

Lorna Simpson's *Public Sex* Series: The Voyeuristic Presence and the Embodied Figure's Absence

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The highly acclaimed African-American artist, Lorna Simpson has acquired a strong reputation for images of 'blackness' that counter stereotypes by persuading viewers to acknowledge those aspects of black identity that are usually overlooked in a white patriarchal society. To address the invisibility and anonymity of black individuals in a white supremacist culture, Simpson explores such power relations as the colonizing gaze and the dichotomy between public bodies and private selves.

In 1995 Sean Kelly's SoHo gallery debuted Simpson's *Public Sex* series that introduced a new visual approach to the presentation of bodies defined by socially constructed norms and prejudices that promote the power structures of dominant groups. The series is composed of six large-scale, multi-paneled photographs silk-screened on felt. Consisting of elliptical texts paired with straightforward imagery, the images are constructed around the theme of private activities taking place in public spaces. Inspired by a book on public sex that deals with the laws and social mores surrounding this activity, Simpson photographed the following seven public sites potentially associated with private sexual acts: a rock, a parked car, a fire escape, an office building, a park and two beds.¹ Accompanying the photographic image are one or two text panels, which contain a phrase or narrative suggesting sexual encounters, illicit activities and voyeuristic pleasures that might relate to these surprisingly unpopulated sites.

What appear to be objective photographs, or seamless representations of reality, are actually somewhat nebulous and fragmented images that deny a straightforward reading and interpretation.² The division of the photographic image into multiple felt panels evokes the constructed nature of photo-

collages and photomontages—techniques that rupture the belief in the seamlessness of reality, insist upon meaning and thereby urge interpretation.³ The photographs in the *Public Sex* series, through this literal emphasis on the constructed nature of the images, lead viewers outside the photographic field in search of a lucid reading of the image. The initial response is to read titles and captions. The nondescript titles of the works in the *Public Sex* series, however, function in a manner similar to the image and offer no immediate explanation.

Efforts to decipher a direct meaning from the documentary-style photographs are further circumvented by the texts, which supply the content, context and possible interpretations of each image without ratifying a particular reading. This juxtaposition of apparently unrelated texts consisting of seductive imagery redirects observers' attention away from mere observation and toward the more complex act of reading representations dialectically. The dynamic relationship between text and image destabilizes traditional rules of reading and looking by prompting viewers to formulate readings of the piece that the images may not validate or support.

Simpson manipulates spectatorship by utilizing the Brechtian method of distancing that relies on audience participation through speculative detachment.⁴ The playwright Bertolt Brecht was an advocate of the epic theater, an anti-representational performative style that incorporates audiences in the production of art's meaning by forcing them to view the work from a detached critical standpoint rather than passively identifying with the fictional characters on stage. Using such estranging devices as actors addressing the audi-

I would like to thank Dr. Robert Hobbs, M. Kathryn Shields and Michael S. Holko for their insightful commentary and generous support. My gratitude also extends to Susan Kelly of Sean Kelly Gallery for her invaluable assistance with the illustrations.

¹ In a videotape about the series, Simpson recounts how she found this book on public sex. David Bowden dir., "Lorna Simpson," *A World of Art, Works in Progress*, Program 1 (Portland, Or.: So. Burlington, VT: Oregon Public Broadcasting [producer]; Annenberg/CPB Project [distributor], 1996).

² Thanks to Dr. Jack Freiberg for pointing out the unseaming of reality in these images and the subsequent emphasis placed on the construction of these photographs.

³ Rosalind Krauss refers to the seamless nature of photography in the following terms: "By carrying on its continuous surface the trace or imprint of all that vision captures in one glance, photography normally functions as a

kind of declaration of the seamlessness of reality itself." After establishing this premise, Krauss discusses how dada and surrealist photographers challenged this notion of seamlessness through the use of collage and photomontage. In her discussion of how collage and photomontage reveal another sense of reality that carries a particular reading, Krauss argues that the reliance upon interpretation in these constructed photographic images indicates a textual structure at work in the image. Replacing the notion of photorealism in the constructed photograph is what Krauss calls the "language effect." The fragments function as signs or words and the spacing surrounding them provides the syntax. Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism," *L'Amour Fou: Surrealism and Photography* (New York: Abeville Press, 1985) 25-35.

