Burning Daylight

Burning Daylight Volume 1 Spring 2012

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Letter from the Founders

When we set about creating a scholarly journal, we envisioned creating a place to house and highlight the impressive scholarship of current students around the country and worldwide. We also wanted to provide our colleagues the opportunity to work on a journal and develop real world skills that will be necessary as we move forth on our academic journeys. For over a year and a half, this journal has been our dream, our labor, our passion, and it is with great pride that I present the first volume of *Burning Daylight*.

I would be remiss to not take this opportunity to thank all of those who helped shape the journal. From its conception, *Burning Daylight* was meant to represent not only the voice of this burgeoning scholastic generation, but also the voice of the Sonoma State University English Department. The way in which the Department—faculty, students, and administrators included—rallied around the project, offering support and insight, shows the caliber of the academic community that we have created. For every email, hallway conversation, commandeered office hour, and answered phone call, I thank everyone that contributed to our dawning effort, and may this be the first volume of many.

Sincerely,

Matthew Martin
Co-Founder and Managing Editor, *Burning Daylight*

Letter from the Editor

I feel honored and humbled to serve as the inaugural Editor of *Burning Daylight*. I am very proud of this year's journal and believe that it not only upholds the literary tradition in which it was founded—drawing on Jack London's words: "The proper function of man is to live, not to exist"—but equally rises to the vision we had in mind at its inception.

I would like to thank the journal staff for their willingness to serve during this inaugural year; the finished product is a culmination of their dedicated hours critically reviewing and responding to the submissions we received. I am indebted to Matthew Martin, my Co-Founder and Managing Editor, for his constant dedication to this project. It has been a privilege over the past year to walk with you on this journey. And lastly, though by no means least, I want to thank the faculty and staff of the English department at Sonoma State University—especially Dr. Hester Williams for her support, encouragement, and enthusiasm throughout the production process.

Finally, turning to the essays within this volume: the topics range from Medieval literature, to Post-Colonial African literature, to literature grappling with gay and lesbian themes, as well as theory based discussions of Lady Gaga and Marina Abramović. These essays represent a wide range of topics and come from all academic levels, yet they possess a common theme: a striving to further our academic conversations with the larger intellectual community through a combination of quality research and innovative thought.

Sincerely,

Nicole De Leon
Co-Founder and Editor, *Burning Daylight*

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What You See Is the Base of All the Faith In The World: Thingly Bodies in The Book of John Mandeville

—Lauren A. Benjamin

The body is an efficient assemblage. Immediately after a heart stops beating, chemical changes occur within the body to activate the process of decomposition: skin shrinks, cells break down, and overall pH changes completely. The once-recognizable organism is transformed from living, breathing person to a biodegraded mass. Although this may sound unnecessarily gory, it is a remarkably resourceful and essential process affirming matter's infinite ingenuity. And, arguably, this isn't the most unnerving aspect of death. Not only is the decomposed body seemingly devoid of individual agency, it is also more importantly devoid of *self*. Since humans have had access to communication, this has been a consistent point of intellectual confusion: Where then does this person, once here but here no longer, go?

In his book on the history of the Christian relic in medieval Europe, Charles Freeman notes that medieval Christianity shared much in common with its polytheistic predecessors, including the veneration of the bones, clothing, and various other possessions either directly or indirectly connected with holy persons (9). As such, it is difficult to pinpoint a distinct beginning of the history of the relic; for all we know, the pre-modern *Homo erectus* may have revered a successful hunter's favorite stone. The point is, relics have long been a part of human history and continue to fulfill a crucial cultural function. As Nicolle Harrity notes, the hallowed place of a medieval saint's bones have their modern equivalent in the celebrity's autograph; the autograph proves that someone who has been deified not only actually exists, but even touched *this particular piece of paper* (1). Saintly relics have a much more critical application in the medieval world, though. Not only do they prove this particular saint existed, they prove the existence of a soul, and the possibility of a life beyond death. Additionally, a discussion of relics becomes particularly apt when viewed in light of their ability to demarcate subject and object, or same and other, particularly with regard to religious and ethnic difference, as will be explored later.

The likely fictional John Mandeville, author of the medieval travel narrative *The Book of John Mandeville*, presents relics in starring roles. If, as Iain Macleod Higgins notes in his critical introduction to the present day English translation, "the work's closest formal analogue is a map" (xi), then relics form those places that are marked with a tacky yellow star: no mere pit stop along the road to somewhere else, but certifiable must-see places well-worth the detour. However, these bodies and objects transcend the merely symbolic in John Mandeville's text and simultaneously become beings in their own right: they are commodities to be stolen,

earthly material capable of harboring disease, objects that must be carried, pre-served, and unabashedly seen. Relics, in other words, "belong to that category, un-usual in Western society, of objects that are both persons and things" (Geary 169).

In this essay, I'll be looking at *The Book of John Mandeville* and the ways in which relics feature as symbolic objects, persons, and things. Throughout Mandev-ille's travels, relics are presented from both an insider and outsider's perspective, for the author dutifully notes the appearance of relics and relic-like objects connected with his own faith as well as that of several others. While the significance of the relics is created in a human likeness, a closer look reveals that the relics themselves help to construct the humans in this text. Moreover, it is things themselves, and a particular people's proper devotion to them, that creates the chasm between Western Christi-anity and Judaism in Mandeville's text—a chasm that is notably absent and, some-what paradoxically, even rendered as *likeness* with regard to the text's other religions.

In his prologue, the Mandeville author immediately presents a Christian pilgrimage to the Holy land "consecrated by the precious body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ" as his text's *raison d'être* (3). As such, relics closely related to Jesus Christ are key. Great pains are taken to describe the crucifixion cross and its composition, as well as the crown of thorns, both of which are said to exist as fragments in multiple locations. Not only do these objects prove the existence of Jesus Christ, they also prove the benevolence of the Lord. For instance, since the crown of thorns was made of hawthorn, "the hawthorn [therefore] has many virtues" (11). Among these virtues is the ability to protect the bearer of hawthorn from bad weather and evil spirits, thereby equating the Lord with protection. This echoes a cultural fascination with the power of the relic; although relics are symbolic of their patron saint, they are also powerful due to their defensive properties. It should be noted, though, that these objects, are holy in their own right; the hawthorn is praised for its many "virtues," only some of which, we can assume, affect human beings. Were these Christly objects not endowed with the ability to protect, they would still be worthy of admiration. This double functionality—as both object and symbol—is what makes the depiction of relics in *The Book of John Mandeville* so noteworthy.

In the Church of Saint Catherine, we again see a unique assemblage of elements that both are things and symbolic objects. Geographically situated at the foot of Mount Sinai, a place which, at least according to the Mandeville author, "no other pilgrimage can compare to," the Church of Saint Catherine was thought to house the bones of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, a popular medieval saint. For the Mandeville author, though, the excursion is no mere human-centered event. Birds, lamps, oil and people all behave in unique, highly orchestrated ways: the birds "flock together once a year and fly there, as if on pilgrimage," carrying with them offerings of olive branches that monks subsequently make into oil and use in lamps that seem to go out and relight of their own accord (36-37). This echoes the kind of nonlinear

assemblage that Jane Bennett describes (with requisite nods to Delueze and Guattari) as a series of causes and effects whose ultimate impact "cannot be grasped at a glance" (42). Although the Mandeville author notes that the birds "have neither natural understanding, nor reason," their role in this assemblage is no less important for that (37). Birds, lamps, oil, bones, and monks all have equal agency here.

The ostensible reason for this miraculous interchange of creatures and things is "that glorious virgin" Saint Catherine, herself become a thing in death. The marvelous description of yet another self-contained world of persons and things is worth quoting at length:

> The prelate of the monks shows the relics to the pilgrims, and with a silver instrument he rubs the bones and a little oil appears out of them just like sweat that resembles neither oil nor balm but is more blackish, and he gives a little of it to the pilgrims, for not a large amount comes out. Then he shows Saint Catherine's head and the cloth in which she was wrapped, which is still all bloody. The angels brought her body wrapped in this cloth to Mount Sinai and buried her with it. And they show the bush that burns and is not consumed in which our Lord spoke to Moses and enough other relics. (37)

One would have difficulty imagining what these "other" relics could be; those that are mentioned are so inordinately fascinating. This passage reflects the strange boundary-crossing inherent in the medieval relic for several reasons. Firstly, we see the strange intermingling of persons and things, where, true to form, John Mandeville gives both equal weight. It is not the prelate who touches the bones of Saint Catherine but an intermediary "silver instrument," and it is this nameless instrument that produces the oil that, as far as we know, has no real value. Later, the author describes lamps that go out in the interregnum between the death of a prelate and the choosing of another. In the Church of Saint Catherine, we see a strange mix of humans affecting things, things affecting things, and things affecting humans, the type of assemblage Jane Bennett would describe as a "living, throbbing confederation" (23).

Secondly, this passage does a lot of interesting work with the idea of body and selfhood. Excepting Caroline Walker Bynum's convincing argument to the contrary, much scholarship on medieval Christianity presupposes an uncomfortable and divided relationship between body and soul. On the one hand, the Christian body is a temple that carries the soul: as such, many Christian rituals, including baptism and communion, center around the body and celebrate its corporeality. On the other hand, the Christian body itself is the very antithesis of the spiritual soul. Sin and vice are distinctly *bodily* problems and an equal number of medieval Christian rituals such as self-flagellation and fasting were practiced with the aim of overcoming the sinful body. Only in taking leave of their bodies after death can souls achieve

perfection. At the very least, it can be said that there existed an uneasy marriage of these dualities in the medieval Christian mind. Seen thusly, the contradictory image of Saint Catherine's head—rather than skull—wrapped in a still-bloody towel can be viewed as encompassing both the body as person or symbol as well as the body as thing for a very specific reason. While St. Catherine's relics symbolize the holiness of the soul, they also do so by reaffirming the thingness of the body.

In some ways, it is the physicality of relics—their very "thingness," distinct from purpose or function—that rectifies the body/soul anxiety of early Christianity. Many medieval texts, including *The Book of John Mandeville*, testify to the ability of a saint's body to avoid the uncomfortable transition of bodies into decomposed non-persons. Indeed, saints were often canonized after being unearthed and discovered to be whole (Freeman 21); interestingly enough, it was their bodies that lent legitimacy to their souls. In this way, a saint's finger, head, or hand asserts its dominance over a very human process and refuses to succumb to the complete transformation of person to thing and becomes, instead, both subject and thing, embodying that "audacious ambiguity" Bill Brown describes as inherent in the word "thing" (4).

Perhaps it is worth a brief digression here to discuss the terms "object" and "thing," because, although it may sound nonsensical, an object is not always a thing. In the seminal 2001 issue of *Critical Inquiry* dedicated to things, Bill Brown cogently argues for understanding of "Thing Theory," as he terms it, that relishes the thingness of objects à la Heidegger. While objects are defined by their relationship to human use—a pencil is an object that helps us write, just as a car is something that gets us to and from work—it is often "when they stop working for us [that] we begin to confront the thingness of objects" (4). Once the lead pencil, for example, breaks, its "flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily" (4). In this way, there is a new story being written in critical theory, a theory of objects "asserting themselves as things" and subsequently challenging subject-object relations (4). It is a fluid line separating objects and things, and one that is by no means entirely solidified within the recent influx of scholarship dedicated to such distinctions. However, these are terms worth using, it seems to me, in spite of their lack of concreteness. And they are particularly applicable to that supremely human object which asserts its thingness far too often: the body.

In *The Book of John Mandeville*, objects are repeatedly rewritten as people becoming things and things becoming people. In Damascus, for example, the narrator describes a church where "behind the high altar in the wall there is a tablet of blackish wood where Our Lady's image was once painted that turned to flesh, but now the image can hardly be seen" (76). This image turned flesh is reminiscent of the Church of Saint Catherine, for "the said tablet oozes oil just like olive oil, and there is a marble vessel below the tablet secured well and wrapped with iron to receive the oil that oozes out and some of this oil is given to the pilgrims" (76).

Moreover, provided that it is "well kept and clean," the oil is rumored to return to flesh and blood after seven years. Here again, people, objects, and things work in concert to create an assemblage that is greater than the sum of its individual parts, an assemblage with a wide array of causes and effects that may not be deduced simply. However, what is unique about this particular assemblage is that the image of Our Lady has slowly removed itself from the human world; unable to be seen, its utilitarian function—to be gazed upon—has been lost, rendering it more thing than object.

Again, too, we see here the uneasy wedding of body and soul in the form of person and thing. The painted image becomes flesh, returns to image, and then "oozes oil" that is rumored to return again to flesh. If flesh is the seat of the soul, where is the person in this flesh? Even more troubling, if flesh is the *antithesis* of the soul, wherein lies human fallibility, why is flesh often so symbolic of saintliness? Such questions, I think, are inherent in such assemblages that abound in *The Book of John Mandeville* and serve to both challenge and reflect the flesh and soul conundrum of medieval Christianity, as well as the philosophical mind-body duality that troubles us still.

As has been noted—and perhaps, as I shall argue later, even overemphasized by many scholars—the narrator of *The Book of John Mandeville* is remarkably tolerant of the rituals of other cultures. As Iain Macleod Higgins notes in his introduction to the text, "difference as such is rarely denigrated" (xx). The Mandeville author, for example, notes that "it always seems to those living [in whatever part of the earth one dwells] that they walk more upright than any other people" (114). Appropriately, then, the cultures and principles of Muslims, pagans, and various other non-Christians are all thoughtfully explored. The narrator is, for the most part, concerned more with the connections that can be made between peoples than in exploring the rifts that separate such diverse systems of belief. As such, the relics of other cultures feature prominently, and, it seems to me, are explicated in a manner devoid of judgment, which succeeds in presenting the familiar in cultures that might otherwise seem to the reader excessively foreign.

Of particular interest is the venerated idol described in the city of Calamie. The inhabitants of this city are described as so pious that they lead their idol "with great solemnity" around the city on a chariot, and residents and pilgrims alike throw their bodies in front of the chariot "out of love for their god and out of great devotion" (109). One might expect a more disapproving view of non-Christian idol worship; instead, the Mandeville author peppers his account of Calamie with words like "reverence," "honor," and "devotion" while avoiding the use of negatively charged oppositional nouns. Indeed, he even goes so far as to suggest that such devotion could serve to teach less dutiful Christians: "In short, they perform such great acts of penance and suffer such great bodily martyrdoms for love of their idols that no Christian would scarcely dare to undertake to do a tenth as much for love of his Christ" (109). Not only are these idol-worshipers freed from the Mandeville

author's judgment, they are explicitly pointed to as a measure of righteousness.

The Mandeville author's account of the worshipers of Calamie ends with a description of what is presented to be an act of great devoutness. After informing their friends and families, the worshipers make a great show of killing themselves for their god, after which their bodies are presented to the idol as amongst the most devoted for having "sacrificed his flesh and blood" (110). The friends and family of the martyred worshiper then cremate the worshiper's body "and then each of them takes some of the ash and keeps it instead of relics, and they say that this is a very holy thing" (110). Put simply, this is a remarkable account of a non-Christian relic devoid of the sort of religious castigation one might expect from a fourteenth-century writer. Although this account, and similar ones present in the text, can and have been read as sarcastic at best and chastising at worst, the lack of condemnatory words and the abundance of positive connotations—as noted earlier—makes it most likely that the Mandeville author's goal is a magnanimous and instructional one. These non-Christian relics bear an uncanny resemblance to the types of Christian relics described elsewhere, but even more than that, their ambivalent relationship to persons and things, as well as bodies and souls, are appropriately familiar.

The agent with most power in this assemblage is, clearly, an object. The idol, useful only insofar as it symbolizes the worshiper's god, causes humans to suffer great "pain and more tribulation" (109), rendering the humans entirely subservient to it. However, this object cannot, or will not, express approval or even acknowledge its worshipers' sacrifices, thereby negating its purpose. With no purpose, then, the idol is more thing than object—a thing that has done a remarkable job of asserting agency over humankind. Moreover, the worshipers themselves become objects, mirroring the strange soul/flesh duality discussed previously. That the martyrs sacrifice their bodies for love of their god functions in two ways. Firstly, it affirms the soul's elevated position in the hierarchy by rendering flesh and blood something to transcend. However, it also simultaneously presents the *body* as foremost by suggesting that it is such a superior sacrifice because it is worth so much. The bodies themselves become relics, in the form of ash, reflecting the familiar sort of double role of an object that is both person and thing. It is precisely these commonalities that the Mandeville author explores in order to highlight the similarities between Christians and non-Christians. It is almost as if to say, "See? These bodily anxieties are not unique to *our* people."

However, despite his willingness to suspend judgment in this case, as well as others, it is important to note that the Mandeville author's magnanimity is not absolute. The merits of idol worshipers and cannibals may be found despite their "evil ways," but the harshest words, and greatest acerbity, is saved for the Jews. As Robert Hakan Patterson notes, "Jews are mentioned almost fifty times throughout [*The Book of John Mandeville*], and at almost every instance, the Mandeville author seizes the opportunity to demonize them in some way" (77).

As early as the first page of the text, they are described as "cruel" (1) and again a mere ten pages later "worthless" (11). Although anti-Semitism bred from an image of Jews as killers of Christ was not uncommon in the fourteenth century, it is interesting the way things both reflect and create this caustic relationship in *The Book of John Mandeville*. Indeed, this "cruelty" is clearly illustrated in a long passage describing the Jews' preference for a crucifixion wood designed to leave Jesus hanging "for as long as His body might last" (9). Additionally, it is the Jews who constructed many of the relics associated with Christ. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, the connection between Christians and non-Christians in *The Book of John Mandeville* falls flat when both things assert themselves to contradictory aims, as is the case with the Mandeville author's portrayal of Jews.

Things, then, can create beneficence and spiteful suspicion both. While, on the one hand, things in John Mandeville's text assert themselves in ways that highlight the relationship between human and non-human actants, as well as the relationship between peoples, things can also be the site of human-centered strife that wreaks havoc on human and non-human beings alike. In this instance, things are re-appropriated as symbolic objects carrying the weight of Jewish "cruelty." As I have hoped to show in this paper, the blending of persons, objects, and things in *The Book of John Mandeville* not only portrays assemblages of complex agency, it mirrors the "audacious ambiguity" of a religious anxiety about the role of bodies and souls. Moreover, these assemblages not only help create our sense of humanity, they can, as in the case of the Mandeville author's anti-Semitism, be appropriated to distinguish certain humanities from others. Things, to be sure, are powerful things; we must be careful how—and to what ends—we view them.

