

“Theatre in Absentia” and Negative Theology: The “Theatre That May or May Not Be Theatre” of Implied Violence

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Introduction: Incomprehensibility and Negative Theology

The theatre (or “anti-theatre”) of Implied Violence, who refer to themselves collectively as “IV,” rigorously makes use of ritual and altered states of consciousness achieved through bloodletting, ether inhalation, and physical exhaustion in order to refuse and excuse themselves from dominant modes of theatre production and an Aristotelian cathartic structure, as well as social demands for propriety, beauty, and authentic communication. They create temporal and spatial expansions, contractions, and disruptions using alternative performance spaces – like streets under freeways and hotels slated for demolition – simultaneity, chant, and kinetic objects such as a giant claw constructed from plywood and cardboard that descends from above and encloses performers in its many-jointed fingers (see figure 1). Masks and puppets evolve throughout performances, disrupting an easy distinction between performer and object. “Refusal” is a strong theme encountered both in a gallery exhibit of Implied Violence’s performance artifacts at the Frye Art Museum in Seattle, Washington, and in the script for their three-part opus called *The Dorothy K*. Refusal functions as a trope when performers, texts, and videos offer alternative modes of perception and means of communication, such as focusing in on the small body of a leech attaching to a performer’s arm, or witnessing a performer reeling from the effects of ether.

Implied Violence's refusal to participate in certain ideological constructions of society and art production allows them to invite direct participation of the viewer or audience member into the making of the performance. They posit being as "otherwise than being," or even *not* being, when such participation subverts the idea that the performance existed before this relational participation, or that a subject who mentally or bodily exits from a performance does not continue to perform. Emmanuel Levinas' *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence* is a work of ethical philosophy and a critique of phenomenological ontology that argues for responsibility for the Other in reaction to the naked, vulnerable proximity of one human being to another. Levinas proposes that the relationship between self and Other is one that, in order to prevent the self from absorbing the Other into the realm of the self-same, must constantly destabilize determinate knowledge of the other-than-the-self. The question at the heart of this work is "whether one can at the same time know and free the known of the marks which thematization leaves on it by subordinating it to ontology" (Levinas 1974, 7). To determine the ontology of the Other even as existent is a transgression of the otherness of the Other. "The task is to conceive of the possibility of a break out of essence," that is, a break with being, and with the propositions of ontology (Levinas 1974, 9). The performances of Implied Violence challenge the ontological proposition that the body on stage can be known and/or accessed by the viewer. They challenge the idea that any image of performance can offer knowledge of the event, unless the viewer becomes an active participant in the seeking of such knowledge.

Because Implied Violence traffics in refusal, abjection, Otherness, and the possibility of non-being, I offer three readings of performances in conversation with three different medieval negative theologians: Meister Eckhart, Hildegard von Bingen, and Marguerite Porete. In doing so, I draw out the parallels between apophatic spirituality and performance that disrupts

ontology, or what I am calling the “theatre in absentia.” Like practitioners of “theatre in absentia,” the negative theologian also often functions as prophet, outcast, or social critic. While faithful to the Church, the negative theologian also takes orthodoxy out of its comfortable discourse as fixed doctrine and revolutionizes it, co-opting it for its own destabilization or even destruction. But the negative theologian always believes that their challenge to orthodoxy – or the re-introduction of orthodoxy, as the case may be – even if it flies in the face of dogma and authority, is most true to its deepest values and beliefs. This depiction of the apophatic thinker as a renegade theologian will be upheld by my brief portraits of Eckhart, Porete, and von Bingen below.

Today, this kind of negative approach is embodied by Catholic theologian Jean-Luc Marion, who challenges theology not to yield to the “metaphysics of presence” (Marion 1999, 33). For Marion, “mystical theology” (which he prefers in name over “negative theology”) is not about the duel between negative and positive speech about God, but finding a “third way” that makes an entirely different move. This third way is “de-nomination,” to “un-name,” or the approach of knowledge through ignorance itself. Instead of seeking to name God or to discover the attributes of the divine, whether knowable or deniable, de-nomination “*inscribes us*, according to a radically new praxis, in the very horizon of God” (38, emphasis added). The believer cannot seek to name the divine, but must surrender to *being named*. The ethical implication of this definition of negative theology that applies to the work of Implied Violence is that by being named, the self must allow the unknowable Other to act in and upon her, becoming the site of a performance of relationship and change, rather than objectifying the Other as the stage upon which meaning is made.

Implied Violence performs through the experience of incomprehension. They surrender themselves to situations that negate being and they strip assumed knowns of their names. They perform “theatre in absentia,” performance that is absent from itself. Through the saturated materiality of its performance, however, it asserts that the incomprehensible is not necessarily the imperceptible. The theatre of Implied Violence is lush and decadent, full-bodied and generous, which demonstrates that theatre in absentia is not simply a minimalistic theatrical form, but an approach. It is different from what has been termed “sacred theatre” because the transcendence it achieves, if any, remains in the realm of the incomprehensible, where sacred theatre’s more modern aim is toward unifying meaning through universal symbol or shared experience.

The essence of Ralph Yarrow’s definition of sacred theatre, for example, is that it propels the performer into a new realization that “the world isn’t like this, like we thought or hoped it might be” (Yarrow 18), whereas theatre in absentia examines the explosive potential of incomprehension, not seeking enlightenment or new understanding, but functioning like the social offering of an excuse. “Excuse me” is a polite refusal to conform that veils a resistant structure operating beneath the skin of the predominant ideology. A simple “excuse me” is surreptitious: it stealthily forces the incomprehensible into the realm of the everyday, quietly insisting that the incomprehensible is the stage and the scene of daily life. The “excuse me” allows for impromptu eruptions of bodily functions in polite circles, but it also is the basis for something like the insanity defense. It is a powerful mechanism by which we incorporate the incomprehensible into a social structure that would seem to reject it. The negative theologian also demands such excuse: he asks to be excused from his inability to either affirm or deny God, but still be allowed to praise God. Theatre in absentia, likewise, demands excuse: it asks to be

excused from the affirmation and the denial of presence, and be allowed to approach the Other through incomprehensibility.

