

What a body can do

Elsa Dorlin

On 11 Brumaire, Year XI [November 2, 1803], a Guadeloupe tribunal sentenced Millet de la Girardière to be placed in an iron cage in the square at Pointe-à-Pitre and left there until dead. The cage employed for this public torture is eight feet tall. The criminal confined therein straddles a sharp blade. His feet are shackled, and he must keep his legs straightened to avoid being wounded by the blade. A table is placed within his reach containing provisions and drinks to quench his thirst, but a guard is there night and day to prevent him from touching them. When the victim's forces start to become depleted he falls on the edge of the blade, which inflicts deep and cruel wounds upon him. Provoked by the pain, the wretch straightens himself, only to again fall down on the cutting blade, wounding himself horribly. This torture lasts three or four days.¹

In this type of apparatus, the convict dies because he resists; because he tries, desperately, to escape death.* The atrocity of the torture lies in the way it transforms every movement by the body to protect itself from pain into a new agony. The slightest reflex of preservation becomes the impetus for the most unbearable suffering: this is what defines such modes of annihilation. What is remarkable is not the novelty of the torture, over which the modern colonial system certainly had no monopoly. The scene, along with the rhetorical device aimed at exhibiting its horror, resonates with another torture narrative, namely, the story of Damiens as described by Michel Foucault at the outset of *Discipline and Punish*. However, the two cases are entirely different.² As Foucault shows, the wounds inflicted on Damiens' body do not address the convict in his individuality, but aim instead to restore

the all-powerful will of the sovereign and the subjugation of the community, which the crime had jeopardised. Mutilations by pliers and shears, scalding hot lead, boiling oil and molten wax, and the eventual dismemberment by horse ... throughout this entire atrocious ordeal, Damiens remains tied up, and there is nothing to suggest that he 'could' do anything. In other words, minimal as it may have been, his power [*puissance*] was in no way taken into account, precisely because it did not count.³ If Damiens' body is reduced to nothingness, this is because it is already nothing other than a theatre for staging the cohesion of a vengeful community ritualising the sovereignty of its king. What is thus exhibited is a complete absence of power, the better to express the magnificence of an absolutely sovereign power.

In the case of the torture of the iron cage, the onlooking public is still present. However, there is something else happening in the exposition of the torture victim's suffering. The technique appears to target the subject's capacity to (re)act, the better to dominate it. The repressive apparatus exhibits and excites the bodily reactions and vital reflexes of the condemned, constituting them as that which defines both the power [*puissance*] and the weakness of the subject. Repressive authority is no longer obliged to cast the powers that oppose it as absolutely impotent in order to affirm itself. On the contrary, the more this subjective power stages its repeated and desperate efforts to survive, the more repressive authority succeeds in governing it, while disappearing behind the passive and puppet-like figure of the hangman. This deadly government of the body is carried out with such an economy

* Editors' note: This article is a translation of the prologue, 'Ce que peut un corps', to Elsa Dorlin's book *Se Défendre: Une Philosophie de la violence* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017), 5–17. Subsequent chapters of the book address episodes in the history that determined which groups of people were authorised to bear weapons or defend themselves and which were constructed as defenceless, from the Early Modern period up to the present. The book also outlines a genealogy of 'self-defence', going back to techniques developed by black panthers or in the Warsaw ghetto and exploring the history of feminist ju-jitsu and Krav maga. Kieran Aarons' full translation of the book is forthcoming from Verso in 2021. We have added a couple of subheadings and some paragraph breaks to the original text.

of means that the condemned appears to perish by his own hand alone. Everything has been worked out so that he will resist the sharp blade that threatens to fatally mutilate him: he must stand up straight in his stirrups, inside his cage.

In this way, the apparatus leads one to suppose that his life depends upon his strength, not only muscular and physical, but also 'mental': he must strain to stay alive, if he does not wish to suffer worse or die. At the same time, the sole purpose of this technology of torture is to destroy him, but in such a fashion that *the more he defends himself, the worse he will suffer*. The cruel comedy of the food placed around him attests to the fact that the torture plays precisely on the efficacy of vital movements so as to control them totally, the better to annihilate them. Just as his exhaustion will cause him to collapse onto the edge of the blade, his unbearable need to eat and drink will likewise become fatal to him. In addition, the initial impact point on his body will almost certainly be his genitals. It is almost as if power's work of encoding gender reaches its final completion here, given that the genitals, far more than any other part of the body, have become the ultimate site in which the subject's power of action lurks. When we defend them, we defend *ourselves*. That the apparatus strikes them first, indicates that it seeks to destroy that by which the subject – not the legal subject, but the *capable* subject – was instituted.

