

... of the flesh: CARNAL KNOWLEDGES IN THE PORN AND HORROR TEXT

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by

Martin McCabe

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page No.
INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER 1	10
CHAPTER 2	46
CHAPTER 3	69
CONCLUSION	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY	94

INTRODUCTION

I want to speak to the despisers of the body. I would not have them learn and teach differently, but merely say farewell to their own bodies - and thus become silent.

"Body am I and soul" - thus speaks the child. And why should one not speak like children. But the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body.

Nietzsche 1

M/y two fingers within you have come together, they attempt the passage from the duodenum from the stomach to your oesophagus, I try to reach your throat, then your mouth, from within, I seek to be absorbed by you during m/y writhings in your interior to be spat out rejected vomited entirely ... the blood spurts from my badly sectioned arteries, I become impatient, I cut myself to pieces in my haste ...

Monique Wittig

Le Corps Lesbien 2

The body constitutes an apparently foreign territory in our culture. It is the silent locus of our species' historical and cultural diversity. It is as if the body has become evacuated, a receptacle, a passive object safely anaesthetised on the table before its investigators. .. However this operation is plagued and jeopardised by the appearance of the doppelganger for the body before us is suddenly recognisable as our own. We are both operating and being operated upon caught in a tautological reflex. This complex scene destabilises the whole project of the 'somatic'.

1

Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche - trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking 1954, p. 164.

2

Monique Wittig, Le Corps Lesbien, trans. David Le Vay. New York: Avon, 1976, p. 88-89. In the introduction to this remarkable book, Margaret Crosland says that '... Wittig has chosen to celebrate the body by creating a new version of the ecorche and the skeleton which exist not for study but for love.' David Le Vay, an eminent practising anatomist and surgeon 'abandoned any male chauvinism long enough to translate this book' (p. vii).

How secure is our identity if the border between subject and object 'mind and body' is so treacherously unstable.

The question of the border is an insistent and pervasive one and always signifies 'the inside' and 'the outside'. The relationship between 'the inside' and 'the outside' between the innermost 'soul' and its external manifestation provides the other axis of corporeography, the pschyo-somatic (exteriority and interiority).

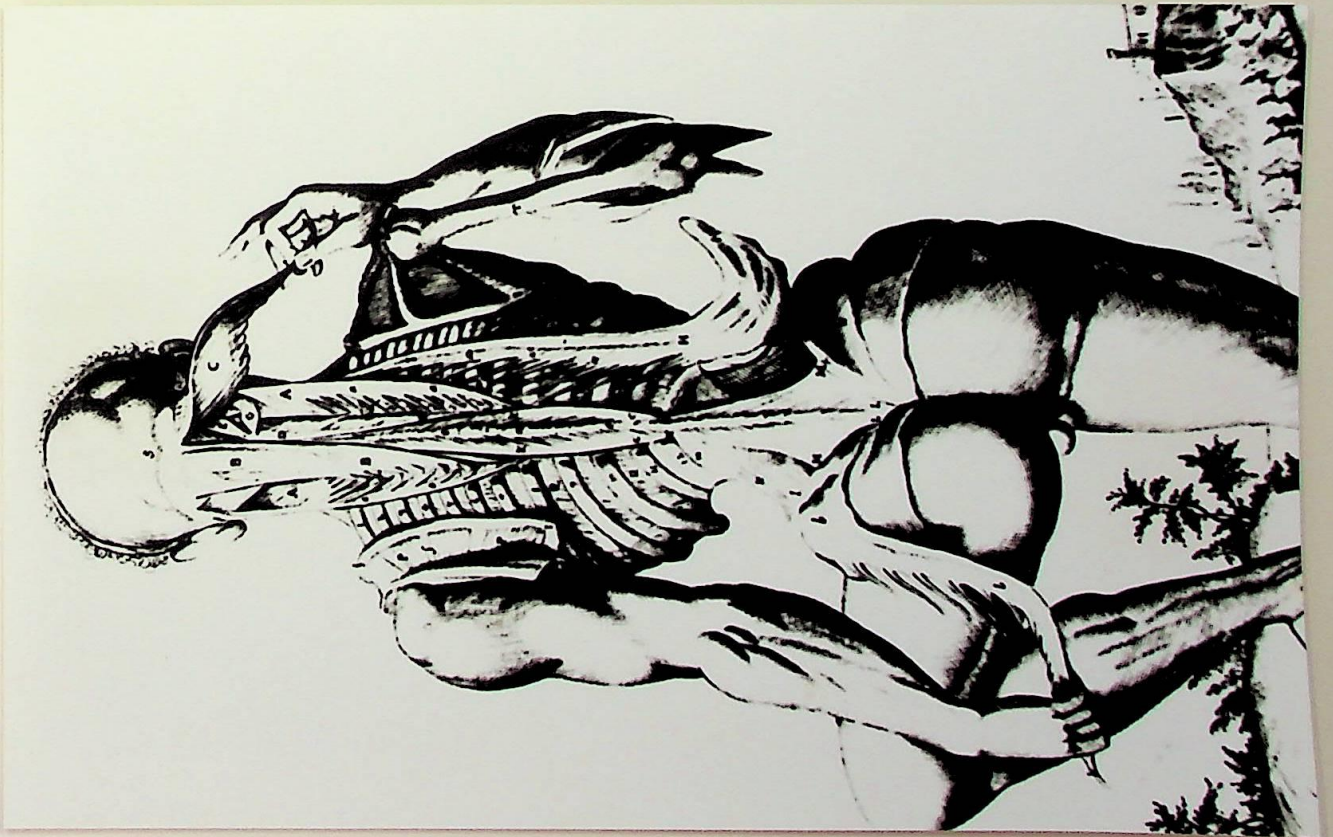
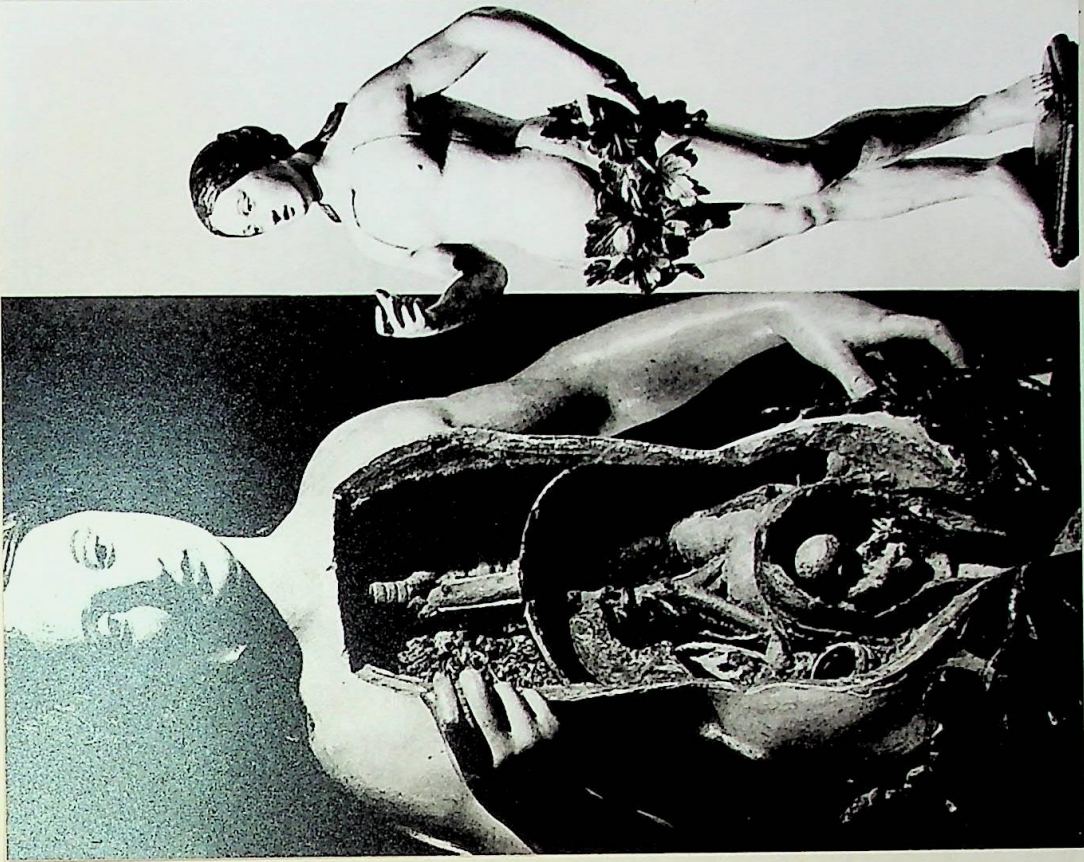
The 'factual' physical evidence of being a body is inescapable, it cannot be deferred or lost in a train of reference. Neither 'difference', nor indeterminacy, nor the ideological constitution of the subject, nor the social or linguistic construction of reality can fully account for or disguise the biological status of our existence.

Psycho analysis discovers that the body is not just an obscure relation to its 'afterimage' but a being which is an immediate image of itself and that the transference is not only repetition but the physical difference of bodies in the present.

The Body is the symbol and the referential aporias of the temporalised sign nearly always turn out to be questions of the physical body in relation to other physical bodies.

One of the psychoanalytic contributions to general knowledge was to show that nobody really knows where the 'inside' of the body ends and the 'outside' begins or vice versa.

The Body inevitably generates a kind of hermeneutic reflex.



But it can't be said that the inside and outside may simply be translated into one another³ or that the 'internal world' can be evacuated through the plugs and ducts of some libidinal machine which discharges directly into the socio-political field.⁴

Freud says that the unconscious is also divided from the body as it straddles the region between 'the body' existing as a given and those things in the external world.

Theoretical aesthetics and socio-cultural thought can no longer get by with a simplified model of the psyche in the body as a process of mediations between drives (internal) and codes (external).

* * *

The somatized meanings and values of sexual and political regimes are elaborated through bodies marked by the system of representation that is culture.

The 'truth' of the body is thereby shifted from its natural to its cultural axis allowing it to be considered as a mutable, dynamic 'entity' rather than a static 'given' one.

3

The Renaissance fascination with anatomy developed into an Aesthetic of the Flayed and Mutilated Body. See the plates of Vasellius and in the 18th century William Cowper in Londa Schiebinger 'Skeletons in the Closet'. Representations, No. 14, Spring, 1986, p. 42.

4

The Body without language (Symbolic) is condemned to the status of false consciousness (Imaginary) and replaced with the false empiricism of the body without organs, (BwO) of Deleuze and Guattari (see Anti-Oedipus). This premise hinges on the half-truth that the difference between inner and outer, dream and object is 'alien' to the organism.

Anyone familiar with the debate and discussion around Post-Modernity will recognise that many of it's chief exponents and writers have acknowledged the radical undertaking to re-write the body be it for a specific political strategy (such as French-Feminisms) or just to signify the crisis in knowledge at which the Western World has arrived.

Lyotard, Irigaray, Deleuze, Foucault and many more have taken up the Nietzschean desire to recuperate the body and materiality itself as the origin of philosophical speculation and the basis of all metaphysics: 'Soul is only a word for something about the body'. The psyche is but the nominative sublimation of the body, of corporeal states and reactions.

An historical analysis of the Body as an object or artifact initiated by Foucault is invaluable since it historicizes the body as a product of complex discourses constantly shifting and oscillating across the cultural field.

Then the Body is conceived as a fundamentally historical and political 'object', indeed for these writers it is the central object over and through which relations of power and resistance are played out.

One quick glance at the contemporary cultural scene will demonstrate an obsession with those things corporeal e.g. medical technologies, fitness and dietary regimes, the AIDS crisis.

* * *

The Body of this discussion traces the impossibility of representing the body. There are only bodies.

These bodies provide the possibility of disruption and breakdown of the

subjects and discourses of symbolic registration.

In place of the mind/body dichotomy, the fundamental connectedness of the mind to the body, the creation of a physical 'interior' for the body's object-like status, the mapping of the body's interior on its exterior and its exterior on its interior all needs to be theorised.

Although clearly the interests, methods and frameworks of these writers are extremely diverse, each is concerned to challenge the ways in which the body has been relegated to a subordinate or secondary position relative to the primacy of the mind, consciousness or reason.

What is imperative to this challenge is a non-reductive materialism which is articulated with regard to the materiality of discourses and which takes account of psychic drives and the processes of the unconscious. There must be though a refusal of biologicistic, naturalistic or physicalist reductions of the body to the status of matter but all of this must nevertheless accept its irreducible materiality and corporeality as a condition of subjectivity.

The subject is produced as such by social and institutional practices and techniques, by the inscriptions of social meanings and by the attribution of physical significance to body parts and organs. The interlocking of bodies and signifying systems is the precondition both of an ordered relatively stable identity for the subject and of the smooth regulated production of discourses and stable meanings.

I have concentrated in this discussion on those two cultural forms which attract the most negative social and cultural values and which

are buried deep beneath the cultural field to ensure and safeguard their contagious potential against the sanctioned and normative cultural forms.

As we now live and work under the dark sign of the AIDS crisis, I would contend that there is indeed an intensification of vigilance and barriers around those aspects of sexuality and the body which are considered improper, excessive and unnatural. This signifies the emergence of a culture based on prophylaxis where categories and symbolic systems, hierarchies and structures, boundaries and distinctions are under threat from 'the other'.