“Theatre in Absentia” versus “Sacred Theatre”

My entrance into conversation with Implied Violence at the moment is unique, as I have not yet had the opportunity to attend a live performance, but have instead visited the gallery where the ephemeral artifacts of their performances currently reside, attended a talk with director Ryan Mitchell, watched online videos, and read their website, press releases, reviews, and a script for one performance. I encounter their work through their footprints and their effects, indirectly, looking through their own selections for their archive, and those made by the curator at the Frye. As such, I am in an interesting position of not being able to say that I “know their work,” even though I have seen and experienced a lot about it. However, I also cannot say that I do not participate in the work of Implied Violence. To encounter the remains of performance, to walk among the objects of their living archive – “living” especially since several pieces on display at the Frye have been used in performances multiple times and will probably be used again – is also to participate. My participation is one that overlays a ready-made performance, inscribes itself over and between the lines to make a multilayered palimpsest, disrupting the confluence between the assumed knowledge offered by an image in a gallery and the knowledge gained by actively learning about that image and entering into conversation with it. I am a renegade of sorts: I superimpose myself where there is no scripted place for me. I may be ignored, but this does not change the depth of my engagement. Because I am peripheral to the performances I engage, I have the power to form the frame that shapes others’ understandings of these works and these rituals. In that way my indirection is extremely direct.

Indirect participation, absence, and disruption of the “scripted” are some of the very themes that *Implied Violence* explores. In many ways *Implied Violence* does share the aims of sacred theatre, but as I argued above, as “theatre in absentia,” its allegiance to incomprehensibility rather than realization sets it apart from much that has been called “sacred theatre.” Any distinctions between sacred theatre and theatre in absentia made here are for the purposes of argument, rather than to be read as watertight definitions. Some who work in sacred theatre would claim incomprehensibility as a defining factor. The pre-eminent book on the subject is *Sacred Theatre*, devised and edited by Ralph Yarrow, and written by a community of practitioners and scholars who represent multiple views (Yarrow 2007). The multitude of definitions offered by this work are so broad, in fact, that at moments “sacred theatre” seems to encompass any kind of performance that questions the stability of the self and offers a transformative experience, and this is something theatre practitioners have discussed since Aristotle’s discourse on identification and catharsis in tragedy. For the purposes of this essay, “sacred theatre” will primarily mean performance that seeks transformation with the intent of gaining new knowledge and alternative modes of perception that negotiate and extend the limits of the individual and the community. “Theatre in absentia” will mean performance that traffics in radical absence and refuses unifying systems of communication, seeking the experience of incomprehensibility. While sacred theatre and theatre in absentia overlap, drawing them apart will help us position them historically and understand their differing political and ethical agendas.

Sacred theatre in this vein harkens back to the beginnings of avant garde theatre in Russia, Europe, and North America in the mid-19th century. The avant garde positioned itself in opposition to social organization and artistic convention that determined aesthetic value or ideals

of skill and fluency. For a movement that proclaimed to always advance into the new, it contradictorily also sought to recuperate the past, but a past that had not been tainted by the history of civilization. “On the one hand there is the transformation of the theatre into a laboratory for exploring fundamental questions about the nature of performance and the relationship between actor and audience. On the other, primitivism in various shapes: the exploitation of irrationality, the exploration of dream states, the borrowing of archaic dramatic models, mythological material or tribal rituals” (Innes 1981, 9). Interest in primitivism, especially in light of myth, manifested in ideas about the renewal and recapturing of “pure” or “basic” forms of communication.

The Russian Symbolists, for example, sought the fusion of underlying forms, symbols and sounds. Wassily Kandinsky proposed a system of painting and theatre production synesthetically linking sounds and colors that “tune” the viewer into the communication of profound truths. He wrote famously in 1912 that art belongs to a spiritual life, which is “a complex but definite movement above and beyond, which can be translated into simplicity. This movement is that of cognition. Although it may take different forms, it holds basically to the same internal meaning and purpose” (Kandinsky 1955, 26). Kandinsky’s contemporary, Nicholas Evreinoff, an experimental playwright known for his spectacles celebrating events of the Russian Revolution, argues in a similar vein for the basic and instinctual nature of theatre, that it is a “fundamental” component of human interaction. “The art of the theatre is pre-aesthetic and not aesthetic for the simple reason that *transformation*, which is after all the essence of all theatrical art, is more primitive and more easily attainable than *formation*, which is the essence of aesthetic arts” (Carlson 1996, 35, Carlson’s emphasis). Perhaps the most influential writer of the avant-garde movement in theatre is Antonin Artaud, the French director and theorist. His

“theatre of cruelty” was a work of “total theatre” on a grand scale, positioning the viewer in the middle of the experience, “thereby rediscovering a little of the poetry in the ferment of great, agitated crowds hurled against one another.” Calling for a shock to the understanding and saturation of the senses, this theatre would have “the magnitude and scale of a show aimed at the whole anatomy, and on the other an intensive mustering of objects, gestures, and signs used in a new spirit.” Total theatre is “unafraid of exploring the limits of our nervous sensibility” (Artaud 1938, 66-67). Artaud represents the pinnacle of the theatrical avant-garde’s interest in transformation and communication through uncovering and rediscovering basic (sometimes understood as primitive) forms of communication that had been stifled by industrial society. While not explicitly religious, it professed a spiritual foundation in universal access to human truth through shared, transformative experience.

The Polish director Jerzy Grotowski can be seen as descending from Artaud, since his work in the 60s and 70s also is a “quest for the essential.” At the Polish Laboratory Theatre he developed his actor training system in relationship to the “via negativa,” which sought to strip the actor of all “blocks” to the essential self, “a complete stripping down, by the laying bare of one’s own intimacy—all this without the least trace of egoism or self-enjoyment. The actor makes a total gift of himself” (Grotowski 1997, 27). The goal was a “poor theatre,” one that needed nothing but bodies in space. Around this same time, groups like the Living Theatre and the Performance Group in New York were at the forefront of experimental theatre that also quested for alternative forms of community experience and audience participation. What had begun as an interest in primitivism at the beginning of the avant-garde movement shifted into work with non-western theatre forms using new techniques in anthropology and ethnography. The relationship between theatre director Richard Schechner (who was director of the

Performance Group) and anthropologist Victor Turner resulted in several germinal theoretical works in the 70s and 80s, namely Schechner's *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (1985) and Turner's *From Ritual to Theatre: on the Human Seriousness of Play* (1982). Schechner especially influenced the introduction of ritual into actor training, bringing insights back into the United States from India, Bali, and Papua New Guinea.