This murderous apparatus regards those subjected to it as *capable of doing something*, and it takes up, stimulates and solicits these vital impulses in their slightest forms so as to interpellate them as *in*-efficiency, to transmute them into impotence [*impuissance*]. It is a technology of power that produces a *subject* whose power of action has been 'aroused' the better to be seized upon in all its heteronomy. In spite of its being entirely directed toward the preservation of life, this power of action now finds itself reduced to being nothing but a mechanism of death in the service of the colonial penance machine. Here we see how an apparatus of domination can set out to persecute the very movement of *life*, targeting its vital impulse in its most muscular forms. The slightest gesture of defence or protection, the slightest movement aimed at the preservation and conservation of the self is enlisted in the annihilation as such of the body. By targeting the *power of the subject* as it is expressed in his impulse to defend his life and himself, this form of power

thereby constitutes self-defence as the very expression of corporeal life, as what a subject is, as 'what a life is'.⁴

From the iron cage to certain modern and contemporary torture techniques,⁵ it is entirely possible to identify a common framework, a repertoire of techniques of power that can be distilled into the following adage: 'the more you defend yourself, the more you'll suffer, the more certain you are to die'. In certain circumstances, for certain bodies, to defend oneself is equivalent to dying from self-exhaustion: to put up a fight is to struggle in vain, to *become defeated*.⁶ Such an *unhappy* mechanics of action has implications at the level of political mythology (what will our resistance accomplish?), as well as for our representations of the world and of ourselves (if every effort to save myself only leads to my ruin, what can I do?).

In all likelihood, it is lived experiences of this sort – i.e., not of our true power, but of the doubt thereof, the counter-effects of anxiety and fear engendered by failure and limitation – that ultimately become fundamental, in the sense that they are no longer the concrete experience of an exogenous enemy or threat of danger, however terrible, but rather the mirror refection of an action/reaction in oneself. The originality of such techniques resides precisely in this inexorable labour: the forcible incorporation of a deadly dimension of the *power of the subject* that engenders its own suspension as the sole recourse to stay alive. From this moment on, every affirmation of a movement of self-defence becomes at the same time a threat, a promise of death.

This economy of means, which transforms the body of the condemned (and of the assaulted more generally) into its own hangman, presents an outline of the modern subject in negative relief. It is certainly the case that this subject was defined by its capacity to defend itself (more on this below); however, this capacity for self-defence at the same time became a criterion for distinguishing between those accorded full subjectivity and everyone else. The latter included all those whose capacity for self-defence needed to be either diminished or annihilated, corrupted or delegitimated, and whose defensive bodies were exposed to the risk of death, the better to instil in them their incapacity to defend themselves, their radical *impotence*. Here it is not the body itself, but its power of action that the apparatus seeks both to target and to mobilise. This *defensive governance* exhausts, conserves, cares for, arouses and kills, following a complex mechan-

ism. It defends some, while leaving others defenceless, accord to a carefully graduated metric. Here, to be *defenceless* does not mean that one is 'no longer able to wield political power'; rather, it is to be affected by a power of action that is no longer a polarised movement.⁷ There is no greater danger of death than situations like this, wherein our power of action becomes twisted into an autoimmune reflex. It is no longer a question of directly obstructing the action of minorities, as in the case of sovereign repression, nor of simply leaving them to die, defenceless, as in the framework of biopower. It is a matter of *conducting certain subjects to annihilate themselves as subjects*, arousing their power of action so as to provoke them to exercise it at their own peril. It is a matter of producing beings who, the more they defend themselves, the more damaged they become.

Rodney King, 1991

March 3, 1991, Los Angeles. Rodney King, a 26-year-old African American taxi driver, is pursued by three police cruisers and a helicopter over a speeding violation. When he refuses to exit his vehicle, a gun is pointed at his face. A few seconds later, he complies and lays down on the pavement; he is then electrocuted with tasers and, as he tries to get up and protect himself to prevent a police officer from striking him, he is brutally beaten across his face and body by dozens upon dozens of baton-strikes. He is tied up and left unconscious, with his skull and jaw fractured in several places, open lacerations on his mouth and face, and a broken ankle, before an ambulance eventually arrived some minutes later to take him to hospital.

