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*Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory
and Politics of Rape Prevention**Sharon Marcus*

Some recent arguments about the incompatibility of poststructuralist theory and feminist politics designate rape and the raped woman's body as symbols of the real. Mary E. Hawkesworth, in an article entitled "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth," defines two tendencies of what she calls "postmodern" thought—a conflation of reality and textuality, and an emphasis on the impossibility of ascertaining the meaning of texts. Toward the end of her essay she states:

The undesirable consequences of the slide into relativism that results from too facile a conflation of world and text is particularly evident when feminist concerns are taken as a starting point. Rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment . . . are not fictions or figurations that admit of the free play of signification. The victim's account of these experiences is not simply an arbitrary imposition of a purely fictive meaning on an otherwise meaningless reality. A victim's knowledge of the event may not be exhaustive; . . . But it would be premature to conclude from the incompleteness of the victim's account that all other accounts (the assailant's, defense attorney's, character witnesses' for the defendant) are equally valid or that there are no objective grounds on which to distinguish between truth and falsity in divergent interpretations.¹

Hawkesworth makes three claims: that rape is real; that to be real means to be fixed, determinate, and transparent to understanding; and that feminist politics must understand rape as one of the real, clear facts of women's lives.

As her argument unfolds it contradicts each of these claims. The subject of the second quoted sentence is "rape"; the subject of the third quoted sentence is "the victim's account of these experiences." This substitution of account for event implies the very inseparability of text and world which Hawkesworth had previously criticized in postmodern thought, and indeed leads her to reverse her characterization of postmodernism: where earlier in the piece postmodernism conflated the fictive and the real, here it problematically separates them because it considers a woman's account of rape "an arbitrary imposition of a purely fictive meaning on an otherwise meaningless reality." The subject of the paragraph shifts again in the fourth quoted sentence, this time to the rape trial, which Hawkesworth insists will adjudicate among competing accounts of the rape; she ends the paragraph with a barrage of legalistic terms—"the standards of evidence, criteria of relevance, paradigms of explanation and norms of truth" which, she holds, one can and must use to determine the truth value of rape accounts. Such a conclusion in fact jettisons feminism's selective political focus on the raped woman, since "standards of evidence" and "norms of truth" derive their prestige from their claims to apply equally to all men and women, all points of view, and all situations. Hawkesworth's argument that the reality of rape must be the "starting point" of feminist politics thus leads her to espouse a supposedly apolitical system of objective judgment. Her climactic assertion that "there are some things that can be known" could be the summing-up of a rapist's defense as easily as that of his prosecution.

Hawkesworth intends to distinguish this empiricist, epistemological view of rape from the textual, postmodern view. Where she insists on rape's reality, she sees postmodernism insisting on rape's indeterminacy as an event, and hence on the impossibility of ascribing blame to a rapist and innocence to a victim.² Where she turns to the legal determination of blame, Michel Foucault, a theorist whom she associates with postmodernism, cautions against repressive measures which might stigmatize male sexuality and advocates instead making economic reparation to raped women.³ Yet ultimately Hawkesworth adopts the same *perspective* on rape that her postmodern opponents do: in the eyes of all these thinkers, rape has always already occurred and women are always either already raped or already rapable. Hawkesworth believes that women can derive power from proving that they have been made powerless and from identifying the perpetrators of this victimization. Postmodernists take issue with the notions of law, action, knowledge, and identity which would enable a woman to label a man her rapist. But for both parties, when they think about rape, they inevitably see a raped woman.

Hawkesworth does not address this fundamental fit between her view of rape and the postmodern one; nor does she rebut the specific content of postmodern analyses of rape. Rather, she asserts the incompatibility of postmodern theories of language and reality with feminist political action against

rape. This assertion actually contradicts one of feminism's most powerful contentions about rape—that rape is a question of language, interpretation, and subjectivity. Feminist thinkers have asked: Whose words count in a rape and a rape trial? Whose “no” can never mean “no”? How do rape trials condone men's misinterpretations of women's words? How do rape trials consolidate men's subjective accounts into objective “norms of truth” and deprive women's subjective accounts of cognitive value?⁴ Feminists have also insisted on the importance of *naming* rape as violence and of collectively narrating stories of rape.⁵ Though some of these theorists might explicitly assert that rape is real, their emphasis on *recounting* rape suggests that in their view actions and experiences cannot be said to exist in politically real and useful ways until they are perceptible and representable. A feminist politics which would fight rape cannot exist without developing a language about rape, nor, I will argue, without understanding rape to be a language. What founds these languages are neither real nor objective criteria, but political decisions to exclude certain interpretations and perspectives and to privilege others.

In this essay I propose that we understand rape as a language and use this insight to imagine women as neither already raped nor inherently rapable. I will argue against the political efficacy of seeing rape as the fixed reality of women's lives, against an identity politics which defines women by our violability, and for a shift of scene from rape and its aftermath to rape situations themselves and to rape *prevention*. Many current theories of rape present rape as an inevitable material fact of life and assume that a rapist's ability to physically overcome his target is the foundation of rape. Susan Brownmiller represents this view when she states in her influential 1975 book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, that “in terms of human anatomy the possibility of forcible intercourse incontrovertibly exists. This single factor may have been sufficient to have caused the creation of a male ideology of rape. When men discovered that they could rape, they proceeded to do it.”⁶ Such a view takes violence as a self-explanatory first cause and endows it with an invulnerable and terrifying facticity which stymies our ability to challenge and demystify rape. To treat rape simply as one of what Hawkesworth calls “the realities that circumscribe women's lives” can mean to consider rape as terrifyingly unnameable and unrepresentable, a reality that lies beyond our grasp and which we can only experience as grasping and encircling us.⁷ In its efforts to convey the horror and iniquity of rape, such a view often concurs with masculinist culture in its designation of rape as a fate worse than, or tantamount to, death; the apocalyptic tone which it adopts and the metaphysical status which it assigns to rape implies that rape can only be feared or legally repaired, not fought.

