

# SPEAKING OUT OF TURN

An Introduction

Speaking was a demand that the work made on me, and that increasing interactions with others made on me.

LORRAINE O'GRADY, 2016<sup>1</sup>

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**S**PEAKING OUT OF TURN: *Lorraine O'Grady and the Art of Language* offers the first sustained exploration of the art and practice of this feminist conceptual artist. O'Grady began her professional arts career in New York during the late 1970s, and as with so many women artists and artists of African descent working at that time, her work and practice were largely overlooked. Today, in her late eighties, she is more productive than ever and has enjoyed greater visibility as her work is being widely exhibited and enthusiastically engaged in both art media and scholarship.<sup>2</sup> O'Grady's impressive interdisciplinary and tremendously significant body of collages, performances, and photo-based installations is being exhibited nationally and internationally. Her writing has also received considerable attention, particularly her much-anthologized essay "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity," which appeared first in *Afterimage* (1992), then in *New Feminist Criticism: Art/Identity/Action* (1994), and later in Amelia Jones's *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (2002/2010), now a feminist art historical mainstay.

Finally, a collection of the artist's writings, *Lorraine O'Grady: Writing in Space, 1973–2019*, was published by Duke University Press in 2020. And while this new attention has generated numerous critical insights, much of her archive and praxis remains unexamined. In addition to retracing the artist's career, *Speaking Out of Turn* reveals the extent to which O'Grady's entire creative practice has been predicated on her critical engagement with language, and more specifically how the written and spoken word have shaped her impressive oeuvre.

This book closely examines key bodies of work from across O'Grady's career in critical dialogue with several important theorists of vision, language, and address: first, feminist, black feminist, and womanist theorists such as Daphne Brooks, Elin Diamond, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Amelia Jones, Lucy Lippard, and Alice Walker, who stake a critical claim to art historical legitimacy for women cultural producers by asserting the important vantage point from which they make rich contributions as "outsiders within," performing incisive institutional critique, and troubling the white male gaze; and second, European philosophers such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Bertolt Brecht, whose work informs my reading of O'Grady's multilayered speaking (double voice) and strategies employed in relationship to her viewers (alienation effects). The book also puts O'Grady's art and creative process into critical dialogue with several artists working in a similar manner across the late twentieth century, such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Senga Nengudi, Adrian Piper, and Carrie Mae Weems. This introduction and the chapters that follow argue that O'Grady's art offers new modes for interrogating these ideas and engaging with other contemporary practitioners, as well as rigorous approaches to theorizing performance and conceptual art more broadly.

What is clear about Lorraine O'Grady's art is that every aspect of it is entangled and interconnected. From her early literary cut-ups to her boisterous performances to the later, theoretically dense diptychs, issues of gender, race, and class are embedded and conceptually explored.<sup>3</sup> In this book I focus specifically on the tactic of direct address, which I argue unifies O'Grady's archive and cuts across mediums. Direct address, as a strategy deployed by visual artists, can be understood as the means by which an artwork "speaks to" or engages its viewers, with the manner of address being central to how the work's meaning is derived. Speech and concepts of language, so fundamental to O'Grady's work, are employed by the artist across a range of modalities such as text, aurality, and performance, and within this modus operandi, I argue, O'Grady's brand of direct address has been fashioned and executed *out of turn*—or, said another way, against the grain of white Western, European art and visual culture.

When discussing these concept-based ruptures in O'Grady's brand of language-as-art, the discursive systems of race and gender can be understood as the complex intersection of philosophies, regimes of representation, and systems of enforcement that work in concert to define human beings through raced and gendered subject categories. Much of the scholarship I draw on itself builds on the theories of Michel Foucault, who argued that social institutions, like the art museums where most of O'Grady's work is

exhibited, are enmeshed in social relations and are thus spaces of social control. Indeed, it is in these institutions and relational entanglements where the subjectivities of artists and viewers are formed within and through language. Furthermore, the terms “race” and “gender” are understood as discursive formations when used throughout the book.<sup>4</sup> As the art historian Jennifer González argues, “Race discourse [and I would add gender] is the politics of representation [in museums, art, literature, popular culture, music, film, journalism, and other media] that insists on presenting people as ‘racialized’ subjects.”<sup>5</sup> Additionally, black feminist discourse has provided the theoretical foundation for such a politics of representation and my own critical engagement with O’Grady’s work.<sup>6</sup>

Within these core concerns of gender and race are nuances that stem from the artist’s persistent use of dichotomies in service of critical and avant-garde visual expression. For example, black and white are two poles continuously interrogated across distinct projects—a tension that drives the artist’s fascination with hybridity and racial and cultural mixing, in particular. Likewise, male and female are also hefty poles between which O’Grady’s multimodal practice oscillates. Language, then, in addition to formal strategies of address, facilitates O’Grady’s theoretical approach to her praxis, and how a viewer might come to make meaning from her work.

