁵⁶Thomas McEvilley, "Stages of Energy: Performance Art Ground Zero?" in *Artist Body*, 16. See also Kaplan, "Deeper and Deeper," 17.

⁵⁷Their work together has been more widely documented and analyzed than the solo work. See *Ulay/Abramović*, esp. Chrissie Iles, "The Shadow and the Reflection: The Relation Works of Marina Abramović and Ulay," 9-16; O'Dell, *Contract With the Skin*, *passim*. Much of their work together and some of their solo actions are available on video from Electronic Arts Intermix, <<http://www.eai.org/qry/eai/catalogue>>, in the collection *Performance Anthology (1975-1980)*; unfortunately, the performances that most interest me are not included.

⁵⁸Ruf, "Marina Abramović in Conversation," 37-39.

⁵⁹See McEvilley, "Serpent," 48-50 for the "crystal-active furniture-sculptures." See also *Double Edge* and *Artist Body*.

with their eyes alone, but with their entire bodies.”⁶⁰ Along with a rigorous physical training regimen, the students fast for the first five days; for the first six, they are silent. On the sixth day, they make one work of art using found materials. Only on the final day do they eat and talk together. Abramović believes that the body must be “cleaned” in order to rid the artist of “the habits of normal life,” after which “normal” life can be viewed from a new perspective, a new state of mind.⁶¹ Abramović’s objects and her teaching seem to be a logical outgrowth of her performance experiments. Her path resembles Grotowski’s earlier progression from the actor’s sacrifice of himself in the Poor Theatre of the 1960s to the spectator’s full participation in paratheatrical Holidays during the 1970s. But Abramović continued to create performances and took those in an entirely different direction. During the 1990s, she reinscribed and recontextualized her body work.

Abramović’s first theatrical work, *Biography* (1993), began as a four-minute videotape made in collaboration with Charles Atlas, who subsequently designed most of the visual structure used in performance.⁶² When the audience enters the theatre, they see Abramović suspended seven meters above the stage on a cross, a live python in each hand, wearing only a skirt. Two dogs enter and begin gnawing on a pile of fresh beef bones. Microphones at the dogs’ throats fill the theatre with the sound of bones

⁶⁰Course description from the Hamburg Art Academy, quoted in Goldberg, “Here and Now,” 18.

⁶¹Elliott, “Balkan Baroque,” 68.

⁶²Wulffen, “Performance. Thoughts on Marina Abramović’s ‘The Biography,’” in *Artist Body*, 385-87. There have been performances at the Hebbel Theater in Berlin (1993) and the Singel Theater in Antwerp (1995). For texts and extensive photos, see *Artist Body*, 388-95. *Biography* has also been performed at Edge '92, Madrid; Kunsthalle, Vienna; and Documenta 9, Kassel (all 1992); the Greer Carson theatre, Santa Fe (1995); and the Groninger Schouwburg, Groningen (1996). Another theatrical work, *Delusional* (1995) explores Abramović’s Balkan background, which took on a different valence with the conflicts in the region during the 1990s.

cracking. This performance includes a narrative that provides a context for the re-enactment of early art actions, with a line or two for each year of her life, such as:

1957

Traumas, dreams of jumping out of the window.

1958

Father buys a television.

1959

Parents divorce.

. . . .

1962

First exhibition.

1963

My mother writes:

“My dear little girl, your paintings have got nice frames.” (390)

After the entry for 1969, Abramović performs a short version of *Rhythm 10* which she names but about which she says nothing else. The temporal relocation (the performance did not take place until 1973) creates a dramatic effect: the action of stabbing a large knife between her splayed fingers reads as an outburst of rage and frustration, turned against herself, making sense of the relation between Abramović’s childhood and her work but radically recontextualizing the action itself.

The time line continues with two sound installations that actually preceded *Rhythm 10* and contribute to an atmosphere of destructive violence, then reaches the period when the body works were actually performed:

1972

I start using my body as material.

Blood, pain.

Watching major surgical operations in hospitals.

Pushing my body to its physical and mental limits. (390)

The performance includes actions from *The Lips of Thomas*, *Freeing the Voice*, and *Cold/Warm*, which I evaluate first as theatrical elements: Abramović cuts herself, whips herself, lies on a bed of ice, and screams, with the textual interlude “Fights with my mother./ Wishing to leave home” (391), and then brushes her hair until she hurts herself. This last action is a re-performance of *Art Must Be Beautiful*. *Artist Must be Beautiful* and is identified as such, but the textual connection to her mother adds a new layer of meaning. Similarly, the star cutting and the flagellation not only make sense of her personal history but create the opposition between God and the state upon which she focuses in telling that history. By re-inscribing these symbols with the details of her personal biography, Abramović makes them comprehensible within a new context. She now describes all of her early performances as being about rebellion. Although she mentions the social structure and the art system, she focuses upon her immediate family and explains that the solo work was done in Yugoslavia, during a period when she was living with her mother and had to be home by 10 p.m., which lasted until she was 29 years old and moved out to live with Ulay.⁶³ Abramović does not mention performing in Scotland, Italy, Austria, or the Netherlands, thus erasing at the same time as she re-inscribes.

In addition to placing her actions from the 1970s within a narrative frame, Abramović performs them only briefly. Her own work is thus vulnerable to her criticism of other recent art actions that seem similar to what was being done in the 1970s: The duration of earlier actions “definitely affected your mind and body and you went through certain changes, and if you really went through these changes then the body limits started expanding further and further, and you looked for further and

⁶³McEvelley, “Stages of Energy,” 15.

further aims.”⁶⁴ With theatrical performances such as *Biography*, Abramović does not test her own endurance or that of her audience in the same way; however, she says, “My body still plays an important role because I keep learning, I keep experiencing limits in a new way. Perhaps the experience of my limits is no longer mostly physical, but is all the more intense at a mental level.”⁶⁵ The shift from physical to mental endurance carries through in the spectator’s relation to the event, because the theatrical framework for *Biography* eliminates any invitation to intervene. The spectator can leave if the ordeal is intolerable, but the proscenium stage does not provide the ready access to the performer’s body that was part of the gallery setting in the 1970s, and there is no longer any question of the artist losing control. Abramović now plays with audience expectations by performing in opera houses, where the spectators “totally expect something else; where blood is fake, where nothing is real. Then, I really cut a star in my stomach on the stage, just as I did twenty years ago in Belgrade. In this biographical piece, the public started fainting in the front row because first they thought it was fake and then they saw it was real.”⁶⁶

Abramović’s move into unabashed narrativity makes her actions comprehensible in a way that the 1970s originals were not; however, her staging of that narrative includes performance elements that retain the capacity to shock her spectators and keep them off balance. I suggest that the narrative helps to keep the spectator off guard by seeming to make a search for meaning unnecessary. The event seems conventional, but the moments of real pain are still excessive, still disturb the spectator. Like the objects that she now creates, Abramović considers her stories to be transitional devices, present

⁶⁴Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Talking with Marina Abramović on the Bullett Train to Kitakyushu, somewhere in Japan,” in *Artist Body*, 46.

⁶⁵Ruf, “Marina Abramović in Conversation,” 43.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 46. See also Goldberg, “Here and Now,” 17.

only in order to facilitate the concentration necessary for her spectator to reach a spiritual state.⁶⁷ Her dramaturgical method is designed to create for the spectators “some kind of mental gap so that they can’t explain it rationally. They will look for tricks, and when they can’t find the trick . . . their knowledge . . . will have to collapse . . .” and “they will have a completely different way of seeing things.”⁶⁸

In addition, by inscribing religious and political emblems within a personal history, she makes them both concrete and mutable. Abramović’s reinscribed actions serve as icons for spectators familiar with her work. The audience may include people who saw her actions in the 1970s and have matured along with her. Like her, they can remember and re-evaluate what they did and believed during that period. Other spectators have heard about her work and now get the chance to see her for the first time—this group includes a new generation of artists creating performances that are influenced by earlier work.

Celebrating Masochism in the 1990s: Fakir Musafar, Bob Flanagan, and Ron Athey

*Because it feels good; because it gives me an erection . . . because I’m sick . . . because I say FUCK THE SICKNESS.*⁶⁹

Male masochists entered the mainstream in the 1990s. This is in many ways a separate phenomenon from the sort of painful conceptual art that I discussed earlier in this chapter, although that work helped to prepare the way by creating a performance genre. None of the three performers whom I discuss in this section comes out of the “art school” culture that produced the other artists I discuss in this chapter, but they have either actively moved into the available genre or been “adopted” by it. All three

⁶⁷Ibid., 21; “Wei wu Wei,” 79.

