ABSENCE IN CINEMA

THE ART OF SHOWING NOTHING

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NAOMI UMAN AND THE PEEKABOO PRINCIPLE

I hear underclothes tearing like some great leaf
Under the fingernails of absence and presence in collusion.

—André Breton, “Vigilance”

Accustom the public to divining the whole of which they are given only a part. Make people diviners. Make them desire it.

—Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematograph*

In 1951 Robert Rauschenberg rolled commercial white house paint onto a series of canvases to create works that were ostensibly free of any content. His goal was to “see how much you could pull away from an image and still have an image.”[1] There were several iterations of these austere, mysterious objects: some with a single panel, others with two, three, four, or seven panels. John Cage was deeply moved by Rauschenberg’s white paintings. He saw them not as mere voids but as “airports for the lights, shadows, and particles.”[2] Cage was astonished by just how much Rauschenberg had managed to evacuate from the aesthetic encounter:

No subject
No image
No taste
No object

No beauty
No message
No talent
No technique (no why)
No idea
No intention
No art
No feeling
No black
No white (no *and*)[3]

But where could Rauschenberg go from here? The white paintings seemed to push aesthetic absence to its limits. If the restless young artist had already created nothing, was the only remaining option *something*? Or might he succeed in discovering a new species of absence?

Rauschenberg had an idea. What if, instead of painting a canvas white, he *erased* a preexisting art work? He tried erasing some of his own drawings, but he was dissatisfied with the results. He would need to erase a work by another artist. In 1953 Rauschenberg visited the home of the celebrated abstract expressionist Willem de Kooning: “I bought a bottle of Jack Daniel’s and hoped that he wouldn’t be home when I knocked on the door. And he was home. And we sat down with the Jack Daniel’s, and I told him what my project was. He understood it. And he said, ‘Okay. I don’t like it, but I’m going to go along with it because I understand the idea.’ ” De Kooning began to look through his portfolios to find a drawing for Rauschenberg to erase, but he did not want to sacrifice a subpar sketch. For the gesture to have meaning, de Kooning would have to sacrifice a work of considerable originality and inspiration, a work that he would “miss.” De Kooning had another requirement. If his artistic creation had required time and effort, he wanted to ensure that its annihilation would require time and effort, as well: He told Rauschenberg, “I’m gonna make it so hard for you to erase this.”[4] De Kooning finally gave Rauschenberg a drawing that he had made with charcoal, oil paint, pencil, and crayon. Rauschenberg gratefully

accepted the gift and then proceeded to attack it with “about fifteen different types of erasers.”[5] After scraping away at the canvas for a full month, Rauschenberg finally succeeded in effacing the image. Well, almost. *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953) is still teeming with the fragmentary and inchoate traces of the original drawing. As Craig Dworkin notes, a more accurate title for the work would be *Partially Erased de Kooning Drawing*.[6] Looking at the recalcitrant residue of de Kooning’s art work, one is reminded of an aphorism by the Lettrist artist Gil Wolman: “An image cannot be deleted … something always remains.”[7]

In 1919 Marcel Duchamp revealed that art could consist of simply *adding* an element to a preexisting work when he drew a mustache and a beard on a postcard reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*. Now Rauschenberg was moving in the opposite direction by *subtracting* elements from a preexisting work. John Cage provided a succinct synopsis of this aesthetic history: “Duchamp showed the usefulness of addition (mustache). Rauschenberg showed the function of subtraction (De Kooning). Well, we look forward to multiplication and division. It is safe to assume that someone will learn trigonometry. Johns.”[8] Perhaps the time has come to fill in some of the blanks in Cage’s schema: surely Andy Warhol is the great multiplier, with his endless repetitions of soup cans, Coke bottles, and cow heads. My vote for the great divider goes to Agnes Martin, whose monochromatic canvases are partitioned into discrete tessellated units. But did Jasper Johns ever “learn trigonometry”? And did an artist ever manage to discover the aesthetic analogue of multivariable calculus?

How might we transfer Cage’s mathematical metaphor to the domain of cinema? Sergei Eisenstein is the filmmaker who is most invested in addition, the way the montage of two distinct shots creates a whole greater than the sum of its parts (1 + 1 = 3). The apotheosis of cinematic multiplication comes from Bruce Conner. In his Warholian found footage film *MARILYN TIMES FIVE* (1968–1973), Conner loops erotic footage of the Marilyn Monroe doppelgänger Arline Hunter while the sound track repeats Monroe’s

rendition of “I’m Thru With Love” (from Billy Wilder’s *Some Like It Hot* [1959]) five times. The great divider of cinema is Willard Maas, who in *Geography of the Body* (1943) uses extreme close-ups to subdivide the human form into its constituent parts: an eye, an ear, a breast, a mouth. And I would argue that one of the most forceful articulations of subtraction in cinema comes from Naomi Uman. In 1999 the American experimental filmmaker used nail polish and bleach to eliminate the women from a German pornographic film of the 1970s. The result, *removed*, is a fascinating and witty work of filmic erasure. While the spectator can still *hear* women reciting stereotypical lines of lubricious dialogue (“They say problems are best solved in bed”), the women can no longer be *seen*. In their place are amorphous, palpitating white holes that seem to be both immaterial traces of past presences and concrete ontological entities.[9] In this chapter I unearth precedents for Uman’s experiment in the erasures of avant-garde artists like Tom Friedman and Tom Phillips. I also argue that *removed* exploits a dialectic between absence and presence to expose (and reconfigure) the spectator’s scopophilic and phonophilic desires. Finally, I claim that the film’s potential for eroticism is largely derived from what the neuroscientist V. S. Ramachandran has called “the peekaboo principle,” a psychological mechanism that causes humans to be drawn to that which is hidden, erased, or obscured. Before fleshing out these arguments, however, it will be useful to provide a brief summary of Uman’s seven-minute found footage film.

“TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE”: A SYNOPSIS OF *REMOVED*

Absence disembodies.

—Emily Dickinson, “Absence disembodies—so does Death”

Prologue. *removed* begins with an erased woman staring at the camera in silence. Like Rauschenberg’s *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, the effacement is only partial. Ghostly traces of the original

image remain, permitting the viewer to glimpse a semblance of the woman's hair, eyes, nose, and mouth (see figure 3.1). The title of the film appears on the screen, and 1970s exploitation music begins to play.

Scene One. A white blob where a woman's body once was writhes and moans orgasmically on a bed as a young, handsome man with formidable sideburns watches. It appears that the woman—whose name is Yvonne—is masturbating, and the observant man strokes his chin, bemused by the spectacle. Yvonne seductively asks the man to join her, but he stays in place, saying, "I tried very hard that time too. But the good doctor's minions were more attractive. It's too bad, Yvonne. The train's pulled out of the station." It quickly becomes clear that we have entered this erotically charged film *in medias res*. Since its narrative armature has been removed, we can only guess at the meaning of the cryptic dialogue. (What did the man try so hard to do? And who are the doctor and his minions?) When Yvonne asks the man, "Will you stay on the platform and wave to me?" he responds with a cocky "No." As she walks away, he stares at her and says, "Have a good trip." After this, the screen becomes black and the music abruptly stops.