Feminist antirape literature, activism, and policy development on rape in the United States during the last two decades have increasingly concen-

trated on police procedures and legal definitions of rape. This focus can produce a sense of futility: rape itself seems to be taken for granted as an occurrence and only postrape events offer possible occasions for intervention. Although feminist drives to change the legal definition of rape, to increase the penalties for rape and to render the terms of a rape trial less prejudicial to the raped woman have publicized rape's seriousness as a crime, an almost exclusive insistence on equitable reparation and vindication in the courts has limited effectiveness for a politics of rape prevention. Quite literally, the rape has already occurred by the time a case comes to court; a verdict of guilty can in no way avert the rape itself, and no one has proven a direct link between increased penalties and convictions for a crime and a decreased incidence of that crime. The notorious racism and sexism of the United States police and legal systems often compromise the feminist goals of a rape trial. Interracial rape cases constitute a minority of rapes committed and rapes brought to trial, but when the rapist is white, exhibit significantly lower rates of conviction than intraracial rape cases, and much higher rates of conviction when the rapist is Afro-American. In both intra- and interracial rape trials, raped Afro-Americans often do not obtain convictions even in the face of overwhelming evidence of brutalization; raped white women have great difficulty in obtaining convictions against white rapists. In the relatively smaller percentage of cases where they have been raped by Afro-Americans, white women often obtain legal victories at the cost of juries' giving currency to racist prejudices and to patronizing ideologies of female protection. These biases fabricate and scapegoat a rapist of color and implicitly condone the exploitation and rape of women of color.⁸ Finally, courtroom trials assert first and foremost their own legitimacy and power to judge events, and only grant power to the vindicated party on the condition that the court's power be acknowledged.

Attempts to stop rape through legal deterrence fundamentally choose to *persuade men* not to rape. They thus assume that men simply have the power to rape and concede this primary power to them, implying that at best men can secondarily be dissuaded from using this power by means of threatened punishment from a masculinized state or legal system. They do not envision strategies which will enable women to sabotage men's power to rape, which will empower women to take the ability to rape completely out of men's hands.

We can avoid these self-defeating pitfalls by regarding rape not as a fact to be accepted or opposed, tried or avenged, but as a process to be analyzed and undermined as it occurs. One way to achieve this is to focus on what actually happens during rape attempts and on differentiating as much as possible among various rape situations in order to develop the fullest range of rape prevention strategies.⁹ Another way to refuse to recognize rape as the real fact of our lives is to treat it as a *linguistic* fact: to ask how the

violence of rape is enabled by narratives, complexes and institutions which derive their strength not from outright, immutable, unbeatable force but rather from their power to structure our lives as imposing cultural scripts. To understand rape in this way is to understand it as subject to change.

The definition of rape as a linguistic fact can be taken several ways. One common conjunction of rape and language refers to the many images of rape which our culture churns out, representations which often transmit the ideological assumptions and contradictions of rape—women are rapable, women deserve rape/women provoke rape, women want rape, women are ashamed of being raped/women publicly lie about being raped. While these cultural productions can collude in and perpetuate rape in definite and complicated ways, the statement that rape is a linguistic fact should not be taken to mean that such linguistic forms actually rape women.

Another crucial, literal way to understand rape as a linguistic fact is to highlight the presence of speech in rape. Contrary to received wisdom, which imagines rape as a wordless, absolutely impersonal attack, most rapists take verbal initiatives with their targets in addition to deploying physical aggression. Many rapists initially engage their targets in friendly or threatening conversation; many speak a great deal during the rape and demand that the women whom they rape either talk to them or recite particular phrases. Internalized strictures on what can be spoken and on what is unspeakable—which restrict men and women differently—structure rape situations as much as physical inequalities do, particularly when a woman knows a rapist—the most prevalent rape situation.¹⁰ Women's noncombative responses to rapists often derive as much from the self-defeating rules which govern polite, empathetic feminine conversation as they do from explicit physical fear.¹¹ To prevent rape, women must resist self-defeating notions of polite feminine speech as well as develop physical self-defense tactics.

A "continuum" theory of sexual violence links language and rape in a way that can be taken to mean that representations of rape, obscene remarks, threats and other forms of harassment should be considered equivalent to rape. Such a definition substitutes the remarks and threats which gesture toward a rape for the rape itself, and thus contradicts the very meaning of "continuum," which requires a temporal and logical distinction between the various stages of a rape attempt. In a "continuum" theory which makes one type of action, a verbal threat, immediately substitutable for another type of action, sexual assault, the time and space between these two actions collapse and once again, rape has always already occurred. Such verbal acts should be countered and censured for what they are—initiatives to set up a rape situation. To make them metaphors for rape itself, however, occludes the gap between the threat and the rape—the gap in which women can try to intervene, overpower and deflect the threatened action.¹²

