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Dances with Things

Material Culture and the Performance of Race

Robin Bernstein

In a photograph from Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, a light-skinned woman stands behind a larger-than-life-size caricature of an African American eating a slice of watermelon (fig. 1).[1] The young man, shoeless and dressed in rags, perches on a fence. The woman poses behind the cutout; her hand gently overlaps with the caricature's. She bares her teeth, miming her own bite from the fruit. A typed caption on the back of the image indicates that the photograph was taken at the Hotel Exposition, a gathering of professionals from the hotel industry, in New York City's Grand Central Palace. At some point, a curator at the Beinecke penciled "c. 1930."



Figure 1. A woman poses with caricature at the Hotel Exposition in New York's Grand Central Palace, circa 1930. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

How might one read this ugly, enigmatic image, this chip of racial history archived at Yale? Taking a cue from Robyn Wiegman, who has influentially called for a transition from questions of "why" to "how" with regard to race, one might bracket questions about the woman and her interiority: Who was she? Why did she pose as she did? What did her actions mean

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to her? These questions are unanswerable not only because the woman never archived a written explanation of her intentions but also, and more significantly, because the "whys" of race are often unstable and inconsistent, unspoken or unspeakable. Given the "difficulties of handling *why*," Wiegman suggests, scholars might "take refuge" in the "*how*," trusting the "how" ultimately to register the "why."[2] In the "watermelon" photograph, "how" questions accrue around the caricature: how did this text produce historically located meanings? Possible answers appear swiftly as the caricature channels a panoply of racist libels. The cutout refers to narratives of the "Old South" through its depiction of a black youth outdoors, wearing ill-fitting clothes that suggest poverty and parental neglect.[3] The caricature's bandaged toe might connect to the racist motif of African Americans attacked by animals, particularly alligators.[4] One could place the image in conversation with films of the 1920s and 1930s, linking the rural setting to that of, say, *Gone with the Wind* (1939) or the action of eating with that of the African American characters in *Our Gang*/*The Little Rascals* (1922–44), who stereotypically feasted on watermelon. The scrawl on the fence, "I LOVE RASTUS" (with each *s* illiterately reversed), connects the figure to the turn-of-the-century Cream of Wheat icon of the same name and, in combination with the oversized slice of watermelon, associates African Americans with consumable commodities. In these readings, the caricature embodies a dehumanizing expression of racism or a tool by which white Americans could symbolically commodify or otherwise control African Americans long after slavery ended.[5]

The "watermelon" photograph constructs race, however, through neither an isolated woman and her "whys" nor an isolated caricature and its textual "hows," but instead through a complex interaction between the two figures. The woman entangled herself with the wooden caricature: she slipped her thumb in the crevice of its palm, grasped its forearm, pretended to consume what it consumed. As she mingled her body with the caricature's, posing so they might together flatten into a photograph, she complicated and disturbed the distinction between person and text, "why" and "how." Of the two subjects that posed at the Hotel Exposition in about 1930, only one was sentient, but she took her cues from the inanimate caricature. The woman arranged her body in response to the caricature's coordinates; it prompted, inspired, and structured her actions. In this dense interaction between thing and human, the caricature scripted the woman's performance.

The term *script* denotes not a rigid dictation of performed action but, rather, a necessary openness to resistance, interpretation, and improvisation. As photographs in this essay will show, the woman's pose was not unique, but it was not compelled: other people posed with parallel wooden cutouts, in roughly the same historical moment, in different ways. When I describe elements of material culture as "scripting" human actions, I am

not suggesting that people lack agency. Rather, I am proposing that agency, intention, and racial subjectivation co-emerge through everyday physical encounters with the material world. I use the term *script* as a theatrical practitioner might: to denote an evocative primary substance from which actors, directors, and designers build complex, variable performances that occupy real time and space. A play script, whether *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare or *Operation Hamlet* by Richard Foreman, combines properties of elasticity and resilience so that the play remains recognizable even as it inspires a unique live performance each night.[6] That which I call a "scriptive thing," like a play script, broadly structures a performance while simultaneously allowing for resistance and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable.

As focus shifts from the caricature or the woman in isolation to the movements enacted between them, questions of "why" versus "how" burst from their binary configuration into a triangle: psychological questions of why a person acts and textual questions of how material culture produces meaning give way to questions of how humans perform with racially meaningful, three-dimensional material culture. In the moment captured in the "watermelon" photograph, a caricature was insentient but active, while a person was agential but reactive. These complexities demand a new question: how do people dance with things to construct race?

Scriptive Things

Things, but not objects, script actions. Martin Heidegger and more recent scholars of "thing theory" define an object as a chunk of matter that one looks through or beyond to understand something human.[7] A thing, in contrast, asserts itself within a field of matter. For example, when an amateur cook uses a knife to chop an onion, the knife might function as an object that the amateur barely notices; in this scenario, the knife is only a tool used to obtain the chopped onion that the human desires. For a trained chef, however, a knife can never be an object: for such a person, each edge of a knife glitters individually with potential and stubbornness, with past, present, and future motions of slicing and chopping.[8] The trained chef's knife is thus a thing with which a chef negotiates, while an amateur's knife is an object to the extent that it is only a means to an end. If the amateur's knife should slip and cut a finger, however, that knife suddenly becomes a thing that has leapt up and asserted itself, a thing that demands to be reckoned with.[9] The difference between objects and things, then, is not essential but situational and subjective.

Objects are important insofar as they manifest, respond to, or transmit meaning that originates in humans. A thing demands that people confront it on its own terms; thus, a thing forces a person into an awareness

of the self in material relation to the thing. When a thing makes a human body a "thing among things," it upsets the boundary between person and object.[10] The thing and person are unmoored from fixed positions of difference and twirl in sudden mutual orbit, each subject to the other's gravity. Thus the thing "names less an object than a particular subject-object relation."[11] The destabilizing interaction between human and thing constitutes what Arjun Appadurai called the "social life of things," or "the things-in-motion that illuminate their social context."[12] An object becomes a thing when it invites a person to dance.

Things are not alive, but people "behave," as W. J. T. Mitchell notes, "as if works of art had minds of their own, as if images had a power to influence human beings, demanding things from us, persuading, seducing, and leading us astray."[13] Thing theorists have eloquently explored the ways in which this animative power derives from the psychological investments of people or from a thing itself. However, things also literally shape human behaviors. A chef's knife, a laptop computer, and a wooden caricature all invite—indeed, create occasions for—repetitions of acts, distinctive and meaningful motions of eyes, hands, shoulders, hips, feet. These things are citational in that they arrange and propel bodies in recognizable ways, through paths of evocative movement that have been traveled before. Objects become things when they trigger what Joseph Roach calls "kinesthetic imagination" as a "faculty of memory"—as when a knife cuts a finger and the person to whom that finger is attached (or was attached, in the worst case) performs a dance of pain that is stylized through its citation of gender, class, age, race, and other categories of analysis.[14] Kinesthetic memory is a way of "thinking through movements—at once remembered and reinvented—the otherwise unthinkable, just as dance is often said to be a way of expressing the unspeakable."[15] Stylized bodily performances in everyday life are utterances of thoughts that cannot be expressed in words. These thoughts are neither conscious nor unconscious, neither wholly voluntaristic expressions of intention nor compulsory, mechanical movement. Things invite us to dance, and when we sweep them onto the dance floor, they appear to become animate.

At the deepest ontological level, then, performance is what distinguishes an object from a thing. In J. L. Austin's terms, objects are "constatives" in that what is most important lies beyond the material or the utterance (a constative describes something beyond itself: an amateur's knife is a means to a diced onion), whereas things are performatives in that they *do* something: they invite humans to move. Dances with things, too, are performative in that they constitute actions: they *think*, or, more accurately, they *are the act of thinking.* Things script meaningful bodily movements, and these citational movements think the otherwise unthinkable.

