



June 1995

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Recommended Citation

Colby Quarterly, Volume 31, no.2, June 1995, p.142-153

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Iconoclasm in the Poetry of Jorie Graham

by ANNE SHIFRER

POEMS ABOUT PAINTINGS are abundant in the works of Jorie Graham, especially in her second volume, *Erosion*, which includes poems about Piero della Francesca's "The Madonna del Parto," Goya's "El Destino," Masaccio's "The Expulsion of Adam and Eve," and Luca Signorelli's "Resurrection of the Body," to mention but a few of her ecphrastic subjects. Indeed, Bonnie Costello, in one of the best essays written on Graham, suggests that ecphrasis is the "chief rhetorical strategy" of *Erosion* (374).

Ecphrasis (a term now used to mean a verbal rendering and response to a visual representation, particularly a painting) is also a valuable entrée to Graham's ensuing volumes of poetry, *The End of Beauty* and *Region of Unlikeness*, and to her aesthetic philosophy generally. Some have argued that the appeal of ecphrasis for poetry resides in a painting's ability to "be" without meaning and to exist in apparent atemporal repose. Words, the medium of poetry, necessarily mean; words, when read, must occupy temporal sequence; thus, the argument runs, poetry envies its sister, painting, for the qualities poetry itself lacks. Graham, however, has a different, more complex relation to visual representation. Her exploration of connections between the medium of words and the media of visual representation abandons the traditional paradigm with its persistent and usually invidious comparisons. Graham examines both verbal and visual art forms as intricate, ceaselessly paradoxical and multivoiced layerings that shroud an ultimate metaphysical void. She also studies visual representation to amplify the resources of her craft.

Graham's poetic techniques have been deeply influenced by the practices of painters. In an interview with Thomas Gardner, she mentions Jackson Pollock in particular, saying that his work calls attention to the process of painting, to "... the gap between the end of his gesture and the beginning of the painting" (80). "I love," Graham exclaims, "to imagine that one-inch gap between the end of the brush and the beginning of the canvas on the floor" (80). It is this gap, "this nothing" in which the plenum of possibility is suspended, that is for Graham the most exhilarating moment of creation, a moment painting and poetry share. In *The End of Beauty*, Graham's third volume, blank spaces are placed within the poems to signify the gap between pen and paper and the openness of what might occur there. Part of the poem remains uncreated or left up to the reader's imaginative interaction with the poem.

Pollock has also influenced Graham in another way. His large murals cannot be seen, she claims, from any distance: Stand close, you can't see the whole canvas; stand back, you can't see the dripwork. Graham suggests that Pollock's work compels "us to stand at that difficult juncture of whole and partial visions . . ." (Gardner 99). Vacillating back and forth, we begin to learn a type of seeing in which we sense the whole from within the limits of our individual perspective. Through viewing Pollock's paintings, we can develop, Graham thinks, a compensatory peripheral vision that negotiates between individual perspective and vision of the whole. This type of seeing is, Graham argues, essential to our survival as a species. Just as Pollock's murals require perspectival agility, so too do the poems in *The End of Beauty* and *Region of Unlikeness*. We, for instance, may find ourselves just getting comfortable within a perspective determined by the speaker's position, when we're tossed into an aerial view. Or we may be nesting within an introspective voice and then abruptly awakened to a perspective which includes us, as in the poem "Room Tone" when suddenly we're addressed: "Dear reader, is it enough for you that I am thinking of you / in this generic sort of way . . . ?" (*The End of Beauty* 73). Or again, we may hear a "click" and a "click, click," a noise that suggests the poem's subject is being photographed or, more disconcertingly, that a picture is being taken of the reader reading.

This brief summary of how Pollock's painterly techniques have influenced Graham should suggest that the visual arts have been for her more than just a subject matter; they also have informed her sense of how poetry might be practiced.