FIGURE 3.1 Naomi Uman, *removed* (1999)

Scene Two. After a few seconds of blackness and silence, the music resumes and we are introduced to Walter, a short, middle-aged man with a red bow tie and a cigarette dangling from his mouth. Walter sits on a couch near an erased woman while using a two-way mirror to voyeuristically spy on another woman in an adjacent room as she undresses. Walter's female companion removes her clothes and lies naked on a table in front of him, in a position that prevents her from seeing the erotic spectacle on the other side of the mirror. As Walter sensually caresses her body, she makes a request: "Tell me what you see." Throughout the following interchange, she breathes and moans heavily, clearly aroused by Walter's description of the woman on the other side of the mirror:

Walter: She's standing near the mirror.
Woman: And?
Walter: She's taking her make-up off.
Woman: And now?
Walter: They're still arguing. He's taking his pants off.
Woman: Go on.
Walter: She's almost finished removing her make-up. She's admiring herself. She's studying her body. She's rubbing her breasts.
Woman: How are her breasts? Hard? Small? Like mine?
Walter: Bigger. Soft white skin. He's approaching her from behind.
Woman: What's he doing now, Walter?
Walter: He's pulling her panties off. His hands are wandering over her body.
Woman: Oh yes!
Walter: She's enjoying it.
Woman: Oh yes! Go on! Tell me! Everything! I want to know everything! Is she blonde? All over?
Walter: As dark as you are.
Woman: Go on.
Walter: She doesn't want to. Now he's turning her around. My God, she's got a fantastic ass!
Woman: Nicer than that lovely redhead's?
Walter: Now he's pushing her down on the bed.
Woman: Oh yes!
Walter: He's kissing her breasts.
Woman: Go on!

At this point, the music fades and a different mirror is shown. Unlike the two-way mirror that had previously displayed a man and his

(absent) lover, this mirror is completely devoid of content. The shot of the mirror is initially bathed in blue before the color shifts to red. The woman asks, “What’s the matter?” and the image of the mirror is abruptly replaced by film leader with upside-down numbers: 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3. *Pornographia interruptus*.

Scene Three. We return to the attractive man from scene 1, who is on a bed with Yvonne. Since she had previously left him, it is unclear if the couple has reunited, or if we are simply witnessing events that took place *before* the ones presented at the beginning of the film. (After all, the placement of a countdown in the middle of the film—rather than at the beginning—suggests Uman’s penchant for nonlinearity.) The man gets off the bed and walks away from Yvonne. Before leaving, he turns his head and gazes at her. Closing credits.

Epilogue. A black screen is displayed for almost a minute, accompanied by exploitation music and Yvonne’s orgasmic moaning. Climax.

ERASURES

I composed the holes.

—Ronald Johnson, *Radi os*

Uman is not the only artist to remove the nude bodies from pornography. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, for example, a number of artists became interested in applying digital processes of erasure to pornographic images from the internet. In his *Buff* series (1995–2005), Charles Cohen removes the actors from pornographic images, leaving in their place nothing more than evocative white silhouettes. In *Censored Porn (no flesh guaranteed)* (1997–2002), Mark Garrett replaces the flesh of nude bodies with computer desktop wallpaper. And in her *Stripped* series, Laura Carton erases the humans from pornographic photographs and digitally

reconstructs the backgrounds, so that there is no longer any trace of the original lascivious content. (The only hint that there were once nude bodies in Carton's photographs comes from the titles, which are domain names like www.joyboys.com [2002], www.plumperhumpers.com [2004], and www.pussycakes.com [2004].)[10]

A noteworthy precursor to these experiments is *11 × 22 × 0.005* (1992) by the American conceptual artist Tom Friedman. The work is simply a blank sheet of creased paper suspended by a thumbtack that purports to be "an erased *Playboy* centerfold."[11] (The title is a straightforward articulation of the width, height, and depth of the blank page.) Craig Dworkin's analysis of *11 × 22 × 0.005* is perceptive: "The viewer's thoughts—whether of the no-longer-present *Playboy* image, or of Friedman's manipulation of that image—are all that is left to arouse interest in the work, which is otherwise an unexceptional sheet of minutely pierced and twice-folded paper. Like the magazine masturbator, the viewer of conceptual art (or at least of this work of conceptual art) falls back on the mental activity of imagination."[12] There are a variety of ways of engaging with the missing content of both *removed* and *11 × 22 × 0.005*: First, one could attempt to mentally reconstruct what the erased women look like. Second, one could "fill in the blanks" with one's own fantasies, in much the way that Laurence Sterne invites each reader of *Tristram Shandy* to imagine his own idealized woman on the novel's blank page: "Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind—as like your mistress as you can—as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you—'tis all one to me—please but your own fancy in it."[13] Third, one could simply accept the absence *as* an absence, and stare into the abyss. Fourth, one might reflect on the labor-intensive process of each work's construction (or perhaps *de*struction). To create *removed*, Uman had to first cover everything she wanted to preserve with nail polish. She then covered the filmstrip in bleach, which chemically reacted with the emulsion and effaced the images that were not protected by the nail polish (that is, the women in the film). In other words, before using bleach, Uman had to meticulously apply nail polish to literally *thousands* of individual frames on the filmstrip.

When I asked Uman how long it took her to create *removed*, she responded with exasperation: “A long time.”[14] And one suspects a similar investment of time would have been necessary to create *11 × 22 × 0.005*. If Uman’s methods involved working on her found footage one frame at a time, Friedman’s methods involved effacing the *Playboy* centerfold one eraser stroke at a time. Of course, one cannot help but wonder if Friedman actually erased an image of a nude woman (in much the way that Rauschenberg erased de Kooning’s drawing) or if he simply pretended to do so. But even if Friedman’s story about the construction of *11 × 22 × 0.005* is a fiction, it is a functional fiction. The very fact that he *claims* that this sheet of paper once featured a *Playboy* centerfold changes the way a spectator “sees” the absence. Imagine how the aesthetic experience would have changed if Friedman had instead claimed to have erased a reproduction of the U.S. Constitution, or a page from the Bible, or a photograph of Robert Rauschenberg’s *Erased de Kooning Drawing*. Absence never exists in isolation. An erasure can be understood only in relation to what has been erased.