Determined and Implied Scripts

Things script performances in two ways: through orders and blandishments. Orders issue through *determined* actions that are necessary for a thing to function. For example, a novel's determined actions include opening the covers and reading English print from left to right. While it is possible to not open a book's covers and to use a novel as, say, a doorstop, that use redesignates the novel functionally as something other than a novel. To use an English-language, printed book as a book, one must open the covers and read words from left to right. These actions are broad and necessarily stable across time and geography.

The force of determined actions becomes clear through a close reading of E. W. Kemble's 1898 *A Coon Alphabet*.[16] Kemble—a white artist and writer who is best known for his advertising logos and for his illustrations in the first edition of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, an 1892 edition of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and works by Joel Chandler Harris and Paul Laurence Dunbar—wrote and illustrated this vicious alphabet book in which African American characters are scalded, stung by bees, bitten by alligators, pummeled, and battered. In *A Coon Alphabet*, Kemble directs violence particularly at African American characters who reach toward social advancement. For example, Kemble opens his book with the rhyme, "A is for Amos / what rides an ole mule / so he can be early / each monin ter school."[17] The final line of the verse is accompanied by an illustration of the mule pitching Amos violently toward a building marked "Gramer Schole." Thus the book ridicules African Americans' education and connects their learning to violence.

This literary-visual content combines crucially with the book's physical properties and the sequential actions that those properties script for the reader. Kemble formatted his alphabet book as an "alphabet array" or "worldly alphabet"—that is, one based on the repetition of the phrase "is for," as in "A is for Apple."[18] During the nineteenth century, this format became dominant over other types of alphabet books, such as the "body alphabet," in which contorting human figures represent each letter, or the "swallow alphabet," in which letters eat other letters or are eaten by children or animals. By listing objects from apple to zither, or people from archer to zany (jester), "alphabet arrays" seem to index the world, rendering it, in Patricia Crain's words, "graspable, and, most strikingly, obtainable."[19] As such, the alphabet book "initiates the individual into that world."[20]

Crain uses the terms *grasp*, *obtain*, and *initiate* figuratively, but the physical configuration of Kemble's book literalizes the first two and sheds new light on the third. In Kemble's book, each letter of the alphabet receives two pages of illustration. On the first page, the reader encounters the first three lines of a rhyme. For example (fig. 2), "D is for Didimus / what blew

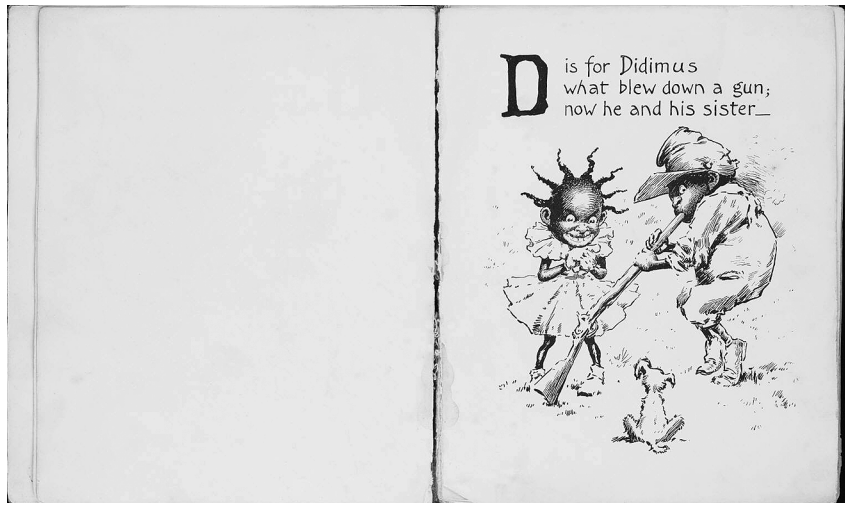


Figure 2. E. W. Kemble, *A Coon Alphabet* (New York and London: Russell, 1898), n.p. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

down a gun; / now he and his sister—". The incomplete rhyme and interrupted rhythm create a sense of tension and inevitability: the reader seeks the satisfaction of the rhyme's closure. The format of the book instructs the reader literally to grasp the page and turn it to obtain the missing portion of the rhyme. The next page (fig. 3) completes the rhyme in a way that brings violence upon the African American characters—a process repeated with differences twenty-four times in Kemble's book (two letter rhymes end without violence against African Americans: one verse ends with an African American character punching a fish, and another resolves without any violence when a group of three swimmers who thought they were threatened by a whale discover that the hump in the ocean is actually a floating watermelon). The reader's literal grasping-obtaining action doubles with the "worldly alphabet" book's figurative claim to render the world graspable and obtainable as knowledge; thus the reader physically causes the characters to meet their violent fate, while the format of the "worldly alphabet" configures that fate as an objective, phenomenological part of the world, as apparently unconstructed and discoverable as an apple.

Kemble scripted this meaningful action for the reader. He could have included each full rhyme in a two-page spread; instead he chose, less obviously, to leave every left-side page blank. No evidence suggests that Kemble consciously thought about the history of alphabet books or that he aimed to inculcate young readers of any race with a psychological urge to attack African Americans. Regardless of his conscious or unconscious intentions, upon which the archive is silent, Kemble designed the book so as to impel the reader's grasping-obtaining, to conflate that action

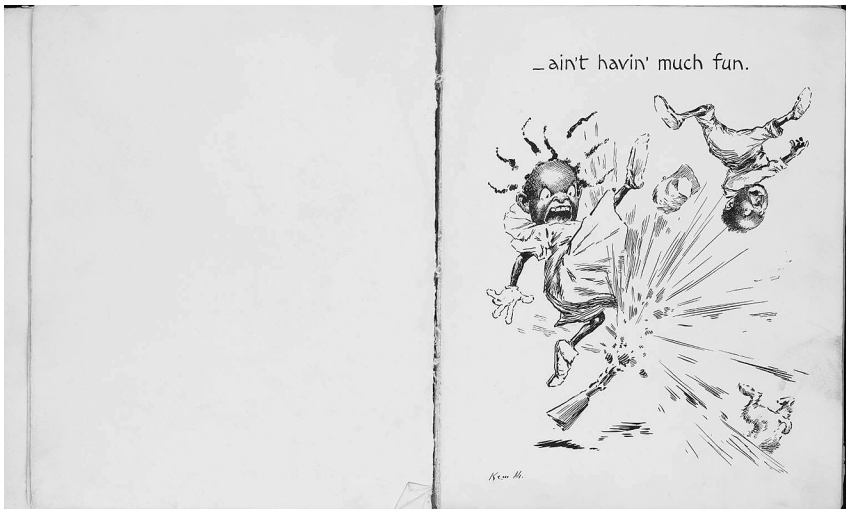


Figure 3. E. W. Kemble, *A Coon Alphabet* (New York and London: Russell, 1898), n.p. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

with the perpetration of violence against African American characters, to substitute satisfaction at a completed rhyme for any other emotion one might feel while participating in violence—and to repeat that sequence twenty-four times.

The act of turning the page of Kemble's alphabet book, which Crain might call "initiation" into a world of alphabetically indexed, naturalized violence against African Americans, I would describe as "enscription"—that is, interpellation through a scriptive thing that combines narrative with materiality to structure behavior. Scriptive things such as Kemble's alphabet book hail human actors as distinctly as a police officer crying out, "Hey, you there!"[21] Like the police, scriptive things leap out within a field, address an individual, and demand to be reckoned with. The ontological distinction between things and objects is that things *hail*. And they do so persistently, constantly, when we are alone and in groups, when we think about them and when we do not, when we respond obediently and when we resist, when we individually or collectively accept the invitation to dance, refuse it, accept but improvise new steps, or renegotiate, deconstruct, or explode roles of leader and follower. A hail demands a bodily response: turning to face the police or turning the page of the book. By answering a hail, by entering the scripted scenario, the individual is interpellated into ideology and thus into subjecthood.[22] Interpellation occurs not only or even mainly through verbal demands followed by bodily actions, as in Althusser's scenario, but through encounters in the material world: dances between people and things.