⁶⁸Obrist, “Talking on the Bullett Train,” 45.

⁶⁹Bob Flanagan, “Why?” in *Dear World*, ed. Camille Roy and Nayland Blake (San Francisco: self-published, 1991), 55-56, quoted in Jones, *Body Art*, 231.

have subsequently been the subject of documentary films.⁷⁰ I propose that these suffering male artists caught the attention of documentary filmmakers in part because they fit into a heroic (or antiheroic) mold and in part because of a more general interest in male masochism on the part of the news media.

Fakir Musafar, whose version of the Lakota and Mandan O-Kee-Pa suspension ritual I mentioned earlier, does not call his body play “art,” although he has avidly documented his body modifications and ritual performances since his early teens and participated in the *Rapture* series at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London (1995), along with Orlan. In addition to the suspension, he performs the Kavandi-bearing, with close to 100 spears inserted into his torso, and Ibitoe waist constriction. He has piercings all over his body and various genital modifications. Discovering in his early teens that painful body play produced a tremendous relief from intense experiences of dissociation, hallucinations, and loneliness, Fakir secretly experimented with body modifications gleaned from encyclopedias. His first out-of-body experience, alone and lashed to the wall of his family’s coal bin at age 17, produced the insight: “Your body belongs to you. Play with it.” By “coming out” as both masochist and spiritual seeker in 1977 at a tattoo convention and continuing to proselytize for body play, Fakir changed the context for his own subsequent actions *and* for anyone self-consciously performing within the context that he helped to establish. Rebecca Novick describes him as “a misfit who, unable to find a mold to fit into, simply fashioned one for himself.”⁷¹

⁷⁰Dan Jury and Mark Jury, dirs., *Dances Sacred and Profane* (1986), released for home video as *Bizarre Rituals: Dances Sacred and Profane*; Kirby Dick, dir., *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Super-Masochist* (1995); Catherine Gund Saalfeld, dir., *Hallelujah! Ron Athey: A Story of Deliverance* (1998).

⁷¹Novick, “Skin Deep.” See also “Fakir Musafar,” n.d., <<http://www.bodyplay.com/fakir/index.html>>, (cited 2 September 2001).

The “mold” took some time to fashion, however. Notably, Fakir did not find his way into the conceptual art world; rather, he met like-minded spiritual seekers when he moved to San Francisco to do graduate work in technical theatre. (As he tells the story, the connection to theatre is purely incidental.) In the mid-1960s he became involved with the Janus Society; in the 1970s, with tattoo and piercing “show-and-tell” parties in Los Angeles. Charles Gatewood, a photographer documenting the tattoo-and-body-modification subculture, brought him wider attention. The release of *Dances Sacred and Profane* and publication of *Modern Primitives* in the mid-1980s fed into a growing interest in body modification within youth culture.⁷² Fakir began to publish *Body Play and Modern Primitives Quarterly* in 1991 and instituted the *Fakir Body Piercing and Branding Intensives* in 1993.

Fakir calls *pain* a “prejudicial word” for intense sensations which, *if* actively sought and expected, are not aversive.⁷³ He describes the pursuit of intense sensation as a form of spirituality and observes that people engaged in sadomasochistic sex “seem to go *someplace*, to unseen worlds that are disconnected from the time and space of the seen world.”⁷⁴ Pain alone is not sufficient for the type of spiritual experience that Fakir describes, nor is it reliable. He stresses the need for an experienced guide, believes that the Top can fulfill this function for the Bottom, and proposes that a modern-primitive shaman (such as himself) can provide much-needed new rituals for modern tribes.⁷⁵ His “body-first” spirituality is dualistic: the “shamanic” state is reached when “you know

⁷²Fakir Musafar, “Body Play,” in Armando R. Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege: Self-Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 326-27.

⁷³Novick, “Skin Deep.”

⁷⁴Bean, “Magical Masochist,” 309.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 313-17.

your body, you can feel everything there is in the body but you also know you're not the body. You can be totally spirit and just be an observer."⁷⁶

Interest in Fakir is to some extent a product of cultural trends, but he has been instrumental in promoting these trends. His career as an advertising executive should not be overlooked. By 1996, *Modern Primitives* had been reprinted six times and 60,000 copies were in circulation.⁷⁷ The volume includes a profile of Sheree Rose, who discusses her transformation from discontented Southern California housewife to happy dominatrix. In 1993, Re/Search published a volume dedicated to Rose's slave, Bob Flanagan.⁷⁸ Flanagan (1952-1996) described his sexual masochism as a way to take control of his bodily experience—that is, to feel pain that he controlled, in contrast with the painful and depersonalizing medical treatments for cystic fibrosis (CF) that he endured from his earliest childhood. CF is an inherited disease characterized by chronic respiratory infections, pancreatic insufficiency, and malfunctioning sweat glands. Two of Flanagan's sisters died of CF, one as an infant and the other in her twenties. People with CF rarely live much beyond 30, although the development of better antibiotics has extended the lifespan of many. During his last years, Flanagan hoped for a heart and lung transplant, but his lungs had deteriorated past the point at which that was possible.⁷⁹

Like Fakir, Flanagan began as an adolescent to experiment with pain in his family home. He was a poet, exhibitionist, and aspiring stand-up comic; Rose, a photographer and video artist. They began to perform in Los Angeles in the late 1980s

⁷⁶Novick, "Skin Deep."

⁷⁷Fakir Musafar, "Body Play," 327.

⁷⁸Re-issued, Andrea Juno and V. Vale, eds., *Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist* (New York: Juno Books, 2000).

⁷⁹Dennis Cooper, "Flanagan's Wake," *Artforum* 34.8 (1996): 75-77.

first as an outgrowth of poetry readings and then in S/M clubs. Flanagan apparently made the transition into a sort of “show business” at some cost to his pleasures—his *Pain Journal* recounts masturbating for spectators, although he feels too sick to enjoy anything, because the show must go on.⁸⁰ Performance had its compensatory pleasures, however. Linda Kauffman says that although Flanagan was a Bottom, “when he performs he relishes the opportunity to go over the top” by confronting the audience with their investments in (male) flesh.⁸¹ Dennis Cooper describes him as “a complex man who wanted simultaneously to be Andy Kaufman, Houdini, David Letterman, John Keats, and a character out of a de Sade novel.”⁸² For Flanagan and Rose’s installation *Visiting Hours* he was present in the museum, sometimes talking with visitors as he lay in a hospital bed, at other times hoisted up to the ceiling by his ankles, naked. Aside from the suspension, pain was present solely in video and photo installations.⁸³ To Flanagan’s surprise, strangers sat by his bedside in the museum and talked about their own experiences with grave illness,⁸⁴ inspired to such intimate exchanges by the charm and humor that were even more notable than his masochism. During the footage of *Visiting Hours*, for example, Flanagan explains that although the bed and the suspension resemble events performed by Chris Burden, and the video scaffold is similar to work by Nam June Paik, he invented these things in his “Derivative” artist persona. For *You Always Hurt the One You Love* (1991) at Q.S.M. in San Francisco, he

⁸⁰See Bob Flanagan, “Pain Journal,” in *When Pain Strikes*, ed. Bill Burns, Cathy Busby, and Kim Sawchuck (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 163-75.

⁸¹Linda S. Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 37.

⁸²Cooper, “Flanagan’s Wake,” 77.

⁸³Santa Monica Museum (1992); New Museum, New York (1994); Boston School of the Arts (1995).

⁸⁴Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys*, 33.

chatted about illness and pain while nailing his penis to a stool.⁸⁵ *Sick* includes a hilarious excerpt from another performance in which he talks about putting a nail through his penis for the first time and accidentally hitting it with the hammer. The film also includes Rose's perspective, footage of Flanagan at a CF summer camp singing "Forever Lung" in the style of Bob Dylan, interviews with his parents and brother, and his deterioration and death. Kauffman points out that Flanagan focused attention on two aspects of sexuality that are usually denied: the sexuality of children and of those who are sick and dying.⁸⁶ *Sick* turns S/M into the everyday backdrop that makes it possible to communicate about the normally hidden, even taboo, experience of terminal illness and grief. The documentary presents Flanagan's illness as, finally, wrenching and unmitigated by his attempt to control bodily experience through volitional pain.