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As *Speaking out of Turn* examines the art of a black American woman, using her creative practice to trace the bounds of direct address as an artistic strategy, it must also acknowledge the long historical legacy of black cultural politics in the United States, making the connection between O’Grady’s contemporary performance art and historic uses of direct-address strategies toward survival and self-determination. In the 1800s, for example, abolitionist practitioners such as Henry “Box” Brown and Sojourner Truth took up direct-address strategies as both aesthetic enactments and to literally speak and exist out of turn as a critical means of liberation.<sup>7</sup> And as discussed later in this introduction with respect to the speech acts of Maria W. Stewart, Josephine V., and Rachel Jeantel, it is imperative to explore how multimodal performance artists like O’Grady inherited these fraught, inventive histories of existing “out of turn” as a means for survival and creative being. Just as the aforementioned actors and their cultural enactments contextualize O’Grady’s disruptive approach, the artist’s direct-address concept-based work illuminates, through contemporary praxis, nuanced and under-theorized aspects of a particular creative cultural and aesthetic past. Fundamental to how I locate and name O’Grady’s process, and the ways the artist has come to engage with issues of silence and erasure, is the notion of *speaking out of turn*.

Speaking out of turn is an idiom I have adopted and retooled in order to theorize the unique position and strategies of black women and women-identified artists of color, O’Grady in particular, as they work through complex histories of exclusion and structures of power and visibility in art industries and art historical discourse. Throughout the text, speaking out of turn is explicated and historically situated as a

critical methodology within O’Grady’s art, and within broader histories of speech acts and performances of visibility emerging from the African diaspora.

By definition, the idiom “to speak out of turn” is predicated on a preexisting order of speech. To speak out of turn means that you have spoken when it was not your turn to do so. Scholar and artist Michele Wallace’s early work recognizes the revolutionary power of speaking out of turn and argues that it is the only “tradition” available to the black female critical voice.<sup>8</sup> Art critic and curator Lucy Lippard invokes this powerful stance in her essay about Wallace’s work, understanding “out of turn” as “outside the dizzying circle of white and male discourse.”<sup>9</sup> I use the phrase in order to further develop and revitalize the vocabulary necessary for intervening in Western-, white-, male-centric discourses of art history and the study of visual objects, as well as for discussing the interventions O’Grady’s art makes. More broadly defined, speaking out of turn connotes speaking at the wrong time or in an undesignated place; saying something without authority; making a remark or providing information that is tactless or indiscreet; or speaking without permission.

Speaking out of turn, then, is also a decolonial apparatus—a methodology of the historically silenced and oppressed—that O’Grady uses in her practice to trouble the field of vision and claim a voice in the art world.<sup>10</sup> Broadly, art that speaks out of turn is a necessary response to the long history of silencing and erasing black artists and artists of color within Western history and culture. Using this analytic, I examine the strategies of address O’Grady adopts, and, drawing upon theories of performance, interpellation, and cultural and visual studies, provide an interdisciplinary analysis and a framework to assess works by O’Grady and her contemporaries that can be said to speak out of turn.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, I analyze throughout the ways O’Grady mobilizes direct-address strategies in the contemporary art world by speaking and existing out of turn. Arguably, the disruptive nature of unsolicited speech has an impact on art museums, altering exhibition dynamics in gallery spaces in interesting ways. Through a variety of creative media and performance technologies, O’Grady’s art reorients viewers to complex issues of class, race, and gender, and to the conceptual underpinnings in each of her bodies of work. My linguistic focus on O’Grady’s art, however, moves beyond real or imagined speech acts to examine what the artist has done or does with the platform of the contemporary art museum when she has inventively fashioned herself within the structure of visual existence. Put another way, this monograph is dedicated to exploring the semiotics embedded in O’Grady’s work as she has stepped into the field of vision and claimed a voice. Naturally, I am concerned with what this voice sounds like, but more prominently throughout, I ask what this voice *looks like*.