⁴ Marianne Kurylo-Litvak, *The Art of Lorna Simpson: Challenging Pre-conceived Notions with Invisibility Imagery*, thesis, Queens College, City University, 1998, 17.

ence and holding placards, back projections and unfamiliar settings, Brecht focused on creating a sense of discontinuity and unfamiliarity that generated an alienating effect for the audience.

The *Public Sex* series evokes Brecht's epic theater: documentary-style photographs serve as backdrops for a non-linear narrative comprised of commentary, abstract conversations, and excerpts from movie scripts. The combination of Simpson's textual collages and multi-paneled grainy photographs ruptures any sense of reality by underscoring the constructed nature of the works. Similar to Brecht's montages, Simpson's text/image relationship encourages a critical examination of contemporary social, economic and political practices.⁵ In the way the works are experiential, they require the delays of looking, reading, comparing and contrasting. The dialectical process involved in viewing this series leads viewers to critically explore how prejudice is constructed and transported by way of power mechanisms invested in social and political structures.

Power enforced through tactics of surveillance is a central issue in this series. Focusing on *The Park* (Figure 1) and *The Bed* (Figure 2), two of the most complex works in the series, this essay examines how Simpson addresses the role surveillance plays in the development and reinforcement of prejudice based on skin tone and sexual tendencies. The theories of French philosopher Michel Foucault, a major late twentieth-century authority on surveillance, are introduced to elucidate the mechanics of power at play in Simpson's *Public Sex* series.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault examines the rise of the prison and those techniques through which disciplinary power functions.⁶ The system of power that serves as Foucault's major model is Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, which was developed in the nineteenth century. Bentham's design for the Panopticon depicts a circular building divided into glass-walled cells with a tower at its center from which a warden, doctor or other institutional figure can observe the inmates in their daily lives.⁷ This disciplinary system, in which surveillance serves as a means for enforcing acceptable behavior, is successful when the subjects under observation end up policing themselves because they cannot anticipate or even know when they are being watched. Foucault uses the example of the Panopticon to demonstrate how knowledge, based on observation and theories of discipline, infuses power. He conjectures that power depends on relations between entities: it is not controlled by individuals or groups.

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there...not only do individuals circulate between its thread; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power.... Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.⁸

The objectifying result of surveillance is summarized by Foucault as: "An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing it to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself."⁹ This policing of the self is a consequence of not knowing when one is being watched, and the effect of disciplinary power is diffused to the point that the external eye is internalized and self-directed.

In the *Public Sex* series, Foucauldian notions of power surface in Simpson's analysis of the invisibility and discrimination against people of darker skin as well as those participating in sexual conduct not sanctioned by society. Exploring how race, class and sexuality affect power, she hits upon three major aspects of Foucault's theory: power relations, the Panopticon, and the subject's internalization of the external eye.

Serving as the "projective eye" of surveillance, the camera transports both the photographer and the work's audience to a position of dominance not unlike the tower of Bentham's Panopticon. From this elevated vantage point, consistent with that of the photographer and characters Simpson introduces in the narratives, viewers of *The Park* are immediately positioned in a voyeuristic position of surveillance, which affords knowledge and thus power. The identity of the text's narrator is central to the analysis of *The Park*. It is unclear whether the narrator is another voyeur, the artist, or the viewer. The text shifts from first to third person, from participant to spectator, puzzling viewers and in turn increasing their curiosity. Mirroring Brechtian techniques of distanciation, Simpson prevents her audience from identifying directly with any specific character in the narratives through a disjunctive use of language, which prompts new readings and distinct interpretations of the artworks. Presented with various perspectives from within the network of power, viewers are introduced to the way power functions via knowledge gained through the observation of others.