Yet another way to analyze rape as a linguistic fact argues that rape is structured like a language, a language which shapes both the verbal *and* physical interactions of a woman and her would-be assailant. To say that rape is structured like a language can account both for rape's prevalence and its potential prevention. Language is a social structure of meanings which enables people to experience themselves as speaking, acting, and embodied subjects.¹³ We can outline the language of rape in the United States along raced and gendered axes. The language of rape seeks to induce in white women an *exclusive and erroneous fear of nonwhite men as potential rapists* and legitimizes white men's sexual violence against all women as well as their retributive violence against nonwhite men in the name of protecting or avenging white women. At various historical moments this language has intensively designated Afro-Americans as targets of rape attempts—so much so that generations of Afro-Americans have developed definite languages of resistance to rape. Simultaneously or at other times, the language of rape may also address women of color as generic "women." The language of rape solicits women to position ourselves as endangered, violable, and fearful and invites men to position themselves as legitimately violent and entitled to women's sexual services. This language structures physical actions and responses as well as words, and forms, for example, the would-be rapist's feelings of powerfulness and our commonplace sense of paralysis when threatened with rape.

As intractably real as these physical sensations may appear to us, however, they appear so because the language of rape speaks through us, freeing our own sense of force and affecting the would-be rapist's perceptions of our lack of strength. Rapists do not prevail simply because as men they are really, biologically, and unavoidably stronger than women. A rapist follows a social script and enacts conventional, gendered structures of feeling and action which seek to draw the rape target into a dialogue which is skewed against her. A rapist's ability to accost a woman verbally, to demand her attention, and even to attack her physically depends more on how he positions himself relative to her socially than it does on his allegedly superior physical strength. His *belief* that he has more strength than a woman and that he can use it to rape her merits more analysis than the putative fact of that strength, because that belief often produces as an effect the male power that appears to be rape's cause.

I am defining rape as a scripted interaction which takes place in language and can be understood in terms of conventional masculinity and femininity as well as other gender inequalities inscribed before an individual instance of rape. The word "script" should be taken as a metaphor conveying several meanings. To speak of a rape script implies a *narrative* of rape, a series of steps and signals whose typical initial moments we can learn to recognize and whose final outcome we can learn to stave off. The concept

of a narrative avoids the problems of the collapsed continuum described earlier, in which rape becomes the inevitable beginning, middle, and end of any interaction. The narrative element of a script leaves room and makes time for revision.¹⁴

We are used to thinking of language as a tool which we preexist and can manipulate, but both feminist and poststructuralist theories have persuasively contended that we only come to exist through our emergence into a preexistent language, into a social set of meanings which scripts us but does not exhaustively determine our selves. In this sense the term "rape script" also suggests that social structures *inscribe* on men's and women's embodied selves and psyches the misogynist inequalities which enable rape to occur. These generalized inequalities are not simply prescribed by a totalized oppressive language, nor fully inscribed before the rape occurs—rape itself is one of the specific techniques which continually scripts these inequalities anew. Patriarchy does not exist as a monolithic entity separate from human actors and actresses, impervious to any attempts to change it, secure in its role as an immovable first cause of misogynist phenomena such as rape; rather, patriarchy acquires its consistency as an overarching descriptive concept through the aggregation of microstrategies of oppression such as rape. Masculine power and feminine powerlessness neither simply precede nor cause rape; rather, rape is one of culture's many modes of feminizing women. A rapist chooses his target because he recognizes her to be a woman, but a rapist also strives to imprint the gender identity of "feminine victim" on his target. A rape act thus imposes as well as presupposes misogynist inequalities; rape is not only scripted—it also scripts.¹⁵

To take male violence or female vulnerability as the first and last instances in any explanation of rape is to make the identities of rapist and raped preexist the rape itself. If we eschew this view and consider rape as a scripted interaction in which one person auditions for the role of rapist and strives to maneuver another person into the role of victim, we can see rape as a *process* of sexist gendering which we can attempt to disrupt. Contrary to the principles of criminology and victimology, all rapists do not share fixed characteristics, nor do they attack people who are clearly marked as rape victims. Rape does not happen to preconstituted victims; it momentarily makes victims. The rapist does not simply *have* the power to rape; the social script and the extent to which that script succeeds in soliciting its target's participation help to create the rapist's power. The rape script preexists instances of rape but neither the script nor the rape act results from or creates immutable identities of rapist and raped.

The script should be understood as a framework, a grid of comprehensibility which we might feel impelled to use as a way of organizing and interpreting events and actions. We may be swayed by it even against our own interests—few women can resist utterly all the current modes of fem-

inization—but its legitimacy is never complete, never assured. Each act can perform the rape script's legitimacy or explode it. By defining rape as a scripted performance, we enable a gap between script and actress which can allow us to rewrite the script, perhaps by refusing to take it seriously and treating it as a farce, perhaps by resisting the physical passivity which it directs us to adopt. Ultimately, we must eradicate this social script. In the meantime, we can locally interfere with it by realizing that men elaborate masculine power in relation to imagined feminine powerlessness; since we are solicited to help create this power, we can act to destroy it. This is not to say that women must demonstrate resistance to provide *legal* proof that sexual overtures were undesired. A resistance criterion for defining rape has often been used to absolve rapists by expecting women trained in passivity to be able to display the same levels of aggressivity as men.¹⁶ But clearly it is preferable to have stopped a rape attempt ourselves than to have our raped selves vindicated in court. We should not be required to resist to prove our innocence at some later judicial date, but we should do so to serve our own immediate interests.