CHAPTER 1

The fallacy that the pornographic economy can be contained and cordoned off discreetly within it's own corpulent discourse has been vigorously defended but irretrievably exploded.¹ Fashion, art, advertising and all forms of popular cultural images have, to a greater or lesser degree, been 'contaminated' by the 'pornographic'. This 'pornographic', the site of constantly shifting and changing definition, can no longer be considered a secret or separate area of our culture. We recognise or perhaps confuse its codes in a variety of images; soft-drink advertisements, record covers, 'art' photography. All these regimes of representation are permeated by the pornographic and its codes.

If we begin to discuss the pornographic and assume to recognise its mark in a variety of representations then we have only confirmed our belief in the fundamental integrity of the pornographic 'moment', it's marginal status and disruptive potential, out there, other. That we are unable to define precisely what that moment might be is confirmation too of the shifting which historically has characterised our understanding of the 'pornographic'.

¹ There has been recent attempts to define 'pornography' (bad) and its antithesis 'erotica' (good) ('Pornography: The New Terrorism', Clodagh Corcoran. Dublin: Attic Press, 1989) in order that the former may be banned, censored and outlawed. This is, I believe, a fatuous and facile argument (akin to 'Art or Porn?'). Further reading to counter the moralising of such a discourse is to be found in 'Caught Looking: Feminism, Censorship and Pornography'. B. O'Dair, K. Ellis, Nan Hunter, B. Jaker (Eds.). (New York: Real Comet Press. 1988).



ARTIST AT WORK



DOCTOR AT WORK

Pornography as a proper subject has as its origin the scientific study of prostitution (porno-graphy from the Greek meaning writing about prostitutes). This was a scientific subject aligned to medicine which specifically concentrated on the lives, bodies, behaviours and diseases of that 'corrupt and festering' part of the 18th and 19th century social body. Pornography and the pornographer were then subsumed into that most rigorous of social policies, public hygiene, to enable the municipal authorities, police and the judiciary to regulate prostitution within the complex of their respective discourses. The pornographer wrote of demographics, poverty, disease and hygiene, but never licentiously because this was science. There was always the possibility that these most respectable and rigorous men of instrumental reason might be misunderstood, so they articulated a style which resisted license and policed their own passions with a repressed rigour to describe in a method pragmatic, statistical and experiential. Theoretical speculation was rarely engaged but what can be extracted from these texts, is their utter fascination with 'the degenerate productivity of the biological processes of decomposition and their tendency to infiltrate, erode and dissolve restrictive boundaries'².

Alexandre Parent-du Chatelet was the original 'pornographer' and the most prolific writer on public hygiene working in Paris in the earlier part of the 19th century. In order to maintain 'the correct distance'³

Parent-du Chatelet had to channel and control his 'civilly,

2

Charles Bernheimer 'Of Whores and Sewers: Parent du Chatelet Engineer of Abjection', *Raritan* 6, 1988.

3

Catherine Clement in her essay 'The Ladies' Way' focuses on Lacan's studies of the feminine enigma. 'The correct distance is the opposite of the feminine ... Lacan searched for the correct distance, but for himself, he preferred madness, the result of incorrect distance.' *The Lives and Legends of J. Lacan*. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1983, p. 78.

subversive fascination with the rotten, corrupt and disintegrating'.⁴
The distasteful task of descending into the sewers and back streets of the city - the realm of the abject - was articulated through diagrams and a style of conveyance, classical in its restraint in order to dispel any possibility of confusion or misunderstanding. However these men paradoxically began to write passionately about why their work should be distinguished from that which was 'designed' to arouse and excite (the latter not yet called pornography), thus belying their fear and anxiety of being contaminated by the contagious, effluvia (prostitutes as 'seminal drains', sewers etc.)⁵ and degenerate bodies of 'fallen' women both at a discursive level and at the personal or figurative level. Such was their faith in the positivist scientific imperative of maintaining 'objectivity' and a 'critical' eye, what these 'pornographers' wrote, exemplified perfectly what Freud called denial. They constructed the very Other in all its excessive detail, precisely that which they set out to negate. For us, though, it supplies an example of how the History of Science and of Western Metaphysics entails the obfuscation, suppression, and indeed the repression, of matter, the substance, the Body. Also these manias, repulsions, and methodologies reveal the social and psychological bases of contemporary male fantasies around the 'Other Body', female sexuality, disease and the technologies of the Flesh.

* * *

The pornographers project is historically taken up with one of Realism as it was developed in France in the 19th century.

4

Bernheimer, op. cit.

5

Louis Fiaux quoted in Alain Corbin's 'Commercial Sexuality in 19th century France: A System of Images and Regulations', Representations 14, Spring 1986, p. 211.

The useful (prodesse) and the pleasurable (delectare) must be separately shored up and contained to ensure a 'true' discourse. The collaboration between the reality principle and pleasure principle must be rigorously policed and their mutual exclusion enforced.

If I were to ask why I, the artist, came into the world, I'd say this: I've come to live out loud.

Zola. Mes Haines. 6

The novels of Emile Zola exemplify the Realist project. He sought to invoke a truth both 'useless and unpleasant' and to de-privatise discourse to reveal the 'true' hidden. Kant defined the sublime as a negative pleasure so Zola's relation to the 'truth', as Denis Hollier asserts, is something of a sublimation.

The sublime is the sign of the absolute, an adjective of superfluity restricted from all description.

Operating at that subtle juncture of nature and culture, the sublime

is the projection of the most severe and discrete manifestations of the libido, the most terrifying and oppressive effects of the super-ego and the most megalomaniacal constructions of the ego.

7

6 Quoted in Denis Hollier 'How to not take pleasure in talking about sex'. Enclitic, p. 84-93.

7 Allen S. Weiss Iconology and Perversion, (Sydney: Art and Text Publications, 1988), p. 40.

These psychic operations are the drives that allow us, as constituted subjects, to live and exist, albeit in a complex of desire, repression and fears. Weiss suggests the sublime explains the 'limits of our phantasms and the counter-sublime the limits of our bodies?'⁸ The sublime may be seen as the ultimate projection of the dissolution of the origins of the self - the object of investigation for psychoanalysis - but because it is the formless always beyond the limits of representation, it is an impossible project. We can only see its symbols and indices (but never its icons).

A short definition of sublimation which might be useful to our discussion is - corpus becomes logos. This reading always connotes teleological repression. Sublimation is a disowning, a distancing in defence of unnamings rather than naming. Sublimation is a way, for Zola, of speaking about love or about sex in a 'voice loud enough so no one in particular can imagine himself (sic)' the intimate reader, the exclusive singular addressee. No pleasure is taken by the hearer and it is so loud no message can be read.

In 1860 Zola decided to appoint himself the unofficial spokesperson of those painters which the salon refused to exhibit. Hollier points out that Zola displayed a certain difficulty in distinguishing between prostitution and painting as though he was trying to bring them close together while at the same time guarding them against their potentially contaminating effect on each other because of their proximity. *The World of Sex (Nana)* and *The World of Sublimation and Painting (L'Oeuvre)* were being

written and researched at this time. In 1867 Zola declares 'painting is the great Impure, the Courtesan, forever hungry for young flesh, who drinks their children's blood' and echoes Baudelaire's elevation of 'fallen' women.⁹

The strange economy of sublimation results: it derives not from a diverting of attention away from sexual zones and themes or its displacement from sexual onto non-sexual objects but from a paradoxical over-exhibition of the sexual from an over-evaluation of sexuality. Sublimation is the truth about sexuality, or more accurately, truth always brings a revelation which in one way or another has to be sexual.

* * *

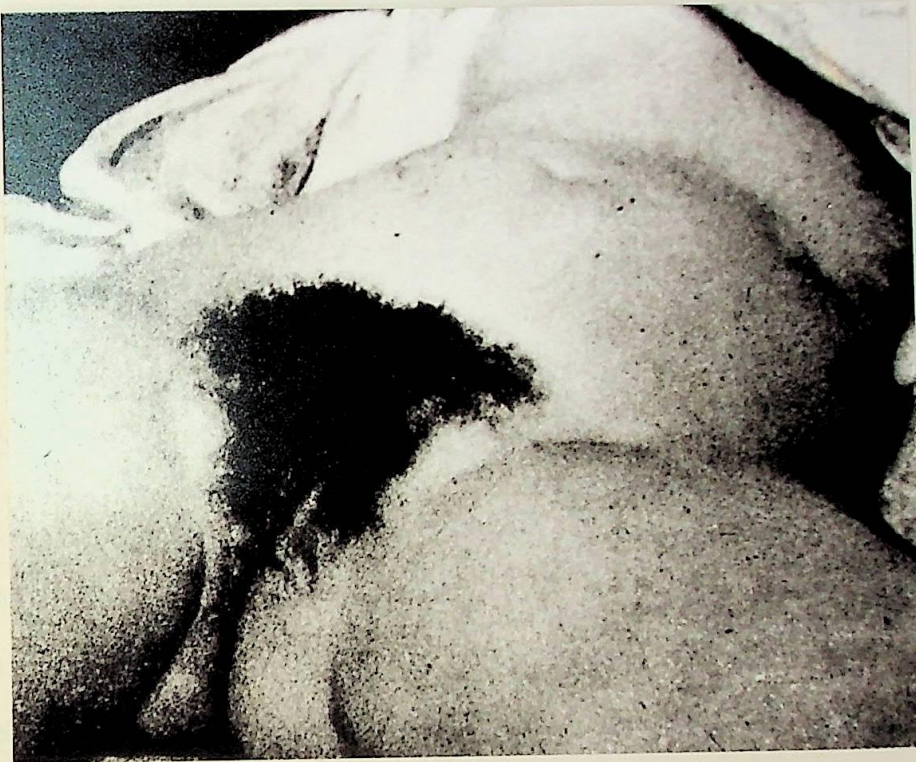
With the recent exhibition on Courbet travelling around the USA and Western Europe, one painting remains a cause celebre. *L'Origine du Monde* (The Origin of the World 1866), is a painting of a woman in which the painter, in the words of Maxime du Camp, has 'neglected to represent the feet, legs, thighs, stomach, hips, breasts, hands, arm, shoulders, neck and head'.¹⁰ This is a massive sublimation on the part of du Camp for he cannot bring himself to name that which the painting represents. In fact such is the effect of this sublimation that du Camp indeed is blind to all else in the image, for breasts, hips, thighs and stomach are also represented.

9

Ibid. Hollier, p. 85.

10

Ibid. Quoted in Hollier, p. 85.



CATHEXIS: From the Greek word for retention or holding. In psychoanalytic theory, the investing of libidinal energy in an activity, an object or person.

Linda Nochlin in 'The Origin without an Original' contemplates this painting and suggests 'Nothing could be more Freudian than the scenario (she) is about to rehearse in the narrative, for it concerns the endlessly repetitive quest for a lost original, an original which is itself, in both the literal and figurative senses of the word, an origin'.¹¹ The painting itself was only recently re-discovered for this international exhibition but before that there only existed various reproductions. It was an origin without an original. 'L'Origine du Monde' supplies us with an emblem of origins; of art (paleolithic images of the vulva), of modernism and indeed of the Human World. It serves as a paradigmatic image equally for the scientist and art historian as the 'ultimate-meaning-to-be-penetrated', the truth of the 'Ultimate Other'. The subject represented, the subject du Camp found so difficult to name, to acknowledge, is the female sex organ - the cunt - the sex of the mother - 'the forbidden site of specularity and ultimate object of male desire', the original pornographic artifact/subject? It can be seen therefore as the origin of perversions for it reveals what the entire History of Western Art - repressed - the 'invisible' the unrepresentable female sex, the 'veritable Medusa'.

... an interpretation suggests itself easily in the case of the horrifying decapitated head of Medusa.

To decapitate = to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something. [emphasis mine]

11

Linda Nochlin 'The Origin without an Original', October 36, pp. 77-78.

... it occurs when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration catches sight of the female genitals ... essentially those of his mother. If Medusa's head takes the place of a representation of the female genitals or rather if it isolates their horrifying effects from the pleasure giving ones, it may be recalled that displaying the genitals is familiar in other connections as an apotropaic act.

Freud, 'Medusa's Head'

And the fetish is a personal fabulation of that repression, a substitute representation of that oxymoron, the absent female phallus. The fetish is a replacement for an absent sex.

But once visible, this sight overturns our metaphysics, upsets our psychology and reconstitutes our ethics.

Freud offers us an interpretation of the reaction which the image of Medusa's Head triggers:

The sight of Medusa's Head makes the spectator stiff with terror turns him to stone. Observe that we have here once again the same origin from the castration complex and the same transformation of effect^o. For becoming stiff means an erection. Thus in the original situation it offers consolation to the spectator: he is still in possession of a penis and stiffening reassures him of the fact.

In 'Medusa's Head: Male Hysteria under Political Pressure', Neil Hertz addresses the issue of the representation of what would seem to be a political threat as if it were a sexual threat and how such a discourse would bring questions of sexual difference of perception and of politics rapidly into relationship with each other.

12

The examples given by Hertz in 'The Medusa's Head ...' refer to the overthrow of the monarchy Louis Phillippe in the June days of the Revolution of 1848 and the ensuing Commune. More specifically it refers to the popular revolt of the 'mob' and the tearing down of a monument, (La colonne Vendome). The images used to represent and symbolise these events of (Hertz p. 34) upheaval and 'revolt' are from Greek mythologies i.e. Gorgon, Medusa, Cybele. Neil Hertz 'Medusa's Head: Male Hysteria under Political Pressure'. Representations 4.