Schechner's cross-cultural work especially contributes to his most well-known theory, "restored behavior." Restored behavior, still cited frequently by performance scholars, is the most recent concept that is a direct descendent of the avant-garde's co-optation of primitivism as a way to resist convention and discover universal truth. According to Schechner, "restored behavior" can be treated like a strip of film – cut, copied, pasted, rearranged, reconstructed. Performances, such as rituals, are things, "materials" that can be used, and "they have a life of their own" (Schechner 1985, 36). "Performance means: never for the first time. ...Performance is 'twice-behaved behavior'" (37). "Restored behavior offers both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome what they once were – or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become" (38). Restored behavior approaches performance as a universal human signifier, something that can be transferred across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

Victor Turner, whose theory stems from his belief in the essentially dramatic nature of the ritual process (Turner 1982, 81), introduced into performance vocabulary two important terms: "liminality" and "communitas." Turner bases his discussion of the liminal phase on the prior work of Dutch anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, whose *The Rites of Passage* (1909) describes ritual as movement from one territory to another. Turner identifies the liminal as that phase of ritual "marked by the separation of the ritual subject from the rest of society. "[T]he

ritual subjects in these rites undergo a ‘leveling’ process, in which signs of their preliminal status are destroyed and signs of their liminal non-status applied” (26). Liminality is an ambiguous state, where social structure is revised, a place for the “breakthrough of chaos into cosmos, of disorder into order” (46). “Communitas” describes the fluid social structure in the midst of the liminal phase, but its unstructured form has the potential to “convert into normative structure” at any time (47). Along with “restored behavior,” liminality and communitas can be used to argue for the transformative ritual underpinnings of performance. These concepts attempt to theoretically legitimize what epitomizes sacred theatre: transformative experience that reveals the world as something new and different and the communication of vital human truths through this transformative, often communal, experience.

This history of sacred theatre is limited and short, but the intent is that the sketch will highlight how *Implied Violence*, while it also draws from avant-garde performance and the history of the use of ritual in theatre, is doing something starkly different. Artaud and Grotowski are certainly progenitors, but *Implied Violence* deviates from these directors in their focus on alterity and incomprehensibility. They are more closely connected to the Expressionistic dance theatre of German choreographer Pina Bausch, whose monumental piece *Café Mueller* (1978) plays on themes of constriction, distraction, and the violence of solipsism. Adrian Heathfield’s description of Bausch’s ghost-like figure stepping gingerly through an empty café crowded with chairs as “a gesture of open giving that seems already withdrawn” is a fitting commentary on the dance as a whole (Heathfield 2006, 191). *Implied Violence* also brings to mind the butoh of Hijikata Tatsumi, who writes that the secret roots of butoh can be detected in “the feeling somewhere inside your body that your arm is not really your arm” (Hijikata 2000, 75). Butoh, a conceptual art movement in Japan arising after World War II and ranging over theatre, dance,

and movement, works closely with themes of death, absence, and the difficulty of communication. As Hijikata asks, “Can even expression, when it reaches the place it set out for, actually accomplish anything?” (78) I offer the term “theatre in absentia” as a way to distinguish performance whose spirituality lies in its loyalty to not-knowing and its commitment to the embodied details of abjection and otherness from a kind of “sacred theatre” whose aim is transformation and the revelation of a new reality.

“In absentia” is Latin for “in the absence of,” and in legal terms is the bodily absence of a defendant from the courtroom. Under United States law, a defendant has the right to be present at all points during a trial, and at times their absence could upset due process. However, a defendant can relinquish the right to be present by signing a waiver and/or voluntarily leaving the courtroom after the trial has begun, or, by virtue of disorderly conduct, being forcibly exited from the court. Then, the court functions “in absentia” the defendant. Theatre in absentia, likewise, is performance that happens “in the absence of.” Implied Violence’s most ambitious piece to date, *The Dorothy K* series, has had three installations so far: in New York, Austria, and opening the exhibit at the Frye in Seattle on October 9, 2010 with the latest in the series called *The Dorothy K: For Better, For Worse, and Forever*. They will present a section of this massive piece at The Guggenheim Museum in New York for the Works and Process Series curated by Robert Wilson in March of 2011. Each installation runs several hours, almost as exhausting (but not quite) for the audience as for the performers. From videos and photos, my impression of the piece is of a skillfully choreographed, operatic disaster scene—a saturated symphony of the senses. Costumes recall 18th century Americana with Revolutionary War style jackets and white shifts and bonnets meant to recall the quiet lives of the “plain people,” such as the Quakers, Amish, Mennonites, and Hutterites (Frye Art Museum 2010, “The Dorothy K: Gohn Brothers

Gown, 2009”). The large, open performance space is soaked in reds and oranges and cut through with stark black objects like the ether machines described below and bare trees hanging upside down from the ceiling. Many actions occur simultaneously, and everything is carefully and precisely performed, from the spoken word performance of a woman in black at a lectern, to the slow dance of a large man holding a smaller man in his arms behind a velvet-rope, the convulsive dances of shift-clad female performers, the continuous hopping up and down at different areas in the playing space, projected footage of a horse rolling over, and amplification of lines via a hand-held toy microphone. What seems like meaningless chaos, when closely attended to, blooms into meditation on the immanency of death, the limits and transcendence of bodily life, and the disruption, resistance, and revision of social norms and givens of behavior and communication. In the absence of linear progression and proscenium-style performance, *Implied Violence* does not ask for a willing suspension of disbelief, but grabs attention whether one wills it or no.

After attending the Frye performance, the art writer for the local alternative newspaper *The Stranger* described *Implied Violence* as “a black-metal band. They exhibit extreme discipline while channeling messy and chaotic scenes; they also add the element of poetry, both visual and verbal. The result is the creation of a legible madness that exercises the ardent American desire to resist, which stretches from Walden to Kandahar” (Graves 2010). Resistance also rules the rather punk attitude of the group as described in the manifesto on their website’s homepage: “*Implied Violence* makes plays that are not plays. We make theatre that may or may not be theatre. We generate pieces that are rooted in an internal logic and rigid structure that audiences may or may not understand. However, our work does not beg to be understood. We don’t care to be understood, to understand is to lie” (*Implied Violence* “Home,” 2010).

Resistance is a component of Implied Violence's theatre in absentia: in the courtroom, the defendant's absence, either voluntarily or as a result of disorderly conduct, resists the order of the court by refusing to participate in the manner deemed fit by both law and custom. Similarly, Implied Violence refuses and resists the classic, Aristotelian structure of theatre, as much absenting themselves from a pre-scripted conversation as creating something new.