I should add that precedents for Uman’s experiment can be found not only in the blank canvases of Rauschenberg and Friedman but also in the literary erasures of the British artist Tom Phillips. In 1966 Phillips purchased a Victorian novel by W. H. Mallock entitled *A Human Document* (1892) and began covering most of its words with ink and paint. The result was an intermedia experiment that blurs the boundaries between literature and visual art. Phillips “erased” five letters of the original novel’s title and christened his text *A Humument*. The first draft of the altered book was finished in 1970 and first published in 1980. The text has been in a state of constant evolution ever since.[15] *A Humument* features an astonishing array of aesthetic styles, from surreal squiggles (reminiscent of Miró) to parodic comic book appropriations (à la Lichtenstein). The (visible) text of the book is also replete with literary allusions, including nods to Beckett (“as years went on, / you began to / fail / better”) and Joyce (“Oh, / Ah, / And / I said / yes /—yes, / I / will / yes).”[16] In addition to Phillips’s clear investment in postmodern pastiche, the

artist is also interested in exposing the "unconscious" of the stuffy and humorless Victorian novel. In fact, the aesthetic underpinnings of Phillips's project are articulated on its very first page: "I / have / to hide / to reveal."[17]

This language provides a useful way of thinking about erasures in a broad variety of media. Let us return, for example, to *Erased de Kooning Drawing*. Not only did Rauschenberg (nearly) obliterate the titular de Kooning drawing, but when he had his erasure framed, he also "hid" another de Kooning drawing that was on the opposite side of the page. Yet by directing attention *away* from de Kooning's drawings, Rauschenberg simultaneously drew attention *to* details that one might normally overlook: the picture frame, the border, the inscription, the imperfections of the paper. Along similar lines, when viewing a pornographic movie, one's attention is normally monopolized by the eroticized body on the screen. But when this body is erased, one instead notices other elements in the mise-en-scène: an empty bottle of Scotch, red flowers, Deutsche marks strewn across the bed. And one also experiences a heightened sensitivity to the film's sound track, including its lustful dialogue and orgiastic cries of pleasure. As Craig Dworkin puts it, "Erasures obliterate but they also reveal; omissions within a system permit other elements to appear all the more clearly."[18]

SCOPOPHILIA

> *There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure.*
>
> —Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

One of the central themes of *removed* is scopophilia: the pleasure derived from looking.[19] As Laura Mulvey notes in her classic essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," scopophilia is a key component in cinematic spectatorship, since "the cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking."[20] This is particularly true of pornography, of course, a genre that is predicated on the gratification

that comes from the gaze. In fact, in the original German pornographic film that Uman reworks, not only is the *viewer* meant to derive pleasure from looking at the eroticized bodies, but the film's *characters* derive pleasure from looking, as well. (Recall the scene in which Walter enjoys voyeuristically gazing on the sexual escapades of a young couple via a two-way mirror.) Mulvey further argues that women in film are often displayed in a way that foregrounds their "visual and erotic impact," their "*to-be-looked-at-ness*." But by removing the female bodies from her film, Uman subverts women's "traditional exhibitionist role" in cinema while reconfiguring the spectator's scopophilic urges.[21]

Why does Uman do this? Why strip away porn's raison d'être: its nude bodies? I have shown *removed* to hundreds of students, and the answers they give to this question, while generally thoughtful, tend to be at odds with Uman's own stated intentions. For example, many students see *removed* as a critique of pornography, a way of destroying and defacing a pornographic film to fight back against the genre's misogyny and objectification of women. But Uman is not entirely comfortable with this reading of the film. She believes that "porn has an important role to play in society," adding, "[*removed*] is definitely not a critique of all pornography, since I'm not anti-porn. I think that porn made with the explicit consent of all adult participants is its own art form. It doesn't necessarily reduce women to simple recipients or vessels."[22] Other students see *removed* as a feminist deconstruction of what Laura Mulvey calls "the male gaze."[23] While *removed* may or may not be a feminist film (Uman deflected this question when I interviewed her), it was not intended to be a critique of the male gaze.[24] Uman rejects the assumption that "the gaze that desires to see the female body is entirely male." There are, after all, a number of gay men who have little desire to see sexualized female bodies, and a number of gay and bisexual women who *do* desire to see these bodies. And this is not to mention the scopophilic pleasure that even straight women and gay men can derive from gazing on the nude female form. For Uman, "the desire to see" is "without gender."[25]

So if, in Uman's view, *removed* is not a critique of pornography or a feminist treatise on the male gaze, what is it? Why did Uman laboriously erase the women from thousands of frames of pornographic film? In an interview with Soledad Santiago, Uman revealed that one of her motivations in making *removed* was thinking through what makes porn pornographic: "I wanted to see what would happen if you remove the women. Would it still be pornography?"[26] In her interview with me, Uman concluded that the answer to this question is no: "I don't really think of [*removed*] as pornographic (and we have shown it in audiences with children). There is no nudity, and the point of the film is not to arouse."[27] There is much to unpack in this response. To begin, notice that Uman is not categorical in her categorization of the film. She does not say, "[*removed*] is not pornographic," but "I don't *really* think of [*removed*] as pornographic," a statement that suggests a certain level of ambivalence. Obviously, Uman has erased what many consider the *sine qua non* of heterosexual pornography: the nude women. But Uman is not entirely correct to assert that "there is no nudity" in *removed*. Early in the film a nude man's buttocks is visible for several seconds, and throughout the film there are very brief flashes of female nudity. Of course, nudity alone is hardly a sufficient condition for pornography, which is likely why Uman follows up this statement with another one: "The point of the film is not to arouse." I have no doubt that this is true. But even if arousal was not the point of *removed*, it is certainly one of the film's effects, at least for some spectators. In fact, Uman herself finds *removed* to be "far more erotic" than the original pornographic film it repurposes.[28]

It may be helpful to think of *removed* as a cinematic version of the sorites paradox. In this paradox, attributed to the ancient Greek philosopher Eubulides, the question is this: When is a heap of sand no longer a heap? (The word *sorites* comes from the Greek word *soros*, which means "heap.") Surely one cannot simply remove one grain of sand from a heap and then proclaim that it is no longer a heap. But how many grains of sand *would* one have to remove? A hundred? A thousand? There is no clear-cut boundary between a

heap and a nonheap. Uman seems to be carrying out a similar procedure with pornography. The question now becomes this: When is a pornographic film no longer pornographic? What if one erases the women? What if one erases all the imagery, leaving behind only orgasmic moans and music? Perhaps the best answer to the question "Is *removed* pornographic?" is "Kind of." Like a heap of sand, pornography is (in Wittgensteinian parlance) "a concept with blurred edges."[29]

But *removed* is more than a philosophical exploration of the ontology of pornography. Uman provides another motivation for her experiment: "I wanted to see what a porn film would *look like* if the women were removed and the absence remarked upon by the accentuating presence of an animated hole."[30] In other words, part of the impetus for the film's construction was sheer visual curiosity. If *removed* thematizes the scopophilia of its characters and its spectators, the film is also designed to satisfy Uman's *own* scopophilia, to reveal to Uman what she herself "wanted to see."