Before we can combat the creation of our powerlessness and of the rapist's power, we need a more detailed understanding of the underpinnings of the rape script. The rape script takes its form from what I will call a *gendered grammar of violence*, where grammar means the rules and structure which assign people to positions within a script. Between men of different races, this grammar predicates white men as legitimate subjects of violence between all men and as subjects of legitimate sexual violence against all women; it portrays men of color as ever-threatening subjects of illegitimate violence against white men and illegitimate sexual violence against white women. In an intraracial context, this grammar generically predicates men as legitimate perpetrators of sexual violence against women. I will address the difference between violence between men and sexual violence in greater detail below, but within the category of general violence we should distinguish among "legitimate violence between," "illegitimate violence against," and "legitimate violence against." Legitimate violence *between* men signifies a competitive pact between potential equals which permits venues for violence; in the United States today, this suggests an intraracial configuration of sparring partners. Illegitimate violence *against* implies that the violence is an unjustifiable and unthinkable attack which challenges social inequalities and can thus legitimately be responded to in unthinkable ways such as lynching; dominant U.S. culture tends to label most initiatives by men of color against whites as "illegitimate violence against." Intraracial male violence against women does not challenge social inequalities and hence is commonly thought to be legitimate; women's resistance to this violence is considered unthinkable and often condemned when it occurs. The dominant grammar of rape subsumes intraracial sexual violence under the rubric

of gender; it does not activate race as a meaningful factor when a man rapes a woman of the same race. Nor does the dominant grammar of rape actively acknowledge paragrammars of gender which do not foster marking women as objects of violence, just as the dominant grammar of language does not acknowledge paralanguages to be anything more than opaque and ungrammatical "dialects."

The gendered grammar of violence predicates men as the objects of violence and the operators of its tools, and predicates women as the objects of violence and the subjects of fear. This grammar induces men who follow the rules set out for them to recognize their gendered selves in images and narratives of aggression in which they are agents of violence who either initiate violence or respond violently when threatened. A grammatically correct mirror of gender reflects back to men heroic images in which they risk death, brave pain and never suffer violence to be done to them without attempting to pay it back in kind. This mirror reflects back to women images which conflate female victimization and female value; this grammar encourages women to become subjects by imagining ourselves as objects.

Feminist theory has widely acknowledged that when women follow social conventions we recognize and enact our gendered selves as objects of violence. It is by now a feminist truism—but nonetheless still an important *feminist truth*—that the criteria of feminine beauty and worthy feminine behavior, if enacted without any modification, create a trameled, passive person. Our culture's various techniques of feminization tend to buttress the rape script, since the femininity they induce "makes a feminine woman the perfect victim of sexual aggression."¹⁷ Studies of rape scenarios enable us to differentiate at least two grammatical positions appointed to and adopted by some women in a rape script, both of which go against women's interest in preventing rape. An interpretive stance of *empathy*, a quality deemed feminine even when detached from female practitioners, prods some women to identify with rapists rather than to defend themselves from rapists' desire to destroy their targets. One author, Frederick Storaska, even advocates empathy as a mode of self-defense, reasoning that men rape to compensate for a lack of self-esteem and love; he thus claims that when women respond lovingly to potential rapists, they no longer feel compelled to rape.¹⁸ Even if we accept this dubious premise for heuristic purposes, we still observe that it places all human agency on the male side: to avert rape, a woman must make a man feel like a full human being, rather than force him to recognize *her* will and humanity. A second, communicative stance of *responsiveness* encourages women not to take the offensive in a dialogue with a would-be rapist but to stay within the limits he sets—she can consent or not consent, acquiesce to his demands or dissuade him from them, but she does not actively interrupt him to shift the terms of discussion.¹⁹

Though feminist theorists of rape have thoroughly analyzed how women serve as objects of violence, they have focused less consistently on how women become *subjects of fear* and what effect this subjection has on our enactment of rape scripts. (By subjection, I mean a process which does not simply oppress, dominate and destroy women but one which incites us to become subjects by subjecting us to fear.) Various theories have recognized that rape causes fear, but have ignored the other half of the vicious circle—that often rapes succeed as a result of women's fears. In *The Female Fear*, Margaret T. Gordon and Stephanie Riger have argued that the distribution of fear corresponds to the other unequal distributions of privilege in U.S. society.²⁰ Even though women in fact are neither the sole objects of sexual violence nor the most likely targets of violent crimes, women constitute the majority of fearful subjects; even in situations where men are empirically more likely to suffer from violent crimes, they express less fear than women do, and tend to displace this fear onto a concern for their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters which usually takes the form of restricting their mobility by means of warning these women not to go out alone or at night.²¹

The grammar of violence assigns women a disadvantageous position in the rape script because it identifies us as objects of violence and because it offers the insidious inducement of a subject position which assigns us an active role *vis-à-vis fear*—a role which is all the more insidious for its apparent agency. Whereas masculine fear triggers the notorious “fight-or-flight” response, feminine fear inspires the familiar sensations of “freezing”—involuntary immobility and silence. Women learn to recognize ourselves as subjects of this fear and thus to identify with a state which does not elaborate our subjectivity but dissolves it. This fear may differ from one rape situation to another. Acquaintance and marital rapes distort the contract of male protection of women and shatter the community of care established between lovers; they may produce an uncanny, dreadful estrangement from familiar expectations. A sudden attack by a stranger may produce shocked, stunned terror. At the broadest level, however, the grammar of violence dictates that feminine fear concentrate the self on the anticipation of pain, the inefficacy of action, and the conviction that the self will be destroyed. Feminine fear precipitates all violence and agency outside of its subject; it thus disables its subject from risking possible pain or death in order to defend herself, since that risk can seem viable only if the subject perceives herself as possessing some violent capacity on which she can draw to try to survive pain or elude injury. Feminine fear also seems to entail a complete identification of a vulnerable, sexualized body with the self; we thus come to equate rape with death, the obliteration of the self, but see no way we can draw on our selves to save that self and stave off rape.