Kemble's alphabet book determinatively scripts the reader's grasping-obtaining action and, through that ritualistic behavior (repeated twenty-

four times), initiates or interpellates the reader into one specific version of the world—one in which violence against African Americans is as satisfying, inevitable, and banal as the act of turning a page in a book. To resist the script by, say, flipping the pages in reverse or random order is to interrupt linear alphabetization itself. Therefore, without executing the determined physical action, it is impossible to use Kemble's alphabet book as an alphabet book.

Things script behavior not only through determined actions that are required for function, but also through *implied* or *prompted* actions. A useful example appears in a black doll owned in the 1850s by Frances Eliza Hodgson, a white girl who would grow up to become Frances Hodgson Burnett, author of many best-selling children's books, including *The Secret Garden* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. This girl called her black doll "Uncle Tom." Imagining herself as "the wicked Legree," she tied the doll to a candelabra stand and whipped "Uncle Tom" with "insensate rage."[23] The child's actions did not proceed only from a psychological urge; rather, her performance of whipping responded to two distinct cultural prompts: Harriet Beecher Stowe's narrative and the materiality of the doll itself. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provided a preexisting scenario that the child entered through play. Her selection of one particular doll to play Uncle Tom was not random but was prompted by the doll's physical properties: its black face, its grin (which suggested, Burnett later wrote, that the doll was "enjoying the situation" of being "brutally lashed"), and the plaything's composition of gutta-percha, a form of rubber used in dolls specifically to enable them to survive physical abuse that would destroy a doll made of porcelain or wax.[24] No evidence suggests that the doll's manufacturer intended for a girl to name the black doll "Uncle Tom" or to whip it, but the plaything did script broadly violent play: black rubber dolls were manufactured, as patent applications for such dolls often specified, to withstand rough use, and this doll's smile suggested that violent play was acceptable, even enjoyable.[25] While the materiality of black ceramic figurines can, as Tavia Nyong'o suggests, propose "blackness as a hardened form of subjectivity,"[26] black rubber dolls configure blackness as an elastic form of subjectivity that can withstand blows without breaking. This elasticity enables the fun of roughhousing with rubber dolls to extend through practices that would shatter ceramic figures and thus terminate play. Burnett's material doll converged in its historical context with the plot scenario provided by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to prompt, inspire, and structure one child's performance of racial violence, a scene of subjection.[27]

A novel is itself a scriptive thing that issues both orders and blandishments. For example, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, when published in book form in English, determines that the reader, regardless of historical context, must open the covers to read the print from left to right; one cannot defy

this determined script and still use the novel as a novel. In Stowe's historical context of mid-nineteenth-century sentimental culture, however, the novel also cued or prompted a reader to weep at the death of Little Eva — another scene that Frances Hodgson Burnett performed, casting a white doll as Eva and herself as "all the weeping slaves at once."[28]

Burnett understood the novel's prompt to weep at Little Eva's death because she possessed "performance competence," a parallel to the concept of "literary competence" developed by reader-oriented critic Jonathan Culler. Culler argues that literature functions as a system of signs; just as comprehension of an individual word depends on competence in a linguistic system, comprehension of a single text depends on a minimal understanding of literary genre (for example, the competent reader approaches a novel, a scholarly monograph, and a dictionary with different expectations).[29] Similarly, the competent performer understands how a book or other thing scripts broad behaviors within her or his historical moment — regardless of whether or how the performer follows that script. Competence differs from literacy in both reading and performance: a reader who possesses literacy but not literary competence might read a novel and a scholarly monograph and understand each individual sentence while failing to understand the conventions and functions of the respective genres. In parallel, a person who possesses performance literacy but not performance competence would understand that a chair exists, literally, as an object to accommodate sitting, but would not understand that a beanbag chair and a Hepplewhite, as things, prompt different styles of sitting and that each of those practices of sitting is embedded in a system of culture, a *habitus*.[30]

Unlike an incompetent performer, who cannot decode a thing's invitation to dance, a resistant performer understands and exerts agency against the script. Often, however, an action that appears to be transgressive actually follows a script's range of implications. Oscar Wilde gestured toward transgressive scripting when he famously quipped, "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing."[31] The humor in Wilde's observation depends partially on the fact that laughter, in the nineteenth century or today, *is* a possible response to sentimentalism. To laugh at the death (or life) of Little Nell or Eva is not to exile oneself to a lunatic fringe but to indulge in an apparently resistant action that the text's script does permit — or even, covertly, invite (in contradiction, certainly, to the novelist's intention). Indeed, in November 1853, a young woman named Else Elisabeth Hysing Koren attended a theatrical production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and observed in her diary that the audience "laughed and clapped as loud as they could" at Little Eva's misfortunes.[32] This moment reveals a range of implied actions Stowe's novel scripted in its historical moment: it prompted actors to dramatize the work and audiences to pay to attend the show. (Koren was clearly familiar with the novel,

as she listed discrepancies between the book and the play in her journal.) Within the theater, some audience members laughed at Little Eva, while Koren's reference to the revelers as "they" suggests that she did not share their mirth (her evening was not a washout, however: she noted that the scenery was "pretty" and "the theater itself was attractive").[33]

The scriptive thing is a heuristic tool for dealing with incomplete evidence—and all evidence is incomplete—to make responsible, limited inferences about the past.[34] A brief tabulation of some performances considered heretofore suggests the evidentiary gaps that the scriptive thing can bridge. In the case of Frances Hodgson Burnett's performance of doll-play, the available evidence includes an adult's published reportage of her long-past thoughts, emotions, and actions; a narrative frame (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*) that structured the child's play; Burnett's description of the doll's appearance and composition; and contextualizing archival evidence relating to the manufacture of similar dolls and to other girls' practices with dolls in the 1850s. Burnett's actual gutta-percha doll, however, is not extant. E. W. Kemble's *A Coon Alphabet* presents an almost inverse configuration of evidence: in this case, evidence includes the material thing of the book; but no written archive, published or unpublished, attests to the producers' or consumers' intentions. We have contextualizing information in the history of alphabet books, but we have no corroborating archival evidence—no journal entry, no letter, no photograph or film clip, no eyewitness account—to tell us how living children interacted with Kemble's book. These disparities do not necessarily mean, however, that we can make more reliable inferences regarding performances involving Burnett's doll than regarding Kemble's book. To the contrary, we can make *more* reliable inferences about the *latter*, because it is possible that Burnett misremembered, distorted, or flat-out lied in her memoir, but it is not possible that no child ever turned the pages of Kemble's alphabet book. By reading things' scripts within historically located traditions of performance, we can make well-supported claims about normative aggregate behavior: in the 1890s, competent performers turned pages of picture books; in the 1850s, competent performers cried (and laughed, as Koren observed) at the death of Little Eva. And in the 1930s, recreational sites such as carnivals and arcades abounded with opportunities for Americans to pose for photographs in fantasy sets. We can best understand the steps in the "watermelon" photograph's dance in the context of these other, contemporary dances with similar moves.

Parallel Gestures: Arcade and Hotel Exposition

While there is much we do not know about the caricature, we do know that at least once, at the Hotel Exposition in New York City's Grand Cen-

tral Palace in approximately 1930, one light-skinned woman stood behind it and pretended to enter the scene and interact with a figure while posing for the camera. This gesture is a twice-behaved behavior that recapitulates other occasions in which humans interact with inanimates for the purpose of snapping a photograph: wax museums, life-sized photographic cutout figures of celebrities or politicians, and, especially in the mid-twentieth century, arcade novelties in which people insert their bodies into wooden scenes.[35] In one such arcade scene (fig. 4), a girl enters a fantasy of regional America by posing in a covered wagon with wooden oxen (the canopy over the wagon, too, may be cleverly painted wood). The covered wagon is but one of many set pieces in which Americans posed in the early- to mid-twentieth century; also common were cutouts of boats, airplanes, cars, and trains.



