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# HOLD IT AGAINST ME

difficulty and emotion in contemporary art

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Steger's death but to work from the final pose of his last performance with Steger. And there he waits for him. There he waits for his own death, already lying in state. We rehearse this relationship of the past to the future together. It is here that the work is haunted most explicitly by its history. Such a performance is not a political act in the same way that a protest march is, but it is no less, and no less powerfully, an act of determined political defiance.

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## THINKING FEELING

criticism and emotion

### What Happened to Feeling?

One of the challenges of writing about this work is the way it forces us to take our feelings into account. We must do so whether we are writing about obviously challenging work like Athey's and Shvarts's, or gentler practices of intimacy, like that of Adrian Howells. This can make the practice of criticism itself feel like trying to stand on shifting sands, for how we feel about a work of art changes, and our own experiences never match perfectly with those of other people. Knowing how we feel is hard enough. Capturing that in writing? Trying to stabilize that experience, to fix it as a photograph captures movement? Writing about Athey's work, I am acutely aware of the aspects of the experience of it that get away from me. So I try, mainly, to give the reader a sense of what happened and where and how those memories of the event travel.

Emotion is no small subject in art history and art criticism. But, as is the case with any discipline, how emotion figures into the field is shaped by traditions of thought. Feelings happen in art on multiple levels: as a subject represented in or by specific works, as something produced in us by those works of art, and as something we experience as expressed by the artist. We are used to thinking about artists as people who feel things intensely, who

even feel things *more* than the rest of us. The artist's emotionality is traditionally transformed into a symbol, an allegory for something much larger—for some universal, transcendent truth. This is a romantic notion in every sense of that word. It describes our ongoing cultural fascination with the artist as a special type of person, and it also describes Romanticism's broad legacy. The Byronic image of the artist as wild child survives in rock-and-roll icons, on our movie screens, and in our attraction to the drama of "bad boys" like Paul McCarthy, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Matthew Barney, and Dash Snow (to name four very different art world personalities). This romance with the artist's emotionality lives on, even though in the wake of postmodernist suspicion of such paradigms we ought to know better. Warhol famously refused this expressive model by declaring himself to be a machine. Much process-oriented and minimalist work appears hard and technical. Collaborative, participatory works can completely displace the artist's personality from his practices. The figure of the emotional artist may still have pull in popular culture as well as in the art press, and he may still draw crowds to the museum, but the *critical* cachet he enjoyed at the height of Abstract Expressionism (e.g., Jackson Pollock) has dwindled.

In a polemical essay on the state of art criticism, James Elkins gives a useful portrait of the shifts in the place of emotion in writing about art.<sup>1</sup> Until the middle of the twentieth century, much art writing could be described as literary, as portraits of how the critic felt about the work of art. Such writing could universalize the critic's reaction to artworks and usually ignored the social, political, and historical implications of artworks, as well as the implications of the critic's own responses to them. In the middle of the twentieth century, the orientation of art criticism began to change. As Elkins explains, writers associated with the magazine *Artforum* (founded in 1962) and the academic journal *October* (founded in 1976) established alternative models that appeared to be more "rigorous," less personal in tone, and also more critically engaged with the question of how to discuss the material forces that shape art, while keeping our attention on the work itself. In her work on *Artforum's* formation and its influence, Amy Newman maps its increasing reliance on models centered on what is "there" in the work, as critics reached for a kind of scientific weight to anchor their observations. Critics wanted to address the way artworks engage history and politics through form. Michael Fried's essay "Art and Objecthood" (1967) is a particularly influential example of the rhetorical opposition to that which feels "personal."<sup>2</sup> In an interview with Newman, Rosalind Krauss, one of the founding editors of *October*, describes a move away from practices in which "poets would compose emotive

catalogue prefaces for artists" and a critical turn toward something that felt "*hard, verifiable.*"<sup>3</sup> This led to the large-scale reconfiguration of art criticism in order to raise its level of seriousness, promoting contemporary art history, in particular, to the level of an academic discourse. Even in the past decade's endless discussions of the crisis in art criticism (in which art criticism is cast as compromised by the market and is distinguished from academic work, which one worries in turn has become almost unreadable in its density), seriousness is presumed to be one of the principal values most worth defending, although there has been little consideration in such discussions of what one means by that term, outside of an independence from market influences. Elkins writes, "Metaphors of intellectual labor, of difficulty, of challenge recur in *Artforum* discussions, beginning with Greenberg: when it is good the work is dry, hard, obdurate and irrigable. . . . It is not easy to imagine how these values could be transposed to the present, and even if they were, it is not easy to picture how useful they would be."<sup>4</sup> Because emotion itself has been associated in art criticism with a self-indulgent and naïve practice, it has been absorbed into the category of things one ought not take seriously. The serious art critic steers clear of anything resembling "a private history, a personal history."<sup>5</sup> A kind of austerity rules this body of writing, in which criticality has a narrow range of acceptable affect; whether the critic expresses a cool appreciation, clinical detachment, or critical disdain, she must be serious (unemotional), and she must address serious things (hard facts). Gavin Butt observes that "taking something seriously is in large part a morally sanctioned and habitually ingrained form of cultural response to something we take to be of value."<sup>6</sup> Seriousness is a disciplinary and disciplining stance that includes both a set of rules regarding the appropriateness of objects of criticism and the affective position that the critic takes in relation to the object of her writing. This is a particularly important question for critics working in queer studies. As Butt writes, queer culture is defined by a "troublesome relationship to serious appraisal" because it is profoundly defined by its capacity to "hold dear" that which is designated as the "non-serious, the trivial and the insubstantial."<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, this intertwining of affect, systems of value, and politics is also central to the work of artists working from other positions of marginality and exclusion. The call for serious criticism in mainstream contemporary art history (by which I mean the writing that grew out of *October* and *Artforum* after the 1960s) limited its ability to address the formal and political complexity of work that centers on the interface of the personal and the political. At issue here is a resistance to the sticky world of feelings and politics.

