

2004

# Figuring Myself Out: Certainty, Injury, and the Poststructuralist Repositioning of Bodies of Identity

James Haywood Rolling

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/tl>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Rolling, J. H. (2004). Figuring myself out: Certainty, injury, and the poststructuralist repositioning of bodies of identity. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 38 (4), 46-58.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching and Leadership by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact [surface@syr.edu](mailto:surface@syr.edu).

## Figuring Myself Out: Certainty, Injury, and the Poststructuralist Repositioning of Bodies of Identity

---

JAMES HAYWOOD ROLLING, JR.

### Certainty

I have been attempting to figure myself out. Out of chaos and incompleteness, toward increased certainty. I have been at this task of construction for quite some time now. I have just proposed my dissertation and my intentions are once again uncertain. My dissertation is to be a self-study. It is also a story about uncertainty and my attempts to redeem a clear definition, to be named a peer and a colleague among artists, writers, and teachers. I have been uncertain as a little boy; uncertain as a son; uncertain as a student of architecture; uncertain as an artist and writer; uncertain as a teacher; uncertain as a black man. To compensate, I have sought the conferral of certainty, a name among leaders in many fields of inquiry. Still, it is not easy to forget that certainty has also been the cause of great injury to my body, to my mind.

On sunny afternoons after school all the kids came outside to play. The air would fill with echoes going back and forth between the red brick and stone buildings on both sides of our narrow street. Pounding rubber balls, the taps and scratches of shoe heels, and the slapping of sneakers on the cement and asphalt.

Sometimes white chalk would appear and hopscotch boxes were quickly drawn on the neat squares of cement pavement in front of my Grandma's house. Grandma lived next door to us. Houses on our block were side by side, sharing each other's walls.

On a particular day, similar to other days, I watched as a small flat stone was tossed to bounce across the cement into a numbered box. I watched the one foot, two feet, one foot hops from box to box to stop and balance on one small hopping foot, steadying itself, to drop a hand to pick up the stone. Some little girl came to sit beside me and asked me to look at her. We were sitting on one of Grandma's two wooden benches, just inside the front gate.

---

James Haywood Rolling, Jr. is on the teaching faculty of The School at Columbia University, serves on the Review Panel for *Art Education*, and is adjunct faculty at New York University and Teachers College.

Two steps down was the sidewalk and other kids. I ignored the girl. I made sure my body had no contact with hers on the bench. Why was she talking to me anyway? Didn't she see I didn't have anything I wanted to say?

"Look at me!" she said, tugging at my arm.

"Will you stop it!" I snapped back, jerking my arm away. Being touched was not natural to me. My family didn't touch. I tightened the skin of my eyebrows and the bridge of my nose into a frown.

"Smile!" the little girl said slyly, trying to tickle me.

"Leave me alone!" I yelled. I tried to move away from the touching.

I must have grinned. Grinning relaxes the frowns on faces. The girl clapped a hand over her mouth, all giggles. I asked what she was laughing so loud for. The kids out in front of us now had our attention. I felt like I was now being watched. I can't remember the faces, just the noise and voices that seemed to stop. The little girl stood up, pointed at my face and declared, finger in my face, pointing, speaking out loud, "Look! He only has *one* dimple! See?! Look at his face!"

"No I don't," I said, dropping my face, my eyes, my voice. My head was down and I didn't want to see if anyone was looking. The attention made my face warm and I needed to move away fast. "No I don't," I repeated, stiffly. My whole head seemed to glow brightly, very hot, drawing lots of attention. I was beneath windows, very near, on both sides of the street, always with onlookers. I rushed through the painted iron gate, going quickly next door, upstairs to "our house," to the second floor apartment we lived in, down the hallway so dark after the bright outside, around a curve and a corner, into the bathroom, closing the door behind me. Locking the door. I didn't have to turn on the light to see. There was a light well in the center of the house, right beside the bathroom. I waited patiently for my eyes to adjust to the murky sun working its way through the frosted glass in the small window above and to the right of the toilet. I wanted the dimness. I wanted the coolness. I wanted the silence. I wanted the tile walls to feel close to me.