In terms of rape prevention, this grammar of violence and fear also structures what can be called an *instrumental* theory of rape and determines

ideas about feminine self-defense. The instrumental theory of rape, propounded by Susan Brownmiller in *Against Our Will*, argues that men rape because their penises possess the objective capacity to be weapons, tools, and instruments of torture.²² Traditional self-defense advice given to women assumes this quasi-invincibility of the male body and advocates passive avoidance techniques. This counsel cautions against the use of any type of weapon unless the woman can be sure to use it effectively; the implication is that unless one is absolutely certain that one's actions will be effective, one should not attempt to defend one's self at all. When police manuals do mention that one can wield impromptu weapons, they tend to cite flimsy and obsolete accessories such as hatpins, rather than suggest that women carry more serviceable objects. These same manuals often neglect to mention male genitalia when they designate the vulnerable points of a potential rapist's body, thus perpetuating the myth of the unassailably powerful penis. These views enact, in effect, a gendered polarization of the grammar of violence in which the male body can wield weapons, can make itself into a weapon, and benefits from an enforced ignorance concerning its own vulnerability; the female body is predicated by this grammar as universally vulnerable, lacking force, and incompetent to supplement its deficiencies with tools which could vanquish the penis's power by dissimulating it. In a culture which relentlessly urges women to make up for our lacks by accessorizing, we are told that we cannot manage bodily accessories if we manipulate them for purposes of self-defense, and that we will be best served by consenting to be accessories to our own violation. We are taught the following fallacy—that we can best avoid getting hurt by letting someone hurt us. We absorb the following paradox—that rape is death, but that in a rape the only way to avoid death is to accept it. Consenting to the death of rape forms our only possibility of fighting for our lives, but these lives will have been destroyed by the rape. Fear forges the link between these contradictory statements: rape is so terrifying because it is like death, and this totalizing fear disables us from combating the rape.

We can begin to develop a feminist discourse on rape by displacing the emphasis on what the rape script promotes—male violence against women—and putting into place what the rape script stultifies and excludes—women's will, agency, and capacity for violence. One of the few books on rape prevention, Pauline Bart's and Patricia H. O'Brien's remarkable *Stopping Rape: Successful Survival Strategies*, has persuasively disproved the widespread belief that resistance to rape will lead only to injury because it will anger the would-be rapist. The authors deftly point out that "advising women to either comply or risk injury assumes that rape itself does not result in injury." They also show that in their sample, there "was no relationship between the women's use of physical resistance and the rapists' use of additional force over and above the rape attempt," and that passive responses

often led to increased violence on the rapist's part.²³ Their surveys of women who prevented rape attempts consistently show that resistance does work, and that often minimal signs of it—an assertive remark, a push, a loud scream, flight—can suffice to block a man from continuing a rape attempt. Many women were able to prevent rape even when the rapist threatened them with a gun or knife. We can translate this finding into the terms of our grammatical framework by saying that the grammar of violence defines rape as an act committed against a subject of fear and not against a subject of violence—not, that is, against someone whom the would-be rapist assumes would attempt to fight back.²⁴ This assumption forms such an integral part of the rape script that we can say that simply by fighting back, we cease to be grammatically correct feminine subjects and thus become much less legible as rape targets.

In order to understand the difference which fighting back can make, we must distinguish sexualized violence from subject-subject violence. Sexualized violence anticipates and seeks its target's subjection as a subject of fear, defenselessness, and acquiescence to injury. In subject-subject violence, each interlocutor expects and incites violence in the other, whereas in sexualized violence women are excluded from this community of violence.²⁵ Subject-subject violence underlies intraracial masculine homosocial competition, in which men fight one another with the understanding that they are following the same rules and that one man can expect to receive from another any violence which he metes out to him. Although on one level the men are opponents, on another level they cooperate in their agreement to play the same game.

This gentleman's agreement does not obtain in a rape situation. Bart and O'Brien's analysis shows that unassertive, accommodating strategies which assume a contract situation of "mutual self-interest and good-will" fail to persuade a rapist who in no way identifies with the interests or subjectivity of his target.²⁶ Flight can work more effectively than rational negotiations since it simply breaks away from a script of polite, empathetic response to a potential aggressor. Verbal self-defense can successfully disrupt the rape script by refusing to concede the rapist's power. Treating the threat as a joke; chiding the rapist; bargaining to move to a different place, to perform only certain acts, or to have the rapist put any weapons he might have aside, are all examples of verbal methods which have in some cases thwarted rape attempts because they assert a woman's agency, not her violability, and a woman's power, rather than her fearful powerlessness. A rapist confronted with a wisecracking, scolding, and bossy woman may lose his grip on his power to rape; a rapist responded to with fear may feel his power consolidated. While we cannot underestimate the power of talking back and talking at the rapist, physical retaliation goes even further to disrupt the grammar of rape. Directed physical action is as signif-

icant a criterion of humanity in our culture as words are, and we must develop our capacities for violence in order to disrupt the rape script. Most women feel more able to use verbal strategies than physical ones—but it is precisely this feeling which indicates that the rape script has colonized our minds and bodies, positioning us as vulnerable to rape. Physical action poses the greatest challenge to most women as we think about preventing rape—and because it is our greatest point of resistance, it is the grammatical dictum we could flout to our greatest advantage.²⁷ The use of physical retaliation undermines the powerlessness which the scenario of violence and fear scripts for us. By talking back and fighting back we place ourselves as subjects who can engage in dialogic violence and respond to aggression in kind; in addition to offering us an opportunity to elude or even overpower an assailant, self-defense undermines a would-be rapist by catapulting him out of his role of omnipotent attacker and surprising him into having to fight someone whom he had marked out as a purely acquiescent victim.