Flanagan's performance of masochism is less radical than Fakir's because of the explanatory apparatus available to create distance from it. Fakir describes dissociation in early childhood, and one can speculate about neurological imbalances or traumatic experiences, but Flanagan identified an originary trauma of sufficient magnitude to explain his behavior. Furthermore, because the trauma was an illness and its associated medical treatment, no blame needed to be assigned. Ron Athey (b. 1961) also explicitly identifies the traumatic origins of his painful art, but unlike Flanagan he assigns blame to both his family and the culture at large. In his performances and in his writing, Athey links childhood damage and the AIDS tragedy. His family were Pentecostal Christians for generations back, and the grandmother and aunt who raised him in Southern California believed that he was born with a "calling" to fill the role of John the Baptist for the second coming of Christ. His aunt was to serve as the new Virgin Mary. As a child, Athey cooperated by speaking in tongues, having visions, and

⁸⁵Jones, *Body Art*, 231.

⁸⁶Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys*, 37.

preaching. When he was fifteen, he revealed his “calling” to his girlfriend. “Under the weight of her incomprehension, the house of cards suddenly collapsed” and his faith was shattered.⁸⁷ He began to self-mutilate in order to dissociate while praying (because the kind of psychic transport to which he was accustomed was no longer available to him) and also to connect with reality. Athey spent ten years addicted to heroin, tried to kill himself a number of times, and was finally redeemed by a vision of himself covered with black tribal designs. He began getting tattoos and also began to perform again in 1990, but in a venue much different from the revival tent—that is, he began go-go dancing at Club Fuck in Los Angeles among “a lot of extreme people who were extreme for private reasons, and the private went public.”⁸⁸ Before long, he began to include live piercings and his new performance career was underway.

Invited by Dennis Cooper to present work at LACE in 1992, Athey compiled scenes he developed at Club Fuck into *Martyrs and Saints*. He describes the piece as an attempt to understand why his HIV-positive status makes him feel like a martyr and how that relates to his religious upbringing. *Four Scenes from a Harsh Life* (1994) includes multiple varieties of piercing and cutting, as well as dancing with bells and limes stitched to the skin with fishing line.⁸⁹ The final section of this trilogy, *Deliverance* (1995), dealing with death, healing, and mysticism, zips its martyrs into

⁸⁷C. Carr, “The Rite Stuff,” *Village Voice*, 15 December 1998, 81.

⁸⁸Unless otherwise identified, Athey’s statements and details about his life and work are cited from *Hallelujah!* See also Ron Athey, “Gifts of the Spirit,” in *Unnatural Disasters: Recent Writings from the Golden State*, ed. Nicole Panter (San Diego: Incommunicado, 1996), 70-80.

⁸⁹Public response to *Four Scenes* focused not on the pain but on the blood: the NEA was attacked for its \$150 contribution in support of performances at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and conservative hysteria over purportedly dangerous bloody towels generated increased attention in the mainstream liberal press for a short time. See Stephanie Cash, “Ron Athey at P.S. 122,” *Art in America*, February 1995, 99-101; John Edward McGrath, “Trusting in Rubber: Performing Boundaries During the AIDS Epidemic,” *The Drama Review* 39.2 (1995): 21-39; Patrick Cambell and Helen Spackman, “With/out An-aesthetic: The Terrible Beauty of Franko B.,” *The Drama Review* 42.4 (1998): 56-67.

body bags and buries them under a mound of dirt. Although the narrative content of these pieces is drawn from Athey's life experience, he does not perform alone and is not the only one to suffer. For example, *Four Scenes* begins with a naked, arrow-pierced St. Sebastian figure (Pigpen, an androgynous female performer) trembling next to Athey in "Holy Woman" drag as he tells the story of a faith healer from his childhood who supposedly bore stigmata and his disappointment that she did not actually bleed when he met her. Athey differs from the other artists whom I discuss in this chapter by bringing on stage just the sort of modern tribe that Fakir talks about, and both the tribe as a whole and the individual performers confound any binary gender analysis.⁹⁰

Interestingly enough, self-mutilation as a "feminine" practice has made the news alongside "masculine" masochism, but remains squarely positioned as pathology.⁹¹ Many trauma survivors, for example, habitually dissociate from their immediate bodily experience as a way to cope with what they have been through. Some of them then cut their skin in order to produce a sense of reintegration and avoid a psychotic break. Favazza describes the act:

The cutting causes blood to appear and stimulates nerve endings in the skin. When this occurs cutters first are able to verify that they are alive, and then are able to focus attention on their skin border and to perceive

⁹⁰Since 1995, Athey has mostly presented his work outside the United States. His first solo performance, *Solar Anus* (2001), premiered at Kanonhalle in Copenhagen. See Athey's home page, n.d., <<http://www.ronathey.com>>, (cited 2 September 2001); the Kanonhallen conference site, n.d., <<http://www.kanonhallen.net/engelsk/frameset.htm>>, (cited January 2001). Some members of Athey's performance tribe have gone on to create independent work; for example, Julie Tolentino (one of the lesbian brides from *Four Scenes*) presented a group work called *The Bottom Project* (2000) at the Kitchen in New York. See Maura Nguyen Donohue, "Full Frontal Tolentino Bottoms Out," 2000, <http://www.danceinsider.com/f1010_2.html>, (cited 22 July 2001).

⁹¹See, e.g., Marilee Strong, *A Bright Red Scream: Self-Mutilation and the Language of Pain* (New York: Viking, 1998), 36-47; Jennifer Egan, "The Thin Red Line," *New York Times Magazine*, 27 July 1997, 20-25ff.

the limits of their bodies. The efficacy of this process is startling; skin cutting almost always terminates episodes of depersonalization.⁹²

A healing process is therefore initiated by the act of wounding, with the pain often less important than the production of blood or some other visible sign. Self-injury can also give a sense of control that is otherwise missing, and produce sensation for those who feel benumbed. Finally, cutting serves to define the body's boundaries. Didier Anzieu suggests that self-inflicted pain is a strategy for reclaiming a body experienced as existing only "on sufferance." When one's body is "emptied of affect, reduced to a mechanical functioning, adequate but bringing no satisfaction. . . . merely a body of need, of mishandled need at that," then the voluntary embodiment of pain is an experience lived "in one's own name."⁹³

The contrast between piercing or tattooing and self-cutting may be more apparent than substantive. Unless it is carried out in absolute secrecy, self-cutting also communicates—regardless of its psychological etiology or function for the cutter. Clinicians describe the manipulation of family, friends, and therapists. At the very least, cutting communicates distress. Socially, it is a highly effective means of communication, *if* it can be received. Often those surrounding the cutter cannot tolerate the message being sent; in fact, dysfunctional communication is often what makes such an extreme method necessary—the cutter has no other way to speak. (Recall the image of Gina Pane holding a razor blade to her mouth.)

The difference between the painful body art actions by Pane and Abramović that I discussed earlier and Flanagan's or Fakir's enthusiastic performance of masochism is

⁹²Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*, 148.

⁹³Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 205-6. See Jones, *Body Art*, for an extensive and well thought-out application of Anzieu's theory to body art. See also Barent W. Walsh and Paul M. Rosen, *Self-Mutilation: Theory, Research, and Treatment* (New York: Guilford, 1988).

comparable to the difference between private self-cutting and an affirmative body modification such as a tattoo or piercing; however, Athey's work troubles both the distinction and the division by gender. He talks about his own adolescent cutting as a desperate, self-destructive prelude to his heroin addiction, in sharp contrast to the redemptive force of his later tattooing and piercing. Yet he acknowledges that they are linked. The difference is the context within which they are performed. Like Pane (and many other body artists), Athey performs as a form of social critique and activism. Like Abramović (in the 1990s), he plays against theatrical conventions even while making use of them. Like Abramović and Flanagan, he includes autobiographical information within his performances. Unlike any of these artists (but like many other body artists whose work I do not address here), he speaks not only for but *to* a specific community whose interests are not addressed by mainstream culture.

The question with which I end this section is why Fakir, Flanagan, and Athey caught the attention of documentary (as opposed to "art") filmmakers, and moreover why the films were considered to have enough commercial potential to warrant a home-video release. Although they are obscure by industry standards, even an obscure film gets more exposure than an art performance. All three are listed on the Blockbuster website, although none is available for rental. *Sick* is listed on the Amazon site as well, and I was able to rent it at a commercial video store. These films are more readily available than tapes of Marina Abramović's work, which are handled by non-profit media arts organizations. To see Gina Pane's performance tapes, I had to travel to Amsterdam. The primary difference is that *Sick*, *Hallelujah!*, and *Dances Sacred and Profane* are documentaries, not documentation. But no one has made a documentary about Pane. Abramović and Orlan are busily documenting themselves, in theatrical performance and CD ROM respectively.