Such a detailed account of Rodney King's lynching is possible thanks to the amateur footage recorded by a witness named George Holliday, who filmed this would-be archive of contemporary domination from his apartment overlooking the freeway.⁸ The video aired on television the same night, before circulating quickly around the globe. One year later, a trial began for the four police officers most directly involved in King's beating (there were more than twenty at the scene of the arrest) on charges of excessive use of force. It took place before a jury from which defence lawyers had struck every single African American (there were ten white jurors, one Latin American and one Asian). After nearly two months, the

jury opted to acquit the officers. As soon as the verdict was announced, the famous 'L.A. riots' began: six days of urban revolt in which clashes with police and the army – veritable scenes of civil war – would leave 63 dead and more than 2000 demonstrators injured.

Beyond the verdict absolving [*qui blanchit*]⁹ the police officers, what is truly edifying is the argumentative rationale that succeeded in convincing the jury to exonerate the accused.¹⁰ The strategy of the defence was to convince the jury that the officers were in danger. According to them, they felt aggressed, leaving them no choice but to defend themselves against a 'giant' (King was over 6'2") who struck them even while down on the ground, and seemed to be under the influence of a drug that made him 'insensitive to being hit'. During the second trial some months later, King would state that he was 'just trying to stay alive'.¹¹ It is this inversion of responsibilities that forms the decisive issue here. During the first trial, lawyers for the police produced and made use of one single and unique piece of evidence, namely, George Holliday's video. The same video that the public regarded precisely as proof of police brutality was called upon as evidence that, on the contrary, it was the police who were 'threatened' by Rodney King. In the courtroom, the video – as seen by the jurors and narrated by the police's legal team – was viewed as the scene of a legitimate defence, attesting to the 'vulnerability' of the police. How can such an interpretive gap be explained? How can the same images engender two versions of events, each with radically distinct victims depending on whether you happen to be a white juror in a courtroom or an *ordinary* spectator?¹²

This is the question posed by Judith Butler in a text composed just days after the announcement of the verdict. Rather than focusing on divergent judgments about 'who is the victim?', Butler draws our attention to the conditions under which certain visions determine individuals to judge that Rodney King is the victim of a lynching, or that the police are victims of an aggression. In accordance with the Fanonian perspective she adopts, Butler contends that the proper object of critique is not the logical relation between contradictory opinions, but the framework of intelligibility of perceptions that are themselves never immediate. The video should not be treated as a brute datum, as raw material for interpretation, but as the manifestation of a 'racially saturated field of visibility'.¹³ In other words, the racial schem-

atisation of perceptions defines both the production of the perceived and what it means to perceive: 'how do we account for this reversal of gesture and intention in terms of a racial schematisation of the visible field? Is this a specific transvaluation of agency proper to a racialised episteme? And does the possibility of such a reversal call into question whether what is 'seen' is not always already in part a question of what a certain racist episteme produces as the visible?'¹⁴ What must be interrogated is this process by which perceptions come to be socially constructed, produced by a corpus that continues to constrain any possible act of knowledge.¹⁵

Independently of any posture of distress or expression of vulnerability, Rodney King is seen as the body of an aggressor, nourishing 'the phantasm of white racist aggression'.¹⁶ Through the eyes of the white jurors sitting in the courtroom, Rodney King can *only* be seen as an 'agent of violence'. The same was true of those former male slaves (or descendants of slaves) throughout the entire segregationist period who, unjustly accused of sexual assault, were hunted down in the streets, dragged out of prison cells or their homes, tortured and executed. And the same remains true today for African American youths and young adults, who continue to be beaten and murdered in the streets. This perception of Rodney King as the body of an aggressor is both the condition and the continued effect of a projection of 'white paranoia'.¹⁷

Images never speak for themselves, particularly in a world in which the representation of violence has become such a central feature of visual culture.¹⁸ At the very beginning of Holliday's video, Rodney King is seen standing with his arms outstretched toward a police officer who is trying to hit him. This protective gesture will be systematically regarded as a threatening posture, a blatant aggression. As Kimberlé Crenshaw and Gary Peller observe, the tactic employed by the police legal team consisted in *making* evidence out of the video by sequencing it into a multitude of still images disconnected one from another, thereby generating room for endless interpretations. By proliferating contradictory narratives about a scene that had become fragmented and isolated from the social context in which and through which it took place, police lawyers succeeded in blurring or 'disaggregating' the meaning of the sequence as a whole.¹⁹ Whereas certain citizens (black as well as white) saw in the video overwhelming evidence of police

brutality, lawyers in the courtroom were able to claim that it offered no evidence of any excessive use of force: the officers had made a 'reasonable use' of violence. The moment where the police brutality reaches its peak, at the 81st second of the recording, had become a scene of legitimate defence against a madman.