Emotion is widely assumed to make things easier to get and to pollute

critical thought. Critical thought, conversely, is assumed to displace emotion. Even as he calls for a reexamination of the ethos of contemporary criticism, Elkins doesn't press this point. In an earlier examination of art and emotion, for example, he writes of his work as a scholar, "The piles of information smother our capacity to really *feel*. By imperceptible steps, art history gently drains away a painting's sheer wordless visceral force, turning it into an occasion for intellectual debate." He writes of the waning of the intensity of his own feelings for paintings under the disciplining pressure of his work as a historian. Inevitably, "in its cumulative effect history undermines passion. It smothers strong emotion and puts calm understanding in its place. It puts words to experiences that are powerful because they are *felt* rather than thought, and in doing so it kills them."<sup>8</sup> In more recent writing, however, Elkins makes it clear that the critical formations opposing passion and analysis, feelings and thought are no longer adequate: "Calls for a return to criticism that is serious, complex, and rigorous are indebted to the model provided by *Artforum* and its descendents. That means, in turn, that it is important to ask whether it makes sense to revive those particular senses of commitment, verifiability, and intellectualism. It seems to me the only defensible answer is that such values are no longer a good fit for art and the beginning of the twenty-first century."<sup>9</sup> These values were *never* a great fit for art. "Serious, complex, and rigorous" criticism can be passionate and personal. Art can be hard and difficult and also saturated with feeling; this is true of writing about art as well.<sup>10</sup> The rhetorical deployment of the personal and the emotional should not be assumed to be a retreat into an ahistorical, apolitical self; such explicit turns to emotion may in fact signal the politicization, the historicization of that self and of the feelings through which that self takes shape in relation to others. The blanket refusal to consider this possibility is itself a political failure, as is the pretense that a critical position can be taken independent of the author's networks of affiliation, friendships, and mentoring relationships, and as if it were not informed by his or her points of identification, estrangement, and institutional location.

The critical shifts mapped by Elkins had their impact on the artist: the romantic vision of the artist whose individual suffering transcends his time and place was long ago supplanted by a model of the artist and the art world as socially, politically, and institutionally situated. Artists engage this fact in diverse ways: by institution critique (e.g., Andrea Fraser's *Museum Highlights* [1989], Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* [1992–93]), by mapping the material context for the work of art (Hans Haacke's *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* [1971]), by

integrating art and activism (Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz's *Three Weeks in May* [1971]), and by engaging the question of history itself directly, making work that is a critically engaged historical practice (e.g., Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave* [2001], Ken Gonzales-Day's series *Erased Lynching* [2003–]). Concurrently, different models of artistic expression have also emerged, taking this politicization of the self as a starting point for recasting the very act of self-imaging (e.g., Adrian Piper's *Cornered* [1988], ASCO's *No Movies* [1972], Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *Border Brujo* [1988–89]).<sup>11</sup> This is where emotion makes things harder, more difficult, and more interesting. [Such works speak to the complexity of feelings themselves, to their sociality, and to the fluidity of the self's boundaries. Finding the right language to access this is not easy because it requires a major shift in the vocabulary we use for talking about not only emotion but artistic expression itself.] For some guidance in developing this vocabulary, let us turn to work in which emotion figures centrally, Franko B's *I Miss You!* (2003) and Nao Bustamante's *Neapolitan* (2006, 2009), in order to access the texture and complexity of emotion within performance, and James Luna's *History of the Luiseño People: Christmas, La Jolla Reservation* (1990) (2003, 2010) and Carrie Mae Weems's *From Here I Saw What Happened . . .* (1993–95), so that we may see how emotional complexity is played out within a work in order to problematize the association of the emotional weight of History with particular communities of people.

### The Difficulty of Sentimentality: Franko B's *I Miss You!* (2003)

One can't talk about Franko B's work without addressing its emotional landscape. Like Ron Athey, Franko B works with his body. His actions leave a strong mark on his audience, and, as is also the case with Athey's work, what these performances say is by no means transparent. For over fifteen years (1990–2007) Franko B was largely known for "bleeding performances." These were live actions in which the artist bled either from wounds he'd created himself or from catheters that had been inserted into his arms by a medical professional before the performance.<sup>12</sup> For many, the very idea of such a practice is challenging. Photographs of his performances often show the artist naked and covered in white body paint that intensifies the visibility of his wounds. Many viewers, whether or not they are particularly squeamish, experience these documents as aggressive. Setting aside the reactions that some people have to blood (which can be independent of one's openness to this kind of performance), photographs of Franko B's bleeding performances can be harder to handle than the events themselves, largely because they conjure



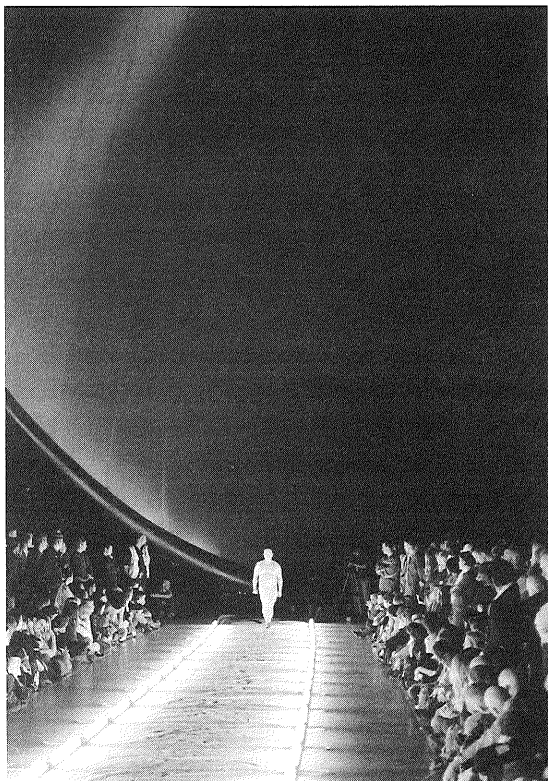


FIGURE 15. Franko B, *I Miss You!* Tate Modern / Live Culture. 2003. Photograph by Hugo Glendinning. Courtesy of Franko B and Hugo Glendinning.

an idea of the performance that is out of scale with the live action. At the live event, you can be present and also turn away. You can look at the floor and still be a member of his audience. Franko B has repeatedly declared that audience members are free to respond as they wish and as they need. Looking away is perfectly acceptable. I make a point of emphasizing this because I think many who are not used to such performances (a majority of readers) imagine attending a live event as being *forced* to look. But the experience of these events is not like that; they are hard, but they are not hard because of what you see.