If speaking out of turn can be understood in the Sandovalian sense as a methodology of oppressed or marginalized individuals and communities, I argue that direct address is part of speaking out of turn’s technological repertoire in the art of O’Grady and others.<sup>12</sup> Direct address is a technology necessary for generating dissident and coalitional cosmopolitics, and for revealing the rhetorical structures by which languages of

aesthetic supremacy are uttered, rationalized, and ruptured.<sup>13</sup> Black women, feminists, and women-identified artists of color have taken up this strategy, just as literary and theater practitioners have in the past, in order to move spectators politically, to reveal structures of power and technologies of vision, and, in other cases, to complicate, disrupt, deceive, mislead, or redirect viewers through their visual constructions.

This line of inquiry points us directly toward the process-based operations of O'Grady's creative practice, in which the linguistic strategy of direct address features prominently. Significantly, direct address emerges most visibly in the history of US art during the late 1970s and the 1980s with the rise of new expressive manifestations of the feminist movement: appropriation, assemblage, mixed-media performance, and aesthetic labor as institutional critique.<sup>14</sup> During this time, contemporary art experienced a sizable shift away from discourses of modernism toward a focus on those producing on the margins of the art world.<sup>15</sup> The strategy of direct address within visual art can be understood as inheriting the concerns and techniques of literature and theater, as artists across media have used this method in order to intervene in audience engagement through visual and performance modalities of disruption and interference. Largely conceptual in form and loosely associated with institutional and cultural critique and the dematerialization of the art object, direct-address tactics center the experience of spectators, often with the goal of moving them socially and politically.<sup>16</sup>

O'Grady entered the art world at the height of this conversation, and during a turbulent moment in the 1970s and 1980s, when white feminist artists such as Barbara Kruger, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Cindy Sherman, and a limited number of nonwhite women artists, such as Ana Mendieta and Adrian Piper, were given space to show their work in larger, more traditional art museum spaces.<sup>17</sup> The arrival of these practitioners marked the emergence of language around direct address, used to describe their work in a dizzying variety of contexts. Indeed, Kruger recognized direct address as a viable tactic regardless of medium specificity, which is reflected in the mutability of the strategy across her practice as well as discourses surrounding her art.<sup>18</sup>

Due to the nebulous uses and loose associations of direct address by a wide array of artists, the particular rhetorics of direct address as a sophisticated deployment of language within the visual arts have never before been distilled within the US art historical context with any great specificity. Thus, using O'Grady's dynamic practice, *Speaking out of Turn* also locates and pins down several coordinates of direct address as an important artistic modality—one that is mapped through a variety of expressive sites that O'Grady herself operates in, such as text-based work, performance, and video.

## ON METHOD

*Speaking Out of Turn* mobilizes a variety of methodological resources from art history, anthropology, gender studies, critical race studies, and philosophy to examine how language operates within O'Grady's art. Sites of engagement range from more traditional

spaces such as museum exhibitions, talks and lectures, and the artist's archive housed at Wellesley College to lesser-studied spaces such as lengthy email exchanges, gallery openings, invited dinners, late-night drinks, and daylong interviews that start over breakfast. And while throughout the book I rarely bring into sharp focus any one site, each contributed to my immersive approach to O'Grady's work and thus informs the questions guiding the entire project: How do Lorraine O'Grady's artworks speak, and whom do they speak to? And what are the conceptual underpinnings of O'Grady's multimodal visual projects—as art, as archival document, as a malleable medium connected to the artist's own position within the art world, and against art historical discourse?