The police perception of violence does not depend exclusively upon a framework of intelligibility drawn from the past. In fact, this framework is continually updated by material and discursive techniques of power that serve (among other things) to disaffiliate the perception of events from those social and political struggles that serve precisely to embed them in history, while crafting alternative frameworks for the apprehension and intelligibility of lived reality. By defending himself against police violence, Rodney King became indefensible. In other words, the more he defended himself, the more he was beaten, and the more he came to be perceived as the aggressor. This reversal of attack and defence, aggression and protection, within a framework that allows their terms and legitimate agents to be structurally assigned irrespective of the efficacy of their gestures, tends to transform such actions into anthropological markers, delineating a colour line that discriminates against the bodies and

social groups that it forms thereby. This dividing line is never solely about distinguishing threatening/aggressive bodies from defensive bodies. Rather, it separates those who are agents (agents of their own defence) from those whose power of action has an entirely negative form, in the sense that they can only ever be agents of 'pure' violence.

Like any African American man arrested by a racist police force, Rodney King is therefore recognised as an agent, but only as an agent of violence, as a violent subject, to the exclusion of any other sort of action. Black men are always made responsible for this sort of violence: they are its cause and effect, its beginning and its end.²⁰ From this point of view, Rodney King's protective reflexes, the disordered gestures by which he struggled to stay alive (he flaps his arms, staggers, tries to get up, stands on his knees) were described as being under his 'total control' and as evidence of 'dangerous intent',²¹ as if violence were the sole voluntary action possible for a black body, effectively excluding the very possibility of legitimate self-defence.²² To attribute disqualified/disqualifying violent action and an entirely negative power of action exclusively to social groups constituted as 'at risk' also serves an important function, since it prevents police violence from being perceived as an aggression. Since bodies that have been made into minorities represent a threat, since they are a source of danger, the agents of every conceivable violence, the violence that is continuously exerted on them (beginning with that of the police and the state) need never appear as the filthy violence that it is: it is secondary, protective, defensive, an always-already legitimate response or reaction.

In the case of the torture in the iron cage, I have shown how targeting a body's power of action permits a certain technology of power to transform it into impotence (the more we struggle to escape suffering, the more wounded we become), with the result that the subject's defensive efforts to survive insidiously become the very mechanism of his negation. Self-defence is thus rendered irremediably impractical for the resisting body. In the case of Rodney King, another element also came into view. Here it is no longer simply about the power of action, but interpellation, the moral and political qualification whereby 'subjects of right' – or better, subjects with the right to defend themselves – come to be recognised. Rodney King cannot be perceived as a body defending

itself; he is seen *a priori* as an agent of violence. The very possibility of defending oneself is the exclusive privilege of a dominant minority. In the case of the lynching of Rodney King, the state (through the intermediary of its armed representatives) is not regarded as violent but as reacting to violence: *it defends itself against violence*. On the other hand, for Rodney King, as for every other body victimised by this rhetoric of self-defence, the more he defended himself, the more indefensible he becomes.

Defenceless and indefensible

Millet de la Girardi re could have defended himself but, by defending himself, he became defenceless. Rodney King defended himself but, by defending himself, he became indefensible. These two logics of subjection, which converge upon the same unhappy subjectivation, make up the principal concern of my book, *Self-Defence*, in the face of a technology of power that has never relied so heavily on such defensive logic to ensure its own perpetuation.

With this point of departure, we may begin to trace the outline of a certain apparatus of power, which I will call the defensive apparatus. How does it function? By targeting anything that expresses a force, a vital impulse, a movement polarised to defend itself, and then (for certain people) either marking out its trajectory and promoting its deployment through frameworks of legitimation, or else (for others) obstructing its realisation, its very possibility, by making its vital impulse uninhabitable and faltering, or dangerous and threatening, for oneself and others alike.