*I Miss You!* was one of the last pieces to evolve from Franko B's practice of working with the process and spectacle of bleeding. In this performance, the artist bodies forth a single melodramatic gesture and frames it as a union with the audience. Naked, covered in white body paint, he walks a length of white canvas while bleeding from his arms (figs. 15–16). When he staged *I Miss You!* for the Tate Museum in 2003, he placed his runway lengthwise along its cavernous Turbine Hall, a cold, industrial space. At the time, the hall was filled



FIGURE 16. Franko B, *I Miss You!* Tate Modern / Live Culture. 2003. Photograph by Hugo Glendinning. Courtesy of Franko B and Hugo Glendinning.

with a suspended sculpture that looked like enormous fallopian tubes (Anish Kapoor, *Marsyas*, 2002). The performance was staged underneath this red structure, which arced across the hall. Franko B walked ceremoniously past his audience and toward a bank of photographers at the base of the aisle. The hall was dead silent, except for the mechanical whirring and clicks made by the cameras. He was lit up on both sides by florescent tubes edging the canvas aisle. Blood slowly dripped along the canvas and collected at his feet at each end of the catwalk, where he stood before turning around and beginning his march again. The performance was structured to resemble a fashion show or a wedding, and the blood-splattered canvas Franko left in his wake was used to make paintings, some of which he gave away to friends as keepsakes.

The experience of witnessing this performance was riddled with the questions you might expect: Should we be doing this? Is he okay? It seemed to take forever for Franko to complete his walk down the aisle, and he repeated this march several times. His body was ghostly, dwarfed by the enormous sculpture hanging over all of us and also by the scale of the space. The mood of the performance was intense; it felt like a silent opera. He seemed vulnerable, lonely. Although always composed, he was, near the end, clearly straining with the effort to keep up his march. Even knowing that he had

medical assistance waiting on him, it was impossible not to feel moved and concerned.

*I Miss You!* is a stark enactment of a fantasy about love and its allure. It is about death, but only as the threat implied by love: Love me (Come back!) or I'll die. Franko B's walk alone down the aisle condensed into a performance the extravagant internal scripts we spin in our heads at the most harrowing points in the process of falling in love, teetering on the edge of abandonment. The scene was marital, but rather than celebrate the couple, we bore witness to the artist's isolation.

Franko walked out of our view, and the lights went up. Standing up, I felt a wave of intense emotion pass through me. I swallowed the urge to cry and looked around for a bar. *I Miss You!* is staged as the act of a desperate lover, an exploration of the aggression the lover feels toward his own body as an instrument of both desire and humiliation. Acknowledging this experience of love, recognizing that this experience registers in the body, is both painful and valuable. For a performance so obviously Catholic, it was also very punk. The artist learned his craft in London's anarchistic squatting scene and has long had a relationship with the queer music scene. If the performance felt punk, it was not in its aggressiveness (nudity, blood) but in the combination of the spectacle of the wounded body with the refusal of a redemptive gesture. As Tavia Nyong'o writes, punk represents "a withdrawal from the constraints of an affirmative culture": "Punk feelings help specify a radically passive and even masochistic orientation to the world."<sup>13</sup> Franko B's performances are staged as ritual but enact no salvation for either the artist or the audience. If we ask ourselves, Why would he do that to himself?, we might also ask, Why do we open ourselves up to anyone?

Many of us were surprised by the emotionality of the piece. For all the blood, for all the ways his performances have an edge one associates with punk, metal, or fetish scenes (his work overlaps with all of these), the thing that really unsettles the critic is the work's tenderness and sentimentality. *I Miss You!* is earnest. His work is often completely and unapologetically sentimental. In one performance, for example, he swings on a swing set, naked, to a melancholy piano score evocative of children's rhymes. In *I Miss You!* Franko B doesn't so much express himself as *leak*. We do not learn a thing about his biography in these performances. They are neither autobiographical nor confessional. He says nothing and in fact does very little. These events are nevertheless supercharged with emotion. Those feelings do not come from the artist so much as they circulate through the room and around his spooky body.

Sentimentality is generally unwelcome in institutional spaces associated with contemporary art; in its messiness, its direct assertion of the world of feeling, and in its hopeless association with the low and the popular (e.g., soap operas and pop music), the sentimental stands in opposition to the codes of conduct that regulate the social spaces of art consumption. In an essay on her experiences as the founding editor of the journal *High Performance*, Lynda Frye Burnham describes the abject status of emotion in discourse on contemporary art:

Abstract art and fashion serve to remove feelings from art, to leave undisturbed the deep sleep we are falling into, where we feel nothing and nothing touches us.

Let emotions belong to the theater, the art critics say. Artists can only be concerned with ideas and philosophies. And the real pursuits turn away from performance altogether because the very presence of the "hot" human body implies emotion, and emotion flows dangerously close to propaganda and self-indulgence.<sup>14</sup>

When Franko B bodies forth this maudlin gesture, walking alone down the aisle, bleeding for us and offering it as a declaration of feeling ("I miss you!"), he walks toward the steamy zone of sentiment, where the authenticity and value of emotion is always already in crisis. For a critic whose values are organized by the assumptions Burnham describes, his work is easy to dismiss as a kind of freak show entertainment, as mawkish and self-indulgent. And his audience's investment in the performance is even more suspect, as it appears to thrive on a vicarious thrill, a provisional identification with the idea of his suffering.

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In his influential polemic opposing the avant-garde and kitsch, Clement Greenberg describes the latter as a category of "vicarious experience and faked sensation" and "the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times."<sup>15</sup> For Greenberg, the term *kitsch* signaled the recycling of feeling through popular culture at the expense of the new and the authentic. Many of the works disparaged using this vocabulary (*vicarious*, *fake*, and *kitsch*) fit easily under sentimentality's umbrella. Greenberg's complaint belongs to a broad rhetorical practice in criticism, in which the author gains the moral high ground by taking a stand against sentimentality. When such language is used in relation to contemporary art, it often wraps itself around a denunciation of political correctness, in which the artist's good intentions override his commitment to good art. In her essay "The Social Turn," the art critic Claire Bishop uses

similar terms to denigrate contemporary collaborative, overtly political art practices as a form of sentimental liberalism. She writes, "The discursive criteria of socially engaged art are, at present, drawn from a tacit analogy between anticapitalism and the Christian 'good soul.'" <sup>16</sup> She attacks collaborative art practices that indulge this Christian ethic of self-sacrifice and good works. In another article she dismisses the work of Vik Muniz and Harrell Fletcher for "generating ripples of embarrassment through the audience for their reality TV sentimentality," a reaction she takes as synonymous with artistic failure. <sup>17</sup> Arguing in particular with Grant Kester's writing on collaboration and "conversation" (in which artists dissolve their authority in dialogue with specific communities), Bishop writes, "In the absence of a commitment to the aesthetic, Kester's position adds up to a familiar summary of the intellectual trends inaugurated by identity politics: respect for the other, recognition of difference, protection of fundamental liberties, and an inflexible mode of political correctness." <sup>18</sup> Her position represents a standard line in New York-centered, museum- and gallery-oriented art criticism on the relationship between art, identity, and politics. In *The Return of the Real* Hal Foster argues that "many artists treat conditions like desire or disease as sites for work. In this way they work *horizontally*, in a synchronic movement from social issue to issue, from political debate to debate, more than *vertically*, in a diachronic engagement with the disciplinary forms of a given medium." <sup>19</sup> He doesn't identify which artists "treat conditions like desire or disease" as sites for their work. It could be Athey. It could be Bob Flanagan and Sherry Rose (who expanded their S&M relationship, which was intimately related to Flanagan's cystic fibrosis, into a performance art practice). It could be David Wojnarowicz.