He points to the accounts of the Commune of 1848 by Burke, Toqueville, Hugo and Maxime du Camp and how they display a certain terror and anxiety in their stylized relating of an incident where two women on the barricades of the Uprising bravely took on the soldiers of the National Guard. Both women ('public whore(s)') raised their dresses, showed their 'belly(s)' and cried 'Fire, if you dare, at the belly of a woman^o'. Both were instantly shot to death. Hugo eulogises, 'it's a hideous thing, this heroism of abjection'. What the revolution is said to be doing figuratively, is precisely what in a moment each of the women will be represented as doing literally, suddenly displaying monstrous and unknown forms to a horrified society.

* * *

Parent du Chatelet, Zola and the other pornographers with their scientific and Realist imperatives gave form and substance to the displacement that would characterise the changing definition of pornography from the study of an object - Prostitution - to the very writing itself. An attention that shifts from the content to the surface from the inside out and thus institutes a semiotic system of exteriority and interiority of the body (and of the text of the pornographic repertoire). It is precisely the repression of the content (the attention to the surface) that may go to explain the underlying anxiety that we as a culture have today about 'pornographic' representations. These images, as censorious critics and pressure groups assert, are 'dangerous' and their danger is of course that the repressed content might return, that underneath the pornography's seductive surface (medium gloss, depending on the market) lurks a 'real' which threatens to rupture and come through the inverted commas that surround 'the pornographic'.

The realist imperative of the 19th century (the century when photography simultaneously 'arrives' and joins the canon) is to make everything legible, exterior and empirical. The desire to occupy the privileged interior appears also as the desire to have an interior; being inside and having an inside are the two sides of a single formation here. The subject of realism is formed from the outside in - filled as it were with the social - and the project of accounting for persons on the realist text becomes then, an account of persons as socially constituted.

It is an imperative therefore that involves a fantasy of surveillance and the embodiment of physical states so that the latter may be opened up to the 'machines of perception'.¹³ The realist insistence on a compulsory and compulsive visibility intensified the privileging of the scopic over the other sensoria. The 'will to knowledge' was mediated through the gaze, 'the clinical gaze' allows for frequent associations of later nineteenth century realism with a sort of dissection or surgical opening of the body. The characters of the Realist Novel were turned inside out for the readers inspection to render interior states, consciousness etc. legible and governable.¹⁴

The requirement of embodiment, of turning the body inside out for inspection takes a virtually 'obstetrical' form in a realist discourse. The reference to obstetrics is not a haphazard or arbitrary one for this discourse takes as its model the figure of the mother and the biological making of persons.

13

See David Green's 'On Foucault: Disciplinary Power and Photography' Camerawork, No. 32, Summer 1985, pp. 6-9.

14

Stephen Crane quoted in Mark Selzter's 'Statistical Persons' Diacritics, Fall, 1987, p. 84.

The opening of these mental and physical states to the 'machines of perception' marks a crucial and incisive turning point in the history and evolution of Modernism as well as in the epistemological bases of the cultural productions of that time. The early documentary photographer, Jacob Riis (a cerebral colleague of Parent du Chatelet) demanded what he called the social technologies of an 'eternal vigilance' to embody, no doubt, the Perfect eye of the Police.¹⁵

The realist investment in seeing entails a policing of the 'real'. It entails also the complex interaction between (super)vision and embodiment, between the visual and the corporeal. One finds in the Realist a fascination with seeing, - not least in the spectacles of violence and thrilled identification with representation, an eroticizing of power. And this eroticizing of power is nowhere clearer than in the almost programmatic rewriting of the story of the (social) 'other' half (as in Zola's 'Nana') as the story of the (sexual) 'lower' half, as the counterpart stories of the 'fallen girl' (rogue vagina) and 'monstrously' prolific mother (rogue uterus) of the slums.

These men (of vision) with their aesthetic fascination with a vision that is also a supervision always calls forth its opposite, the dangers and vulnerabilities inherent in that desire. That struggle to see

15

See Roberta McGrath, 'Medical Police', *Ten/8*, No. 18, 1984, pp. 36-43. Riis was a photographer at the turn of the century whose now famous book 'How the Other Half Lives' detailed the lives of those who lived in the slums and tenements of New York at that time.



involves not merely the (Foucauldian) scenario of a disciplinary relation between seeing and exercising power but also the possibility of a dangerously corporeal absorption in a 'theatricalised' watching¹⁶ (staging the look).

The self-contained look might be described as a recidivist way of seeing, as a way of seeing that makes the entranced observer the agent of his own 'containment' hence the recidivist way of seeing ratifies the closed circuit between self-containment and the police, and¹⁷ constitutes what Foucault has called a, 'self-absorbed delinquency'.

* * *

How does a man come to be there in that place so long reserved for man's investigation of the woman's body, of her internal organs. It's the surface of the Image, the gloss on the page, the grain of the photograph that we must first encounter and move across in an ocular penetration of the pornographic image.

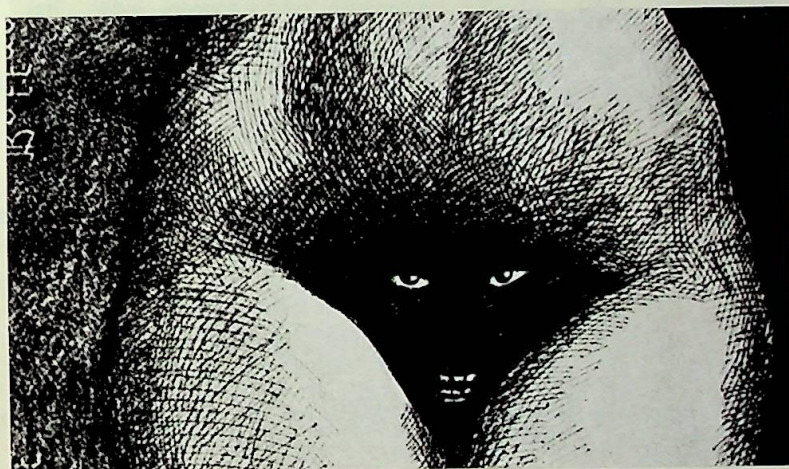
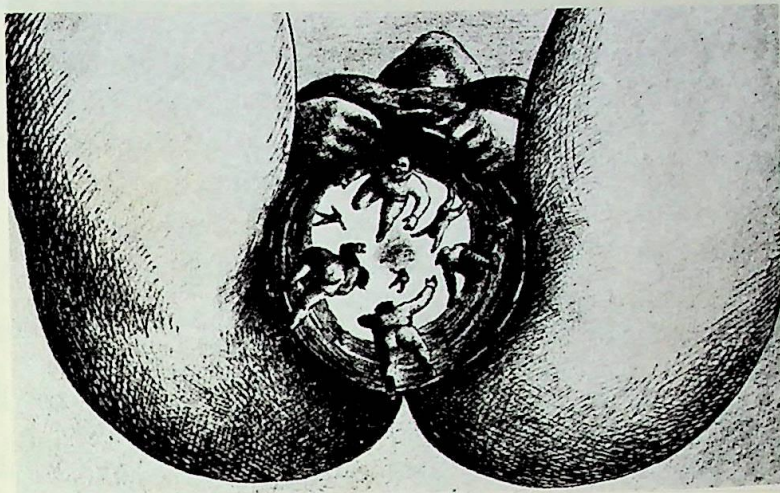
Because porn produces sexuality in the realm of the visible, specular identification is central to the workings of visual imaginaries. But the axes or twinned oppositions of seeing/being seen and male/female do not represent antinomies when applied to the gaze or look within pornographic genres, for it (the look) is contradictory and oscillating. For the genre I am dealing with soft/hard core heterosexual pornographic magazines, this look is possessed by both the reader and the subject of the representation; thus subject positions of

16

Michael Fried quoted in Selzter, p. 85.

17

In Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, London: Tavistock, 1977, p. 278. Translated by M Sheridan



female/male are only as good as their discourses. When talking of the power of the gaze designations of masculine/feminine do not represent a picture of unity but are themselves unstable, shifting and rife with cross-currents.¹⁸

Paul Willemen posits the notion of the 'fourth look', a negotiation of 'looks' and enunciations which organise the field of vision, of camera, viewer and 'direct address' of the 'object or scene', the 'light-in-the-eyes' of the pornographic model. He writes 'when the scopic drive is brought into focus then the viewer also runs the risk of becoming the object of the look'.¹⁹

The vehicle of the courtship between image and looking is of course the eyes, mediated in pornographic discourse around penetration. Much porn has models eyeing up (the viewer), soliciting a series of exchange of looks. These solicitations involve an exchange of looks which circulate within libidinal economies. The libidinal investment is in a sexual discourse privileging a commerce and penetrating exchange which are by definition ocular (and not carnal, as Kaite so accurately argues). To speak then of ocular penetration is to penetrate the workings of this visual imaginary. The 'staging of the look' manifests itself as a gaze gone hard ... a will to penetrate,

18

Berkeley Kaite, 'The Pornographic Body Double: Transgression is the Law'. Body Invaders Sexuality and the Post-Modern Condition. (Eds) Kroker, Kroker. London: MacMillan, 1988. The following argument owes much to the work of Kaite in 'The Pornographic Body Double ...' and 'The Anatomy of Desire: Phallic (In)Significance in the Pornographic Body-Scape'. Public 3, Toronto, 1989.

19

Paul Willemen 'Letter to John'. Screen 21:2, Summer 1980, p. 56.

to pierce, to fix in order to discover the permanent under the changing appearances ... implies a certain anxiety in the relation between spectator and object scene'.²⁰

The eye, at the summit of the Skull ... opens and blinds itself like a conflagration ... the head has received the electric power of points. This great burning head is the image and the disagreeable light of the notion of expenditure ...

Bataille. The Pineal Eye 21

The eye is an orifice, a hollow organ, the eyeball is penetrable²² (Bunuel and Dali's 'Chien Andalou') but it is also an orifice of projection, an agent of illumination and enlightenment. 'To look into' and to 'lay eyes on' are common usages that demonstrate that sensitive organ to be an active agent of capture, possession and penetration (If looks could kill ...). The figurative eye is hence both feminine and masculine yet, through much feminist critiques of the gaze, has been gendered as a male trajectory because of its ability to extend vision to the spectacular, and to objectify and fetishise the body of the woman.²³ But the bisexual potential to the eye and its inscription on the gaze are what will stimulate this discussion. The power resides in the eye of the beholder and in most porn is shared by the model who is often the 'subject' doing the looking. This operates

20

Mary Ann Caws 'Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art' in The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives. Ed. Susan Sulieman (Cambridge: MacMillan, 1986), p. 269.

21

Georges Bataille, Visions of Excess: Selecting Writings, 1927-1939. Ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985), p. 17.

22

See Paul Foss, 'Eyes, Fetishism and the Gaze', Art and Text, 20 (1986), pp. 24-41.

23

See the work of Mary Ann Doane, Laura Mulvey and Ann Caws.



on the returned gaze (open eyes) of the model; an 'eye opener' is a lesson, instruction for the uninitiated and a turn of phrase commonly attributed to lewd or 'erotic' imagery. But 'eye-popper' denotes a more explicit image as it increases the grip the model has on the (eye)(balls) of the viewer. The viewer is voyeuristically 'glued' to the veritable 'peephole' in shock, fascination or overwhelming desire. 'He' is projected as his eyes pop out of his 'head'. The viewer is rendered sightless by the model as it follows up on the last instalment of the Oedipal Drama: guilt and castration.

Thus the gaze/look by its economy can take an active or passive stance. As Kaite posits ... 'the model in this case' looks 'as a projection of the readers desires; she also desires to be looked at and thus solicits a visual rapport from her desiring reader (or makes a visual pass at him)'. The tension between the reader and model, the reader's desire to be dispossessed of his/(her) bodily properties, may be analogised, as being stripped.

The eyes can be a projection of desire and the 'eye popping' effect of the sexually explicit and illicit dispossesses the reader of the sole power of the gaze and the assumed stability. 'To have someone by the balls' is to have someone utterly in one's power, especially of women over men.

Ocular penetration (by both protagonists) is an important motif of pornographic photographs but its diegetic absence does not signify a lack of penetrating potential because usually other parts of the body of the model are offered for penetration.

The received notion that the model/female body in this genre is a passive spectacle/receptacle is critically deconstructed in Kaite's semiotic analysis of such images; 'Fully erect nipples' looking to penetrate, Protrusions and the 'masculinisation' of the model's desire to satisfy the viewer's desire; enactments, simulated contortions and positions of the model. This scene is the simulated world of sex ('the delirious surround of the spectacular'), the consumption of meaning which defies representation. The Body becomes a text for the inscription of a series of simulated codes, as the masculinised body of woman has no referent but is a composite of signs which only refer to signs of masculinity '... it is hard, taut, turgid with desire and bearing protuberances which aim for penetration the desirous belongings of an androgynous commerce (fingers, finger nails, spike heels, the positioning of limbs etc.)'.

The surface is the site/sight of interrogation. It offers us information but we are not satisfied. (One of the opening questions in telephone sex is 'Are you wearing any underwear?') This question is rhetorical but important because it allows the answer to be continually disseminated as a kind of enigma - a quest in the field of representation.
24

The surface of the image must be constantly available for the questioning of 'the underneath' (bas ventre; the lower-half of the 'L'origine du Monde'). What is important is the actual questioning of

what is underneath rather than the underneath itself. We cannot know for sure, as under covers, garments it reveals and yet denies this possibility. The emulsion of the photography, the paint surface, the gloss of the image can all barely conceal the fact that underneath is everything and nothing.