Graham is also, however, drawn to the visual arts for what might be called perverse reasons. In an interview published in 1986, Graham was asked about the motives behind her ecphrastic poems, and she responded that paintings activate her rage, her rage to have things change:

I don't *use* the paintings as much as spring off the scene in them which is strangely fixed and free from us and so makes especially evident our desire for transformation, our tiny imperialisms of the imagination. Paintings are "finished" and stilled in ways few things in nature are, and therefore resistant in ways that make my rage to change more visible to me. (Snodgrass 153)

Indeed, throughout *Erosion*, we see Graham subtly, and not so subtly, tinkering with masterpieces of Western visual art. In "San Sepolcro," she agitates and eroticizes the notably quiescent figure of Piero della Francesca's "The Madonna del Parto" (2-3). While Kenneth Clark describes this madonna as oriental in her tranquility, Graham has her unbuttoning her dress to enter into both labor and temporality. The figure almost walks out of the fresco into the present space of the viewer. Similarly, in her description of Masaccio's "The Expulsion of Adam and Eve," Graham injects kinesis into the stasis of the painting. She addresses Adam and Eve directly, telling them to take their hands from their faces and step out of the confining frame of pictorial composition, "a space too small to fit in" (68). Again, Graham temporalizes the painting by insisting on taking its implied kinesis literally. (We are reminded that Adam and Eve did, after all, initiate Time.)

Although Graham's ecphrastic poems do acknowledge some of the surface of the paintings and some of their traditional significance, she changes them enough to call her at least "a strong reader," to use Harold Bloom's phrase for artistic appropriation, if not an iconoclast. What seems to provoke her iconoclasm is, in part, the traditions of meaning which help compose these artworks; but more, the very fact of their pictorial stasis, their apparent pretense to exemption from temporality. One might think that Graham is reinvoking that old and potentially invidious distinction between the verbal and the visual arts, i.e., that poetry is a temporal art and painting a spatial and static art. This is not, however, so. Both art forms can be understood as fixed and atemporal, and both can alternatively be understood as a field of transformative possibilities. Graham, of course, prefers the latter for reasons that I think are moral. What exasperates her about the visual arts is exactly what she finds and resists in the traditional conception and practices of poetry: the idea that art works of any medium should pretend to immunity from time and circumstance.

Since I read the ecphrastic poems of *Erosion* as a resistance to iconography and the idea that meaning can be stabilized, either within the work of art, or, if not there, within the culture and systems of signification that surround the artwork at the time of its creation, I was surprised when I read Bonnie Costello's essay on ecphrasis in *Erosion* because she describes it as a work that presents art as "an alternative space to the world of erosion, a form of 'rescue' from the flux . . ." (373-74), and she even suggests that Graham composes the visual arts "into a kind of New Critical verbal icon" (381) within her own temporal poetic creations. With this reasoning behind her, Costello calls *Erosion* a modernist work and Graham's later works postmodern. While Graham's later poems do increasingly insist on disrupting their own surfaces, I would argue that the seeds, if not the fruits, of postmodern ideas about art are very much present in *Erosion*.

To pursue this argument, I take Costello's ending point, her analysis of Graham's "Two Paintings by Gustav Klimt" as my point of departure. After an astute analysis of the poem, Costello concludes that Graham, while questioning the Klimt paintings, finally seems in sympathy with their treatment of surface because the pleasure it offers "draws us toward the unknown and unspeakable" (394). Although sharing much of Costello's understanding of this difficult poem, I disagree with her conclusion and instead feel that Graham verbally dissects the paintings and then ends her poem with an ironic comment on their surface innocence. Graham finally never trusts the surface calm of artworks, even though she at times may try to admire it.

"Two Paintings by Gustav Klimt" begins with a description of one of Klimt's paintings of a beech tree forest, in German a "buchen-wald." The shimmery trees and the forest floor dominate the foreground; a band of blue sky on the horizon establishes the depth of the wood. High in the trees, a few leaves shine brightly like gold foil. The well-known imprimatur of Klimt, the Egyptian glitter that decorates his women, would seem to be all but absent if it weren't for these small golden leaves.

The scene is seductively pleasant: Trees and ground seem to refract and

reflect, becoming all one light on a fine ceramic glaze. But as Graham presents the painting to our view, she insinuates that the kaleidoscopic glitter of the beech trees is deceptively beautiful. The poem suggests that this exquisite, apparently innocent, landscape painting must be viewed in moral terms:

Although what glitters
 on the trees
 row after perfect row,
 is merely
 the injustice
 of the world,

 the chips on the bark of each
 beech tree
 catching the light, the sum
 of these delays
 is the beautiful, the human
 beautiful,

 body of flaws.
 The dead
 would give anything
 I'm sure,
 to step again onto
 the leafrot,

 into the avenue of mottled shadows,
 the speckled
 broken skins. The dead
 in their sheer
 open parenthesis, what they
 wouldn't give

 for something to lean on
 that won't
 give way. I think I
 would weep
 for the moral nature
 of this world,

 for right and wrong like pools
 of shadow
 and light you can step in
 and out of
 crossing this yellow beech forest,
 this *buchen-wald* . . . [.] (61-62)

The aggrieved dead, the victims of Buchenwald, seem to be waiting in these trees, longing to resume life. Their formlessness—the form the painter has failed to give them—is present, as one end of an open parenthesis, in the leafrot which metaphorically interfaces their skin.

