



## Bodies of Work: Essays

*Kathy Acker*

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## **Bodies of Work: Essays** Kathy Acker

With enervating experimentation but touching directness, postmodern novelist Acker (*Portrait of an Eve*, 1992; *My Mother: Demonology*, 1993; etc.) explores art, politics, and being in her first essay collection. Subjects are various, ranging from William Burroughs to Goya to San Francisco; many of the pieces have been published previously (prefaces to books, articles in *Marxism Today*, *the Critical Quarterly*, etc.). Despite the variety of subjects and sources, the collection is neatly structured: Essays are grouped agreeably by subject-'On Art and Artists,' 'The City,' 'Bodies of Work.' Though Acker says she aims to 'destroy' the essay form, she does more of what the form openly invites--to tinker and confess. For example, she interweaves stories into a piece on artist Nayland Blake and applies Wittgenstein's 'language games' to bodybuilding: 'In a gym, verbal language or language whose purpose is meaning occurs, if at all, only at the edge of becoming lost.' But she also reveals her current weightlifting goals and describes a childhood desire to be a pirate. Not surprisingly, her most accessible works are those written for a wide audience, particularly an illuminating essay for the *Village Voice* on film director Peter Greenaway and a moving piece for the MMLA on copyright in the age of the Internet. In all, these essays are serious and reflective of a discontented mind bent on deconstruction. Some may find dreary her tale of patriarchy, dualism, and linearity of time; her elliptical tales and stark sentences may lack immediate clarity. For sure, her essays aren't casually authoritative like Updike's or reassuringly religious like Dillard's. Read Acker when you're patient and don't want to be comforted--or even satisfied. An unthreatening introduction to a vexing writer.-*Kirkus*

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