Reading the script for the performance of *The Dorothy K* at the Donau Festival in Austria, I find the theme of resistance peppered throughout with various points called simply "refusal" or "mistake"—here either a performer refuses to carry through with a particular action, the dialogue disrupts or disintegrates, or there is a marked shift in the stage action as a whole. The "refusal" refers to a point in a dressage competition when the horse refuses, for whatever reason, to go through with a particular exercise, such as jumping a fence. Sometimes referred to as "Horse Ballet," dressage displays the athletic training of the horse while maintaining an appearance of effortless and lightness, with seamless communication between commanding rider and perfectly responsive horse. If there is any violence in a dressage competition, it is carefully smoothed over with graceful spectacle. To uncover the violence implied would be to undress the dressage, expose a chaotic interior that frantically works to maintain the illusion of mastery. The metaphoric connection between *The Dorothy K* and dressage speaks most clearly in an exchange in the script between characters/performers Piece of Meat (POM) and Derrick Ryan Claude Mitchell (drcm):

POM: My knee-cap is fractured across the top. And later you will find out that it is, in fact, shattered. After some time you will realize that this handicap merits "putting me down". This knee-cap fractured across the top.

-drcm: Are you going to be all right?

POM: Yes and no. They shoot horses don't they.

-drcm: Cute answer.

POM: My back isn't broken.

-drcm: Oh. Hm. Are you lying to me?

POM: (nothing)

-drcm: Right. Are you— Are you in pain?

(Pause)

POM: (Calmly) Why are you so awful?

(pause)

-drcm: Well, thank you for getting directly to the point.

POM: You're welcome. (Mitchell 2010, 4)

POM performs resistance through the identification of these violent practices, even as she remains caught in the sequence that both allows this identification and subjects her to its violence. Through her participation in dressage, whether willingly or no, POM's "refusal" is a direct confrontation with the culture and the custom that breaks her body and puts her life in danger.

I find direct confrontation a useful paradigm for engaging Implied Violence's work. By being blatant—for example, using elemental, unrefined materials like vast quantities of fake blood, real blood, saliva, live leeches, invisible ether, dirt, water, ashes, flour, tar, and wax to mask, transform, and reveal the faces and bodies of performers—Implied Violence directly confronts the craft of theatre by displaying its naked parts, reveling in the fear, the eroticism, and the grotesque humor of that display. Even from the relative distance of the gallery space, I find myself both engrossed and "grossed out." In a video installation called "My Wounds Will Weep

(Ecstatic Fit)” at the Frye Art Museum, videographer Steven Miller captures the dance work of Allie Hankins in the Donau Festival performance. In this 44 second looped video, the sequence begins with Hankins falling to the floor, then raising herself on painfully bent wrists, face invisible beneath a shag of brown hair covered in an old-fashioned white linen bonnet. Falling again to the floor and rolling onto her back, she raises her torso, neck strained backwards, and lifts her knees. As she holds this difficult pose, another performer who has been standing by leans over to drop spindles of saliva into her mouth. Hankins rises here, bent double, her hands flying angularly from bent wrists as she presses them into her knees. Her body is covered by a loose white shift like those worn by the “plain people,” whose plain style of dress signified their religious affiliation and adherence to ideals such as modesty, piety, disavowal of desire for material possession, and separation from the secular world (Frye Art Museum 2010, “The Dorothy K: Gohn Brothers Gown, 2009”). Her calves are tightly strapped with wide white bands, and she wears black laced shoes. The sequence begins again, and repeats. By closing in on one performer, whose movements are one small part of *The Dorothy K’s* symphonic whole, the videographer confronts the viewer with the raw work of Hankins’ physical expenditure, disallowing the viewer to sit back and ingest the performance from a distance. In the gallery space itself, this projected image takes up one entire wall, impossible to ignore. Hankin’s image is larger-than-life. The video repeats endlessly, compounding the effect of exhaustion (see figure 2).

Direct confrontation with materials, movements, and their experienced and embodied effects on both performers and audience members comprises one side of Implied Violence’s resistant “theatre in absentia.” The other side is the hidden, the “implied” that must be searched for rather than taken for granted. Hankin’s dance, for example, is conditioned by the fact that

beneath the loose white shift she wears a tight corset designed by costume designer Anna Telcs. A placard next to the projection informs viewers that “The corset doubles the effort it takes Hankins to execute a simple movement – a forward bend, for example – and makes it difficult for her to expand her lungs enough to take a full breath during exertion. The corset is cinched with rope from the back. Hankins can neither get in nor out of the corset without assistance. The rope digs into her skin, adding to the difficulty and discomfort of her actions, and leaves deep traces on her body that last long after the end of the performance” (Frye Art Museum 2010, “My Wounds Will Weep (Ecstatic Fit”). Thanks to the gallery, the viewer has privileged inside knowledge of this performance, since the corset is not visible in the video. Hankins’ movements imply constriction and pain, but they do not speak the lived reality of her experience directly. Instead, the viewer must expand her field of inquiry from the projection itself to the information offered, to look for the source of violence behind the performed implication of it. In doing this, I draw the connection between assuming that a performance is contained in one’s visual, aural, even visceral experience of it and the violence of assuming that any observation of a performer, of a person, no matter how direct it appears, tells the viewer all they need or should know.

Challenging the assumption that to see is to know calls to mind the “false consciousness” of Dubord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, where social relationship is mediated by the image. Dubord expresses his main argument pithily in his first thesis, stating, “All that once was directly lived has become mere representation” (Dubord 1995, 12). *The Society of the Spectacle* is a work of Marxist criticism that re-deploys the idea of the commodity fetish in connection with modern mass media. The spectacle is not simply a collection of images, but “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (ibid). In the *Society of the Spectacle*, subjects interact with one another, and with themselves, through their relationship to images of society,

wealth, happiness, health, etc., rather than with real objects and real people. As a result, a commodity is circulated as an ideal through interaction with its image; it is not something that can actually be possessed. “The spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production” (13). Thus consciousness within the ideology of the Society of the Spectacle will always be false, because it is based on the circulation of images rather than interpersonal or embodied relationship. What is pernicious about the Society of the Spectacle is that although its consciousness of itself is false, its structure still has real effects, such as disparities in social class and wealth distribution.

Dubord, like *Implied Violence*, is careful not to pit the image against the “objective reality” of activity. “Thus the spectacle, though it turns reality on its head, is itself a product of real activity. Likewise, lived reality suffers the material assaults of the spectacle’s mechanisms of contemplation, incorporating the spectacular order and lending that order positive support. *And every concept, as it takes its place on one side or the other, has no foundation apart from its transformation into its opposite: reality erupts within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and underpinning of society as it exists*” (Dubord 14; emphasis added). To simply observe Hankins’ performance is to accept her pain at face value as something signified. To accept offered knowledge about the performance beyond the visual presentation is to begin to understand the actual violence implied. In the Society of the Spectacle, seeking that knowledge will be forever trapped between observing the performance as if it were “only an image” and entering into it with the performer as if that were “reality” – both are impossible to fully achieve, in the way that neither spectacle nor reality can be fully entered without the mediation of one through the other. But in this performance *Implied Violence* chisels away at the Society of the Spectacle’s spectacle/reality monolith. By concealing from view the

constricting corset that conditions the dance, they open up a new kind of participation for the viewer, which is the active seeking and incorporation of information about the making of the performance in the present moment of the gallery visit. This creates the “*détournement*” that Dubord argues for toward the end of *The Society of the Spectacle*. *Détournement* is dialogue based in practical experience that disrupts the alienated language of the spectacle’s ideology. “It occurs within a type of communication aware of its inability to enshrine any inherent and definitive certainty” (146). It is a fluid discourse in direct response to lived experience. “*Détournement* finds its cause on nothing but its own truth as critique at work in the present” (Ibid). In other words, *détournement* refuses to participate in the ideology of the society of the spectacle.