On the text panel located to the left of the image, Simpson writes: "Just unpacked a new shiny silver telescope. And we

⁵ The epic theater allowed Brecht to encourage "a rational critique of contemporary social, economic and political practices." Roger Fowler, "epic theater," *Dictionary of Theories*, ed. Jennifer Bothamley (London: Gale Research International Ltd, 1993) 178.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

⁷ For an illustration of Bentham's Plan of the Panopticon refer to Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, plate 3.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 98.

⁹ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 154.

are up high enough for a really good view of all the buildings and the park.... On the sidewalk below a man watches figures from across the path." In response to this account, the panel on the right states: "The lone sociologist walks through the park...he decides to adopt the role of voyeur and look out in order to go unnoticed and noticed at the same time." The fragmented and elusive narrative brings viewers into the work and produces an awkward feeling of complicity. During a videotaped interview, Sean Kelly states: "It's almost like you're eavesdropping on something and that refers back to the voice in the text in the way that you're almost hearing something you're not meant to hear, you're finding something you weren't quite supposed to find."¹⁰

Knowledge resulting from surveillance grants observers the authority to codify and enforce, through social practices, accepted truths and tolerable infractions. In *The Park*, Simpson demonstrates how science plays a part in the construction of these social norms. The figure of the sociologist in her text introduces the scientific treatment of the body as an instrument for securing power relations through the justification of such categories as normalcy and deviancy. The sociologist in *The Park* is a reference to Laud Humphreys who in the 1970s studied homosexual activities in the men's public bathrooms, known as tearooms.¹¹ Situated in the center of the sexual activity he is monitoring, Humphreys serves as a lookout announcing the arrival of police—a position that granted him unmediated access to witness sexual developments.

The flexibility of power positions is a prominent theme in *The Park*. In the text panel on the left, the narrator comments on the man watching "figures from across the path," thereby stressing how he too is observed and further integrates viewers into the piece by highlighting the sociologist's role as a surrogate voyeur. In the same manner that he evaluates the sexual conduct of tearooms, those observing the sociologist could reach their own assumptions about his sexuality because of his apparent involvement with these men.¹² The impossibility of unbiased reading, the misleading quality of appearances and the importance of context are thus indicated in this piece to emphasize the unreliability and inaccuracy of generalized knowledge.

Through these ambiguous positions in which viewers are placed, Simpson sets up a parallel between watching and being watched, demonstrating how power is transmitted via the objectifying gaze and invested in a system rather than in a hierarchical structure. She creates a complex chain of voyeurism that includes the viewer, the photographer, the sociolo-

gist, and his subjects. This voyeuristic chain demonstrates how systems of power become mechanisms in which viewers and voyeurs are subjected to the gaze of public surveillance as well as being its promoters. The ambivalent locus of the gaze in this piece echoes Foucault's description of power relations.

Applying the existential dilemma of the internalization of surveillance to black identity and consciousness, African-American feminist scholar bell hooks reflects:

Most black folks in the United States are colonized—that is think about "blackness" in much the same ways as racist white mainstream culture. Living in white-supremacist culture, we mostly see images of black folks that reinforce and perpetuate the accepted, desired subjugation and subordination of black bodies by white bodies.¹³

In her *Public Sex* series, Simpson may be commenting on this internalization of the objectifying gaze. *The Bed* plays an interesting role in the series since it is the only piece depicting an interior view, using a double image, and referencing racial and economic discrimination. This distinction raises several profound questions. The first is a reaction to critical reviews of the series itself, which typically analyze its theme of sexuality in universal terms by asserting that it is unconcerned with race.¹⁴ If this assertion is accurate, why does Simpson specifically refer to skin tone in the text for *The Bed*? The text panel states:

...decided to have a quick nightcap at the hotel having checked in earlier. Hotel security is curious and knocks on the door to inquire as to what is going on, given our surroundings we suspect that maybe we have broken the too many dark people in the room code.

The mysterious imagery and the slippery arrangement of the text place viewers in the narrational 'we,' even before 'we' connotes a collective concerting of 'dark' people. Later, the narrator addresses issues of surveillance and privacy in terms of 'you.' "More privacy is attained depending on what floor you are on, if you are in the penthouse suite you could be pretty much assured of your privacy, if you were on the 6th or 10th floor there would be a knock on the door." Viewers simultaneously penetrate and stand outside the indeterminate 'you' that may refer to viewers, general human subjects, the dark bodies discussed or their light-skinned counterparts.