I sat on the edge of the sink. It was clean white porcelain. I had shorts on but the surface warmed quickly against my bare legs as they made contact. In front of the bathroom medicine cabinet mirror, above the sink, I stared long at my face. The house was quiet. Everyone else was outside.

Everyone else knew that you either have two dimples or no dimples at all. You could see that from all the illustrations and photographs and pictures in books and magazines. I was certain. But in the soft, chubby skin of my left cheek was the only dimple I could manage. Although I strained or poked at my tiring, smiling face muscles, my right cheek remained undented. I poked and I strained. I poked and I strained. I made my face muscles move every way I could think of. I stared at my face.

That was when I decided I would never let anyone else notice there was something very wrong with me. As much as I could help it, as much as I

could keep anyone else from knowing my secret, I would never let anyone else see my smile.

Certainty has been the precursor of injury to my body, injury to my sense of my body, injury to my representation of my body, in photographs taken by others, in self-portraits. Certainty has distorted my configuration, but it should be noted that discourses that distort African Americans as a definitive category have named me ugly long before I chose to do so.

Before birth, at the onset of consciousness, there was a body. My body. My body was already inscribed with the pseudo-predictive discourses of my expectant parents and family, with social/medical discourses of prenatal caregivers, and social/citizenship discourses of the inalienable rights and responsibilities of the un-born/ the pre-born/ the expected. My body was inscribed also with other competing discourses that prescribed, described, and circumscribed it with alienable, alienating, definitively named identities.

The inscription of a body prefaces the subjunctive mind — the mind we carry embedded in our sensory-motor and physiognomic memory, and the socially constituted mind — the shared, “transcognitive” mind we shed from event to event, conversation to conversation.<sup>1</sup> The inscription marks it, calling it different from other bodies. The inscribed body is discharged into the world and, in turn, it reconstitutes the discourses that first called it by name. The naming of a body represents that body, certifies it — figures it for discursive positioning. A name also limits the body’s motility in reconstituting the world when the abstracted name is made material, becomes physical memory, becomes settled landscape, is reified as more than glancing description.

In an 1885 book on phrenology and physiognomy, *Panorama of Man*, the professorial-looking white man is named and positioned as apex of our species.<sup>2</sup> Through reductive discourses, the development of an imagined or theorized identity into a rationalized and definitive identity is a progression of decreasing possibilities, each step in the execution of the discourse reducing future options by converting only one framework of possibility into a reality.<sup>3</sup> This is not dissimilar from the traditional reductive religious discourse stemming from the discovery of “heathens” in the New World, which could not see the possibility of non-whites as the spawn of the same holy creation that gave breath to ascendant humanity. Nor is it dissimilar to the reductive evolutionary discourse within anthropology that advanced the doctrine of polygeny, which could see no possibility other than the idea that humans are distributed across the world as biogeographically separate and hierarchically ordered species which may be named as distinct races, culminated by that apex of human evolution, the white man. Jacques Ellul comments:

Man seeks to reach his full stature: he stands upright, he speaks, and he cannot help wanting to be differentiated from others, possessing

his own autonomy and accepting neither constraints nor limits...the West gave expression to what man — every man — was seeking. The West turned the whole human project into a conscious, deliberate business. It set the goal and called it freedom, or, at a later date, individual freedom. It gave direction to all the forces that were working in obscure ways, and brought to light the value that gave history its meaning. Thereby, man became man.<sup>4</sup>

In response to visual and literary attempts to encapsulate the development of the Western social identity into definable norms, and similarly to classify and marginalize other social identities and whole cultures as merely the boundary totems of a correctible abnormality (corrected by bringing them under the aegis of the white male body politic), this chapter asks: *How does the named body refigure itself? How do I validate my new names?*

### Name Calling

To call a body a name is to position it socially, to make it discursively certain. But the body acts upon its positioning; it repositions (pre)positions and (pro)positions. The body does so by (re)(con)figuring itself among the discourses that seek to name it. By moving the body from object position, by claiming agency within the discourses that claim to know me, by exercising the power to tell what I know about me, by stating my own position, language is changed. The active voice supersedes the passive voice. More than having acted upon, having been discussed, having been explained and defined, I am. I make known.