This gallery performance incorporates refusal into its encounter with the viewer when the image refuses to contain itself as a unified performance. The information offered refuses to allow the viewer separation, but changes and challenges perception and understanding of the image on visual as well as social and interpretive levels with new knowledge about the “how” of the performance. In the exchange between image and the disclosure of information about its construction, the viewer participates in the gallery performance, deconstructing the image while she learns about it. Dubord maintains that image and reality inform one another, but that through *détournement* subjects can freeze the flow of images in the Society of the Spectacle and create a new kind of dialogue based on experience in the present. In the Implied Violence exhibition, that very interplay between viewing the image and learning about its performed reality is the way in which the viewer participates in the construction and deconstruction of the performance itself. Such a relationship shifts the viewer out of the spectacle/reality dynamic into another dimension of experience and discussion: *détournement* is direct participation. Participation occurs through

exposure of the absence of knowledge in the “false consciousness” of the spectacle. Participation is the exposure of and the confrontation with incomprehensibility.

Theatre in Absentia and Negative Theology

This particular attitude toward participation, one that works with the inapproachable and unknowable (such as in the way that Hankin’s autonomous experience remains a mystery to the viewer) while at the same time offering saturated experience and new knowledge (in the way that the viewer can challenge their perceptions through seeking information), characterizes Implied Violence as theatre in absentia and parallels the work of negative theology. The negative theologian seeks the void through which one peers into the infinity of the exact as well as the vastness of the unknown. It is an ascetic practice of self-denial through the denial of knowledge of the divine while caught up in the particulars of bodily and social existence. Negative theology not only talks about God in terms of what cannot be known about God or the human-divine relationship; it is a way to get to the bone of intra-human relationship very quickly, because the negative theologian must learn how to deal with the world – human compassion as well as violence – without God. For Jean-Luc Marion, negative theology cannot be confined to the re-affirmation of a wholly transcendent God through denial, but is a “third way,” one which steps out of the positive/negative dichotomy and into another kind of speaking altogether. His example is the prayer of praise, which is speech that is “non-predicative;” that is, it does not depend on a “to-be” verb construction that can either be affirmed or denied but offers an alternative approach to the divine (Marion 1999, 23). Negative theology is a subversive kind of rhetoric because it questions anthropomorphism, arguing that human analogies for the divine are limited when they exclude certain sectors of humanity (the lay as opposed to clergy, the female as opposed to

male). Because of this, negative theologians undermine claims to authority by a religious or political order that understands its power as divinely given, rejecting the dogmatism accompanying those claims. The negative theologian also rejects the hubristic regard for human reason as the ultimate approach to truth, making space for alternative experience, such as poetry, ecstasy, or trance. It explicitly traffics in abandonment, rejection, denial, absence, loss, and especially refusal of the definitive. The negative theologian makes it his or her business to deny God. It's not that that the negative theologian simply doubts the existence of God and strives to overcome that doubt; rather, the negative theologian lives abandoned by faith. It's not that the negative theologian simply expounds upon all that cannot be humanly know about the divine; rather the negative theologian lives the separation between him- or herself and the impossibility of ever being assured of divine presence or love. Marion speaks of divine truth as the experience of incomprehension, encountering this idea in Nicholas of Cusa and Dionysius the Areopagite (Marion 28). "Incomprehension as truth" describes the performer who lives the separation between self and role, reality and mimesis, myth and life in a fully present way so that their performance gains truthfulness when they surrender themselves to not-knowing.

The title of the Frye exhibition is "Yes and More and Yes and Yes and Why," a phrase from a short story by American poet Gertrude Stein, whose writings resonate with Implied Violence, especially co-founder Mandie O'Connell (no longer with the group), who has the phrase tattooed along one forearm. Robin Held, curator of the Frye exhibit, notes that the phrase's "verbal construction with a dense visual result, its breathless repetition-with-a-difference, its change-within-difference" describes the performances of Implied Violence as well (Frye Art Museum 2010, "Exhibitions"). To repeat is to both emphasize what has come before and to erase it, replace it. The language of negative theology is a process of *unsaying*. Language

as unsaying, while creative and active, is also transgressive, scandalous, disruptive. Like Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival, Implied Violence and its language "know no footlights" because it embraces all who participate, in the "laws of its own freedom" (Bakhtin 1984, 8). Shoshanna Felman's "radical negativity" describes the unsaying of language when she refuses to allow that language can fix a distinction between the false and the true: "Radical negativity (or 'saying no') belongs neither to *negation*, nor to *opposition*, nor to *correction* ('normalization'), nor to *contradiction* (of positive and negative, normal and abnormal, 'serious' and 'unserious,' 'clarity' and 'obscurity') – it belongs precisely to *scandal*: to the scandal of their non-opposition" (Felman 2003, 104; emphases in original). The principle of apophatic discourse, the language of negative theology, is that it refuses to resolve the apophatic dilemma by posing a distinction between two kinds of names for God, for example, or two or more means by which the seeker approaches the divine (Sells 1994, 189). Instead, negative theology submits to the scandal of living that dilemma itself: God is incomprehensibility itself.