My first encounter with O'Grady's work was in the context of curator Bennett Simpson's 2012 exhibition *Blues for Smoke* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. I was captivated, and admittedly disturbed, by one of the artist's diptych photomontages from the series *Body Is the Ground of My Experience* (1991/2019, see fig. 28). On the right, a little boy and girl play ball in a clearing, with a heap of clothes and a handgun strewn across the grass nearby. In the air hovering over the tree line, a naked couple embraces, a white man atop a black woman, apparently penetrating her. In the frame on the left, the black woman lies in the now-empty clearing; her eyes gaze overhead, unfocused, as she is fondled by the white man, now in a torn chain mail bodysuit, his head replaced by a human skull. Titled *The Clearing: or Cortez and La Malinche, Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, N. and Me*, the work left me conflicted. I was immediately interpellated by the mixed-race couple, a pairing resembling my own parents. However, the bizarre context and title were disorienting. The historical figures O'Grady summons with her framing are Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States; Sally Hemings, a woman enslaved to him; sixteenth-century Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortez; and an enslaved Indigenous Nahua woman known as La Malinche, who played a key role in Cortez's defeat of the Aztecs. "N. and Me," the last attribution, is presumably coded to protect the identity of the artist's past spouse, lover, or friend to whom she draws the powerful comparison. I went searching for more, determined to understand what it all meant, and in the process formed a unique relationship with O'Grady herself, which laid the foundations for this book.

Trained as an interdisciplinary cultural theorist, I initially approached O'Grady's work from a place of ethnographic phenomenology, exploring through participant observation and embodied theorizing how and why the work spoke to me specifically: a light-skinned black woman of means entrenched in elite academic environs. It became clear during the research process, as I began to shift into more art historical and formal modes of writing, that when analyzing O'Grady's use of language and the alienating effect it often produces, I would be unable to extract myself from any substantive reading of the artist's work. As Christina Sharpe elucidates of fellow black and African American studies scholar Saidiya Hartman's "autobiographical example," it is an approach that is "not about navel gazing"; rather, autobiography and autoethnography are necessary modes when looking "at historical and social process and one's own formation as a

window into social and historical processes, as an example of them.”<sup>19</sup> Beyond certain positionalities I share with O’Grady herself, when discussing strategies of address, this monograph makes an intentional shift away from theories of universal viewership and instead invests in interdisciplinary and situated ways of knowing and understanding contemporary art. Indeed, a strong parallel exists between ethnographic and phenomenological methodologies and artistic strategies of address, as the meaning of any given artwork that might be understood as “calling out” from the walls stems from the material conditions of the piece *and* its effects (intended or otherwise) on its viewer.

I took seriously a commitment, then, to multi-sited ethnography as an inner subjective relationship between myself and O’Grady, her work, the archive, and the space of the museum.<sup>20</sup> By reflecting on my role in the research process, my own racialized and gendered body in relationship to both the history of art and the space of the fine art museum, alongside O’Grady’s black conceptual praxis, this manuscript is uniquely situated to make a critical intervention in the ways O’Grady’s work is studied and understood.<sup>21</sup> The Canadian poet Dionne Brand provides a stunning articulation of one’s ties to and relationship within an archival praxis:

One enters a room and history follows; one enters a room and history precedes. History is already seated in the chair in the empty room when one arrives. Where one stands in a society seems always related to this historical experience. Where one can be observed is relative to that history. All human effort seems to emanate from this door. How do I know this? *Only by self-observation, only by looking. Only by feeling. Only by being a part, sitting in the room with history.*<sup>22</sup>

Motivating this shift away from more traditional approaches to art historical writing is a desire to demystify the processes of academic research, particularly in the realm of art and culture, which is an inherently subjective endeavor. Furthermore, locating my own positionality as a researcher—sitting in a room (read: art gallery) with history—and naming my relationship to artists and objects of study, is a dissociative act against the historically exclusive project of art historical canon formation, and the damaging debates surrounding field-engrained notions of adjudicating quality, purity, authenticity, and beauty.

My own methodological shift perhaps mirrors and advances a steady change taking place in the art world, which until recently has historically moved at a glacial pace. In the early 2000s, specifically, recuperative impulses increased among scholars and curators, many motivated by the swift emergence and cooptation of multicultural discourse.<sup>23</sup> When O’Grady was invited to participate in the influential 2007 exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, the artist experienced an important shift in her practice toward the archive as a means of self-conscious resuscitation of her own forgotten art practice.<sup>24</sup> At this time, the internet made rendering oneself visible a much easier endeavor than it had been in earlier decades, and O’Grady’s deployment of the

World Wide Web provides an interesting model, and point of study, for born-digital archives as well as online creative practices more broadly. In an interview with *Brooklyn Rail*'s Jarrett Earnest, the artist described how she engineered her own comeback:

I did it [created an archive] because I thought I'd disappeared in many people's minds—Connie Butler being one exception. Connie had been at WAC (Women's Action Coalition) as a young woman, and I was one of the very few women of color who were active in that group. When she later curated the exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007) and put me in it, I knew it would be important, I felt I had to be ready. That's when I put the website up; I wanted to make it possible for anyone that was interested to become more engaged. Everything had disappeared from public view, it was all just sitting in the drawers of my file cabinets. I realized that for any of it to be understood I had to include everything: the images, the texts—it had to be a mini-archive. It's designed to shape my work for the public and be a teaching tool. But it's also meant as a staging for serious research, a start for access to my physical archives at Wellesley. *I deliberately built the site to emphasize the connections between text and image*—I didn't want people to just look at the pictures. You can't even get to the images without going through text; every link lands you back into text.

During my [2015–16] exhibit at the Carpenter Center, I met with art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty's PhD seminar. I think I shocked the grad students when I said, "I would not be here now were it not for my website." But you know, to have just appeared in *WACK!* with *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire*'s gown, I would have been a one-hit wonder. Having the website up with my other artwork and my writings available would make it more possible for me to be recuperated by a new generation of artists, writers, and curators.<sup>25</sup>

O'Grady makes clear here the centrality of text in the viewing of her artwork, and her desire to control viewer engagement with the work through textual mediation both in the gallery and online. Until recently, the artist's website was the only place one could go to view a large portion of O'Grady's life's work, and O'Grady herself attributes her reemergence to this didactic strategy of creating easy access and legibility for contemporary interlocutors.

My own relationship to the artist's work indeed continued online following my viewing at *Blues for Smoke*. When I located O'Grady's web archive, then still being developed, I read every text and image the artist had purposefully placed, like breadcrumbs, to lead the reader-viewer into her process, hinting at the personal depth and conceptual heft that lie beyond the surface of *Body Is the Ground of My Experience* and other works. By the time I met the artist in person in 2015 (see fig. 37), I had already decided to dedicate a significant portion of my dissertation to her practice, including performances like *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* (1980–83) and *Art Is . . .* (1983); my project involved examining a cohort of artists' work in order to understand and interpret



direct-address art presented in US art museums and galleries. When I met her, she was delivering a talk titled “Both/And,” a fitting attribution that would later be used as the title of her 2021 Brooklyn Museum retrospective. In the lecture, O’Grady outlined her nearly forty-year practice, making connections between her experiences as a black woman artist, her conceptual practice, and her use of the diptych as a mode for theorizing two distinct images or ideas in space and time. “Both/and” connotes both inside and outside of the art world, both black and white, both historical and contemporary, both the right and left sides of O’Grady’s diptych pairings, and other such tensions that manifest throughout her oeuvre.<sup>26</sup> I reached out to O’Grady and, much to my surprise, she responded in kind. In the years since, we have enjoyed regular correspondence, which has been central to the research and development of this book, from dissertation case studies to the analysis found here.<sup>27</sup>

Parallel to my profound gratitude to O’Grady, as a black feminist art historian and theorist, I am also indebted to the black feminist literary scholars and cultural historians whose groundbreaking approaches to locating and naming the sedimented ramifications of interlocking systems of oppression, particularly from the perspectives of black women, have deeply informed my own approach to O’Grady’s language-centered visual art practice. Aligned with the project of black feminist theorizing, this monograph takes seriously the artworks and creative modalities of black women, particularly those of O’Grady, which have historically been overlooked or excluded from white mainstream feminist and contemporary art discourses.

As a graduate student, I was drawn to O’Grady’s work for reasons I could not then explain. Since encountering the artist’s self-reflexive archive and engaging in deep conversation with O’Grady herself, I have found that I am drawn to the work because of the way it speaks to and interrogates an aspect of the black American experience often left undealt with, brushed aside as more urgent dilemmas take (necessary) precedence. O’Grady’s experience of black affluence, the appearance of social and cultural thriving, and light-skinned privilege resonates with my own. In fact, several of the artists I have written about, including Delphine Diallo, Coco Fusco, and Adrian Piper, also directly and indirectly take up these intersections as they mobilize their own “lightly melanated” black female bodies within their work. For me, also a highly educated light-skinned black woman of means, O’Grady’s art, along with Piper’s, has opened up intriguing possibilities in constructive self-reflexive knowledge production and theorizing.