Legislation backs up the objectifying violence of the rape script by not defining rape as an assault, which would fall under the rubric of subject-subject violence against persons, but as a sexual offense. This definition separates sexual parts from the person and views them as objects which have been violated. I have been arguing that to prevent rape, we must resist a would-be rapist's attempt to place us in a sexualized, gendered position of passivity and that instead we fend off the rape by positioning ourselves as if we were in a fight. For definitional purposes, however, rape is clearly neither sex nor simple assault. Rape could best be defined as a sexualized and gendered attack which imposes sexual difference along the lines of violence. Rape engenders a sexualized female body defined as a wound, a body excluded from subject-subject violence, from the ability to engage in a fair fight. Rapists do not beat women at the game of violence, but aim to exclude us from playing it altogether.

We have seen that subject-subject violence presumes a contractual relation between its participants, who engage with one another as equals who agree to disagree. This subject of contractual relations also underwrites the subject of property ownership. In capitalist culture one owns property by virtue of being free to contract with equals to exchange it. Alienability and the power to contract for the transfer of alienable goods form the basis of property in things, in others, and in one's self. A masculine capacity to alienate the self in a risky encounter which involves a contractual exchange of aggression positions men as the subjects of property in themselves. This capacity, combined with a sense of entitlement to women-as-property, positions men as potential rapists in the rape script. Violation entails the invasion and destruction of property; it is the obverse of alienation which demarcates the boundaries of a property and maintains its integrity

in the face of circulation. Since women are considered to be property and thus not to own it, it is not possible to enter into contracts with us and thus implausible that we would resist attempts to appropriate us.²⁸ If what one owns expresses what one is worth and hence what one merits, women seem to own only our violation—hence we are often said to “deserve” rape.

Many feminist theorists have focused on how the infliction of violence against putative female objects is related to the view that women are also considered objects of property. Lorenne Clark and Debra Lewis, in *Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality*, have offered a thoughtful analysis of the relationships among rape culture, rape laws, and property laws. They show that the adherents of rape culture see female sexuality as a property which only men can truly own, which women often hoard, which can thus justifiably be wrested from us, and which women themselves merely hold in trust for a lawful owner. Rape thus becomes the theft or violation of one man's property rights by another. Clark and Lewis advocate transforming rape from a crime against a valuable object to a crime which violates a female person's right to contract to exchange her own sexual property. They thus seek to reinforce women's property in themselves and to guarantee women's “right to the exclusive ownership and control of their own bodies.”²⁹

This move criticizes male property in women but sustains a definition of female sexuality as violable property. The call for female ownership of this property does not displace this injurious definition; it merely erects legal impediments to carrying out naturalized violations. While I have argued that we can prevent rape by positioning ourselves as subjects of violence and objects of fear, to assume property-in-ourselves and that our selves are property will only extend, not challenge, the hold which rape scripts have over women. The rape script strives to put women in the place of objects; property metaphors of rape similarly see female sexuality as a circumscribable thing.³⁰ The theft metaphor makes rape mirror a simplified model of castration: a single sexual organ identifies the self, that organ is conceived of as an object that can be taken or lost, and such a loss dissolves the self. These castration and theft metaphors reify rape as an irrevocable appropriation of female sexuality.

The rape script describes female bodies as vulnerable, violable, penetrable, and wounded; metaphors of rape as trespass and invasion retain this definition intact. The psychological corollary of this property metaphor characterizes female sexuality as inner space, rape as the invasion of this inner space, and antirape politics as a means to safeguard this inner space from contact with anything external to it. The entire female body comes to be symbolized by the vagina, itself conceived of as a delicate, perhaps inevitably damaged and pained inner space.

Antirape activists have often criticized the false demarcation between an inside and outside of rape in terms of geographical space: rape culture spawns spatial contradictions by warning women not to go outside because of possible rape, but most rapes occur inside women's homes. Denaturalizing this myth unveils the boundary between inside and outside and indicates the irrelevance of this inside/outside distinction for fighting rape: if rape can occur inside, then "inside" is no longer what it is meant to be—sheltering, separate and distinct from an unsafe, external realm. Yet anti-rape theorists often continue to map external and internal spatial divisions onto the female body by using invasion as a metaphor for rape. This metaphor coheres with the gendered grammar of violence outlined earlier, since positions vis-à-vis violence coincide with spatial coordinates: a subject of violence acts on an object of violence to define her as the boundary between exterior and interior, which he crosses, and as the immobilized space through which he moves.³¹ Precisely because the invasion metaphor coheres so strongly with the grammar of sexualized violence, we should question its efficacy in helping women fight rape. The need to define rape and to assert its existence can distract us from plotting its vanishing point. To combat rape, we do not need to insist on the reality of an inside/outside distinction between the female body and the world; this distinction may be one of the rape script's effects, but if so, it is this distinction we must dissolve in order to undo rape.

