

RESISTING REPRESENTATION



ELAINE SCARRY

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ELAINE SCARRY



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Contents

Introduction	3
1 OBLURATE SENSATION: PAIN	3
Willow Bark and Red Poppies: Advertising the Remedies for Physical Pain	
2 PARTICIPIAL ACTS: WORKING	49
Work and the Body in Hardy and Other Nineteenth- Century Novelists	
3 NOUNS: THE REALM OF THINGS	91
Six Ways To Kill a Blackbird (or Any Other Intentional Object) in Samuel Beckett	
4 THE EXTERNAL REFERENT: HISTORY	101
Untransmissible History in Thackeray's <i>Henry Esmond</i>	
5 THE EXTERNAL REFERENT: COSMIC ORDER	143
The Well-Rounded Sphere: Cognition and Metaphysical Structure in Heidegger's <i>Contributions to Philosophy</i>	
Acknowledgments	131
Index	183

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Introduction

The problematically abstract and the problematically concrete are the two starting places of the essays in this book. One group of essays looks at the ability of language to accommodate conceptions of truth and cognition, subjects whose immateriality or alacrity might place them beyond the reach of speech and writing. The other group examines phenomena such as physical pain and physical labor whose materiality might leave them outside the reflexes of language. By the side of the problematically abstract, language sometimes seems full of the weight of the world. By the side of the problematically concrete, language can seem inappropriately quick and cavalier. In both instances, what is overtly at issue is the knowability of the world, and that knowability depends on its susceptibility to representation. This is the case, whether the particular world whose knowability is in question is (as in Hardy) the deep interior of another person at labor or (as in Beethoven) the metaphysically expansive ground that lets one “learn how to die.” In this sense, all the essays are about the labor of cognition.

A second feature shared by these writers is the continuity they display between grammatical structures and narrative structures. A given subject resists representation. In order to overcome that resistance, the writer bends the sentence into a particular shape. But precisely that same grammatical or syntactical shape may then, in magnified form, reappear in larger patches of language such as a scene or finally even the narrative as a whole.

Why should this be the case? Perhaps there is no need to answer this question. It may be enough simply to notice how persistently it is the case—not only in writings by Beckett, Hardy, Turgenev, Beethoven, but in many other artists as well as in philosophers like Plato, Rousseau. The continuity between small and large patches of language seems—in the precision of the match and in the pressure toward totalizing linguistic structures it implies—neither casual nor incidental but (at least for these writers) artistically needed, necessary. But why should it be necessary?

One way of answering the question is to point to the “extendibility” of language, the coherent way it can be steadily elaborated and unfolded. Once opened and elaborated, it can be contracted again. The unceasing

practice (every day, all day long, not only in intellectual conversation but in the stories accompanying all daily tasks) of elaborating what was a moment ago brief and, conversely, of redacting what we have just finished making long, reflects our desire to affirm the consistency between folded and unfolded versions, like making certain that a sheet has two hundred threads a square inch in both its folded and unfolded states. The shift to concrete objects is useful. Large narrative structures can be expected to have grammatical attributes in the same way that bridges, buildings, and human skeletons are presumed by engineers to have structures only partially distinguishable from the materials out of which they are made. "Structures are made from materials," writes J. E. Gordon in *Structures: Or Why Things Don't Fall Down*, "but in fact there is no clear-cut dividing line between a material and a structure."¹ Since narratives are made out of sentences, it would be strange if the vocabulary for describing the attributes of sentences (nouns, verbs, appositives, definite articles, connecting particles) were wholly distinct from the vocabulary for describing the attributes of large narrative structures (acts, chapters, denouement, character, plot), or if there were no accepted way of aligning those separate vocabularies.