## **THE VOICE, AND OTHER RADICAL SPEECH ACTS**

[The] Black woman, silent, almost invisible, in America, has been speaking for three hundred years in pantomime or at best in a borrowed voice.

**JOSEPHINE CARSON, *SILENT VOICES: THE SOUTHERN NEGRO WOMAN TODAY*, 1969<sup>28</sup>**

A stunning woman in her mid-eighties appears against a black screen. She smiles pleasantly and glances off camera. Electronic music begins to play, and the woman's bare shoulders bob, her delicate body sways to the beat. As the introduction segues into lyrics, the woman parts her lips to sing, but it is not her voice that touches listeners' ears; instead, it's the voice of British-born visual artist, singer, and composer Anohni, formerly known as Antony, of the band Antony and the Johnsons. And while Anohni has her own unique history of speaking and existing out of turn, the woman who appears in the video and claims another's voice as her own is feminist conceptual artist Lorraine O'Grady, who for the entirety of the three-minute video lip-synchs to Anohni's song "Marrow," from the singer-composer's biting and beautiful 2016 album *Hopelessness*.

The sound is distorted, and the lyrics chillingly allegorize the planet Earth as a woman's cancer-riddled body. The woman is exploited through capitalism and abused by a culture desensitized to its own violence. The resounding refrain—"We are, we are all Americans now"—packs a powerful indictment of the US-led misuse and destruction of the planet's resources, and subsequent denial of the environmental ramifications of this historical abuse. In a statement on the video, Anohni wrote, "Capitalism cares only for wealth extraction, from the earth and from its people. We are slaughtering the future. Only a wartime effort can save us now. Stand with the Water protectors in North Dakota. There is only one prayer left: save the earth."<sup>29</sup> The singer-composer references then-current efforts by Indigenous groups to thwart the development of an oil pipeline that would cut through Native lands and pollute local water sources, one of the most contentious environmental crises at the time of the song's release. In fact, the entire album addresses a myriad of disasters, each highlighting the human and environmental tolls that come with the current trajectory of rapidly Westernizing civilizations.

The music videos that accompany these doomsday dirges utilize predominantly steady shots of a single celebrity as they lip-synch to the disconcerting lyrics. Other such arrangements include actress Susan Cianciolo in the video for the album's namesake track, "Hopelessness," Broadway musician Storm Lever in the video for "Crisis," and a haunting appearance by supermodel and actress Naomi Campbell, who, through streaming tears, mouths the words to Anohni's "Drone Bomb Me." In "Marrow," O'Grady's cheery expression quickly dissolves into disillusionment; we see anguish set into the artist's face while lip-synching the words "Suck the oil out of her face / Burn her hair, boil her skin."

O'Grady's lip-synching performance is average, at best, which is largely why the collaboration is so mesmerizing. Throughout the video, the artist struggles to keep up with Anohni's sinuous runs and often overdramatizes the lyrics. Full synchronization remains just out of reach. Despite this, what makes the enactment so entrancing and powerful is the embodied presence of O'Grady herself, and what she has come to symbolize through her practice of claiming physical space by deploying her voice in radical and disruptive ways in the art world. O'Grady remixed the words of variously authored texts culled from the *New York Times* in *Cutting Out the New York Times* (1977); invaded

white-walled galleries as *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* and New York's Central Park in her performance *Rivers, First Draft* (1982); infiltrated Harlem's African American Day Parade for *Art Is . . .*; and now mimes the words of another artist, her body mobilized as a hypervisible stand-in for the age, and yet timelessness, of the planet. Certainly, the power in the artist's dynamic presence is what is captured and bodied forth in both the video and the performance still that activates this book's cover.

O'Grady's body in this instance becomes a rich textual metaphor for her own distinct language-driven practice. For O'Grady, speech is central, even when the artist appears to be rendered silent, voiceless, a vessel for someone else's voice and lyrics. In "Marrow," O'Grady's bright red lips move, and yet her voice is evinced by another's. Is it O'Grady who appropriates the words and sounds of Anohni to communicate something new, or is it the other way around? This dialogic collaboration, in ways similar to O'Grady's other projects, such as *Cutting Out the New York Times* or *Miscegenated Family Album* (1994), makes it difficult to pin down what is being appropriated and whose voice is ultimately present. The trick O'Grady performs is not one of impersonation but of implication. Her less-than-perfect lip-synchronization is a subtle yet profound exercise in ontological polyvocality.

