

# BORDERLINE MAGIC: JANETTE TURNER HOSPITAL AND TRANSFIGURATION BY PHOTOGRAPHY

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Janette Turner Hospital makes use of photographic motifs in her novels with a consistency that surprises even herself. When I asked her, during an interview at the University of Ottawa in November 1987, about her interest in photography, she reached for the manuscript of *Charades*, the novel she was working on at the time, and showed me, with the amusement of self-discovery, that it included a whole segment entitled "Photographs." Hospital told me that she finds photographs both disturbing and tantalizing, because they tease the spectator about the nature of reality by arranging and preserving it. At the same time there is something totemic about them. This intuitive response of Hospital's to the photographic image is not incompatible with several of the more organized responses which have been formulated by contemporary theorists of photography.

Roland Barthes is perhaps the most influential theorist to have argued that the photograph has irreducible authority despite its limitations. It retains a mystique beyond artifice that represents a real force to be reckoned with, the past. The photograph as a "certificate of presence" can never lie as to past existence, though the meaning of that existence will remain undisclosed (*Camera Lucida* 87). Barthes's own attraction to photography is notoriously paradoxical, however. In his parodic autobiography *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975), he plays with the notion of the photographic referent as the most telling instance of constructed representation, since "[i]n the field of the subject there is no referent" (*Roland Barthes* 56). The book's simultaneous use and abuse of both realist reference and modernist self-reflexivity is typical of what Linda Hutcheon, for instance,

understands as postmodern (*Politics* 48). But in *Camera Lucida* (1980) Barthes sees in the photograph the possibility of a private escape from mere fiction as a means of responding to the personal crisis caused by the death of his mother. In other words, the photograph's referentiality meets him at the point of his own desire.

Despite his radical difference from Barthes in his commitment to a marxist critique and a centred subject, John Berger is in agreement with Barthes concerning the opacity of meaning in the photograph and the vital role of the spectator. "All photographs have the status of fact. What has to be examined is in what way photography can and cannot give meaning to facts," since "photographs do not translate from appearances. They quote from them" (*Another Way of Telling* 98, 96). The way in which such quotations are to be understood is through an appreciation of appearances themselves as a "half-language" which is completed by the spectator's expectation of coherence. Berger does not privilege the temporal context over the spatial: he argues that both individual memory and the spectator's recognition of correspondences within and across the photograph are responsible for granting meaning to the image. Nevertheless he does assert that photography's particular power resides in its situating its subject before "the task of memory: the task of continually resuming a life being lived in the world" (*Another Way* 287). Memory and photography are closely associated, in that both depend on and oppose the passing of time, both preserve the individual moment, and both "propose their own form of simultaneity, in which all their images can coexist" (280).

For Janette Turner Hospital, this relationship between memory and the image makes possible for the spectator of the photograph a constant rewriting of the narrative inherited from the past with meanings appropriate to the present. Though she is overtly postmodern in the apparent concerns and structures of her two most recent novels—for instance in the fragmentation of both the narrating and the narrated subject, the self-conscious revelation of narrative artifice, and the suggestion of the indeterminacy of textual meaning—Hospital is only superficially committed to what Hutcheon defines as the "complicitous critique" of postmodernism (*Politics* iv). Despite the violence they contain, Hospital's books are not concerned with violence as an

exhilaration in surfaces, however bleak—an aspect of that “new kind of superficiality” which Fredric Jameson sees as “perhaps the supreme formal feature” of postmodernism (“Postmodernism” 60). Instead, Hospital’s novels tell stories that have hopeful or even happy endings which do not suggest themselves as tricks played on the reader. Hospital’s fundamental concern is not with the problematizing of representation but, like Berger’s, with how to read meaning in appearances. And, in a move that is congruent with Barthes’s later position, she reads in the photograph a referentiality which satisfies desire. For her, photographs function paradigmatically to show the potential for transfiguration in a representation of the past.