Figure 4. Arcade photograph, mid-twentieth century. A girl performs a fantasy of regional America. Author's collection

Many performances in arcade sets provided a safely bounded space for play at transgression. "Jails," for example, were common: dating couples, families, or groups of friends posed in a wooden cell, often grasping the bars and snarling comically at the camera (fig. 5). Also common were crudely sexual and comic scenes, as in figure 6, in which a shirtless man in an apron scrubs a buxom, apparently nude woman who splays her legs open—a scene that combines mild gender transgression (a man in an apron) with an equally noncommittal sexual tease (an image of a woman's body simultaneously displayed and hidden, a sexual cartoon that substitutes for and blocks out real flesh).

The "watermelon" caricature appeared in about 1930 at the Hotel Exposition, a carnivalesque mélange of a business meeting, a county fair, and a consumer orgy. The Hotel Exposition, an annual gathering of businesspeople involved in the hotel industry, ran every year from 1915 through the 1960s and was usually located at New York's Grand Central Palace, a



Figure 5. Arcade photograph, inscribed on verso "2-1-1970." Eight people of varied ages pose in a set of the "Long Beach Jail." Author's collection

massive convention hall that occupied the city block between Lexington and Park avenues and Forty-sixth and Forty-seventh streets until it was demolished in 1964. Although the exposition was ostensibly for professionals in the hotel trade, it replicated many aspects of the arcades, boardwalks, and fairs that occasioned posed photographs in cutout scenery. Carnivalesque amusements at the Hotel Exposition attracted members of the public, often to the point that they outnumbered the professionals. In November 1929, for example, only three weeks after the stock market crashed, more than 100,000 people — most of them members of the public rather than hotel industry professionals — attended Hotel Exposition events that ranged from formal lectures and "Hotel Accountants' Day" to cooking competitions, dances, and a "musical extravaganza" titled "A Trip to Havana." The main attraction every year, however, consisted of hundreds of booths in which manufacturers and distributors of food, furniture, appliances, and other items displayed their wares.[36] Some of these exhibits capitalized upon nostalgia by using county fair motifs, as when the booth for Kirsch's Richmond Inn displayed, in 1924, the "world's largest ham," a 94-pound slab of pork bequeathed by a 1,064-pound hog owned by E. Lee Trinkle, the governor of Virginia.[37] Other booths celebrated modern technology as they hawked inventions to steam-clean clothes, wash spinach, and ventilate buildings.[38]

Interactive pleasure suffused the exposition's paeans to both modernity and nostalgia, urban and rural America. An automatic door, now a fixture in every supermarket, debuted at the Hotel Exposition in 1931. This "Stanley Magic Door," which pleasurably "mystified" visitors, performed its technological "magic" only in response to a person's movements.[39] Nostalgic displays, too, used interaction to attract attention: in a highlight of the 1924 exposition, visitors to the third floor of the palace encountered an

artificial stream "liberally stocked" with live trout. For fifty cents, one could rent a pole, fish for ten minutes, and take home whatever one caught ("a tagging machine was in operation, so that the fish might be taken anywhere without the owner running afoul of the New York State Game Commission").[40] Visitors sampled produce, rode electric hobbyhorses, played mechanical golf games, threw suction darts, tossed bottles into automatic glass smashers, and stuck their fingers into the hose of a vacuum cleaner to assess its strength.[41] By 1937, visitors had come to expect physical interaction with the displays, forcing exhibitors to post Hands Off signs to mark *non*-interactive exhibits, such as confectionary sculptures prepared by master chefs.[42]



Figure 6. Arcade photograph, mid-twentieth century. A woman and man insert their heads into a risqué scene. Author's collection

In this fairlike atmosphere in which manufacturers enticed consumers and hotel professionals with interactive fun, one woman posed for a photograph behind a caricature of an African American youth eating watermelon. It is possible that the woman in figure 1 ducked behind a decoration not intended for such use, but the context makes it far more likely that this caricature was yet one more interactive display—that it existed, like the cutout covered wagon, for the purpose of staging a performance to be photographed. Evidence within the photograph itself supports the supposition that the caricature sanctioned, and indeed existed to shape, a human pose. The lighting is not haphazard but relatively even; it minimizes shadows by illuminating from left, right, and above. The caricature stands several feet in front of a wall or painted background, which allows space for a human body (if the caricature had not been intended for interactive fun, the gap between the wood and the wall would have wasted expensive space on the floor of the expo). The carefully coiffed woman, with not a hair out



Figure 7. Arcade photograph, mid-twentieth century. A man and woman insert their heads above a cutout scene. The man poses as a primitivized, muscular man in an animal skin, while the woman poses as a bathing-suit-clad, curvy woman (a likely reference to Tarzan and Jane, or to "strong man" vaudeville acts). The scene includes depictions of what may be footlights, implying that the two characters are performing on stage. The primitivized man holds a chain but does not appear to be shackled. Author's collection

of place, looks not like she just climbed over or through a fence that extends beyond the frame of the photograph but, rather, like she walked comfortably behind a delimited segment of scenery. Her pose is still, symmetrical, with no sense that she is about to bolt if she gets caught where she does not belong. The woman's absence of tension or apprehension manifests itself especially clearly in her left hand, which grasps the caricature's hand gently: her pinkie floats as elegantly as that of a duchess holding a teacup. The caricature's scale is distorted, yet it conforms generally to the scale of a human body; the thing is neither two feet tall nor twelve. Indeed, the limited distortion aligns the caricature with other cutouts, as in figure 6, where the aproned man's elongated legs are out of scale to both the human poser and the woman in the bath. The "watermelon" woman's mischievous smile suggests transgression—an intimation, perhaps, that she ignored a Hands Off sign and inserted her body where it was not permitted. However, many cutouts built mischief into their scenes, as in "jails" or the risqué "bathing" image. The sense of naughtiness in the jail, bath, or watermelon photographs derives from the outlaw, sexual, or racial content of the scenarios, not the act of stepping into the scene.

Even when an image does not determine a gender-transgressive performance (as the "bath" cutout does in its aproned man), it can still



Figure 8. Arcade photograph, mid-twentieth century. A woman and man play at gender transgression. Author's collection

imply one. Take, for example, a cutout scene of Tarzan and Jane. A dating couple, strolling on a boardwalk, pauses to have a snapshot taken: a man inserts his head in the hole above Tarzan's muscle-bound body, and a woman substitutes her face for that of the scantily clad Jane (fig. 7). A second couple encounters the same scene and conceives an apparently creative transgression: she floats her head above the ape-man's body, and he, grinning for the camera, plays Jane (fig. 8). In this example, the gender-normative and gender-transgressive performances are both scripted by the thing (much as weeping and laughing are both scripted by Little Nell's or Eva's death). An appeal of the Tarzan/Jane cutout is that its constraints allow for a temporary, Bakhtinian inversion that reinforces rather than undermines existing configurations of power.[43]