Simpson employs textual ambiguity and equivocal lan-

¹⁰ Sean Kelly in Bowden's "Lorna Simpson," *A World of Art, Works in Progress*.

¹¹ The reference to Laud Humphreys was pointed out by Kurylo-Litvak in *The Art of Lorna Simpson*. Kurylo-Litvak 32.

¹² This visual interplay also functions like a chain of signifiers where actions, postures and appearances become signs that are (mis)read.

¹³ bell hooks, "Female Difference: The Black Female Body," *Lorna Simpson* (Vienna: Wiener Secession, 1995) 9-10.

¹⁴ Most of the publications dealing with the *Public Sex* series address the "universality" of the works and discount the significance of discrimination based on anything other than gender and sexuality. Eleanor Heartney, for example, stated the following: "Race, previously one of Simpson's dominant themes, is played down here." Eleanor Heartney, "Figuring Absence," *Art In America* (Dec. 1995): 87. While issues of race or skin color may not be the theme of the series or accentuated in many of the works, this paper hopes to reveal that Simpson's sensitivity to the subject of racial prejudice plays a more complex and critical role than these critics claim.

guage in *The Bed* to challenge viewer's response to racial and economic difference. The term 'dark' is another enigmatic device, a slippery signifier, interjected to provoke an unmediated response based on racial assumptions. Using the term 'dark' Simpson demonstrates how stereotypes play into everyone's reading of images and text by prompting viewers to immediately conclude that she is referring to blacks or people of color.¹⁵ Those familiar with her previous works concerned with issues of black identity could be conditioned to read the *Public Sex* images, particularly *The Bed*, as a statement on black invisibility.

In this piece, however, Simpson introduces broader prejudicial issues by presenting 'dark' bodies in opposition to 'light,' a quality not solely defined in terms of the white dominant class. This other-than-light-skin classification may not only reference the marginal position of blacks, Latinos and American Indians in white society, but also discrimination against darker skinned people of the same race. The emphasis on gradations of skin color, rather than generalizations of race, revert the work's focus to the individual.

The next question is: Why does Simpson choose to present the issue of racial identity within the context of a hotel room, the least 'public' of the sites in the series. Perhaps, the anonymity of a hotel room parallels the public/private faces of those prisoners in the cells of a Panopticon who are known from the outside, and whose bodies and minds are objectified as they are being surveilled. In both spaces—the hotel room and the Panopticon—the gaze of public surveillance penetrates the boundaries of the private and personal.

These 'dark' individuals that populate the text, like the sociologist and other voyeurs mentioned in *The Park*, are invisible in the photographs, further revealing a deliberate disparity in the information provided to viewers. The body, which is simultaneously absent and present in these works, may reference the invisibility of socially marginalized and oppressed bodies. In the same way that these existing bodies are denied visibility in these public sites, the presence of those subjected to the dominant group's oppressive position is overlooked and erased in social spaces. Even within the relatively private realm of the hotel room, the individuals have internalized the objectifying and controlling eye that only sees in terms of generalities and appearances according to regulated norms and knowledge. Simpson's viewers, on the other hand, are informed of

the presence of these individual or private bodies through the dialectical relationship between the text and photograph that forces them to acknowledge the notion of invisibility.

When juxtaposed with the other images in the series, *The Bed* also stands out in its use of a double image. The photographic technique of doubling, its semiological significance and its implications of dispossession are extensively discussed by Rosalind Krauss in *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*. Defining doubling as the "signifier of signification," Krauss demonstrates how the double image communicates signification, a meaning beyond the purely visual or documentary image.¹⁶ More than an illustration, the bed becomes the signifier of an underlying meaning in the same way the fragmentary surface of the print accentuates its construction. By doubling the object portrayed and refraining from presenting the title in plural form, Simpson further complicates the interpretation of this piece. The beds are not identical and the title implies one bed, while two beds are represented. The deliberately inexact duplication and inconsistent titling opens the reading of the image onto more subjective levels of interpretation.

