

Introduction

The Ethics of Enactment

In their concentration on small scale moves, on textures, on contradictions, on imaginary identifications, the writings in this volume search for a sense of the ethical as it realizes itself through a variety of social practices. For each writer the importance of the visibility of these practices figures prominently. From secular iconoclasm to gynecology, in the museum or within the personal anecdote, the concern for the visual resonates with efforts to understand and to establish creative possibility and valuable action. The ethical emerging here is clearly not a static imperative. It is something that *requires* images, icons, stories, pictures and public display in order to be enacted.

While this visibility could recall monolithic versions of the spectacle, throughout this volume such *publicity* is discussed in terms that emphasize instead the possibilities for meaning created by fascination, mobility, ambivalence, and awe. The papers also share a recognition of the importance of the visual for identification and its role in the production of history. They consider aspects of what official histories have rendered invisible, or conversely, isolated and desolated within the hyper-visibility that belongs to the persecuted, the exoticized, and the reviled. They trace the connections between witness and participant, mapping the short-circuit relation between what one sees and what one is. Observation and performativity are, here, hardly a beat away from one another; the spectacle as with practice never appears as something *out there*.

For us the phrase “ethics of enactment” blends numerous considerations relevant to the affective dimensions of contemporary culture: particularly those said to be located “in the margins.” The tension between the drift and the particular preoccupation of each essay is as much a constitutive dynamic as it is the effect of engaging a discourse of resistance: their movements make sense not only in relation to something they are set against. We assume that declaration – whether in the form of identity-statements or political

polemics – tends to demonstrate greater concern for strategic opposition than exploratory initiative. Although such positivistic gestures may *feed* an ethos, a politics, or a social movement, they are too fixed to permit its manifestations. And so, in searching for writings that could philosophically take into account local levels of meaning – as well as the necessity and even the desirability of indeterminacy, revisability and incompleteness – we relied upon the notions of performativity and enactment.

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In the course of compiling these essays it became apparent that the writers share an appreciation of the importance of social rituals not only for creating collective bodies, but also for introducing and insisting upon ethics as an animating force of history. Our hope, then, is that the significance of the phrase “ethics of enactment” will develop in relation to the suggestion implicit in such an orientation – the suggestion that the stilled image of an already owned future, one belonging to invisible forces of hegemony or even catastrophe, might yield to our solicitations and be put in motion.