By both obscuring and revealing content that spectators might "want to see," *removed* has affinities with more traditional forms of erotic spectacle, such as stripteases. As Rachel Shteir has noted, striptease is not simply about exposed flesh but about the delicate tension between the seen and the unseen: "Striptease is more about the *relationship* of being dressed to being undressed than about mere nudity."[31] And Linda Williams persuasively argues that this dialectic between what is shown and what is hidden is present not only in striptease but in *many* forms of "sexual spectacle," including pornography.[32] After all, pornographic films rarely begin with completely exposed flesh. More often than not, there is a *build-up*, an attempt to tease (and entice) the audience as the nude body is gradually revealed. This tension is especially salient in softcore pornography, the genre that Uman appropriates in *removed*. In his monograph *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in Its Contexts*, David Andrews perceptively conceptualizes softcore pornography as a "peekaboo form emulating the mechanisms of striptease."[33] Uman is well aware of the game of "peekaboo" that is

played in erotic spectacles such as striptease and pornography, and she playfully gestures toward this convention by playing her *own* game of peekaboo with the audience. As Danni Zuvela observes, *removed* exploits "the central erotic tension of the striptease, the play between exposure and concealment," and as a result, "the spectator strains to see what is denied, is inexorably drawn to what is withheld."[34]

Take the erased women, for example. At times they are completely invisible, replaced by jittery white holes (see figure 3.2). At other times the bleach does not entirely erase the nudity, resulting in barely legible traces of the original faces and bodies (see figure 3.3). On still other occasions Uman's bleach fails to completely cover the nude female form (see figure 3.4). Finally, there are moments in which a nude woman becomes completely visible, but only for a split second (see figure 3.5). The flashes of full frontal nudity are unintentional byproducts of the way the source material was spliced. Uman recalls, "The original film print had been spliced in several places, and when I bathed the whole thing in bleach, the one frame on either side of the splice would not be erased." But even if these brief glimpses of nudity are unintentional, their inclusion is fortuitous. The sporadic "peeks" that the spectator is given result in a kind of cinematic striptease. And because the nudity that *is* seen can often only be seen for 1/24 of a second (blink and you'll miss it), Uman rightly suggests that "the viewer is compelled to look harder."[35]

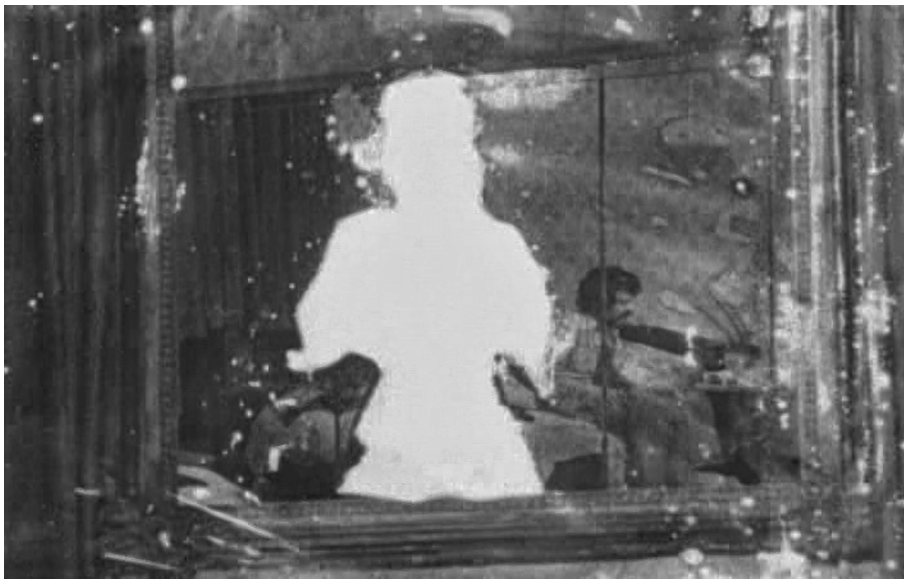

FIGURE 3.2 Naomi Uman, *removed* (1999)

FIGURE 3.3 Naomi Uman, *removed* (1999)

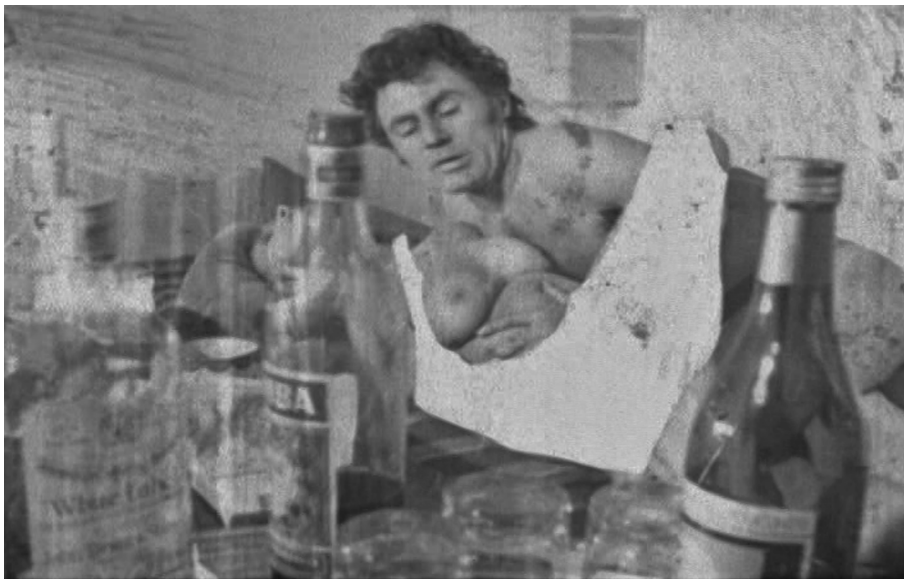

FIGURE 3.4 Naomi Uman, *removed* (1999)

FIGURE 3.5 Naomi Uman, *removed* (1999)

But why would these momentary glimpses of nudity result in a film that is "far more erotic" than the original pornographic film that it reworks?[36] After all, many assume that the point of *removed* is precisely to drain the original film of its eroticism. They suspect that Uman is engaged in the Mulveyan project of using the "destruction of pleasure as a radical weapon."[37] Uman, however, claims that she had no interest in destroying pleasure.[38] Instead, by partially erasing

the naked bodies, she intensifies the erotic charge of the bodies that intermittently "escape" from her bleach. As Ofer Eliaz correctly notes in his book *Cinematic Cryptonymies*, "The point … is not that *removed* is an antipornography film, but that it is a film that works to *rediscover* the eroticism of the pornographic image." For Eliaz, Uman's erasures do not de-eroticize the pornographic film; rather, they result in "a new eroticism of ruptured and collaged bodies."[39]

In fact, Uman's erasures expose what I call *the paradox of censorship*: while salacious content is often removed precisely to drain a work of its eroticism, in actuality such removals often result in an intensification of eroticism. This is the sentiment that undergirds André Bazin's conceptualization of Hollywood as "the world capital of cinematic eroticism." Given the severe restrictions placed on the sexual content of Hollywood films during the 1950s (when Bazin made this claim), this may seem like an odd assertion. But Bazin rightly argued that Hollywood cinema was supremely erotic precisely "*because* of the taboos that dominate it."[40] As Slavoj Žižek has noted, the prohibitions of the Hollywood Production Code, while designed to subdue sexuality, often had the paradoxical effect of generating "an excessive, all-pervasive sexualization."[41]

This is not to suggest that Uman created *removed* in order to make an explicit argument about censorship. (When I asked her if *removed* represented a "political statement" about "feminism or pornography or censorship," she simply responded, "I don't really think in those ways. I'm interested in cinema.")[42] Nevertheless, as Ofer Eliaz notes, Uman's erasure of taboo images "ironically mimic[s] the work of censorship."[43] I find it difficult to watch *removed* without thinking about the long history of expurgating nudity from visual art: from the draperies that were painted over the genitalia in Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* (1536–1541) to the black bars and pixelations that are used to censor nudity in contemporary photographs, films, and TV programs.