The body is less certain of its senses than language will allow it. All knowledge, all learning, all identity, is social (re)positioning. Repositioning is the postmodern processing of thought by revisiting discourse-bound knowledge structures even after they have been shaped into a coherent form in consciousness, with the ultimate effect of disrupting the certainty of those forms. Poststructuralism disrupts the integrity and fixity of modern, positivistic forms of knowledge.

Poststructuralist and discursive repositioning spin the familiar axes of knowledge structures as in a workshop lathe. And in the discursive action upon named knowledge structures, positions are shaved away by imagination's repositioning blade. In shedding the hard edges — those syntactical and semantical certainties of discursively created knowledge — new bodies of knowledge are crafted: Softer, ill-formed figures, un-named bodies.

Name-calling is at times the derivative act of modern, rational, scientific thought. A name is a paradigm intended to represent a posited and socially positioned reality. A modern name fixes a particular reality as dominant, a particular discourse as correct. In essence, a name is a solution to a problem. In defining the term *paradigm* as a scientifically derived solution to a naturally

observed problem, scientific historian Thomas S. Kuhn cites solutions such as “Aristotle’s analysis of motion, Ptolemy’s computations of planetary position, Lavoisier’s application of the balance, or Maxwell’s mathematization of the electromagnetic field.”<sup>5</sup> That I am named James Haywood Rolling, Jr. is merely the solution to the positioning of my body, the first body out of my mother’s womb, in relation to the bodies of James and Sylvia. My name situates me within the discourse that tells the correct hierarchy of my immediate Rolling family. I am a junior member. Even so, at the time of this writing, I tell the Rolling family. I constitute it for the purpose of this writing. I take hegemonic and signifying authority in spite of my named designation. So what is in a name?

### Scientific Positioning

What knowledge is of the most worth? — the uniform reply is — Science. This is the verdict on all the counts.<sup>6</sup>

There is certainty in the preceding quote. Certainty is a product of a particular discursive worldview. Jerome Bruner describes two alternative discourses of thought: the narrative and the paradigmatic.<sup>7</sup> Merlin Donald offers this synopsis of Bruner’s position:

Narrative imagination constructs stories and historical accounts of events. Paradigmatic imagination seeks logical truth. Narrative skill develops early and naturally in children, whereas the logical-scientific skills that support paradigmatic thought emerge only after systematic education. The differences between these modes of thought run very deep, even to the definition of truth employed by each. In modern culture, the narrative mode still predominates in the arts, while the paradigmatic predominates in the sciences.<sup>8</sup>

The logical-scientific discourse of consciousness seeks to reduce the indiscernible and transitory patterns of the natural world to definables, systemizing, and collapsing the observable world into measurable, controllable, predictable bits. However, our application of logic is more subjective than we would like to believe. Logical-scientific discourse is a function of the human need to create order within growth. Logical cognition is the scaffolding that stabilizes our discursive consciousness. As in architecture, it determines the specifications for further discourse, yielding ever more accurate solutions. Logical-scientific methods are primarily mathematical and quantitative rather than metaphorical and philosophical since measurements are much more replicable and verifiable than the “moonbeams and fairy dust” of qualitative knowledge.<sup>9</sup> The logical-scientific discourse of consciousness transforms its knowledge models into cartographic certainties, each named quantity a colored pin on the map of knowledge, with nothing of validity beyond evident boundaries.

In the discourse of the paradigmatic and scientific consciousness, the range of possibility beyond the boundaries is improbable — neither credible as fact, nor usable as point of reference — since it has yet to be plotted, graphed, and measured. That which cannot be measured is considered speculation at best, certainly not knowledge, unlikely to exist as we would like to believe it does, mere “philosophical Styrofoam.”<sup>10</sup> We use cartographic models that we can manipulate, redraft, and make a presentation of as viable solutions to observation — *measurement models* — to take measure of our experience of the natural and external world. Repositioning, as a process, is not compatible with the reductive demands of measurement models. Poststructuralist repositioning does not produce new knowledge scientifically, but rather, discursively and parabolically.