As we strain our (psychic) necks to unveil and reveal the enigma of the underneath we realise that this questioning surfaces on many occasions.

The sequence in 'The Seven Year Itch' (1957) where that icon of post-war femininity, Marilyn Monroe stands over the hot air vent which forces her skirt to billow and rise up her thighs, revitalises the question. (The popular legend that Monroe never wore underwear adds frisson to the question.) The skirt rises and the (male) viewer lurches or cranes his neck to see if the story is true - to be confirmed and corroborated in representation. But fortunately Marilyn denies the revelation and throws the enigma back into question. Displacement and revitalisation of this truth are assured. This scene is cinematically re-enacted in Nic Roeg's 'Insignificance' (1985) with an addendum that only manages to allow for another closure, slightly re-routed. Two men operating the fan under the grill (beneath the pavement) are awestruck as they gaze up and one swears he has seen the face of God. (The enigma is displaced onto their facial expressions.) The rising skirt which promises a genital conclusion, a fixed sexual difference maintains the interest of the viewer keeping 'his' eyes in an 'endoscopic embrace' with an enigma that ultimately has no truth. Save the necessity of staging itself over and over again, we'll never 'know' for sure what was underneath.

Pornographic Imagery would seem preoccupied not just with the skin (of the image, of the Model) but also with the internal organs of the 'woman'. It becomes a question of investigation of epistemophilia (libido sciendi), of the picturing of woman's body (the syntax of 'her' display).

Pornography establishes, or sets out to establish, for the viewing subject a 'lived' relationship; between an erotic perception and its representations and accomplishes this by motoricity i.e. an intentional practice involving one's own body and the body of another. But any real discussion pertaining to this space of investigation produces responses other than or beyond the simple affirmation of the male as excitable viewer (frustrated, but that's the point) allaying castration anxiety by fetishising the female sex.

The pornographic imaginary may well be considered an economy that at some level is the very traffic between a variety of representations. Beverly Brown has convincingly argued that this pornographic imagery can never be reduced to the percentage of exposed flesh etc. and can never really be accounted for by the obvious 'objective' quality of the image (following the traditional belief in the ontological status of the photographic image, the transparency of the sign). I am interested in the male imaginary and the phantasms/fantasies that occupy it and wish to address the pornographic as the sign of a certain anxiety and it's contradictory and oscillating discourse as it flows across the broader cultural field.

* * *

This anxiety envelopes and seduces the 'male subject' passionately within the image rather than fixing him objectively outside. For the

repertoire of pornography, (the soft core hetero genres) it can be safely said that there isn't a male body in sight. 'He' is generally absent, without representation, but if such a discourse as this has learnt anything from feminist critiques of patriarchal culture, then absence itself can be very revealing and can speak demonstrably about the forces that coalesce around its (lack of) figuration.

The desire to be inside the privileged interior is also the desire to have an interior as such. The obstetrical eye (ocular penetration) and the eye of the police (detective) combine in the Realist text to produce an eroticisation of power. Now to transpose this observation concerning the sexual nature of power to the pornographic text would probably, on the surface anyway, be saying very little. But to contend that this double figure/fantasy works not only in those texts we evaluate as pornographic, but in every so called Realist representation, that pornography (for Parent du Chatelet and Zola) might accurately depict a world of 'perverted' attitudes (porn is pictures of sick people doing sick things to each other).

* * *

In photographic discourse, claims are made for photography as the deliverer of a democratic representation, one which allows for public legibility without the aid of a privileged semiotic de-coding. These claims are an ontological investment in photographic indexicality, an evidential logic of course, which is not without its contradictions and problems.

Roland Barthe's 'Camera Lucida' (1980) elucidates his 'theory' on that which enables every (trivial) photographic image to be eroticised, and

that which envelops the image within an 'obstetrical' fantasy for the subject. The 'Punctum' (the cut, puncture/pierce) is, for Barthes in his pursuit of his 'impossible science' of the individual, that erotic relation to (the figure of his) dead Mother i.e. invisible, impossible to represent.

Barthe's 'punctum' is never coded hence may be associated with Kristeva's pre-lingual semiotic chora or Lacan's Real because

'... the effect (of the punctum) is certain but unlocatable, it does not find its sign, its name, it is sharp and yet lands in a vague zone of myself; it's acute yet muffled, it cries out in silence. Odd contradiction; a floating flash.'

25

What pricks Barthes is something about ... something insignificant almost invisible, something below the belt something nearly always on the lower portion of the body.

26

This notion appeals to this discussion because it goes some way to indicating something about the relation to the inside of the image which we might want to find conveniently specific to a particular type of imagery (pornography) turns out to be the very *modus operandi* of our relationship to representation *per se*.

All art forms, scientific discourses, journalism etc. aspire to a fascination and epistemophilia, a seeking out to know the inside, the underneath. They are all obsessed with that hidden lower half (the plight of the impoverished), the invisible, unseen.

25

Roland Barthes, Camera Ludica. London: Fontana, 1982, pp. 52-53.

26

Ibid. Barthes gives examples such as strapped pumps (p. 43), finger bandage (p. 51), necklace (p. 53).

Pornography as it is popularly defined is the exemplary image of the 'lower half', (below the belt), the 'nether regions'.

Historically it was born as the writing on prostitutes and figurally it gives studied attention to the hidden, invisible and the underneath, to the place where the 'perfect eye of the police' disappears and might just stare back at us.

* * *

... Extreme seductiveness is probably at the boundary of horror ... the eye could be related to the cutting edge.

27

Georges Bataille

28

The pornographic body knows no textual limitations.

A particularly vicious collapse of the discursive and the real is found in representation of the male body adorned as 'female' in transvestite pornography (She-males).

The spectacular moment contains a body in excess of normative and pleasurable transgressions. The 'body double' in t.v. pornography in its symbolic sexual and feminine masquerade is a body that doubles as its other.

Linda Williams investigates the structure of the female 'look' in the horror film and traces a consistent relation to the gaze by the monster, thing and the female protagonists. Upsetting the cliché

27

Georges Bataille, 'Eye' from Visions of Excess p. 17.

28

Inspection of the top shelf of any distributor of porn attests to this. There is available a pornographic magazine for every possible body part and function imaginable and is spread out to accommodate style, race or age preferences. The problematic mystery is - who reads them?

that men look while women exist only to be looked at, she focuses on the visual encounters and prompts the questions what happens when the woman tries to look, tries to command the gaze and actually sees? And, what does she see?

29

Williams argues that the woman and the monster share an affinity within the phallic economy of the gaze, within patriarchal structures of seeing, such that when she looks she sees herself in the mutilated grotesque body of the monster; she encounters her double and becomes inscribed in a 'masochistic drama'. What would happen then when the pornographic t.v. model (Williams' grotesque and monstrous body) looks or returns the gaze of the viewer and what is s/he looking at?

Where does the (presumed male) reader fit into this exchange of looks when he encounters the freak or grotesque body double of the t.v. model? There is, Kaite contests, 'pleasurable (yet unspeakable) surrender' on the part of the (male) reader to the 'cut', that incisive moment formed around loss and pleasure; that is at the moment of reading (the pornographic moment?) the subject is reaffirmed as subject (a position originally formed in reflection opposite otherness).

30

29

Linda Williams, 'When the Woman Looks' in Revision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, (New York: A.F.I., 1985), p. 85.

30

Kaite, op. cit., p. 160. The concept of the 'cut' is from Kaja Silverman's 'Masochism and Subjectivity', (Framework, No. 12, Winter, 1979), where she refers to the formation of the rhetorical subject within a painful dialectic of plenitude and loss, the child 'both defined by and separated from (the) ideal image granted by the other'. The constitution of the subject is contingent on a continual repositioning through the reading of cultural texts, by language, discourse and desire. The spectator-text relationship plays out the 'compulsory narrative' of loss (Silverman p. 10) and recovery where photographic syntax and visual pleasure enlist a gap into which the viewer is inserted. This gap of 'missing space' is the 'cut' and entails oscillations between absence, separation and imaginary plenitude which is served by the image.

1 (213)

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4

SHEENA THE SHE-MALE

Half Woman Half Man

She'll tell
you how she
satisfies
Girls and
Boys and
Herself

Terrific
Tits—
Tight
Ass—
Big
Cock



I suggest that the 'freak' in the representation encounters the freakish and mutilated body of the viewer. In t.v. pornography each meets the double of the other in a body which doubles as it's other, which bears the marks of a simulated androgynous writing, i.e. clothing adornment etc.

That is, the categories of sexual difference collapse around a law which prescribes transgression of the 'sexual fix' such that there is potency in that 'different kind of sexuality'.³¹ But this is a desirable transaction (which is not totally threatening). In t.v. pornography potential resides in the 'body double' weighted with meaning in a non-aligned sexuality that transgresses 'the sexual fix'.³²

The seemingly feminine body thus read through its erotic accoutrements (shoes, boots, underwear and makeup) is restored to masculinity through (not only) its biological adornment, (but also) it is masculinised beyond the fleshy configurations which always threatens to

31

Williams, op. cit., 1980, p. 89.

32

See Stephen Heath's The Sexual Fix. London: MacMillan, 1982. p. 78. The 'sexual fix' is that 'inscription into the happy family of sexually confirmed individuals', into which we, as constituted individuals are caught. However the privileged masculine position within sexual discourse, because it imposes sexual demands, is unsettling because instabilities around male sexual identity are given space in the pornographic genre, a discourse which purports to empower men (at the price of women's voice) and give full expression to their sexuality. The accompanying texts to the images in many pornographic magazines articulates the woman's demands on her partner/viewer. This along with the fetishization and masculinisation of the body must be seen to contradict the much vaunted criticism that porn exists to silence women and negate their sexuality. See Susan Griffin's 'Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge against Nature' (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).

emerge. Hence discursively, psychoanalytically, symbolically, sartorially, and literally, the penis and its conflationary double, the phallus, are 'never out of sight'.

The surplus of clothing which marks the masquerade also carries the possessive marks of desire. Thus the androgyne bears the marks of simulation (the erotic clothing, coded as feminine), a writing of what might never take place, (simulation as incomplete), which is why the body is written on top of its androgynous properties. In other words the androgyne, far from being a unity of opposites (the lost desirable original union), is 'jouissance', that which cannot achieve closure, which plays on the open seam of the 'cut' through its simulation (clothing, makeup etc.).

This 'perverse' pornographic moment carries more (hidden) subversive elements which coalesce not around a body which is rendered feminine (in this culture, a spectacle), but a body read as feminine but at the same time restored to masculine vocabulary.

At the same time, identification involves visual projection, a loss and a surrender. In this case the visual object oscillates between the 'feminine' and the 'masculine'. ('... human beings are only united with each other through rents and wounds' (Bataille).)

This represents more than the repressed pleasure for a reunion with the original plenitude. The pleasurable spectacle is the body which has annihilated difference and which at the same time cannot disguise the masculinity, apparently renounced by the surplus of ('feminine' 'fetish') signifiers on the models body. A virility is bestowed on

the body making it posed to penetrate and invade, particularly in t.v. pornography. But why speak of a fetish, a stand-in, a substitute, when the 'real thing' is so evidently visible (and semantically overdetermined).³³

It may be that the fascination with looking at the androgyne (freak) does not contain the lustful search for a lost 'wholeness' but the seductiveness of the image promises a 'representation of moments of separation and loss which captures us more than the promise of plenitude'.³⁴

It is the mutilated 'cut' body which stands before the body double, always threatening to cancel out the 'other'.

In pornography, sexual configurations appear at first glance as a site of realism, the immediately visible and prehensible bodies 'in evidence' in possession of feminine or masculine identities (the conclusion of genital morphology).

The pornographic genre apparently the most revealing and explicit of all fleshy discourses that which 'with semiology ... cannot bear the sight of modesty' provides entry into a discovery of the body and the normative transgression of desire such that what appears as obvious biological and discursive difference is really the simulation of androgyny on the body's text.

33

Francette Pacteau discusses this 'real thing' and the difficulties in its representation in 'The Impossible Referent: Representations of the Androgyne' in *Formations of Fantasy*. Eds. V Burgin, J Donald and C Kaplan. (London: Methuen, 1985).

34

Kaite, p. 164.



The true nature of horror is ...
honestly preferring a painting to a
landscape or a preserve to fresh fruit.

The Goncourt Brothers

The Naked Body is not in itself desirable, it must be poised, posed dressed, written, spoken and fetishised to be desirable, and only then with a discourse of others.

A close synchronic reading of the pornographic moment (and a paradigmatic discussion of the penetrating eye) reveals the powerful ambiguity of 'the gaze'.

If pornographic negotiations position the (male) reader to be mastered by the image or to surrender pleasurably to the castrating potential of the model; if pornography is that representational discourse where the 'female' model is masculinised and transgressions are the norm then it is not so much an anchor for Heath's 'sexual story' but a lawful transgression of it; it un-pins the pin-up and the reader of their 'sexual fix', thus disrupting the safe world of sexual difference. Endowing the 'female' model with the fetish(s) does not invite the ineluctable search for the lost phallus (a closing in on lack) but is a simulated representation of the desire for lack (Lacan) for repression (Freud).

