

Crucially, Phelan struggles to write “with and toward a theatre of affect” (18). In practice, this performative writing makes for a daring mode of analysis: essays uniting linear, fiercely coherent critiques of disturbing cultural moments with the meandering, melodramatic, even close-to-hysterical narratives that bring these traumas to life in the minds and bodies of readers. “Whole Wounds: Bodies at the Vanishing Point,” probes the possibility of redemption in our postmodern age of despair by linking a concept derived from Renaissance painting, that of perspective, to current technologies of theatre. Here, Phelan fosters performance theory’s dialogue with art history and theology by asserting that the cathartic value of theatre, like Caravaggio’s classic painting, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*, hinges on witnessing: “Western theatre is itself predicated on the belief that there is an audience, an other willing to be cast into the role of auditor” (31). Working with the problem of securing external response to injuries that are internal and thus empirically unverifiable, this ground-breaking artist/critic goes on to uncover theatrical strategies that help women forge embodied form—hence credibility—for that which is no longer present.

Chapter two, “Immobile Legs, Stalled Words: Psychoanalysis and Moving Deaths,” interweaves the voice of a rigorous feminist academic with that of an injured dancer who once had an illustrious career as a member of the New York City Ballet. By retracing, literally and metaphorically, the mis-steps that marred both the dancer’s ties to her academy and the analyst’s relationship informing the history of psychoanalysis, this stirring movement of voices acts out the “talking cure” that lies at the crux of *Mourning Sex*. Chapter five, “Bloody Nose,” explores the temporal nature of memory, and specifically sexual memory. Here, Phelan draws a pivotal distinction between legal and psychoanalytic notions of sexual injury, arguing that the liminal forum of the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings offers a fascinating stage on which to weigh the political stakes of this contrast: “Precisely because they were not conducted in a in a court of law nor on a psychoanalytic couch, the hearings can illuminate how each system of understanding has both perils and possibilities for redressing sexual injury” (95).

Finally, in my view, chapter seven marks the most afflicted member of this complex body of losses and injuries. Moving from public traumas to a more personal one, “Failed Live(r)s: Whatever Happened to Her Public Grief?” is a peculiar performance of repetition, citation and copying, one restaging and trying to make sense of several women’s wounded identifications with academia and each other. Though intimate and at times rawly moving, the author defines (and perhaps renders manageable) the private grief driving this text in curiously clinical terms: “a case history of a patient called Echo who grieves over the death of her colleague, Rena Grant, a critic and assistant professor at the time of her death” (20). Aptly enough, despite Phelan’s extensive, pseudo-Freudian bid to cast

herself as the stable critic/psychoanalyst, the roles of doctor and patient, as well as the symptoms of blindness and insight chronicled by this script, grow increasingly blurred. Her closing bid to justify why she published this highly allusive memorial (instead of simply responding to Echo in private and discussing the mistakes they each made), seems as prone to guilty repressions and enabling distortions as the public negotiations of traumatic memory assessed in the rest of the book.

Keen to the diverse and deeply conflicted investments that subjects of the present make in restaging the past, *Mourning Sex* speaks toward voicing and hearing the haunting narratives that persist in contemporary Europe and North America. From classical art to postmodern video, from theory to practice, from private to public grief, this volume and its understanding of performance as a discipline of inclusions is pressing, unswervingly hopeful reading for students, scholars and performers alike.

Theresa Smalec

University of Western Ontario

BOOKS RECEIVED

Listing does not preclude a subsequent review. Interested reviewers should write directly to the Book Review Editor, James Fisher, c/o Theater Department, Wabash College, Crawfordsville, IN 47933. [Phone: (765) 361-6394] A résumé and a letter indicating areas of expertise should be included.

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