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Oroonoko: the African King of England
—Alexis Wolf

Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* has long provoked scholarly attention due to the incongruous enigma of its authorship; that of a 17th century British woman involved in the colonialist structure apparently sympathizing with the subjugation and heroic struggle of an African slave. Though this bizarre and beautifully written story may at first read appear to have been motivated by the author's progressive or revolutionary impulses, many aspects of the scenario come into a different focus when viewed in light of the Behns' own biography and political leanings. Among the myriad readings through which this fantastical tale can be interpreted, it is clear that the novel is imbued with the emotions of a romantic, royalist love-letter; Behn's background as a staunch Tory supporter of the throne in 17th century England gave birth to her symbolically monarchical and religious personification of the princely slave Oroonoko. By evoking an outside entity through the exotic story of an African hero who appears antithetical to the King of England, *Oroonoko* conveys the message that naturally ordained royalty and those of noble breeding will always rise, no matter their nationality or place of birth.

While it is not possible to concisely interpret the dense textuality and implications of *Oroonoko* in just one way—as a wide range of diverse critical opinions on the work tends to prove—I believe it is vital that Behn's intentionality be evaluated alongside the exegesis that her book has brought about. Despite the author's heavy insistence on the work's verisimilitude—stating on the primary page that there is "enough of Reality to support" her claims against any who might question its authenticity—the incredulous storyline of *Oroonoko* requires a major suspension of disbelief to be taken as an accurate work of historical documentation. It is now widely understood by scholars that Aphra Behn did in fact travel to Suriname in 1663, lodging for a time on a sugar plantation (Duffy 32). However, there is a palpable nature of sensationalized presentation in the text, an emotionally charged and fictionalized narrative that idealizes characters (and cultures) instead of attempting to portray them in a manner that is true to life. The utilization of metaphysical aspects of Oroonoko's saint-like persona undermines the aspects of realism that exist in the text. Behn paints her hero in an unrealistic portrayal of veneration that separates him from everyone else and gives him an aura of holiness. Though Behn sought to maintain the reader's belief in the historicity of *Oroonoko*, it fits more comfortably into McKeon's categorization of 17th century "aristocratic ideology," or romance that "comes to stand for a species of deceit that undiscriminately includes lying and fictionalizing; a category to which is most often opposed not 'the novel' but 'true history'" (McKeon 162).

The underlying romantic glorifications and royalist motives that occur in the text also cast doubt over the long-standing question of whether or not *Oroonoko* can

be understood as a proto-feminist or early abolitionist social critique. As Laura Brown states in her *Ends of Empire*, the text is crucial "in the development of the novel," saying that "Behn's novella draws upon the conventions of heroic romance" (Brown 13). I agree with Brown that *Oroonoko* is best assessed as a work of romantic fiction— however, a major contextual problem emerges when one poses the question: what exactly is being romanticized by the artfully crafted personifications within *Oroonoko*?

A famous quotation from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* gives an accurate picture of the feminist viewpoint of Aphra Behn's achievements: "All women together, ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn . . . for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds" (Woolf 91). As Jane Spencer cautions, it would be too simplistic to label an early writer such as Behn as either "feminist or anti-feminist" (Spencer X). It is true that "many woman, writing in conscious support of current doctrines of female inferiority, left by implication a feminist message" (Spencer X). We know, through the preface to her comedy, *The Lucky Chance* (1687), that Behn lamented the limitations that her gender afforded her, writing: "All I ask, is the Priviledge for my Masculine Part the Poet in me . . . If I must not, because of my Sex, have this Freedom, but that you will usurp all to your selves; I lay down my Quill" (Spencer 43). Yet this bold pronunciation remains at odds with the fact that Behn's authorial narrator hides behind—or it could be said even embraces—the perception of the weakened woman, abandoning Oroonoko's side at his most desperate moments of danger because of her countenance being "Sickly, and very apt to fall into Fits of dangerous Illness upon any extraordinary Melancholy" (Behn 64). In this and many other instances, as Spencer says, "the narrator's gender is now her alibi" (Spencer 50). Likewise, the convoluted and victimized voice of the narratorial Behn acts repeatedly to participate in the oppression of Oroonoko through his continued subjugation. She does not think "it convenient to trust him much" as an independent individual out of her own supervision, in spite of assertions of admiration towards Oroonoko (Behn 42).

It is indisputable that the very act of authorship of plays and novels by a prolific female writer does factor into a feminist lineage which gives strength to an important discipline—a trailblazing that could be understood as a type of "accidental feminism"—but while Behn as a historic figure anchors these arguments, the transparency of her motives make the case for *Oroonoko* as a feminist or abolitionist text appear as their own type of fictionalization. The contradictions that exist between historical fact and intellectual theory negate the potential for mutual solidarity between women and slaves. This reading conveniently serves the agenda of modern ideologies, which desire to reinterpret Behn's work in a forgiving manner that is profitable to their own agenda, thus creating a literary legacy that was never meant to be. Such a portrayal does not take into account the complicated nature of Aphra Behn's political alliances and roles within what was at the time a

volatile British society. When dealing with the subject of whether or not *Oroonoko* contributes to Behn's legacy as a potential proto-feminist, it is prudent to undertake a methodical examination not only of the influences of her life and writings, but of the original intentions of her works in order to avoid a skewed evaluation.

Aphra Behn was a public supporter of the pseudo-Catholic reign of Charles II after the Restoration, publishing "formal pindarics of mourning" upon his death in 1685, as well as congratulatory poems dedicated to his brother and successor, King James II, upon the birth of a royal heir in 1688 (Lipking 265). It is interesting to note that Behn wrote *Oroonoko* in that same year, an era during which England was perpetually at risk of evolving into a country governed by Dissenting Protestantism. Behn wasted no time in making her sympathies clear in the introductory dedication of the novel, addressed "To The Right Honourable The Lord Maitland" (Behn 5), who was described as a royalist supporter of James II, and by Behn as "a Champion for the Catholick Church" (Lipking 6). The fact that Behn set out to write *Oroonoko* over 20 years after her return home from Suriname and during a period of political volatility implies that the message of the story held a level of time sensitive relevance. It is possible that Behn was hoping to not only express her sympathies but also influence a wider, and potentially changeable, public opinion. Correspondence from 1688 shows that Behn did not expect to live much longer due to her ill health, and at this time began to make some of her most critical and outspoken public statements, referring to King William of Orange only by the disparaging nickname of 'Nassau' and comparing his ascendancy to the throne with the invasion of the Greeks into Troy (O'Donnell 286).

Behn was neither a Catholic nor a Dissenter—she was an Anglican who primarily believed in reason over spirit, though there is evidence that she may have experienced Catholicism as a child (Starr 362). As a result of her religious beliefs, Behn was never in the direct favor of James II and Mary during their reign, despite the loving verses that she penned in their honor (Duffy 239). This was a problem for Behn, who longed more than anything to be in the literary spotlight that surrounded the royal household, with her behavior at times being construed as that of an aristocratic sycophant (Todd 6). Behn had already spent a great deal of her life vying for the public recognition among the Stuarts that would not only guarantee her fame but also allow her to promote their fragile position in England, a duty she considered to be both vital and worthy. A period of her life was spent in the employ of Charles II as a spy during the Anglo-Dutch War of 1665, a voyage resulting in a year passed in debtors prison when the king refused to pay for the cost of her expeditions abroad due to the unsuccessful outcome of her mission. Yet Behn never lost her faithfulness to the Stuarts, though she did not follow the same church as the monarchs whom she venerated. To a staunch Tory such as herself, the most important issue at hand was the enduring support of a lineage that was divinely ordained.

A viable argument for Behn's anxieties about and defenses against a Dis-

senting Protestant-led government can be found by examining some of the fears and preoccupations that Behn and her literary fellows were facing. In his study of English barbarism as it appears in *Oroonoko*, Elliott Visconsi cites the fact that England had only recently achieved a level of comfortable civilization. Visconsi paints a picture of an aristocracy terrified of the unwashed masses, imagining their lower classes as a rabble that would surely degenerate into the former incarnation of the English people—a violent pre-political state. Behn (and other Tories, such as Dryden) believed that without the absolute power of the King existing above the law there could be no order, and an elected King would simply be a puppet chosen by the "monstrous, mercantile middle class" (Visconsi 674). Such a leader would surely take the country back to its barbaric origins. In this context the character of Oroonoko is better understood as a fetishized colonial object that exists solely to further Behn's agenda as an apologist for the Stuart line.

Behn's introduction of the African Prince draws an easy comparison in the reader's mind with any ruler among European royalty by providing details that quickly begin to negate the perceived differences of race. Behn notes Oroonoko's innate sensibility, stating that he "was as capable even of reigning well, and of governing wisely, had as great a Soul, as politick Maxims, and was as sensible of Power as any Prince civiliz'd in the most refin'd Schools of Humanity and Learning, or the most Illustrious Courts" (Behn 14). Oroonoko's Western accessibility is easily recognizable as he speaks Spanish, French, and English, having learned these from his French tutor and through the trading of captured slaves with various ship captains. Oroonoko's knowledge of European politics implies his sympathies to the British monarchy as a royalist when he states that he had heard of "the deplorable Death of our great Monarch; and would discourse of it with all the Sense, and Abhorrence of the Injustice imaginable," an affinity which resonates Behn's own loyalties (Behn 13). As the text notes, "He had nothing of Barbarity in his nature" (Behn 13). Though still an African, the common ideological ground on which Oroonoko stands might well comfort and placate a nervous 17th century reader into a sense of mutual understanding between themselves and an otherwise challenging character.

Oroonoko's highly conceptualized physical appearance would also serve to endear him to the cautious European reader by drawing on ideals of beauty and magnificence: "His Nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat. His Mouth, the finest shap'd that cou'd be seen; far from those great turn'd Lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes" (Behn 13). A notable feature of the agreeable African Prince is that his skin is described as extraordinarily black—a blackness that is unique from the fellows of his race, the text stating: "His face was not of that brown, rusty Black which most of that Nation are, but a perfect Ebony, or polish'd Jett" (Behn 13). As Catherine Gallagher recognizes, "Unless we acknowledge that Oroonoko's blackness refers to racial difference and indeed is

dependent on a stock response of racial prejudice in the reader, we cannot explain what was supposed to be so wonderful about him . . . the reader is frequently invited to marvel at the fact that Oroonoko, *although black*, behaves just like a perfectly conventional European tragic hero" (Gallagher 240). To be sure, a large effort is also made to maintain Oroonoko's exotic façade through the many qualities that are associated with his nationality—to keep him identified as African. He has an immense prowess for hunting and killing, possessing the extraordinary capacity to tame beasts and often humans by "fixing his Awful stern Eyes full upon" them (Behn 45). Behn's hero embodies the stereotypical primitive and untamable warrior, with "a Bow in his Hand, and a Quiver at his Back," leading his people to victory against other tribal factions with a spirit that is "all rough and fierce" (Behn 42). Though these exotic qualities at first appear to work against the reconciliatory European aspects of the character, they are actually essential to Behn's agenda. In this way Behn relates Oroonoko's dominion within his native society to a correlation with that of what she believes should be embodied by the monarchy in England; everything about him is evocative of an organic form of power as if by divine right. Oroonoko is differentiated from his own race to such a degree that he begins to represent a form of natural nobility. This fact does not mitigate, but rather underlines, the racist cultural perspective from which Aphra Behn was narrating.

All of these missed opportunities to criticize racism would be enough on their own to discredit the book as abolitionist without looking towards a damning piece of evidence that is hard to ignore from the life of Aphra Behn, which is that it is widely believed by scholars that her husband, Johan Behn, was a merchant who profited greatly from the trade of slaves (Todd 70). Though their marriage admittedly did not last long, it feels impossible to allow that a writer who was advocating for the abolition of slavery would willingly marry a man who traded in slaves. From a moral and historical standpoint Behn was firmly rooted within the class of those who practiced enslavement during her time in Suriname, rather than identifying with those who were the oppressed. All examples found within the text as well as those drawn from reality point to Behn's acceptance of the contemporary ideology that groups of the powerful would enslave and commodify the powerless.

Behn's religious leanings and her desire for strong leadership in England are artfully called forth in her holy personification of Oroonoko. Despite the statement that he could never "understand what Faith was," and "wou'd never be reconcil'd to our Notions of the Trinity, of which he ever made a Jest," the author poses the prince as a figure of inspirational godliness, drawing nearly ironic parallels between Oroonoko's behavior and attributes with those of a saint (Behn 41). His mystical essence emerges in righteous battle when "he appeared like some Divine Power descended to save his Country from Destruction; . . . he fought as if he came on purpose to die, and did such things as will not be believ'd that Hu-

mane Strength cou'd perform" (Behn 29). Behn cloaks Oroonoko's character in a tangible aura of divinity, stating that he "shone all through" his robes and clothes which "could not conceal the Graces of his Looks and Mien" (Behn 36). When the plantation slaves learn that Oroonoko, the man who had sold many of them into bondage, is in the new world they "were transported with Excess of Joy at the sight of their Darling Prince; falling at his Feet, and kissing and embracing 'em; believing, as some Divine Oracle, all he assured 'em" (Behn 33). The superhuman quality that the Prince possesses agitates and affects everyone around him—whites, blacks and natives alike. Oroonoko's soothing presence is able to insure a safe adventure to the native village for his colonialist companions, his mystical qualities of natural ambassadorship creating "understanding between the Indians and the English, so that there were no more Fears or Heartburnings," bringing peace between different peoples where tension might have been (Behn 45). Oroonoko also conquers a vicious tiger that the local people believed "was a Devil rather than a Mortal thing," symbolizing the power that he has to eclipse evil (Behn 45).

      Conjuring an association with moral martyrdom, Oroonoko repeatedly attempts to sacrifice himself to preserve his immense dignity and honor. This occurs first during his initial captivity aboard the slave ship, wherein he decides to "perish for want of Food" and "sullenly resolved upon dying" (Behn 32). Oroonoko later acts according to virtue through the extremely painful act of slaying his wife Imoinda, who dies "Smiling with Joy she shou'd dye by so noble a hand," leaving him broken yet "resolv'd now to finish the great Work" of righteous revenge (Behn 60; Behn 61). Oroonoko's conscious trajectory towards the sacrifice of his life in exchange for his dignity at the conclusion of the novel correlates with the deaths of other similarly magnanimous leaders both in Behn's time and before, such as death of King Charles I, who was canonized as a saint during the reign of his son, Charles II. Although it is known that Behn was not a Catholic, her sympathies had in the past moved her to public association with Catholic ideals, in a political more than religious context, and in many ways this martyrdom calls to mind the feverish devotion of her many coronation pindarics.

      Perhaps the most important aspect of the novel is Behn's illustration of the dangers that can occur during times when a strong figure of absolute leadership is lacking, a reflection of Visconsi's reading of the aristocracy's fear of and preoccupation with the monstrous capabilities of the mob-like middleclass. The lawlessness of the practices of the slave trade on the high seas, hidden away from the jurisdiction of British rule, are apparent in the trickery that befalls the Prince and his companions. Behn's real-life apprehensions concerning disrespect for hierarchical law are mirrored in her fictionalized representation of Suriname. The absence of the Lord Governor at the moment of Oroonoko's condemnation allows the unscrupulous Deputy General Byam to wrongly usurp power. The temporary disconnection from the authority of the rightful ruling party subsequently results in the death of Oroonoko at

the hands of a shabbily configured local council, characters whom Behn illustrates as "notorious Villains" that "understood neither the Laws of God or Man" (Behn 59). The crimes committed against Oroonoko by "the Rabble" are so brutal that all of the present members of civilized society, who stand by in a state of frightened and silent support, are horrified by their actions. A severed piece of Oroonoko's body is sent to the local Colonel Martin, who disdains the unjust and gory execution, stating that, he "cou'd govern his Negroes without Terrifying and Grieving them with the frightful Spectacles of a mangl'd King" (Behn 65). Through these means, Behn demonstrates to her readers the ways in which a vacuum of appropriately ordained power inevitably results in tyranny and tragedy. This scene of death at the hands of the mob is once again a poignant and loosely veiled reminder of what was at the time recent history, with Behn carefully crafting the shameful death of a fictional monarch in a style immensely reminiscent of the actual regicide of Charles I.

By acknowledging Behn's position as a royalist sympathizer as well as the renunciation of the potential to read the text as feminist or abolitionist, it is possible to avoid instances of inappropriate misreading based on modern ideals. While it is true, as Brown says, that *Oroonoko* "powerfully evokes the brutal realities of the Caribbean slave trade," this interpretation ignores and discredits a Tory legacy that is historically important in its own right (Brown 13). Rather than serving as a symbol of unity between two subjugated minorities—women and slaves—*Oroonoko* shows itself to be an inherently conservative text that self-consciously supports Tory aspirations toward maintaining social order and enforcing institutions of class. Stripped of its potential as progressive, the text presents a whole new set of problems and concerns that fall upon the modern intellectual to discern; namely, if a text must be perpetually "re-read" by scholars in order to allow it an acceptable and modern interpretation, is there something unsavory in its original worth that deserves to be rightfully acknowledged? What do we stand to gain from the repackaging of literary history?

Through a series of highly designed personifications, Aphra Behn transformed an unusual icon, the African slave, into an enduring symbol of royalist integrity and power. By posing Oroonoko as someone equal to a member of the European royalty and also steeped in a worthy and redeeming brand of mysticism, he becomes the shining image of valor and leadership. *Oroonoko* offers a complicated representation of England's early confrontations with the new world, in which the anxieties of the political atmosphere are blended with a slew of contradictions concerning class, race and gender. In creating a character such as Oroonoko, a noble among obvious savages, Behn is underlining an ideal of inherent nobility. Not immune to the corporeal pitfalls of a volatile environment that cannot appreciate princely eminence, *Oroonoko* not only laments such a tragedy, but also warns against the risk of allowing interferences with divine power to occur.

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Beyond the Binary: Violent Resistance in *Time of the Butcherbird* and Prosaic Resistance in *The Conservationist*
—A.L. Evins

In the 1960s and '70s, a politically tumultuous Africa gave rise to a generation of writers for whom the political was inextricably intertwined with art. A brief survey of African literature reveals a canon inundated with signs of overt rebellion—songs of resistance, protests and shotgun blasts, all give voice to the political upheaval of the era. Though powerful images of revolution linger in the mind's eye, they also overshadow instances of everyday resistance that are just as, if not more, momentous than active rebellion. To ignore subtle acts of resistance undermines the agency of individuals already systematically and negatively stereotyped, and thus risks reinscribing them as objectified victims. Taken one step further, such elisions risk the presumption of a certain degree of complicity between the oppressed and her oppressor.