The scientific method for the observation and report and paradigmatic construction of new knowledge has rules first delineated by René Descartes in 1639 in *The Discourse on Method*, and further mapped in Isaac Newton’s 1686 publication *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (or *Newton’s Principia*). Descartes’s method sought solutions that were certain, requiring that the mind first be rid of all preconceptions, and that the problem being observed then be reduced to mathematical form, employing “the minimum number of axioms, or self-evident propositions, to shape it.”<sup>11</sup> Descartes invented analytic geometry to further reduce the problem’s description to a set of numbers, applying the rules of algebra to arrive at a true result.

Newton enumerated four rules that would become the scientific method, a remarkably successful model of a particular cognitive district modality for the creation of knowledge. First, to admit no superfluity of causes to natural things “than such as are both true and sufficient to explain the appearances.” Second, that the same natural effects, wherever they are observed in Nature, would be uniformly assigned the same causes. Third, that the qualities of a phenomena or bodies observed through experiment were universally applicable to phenomena and bodies everywhere. Finally, that all propositions inferred by the direct induction of empirical evidence are acceptable as close to certainty, in spite of all other conjecture or hypotheses, until or unless some other observable phenomena occurs that might refine the accuracy of the proposition or define an exception.<sup>12</sup> Only the paradigmatic solution is of import in logical-scientific discourse; only the inductive solution bears the academic nomenclature of certainty. Such is the discourse of Science. The scientific method has become in itself the architect of whole maps of bodily identity, classifying those identities within its positivist framework. Within so certain a discourse, names are true; they are logical abstractions based on undistorted evidence. They are fixed representative models, reductive discourses. They are maps through which bodies are located and named or enumerated with certainty. They are incapable of desire, impervious to trauma.

But what if newly encountered maps tell me to build myself an ugly body? Such has been the case for me both personally and socially. And in my own case, certainty has brought only injury.

### **Original Body Maps**

There are anomalies within named structures that allow uncertainty to be found there. According to Kuhn, it is the emergence of unanswered or unanswerable question(s) that provides the impetus to shift to a newer paradigmatic sense — to rename a body of knowledge. To rename a body. Thomas Gieryn reveals that “(n)o completely accurate and detailed map ever settles the lay of the land; it just begets more maps.”<sup>13</sup>

Architecture is a discipline of structures and constraints, utilizing old maps. Abstract and theoretical structures become hand-drafted or computer-aided designs which become three-dimensional constructions. These are structures and constructions constrained by client needs and proclivities, budget limitations, site surveys and drilling samples, local contextual fit, general cultural norms, material costs and availability, usage specifications, time windows, structural safety standards, building codes, city or local ordinances, property lines, labor union and general contractor agreements — even regional weather, water tables, and geological phenomena. An architectural design is an effort to fit each and all of these normalizing constraints.

But I enjoyed freehand and life drawing classes more than any architectural design course I have ever taken. Why? I think because, in stark contrast to architectonic constraint, I saw that free-hand drawings tended to migrate around the constraints presented by perceptions of accuracy and measurements. It was the perceptual migration we know as inherent to all forms of dialogue; vocal dialogues, mute dialogues, dialogues wherein the encountered species or material is allowed to “tell” what it is, wants to be, and how to make it so. Undulating in the capricious stir of memory and observation, patterns for coherent readings tighten and unravel. Perception moves from what once was to what now is. What will be is no longer certain. As observer, I am also participant, responding to each “telling,” to each taking in of the eye and senses, to each incipient shift in understanding, with a stroke upon the page, with a response. An alternate to reality. A place marker. Not always certain.

Mark Turner argues that the projection of bodily stories and their inherently uncertain models is fundamental to the construction of a narrative and literary discourse of consciousness.<sup>14</sup> According to Turner’s theory, rudimentary stories first come into existence as a precursor to the development of oral and literary language skills. Early sensemaking and learning proceed from un verbalized narrative understandings. Growth is initiated through visual and physically senses embodying spatial understandings.

Spatially embodied stories hold a position foundational to all compounding discourse that will follow — Bronwyn Davies writes that as children “we learn the patterns and meanings of our language as embodied patterns and meanings.”<sup>15</sup> Before spoken language blooms we possess tools that we have already used successfully in shaping a particularly human experience of how the world works and how one interacts with the world. Childhood agency in early development demands repetition, the bodily appropriation of subjectified roles and fictionalized behaviors played out physically, visually, over and over again. Embodied stories are retained in cognition as what Mark Johnson has described in the following quote as “image schemata.”

