CHAPTER FOUR

# QUEER NEGATIVITY AND RADICAL PASSIVITY

It goes without saying that to be among the callous, the cynical, the unbelievers, is to be among the winners, for those who have lost are never hardened to their loss; they feel it deeply, always, into eternity.
—Jamaica Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*

Utopias have always entailed disappointments and failures.
—Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third-world" woman caught between tradition and modernity.
—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

In chapter 2 I proposed forgetfulness as an interruption to generational modes of transmission that ensure the continuity of ideas, family lines, and normativity itself. While generational logics and temporalities extend the status quo in a way that favors dominant groups, generationality for oppressed groups can also indicate a different kind of history, a history associated with loss and debt. In relation to the lineage of an African America that begins in slavery, Saidiya Hartman in *Lose Your Mother* suggests, "The only sure inheritance passed from one generation to the next was this loss and it defined the tribe. A philosopher had once described it as an identity produced by negation" (2008: 103). Hartman's title indicates a loss that has always already

happened for African Americans, but it also argues against a simple genealogical account of history that stretches back in time through the family line. Losing one's mother, as we saw in relation to *Finding Nemo* and *50 First Dates*, is not simply "careless," as Oscar Wilde might say; it actually enables a relation to other models of time, space, place, and connection.

Beginning with the injunction "Lose your mother" and building toward a conclusion that will advocate a complete dismantling of self, I explore a feminist politics that issues not from a doing but from an undoing, not from a being or becoming women but from a refusal to be or to become woman as she has been defined and imagined within Western philosophy. I will trace broken mother-daughter bonds toward an anti-Oedipal feminism that is nonetheless not a Deleuzean body without organs. This feminism, a feminism grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence, and silence, offers spaces and modes of unknowing, failing, and forgetting as part of an alternative feminist project, a shadow feminism which has nestled in more positivist accounts and unraveled their logics from within. This shadow feminism speaks in the language of self-destruction, masochism, an antisocial femininity, and a refusal of the essential bond of mother and daughter that ensures that the daughter inhabits the legacy of the mother and in doing so reproduces her relationship to patriarchal forms of power.

The tension between memory and forgetting as explored in chapter 3 tends to be distinctly Oedipal, familial, and generational. Are there other models of generation, temporality, and politics available to queer culture and feminism? The Oedipal frame has stifled all kinds of other models for thinking about the evolution of feminist and queer politics. From women's studies professors who think of their students as "daughters" to next wave feminists who see earlier activists as dowdy and antiquated mothers, Oedipal dynamics and their familial metaphors snuff out the potential future of new knowledge formations. Many women's studies departments around the country currently struggle with the messy and even ugly legacy of Oedipal models of generationality. In some of these departments the Oedipal dynamics are also racialized and sexualized, and so an older generation of mostly white women might be simultaneously hiring and holding at bay a younger generation of (often queer) women of color. The whole model of "passing down" knowledge from mother to daughter is quite clearly invested in white, gendered, and hetero normativity; indeed the system inevitably stalls in the face of these racialized and heterosexualized scenes of difference. And while the "mothers"

become frustrated with the apparent unwillingness of the women they have hired to continue their line of inquiry, the "daughters" struggle to make the older women see that regulatory systems are embedded in the paradigms they so insistently want to pass on. The pervasive model of women's studies as a mother-daughter dynamic ironically resembles patriarchal systems in that it casts the mother as the place of history, tradition, and memory and the daughter as the inheritor of a static system which she must either accept without changing or reject completely.

While Virginia Woolf's famous line about women from *A Room of One's Own*, "We think back through our mothers if we are women," has been widely interpreted as the founding statement of a new aesthetic lineage that passes through the mother and not the father, the crucial point of the formulation is the conditional phrase (1929: 87). In fact "if we are women" implies that if we do not think back through our mothers, then we are not women, and this broken line of thinking and unbeing of the woman unexpectedly offers a way out of the reproduction of woman as the other to man from one generation to the next. The texts that I examine in this chapter refuse to think back through the mother; they actively and passively lose the mother, abuse the mother, love, hate, and destroy the mother, and in the process they produce a theoretical and imaginative space that is "not woman" or that can be occupied only by unbecoming women.

Psychoanalysis situates the figure of the woman as an incomprehensible, irrational, and even impossible identity. Freud's famous question "What do women want?" is not simply evidence that, as Simone de Beauvoir famously commented, "Freud never showed much interest in the destiny of women" (1989: 39); rather it asks of women why they would want to occupy the place of castration, lack, and otherness from one generation to the next (Jones 1957: 421). Answering the question of what men might want is quite simple in a system that favors male masculinity; what women want and get from the same system is a much more complex question. If, as Freud asserts, the little girl must reconcile herself to the fate of a femininity defined as a failed masculinity, then that failure to be masculine must surely harbor its own productive potential. What do women want? Moreover, how has the desire to be a woman come to be associated definitively with masochism, sacrifice, self-subjugation, and unbecoming? How might we read these avenues of desire and selfhood as something other than failed masculinity and the end of desire?

In this chapter I chart the genealogy of an antisocial, anti-Oedipal,

antihumanist, and counterintuitive feminism that arises out of queer, postcolonial, and black feminisms and that thinks in terms of the negation of the subject rather than her formation, the disruption of lineage rather than its continuation, the undoing of self rather than its activation. In this queer feminist genealogy, which could be said to stretch from Spivak's meditations on female suicide in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) to Saidiya Hartman's idea of a politics that exceeds the social conditions of its enunciation in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), we might find the narratives of this version of feminism in Toni Morrison's ghosts or among Jamaica Kincaid's antiheroines, and we must track it through territories of silence, stubbornness, self-abnegation, and sacrifice. Ultimately we find no feminist subject but only subjects who cannot speak, who refuse to speak; subjects who unravel, who refuse to cohere; subjects who refuse "being" where being has already been defined in terms of a self-activating, self-knowing, liberal subject. If we refuse to become women, we might ask, what happens to feminism? Or, to pose the question another way: Can we find feminist frameworks capable of recognizing the political project articulated in the form of refusal? The politics of refusal emerges in its most potent form from anticolonial and antiracist texts and challenges colonial authority by absolutely rejecting the role of the colonized within what Walter Mignolo, citing Anibal Quijano, has called "a coloniality of power" (2005: 6).