Pornography's repertoire is an over-investment in the phallus on the body, a textual dis-investment of the body's 'essential' power and the management of sexual difference. It ultimately performs an exposure of the representational nature of the desire, the fetishization of the spectacular, the phallus and 'otherness'.

Discursive and rhetorical bodies have surpassed 'real' bodies and what remains is an ambivalent and 'representational' - over investment, a

fetishism of objects complimented by a fetishism for subjects'.³⁵
This radical play as 'otherness', the stand in what's 'gone missing'³⁶
and the (ubiquitous) fetish represents a two-fold manoeuvre which could
be considered 'post-modern'. It manages the threat of
separation/otherness as it courts 'absence presence', 'presence
absence' but the threat is once again activated a rather pathetic
attempt to cover up the flaw of the 'real' (and the flaws are what
unsettles the text). Under the sign of a post-modern ambivalence
fetishistic negotiations cut both ways; they contain and represent the
threat and desire of/for otherness.

35

Kaite, p. 166.

36 The writings and commentaries of Baudrillard may be characterised
by their requiem for those things that have disappeared or 'gone
missing' in Western culture. See Baudrillard's 'America'.
London: Verso, 1988 or 'The Ecstasy of Communication', Media
Matic 3 No. 2, 1989, pp. 14-17.

CHAPTER 2

Carol J Clover in her excellent textual analysis of the horror film's most controversial subgenre 'The Slasher' describes this most "corruptive and degrading" genre as 'drenched in taboo and encroaching vigorously on the pornographic'.¹ Situated beyond the purview of respectable criticism, the horror film must be maintained within its ambiguous and unsavoury boundaries for fear of it spilling over into 'other' genres.

But in contrast to the usual campy tones of the criticism consistently delivered around these films, which only concentrates on technique, special effects, profits, Clover promotes 'The Slasher' and its related subgenres as being of exceptional importance for a cultural interrogation of the cultural codes that constitute and form subjectivity, gender and the politics of sexual difference in the culture where they have a cult following.

'Unmediated by other worldly fantasies, cover plot, bestial transformation' or civilised routine, slasher films present us with in startlingly direct terms a world in which male and female are at odds with each other but in which masculinity and femininity are more states of mind than of the body.

As Clover contends, this subgenre displays and offers a clearer image of contemporary sexual mores and attitudes than the lavish productions of

1

Carol J Clover 'Her Body/Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film'. *Representations* 20, Fall, 1987, and in 'Fantasy and Cinema' Ed. J Donald. London: BFI, 1989, pp. 91-133.

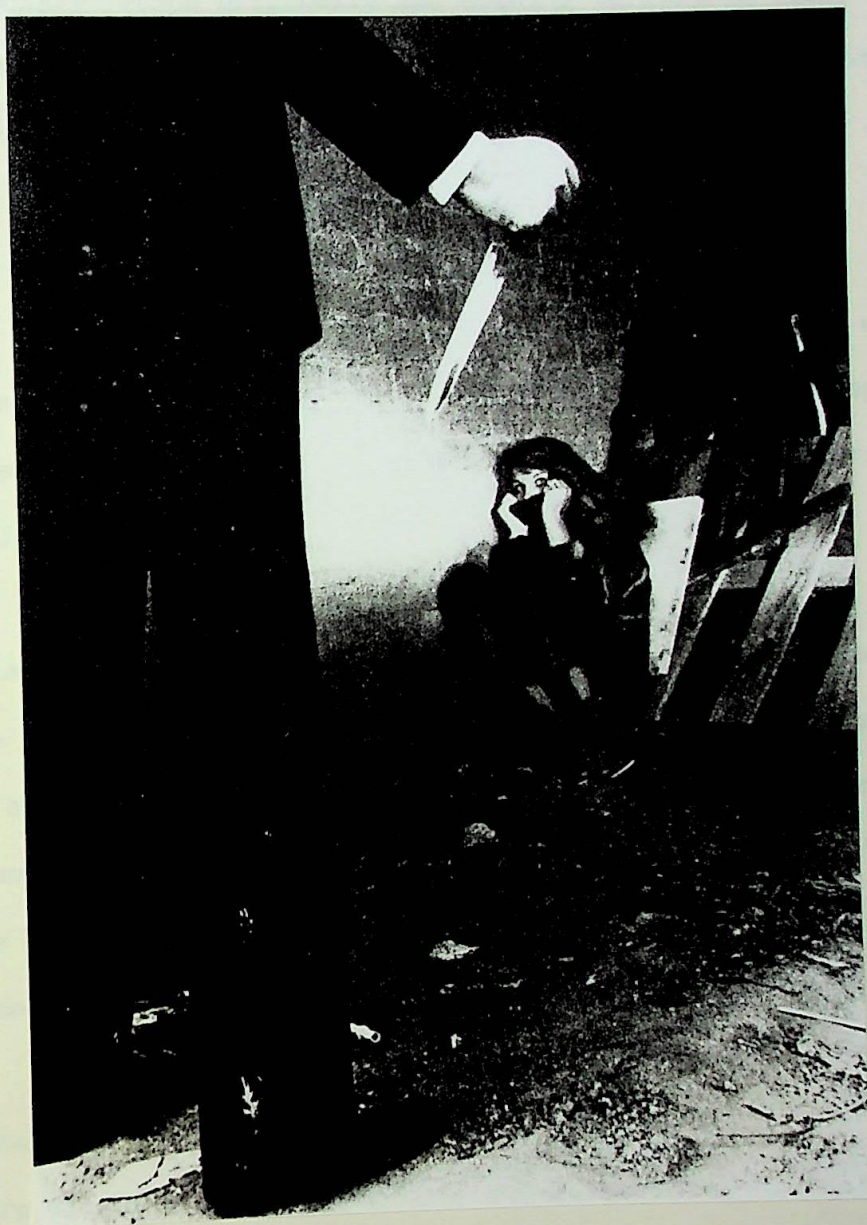
Hollywood precisely because of their low production values, crudity and compulsive, obsessional and formulised repetition.

Brian de Palma's campy art horror 'Body Double' (1984) serves as an example for an overview of the critical and cinematic issues that attend the study of the horror film text.

The plot follows Jake an actor who witnesses the murder of a woman with whom he has become voyeuristically involved. But of greater interest to us, is the three career levels through which 'the hero' ascends and then descends. First, he aspires to classically legitimate roles but because of an unresolved childhood fear opts out and takes the role of a vampire in a low budget horror film. But this oedipal complication jeopardises his job when he is shut into a coffin (claustrophobia). He then descends desperately in search of work to a pornographic film production. The sexual roots of Jake's neurosis are revealed as an unconscious fear of the (female) cavern and his problem is solved (therapy). Jake returns to finish the coffin scene and we understand that his next role is Shakespearean.

The three cinematic categories are thus ranked by degree of sublimation. On the civilised side of the continuum lie the legitimate genres, at the other end, hard on the unconscious, lie the sensation or 'body' genres, - horror and pornography.

This is very similar to Freud's archaeology of 'uncanny' feelings.



'To some people', Freud wrote, 'the idea of being buried alive by mistake is the most uncanny of all'.² An yet psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasy is only a transformation of another phantasy which originally had nothing terrifying about it at all but was qualified by a certain lasciviousness - the phantasy of intra-uterine existence.

Pornography thus engages directly (in pleasurable terms) what horror explores at one remove (in painful terms) and 'legitimate' film does at two or more, e.g. melodrama. Pornography, in short and simplified terms may be seen to deal with sex (genitality). (But does horror deal with gender?)

The example of 'The Graduate' (Nichols, 1969) thus demonstrates that beneath the legitimate ploy lies the plot of psycho - Ben must give up his relationship with a friend's mother in order to marry (her daughter) and take up his proper social position. Norman in 'Psycho' (1963) has an unnatural attachment to his own mother and this drives him to murder women who he finds attractive.

Beneath the plot of 'Psycho' is for Clover the plot of 'Taboo' (1980), a cheap porn film in which the protagonist, a young man, actually lives out the oedipal (or part thereof) narrative and sleeps with his mother breaking the primary taboo of incest.

2

Freud, 'The "uncanny"', Art and Literature, The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 14 (Hamondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 373.

Much criticism of the horror film argues the texts of this genre to be nonsensical having no real relationship to 'our' lives as we live them. They are not 'our' 'reality'. But what makes horror crucial enough to articulate and relate is, for critics since Freud, what makes all fantasy, ghost story etc. crucial enough to pass along - its engagement of 'repressed fear and desires and its re-enactments of the residual conflict surrounding those feelings'.³ Because it plays on our personal and collective fears and dreams, it can be argued that the horror film is culturally, historically and gender specific because of our shared structures of our common ideology.

* * *

Rarely does a Hollywood production fail to devote a passage or scene to a car chase or sex scene for the physical excitation of the audience/viewer. Cinema owes its particularised success in the sensation genres due to its unprecedented ability to manipulate the point of view, the eye/I, identification of the viewing subject. What written narratives must announce, film can accomplish silently and instantaneously through cutting. Within the space of seconds the thing, monster or first person perspective is displaced by third person or documentary shot. To cinema's ability to shuffle-edit can be added the variables of distance, technique, an array of electronic mechanisms and special effects all subject to sudden manipulation.

3

Robin Wood 'Return of the Repressed', Film Comment 14, 1978, p. 30.

Thus the effectiveness of the horror film text relies much on the mechanisms and processes by which a certain image filmed in a certain way causes one person's (but not another's) pulse to race. This process of identification or 'suture'⁴ is sensed to be centrally important in effecting audience identification, though just how and why is unclear. Nor is identification the straightforward notion some critics take it to be. The importance of the play of the 'pronoun function' is frequently overlooked and understated in the actual articulation of the diegetic space. The fantastic and horror text depend for their effects on an uncertainty of vision, a profusion of perspectives and most importantly the confusion of subjective and objective (or the subject and the object). The cinematic apparatus is pre-eminently suited to such activations and formations as well as for the production of sensations, bodily states and the simulation of unreal combinations of objects in a fragmented spatio-temporal relationship.

The actuality of a given 'truth', its empirical presentation, its rational explanation and its physical impression on our physical bodies are all secondary to the primary acknowledgement. The touch, the flesh, the body are then not just cultural metaphors or exceptional facts but also the phenomenal agents in the realisation of our existence, through our bodies.

4

See Jean-Pierre Oudart, 'Cinema and Suture', *Screen*, 18:4, Winter 1977, p. 37. The suture 'happens' when the viewer is inserted into the gap or 'cut' described in footnote No. 30, Chapter 1, p. 38.



Not only may we pinch ourselves to prove that an experience is real, but we may also re-interpret that act as a gesture, a process, an image, a tool for some proof of the act and state of experiencing, feeling, being. It also provides us with the ability to identify shapes (bodies), forms, presences as indicators of physicality.

Above all other cinematic genres, pornography and horror have as their sole pre-occupation (as generic texts) the physical excitation and arousal of bodily sensation. They exist and function solely to horrify and/or arouse (not always respectively) and they are judged and marked as successful purely by the physical reactions and responses, they effect upon the witnessing bodies of the audience. The body itself on the screen becomes a text that operates directly on the witnessing body which is read as the index of the effectiveness and power/value of the text.

The porn and horror film have 'to prove themselves upon our pulses'.
5

In respect to horror then, when the advertisers, critics, reviewers mean good or successful they use corporeal epithets - ads promise shivers, chillers, spine tingling, skin or flesh crawling experiences.
6

5 Steven Marcus, 'The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in mid-Nineteenth Century England. (New York, 1964), p. 278.

6 The Oxford Dictionary notes 'horror' as deriving from 'horripilation' where a feeling of dread causes the physical reaction of one's skin tightening and forcing the hairs to stand on end - otherwise known as the creeping of the flesh. Horror is therefore physical.

The pornographic magazine 'Hustler's Erotic Film Guide' rank pornographic films according to the degree of erection they produce from 'pecker popper' to limp thus reflecting both the figurative and literal phallo-centricity of its texts and audiences. Other film guides refer to pornographic films being 'hot' or 'steamy' or as in 'Body Politic' whose 'wet test' recommended the best in both gay and straight pornographic videos and films.⁷ The generic terms 'flesh' or 'meat' movies and skin flicks respectively are remarkably apt.

* * *

The subgenre of horror, the category we know contentiously as 'body horror' does not display or articulate the pornographic body in 'flagrante delicto' or even the body under threat as in the relatively more palatable horror genre but does these and more, always representing the body as vulnerable, organic, mysterious and in profuse disarray.

The act of showing supplants the act of telling as it does in the pornographic genre but the photographic image overpowers the 'realistic' scene.

7

It must be remarked that all adjectives related to sexual activity play on the properties of liquids, temperature and bodily states. See also Cindy Patton's 'Hegemony and Orgasm - or the Instability of Heterosexual Pornography'. Screen, Vol. 30, Nos. 1-2, 1989.

One of the interesting structures operating on the screen-spectator relationship relates to the sight of the monstrous within the horror text. In contrast to the conventional viewing structures working within other variants of the classic text, the horror film does not constantly work to suture the spectator into the viewing processes. Instead, an unusual phenomenon arises whereby the suturing processes are momentarily undone while the horrific image on the screen challenges the viewer to run the risk of continuing to look.

Here, I refer to those moments in the horror film when the spectator, unable to stand the images of horror unfolding before his/her eyes is forced to look away to not look to look anywhere (in a darkened cinema) but the screen.

Strategies of identification are temporarily broken as the spectator is constructed on the place of horror, the place where the sight/site can no longer be endured the place where pleasure in looking is transformed into pain and the spectator is punished for his/her voyeuristic desires.