What is most striking about the Tarzan/Jane cutout is not only that it prompts a heterosexual couple to perform both "proper" and "improper" gender, but that it "projects" (to use Elaine Scarry's word) a heterosexual couple—as does the "bath" cutout.[44] Philip Fisher echoes Scarry in his assertion that "most things *imply the human* by existing like jigsaw pieces whose outer surfaces have meaning only when it is seen that they are designed to snap into position against the body"[45]—an image literalized in wooden cutouts that provide negative space for and thus arrange the human body. While a jigsaw puzzle calls for positive and negative curves to snap together, a wooden cutout calls for humans to shape themselves—either their heads, as in the "bathing" image, or their full bodies, as in the covered

wagon and jail sets — into the absent pieces. The Tarzan/Jane cutout "projects" or "implies" heterosexuality by inviting a woman to configure herself as the positive to fill the void above one figure and a man to do the same with the other — and which person performs which role depends on whether the couple follows the "proper" or "improper" script. Put differently, the human body functions as what Fisher calls a "latent presence" in things such as a spoon, which "is, at one end, a negative of the hand, designed to fit in the space left within a fist," while "the other end of the spoon is the positive of the mouth."[46] Certainly, two men or two women, or a woman and a man who are not a couple, could pose in the Tarzan/Jane cutout, just as the positive end of a spoon could (and not infrequently does) enter a jar rather than a mouth. Nevertheless, the concavity of a flatware spoon is designed in relation to the curve and size of a mouth, not a jar, and the Tarzan/Jane cutout exaggerates polarized, sexualized gender (Tarzan with bulging muscles, Jane with tiny waist and oversized breasts) in relation to the normalized gender polarity of a heterosexual couple. While the Tarzan/Jane cutout could physically accommodate the pose of a same-gender pair, it actively invites — scripts — the performance of a mixed-gender couple in *either* the gender-normative *or* gender-transgressive configuration. Thus the Tarzan/Jane cutout "projects" or "implies" a heterosexual couple, which in turn functions as a "latent presence" in the thing.

The "watermelon" cutout, like arcade sets of covered wagons or jails, provided space for a face and body; and as much as a spoon addresses a mouth and the Tarzan/Jane cutout projects a mixed-gender pair, the "watermelon" cutout invited a white person to enter its scene in New York City's Grand Central Palace circa 1930. Many arcade photographs invited posers to mingle with black caricatures, as is the case in figure 9, in which two light-skinned children enter a giganticized box of Fairbanks Gold Dust Washing Powder.[47] The

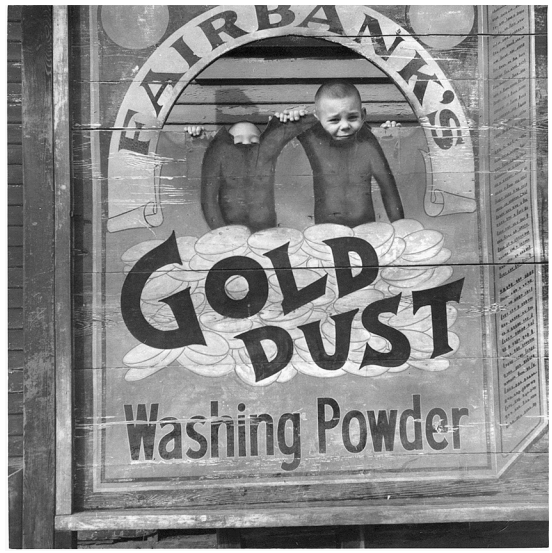


Figure 9. Arcade photograph, inscribed on verso "2/6/63." Two light-skinned children insert their faces above the bodies of the Gold Dust Twins logo on a giganticized box of Fairbank's Gold Dust Washing Powder. Author's collection

icon of Gold Dust soap—the wooden bodies against which the children pose their faces (with differing levels of logistical success)—was the Gold Dust Twins, a grotesque and immensely popular caricature of African American children. The designer of the Gold Dust Twins was none other than E. W. Kemble, author and illustrator of *A Coon Alphabet*. The watermelon caricature and the Gold Dust cutout, as much as *A Coon Alphabet*, hailed their users and interpellated them, through scripted actions of posing, into a subjecthood that was specifically raced white. As difficult as it is to imagine an African American who lived in a time of Jim Crow laws deriving pleasure from these things, it is even more difficult to imagine the makers of the Gold Dust and "watermelon" cutouts intending African Americans or other people of color to pose within the respective scenes. The Gold Dust and "watermelon" cutouts projected white users much as the Tarzan/Jane cutout projected a cross-gender couple.

The watermelon or Gold Dust cutouts and the Tarzan/Jane cutout ultimately framed not just human faces but identities: whiteness and heterosexuality, respectively. Interpellation, in Althusser's classic scenario, begins with a kind of framing: the police officer calls out, "Hey, you there!" and the individual implicates—frames—herself by turning around. The scriptive thing hails a person by inviting her to dance. The person ritualistically engages the matter, and in that process, subjectivation—how one comes to "matter"—occurs. Interpellation occurs not only through performative utterances but also through thing-based enscription into identifiable, historicized traditions of performance from both the stage and everyday life.

The "watermelon" photograph invited a nonblack person to dance a dance of racial impersonation that Eric Lott famously called white people's "love and theft" of blackness.[48] Love and theft is inscribed in the caricature: the literal declaration of love scrawled on the fence post contrasts with the past physical violence marked by the young man's bandaged toe. The light-skinned woman performed love, or at least tenderness, in her gently curved left hand, even as she bared her teeth to thieve a bite of watermelon. By temporarily entering the scene and performing blackness, and by simultaneously stepping into a performance tradition of love and theft, this actor asserted not blackness but whiteness—a fraught endeavor for a woman whose name, according to the caption on the back of the photograph, was Helen Hernandez.

Helen Hernandez's Performance of Race

How might we understand Helen Hernandez's racial identity, and how does that understanding prompt a reevaluation of her dance with a caricatured thing? When Hernandez posed at the Hotel Exposition in about

1930, she did so in the midst of a series of dizzying revisions in the racial designation of people who might now call themselves Latina/o or Hispanic—revisions that made the 1920s, in the words of historian Mae M. Ngai, "an extraordinary time when immigration policy realigned and hardened racial categories in the law."[49] For people of Spanish and Latin American descent, this hardening dynamic crystallized around the questions of who was and was not white, and who could or could not immigrate to the United States. Three touchstones reveal the process by which some people—including, perhaps, Helen Hernandez—became legally fixed, in this moment, as white, while managing the cultural contestability of that whiteness. These touchstones were the Immigration Act of 1924, the 1930 census, and the 1940 census.

The 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act set a quota system by which immigration from any European nation was limited to 2 percent of the number of people from that country living in the United States at the time of the 1890 census; it also prohibited all immigration from Asia. North, Central, and South American countries, however, were exempt from national quotas. As Ngai notes, Mexicans, unlike people from Asian countries, were "not excluded from immigration on grounds of racial ineligibility because, for the purposes of naturalization, and therefore for immigration, the law deemed Mexicans to be white" (as Mexicans and Mexican Americans had been counted in the 1920 census).[50]

The 1930 census radically revised this designation by inventing a new racial category: "Mexican." The year Helen Hernandez may have attended the Hotel Exposition, 1930, was the only year in which the U.S. census designated "Mexican" as a race; thus, for the first time, the federal government formally identified a Latin American group as nonwhite.[51] Census workers were instructed to visually identify "all persons born in Mexico, or having parents born in Mexico, who were not definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese or Japanese" and to designate such people as "Mexicans," to be counted as nonwhites. The 1930 census also produced a table titled "Estimated Number of Mexicans Included in the White Population in 1920"—a tally, according to sociologist Clara E. Rodríguez, of people imagined to have been "miscounted" as white in the 1920 census.[52] Thus, in 1920, the U.S. census registered Mexicans who were not of African, Native American, or Asian descent as white; in 1930, however, the census reversed itself, counted such individuals as members of the "Mexican" race, and took pains to "correct" the previous censuses' categorization of such people as white.