But how might one explain this paradox of censorship? Why does leaving something to the imagination tend to increase excitement? And why is a momentary glance of taboo content often more

stimulating than a sustained gaze? The answer lies in a fundamental feature of human psychology, an "aesthetic law" that the neuroscientist V. S. Ramachandran has called "the peekaboo principle." Ramachandran persuasively argues that one can "sometimes make something more attractive by making it less visible": "A picture of a nude woman seen behind a shower curtain or wearing diaphanous, skimpy clothes—an image that men would say approvingly 'leaves something to the imagination'—can be much more alluring than a pinup of the same nude woman."[44] To illustrate this principle, consider a revealing passage in Pierre Louÿs's novel *La femme et le pantin* (*The Woman and the Puppet*, 1898), which served as the source material for both Josef von Sternberg's *The Devil Is a Woman* (1935) and Luis Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977). The novel recounts Don Mateo's sexual longing for a beautiful young Andalusian woman named Conchita. At one point, he walks into "a room for dancing" and discovers Conchita dancing provocatively in front of several onlookers. Louÿs describes the encounter this way:

> Inside there was a second room for dancing, smaller but very well lit, with a platform and two men playing guitars. In the middle Conchita, naked, was dancing a frenzied *jota*, along with three other nude, nondescript girls in front of a couple of foreigners who were sitting at the back. In fact she was more than naked. She had on long black stockings that came right up to the top of her thighs, like the legs on a pair of tights, whilst on her feet she was wearing little shoes that made the wooden floor ring out as they struck it. I didn't dare interrupt. I was afraid I might kill her.[45]

What I find most interesting in this passage is Louÿs's formulation "more than naked." It implies that Conchita's "long black stockings" and "little shoes" result in her becoming even more alluring than she would have been if she were literally naked. A number of thinkers have commented on the crucial role that concealment plays in stimulating sexual desire. In 1905, for example, Sigmund Freud asserted that "covering … the body," far from erasing eroticism, instead "arouses sexual curiosity."[46] In 1955 Roland Barthes argued that concealment is a crucial component in striptease, since at the "very moment" a woman becomes completely nude, she also

becomes “desexualize[d].”[47] And in 1957 Andre Bazin pointed out that the quintessential erotic image of Marilyn Monroe is not one of her nude photographs but the iconic scene from Billy Wilder’s *The Seven-Year Itch* (1955) in which “the air from the subway grating blows up her skirt”—a scene that stages an alluring interplay between concealment and exposure.[48] Is it any wonder that the Motion Picture Production Code warned in 1930 that “transparent or translucent materials and silhouette are frequently *more* suggestive than actual exposure?”[49]

Of course, in spite of the efforts of the censors, filmmakers have been exploiting Ramachandran’s peekaboo principle since the birth of cinema. Consider just a few suggestive remarks from canonical directors:

> Fritz Lang: A half-dressed girl is much more sexy than a nude one.[50]
> Luis Buñuel: A woman in a black lace chemise with gartered stockings and high-heeled shoes is more erotic than a naked woman.[51]
> Alfred Hitchcock: Suspense is like a woman. The more left to the imagination, the more the excitement.[52]

While these examples focus on the erotic female form, Ramachandran is quick to note that the peekaboo principle transcends gender: “Many women will find images of hot and sexy but partially clad men to be more attractive than fully naked men.”[53] And even if Ramachandran’s language posits a heterosexual subject, this desire for (partial) concealment extends to queer subjects as well. Regardless of gender or sexual orientation, eroticism is produced not only by what is seen but also by what is *unseen*. A central element in sexuality is fantasy, which suggests that seeing too much can impede our desire to imagine what is being withheld from us. This is why, in his influential text *Laocoön* (1767), the German aesthetician Gotthold Ephraim Lessing argues that “only that which gives free rein to the imagination is effective,” adding, “To present the utmost to the eye is to bind the wings of fancy.”[54]

This phenomenon may, at first, seem counterintuitive. After all, if *Homo sapiens* derives pleasure from seeing, one might conclude that seeing *more* would engender more pleasure. But this is not always the case. In his essay "The Science of Art" (published in 2000, eleven years before *The Tell-Tale Brain*), Ramachandran was already trying to resolve this ostensible paradox. Though he had not yet coined the term *peekaboo principle*, he was already well aware of its psychological force. In an attempt to explain "why a nude hidden by a diaphanous veil is more alluring than one seen directly in the flesh," Ramachandran speculates, "It is as though an object discovered after a struggle is more pleasing than one that is instantly obvious. The reason for this is obscure, but perhaps a mechanism of this kind ensures that the struggle *itself* is reinforcing—so that we don't give up too easily—whether looking for a leopard behind foliage or a mate hidden in the mist."[55] In *The Tell-Tale Brain*, Ramachandran elaborates on this evolutionary theorization of visual perception. He argues that we often prefer a level of "concealment" because "we are hardwired to love solving puzzles." After all, our ancestors were those who were able to successfully solve "social puzzles" (such as persuading a member of the opposite sex to mate) and "sensorimotor puzzles" (such as chasing prey by skillfully navigating through "the underbrush in dense fog"). In the modern era, art and pornography can exploit this evolved feature of our minds by providing "a form of visual foreplay for the grand climax of object recognition."[56] This evolutionary framework helps to explain the appeal of a diverse range of phenomena, including hide-and-seek, peekaboo, jigsaw puzzles, murder mysteries, and, of course, stripteases. Uman is well aware of this quirk of human psychology. She believes that one of the questions posed by *removed* is this: "Can desire for narrative (or desire to complete an image or desire to see a naked woman) be similar to sexual desire?"[57] All these diverse desires involve a tension between absence and presence. Narratives must intentionally *withhold* certain information if they are to pique a spectator's curiosity. An image that is only partially exposed tends to be more intriguing than one that is fully exposed. And sexual desire

is also predicated on absence. We fantasize about what we have not *yet* seen, and this yearning to uncover what has been hidden is one of the central engines of *eros*.[58]

PHONOPHILIA

> *It is accepted among true libertines that the sensations communicated by the organ of hearing excite more than any others and produce the most vivid impressions.*
>
> —The Marquis de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom*

This emphasis on the seen (and the unseen) tells only half the story, however. For cinema generally exploits not only the pleasure derived from *looking*, but also the pleasure derived from *hearing*. While *scopophilia* has proven to be a useful and widely accepted term for the former, no analogous term has been established for the latter. Some terms that have been proposed include *acousticophilia* and *ecouteurism*.[59] It is easy to see why these two terms have never caught on: surely no one derives pleasure from hearing them. Additionally, the term *ecouteurism* is sometimes reserved for the enjoyment of *nonconsensual* listening (as when one listens in on the sexual liaisons of others without their knowledge). I am somewhat sympathetic to the colloquialism *eargasm*, although this term refers to an isolated incident of auditory gratification rather than a general tendency to take pleasure in sounds. In this chapter I use the term *phonophilia* to refer to the pleasure derived from sound, whether it be talking, whispering, breathing, moaning, music, or any other noise. While phonophilia would certainly include the arousal prompted by sexually stimulating sounds, I favor using the term in a broader way to encompass any kind of pleasure derived from sound, from the excitement produced by hearing Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913) to the serenity that comes from the babbling of a brook.