Why has mainstream American culture shown interest in these artists? The fact that “reality”-based entertainment is increasingly popular has some explanatory value, as does the fact that they are American rather than European. More importantly, they are male and the other artists I discuss are female. The relative neglect of female artists is well known—I must note that the closest I can come to a female equivalent of Ed Harris’s film *Pollock* (2000) is *I Shot Andy Warhol* (1996), and Valerie Solanas is too obscure for this film about her to have an eponymous title. Another important difference is that Fakir, Flanagan, and Athey present themselves as sexual masochists, whereas Pane, Orlan, and Abramović keep their sexual practices private. The latter artists speak for women, or even for people generally, and many other voices are available to speak for these groups. One can look away from the uncomfortable excess of their performances and acknowledge receipt of the explicit messages in less painful formats. Other voices, easier to listen to, tell us that women are oppressed by standards of beauty, that people are insensitive to one another and to the state of the world, that culture and the family are repressive. The same cannot be true for S/M, where the affirmation of volitional pain is central to the message. Flanagan, Fakir, and Athey are perceived as speaking for a sexual-preference minority at a time when a great variety of queer voices are being allowed into mainstream discourse—at least on its fringes.

One can imagine various responses. Someone active in the S/M subculture might see Fakir, Flanagan, or Athey as a spokesperson. Anyone who feels oppressed might imagine being a super-masochist—*Sick* makes it clear that Flanagan’s canny parody of Superman does makes him a hero to the kids at CF camp. Furthermore, anyone might see himself or herself as open-minded by virtue of “understanding” a previously incomprehensible sort of behavior; or one might become newly aware of one’s own limitations. Perhaps S/M is a last frontier: the battles for women’s rights and

gay rights have made queer practices increasingly acceptable to many and increasingly visible to everyone.

Since the 1990s, the bearing of “stigmata” has itself become glamorous. The “look” is to some extent a commodification of the punk movement and a domestication of formerly transgressive signs. Flanagan, Fakir, and Athey were all involved with the S/M scene in Los Angeles, which *Hallelujah!* helps to place in the context of post-punk alternative culture. Piercing, branding, and tattooing were logical extensions of punk body-marking of the late 1970s and early 1980s that claimed unhappiness, disenfranchisement, and lack of a viable future and displayed them as quasi-virtues. Favazza argues that culturally sanctioned and pathological self-mutilation in fact serve much the same purpose; that is, “to correct or prevent a pathologically destabilizing condition that threatens the community, the individual, or both.” He also points out that “A psychiatric diagnosis *cannot* be presumed in persons who engage in body piercing, branding, tattoos, and so forth.”⁹⁴

Margo DeMello argues that the discourse of the “modern primitive” movement of which Fakir is the avatar denies the working-class history of tattooing in the United States and replaces it with a “new history based on the histories of non-Western, non-industrialized people who practice tattooing.” For the modern primitive, these people represent an ideal, with social relations based upon equality and people living “in harmony with both nature and their own internal desires.” DeMello argues that “the creation of this new past sanctions a cultural tradition that was once seen as low class and, through the essentialist language of primitivism, naturalizes it.”⁹⁵ Although Athey and his company see their bodily practices as evidence that the Western tradition of

⁹⁴Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*, 222, 287.

⁹⁵Margo DeMello, *A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 182-83.

keeping the body clean is breaking down, they also acknowledge that their tribal tattoos and ritual dances are a form of imperialistic stealing. In the absence of religion, a functional belief system, or an effective support system, borrowed ritual practices have provided Athey and his fellow performers with the means to perform *communitas* on stage in defiance of a homophobic culture. Yet there are limits to willful recontextualization. For example, Athey finally covered the Tibetan swastika tattoo on the back of his neck because he couldn't bear having it misinterpreted as a hate symbol, an interpretation all too easily reinforced by his other "skinhead" features (shaved head and leather jacket).

Furthermore, visibility is not fashion, and S/M is fashionable—but why? The recuperation of masochism and S/M as politically subversive is a phenomenon of the 1990s, fueled in part by Michel Foucault's explication of power relations and Judith Butler's work on gender performativity.⁹⁶ As Leo Bersani notes, the "political rescue" of S/M depends upon the claim that it is a game, within which the master-slave relation is aestheticized.⁹⁷ Lynda Hart says that the emphasis on power is a result of the long history of denial within psychoanalytic theory that masochists actually desire pain.⁹⁸ Developments in pain theory have an effect as well. Opiate receptors on nerve cells, endorphins, and enkephalins were discovered in the late 1970s, leading to research on endogenous pain-control systems.⁹⁹ The term "endorphin" quickly found its way into

⁹⁶See, e.g., Anne McClintock, "Maid to Order: Commercial S/M and Gender Power," in *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*, ed. Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 207-31.

⁹⁷Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 89-90.

⁹⁸Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism (Between Men—Between Women)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 134.

⁹⁹Melzack and Wall, *Challenge of Pain*, 169-73. Endorphins are "endogenous morphine-like substances." Enkephalins are "opioid substances 'in the brain.'"

popular discourse, from the “runner’s high” to S/M.¹⁰⁰ Bersani further observes that biochemical descriptions of leathersex in effect de-pain masochistic pain. In other words, an emphasis on the release of opioids as a result of painful practices leads to the conclusion that “the masochist, just like everyone else, pursues only pleasure”; in fact, the masochist wants *more* pleasure and is willing to tolerate the extreme pain needed to reach “that biochemical threshold.”¹⁰¹

Whatever may actually occur during an S/M scene, the way in which masochistic role playing enters the popular imaginary instantiates a phenomenon about which I speculate in Chapter Five: Placing oneself temporarily in the victim role makes it easier to cope with one’s actual role as victimizer. For one thing, mainstream S/M is largely heterosexualized. However “queer” Flanagan may have been, he is reassuringly inscribed within a loving male/female relationship. Fakir is similarly coupled, although his public persona is not defined by a private relationship. For some, these two men might provide a relatively safe ground for identificatory fantasy—a “walk on the wild side” that unsettles but does not derail standards of normalcy. Bersani suggests that the inversion of power relationships in representations of S/M might simply solidify the existing order of things:

The transformation of the brutal, all-powerful corporate executive (by day) into the whimpering, panty-clad servant of a pitiless dominatrix (by night) is nothing more than a comparatively invigorating release of tension. The concession to a secret and potentially enervating need to shed the master’s exhausting responsibilities and to enjoy briefly the irresponsibility of total powerlessness allows for a comfortable return to

¹⁰⁰See, e.g., Geoffrey Mains, *Urban Aborigines: a Celebration of Leathersexuality* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1984); “The View from a Sling,” in *Leatherfolk*, 233–46.

¹⁰¹Bersani, *Homos*, 93, 99.

a position of mastery and oppression the morning after, when all the “other side” has been, at least for a time, whipped out of the executive’s system.¹⁰²

I do not suggest that this explains anything about Flanagan’s, Fakir’s, or Athey’s sexuality; however, it does explain something about the current fascination with masochists that opened a tiny niche for films about them.

David Savran argues persuasively that the phantasm of the white male as victim plays a central role in contemporary American culture, beginning with the Beats imagining themselves in the 1950s as “white niggers”; developing into the hippie and the political radical of the 1960s; and culminating in “the angry white male, the sensitive male, the male searching for the Wild Man within, the white supremacist, the spiritual male.” Savran says that the formerly dissident and marginal position of the masochist became central and hegemonic in the 1970s

because it represents an attempt by white men to respond to and regroup in the face of particular social and economic challenges: the reemergence of the feminist movement; the limited success of the civil rights movement in redressing gross historical inequities through affirmative action legislation; the rise of the lesbian and gay rights movements; the failure of America’s most disastrous imperialistic adventure, the Vietnam War; and, perhaps most important, the end of the post-World War II economic boom and the resultant and steady decline in the income of white working- and lower-middle-class men.¹⁰³

¹⁰²Ibid., 87.

¹⁰³David Savran, *Taking it Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 5.

The twentieth-century *figure* of the male masochist is thus both transgressive and conservative.