Neither all women nor all rape survivors represent rape as an invasion of female sexual property. Bart and O'Brien's work has shown that many women represent rape as the extraction of a service and define it "as something done with a penis, not something done to a vagina."³² My previous claim that rape scripts gender suggests that we view rape not as the invasion of female inner space, but as the forced creation of female sexuality as a violated inner space. The horror of rape is not that it steals something from us but that it makes us into things to be taken. Thus, to demand rights to ourselves as property and to request protection for our vulnerable inner space is not enough. We do not need to defend our "real" bodies from invasion but to rework this elaboration of our bodies altogether. The most deep-rooted upheaval of rape culture would revise the idea of female sexuality as an object, as property, and as an inner space.

Such a revision can and should take multiple directions. One possible alternative to figuring female sexuality as a fixed spatial unit is to imagine sexuality in terms of time and change. The use of past sexual history in rape trials to determine the probability of consent and to invoke claims of right based on past consent (used to defend the rape rights of boyfriends and husbands), demonstrate that rape culture consistently denies female sexuality the ability to change over time. Rather than secure the right to alienate and own a spatialized sexuality, antirape politics can claim women's right to a

self that could differ from itself over time without then having to surrender its effective existence as a self. The title of a book on acquaintance rape, "I Never Called It Rape," provides an emblem of this conception of female sexuality. This title expresses a nonunified consciousness for which the act of naming the active desire not to have intercourse does not coincide with the nonconsensual sexual act; it insists that this split self can come to power and knowledge over time. The title conceives of female sexuality not as a discrete object whose violation will always be painfully and instantly apparent, but as an intelligible process whose individual instances can be reinterpreted and renamed over time.

I have argued against understanding rape as the forced entry of a real inner space and for considering it as a form of invagination in which rape scripts the female body as a wounded inner space. We can elude the limits of an empiricist approach by developing a politics of fantasy and representation. Rape exists because our experience and deployment of our bodies is the effect of interpretations, representations, and fantasies which often position us in ways amenable to the realization of the rape script: as paralyzed, as incapable of physical violence, as fearful. New cultural productions and reinscriptions of our bodies and our geographies can help us begin to revise the grammar of violence and to represent ourselves in militant new ways. In the place of a tremulous female body or the female self as an immobilized cavity, we can begin to imagine the female body as subject to change, as a potential object of fear and agent of violence. Conversely, we do not have to imagine the penis as an indestructible weapon which cannot help but rape; we can take the temporality of male sexuality into consideration and bear in mind the fragility of erections and the vulnerability of male genitalia. *Stopping Rape* reports the words of one woman who had been threatened with death unless she cooperated with her rapist: "If he's going to kill me he'll just have to kill me. I will not let this happen to me. And I grabbed him by his penis, I was trying to break it, and he was beating me all over the head with his fists, I mean, just as hard as he could. I couldn't let go. I was just determined I was going to yank it out of the socket. And then he lost his erection . . . pushed me away and grabbed his coat and ran."³³

I have tried to show that such self-defense is not merely an immediately effective and practical strategy; as female violence and as the refusal to accept the rapist's body as powerfully real and really powerful, this self-defense strikes at the heart of rape culture. Self-defense of course offers no final solution: it will not always be sufficient to ward off rape and it should certainly not be necessary. While the ethical burden to prevent rape does not lie with us but with rapists and a society which upholds them, we will be waiting a very long time if we wait for men to decide not to rape. To

construct a society in which we would know no fear, we may first have to frighten rape culture to death.

NOTES

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1. Mary E. Hawkesworth, "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14, 3 (1989), p. 555.

2. Hawkesworth does not cite specific poststructuralist discussions of rape. For more detailed discussions of the relationship between textual criticism and sexual violence, see Teresa de Lauretis, "The Violence of Rhetoric: Considerations on Representation and Gender," in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 31-50; Frances Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," *Representations*, 20 (Fall 1987), pp. 88-112; and Ellen Rooney, "Criticism and the Subject of Sexual Violence," *Modern Language Notes*, 98, 5 (December 1983).

3. See Monique Plaza, "Our Damages and Their Compensation: Rape: The Will Not to Know of Michel Foucault," *Feminist Issues* (Summer 1981), pp. 25-35. She cites Foucault's statements in *La folie encerclée* (Paris: Seghers/Laffont, 1977).

4. See, for example, Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770-1845* (London: Pandora Press, 1987); Lorene Clark and Debra Lewis, *Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1977); Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), esp. "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist," pp. 172-201; Delia Dumaresq, "Rape—Sexuality in the Law," *m/f*, 5 & 6 (1981), pp. 41-59; Sylvia Walby, Alex Hay, and Keith Soothill, "The Social Construction of Rape," *Theory Culture and Society*, 2, 1 (1983), pp. 86-98; Susan Estrich, *Real Rape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Frances Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel"; Susan Griffin, *Rape: The Politics of Consciousness*, Rev. 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986); Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Andrea Medea and Kathleen Thompson, *Against Rape* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974); Ken Plummer, "The Social Uses of Sexuality: Symbolic Interaction, Power and Rape" in *Perspectives on Rape and Sexual Assault*, June Hopkins, ed. (London: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 37-55; Elizabeth A. Stanko, *Intimate Intrusions: Women's Experience of Male Violence* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

5. See *I Never Called It Rape: The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Fighting, and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

6. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), p. 14.