Phonophilia plays a central role in scene 2 of *removed*. While Walter gazes at the attractive woman on the other side of the two-

way mirror (the one who, for some reason, is “rubbing her breasts”), his female companion does not. She tells Walter that she wants to “know everything” that is happening on the other side of the mirror, but at no point does she simply get up and *look*. Instead, she asks Walter a series of questions about the woman (“How are her breasts? Is she blonde? All over?”). Her sexual stimulation comes from Walter’s *descriptions* of the other woman’s naked body. She apparently derives more pleasure from the experience when she cannot see the erotic spectacle, as absence of a visual stimulus allows her imagination to run wild. In other words, if Walter embodies scopophilia, his sexual partner embodies phonophilia. In Hilary Bergen and Sandra Huber’s view, the woman’s reliance on Walter’s descriptions of what is happening has the effect of “robbing her of her own vision.”[60] But this description strikes me as problematic. She is not robbed of her vision; rather, she *chooses* to forgo visual pleasure in favor of phonophilia. It appears that Walter’s lover is enthralled by the titillating narrative that he articulates—and, perhaps, by his deep, authoritative voice.

Then again, it is impossible to know what Walter’s voice actually sounds like, as the American distributor of the original German pornographic film has dubbed each Germanophone voice with an Anglophone equivalent. (For obvious reasons, few spectators are eager to read subtitles while watching porn.) This means that, in *removed*, not only have the images of women been effaced, but their *voices* have been removed (and replaced) as well. When we hear a woman moaning, we are not hearing the sounds of the original actor, but the sounds of an American voice actor. By the time the epilogue arrives—in which orgasmic moaning is accompanied by a black screen—no trace of the original woman remains. We cannot see her (since the visuals of the film have been extinguished), nor can we hear her (since we only hear her voice actor counterpart). For its final minute, *removed* becomes a purely aural experience, a “blind film” akin to Walter Ruttmann’s *Weekend*. (It is worth noting that Ruttmann’s soundscape also briefly includes a woman’s orgasmic moan.) Luis Buñuel once observed that pornography “finishes with

everything … [and] leaves nothing to the imagination."[61] *removed*, on the other hand, finishes with nothing and leaves everything to the imagination.

Uman's black screen is especially interesting given that pornography is generally theorized in terms of the *visible*. In the introduction to his edited volume *Earogenous Zones: Sound, Sexuality, and Cinema*, for example, Bruce Johnson laments the fact that scholarship on sex in cinema tends to have a "relentlessly visual focus." He recalls attending porn studies conferences that were "almost unanimous" in framing porn as a "visual form."[62] He is quick to point out, however, that the work of porn scholar Linda Williams is a welcome exception to this rule. It is true that in her most influential text, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible*," Williams argues that hardcore pornography tends to follow "principles of maximum visibility," particularly in the convention of the "money shot," which provides visual "proof of pleasure." But Williams is also quick to acknowledge that this evidence "extends only to the hydraulics of *male* ejaculation."[63] Perhaps, as John Corbett and Terri Kapsalis argue, "female sexual pleasure is better thought of in terms of a 'frenzy of the audible.' "[64] Since visible evidence of female climax is elusive, pornographic films generally indicate women's pleasure through orgasmic moaning. (As Corbett and Kapsalis succinctly put it, "You can *see* men orgasm; you can *hear* women orgasm.")[65]

Of course, money shots are absent from softcore pornographic films like the one that Uman appropriates in *removed*. But the sounds of female pleasure are prominent components of both hardcore and softcore pornography. Linda Williams's description of the sounds of women moaning in hardcore apply with equal force to softcore: "The articulate and inarticulate sounds of pleasure that dominate … are primarily the cries of women. Though male moans and cries are heard as well, they are never as loud or dramatic." And Williams draws attention to a variety of other potentially arousing sensual sounds that play an important role in pornography, such as "the smack of a kiss or a slap," "the sounds of bedsprings," and

erotic expressions such as “fuck me harder.”[66] Normally, of course, the sounds of porn are synchronized with the images on the screen—even if the slight asynchronicity of dubbed films complicates this illusion. But at the end of *removed*, the sounds float free of any specific visual figure. The “ooohs” and “aaahs” become indexes of an unseen (and unseeable) sexual encounter. And the spectator (or should I say auditor?) is free to “complete” this sexual encounter in whatever way she sees fit. She can fantasize about *being* the woman in the throes of orgasmic ecstasy, or *pleasing* that woman, or both. By isolating these sounds of pleasure, Uman foregrounds the centrality of phonophilia to both eroticism and the cinematic encounter. The audience of *removed* becomes much like the woman in the film who gets excited simply by listening to her lover describe an erotically charged event on the other side of a two-way mirror. If, as Mulvey argues, “There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure,”[67] there are also circumstances in which *hearing* itself is a source of pleasure.

I LOVE DICK

> *Absence often commands an attention that far surpasses the potential of anything present.*
>
> —Timothy Walsh, *The Dark Matter of Words*

Uman’s erasures have proven to be contagious. The fifth episode of the Amazon TV series *I Love Dick* (2017) (created by Jill Soloway and Sarah Gubbins) opens with approximately thirty seconds from Uman’s film. (In other words, this episode of *I Love Dick* is a televisual appropriation of an avant-garde reworking of an English-language dubbing of a German porno.) The episode—entitled “A Short History of Weird Girls”—also features an excerpt from Uman’s documentary short *Leche* (1998), about a Mexican family that lives on a dairy ranch. In fact, *I Love Dick* regularly pays tribute to the art of women in the avant-garde. “A Short History of Weird Girls” features allusions to Hannah Hoch’s collage *Da-Dandy* (1919),

Cauleen Smith's experimental film *Chronicles of a Lying Spirit (by Kelly Gabron)* (1992), Louise Bourgeois's sculpture *The Couple* (2003), and Petra Cortright's flash animation *Enchanted Foreststrippersnopoloeeasy2girls[1]* (2012). But the key intertext in "A Short History of Weird Girls" is *removed*, which is referenced repeatedly throughout the course of the episode. In addition to the excerpt of the film that begins the episode, the motif of removal recurs throughout its duration, as female characters are periodically erased in an homage to Uman.

I Love Dick explores the fantasies of a woman named Chris (Kathryn Hahn) and her husband, Sylvère (Griffin Dunne), after they meet a handsome and rugged minimalist artist named Dick (Kevin Bacon). In "A Short History of Weird Girls," Chris recalls an early sexual encounter with Sylvère. The Chris of the present appears in her memory alongside the Chris of the past. As the older Chris circles around the bed watching her former self pose for Sylvère, the Chris of the past begins to be erased (see figure 3.6). As in *removed*, the erasure is not complete: traces of the original nude figure are still partially visible. In this case, the erasure of young Chris suggests her ontological instability: she exists not as a flesh-and-blood being but as Sylvère's fantasy—or perhaps as her future self's fading memory. As the episode continues, three other women recall sexual encounters from their pasts, and each woman is erased at an erotically charged moment. In part, these erasures suggest the ephemerality of memory and desire. But they also suggest the ways that female desire has historically been "erased" from film and television, which have instead foregrounded the fantasies of (straight) men.