The disparate presentations of resistance in two contemporary South African novels—*Time of the Butcherbird* and *The Conservationist*—illuminate the complexity of the issue. *Time* features a man haunted by the cruel murder of his brother, so much so that he embarks upon a culturally sanctioned journey of retribution that ends in a violent declaration of his subjectivity. Easily overlooked when juxtaposed to violent, unequivocal examples, resistance by marginalized South Africans in *The Conservationist* creates an ironic, subversive subtext. *Time* illustrates what is commonly conceived of as the binary of resistance: to resist or not to resist, while *The Conservationist* moves us beyond the binary and to an understanding of resistance as a spectrum. Both texts mobilize autochthonous resistance to assert the agency of black South Africa, which also simultaneously touches upon white South Africa's anxiety regarding their claim to the land, a dominant and recurring cultural anxiety stretching from the nation's founding and through the writing of these texts.

The Binary of Resistance: Violence in
Time of the Butcherbird

In Alex La Guma's *Time of the Butcherbird*, we encounter a man on a mission. Mysterious and reticent almost to a fault, the man called Shilling Murile enters the scene ready for action and dressed in the "cast-off" clothes of an unnamed

war (13).[1] Throughout the text, the reader's gaze lingers on the garments clothing the characters. As Aijaz Ahmad notes, "there is no such thing as a category of the 'essentially descriptive' . . . 'description' is never ideologically or cognitively neutral" (99). With this in mind, Shilling's garb highlights a violent rendition of the power struggle between the individual black South African man and the symbolic authority embodied by the white, male South African (a struggle that will also later be seen in *The Conservationist*). Shilling's military attire is a destabilizing force in the text; it is an uncanny visual invocation of white South Africa's military power, *but* has been twisted and re-mobilized to enact one of their primary anxieties: empowered black South Africa, with the boots a metonym of mobility. Shilling's frayed, militaristic ensemble encourages the reader to interpret his otherwise apolitical act as inescapably political. He is, in essence, wearing his ideology.

During the reader's first lengthy encounter with Shilling, he is seen repeatedly adjusting his well-detailed outfit. First he "pulled on the boots which he had taken off, and laced them up again carefully" then he "wriggled his toes in the boots" (La Guma 14). This need to "wriggle" his toes, this hesitation before he continues on his way, constructs the boots as something alien to which he must accustom himself. The care he takes in lacing up his boots (which is itself another hesitation) foregrounds the production, making it seem almost as if he is adorning himself for a momentous occasion. This idea is later reinforced when the word "care" is again used, this time to describe how he is mindful to avoid damaging his clothes while climbing through a "rusty barbed wire" fence separating the road from a field.[2] The subtly violent diction throughout the passage used to describe his actions indicates that if he is indeed adorning himself, it will surely be for a bloody purpose. He is emphatically framed as militaristic, which begs the question—to what army does he belong with his dangling epaulettes? He could be the contemporary political revolutionary, a lone anarchist, or a man seeking personal justice for the barbaric murder of his brother.

His boots provide an ironic answer to the implied question. Given to him by the government during his imprisonment, these government-issue accouterments offer added protection as he journeys by foot to destroy Hannes Meulen, a local poli-

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[1] Throughout the text, there is a disconnect between his identifier, "Shilling Murile," and its ability to fully represent him. The first member of his community to recognize him, names him to the reader as follows: "You are the boy *called* Murile, whom the *white farmers named* Shilling. Shilling Murile" (La Guma 17, my emphasis). This insistence upon the community's role in naming him suggests that 1) he is a construction by the larger community and 2) he is somehow unknowable outside of this superficial naming. His name is less a declaration of self and more a communal dictate.
[2] The passage reads as follows: "He stooped and climbed through the fence, taking care not to catch his clothes in the *rusty barbed wire*. He was wearing a *khaki army shirt* . . . badly *frayed* . . . Only the *hard* boots looked in good order, and when he set out . . . they *crushed* the brittle . . . soil and *kicked* up little puffs of reddish dust . . . the jacket was a castoff topof khaki serge *battledress*, one of the *epaulettes* dangled free and an elbow had been *torn*" (La Guma 13-14, my emphasis).

tician. Though there are obvious political ramifications for killing an up-and-coming politician, given his marked disassociation with any organized group, one can easily interpret Shilling's homicides as personal justice rather than political.[3] However, his ideology-laden attire suggests otherwise. That he wears his boots from the government signals an appropriation of white South African power, thus wedding his apparently apolitical act to the political. Furthermore, his overt association with the military, as signaled by his clothing, renders him a symbolic force on par with that vast appendage to the government that is the military machine. In contrast to contemporary times, which have witnessed a rise in the privatization of violence, a mid-twentieth century conception of violence held that the "state supposedly had a monopoly on legitimate use of force . . . [thus] any upsurge of non-state violence was effectively a challenge or threat to that monopoly" (Wieviorka 27). His violence is again framed as an appropriation of political power. Thus, as the cleansing nature of the titular butcherbird suggests, his is an act of political resistance girded by ethical cleansing.[4]

When Shilling first returns to the community, he consciously avoids registering his arrival with the local authorities to delay his recognition. His stealth renders him a ghost-like figure, unseen by the white South African community. La Guma later reinforces Shilling's borderline preternatural status when the narrator describes him as "one with the graves, the battered head-boards with doom peeling off them" (66). As he stands before his brother's grave, the imagined decomposition of his brother's body mirrors his mental state; where before there was love, his macabre fixation with the flesh falling away from his brother's corpse reveals "the bare teeth of grinning revenge" (66). The deep connection between the brothers (which at times resembles a doubling) suggests that when his brother died, part of Shilling also died, rendering him a specter.

Later in the text, his spectral status is again emphasized when he uses Meulen's own stolen shotgun, a gun that Meulen ironically does not recognize, just as he does not recognize Shilling. Meulen's inability to recognize Shilling as an individual with a unique history capable of a grudge reduces Shilling to the functional invisibility similar to that of a ghost.[5] When Shilling stands before Meulen and appropriates his power Shilling also expresses white South Africa's fear of

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[3] I say homicide*s* as Shilling also kills a bystander.

[4] Shilling's violence straddles the border between ethical retribution and political statement. The dual nature of his violence renders it a metapolitical act that "becomes a vector for meanings . . . [of a] non-negotiable quality or a religious, ethical, or ideological import that makes absolute demands" (Wieviorka 37).

[5] Shilling's functional invisibility recalls Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Just as the unnamed narrator of *Invisible Man* struggles to assert agencey and fashion an identity other than that assigned to him under an essential understanding of race, so, too, does Shilling.

anonymous, black South Africa gaining agency within society.[6] Through this connection "between preternatural horrors and current focal points of anxiety, the Gothic captures the *Zeitgeist* of cultural tension. Cultures, then, breed their own demons necessarily" (Shear 73). Shilling transcends his own embattled individuality and becomes symbolic for a ubiquitous cultural anxiety. He becomes white South Africa's "demon." He is also simultaneously a model of autochthonous resistance for his community. Meulen's brutal treatment of Shilling's brother, Timi, that led to the latter's death and Shilling's own unjust imprisonment led to a moral verdict that necessitated violence. Shilling's shotgun blast reverberates through the political realm, forcing an acknowledgment, however fleeting, of himself as an individual capable of agency.[7] He creates himself in that moment by and through violence and thus represents the uncompromising resistance demanded by intellectuals of the era.[8]

Towards a New Understanding of Resistance

The glorification of violence as the "authentic" means of resistance that leads to revolution underpins an understanding of resistance as a clear-cut binary of to resist or not resist. Such a perspective is potentially problematic in that it risks overlooking everyday acts of resistance and suggests that those who do not unambiguously resist are victims complicit with their oppressor. In contrast to La Guma's novel, Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* captures the spirit of conflicted 1970s South Africa more subtly. Central to the narrative is Mehring, a stand-in for the white male subject of the Western master narrative brought under close scrutiny by postmodernism. The novel begins with Mehring's routine weekend visit to his country estate, during which he discovers that "his" land is being haunted by the cadaver of an anonymous black man. In the concise, allusive manner of the Gothic, the mysterious cadaver articulates an anxiety regarding white South Africa's claim to the land. His fear of the land is evidenced when he accidentally loses his footing and gets trapped in the muddy bank of the river on the property. To him, the encounter takes on sinister import for it feels as if the land "holds him in a cold thick hand round the ankle. A soft cold black hand . . . just as if someone has both arms tightly round the leg" (Gordimer 228). The "cold black hand" recalls both the cadaver and the ubiquitous sign of black empowerment, the raised fist, suggesting that the land has rejected Mehring-the-settler and will be

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[6] Meulen's inability to recognize his executioner is foreshadowed by his inability to recognize Shilling during the scene in which he kills Shilling's brother, both of whom have worked for Meulen in the past. In response to Shilling's plea for humanity, for recognition of their shared history, Meulen says, "Since when do I know a kaffir? One kaffir looks just like another as it concerns me" (La Guma 75).

[7] I say fleeting, as with the close of the novel, the reader finds Shilling hiding in plain sight among his community, as he recognizes that the authorities will be unable to identify him as an individual among the crowd.

[8] Take, for instance, Frantz Fanon's stance on violence.

reappropriated by black South Africa. When he finally escapes and stands with his leg yet caked in black mud, it feels as if "part of him is still buried" (Gordimer 228). His partial and premature burial highlights his anxiety-driven rapport with the land, and thus black South Africa; his struggle with the land is a quite literal representation of the South African trope of the "settler consumed by the land . . . in which the land is a metaphor for native" (Lawson 1220). Gordimer later unequivocally unites the land with the subjectivity of black South Africans when their anonymous representative claims it during his burial, a scene that will be examined closely momentarily.

Throughout, the novel's free indirect discourse traps the reader in Mehring's consciousness, encouraging complicity with the beliefs and objectives of the quintessential subject of western discourse that he, as a moneyed, white, businessman, represents. It is his (interpreted) world the reader encounters. Though the narrative occasionally breaks free of Mehring's subjectivity to follow minor characters, his perspective is most consistently (and somewhat cryptically) ruptured by periodic section breaks containing quotes from Reverend Henry Callaway's *The Religious System of the Amazulu*. One such reference to Zulu mythology eerily echoes Mehring's fear of the land as an extension of indigenous South Africans. The section break references Zulu ancestor spirits, "The Amatongo, they who are beneath. Some natives say, so called, because they have been buried beneath the earth" (Gordimer 163). This allusion to the subterranean Amatongo frames Mehring's struggle with the "cold black hand" as an act of retributive violence on the part of the land (Gordimer 228). Just as the inclusion of Zulu mythology ruptures Mehring's dominance over the narrative, so too does it rupture his claim to authority over the land. Furthermore, though his subjectivity dominates the text, the "ironic tinge" that permeates the novel liberates the text from his perspective and gestures towards the undercurrent of South African anger and anxiety swirling about his subjectivity (Smith 47).

Oddly enough, Gordimer most clearly articulates the plight of the oppressed in a scene not between "black" and "white" South Africans, but between a disenfranchised indigenous South African and a similarly disenfranchised Indian immigrant. A minor character most often referred to as simply "Dorcas's husband" suffers the death of his dream for a materially successful Christmas. For months he subscribed to a Christmas Club, one that promised a modest feast to those that paid thirty cents per week for a year. Unbeknownst to him, his wife curtails her pay from the Indian convenience store to help purchase a sewing machine. Without the expected money, Dorcas's husband is unable to pay his subscription to the Christmas Club. Thus a dream dies. Following the realization, he breaks into an impressive *cri de coeur* in which he demands that "all the Indias (sic)" leave South Africa. He believes that "the government will throw them away. We are going to throw them away with the white people" (Gordimer 125). His frustration is rendered particularly poignant when Gordimer notes that his "feet felt tethered to

the weight of the boots in which he worked in blood all day in the abattoir" (125).

The denouement of the scene rings eerily reminiscent of Kafka's *Before the Law*, which elusively captures the essence of the difficulty faced when struggling against the machinations of an oppressive socio-political system. The scene ends with a disturbing image. Though in his angry exit Dorcas's husband has left the gate wide open, the guard dogs do not escape, instead, come morning, they "snarled and raced up and down before the gap, up and down, as if, for them, the pattern of closed gates was still barred across their eyes" (Gordimer 125). It would seem that the fate of South Africa's various minorities is that of their metaphoric counterpart: the guard dogs. However, though the "pattern of the gate" may be imprinted within their minds, one notes certain ironies within the scene. First, at least one man, Dorcas's husband, has escaped. Second, whether the gate is open or closed, it marks a subversive space for the Indians occupy the land in defiance of the law. To maintain their claim to the area, they engage in a convoluted and recurring legal battle. Thus, though the scene falls short of the defiance called for by contemporary writers and intellectuals, it gestures towards the subtle resistance that permeates the text.

To resist, or not to resist? As Kafka suggests, the question, let alone the answer, is not so simple. Resistance cannot be reduced to whether or not the characters saw past the "pattern of the gate" and exited the property. For, in fact, the question is rarely a one-dimensional query demanding a yes or no answer, a "to be" or "not to be," a "to leave" or "not to leave." Instead, an array of minute acts completes the spectrum of resistance. In *Weapons of the Weak*, James C. Scott explores the aggregate nature of everyday resistance and concludes that, though alone ". . . the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage . . ." may be easy to ignore or simply miss, to do so risks denying the agency of already largely disenfranchised subjects (29).[9] Furthermore, one cannot overlook the power of the individual acts without potentially missing their collective weight. "Anthozoan polyps" of resistance are ubiquitous in *The Conservationist*, forming a coral reef upon which the ship of Mehring's presumed supremacy as the white, male subject will soon run aground (Scott xvi). It is the everyday, prosaic resistance that lends the book its subversive subtext.

With this in mind, Dorcas's husband's boots offer new insight to the scene. As in *Time of the Butcherbird*, the boots act as a powerful symbol; here they signal the oppressive economic situation created by contemporary South African laws. Boots are a site of ideological struggle in the novel, as noted in Mehring's disgruntled response to his son's habitually barefoot state. His son rejects

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[9] Scott goes on to imaginatively summarize the power of prosaic resistance. He writes, "Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines. But just as millions of anthozoan polyps create . . . a coral reef, so do the multiple acts of peasant insubordination and evasion create political and economic barrier reefs of their own" (Scott xvii).

shoes to mark his liberal politics and to deny his birthright as the heir of the Western subject. Mehring recognizes this when he describes his son's clothing as "penitent's rags for all the sins of the fathers" (Gordimer 139).[10] The boots represent material success, but, as Mehring's disgruntlement hints, they are also tied to sociopolitical power. Thus, though they are coated in the blood of the slaughterhouse and he is "tethered" to their weight, Dorcas's husband does own boots, suggesting a level of empowerment (Gordimer 125).[11]

Prosaic Resistance: A typical interaction between Mehring and Jacobus

Though Mehring is the nominal authority on his country estate, the de facto man in charge is Jacobus, the head field hand. Within the first few pages of the text, the reader witnesses the complex power struggle that marks their interaction.[12] During a weekend visit to his vacation home, Jacobus approaches Mehring bearing "the authority of dreadful knowledge" (Gordimer 12). The cadaver of an anonymous black man has been abandoned on the estate. Before Jacobus can inform Mehring of the pivotal news, Mehring chastises him for allowing the local children to appropriate guinea fowl eggs, a recurring drama in which the children assert a claim to the eggs Mehring covets. Both men are well versed in the roles they are to play: Mehring the admonisher, Jacobus the admonished. However, just as the use of "authority" to describe Jacobus' information hints at a potentially subversive undercurrent to the exchange, so too does Jacobus' reaction. Aware of the subtle opposition, Mehring thinks, "Of course he understands perfectly well but wears that uncomprehending and pained look to establish he's not to blame, he's burdened by the behavior of all those other people down at the compound . . . Jacobus is not without sycophancy" (Gordimer 12). Though his truculence could be interpreted as the natural result of a reprimanded subordinate, Jacobus' insincerity suggests that his is a prosaic resistance that recognizes the severe repercussions possible in overt revolt, and so instead adapts and becomes a calculated defiance. It is a manifestation of "minimal compliance," for though "[t]he necessary lines may be spoken, the gesture made . . . it is clear that many of the actors are just going through the motions and do not have their hearts in the performance" (Scott 26).

[10] Further underscoring their ideological import is that, when discussing the fate of the world's impoverished population, Mehring sums up his thoughts on the matter by simply saying, "They want shoes for their feet. They'll have the Germans and French and Italians and South Africans to thank for that, whatever name you use for the place" (Gordimer 147).

[11] Though "tethered" here proves an uneasy descriptor for emopowerment, it recalls the paradoxical empowerment of Shilling's prison-issue boots. Thus, though they may at first represent disenfranchisement, in each case the boots allow for conscious, rebellious mobility.

[12] Given the ideological import of boots within the novel, one should also note that Mehring is forever annoyed by the fact that Jacobus wears his rubber work boots, intended for the rainy season, during the drought.