When grammatical or syntactical features remain constant across small and large stretches of language, they do so in two distinguishable ways. The first way might be called *iterative constancy* and the second, *inflexible* or *mimetic constancy*. (The writers in this book practice the second.) Iterative constancy can be illustrated by Harold Weinrich's ingenious account of words like "a," "an," "the," "one." He argues that "the definite article has the function of directing attention to pre-information while indefinite articles direct it to post-information."² When a fairy tale mentions "a girl," we have just been told that we do not yet know anything about the girl; we have been put on watch. When the fairy tale mentions "the girl," we have just been told that this person is someone we have already met; we suspend the work of identification. The disposition of articles in the sentence, "There once was a girl who lived in a sunny house, and one day the girl decided to leave the house," cannot easily be inverted. Further, the distribution of the articles in this sentence recurs in long and varied stretches of language such as Camus's "La Pierre qui pousse," Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood," and (as Weinrich notes) Weinrich's own article about articles. In both short and long patches of language, indefinite articles appear earlier, as well as at "decisive points" in the narrative where a "new or unexpected direction" occurs, and the definite articles greatly outnumber the indefinite.³ The text, argues Weinrich, has a "macrosyntax"⁴ carrying forward the requirements of the sentence beyond its own boundaries. This can be called *iterative or literal constancy* because the words in question—"a" and "the"—remain the same. The movement from syntax to macrosyntax entails a magnification only in the sense that the number of iterations increases: the thing being counted

stays the same. But presumably one might additionally notice some narrative unit larger than, or different from, the solitary word that performs the same function and this would be mimetic constancy. Music in a film, for example, acts like a steady stream of indefinite and definite articles, situating the audience in relation to pre- and post-information, now insinuating, now relaxing, our readiness to perform the work of identification. This second form of constancy can be illustrated by turning away from Weinreich's indefinite articles to J. L. Austin's connecting particles.

Connecting particles such as 'still,' 'therefore,' 'moreover,' and 'although' can all, as Austin has shown, be unfolded into speech acts

We may use the particle "still" with the force of "I insist that"; we use "therefore" with the force of "I concede that"; we use "although" with the force of "I concede that." Note also the uses of "whereas" and "hereby" and "unlike."

The connecting particle ("still") contains within it a speech act ("I insist that"). Conversely, the speech act ("I insist that")—although composed of a pronoun, verb, and conjunctive—may be understood as a species of connecting particle. It imitates the labor of that part of speech without repeating the word "still." So, in turn, the specific grammatical attributes of this longer phrase might themselves be carried mimetically forward into progressively more expansive verbal terrain. The set of performative utterances that particularly preoccupied Austin are centered in sentences such as "I take this man as my husband," "I pronounce him guilty," "I bid thee adieu," "I contract." They have been summarized by Jürgen Habermas as a set of "institutionally bound" illocutionary acts⁶ to distinguish them from the much wider class of performative utterances explored by other philosophers. It can be argued that the attributes of these sentences reappear in the language-drenched institutions (marriage, the courts, the social contract) to which they are attached and by which they are enforced. As one moves from the sentence to the institution, the prominent grammatical requirement of a first-person pronoun is sustained not by vastly multiplied iterations of sentences that begin with the word "I" (though that might also be the case) but by large structural features that preserve and distribute the exercise of the performative. Constitutional provisions of free speech guarantee the first-person act of speaking; the provision for trial by jury distributes to the full population, rather than to a small number of judges, the capacity to announce the words, "I find him guilty";⁷ voting rights distribute to the adult population the capacity to perform the sentence, "I vote for" or "I consent." These constitutional guarantees sustain the first-person requirement of performative speech even though the First, Sixth, Fifteenth, Nineteenth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution are not themselves framed in sentences with first-person pronouns. A society that distributes the right of self descrip-

fair has a different grammar from a society that gives an executive (king, president, or party), attended by a cadre of security officers, the right to describe all other citizens in the third person.

It would take time to show the mimetic constancy of grammar as one moves from a sentence to an institution because the institution is only partially verbal. Showing mimetic constancy in a literary or philosophic text is less difficult because the text is exclusively verbal. The essays in this book on Hardy, Beckett, Thackeray, and Boethius all begin with the attributes of some small patches of language; they then show the same structures at work in isolated scenes, and then, finally, in the narrative as a whole. Although the essays provide an extended portrait of mimetic constancy, it can here be quickly glimpsed by thinking about a sample scene.