Postcolonial feminists from Spivak to Saba Mahmood have shown how prescriptive Western feminist theories of agency and power, freedom and resistance tend to be and have proposed alternative ways of thinking about self and action that emerge from contexts often rejected outright by feminism. While Mahmood focuses on Islamic women engaged in religious practices in the women's mosque movement in Egypt to flesh out a critique of feminist theories of agency, in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak uses the example of nineteenth-century bride suicide (after the death of the husband) to demonstrate a mode of being woman that was incomprehensible within a normative feminist framework. Both theorists argue in terms of a "grammar of concepts," to use Mahmood's term, and both consider speech to be something other than the conventional feminist trope of breaking silence. At the heart of Mahmood's book, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* is a concept of woman that does not presume the universality of desires for freedom and autonomy and for whom resistance to patriarchal tradi-

tions may not be the goal (2005: 180). At the center of Spivak's essay is a notion of womanhood that exceeds the Western feminist formulation of female life. Spivak ends her essay on the perils of intellectual attempts to represent oppressed peoples with an extended meditation on suttee, and Mahmood ends her book with an exploration of the meaning of feminine piety within Islam. Both theorists use patently antifeminist acts and activities to point to the limits of a feminist theory that already presumes the form that agency must take.

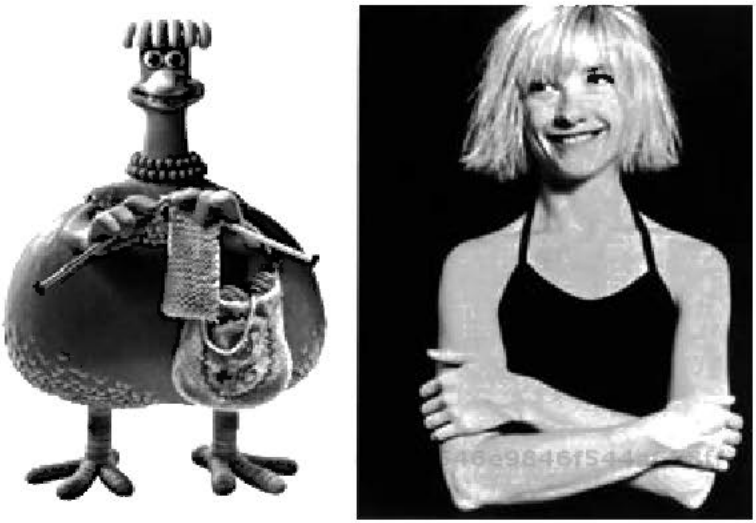
Spivak explores the British attempt in 1829 to abolish Hindu widow burning in relation to the self-representation of colonialism as benevolent intervention and places this argument against the claim advanced by nativist Indians that sati must be respected as a practice because these women who lost their husbands actually *wanted* to die. She uses sati to illustrate her claim that colonialism articulates itself as "white men saving brown women from brown men," but also to mark the complicity of Western feminism in this formulation. In a move that echoes Spivak's counterintuitive break from even poststructuralist feminisms, Mahmood explores women in the mosque movement and their commitment to piety in order to ask, "Does the category of resistance impose a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power—a teleology that makes it hard for us to see and understand forms of being and action that are not necessarily encapsulated by the narrative of subversion and reinscription of norms?" (2005: 9).

"Can the Subaltern Speak?" sets up a contradiction between different modes of representation within which an intellectual proposes to speak for an oppressed other. Spivak accuses Foucault and Deleuze as well as Western feminism of sneaking a heroic individualism in the back door of discursive critique. "Neither Deleuze nor Foucault," she writes, "seems aware that the intellectual within socialized capital, brandishing concrete experience, can help consolidate the international division of labor" (1988: 275). For Spivak, intellectuals, like poststructuralist feminist theorists for Mahmood, by imagining themselves to be a transparent vector for the exposure of ideological contradictions, cannot account for their own impact on the processes of domination and instead always imagine themselves in the heroic place of the individual who knows better than the oppressed masses about whom they theorize. The very notion of representation, Spivak claims, in terms of both a theory of economic exploitation and an ideological function, depends upon the production of

"heroes, paternal proxies and agents of power" (279) and harbors "the possibility that the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of the Other as the self's shadow" (280).

This idea, that intellectuals construct an otherness to "save" in order to fortify a sovereign notion of self, applies also to liberal feminism. In the context of the Hindu widow's suicide, for example, the Western feminist can see only the workings of extraordinary patriarchy, and she also believes in a benevolent British colonialism that steps in to stop a brutal and archaic ritual. For Spivak, feminism is complicit in the project of constructing the subaltern subject it wants to represent and then heroically casting itself as the subaltern's salvation. What if, Spivak seems to ask in her enigmatic final sentence, feminism was actually able to attend to the nativist claim that women who commit suttee actually *want* to die? She writes, "The female intellectual as an intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish" (308). Leaving aside the ambiguity of the double negative here ("must not disown"), the meaning of "female," "intellectual," and "circumscribed task" are all up for grabs, especially since Spivak has already contended that suttee makes an essential link between unbeing and femininity. This question clearly informs and influences Mahmood's question about whether we have become willfully blind to forms of agency that do not take the form of resistance. In her Derridean deconstructivist mode, Spivak is calling for a feminism that can claim not to speak for the subaltern or to demand that the subaltern speak in the active voice of Western feminism; instead she imagines a feminism born of a dynamic intellectual struggle with the fact that some women may desire their own destruction for really good political reasons, even if those politics and those reasons lie beyond the purview of the version of feminism for which we have settled. Spivak's call for a "female intellectual" who does not disown another version of womanhood, femininity, and feminism, indeed for any kind of intellectual who can learn how not to know the other, how not to sacrifice the other on behalf of his or her own sovereignty, is a call that has largely gone unanswered. It is this version of feminism that I seek to inhabit, a feminism that fails to save others or to replicate itself, a feminism that finds purpose in its own failure.