In a characteristic move, Graham insists that seeing is impure; it is conditioned, in this case, by our knowledge of the holocaust even while Klimt's life

and work preceded that event. Our light has changed: "[L]ate / in the twentieth / century, in hollow light, / in gaseous light . . ." (62), when we gaze on a buchenwald, we can't help thinking of that other Buchenwald. To see the trees receive light and return it in apparently sheer and amoral beauty appears not to be possible. Light and dark become substantive and morally infused; the speaker of the poem walks through them. The lingering effluvia of the holocaust osmotically penetrate and infect the coppered blues and yellows of the painting.

The second half of the poem describes another painting by Klimt, "The Bride"; this painting seems subtly but firmly to corroborate Graham's reading of the "Buchenwald" and her eerie sense that a dismantled ethos lurks in the landscape painting. Shortly after Klimt died, an unfinished painting was found in his studio. One side is a tangled group of figures wrapped in the mosaic trappings for which Klimt is famous. On the other side is an uncompleted female figure, with legs splayed and a mangled composite head (that of a sleeping female face and what appears to be an aged male face or a death's head). One art critic, Alessandra Comini, reports that the painting was first seen by burglars, who broke into Klimt's studio on the day when Klimt had a stroke from which he later died. Comini describes what the burglars saw as follows:

For here, even to the uninitiated, was an extraordinary revelation of what might be called a "dirty old-master" technique. In opposition to the floating knot of figures covering the left side of the canvas, the splayed-out nude body of [a] young girl dominated the other half. Her face was averted in a profile turn[ed] to the right, and a mufflerlike wrap at the throat seemed to separate the head from its glimmering white torso, creating a startling effect of mutilation. The knees were bent and the legs spread apart to expose a carefully detailed pubic area upon which the artist had leisurely begun to paint an overlay "dress" of suggestive and symbolic ornamental shapes. . . . The unfinished painting, by the mere fact that it was unfinished, contained the clue to the erotic premise of Klimt's great allegories involving female figures. The unknown ransackers of the studio had, sheerly by accident, caught the artist in the secret and revelatory act of flagrant voyeurism. (Comini 5-6)

Apparently Klimt had intended to cover the woman's body, including what Graham designates as "a scream between her legs," with his usual imbrications. Graham describes the painting as follows:

They say that when Klimt
died suddenly
a painting, still
incomplete,

was found in his studio,
a woman's body
open at its point of
entry,
rendered in graphic,
pornographic,

detail—something like
a scream
between her legs. Slowly
feathery,
he had begun to paint
a delicate

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garment (his trademark)
 over this mouth
 of her body. The mouth
 of her face
 is genteel, bored, feigning a need
 for sleep. The fabric

defines the surface,
 the story,
 so we are drawn to it,
 its blues
 and yellows glittering
 like a stand

of beech trees late
 one afternoon
 in Germany, in fall.
 It is called Buchenwald, it is
 1890. In

the finished painting
 the argument
 has something to do
 with pleasure. (63)

Graham gives the painting two mouths, one of which was about to be silenced by “a delicate garment (his trademark).” Had Klimt finished the painting, we would not, presumably, know what lay behind it. The woman might have looked like other Klimt works—those beauties who appear to be drugged, embalmed or mummified, their delicate leers hovering between the erotic and a death grimace. A perverse tang—a love in death motif, which links the erotic with the enshrined death of women—is everywhere implicit in Klimt’s work; but only in the unfinished painting is it possible to link his portraits of women so definitely with mutilation.

Graham’s reading suggests that the decorative glitter with which Klimt covers his women (and his beech trees) conceals a deeper intention and reality, one we might never glean from the finished paintings themselves. With our knowledge of Klimt’s painting process and our knowledge of history, we can no longer see his “Beech Trees” as a stand of beech trees. “In the finished painting the argument is pleasure,” says the end of Graham’s poem, a line which is chilling for its suppression of judgment, its suppression of the moral world for which we weep. It is a line forged, we might imagine, in an agonizing attempt to remain neutral; it is also a line which resonates, finally, with deepest irony.