This double-edged defensive apparatus traces a line of demarcation between subjects who deserve to be defended and to defend themselves, and bodies driven back onto defensive tactics. For these vulnerable and violable bodies, only bare-knuckled subjectivities remain. Kept in check through violence, they live or survive only to the extent that they manage to equip themselves with defensive tactics. These subaltern practices constitute what I call self-defence [*autod fense*] in the proper sense of the term, by contrast with the juridical concept of legitimate defence [*l gitime d fense*]. Unlike the latter, self-defence paradoxically has no subject – by which I mean that the subject it defends does not pre-exist this movement that resists the violence that targets it. In this

sense, self-defence is part of what I propose to call the ‘martial ethics of the self’.

Tracing this system back to its colonial origins makes it possible to question the supposedly monopolistic capture of violence by states laying claim to the legitimate use of physical force. Instead of a tendency towards monopoly, we may hypothesise an imperial economy of violence that paradoxically defends individuals who have always already been recognised as legitimate defenders of themselves. This economy maintains the legitimacy of the use of physical force for certain subjects, granting them powers of conservation and jurisdiction (vigilantism), or what amounts to a license to kill.

However, what is at issue is not merely the distinction, fundamental though it may be, between ‘defended subjects’ and ‘defenceless subjects’, between subjects who may defend themselves legitimately and those for whom this has been deemed illegitimate (and who are thereby rendered indefensible). There is an even more subtle threshold. For we must add that this government of the body intervenes at the level of the musculature itself. There is an art of governance that takes as its objects nerve impulses, muscular contractions, tensions of the kinaesthetic body and the discharge of hormonal fluids. It operates upon whatever excites or inhibits it, whatever allows it to act or counteracts it, restrains it or provokes it, reassures it or makes it tremble, whatever determines it to strike or not strike.

To begin from muscle rather than law: this is certain to change the way in which violence has come to be problematised by political thought. The focus of *Se Défendre* is on moments of the passage to defensive violence, moments that I did not feel could be rendered intelligible by subjecting them to a political and moral analysis centred around questions of legitimacy. At each of these moments, the stakes of the passage to defensive violence are nothing other than life itself: to not be shot down, first and foremost. Physical violence is thus understood here as vital necessity, as a praxis of resistance.

The history of self-defence is a polarised adventure marked by the continuous opposition of two antagonistic expressions of the defence of the ‘self’. On the one hand, there is the dominant juridico-political tradition of legitimate defence, articulated to a myriad of practices of power with various modes of brutality. On the other hand, there is the submerged history of a ‘martial ethics

of self’ that has traversed both political movements and contemporary counter-conducts, testifying to a surprising continuity of defensive resistance that has invested them with strength.

I propose to map out a constellational history of self-defence. My itinerary was assembled not by rounding up the most illustrative examples, but by exploring the memory of struggles for which the dominated body constitutes the principal archive: the syncretic knowledge and cultures of slave self-defence, feminist self-defence practices, the fighting techniques developed in eastern Europe by Jewish organisations against pogroms, etc.

By opening this archive, which includes many other stories as well, my aim is not to produce a work of history, but to practice a labour of genealogy. In our darkening sky, this constellation sparkles with echoes, addresses, testimonies and citational relations that connect its different points of light in a tenuous and subjective way. The major texts that form the philosophical backbone of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense pay homage to the insurgents of the Warsaw ghetto; queer self-defence patrols are in a citational relationship with black self-defence movements; the jiu-jitsu practiced by English internationalist anarchist suffragists was accessible to them in part due to an imperial policy for capturing the wisdom and know-how of the colonised, through their disarmament.

My own history and bodily experience served as the prism through which I listened, saw and read this archive. My theoretical and political culture has instilled in me a foundational idea, namely, that relations of power *in situ* can never fully depend upon confrontational encounters that are already collective, but everywhere involve lived experiences of domination transpiring in the intimacy of bedrooms, in subway station lobbies, beneath the apparent tranquillity of family reunions, etc. In other words, for some, the question of defence does not disappear when the moment of overt political mobilisation ends, but is part of a continuous experience, a phenomenology of violence. This feminist approach seizes upon something in the fabric of power relations that was traditionally construed as being either pre- or extra-political. Having made this shift, I intend to work not at the scale of constituted political subjects, but with the politicisation of subjectivities: in everyday life, in the intimacy of the enraged affects trapped within us, in the solitude

of lived experiences of violence, where we continuously practice a nameless self-defence. From one day to the next, what does violence do to our lives, to our bodies, to our muscles? And what can our bodies both do and not do, in and through this violence?