A more accessible text makes the very same point. In one of my favorite feminist texts of all time, the epic animated drama *Chicken Run*, the politically active and explicitly feminist bird Ginger is opposed in her struggle to inspire the birds to rise up by two other "feminist subjects." One is



15. Babs and Jane Horrocks, from *Chicken Run*. "Are those the only options?"

the cynic, Bunty, a hard-nosed fighter who rejects utopian dreams out of hand, and the other is Babs, voiced by Jane Horrocks, who sometimes gives voice to feminine naïveté and sometimes points to the absurdity of the political terrain as it has been outlined by the activist Ginger. Ginger says, for example, "We either die free chickens, or we die trying." Babs asks naïvely, "Are those the only choices?" Like Babs, and indeed like Spivak and Mahmood, I am proposing that feminists refuse the choices as offered—freedom in liberal terms or death—in order to think about a shadow archive of resistance, one that does not speak in the language of action and momentum but instead articulates itself in terms of evacuation, refusal, passivity, unbecoming, unbeing. This could be called an *antisocial feminism*, a form of feminism preoccupied with negativity and negation. As Roderick Ferguson puts it in a chapter titled "The Negations of Black Lesbian Feminism" in *Aberrations in Black*, "Negation not only points to the conditions of exploitation. It denotes the circumstances for critique and alternatives as well" (2005: 136–37). Building on the work of Hortense Spillers, Ferguson is trying to circumvent an "American" political grammar that insists upon placing liberation struggles within the same logic as the normative regimes against which they struggle. A different, anarchistic type of struggle requires a new grammar, possibly a new voice, potentially the passive voice.

When feminist freedoms, as Mahmood shows, require a humanis-

tic investment in both the female subject and the fantasy of an active, autonomous, and self-activating individualism, we have to ask who the subjects and objects of feminism might be, and we need to remember that, as Spivak puts it, to speak on behalf of someone is also to "restore the sovereign subject within the theory that seems most to question it" (1988: 278). If speaking for a subject of feminism offers up choices that we, like Babs, are bound to question and refuse, then maybe a homeopathic refusal to speak serves the project of feminism better. Babs's sense that there must be more ways of thinking about political action or nonaction than doing or dying finds full theoretical confirmation in the work of theorists like Saidiya Hartman. Her investigations in *Scenes of Subjection* into the contradictions of emancipation for the newly freed slaves proposes not only that "liberty" as defined by the white racial state enacts new modes of imprisonment, but also that the very definitions of freedom and humanity within which abolitionists operated severely limited the ability of the former slaves to think social transformation in terms outside of the structure of racial terror. Hartman notes, "The longstanding and intimate affiliation of liberty and bondage made it impossible to envision freedom independent of constraint or personhood and autonomy separate from the sanctity of property and proprietal notions of self" (1997: 115). Accordingly where freedom was offered in terms of being propertied, placed, and productive, the former slave might choose "moving about" or roaming in order to experience the meaning of freedom: "As a practice, moving about accumulated nothing and it did not effect any reversals of power but indefatigably held onto the unrealizable—being free—by temporarily eluding the constraints of order. . . . Like stealing away, it was more symbolically redolent than materially transformative" (128). There are no simple comparisons to be made between former slaves and sexual minorities, but I want to join Hartman's deft revelations about the continuation of slavery by other means to Leo Bersani's, Lynda Hart's, and Heather Love's formulations of queer histories and subjectivities that are better described in terms of masochism, pain, and failure than in terms of mastery, pleasure, and heroic liberation.[1] Like Hartman's model of a freedom which imagines itself in terms of a not yet realized social order, so the maps of desire that render the subject incoherent, disorganized, and passive provide a better escape route than those that lead inexorably to fulfillment, recognition, and achievement.

Bersani names as "masochism" the counternarrative of sexuality that undergirds the propulsive, maturational, and linear story installed by

psychoanalysis; he suggests that the heroic, organizing narrative defines sexuality as "an exchange of intensities between individuals," but the masochistic version constitutes a "condition of broken negotiations with the world, a condition in which others merely set off the self-shattering mechanism of masochistic jouissance" (1986: 41). It is this narrative that Heather Love turns to in *Feeling Backward*, when she examines "moments of failed or interrupted connection" or "broken intimacies" in order to take the impossibility of love "as a model for queer historiography" (2009: 24).

In what follows I propose a radical form of masochistic passivity that not only offers up a critique of the organizing logic of agency and subjectivity itself, but that also opts out of certain systems built around a dialectic between colonizer and colonized. Radical forms of passivity and masochism step out of the easy model of a transfer of femininity from mother to daughter and actually seek to destroy the mother-daughter bond altogether. For example, in the work of Jamaica Kincaid the colonized subject literally refuses her role as colonized by refusing to be anything at all. In *Autobiography of My Mother* (1997) the main character removes herself from a colonial order that makes sense of her as a daughter, a wife, and a mother by refusing to be any of these, even refusing the category of womanhood altogether. At the novel's beginning the first-person narrator tells of the coincidence of her birth and her mother's death and suggests that this primal loss means that "there was nothing standing between me and eternity. . . . At my beginning was this woman whose face I had never seen, but at my end there was nothing, no one between me and the black room of the world" (3). Obviously the loss of her mother and the "autobiography" of that mother that ensues is an allegorical tale of the loss of origins within the context of colonialism and the loss of telos that follows. But rather than nostalgically searching for her lost origins or purposefully creating her own telos, the narrator, Xuela Claudette Richardson, surrenders to a form of unbeing for which beginnings and ends have no meaning. With no past to learn from, no future can be imagined, and with a present tense that is entirely occupied by colonial figures, language, logics, and identities, the colonized self has two options: she can become part of the colonial story or she can refuse to be part of any story at all. Xuela chooses the latter: *Autobiography of My Mother* is the unstory of a woman who cannot be anything but the antithesis of the self that is demanded by colonialism. Xuela neither tells her own story of becoming, nor does she tell her mother's story; by appropriating

her mother's unstory as her own she suggests that the colonized mind is passed down Oedipally from generation to generation and must be resisted through a certain mode of evacuation.