Hospital’s second novel, *The Tiger in The Tiger Pit* (1983), makes central play with the notion of the photograph, though at this stage Hospital is still treating it in a fairly straightforwardly referential manner. For the characters in this novel, the past is to be consciously avoided, because it is too full of traps, and of damage. The most graphic presentation of the destructive power of memory is in Tory, for whom memory is not merely a mental but also a physical trap. Seared by her father’s aggressive banishing of her lover in adolescence, she retreats into an underwater world, a tangle of images, snatches of poetry, and childhood pleading. Her body, bloated by sedatives, has become a “muffling disguise she ingest[s] with her medication” (90). But memory is imaged as a store of old photographs whose interaction with the present may radically change their meaning. The referentiality of photographs can stimulate in Tory what Barthes calls a “punctum,” a flash of insight and recognition. The photographic image thus represents both the intransigent nature of past experience and the open-ended possibilities for new interpretation: given a fresh contextualization, “the past is not absolute after all” (205). Tory, at first described as “elephantine with the unchangeable past” (98), discovers its relativity when she is able to repay her father in his own coin and thus free herself from his power.

Susan Sontag has argued that the photograph’s fragmentary nature is dangerous: “with the passage of time its moorings come unstuck” (*On Photography* 71). On the contrary, in *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit* Hospital privileges a contextual destabilization of the image.<sup>1</sup> She suggests that it is the ability of the photograph to retain its “moorings” over time that is dangerous: its witness to

the past may also transfix the emotions of the past. But when the photograph breaks free from its moorings its contingency has quasi-magical powers, because the image is freed to be reconstructed in the mind of the spectator.

This link of photography with the transcendent is especially important in Hospital's most ambitious novel, *Borderline* (1985). Here, a specific photograph becomes the bearer not only of the past in the present, but also of the viewer's bonding with and responsibility towards the subjects of the photograph. For the mysterious Dolores Marquez, the sole survivor of a group of illegal immigrants who try to cross the Canadian/U.S. border in a truckload of frozen meat, the photograph of her children and her mother is a necessary talisman. The underground agent Angelo says that she needs it more than food, because "[w]e all need a piece of magic to keep going"; he asks Felicity to return the picture across the border to Dolores (206-7). But this "piece of magic" comes to feel to Felicity like a "steel trap": it obligates her to take responsibility for the family it portrays, and thus implicates her further in the network of illegal immigration and underground political dealing she has stumbled into through a chance encounter.

As a result, when she hands over the photograph to a priest whom she later discovers will feel legally obliged to give it to the authorities, she accuses herself of having handed over both its subjects and its owner: "I gave away the photograph, I *told*" (262). As Susan Sontag points out, photography revives the primitive status of the image as magically participating in the reality of the subject depicted (*On Photography* 155). Moreover, according to Roland Barthes, the photograph is a temporal hallucination, "false on the level of perception, true on the level of tie" (*Camera Lucida* 115). For Hospital, such an understanding of the image as hallucinatory magic is not so much primitive as suggestive of the profoundly disturbing and extraordinary nature of contemporary existence, where reality is as often as not experienced as surreal.

Photography, Sontag asserts, is the only natively surreal art-form, by virtue of its ability to create a duplicate world, a "reality in the second degree, narrower but more dramatic than the one perceived by natural vision" (*On Photography* 51-2). According to this reading, photography is surreal in its relationship to time: it both assimilates time and imposes temporal distance (54, 58).

Hospital's perception of reality might itself be called natively surreal; in an interview in 1987 she states explicitly that, for her, "[i]t's difficult to separate the surreal from the real" (Cameron 57). In *Borderline* she explores the uneasiness of the boundaries between the real and the illusory, presence and absence, subject and object.

Hospital has said that the notion of the unattainable other has always had a strong hold on her: what is the visceral meaning of such unattainable people? She cites the story of the behaviour of Christ's disciples at his transfiguration as the archetypal instance of the human desire to hold on to what is ineffable, and of the resultant blurring of the borders of intelligibility.<sup>2</sup> This image of transfiguration is one of which she makes central use in *Borderline*. The mystique of Dolores is made psychologically plausible because she is identified with whatever is unattainable in significant others. For instance, she represents the unattainableness of Felicity to the narrator Jean-Marc, son of the painter who is her long-time lover; she also represents the long-suffering of his wife to Gus, the philandering insurance salesman with whom Felicity has rescued Dolores from the meat van at the border. Jean-Marc, in telling the story, projects into Dolores everything that is unattainable about Felicity to him, and everything that is idealized about his wife to Gus.

Dolores herself is silent and shrinks from being touched. She does not speak until she is on the car-journey that (probably) leads to her death, and even then in unintelligible and frantic Spanish. Felicity calls her La Magdalena because she sees in her an overwhelming likeness to the Perugino painting she is trying to acquire for an exhibition in her gallery. La Magdalena never does materialize in an unquestionably definite way, but day-to-day life continues regardless. Felicity never does acquire the painting, but her exhibition goes ahead without it. When Gus has a vision of La Magdalena outside a Quebec village called L'Ascension, neither the narrator nor the reader is ever sure whether the vision had material reality:

She was standing under a tree, transfigured by light, her head tilted back, watching the sky through the leaves . . . .