FIGURE 3.6 Jill Soloway, “A Short History of Weird Girls,” episode 5 of *I Love Dick* (2017)

There are important differences between Uman and Soloway, of course. While Uman’s erasures were achieved through the tactile manipulation of celluloid, Soloway’s erasures appear to be digital effects. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, Uman is hesitant to conceptualize *removed* as an explicitly feminist work. Soloway, by contrast, describes *I Love Dick* as a “feminist, matriarchal revolution-inspiring comedy about love and sex.”[68] Nevertheless, both *removed* and “A Short History of Weird Girls” display a commitment to the aesthetic force of absence, a conviction that, in the words of Robert Bresson, “One does not create by adding but by taking away.”[69] From Robert Rauschenberg’s *Erased de Kooning Drawing* to Tom Friedman’s *11 × 22 × 0.005*, from Naomi Uman’s *removed* to Jill Soloway’s “A Short History of Weird Girls,” the arts have long sought to satisfy scopophilic (and phonophilic) urges, even if this has often paradoxically involved *erasing* content to prompt a more active and participatory response. The peekaboo principle is a foundational part of human psychology, and art tends to exploit this evolved feature of the human brain. Seeing and hearing are often sources of pleasure, but so are *not* seeing and *not* hearing. By exploiting aesthetic absence, artists open up a space for a spectator to insert her own desires and fantasies. In the memorable words of Denis Diderot, “If you paint, must you paint everything? Have pity and leave a gap that my fantasy can fill.”[70]

between Schneemann and Tenney. According to Schneemann, "*Loving* failed to capture our central eroticism, and I wanted to set that right." See Scott MacDonald, "Carolee Schneemann," in *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 142. For more on the respective aesthetics of Brakhage and Schneemann—including their shared interest in corporeality—see Ara Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 93–176.

57. Carolee Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 43.
58. Quoted in Marjorie Keller, "Montage of Voices," *Millennium Film Journal* 16–18 (Fall 1986–Winter 1987): 252.
59. This assertion is complicated by the fact that Jane Brakhage may have shot some of the material in *Window Water Baby Moving*—although this is a matter of considerable debate. See, for example, Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema*, 97, 130. For more on the issue of gender in *Window Water Baby Moving*, see Lynne Sachs, "Thoughts on Birth and Brakhage," *Camera Obscura* 64, no. 22, no. 64 (2007): 194–96.
60. Quoted in Keller, "Montage of Voices,"252.
61. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 244.
62. See Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 347–70. In spite of the numerous differences between Brakhage's films and those of structural filmmakers like Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton, it is striking just how frequently structural filmmakers follow Brakhage's lead by eliminating sound from their films. Examples include Michael Snow's *One Second in Montreal* (1969) and *So Is This* (1982), and Hollis Frampton's *Process Red* (1966), *Lemon* (1969), and *Poetic Justice* (1972).
63. For more on Benning's *Grand Opera*, see James Benning, "Sound and Stills from *Grand Opera*," *October* 12 (1980): 22–45.
64. Scott MacDonald, "James Benning," in *A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 240.
65. As Benning succinctly puts it, "Stan is the man, but Snow and Frampton were my influences." James Benning, e-mail to author, April 10, 2016.
66. James Benning, e-mail to Ken Eisenstein, March 28, 2016.
67. James Benning, "AV Festival 12: James Benning: Nightfall Post Screening Q&A," YouTube video, www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MqGt7OuOxE.
68. Stan Brakhage (as told to Jennifer Dorn), "Brakhage Meets Tarkovsky," *Chicago Review* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 46.

3. NAOMI UMAN AND THE PEEKABOO PRINCIPLE

1. Barbara Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 45.
2. John Cage, *Silence: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 102.
3. John Cage, quoted in Branden W. Joseph, "White on White," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 112. Italics in original.
4. "Robert Rauschenberg on 'Erased de Kooning,' " YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGRNQER16Do&list=PLY47uV3netxFTCbYXXx6UD3B

QCM4jW2tN&index=72.

5. Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg*, 51.
6. Craig Dworkin, *No Medium* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), 41.
7. Quoted in Nicole Brenez, *"We Support Everything Since the Dawn of Time That Has Struggled and Still Struggles": An Introduction to Lettrist Cinema*, trans. Clodagh Kinsella (Berlin: Sternberg, 2014), 32.
8. John Cage, "26 Statements Re Duchamp," in *A Year from Monday* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 71. For more on Duchamp's influence on Rauschenberg, see Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg*, 63–64.
9. A number of philosophers have grappled with the ontology of holes. See, for example, David and Stephanie Lewis, "Holes," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 2 (August 1970): 206–12; and Roberto Casati and Achille C. Varzi, *Holes and Other Superficialities* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994).
10. See Laura Carton, *Stripped* (Portland, Ore.: Nazraeli, 2010). For more on the erasures of Cohen, Garrett, and Carton, see Kelly Dennis, *Art/Porn: A History of Seeing and Touching* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 143–47.
11. Dworkin, *No Medium*, 19.
12. Dworkin, *No Medium*, 21.
13. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 422.
14. Uman, e-mail to author, December 2, 2016. I should note that almost all the scholarship on *removed* mistakenly asserts that Uman used nail polish *remover* (rather than nail polish) on the filmstrip. See, for example, Ofer Eliaz, *Cinematic Cryptonymies: The Absent Body in Postwar Film* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2018), 141; Ofer Eliaz, "Acts of Erasure: The Limits of the Image in Naomi Uman's Early Films," *Discourse* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 211; and Danni Zuvela, "A Little Light Teasing: Some Special Affects in Avant-Garde Cinema," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 26, no. 4 (August 2012): 594. Lest I be accused of throwing stones from within the comfort of my glass house, I should confess that I also repeat this error in the introduction to my interview with Uman. See Justin Remes, "Animated Holes: An Interview with Naomi Uman," *Millennium Film Journal* 66 (2017): 70.
15. The sixth and allegedly final edition was published in 2016. See Tom Phillips, *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel*, final ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2016).
16. Phillips, *A Humument*, 33, 366. The original Beckett aphorism is from *Worstward Ho*: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." See Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, in *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, and Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove, 1996), 77. The Joyce allusion is derived from the end of Molly Bloom's stream-of-consciousness soliloquy in *Ulysses*: "I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes." See James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 783.
17. Phillips, *A Humument*, 1. Literary erasures have proliferated in the aftermath of *A Humument*. For example, in *Radi os* (Chicago: Flood Editions, 2005), Ronald Johnson deletes text from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*; in *Tree of Codes* (London: Visual Editions, 2010), Jonathan Safran Foer literally cuts out large swaths of text from Bruno Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles*; and in *Darkness* (Los Angeles:

Make Now, 2011), Yedda Morrison whites out most of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This is not to imply, however, that *A Humument* is the first literary erasure. Thomas Jefferson, for example, anticipated this aesthetic trend when he used a razor and glue to reassemble and reimagine the New Testament gospels. His goal was to foreground Jesus's moral teachings (which he admired) while excising elements that he deemed superstitious, such as miracles and prophecies. See Thomas Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth Extracted Textually from the Gospels in Greek, Latin, French, & English*, Smithsonian ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2011).