While Xuela's relationship to her mother is mediated by loss and longing, her relationship with her half-Scots, half-Caribbean policeman father is one of contempt and incomprehension. She despises his capitulation to colonialism, to the law, and to his own mixed heritage, and she tries, through the writing of this narrative, to root out his influence and inhabit completely the space of her absent Carib mother: "And so my mother and father then were a mystery to me; one through death, the other through the maze of living; one I had never seen, one I saw constantly" (41). Choosing death and absence over a colonized life, Xuela avoids becoming a mother herself; aborting a child, she avoids love, family, and intimacy and disconnects herself from all of those things that would define her. In her refusal of identity as such Xuela models a kind of necropolitical relation to colonialism: her refusal to be is also a refusal to perform the role of other within a system that demands her subjugation. "Whatever I was told to hate," she says, "I loved most" (32).

In an interview about *Autobiography of My Mother* Kincaid was told, "Your characters seem to be against most things that are good, yet they have no reason to act this way—they express a kind of negative freedom. Is this the only freedom available to the poor and powerless?"[2] Kincaid answered, "I think in many ways the problem that my writing would have with an American reviewer is that Americans find difficulty very hard to take. They are inevitably looking for a happy ending. Perversely, I will not give the happy ending. I think life is difficult and that's that. I am not at all—absolutely not at all—interested in the pursuit of happiness. I am not interested in the pursuit of positivity. I am interested in pursuing a truth, and the truth often seems to be not happiness but its opposite" (1997: 1). Kincaid's novels do indeed withhold happy endings, and she adds a fine shading to the narrative of colonialism by creating characters who can never thrive, never love, and never create precisely because colonialism has removed the context within which those things would make sense. Kincaid concludes the interview by saying, "I feel it's my business to make everyone a little less happy."

Kincaid's commitment to a kind of negative life, a life lived by a colonized character who refuses purpose and who as a result leaves the reader unsettled, disturbed, and discomforted, represents a Fanonian refusal to blindly persist in the occupation of categories of being that simply round

out the colonial project. Where a colonized subject finds happiness, Kincaid, following Fanon, seems to say, he or she confirms the benevolence of the colonial project. Where a colonized woman bears a child and passes on her legacy to that child, Kincaid insists, the colonial project can spread virus-like from one generation to the next. Refusing to operate as the transfer point for transgenerational colonization, Xuela inhabits another kind of feminism, again a feminism that does not resist through an active war on colonialism, but a mode of femininity that self-destructs and in doing so brings the edifice of colonial rule down one brick at a time.

But is this passively political mode of unbecoming reserved for the colonized and the obviously oppressed? What happens if a woman or feminine subject who occupies a privileged relation to dominant culture occupies her own undoing? In Elfride Jelinek's novel *The Piano Teacher* (2009) the refusal to be is played at the other end of the scale of power. Jelinek is an Austrian author who was not very well known in 2004, when she won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Her novels, generally speaking, dissect Austrian national character and depict the inner workings of the family, domesticity, and marriage in postwar Austria as a seething mess of resentments, bitterness, cramped intimacies, and vicious incestuous love in the wake of fascism. In the process of ripping apart the family she implicitly and explicitly takes aim at a nation that is far from done with its Nazi past and with the small-town anti-Semitism and racism that fueled it. Jelinek's father, a Czech Jewish chemist, managed to survive the Holocaust, but many members of his family died. Her mother, a Roman Catholic from an important Viennese family, encouraged her daughter to become a pianist from an early age, but Jelinek instead became a writer of deliberately ugly depictions of an aspirational middle class. Like Kincaid's novel, Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher* documents the destructiveness of the mother-daughter bond. Needless to say, Austrians were not terribly pleased at her selection by the Nobel committee, and her works regularly received poor reviews in both Europe and the U.S. A member of the committee, Knut Ahnlund, even left the Academy in protest, describing Jelinek's work as "whining, unenjoyable public pornography" and "a mass of text shoveled together without artistic structure." He also claimed that her selection for the Nobel Prize "has not only done irreparable damage to all progressive forces, it has also confused the general view of literature as an art."[3] Jelinek did not attend her own Nobel Prize ceremony but sent a video message in her stead. It is widely assumed that she skipped the ceremony on account of her agoraphobia.

In *The Piano Teacher* Erika Kohut, the main character, is an unmarried Austrian woman in her thirties living with her mother in Vienna after the Second World War and giving piano lessons in her spare time at the Vienna Conservatory. She colludes with her mother in a certain fantasy about music, about Austria, about high culture, and about cultural superiority. On many days Erika leaves the house and indeed the bedroom that she shares with her controlling mother and wanders the city, as if searching for some way out of the claustrophobic life of professional boredom and petty quarrels with her mother. On some nights she visits peep shows in the Turkish part of town or follows amorous couples to their cars and furtively watches their sexual struggles. Such is her life until a new student comes to her class, the handsome young Walter Klemmer. Klemmer sees his prim teacher as a potential conquest and begins to romance her, and soon they begin a secret sexual relationship.