In any given scene, the character is made up wholly of sentences. The house in which the character dwells is made up wholly of sentences. The character's movement as she crosses the room to the door at the side porch is made entirely of sentences. While it does not follow that the scene itself must therefore acquire syntactical features, it would on the other hand not be surprising if it did. Each writer might summarize this scene in a sentence whose syntax would reappear in the larger structure of the scene. Hardy would say,

Eve turned from the wardrobe and, dressing still, walked toward the man at the door.

Thackeray would say:

He would remember to the end of his life the look of the setting sun shining on her face as she moved to the door to meet me on the eastern porch.

Beckett would say:

Once at the door, she was on her way, to what no matter, she was on her way.

Boethius would say:

Then gliding toward the door, she spoke freely to me of the impediments restraining my capacity for straightforward argument.

The felt weight of the woman as she moves across the floor would be different in each scene, as would scores of other attributes. Precisely because each writer needs to solve a different problem of representation, each requires a sentence bearing a different grammatical shape. That shape, the "fantastical signature" of fair resistance: the sentence must over-

room, holds visible within a small compass the larger scope of the scene as a whole.

For Hardy, the problem is how to represent the increasing activity of physical labor when the linguistic structures that accommodate actions — sentences, verbs and story plots — more easily accommodate discrete actions that start and stop. He solves this problem by transposing the action out of the realm of the verb, across the hybrid terrain of the gerund, and into the realm of the noun, where he places it in apposition to the person whom it now permanently accompanies, even in the midst of many other actions that themselves have nothing to do with labor. The sentence:

She turned from the worktable and, *crossing silk*, walked toward the man at the door.

can be written in the more familiar apposition form:

She turned from the worktable and, *crossmaker silk*, walked toward the man at the door.

On the level of the scene, the gerund and appositive are mixed and magnified by grafting the materials of labor to her body:

She turned from her worktable and, *making silk in a dress of silver thread and grey filaments of wool and silk*, walked toward the man at the door.

As she crosses the room, the light might scatter, glint, across the actual fragments of silk. Dash suddenly on the silver scissors at her belt, exposing in the continual shimmer the tremor of her own desire for the man at the door. Hardy thickens the world, and lets us see the pulse that runs through it. His appositives affirm the continuity of the worker and the materials of her labor by compounding the subject, joining substantive to substantive. In his relation with his characters, Hardy is profoundly enabling. By embedding verbs within substantives, he gives action a permanent residence within the interior of persons who are made ample, able, even in the moment of passivity. In the disarray of desire, still his men and women work. Although subject to fatality, they down to the final second reproduce their lives.

For Thackeray, the opposite is the case. The passage of the woman from the interior to the door cannot occur, except as an intellectual claim that passes fleetingly through the mind it will soon disappoint. If the scene were rendered in bodily terms, the woman would slip and slide across the floor. But it is in the cognitive categories she illustrates, rather than the room she occupies, that she is made to take her fall:

He would remember to the end of his life the look of the setting sun shining on her face as she moved to the door to meet me on the western porch.

Thackeray creates a syntax of disablement. The features of "orientation" required to permit the coherent passage of the woman to the doorway are simple: all that is needed is that she not move in two directions at once, or that she not turn to the right and see objects we know to be on the left. Those simple requirements of orientation are exaggeratedly fulfilled by a literal invocation of the compass points, and eroded by the disabling overlay of east and west: the sun setting in the west shines on the face looking east. The shift between the third- and first-person pronouns—between the "he" who remembers and the "me" who is met—similarly disables the sentence and situates both auditors and characters in a defective space. Doubling a pronoun for a single person, always mildly disorienting, is here licensed by the fact that the person is at once the teller of and the participant in the story. But normal pronominal habits—which reserve the more intimate first person for the spatially and temporally proximate act of story telling and third person for the earlier (hence now distant) and externally observed story action—are here inverted so that the woman is about to cross over the doorway out of the story into the space of the storytelling, while the man standing with his back to us on the eastern porch confides to us the day's memorability.