Graham sees that the unfinished painting authorizes, even mandates, a reading of “Buchenwald” that refuses its surface beauty. The clue may begin in a transposition (*buchen-wald* becomes Buchenwald), which is then curiously ratified by the unfinished painting, with its unfinished burial which reveals the chasm dividing surface and depth. An ecphrasis that at first seems eccentric and even puritanical, which sees didactic polarities in a landscape painting, finally, by the end of the poem, seems highly relevant, perhaps indispensable to how we

might understand Klimt's work as a whole. I, for one, now see his work differently.

My reading of Graham's reading of Klimt has, I think, illustrated that though Graham is deeply influenced by the visual arts, she is better seen as an iconoclast than as an icon maker. Indeed, when I presented this analysis at a conference, one art historian in the audience was deeply angry at Graham for distorting Klimt's intent. If Graham's attitude toward art were thoroughly modern in *Erosion*, I don't think her poems would win such anger. Traditional art historians are more likely to see Graham as an icon basher than icon maker. It is clear, I think, even in her second volume, *Erosion*, that Graham is troubled by the static, atemporal pretensions of art. She wants to make artworks move, change, and, most importantly, to submit to the preoccupations, perspectives, and needs of our present moment. For her, when art becomes an objet d'art, it becomes not-art. This is as true for poems as it is for paintings; she bears no particular hostility to the visual arts.

In fact, when she seeks to make her own art more aleatory and open-ended, Graham again turns to Jackson Pollock. His works, she suggests, are aclosural. They include chaos, and in her own poetry Graham strives to postpone closure, trying to find "forms of delay, digression, side-motions which are not entirely dependent for their effectiveness on the sense-of-the-ending, that stark desire" (Gardner 84-85).

Graham's insistence on exposing the historical and experiential contexts of artworks both visual and verbal seems to arise from a fundamentally moral concern about the place of art and its role in history and our lives. Closural art, for Graham, is linked to the imperial motive to contain and possess and to the eschatological sort of thinking that encourages us to think that we only have meaning through endings and completions. These proclivities in our lives and art are, for Graham, what is driving us towards apocalypse. As she says in her 1992 interview with Thomas Gardner:

... we have created a situation whereby we are only able to know ourselves by a conclusion which would render *meaningful* the storyline along the way. (Gardner 84)

Then, after reminding us of Jonathan Shell's *The Fate of the Earth*, Graham says that we live with a "secret sense 'well let's get it over with so that we might know what the story was, what it was *for*'" (Gardner 84).

Interestingly, at this moment Graham looks to the visual arts for a clue about how to proceed with her own art: "I'm intrigued by medieval triptychs—in which the middle panel (the *present*) is larger than the side panels (past and future)—as a model" (Gardner 84). Again, we sense her iconoclastic impulse at work, for we gather that in making the present frontal, Graham would revise the better part of Christian eschatology present in most medieval triptychs.

In addition to desiring art forms that would help change our thinking about the dependency of value on endings and completions, Graham also believes that art is only significant as it is experienced. All of the arts must be temporal in this sense. She asserts that art should always involve genuine risks, not just "risks

fabricated for the purposes of getting a poem" (Gardner 93). This risk is the risk of change: for the creator, for the person who experiences the art piece, and for the very artwork itself. In this, Graham's art might be allied to postmodern forms such as performance art and installations. Her own poems happen, she says, always in the present tense, *to her*, and she tries to make a present-tense, transformative experience available for readers.

Similarly, the rhetoric of her ecphrastic poems is always that of a present-tense temporality that makes the artwork available as an experience rather than as an immutable, temporally transcendent object. This approach to ecphrasis is an interesting twist because so often it has been suggested that poets turn to the visual arts because they admire, even envy, the nontemporal repose of paintings and sculpture. The allure of the visual arts for Graham is just the opposite: They activate her rage to subsume all art forms into the kinesis of personal change.