Beyond serving as an indicator of signification, a wedge in the seamlessness of reality and a reminder of subjectivity's role in the attribution of meaning to these works, doubling also refers to the issue of invisibility that is central to *The Bed*. Krauss associates the use of the double in surrealist photography with the sociobiological theory on mimicry that Roger Caillois set forth in the seventh volume of the surrealist publication *Minotaure*.¹⁷ In this 1935 publication, Caillois asserted that conscious subjects, upon blending with the surrounding space, become dispossessed.¹⁸ Furthermore, Krauss indicates how this notion of dispossession is developed by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in his mirror theory "in which the subject occurs only as alienated from himself—for he is defined or inscribed as a *being-seen*..."¹⁹ Basing her argument on Caillois and Lacan's theories, Krauss concludes that the doubled subject in the photographic prints of surrealist Maurice Tabard is "a subject that is dispossessed within its very being by the fact of being seen."²⁰ The duplication of the represented image in *The Bed* also introduces the notions of invisibility and dispossession. Simpson's subjects, which are visually absent in the photographed space, are dispossessed by their objectification via observation and subsequent anonymity.

¹⁵ Further complicating signification and increasing the audience's awareness of their own subjective interpretation, the signifier "dark" can also connote such notions as mysterious, suspicious, evil, death, etc.

¹⁶ Krauss explains, "In being seen in conjunction with the original, the double destroys the pure singularity of the first. Through duplication, it opens the original to the effect of difference, of deferral, of one-thing-after-another." She compares doubling in surrealist photography with the notion of reduplication in linguistics that attributes signification to the reduplication of a sound, rather than dismissing it as mere babble, since it suggests the intent of the speaker. "Repetition is thus the indicator that the ... sounds ... have been rendered deliberate, intentional, and that what they intend is meaning." Krauss, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism" 28-31.

¹⁷ Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," *L'Amour Fou: Surrealism and Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985) 74.

¹⁸ Krauss translates: "Mimicry, Caillois argues, is the loss of this possession because the animal that merges with its setting becomes dispossessed." Krauss, "Corpus Delicti" 74-78.

¹⁹ Caillois' article influenced not only the surrealist group but also the psychoanalytical circles in Paris at the time. The focus on doubling, in this case "replication of a conscious subject by his pictured duplicate," serves as the foundation for Jacques Lacan's mirror stage. Krauss, "Corpus Delicti" 74.

²⁰ Krauss, "Corpus Delicti" 82.

The works in the *Public Sex* series challenge the power relations and social values that pass judgment upon these bodies. While maintaining a sense of bodily presence, Simpson avoids any visual reference to specific bodies. Some of the text panels directly refer to the body. For example, in *The Fire Escape* (Figure 3), "...they ended up with impressions on their skin in the shape of stripes." In others, it manifests itself as a voyeuristic eye, an eavesdropping ear, conspiring voices, and the passions and desires described in *The Rock* (Figure 4), *The Car* (Figure 5), and *The Clock Tower* (Figure 6). Her unpopulated images are statements about the private self and its identity within the public space where its politicization is placed in high relief.

Considering (1) Lorna Simpson's ability to have anyone from any culture identify with her images, and (2) the importance of audiences in her work, it appears that she assessed the venue of these works and acknowledged that her audience would consist mostly of the empowered art world population. Perhaps in an attempt at equalizing the traditional power relations of the gaze, particularly the subject-spectator paradigm, Simpson used a seemingly neutral imagery that would be a

more effective way of drawing this audience into her work and communicating the invisibility of certain minority groups, as opposed to images laden with references to a specific racial and sexual identity. Her allusive treatment of racial issues in this series is most likely yet another subversive tactic aimed at having viewers, regardless of race, discover their prejudices in the process of looking at the works.²¹

Just as audiences of Brecht's plays do not suspend disbelief, viewers of Lorna Simpson's works become aware of their role in the construction of its meaning through broken imagery and paired text/image presentation. The disparity of visual evidence and text not only creates the stage for the exposition of prejudicial issues of a sexual and racial nature, it also displays inherent assumptions made about the images. By deconstructing both the imagery and possible meanings implied by Simpson's polysemous photo-text works, viewers question their own methods of reading, challenge their own preconceived notions, and ultimately initiate the process of reconstructing a positive identity from negative stereotypes.