Thackeray wants to make an argument about the untransmissibility of both objective and subjective history. The problem of representation he must solve is how to argue that assertions do not have enough stability to secure their own content, while himself enlisting the deep coherence of language to enable him to transmit that speculative argument. On the level of the individual sentence, both external referent (east, west) and internal referent (he, me) must be implicated. Across the larger scene, the same syntax of disablement must be at work: names must change; names, nouns, pronouns, and titles must have multiple referents; words must scatter and phrases contradict; discursive illusions must disappear yet remain in moments of personal urgency. The overall narrative architecture, like the solitary sentence, must question both external and internal assumptions about reference. It encourages us to imagine that both public history and private history are knowable, then invites us to imagine that not public history but only private history is knowable, and then requires us to imagine that neither public nor private history is knowable. The three stages of syntactical scaffolding—both . . . and; not . . . still; neither . . . nor—dismantle our basis for cognitive optimism.

The passage of Beckett's woman through the door: first points, then craves, the object toward which she moves.

Once at the door, she was on her way, to what no matter, she was on her way.

Elementary ways of being—here, being on one's way—are concretely rendered by reducing the clutter of irrelevant nouns. The structure of solitary

sentences, the structure of scenes, the structure of full works are persistently preoccupied with the task of regulating the disappearance of objects from the world, either through overexposure or, as is more often the case, through underexposure. In the instance of underexposure, the woman during the scene refers repeatedly to the object without ever specifying what it is. In the instance of overrepresentation, she joins Joe Breem on the porch, then returns, then leaves and muses about through the city. She returns, then walks out with a telescope to a nearby hill. Returns, then walks out again to the flower market. Returns, then goes to a repair shop.

Given the steady erasure of the object world, one might argue that Beckett shares Thackeray's merciless incredulity about our epistemological aspirations. The syntactical disability that had no physical correlative in Thackeray (whose young woman does not slice on the floor) even has one in Beckett whose woman sallies forth with an inflected gait or lurch. The fact that all states of consciousness are nearly objectless also means that his women and men inhabit the neighborhood of physical pain.⁹ But the scepticism that for Thackeray is an exhausting final conclusion (denied, delayed, half conceded, and at last acknowledged) is for Beckett a good-natured first premise. Because so little labor has been spent here, it can be invested instead in catching in language the fragile reflexes of the phenomenological state, the lilt and cadence of being on one's way. Beckett has a nearly *idiot savant*-like openness, an openness so remarkable it appears a preternatural talent. This openness also marks his incorporation of grammar into large narrative structures. Because his magnifications of grammar are so overt, his readers often remark on the linguistic features not just of sentences but of long passages (Richard Ohmann's description of speech acts in *Wax*² is a sample) as well as in the shape of the work as a whole ("Not *I?*" writes Keir Elam, "must be the first drama in history whose central agon has to do with a grammatical category"¹⁰). But Beckett, though not ordinary, is also not alone in this. For Boethius, too, words, sentences, the features of poetry and prose, logical and analogical tropes are things to be seized, prayed over, and unfolded not only, or even primarily, in "the sentence" but in the larger work.

Boethius's woman in the room attends to language—her own and that of the man near the door—with an exquisite and sustained level of acuity. Solitary sentences duplicate their subject matter in their very act of enunciation.

Then gliding toward the door, she spoke freely to me of the impediments restraining my capacity for straightforward argument.

The display of volition in the motion of speech is what she speaks about and what her manner of speaking itself demonstrates. Over the expanse of the scene, the woman alternates between poetry and prose so that her

nouns will sometimes carry material particulars into the mind and sometimes universals, and so that her intellectual and verbal motion will be regulated now by meter and now instead by logical connectives. The linguistic attributes of poetry, prose, prayer, complaint, argument, analogy are vital to her because these collective attributes (in their many arrangements and recombinations) are the materials out of which she will rearrange the universe. In back of all her other assertions lies an extreme claim about linguistic representation—that it can reproduce its own content. Rigorous speech does not merely describe godlike cognition, it induces its practice and so brings it into being.