"Desire or disease" is, in Foster's formulation, a condition (an affliction?) from which no artist can achieve critical awareness. (Whereas once artists were engaged with art history, now, working from these "conditions," "the vertical lines appear to be lost.") Art of the period has become "dangerously political," grounded in issue and identity as the artist indulges an "over-identification with the other," which Foster forecasts as "a murderous disidentification from the other." "Today," he writes, "the left overidentifies with the other as victim, which locks it into a hierarchy of suffering whereby the wretched can do little wrong. . . . The right disidentifies from the other, which it blames as victim, and exploits this disidentification to build political solidarity through fantasmatic fear and loathing. Faced with this impasse, critical distance might not be such a bad idea at all." <sup>20</sup> Critical handwringing over the plight of the other is upstaged here by critical handwringing over identification with the other.

The antisentimental turn cuts across period and genre, and many of the most influential denunciations of the sentimental focus on this confluence of emotion and liberal politics. James Baldwin's essay "Everybody's Protest Novel" offers some of the most scabrous prose regarding sentimental fiction. Tackling the rigid political terms of the "race novel" (in which white and black characters battle over the humanity of the latter), Baldwin draws a deliberately polemical line from Richard Wright's *Native Son* backward to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The movement from one to the other describes a liberal tradition that deploys (and exploits) black abjection in a national, self-serving rehearsal of racist paradigms. It is a controversial analogy: one novel (written by an African American man) offers a contemporary and hard critique of American dynamics of race and gender; the other (written by a white woman) is credited with having contributed to the Civil War and the abolition of slavery but also spawned an enduring tradition of minstrelsy and racist stereotyping. Baldwin's essay is an indictment of readers who feel their consciousness has been raised by *Native Son's* violence as if such scenes bear out the full truth of racism's power. Baldwin works with terms and assumptions important to our conversation; namely, he presents sentimentality as a (bad) form of sadism, one ultimately complicit with the racist structures it purports to fight. He dismisses Stowe as a "pamphleteer." He calls *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "a very bad novel" and compares its "virtuous sentimentalism" with Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. The comparison needs no explanation, as, within the logic of the essay, the literary abjection of popular sentimental novels is treated as a given. Drawing from the presumption that one can name no genre more universally despised, he proceeds, "Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, like its multitudinous hard-boiled descendants, is a catalogue of violence." <sup>21</sup> The debate generated by Baldwin's essay was not provoked by his description of sentimentality but by his attempt to mark Wright's novel with its stain. <sup>22</sup> There is good reason for critical suspicion of sentimental practice: not only can such work package vicarious experiences of suffering as an enlightened form of entertainment, as Lauren Berlant explains in her writing on the subject, but the desire to make readers "feel right" (as Stowe herself once put it) can also look a lot like a desire for a world in which we all feel the same. <sup>23</sup>

The hard stand against the sentimentalist may be popular in criticism, but

it frequently belies the complexity of the politics of feeling and identification, and it sometimes masks the critic's position, creating the illusion that she stands entirely outside the emotional economy she denounces. More problematically, it can support a critical practice that assumes that the problem is feeling, in and of itself, because in art feelings are always either not real or vicarious. (How many times have you seen an artist's, filmmaker's, or writer's lack of sentimentality cited as praise, as if the value of this were self-evident?) Complaints regarding the vicariousness of emotion in art have always struck me as Platonic, centering as they do on the problem that no emotion encountered in art is properly real, at least according to the standards by which such discourse measures realness.

The sharpest edges of antisentimental rhetoric are formed around words like *vicarious* and *inauthentic*. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observed, "It would be hard to overestimate the importance of vicariousness in defining the sentimental." The anchoring point for a modern critique of the sentimental, she observes, is the identification of a "tacitness and nonaccountability of the identification between sufferer and sentimental spectator."<sup>24</sup> Threaded through such critical discourse are contradictory strands of thinking about art and emotion; it implicitly calls to mind the idea of an art form that does *not* depend on vicarious experience (for it is often vicariousness itself which the critic presents as the problem), while also banishing the juicy, nervous, and unpredictable dimensions of feeling triggered by proximity—especially where such proximity occasions empathy or identification. The feelings generated in the affective circuits between people are banished as always already suspect, for not being real, authentic, and truly one's own. The only solution offered by such rhetoric is the privileging of an anaesthetized version of the aesthetic encounter, from which the feeling body is banished. (On this point, I am tempted to see in Eakins's *The Gross Clinic* a sadistic emblem for the practice of criticism.)

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Sedgwick observes that when we say something is sentimental, we describe a quality that pertains not to the text itself but to the reader's or viewer's relationship to it; in other words, there may be no such thing as an intrinsically sentimental text. She asks, "'Sentimental' with its quiverful of subcategories: don't they work less as static grids of analysis against which texts can be flatly mapped than as projectiles whose bearing depends utterly on the angle and impetus of their discharge?"<sup>25</sup> If sentimentality is presented as an overidentification with the other and if its abjection operates as a given in debates about

the difference between good art and bad art, it is because that word embodies a singular truth about aesthetic judgment which must be disavowed in order for the disciplinary protocols of discourse on art to continue to operate. The line between good and bad art is fundamentally contingent (on class, for example) and deeply subjective.