When Erika meets Klemmer it seems as if the narrative of incestuous mother-daughter collusion must surely reach its end and cede ground to a more appropriate intergenerational kind of desire, the desire of the young man for his older teacher. Klemmer's courtship of Erika consists of his trying to charm her while she insults him in return. He asks her on a date; she "feels a growing repulsion" (79). He walks her and her mother home; she wishes he would leave them alone. When finally the brash young man does head off into the Vienna evening, Erika returns home to her maternal cocoon and locks herself in the bathroom to cut away at her private flesh with a shaving razor.

When Klemmer and she begin an explicitly sexual relationship, Erika writes him a letter demanding that he sexually abuse and mistreat her, break her down, starve her, and neglect her. She wants to be destroyed and she wants to destroy her own students in the process. From Klemmer, Erika demands sadistic cruelty: "I will writhe like a worm in your cruel bonds, in which you will have me lie for hours on end, and you'll keep me in all sorts of different positions, hitting or kicking me, even whipping me!" (216). Erika's letter says she wants to be dimmed out under him, snuffed out: her well-rooted displays of obedience require greater degrees of intensity. Her letter is, as Klemmer puts it, "an inventory of pain" (217), a catalogue of punishments that he is sure no one could endure. She wants the young man to crush her, torment her, mock her, gag her, threaten her, devour her, piss on her, and ultimately destroy her. Klemmer reads the letter in her presence, refuses outright to meet her demands,

and withdraws into the night, only to return later to obey the letter in its direction to dismantle and abuse her.

While the narrator of Kincaid's novel pulls herself and her mother back from the narratives that colonialism would tell about them, Jelinek exposes her mother-daughter duo to intense and violent scrutiny and locks them in a destructive and sterile incestuous dance that will end only with their deaths. The novel ends with the protagonist fighting with and then kissing her aged mother in their shared bed and then wounding a young female student who is preparing for a recital. She then wounds herself with a knife, stabbing herself, not trying to kill herself exactly but to continue to chip away at the part of her that remains Austrian, complicit, fascist, and conforming. Erika's passivity is a way of refusing to be a channel for a persistent strain of fascist nationalism, and her masochism or self-violation indicates her desire to kill within herself the versions of fascism that are folded into being—through taste, through emotional responses, through love of country, love of music, love of her mother.

### *Cutting*

Cutting is a feminist aesthetic proper to the project of female unbecoming. As Erika Kohut walks along the streets of Vienna at the end of *The Piano Teacher* she drips blood onto the sidewalk. The cut she has made in her shoulder, which repeats a number of other cuts she has applied to her own skin and genitalia at other times, represents her attempt to remake herself as something other than a repository for her mother, her country, and her class, but it also crafts a version of woman that is messy, bloody, porous, violent, and self-loathing, a version that mimics a kind of fascist ethos of womanhood by transferring the terms of Nazi misogyny to the female body in literal and terrifying ways. Erika's masochism turns her loathing for her mother and her Austrianness back onto herself. With the notable exception of work by Lynda Hart in *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (1998) and Gayle Rubin's early essays on S/M, power, and feminism, masochism is an underused way of considering the relationship between self and other, self and technology, self and power in queer feminism. This is curious given how often performance art of the 1960s and 1970s presented extreme forms of self-punishment, discipline, and evacuation in order to dramatize new relations between body, self, and power. It may be illustrative to turn to Freud, who refers

to masochism as a form of femininity and a kind of flirtation with death; masochism, he says, is a byproduct of the unsuccessful repression of the death instinct to which a libidinal impulse has been attached. While the libido tends to ward off the death drive through a "will to power," a desire for mastery, and an externalization of erotic energy, sometimes libidinal energies are given over to destabilization, unbecoming, and unraveling. This is what Leo Bersani refers to as "self-shattering," a shadowy sexual impulse that most people would rather deny or sublimate. If taken seriously, unbecoming may have its political equivalent in an anarchic refusal of coherence and proscriptive forms of agency.

Following up on the act of cutting as a masochistic will to eradicate the body, I want to use the example of collage, a cut-and-paste genre, to find another realm of aesthetic production dominated by a model of radical passivity and unbeing. Collage precisely references the spaces in between and refuses to respect the boundaries that usually delineate self from other, art object from museum, and the copy from the original. In this respect, as well as in many others, collage (from the French *coller*, to paste or glue) seems feminist and queer. Collage has been used by many female artists, from Hannah Hoch to Kara Walker, to bind the threat of castration to the menace of feminist violence and both to the promise of transformation, not through a positive production of the image but through a negative destruction of it that nonetheless refuses to relinquish pleasure.

To apprehend the violence implied by collage, one only has to think of the work of Kara Walker, the African American artist who has used cut paper and the silhouette form to convey the atrociously violent landscape of the American racial imagination. By maintaining a constant tension between the elements of the work, the collage asks us to consider the full range of our experience of power—both productive power, power *for*, but also negative power, or power to unbecome. Hijacking the decorative silhouette form, Walker glues life-size black silhouettes to white gallery walls to produce a puppet show version of the sexual life of slavery. In the black figures and the white spaces in between she manages to convey both the myriad ways that the human body can be opened up, ripped apart, penetrated, turned inside out, hung upside down, split, smashed, fractured, and pulverized and the nearly limitless archive of the human violent imaginary. Despite the flatness of the silhouette form, she creates an illusion of depth, sometimes by projecting light onto the dioramas she creates but also by making the whole gallery a canvas and then gluing cut-

outs, sketches, and paintings all over its walls. In some pieces she also writes letters to her detractors and enemies and refuses the reading of her work as simply confirming stereotypes.