If we are to experience our world as a connected and unified place that we can make sense of, then there must be repeatable pattern and structure in our experiences. Image schemata *are* those *recurring structures of, or in, our perceptual interactions, bodily experiences, and cognitive operations*. These schematic structures have a relatively small number of parts or components that stand in very definite relations to one another. So whenever a single schema is instantiated in a number of different experiences or images, these same parts and relations recur.<sup>16</sup>

Embodied identities are constituted in the recurrence of image schemata, memories of possible subject positions over time, subject over time to the brain’s continual processing of “various additions, incorporations, emendations, and overwritings of content.”<sup>17</sup> The image schemata that form bodily potential and embodied possibility are metaphors. Our bodies are like Arthur C. Danto’s “deviant utterances” deviating from logical certainties and humanist definitions.<sup>18</sup> Embodied image schemata are not the solutions to ourselves but the patterns that serve to reposition us. Such patterns are not fixed; they are motile. They are unsettling.

Each schema mediates a preceding image diaphanously, so that the previous shape and meaning shows through. Each narrative-metaphorical model acts as an extant ripple of contiguous models. They are palimpsests revealing embedded embodiments. The significance of image schemata is in both their recurrence and their embeddedness, as with a series of Russian nesting dolls, moving at the same time both outward and inward, moving like the patterns of hubcap spokes on the tires of a traveling automobile, moving forward, yet perceivable as reversing itself, spinning backwards, adjusting its directions, the speeds of its rotations, its positions. Uncertain.

The mind aligns and compares embodied patterns, repositioning them in comparison to knowledge already felt and formed from ongoing discourses of instantiated meaning. In the process of the repositioning, knowledge is fashioned in bodily relation to prior and less complex knowledge.

## Injury

From the represented shall come that which overturns the representation.<sup>19</sup>

I began this essay with a reflexive accounting of my own self-image, the little boy looking at and believing in the objective irrefutable reality of his face in the mirror. Why was it so easy to presume ugliness as my condition? Why, as yet a child, was I so certain? Certainty is injurious to development... what discourse predicated my body's injury?

Development, that process which gives rise to both cognition and affect, is an activity that brings into being structures that define the boundaries between self and other. In other words, identity formation (or meaning-making) is an ongoing process in which the boundaries between self and other become structured, lost, and reformed. The activity of meaning-making, of organizing and making sense of the world, and then losing that coherence and sense of self to a newly emerging way of being and making sense are the foundations of the constructive-developmental approach; questions regarding the form and process of meaning-construction are this orientation's preoccupation.<sup>20</sup>

In the preceding passage, Jane Kroger introduces her readers to the identity theory of psychologist Robert Kegan. To Kegan, the process of identity formation is a matter of defining equilibriums, a balancing and re-balancing of past selves and post-selves "in an ongoing process of change that may continue over the course of the life-span."<sup>21</sup> Past selves are de-subjectified when they no longer make sense, when they are no longer useful, when they one by one create contradiction in the successive "cultures of embeddedness" serving to hold each version of identity secure until the appropriate time for it to be let go. And yet past selves are never lost; they become the property of a newer, more differentiated self. In Kegan's terminology, a past self is no longer "subject" (self), but "object" (other) and raw material in the service of identity construction.

*The incorporative self*, embedded in basic reflexes and sensations, yields to a new impulsive balance, and is gained again as an object within the toddler's agency. *The impulsive self*, embedded in the child's intransigent perceptions of the world, yields to a new imperial balance, and is gained again as an object within the child's agency. *The imperial self*, embedded in the youngster's own self-sufficient needs and interests, yields to a new interpersonal balance, and is gained again as an object within the youngster's agency to make use of. *The interpersonal self*, embedded in the teenager's need for the approval and acceptance of others deemed trustworthy, yields to a new institutional balance, and is gained again as an object within the teenager's agency to make use of. *The institutional self*, embedded in the young adult's public frameworks of participation organizing citizenship, religion, career, schooling and ethnicity, yields a new interindividual balance, and is gained again as an object within the young adult's agency to make use of. At this point, the bearer of an identity already has agency over multiple objectified selves, useful in the continuing architecture of a

modern humanist identity. At this final stage, the *interindividual self* is purported to have become "open to its own re-creation through ongoing contact and exchanges with other individuals and systems, also open to change and redefinition."<sup>22</sup>