Throughout *The Conservationist* individuals subordinated by South African society risk severe economic repercussions should they undermine the dominant power structure. Yet, in spite of very real consequences, individuals offer small-scale instances of resistance. Take, for instance, the final words of the novel, which detail the burial of the dead body that has haunted the text for hundreds of pages:

> The one whom the farm received had no name. He had no fam-
> ily but their women wept a little for him. There was no child of
> his present but their children were there to live after him. They
> had put him away to rest, at last; he had come back. He took
> possession of this earth, theirs; one of them. (Gordimer 267)

One could argue that by burying this man and bypassing the legal system, they are made complicit in an act of injustice, an act of injustice underscored by the loss of the cultural rites that would be the murdered man's due had he been buried in his own community. However, Gordimer's language encourages the reader to interpret the burial as an act of reclaiming the land, an act of resistance to the idea that Mehring owns the land. Supporting such an interpretation is Mehring's last contact with the land, which reads as a tacit acknowledgement of his tenuous claim. After a grotesque scene in which Mehring imagines his own death in a barren landscape haunted by South Africa's mining past that so scarred the land, Mehring thinks, "They can have it, the whole four hundred acres" (Gordimer 264). This sentiment echoes his increasing physical and emotional distance from the land at the close of the novel. Mehring's last contact with the farm comes mediated by a phone call from Jacobus, who is, ironically, calling to request money for the dead man's coffin; the mechanical distance imposed by the phone foregrounds Mehring's distance, which will shortly grow as he is soon leaving the continent on a business trip. He ends the conversation with "some instructions over the phone; Jacobus must look after every-thing nicely" (Gordimer 266). That the last reference to Mehring within the text is him ceding responsibility for the land to Jacobus answers the question implicit in the first words of the novel, to whom does the land belong? To "one of them" (Gordimer 267).[13]

Conclusion

Time of the Butcherbird and *The Conservationist* illustrate two disparate models of autochthonous resistance for the black South African community. By ap-propriating the state's claim to violence, Shilling's rebellion in *Time* manifests the un-equivocal resistance called for by many contemporaries. His declaration of agency

[13] The novel begins with the following three words: "Pale freckled eggs" (Gordimer 9). In the scene that fol-lows, Mehring struggles to assert his claim over the eggs, which have been appropriated by the local children. As the reader discovers, this is a recurring battle. The eggs are a metonym for the overall struggle for the land.

is a striking representation of overt rebellion for South Africa. In *The Conservationist*, Gordimer deconstructs the Western subject and his accompanying claims to "a subjecthood that would authorize . . . collective action or politics" by removing Mehring from the land and framing him as a frightened man aware of his suspect claim to power (Olaniyan 638). As an analysis of *The Conservationist* demonstrates, it is crucial to recognize acts of subtle resistance, to recognize the political in the ostensibly apolitical. Analyzing the subversive subtext in prosaic resistance reveals the alternate forms of calculated defiance accessible to oppressed individuals. It acknowledges the severe repercussions communities face when contemplating rebellion, repercussions that may hinder more active expressions of discontent. Though the presentation of resistance in *The Conservationist* and *Time of the Butcherbird* occupy contrasting positions on the spectrum of resistance, both undermine the presumptuous authority of white South Africa and struggle against hegemony to assert autochthonous authority, and in doing so create empowering literary models of resistance.

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Minding the Gaps: The Semiotic as Gender Subversion in Mulholland Dr.
—Laura Stamm

In Judith Butler's landmark feminist text, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, she provides an extensive explication of gender identity acquisition, rooting the process in performance and performativity. Yet, Butler neglects to explain how a subject makes the leap from performance to performativity; that is, how individual acts or citations form a continuous narrative of identity. If we think of singular gender performances as film cells and the implied intervals between acts as cuts, we arrive at a model of gender performativity best described in cinematic terms. In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval describes identity as cinematic: "Differential consciousness represents a strategy of oppositional ideology that functions on an altogether different register. Its powers can be thought of as mobile—not nomadic, but rather *cinematographic*: a kinetic motion that maneuvers, poetically transfigures, and orchestrates while demanding alienation, perversion, and reformation in both spectators and practitioners" (44). Sandoval defines a radical re-conception of identity as filmic movement that calls for the denaturalization of both conventional spectatorship and cinematic practices. To implement this denaturalization, I argue that theories of gender subversion must first address what allows the subject to perceive her identity as a continuous narrative. It is only with continuity's source identified that we can discuss the disruptive potential of the intervals it suppresses; Julia Kristeva's *chora* is what provides the filling in of gaps that arise with individual performances. To demonstrate the cinematic nature of identity formation and the disorder that occurs when *chora* bubbles to the surface, I turn to the film *Mulholland Dr.*, reading the film for its representations of gender identity and figuration of *chora*.

Kristeva's project of semanalysis functions to deconstruct the phallocentrism in psychoanalysis, as her concept of the semiotic provides an effective modification to the symbolic order. By contrasting the fluidity of meaning and heterogeneity of the semiotic with the closed down signification of the symbolic order, Kristeva constructs the semiotic as full of subversive potential. More specifically, the semiotic *chora*, with its access to the pre-Oedipal phase, becomes the space for subversion. The foundation of Kristeva's project lies in her description of the relationship between the semiotic and symbolic orders. The semiotic "provides the *matter*, the impetus, and the subversive potential of all signification. It is the 'raw material' of signification, the corporeal, libidinal matter that must be harnessed and appropriately channeled for social cohesion and regulation" (Grosz, "Jacques Lacan" 151). Because semiotic drives, energies, and articulations are indeterminate and not closed down to a specific meaning, semiotics allows for fluidity of signification and the flowing of *jouissance*, or inarticulable plea-

sure. In this regard, semiotics captures the heterogeneous nature of language.

In contrast to the semiotic, the symbolic order represents the Oedipalized language system, regulated by the Law of the Father. To become a speaking subject, one must take up the symbolic order and align oneself with the phallic law. The symbolic order consists of the rules, signification, and singular meaning "superimposed on the semiotic order" (Grosz, "Jacques Lacan" 152). Kristeva's description of the symbolic order's regulation of the semiotic leads to her development of a critical theory known as semanalysis. According to Kristeva, semanalysis works "as a mode of thought which subverts established beliefs in authority and order" (24). Semanalysis looks at language as a system of signification and, thus, seeks to uncover the heterogeneity inherent to language, but closed down by the symbolic order.

Kristeva defines the space that makes possible the semiotic order's heterogeneity of language as *chora*. *Chora* is defined by the pre-Oedipal phase and its primary processes, "which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" (Kristeva 93). In this manner, the *chora* is not only the space for the maternal body, but it is also the space for the disruptive dimension of language. Through its disruption of the signification of the symbolic order, *chora* functions as the semiotic space for subversion. Because *chora* disrupts the symbolic ordering of meaning, the *chora* must consequently be repressed in order for the subject to take up its position in the symbolic order. Kristeva explains this repression in terms of the *thetic* phase; she explains, "the semiotic continuum must be split if signification is to be produced. This splitting (*coupure*) of the semiotic *chora* is the *thetic* phase (from *thesis*), enabling the subject to attribute differences and thus signification to what was the ceaseless heterogeneity of the *chora*" (13). For the subject to recognize itself as a unified subject, it must repress *chora* of language in favor of symbolic significations.

Because of the way in which Kristeva positions the two separate orders, many critiques of her work, including the one offered in *Gender Trouble*, often charge her with essentialism in her supposed description of woman as nature (the semiotic order) and man as culture (the symbolic order). Butler critiques Kristeva's supposed essentialism by writing, "Kristeva describes the maternal body as bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself. She thereby safeguards the notion of culture as a paternal structure and delimits maternity as an essentially pre-cultural reality. Her naturalistic descriptions of the maternal body reify motherhood and preclude an analysis of its cultural construction and variability" (109). However, a close reading of Kristeva's work reveals that she is aware of the dangers of essentialism and attempts to avoid them.

Interestingly, and in contradiction to the criticism that Butler levies, Kristeva points out that despite the fact that *chora* is associated with the maternal, it is a

space accessible to men and women alike. The subversive potential of *chora* for language and literature lies in its disembodiment from the female body. Kristeva, in fact, cites avant-garde male authors, such as Joyce and Kafka, for their ability to access the semiotic *chora* in their writing. Avant-garde writers access the *chora* through their "renewing and reshaping of status of meaning within social exchanges to a point where the very order of language is being renewed" (Kristeva 32). These male authors demonstrate how Kristeva's *chora* allows for the separation of femininity from the maternal or female body and, thus, challenges many of the critiques of essentialism attached to Kristeva's work. This femininity is positioned "as different or other in relation to language and meaning, but nevertheless only thinkable within the symbolic, and therefore also necessarily subject to the Law. Maintaining such a finely balanced position is far from easy, and Kristeva herself has from time to time written about femininity in terms which would seem to equate the feminine with the 'semiotic' or the pre-Oedipal" (Kristeva 11). Kristeva recognizes the difficulty and contradiction involved in attempting to theorize the "untheorizable" *chora* and, similarly, acknowledges the occasional slippages in her argument. Yet, whether or not Kristeva posits a before-the-law in her project, I contend that much of her theorizations of the abject and *chora* are crucial components to the model of gender identity acquisition Butler outlines in *Gender Trouble*.

As Kristeva uses male avant-garde writers as exemplars of those able to access *chora*, I will now turn to avant-garde filmmaker David Lynch to show how his constructions of femininity and experimental film practices figure *chora*. By exposing the ever-present gaps, Lynch's films upset gender performance and visualize the possibility of gender subversion. Lynch's work utilizes feminine experimentation not only in its play with gender, but also in its break with conventional cinematic practices. To demonstrate the importance of Kristeva's *chora* for Butler's model of identity formation, I read Lynch's film *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) through this lens, paying attention to the film's figuration of *chora* and the subversive potential afforded by this reading. Furthermore, I want to use semanalysis to provide an alternative reading of the film; many scholars write about *Mulholland Dr.* in terms that close down the film's slippery meaning, making it easily determined by phallocentric, symbolic language. *Mulholland Dr.* begins with a car crash that leaves a woman, who becomes known as Rita, amnesic. When Rita takes refuge in a stranger's house, she meets Betty, a perky, blonde ingénue actress, who attempts to help her discover her former identity. Their quest to uncover Rita's former life takes an unexpected turn when the two women enter Club Silencio. Writers commonly read the first part of the film with Rita and Betty before the blue box, discovered at Club Silencio, as a fantasy, and everything after the box's opening as the film's grim reality. This interpretation, or more accurately simplification, creates a narrative that is easily expressed in symbolic language. However, Lynch's film functions in opposition to

determinability and decidability, instead forming a filmic text full of fluid meaning and disruptive gaps. In place of reading the opening of the blue box as the end of a fantasy and the beginning of the film's "reality," I read it as the return of the repressed *chora*. The release of *chora* and its ability to speak disrupts the film's previously established gender identities and replaces continuity with chaos. In fact, as *chora* upsets the narrativized gender identities, it also upsets the film's narrative structure by making the fulfilling resolution the spectator anticipates impossible.

  Mulholland Dr. opens with men and women dressed in 1950s style clothing, dancing the jitterbug. It may seem odd for the film to open in this manner as it soon transitions to contemporary (2001) Hollywood, but this opening and 50s nostalgia that crops up throughout the film work as markers of the fantasy of stable gender relations signaled by that era. Indeed, after the end of WWII and men's return home, the gender fluidity women experienced during the war was closed down due to its threatening potential. Post-war anxieties surrounding masculinity were assuaged by women's re-domestication along with a strong investment in traditional femininity and masculinity. This opening is then quite appropriate as the first part of the film represents "successful" heteronormative gender acquisition.

  Before the opening of the blue box, and with *chora* still repressed, identity formation takes place in the way that Butler describes in *Gender Trouble*. This Butlerian model of gender identity becomes fully realized in the film when the previously anonymous Rita adopts her name. In the Lacanian model of ego formation that Butler adapts, Lacan proposes "that human identity or ego is formed during the Mirror Stage, when an infant first encounters itself as a separate entity, typically through its reflection in a mirror" (Chaudhuri 34). After Rita gets out of the shower and stands gazing in front of the mirror, the scene actually contains two mirrors: one reflecting the yet unnamed character and another attached mirror reflecting a *Gilda* movie poster featuring its star, Rita Hayworth. In an act congruous with both the mirror stage and Butler's theorization of gender as citational, Rita simultaneously recognizes herself as a subject and cites Hayworth's feminine identity. By identifying herself in this manner, Rita's acquisition of identity follows the normative model set up by the film's preceding narrative.

  Butler describes this model of gender performativity that Rita visualizes as a continuous repetition of specific gender performances or acts, stating, "the subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects" (198). This process insinuates that there is no before-the-law that endows the subject with an inherent code of gender identity or characteristics. Instead, the subject is socially constructed through the repetitive citations of culturally intelligible gender performances. Butler elaborates, "the rules

that govern intelligible identity, i.e., that enable and restrict the intelligible asser-
tion of an 'I,' rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy
and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through repetition" (198). Therefore, for
a subject to become an "I," one must constantly perform individual acts that al-
low the subject to see itself as having a continuous, narrativized gender identity.

 Because Butler's concept of gender is based on repeated singular acts of
gender performance, her argument suggests that there then must be intervals or gaps
between acts. Additionally, these singular acts point out the "trouble" with gender found
in the otherwise comprehensive model of gender acquisition that Butler presents. By
separating gender performativity into individual constitutive acts, she implicitly high-
lights the intervals between acts that threaten to disrupt narrative gender identity.
Despite the intervals between acts, though, we see ourselves as continuous, unified
subjects. What is implicit, but never discussed, in Butler's argument, then, is the rea-
son gender performativity appears as a continuous narrative. In order to explain the
gaps between acts of gender performance, I return to Kristeva's concept of *chora*.

 For one to become a speaking subject in the symbolic order,
the maternal body must be abjected and *chora* repressed. Though re-
pressed, the semiotic *chora* maintains an important role in the subject's
gender identity. Kristeva explicates the unknowable existence of *chora*:

> The kinetic functional stage of the *semiotic* precedes the estab-
> lishment of the sign; it is not, therefore, cognitive in the sense of
> being assumed by a knowing, already constituted subject. The
> genesis of the *functions* organizing the semiotic process can be ac-
> curately elucidated only within a theory of the subject that does not
> reduce the subject to one of understanding, but instead opens up
> within the subject this other scene of pre-symbolic functions. (95)

Chora operates as the space in between slippages and ruptures in repetitions of gen-
der performance. *Chora* is the means by which gender performativity can appear to
be a series of performances whose gaps or intervals in between, like the cuts in a film
are edited for continuity and remain invisible or unnoticed. In other words, *chora* pro-
vides the unconscious filling of gaps in between singular gender performances. Be-
cause individual gender performances do act similar to individual film cells, I believe
that it is why film provides an effective means for understanding *chora*'s function.

 The narrative, continuous gender performativity Rita models in the bath-
room scene continues until the appearance and successive opening of the blue box.
The box first materializes during the scenes at Club Silencio where the film breaks
narratively and visually from the prior scenes, thus suggesting the chaos about to
ensue. When Rita and Betty enter the club, the man on stage walks around shout-

ing "no hay banda (there is no band)" and upon this announcement, the two women clasp hands in a signaling of the scene's building anxiety. Soon afterwards, as the man announces that everything in Club Silencio "is all an illusion," Betty begins to convulse in her seat. Directly following her convulsion, blue lights and smoke fill the stage and the camera wanders up into the balcony to reveal a woman with blue hair seated above the stage. These elements not only predict the disorientation to come, but also hint at the arrival of the blue box with their evocative color.

The scene allows for the suspension of disbelief when the singer takes the stage and delivers a seemingly believable performance. As she sings "Llorando (crying)," Rita and Betty cry in the audience in what looks like an identification with the woman on stage. The performance proceeds with this sense of reality until the singer faints and the tape recording continues to play "Llorando." After the woman on stage faints, Betty reaches for her purse and opens it to find the blue box, both Rita and Betty gazing at it in wonderment. When two men carry the singer offstage with the music still playing, the scene reveals that indeed, it is all an illusion—explicitly, the show at Club Silencio and, implicitly, gender identity, a performance that appears to be a continuous narrative due to the repressed *chora*.

Betty and Rita rush home where Rita locates the blue key previously discovered in her purse. In a close-up shot of the blue box, Rita inserts the key into its triangle-shaped keyhole and as she opens the box, the camera funnels into the box pulling the spectator into the film's *chora*. I recognize in the blue box's characteristics of unruliness, disruption, and undefined space that make it the film's figuration of *chora*. In addition, the box works as an apropos representation due to *chora*'s frequent equation with a receptacle space; in fact, semiotics is often described as drawing "its sustenance from the *chora*, a term meaning 'receptacle' or 'enclosure'" (Chaudhuri 54). Opening the box represents the release of the suppressed *chora* and the subsequent possibilities for disruption or subversion. This disruption comes through the film's rejection of the symbolic order's need to make meaning through an intelligible narrative.

Mulholland Dr.'s rejection of symbolic meaning, and its accompanying traditional film practices, becomes visualized in its making visible the intervals or cuts between individual performances. In its refusal of a continuous narrative, scenes that would typically be edited for coherent flow are instead pieced together in such a way that opens up polysemous readings of the film. Moreover, through the film's rejection of a linear temporality, it exposes the gaps between each film cell that continuity editing typically masks. This utilization of the gaps disrupts normative cinematic practice in much the same way that it disrupts normative gender identification. Through his experimental filmmaking, Lynch uses film language that disrupts Hollywood's traditional representations of women that silence them to fulfill male fantasy. By exposing the intervals between acts, Lynch's work creates the filmic opposite of the male gaze that Laura Mulvey puts forth in her influential argu-

ment; that is, women as object of the gaze works to resolve narrative, fulfill pleasure in Hollywood mainstream cinema. Mulvey contends that "in narrative cinema, woman plays a 'traditional exhibitionistic role'—her body is held up as a passive erotic object for the gaze of male spectators, so that they can project their fantasies on to her" (Chaudhuri 35). Mulvey views the avant-garde as a counter-cinema that provides a space for alternative images of women. In the essay "Feminism, Film and Avant-Garde," Mulvey fleshes out avant-garde cinema as the means for subverting dominant cinema that utilizes woman as for her looked-at-ness. Minding the gaps and looking at *chora* underlying gender performance in Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.* illuminates why Mulvey finds disruptive potential in avant-garde film.

With the return of the repressed *chora* in *Mulholland Dr.*, women no longer function as vehicles for the film's fulfillment of symbolic narration, but instead work to refuse symbolic meaning. Like Club Silencio's split between sound and reality that reveals that it is all an illusion, *chora*'s disruptive force reveals the construction or illusion that is symbolic meaning and normative gender identity. On a very basic level, Betty and Rita's changed identities are immediately exposed through their change of names, Diane and Camilla, respectively. The film's rethinking of the women's (gender) identity is further seen in its linking together of disjointed scenes such as the dinner party towards the end of the film. Diane's car ride to the party is reminiscent of Rita's car accident in the opening with the car drifting down Mulholland Drive. After Diane and Camilla enter the party and Coco, the party's host, urges them inside, the image on screen becomes blurred and out of focus. When the image of the dinner scene finally comes into focus, it does so only with a shaking camera and the playing of disconcerting music. The shaking of the camera visualizes *chora*'s disruption through a break in the film's cinematic practices.

After the exchange of stilted, denaturalized dialogue, the camera once again shakes and goes out of focus, ending up in focus on a close-up of Diane's espresso, suggestive of the abject spitting and spewing of espresso earlier in the film. As the scene progresses, Camilla and Adam's smiles, laughter, and forced dialogue seem to mock and torment Diane with their happiness as a heteronormative couple. This sudden coupling of Camilla and Adam, the character formerly known as Rita and the character previously only known as the film director, disrupts the naturalization of a heterosexual pairing. The artificiality of the heteronormativity that Camilla and Adam act out is supported by the shaking camera's break with a coherent, complete image of the couple.