The problem of sentimentality is not as easily dismissed in literary criticism as it has been in art criticism. Doing so would negate the value and influence of large communities of writers and readers (e.g., in the United States sentimental novels by Stowe and Rebecca Harding Davis, regional writing by Sarah Orne Jewett and Charles Chesnutt, the racial romances of Pauline Hopkins, and popular fiction by Horatio Alger, E. D. E. N. Southworth, and Helen Hunt Jackson).<sup>26</sup> Scholars invested in popular novels have a stronger voice within their discipline and have in fact reshaped its practice; we long ago gave up on using arguments regarding literary value as criticism's moralizing anchor. Interestingly, Foster's writing on these issues expresses anxiety that the practices of literary scholars might penetrate contemporary art history. His attack on the emergence of the ethnographic in art writing pivots on an unlikely reference to Janice Radway and her book *Reading the Romance*.<sup>27</sup> Radway asked readers of serial romances what they got from such novels and how they understood their reading practices. She was among the first scholars to take fans of feminine "trash" seriously. *Reading the Romance* was part of a wave of scholarship that moved beyond the assumption that consumers of popular genres are passive dupes to dominant ideology. To gesture back to John Vincent's work on difficulty and poetics: this kind of scholarship explores the question "What do readers want?" and also recognizes that not all readers want or need the same thing. This diversity in our investments and the text's enormous capacity to meet our interests are, in fact, what make the whole enterprise of literature interesting.

Radway is a cultural studies scholar who studies the formation of reading practices as well as institutional articulations of literary value. Her work is extraliterary, focused not on the text but on how it circulates. Diverse scholars—like Sedgwick, Jane Tompkins, Laura Romero, and Berlant—have spent quite a bit of time exploring how feeling can take on complex and productive dimensions in sentimental literature. The authors identified with this (porous) category were far from naïve about the textuality of their work, and sentimental writing is not always synonymous with the coercive dynamics that shaped its most celebrated (or notorious) examples. Some authors showed a remarkable optimism regarding the capacity for feelings in and of themselves to lead to action and social change. Others clearly saw the reader's



feelings not as an end but as a means and as something that an author might manipulate to a wide range of purposes—sometimes even to stage an intervention against the habits of sentimental reading. Louisa May Alcott, famous for the intensely sweet *Little Women*, also wrote *Behind the Mask*, a potboiler and social satire in which an “old maid” pretends to be an ingénue governess and manipulates every member of the family through, of course, their sentimental investment in what they imagine to be her story (of some sort of suffering). Rebecca Harding Davis’s “Life in the Iron Mills” quite clearly indicts its own middle-class readers who feel sympathy for the story’s characters and do nothing regarding their real-world counterparts except read about them. The main character of that story, a factory worker with the soul of an artist, ends up in jail and slits his wrists in a scene that reads more like Poe than Stowe. Although the story has many of the hallmarks of the sentimental narrative, it is also acutely wary of the feelings it puts into circulation. Sentimental literature, in other words, is diverse, and a surprising amount of it is ambivalent about sentimentality itself.

As a number of literary scholars observe, there are countercurrents within sentimental culture in which sentiment and sincerity are redeployed in order to challenge exactly the sort of affective economy Baldwin described. Berlant uses the term *countersentimental* to describe texts that are “lacerated by ambivalence” and “withdraw from the contract that presumes consent with the conventionally desired outcomes of identification and compassion.”<sup>28</sup> These works manifest a commitment to the transformative effects of emotion but also resist the universalizing imperative of sentimental traditions that use emotion to negate difference with the assumption that we all ought to feel the same. Countersentimental works explore the possibilities of feeling differently.

As live actions in which the artist appears to suffer before our eyes, *I Miss You!* and *Incorruptible Flesh: Dissociative Sparkle* both raise questions about vicariousness: within the space of art, it is hard to imagine how one might get closer to another’s pain, and yet that proximity yields surprisingly little information about the other’s experience. At such performances, I am very conscious of my own skittishness and unease, my own projection—but, above all, I feel acutely aware of the fact that there is a difference, a distance between not only myself and the artist but between myself and other spectators.

Although performances like Franko B’s are worlds away from the nineteenth-century sentimental novel, we can think of the artist as having countersentimental practices in his commitment to “desire and disease” not only as content but as material (in some performances, he sprayed the venue with

hospital disinfectant for its strange hygienic smell); in his reliance on a lateral (as opposed to vertical) poetics (refusing models that present a causal, linear narrative regarding feelings and politics); and in the open and unresolved structure of his performances, which throws his audiences back onto themselves.

The challenge of Franko B’s work is connected to our suspicion that the pleasure we experience in being emotionally moved is structurally exploitative and sadistic; one might say that Franko B’s and Athey’s work explicitly stages the problem of the ethics of feeling for others. The overt masochism of Franko B’s work in particular aligns a performance of bodily vulnerability with the world of emotion.<sup>29</sup> His performances are masochistic, but they also feel oddly sincere and nearly child-like. Tavia Nyong’o has used the term *punk feeling* to describe the sweet and rough masochism of queer and underground performance, its sometimes “truly shocking conflation of the sentimental and the obscene, the perverse and the innocent.”<sup>30</sup>

Franko B’s performances are staged at that punk intersection of “the sentimental and the obscene, the perverse and the innocent.” The principal difficulty of his performance rests with his audience, with how *we* feel in relation to his display. The structural resemblance of *I Miss You!* to a wedding positions his audience as witness to his action and casts the performance as a ritual of transformation. Weddings give form to a relationship not only between two people but between that couple and a community (be it friends, family, or the state).<sup>31</sup> In walking down the aisle alone, Franko B performs a union with an absence, for an audience. In this sense, the performance locates itself in the agonistics of the melodramatic conclusion as one attempts to absorb loss, the gap between what one wants and what one has. If the loved one is missing from the artist, he is also missing from us. Franko B redirects questions about art and emotion away from the self-reflexive representation of the artist’s emotional state to the production of feelings themselves within a social space. It’s a risky move. In taking that walk alone, in marking the absence of the one he loves, he places the burden of filling the gap on his audience. He ask us if, and how, we plan to love him back.