The 1940 census reversed the racial designation yet again, recategorizing Mexicans and Mexican Americans as white, as the 1920 census and the 1924 Immigration Act had done. Census takers in 1940 received instructions that "persons of Mexican birth or ancestry who were not defi-

nitely Indian or of other nonwhite race [should be described and counted] as white." Thus "within a decade," Rodríguez notes, "Mexicans were shifted from their own 'Mexican' category to being included in the 'white' category—unless they appeared to census interviewers to be 'definitely Indian or of other Nonwhite races.'"[53] The 1940 designation of Mexicans as white unless identified otherwise applied to other groups that migrated in larger numbers after World War II: "Puerto Ricans in the late 1940s and 1950s, Cubans during the 1960s, and Dominicans and Central and South Americans in the late 1960s and 1970s."[54]

When Helen Hernandez posed with a wooden caricature in New York City sometime around 1930, then, she was most likely designated racially "Mexican" if she or her parents had been born in Mexico, or "white" if she was of any other Latin American or Spanish descent—and either categorization would have been in transition and culturally contested but also in the process of stabilizing through law. The identity of the Helen Hernandez who posed for the photograph is unknowable: the 1930 census counted forty-four Americans named Helen Hernandez, and because the Hotel Expo attracted visitors from across the nation and around the world, there is no way to prove which Helen Hernandez grins from behind the wooden cutout.

Among the forty-four Helen Hernandezes that the 1930 census registered, three were New Yorkers, and these individuals deserve special attention for the ways in which they mark a range of complications within the legal category of whiteness. The youngest of these Helen Hernandezes—clearly not the one photographed at the Hotel Expo—was six years old in 1930. She was born in Manhattan to Gebano and Esperanza Hernandez, both Spanish speakers from Puerto Rico, and the 1930 census listed all members of the family as white.[55] Either of the other two New Yorkers named Helen Hernandez could have been the one who posed at the Hotel Exposition. The younger of these, who lived in the Bronx, was born in New York City in about 1906 to parents from Cuba; she lived with her Spanish-speaking mother, Amelia Hernandez, and worked as a stenographer. The census counted both women as white.[56] The older Helen Hernandez, a public school teacher born in 1899, lived in Queens with her daughter Carmen; her husband, Lewis Hernandez, a Spanish-speaking immigrant from Venezuela; and her mother, Melanie Levy. The census listed all members of that household, as well, as white.[57]

New York's three Helen Hernandezes and their families emblematize the range of people who were in the process of being legally stabilized as white in 1930: Spanish-speaking immigrants from Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and Cuba; their American-born, English-speaking children; and, in the case of Melanie Levy and Helen Levy Hernandez, perhaps, Jews (the 1930 census did not consistently record Jewish ethnicity or religios-

ity). Had one of these Helen Hernandezes been Mexican or Mexican American, the 1930 census would have designated her as nonwhite (as it did, for example, Helen Hernandez of Fresno, California, who was born in Mexico in 1901).[58] This emerging legal fixity coexisted, however, with an underlying, ongoing cultural instability.[59]

In the moment imprinted on photographic film, Helen Hernandez, whose race—white, "Mexican," or something else entirely—was in the process of being legally and culturally codified as well as contested, followed the script embedded in a thing that projected a white user. She stood precisely where the thing invited her to stand, and she mugged exactly as the thing prompted her to mug. In so doing, she and the thing danced a dance of white racial identity—a racination that originated, coalesced, and was contained in neither human flesh nor wooden caricature alone, but in the processual interaction between them. At the same moment that immigration policy and the census "realigned and hardened racial categories in the law,"[60] Helen Hernandez aligned herself bodily with a black caricature and thus categorized herself as white, and she hardened that categorization through the obdurate shine of the photograph's surface.

Hernandez's racial impersonation balanced claims of likeness and distance: even as she entered the scene and ate along with the caricature, she raised her pinky delicately and looked directly at the camera, thus acknowledging her audience and alienating herself from her performance. She danced with the caricature, physically embraced it, while figuratively winking at the audience to say, "I'm not this."

"Why" and "How" Revisited

Helen Hernandez playfully embraced and distanced herself from blackness and thus ratified the project of racial stabilization that was already under way through law. The rich "how" of this performance makes repressed questions of "why" resurface—unanswerable but tantalizing questions about conscious identity and psychological motivation. Was she Helen Levy Hernandez, and was she Jewish? As she danced her dance of racial impersonation in about 1930, did she think of her coreligionist Al Jolson, whose blackface performance in the 1927 film *The Jazz Singer* worked to assimilate Jews into whiteness?[61] Did she hope, consciously or unconsciously, to subsume her ethnic and religious difference to the whiteness constructed through temporary blackness? Or was she Helen Hernandez, stenographer and daughter of Cuban immigrants? If the year was 1929 rather than the curator's estimated 1930, this Cuban American Helen Hernandez could have posed after attending the Hotel Exposition's musical extravaganza, "A Trip to Havana." The script to that performance is not extant, so we cannot know whether the show's representation

of this Helen Hernandez's parents' country was exoticizing, derisive, celebratory, or some combination thereof, or some other tone entirely. And we cannot know whether "A Trip to Havana" might have filled this Helen Hernandez with delight, longing, or shame; with an impulse to contrast her Cuban heritage favorably against blackness, or to mask her racial complexities beneath the whitening effects of corkless blackface. And we also can never know whether this Helen Hernandez, a stenographer who earned her living by receiving the swift flow of speech, arresting it in shorthand, and then translating that cipher into typewriting, might have thought, as she danced with the caricature, about speed and fixity, about code and legibility, about a skilled body that can transform that which seems fleeting into that which may endure. We can never know what she thought about the act of freezing a moment in a photograph.

That flash-freeze constitutes the defining gesture in this performance. Helen Hernandez's direct gaze into the camera's lens indicates that she consciously knew her photograph was being taken and that she built and oriented her performance around that knowledge. The material photograph is, then, both a "how" and a "why" of Helen Hernandez's performance: the "watermelon" cutout arranged and stylized a human body—that is, prompted the "how"—for the purpose—the "why"—of taking a photograph. Helen Hernandez danced with *three* material things: the cutout caricature, the camera, and the photograph-to-be. Hernandez followed the choreography that the three things scripted not only in that she stood where the cutout told her to stand and "invented" the ostensibly transgressive joke that it told her to invent, but also in that she oriented herself to a camera and stilled herself for the snapping of the photograph for which the caricature created the occasion. The cutout was indeed like a "jigsaw piece whose outer surfaces have meaning only when it is seen that they are designed to snap into position against the body"[62]—*two* bodies, those of Helen Hernandez and the anonymous photographer. The cutout provided a negative space for the photographer to stand in as effectively as it provided the negative space where Hernandez inserted her body. Three things and two humans danced this dance. One of those scriptive things—the photograph—did not yet exist, but it was perhaps the most important element, because its production provided the "why" for the event.

Of the stylized movements that this all-important, not-yet-existent photograph scripted, perhaps the most crucial one was stillness, because Hernandez's stillness conflated person and thing both at the moment of the pose and then, later, within the photograph. Hernandez playfully entered a scene and likened herself to the unmoving caricature (even as she distinguished herself from it) by imitating not only its chomp from the watermelon, but also its immobility. Hernandez's performance of still-

ness resulted in a photograph that is free of blurs—a photograph in which human and caricature appear equally flat and sharp. In this equalizing, the photograph confuses person and thing: a swift glance at the photograph might fool the eye into momentarily perceiving two wooden figures or two masked and costumed humans. Ironically, the sharpness of the photograph blurs person and thing: had Helen Hernandez flinched at the snap of the camera's shutter, the resultant blur would have differentiated her from the wood, much as one child's ill fit with the Gold Dust cutout interrupts any potential illusionism in figure 9. But Helen Hernandez's photograph stages no such disruptions.