Mulholland Dr.'s ending scenes fully realize its opening up of *chora*. The posing of the monstrous "bum" with the blue box reminds the viewer that the key opens up and releases the repressed *chora*. When the "bum" drops the blue box, the camera zooms in to focus on the box inside a brown paper bag—the extreme close-up of the bag exposes tiny old people scurrying out with quick editing, jerky

motion, darkness, and flashing blue light, all of which disorient the spectator. The old people's laughter and chilling music highlight the scene's chaos as it suddenly shifts to a shot of the blue key. As the camera suddenly enters Diane's home, the scene reveals the key on the coffee table, representing that this disorder will end the film. The squealing and screaming of the elderly couple who escaped from the paper bag, the knocking on Diane's front door, and close-up shots of Diane's heavy breathing evoke extreme discomfort in the viewer. The old people instantaneously grow to full size and chase after Diane with the blue light, rapid editing, and terrifying music that fully create the scene's disorientation. Similar to the dinner party scene, this elderly couple represents an ideal heternormativity reminiscent of the film's jitterbug opening.

The film's chaos comes to a close with its ending scene at Club Silencio. This return to Club Silencio reinforces it as the catalyst of the *chora*'s return. The empty stage and the blue-haired woman who whispers "silencio" communicate the failure of phallocentric language and narration to end the film along with the incommensurability of *chora* and the symbolic order. *Mulholland Dr.* turns to exposing the film's gaps in order to disrupt stable gender identity, a subversion that remains inarticulable in symbolic language. Because the *chora*'s release upsets the continuity of the symbolic order, this subversion necessitates a mode of expression with access to the semiotic order—a feminine expression or language speaks through vehicles that symbolic language or phallocentric logic cannot account for. In film, the semiotic, as opposed to the symbolic, manifests as a disruption, a fissure; it exceeds the boundaries created by phallocentric thought and language. The film does not allow the spectator at its closure to have the pleasure of viewing Rita as the quintessential femme fatale, and Betty as the fresh, naive ingénue. Through its reopening of *chora* and rendering visible the cuts in between acts, the film rejects traditional cinematic practices that relegate women to stabilized gender roles that fulfill narrative resolution.

Reading *Mulholland Dr.* for the film's figuration of the return of the repressed *chora* offers a semiotic reconsideration of gender subversion. Kristeva states that when we refer to semiotics, "we mean the (as yet unrealized) development of models, that is, of formal systems whose structure is isomorphic or analogous to the structure of another system (the system under study)" (76). Paying attention to a film's gaps and fissures allows us to see *chora*'s significance for Butler's theory of gender performativity. If the possibility for gender subversion takes place in the intervals between acts as Butler's argument suggests, to successfully disrupt heteronormative gender identity, we must first understand what renders those intervals invisible. Accordingly, an understanding of *chora*'s role in gender performativity precedes an examination of the temporal cuts in between each performance. Because of its ability to experiment with temporality and thereby visualize these gaps and intervals, avant-garde film is an ideal medium in which to consider the relationship of *chora* and performativity. Working through a film in this

manner empowers feminist theory to reveal disruptive gender performances that stand in sharp contrast to mainstream Hollywood's use of repetitive performances.

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Something Maybe, Possibly, Called Lesbianism: The Failure of Language in the Iphis Tales of Ovid and Gower
—Elison Alcovendaz

One of the difficulties of contemporary literary analysis is attempting to use terms that, while useful to the modern reader, seem anachronistic when paired with much older texts, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. When looking at the Iphis tales found in the aforementioned works, however, it becomes apparent that neither author, as men and products of their own historical time periods, possessed language accurate enough to describe the female-female desire at the heart of Iphis' story. What we get instead is female-female desire described by Ovid as "a strange and monstrous passion" (IX: 1050) and by Gower as "agein the lore / of that nature in kinde hath sett" (Book 4: 494-495), indicating that even over the fourteen centuries spanning the times of both authors, lesbianism remained an idea so foreign, so unnatural, no word existed for it. I use "lesbianism" cautiously here, acknowledging its relative emptiness as a signifier when dealing with texts written centuries before the term was even coined, and yet it is precisely the idea of "labeling" or "naming" *something*–lesbian love or even her name of Iphis itself–that makes language and the lack of it so crucial to understanding the gender and sexuality tensions at work deep in Ovid's and Gower's Iphis narratives. In both tales, language is treated as a heterosexual and masculine power, and while Iphis at least indicates that something maybe, possibly, like lesbianism existed in the times of the authors, in the end the only way she can explain, understand, and satisfy her desires is by transforming into a heterosexual male.

Ovid begins his Iphis tale by introducing us to Iphis' father, Ligdus, a poor plebeian who was "blameless in his life" and yet tells his wife, Telethusa, that if she gives birth to a daughter, the girl must be killed since they will not be able to afford her eventual dowry (970). The "blameless" masculine voice is powerful here – "*But let it die*!" Ligdus tells his wife (981), who despite continuing to "implore her husband" (984-985), never gets an actual voice in the tale until the end. The invisibility of Telethusa's voice for the majority of the tale should come as no surprise; as Diane Watt states, medieval texts were "gendered . . . written by and primarily for men" (529). The idea of female infanticide, then, is an important one, as it could be considered the *ultimate* silencing of the female voice not only by the male author, but by the only male character in the story; despite Ligdus' wish for a son, his order to kill the potential daughter is unquestionable. Telethusa, seemingly lacking the power over language that Ligdus has, cannot convince her husband to change his mind. Instead she prays to the goddess Isis, who responds:

> Disobey your spouse
>
> . . . .
> I am the goddess who, when asked, delivers,
> and you will have no reason to complain
> that honors you have paid me were in vain. (1008; 1012-1014)

Isis essentially tells Telethusa to disobey her husband, and yet gives Telethusa *no plans* and *no information* on how the ruse is going to succeed. In fact, Isis doesn't even tell Telethusa to pretend that the baby is a boy, only to "raise this child, whatever it will be," a vague and obvious pronouncement at best (1011). The use of language by females, then, even from a goddess, is rendered less authoritative than that of Ligdus, a poor commoner.

Gower imbues Ligdus with even more power over language in his version: instead of a simple plebian, he is a king, whose words are commands. King Ligdus does not need a reason to kill his potential daughter, as Gower writes:

> He swor it scholde noght be lete
> That if sche have a dowhter bore
> That it ne scholde be forelore
> And slain, wherof sche sory was. (454-457)

Unlike Ovid's Ligdus, whose infanticide wish is driven by economic reasons, Gower's Ligdus has no such fiscal problems, and the fact that we are not given *any* reason for him to kill his potential daughter only speaks to his power. We know, of course, that his wife Thelacuse doesn't obey him, but that disobedience comes not from any individual agency she might possess, but via Isis, who this time tells Thelacuse exactly what to do, "that thei scholden seie / it were a sone" (465-466). Isis' direct involvement might suggest an increase in female agency from Ovid's tale, an idea supported by the fact that it is now the women, Thelacuse and Isis, who bestow the name of Iphis onto the child, successfully deceiving Ligdus. However, as we will observe in the etymology of the name Iphis, the tales seem to be more about merely acknowledging the existence of female homoeroticism while simultaneously illustrating the overarching reach of masculine and heterosexual power.

As Stephen M. Wheeler expounds in his essay "Changing Names: The Miracle of Iphis in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 9," the name Iphis operates internally not only as a struggle between genders, but also a struggle for sexual power. Ovid tells us Iphis carries a patrilineal significance, as Ligdus names his child "for its grandfather," as though the name itself *means* the child *is* a boy (1025). And yet Ovid also states Iphis is a name "given men and women both," indicating its import as strictly a masculine signifier is tenuous at best (1026). To further complicate the etymological

tensions at work in the name, Wheeler also notes that Ovidian readers would have associated the name to *vis*, the Latin word for "by force," and *vires*, the Latin word for "sexual virility" (195). When Iphis learns that she is to marry Ianthe, and falls in love with her, the sexuality struggle inherent in her name manifests itself in her physical inability, without a penis, to consummate her marriage. Iphis complains, "O Hymen, god of marriage, come / to these rites, which cannot be rites at all, / for no one takes the bridge, and both are veiled?" (*Metamorphoses*, IX: 1097-1099). The language needed to describe lesbian love is non-existent and as a result, Iphis cannot even comprehend how sexual intercourse between women might work. Gower's Iphis seems to have a similar lament when he describes the sexual relations between the two lovers: "Nature . . . / Constreigneth hem, so that thei use / Thing which to hem was al unknowe" (*Confessio*, Book 4: 484-487). In other words, "nature," or the normative male-female relationship, has constrained them since without either of them having a penis, they know no way to not only consummate their marriage, but satisfy their sexual desires. This apparent sexual inability exists because of the ever-present normative heterosexual relationship, which is illustrated in the etymology of Ianthe's name. Wheeler states Ianthe to mean "bloom of a violet" and sets her up as the "maiden who is properly to be *deflowered*" (194, my italics). In other words, despite the lesbian relationship at the heart of the Iphis narratives, the relationship remains in many ways a heteronormative one: Ianthe is the woman who must be deflowered and Iphis is—or will become—the man to perform the act. While both authors acknowledge the existence of female homoeroticism, the traditional heteronormative hierarchies—male over female and heterosexual over homosexual—remain intact.

   As stated earlier, a term such as *lesbianism* works to locate the modern reader when analyzing gender and sexuality issues in older literary works, and yet we do so with the knowledge that "in order to 'find' medieval lesbians, one must first define an indefinable state, and then uncover that which does not exist" (Sauer 333). Thus, it is with caution that I approach this "indefinable state"—not only for medieval lesbians, but lesbians from classical Rome as well—with a quote from Judith Butler: "Gender is *performative* . . . a compulsory performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment, and violence" (725). Interestingly missing from both Iphis narratives are Iphis' pre-adolescent years, the years that pass before she meets Ianthe. In order to successfully "pass" not only as a male, but in Gower's version as a son of a king, Iphis must have *performed* the role so convincingly that even her own father wouldn't have known the difference. "Punishment" and "violence" hang over Iphis' head if the ruse fails. From Butler's gender-as-performance theory, a modern reader might argue that Iphis' male performance might *mean* she *is* a man, a simple enough statement, yet perhaps one that neither Ovid nor Gower had the language to make or explain. As Jonathan Walker remarks, lesbianism in Ovid's time had the "problem of invis-

ibility," creating a "power of ignorance [that] has its shadowy effects on both material and linguistic levels" (207). If this is true, then Ovid could not have possessed the necessary language to describe precisely *how* Iphis is able to live for thirteen years as a male. Similarly, regarding medieval England, Carolyn Dinshaw writes:

> Women are, it seems, always already pervered. The cause of their sinful acts with each other . . . is really feminine nature itself. If the language of psychology is missing here, there is another language quite in evidence: working in tandem with the language of natural philosophy that we have observed is a language of morality. (92)

This "missing language of psychology" presents itself in contemporary terms as "gender studies" and "queer theory," among other titles, as ways to explore how and why women would want to perform "sinful," sexual acts with each other, reasons unfathomable at the time of Gower. Like Ovid, Gower completely skips over Iphis' life as a preadolescent and we can see why: not only would he have to deal with the crossdressing success of Iphis, but also with the complicated tensions created by the success of that transvestitism in a heteronormative world. As Walker and Dinshaw have illustrated, neither Ovid nor Gower possessed the language needed to describe Iphis' prepubescent transvestitism, instead deciding to skip her sexually formative years and fast-forward to another unexplainable dilemma: her desire and love for Ianthe.

Ovid provides Iphis a loud voice in his version, though her 52-line monologue reads simultaneously as a lamentation and an exercise in describing the indescribable. Iphis states, "If the gods had wished to spare me, / they should have; if they wanted to destroy me, / they should have given me a *natural affliction*" (IX: 1051-1053, my italics). She later goes on to lament that her love for Ianthe is "less rational" (IX: 1063) than that of Queen Pasiphae for a bull (IX: 1060). Iphis believes her love and desire for Ianthe is both unnatural and irrational, beneath that of an animal, and incapable of existence in the heteronormative world in which she lives. It might be true that Ovid "refuses to make what we now call lesbianism at all visible, intelligible, or nameable," but it seems less of a refusal on Ovid's part and more of an incapability (Walker 206). Iphis' lesbian love is impossible, as all-powerful "Nature . . . / wishes it not" (IX: 1091-1092). Throughout Iphis' monologue, Ovid presents lesbian love as a lack, as a denial by Nature and the gods. She never once *names* her desire and thus can never fully understand it, though we can't really blame her; her author's only means of *attempting* to describe lesbianism is from a phallocentric point of view.

Unlike Ovid, Gower doesn't give Iphis a 52-line monologue; in fact, he doesn't give her a voice at all, though the silence speaks as loudly as any monologue could have. This is an important choice that Gower makes to differ from his Ovidian source text; Iphis' voice is now silenced by three different men: Ligdus,

the male narrator Genius, and Gower himself. Instead of round about and in-complete descriptions of lesbian desire that we get with Ovid, Gower hints that some sexual exploration may have taken place between Iphis and Ianthe:

> Togedre as thei ben pleiefieres,
> Liggende abedde upon a nyht,
> Nature, which doth every whit
> . . . .
> Constreigneth hem, so that thei use
> Thing which to hem was al unknowe. (Book 8: 482-487)

Gower's language here reads as extremely vague: the "playmates" lie in bed one night, but because Nature has "constrained" them, they "use" something "un-known" to them. It seems that this "constraint" is that neither of them have a pe-nis and therefore no way to have sex other than the penetrative, penile-vaginal way. Carolyn Dinshaw adds an interesting point: "What *is* clear is that the desire did not need to be taught" (11). While Dinshaw's statement is true, there still is no *name* for their lesbian desire, and thus Gower can only hint at what transpires in the bedroom. The words needed to describe lesbian sexual activity are non-existent, so Gower must rely on ambiguous language that leaves an accurate understanding of Iphis and Ianthe's love and desire for each other impossible.

At this point in both narratives, it appears that in order for their love to last something miraculous must happen. Ovid sets up Iphis' transformation with the reappearance of Telethusa, who is capable of postponing the "marriage day / with one concocted pretext and another" but once again must turn to Isis, who responds with supernatural help (IX: 1105-1106). When enumerating Iphis' transfor-mation into a man, Ovid's language becomes much more clear and confident: as a man, Iphis now has "longer strides . . . / . . . greater force . . . / a keener counte-nance . . . / . . . and more vigor" (IX: 1132-1136). Returning to Wheeler's statement that Ovidian readers would have associated the name of Iphis to the Latin words *vis* and *vires*, meaning "by force" and "sexual virility" respectively, Iphis' gaining of "greater force" and "more vigor" means she "gains those qualities that are inher-ent to her name" (Wheeler 199). This might indicate, as Wheeler suggests, "the ambiguous name of Iphis proves in the end to be an omen of sexual transforma-tion and divine reward" (199). However, if Iphis has successfully lived as a boy for thirteen years, wouldn't she have had to also successfully perform that male role with forceful, keen, and vigorous actions? While I agree with Wheeler's argument, I disagree with his conclusion: how can Iphis gain the "inherent qualities" of her name if her name is "ambiguous?" We must remember that the name Iphis itself, as Ovid tells us, is a name "given to men and women both," and yet the quali-

ties she gains are masculine ones, not feminine. In the end, it's not so much the qualities she gains that are important, but the *sexual transformation*. Ovid's final words are "Iphis in *possession* of Ianthe" (IX: 1147, my italics). Her possession of Ianthe can only occur now because Iphis has a penis and can consummate their marriage. Had she possessed the language to understand and explain her lesbian desire, the sexual transformation would not have been necessary. In a heteronormative world, the only way she can gain power is to become a heterosexual male through unnatural means, an impossible feat in the mortal world of Classical Rome.

In medieval England, Iphis' transformation may not have been so impossible, at least in theory. As Watt states, "According to certain theories of medicine, the one sex model, the transformation from female to male was not itself contrary to nature" since it was considered a "change from an imperfect state to a perfect one" (544). Gower's story certainly supports this idea, as Cupid:

> Tok pite for the grete love,
> And let do sette kinde above
>
> . . . .
>
> For love hateth nothing more
> Than thing which stant agein the lore
> Of that nature in kinde hath sett. (Book 8: 490-495)

In other words, even Cupid, the god of desire, does not have a way (or the words) to understand how lesbian love might work and thus transforms Iphis into a man so that their lesbian love, an unnatural love, can now abide by the laws of nature. Their love can become "perfect" because it now exists within an understandable vocabulary: between a man and a woman. Watt goes on to note that Iphis is one of few "exemplary female lovers" in the *Confessio*, though she admits that exemplariness may be "because she exhibits virtues construed as masculine rather than feminine" (545). In other words, it is not Iphis' lesbian love, or her feminine qualities, that earn her transformation; it's that she *acts like a man*. One might argue, then, did a transformation actually take place? If she acted like a man her whole life, and the whole world believed she was a man, and at the end of the story is a man, did anything actually change? Butler writes, "Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation" (722). If we take Butler's comment into account, then no, a transformation did not occur. What did change, however, was the vocabulary with which Gower could explain, or "make right," the love between Iphis and Ianthe. By transforming Iphis into a man, Gower places lesbianism back into the realm of invisibility, where his readers could safely consume Iphis' and Ianthe's story using heteronormative language that they understand.

Not that I'm blaming Gower for skirting the subject by any means. As Watt states in another article called "Gender and Sexuality in *Confessio Amantis*," Iphis' tale is the only tale of outright homosexuality in the *Confessio*; Gower avoids male sodomy altogether perhaps because "it would be inappropriate to introduce the subject in a narrative centered around confession" (203-204). Much like Gower, Ovid, and any writer for that matter, is certainly a product of his own historical time period. For this reason I have tried to repeat that terms such as "lesbianism," and indeed other terms I have used such as "heteronormativity," perhaps do not give the Iphis narratives much justice since these terms only allow the modern reader to compare what happened back then to what we understand now. Surely such an enterprise carries risk, as contemporary readers tend to view the medieval era, for example, as "not an essence that exists prior to modernity but instead an after-the-fact construction occasioned by modernity's definition of itself over against that which preceded it" (Kruger 414). A similar argument could be made for Ancient Rome; we only understand it in comparison to ourselves. In this light, one might argue that perhaps the language, or lack of it, in the Iphis narratives is not so much a *failure*, that there is no need to name or label everything as modernists are known to do. However, the narratives themselves evince the problem of not having a language to understand who we are; without the appropriate language, Iphis does not have the vocabulary to explain her own desire, and thus she cannot exist as a homosexual woman. And if that's not a failure, I'm not sure what is.