### The Strange Theatricality of Tears: Nao Bustamante’s *Neapolitan* (2009)

The emotional labor of Franko B’s performances is visibly carried out by his weeping audience. To gain some perspective on how a critically engaged sentimentality might figure into an art practice, it is worth looking at artists who



FIGURE 17. Hayley Newman, *Crying Glasses (An Aid to Melancholia)* from *Connotations Performance Images—1994–1998*. 1998. Photograph by Casey Orr. Courtesy of Hayley Newman and Matt's Gallery, London.

engage emotion more directly than he does. Tears are suspect, whether they are represented within a work of art or produced in the spectator. Tears seem to embody both the height of unquestioned emotionality and the depths of emotional manipulation.<sup>32</sup> Because of this, questions about the nature and sincerity of artistic expression figure prominently in works that feature a weeping subject. Hayley Newman's *Crying Glasses (An Aid to Melancholia)*, for example, shows the artist sitting in a subway car, wearing dark glasses (fig. 17). Tears appear to be streaming down her cheek. The photograph is accompanied by wall text that explains, "Over a year I wore the crying glasses while traveling on public transport in all the cities I visited. The glasses functioned using a pump system which, hidden inside my jacket, allowed me to pump water up and out of the glasses and produce a trickle of tears down my cheeks. The glasses were conceived as a tool to enable the representation of feelings in public spaces. Over the months of wearing glasses they became an external mechanism which enabled the manifestation of internal and unidentifiable emotions." The work belongs to a series of photographs and text called *Connotations—Performance Images*. Newman presents these images as documents of performances, but they are in fact staged images of fictional performances that never happened. *Crying Glasses* is therefore a false image

of artificial tears. Although presented as "a tool to enable the representation of feelings in public spaces," within the larger context of falsified performance documents they become an uncomfortable allegory for the difficulty of "real" feeling (which the film director Krzysztof Kieslowski called "the fright of real tears").<sup>33</sup> Do we really want real tears from the artist? The photograph suggests that regardless of what we want from the artist, all the museum or gallery can offer us is a suspicious, unreliable record of performance—a third-hand record of emotions that may or may not be real. In fact all art, Newman suggests, is merely "a tool to enable the representation of feelings in public spaces" and not a tool to enable feelings themselves. Once emotion is absorbed into the sphere of representation, once a feeling becomes an image of feeling, its claim to authenticity (to being a real feeling) is thrown into question. Furthermore, the work mischievously implies that the disciplinary protocols of art history demand not sincerity from the artist ("real tears") but ironical distance. And so Newman offers a counterfeit version of *that*.

Marina Abramović's video performance *The Onion* (1995) calls attention to the difficulty of reading, bearing witness to, and responding to the artist's emotional display. In this piece, she holds an ordinary unpeeled onion to the side of her face and then slowly eats it, keeping her eyes pointed "up to the sky" (according to her own description of the performance) while we listen to a soundtrack of her complaining about her life. In a low, flat monotone, she recites a depressing litany of grievances, none of which is that grave or interesting: "I am tired of changing planes so often. Waiting in the waiting rooms, bus stations, train stations, airports. . . . I am tired of more career decisions, museum and gallery openings, endless receptions, standing around with a glass of plain water, pretending I am interested in conversation. . . . I am tired of always falling in love with the wrong man." This recitation (which is repeated several times over the duration of the performance) concludes with, "I want to understand and see clearly what is behind all of this. I want not to want anymore." The act of eating the onion begins as a perversely masochistic variant of using an onion to shed artificial tears—an external provocation to cry over a life not interesting enough to cry about. As the loop of complaints repeats itself, we watch her struggle over her own instinct as she takes one large bite from the onion after another. We hear her moan and whimper as she chokes it back, skin and all. (This aspect of the performance is almost erotic.) Over time she disintegrates before our eyes: her composed face collapses in abjection and grief.

This is a difficult performance to watch, even on a video monitor. You want to turn away, but you also want to keep watching to see if she finishes

the onion. While at first the subject of the performance appears to be the artist's inability to feel, to care, to cry, as she gets deeper into the onion and is more and more overcome by the difficulty of eating it, her upset appears more and more authentic. In the end, it is not the authenticity of her tears that you question but their artificiality, in part because as you watch this video it is hard not to have a physical reaction in sympathy with the manifest difficulty of eating a raw onion while suppressing the impulse to gag. Importantly, the performance anticipates and interrupts the first question we usually ask of representations of crying: "Are those tears real?" Here what starts as a theatrical production of artificial tears appears to morph into real tears over the artificiality of the performance of her daily life.

Nao Bustamante's *Neapolitan* (2009) negates the question of whether or not her tears are sincere. The installation features a video of the artist sitting on a couch as she watches, rewinds, and watches again the end of *Fresa y chocolate* (Strawberries and chocolate), a moving film about the Cuban Revolution, whose drama revolves around the betrayal and exile of homosexual love (see plates 5–6). At the same point in the film's last scene, she starts to cry. When that scene ends, she rewinds and indulges in the same tears. She does it again. And again and again. The monitor is shrouded in domestic ornaments and grandmotherly doilies—not genteel white lace but a riot of garish orange and yellow. The monitor is cloaked in crocheted yarn; little tassels adorn every corner and dot the blanket that wraps around the monitor's base. The headphone's earpieces and wires have cute coverings, turning them into adorable caps. The bench is covered in its own tailored outfit. A black crow perches atop this mountain, wearing a crocheted hat. The installation is customized for each appearance. Electric cords, outlets, and power strips all wear yarn cozies that take the artist several days of continuous labor to fashion.

Abramović's tears appear unpleasant and painful, and, typical for the genre, her performance video is minimal: face, onion, blank wall, screened on a no-nonsense monitor. Bustamante's tears are, on the other hand, attractive. At the heart of *Neapolitan* is a scene of indulgence, the treat of a weepie. The installation is full of pleasure and care; we see this in the artist's obvious affection for the film and the loving hand applied to the installation itself, in which the television becomes a homey shrine. We also see it in the artist's desire to replay the scene over and over again and in the hospitality extended by the work to its own viewer. All those custom cozies invite the viewer to join her, to sit down and put on the headset. Usually video installations are hard to place in an exhibit; getting people to stop and put on headphones is hard enough, but getting them to stand or sit in a gallery for just five minutes is a

real challenge. Not so with *Neapolitan*. The work is eminently approachable. In fact it's something of a scene-stealer: the bright colors, the plastic flowers and crow adorning its top demand the viewer's attention. In the artist's words, it's "showy."

Bustamante has said that when she sat down on the couch to record the crying performance for the camera, she expected that as she watched this scene over and over again, the tears would eventually stop flowing. But they didn't. The eleven-minute loop of the artist sobbing, making herself cry, is powerful and funny. She cries but doesn't seem (to me, anyway) unhappy. *Neapolitan* is oddly moving in its revelation of the momentum that tears have on their own, spilling over from the contrived scene of melodramatic spectatorship to suggest a self-sustained cycle, in which tears make more tears, in which tears migrate from screen to face and back again. This, the work reminds us, is what we want from melodrama.