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Notes

1. Joseph Elzéar Morénas, *Précis historique de la traite des Noirs et de l'esclavage colonial* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1828), 251–252.
2. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).
3. [Translator's note: The author frequently exploits the difference between the French term *puissance*, or 'power' in the sense of capacity, force, strength, or potential, and *pouvoir*, or 'power' understood as authority, influence, juridical right, and domination. With the exception of a small number of instances indicated with square brackets, the term *puissance* is always employed in a qualified form, as 'power of action' [*puissance d'agir*] or 'vital impulse' [*élan de puissance*]; where the term 'power' appears without further qualification, it translates *pouvoir*.]
4. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2009). [Translator's note: The citation refers to the French title of the book, which was translated as *Ce qui fait une vie. Essai sur la violence, la guerre et le deuil*.]
5. See the introduction by Grégoire Chamayou, in *Kubark: Le Manuel secret de manipulation mentale et de torture psychologique de la CIA* (Paris: Éditions Zones, 2012).
6. [Translator's note: The author here plays off a continuity of terms that cannot be reproduced in English: *se battre, c'est se débattre vainement, c'est être battu.e*.]
7. When he defines life, Georges Canguilhem notes that, 'far from being indifferent to the conditions that it confronts, life is that which fills out the concept of polarity in its true sense: life is polarity, or a polarised activity'. See Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, trans. Carolyn Fawcett (Boston: Reidel, 1978), 70–71.
8. The video is 9 minutes 20 seconds long. It is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sb1WYwlpUtY> (Accessed 07.22.2019).
9. [Translator's note: ...*qui blanchit à proprement parler*: in French, the word *blanchir* means to 'clear of suspicion,' but also more literally, 'to whiten,' 'bleach,' or 'launder'.]
10. A second trial took place in February of 1993 in Federal civil rights court, which ultimately sentenced two police officers im-

plicated in the lynching to 32 months of prison time (the other two were acquitted again). During the trial, the judges granted that the police officers had acted within the legal scope of their duties during the first few minutes of the arrest, arguing that the first wave of beatings was justified by King's recalcitrant attitude. It was only on account of the 'useless' beatings that followed that the two were convicted.

11. See Seth Mydans, *The New York Times*, March 10, 1993.
12. I am using this expression deliberately, since George Holliday is white; in reality, it would be necessary to enter into detailed analysis of the mobilisation of national and international 'opinion' around the Rodney King case. What interests me here is the performative dimension of racial identity produced, among other things, by the courtroom and the temporality of the trial.
13. Judith Butler, 'Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia', in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15.
14. Butler, 'Endangered/Endangering', 16.
15. For example, in a study published in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* in 2005, the authors attempt to demonstrate on the basis of clinical research that African Americans feel more anger than Whites, and have fewer resources to manage their emotions in 'socially acceptable' ways. See J. Beth Mabry and K. Jill Kiekolt, 'Anger in Black and White: Race, Alienation, and Anger', *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 46:1 (2005), 85–101. Such publications are part of a broader and continuously renewed production of racist knowledge, particularly in psychopathology, psychology and psychosociology. I would like to thank Paul Preciado for drawing my attention to this reference.
16. Butler, 'Endangered/Endangering', 20.
17. *Ibid.*, 16.
18. The ontological status of evidence in the judicial system is a narrative construction. This becomes only more true wherever it is a question of visual evidence being considered as the recording of a fact. However, it is never an immediate truth that we grasp therein, but rather the manifestation of what is perceived as visible, sayable and therefore legitimate to constitute proof. The judicial field only offers a particularly rich terrain of investigation on which to grasp suchgnoseological constructions of perception (schematisations) through socio-historical definitions. This hermeneutics is less about constructing evidence piece by piece than it is about deciding what counts as legally 'objective' evidence. This process is thus concealed by its claim to be guided solely by the 'naked truth' of facts. See Kimberlé Crenshaw and Gary Peller, 'Reel Time/Real Justice' in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Gooding-Williams, 56–70.
19. Crenshaw and Peller, 'Reel Time/Real Justice', 61. The authors describe a narrative technique of 'disaggregation'.
20. Butler, 'Endangered/Endangering', 20.
21. These were the terms used by the police officers during their hearings at the first trial.
22. 'Attributing violence to the object of violence is part of the very mechanism that recapitulates violence, and that makes the jury's 'seeing' into a complicity with that police violence.' Butler, 'Endangered/Endangering', 20.