Boethius brings *Reading Representation* to a close. His writing takes place on a ground very distant from that on which the book opens—advertising the remedies for physical pain. The two belong at opposite ends because they are, among the essays, the two most widely separated in time, tone, and metaphysical aspiration. Yet they are, in several respects, strangely similar. Because each seeks to instigate a certain mental practice, each is openly utilitarian.¹¹ Each makes itself available to us as a set of instructions for prescribed action. Equally noticeable, the perceptual practice is in both instances closely bound up with (though not identical to) the very concrete project of diminishing pain. A “consolation” is for Boethius not a loose set of genre requirements but a direct work of help extended to those in an immediate state of distress, the severe isolation that comes with imprisonment or approaching death. That his project differs greatly from that of the advertisements is clear. But in fact, even these advertisements, taken alone, in themselves contain two strikingly disparate genres—on the one hand, the mildly restrained portraits of aspirin and nonaspirin substitutes addressed to a wide public; on the other hand, the decadently lavish portraits of pharmaceuticals addressed exclusively to physicians and surgeons. In making human thought a remedy for hurt, Boethius widens the spectrum of ethical possibility that, in much narrower form, is already set in place by the two advertising genres in their divergent narratives of promised transformation, their representations of the human body, and their strategies for product identification. If Boethius’s “well-ordered sphere” were for a moment imagined as a species of opiate (one that works by linguistic rigor rather than narcotic relaxation), it would vastly extend a line already drawn by the divergent points of willow bark and red puppies.

What distinguishes the opening and closing essay from the essays they frame is their overt urge to intervene in the world. But the writers contemplated in all the essays, precisely because they solve hard problems of representation, may seem drawn to the same act of world-moulding. At the same time, their linguistic virtuosity may distract us from the world. Because they enable us to witness a problem in the exact moment they are uncovering a solution, it may be only the “fullness” or the “perfection” or even (quite mistakenly) the “ease” of representation that we see, rather

than the ordinary state of difficulty. Of the two general subjects considered here—the problematically abstract (the varying accounts of “truth” in Boethius, Thackeray, and Beckett) and the problematically concrete (the picture of pain in advertising, the picture of labor in Hardy and other nineteenth-century writers)—the second is by far the more difficult terrain, especially since the question of “truth” is often understood as a question about language, rather than a question about something taking place outside language that needs to be brought in. But even on the inaccessible ground of extreme materiality, where events do take place outside language and do need to be brought in, it may—once we are inside the writer’s sentences—again be the extraordinary resourcefulness, the expansive originality of the human voice that we hear.

Notes

1. J. F. Gordon, *Answers: Or Why Things Don't Fall Down* (Harmondsworth), 1978, p. 29.
2. Harold Weirich, “The Textual Function of the French Article,” in Seymour Charnin, ed., *Literary Style: A Symposium* (London, 1971), p. 233.
3. Weirich, “The Textual Function of the French Article,” p. 227.
4. Weirich, “The Textual Function of the French Article,” p. 221.
5. J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd ed., J. O. Jonsen and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, 1962), p. 55.
6. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, 1981), pp. 284, 295.
7. We ordinarily think of the jury trial as an individual right protecting the person *in* it, but Ashli Aron—drawing on the writings of Tompkins, calls attention to its equally important role as a collective right, enabling citizens to participate in the legal process (“The Bill of Rights as a Constitution,” *100 Yale Law Review*, 1:65–80).
8. For an extended account of physical pain as an interiorial state without an external object, see E. Szalay, *The Body Is Pain* (New York, 1985), Chapter 3 “Pain and Imagining,” pp. 161–80.
9. Richard Ohmann, “Speech, Action, and Style,” in Seymour Charnin, ed., *Literary Style: A Symposium*, no. 247E.
10. Keir Elam, “Not In Beckett’s Mouth and the Art(s) Rhetoric,” in Enoch Brucher, ed., *Beckett as Be/Beckett in Context* (New York, 1986), p. 126.
11. The kinship between the instrumental goals of classical writing and the “applied practical art” of modern advertising was argued by Len Spitzer in his juxtaposition of Cicero and Swift oranges, and probably requires no elaboration here (“American Advertising Explained as Popular Art,” originally published in 1949 and republished in *Essays on English and American Literature*, ed. Anna Haebler [Princeton, 1992], p. 256).