Anesthetic Discourse in the 1990s: Orlan

*Carnal Art considers the acceptance of the agony of childbirth to be anachronistic and ridiculous. Like Artaud it rejects the divine judgment. Henceforth we shall have epidurals, local anaesthetics and multiple analgesics! Hurray for the morphine! (Vive la morphine!) Down with the pain! (A bas la douleur!)*¹⁰⁴

Orlan was born in France in 1947 and was active in the 1970s, when Pane and Abramović were staging their painful actions. Although her work at that time was comparable to that of many other feminist conceptual artists—and Valie Export in particular—none of it could be interpreted as self-harm. Then in 1990 she began a project entitled *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan*. To say that Orlan has “undergone” a series of operations that incorporate facial features selected from canonical works of art is misleading. She has meticulously staged her surgeries, working a significant shift in the balance of power between surgeon and patient by having the operating room painted to her specifications, commissioning costumes by well-known fashion designers for herself and the surgical personnel, and not only having the procedure videotaped but for *Omnipresence* (1993) arranging live telecommunication with galleries around the world.¹⁰⁵

The artist began this project by digitally combining an image of her own face with representations of Greek goddesses “chosen not for the canons of beauty they are

¹⁰⁴Orlan, “Carnal Art Manifesto,” in *Border Crossings* 17 (1998): 46.

¹⁰⁵See Tanya Augsberg, “Orlan’s Performative Transformations of Subjectivity,” in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 285-314; Jill O’Bryan, “Saint Orlan Faces Reincarnation,” *Art Journal* 56.4 (1997): 50-56.

supposed to represent, but for their histories.”¹⁰⁶ After reworking the combined image “as any painter does, until the final portrait emerged and it was possible to stop and sign it,” Orlan set about altering her own physiognomy to match the computer-generated image. Her project is, first and foremost, an embodied critique of the ways in which women are coerced into adhering to an impossible standard of beauty. Orlan is working hard, with personal appearances, her website, and the publication of a CD ROM, to place the surgical work in the context of her performance practice of the last thirty years. But the surgeries tap into something far more profound than her discourse, and that “something” revolves around pain.

Orlan repeatedly explains that she has no desire to suffer. She acknowledges the spectator’s discomfort and apologizes: “Sorry to have to make you suffer, but know that I do not suffer—unlike you—when I watch these images” (1). Nor does she suffer during the surgery, which is carried out with the help of local anesthetic. Yet critics focus upon the pain and the *cut*. Carey Lovelace describes the surgeon “sawing away, methodically scraping out flesh from below the hairline.”¹⁰⁷ Annie Griffin says: “We see the surgeon’s knife slide beneath the skin of her cheek, almost reaching her mouth, which is moving.” A bit later, she continues: “a fold of cheek skin is hanging by her ear. I feel sick.”¹⁰⁸ As Parveen Adams puts it, “The body of suffering is produced in the spectator, if not the patient.”¹⁰⁹ Most attempts to create meaning from this body of

¹⁰⁶Orlan, “Conference,” n.d., <http://www.cicv.fr/creation_artistique/online/orlan/conference/extract3.html>, (cited 19 April 2001). Except where otherwise specified, citations to Orlan’s statements refer to this URL, by “extract” number.

¹⁰⁷Carey Lovelace, “Orlan: Offensive Acts,” *Performing Arts Journal* 17 (1995): 13.

¹⁰⁸Annie Griffin, “Facial Figurations,” *New Statesman & Society* 9.398, 12 April 1996: 30.

¹⁰⁹Parveen Adams, “Operation Orlan,” in *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Difference* (London: Routledge, 1996), 143.

suffering focus on skin and identity.¹¹⁰ Orlan's flayed face gives a glimpse of the abject—that is, of everything that one must “permanently thrust aside in order to live,” an effect produced by “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”¹¹¹

In April 2001, I finally saw Orlan in the flesh after having heard and read for nearly a decade about her performances of plastic surgery as art. This is the performance that I want to analyze—not the surgeries, but the way Orlan uses them in conversation. When she shows the video of *Omnipresence*, I remember her request to resist any reflexive response to the images and to “do what you probably do when you watch the news on television. It is a question of not letting yourself be affected by the images, and of continuing to reflect upon what is behind them” (1)—the exact opposite of the effect Gina Pane wanted to achieve. I try to watch. Descriptions of the incision in front of the ear and the face peeled off, together with my previous experience of strong visceral responses to pain, lead me to anticipate a heightened awareness of my own face, with some tingling or an ache around the jaw.

Contrary to my expectation, I experience no empathic pain or even dys-appearance while watching the video.¹¹² As the surgeon's tools work under the skin in front of Orlan's ear, however, I begin to cry, and before long I must avert my eyes. In fact, this *is* what I do when I watch the news on television. In both cases, I can reflect

¹¹⁰See Philip Auslander, “The Surgical Self: Body Alteration and Identity,” in *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1997), 126-40; Adams, “Operation Orlan,” 147; Lovelace, “Offensive Acts,” 18; Jill O'Bryan, “Penetrating Layers of Flesh: Carving In/Out the Bodies of Orlan and Medusa, Artaud and Marsyas,” *Women & Performance* 11.1 (1999): 51. For a contrasting focus on the body's materiality, see Augsburg, “Orlan's Performative Transformations,” 291; Jones, *Body Art*, 324-25, n.87, 97.

¹¹¹Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, ed. and trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3-4.

¹¹²As I discuss in Chapter One, dys-appearance is the abnormal increase in awareness of one's own body brought about by pain or pleasure.

upon what is behind the images, but I cannot look at them. Orlan says that images from which one wants to look away “plunge in and strike directly where it hurts, without passing through the habitual filters” (1). She is right: her very persuasive rationale for this project has no effect whatsoever upon my emotional response to the violation of her body. As I turn away from the video, I wonder exactly what upsets me so much. Ultimately, I realize that I am most disturbed by the rupture between event and experience; that is, Orlan’s refusal to feel the injury, the very distance from embodied experience that makes it possible for her to speak dispassionately about “the images” of her surgery and healing.

After her presentation, Orlan talks to the audience. The discussion inevitably turns to pain, which she refuses to perform but which spectators insist upon seeing. Regardless of what Orlan says about her work, spectators see the signs of suffering and sometimes appear to be angry that she will not confirm the accuracy of their perception. She acknowledges the expected reactions, having heard them many times by now, but denies the assumptions made by those who voice them. This is a major component of the communicative event that she stages: Orlan refuses to acknowledge the conventional meanings encoded within the images that she presents, and spectators misread her alternative codes. On this day one woman who has obviously been crying asks about the pain that she sees in the post-surgery photos of bruised eye sockets and puffy skin. (In the Sandra Gering Gallery, the artist displayed 41 of the composite portraits and added a photo of the bruised, bloated, and bandaged “face of the day” for each day of the “quarantine” period following the surgery. They resemble the photos of abused women displayed in the New York subways as part of a campaign against domestic violence in the late 1990s—although in the latter case, the bruises were created by a makeup artist.) Orlan explains once again that she experiences no pain. There is some discomfort, but she uses analgesics during recovery and does not suffer.

Orlan's explanations of her work do not explain its performative force. She could make her point about the tyranny of images without the surgery,¹¹³ or she could have her face altered and show the result. What is implicated by showing, repeatedly, the peeling away of her skin? Does she repeat this interaction again in 2001 only in order to reawaken interest in a CD-ROM that documents a stalled project or out of frustration that her message is still misunderstood? Do spectators insist on misunderstanding because Orlan forecloses the intersubjective experience of suffering? She evokes a visceral response, then denies the validity of that response; produces a body of suffering in the spectator, then declares that she is exempt and that the spectator should be so as well.

Orlan, like Virginia Woolf, appears to believe that compassion is useless because it immobilizes the spectator.¹¹⁴ As Gina Pane discovered, the problem with using painful actions to communicate is that spectators are too deeply disturbed to receive the communication. Many dismiss the work out of hand. Some spectators may feel compelled to understand the source of their perplexity and distress—as was the case for me. I still tend to look away, but not as quickly; more importantly, I think about what I have seen even though the thoughts make me uncomfortable. Painful body art has not desensitized me but has, rather, increased my capacity to receive communication about suffering. Paradoxically, both Orlan (who wants me to look at the images in spite of my discomfort and to think about what's behind them) and Gina Pane (who wants me to watch without anesthetic) have their way with me.