The array of discourse that chatters from the walls of the museum and that dialogues with the silence of the black characters in the cut pieces implies that institutions of art are themselves catalogues of both racial violence and the erasure of such violence through the theoretical association of art with beauty. The title of one of her shows, "Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love," names the sadomasochistic terrain of speech and silence and makes clear that in a world engendered by sexual violence and its bastard offspring, a world where the enemy and the oppressor is also the lover, the victim is not choosing between action and passivity, freedom and death, but survival and desire. In such a world sex is the name for war by other means. From the horrified responses to her work (charges mainly of creating a new archive of racist imagery), many of which are pulled into her textual collages, Walker draws out the anxieties that she also represents. Using art as bait and deploying the female body in particular as a site for the negative projection of racial and colonial fantasy is simply a modern technology. But using the same technology to turn racism and sexism back upon themselves like a funhouse mirror is a part of what I am calling feminist negation. In fact in 1964 Yoko Ono used her own body as a battleground to draw out the sadistic impulses that bourgeois audiences harbor toward the notion of woman. Her performance "Cut Piece" is not a collage, but the elements of the performance—cutting, submitting, reversing the relations between figure and ground, audience and performer—do conform to the definition of collage that I am using here. What is more, in the dynamics that Ono explores between stillness and motion, production and reception, body and clothing, gender and violence, she allows for a complex and fascinating discourse on feminism and masochism to emerge at the site of the cut or castration itself. In her nine-minute-long performance she sits on stage while members of the audience come up and cut off pieces of her clothing. The act of cutting is thus assigned to the audience rather than to the artist, and the artist's body becomes the canvas while the authorial gesture is dispersed across the nameless, sadistic gestures that disrobe her and leave her open to and unprotected from the touch of the other. As the performance unfolds, more and more men than women come to the stage, and they become more and more aggressive about cutting her clothing until she is left, seminude, hands over her breasts, her supposed

castration, emotional discomfort, vulnerability, and passivity fully on display. How can we think about femininity and feminism in the context of masochism, gender, racialized display, spectatorship, and temporality?

In a brilliant analysis of "Cut Piece" Julia Bryan Wilson acknowledges the reading of Ono's performance within a meditation on female masochism, but, she proposes, most often these readings fix Ono's mute and still female body within a closed system of female submission and male aggression. As she puts it, "There is little possibility in these interpretations that the invitation Ono proffers might be positive—no space for "Cut Piece" to be a gift, a gesture of reparation, or a ritual of remembrance" (2003: 103). Locating Ono's peformative offering of her clothes, her body, and her silence against the backdrop of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Wilson places the piece within a global imaginary. Calling it a "reciprocal ballet" in terms of its gesture of generosity and a "tense pantomime" in terms of the way Ono stages her own vulnerability and brings her flesh close to strangers wielding scissors, Wilson refuses to sever Ono's remarkable performance from either postwar Japanese art or the rest of her oeuvre. Nor is Wilson content to rescue the piece from its own self-destruction or consign it to what she calls "solipsistic masochism" (116). Instead she situates the work firmly within the activity of witnessing and casts Ono as a master of the art of sacrifice. I am absolutely convinced by Wilson's reading of "Cut Piece," and I see this reading as definitive on many levels. And yet, while I want to build upon the situating of Ono's work within the context of photographs of torn clothing taken after the atomic blasts in Japan in 1945, I also want to return to the ambivalent model of female selfhood that the performance inhabits.

Wilson notes the strange temporality of "Cut Piece" and the ambivalent optimism in the gesture of allowing people to cut off pieces of one's clothing as souvenirs; in this performance and in Ono's "Promise Piece" (1992), where a vase is smashed and its shards handed out, Wilson points out, there is always the possibility, indeed the probability that the fragments of the whole will never be reunited. I would emphasize this commitment to the fragment over any fantasy of future wholeness, and I want to locate the smashing gestures and the cutting gestures in Ono's work in relation to this other antisocial feminism that refuses conventional modes of femininity by refusing to remake, rebuild, or reproduce and that dedicates itself completely and ferociously to the destruction of self and other.

Wilson notes the tendency to pair "Cut Piece" with Marina Abramo-

vić's *Rhythm 0* (1974) and Chris Burden's *Shoot* (1971), but she quickly dismisses Abramović's performance as unscripted and marked by "complete surrender" and is similarly critical of Burden's work, which she sees as an attempt to "manage and engineer aggression" and as "a far cry from the peaceful wishes of Ono and Lennon" (117). Male masochism certainly stakes out a territory very different from female performances of unraveling. While the male masochist inhabits a kind of heroic antiheroism by refusing social privilege and offering himself up Christ-like as a martyr for the cause, the female masochist's performance is far more complex and offers a critique of the very ground of the human. A remarkable amount of performance art—feminist and otherwise—from the experimental scene of the 1960s and 1970s explored this fertile ground of masochistic collapse. Kathy O'Dell (1998) writes about masochistic performance art of the 1970s as a performed refusal of wholeness and a demonstration of Deleuze's claim that "the masochist's apparent obedience conceals a criticism and a provocation" (Deleuze 1971: 77). O'Dell's psychoanalytic account of masochism provides a nice summary of the genre and places pieces by Burden, Cathy Opie, and others into interesting conversation with one another, but ultimately she wants to make masochism into something from which we can learn, through which we can recognize the invisible contracts we make with violence, and with which we can negotiate relations with others. But there is a problem with trying to bind masochistic critiques of the subject to humanistic renegotiations with selfhood. In many ways this reconfiguring of masochism as a way of grappling with and coming to terms with violence rewrites the dilemma I identified at the start of this chapter in terms of a feminism that needs to rescue other "women" from their own destructive tendencies. Performances like "Cut Piece" and *Rhythm 0* but also like Faith Wilding's *Waiting* (1972) do not necessarily want to rescue the woman; rather they hang her out to dry as woman.