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OBDURATE SENSATION: PAIN

Willow Bark and Red Poppies: Advertising the Remedies for Physical Pain

Advertisements for aspirin and nonaspirin substances are remarkably tedious. They are so uniform in their imagery, so narrow in their claims and so unmemorable in their dramatic methods that it might indeed be difficult to remember them were it not for the sheer frequency of their appearance in the creviced spaces of prime-time television and large-circulation magazines. Anything endlessly reiterated is likely to be tedious; anything barely noticeable is likely (once noticed) to be tedious, for two together do not produce what would ordinarily be understood as a winning combination. But the opening designation of this tediousness as 'remarkable' is not meant only as word-play, for when the advertising industry - not notorious for its restraint - suddenly becomes restrained, something at least moderately remarkable has in fact happened: and this restraint in turn must be recognized as only the visible sign of the anomalous and mystifying conditions that have brought it about.

Aspirin and aspirin substitutes work to diminish pain, and commercials assert that they do so. But in the very modesty of their assertions, they violate four categories of claim ordinarily present in advertisements. Category one is intensification. Most advertisements identify what the product actually does and then exaggerate that actual function into a fictional extreme. Tires certainly do enable a car to move along the surface of a road; and some brands of tire no doubt enable the car to maneuver in rain and snow more effectively than others; but an advertisement for Michelin tires pictures a car moving confidently forward into a nuclear

mushroom cloud (Figure 1). The jaunty sentence printed across the bottom of the photograph—"The Michelin XAG all-season tire can handle just about anything the weather can throw at you"—cannot retroactively change the fact that what compelled the *Newswatch* reader to stop turning pages was the unmistakable image of a nuclear cloud, even if that reader now (after reading the sentence) dutifully revises the image downward into a mere hurricane or tornado. Aspirin commercials do not claim to make us immune to nuclear war, conventional war, hurricanes, or tornadoes. They say nothing about eliminating the external agents of pain, whether international or domestic, but speak only about diminishing the sensation of pain itself, and they never claim total relief from extreme pain but only *some* relief from *minor* aches and pains *relatively* quickly. No wonder America is yawning.

Category two is the negative counterpart of category one, the threat of what will happen to us without the product. The ominous "Don't leave home without it" of American Express is only the most familiar negative in a steady cascade of negatives: "The right suit might not make you



FIGURE 1.



FIGURE 2.

president of the bank. But the wrong suit could keep you out of the running," announces Hart Schaffner and Marx in the *Sunday New York Times* (Figure 2). The photograph shows a several-foot-thick bank vault door, so studded with intricate mechanisms and dials that it might have resisted Linus Yale, Jr. himself, but which seems to have swung effortlessly open in response to the sheer matter moving characteristics of the man in the right suit. The door (the only door that matters, the at-door, the door to the bank vault) will never open for the man in the wrong suit. While not every advertisement announces its penalty so explicitly, perhaps no advertisement, however free of *overt* warnings, is ever wholly free of negation, as Hannah Arendt long ago suggested in her analysis of the coercive psychology embedded in the lifting commercial for facial soap: behind the advertiser's crowning assurance that the right soap will bring a woman the right husband is that advertiser's fantasy of omnipotence, his belief that the woman who fails to use his product deserves never to find a husband.¹⁷

The logic of negation Arendt exposes is almost equally applicable to all products. Though empty of overt threats, advertisements for aspirin and nonaspirin substitutes certainly contain the implicit threat that, without the Excedrin, Bayer, Tylenol, Advil, or Bufferin, one's headache will continue. But the scale and intensity of any negative threat will be directly determined by the scale and intensity of the positive claim made: those who fail to buy Excedrin deserve to have an ongoing headache, but those who fail to buy Michelin tires deserve to be annihilated.

Thus by this second criterion, as by the first, advertisements for pain remedies must be given a low rating. This is perhaps especially surprising because a moment's reflection reveals how easily these products might lend themselves to negative advertising: "Don't wait until you are already in the middle of that crucial business meeting to take the aspirin; be smart, take it before the meeting, and your headache, even begin." People who do not take aspirin before business meetings deserve to fail at business. The recent medical finding suggesting that aspirin may reduce chances of heart attack or stroke, though widely reported in the news, was for several years never even subliminally alluded to in advertisements, and has so far not been merely alluded to even after the medical speculation has become actual "evidence." The hypothetical examples introduced here are, at the very least, unpleasant. But that unpleasantness should not explain why the advertising industry abstains from this genre of advertising, since the examples given are totally consonant with the strategies for selling endless other products we every day encounter.