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²¹ In the *Public Sex Series*, Simpson also explores the preconceptions and positions of power that result from socioeconomic classifications and the value systems placed upon sexuality. Unfortunately, the length of this ar-

ticle does not permit a thorough discussion of the pertinent issues that Simpson raises and challenges in connection with these constructions of power.



Figure 1. Lorna Simpson, *The Park*, 1995, serigraph on six felt panels with two felt text panels, 33.5 x 22.5 inches each panel. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Text panels for *The Park*

[left panel] *Just unpacked a new shiny silver telescope. And we are up high enough for a really good view of all the buildings and the park. The living room window seems to be the best spot for it. On the sidewalk below a man watches figures from across the path.*

[right panel] *It is early evening, the lone sociologist walks through the park, to observe private acts in the men's public bathrooms. These facilities are men's and women's rooms back to back. He focuses on the layout of the men's room—right to left: basin, urinal, urinal, urinal, stall, stall. He decides to adopt the role of voyeur and look out in order to go unnoticed and noticed at the same time. His research takes several years. He names his subjects A, B, C, X, Y, and O, records their activities for now, and their license plates when applicable for later.*



Figure 2. Lorna Simpson, *The Bed*, 1995, serigraph on four felt panels with one felt text panel, 36 x 22.5 inches each panel. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Text panel for *The Bed*

It is late, decided to have a quick nightcap at the hotel having checked in earlier that morning. Hotel security is curious and knocks on the door to inquire as to what's going on, given our surroundings we suspect that maybe we have broken the too many dark people in the room code. More privacy is attained depending on what floor you are on, if you are in the penthouse suite you could be pretty much assured of your privacy, if you were on the 6th or 10th floor there would be a knock on the door.

