

House Arrest
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PhD Art

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Declaration of Authorship I, **Katharine Sarah Fry**, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____ Date: 28/05/19

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Abstract

This thesis is directly informed by my video practice. My videos, produced between 2015 and 2019, show a female figure performing a limited series of gestures in relation to a set of objects and a containing space. I ask why the figure keeps appearing. My answer: she is under *house arrest*, which I define as an animate subject's inability to experience a living return to a primal inanimate state, to the lost wholeness of an originary home. Her desire to return is contained, under compression, by the surface boundary of her skin.

I elaborate on a house arrested subject in relation to my practice and through specific works by three artists: Lili Dujourie's black and white video *Sonnet*, 1974, Francesca Woodman's series of black and white house photographs, and Jayne Parker's black and white 16mm film *K.*, 1989, looking to each for strategies to return home and, in the frustration of each of their attempts, reveal three moments of house arrest.

I read each strategy through a psychoanalytic framework, built on close readings of Freudian texts. The precision with which I unpack specific terminology in each text, to draw out any theoretical problems or discrepancies and to elaborate the condition I call house arrest, constitutes the original contribution of this research. Key examples of this textual analysis are: the distinction between inertia as a tendency and a property in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," the temporal and spatial difference between the former *heim* of the womb and "once upon a time and in the beginning" of "The Uncanny," the contradiction between the sensation of eternity and the threat from the external world in *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, and the nuances of the forms of

repetition Freud conceives in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” “The Uncanny,” and “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through.”

“As from a star I saw, coldly and soberly, the *separateness* of everything. I felt the wall of my skin. I am I. That stone is a stone. My beautiful fusion with the things of this world was over.”

– Sylvia Plath, *Ocean 1212-W*, 1962

“Because you see it's the monotony that's got to me

Every afternoon like the last one

Every afternoon like a rerun

...

And I got something to hide here called desire

I got something to hide here called desire

And I will get out of here...”

– Patti Smith, *Piss Factory*, 1974

“Do you think this feeling can last forever?

You mean, like, forever ever? Forever ever... Forever ever... Forever ever...”

– Desire, *Under Your Spell*, 2009

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Introduction: House Arrest

Pre-Loved and Ex-Display



Figure 1: Katharine Fry, *Pre-Loved and Ex-Display*, 2017, HD video

Her world is an almost liquid surface of gold. She moves. Legs, arms, torso, ripple through gold waves of a golden sea. This sea is a surface like skin that supports her, pressing against her own skin. Her skin presses back, presses the space between the skins. She is in constant motion. So is the video frame that pans up, down and round her body. She is caught and truncated by this frame, part of her body always exposed, part of her body always hidden. Another part is not exposed. Another part is always hidden. It is the other side of the skin. The inside of her skin. Inside the gold skin.

A chorus of voices penetrate the scene –

*“Your flirt, it finds me out, she is the root connection, teases the crack in me,
have I doubt baby when I’m alone, maybe I should have called you first but I
was dying to get to you, she is connecting with he, could taste your sweet kisses
your arms open wide, this fever for you was just burning me up inside, here I go
and I don’t know why, to get to you, take my hand, I spin so ceaselessly, crept in
your room, wanting, needing, waiting, woke you from your sleep, to make love
to you, for you, to justify my love, could it be he’s taking over me, what in this
world keeps us from falling apart, hold me close try to understand, what are
you going to do? desire is hunger is the fire I breathe, love is the banquet on
which we feed, I hear the beating of our one heart, got a bad desire, the world
was on fire, oh-oh-oh I’m on fire, and no-one could save me but you, poor is the
man whose pleasures depend on the permission of another, it’s strange what
desire will make foolish people do, she is addicted to thee, she intoxicated by
thee, she has the slow sensation, cool this desire, that he is levitating with she,
oh god I fell for you, I spin so ceaselessly, I’m open and ready, oh god I fell for
you, I lose my sense of gravity, heartbeat, heartbeat, listen to my heartbeat, my
mouth, flesh, sweat of your body covers me, flesh for fantasy, feel how it
trembles inside, my mouth is touching, my senses tell me to stop, she cried, you
and I engaged in a kiss, and I would be your slave, so life will still go on, sweat
of your body covers me, I feel blood, I want to taste you, remember when I
moved in you, listen to my heartbeat, flesh for fantasy, hello heaven, I need you
right now, possibly maybe, is this desire enough, you have to take me right now,
enough enough, give me a reason to love you, you have to take me right now,
taste the hands that drink my body, find me in the dark, come loose your dogs*

upon me, wrestle your bones over mine, to lift us higher, we make a little history, I just want to be a woman, because this the beginning of forever and ever, chosen by she.”¹