Yet I argue that it is the objectification of self in modern identity theory that becomes the source of heinous injury to the body. Personal agency is always at the crux of transitions in the modern self, since, as exemplified in Kegan's theory, past selves must be relinquished by the identity if development is to proceed to a new state of equilibrium and the mitigation of internal contradiction. Kegan's "evolutionary truces," establishing balances between new "subject" and newly relinquished "object," are constructions intended to eradicate developmental uncertainties and maintain a steady progress to maturity. But Kegan's conception of personal agency is located within a positivist discourse of humanist theory which dictates that there is a definite and empirical cause for every effect and that enough progressive causes strung together will eventually catalyze an essential effect, a product which is complete, in this case a fully, adult, modern man. To make a modern individual Kegan presumes a personal agency yields from an "agonistic relationship between the self and other and between the self and society."<sup>23</sup>

Kegan describes the transitions between normative stations in an individual's development. (I will use the masculine reference in the following paragraphs since I essentially discuss my own identity-formation.) In Kegan's model, "individuals are conceived as being in relation to something external to themselves...which acts forcefully upon them and against which they can pit themselves" in the heroic fight to make the choices that produce a rational, coherent, unified identity.<sup>24</sup> Each self is essentially translated from subjectification to objectification. At the border of each translation of self there is loss and dissolution, a temporary collapse into meaninglessness as holding environments for embodiment give way.

The incorporative loses the security of the mother's cradling arms, the whole world to an infant settled into the bosom's sensory delights; the impulsive self loses the incessant bodyguard of the family as the outer social world of schooling welcomes the child into the classroom; the imperial self loses the security of gender peer groupings that work to shield the body from the vulnerabilities of puberty and emerging individuality; the interpersonal self will eventually lose the company of key intimate social relationships, each loss a tragedy of potentially all-consuming proportions; the institutional self can become utterly disassociated, with the inexorable disenchantment with initially marshalling institutional affiliations; only the interindividual self, the one most acquainted with injury of these compartmentalizations, finds its completion in the certainty that it has nothing more to lose. Thus, the complete and interindividual man becomes the bearer of the burdens for others. Each loss brings mourning; each loss becomes an

enduring sorrow, folded into the interstices of identity. The interindividual identity is purported to be the best to which we can attain. Thus we may construct the modern man, steeped in injury.

### **(Re)positioning**

I was told I was an ugly child. The mirror told me. I couldn't hide my deformed face, so I hid my smile. I hid my voice. I let my teachers name me. I allowed the logical-scientific discourse that says that "seeing is believing," name me. I was illegitimate. I was casually told by a professor that none of my undergraduate tragedy would have befallen me if I had chosen the right school for someone like me, more of a trade school — Pratt Institute's school of architecture perhaps — a schooling not quite so taxing for someone as limited, as fixed, as I. That was about the last time a professor in Cooper's architecture program even bothered to speak to me. By the time I was in the process of applying for a transfer from the School of Architecture to the School of Art at The Cooper Union in New York, I had yet to rediscover my own embodied agency for naming myself through discourse. Through my tears, I still sought mirrors and certainty. Mirrors and smoke. Smoke and mirrors and the presentation of a reality I could believe in.

Yet, I could never quite finish the self-portrait. I still do not quite believe what I see when I look in a mirror. I am frozen in the moment before pencil touches paper, unable to parse the truth. I am as I have been told: I am fearful, the sinful, the ugly, the subjugated. I am conquered; I am the monster, a sullen and piteous creature. I am lost in the dark. I am unable to see the future. Long before I was born, Western discourse told of my coming ugliness, founding and fixing the meaning of my body "more than any transparent and transhistorical meaning of black skin."<sup>25</sup> Blended together, whiteness and Westness together create static figures for my body to occupy. These are my prophecies.