Poems, for Graham, should not be told by survivors. In reviewing Graham's third volume of poetry, *The End of Beauty*, for *The New Yorker*, Helen Vendler majestically sums up this impetus in Graham's poetry, tracing it back to an early essay written before the publication of *Erosion*:

... In an essay called "Some Notes on Silence," explaining why she writes poems of inconclusive, ongoing presentness, Graham contrasts such poems with narratives, reminiscences, and prophecies—poetic forms that are strung on the temporal axis of past, present, and future. . . . [P]oems in the past tense are told by a survivor of the experience recounted. Such poems are containers for understood experience rather than a precarious enacting of experience as it is being undergone. . . .

Rushing into temporality, Graham's new verse resembles Action painting in words. (75)

Graham's commitment to art forms which render the artist herself vulnerable becomes increasingly evident in *The End of Beauty* and *Region of Unlikeness*. Even the title of the latter comes to mean, as one reads the volume, the self which is never self-identical and the terra incognita wherein metaphorical unities come undone.

The opening poem, "Fission," suggests this fragmentation and also reveals a new dimension in Graham's employment of ecphrasis. Rather than using a painting as the "springing off scene," Graham describes a film, Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*, based on Nabokov's novel of the same name. Both Helen Vendler and Bonnie Costello note a shift from the pictorial to the cinematic in Graham's work and see it as a symptom or sign of postmodernity in Graham's artistic practice. Vendler suggests that "the inevitable present tense of film," its rhythm of "this moment, then this moment," becomes the formal principle of Graham's poetry after *Erosion* (76); and Costello suggests that Graham's recent work decenters the image, "thrusting it out of controlling aesthetic form and into personal and public history. . . . Film rather than painting has become her sister art" (276).

While the comments of Vendler and Costello are both precise and evocative, their insights can be usefully enlarged by looking more closely at the poem "Fission." This poem is, I think, epic in its dimensions while also being intensely, almost obscenely, personal. What Graham begins in *Erosion* (that vivisection of masterworks which reveals the spurious insularity of aesthetic experience and

pleasure) is carried further in "Fission." In this poem and in the later work generally, Graham applies her analytic, deconstructive gaze not only to the ephephastic subject, but also to herself. While "Two Paintings by Gustav Klimt" focuses on the deceptive surface layering of Klimt's palimpsests, the focus of "Fission" is more inclusive and unstable. The poem begins with a description of *Lolita*: "the full-sized / screen / on which the greater-than-life-size girl appears" (3). Graham's description entangles both the film's subject and the film qua film. In virtual simultaneity, we are made aware of the film's encompassing contexts: the theater with its "real electric lights," the viewer of the film (the poem's speaker, a young girl, perhaps Graham herself, who sits in the audience with her father), and also the larger historical context.

It is, we learn, 1963, the year John F. Kennedy was shot and killed. The announcement of this event disrupts the kinetic flow of cinema and the aesthetic experience of the speaker. If historical awareness had an originary moment for Graham's generation, it would probably be John F. Kennedy's assassination. The sense of the tragic was inscribed in and by this event, as was, paradoxically, the personal. As is so often noted, everyone remembers what they were doing when they first heard news of this president's death.

It is this moment, the collision (or fission) of aesthetic experience with the public and the historical, that Graham explores in "Fission." A man runs into the theater, "asking for our attention," . . . "the man hoarse now as he waves his arms, / as he screams to the booth to cut it, cut the sound . . ." (4-5). I quote in this broken fashion because the film plays on as the man screams, and the poem's speaker describes her divided experience from more than one perspective. At times, she seems to be wholly inside the experience of viewing the film. At other times, perspective seems to embrace the larger context (and here one should remember Graham's admiration for Pollock's handling of perspective).

As the man continues to shout, various lights go up: first the electric lights of the theater, revealing "the magic forearm" (4) of the cinematic light coming from the projector. These additional lights turn the screen figures, *Lolita* with her heart-shaped sunglasses, her mother and Humbert Humbert, into leper-like figures. Next, "the theater's skylight is opened and noon slides in / . . . whiting the story out one layer further" (5). *Lolita*'s flesh is turned into "a roiling up of grayness," "bits of moving zeros" (5). As the "real" lights of the theater deteriorate the image projected by the film light, and as the "more real" light of noon destroys the lights of the theater, and as all these lights wrap themselves about "the real," what ultimately gets revealed is the poem's speaker herself:

Where the three lights merged:
 where the image licked my small body from the front, the story playing
 all over my face my
 forwardness,
 where the electric lights took up the back and sides,
 the unwavering houselights,
 seasonless,

where the long thin arm of day came in from the top
 to touch my head,
 reaching down along my staring face—
 where they flared up around my body unable to

 merge into each other
 over my likeness,
 slamming down one side of me, unquenchable—here static

 there flaming—
 sifting grays into other grays—
 mixing the split second into the long haul—
 flanking me—undressing something there where my
 body is
 though not my body—
 where they play on the field of my willingness,

 where they kiss and brood, filtering each other to no avail,
 all over my solo
 appearance. . . . (6-7)

This solo appearance, a showing of the self to the self, is extremely painful. Graham compares the speaker's sense of exposure to being made suddenly naked. Light becomes a perversely erotic force, undressing her, fondling her body. The viewer, rather than the film, suddenly becomes the center of attention, or so, at least, she feels herself to be. Where Graham in "Two Paintings by Gustav Klimt" focuses on Klimt's exhibition of a painted woman's body, here she focuses on the exhibition of her own body.

The classic privacy of the cinema is violated, dramatically. The primary conditions of film as medium—the invisibility of the cinematic apparatus and the invisibility of spectators—are all at once exploded, revealing the voyeuristic privacy of the audience that Laura Mulvey discusses in her germinal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." It is not just that the speaker in Graham's poem becomes excruciatingly aware of her body; it is also that she becomes aware of her own desire, as it has been stirred by the film. "I wanted," she says, "someone to love" (6). And yet she resists being an object of desire; she thinks, "there is a way to not yet be wanted / . . . no telling what on earth we'll have to marry marry marry" (6). The speaker finds herself in what Mulvey would call the "traditional exhibitionist role" (11) of woman; her eros, like that of the young *Lolita*'s under Humbert Humbert's male gaze, is beginning to be fixed in her "to-be-looked-at-ness," to use again a phrase from Mulvey (11).

The poem is full of exposures—the exposure of the cinematic apparatus, the exposure of the viewer, the exposure of the personal moment as a public moment. The public largeness of Kennedy's assassination redoubles the nakedness and embarrassment of personal desire. Desire, especially the desire of a young girl, seems minute and mortifying within the magnitudes of history. Cast within the trajectory of tragedy (if it is true that tragedy is only for males, as Camille Paglia claims), the girl could be made to feel even more small. Reading the poem as a

In moving her iconoclasm from the field of pictorial art to the mobilities of film, Graham becomes, I think, more readily able to suggest the processional and kinesis of image and icon and also their immersion in history and time. By focusing on visual masterpieces of the past, *Erosion* seems to cast itself against the notion of image inherited from Modernism. Iconoclasm in *Region of Unlikeness* definitely moves within the postmodern maze of images, or what Baudrillard calls “simulacra.” The “precession of simulacra” that moves through “Fission” presumes no ultimate ground for mimesis; the image is never certainly an image of anything. The poem shows a speaker who moves through simulacra, including simulacra of herself. The image of Lolita is in one sense an image of the speaker herself, and as the film dissolves, dissolving Lolita’s body, so also does the speaker’s sense of her body dissolve. The lights with their “sifting grays into other grays” (7) turn her into an “almost leper” like Lolita.

For the Jorie Graham of *Region of Unlikeness*, who declared in her previous volume's title "the end of beauty," images are, if anything, a shroud to reality. I quote now the end of the poem "Fission":

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of the layers of the
 real: what is what also is, what might be that is,
 what could have been that is, what
 might have been that is, what I say that is,
 what the words say that is,
 what you imagine the words say that is—Don't move, don't
 wreck the shroud, don't move— (8)

"Choice," the only thing that gives the girl agency and being, must negotiate the most complex of regions and unlikenesses. Choice must sort through layer after layer, image after image. Successive, mobile layers of image may wrap the real, or they may be the real. Getting to the heart of the real, for Graham, means, I think, the pondering of a mass grave, not only the particular death of Kennedy but also the nothingness at the center of metaphysics, the nothingness of the female body. The shift from immobile to moving image in Graham's ecphrastic work and the iconoclasm which she exerts on the images of both media enable her to peer, reverentially I think, into the graves of both beauty and truth and to begin to construct a feminine subject who exists in agency rather than image.

Laura Mulvey ends "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" with this comment: "It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article." Mulvey would destroy pleasure and beauty "in order to conceive a new language of desire" (8). Graham's iconoclasm is similar in its aim.

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