There was a ring of light about her head. . . .  
Equipped with no tools for articulating to himself a sense of

the ineffable, he was simply obscurely aware that nothing would ever be quite the same again. (161)

Afterwards, he never checks out whether La Magdalena really was staying safely in Felicity's L'Ascension cottage. Why not? "Because," says Jean-Marc, "one doesn't tamper with visions of transcendence" (187).

"Do you think I'm not aware of what is happening?" he asks. "Do you think I don't know I'm really writing about Felicity at ten years of age, lost in the dark world, trying to make the woman in the photograph turn around?" (163). This is a reference to the only photograph Felicity has seen of the mother who died when she was born, a photograph she had been shown as a child, by her grandfather:

There was a drawer in an old dresser that was crammed with photographs. When anyone opened it, the pictures would spill onto the floor like fish out of a burst aquarium. A waterfall of the past. All the pictures were a sort of creamy brown color, not even proper black and white. It took her grandfather a long time to find the one he wanted. (145)

The picture is of Felicity's mother before her marriage, as a schoolteacher guiding her students through an air-raid drill. Her back is to the camera:

Felicity looked intently at the back of the mother whom she had never met. But the people in the photograph seemed to be on the other side of a thin white cloud, as though sunlight had been spilled on the picture and had stained it with too much brightness. The harder Felicity looked, the hazier her mother became. If only she could make her turn around. (145)

This blending of the real with the inaccessible links the desired image in the photograph to the experience of the transcendent. Does Jean-Marc know what he is doing? "Of course I know," he says. "We impose our own lives on the world: the self as template" (163). He is completing Berger's "half-language of appearances" according to the dictates of desire, and he recognizes this as a construction rather than a discovery of meaning. He knows that quite as suspect as Gus's version of La Magdalena is

Jean-Marc's version of Felicity, "[t]hat her photograph is blurred with light" and "[t]hat she has, as it were, her back to you."

Critics hailed *Borderline* as Hospital's first major involvement with the postmodern, and a breakthrough in her own development, because of the way in which it combines elements of a romantic notion of the imagination with a postmodern interest in the constructed nature of representation. Elspeth Cameron declares that "*Borderline* is a coup for Hospital . . . . In the silent Dolores Marquez, who first appears framed by ominous swinging caracasses, art and life merge . . . . Janette Turner Hospital reminds us that the world's surrealist nightmares are all too real" ("Borders" 58-9). And, even more effusively, the *Quill & Quire* reviewer states that "[t]here is a reverberating sense of revelation, something indisputable yet ineffable, flashing through the prose. This is a fugue in words . . . . With *Borderline*, Janette Turner Hospital has crossed an important line herself" (Roberts 23). She herself has said of the book that, after the success of *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit*, "I suddenly had the feeling that I should go for broke, and do that more adventurous thing I've always wanted to do" (Cameron 57). Writing this novel, she confesses, "almost killed me" (Cameron 59).

Certainly the declared instability of the narrative is a departure for Hospital. The narrator, Jean-Marc, is, as shown above, self-confessedly unreliable: a piano-tuner who finds he wants to conduct the orchestra, he plays with what information he has to create the story that he wants. Sometimes he is so closely identified with Felicity as to be almost her double. At other times his yearnings for her are so strong that he invents her as the ideal woman around whom the light is so bright that he can barely see her. But the basic proposition behind the novel is not different from that behind *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit*. Jean-Marc refuses to deprive himself, his acolyte Kathleen, or the reader, of all hope of a happy ending, and declares, "[t]here's a fine distinction between what cannot be proved or disproved and what is essentially true" (282). As in her previous novel, Hospital is concerned here with the relationship of the past to the present, with the necessity for a transfiguration of memory, and with life-patterns that are cyclical rather than linear. The difference is that in *Borderline* she refuses to give reader or narrator a place of privileged understanding.