Songs of longing, distance, urgency, getting closer, meeting, getting lost, being saved, merger, surrender, engulfment and incorporation penetrate the scene. A chorus of desire for the transformation of bodies and of time permeates the scene. Each voice sings a story of separation. They trace over the gold surface, over her surface, enunciating these boundaries with each lyric collision.

Woman and world keep pressing. She moves in a fever dream of desire; a dream bound to a surface, her desire bound by a surface. A mouth. A gold ripple. A mouth. A gold ripple. Surface presses against surface. Surfaces separate separate surfaces.

The above is a description of *Pre-Loved and Ex-Display*, an HD video I made in 2017 (see fig. 1). Through it, the desire for something outside the figure plays out in her calls to an other, whom she must “get to,” “connect with.” The call remains unanswered. The figure remains alone. She presses against a gold surface that presses back. The contact between these two surfaces hides an unsatisfied interior.

¹ The soundtrack of *Pre-Loved and Ex-Display* features layered fragments of reinterpreted song lyrics. This extract was transcribed during a single listening and represents what can be caught by the ear rather than a complete and faithful transcription. Lyrics from: *Possibly Maybe*, Bjork; *Justify My Love*, Madonna; *Dancing Barefoot* and *Because the Night*, Patti Smith; *I’m on Fire*, Bruce Springsteen; *I Drove All Night*, Roy Orbison; *Wicked Game*, Chris Isaak; *Heartbeat*, Red7; *Flesh for Fantasy*, Billy Idol; *When Doves Cry*, Prince; *Dragon Queen*, Yeah Yeah Yeahs; *Poison*, Alice Cooper; *I Would Be Your Slave*, David Bowie; *I Feel Blood*, Gazelle Twin; *Hallelujah*, Jeff Buckley; *Yayo*, Lana Del Ray, *Is This Desire?*, PJ Harvey; *The Wizard*, Bat for Lashes; *The Ship Song*, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds; and *Glorybox*, Portishead.

Midas Touch

There is another world of gold born of desire. "Grant that whatever my person touches be turned to yellow gold," King Midas asks of Bacchus.² His wish is granted. Oak branch, plucked apple, harvested grain, stone and streaming water turn to gold at his touch. His appetite for gold is vast and "his hopes soared beyond the limit of his imagination."³ Everything he touches turns to gold. Everything, including any food he tries to enjoy. "No amount of food could relieve his hunger, parching thirst burned his throat, and he was tortured."⁴ What Midas takes in does not nourish him. Instead, as each new mouthful kisses his parting lips and slips into his salivary pools, it solidifies. The morsels of gold tumble on top of each other. The body, usually an open channel from mouth to anus, is blocked as the slipstream of each golden nugget is sealed by its successor. Midas is hungry. He is filling up with gold but his appetite is not satisfied. Continued to extremis, his filled-up digestive tract connects Midas to his gold surroundings. Inside and outside lose their spatial distinction as gold presses everywhere against Midas. Everything, except Midas, loses its distinctness – once told through boundaries and surfaces of difference – in the accumulating gold world. Midas is pressed against a oneness of world that is almost complete bar the still-flesh of his body, the lines of which trace his gold touch, connecting once-glass-oneness to once-wood-oneness to once-chair-oneness, now all-gold-oneness, while remaining a barrier to relinquishing his own boundary distinction. His outline, reflected in a one world

² Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), 271.

³ Ovid, 271.

⁴ Ovid, 272.

mirror of gold, traces his vitality of difference. Midas is held in and against gold oneness.