Perhaps as Barbra Creed suggests this alongside Willemsen's fourth should be referred to as a 'fifth look' operating alongside the other 'looks' which have been theorised in relation to the screen-spectator relationship.⁸

8

Barbra Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection' in Screen, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1986 and Fantasy and Cinema (ed.) J. Donald (London: BFI), 1989, p. 82.

Confronted by the sight of the monstrous the viewing subject is put into crisis - boundaries designated/designed to keep 'the abject' at bay threaten to disintegrate, collapse.

The horror film puts the viewing subject's sense of a unified self in crisis, specifically in those moments when the image on the screen becomes too threatening or horrific to watch when 'the abject' threatens to draw the viewing subject to the place 'where meaning collapses', the place of death, abjection.

By not looking the spectator is able momentarily to withdraw identification from the image on the screen in order to reconstruct the boundary between self and screen and reconstitute the self which is threatened with disintegration.

This process of reconstitution of the self is re-affirmed by the conventional ending of the horror narrative in which the monster is usually named, recognised, seen in the light and then destroyed.⁹ Fear of losing oneself and one's boundaries is made more acute in a society which values boundaries over continuity and separateness over sameness. Given that death is represented in the horror film as a threat to the self's boundaries, symbolised by the threat of the monster (the body, the material existence of the 'self') death images are most likely to cause the spectator to not look away.

* * *

9

Every horror film beast/monster/thing has to be 'known' before it can be stopped and destroyed (we, the audience, all know how to deal with vampires, i.e. garlic and stakes when we 'encounter' them on the screen). Even in the example of 'The Thing' (Carpenter, 1982) where the 'thing' was a non-corporeal figure with no fixed form but was located and constituted by a computer screen.

What these 'body horror' films have in common with each other is their shared articulation of what would appear to be a peculiarly 'post-modern sense of dread' and horror, a sense of dread and horror situated and articulated through the body in physicality, many of the most fully realised instances of which are to be found in horror or body horror films.

Here the archetypal body horror text 'Frankenstein' the manipulation of flesh by a doctor's will to life leads him to Promethean guilt, the contemporary horror film allows us to view, in a dead pan matter of factness, routine instances of physical helplessness at the hands or the tools of a doctor or a medical institution usually brightly lit and hygienic. This unquestionable obsession with the physical constitution of the body and the destruction of that body. The textuality of the modern horror film then plays precisely on the fear of one's own body of how one controls and relates to it.

Such is the strength of the impulse to release the loss of this control through cleverly controlled instances of gory special effects that the coherence of accepted patterns of film language is frequently relegated to a position subordinate to the demands of presenting the viewer with the uncompromised or privileged detail of human carnage.

The accurate reconstruction of anatomical detail is a major industry which supplies the film makers with life-like creations of human tissue in torment, of the body 'in profuse disarray'.

The knowledge of the human body the average viewer is likely to possess does not include the anatomical accuracy of the various nerves,

muscles, arteries, sinews and so forth.

The special effects task then is to register these images with recognisable signifiers, literally a simulacra of the viscera of the subjects physical limitations to its corporeal horizon. This signifies a concern with the 'self as body'. For death in the contemporary horror film to occur offscreen would be almost unthinkable (it would miss the point).

In the 'western' for instance or the thriller the death of a character would be relatively bloodless and ungraphic since the point or moral to be extended and learned was the defeat of wrong by right and the image of death is a token of this.

But the Zombie movie or Slasher etc. the *modus mortandi* the method of dispatch is of great importance and is articulated in all its detail to prove the point.

This type of morality tale, the graphic depiction of the body being punished, mutilated, dismembered, serves as a way of figuring punishment, according to J. B. Twitchell, for 'moral and sexual transgression' (or is it?).¹⁰

The assertiveness of these acts then is what emerges on the loss of blood or tissue; the emphasis is one of quantity rather than quality

10

See J. B. Twitchell, 'Dreadful Pleasures: An anatomy of modern horror'. New York, 1985.



(physicality as volume). These sensational acts of violence are nearly always either extraordinary feats of strength, cruelty or more importantly grotesque and imaginative and rarely lay claim to verisimilitude being bound up with problems of action and desire. Their disturbing quality remains due to the way the spectator is caught and implicated in the production of these problems. Devoid of any metaphysical support, the random bodily destruction that populates these texts is sometimes coincidental to the main action and routine in its execution under the intense scrutiny of the lens as it seeks out that frisson of broken bodies and disarticulated flesh.

These images which produce carnal knowledges are presented in a privileged but wholly detached manner. The reduction of the characters to mere tissue, skin and bone to simply signify the body as demystified matter is the forte of the cheaper and blacker productions in this genre. The body becomes the site of conflict where health and sickness order and chaos compete.

* * *

In a discussion of the male imaginary and the possibility of articulating a male sexuality that does not rely on the 'phallus' as the central metaphor or keystone of the economy of desire within patriarchal culture, Paul Smith points to the treatment of neuroses by Freud with particular reference to male hysterics.¹¹

Masturbation, coitus interruptus, problems and worries about contraception and the ever present danger of venereal disease all enter Freud's discourse as the factors of various debilitating neuroses in his male patients.

Much of Freud's thinking on these matters is predicated upon what might be called a 'substantialist' theory of sexuality wherein prognosis is a matter of recognising the economy of substances in the body and in the brain. Symptoms and illnesses are, for him at this point, often signs of a derangement in such economies.

Freud in complaining and discussing with Fleiss his own migraine was anxious to understand the origin of the ache and remarked upon very particular epiphenomena both somatic and physical; suppurations and secretions 'from the left side of [his] nose'. He later states that the migraine he suffers from coincide with events in his life (his daughter Mathilde's puberty) and form and play out fantasies which cannot be explained purely by tension or somatic symptoms or imbalances. But Freud's anxiety is displayed more accurately in a passage he relates to Fleiss where:

11

Paul Smith, 'Vas' in Camera Obscura, No. 17, 1988.

... hysterical headaches rest upon an analogy in fantasy which equates the top with bottom parts of the body, so that an attack of migraine can be used to represent a forcible defloration...

12

His attention shifts from his migraine to his daughter's burgeoning sexuality, from the male to the female as object of investigation. Smith suggests that what psychoanalysis comes to repress is masculinity or perhaps a particular experience of masculinity which is uncomfortably close to hysteria.

Maybe Freud's examination of male hysteria, the prospect of isolating the sexual origins of psychic and somatic symptoms in a male body might have been too radically subversive, something too threatening to the patriarchal male ego which, we are told so often, Freud epitomized.

Michele Montrelay has suggested that psychoanalysis was invented to repress femininity where as another might say that Freud identified with femininity maybe in order to access to the power of the other. Either way this displacement from the migraine's ache to the puzzle of femininity constitutes a flight from a particular condition of masculinity.

Presenting himself as marginal, Roland Barthes, who also suffered from migraine headaches, interpreted them as 'psychosomatic sign of man's mortal malady; the failure of symbolization'.¹³ In this identification with femininity the headache becomes most intolerable.

12

Freud, quoted in Smith, op. cit.

13

Roland Barthes. Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

The bodily secretions and suppurations of Freud's own migraine might not so much bespeak some kind of castration anxiety, but rather subsist as exactly real substances that escape sexual repression and therefore speak directly of the malady of sexuality itself.

In one of the most remarkable books on the subject, Klaus Theweleit provides an interpretation of the image of women in the collective unconscious of the 'fascist warrior'.¹⁴ A psychoanalytic investigation of fascism and misogyny, it details an analysis of a masculine identity as a flight from the 'feminine'.

He contends that it is male desire which is signified in the 'I' which surfaces into the symbolic systems of western patriarchal culture. In section one, simply called 'Men and Women', he explores the recording of the productive force of desire through representations of femininity in the writings of the 'soldier males'; woman as bride, mother or beloved: woman as aggressor (rifle-woman) as Bolshevik, Red Nurse etc.

If that stream reaches, touches me, spills over then I will dissolve, sink, explode with nausea, disintegrate in fear, turn horrified into slime that will suffocate me a pulp that will swallow me like quicksand.

I'll be in a state where everything is the same, inextricably mixed together.

Male Fantasies 15

¹⁴ Klaus Theweleit, Male Fantasies, (Pt. 1). London: Polity, 1987.

¹⁵ Quoted in Theweleit, *ibid*.



This extract from one of the novels of the Freikorps displays horror of being engulfed, of being swallowed, causing him to 'explode' with nausea.

Theweleit draws attention in the second section 'Floods, Bodies, History' to the flight of these 'soldier males' from hybrid, fluid substances ('Floods', 'morasses', 'mire', 'pulp', 'slime'), not just merely fantasised but 'concrete' bodily flows, bodily secretions. The feminine he posits on the side of liquescence, fluidity and substance. These substances are regularly used to signify something other than themselves, and whenever they are referred to are properties of the human body, the bodies of the 'soldier males'. They produce anxiety bordering on hysteria. But they all have something in common: they could be called upon to describe processes occurring in or upon the human body, especially its orifices. The terms used ('Floods', 'morasses' etc ...) can describe bodily secretions (if you start out with a negative attitude towards them). The elimination of substances from the body usually affects pleasurable sensations but with the 'soldier males' they have all been replaced by a panic defense against the possibility of their occurrence. These substances are defined by their ability to flow, their hybrid status and their ability to absorb objects without changing in the process.

Their hybrid and hence impure condition made them very well suited as displaced designations for danger and the forbidden. Their 'aliveness', vitality made them attractive for representing processes within living bodies and the attribute of leaving no traces of their activity of closing up again after every action invited the presence of hidden things, things from the secret realms and from the domain of the dead.

Theweleit offers an explanation or a theory for the 'male soldier's' intense fear of the hybrid. He suggests it must be closer to the body than the explanation of a defense reaction. The 'soldier males' bodily fluids must have been negativised to such an extent that they became the physical manifestations of all that is terrifying. All the hybrid substances that were produced by the body and flowed on, in and over the body 'the floods and stickiness of sucking kisses' the 'swamps' of the vagina with their 'slime and mire'; the 'pap and slime of male semen'; the 'slimy' stream of menstruation, the damp spots where limbs join the body; the warmth that dissolves boundaries (meaning not that it makes one body out of a man and woman but that it transgresses boundaries; the infinite body; the body as flow).

* * *

'All that's solid melts into Air ...'
Marx

Since historically the properties of fluids have been abandoned to the feminine, how is the instinctual dualism articulated with the difference between the sexes?

Luce Irigaray

Luce Irigaray in 'The Mechanics of Fluid'¹⁶ asks why has 'science' historically lagged behind in its elaboration of a theory of fluids. She states that this delay is a 'postponed reckoning that was eventually to be imputed to the real'.¹⁷ She says that this 'real' includes a physical reality that continues to resist adequate symbolization and/or that signifies the powerlessness of logic to incorporate in its writing all the characteristic features of 'nature'¹⁸ [emphasis mine] necessary to minimise these features and envisage them in a minimal or ideal light to avoid them 'sticking up the theoretical machine'. Rationalists and patriarchal discourse has problems in coming to grips with liquids and fluids because of the former's allegiance to the mechanics of solids. The Ruling Symbolics see liquid as disruptive or irrational and turbulent and that which evades the containing modalities of principle. The fear of the Symbolic

¹⁶ From Luce Irigaray's This Sex Which is not One. Translated by Catherine Porter. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 106-118.

¹⁷ Irigaray uses Lacan's notion 'the real'. See Lacan *Ecrits: A Selection*, 1977.

¹⁸ In this essay, Irigaray uses 'la nature' without footnote or translator's note as well as 'God or feminine pleasure', p. 108. Perhaps a touch of irony or sense of humour here.

Order, according to Irigaray, is the spreading to infinity of chaotic fluids. Lack of structure, logic or principle escapes the totalising system modulating the order of truths which Modernity has initiated and therefore certain properties of 'real' fluids have been excluded from their mode of symbolisation.

Irigaray states that considerations of pure mathematics have precluded the analysis of fluids by stopping at a certain level and only continuing to approximate reality after which a remainder is left over which is contrary to all theoretical speculation.

Certainly these 'theoretical' fluids have enabled the technical and mathematical form of analysis to progress while losing a certain relationship to the reality of bodies in the process.

Whereas hardness, dryness and solidity can be symbolized as male, those that are wet, fluid and soft are symbolically female in this patriarchal culture. Flows - milk, blood, tears are all ascribed a 'feminine' position. Water has no shape, form or structure in and of itself. It assumes its form from the container in which it is contained. Liquid always threatens to spill, to sweep away structures, to engulf, to drown etc. Liquids above all other forms of substance require maintenance and containment because they can contaminate and infect. Contagion and disease is carried in it.

CHAPTER 3

Le moi est Haïssable
Pascal

Julia Kristeva devoted 'The Powers of Horror' (1980) to the notion of 'abjection' which for her was intensely bound up with the feminine and the maternal figure in patriarchal culture. The Abject as a source of horror¹ within patriarchal societies functions as a means of separating the human from the non-human and the unified fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject in disarray.

Kristeva's abjection pivots on the threshold when the child acquires language and enters the symbolic with a relatively stable enunciative position. This occurs through the delimitation of the 'clean and proper'² body where the symbolic order and the acquisition of a sexual and physical identity control those dispersing impulses of the semiotic drives which strive to breakdown identity, order and stability. Abjection attests to this perilous and provisional nature of the Symbolic Law, because it does not respect borders, positions, rules and it disturbs systems, order.