The artist has lavished attention on the scene, looking after her television as if it were a sentimental object to be treasured. Crying, here, isn't something one stops but something one nurtures. The work has its own onion-like quality: layers of sticky-sweet sentiment collect around the story Bustamante watches. The work does not declare that the artist is sad because homosexuals were exiled from Cuba's revolutionary political community. It is not this history that makes her cry but a movie about it. It isn't even the whole film that works on her but just this one segment, this one swell in the film's affective score. Repeating this encounter and then looping these repetitions, Bustamante leaves no room for doubt: these tears are textual, squeezed from the film's melodramatic conclusion in which (classically) love must remain unrequited, in which the film's protagonist must let go of what he wants most. In melodrama, there is no solution, no resolution beyond the sacrifice of our happiness. There is no direct, linear relation between the story of *Fresa y chocolate* and that of *Neapolitan*. But one story, one scene, is wrapped around the other in an affective embrace.

The work contrasts nicely with Bas Jan Ader's *I'm Too Sad to Tell You* (1971), a three-minute silent black-and-white film of the artist crying (from which he also produced still photographs and postcards; fig. 18). Emotion here is both more intense and more contained. His eyes are wet, tears stream down his face, he tries to wipe his eyes dry, his face contorts into sobs, he holds his face in his hands, he grimaces. As the title reminds us, we do not know why Ader is crying; his sadness is cited as the very thing in the way of explanation, and so it registers as expression itself. As a male artist with a particular mythology (he disappeared while attempting to sail across the



FIGURE 18. Film still from Bas Jan Ader, *I'm Too Sad to Tell You*. 1971. Black-and-white film in 16 mm. 3 min., 21 sec. Courtesy of the Bas Jan Ader Estate.

Atlantic in execution of a performance), Ader is closer to the eighteenth-century ideal of the gentlemanly “man of feeling” than he is to the female melodrama cited by Abramović and Bustamante—and this very gendered and classed difference signals the sociality of our feelings about feelings. We are ready to accept his tears as real, in part because there is a tradition of sad, melancholy white male artists that supports this response, a tradition Ader deliberately and ironically engages. His tears might register as real, and yet they are spared being marked as naïve.

*I'm Too Sad to Tell You* extends Ader's interest in exploring his own vulnerability as a performative subject, as in a series of quirky short films that document the artist falling over: riding a bicycle into a canal, falling from a tree, standing and swaying from side to side until he falls down. But it may also be read as a contemporary iteration of the self-representation of the male artist as emotionally injured, in which that very injury authenticates his artistic identity, as in, for example, Gustave Courbet's *Self Portrait as a Wounded Man* (1844–45) or *Self Portrait (Desperate Man)* (1943). When compared with Newman's photograph, Abramović's performance, and Bustamante's installation, Ader's film comes off as more directly seductive and also more

private. Unlike our relationship with Abramović, we don't know the story behind his tears (other than that he's too sad to tell us). There is nothing in Ader's filmic performance to signal that we should read it as produced for the camera; in contrast, Abramović and Bustamante theatricalize the artificiality of their tears by showing us explicitly their cause. If the critic is tempted to read Ader's tears as performed for the camera, furthermore, he is likely to see in it not a story about how one can't trust the honesty of male emotion but rather a comment on the unreliability of cinema itself. As we look at a broader range of work in which crying figures centrally, we see that how we read emotion, and how emotion circulates, depends very much on the location and identity of the bodies shedding the tears. The emotionality of women is always already suspect, always already visible as performance, as imitative. Ader is a genius; the women are either acting or hysterics, or both.

### Relational Aesthetics and Affective Labor

At this point, we should pause and consider the relational nature of emotion and its association with gendered forms of labor. It is widely accepted that since the early 1990s, the contemporary art world has increasingly invested itself in relational aesthetics. Nicholas Bourriaud's term was intended to describe the prominence of art practices that produce relationships (between the artist and the viewer, for example) as their object. Although Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* was written as a response to a specific group of artists with whom he had worked (as is largely true of this book), the term *relational aesthetics* has wide application as a way to name the increasing centrality of relationships (e.g., of exchange, collaboration, and participation) to contemporary artistic practices. The historicization of relational aesthetics as a product of the 1990s belies the subjective, contingent, and relational structure of all aesthetic practices (even those that are object-based). But it does describe the increased visibility of work that evolved from the conceptualist and process-oriented art of the late 1960s and 1970s. The more a work looks like a relationship, the more important the place of affect and emotion may be to critical engagement with it.<sup>34</sup> This is explicitly the case with artists like Franko B and Adrian Howells (whose performances invoke structures of love, friendship, and intimacy), but it is also true of work that looks less personal.

Santiago Sierra is one of the most widely discussed and exhibited artists working along these lines. His work can appear totally complicit with the forms of exploitation that underwrite the privileged lives of his audiences. This often leaves the latter with no moral high ground from which they



might pass judgment on the artist or his work. His signature installations reproduce, in gallery settings, the exploitation of day laborers (by, for example, paying undocumented workers to sit in boxes). The audience's relationship to those forms of exploitation is his subject. How can you judge Sierra for deploying underprivileged workers when much more violent forms of exploitation produce daily life as you know it? When you accept such relationships every time you buy a cup of coffee, drive to work, or put on your shoes? The outrageousness of his work grows from the banality of the crime at its core: the ideological submission of the consumer who acquiesces to these forms of inequity as inevitable.

Importantly, the affective orientation of Sierra's work is not toward the exploited performer but toward the guilt-ridden liberal art consumer. His installations of day laborers performing menial tasks (holding up beams or a wall or sitting inside cardboard boxes) for the city's going rate (usually poverty wages) thus interest Claire Bishop because they make spectators uncomfortable with their complicity in the exploitation at the performance's heart, while also referencing art historical debates about minimalism; for example, in Sierra's hands, Michael Fried's discomfort with how much the minimalist cube feels like a body becomes a gallery installation of day laborers sitting inside refrigerator boxes. In terms of their emotional economy, Sierra's performance installations, in which the work is outsourced, performed by people hired by the artist, are the opposite of Howells's and Franko B's work.<sup>35</sup> Howells explicitly creates the feeling of being at home, whether or not his performances are staged in a gallery. When Franko B performed *I Miss You!* at the Tate Modern, it had the effect of defamiliarizing the museum's affective space, of reminding you of the parts of yourself you normally check at the door. Sierra, on the other hand, draws from exactly that process of exclusion: the exploitative gestures that define his practices are already part of art's business, and that's his point. The feelings of those he exploits appears (at first glance, at least) irrelevant. This is not to say that those enlisted in these performances do not have feelings, but those feelings never factor into critical reception of his work; to examine them would approach the sociological and step outside of the concerns of the (traditionally defined) art critic.<sup>36</sup> Which is to say that the feelings of those deployed in Sierra's performances are not only irrelevant to the business of art, they have in fact been irrelevant to the practice of criticism.