Felicity herself is the unstable subject of more than one artist's work. She is an art historian and the curator of a private gallery in Boston. Over a period of some fifteen years she has been model and lover to Jean-Marc's father Seymour, a painter whom Jean-Marc dubs "the Old Volcano" and whom he accuses of thinking that "his paintings are the borders of reality" (285). While Jean-Marc is trying to "save [Felicity] from the old Volcano's misappropriation" by being himself her "official biographer, the final authority" (253), Seymour wants to fix her in paint before she slips away from him again. The paintings that had made him famous were those in which he took a painter's revenge on her for having left him the first time, and "reduced her to the rules of his own imagination, confined her within his own borders" (215).

The last painting of the book is the one on which the Old Volcano has worked obsessively before Felicity's disappearance. It is a huge painting which dazzles even Jean-Marc and looks "as though he has painted the mind of the sun, the concept of light, the idea of God" (285). Seymour is asked to comment on "the shadow of the woman behind the light" and he replies, "It is the shadow of a woman who left me . . . . The idea of a woman I lost" (286). Jean-Marc's narrative is, of course, homage to the same shadow, the same idea. Did Felicity die in an apartment fire instigated by the agents who were following her? Or has she slipped away to South America, to "trail streamers of children" as she follows the dictates of her sensitive conscience in trying to care for the underprivileged? In either case she has become, like those with whom she inadvertently got involved, one of *los desaparecidos*, the disappeared ones. She can be known only through the witness of paint and word, both of them shot through with the subjectivity of the individual before experience that is transcendent, that cannot be grounded and held.

Felicity's own description of the effect of an exotic and motherless childhood is to refer to herself as "a live transparency . . . from a camera that was jammed. A multiple-exposure life" (6). She keeps a file of newspaper cuttings of "dark and bizarre events" as "a kind of proof that I didn't invent my own childhood." To the agents (of the right? of the left?) who come to question her, she describes this file as "my immunization program. I mean, the desire to understand is itself absurd, isn't it?"



(128). Language itself, she says, has become absurd, in the face of the surrealities of real life. Jean-Marc also discounts painting, on the basis that it is too static to contain the vitality of someone like Felicity—at least until he absorbs the light of Seymour's last canvas. Through the media of word and paint, both Jean-Marc and Seymour leave the reader with this "idea" of Felicity, this shadow, which is fuller in expression but not in evidential power than the photographic images of the book. Not that there is a photograph of Felicity, apart from the "live transparency"; rather that photographic images throughout the narrative contain the power of the transfigured and ineffable in a way that supersedes the subjectivity of the writer and the painter. Photography offers "a kind of proof."

It is not what photographs tell, but what they show, that is magic. Thus when Jean-Marc refers to his narrative about Felicity as a photograph blurred with light in which she has her back to the viewer, he is claiming that even such an inadequate photograph captures a reality of reference that is substantial. The photograph of her mother is not less important to Felicity for bearing less information than she desires. The reality that photographs bear witness to is irrecoverably past and artificially arranged. And yet the image in a photograph has not been at every point interpreted as has the image in a painting. It seems to escape the limitations of both painting and narrative through its "deferred reference," its magical association with the real.

But their inability to tell can render photographs particularly disturbing. Just as the dense meanings of an experience of transcendence are unreadable in its glare, so the meanings of a photograph are a second order of reference:

Felicity looked at the photograph in her wallet. The two little girls and the old woman stared impassively back. They told her nothing. She looked at her other photographs: her father was mending nets, preoccupied; her mother would not turn around. No messages there either. Nothing. (240)

One recalls Berger's point: "All photographs have the status of fact. What has to be examined is in what way photography can and cannot give meaning to facts." Thus the inescapable presence of the photographed image, together with its unassailable silence, leaves photographs open to manipulation, as Sontag has argued.

When the secret police (of the right or the left) show Felicity a photograph of a woman slashed to death and declare it to be La Magdalena, Felicity is not in a position to deny the validity of their interpretation (123).

Later, however, the police show Jean-Marc photographs of a wrecked Chevrolet in which they suggest Gus and La Magdalena were both killed. Although he is no more able than Felicity to offer counter-evidence, he is less prepared to accept the pictures at face value: "I push the facts back across the table. Opaque, I say. They yield nothing to me" (264). The police show him the pictures of Felicity's burnt-out apartment building, but the fire he dismisses as contrived: he accuses the police of being "plodding literalists," whereas he is used to exploring the subtext.