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Our Own Personal Jesus: *Corpus Christi*, *Angels in America*, and a Theater of Reconciliation

—J.D. Isip

"As you might imagine, many people have shared with me quotes, excerpts and even video clips of [Corpus Christi]. My personal reaction is that I see no artistic or redeeming quality in the work. I believe, as many have opined, that it is offensive, crude, and irreverent."

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People who like to think that everything is settled once and for all are terrified at the thought of viewing social phenomena in new and different ways. That's why some individuals and groups have been reacting with such fierce abhorrence to gay and lesbian civil rights efforts. Since their own world is a heterocentric one, they have already made up their minds from the heterosexually based vantage point and are positive they know God's mind as well (often viewing the two minds as one and the same).

from Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?[2]

Before any real action takes place on stage, the actor playing Judas in Terrence McNally's *Corpus Christi* tells the audience, "No one has ever told this story right. Even when they get the facts right, the feeling is wrong" (8). The story Judas is referring to is the story of Jesus as told in the Gospels of the New Testament (and as performed in the play), but this idea about the "feeling" of the story being right seems to go right to the core of what McNally tries to do in *Corpus Christi* and what Tony Kushner tries to do in *Angels in America*. Both attempt to negotiate the conflict between gay men and religion, specifically fundamentalist or conservative points of view in Jewish and Christian traditions. The two worlds—that of gay men, broadly conceptualized by both playwrights, and that of traditional Jews and Christians, again, broadly sketched out of myriad sects and denominations—could not be more different and, therefore, their intersection offers a terrific starting point for a dramatic work. However, McNally and Kushner have very different takes on how best to approach this conflict. Kushner's *Angels in America* seems to be more radical intervention, where McNally's *Corpus Christi* leans more towards radical containment; both terms I borrow from Ric Knowles' *Reading the Material Theater*; Knowles says, "I want to look at the degrees to which the transgressive or transformative potential of a particular script or production functions on a continuum from

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[1] Jaschik, Scott. "No 'Corpus Christi' at Tarleton State."

[2] Scanzoni, Letha Dawson and Virginia Ramey Mollenknott. *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*

radical intervention to radical containment (that is, the control of transgressive elements in society in the interests of the reproduction of the dominant order)" (10).

Two Gospels

Knowles posits that at one end of the continuum, a playwright might be "transgressive" with his audience by *intervening*—as with an "intervention" with a drug addict or alcoholic, the intervener (i.e. the playwright) sees the audience on the wrong path and feels he or she must turn the audience's point of view around, by force if need be. The intervener has lost faith in the ability of the audience to turn around on their own, they are too blinded by what they are *in* or *addicted to.* Yes, it is a theory that smacks of an old style Marxist rhetoric, but it is a helpful way to understand just what role a playwright (and his play, and the production(s) that follows) can play in changing, or at least challenging, the status quo. I propose that Kushner's *Angels in America* can be seen as perhaps the most radical intervention one could conceive of in the face of the gay community versus the conservative religious community quarrel; in it, Kushner pushes his audience to "not need God" and to see the world around them as a place in which *they* are ultimately in control.

McNally, on the other hand, I believe, has been portrayed as the *more* transgressive because he chooses to envision a Jesus who is a gay man with disciples who are also gay; in Knowles words, McNally uses radical containment for "control of transgressive elements in society in the interests of the reproduction of the dominant order." However, when audiences get past the sexuality of the character, they might see that McNally's *Corpus Christi* is actually a careful interpretation of the Gospels (*not* the refutation we see in *Angels in America*). Robert Goss points this out in his book *Queering Christ*: "Fundamentalist Christian protests and Catholic outcries against McNally's play center on Joshua's sexual intimacy with his male disciples. Fundamentalists are obsessed with maintaining a sexless (or a heterosexually celibate) Jesus and fail to recognize the poignant theology of McNally's play by their refusal to read or view it" (137). With his script being much more grounded in a specific theology than Kushner's (whose script only lightly touches on a range of theologies, including Jewish, Mormon, and kabalistic practices), and his adherence to and promotion of the teachings of Jesus, McNally seems to be quite the opposite of an intervener. *Corpus Christi*, when we get past "gay Jesus," is really as close to radical containment as one might get in theater. McNally is not throwing out God with the holy water. He is using the God of the dominant culture to *teach* the audience how to treat the homosexual as their neighbor.

The reception of McNally's play as a whole and of Kushner's play in respect to the religious/spiritual aspects, seems to point toward a troubling reason why there has not been more successes in the theater (or in film, for that matter)

on this subject: neither the gay community nor the religious community seem to want anything to do with a work that reconciles the two. It seems that both camps, the supposed target audiences, are rather comfortable with a separation of church and gay, which is why both of these plays are tremendously important—these plays seek to *tell the story right*, one through radical intervention and the other through radical containment. They are not at all what their audiences *want* to experience, but they are exactly what McNally and Kushner audaciously feel the audience *needs* to experience. McNally and Kushner acknowledge the attraction of those who need love dearly (gay men) and those who seek to give love (the religious), how they should *naturally* come together, but fight against that nature. The story they tell is not of two sides that hate, but two sides that love but don't quite know how to. Kushner ends at divorce where, I believe, McNally ends at the much more difficult option, perhaps impossible, and certainly undesired by either community: reconciliation.

The Role of Theater in the Gay and Christian Conflict

To understand the truly transgressive nature of both *Angels in America* and *Corpus Christi*, it is necessary to give some context to the conflict between the gay community and fundamentalist and conservative religious communities—both at the times of original productions and at the present. Neil Blackadder, in *Performing Opposition: Modern Theater and the Scandalized Audience*, says that, "Any opposition expressed in response to a theater performance must stem from a discrepancy between what is presented on stage and what the spectators consider acceptable" (15). The first part of *Angels in America, Millennium Approaches*, was performed in 1990. In the early 1980s, what is known today as HIV (and, at its final stages, AIDS), a strange and deadly disease was ravaging the gay community and, worse, was given the name GRID, or "gay-related immune deficiency." The popular notion was that this was a "gay plague" and, in spite of the huge social leaps that had been made since the Stonewall Riots in 1969 and the prominence of Harvey Milk in the late 1970s (and, particularly, response to his murder in 1978), the gay community found itself shut out of not only the larger American culture, but, also vilified by the rising conservative religious/political power known as the Moral Majority—lead by Jerry Falwell and instrumental in the election and re-election of Ronald Reagan. By the time Kushner was mounting *Millennium Approaches*, scores of gay men had died a terrible death by HIV and AIDS and the United States government seemed to be only just accepting that the disease had reached an epidemic proportion. The character Louis basically voices the political history of AIDS in the United States as reported in Randy Shilt's *And the Band Played On*, while Prior and Belize are used to preach to the audience Kushner's anger and dismay over the general response to men dying of AIDS. One of the best examples of this anger is Belize's famous rant in *Perestroika*:

> I hate America, Louis. I hate this country. It's just big ideas, and sto-
> ries, and people dying, and people like you. The white cracker who
> wrote the national anthem knew what he was doing. He set the word
> 'free' to a note so high nobody can reach it. That was deliberate. Noth-
> ing on earth sounds less like freedom to me. You come to room 1013
> over at the hospital, I'll show you America. Terminal, crazy and mean.
> . . . .
> I live in America, Louis, that's hard enough, I don't have
> to love it. You do that. Everybody's got to love something.

Kushner could just have as easily had Belize say "nothing sounds less like God" or "less like compassion" or "less like love" when one considers the religious response to the epidemic of AIDS in the gay community. There is anger, even rage, in the words of Belize and Prior and, to a lesser degree, Louis and Joe. Kushner's anger, of course, resonates with the gay community, but it also resonates with the more liberal supporters of the gay community—academics and theater types who heralded Kushner's bravado and passion, likening him to Brecht and Beckett. If *Angels in America* had a religious message, then it was one that the gay community and their intellectual and anti-religious sympathizers could be enthusiastic about: God was, indeed, dead, religion was useless, distrust of the church and any other proclaimed "believer" was warranted.

A Brief History of Hate (on Both Sides)

Even Harold Bloom [called] "Kushner a 'theological writer,' which is true to the extent that *Angels in America* is, in Kushner's words, a 'struggle and pursuit between the human and the divine'" (Krasner 109-10). However, when we look at *Angels in America*, it becomes very hard to see the pursuit beyond the struggle. By contrast, Terrence McNally is emphasizing pursuit—of God, of love, of compassion—from the start of *Corpus Christi*. McNally's play enters the battle between the gay community and the religious community at the end of the 1990s, after AIDS has been acknowledged by the world as a disease that is not socially selective (i.e. *not* a "gay plague"), after President Reagan and President Bush (Senior) are replaced by the "gay friendly" President Clinton, who immediately takes on the ban on gays in the military (resulting in the disappointing, but significant legislation known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"). Gay men and lesbians were gaining notoriety and acceptance that had seemed unfathomable only a decade beforehand. Yet, McNally's transgressive theater was not embraced by the gay community and theater critics gave it a tepid reception. The reaction of the religious community was fierce, especially when compared to the reaction that was given to *Angels in America* in the early 1990s, in the prime of the Moral Majority and the Reagan Era.

Where Kushner's *Angels* was an expensive production, layered with the intellectual language of the academic elite, and seemingly addressed to New York theater types and affluent homosexuals, McNally was presenting a bare-bones script based faithfully on the Gospels, using camp instead of anger to give the audience "a way in," and, perhaps most transgressive of all, he was staking a claim for homosexuals not in a nebulous "great work" (as alluded to by Prior at the end of *Perestroika*), but in the love and being of God—and not just any little-g "god" but the God of the Bible and the God/Man, Son of God, person of Jesus Christ, the very basis for Christian faith. It is strange to think that what the religious community saw as *more* offensive was not Belize saying "I hate" but Joshua saying "I love." Cynthia Burack, in her book *Sin, Sex, and Democracy: Antigay Rhetoric and the Christian Right*, explains exactly what was so offensive–in her words "dangerous"–about the gay community in the late 1990s and it is not hard to see why *Corpus Christi*'s claim on Jesus' love caused such a stir:

> Homosexuals and transgendered people are dangerous not because we intend or aspire to do anything *to* anyone but because we are more emboldened than ever to live openly and without apology, to call into question the settled beliefs of our fellow citizens, and to alter historical patterns of the distribution of rights and status. Make no mistake: these are radical acts. (136-7)

In fact, the 1998 production of *Corpus Christi* was cancelled because of the intense fervor over the subject matter, only to be given a final play date of October 13th. The date is significant in giving context to the role of theater in the struggle between the gay community and the religious community because, just as this play about love and compassion was being "un-embraced" by the communities it seemed to be written for, the tragedy of Matthew Shepard's "gay bashing" was being played out in the media, ending in his death the night before *Corpus Christi* opened. Suddenly, a play which both gay and Christian seemed to want to "hide away" as quickly as possible became infused into the history of gay civil rights. The line "Look what they did to him" would forever be associated not only with Joshua/Jesus, but with Matthew Shepard (McNally 81).

Tarleton State University 2011: Nothing Has Changed

So this brings us to the present day and how these two plays continue to "transgress and transform" the battle lines between the two communities. *Angels in America* was made into a very well-received HBO mini-series in 2003 and was also successfully remounted this year by the Signature Theater Company.

The battle outside of the theater has ramped up with the controversial issues of legalized gay marriage in the United States and the recent drop of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. One of the most significant (yet often taken for granted) pieces of legislation to take place between the end of *Corpus Christi*'s first run and the present is the legalizing of gay sex in the case of *Lawrence v. Texas*, but, as Paul Brewer points out, the statistics show that progress comes with a price:

> Gallup polls conducted before and after the June 2003 United States Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* [revealed] that public support for same-sex marriage and civil unions exhibited short-term declines in the immediate aftermath of the decision and the wave of media coverage that accompanied it, a pattern that indicates a public backlash. During the same period, Gallup polls also showed evidence of a decline in the percentage of Americans who said that 'homosexuality should be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle.' (61)

This year began with media coverage of a planned mounting of *Corpus Christi* at Tarleton State University in Texas, only to be cancelled because of the intense religious opposition (Jaschik). Though the production was only to be part of a set of four other plays to be performed, though the university initially stood behind the students and the theater department's First Amendment rights to perform the show, the safety of faculty and students could not be guaranteed; in the thirteen years since the original production of *Corpus Christi*, it seems that not much has changed. In fact, as Brewer suggests, the situation certainly stands to get worse.

The Gospel According to Kushner

Kushner and McNally both offer ways in which the theater can continue to contribute to the conversation between both sides, if not *solve* the conflicts. Kushner's approach in *Angels in America* really mimics the sort of surface-level, grudging acceptance we have seen plaid out in the popular media and in headlines throughout the past decade. James Fisher applauds the approach, pointing out that, "As a social progressive, Kushner's politics are paramount in *Angels in America*; he allows both political poles—conservative and liberal—to be seen and heard at their best and worst" (41). Though I can agree with Fisher on the count that Kushner *does* allow both sides "to be seen," the representation of the conservatives (i.e. the religious) are all fairly negative unless the character renounces his or her faith. There is a need for separation; there is deep-seated distrust of "conservatives" and Christians—the two terms used to represent the most negative stereotypes of believers by gay men who continue to see "us against them" like

Kushner's protagonist Prior and like Belize. Like Fisher, Ela Nutu praises Kushner's work through his character, pointing out that, "Prior is he 'metaphorical human' who comes to represent us all. Our 'battered hearts' know him. Thus, by weaving his vision onto human texts (that is, experiences common to all human life, which cannot be divorced from some kind of materialism or another), Kushner manages not to alienate his heterosexual audience altogether. The image that emerges is a world in which 'healing' takes place through communitarian action" (Nutu 185). Again, like Fisher, Nutu gets it half right. If Kushner, in fact, *does* suggest "communitarian action" in *Angels in America*, that communitarian action certainly has nothing to do with people who continue to hold onto their belief in the Judeo-Christian God.

This is not to say that what Kushner offers in *Angels in America* is bad—if the popularity of the HBO Miniseries and continued sales of the print version of the play are any indication, the message resonates—there must be *some* change. However, *Angels* also leaves the audience with the funny feeling that Christianity, God, and faith are all part of a big "lie." In his book, *God Hates Fags: The Rhetorics of Religious Violence*, Michael Cobb states that

> . . . . the conservative Christian lie that homosexual families are non-procreative. In any case, we are led to worry, in a sentimental way, about the future loss of children. We are told to worry about the violent world they will be forced and coerced into accepting if homosexuals were permitted to thrive in privacy, in consensual relations, in marriage, and, *especially*, in the Church, which, as we know, is increasingly synonymous, through the pervasive presence of conservative evangelicals in the United States, with 'the Family.' (159)

Anthony Lioli, rightly, points out that Kushner does in fact rely on religious symbolism and spiritual themes, but Kushner's use of these elements are in no way an endorsement of the faith(s) from which they are plucked. They are often inserted to make the point of the outlandish idea that anyone would take them (i.e. angels, prophecies, a holy book) seriously.

Yes, Tony Kushner's radical intervention calls for change, but his conclusion sets the characters far outside of reality, outside of here and now, and certainly outside of a religious-based or–inspired change. Raymond-Jean Frontain points out the problem with this sort of intervention when he says that

> By satirizing or inverting the Bible, the gay and/or lesbian writer proclaims his or her independence of a society intolerant of, or inhospitable to, difference; the walls of an oppressive tradition are pushed back by the transgressive text to create a space where gay and lesbian readers may breathe more easily. There is a danger to the sa-

tiric impulse, however, which is often clear about what it rejects but *less certain what it would create in its place*." (9, italics mine)

Kushner, through Prior and the final gathering, leaves the audience with the limp proposition that they need to figure it out on their own. As true as the conclusion might be, it does not present an alternative with the same sort of certainty that a religious belief system would offer. Perhaps Kushner offers the logical or intellectual conclusion, but what does he really offer to the person who places faith above all? What does *Angels in America* ultimately offer to a believer or to a gay man who cannot/will not cleave himself from his beliefs, his church, or his God?

The Gospel According to McNally

In an interview with Randy Shulman for *MetroWeekly*, Terrence McNally plays coy about the controversy surrounding *Corpus Christi*, but his commentary also reveals a continued wonder at the disconnect between the message of love in Christianity and the homophobia of those who claim to be followers of Christ:

> I didn't think it was controversial in this day and age to suggest that Christ and his Apostles could be imagined as gay men. I was naive because I thought the message that we're all created in God's image had been more accepted than it has been. I thought people would at least say, 'Yeah, this world should be about love and acceptance and tolerance, about love of our family and fellow man, and that we all have divinity. And when we recognize the divinity in each other we become truly complete people.' But it was all dismissed as a sacrilegious, dirty blasphemous play. I really didn't see that coming . . . The reception to *Corpus Christi* revealed how much homophobia still exists in polite society . . . You can say Christ was a woman, you can say Christ was black but if you suggest that Christ might have been a gay man, then you're suddenly a blasphemer.

Part of what McNally says—"you can say Christ was a woman, you can say Christ was black"—assumes that even these other marginalized groups have made great strides in acceptance, but it doesn't seem to be an assumption based on much fact. "Black Christ" rarely appears or is spoken of outside of Black congregations and "Woman Christ" is not an idea that has caught on with any particular Christian denomination. McNally simply expects much more *progress* in the church than it has, to this point, accomplished. The radical containment of the dominant culture's Christ and his disciples in *Corpus Christi* places McNally in a role beyond Kushner the intervener; where Kushner wants to bring all humanity *out* of the church, McNally, through a gay Jesus (Joshua), wants to bring the gay man *into* the church.

One of the first reviews of *Corpus Christi* states that, "Much of what McNally points out—such as the hypocrisy of the Church's persecution of homosexuals in light of Christ's teachings of love and tolerance—is obvious . . . Of course, the protesters outside the theater are a poignant reminder that even the obvious oftentimes needs to be restated" (Greem 195). Compared to Kushner's insistence that the audience question political motivations, greed, historical cover-ups, and the fractured morality of humanity in general, McNally's play only ponders the gulf between those who preach love and their inability to act on their own teachings when faced by the gay community. At first glance, it does seem "obvious," but *Corpus Christi* has continued to irritate and enrage much more than *Angels in America* because McNally's play uses the very words and teachings and actions of Christ to hold a mirror up to the church. Some have tried to blunt the message by making it more like Kushner's "social progressive" vibe, suggesting for instance, "McNally's prefatory claim that 'Jesus Christ belongs to all of us because He is all of us' serves to reinforce the play's argument that Joshua (and Jesus) are exemplary rather than unique and thus merit emulation rather than worship" (Eads 170); however, McNally's crucifixion scene of Joshua is faithful to the gospels, including the final words between Joshua (Jesus) and God—divinity is not only implied, but is presented on the stage (thunder, lightning) and in the script. McNally's play is not intervening the Christian faith, but it is adopting it.