Obviously none of these performances immediately suggests a "feminist" act, but they instead make feminism into an ongoing commentary on fragmentariness, submission, and sacrifice. Ono's dismantling performance presses us to ask about the kind of self that comes undone for an audience in nine minutes. Is such an act, and such a model of self, feminist? Can we think about this refusal of self as an antiliberal act, a revolutionary statement of pure opposition that does not rely upon the liberal gesture of defiance but accesses another lexicon of power and speaks another language of refusal? If we understand *radical passivity* as an

antisocial mode with some connection to the anti-authorial statements made within postcolonial women's theory and fiction, we can begin to glimpse its politics. In a liberal realm where the pursuit of happiness, as Jamaica Kincaid might say, is both desirable and mandatory and where certain formulations of self (as active, voluntaristic, choosing, propulsive) dominate the political sphere, radical passivity may signal another kind of refusal: the refusal quite simply to be. While many feminists, from Simone de Beauvoir to Monique Wittig to Jamaica Kincaid, have cast the project of "becoming woman" as one in which the woman can only be complicit in a patriarchal order, feminist theorists in general have not turned to masochism and passivity as potential alternatives to liberal formulations of womanhood. Carol Clover (1993) famously cast male masochism as one explanation for the popularity of horror films among teenage boys, and we might similarly cast female masochism as the willing giving over of the self to the other, to power; in a performance of radical passivity we witness the willingness of the subject to actually come undone, to dramatize unbecoming for the other so that the viewer does not have to witness unbecoming as a function of her own body. Here Joseph Roach's (1996) formulation of culture as a combination of projection, substitution, and effigy making comes into play. Indeed radical passivity could describe certain versions of lesbian femininity. Queer theory under the influence of Judith Butler's work on the "lesbian phallus" argues for the recognition of the potentiality of masculine power in a female form, but this still leaves the feminine lesbian unexplained and lost to an antiphallic modality.

In fact if one form of phallic queerness has been defined by the representation of the body as hybrid and assembled, then another takes as its object the dis-appearance of the body altogether. In an explicitly queer use of the collage, that tension between the rebellious energy of gender variance and the quiet revolt of queer femininity comes to the fore. J. A. Nicholls's work has mostly involved figuration and has evolved around the production of work in stages, the building of an aesthetic environment through representational strata that become progressively more flat and progressively more painterly at the same time. This movement works precisely against the three-dimensional aspirations of collage which build up from the canvas and transform the dialogue between paint and canvas into a multivocal discourse through the importation of "external" materials. In her process Nicholls first creates, Frankenstein-like, a small collage of myriad parts and materials of the figure she wants to

16. J. A. Nicholls, *all of my days*, 2006. Oil/acrylic on canvas, 145 cm × 110 cm. Printed with permission of J. A. Nicholls.

paint. Next she paints a version of the collage onto large canvases, trying to capture the quality of the pieced-together materials in an assemblage of moving and static parts, anatomically correct limbs and cartoon-like stumps, motion and stillness, identity and facelessness. Some of her figures recline like classical nudes, but many of them, gender-ambiguous figures all, are suspended in time, space, water, or paint. They are glued together, the sum of their parts, and they twist and turn in and out of wholeness, legibility, and sense.

In new work Nicholls turns to landscapes, emptying the landscape of figures altogether, turning from gender variance as assemblage to queer femininity as startling absence. What had been a backdrop becomes a stage; what was ground becomes figure; what had been secondary becomes primary. The landscape emptied of figures, when considered in relation to her paintings of figures, still does speak about figuration. Only here figuration, as in Kara Walker's art, is absence, dis-appearance, and illegibility. In *Here and Now* the landscape is graphic and dramatic, vivid and emotional (see plate 10). The figure's psyche is spread horizontally across the meeting of ocean and land rather than encased vertically in an upright body, and the relationships between inside and outside, the primary drama staged by the collage, are cast here as sky and land, vegetation and waves, blue and green, with a barely transparent fence marking the nonboundary between the two. Time and space themselves collide at this boundary, here and now, and the immediacy and presence of the emotional landscape announce themselves in the startlingly dynamic waves in the middle ground. In *Higher Ground* and *New Story* the canvases are marked more by stillness and fixity, and the landscape becomes much more of a backdrop waiting for a figure (see plates 11 and 12). These new paintings attempt to represent femininity as a blurring of the female form with the natural landscape and as a violent cutting out of the figure altogether. The surreal and often hyperartificial landscapes represent queer femininity as a refusal of conventional womanhood and a disidentification with the logic of gender variance as the other of normativity.

Appropriately, given the new subject matter, Nicholls also uses a new form of collage that challenges the viewer to consider the meaning of collage in the age of digital graphics. She scans a photograph into the computer, where she uses Photoshop to cut and paste different elements and materials onto the photo. She then prints the image and paints from it onto a canvas. The three media—photography, digital imaging, and painting—become sites for elaborate and complex digital collage. Whereas in traditional collage by Picasso and others we might find newspaper pieces pasted onto paint, here we find graphic elements grafted through software onto a photograph and then transformed into a painted canvas.

In a contemporary fifty-five-minute performance piece that picks up where these artists left off, titled "America the Beautiful," Nao Bustamante combines avant-garde performance with burlesque, circus act, and the antics of an escape artist. The solo performance marries banality and the rigors of feminine adornment, to high-wire tension, the trem-

bling and wobbly ascent of the bound body up a ladder, and combines the discipline of physical performance with the spectacle of embodied uncertainty. The audience laughs uncomfortably throughout the performance, watching as Bustamante binds her naked body with clear packing tape and clumsily applies makeup and a raggedy blond wig. Sentimental music wafts smoothly in the background and conflicts noisily with the rough performance of femininity that Bustamante stages. In her blond wig and makeup, with her flesh pulled tight, she displays the demands of racialized feminine beauty; to confirm the danger of such beauty, she bends and sways precariously as she dons high heels atop a small ladder. Finally she ascends a much larger ladder carrying a sparkler and threatening at any moment to fall from her perch.