Jean-Marc's job is to tune pianos, and he describes the way in which mechanical accuracy must be tempered with art and intuition before the resultant sound is musically true (15). In the same way, he suggests, "the well-tempered heart of the matter" about which he is composing his narrative will not be pure and simple: "the absolutely accurate is too narrow; it is false and imperfect." The "bald facts" which, in the year since the disappearance of Felicity and Gus, Jean-Marc and Kathleen have committed to filing-cards, do not make sense of themselves, any more than do the photographs Jean-Marc has been shown. He sets out "to examine the dynamics and harmonics, to look for patterns, resonances, meaning" (17). His narrative is, then, an exploration of ways to read meaning in appearances, unashamedly motivated by a desire for immortality in a transcendent other.

Jean-Marc's alternative reading of the photographs of disaster he is shown is based on his own intuitions about Felicity. "The one who looks is essential to the meaning found and yet can be surpassed by it. And this surpassing is what is hoped for" (Berger 118). For what is needed is an understanding of the event photographed as experience rather than simply as fact; the subjective need of the listener will be responsible for the precise meaning conveyed. Jean-Marc imagines Felicity in Latin America, caring for children: "Children follow like flocks of doves, they clutch at her hands and skirt. She is walking away from me, she will not turn around" (266). His interpretation of the photographs results from his intuitions, his desire for a happy ending, and his skills as a story-teller—one who recognizes a tempering of (or

tampering with) the evidence when he sees it. "[D]oesn't it strike you as odd, these separate fires? All this destruction of evidence? Isn't there something *contrived* . . . ?" (265).

In fact Jean-Marc describes contrivance of many kinds in his narrative concern with borderlines: the aunts' escapist philosophy that "all things, when looked at from the right angle, lead to contentment" (105); the reparatory fantasies of Gus the "borderline saint"; the double life of dreadlocked Leon/Angelo who disguises himself as a black to escape detection as an Hispanic agent; and, not least, the fictions of Jean-Marc himself. "For the past . . . is a capricious and discontinuous narrative, and the present an infinite number of fictions" (122). But the photograph is not among the fictional modes by which the various characters define their borders, because, rather than representing a fictional mode itself, it is a borderline example of that evidential material which must be interpreted into meaning through fiction. Near the beginning of the narrative, Felicity has a dream which illustrates the comparative powers of the photograph, the painting and the text in defining borders, and demonstrates just that ambiguity in the nature of the photograph which is its mysterious authority.

In her dream Felicity is trapped in a painting, and there is a square-foot hole in her torso through which the viewer can see a living tropical landscape. Across her thighs is written, in jasmine flowers, "This is not a real woman" (9). She slips out of the painting and heads towards the exit, ready to hand her passport to the border guard. But there is something wrong with the passport: "a visa lacking, or a hole in the middle of her photograph." She is told to stand aside and wait. Then:

Once the inspector arrived, it was all over. You again, he said, back you go. The man with the brush was waiting as usual and they pasted her back on the canvas, flattening the curves, elongating here, twisting there, making free with the placing of her eyes. She had not even settled herself properly around the empty space—through which the surf hissed and writhed—when the frame was clanged shut around her. Locked. All borders in place. The man with the keys shook the bunch in front of her face.

Felicity woke in a sweat. (10)

Clearly the main reference here is to Felicity's anxiety about her

relationship to Seymour's paintings of her. He has told her that she is "an idea" of his, the embodiment of his painterly fantasies, and has catalogued a picture of her in these terms, stating explicitly that "[t]he woman is not real" (7). This comment has worried Felicity, because it has seemed to take on a life of its own. To be described constantly as a "painter's dream" has thus become for Felicity not so much a matter of pleasing compliment as a question of metaphysical anxiety. Long ago she had told Seymour, concerning her "entire history," that "[n]obody even believes it's real," and he had countered with, "Anything's real once I've painted it" (13). Is her life, then, only the stuff of paintings and dreams? Is she merely, as in the picture she dreams about, a framework within which other people can experience the life of the senses? Even Jean-Marc says, "I have to admit, there has always been a quality of absence about her; which is why her disappearance itself seems insubstantial, merely a figure of speech, or a trick of the light, a momentary thing" (8).

Seymour's paintings trap Felicity; they flatten her and twist her and declare themselves as more real than she is. But in her dream, what verifies the image in the painting is its duplication in a passport photograph—the universal badge of identity, the archetypal "certificate of presence." It is not because the painting dubs her as insubstantial that she cannot escape across the border, but rather because the photograph confirms this verdict: there is a hole in the middle of it. Felicity may be able to step out of the picture-frame and observe her own immolation as a casual viewer, but the self who views the painting is certified inadequate, unreal, by the passport photograph. The photograph confirms her fears that she has no passport to a really independent existence.