The charcoal and bloodied bodies of victims that hang about the American visual cultural landscape are the heralds of my subordination. I am pinned to the sky, a figure frozen against a tableau of tall trees and accusing fingers. It is not difficult to imagine the voices of those who have named me, raw with the stench of a Sunday morning barbecue, pinched with the strain of shouting invectives over the din of the gathered mob, sounding very much like that of Charles Carroll in his treatise, *The Negro A Beast*, holding that Negroes lacked a human soul:

But for the existence of the lower apes we, at this late day, would have no alternative than to decide that the Negro is the sole representative of his species or that he is a man. But with this family, shading up from the Lemur to the Negro, we are enabled, with the aids of Scripture and the sciences, to determine that the Negro is a member

of it. Thus this interesting family of animals, though unfit for general domestic purposes, are invaluable to man in that they enable to him determine the Negro's proper position in the universe — that he is simply an ape.<sup>26</sup>

The prefiguration of apishness is a harsh and certain inhabitation. In unfulfillment I am fulfilled. The screams of brutes are not heard; I am positioned in anthropomorphic misery. In order to reconstitute this modern conception of the African American mystique — in order to soften my body and tell of *postmodern* names — in order to restore the agency that allows me to embody a discourse rather than be disembodied, classified and delimited by it, I turn to the poetic representations of sociologist Laurel Richardson. Richardson describes the “poetic representation of lives” as that which “reveals the process of self-construction, the reflexive basis of self-knowledge, the inconsistencies and contradictions of a life spoken as a meaningful whole” by a poem that has the simultaneous quality of acting as a whole to make sense of its parts, while it as a whole can be experienced through its parts or subtexts.<sup>27</sup> Richardson also writes that poetry, “built as it is on speech as an embodied activity, touches both the cognitive and the sensory in the speaker and the listener” and touching us “where we live, in our bodies.”<sup>28</sup>

In my attempt to figure myself out I will return to the transformational agency of my own body. I can trust its uncertainty. When I was a child, I spake as a child. My body verifies the memories embodied here. I still do what I first did when I learned to occupy the spaces provided for my body. I still stand on the outside, seen but not heard, but not as a mere spectator. No. Rather, as a creator of new bodies of knowledge to converge upon the center and concatenate outward beyond the boundaries. I am mad. I am genius. I am author.

As I write about my body, it feels strong and uncertain. It is a child again. I can kick my legs out. I can move my body wherever I choose. I can tell about its strength. I can paint it. I can sing it. I can stomp it. I can reconstruct the fragments of my broken body. I can move it near to other bodies, blend my body with other selves. Past selves. No body will be discarded. I can be beautiful. I can (re)imagine. I can say my new and changing names.

## NOTES

1. Graeme Sullivan, “Artistic Thinking as Transcognitive Practice: A Reconciliation of the Process-product Dichotomy,” *Visual Arts Research* 27, no. 1 (2002): 212.
2. Nelson Sizer and H.S. Drayton, *Panorama of Man*. Frontispiece of the book. *Heads and Faces and How to Study Them: A Manual of Phrenology and Physiognomy for the People* (1885).

3. David Bayles and Ted Orland, *Art and Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking* (Santa Cruz: Image Continuum Press, 1993), 16.
4. Jacques Ellul, *The Betrayal of the West*, trans. M.J. O'Connell (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 19.
5. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 23.
6. Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (New York: D. Appleton, 1896).
7. Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).
8. Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 257.
9. Charles Van Doren, *A History of Knowledge* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992) and Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 176.
10. Gross and Levitt, *Higher Superstition*, 98.
11. Van Doren, *History of Knowledge*, 204.
12. *Ibid.*, 209-10.
13. Thomas Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 11.
14. Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
15. Bronwyn Davies, *(In)scribing Body/Landscape Relations* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2000), 43.
16. Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 79, italics in original.
17. Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1991), 112.
18. Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 177.
19. Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 135.
20. Jane Kroger, *Identity in Adolescence: The Balance between Self and Other*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 146.
21. *Ibid.*, 147.
22. *Ibid.*, 160.
23. Bronwyn Davies, *A Body of Writing, 1990-1999* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2000), 55.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 4.
26. Charles Carroll, *The Negro a Beast; or, in the Image of God?* (St. Louis: American Book and Bible House, 1900), cited in *Documents of American Prejudice*, ed. Joshi (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 308-9.
27. Lauren Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (Rutgers, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 143.
28. *Ibid.*