Amelia Jones argues that body art “provides the *possibility* for radical engagements that can transform the way we think about meaning and subjectivity (both

¹¹³She has done just this with the series *Self-Hybridations*. In addition to Orlan's website, see Pierre Bourgeade and Orlan, *Orlan: Self-Hybridations* (Romainville: Al Dante, 1999).

¹¹⁴See discussions in Chapters One and Three.

the artist's and our own.)"¹¹⁵ The possibility comes about because the artist's body/self is implicated in the work in all its particularity, and as such solicits the spectator's engaged response, in all its particularity as well, including embodied desire (or repulsion). Jones argues that body art makes it difficult for the critic or historian to maintain a "disinterested" position, and from that position pronounce upon the meaning and value of the work. As a result, body art has the capacity to "destabilize the structures of conventional art history and criticism."¹¹⁶

Contingency is all too easily conflated with biography and runs the danger of circumscribing the artist's work within a narrative of *personal* trauma. For example, Kristine Stiles voices dismay about the "self-denigrating and self-destructive" attitudes evident in photographs documenting women's performance art. She goes on to refer to "the horrific suicidal mania of Orlan's serial body-reconstructions," stressing the danger of the spinal blocks required for Orlan to remain conscious during these performances. For Stiles, the "self-punishment" evident in Orlan's work "suggests exposure at some early point to identity-shattering psychological experiences, the dissociative effects of which now appear in her art in a manner that indicates posttraumatic stress disorder."¹¹⁷ Unlike Abramović and Athey, Orlan excludes autobiographical elements from her art. Interviews are hardly more informative, but one detail stands out: Orlan's first "impromptu" surgical performance in 1978 was occasioned by the emergency termination of an ectopic pregnancy. The artist turned her

¹¹⁵Jones, *Body Art*, 14.

¹¹⁶Jones, *Body Art*, 5.

¹¹⁷Kristine Stiles, "Never Enough is *Something Else*: Feminist Performance Art, Avant-Gardes, and Probity," in *Contours of the Theatrical Avant-Garde: Performance and Textuality*, ed. James M. Harding (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 240, 247, 256.

medical crisis into an opportunity, having the procedure videotaped and the tape shown at a performance symposium in place of her scheduled speech.¹¹⁸

On the day that I see her, at least, Orlan's discussion of pain and anesthetic all centers around childbirth, and the Judeo-Christian understanding of pain as a punishment for original sin and/or an ordeal that builds character. This emphasis is not incidental—it is there in the "Carnal Art Manifesto," quoted as epigraph for this section. As she talks about childbirth, Orlan appears to refuse not only her own suffering but that of others. She expresses at great length her scorn for the choice to experience labor pains, not acknowledging the fact that many women who say "vive la douleur" and "à bas la morphine" do so in order to minimize medical intervention in labor, to reclaim pregnancy as a bodily process rather than an illness, and to wrest control from doctors. Orlan is not critical of medicine, only of art. In the course of taking control of her surface image, she hands "the body"—her body—over to medicine. She could hardly do otherwise, given the complexity of the alterations that she has designed. But her necessary physical passivity during the cutting and peeling away of her skin reinscribes all of her verbal discourse within the very scenario of disempowerment that she sets out, as a feminist, to speak against.

But *even if* Orlan's earlier life experience connects to her current discourse about the pain of childbirth, does that information elucidate her work? To give a biographical explanation is to run the risk of reducing the artist's elaborate conceptual framework to a screen that conceals and props up individual psychopathology. Pathologizing as *individuals* those who attempt to launch a social critique has been one of the tactics most effectively used to disempower women. This is not a project that I

¹¹⁸Augsburg, "Orlan's Performative Transformations," 287-88, citing Gladys C. Fabre, "Femme sur les Barricades, Orlan Brandit Laser Time" in *Orlan Skai et Ski et Video*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Galerie J. and J. Donguy, 1984); Orlan, "Signalement d'Orlan," interview by Maurice Mallet, *VST* 23-24 (Sept-Dec 1991).

want to undertake. I agree with Augsburg that, although questions about Orlan's sanity or her history of trauma might be inevitable, one must also try to understand what the work of art might have to say. Augsburg proposes that Orlan's refusal to speak of herself as suffering is a feminist strategy, a refusal "to be associated with the sick/mentally ill woman."¹¹⁹ Orlan's refusal of pain is not necessarily a rejection of embodied experience; rather, she insists that her feelings and her subjectivity are none of our business. But the artist's attempt to reinscribe is highly problematic and tends to reinforce (even for thoughtful and well-intentioned critics) her status as the kind of hysterical "beauty victim" against which she directs her art.

Orlan is not alone in being "explained away" by means of biography, of course. Athey not only performs his autobiography but also explicitly compares his performance works to the experience of being an emotionally disturbed teenager: "It's expression but it's like a temper tantrum" that results when you are "so frustrated and so helpless that all you can do is turn to your own body." He says that each person in his cast identifies for some reason with the "demonstration of pain to represent how they feel about this life," because they are all "marginalized in different ways, from size to race to gender identity." Physical pain speaks for suffering of all kinds. The fact that the performers themselves identify ways in which their art is contingent upon their personal experience serves as a reminder that the personal is never entirely *private*. As Valie Export said with respect to women, repression leaves

historical scars, traces of ideas inscribed onto the body, stigmata to be exposed by actions with the body. If they are interpreted as pathologies of self-hatred, poor self-esteem, sorrow, subjugation, or even identification with the oppressor, then they are part of the truth of women's history. And the myth is such that only very few women are

¹¹⁹Augsburg, "Orlan's Performative Transformations," 288, 307.

ready to scrape away the veneer. Many prefer the illusion of meaningless glamour to the sovereignty of fully exposed pain and to the *painful energy of resistance*.¹²⁰

Oppression that is tied to race or sexuality is also inscribed on the body and subject to exposure; however, the exposed stigmata are in turn subject to commodification. The garter that Export tattooed on her thigh in *Body Sign Action* (1970) would barely register as resistance today.

The parallel (and primary) thrust of Jones's argument is the value of contingency for the critic and the historian. She advocates a reflexive analysis of *all* art, but placing real physical pain within an aesthetic framework throws the spectator's ethical relation to the spectacle into question. The involvement of those who write about it is even more disturbing. What does Stiles' interest in Orlan and other pain artists say about her, or my dissertation topic, about me?¹²¹ Jones challenges me to address my personal response and my psychic investment in these actions. Examining my own response, I discover that my reaction to the scalpel under Orlan's skin is familiar from occasions upon which I needed to contemplate the surgical violation of my own body—not the surgery itself, but the anticipation. Orlan's discourse leads me indirectly to a new understanding of my reaction to her work and of the place of pain in my lifeworld.

¹²⁰Valie Export, "Aspects of Feminist Actionism," *New German Critique* 47 (1989): 73 (emphasis in the original).

¹²¹Stiles is no more forthcoming than the artists about whom she speculates. A few weeks before Orlan's presentation at NYU, however, I listened to Jennifer Parker-Starbuck wonder about the personal history behind Stelarc's alienation from "the body," as he refers to his own body, the primary medium for his artistic explorations. She went on to discuss not his personal history but her own investment in the question and the history behind her fascination. Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, "Terminating Trauma: Finding Solace in the Cyborg," *7th Performance Studies Conference*, Mainz, 28 March - 1 April 2001.

If strictly adhered to, however, an emphasis on contingency produces confession rather than analysis, thereby removing not only the artist but also the spectator/analyst from the social realm. Little would be gained by replacing Orlan's elided trauma narrative with my own. I would be left with the same questions: Why perform this suffering? Why watch it? Why now?

Conclusions

Orlan raises issues about the body and phenomenology different from those raised in the 1970s. The question whether the face can represent the self is indeed central to her project of surgical "reincarnation," but peripheral to my project of examining performative pain; however, Orlan's dialogue with her audience raises different questions: To what extent is pain a source of identity? Could we, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, do without suffering as a means to define ourselves (both as individuals and as imagined communities)? Those who are sympathetic to Orlan's project tend to share a fascination with the "posthuman" body that she, Stelarc, and certain cyborg theorists champion. The figure of the cyborg is useful as a means to sever the deterministic connection between the "natural" material body and personal identity. Pain brings one back to the material body—without, however, making its "naturalness" necessary. Optimism about a painless future betrays a simplistic conception of pain. ("Henceforth we shall have epidurals, local anaesthetics and multiple analgesics!") The proliferation of chronic pain syndromes and treatment centers during the last thirty years shows that pain cannot be so simply done away with, and AIDS is the most dramatic of the new illnesses that have shown that *bodies* cannot be so easily transcended or even managed. Those who treat chronic pain and those who advocate home birth tend to champion a "postbiomedical" body, often (but not necessarily) construed as "natural."