The third category is the wide frame of extraneous claims. Advertisements ordinarily push the object's actual function into a fictional extreme (category one), but they also include claims about originally fictional outcomes—that is, outcomes or functions that the product does not produce at any level. Thus, before our very eyes, the most fragile of objects becomes the most robust, and the most robust asserts and magnifies its reputation for sturdiness while simultaneously acquiring a logo of mental fragility; the pre-scientific transforms itself into the apotheosis of space age invention, and the ultrascientific becomes the vehicle of our return to agrarian values; the domestic becomes the professional; the homely acquires the scale of the catalyze; the non-erotic explodes into the organic; ice skaters become preachers; the male becomes female; the high-tech becomes the high-dec; and Frank Perdue can host a dinner party as elegant and smart-wise as Calvin Klein's because this is the community culture of change and exchange, Bertolt Brecht's alchemy of theatrical transformation, where anything can become a new thing, and all things vanish and reappear, merged in an ever-widening democracy of glamour.

Television is our national theatre; and the periodic commercial interruptions are like rhythmic recitations of the pledge of allegiance, affirming (in their succinct, thirty-second dramas of transformation) a political ide-

ology whose central provision is the *power of attention*: Give me your tired and your pain; Nothing need stay as it is; None of us need be what we are. Thus a large red bottle of Tide emerges before us on the television screen; it tips over into a downward spin, rotates through the air, and when it comes to a stop, its shape has changed into a map of the United States; it spins once more and reacquires its bottle shape. Having, in its very name, assimilated one of the large facts of nature, Tide now becomes, with equal ease, an emblem of the polis itself. Because it can change dirty clothes into clean clothes, it is a legitimate vehicle for the ideology of transformation; it is a palpable, purchasable fragment of citizenship.

In the midst of this, aspirin remains stubbornly itself; and people who take aspirin remain stubbornly themselves. Although the brow of the person who has just taken Anacin is less furrowed than it was a few moments ago, that person has not turned into Sophie Loren, nor is there any implications that she has suddenly become the hip employee of a high-tech computer company. Despite her arthritis, the woman who takes Bufferin can play the piano (Figure 3), but she has not suddenly become a concert pianist, and it will cross no one's mind that she is playing *The Goldberg Variations*. Although her freedom from pain now allows her to enjoy the camaraderie of her friends, we are not invited to suppose that it is her skill itself that has earned her their friendship, nor that they loved her less when she was in pain. Nor, finally, can we even think she is now *wholly* free of pain and stiffness; the position of her neck does not allow us so. Like most advertisements for aspirin and nonaspirin, the form of pleasure claimed here is that of unforced *enablement*, not a level of "enablement" that entails extraordinary liltiness or agility. Swallowing an aspirin is not like inserting a tampon, which (according to its advertisers) enables one to hurl and spin through the air as though one had just been transformed into Kathy Rigby and the inserted product had just been transformed into a supercharged battery (or a miniature bottle of spinning red Tide).

In a widely televised commercial for *aspirin*, the woman who an hour ago could not zip up her dress can now do so. But she is the same woman. Her husband is the same man. Remarkably, her dress is the same dress. (All that has changed is that she herself can now fasten it.) The advertisers do not suggest that while troubled with arthritis, she was confined to the loose, slip-it-over-your-head genre of housecoats, and that having regained the full use of her hands, she now enters into the transformational grammar of high fashion, with its intricate fastenings, hooks, eyes, and zippers. Advertisers of aspirin are perhaps in more danger of *underrepresenting* rather than *overrepresenting* their product: from the inside, the striking sense of empowerment that comes with the recovery from pain and the extended use of one's hands is not wholly unlike the feeling of being glamorous or the warm pleasure of receiving adulation for one's musical skills. But commercials for aspirin and non-aspirin analgesics tend never to represent either the intensity of the original pain or the intensity

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