Implied Violence, with its invocation of ecstasy and transcendence, recalls the radical negative theology and mysticism of medieval figures like Meister Eckhart, Marguerite Porete, and Hildegard von Bingen, whose surviving writings *unsay*. Meister Eckhart's writings, for example, perform a grasp for the meaning of the eternal as seen from a standpoint in time. He linguistically transforms temporal categories in order to argue that divine emanation does not "slip into the past" but "is always in the principle, always being born, always being generated." "Eckhart's language violates the normal grammatical division between perfect or completed action, and imperfect or action in progress: the one and only-begotten son always *has been born* and always *is being born*" (Sells 1994, 148). Eckhart's language unsays the human experience of time to look past it to another possibility of being – that a procession is also a return. In the script

for the Vienna version of *The Dorothy K*, one section repeats the following passage by Piece of Meat, once by being spoken through convulsive shaking, and the next time via a recording: “Blood leaves, lovely. (A lullaby sung me once.) My liver hurts, for there is blood in it. My pussy hurts, for there is blood in it. My mouth hurts, for there is blood in it. Slowly found on my hands and knees. A broken back(ed) bear(er). Slowly, the blood leaves lovely, leaves colder than when it burst forth. Blood not bleeding” (Mitchell 2010, 14). The repeated description of blood and pain ends with “blood not bleeding.” How can there be blood without bleeding? In the way that a progression can be a return. The passage performs the unsaying of word and sense, paralleling the undoing of clear, linear thought from the mind to propel the performer into another state of experience or consciousness through repeated encounters with pain. The language of Implied Violence *unsays* experience from rational, linear progression much in the same way that Eckhart *unsays* linear time.

Negative theology, while rooted in the materiality of experience, also performs transcendence. “Instead of a concept of God, negative theology, earlier and now, looks to an experience of God, in which the duality of God and humanity is often endured as distance. It thinks that by opening itself to this experience, humanity becomes involved in a transcendence that traditional negative theology represents as divine life and divine light” (Bulhof and ten Kate 2000, 10). Implied Violence speaks to the materiality of transcendent experience through alternative states of consciousness gained by the use of ether. The Frye exhibit includes one small ether machine, one large ether machine, and a used ether cloth as artifacts of this practice. The small ether machine, made of plywood and burned in places, fits over the head and rests on the shoulders; a small plastic tube descends from the bottle of ether, on its end a folded and tied cloth that hangs in front of the nose and mouth (figure 3). The large ether machine is black,

covered in tar, resembles some sort of crank-driven guillotine, and features a similar configuration with bottle and tube (figure 4). Both machines are imposing and brutal-looking. Informational placards describe the uses and origins of ether: its hypnotic effects were discovered in 1275; it was used in medicine to treat fevers and infections, and as an anesthetic; it has a long history as a recreational drug, sometimes used at parties called “ether frolics” (Frye Art Museum 2010, “Ether Rag”). In the United States today, the compound diethyl ether is used mainly as a solvent and an anesthetic, and while it is legal to purchase (I was able to find it for sale from online homeopathy companies), its sale and distribution may be strictly monitored in certain states, since it is highly explosive and used in the manufacturing of cocaine (Associated Press 1985, “Restrictions on Ether Approved”). Implied Violence uses ether to forcibly exit performers from the stage, both mentally and bodily. When a performer remains on stage after taking ether, they must renegotiate the strict structure of the performance through this altered state, which is additionally difficult if a performer first blacks out and then wakes up, not knowing exactly what has elapsed during their “absence.”

A photograph from *The Dorothy K* accompanying the placard shows Ryan Mitchell being ethered by Zac Pennington. Pennington stands behind Mitchell, pressing the white cloth to Mitchell’s face; Mitchell kneels on the floor. While I cannot speak to the individual performer’s experience of ethering, I can speak to the eerie experience of watching video footage of Ryan Mitchell inhaling ether, and transforming from one mental state to another (Implied Violence, *Dorothy K at the Donau Festival*). The change in state is palpable, even in a grainy online video. When Pennington holds the cloth to Mitchell’s face, Mitchell inhales deeply, and then begins to shriek inarticulately. Up until this point, Mitchell’s presence in the video has been precise and clear—he speaks eloquently, blue eyes shining intensely from a thin face. His movements have

been decisive, presentational. After taking the cloth from Pennington and holding it to his own face, Mitchell slumps to the floor, then attempts to rise again, his body now hunched and fluid where before it was strong and exact. He hits the floor with his knuckles, as if thinking about how to get his body to move. Lurching to his feet, head lolling, his voice high, he finally realizes that Pennington is speaking to him through a microphone, and responds with slurred speech. That penetrating gaze from before seems to fold in on itself. The Mitchell who had been present has been replaced by a ghost or a ghoul – he has been replaced by an absence.

The use of mind-altering chemicals from plants and animals has been a part of human spiritual practice for ages. In her study of plant-based hallucinogens and their use in traditional societies as opposed to modern Western societies, Marlene Dobkin de Rios concludes that the use of hallucinogens for recreational purposes has been rare in traditional societies, and that in all cases where members of a society merely indulge in a plant recreationally, “we tend to find European influence, cultural disorganization, and concomitant problems of alienation and alcoholism” (de Rios 1986, 218). Traditional societies’ uses of these plants include inducing heightened awareness as an aspect of a learning experience, facilitating an initiation or other kind of ritual, or enhancing interactions among strangers or other social groups (ibid 217-218). Implied Violence’s use of ether offers criticism of the drugged body as an abjected, othered body. While contemporary discourse around the evils of drug use often issue, especially after Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” campaign of the 1980s, from an understandable position of care and protection, it also often veils racism and classism directed toward people of color, as well as a blind dependence on other drugs such as the millions of dollars worth of pharmaceuticals Americans consume each year (Cohen 2006, 55). By offering the ethered body of Mitchell as a

source of aesthetic surprise, shock, and contemplation, *Implied Violence* questions the Western moral history of drug use, and especially its abjection of the non-Western body.

The focus in this sequence of the performance is how Mitchell's transformation affects his strict adherence to the script. Although reeling from the ether, Mitchell's first concern is for the text and the flow of the performance. His strange self-surrogation, the absencing of himself from himself, is only important in that it serves the performance as a whole. Similarly, the negative theologian, while highly aware that his mystical vision is grounded in bodily experience, also often channels the intensity of experience into scriptural exegesis. This is very clear in the writings of the 12th century Benedictine abbess Hildegard von Bingen. As Barbara Newman argues, Hildegard's "startling lack of interest in her own subjectivity" can be explained by the prophetic character of her spirituality (Newman 1990, 17). Her interests were pointedly exegetical and ecclesiastical. As a Benedictine, she did not practice self-mortification or any kind of supreme asceticism. Unlike other contemporary mystics, she did not cultivate her visions but was forced by a physiological condition (some have suggested she suffered from acute migraines) to endure them. Furthermore, Hildegard always stressed that her visions came to her while she was awake and conscious:

In this vision my soul, as God would have it, rises up high into the vault of heaven and into the changing sky and spreads itself out among different peoples, although they are far away from me in distant lands and places. And because I see them this way in my soul, I observe them in accord with the shifting of clouds and other created things. I do not hear them with my outward ears, nor do I perceive them by the thoughts of my own heart or by any combination of my five senses, but in my soul alone, while my outward eyes are open. So I have never fallen prey to ecstasy in the visions, but I see them wide awake, day and night. (Newman 18)

Mitchell's struggle to maintain the flow of the performance while affected by ether, being in one sense physically and mentally absented from the performance space while at the same time contributing his transformed presence to the new *mise-en-scène*, parallels that of Hildegard's

fierce control of interpretation of her visions despite their painful intensity. Both Hildegard and Mitchell struggle to keep control while at the behest of experience that grants them access to another, transcendent dimension. Hildegard performs transcendence through a dual consciousness that rigorously integrates body and spirit, the materiality of her experience never allowing her to lose footing on the earth. Mitchell performs through his altered state so it becomes both an object of interest in itself and a lens through which the audience views the performance as a whole. As viewer, I garner through Mitchell a visceral, empathetic and therefore embodied sense of his transcendence of the spatial and temporal dimensions of the performance.