Don Shewey's review of the play for *The Advocate* in 1998 points out that perhaps it is not the end of the play that demonstrates the real transgression of McNally's theater, but the opening scene, when the actors are blessed by John, "reveals the playwright's true audacity. He takes seriously the teachings of Jesus Christ that all human beings are well-loved children of God, not mere slaves quaking in fear of some punishing deity" (Shewey 77). Returning to Ric Knowles terms of transgressive and transformative, we might say that McNally ultimately offers the audience the most transformative version of God's relationship to gay men—whether they (or Christians) want it or not; McNally suggests that Christ's love is unconditional and, as Andrew Marin points out in his book *Love is an Orientation*:

> If love is an unconditional set of measurable behaviors, it is put to the test most starkly when Christians are confronted with an outcome many of them least expect – when, for example, their gay friend tells them, 'I have listened to God as you have showed me and he told me it's OK to be gay.' Our instinct is to fight, to defend a traditional interpretation of God's posture toward homosexuality. But to respond in such a way, no matter how well intentioned, is to step in between the other person and God. (175)

Stepping in between is the job of the intervener, the Tony Kushner, the Prior and the Belize. Terrence McNally and his Joshua are offering something

transformative: reconciliation; "rather than claiming that McNally is offering a new or alternative gospel, perhaps it is more accurate to say he is recovering the Gospels for gays who feel dispossessed by institutionalized Christianity when in reality the Bible has a great deal to teach them" (Frontain 238).

"I'll Show You…"

Kushner, through a hostile and combative Belize, tells his audience, "*I'll show you* America" (emphasis mine). And it is easy for us to walk away from *Angels in America* feeling like we have witnessed a complete deconstruction of faith. Indeed, this seems to have been Kushner's intent. However, returning to Knowles ideas about the reasons for creating a transgressive theater, an understanding that the playwright seeks to "alter the course," seems to suggest a convergence between McNally and Kushner. Both, in their own way, are seeking a type of reconciliation. The end game is not really what happens to a religion, but what happens to a people, to gay men. Where Kushner and McNally put *their* faith is in their target audience. They present the evidence against and for religious belief, but throw it back to the audience to reconcile what they know and experience with what they will ultimately believe. Transgressive theater is not so much about what the playwright decides to show; it is about what the audience decides to see. Belize may be confident in what *he* sees, but he anxiously ushers Louis in. For what reason? For proof? For validation? Good theater, good literature in general, never offers an easy union between the audience and the writer. Whether the writer is seeking to intervene or radically contain, both are just acts of faith. Not in their craft, in their own vision, but in their audience. Just like Jesus.

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What's in a Name? An Exploration of the Textual Names of Marie de France and Lady Gaga
—Shelley E. Masini

Presentism is an ongoing project that aligns "the newest of the now with a past so old that it qualifies as medieval" (Partner xi). It is an exercise in recognizing how medieval culture can help us understand our modern world and issues. What would be the newest of the now? With an eye towards popular culture, it has to be none other than the new Queen of Pop, Lady Gaga, who renews her identity from performance to performance, song to song. Who from medieval times could match such a figure and help us to understand this phenomenon of our time? There is one woman, if we can call her that, since her own gender has been debated in a way that has far outlived the rumors surrounding Lady Gaga's. This medieval artist is the first French female writer, Marie de France, a sensation of the 12th century. According to R. Howard Bloch in his book, *The Anonymous Marie de France*, Marie's contemporaries, such as Denis Piramus, wrote jealously: "And so it is with Lady Marie who . . . is much praised, and her rhymes are admired by all, for counts and barons and knights love her and hold her dear" (12).

This Presentism project about these two female authors separated by centuries will be guided by their names and fame. Anyone familiar with Lady Gaga's work will recognize the importance of naming and identity in her texts—she has gone from Stefani Germanotta, to Lady Gaga, and most recently to Jo Calderone, a male alter-ego whom she appeared and performed as at the 2011 Video Music Awards. Likewise, Marie not only names herself in her own works, but inserts herself into the narrative in other ways as well, such as the ever-present "I" and her characterizations. By looking at how names denote gender and authorship, as well as the fame that ensues, we are able to understand how these two writers are breaking down long-standing dichotomies, such as individual/community and then/now.

We will focus on Marie's twelve *Lais* and Lady Gaga's first complete collection, *The Fame Monster [the Deluxe Version]*, as well as her recent performance as Jo. Some might ask how it is possible to compare a 12th century poet with a performing artist. The justification is summarized by Roberta Krueger whose work explains that French literature was founded on an oral tradition, which included story-telling and performances. Krueger spends a good deal of time in her own work comparing Marie's writing to that of the *trobairitz*, or French female troubadours, who composed and performed songs (Female 26). Others might ask how do we compare a living writer with a dead writer, given that the former has the unfair advantage of being able to supply an opinion of her own work? To eliminate that advantage I will not use any direct quotes from Lady Gaga. As we shall see, both authors speak clearly enough through their texts.

In her book, *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler explains how society creates "normal" ideas of gender and desires, and also how those ideas can "undo" a person, making it hard for them to live. Not only that, but since our gender is made up outside of us, by a society of "no single author," then the idea of our individual authorship is negated as well (Butler 1). Let us keep this in mind as we first explore the scholarly work already done on Marie to reveal how she uses her name to ultimately undo the gender thrust onto her and reclaim her sense of authorship. We will then see what light Marie can shed on Lady Gaga's respective self-naming.

As stated above, Marie's gender as female has been disputed, especially given that so little is known about her. R. Howard Bloch points out that despite the sophisticated concepts of authorship that existed in Marie's times, she kept herself as close to anonymous as possible, going only so far as to name herself (10). But that name, Marie, which appears in the text, cannot be ignored. Echoing Butler's gender theory, Heather Arden writes that "the importance of Marie's gender for her writing is primarily the consequence of a social system built on sexual difference . . . I consider Marie's gender relevant to understanding the *Lais* not because of her biological sex but because society treated her like a woman" (212). The appearance of the name Marie in an authorial capacity urges us to treat the author of the *Lais* as female, real or illusory.

What then did it mean to be a female writer in the 12th century? While women were indeed experiencing wider opportunities in this time of cultural renaissance, with increased education as well as apprenticeships, properties and trades, they still existed in a larger tradition of misogyny (Delany 320). Jane Chance draws on the writing of two medieval males to demonstrate the misogynistic thought faced by women writers attempting to flourish in the 12th century. She notes that Isidore of Seville identified Eve as both "life" and "woe," and further asserted that the male used his semen to create while the woman passively housed his creation (5). She also quotes St. John Chrysostom who urged women "to learn in silence and not speak in the church" (6). Thus, in a time that encouraged women to become educated, it still feared their words and denied them a true sense of authorship. Marie found herself in a society that placed on her its "normal" restrictions that might have made it difficult to live; she would have been silenced and denied the role of creator. As a means to explore what life would be like if she were not gendered female, Marie would have had to find a space in which she could not only redefine her identity but act as creator. Under the guise of retelling Breton *lais*, she did just that.

In the *Lais*, Marie created a liminal space. The theory of liminality was used in another Presentism project, that of Betsy McCormick, who compared the liminal spaces of modern reality TV shows with the medieval dream. In her work, McCormick specifies that as "a clearly defined area lying outside the everyday world, the liminal realm provides safe (because separate) space in which to experiment with social rules and norms" (91). Many scholars have identified the unique space in Marie's writing,

such as Eva Rossen who writes, "Marie, wishing to speak, chose not to engage in a *translatio studii*; rather she had to create a space in which to speak" (227). But none have identified it as a liminal realm. Though Marie is writing courtly romances popular of her time, multiple points establish her texts as a liminal space. First, she chose Breton *lais* over more popular Latin sources (Krueger, Marie 173). Second, she neither quoted nor translated her source, as her contemporaries would have (Freeman, 865). Finally, there are the undeniable otherworldly qualities of popular folktales and fairy tales found in the *Lais* (Rothschild 143). These points establish how her texts are something familiar but different, a space to experiment and create. In this space, and through the name, she ungendered herself and regained her authorship.

Michelle Freeman demonstrates that it is not just the name, Marie, or the multiple "I" pronouns that refer to the author of the *Lais*—it's potentially every name and character. When describing the Lady of *Laüstic* up all night at the window, Freeman asks if this alter-identity of the Lady is "like that of Marie during her all-night writing vigils?"(868). She goes on to answer her own question later in reference to the encased dead nightingale that the Lady sends her lover: "we note the parallels between Marie and the Lady of the *lai*, who puts something of herself, or rather all of herself as she existed in the secret and at night, into the creation of this relic that she sends forth" (870). Freeman is asserting that, in so far as they are both sending themselves forth in their own creations (one a relic, one a *lais*), the Lady and Marie are alter-egos. But she does not stop there. She locates Marie in the male characters as well: "She also behaves like the Lover, as she too had once heard the song of the *laüstic* and had been told . . . the story behind it" (870). Freeman establishes that in Marie's liminal world, she can be both female and male, an idea reinforced when she writes of *Chievrefoil*, "Throughout there is an unbroken chain of male onto female and female onto male, each gender giving way to the other in turn" (876).

If Marie is not just present in her text when her own name is mentioned, but also through her characters, female or male, then the idea of the author's name comes to denote many identities and genders. The repetition in the *Lais* reflects this. Judith Rothschild's work on Marie and the folktales provides a sampling of events and images that repeat throughout the *Lais*, for example, contests (*Les Deus Amanz* and *Chaitivel*) and birds (*Yonec*, *Laüstic*, and *Milun*). Rothschild argues that through this repetition, any one object or event "gradually accretes unto itself a succession of symbolic functions and meanings" (145). The authorial presence might be considered one of these repetitive, ever-changing events. Though Marie's name only appears once in the collection, in the beginning of *Guigemar*, the pronoun "I," in reference to the author, appears throughout. The authorial presence becomes a repetitive symbol of Marie's identity and its meaning keeps changing, from *lai* to *lai*, character to character, female to male. Her identity and gender is in constant flux. Sarah Spence expands on this by referencing the intertwining of Marie's characters

and plots. "As with the formal intertwining of troubadour lyric the change in context provides a change in emphasis; what is highlighted is the multi-faceted, ever-changing qualities of life of the individual in a changing spatio-temporal frame" (271). If Marie is present, as Freeman says, in her plots and her characters, then it is *her* identity that is being highlighted as multi-faceted. She is not just here a female, there a male, she is all genders at once, and as such, the true author of her own identity.

Through naming, Marie has undone the gender restrictions forced upon her by her society and reclaimed her authorship. But what can this tell us about the Lady Gaga of today? Arden writes that women today "can share enough cultural constants with Marie to approach her writing with modern ideas; in both times women grow up in an extensive sex-role system where the roles of men and women are clearly distinguished" (213). Thus far, little formal scholarly work has been done on the female pop icon, but one website, *Gaga Stigmata*, has endeavored to elicit critical pieces to further understanding of the influential performer. Drawing from the website's editors and contributors and Marie's example let us shift our attention to Lady Gaga to demonstrate that she, centuries later, is equally concerned with ungendering herself and reclaiming authorship.

Like Marie, Lady Gaga uses the name in her liminal space to question social norms, especially around gender. The liminal space can be found in all of Lady Gaga's work: the sets of her concerts, such as The Monster Ball; her conceptual *Haüs of U*; as well as each video. These epically long, artistic productions depict surreal, sometimes cartoonish, worlds where the taboo is explored—Nazis in drag seducing nuns, Judas and Mary Magdalene riding on Harley's in Jesus' motorcycle gang—and often feature the interactions of mythical characters of fairy-tales (i.e. the Nymph, the Bride, the Villain). In the 21st century, Lady Gaga has been able to also extend her liminal space into the World Wide Web, creating a virtual community for all her "little monsters," as fans call themselves.

Within this space Lady Gaga has created numerous alter-egos, just as Marie formed alter-egos in her characters. Lady Gaga was born Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta (Robinson 52). However, Stefani Germanotta and Lady Gaga should not be seen as separate but the same, much in keeping with Spence's understanding of Marie's intertwining. The editors of *Gaga Stigmata*, Katie Durbin and Meghan Vicks, substantiate this in a recent interview with *Spex Magazine*: "even in her earliest interviews, Gaga was adamant that Stefani Germanotta is Lady Gaga; that Lady Gaga is her 'real' identity . . . the façade, spectacle, artifice, performance—all these are Gaga's essence, her fundamental components." In keeping with this assertion, Jo Calderone, the male alter-ego mentioned earlier, must also be a manifestation of the real Lady Gaga. Jo says in reference to Lady Gaga during his performance, "She said, it always starts out good and then the guys, meaning me, I'm one of the guys, we get crazy. I did, I got crazy. But she's fucking crazy

too" (Lady, "Yoü"). In this moment, Lady Gaga claims that she is Jo, and by emphasizing a shared quality, she reinforces that they are indeed one and the same.

One *Gaga Stigmata* contributor, Eddie McCaffray, writes, "Her point isn't that dressing and speaking as Calderone allows her the freedom to be someone else, but that it allows her the freedom to be herself specifically." While he is exploring Gaga's challenge to the model, asserting that "true selfhood is achieved in ways that may appear to be something other than fulfillment of a certain ideal," I urge that we end his statement at "other." Like Marie's identification with her own male characters (Lanval, the Lover of *Laüstic*, and Tristan), Lady Gaga is ungendering herself and challenging the idea of the Other. Just as women have traditionally been the Other in a male society, the male is traditionally the Other to women. When McCaffray goes on to conclude that "identity requires the destruction of a model," he is not far from our point. True identity, first demonstrated by Marie and now by Lady Gaga's appearance as Jo, comes from destroying the sense of female as Other, or as existing without the male Other. In other words, true authorship destroys the female/male dichotomy because it accepts and intertwines both genders.

But if these two women are undoing the gender and restrictions their respective societies have placed on them, why are they recognized and loved for it? Continuing with Judith Butler, "agency is recognizing that we are constituted by a social world we didn't choose. The 'I' is both constituted by norms and dependent on them but also tries to live in a way that maintains a critical and transformative relation to them" (3). Lady Gaga and Marie participate in their societies, even as they critique them, and it is these very societies that have allowed their individuality and authorship to flourish. As if an unexpected reversal, by asserting their name, their ungendered selves, onto their societies, they have been rewarded with fame. Yet, it is not unexpected at all.

Michel Foucault helps us to understand this with his "author function," which links the author's name directly to the author's society. While texts point to the person who is outside of it, the "author's function" is to "characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society" (124). We may conclude that the author is a reflection of the society within which she writes and a successful writer, a famous writer, is one who aptly reflects the discourses and concerns of a particular society. Existing here in the 21st century with Lady Gaga it is easier to observe this. Durbin and Vicks note that, "Gaga learned the art of fame and projected it into the world and the world responded." She appeared on the pop music scene, opened with her name in the first lines of her first song, and the world responded. It did so because her name and her text reflected society's discourses. "Gaga is also a reflection, a 'spiritual hologram,' of pop culture. By embodying a superabundance of cultural symbols . . . she thereby reflects our current cultural condition" (Durbin and Vicks).

Though Marie may not seem as concerned with fame and success, it is here that Lady Gaga can reveal something of Marie—that she was equally interested in

success and overt in her pursuit of it. This is first evidenced by her very choice of the Breton *lai* which compared to Latin sources of the time might be likened to the pop music of today. Marie writes, "That's why I began to think / about composing some good stories / and translating from Latin to Romance; / but that was not to bring me fame / too many others have done it. / Then I thought about the lais I'd heard" (Prologue, lines 28-33). Marie's boldness is expressed by Freeman who writes in reference to Marie's dedication of her *Lais* to the King, "This initiative of the poet-narrator is all the more arresting not only because it is a woman who dares to address her male interlocutor first . . . but also because the person addressed is the King" (860).

While we've already seen that the 12th century still harbored more than enough misogynistic thought to go around, we've also had hints that it was far more progressive than many would suspect. If we are to understand Marie's fame by the theory of Foucault and the example of Lady Gaga, then something about the time that Marie asserted her name and all it represented within her texts resonated with the discourses of her society. Denis Piramus is also quoted as saying: "And they [counts and barons and knights] greatly love her writing, they have it read aloud, they have them [lays] often told" (Bloch 24). Marie's fame, like Lady Gaga, was boldly asserted through her name and an accessible medium, but only granted because she as an author reflected her society's discourses. Her individual fame could not exist without the community to support it.

Our examinations of the names that appear in the texts of Marie de France and Lady Gaga have led us here, at the end, to a place that is both individualism and community. We have it on the authority of Butler that this is where we should be: "If I am a gender but it is undoing me because it comes from a sociality I do not author, then gender undoes the 'I' and that undoing is part of the meaning of that 'I.' But that means we are claimed by others, which does not mean an end to our political claims but that when we make these claims we are making them for more than ourselves" (16). Just as Marie used her "position as writer who had found favor at court to urge her readers to transform themselves and their communities" (Krueger, Female, 37). Likewise, Lady Gaga is urging, through performance and pop music, that her fans, and society at large, embrace themselves and each other.

It is also right, that at the end of this Presentism project, we should strive to break down binaries, such as male/female, individual/community. According to the editors of *Cultural Studies of the Middle Ages*, Presentism is about overcoming such oppositions; it is a "recurring and powerful tribute of recognition to something in medieval culture that speaks to us of ourselves" (Miller xii). In attempting to show what a 12th century French writer can reveal about a 21st century pop star, we are undertaking to break down the opposition of medieval/modern. This is furthered when Gaga, in turn, provides new understanding of Marie. Thus, when we hear Lady Gaga's name, we can think of Marie; when we hear Marie's name, we can think

of all of us, in the Present.

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Marina Abramović: A Body of Dichotomy
—Christine M. Davids

Q: How many performance artists does it take to screw in a light bulb?
A: I don't know. I was only there for four hours.[1]
-Marina Abramović

      Throughout her decades-long career, performance artist Marina Abramović has used the public sphere as a stage for social commentary, personal resolution, and as a means of pushing the boundaries of the body and mind through art. Abramović is a woman aware of her abounding incongruities. In search of her place amidst a sea of predetermined social roles, she finds that she does not fit seamlessly into any single one, and openly admits, "[my] life is full of contradiction" (Kaplan 7). Marina Abramović confronts personal paradoxes, and reconciles her various embodied binaries through performance. Her objective as an artist "is to lead her spectators through an anxious passage to a place of release from whatever has confined them," while also working to solve deeply personal concerns and to free herself from haunting social histories (Thurman 25).