The last thirty years have also seen an increase in self-mutilating behavior, which often functions to ward off feelings of depersonalization. One might read the increased incidence of such behaviors (socially sanctioned and not), along with the aesthetized performance of similar behaviors and concomitant spectator reception, as evidence that we live in an increasingly depersonalized culture and that something should change. This was precisely the point that Gina Pane (and many other body artists) wanted to make in the 1970s, when action art was still transgressive, still in revolt against commodity culture, not yet reincorporated into the gallery system. Body art began as a primitivistic enterprise, with the “primitive” counterposed as a utopic alternative to modern industrial culture. Pain exemplified intense physical sensation, the epitome of the primitive and the authentic.

Body art in the 1970s reflected the political viewpoints of the 1960s—that changing one’s perception or language could (hopefully) change the world, and the accretions of culture could (again hopefully) be scraped away—but its conceptual bases were eroded by the death of any New Left that could imagine itself as unified and the development of identity politics. When painful art re-emerged in the 1990s, it often enough looked back to and revised performances and ideas from the 1970s. But the category “primitive” was systematically dismantled, if not erased, as part of the post-modern project. Rather than being universalized, the “new” pain was most often particularized through a connection with the performer’s life history. To postulate a uniform social function for painful body art would be misleadingly reductive. The body itself is contested, and body art is a fascinating but marginal site of contestation: Artists use painful body modifications to criticize dominant culture. Their transgressive practices may be reincorporated as fashionable commodities, but popular culture is transformed in the process.

In the late 1960s, Claude Lévi-Strauss suggested that phenomena generate intense academic interest just as they disappear. In the early 1990s, Emily Martin used this idea as a springboard for speculation about the then-current flurry of interest in the body (at least among academics in the United States). Lévi-Strauss posited the disappearance of the “primitive”; Martin, of the reproductive “body.”¹²² As I suggested earlier, however, the “thing” that captures such interest as it reaches the brink of disappearance never quite existed—at least, whatever *did* exist was distinct from what was imagined. The “thing” is conjured up to meet a cultural need, and then as the needs of the culture are transformed, the phenomenon appears to vanish or to be radically altered. The “primitive” that was so important to Western industrialized culture during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century became an untenable category during the transition from Ford-ist mass production to flexible accumulation. By the same token, the bodily boundaries sketched out as a feature of late capitalism must be redrawn after the collapse of world Communism. As the twentieth century ended, the imaginary body of Western culture fluctuated between intense feeling (the hidden life of male masochists and female cutters) and lack of feeling (fantasies about the cyborg and virtual reality). Pain, as a phenomenon, is not disappearing, but its performative function is in flux.

¹²²Emily Martin, “The End of the Body?,” *American Ethnologist* 19 (1992): 121-40, citing Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques: An Anthropological Study of Primitive Societies in Brazil*, trans. John Russell (New York: Atheneum, 1967).

Conclusions

Like the experiences that are categorized as pain, performances of pain result from various causes and are characterized by qualities that vary “along a number of sensory and affective dimensions”¹; therefore, a unified conclusion about performative pain is hardly possible. Without exactly generalizing, however, I propose to read across the material that I have examined. Accepting Elizabeth Grosz’s caveat that “bodies . . . are not only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature itself,” I begin by reviewing the kinds of bodies that these painful performances entail and the kinds of imagined communities they construct.²

All of these performances of suffering are best understood within their specific sociohistorical context. In each case, the body in pain was situated to communicate with spectators, for whom multiple responses were possible. These performances influenced and were in turn shaped by the culture’s understanding of pain and the uses to which it was put. Pain is not incommunicable; rather, it lends urgency to communication. Any other sensory experience can take the place of pain if the intention is to communicate that for which rational language is inadequate. But pain is particularly appropriate as a

¹Ronald Melzack and Patrick Wall, *The Challenge of Pain*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 71.

²Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), x.

form of metonymic reference to suffering and injustice in the world. More importantly, pain creates a greater *need* to communicate than any other form of sensory experience.

Like *Angels in America* in the 1990s, *Philoctetes* uses the pain of illness to interpellate the spectator as a member of a utopic imagined community. Both of these plays were staged during periods of apparent recovery from social crisis. The ancient Greeks conceived of pain as an emotion; that is, a movement of the soul, with no sharp distinction made between mental and physical pain. In Sophocles' play, Philoctetes' unseemly pain has removed him from the cooperative social sphere, but he is essential to victory against Troy and must be reclaimed. Pain is a contagious emotion, however, and Neoptolemus nearly joins Philoctetes in anti-social exile. This pain is supernatural in its origin and its cure. The Greeks must figure out how to interpret and respond to divine omens, how to do what is required at the moment, even if it is inconsistent and contradicts past actions. The difficulty is ultimately resolved through divine intervention.

Philoctetes creates a memory of an inclusive society: the heroic, orderly, and courageous Athens that can reclaim those whom it was forced to temporarily reject. If it is understood that the gods let the Athenians know when to fight and when to wait, then past defeats and disorder are shown to serve a purpose in gaining *future* victory.

Suffering and losses were necessary, even if they did not seem so at the time.

Philoctetes helps to heal divisiveness by erasing it from social memory, thereby making the community more effective against its external enemies. The distinction between

Athenians and contemporary others (such as Spartans) is taken for granted, but the play defines the present Athens against the divided city of the recent past.

Although Greek tragedy includes plenty of suffering, violence is not shown: Agamemnon and Clytemnestra are hacked and Hippolytus torn apart offstage. Why were these events created in the spectator's imagination rather than being enacted? Athenian society not only included but sanctioned violence in certain cases. The law courts put people to death and permitted revenge killings. But public performances of interpersonal violence appear to be rare in classical Athens. Public discourse is about disciplined behavior and the rule of law. Dramatic and legal texts present trainable bodies that can be effectively governed, against a backdrop of superseded violence. Tragedy stages a tension between order and chaos, in which the visible order makes no sense without the implicit disorder.

In the medieval dramas that I examined, order is achieved through suffering. The suffering of Christians is itself orderly, the result of formulaic ordeals and tortures, all of which mimic Christ's Passion. What happens to pagans is less predictable. So God creates an orderly universe for believers. Pain is part of that universe in late medieval drama; in early medieval drama, martyrs are protected from suffering.

Tenth-century bodies are understood as visible manifestations of the soul and of God's will. Beauty is a sign of virtue; ugliness, by implication, of evil. Hrotsvit's conversion plays also equate illness and sinfulness: In *The Conversion of General Gallicanus*, for example, Constantia explains that she was simultaneously converted to Christianity and cured of leprosy. Success and power are signs of virtue; therefore,

obedience to those in power is obedience to God. Hrotsvit's virgin-martyr plays create a community of obedient Christians who act in accord with the wishes of the church and the empire (not always separable from one another). These plays feature two distinct groups of characters, with no movement between groups. Christians are purified by torment and rewarded with eternal life; pagans, debased and destroyed.

Hrotsvit's conversion plays show movement into and out of the Christian community, although the lapse is temporary. In *The Fall and Repentance of Mary*, the pure and devout niece of the hermit Abraham is seduced by a false monk and runs away to a life of carnal pleasures. Abraham eventually rescues her from a brothel, and she returns joyfully to a life of harsh penance. In *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais*, the hermit Pafnutius turns a whore into an anchoress—not exactly an elevation to sainthood, but none of Hrotsvit's martyrs are identified as saints, either.³ If one thinks of Hrotsvit's six dramas as an interrelated body of work, pain-free martyrdom appears as a reward for post-conversion steadfastness, whereas conversion itself entails both danger and suffering.

The bodies that perform late-medieval culture bear the traces of the Black Death, famines, the Hundred Years' War, and a rise in saints' cults as people turned to them for miraculous cures. As Jelle Koopmans suggests, a saint play might well be

³It is worth remembering that beatification was not yet a codified procedure. As I noted in Chapter Five, in the tenth century only those who had been martyred at least a century earlier were considered saints, and the conception of a non-martyred saint developed even later. See Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 21-25.

performed in order to “cajole” God.⁴ In the late-medieval French material that I discussed, illness is a commonplace occurrence to which one must respond appropriately but is neither a punishment nor a cause for compassion, although illness and death require responsible actions by survivors. In *Le Jeu Saint Denis*, Saint Anthonin falls ill and dies. His illness is certainly not a punishment or sign of sinfulness. Nothing is made of his suffering, but the death serves as a trial for the innkeeper who throws his corpse into a refuse pit and steals his money. The problem is not a lack of compassion, but a broken promise and abrogation of duty.