The change brought about by the inhalation of ether is an event that stands out against the ritualistic structure around it. What distinguishes *Implied Violence* as theatre in absentia as opposed to sacred theatre is its use of the event (such as inhaling ether) as a means to sink the performer deeply into his embodied experience so that he is strongly rooted, almost trapped, in the otherness of his own alternative state. Importantly, the violence of the scene between Mitchell and Pennington suggests a rape or a kidnapping—the event happens *to* Mitchell. By forcing itself on the performance, the event exits the economy of the performance, paradoxically deleting itself, which is why looking at Mitchell's lurching body in the video is also looking at an absence, at nothing. Sacred theatre, on the other hand, may often use consciousness-altering drugs, trance, or physical exhaustion for the purpose of going beyond the constraint of the body, which instantiates the body more fully in the ritual process. The goal is "cosmicization," or the expansion of individual or group perception "across and against elemental or transindividual forces perceived as existing 'beyond' or 'outside' those frameworks" (Yarrow 2007, 43).

In his introduction to *Ritual and Event*, choreographer Mark Franko asks readers to consider ritual in light of events such as Hiroshima, Nagasaki, or 9/11—when the event turns in on itself as disaster. How can ritual or performance respond? “The event which ‘happens to us’ ‘mocks’ [Austin’s understanding of the speech act as live enunciation and Derrida’s as performative mark]. *The event is neither conventional, subjective, nor iterative.* The singular presence of ‘what takes place’ *takes the place of* the performative, and mocks it, displaces it, and supercedes it. The event, in other terms, disarms the performative by effectively removing its capacity to respond. The event leaves the act ‘speechless’” (Franko 2007, 128, Franko’s emphasis). This is further appropriate to the connection with negative theology and the example of Hildegard von Bingen, because the “event” of the vision is not Hildegard’s own, but a singular instance that fills her presence, absenting her from both herself and others so that the divine voice rings out through Hildegard, rendering her speechless. In the “declaration” that begins her *Scivias*, she describes how after refusing for many years to obey God’s command to write, a devastating illness almost overcame her. Only when compelled by her spiritual director to write did she regain her strength. “And I heard a voice from Heaven saying to me, ‘Cry out, therefore, and write thus!’” (von Bingen 1990, 5). Her cry is not her own, but God’s, and since it is not her own, her voice no longer exists. The parallel here is that Mitchell’s body is not his own, but the event’s, resisting and refusing the economy of ritual. His body no longer exists.

Along with speech that says through unsaying and experience that transcends through embodiment, the negative theologian also reaches for union with the divine through the denial of the self. The theological treatise of Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, is an esoteric doctrinal advancement of the soul’s complete annihilation in relationship with what Porete terms “Divine Love.” Porete was a 12th century French Beguine, meaning that she was a laywoman

who had adopted a religious and cloistered lifestyle. The Beguines operated outside the authority of the institutionalized church and were dedicated to chastity, but they eschewed male leadership, which made the Church hierarchy sometimes nervous and suspicious. Porete's theology often discomfited her ecclesiastical contemporaries, while those who supported the orthodoxy of her work also recognized that due to its difficulty, minds less capable of nuance would take the shell and leave the kernel. One of the most upsetting ideas that Porete proclaimed was that Biblical and doctrinal virtues serve the human soul, not the other way around. The annihilated soul, the person who is unencumbered by the demands of the flesh and her own will, is also relinquished from the demand of virtue as well. The virtues are messengers of God. "The annihilated soul becomes the master of the Virtues, who serve her absolutely, and which she fulfills without desire and out of habit. When she does the 'word' of the Virtues it is not out of compulsion or with the hopes of advancement toward divine life; rather it is because God wills through her" (Robinson 2001, 47). The implication is that the virtues serve the soul in the same manner that they serve God, which makes the confluence between annihilated soul and Divine Love very close. A further and even more controversial implication is that embodied souls, when they operate as annihilated souls, can take advantage of whatever their bodies might need in life without regard for "virtue." The soul lives without reproach. To be guilty of satisfying bodily needs, according to Porete, is to refuse a gracious gift from God. Some read this as an endorsement of hedonistic pleasure. After repeatedly refusing to stop writing and circulating her ideas, Porete was condemned as a relapsed heretic by the Inquisition and executed in 1310.

The fluid relationship between God and soul in Porete's writing is a result of annihilation's radical self-denial. *The Mirror of Simple Souls* describes a seven-stage path to annihilation through states of increasing perfection. At the end of the arduous journey, the Soul

is completely annihilated and attains a pre-created state of nothingness. Once the Soul is nothing, she becomes “as rich as God.” Having given everything to God, God gives back all God possesses to the Soul, in God’s infinite largesse. The Soul’s complete nothingness and utter nakedness “shows her the All Powerful through the goodness of divine righteousness. These showings make her deep, large, supreme, and sure. For they make her always naked, All and Nothing, as long as they hold her in their embrace” (Porete 1993, 130). In the intersection between All and Nothing is the blending of God and Soul.

The radical community between divine and human in Porete’s theology echoes in Implied Violence’s use of the medicinal leech, where the indistinction of God and Soul parallels the indistinction between parasite and host. In the Frye gallery, a large glass urn covered with a white cloth and tied around with a scarlet bow showcases a handful of leeches, who suck the sides of the glass and slowly undulate their soft bodies (figure 5). The living presence of these creatures testifies to the ongoing performative significance of Implied Violence’s work. The leeches enter into a reciprocal relationship with a performer in an act signifying the porous and often imaginary boundary separating self from Other. Implied Violence, by showcasing the leeches as performers in their own right, feeds upon the parasite they invited to feed upon their own blood, in a fitting reciprocation of sustenance and care-taking. Implied Violence attend their leeches with respect for the living beings that they are: they work with professional leech farmers to educate themselves about the biology of leeches and how to best care for them. As Ryan Mitchell stated in an e-mail correspondence, “The use of any living creature, no matter how small, is something to be [under]taken with the utmost care and compassion, for once you place any creature into the framework of a piece of art, it becomes representative of all living things” (Mitchell 2011). The radical self-annihilation achieved through leeching during the performance

is amplified in its performative power with the live presence of the gallery leech, because there is no way to fully recapture in a gallery exhibit that simultaneous annihilation and communion in the moment that the performer invites the leech to attach to his skin. At that moment, living creatures bond in a way that sustains the life of each.