The distinction and transitivity between person and thing has encapsulated deep anxieties about race ever since slavery legally defined some black bodies as property and all black bodies as inherently ownable. Harriet Beecher Stowe named this anxiety when she originally, scathingly, subtitled *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "The Man That Was a Thing."[63] Stowe's novel, as Philip Fisher has shown, performed the cultural work of the "redesign of the boundary" between person and thing: that is, Stowe enacted culturally a distinction between African American people and things that Emancipation later ratified juridically.[64] Recently, Bill Brown argued that this historical ontology "congealed" within black collectibles such as mammy cookie jars, and that narratives of such objects coming to life and wreaking havoc "recollect . . . the ontological scandal perpetrated by slavery" and the "re-enactment of the breakdown of the person/thing binary" embedded in both slavery and Emancipation.[65]

In the "watermelon" photograph, however, a thing does not come alive; rather, a living woman becomes a thing. When Helen Hernandez stilled herself in a pose for the purpose of taking a photograph, she knew that she was coproducing, with the camera and the photographer, a material artifact that would imagistically collapse her and the caricature into one seamless whole, one thing. By coproducing this photograph, Helen Hernandez literally objectified herself—or, more accurately, bethinged herself.

The borders of thing/person, black/white—so volatile and dangerous for African Americans, so provocative to Stowe—became, in Helen Hernandez's performance, a controlled space for delimited play, just one more aspect of the Expo's interactive, consumer-based fun, no more threatening than posing in a "jail" or walking through a Stanley Magic Door. Calm steadiness registers in the balance among the four extremes of Hernandez's body: her right hand caresses the caricature, while her left hand grabs it aggressively, and a mischievous smile dominates her face. But these three bodily poles, respectively manifesting love, theft, and play, root through the fourth pole of her body: her feet, which are planted firmly on the ground and thus cause a sense of control and willingness to pervade and define her stance. Helen Hernandez was a self-possessed woman who performed

blackness and thus constructed whiteness, and who played at being a thing, a potential possession, and thus affirmed that she was not one.

Archiving the Repertoire

As W. B. Worthen has recently pointed out, a powerful current within performance studies contrasts "archival" memory—written and material text that can be housed in an archive—with the "repertoire"—embodied memory of traditions of performance, including "gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral."[66] Diana Taylor and others call for "shifting the focus from written to embodied culture, from the discursive to the performative," because the archive "sustains power," while the repertoire often enacts social agency and resistance, especially of oppressed peoples in the Americas.[67] Taylor describes the "relationship between the archive and the repertoire" as "not by definition antagonistic or oppositional"; the two forms of knowledge "usually work in tandem" (as in the wedding ceremony, which requires "both the performative utterance of 'I do' and the signed marriage license").[68] However, a model of interaction, or even of harmonious cooperation, reifies a polarity between the two forms of knowledge.

The scriptivity in the "watermelon" photograph calls into question the very model of archive and repertoire as distinct-but-interactive. The word *script* captures the moment when dramatic narrative and movement through space are in the act of becoming each other.[69] Accordingly, archive and repertoire are one in the materiality of the photograph, which both records one woman's past performance and serves as a proleptic prop in that performance (that is, the future production of the photograph functioned as a key purpose of the performance; thus, the not-yet-existent photograph scripted Helen Hernandez's actions). The caricature, camera, and photograph are all both *artifacts of* and *scriptive props in* a performance—that is, simultaneously archive and repertoire, with neither form of knowledge preexisting the other.[70]

When a thing scripts actions, it manifests the repertoire of its historical moment. An alphabet book prompts the sequential turning of pages in coordination with parallel practices with other alphabet books; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* cues actions of weeping and laughing, playing and whipping, for audiences with performance competence in sentimental culture; a not-yet-existent photograph operates with a camera and a caricature to script a pose that produces racial subjectivation. Scriptive things are simultaneously archive and repertoire; therefore, when things enter a repository such as the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the repertoire arrives with them. Scriptive things archive the repertoire—partially and richly, with a sense of openness and flux.

To glimpse past repertoires through the archive requires a revision of what qualifies as "reading" material evidence. A scholar understands a thing's script both by locating the gestures it cites in its historical location and by physically interacting with the evidence in the present moment. One gains performance competence not only by accruing contextualizing knowledge but also, crucially, by holding a thing, manipulating it, shaking it to see what meaningful gestures tumble forth. Ultimately, historians must place our living bodies in the stream of performance tradition. The archive then becomes a ghostly discotheque where things of the past leap up to ask scholars to dance; and we listen, accept the invitation, and, hearts pounding, step onto the floor.

Notes

I thank Hazel Carby for drawing my attention to the "watermelon" photograph during a workshop conducted by Deborah Willis as part of the ongoing Photographic Memory Workshop directed by Laura Wexler at Yale University. I also thank the members of the Performing Marks exploratory seminar at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in May 2008. That seminar, convened by Elizabeth Dyrud Lyman, Claire MacDonald, and Daniel Albright, included Caroline Bergvall, Seth Brodsky, Elaine Chew, Stephen Farthing, Alexandre Francois, and Vinod Goel. This essay benefited further from the comments of Vince Brown, Glenda Carpio, Wai Chee Dimock, Anna Mae Duane, Cheryl Finley, Ellen Gruber Garvey, Amy Strahler Holzapfel, Matthew Frye Jacobson, Sindhumathi Revuluri, Barbara Rodriguez, Adelheid Voskuhl, and the *Social Text* collective.

1. The photograph is part of the Beinecke's James Weldon Johnson Collection, but Johnson did not own the image, which was collected in the late twentieth century by Randolph Linsley Simpson. Patricia Willis, e-mail to author, 10 October 2005.

2. Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 1, emphasis in original. On the transition from questions of "why" to "how," see especially "Taking Refuge: An Introduction," 1–17.

3. Patricia A. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor, 1994), 14–16.

4. Ibid., 31–41.

5. On caricatures as signs of racism, see ibid.; on symbolic slavery, see M. M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

6. In her description of meaningful lines of activity, Susan Leigh Foster favors the term *choreography* over *script* because, in her view, "the legacy of the dramatic text continues to infuse the script with a kind of permanence, whereas the notion of choreography as a theoretical premise underscores the changeability of events and their environs" (Susan Leigh Foster, "Geographies of Gender," *Signs* 24 [1998]: 28). In this claim, however, Foster foregrounds vernacular uses of the word *script* rather than the actual practices of actors and directors.

7. Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 174–82.

8. I thank Betsy Klimasmith for her observation that a knife becomes a thing in the hands of a trained chef.

9. Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2001): 3–4.

10. Ibid., 4. See also Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

11. Brown, "Thing Theory," 4.

12. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.

13. W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 7.

14. Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 27.

15. Ibid.

16. E. W. Kemble, *A Coon Alphabet* (New York and London: Russell, 1898).

17. Ibid., n.p.

18. Patricia Crain, *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from "The New England Primer" to "The Scarlet Letter"* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 91.

19. Ibid., 88, 85, 91.

20. Ibid., 101.

21. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–86. See esp. 174–77.

22. Ibid.

23. Frances Hodgson Burnett, *From the One I Knew the Best of All: A Memory of the Mind of a Child* (New York: Scribner, 1893), 57.

24. Ibid., 55, 56.

25. Ibid., 55. Frances Hodgson Burnett was far from alone in her actions. On mid-nineteenth-century girls' practices of whipping dolls, see Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 161–63.

26. Nyong'o reads the "shiny, hard, and brittle" materiality of racist ceramic figurines of black children as a "racial simile" in which "a black skin is as hard as stone; not skin at all, but a mask, with perhaps nothing behind it." Tavia Nyong'o, "Racial Kitsch and Black Performance," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 15 (2002): 377. The shiny hardness Nyong'o describes is spectacularly illuminated in David Levinthal's photographs of racist collectibles (David Levinthal and Manthia Diawara, *Blackface* [Santa Fe: Arena, 1999]).