The *Saint Denis* play includes a great variety of characters and different types of conversion: through argument (Lisbie), witnessing (Larcie), and witnessing accompanied by fear (the innkeeper). Those characters who are steadfast (the saints) are understood to be recent converts. Beginning the play in Greece and Rome reminds us that conversion is the essence of Christianity. The boundary of the Christian community can be crossed in only one direction, however—no one lapses, nor does anyone *become* a saint in the course of the play. Although Lisbie and Larcie are put to death after converting, they do not become saints. Furthermore, none of the Romans is redeemed. So the play draws social boundaries that are permeable, but in one direction only and to only a certain category of person—that is, the French bourgeoisie. In late-medieval Paris, public torture and execution were depicted in devotional images, recorded in chronicles and journals, and performed in saint plays. In both the *Parisian Journal* and

⁴Jelle Koopmans, *Le Théâtre des exclus au Moyen Age: Hérétiques, Sorcières et Marginaux* (Paris: Imago, 1997), 25-26.

Le Geu Saint Denis, performances of suffering are structured to produce surprisingly conciliatory responses.

When illness appears as a theme in modern drama prior to the twentieth century, pain remains largely offstage. The tubercular heroines of *La Boheme* and *La Dame aux camélias* engage in no lengthy, blood-spitting fits of coughing. By contrast, late twentieth-century plays such as *Wit* and *Angels in America* put graphic suffering center stage: for the first, caused by cancer; the second, AIDS—diseases that are not mastered by medical science. The dramas focus on the response evoked by the suffering body—both one's own and that of others. Unlike *Philoctetes* or medieval martyr plays, twentieth-century illness dramas use pain to evoke compassion. Fear (such that exhibited by Louis in *Angels*) or lack of feeling (exemplified by the resident who treats *Wit's* protagonist) are positioned as moral failings. Bodies are not identical with selves or souls in these plays, and illness is understood to have a biomedical cause. Contagion certainly forms some sort of conceptual background for *Angels*, since AIDS is central to the play, but it is largely absent from the drama. Those who suffer are not dangerous on account of their infection, although one of them (Roy Cohn) is dangerous for other reasons.

Like Kushner, Ron Athey and Bob Flanagan resist the thing-ness that illness creates. They explicitly stage acts of suffering in defiance of the illness that causes them to suffer in "real" life. The person is not simply the suffering body, nor is he separate or separable from it. Athey's illness provides him with a drive to "make his mark" and be more than "a poor faggot who died of AIDS," but the illness is not the source of his

identity. Athey and his company make themselves insistently visible, as well as their deviance from dominant social norms and the illness from which some of them suffer. At the same time, like Flanagan, they refuse to disappear into the illness. Using a slightly different tactic, Kushner ensures that the moral implications of illness remain ambiguous by multiplying the figures of illness in *Angels*: One character who suffers from AIDS is admirable; the other, despicable. In neither case is moral stature made out to be the result of illness, nor are these two characters transformed or redeemed by suffering. None of these performances is centrally concerned with transcending the body or bodily pain; rather, they insist that the suffering individual remains a complex, multidimensional individual.

Angels presents a permeable community, within which it is no simple matter to remain, but from which it is even more difficult to cut oneself off. By interpellating Roy in spite of himself, and embracing Hannah and Harper, *Angels* sets itself apart from the radical Right and also from the divisiveness within liberal politics. *Angels* engages in an *inclusive* rather than exclusive identity politics. Kushner and his audience are distressed by the failure of the Left in the 1970s, conservative retrenchment in the 1980s, and the collapse of international Communism. The play grapples with the question of how to begin again and not make the same mistakes.

As the medical profession comes to recognize that the body's pain cannot always be treated in isolation from the rest of the person, Western culture at large struggles with related problems. The promises of twentieth-century medicine have come up short in the face of AIDS and chronic pain syndromes at the same time as industrial

technology (of which medicine is a part) reveals its limits in solving problems of hunger and disease across the world *and* across the economic spectrum. Poverty has not been eliminated, seemingly *cannot* be eliminated—a state of affairs both inexcusable and insoluble. If capitalism has won the ideological battle, the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor seems to signal that *we* are the “evil empire,” and the world will only become worse. Now that drugs are available not to cure AIDS but to treat those who are living with it, for example, why can’t they be provided to the African populations who are currently most devastated by this epidemic?

In late twentieth-century performance, bodily suffering most often evokes outrage, whether its cause is illness or injury. Bodies have rights, one of which is freedom from pain. The body is thus a site of control, and postcolonial torture plays use the violated body as a sign of injustice. The suffering body is understood to be separate from consciousness and serves as a means to get at the consciousness of the person who inhabits the body, thereby also serving as a call to action for the spectator. Terrorist regimes use incarceration and torture to control their populace through an effective percepticide; in other words, they force citizens to cease seeing what is going on around them or else cease to lead their daily lives. The theatre of resistance produced within such regimes counters the numbing of percepticide by insisting upon seeing and remembering. In the postcolonial global society, however, the operations of power can be difficult to see, adding a new sort of invisibility to local reigns of terror. The visible local enemy can serve as a screen that obscures global political and economic forces; conversely, a focus on “invisible” forces can disembody and depersonalize suffering.

In addition to outrage, torture plays create anxiety and guilt for spectators, in part because the sides are so clearly distinguished. One wants to be on the “right” side, and any enjoyment of spectacular suffering threatens that positioning. Passive watching, the very act of spectatorship, places one in an ambivalent position. Does *compassion* for theatrical suffering waste potential *passion* against injustice? Agit-prop is designed to produce outrage without compassion, and action without reflection. I accept the proposition that compassion is not enough; but without compassion, where are we? Where do we find a basis for ethical social relations? The alternative is a harsh moral certainty, the danger of which seems to me *much* more serious than the danger that one might be incapacitated by compassion.

Virginia Woolf suggests that if people allowed themselves to experience sympathy for the pain of others, “buildings would cease to rise; roads would peter out into grassy tracks; there would be an end of music and of painting; one great sigh alone would rise to Heaven, and the only attitudes for men and women would be those of horror and despair.”⁵ One can experience this sort of debility in the face of suffering, but the situation is usually temporary. I propose that it serves as a useful check on passion by creating a space for reflection. One is upset, outraged, and depressed. But during the recovery from depression, one has time to think about an appropriate and effective course of action. Listening to suffering can result in energy for change and add impetus to a reasoned and *compassionate* fight against injustice.

⁵Virginia Woolf, “On Being Ill,” in *Collected Essays*, Vol. 4 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 195.

Levinas says that suffering is essentially passive and is perhaps the essence of passivity, because suffering is not “*the performance of an act of consciousness*” but “a submission” to that from which consciousness strains unsuccessfully to turn away. This passivity *is* evil, and it reduces the human being to thing-ness because there is no freedom from the undergoing, no agency, no choice. “Suffering is a pure undergoing.”⁶ I propose that performances of suffering provide a sort of controlled undergoing. For example, in the aftermath of the destruction of the World Trade Center by terrorists on 11 September 2001, I find that I have a need to reawaken my feelings in measured doses, because I cannot cope with the enormity of what has happened. In this case, the absence of spectacular bodily suffering has exacerbated the emotional suffering of survivors. There were very few bodies in pain to care for. As with Greek tragedy, the agony must be imagined. Images and stories connected with the attack remain overwhelming; however, those that are in some way distanced from the current situation but that activate certain emotional responses (fear, mourning) help me to process recent events.

The relevance of postcolonial martyr plays for my imagined American community is radically altered. I am *directly* folded into a world where “such things” as disappearances happen, with perhaps 1000 people held incommunicado by my own government. Our present situation highlights the importance—even the urgency—of

⁶Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” trans. Richard Cohen, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 157.

compassion. Outrage without compassion can only perpetuate suffering. Theatrical performances and body art allow us to practice responding to the pain of others and to reflect upon our responses. They also allow us to experience dangerous emotions, safe from the consequences of our immediate reactions—reactions that run the gamut from unrestrained weeping that is inappropriate in a workplace to vengeance that is unwisely executed.

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