The problem of the performer's feelings emerged dramatically in an installation in 2002 for Deitch Projects in New York City. It is not easy to find day laborers in New York who will put up with being paid a meager wage to hold

heavy beams for no apparent reason; most day laborers work in construction, help with moving, and do other familiar jobs and would be suspicious of something so out of the ordinary. The gallery hired the "performers" for their event from an employment agency. These workers organized during the opening and walked off the job, arguing that it was "demeaning to be used as props in an artwork."<sup>37</sup> In the workers' refusal to participate in Sierra's installation, we see something of the complexity of the actual work they were being asked to perform: they were hired to provide a complex service for Sierra's audience, a service closer to that demanded from the artist than to that asked of the manual laborer. Sociologists call this aspect of our work life "affective labor." The emotional economy of Sierra's installations exploits the overdetermined place of affective labor in the art world. This is what many of the people around artists do for a living: they work in a service industry, educating, writing, selling. The receptionist, the bartender at an opening, and the person parking cars all provide services that have an affective dimension, as do curators, critics, and teachers. This is what artists do as well; their work makes people feel good, smart, or important (for example). Work based in process or collaboration, work that presents itself as a service explicitly positions itself in relation to the affective labor already present in the production of the art experience.

Drawing from feminist sociological writing about the affective labor assigned to women (as mothers, daughters, and wives, but also as teachers, nurses, and secretaries), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that labor which revolves around the production of affect can be particularly alienating, for in this case we are alienated not merely from our time (as is the wage laborer) or from the product of our labor (as is the factory worker) but from our very emotional selves. They write, "When affective production becomes part of waged labor it can be experienced as extremely alienating: I am selling my ability to make human relationships, something extremely intimate, at the command of a client or boss."<sup>38</sup> The professionalization of affect is especially hard on those working at the margins of economic survival—life is hard enough without health care, job security, affordable housing, and transportation—but to have to produce the spectacle of a woman at peace with the world and her position in it while working at the very job that fails to pay a living wage or provide health insurance can be too much.<sup>39</sup> She is nevertheless expected to smile through it ("Welcome to Walmart!").

Affective labor is hard too because it is confusing. We are so used to thinking of our emotions as inside and private that this cultural shift unsettles not only how we understand work but also how we understand the very constitu-



tion of ourselves. Hardt and Negri argue that as the production of immaterial goods (services, information, knowledge, social relationships) becomes a larger and larger part of the global economy, affective labor and how good we are at it becomes increasingly important to how we understand our own value in the world; indeed it is transforming the boundaries of the self. We are bearing witness to the emergence of new models for the subject that are less bounded, and new hierarchies for labor in which the ability to connect becomes prized above, for example, the ability to make something. That said, our usefulness to others as emotional caretakers and surrogates—the availability of our time and space to the emotional needs of others—is wildly contingent and is an indicator of the kinds of privileges and entitlements we enjoy and from which we are barred by virtue of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, age, and (perhaps more than anything) location.

Hardt and Negri's observations regarding a transformation in how labor is understood helps to situate the emergence of relational aesthetics as a hot topic in art criticism at the turn of the new century. Just as skilled manual labor (the ability to make things) has waned as capitalism's ideal model for production, so it has in art. As affective labor (the ability to create and maintain relationships) emerges as the privileged model for the global citizen, we see models for art-making recast in these terms. What makes Sierra's installations challenging is not the demand that we keep company with manual labor but the awkwardness of keeping company with people who so powerfully make visible the economies of class exploitation that structure our experiences of labor and that draw the line between what kinds of work are valuable and what kinds of work are not. Sierra's installations work as long as no one thinks of his workers as artists, and this is, perhaps, his point.

The most visible discourse on relational aesthetics evolves out of a modernist investment in the art object as a site of ideological struggle (e.g., Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried). This mode of criticism scrutinizes the art object for signs of resistance to processes of objectification and commodification, for a critical engagement with itself as object. According to this modernist vein of thought, the object has by now been wrung dry of whatever oppositional value it might once have held for the critic looking for art practices that are aggressively defined by their self-awareness, their self-referentiality, and their resistance to market culture. Experiential artworks (e.g., conceptual art, performance art, some installations) seem to offer an escape route from art as commodity; certainly the artists making process-oriented work in the 1960s and 1970s saw their practice this way. For quite a long time, art criticism wrestled with the distinction between good objects (which ex-

hibit a critical relationship to their status as objects) and bad ones (which are complicit with that objectification). Critics now have this argument about the relationships staged in these interactive, collaborative, participatory art practices (e.g., Bishop's arguments with Bourriaud; Grant Kester's and Liam Gillick's responses to Bishop's polemics in the pages of *Artforum* and *October*). The ultimate rhetorical aim of such a critical practice is the acquisition of a moral high ground from which one can arbitrate the distinction between modes of experience that are merely entertaining or merely representative and modes of experience that are critical and also have some sort of aesthetic value (thus Foster's call for "critical distance" at the conclusion of *The Return of the Real* as an antidote to the "ethnographic impulse"). Hardt and Negri help us to see that the important thing here is not the arbitration of which forms of relationality are best, which have more ethical or aesthetic integrity, but that this conversation is being staged around these terms at all. The fact that relationality itself has become the battleground for arguing the meaning and value of contemporary art confirms these global shifts regarding how people and the work they do are valued. Alarming, some of the criticism in this area mirrors the hierarchical logics of this service economy, in which the feelings of some communities (Sierra's audience) outweigh those of others (his workers) and in which the emotional register attributed to the work of some artists (Sierra, Thomas Hirschhorn) is valued as more complex, as having more integrity and intelligence than the emotional register of the work of other artists (invariably, women artists and artists of color). The same classifications map onto audiences too.

When Sierra's workers walked off of the job, they demonstrated their awareness of the difference between the labor that they were told they were being paid to perform (manual) and the actual labor that had been asked of them (affective). Their protest registers the offensiveness of the idea that they would not be aware of this difference and that they would be so economically vulnerable as to not care. These workers were aware, in other words, that service work is different and, in that setting, much more valuable than manual labor. It is hard to name their anger as a part of Sierra's work, as that anger seems to have been the very thing that brought the piece to an end and forced the art to walk out the door. But perhaps it should be seen as the natural extension of his practice: it forced into the light the intensity with which the emotional lives of the exploited are policed and negated, even (or especially) in art that purports to be critically engaged with this exploitation.