7. Mary E. Hawkesworth, "Knowers, Knowing, Known," p. 555.

8. Members of other groups such as Hispanics and Native Americans have and still do experience similar inequities; our culture's alacrity to blend sexual and racial oppression

means that any other group in the process of becoming racially stigmatized could find itself enmeshed in these webs of injustice. However, Afro-Americans have historically borne the brunt of symbolizing rapist and raped to the white imagination, and it is for this reason that I refer specifically to Afro- and Afro-Americans as well as to the more generic group "men and women of color." For further discussion of rape and antiblack racism, see Hazel Carby, "'On the Threshold of Woman's Era': Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory," in *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (Autumn 1985), pp. 262-277; Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*; Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "'The Mind That Burns in Each Body': Women, Rape, and Racial Violence," in *Powers of Desire*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), pp. 328-49; Rennie Simson, "The Afro-American Female: The Historical Context of the Construction of Sexual Identity," in *Powers of Desire*, pp. 229-35; Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1985).

9. See, for example, Pauline Bart and Patricia O'Brien, *Stopping Rape: Successful Survival Strategies* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), especially chapter 3, "The Rape Situation," pp. 23-31.

10. See Andrea Medea and Kathleen Thompson, *Against Rape*, p. 25.

11. See Nancy Henley, *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977); Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place* (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), and Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker, Nelly Furman, eds., *Women and Language in Literature and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1980).

12. The way in which the continuum theory equates all signs of intended, projected violence with realized, completed violence curiously mirrors myths that women provoke rape (and thus cannot be said to be raped at all). These "provocation" theories interpret all perceptions of female sociability—a smile, a nod, or even saying nothing at all—as signifying sexual consent and as thus obviating the need for further negotiation. Here too, the time and space between acts vanishes and women become always already raped, "seduced," or "seductive." For a demonstration that efforts to keep seduction and rape logically distinct continually fail because seduction and rape alike define female sexuality as passive, see Ellen Rooney, "Criticism and the Subject."

13. For discussions of the relevance of this definition of language to feminist analyses, see Teresa de Lauretis, "Violence of Rhetoric," especially pp. 41-42, and Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, The Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," *Feminist Studies*, 14, 1 (Spring 1988), p. 34.

14. My definition of a script differs from the sociological one posed, for example, by Judith Long Laws and Pepper Schwartz in *Sexual Scripts: The Social Construction of Female Sexuality* (Hinsdale: The Dryden Press, 1977). They write: "By sexual scripts we mean a repertoire of acts and statuses that are recognized by a social group, together with the rules, expectations, and sanctions governing these acts and statuses" (2). This definition focuses on scripts as prefabricated interactions between bearers of fixed roles, rather than as a process which in every instance must strive to reproduce itself and its performers. Although the authors note that the institutionalization of one script entails that "alternative scripts are denigrated or denied," they conceptualize each individual script as secure from implosion and internal contestation (6). I argue that these scripts are self-contradictory and can be challenged from within. One crucial contradiction of the rape script is that it casts women as weak victims yet posits massive amounts of force and violence as necessary to rape us. We can thus draw from the

rape script itself the implication that we may possess more force than the script leads us to think we do.

15. Angela Davis makes a similar point when she argues that rape by slave owners and overseers was the one act which differentiated between slave men and slave women. Rape from without inaugurates sexual difference within a group of men and women otherwise equal, hence otherwise indistinguishable. *Women, Race and Class*, pp. 23–4.

16. See Susan Estrich, *Real Rape*.

17. Susan Griffin, *Rape: The Power of Consciousness*, p. 16.

18. Frederick Storaska, *How to Say No to a Rapist and Survive*, cited in Pauline Bart and Patricia O'Brien, *Stopping Rape, passim*.

19. See Ellen Rooney, "Criticism and the Subject," for a critique of "consent" as a criterion of rape and the ways in which it precludes the theorization of female sexuality.

20. Margaret T. Gordon and Stephanie Riger, *The Female Fear* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 118.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

22. See Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 14.

23. Pauline Bart and Patricia H. O'Brien, *Stopping Rape*, pp. 40–41.

24. See, for example, the Queen's Bench Foundation report on interviews with rapists: when asked why they chose a target, 82.2% said because she was "available" and 71.2% because she was "defenseless"—terms which amount to the same meaning, since "available" here means "available to be raped." *Rape: Prevention and Resistance* (Queen's Bench Foundation: San Francisco, 1976).

25. Teresa de Lauretis follows René Girard in calling this type of subject-subject violence "violent reciprocity" . . . which is socially held in check [and promoted] by the institution of kinship, ritual, and other forms of mimetic violence (war and sport come immediately to mind). "Violence of Rhetoric" p. 43.

26. Pauline Bart and Patricia H. O'Brien, *Stopping Rape*, pp. 109–10.

27. Jeffner Allen underlines this point when she criticizes "non-violence as a patriarchal construct" and as a "heterosexual virtue [which] charges women to be 'moral,' virtuously non-violent in the face of the 'political,' the violent male-defined world. The ideology of heterosexual virtue entitles men to terrorize—possess, humiliate, violate, objectify—women and forecloses the possibility of women's active response to men's sexual terrorization." *Lesbian Philosophy: Explorations* (Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1986), pp. 29, 35.

28. See Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor* (London: Zed Books, 1986), p. 169.

29. Lorence Clark and Debra Lewis, *Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality*, p. 166.

30. Clark and Lewis are not the only authors to use the rape metaphor: Pauline Bart and Patricia H. O'Brien compare rape laws to trespassing laws, *Stopping Rape*, p. 21; the *Ms.* report on acquaintance rape compares definitions of rape with those of theft, p. 22, and Susan Estrich makes several analogies between theft and rape, *Real Rape*, pp. 14, 40–41.

31. See Teresa de Lauretis, "Violence of Rhetoric," pp. 43–44.

32. Pauline Bart and Patricia H. O'Brien, *Stopping Rape*, p. 20.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 38.