      An impossibly wide gulf exists between Marina Abramović the artist, and Marina Abramović the person. Mary Douglas explains this division of the self in "The Two Bodies," noting that individuals have a 'social self' whose behavior has been trained, and constrained, by the social rules of authoritative discourse, which serves to actively suppress the 'natural self'. Abramović appears to be aware that she exists somewhere between the opposing poles of social normalcy and Otherness, and uses her art as a means to express personal discord with the 'one size fits all' prescriptions of dominant discourse. Her work merges the public and private realms, and invites spectators to participate in unpacking, abandoning, challenging, and unsettling encoded social norms that are inscribed upon the body. Marina Abramović is a body of dichotomy, and her performance art is a vehicle for personal and social reconciliation.

      The beginnings of performance art, as we know it today, are firmly rooted in the twentieth-century and can be traced back to Modernism, specifically to the work of the Italian Futurists in 1920s Paris (Goldberg 9). The Slavic artist first arrived on the scene when performance art boomed in the 1970s, and body art "became accepted as a medium of artistic expression in its own right" (Goldberg 7). Occurring in tandem with feminism's second wave, performance art became widely popularized in the midst of socio-political upheaval in the United States. Thus, the unconventional medium—that of the flesh—and the fantastically questionable methods Marina Abramović

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[1] At the end of her very serious interview with Janet Kaplan, Abramović wanted to finish the session on a light note: "Wait. A little joke. Sometimes there is so little art that has real humor, and humor is very important, because with laughing, the truth, even the worst, is easy to say."

employs upon her body, create a corporeal tension for both artist and viewer that serves to rupture the naturalized normatives imbedded in day-to-day performativity.[2]

Peggy Phelan provides insight into the art form when she explains that "the best body art of the 1970s employed endurance and physical pain as primary tools for the exploration of a new practice predicated on exploring bodily limits. Body artists," she continues, "claimed their own bodies as a medium and a metaphor for the relationship between the self and the other, performer and spectator, art and life, and life and death" (17).[3] Abramović's art is largely about endurance, pain, and using the body as a medium of communication between long standing social binaries. As Phelan underscores, body art's mediation of "bodily limits" serves to both amplify and resolve the natural and social selves; making Cartesian lacunas visible through self-inflicted pain and spectator anxiety. Many of Marina Abramović's installations, including her most recent exhibition entitled *The Artist is Present*, test the capabilities of her own body, while inviting spectators to participate in questioning the situatedness of their bodies in relation to culture.[4] Abramović's artistic explorations of internal and external conflicts are often revealed in performances that are both physically and emotionally painful. Abramović uses pain as a means of connecting her mind and body, while simultaneously bridging her public and private selves. Abramović "has screamed until she lost her voice, danced until she collapsed, and brushed her hair until her scalp bled" all in a campaign for connectivity (Thurman 26).

In a recent interview, Judith Thurman probed Abramović about her performances. Thurman asked, "What makes it art?" To which the artist replied: "The sense of purpose I feel to do something heroic, legendary, and transformative; to elevate viewers' spirits and give them courage. If I can go through the door of pain to embrace life on the other side, they can, too" (26). Marina Abramović's performative experiences are inseparably linked to her audience; the interactive nature of her artistry challenges traditional ideas of art where the creator is elusive, distant, and not *present*. The shared experiential style of her work meticulously merges the public and private spheres, while questioning socialized traditions that we, often unknowingly, perpetuate.

The artist's invitation to explore bodily conventions is closely linked to the mental and emotional aspects of the body. Like many body artists, Abramović seeks to reconcile the body-mind dichotomy, and undermine Cartesian philosophy. During the 1970s performance art "undertook a radical examination of the mind/body problem, attempting to link ancient, inherited knowledge of the body with a newly expanded medium for art" (Phelan 17). Phelan's acknowledgement of the relationship between mind and body as a "problem"

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[2] In "Critically Queer," Judith Butler explains that "Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech" that reflect our relationship with authoritative discourse and the "binding power" it has over bodies (611).

[3] "On Seeing the Invisible: Marina Abramović's *The House With an Ocean View*" (2004).

[4] Museum of Modern Art, New York, March 14-May 31, 2010.

begins to get to the heart of Marina Abramović's project. Further, as a whole,

> Performance art and New Age investigations were motivated to explore alternative modes of consciousness by a recognition that much of Western thought and culture was insufficiently sensitive to the psychic and political force of embodiment. Descartes' famous proclamation, 'I think therefore I am,' central to post Enlightenment thought, ignored modes of being not related to rationality. (Phelan 17)

For performance artists, explorations of the body are undeniably linked to the mind and consciousness, and the psychological components of Abramović's installations are as challenging as the physical feats she achieves in her art. Many claim they don't understand performance art, but the resulting confusion and discomfort caused by her performances is a direct challenge to the widely accepted mantra "I think therefore I am."

Bodies are social signifiers with learned boundaries, and when presented with something that falls outside the bounds of normalcy individuals are required to define what 'normal' is, how it relates to their body, and to a greater set of cultural rules. Body artists, "especially feminists, saw in performance an opportunity to explore questions that had been systematically repressed and ignored in Western thought," which makes Abramović's role as a female performance artist of paramount significance (Phelan 17). With a quest to destabilize longstanding 'rational' truths and ingrained Cartesian ideologies, Marina Abramović implores viewers to question why it is that society has worked so very hard to eliminate the presence of the body—especially women's bodies—and its natural functions from everyday discourse. In feminist terms, the artist appears to be working in conversation with Hélène Cixous, exploring the false justifications of the man-over-woman, and head-over-heart refrains so commonly supported by patriarchal discourse; her work is "a universal battlefield" that publically explores a series of "dual hierarchized oppositions" (Cixous 359-60).[5]

The endeavor to connect the brain with the body is inherently feminist, and Abramović's means of unification must be jarring in order to be effective for both performer and audience. The artist explains that bodily mutilation and physical pain act as gateways for a deepened consciousness, and in "certain state[s] of mind," Abramović states, "you can push your body over its limit" (Kaplan 8). Marina Abramović defies Descartes' famed denial of the body by using corporeality to exceed the bounds of her mind, while simultaneously using her body to incite thought in the minds of her spectators. Abramović specifically addresses her concern with the social habit of separating the body and the mind into detached entities when she explains her philosophy as an artist:

[5] Cixous, Hélène. "Sorties." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader.* Ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood. London: Longman, 1988. 358-365.

> Art has to have a spiritual value and something that opens certain states of consciousness, because we are losing ourselves so much. The main thing for me is this total separation. We are facing a separation of body and mind . . . we are sitting at home with the body in once space, but we are everywhere with the mind—by the Internet, by computers zipping through the world. The body is becoming something very heavy, an obstacle. This separation will become so disastrous that that body and mind must eventually come back together. And art has to have the answers. (Kaplan 16)

By publicly fetishizing her own body, Abramović calls attention to the social tendency of denying the spiritual importance of the physical form, and emphasizes the movement toward viewing the body as an "obstacle" to be overcome. Art is the vehicle through which Abramović hopes to reunite what has been separated out of, or deemed unnatural, by Western discourse.

The compartmentalization of the body is a learned behavior that functions to limit and control the physical self so that it can exist safely within the cultural norms of society. In order to completely understand the meaning of Abramović's performances it helps to return to Mary Douglas' concepts of the physical self in relation to greater discourse. Douglas states, "The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society" (78). Social ideologies are reflected physically, thus the social and natural selves, as inscribed upon the body, become confused and the social self is mistaken for what is natural. There is an ongoing "exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the category of the other," which ultimately results in "the body itself [being] a highly restricted medium of expression" (Douglas 78). The body is indeed "highly restricted" in daily—naturalized—performative acts; through her artistry, however, Marina Abramović seeks to radically diminish such restrictions. Various bodily constraints have become so deeply ingrained within our culture that their effects appear only as subtle, invisible ripples upon the surface of the body, seemingly imperceptible—normal. Unconscious uses of gesture, dress, posture and other forms of implicit physical containment serve to reinforce a cultural code of bodily conservatism. "Natural expression is culturally determined," and what is conceived as 'natural behavior' is actually a learned application of the body within the context of society (Douglas 79).

Furthermore, Douglas calls attention to "expressions of social distance," noting the importance and meaning of physical positioning and the placement of bodies in space. Abramović's famed 1974 performance, *Rhythm 0*, rendered spectators in control of her body, and removed rules of social distance as the audience was given permission to use any of the seventy-two objects provided by the art-

ist (including feathers, lipstick, a gun, a bullet, a Polaroid camera, razor blades, a cake and even an axe) on her body at their will. At the start of the performance, the artist introduced the piece by announcing: "I am the object . . . During this period I take full responsibility" (Thurman 28). Marina Abramović relinquished bodily power to her viewers and participants, and "as the hours passed, she remained utterly impassive, though she couldn't hold back her tears. A few spectators wiped them away, and, as others began toying with her body, two factions emerged: vandals and protectors" (Thurman 28). Those deemed "vandals" were able to successfully abandon ingrained notions of acceptability and freely marked upon Abramović's body without considering the restrictive rules of the social self.

By publically highlighting subject/object relationships through the use of her own form, and by collapsing the role of the object and the subject into one being, Abramović begins the complicated process of unifying the mind and the body.[6] Interestingly, Judith Thurman uses negative language to describe such "trespassing" on Abramović's body, demonstrating that even she is unable to free herself from the uses of "the body as a medium" of social expression (Douglas 79).[7] The "protectors" that emerged in *Rhythm 0* served to reinforce the limits and rules of dominant discourse by undertaking the responsibility of defending and protecting Abramović's body. They viewed the invited inscriptions as forms of defilement, violation, and humiliation, yet the response provoked in many of the "protectors" was ardently emotional, further confusing rationality with sentimentalism. Peggy Phelan observed a similar confusion in terms of the creation of the performance piece:

> *Rhythm 0* demonstrated that what makes live performance a significant art form is that it opens up the possibility for mutual transformation on the part of the audience and the performers . . . By accepting both her audience's care for her safety and her audience's desire to hurt her . . . they became co-creators of the event itself. (19)

The most intriguing reading of *Rhythm 0* is found in the artist herself. Marina Abramović embodies the personalities of both the "vandals" and the "protectors." The dichotomy of emotionless "impassivity" and uncontained emotional response, as seen in the artist's tear-filled eyes, reflects Abramović's internal battle to both hold on to and reject notions of social acceptability; to be publically humiliated, or to damn the idea of humiliation all together. *Rhythm 0* provided a space for a con-

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[6] Although the artist relinquished control, she gained power in such relinquishing. Thus, the familiar subjugation (associated with subjects and objects) is confused, and hierarchical meaning is lost. In being victimized by the participants, yet by "accepting all responsibility" Abramović blurs social roles.

[7] I'd like to not the significance of Thurman's use of "trespass." "Trespass" immediately evokes the law and its violation, it also summons concepts of ownership. That Thurman would contextualize audience participation as a form of corporeal trespassing demonstrates her own involvement with limitations of social acceptability.

versation between the 'social self' and the 'natural self' by simultaneously violating and reinforcing acceptable forms of bodily expression in public, and by the public.

A topic Abramović repeatedly attempts to resolve in her art is the complex history of her Yugoslavian heritage. In *Lips of Thomas* (1975) and *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005), the artist carves a "five-pointed Communist star" into the flesh of her abdomen while donning a traditional Balkan solider cap, and nothing else. In search of personal resolution it was "with her wound [that] Abramović showed how ideology marks the body, and by making it so viscerally present, she pointed to the deepest layers of her own being" (Stokić 25).[8] During the Bosnian war, Marina Abramović performed *Balkan Baroque* (1997), which was "An expression of her complex shame for, and her attachment to, her identity as a Yugoslav" (Thurman 29). With bristled brush and bucket in hand "she spent six hours a day, for four days, abjectly scrubbing fifteen hundred raw cow bones that, in the summer heat were crawling with maggots" (Thurman 29). As Julia Kristeva reminds us, it is "not the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4).[9] This seemingly tortuous performance enabled Abramović to directly confront conflicting emotions surrounding her cultural history. By becoming herself abject—sitting in the waste of the world, confronting its decomposition—and in using her body as a place where the "shame" and "attachment" to her ethnic roots were able to publicly dialogue with one another, the artist successfully created a "place where meaning collapses," where binaries meet, and new meaning can be made (Kristeva 2). Abramović "wept as she scrubbed [the raw cow bones], and sang folk songs of her homeland"; her viewers elicited a profound response as they witnessed the artist's emotionally charged cultural confrontation (Thurman 29). Judith Thurman noted that "the stench . . . was unbearable, but so was the intensity" (29). Blood soaked and tear-stained, Marina Abramović used public performance to convey her innermost struggles with identity, while also inviting the public to witness the use of her body as a vehicle to resolve her Slavic/self binaries.

When Thurman asked Abramović what differentiated her work from masochism, the artist replied by saying,

> Funny, my mother asked the same question . . . All the aggressive actions I do to myself I would never dream of doing in my own life—I am not this kind of person. I cry if I cut myself peeling potatoes. I am taking the plane, there is turbulence, I am shaking. In performance, I become, somehow, not like a mortal. (26)

Here, Abramović clearly distinguishes her private self from her public persona as

[8] Stokić, Jovana. "The Art of Marina Abramović: Leaving the Balkans, Entering the Other Side." (2010)
[9] "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection" (1982)

an artist. The same individual who promotes pain as a means to transcend into a greater state of consciousness, and whips herself until she is unable to feel, also cries when she cuts herself peeling potatoes. Abramović traces this contradiction to her Balkan heritage when she explains that Yugoslavians possess both "tenderness and violence" that work in concert and in conflict with one another (Stokić 166). This contrast between her mortal-potato-peeling-self and immortal-artist-self can be seen in her inability to control the tears that so often streak Abramović's stoically brave face during her performances. This collision, this meeting of selves, is what makes Marina Abramović's art meaningful.

These same heritage-based contradictions carry over into Abramović's ideas of gender, and her fraught relationship with the female identity. At the start of her interview with Janet Kaplan, Abramović tells her interviewer "you absolutely need fresher lipstick" (7). Abramović claims that her contradictions come from her divorced Yugoslavian parents; when she was living in the United States during the Bosnian war, Abramović wanted to provide her parents with supplies during the conflict:

> I called my father to ask him what he needs, and he dictates a long list—antibiotics, bandages, penicillin, toilet paper, coffee, sugar, powdered milk, all these basic things for survival. Then I call my mother and ask what she needs. She says 'I need Chanel lipstick, Absolute Red, Number 345, and hair spray.' I am between these two. It took me a long time to come to terms with this because I've always tried to put a face in front of the public that is very tough, very male. (Kaplan 7)

This contrast between her father and mother establishes differences in gendered needs, and both parents/genders appear to inhabit different aspects of Abramović's being. While her father was overly concerned with items vital to survival, her mother's idea of basic necessities represented desire, and elevated want over need.

In 1975 Marina Abramović performed *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful*, during which she used a metal brush to violently groom her hair for one hour while repeating the title of the piece like meditative mantra. The performance ended when she succeeded in severely damaging her hair and induced scalp bleeding due to the ferocious brushing. Abramović says of the piece: "[I] really hurt myself, showing a very disturbing image that is the opposite of beauty" (Kaplan 15). It appears that Abramović *always* makes a concerted effort in her work to show "the opposite of beauty." "I never create to be decorative," she says, "I don't like aesthetic beauty—a beautiful frame, nice colors that go well with the carpet. To me art is disturbing. It has to ask questions and have some kind of prediction of the future within it. It has to have different layers of meaning" (Kaplan 16). To make aesthetically pleasing art, Abramović claims, is to re-

main on a superficial level—she wants to go deeper, a task which her younger self did not think could be accomplished while wearing Absolute Red lipstick.

In her earlier years, Abramović denounced "culturally processed ideas" of beauty through her work—a perspective which aligned with her efforts to be tough and male, which she initially felt she needed in order to be accepted as a serious artist (Douglas 78). Abramović admitted that "if the woman artist would apply make-up, or put [on] nail polish she would not have been considered serious enough" (Stokić 25). In an interview in 1999, however, Abramović declared, "I'm more female in my private life. I don't think so much in my work, but in my private life very much. I'm in love with glamour, fashion and so on. But in the '70s, it didn't exist for me" (Kaplan 15). Abramović associates her work with masculinity, and her private life with femininity—she describes her younger years as tough (male) and her more recent ones as glamorous (female). Throughout her career, Marina Abramović's female body imbued her work with greater meaning. The stripping of her body by male audience members in *Rhythm 0* held more charge because she was a woman.

Abramović's works addressing ideas of beauty are successful because she is a woman who initially rejected, and later participated in, traditional notions of female attractiveness. Even so, the artist denies any concrete ties to feminism. Judith Thurman says, "Abramović's feminism has always been a mythical, rather than a political understanding of women's oppression—and of their power" (28). Even the artist claims that accepting femininity is a new sensation for her: "it's very interesting, this feeling of being feminine. I only started after I became fifty. Not before. In most of my performances, I use the body naked, but for totally different reasons, because it's the most natural, simple, architectural" (Kaplan 15). Again, Abramović openly presents herself in a state of wild contradiction as she attempts to separate her femaleness from her use of the body in art. Though the naked female form might be "natural" and "architectural," it is no way simple. In her efforts to actively deny the femaleness of her body, while also using the loaded image of her nude form in her work, Abramović is creating a place for her public and private battles with gender to converse. Interestingly, the artist proclaims, "When I'm doing performances, I don't emphasize gender" (Kaplan 15). For Abramović, gender is an issue buried deeper than any other identity complexity she addresses in performance. Though she adamantly denies that she works with or confronts ideas of gender in her performances, it is undeniable that on a subconscious level Abramović is working to tease out personal and social tensions about her sex.

Marina Abramović's body houses a multitude of identity-based contradictions. From greater socio-cultural matters to intensely personal legacies, the artist uses performance art as a stage to confront, converse with, and to play out her numerous contradictions. Marina Abramović's willingness to make her dichotomies public encourages audiences to locate themselves within society, and to consider the

greater extent of their own contradictions. I cannot help but be moved by Abramović's body—she uses it in ways that are powerful, sickening, beautiful, and disturbing. The uncomfortable nature of her work functions to enhance her message, and awakens viewers to the ways in which their own bodies operate in space and culture.

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