What O'Grady's appearance in "Marrow," as well as the rest of her work presented throughout the book, makes clear is that the voice is a powerful medium through which artists in all fields cultivate and define their practice. Indeed, Anohni recognizes her own authority and participation by using her voice in disruptive ways in *Hopelessness*: "People that know my music tend to rely on my voice as a source of comfort. . . . This album was me not only making a series of indictments of our world, but also dealing with my own complicity as a participant in this prevailing consumer culture we're all enmeshed in."<sup>30</sup> And while language is not dependent on the voice, as we will see in O'Grady's work, the voice becomes one of language's most powerful implements, especially when it is presumed to be the "wrong" instrument, or one that is not yours to use, or one you are using in the "wrong" manner.

In this way, direct address and speaking out of turn are tactics that have historically made visible the workings of power within the art world and beyond.<sup>31</sup> Here, taking my lead from scholars Daphne Brooks, Kobena Mercer, Uri McMillan, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tavia Nyong'o, and artists Coco Fusco, Lyle Ashton Harris, Iké Udé, and Carrie Mae Weems, I draw upon much longer and uneven developments in black global performance cultures to locate and name strategies of address specific to diverse artists across the diaspora. The analytic hook for this monograph, "speaking out of turn," both gestures toward the disruptive power and potential for the artistic category of direct address (and other radical speech acts) and takes seriously the question of why particular artists have not been given space to speak or to exist in the art world in the first place. In acknowledging these historic power dynamics, O'Grady, along with many of her contemporaries, have taken up direct-address strategies in order to tap the participatory potential for artworks to enter into dynamic spectator relations

as extensions of artists' own material and ideological subjectivities. These artists' voices carry, so to speak, despite the absence or presence of their physical bodies.

Bertolt Brecht used direct address, among other strategies—commonly referred to as “breaking the fourth wall”—to expose technologies of production to his audiences, and to expose the unjust social power relationships embedded in particular narrative structures. I read direct-address art as a similar kind of disruption and understand O’Grady’s art as often making the familiar space of the art museum and the process of viewing art strange and highly politicized. Even though there is no prescribed formula for creating contemporary art, there are tacit expectations of art spectatorship—a set of socialized behaviors and cues one practices when making one’s way around and through a given art space. This set of expectations and spectator performances, alongside theories such as Brecht’s, inform my analysis of O’Grady’s language-centered practice. I argue throughout that O’Grady’s at times confrontational artworks have the potential to disrupt the power matrices that define the colonial rhetorics of Western fine art spaces.<sup>32</sup> Inspired by her multimodal practices, I also draw on a set of theoretical apparatuses for decoding direct-address art’s effects, or potential effects, on spectators. These tools emerge from an interdisciplinary black feminist, historical, and cultural studies standpoint that examines a broad range of speech acts as a way to contextualize and more richly theorize O’Grady’s approach.

My autoethnographic research and use of the term “speaking out of turn” is site specific within art museum and galleries, with a critical lens fixed on the power structures that shape such spaces. Speaking out of turn, however, is not only an artistic methodology that occurs exclusively in art spaces. Rather, it is an act with historically risky and life-threatening ramifications for black people, especially in the United States—a reality O’Grady references before turning it into a call for action in her *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* performances. Yet even a solicitation to speak does not guarantee that one will be able to speak uninterrupted, or that one will not be actively silenced in the process of said solicited speech.

A timeless and often overlooked example is that of Maria W. Stewart, who more than 180 years ago became the first American woman of any race to speak to a mixed public of men and women, both black and white.<sup>33</sup> Stewart, also well known as the first African American woman to give regular public lectures, spoke on topics that ranged from abolition to women’s rights to religion. On February 27, 1833, she addressed the Boston chapter of the African Masonic Lodge, a men’s fraternal organization. Her now-infamous series of claims that men lacked “ambition and requisite courage” to pursue women’s rights and the complete abolition of slavery caused predictable uproar from the audience and abruptly ended her public speaking career.<sup>34</sup> The uproar suggests that, while invited, her speech was out of turn and out of place. Thus, Stewart had to be silenced. This moment in the nineteenth century, which witnessed other abolitionist enactments such as Frederick Douglass’s now widely acclaimed 1852 speech “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July,” point to what Chela Sandoval names