27. See Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

28. Burnett, *From the One I Knew Best of All*, 58.

29. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975). See also Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982). Reader-response theory provides a broad avenue by which to think about the scriptive properties of things. For example, Wolfgang Iser and Wayne Booth argue that a literary text actively encourages an "implied reader" to perform a finite range of actions (Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974]; Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961]). A particularly useful adjunct to the scriptive thing appears in Walker Gibson's "mock reader." Gibson, writing in 1950 and within the school

of New Criticism, was a text-oriented literary critic whose "mock reader" is not an actual human being but is instead "a role that the real reader is invited to play for the duration of the novel." See Jane P. Tompkins, "An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism," in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), xi. In tellingly theatrical language, Gibson described the mock reader as a "fictitious reader . . . whose mask and costume the individual takes on in order to experience the language [of a text]" (Walker Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," *College English* 11 [February 1950]: 265–69; reprinted in Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism*, 1–6; quote on 1). This mock reader is an "artifact, controlled, simplified, abstracted out of the chaos of day-to-day sensation" (Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," 1). The mock reader, like a scriptive thing's user, responds to a set of instructions dictated by the text—and that response may take many forms, including resistance.

30. On the *habitus* as a system of culture, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1977), and Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," trans. Ben Brewster, *Economy and Society* 2 (1973): 70–88. The difference between raw comprehension of words' meanings or things' choreographies and literary or performance competence maps onto the difference between "why" and "how": the literate but incompetent performer knows what an object literally is and what actions it determines (that is, *why* it exists, as in, "a chair exists to enable the act of sitting") but cannot understand the historically located, stylized practices that the thing prompts (that is, *how* the thing cues behavior, as in, "a Hepplewhite and a beanbag chair prompt different styles of sitting that cite and signify in distinct cultural systems").

31. Quoted in Ralph Keyes, *The Wit and Wisdom of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Gramercy, 1999), 6. Judith Butler argues in a similar vein that Althusser underestimates the range and effects of "disobedience" in possible responses to hails; for Butler, gender transgression such as drag can simultaneously and ambivalently critique and ratify gender norms. See Butler, "Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 121–40.

32. Else Elisabeth Hysing Koren, *The Diary of Elisabeth Koren, 1853–1855*, ed. David T. Nelson (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1955), 62.

33. Ibid., 63.

34. On the incompleteness of all evidence, see Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 183–201.

35. Richard Schechner famously defined performance as "twice-behaved behavior" in *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), esp. 36.

36. "Hotel Show Orders at New High Level," *New York Times*, 16 November 1929.

37. "Exposition Draws 8,000 Hotel Men," *New York Times*, 18 November 1924.

38. "Ducks to Dishwashing Range of Hotel Show," *New York Times*, 15 November 1927; "Hotel Show Opens with 450 Exhibits," *New York Times*, 11 November 1930; "Hotel Show Opens; Business Aid Urged," *New York Times*, 10 November 1931.

39. "Hotel Show Opens; Business Aid Urged."

40. "Exposition Draws 8,000 Hotel Men."

41. "Ducks to Dishwashing Range of Hotel Show"; Meyer Berger, "About New York," *New York Times*, 15 November 1939.

42. "Art Made of Foods at Hotel Exhibit," *New York Times*, 18 November 1937.

43. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (1940; reprint, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

44. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). See especially Scarry's final chapter, "The Interior Structure of the Artifact," 278–326.

45. Philip Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museums* (1991; reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 243–44, emphasis added.

46. Ibid., 243.

47. As Susan Stewart aptly notes, giganticism provides "a metaphor for the abstract authority of the state and the collective, public, life." *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), xii.

48. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

49. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7.

50. Ibid., 50.

51. I thank Brian Herrera for his observation that the 1930 census constituted the United States' first federal, formal categorization of a Latin American national group as nonwhite.

52. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *200 Years of U.S. Census Taking: Population and Housing Questions, 1790–1990* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 60; quoted in Clara E. Rodríguez, *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 208–9n21.

53. Rodríguez, *Changing Race*, 83–84.

54. Ibid., 102.

55. U.S. Census of 1930, Manhattan, NY; Roll 1572, 18B; Enumeration District 852; Image 1107.0. All census data accessed through Ancestry.com. 1930 U.S. Federal Census (online database) (Provo, UT: Generations Network, 2002). Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930), T626, 2,667 rolls.

56. U.S. Census of 1930, Bronx, NY; Roll 1487, 1B; Enumeration District 620; Image 217.0.

57. U.S. Census of 1930, Queens, NY; Roll 1598, 15B; Enumeration District 363; Image 739.0.

58. U.S. Census of 1930, Fresno, CA; Roll 116, 26B; Enumeration District 15; Image 267.0.

59. This slowly emerging legal fixity within ongoing cultural instability continued for decades. In 1940, the census instructed workers to inspect people we might now call Latina/o or Hispanic for visual signs of being "definitely Indian or of other Nonwhite races" (Rodríguez, *Changing Race*, 83), and if, in the eyes of that census taker, no such signs were evident, to designate the individual white; at the same time, however, the definition of the group being so scrutinized was itself in flux. In 1940, the census identified this group through language, tabulating "persons of Spanish mother tongue." In 1950 and 1960, the category of interest was "persons of Spanish surname,"

and by 1970, country of origin supplied the defining factor. "Thus, between 1940 and 1970," Rodríguez notes, "Hispanics were counted according to three different cultural criteria[:] linguistic (1940), surname (1950 and 1960), and origin (1970)" (*Changing Race*, 102). Even as the group of people who might now call themselves Latina/o or Hispanic was being legally fixed as white, then, the foundational definitions of the group itself—whom it included, whom it did not—were in flux.

60. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 7.

61. On *The Jazz Singer* and the assimilation of Jews into whiteness, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 121, and Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), esp. 112.

62. Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art*, 243–44.

63. Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4, 100. See also Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Hollis Robbins, "Harriet Beecher Stowe and 'The Man That Was a Thing,'" introductory essay in *The Annotated "Uncle Tom's Cabin,"* ed. Gates and Robbins (New York: Norton, 2006), xxxi–xlvii.

64. Fisher, *Hard Facts*, 4.

65. Bill Brown, "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny," *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2006): 183, 197.

66. W. B. Worthen, "Antigone's Bones," *Tulane Drama Review* 52 (Fall 2008): 10–33; Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 20.

67. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 16, 19, 20.

68. Ibid., 36, 21.

69. Worthen asks an enormously valuable question: "How do we, can we, articulate *writing* with/in/through *performance*?" ("Antigone's Bones," 28, emphasis in original). He undermines efforts to answer his question, however, when he calls for "renewed attention" to the "interaction" or "interface" between archive and repertoire (27, 28). This call does not think with/in/through but instead distinguishes between writing and performance; thus Worthen affirms a model of distinction-and-interaction between archive and repertoire. The word *script* as I use it signals neither writing nor performance alone, neither archive nor repertoire alone, neither thing nor human alone, but dances between and among all of these forms of knowledge. The word *script* "articulates" this dynamic and thus answers Worthen's question.

70. The photograph continues to script actions in the present, from its location in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. When John Berger famously noted that every photograph issues the same command to its viewer—"Look!"—he was describing the ontological scriptivity of every photograph (see the chapter "The Uses of Photography" in his *About Looking* [New York: Pantheon, 1980], 52). Photographs invite not only looking, but stylized touching: jumbling roughly through a stack of snapshots, or pinching gingerly at the edges of an image imbued with artistic, monetary, or historical value. Kathy O'Dell's point about photographs of performance art applies equally to photographs of performances in everyday life: the photograph triggers a "haptic response . . . as the viewer touches a photograph taken by a photographer who touched the trigger of a camera as the performer touched his or her own skin, used his or her own body both as an instrument of touch and as performance material." See her *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 14.