Through abjection, bodily processes³ become enmeshed in significatory processes in which images, perceptions and sensations become linked to and represented by 'ideational representatives' or signifiers.

¹ Julia Kristeva, The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Translated by S. Roudize. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

² Kristeva examines the French expression 'le propre corps' which means 'clean body'. The notion of the body in French culture signifies an ordering of dirt and cleanliness. The body is the site of this conflict.

³ Kristeva develops her notion of the abject from Freud's 'Totem and Taboo' in SE, Vol. XIII.

She explores the ways in which the inside and the outside of the body, the spaces between the subject and object, and the self and other become structured and made meaningful through the child's taking up a position in the 'Law of the Father'. These pairs need to be oppositionally coded in order for the child's body to be constituted as a unified whole and for its subjectivity to be definitively tied to the morphology and limits of the body. The point of enunciation, the construction of the self, are all conditional under these necessary processes.

This adoption of a position entails the disavowal of the subject's modes of corporeality especially those representing what is culturally determined as unacceptable, anti-social and unclean. The subject must disavow part of himself/herself in order to gain a stable self and this form of refusal marks whatever identity it acquires as provisional and⁴ and open to breakdown and instability.

What Kristeva says that differs from Freud's account is that that which is expelled from the subject's corporeal functioning can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the border of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and possible dissolution.

The pollutants, contaminants and impurities that threaten to dissolve or engulf the subject (as they do in Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*), are

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Kristeva's argument owes much to Mary Douglas' Purity and Danger
An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo. London: RKP,
1966.

not only in those events that Freud called the 'Return of the Repressed' but also a necessary accompaniment of sublimated and socially validated activities such as art, literature or science.

The unclean and improper must be harnessed according to Kristeva in all these goal-oriented activities and the subject's recognition of this responsibility (to know the truth) provokes the sensation (a physical alteration) and attitude (a psychic disposition) that is 'abjection'.

The central concern of the 'Powers of Horrors' lies with the structuration of subjectivity within, and by the processes of subjectivity, within and by the processes of abjectivity in which the subject is spoken through both religious and cultural discourses.

The place of the abject is 'the place where meaning collapses' (p. 2). It's where "I" am not. The abject threatens life and must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, it must be propelled away from the body and positioned or deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self.

Abjection (...) is merely the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding abject things (and that acts establishes the foundations of collective existence).

Bataille

quoted in Kristeva's Powers of Horror

These abject things must be excluded by the subject but nevertheless they must be tolerated for they threaten by defining what is alive/life. The activity of exclusion of defining, imposing discrete boundaries is necessary to guarantee that the subject take up his/her clean and proper place in relation to the symbolic, - 'To each ego its object, to each super-ego its abject.' (Kristeva, p. 26.)

* * *

The ultimate in abjection is that which populates the horror film (though not exclusively) in vast amounts and diverse forms i.e. monsters, grotesquerie, mutilation and excessive amounts of bodily fluids from blood and gore to mucus and pus.

The body protects itself from bodily wastes and fluids, the actual vital fluids that perpetuate life - shit, blood, semen, urine and pus - by ejecting these substances just as it expels food that for whatever reason the subject finds loathsome.⁵ The body extricates itself from them and from the place where they fall, so that it might continue to live.⁶

The corpse is utterly abject because it signifies one of the basic forms of pollution (within religious discourses) - a body without a soul. Popular horror genres are: bodies without souls (the vampire); the living corpse (zombie) and the corpse eater (the ghoul) because they disrupt the definition, they collapse the construction that orders the live and the dead. The werewolf, whose body signifies a collapse of the boundaries between human and animal, belongs to this category. That which exists on the other side of the border which separates out the living subject from that which threatens its extinction is the abject in operation.

⁵ Kristeva posits oral disgust as the ultimate in abjection. See p. 3.

⁶ E. Gross, 'The Body of Signification' in Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The work of Julia Kristeva, (Eds.) J. Fletcher and A. Benjamin, London: Routledge, 1990, pp. 80-104.



If the subject constructed in/through language through a desire for meaning is also spoken by the abject - the place of meaninglessness - thus the subject is constantly beset by abjection which fascinates a desire which must be repelled for fear of self-annihilation (psychic death).

The abject always signifies ambiguity, but as Bataille, emphasises the undifferentiated having an attractive aspect as well as an horrific fascination because while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it - on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger.

To the extent that abjections works on the socio-cultural arena, the horror film would appear to be, an illustration of the work of abjection.

The horror film abounds in images of abjection foremost of which is the corpse whole and mutilated followed by the explicit exhibition of bodily fluids and wastes such as blood, vomit, saliva, sweat, tears, putrefying flesh and viscera etc.

When we say a certain film 'made me sick' or scared the shit out of me we are actually foregrounding that specific horror film as a work of abjection or 'abjection at work' in both a literal and metaphoric sense.

Where the old religions and their respective rituals performed, for Kristeva, the function in societies of renewing their initial contact with the abject and it's subsequent exclusion the contemporary horror film, it might be argued, serves a similar secularised ritual.

Viewing the horror film signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure (confronting sickening horrific images, being filled with horror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, having taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject, ejaculate the abject) from the safety of the spectators seat.

The concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous for that which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border' is abject. Although the specific nature of the border changes from text to text the function of the monstrous remains the same - to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability. The monstrous is produced when transgression of those borders, which the law has inscribed on those (other) bodies, between human and inhuman, good and evil; or the monstrous is produced at the border which separates those who take up their proper genre/gender roles from those who do not (*Psycho*, *Dressed to Kill* etc.) or the border is between normal and abnormal sexual desire (*Cruising*, *Cat People*, *The Hunger*).

Religious abominations pervade the text of the contemporary horror film as they signify the constructions of the abject within religious discourses - blood as religious abomination in 'Splatter' movies (*Texas Chain Saw Massacre*), cannibalism in meat movies (*Hills Have Eyes*), the corpse - zombie and ghoulish movies etc.

Bodily disfigurement as a religious abomination is also one of the forms of violence to which we are subjected. The 'Slasher' genre is the pre-eminent example especially when we witness a woman being slashed. She is marked as a sign of her difference. The image

coincides with the blood of menstruation, which Kristeva posits as a primary source of the abject as woman's sexuality is seen as the source of all evil, blood as the sign of sin. The bleeding body of women attracts much criticism as it becomes the central image of this genre. The knife, or something similar, transforms the body into a gaping wound (an index of her sex?) but belies the anxiety around castration as a central concern in the horror text. This ritualised mutilation not only marks her as lack, signifying her own castrated state but also castration for the male.

In the guise of a psychopath, 'he' inscribes on her body the sign of difference, the mark of the text that the symbolic interpellates. He enacts on her body the one act he most fears himself transforming her entire body into a wound. As Kristeva links the universal practices of rituals of defilement to the mother, she i/e argues that within the practises of all rituals polluting objects fall into two categories: 'excremental' which threatens identity from the outside and 'menstrual' which threatens from within.

Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, death etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without; the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its society, life by death.

Images of blood, vomit, pus, shit etc. are central to our culturally constructed notion of the horrific. For Kristeva they signify a split between two orders, the maternal authority or pre-oedipal sexuality and the Law of Father, the Symbolic Order organised around the Phallus.

On the one hand, these images of bodily fluids and wastes threaten a subject that is already constituted in relation to the symbolic as whole and proper imprinted by the Fathers Law.

Consequently they fill the subject both the protagonist in the text/film and the viewing body with disgust and loathing. On the other hand, they also point back to a time, for Kristeva, when a fusion between 'mother and nature' existed; when bodily wastes and fluids, while set apart from the body when they were not seen as objects of embarrassment and shame.

Their presence in the horror film may invoke a response of disgust from the audience situated as it is within the symbolic but at a more archaic level, the representation of bodily wastes may invoke pleasure in transgressing the taboo on filth - sometimes described as a pleasure in perversity - and a pleasure in returning to that time when the mother-child relationship was marked by an untrammelled pleasure in playing with the body and its wastes.

Kristeva argues that since the disintegration of the historical forms of religion the work of purification now rests solely with that 'catharsis par excellence called art' (p. 17). In a world in which the other has collapsed the aesthetic task - a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being 'closest to its dawn' to the 'bottomless primacy' constituted by primal repression.

Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by 'the other' 'subject' and 'object' push toward each other.

* * *

The contemporary horror film (post 1978) has been the major market of a consciousness of bodily contact - that which virtually any form of fiction, artifice etc. grants us as a kind of non-physical experience - not simply in how the films work the body as image, object, sign and symbol through photographic and cinematographic modes but also how the genre as a whole has recently informed other areas of the cinema.

If one views Flashdance, Rambo and Transformers as horror texts (by virtue of their fetishization and manipulation of the body), one can see that what was once presumed to be directed at the body could perhaps now be also projected from the body. (This of course, is another example of how the mechanisms of genre operate, of how genres can feed off one another in those manifold cracks which thematic, iconographic and symbolic readings cannot seal off.)

Philip Brophy terms two dominant ways in which the body is fetishised⁷ and manipulated as Expansion and Explosion.

Explosion is the directing of concerns, fears, frustrations at the image of the body causing it to splatter under force, impact, intensity and pressure. It is the moment or instant eruption or dematerialisation that serves as the dead end centre for the painful yet pleasurable build up of everything being directed at the body both

7

See Philip Brophy, 'The Body Horrible' in Interventions 21/22. Sydney: Intervention, 1988, p. 59.

material and symbolic. As Brophy points out the photographic effect of the exploding body or body part is not unlike the 'come-shot' in pornographic films.⁸ The Explosion is 'the catharsis of savaging the self, maligning the other and generally terrorising all those touted symbolic codes'.⁹

Expansion is closely related to Explosion in that the explosion is sometimes the conclusion of the expansion. Expansion illustrates similar concerns as coming from the body - seeping, bleeding, inflating, enlarging etc. causing it to transmogrify, shed its skin and re-shape and re-constitute itself. The stretching of limits, the mutation of familiar body parts and textures signifies a body intact material and corporate and thus disallowing its excessive climax. The body is a container of drives and energies which sometimes deform and push the boundary that we, as human beings confront each day - the flesh.

These principles are presented so as to extend relations and analogies between technique, image and effect, based on the notion that everything can be fused in the one place of physicality. The body serves as this nexus of events and symbolics mobilised to exploit and interrogate the fate of the body.¹⁰

8

For one of the most enlightening articles on this issue is Cindy Patton's 'The Lesbian Cum-Shot' in Square Peg No. 19. Summer 1989, pp. 20-22.

9

See Philip Brophy, op. cit. p. 59.

10

See Philip Brophy's 'Horrorality - The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films' in Screen, Vol. 27, Nos. 1-2, pp. 2-13.

But to be able to accept the simultaneity of measures and concerns one must accept the premise of desire here - the desire to experience a form (phantom, material, symbolic, physical) not of the body, but of 'bodily contact'. It is a desire that finds fascination in being stimulated, repulsed, engaged, assaulted by representations of body-ness.

The confrontation with a body of human form which is not human is a classical figure of horror (from *Psycho* to *Blade Runner's* Replicants to *Terminator*). Consider those monsters whose human form belies inner presences - vampire, werewolf, zombie, possessed person, alien etc. What marks these figures as classical, in a sense, is the mystical nature of those inner presences. These images and their incurrent horror mobilise our conception of our own selves as somehow mystical, somehow unattainable and unfathomable. Hermeneutics abound (the beast within us, our moral soul, our lustful drive) but the central fascination is with the unexplainable - particularly ourselves. The contemporary horror film focuses on a shift from this mode of identification to one based on disembodiment where we are more fascinated with tactile presences than ethereal ones and more interested in the body's exhibition of surface form than its disclosure of spiritual depths. Disembodiment thus signifies an absence of those inner presences.

The screen body in contemporary horror is thus a true place of physicality; a 'fountain of fascination' a 'bounty of bodily contact'.

11

And if there is any mysticism left in the genre it is that beyond

11

See Brophy, *op. cit.*

the surface, the epidermis we know, our own insides constitute a fifth dimension, an unknowable world, an incomprehensible darkness - the fifth dimension of physicality.¹²

Disembodiment is intended to signify an emptiness of the body, not the finality of a corpse or the spirited evaporation of 'the soul' to another dimension, but the presence of emptiness. It is an emptiness which connects with our emptiness as vessels for the contemporary horror film, where pleasure is generated by a certain detachment from, and bemusement with, the saturated effects of the genre's history and where knowledge of our own bodies is infused with the unworldly logic of the body's terrain on the screen.

This is how the vilest and most savage scenes can fully retain their comic effect and medical procedures and observations can serve as contemporary horror scenes.¹³

Bursts of laughter at dismemberment are one with our perception of the screen's non-bodies, just as our rushes of adrenalin are one with our imagination of our own bodies.

¹² The fifth dimension to compliment Barbra Creed's 'Fifth Look'. See p. 43, Chapter 2.

¹³ For an account of how the medical can horrify see Pete Boss' 'Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine'. Screen, Vol. 27, No. 1 Jan-Feb. 1986.

14

The body in 'gore movies', is generally subordinate to the intensification of blood into gore. The most socially acceptable form of 'intense' screen violence is where fresh, bloody fluid signifies the immediate instant of dramatic action - we could term it a dramatic mode of 'humorality' in that drama is humoral, i.e. coming from the blood.