This performance, along with a number of others in Bustamante's portfolio, confirm her as what José Esteban Muñoz (2006) has called a "vulnerability artist." In his inspired essay on Bustamante's performance practice, Muñoz calls attention to the ways Bustamante "engages and re-imagines what has been a history of violence, degradation and compulsory performance" (2006: 194); her engagement with the dangers attached to the subject position of "woman of color" make her vulnerable and infuse her performances with the frisson of potential failure, collapse, and crisis. At a poignant moment in *America the Beautiful*, for example, while perched precariously atop a large tripod ladder, Bustamante turns her back to the audience and uses the stage lights to create a puppet show with her hands. The flickering shadows that she creates on the backdrop refuse to cohere into another theatrical space and merely mirror her blurry status as puppet, mannequin, and doll. But the moment is compelling because it reveals the mode in which Bustamante becomes her own puppet, ventriloquizes herself, constructs her body as a meeting point for violent discourses of beauty, profit, coherence, race, success.

In an interview with Muñoz, Bustamante addresses the improvisational quality of her work and clearly and brilliantly engages both the thesis that there is no such thing as improvisation in performance and the idea that "fresh space" always exists. Something of the balance between rehearsed improvisation and the unpredictability of "fresh space" marks her work as a rigorous refusal of mastery. Muñoz terms this positively as "amateurism," in relation to the ladder performance in "America the Beautiful" in particular, and Bustamante concurs but elaborates: "The work that I do is about not knowing the equipment, and not knowing that particular balance, and then finding it as I go" (Muñoz and Busta-

mante 2003: 5). As she says, each night the ladder is positioned slightly differently on the floor, or it is a different ladder; the wobbling is different, it has a different range, and her body must respond on the spot and in the moment of performance to the new configurations of space and uncertainty.

## Summary

The antisocial dictates an unbecoming, a cleaving to that which seems to shame or annihilate, and a radical passivity allows for the inhabiting of femininity with a difference. The radical understandings of passivity that emerge within Marina Abramović's and Yoko Ono's work, not to mention Faith Wilding's legendary piece "Waiting," all offer an antisocial way out of the double bind of becoming woman and thereby propping up the dominance of man within a gender binary. Predicting master-slave couples in Kara Walker's work and the disappeared figures in J. A. Nicholls's landscapes, Ono's nonact of evacuation and performance stripping implicates the frame in the aesthetic material, just as Spivak cautioned us to consider the role of the intellectual in all representations of the subaltern. In all of these pieces the frame—globalization, the canvas, the gallery walls, academia—binds the perpetrator to the criminal, the torturer to his victim, the corporate raider to the site of pillaging; collage shows the open mouth, the figure in distress, the scream and its cause; it glues effect to cause and queers the relations between the two. In the end there is no subject, no feminist subject, in these works. There are gaping holes, empty landscapes, split silhouettes—the self unravels, refuses to cohere, it will not speak, it will only be spoken. The passive voice that is the true domain of masochistic fantasy ("a child is being beaten,") might just be a transformative voice for feminism. Freud himself said he could not really understand the final phases of the feminine masochistic fantasy which progressed from "a child is being beaten" to "I am being beaten" and finally to "the boys are being beaten by the schoolteacher." But this final phase of the masochistic fantasy transfers punishments definitively away from the body of the subjugated and onto the body of the oppressor. Masochism, finally, represents a deep disruption of time itself (Freeman, 2010); reconciling the supposedly irreconcilable tension between pleasure and death, the masochist tethers her notion of self to a spiral of pain and hurt. She refuses to cohere, refuses to fortify herself

against the knowledge of death and dying, and seeks instead to be out of time altogether, a body suspended in time, space, and desire.

Ono's performance of "Cut Piece," racially inflected in 1965 by her status as an Asian woman within the imperial imagination, asks in terms that Hartman might recognize whether freedom can be imagined separately from the terms upon which it is offered. If freedom, as Hartman shows, was offered to the slave as a kind of contract with capital, then moving about, being restless, refusing to acquire property or wealth flirts with forms of liberty that are unimaginable to those who offer freedom as the freedom to become a master. Here Ono sits still, waits patiently and passively, and refuses to resist in the terms mandated by the structure that interpellates her. To be cut, to be bared, to be violated publicly is a particular kind of resistant performance, and in it Ono inhabits a form of unacting, unbeing, unbecoming. Her stillness, punctuated only by an involuntary flinch seven minutes into the event, like the masochistic cuts in *The Piano Teacher* and the refusals of love in *Autobiography of My Mother*, offers quiet masochistic gestures that invite us to unthink sex as that alluring narrative of connection and liberation and think it anew as the site of failure and unbecoming conduct.

5. Robert McRuer has theorized the multiple relations between queerness and disability in his landmark book, *Crip Theory* (McRuer, 2006).

### CHAPTER FOUR. *Shadow Feminisms*

1. Elizabeth Freeman tackles a similar reconsideration of S/M in relation to feminism and queer temporalities in a chapter titled: "Turn the Beat Around: Sadomasochism, Temporality, History" in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010: 137–70).

2. Jamaica Kincaid interviewed by Marilyn Snell, "Jamaica Kincaid Hates Happy Endings," *Mother Jones*, September–October 1997.

3. Jeffrey Fleishman, "Member's abrupt resignation rocks Nobel Prize community," *Boston Globe*, 12 October 2005.

### CHAPTER FIVE. *Homosexuality and Fascism*

1. For an informative account of the women who formed Britain's Volunteer Police Force see Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism* (2001).

2. Harvey Milk, speech on 25 June 1978, quoted in Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 364.

3. For more on Stein's interest in Weininger, see Harrowitz and Hyams 1995.

4. Richard Goldstein, "Culturati: Skin Deep" in *Village Voice*, February 9–15, 2000.

5. Edith Newhall, "Out of the Past," *New York Magazine*, 3 December 2001, 5.

6. Collier Schorr, "'Racing the Dead' by Howard Halle," *Time Out New York*, 13–17 September 2007.