Jean-Marc's comment, however, holds the seeds of hope. If Felicity's "quality of absence" is understood positively rather than negatively, then her disappearance too may be insubstantial. This is the basis on which Jean-Marc interprets all the evidence of his narrative. It is not only Felicity but also La Magdalena who is described at different times as seeming like a dream, a multiple exposure, a surreal picture, one of Seymour's paintings. Felicity tries to persuade herself that she has merely "stumbled into someone else's nightmare" and that all the intrigue is really just a dream about a painting (204), but she is fighting against her own perception of the world when she does this. Of the "police" who

inquired about her file of macabre and disturbing news-clippings, she had asked, "Does any of this seem real to you?" (131). And Angelo, responding to her incredulity at his description of atrocities in El Salvador, says, "None of it's possible . . . None of it's real. But it happens" (206). If, then, the atrocities are true, and La Magdalena exists, it is quite as likely that Felicity also is real, and that she can have disappeared into another life rather than into death. For Hospital, life is shot through with both the surreal and the magical, and photographs hover as potential evidence on the borderline between worlds.

The attempt to represent the surreal and the magical leads inexorably to photography. "I am often distressed," Felicity confesses to her mirror, "by the gulf between experience and the possibility of representing it in any medium other than memory" (12). (Hospital's heroines are apt to address themselves in mirrors when they have important thoughts.) Seymour uses painting as his representational medium; Felicity herself, like Jean-Marc, uses words. When Jean-Marc is trying to make sense of Felicity's response to La Magdalena, he invokes stories of her past that she has told him:

Her stories bombard me, they seem to have become my own memories, they writhe and change and regroup in the way true memories do. They are like the photographs in her grandfather's dresser, a deluge of the ever-present past. (155)

What is interesting here is that photographs are understood as the presence of the past not in fixity, as one might expect of the fixed photographic image, but in flux: the present meaning of the past is constantly reinterpreted and reshaped, as memories are reinterpreted and reshaped.

Susan Sontag, always conscious of the photographer's power and alert to its abuse, argues that the photographer is the inventor rather than the recorder of the past, so that photographs replace rather than aid memory (*On Photography* 66, 165). But for Hospital, the images of memory and photography share in that same validity which Barthes attributes to photography alone when he describes photographs as "reality in a past state: at once the past and the real" (*Camera Lucida* 82). Hospital's understanding of the relationship between photography and memory is

such that she sees the image's representation of the past as a magical site of potential transfiguration. Photographs present opportunities for the reinterpretation of appearances into new harmony.

The implication, then, is that both photographs and fictions are opaque, limited by the viewpoint of their creator, and by their exclusion of what is beyond their borders. But both have the potential to satisfy desire through transfiguration. It is in this sense that *Hospital* is a romantic rather than an ironic postmodernist. Though her later novels seem to engage in postmodern irony in their foregrounding of the indeterminate subject in textual play, her use of photography, despite an awareness of its constructed nature as representation, discloses an attachment to the notions of essential meaning, narrative coherence, and the unity of the subjective consciousness.<sup>3</sup> For *Hospital*, it is not that photographs are inherently dangerous because of their privileging of dissociation and the instability of their meaning, as Sontag argues. Although photographs offer magical and apparently transparent reference to the unattainable past, they hover on the borders of opacity, witness not so much to the absoluteness of the past as to both its reality and its reinterpretability in fictions of transfiguration.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, to take a radically different line from a Marxist critic like John Tagg, who argues that "Photographs are never 'evidence' of history: they are themselves the historical," and that they must be understood within this historical context (*The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* [London, U.K.: Macmillan, 1988] 65). On the other hand, Allan Sekula, who also has Marxist sympathies, argues that a photograph is open to appropriation by a range of texts, each new discourse situation generating its own message ("On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin [London & Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1982] 91). *Hospital* demonstrates what happens when discourses of the past and the present overlap across an image.

<sup>2</sup> Comments made by Hospital during the interview I had with her at the University of Ottawa, November 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Hospital gives clear expression to this yearning for coherence when she says in an interview with Elspeth Cameron, "I'm always trying to find some connecting thread that makes sense. That's why I write" ("Borders," *Saturday Night* Apr. 1986: 58).

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