Screen-blood eventually thickened into gore into a state beyond liquification, and the dramatic instant into a realm of ugly viscosity and voyeuristic pondering. This intensification - both of violence and its substance/(quantity) - is central to gore movies, replacing the shiny veneer of red with unsightly patches; splatters and blobs of half-recognisable offal.

* * *

David Lynch's *Eraserhead* and David Cronenberg's *Shiver* (both 1976) both explore the body, but the former conveys it's findings symbolically while the latter conveys them viscerally; both are motivated by a desire to discover the inner body, desiring to be transfixed by their discoveries (*Eraserhead*) and overwhelmed by them (*Shivers*).

These relationships are intensified a decade later with Lynch's *Blue Velvet* and Cronenberg's *The Fly* (both 1986) in the way that they represent the reflective conclusions of their journeys into the body. Cronenberg's imaging of the baboon being turned inside out is an

14

The 'gore movie' emerged in the mid-sixties as an aberration of the Slasher and Horror genre. My own personal theory as to their origin is the technical lagging behind of the special effects department at that time where fresh blood was difficult to come by and when it was available, difficult to preserve.

unimaginable image which virtually negates all other assumptions as to how the fantastic can be rendered in film today. It also tells us what he finds inside the body; our organs total in their presence. Lynch's discoveries touch on the repulsive too but remains ambivalent about the mystery surrounding the body.

The Body in Blue Velvet like Eraserhead is transformed into an alien landscape whose unsolved mysteries instigate the quest of our journey. As the human form undergoes a reverse anthropomorphism, we penetrate its walls, cavities, chambers. While both films are rich in symbolics (the self-conscious presentation of which seems deliberate), those quests somehow don't feel psychological in their orientation.

It's as though one is recognising those mysterious, inner psychological impulses not as solutions or explication (in the psychoanalytic manner) but as their own symbols, as icons whose phenomenological presence (photographically, cinematically semiologically and symbolically) is employed as textual atmosphere for the narrative; from the severed ear found on the ground to the camera's penetration into the darkness of its inner world from the throbbing, dizzying drape of blue velvet behind the credits to its place in the grotesque display of a basic Freudian scenario; from the igniting of a candle - to create the feel of darkness - to ignition of every possible dark feeling imaginable. This process indicates what could be termed a textual syllepsism where symbols and icons converge on one another.

Blue Velvet transfixes through its complicated and confusing overlays of fabrics, surfaces and textures on top of and within the body. 'The Fly' uncovers the body as more organs; Blue Velvet discovers it as

more darkness. Like much contemporary horror, these two films realise that the most we can ever encounter inside our bodies is more bodies.

15

The *Flesh Bodies* as distinct from *Techno Bodies* also manages to articulate how factility itself can be made monstrous, how touching can be both fearful and pleasurable. Many horror films feature flesh bodies (deformed, vile and secreting) eroticising the touch (our desire to feel the liquescence) and de-eroticise the flesh (our repulsion in recognising our body in the putrid state).

The *Flesh Body* illustrates how the horror film can 'pornograph' the body and its flesh through a mix of eroticization and de-eroticization (the degradation of skin and tissue - the eroticization of weaponry).

Conversely one can read hard core pornographic imagery as horrific i.e. alien, unworldly, non-human (my god and what is that?) in its reconstitution of the body and its flesh where organ, muscle, tissue and secretion convey their effect through a type of 'semiotic abstraction' the real photographed as abstract to signify 'the reals'. The photograph here accents material surfaces more than it portrays recognisable parts and wholes. Bodies (their insides and their outsides) in contemporary horror films exploit and are exploited by this inherent quality of the photographic medium, the very act of

15

For an extensive discussion of 'Techno Bodies', see Alice Jardine's 'Of Bodies and Technologies' in Discussions in Contemporary Culture, (Ed.) Hal Foster. New York: Dia Foundation, 1987, pp. 151-165 and Donna Haraway's 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs, Science Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', Socialist Review, No. 80, 1985.

photography. Indeed rather than condemning the horror genre as pornographic, one should perhaps be considering whether it is possible to not invoke an erotic vacillation in the photographic (hence cinematographic) act.¹⁶

16

For the origin of the cinematic apparatus and it's crystallization around the female body, see Annette Michelson 'On the Eve of the Future: The Reasonable Facsimile and the Philosophical Toy'. October: The First Decade, MIT Press, pp. 417-435.

CONCLUSION

Nothing could be more meaningless than a virus. It carries no inherent significance. But as Judith Williamson relates that 'nothing is harder for us to confront than the complete absence of meaning'.¹

Meaninglessness cannot be articulated within our modalities of logic, our symbolic laws, our social language. The virus resists symbolisation not because meaninglessness is the opposite of meaning, but it is the end of meaning and threatens the order of things which structure and make sense of our world. It is not a hole or an absence of meaning but manages to overturn our metaphysics, upset our psychology and destabilise the very notion of being in a culture where that subject-hood is interpellated by multivalent and interconnected discourses.

This analysis goes some way to explain the hysteria over the AIDS crisis and the 'necessary' narrativization of the HIV virus. We must give it a meaning, we must code it to make sense of it.

Williamson has characterised the coding of the HIV virus as a combination of Gothic Horror and sentimentality discourses. I would like to draw on some of her conclusions around the discourses of Gothic Horror and Kristeva's notion of 'the abject'.

1

Judith Williamson 'Every Virus tells a Story: The Meanings of HIV and AIDS' in *Taking Liberties: AIDS and Cultural Politics* (Eds.) E Carter and S Watney. London: Serpents Tail, 1989, pp. 69-80.

If it bleeds, it leads.

American Media Maxim.

You can't tell? No, you can't tell from looking. A.I.D.S. doesn't choose other people. A.I.D.S. can choose you.

Christine Chapman

quoted by Simon Watney in 'Policing Desire' 2

The popular press in Britain is responsible for the construction of the HIV virus as a 'killer' who 'claims' its victims as if it had an intentionality and its victims belonged to it. Watney also argues that these populist discourses construct those who are HIV sero-positive as not only victims of the "[gay] plague" but also they become representatives of the virus and become virtually identified with it. The image of the 'killer' virus then becomes easily transferred to the person carrying the virus. On top of this may be projected the insistent stigmatisation of the communities targeted as being different because of their behaviour and their socially constructed mythologies; Prostitutes, homosexuals, drug addicts, Central Africans who are continually and historically constructed as 'others' in our culture.

Those members of our society who engage in marginal activities are constructed as marginal, perverse and unacceptable but are completely demonized when the normative discourses construct them as explicitly 'monstrous'.

2

Simon Watney, *Policing Desire, Pornography, AIDS and the Media*. London: Comedia/Methuen, 1987, p. 117.

So from gay men in the pre-AIDS era gaining credibility as a political and social constituency through to a massive backlash in the AIDS hysteria, they have become 'killers' and agents for viral transmission from the 'diseased' and 'perverse' part of social body to the healthy and 'normal' part, with a perverse twist of logic those being killed are killers.

Watney points out precisely the connection between death and sexuality that presses hard in the phantasms of the public discourses. This public discourse about homosexuals since the AIDS crisis began has a startling resemblance to the representation of female prostitutes in the nineteenth century (see Bernheimer, Corbin etc.) 'as contaminated vessels conveyancing' female 'venereal' diseases to innocent men.

These people have sex twenty to thirty times a night A man comes along and goes from anus to anus and in a single night will act as a mosquito transferring infected cells on his penis. When this is practised for a year, with a man having three thousand sexual intercourses, one can readily understand this massive epidemic that is currently upon us.

Professor Opendra Narayan
The John Hopkins Medical School 3

This account of sex in the gay communities of New York and San Francisco along with other remarks are much less descriptive of even the most promiscuous male sexuality that they are reminiscent of male

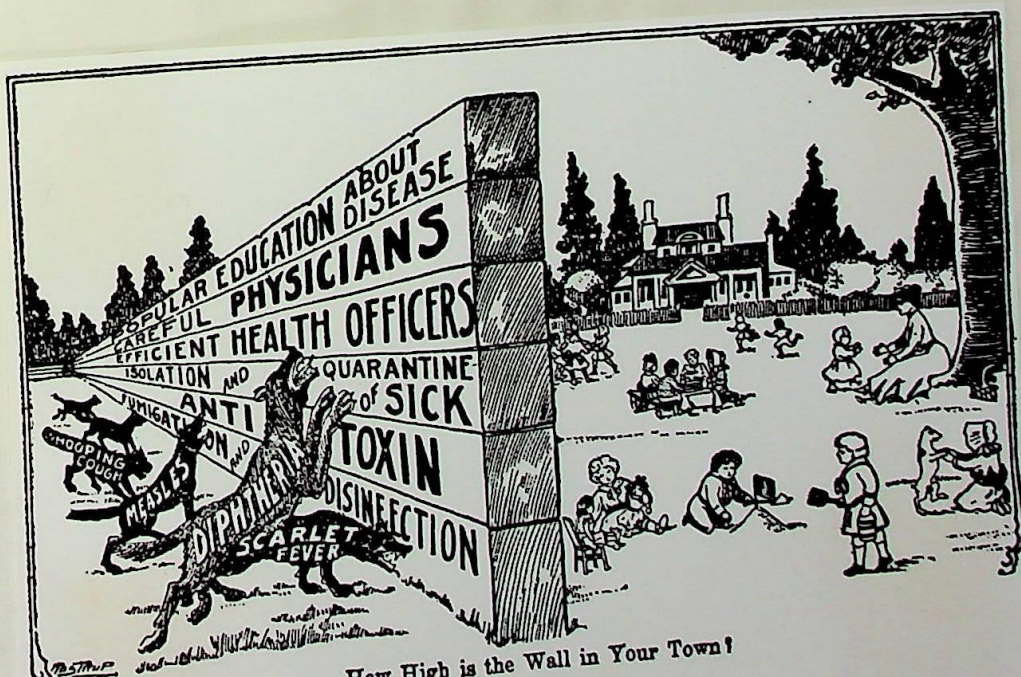
3

Doctor Narayan has a background in veterinary medicine (hence the reference to mosquitos?), quoted from an 'Horizon' Report in 1986 on BBC 2 and reprinted in Leo Bersani's 'Is the Rectum a Grave'. October 43. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 197-222.



Her prose never richer, litters it's beautifully deformed sentences with riveting new images and ideas Her world is ours with it's implications restored spelled out clearly in blood and sperm.

Publicity blurb for
"Empire of the Senseless"
by Kathy Acker



How High is the Wall in Your Town?
Public Health Poster (1910)

fantasies about women's multiple orgasms. This coincides with Victorian and 19th century representations of prostitutes and the notion of promiscuity as the social correlative of a sexuality physiologically grounded in the menacing phenomenon of the non-climactic climax.

Prostitutes publicise (indeed sell) the inherent aptitude of women for uninterrupted sex. Conversely the similarities between representations of female prostitutes and male homosexuals should help us to specify the exact form of sexual behaviour being targeted, in representations of AIDS as the criminal, fatal and irresistibly repeated act.⁴

The realities of syphilis in the 19th century and of AIDS today 'legitimate' a fantasy of female sexuality as intrinsically diseased; and promiscuity in this fantasy far from merely increasing the risk of infection, is the sign of disease, of infection - from moral corruption to corrupt flesh.⁵

Robin Wood in his 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film' elucidates on Freud's Return of the Repressed as the classic tenet of horror theory where the monstrous, which the narrative splits off from the self, is a projection of unacceptable parts of the self and indeed of society. That which has been repressed, buried both in the individual and social psyche returns to haunt and threaten in the form of the 'other' or 'monster'.

⁴ Sander L Gilman. *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from madness to AIDS*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

⁵ Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral Politics in England since 1830*, London, 1987.

And what is largely repressed is sexuality. 'The release of sexuality in the horror film is always presented as perverted monstrous and excessive' This is precisely how homosexuality and (predatory) female sexuality are represented in the wider horror discourse of the popular media (newspapers, t.v.) and peoples imaginations. 'Unnacceptable sexualities are the monster lurking in the gloom of the unconscious.

This splitting off and projection is, if not exactly a solution, at least one way of dealing with what cannot be contemplated; turning the Repressed into an Other.

But what seems to be particularly threatening about AIDS is that it is linked to the breakdown of boundaries.

The virus threatens to cross over that border between the Other and Self; the threat it poses is not only one of disease but one of dissolution, and the contamination of categories.

'It' - as a British government poster so anthropomorphically put it - 'isn't prejudiced'.

And in a kind of analogue to this transgression of social bounds it also 'breaks down' the immunological systems of the body 'letting in' the infections that a functioning immune system keeps firmly out. Thus, while on the one hand, enlisted to the codes of narrative order, the virus becomes a coherent subject with schedules, targets and even an admirable lack of prejudice, on the other it threatens the disintegration of precisely that order of narrative closure which keeps our subjectivity in place - and in its effects on the body itself seems

to produce the very image of dissolution of the subject the self as
cut out from the world and separate from all that is not self.⁶

It may be suggested that gay, lesbian and 'perverse' sex are not frightening merely because they are perceived as 'other' but precisely because they suggest or recall the dissolution of the binary categories on which 'straightdom' rests. The violence of transgression of affirmed categories leads to a disordering of the 'natural' order of things.

6

See Paula Treichler's article on the AIDS crisis as precipitating 'a crisis in signification' in 'Aids, Homophobia, and Bio-Medical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification', October 43, Summer, 1988.

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