An informational placard near the leech exhibit tells me that “IV members describe each stage of the leeching process as containing visual beauty and visceral sensation: the act of taking the leech from the jar and placing its cool body on the skin; feeling it attach, suck blood, and pulsate; feeling the warm, full leech slowly slip off; and finally, watching thin rivulets of blood flow and coagulate” (Frye Art Museum 2010, “Medicinal Leeches”). The act of leeching can create an alternate state of experience and consciousness for the performer. It necessitates a heightened sense of awareness, careful preparation, attention, focus, and care for the body of the performer as well as the leech. It is a purely physical ritual of self-annihilation, as the parasite-host relationship blurs, and as the leech and the human co-mingle at the site of mouth and wound. Annihilation can here be understood not as the literal disappearance of the performer, but as the introduction of Otherness into the self. This also helps us understand Porete’s insistence that the annihilated soul did not need to be bound by virtue to fasting and wasting away, but to live life in the fullness of Divine Love. As Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas writes, “The relation with the Other as a relation with his transcendence—the relation with the Other who puts into question the brutal spontaneity of one’s immanent destiny—introduces into me what was not in me” (Levinas 1969, 203). But at the same time, “No fear, no trembling could alter the straightforwardness of this relationship, which preserves the discontinuity of relationship, resists fusion, and where the response does not evade the question” (ibid). The relationship preserves and respects the unbridgeable gap between self and Other. It “resists fusion,” that is, does not

allow difference to be absorbed into the totality of the self; it also “preserves discontinuity,” that is, acknowledges the inequality of the relationship. Implied Violence grasps for the understanding of live performance what Levinas gives to philosophy: a regard for mystery without placing the wholly Other in a paranormal sphere that cannot speak to the simple fullness of material life. Implied Violence’s performance can be encountered as speaking the unsayable without the unsayable standing in for the spiritually inaccessible, as achieving transcendence without that transcendence departing from the firm footing of earthly and fleshly experience, and finally, as self-annihilation that is also physical communion between self and Other.

Conclusion

This brings us back to participation and the difference between sacred theatre and theatre in absentia. Where sacred theatre seeks revelation through communion, Implied Violence’s theatre in absentia wades through the implications of the absence of knowledge of the divine by making use of similar practices by which the mystic or the negative theologian would also approach aporias of impossibility and incomprehensibility. Implied Violence’s performances are ritualistic and spiritually heightened, but at the same time do not argue for divinity or holiness outside the embodied experience of everyday life. Each absence or aporia performed – such as the absence of the unified and contained self in the performance of leeching, the absenced body in the practice of ethering, the absence of linear logic in the *unsaying* achieved through repetitious and poetic language, the absence of compliance with traditional theatrical forms in the direct confrontation of the audience with the often painful reality of performance – is an invitation to participation in and among the incomprehensible. To participate is to insert myself into the space of performance where I indeed find a place but where one was not made explicitly

for me, so that I must strive to make myself present in a structure that renders me incomprehensible to myself. Therefore, I must ask to be excused, to be allowed to exist *as* incomprehensible, as Other. To excuse myself is to refuse to be excluded, to offer my creative voice dialogically as *détournement*. Participation exposes absence: in participation, I must excuse myself from my normal sphere of operation and gain entrance into another, exposing my absence in the place I came from and from the place I went to.

“Excuse me” means: please allow me to be here in this unacceptable manner, but disregard me at the same time. To say “excuse me” is a socially resistant act at the same time that it complies with convention, because it makes space for the inexcusable within the parameters of politeness. It creates an absence for the one being excused through its identification of a presence that does not exactly fit the social script. It is participation through absence: theatre in absentia *par excellence*. The genius of Implied Violence is that it capitalizes on such paradoxical performative absences, resistively excusing itself while blatantly displaying its own impropriety. “Excuse me” rings out with rude and ironical laughter that grabs everyone in its messy embrace, but at the same time it also weeps with the frustration of isolation and difference. In other words, it respects the autonomy of the Other while at the same time celebrating the mutual sustenance offered from each to each. Implied Violence’s theatre in absentia performs the paradoxes that alterity and difference sustain life, that participation occurs through notorious absence, and that incomprehensibility is itself an approach to truth.

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Illustrations



Figure 1. Large claw.
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Figure 2. Allie Hankins performs in video footage from the installation “My Wounds Will Weep (Ecstatic Fit)” by Steve Miller.

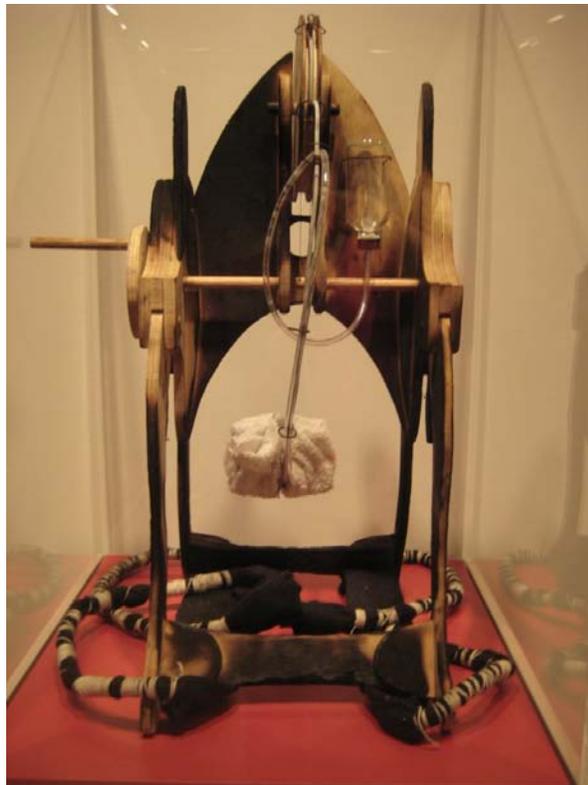


Figure 3. Small ether machine.



Figure 4. Large ether machine.



Figure 5. Medicinal leeches and plastic needles.