18. Dworkin, *No Medium*, 9.
19. *Scopophilia* is a common translation of the Freudian term *Schaulust*. See Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1995), 251. For a critique of *scopophilia* as a translation of *Schaulust*, see Bruno Bettelheim, *Freud and Man's Soul* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 90–91.
20. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 9.
21. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 11.
22. Remes, "Animated Holes," 72.
23. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 11.
24. Uman, e-mail to author, November 23, 2016.
25. Remes, "Animated Holes," 71–72. The assumption that the nude women in pornography gratify only the "male gaze" is undermined by empirical research suggesting that women, like men, generally spend more time looking at nude women than nude men in heterosexual pornography. See Heather A. Rupp and Kim Wallen, "Sex Differences in Response to Visual Sexual Stimuli: A Review," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 37 (2008): 209.
26. Quoted in Soledad Santiago, "Milking the Subject: Experiments in Film," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 27, 2006.
27. Remes, "Animated Holes," 72.
28. Quoted in Santiago, "Milking the Subject."
29. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, rev. 4th ed., ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 38. For more on the sorites paradox, see Sergi Oms and Elia Zardini, eds., *The Sorites Paradox* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
30. Remes, "Animated Holes," 71. Italics added.
31. Rachel Shteir, *Striptease: The Untold History of the Girlie Show* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8. Italics added. For more on striptease, see Dahlia Schweitzer, "Striptease: The Art of Spectacle and Transgression," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 65–75.
32. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 77. In making this argument, Williams builds on the insights of an unpublished essay by David E. James that argues that "the striptease consists of a continual oscillation between exposure and concealment—the satisfaction of seeing all and the frustration of having that sight cut off in a 'premature climax.' " Along similar lines, in her book *Screening Sex*, Williams argues that "moving-image sex" is predicated on a "dialectic

between revelation and concealment." See Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), 7.

33. David Andrews, *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in Its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 17.
34. Zuvela, "A Little Light Teasing," 594–95.
35. Remes, "Animated Holes," 72. The impulse to obscure content to make spectators "look harder" is fairly common in visual art. Consider, for example, Jean-Michel Basquiat's explanation for his use of crossed-out words in many of his canvases: "I cross out words so you will see them more; the fact that they are obscured makes you want to read them." Quoted in Jeffrey Hoffeld, "Word Hunger: Basquiat and Leonardo," in *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Rudy Chiappini (Milan: Skira, 2005), 87.
36. Quoted in Santiago, "Milking the Subject."
37. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 7.
38. Remes, "Animated Holes," 71.
39. Eliaz, *Cinematic Cryptonymies*, 205, 144. Italics added.
40. André Bazin, "Marginal Notes on *Eroticism in the Cinema*," in *What Is Cinema?* vol. 2, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 172.
41. Slavoj Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's* Lost Highway (Seattle: Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities, 2000), 7.
42. Remes, "Animated Holes," 72.
43. Eliaz, "Acts of Erasure," 211.
44. V. S. Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Makes Us Human* (New York: Norton, 2011), 227.
45. Pierre Louÿs, *The Woman and the Puppet*, trans. Jeremy Moore (Monroe, Ore.: Subterranean, 1999), 124.
46. Sigmund Freud, "The Sexual Aberrations," in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, 1995), 536.
47. Roland Barthes, "Striptease," in Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 165.
48. Bazin, "Marginal Notes on *Eroticism in the Cinema*," 172.
49. Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, "Code to Govern the Making of Talking, Synchronized, and Silent Motion Pictures," 416. Italics added.
50. Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 86.
51. José de la Colina and Tomás Pérez Turrent, *Objects of Desire: Conversations with Luis Buñuel*, ed. and trans. Paul Lenti (New York: Marsilio, 1992), 69.
52. Quoted in Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Da Capo, 1999), 398.
53. Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain*, 228.
54. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 19.
55. V. S. Ramachandran, "The Science of Art: How the Brain Responds to Beauty," in *Understanding Wisdom: Sources, Science, & Society*, ed. Warren S. Brown (West Conshohocken, Pa.: Templeton, 2000), 277–305. Italics in original.
56. Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain*, 228, 229.
57. Remes, "Animated Holes," 72.

58. Many scholars in the humanities become nervous when appeals are made to fields like neuroscience and evolutionary biology. The concern, at least in part, seems to be that by positing a human nature, neuroscientists and biologists risk falling prey to biological determinism and essentialism. But as the evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould was fond of pointing out, "Biology is not inevitable destiny." In other words, one's upbringing, culture, and education can all profoundly inflect one's genetic predispositions. So while Ramachandran is right to see the peekaboo principle as being a part of human nature, there is no reason to suspect that this tendency is *purely* biological, since biology interacts with social and historical factors in complex and multifaceted ways. See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Norton, 1996), 389.
59. See, for example, Brenda Love, *Encyclopedia of Unusual Sex Practices* (New York: Barricade, 1992), 1–2, 93; and Mark Griffiths, "Aural Sex? A Brief Overview of Ecouteurism and Acousticophilia," *DrMarkGriffiths* (blog), September 28, 2012, https://drmarkgriffiths.wordpress.com/2012/09/28/aural-sex-a-brief-overview-of-ecouteurism-and-acousticophilia/. While scholarship on the role of sound in human sexuality is scant, notable exceptions include F. M. M. Mai, "A New Psychosexual Syndrome—'Ecouteurism,' " *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 2, no. 4 (1968): 261–63; and Roy J. Levin, "Vocalised Sounds and Human Sex," *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 21, no. 1 (2006): 99–107.
60. Hilary Bergen and Sandra Huber, "Pornography, Ectoplasm, and the Secret Dancer: A Twin Reading of Naomi Uman's *Removed*," *Screening the Past* 43 (April 2018).
61. Colina and Turrent, *Objects of Desire*, 85.
62. Bruce Johnson, "Introduction," in *Earogenous Zones: Sound, Sexuality, and Cinema*, ed. Bruce Johnson (London: Equinox, 2010), 2, 1.
63. Williams, *Hard Core*, 91, 8, 94. Italics added.
64. John Corbett and Terri Kapsalis, "Aural Sex: The Female Orgasm in Popular Sound," *Drama Review* 40, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 103.
65. Corbett and Kapsalis, "Aural Sex," 104. Italics in original.
66. Williams, *Hard Core*, 123, 139.
67. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 8.
68. Juan Diaz, "*I Love Dick*: Jill Soloway and Kevin Bacon Explain What the New Amazon Comedy's Really About," *IndieWire*, April 18, 2017, https://www.indiewire.com/2017/04/i-love-dick-jill-soloway-kevin-bacon-behind-the-scenes-watch-1201806670/.
69. Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematograph*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: New York Review of Books, 2016), 59.
70. Quoted in Peter Wagner, "Minding the Gaps: Ellipses in William Hogarth's Narrative Art," in *The Ruin and the Sketch in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Wagner et al. (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008), 121.

4. MARTIN ARNOLD'S DISAPPEARING ACT

1. Robert Burgoyne, "Douglas Gordon and Cory Arcangel: Breaking the Toy," in *Embodied Encounters: New Approaches to Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, ed. Agnieszka Piotrowska (London: Routledge, 2015), 159.