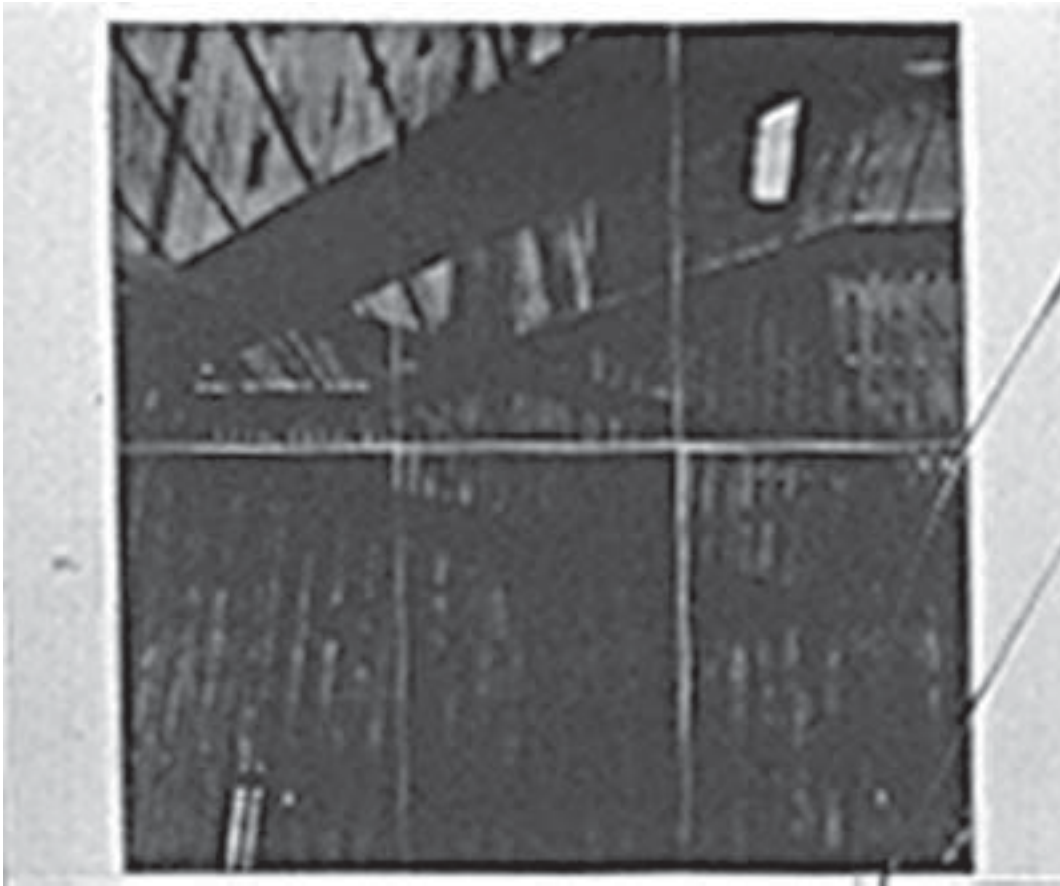


Figure 3. Lorna Simpson, *The Fire Escape*, 1995, serigraph on six felt panels with one felt text panel, 34 x 23 inches each panel. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Text panel for *The Fire Escape*
... and then, they ended up with impressions on their skin in the shape of stripes.

Figure 4. Lorna Simpson, *The Rock*, 1995, serigraph on twelve felt panels with two felt text panels, 33.5 x 22.5 inches each panel. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Text panels for *The Rock*

[left panel] *Female Trouble: Divine has just left home after an argument over a Christmas gift, and storms out of the house. She is picked up on the highway by an auto-mechanic (played by Divine). They approach a wooded area and have frantic sex on a mattress, by the side of the road.*

[left panel] *Driving all day long, has induced a hypnotic state upon both of us. It is definitely time to pull over. I recognize the state park that we are now in the middle of, and can endure a few more minutes of this drive in order to find the same spot I went to last time I was here. Hoping that this search will not turn into another journey, since I didn't make any mental notes of the surroundings during my last visit, I'm ill prepared, and not really wanting to appear too familiar with the area. I make an effort this time to commit this trip to memory. But here we are, sick of driving. We get out of the car and start to hike to find a spot and it will probably replace the last one, completely. Haven't seen any weekend hikers for a while and since we are miles away from any rest stops it seems plausible that we will not be patrolled. I asked, How's this? Is it secluded enough for you?*





Figure 5. Lorna Simpson, *The Car*, 1995, serigraph on twelve felt panels with one felt text panel, 34 x 26 inches each panel. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Text panel for *The Car*

I could hear the voices of a couple arguing in the distance. It sounds as though they have entered the arcade, but only their voices have entered, and linger for a while even after they have passed the opening and continue on their way. The intensity of their voices indicates an argument, but I am not really concentrating on them completely. It seems as though even if they had walked through they would not have noticed the presence of anyone, let alone anyone having sex. It is around noon time, other than that and you can hear a pin drop in this echo chamber. An open car door, the perfect hour, perfect opportunity. We get into the car, which becomes a small cramped room within a larger room.

Figure 6. Lorna Simpson, *The Clock Tower*, 1995, serigraph on twelve felt panels with one felt text panel, 33.5 x 22.5 inches each panel. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Text panel for *The Clock*

He can hear sighs and conversations of people collecting in the hall waiting for elevators, heading out of the building, the telephone rings. Good, I hoped that you were still here. Yeah, well I thought that it might be you. Where do you want to meet? Well, they are still under construction on the 15th floor and the union guys are out of there by now and I think they have finished a few of the offices with good views. Wait a second... I don't hear the muffled power tools. Want to go there? Sure, I have not been down there as yet. What about the rooftop conference room? Was there anything scheduled today? I don't think so, but we will have to take the stairs to get up there.... the west staircase is always an option a little later if you still have work to do. Naw, I'm almost finished. What time do you have? 8:20. I'll meet you in the hall at a quarter to. Okay.