Ovid's telling of Midas' appetite for gold does not continue his hungerful transformations to the logical extreme that I do. Instead, parched and starved, Midas begs for forgiveness and washes the power of gold transformation from his human flesh. I wonder at the dimensions of Midas' hunger and appetite; if he cries for mercy sooner in Ovid's rendition because he knows he can never be truly full; and what it would mean for him to be truly full. Were my rendering to continue, I speculate if Midas could be pressed any further, compressed any thinner, if he could touch himself to gold and, if he did, where Midas would go. Midas might only know himself by, might only be known by, his boundary outline. I ask, if Midas were to slip into gold, where, what and who he would be, if he could still touch something that is himself or if "he" would be lost. I question which Midas desires most or fears most: becoming gold-oneness, or remaining himself, preserved and reflected as distinct and whole. In my rendering, the contact between Midas and his gold world is one of total compression against a slight remainder of him. His thin skin traces a surface of dissatisfaction that marks desire against a boundary.

Practice Overview

This thesis is directly informed by my video practice. My videos, produced between 2015 and 2019, show a female figure performing a limited series of gestures in relation to a set of objects and a containing space. Considering my practice as whole, I ask why the figure keeps appearing. My answer: she is under *house arrest*, which I define as an animate subject's inability to experience a living return to a primal inanimate state, to

the lost wholeness of an originary home. Her desire to return is contained, under compression, by the surface boundary of her skin.

The house is a vital metaphor throughout my work. It performs both a containment and a separation. It stands for the figure's separate body; for another body with which she might attempt a merger; for the parameters that contain the figure as an animate being; for a decoy onto which nostalgia for the lost originary home is focused; and for this lost home that returns to haunt the figure as an unfamiliar house. Each conjuring of the house reinforces the house arrest of the figure, reiterating her separateness and the constraints of her containment.

The containing spaces in my videos are either recognisable domestic settings or artificially constructed worlds. The domestic spaces – whether an attic (*d.a.n.c.e. f.o.r. y.o.u.r. d.a.d.d.y.*, 2017, *Tablemouth*, 2016, *I would tell you everything but there's no room*, 2016, see figs. 45, 21 & 33), a lounge (*Creepers*, 2017, *And you want*, 2017, *It could be a bossa nova*, 2015, see figs. 43, 41 & 54), a hallway (*Rockingmouth*, 2017, *Prenuptial Hydra*, 2017, see figs. 46 & 44), a bathroom (*Did I get rid of it or are we just pretending not to notice?*, 2015, and *I'll wait like this until I see you again*, 2015, see figs. 52 & 53) – are all familiar spaces that appear unfamiliar due to their anachronistic style or dilapidated condition or by the restricted view onto them allowed by the tight framing of the camera. The artificial worlds – whether rippling gold (*Pre-Loved and Ex-Display*, see fig. 40) multicoloured plastic balls (*I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me.*, 2018, see fig. 38) artificial flowers (*I could stay here forever and I would never die. But like the flowers I would never have been alive.*, 2015, see fig. 51) – offer no clear spatial anchor. Whether a domestic setting or an artificially constructed world, these containers stage a separation between the subject's body and another surface.

I perform the figure in each work but, because I do not consider this as a performance of 'myself,' refer to the figure in the third person, as she or her, throughout this thesis. The recurring figure is dressed as a girlish woman, sometimes a girlchild. She performs robotically, rarely displaying emotion or fatigue. She is part *femme-enfant*, part automaton, two figures that appear in different strategic renderings throughout my thesis. The gestures she performs either respond directly to the site or connect her body to it. This connection is made between each space, a vocabulary of objects – a table (*Tablemouth*), a rocking chair (*Rockingmouth*), gravel (*I would tell you everything but there's no room*), pearls (*Did I get rid of it or are we just pretending not to notice?*), and, often, her mouth. The gestures she performs are limited in their physical scope as her body is constrained by the objects to which she is connected.

I stage my work as encounters with bodies. Whether as a single projection or across multiple screens, each piece plays out as an intimate confrontation where the viewer is invited to perform a particular physical proximity. The work is shown at 1:1 scale. The viewer may crouch with the figure (*Tablemouth*, *I would tell you everything but there's no room*, *Did I get rid of it or are we just pretending not to notice?*, see fig. 22), stand over the figure (*I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me.*, see fig. 39), lay under the figure (*And you want*, see fig. 42), get caught between mirror figures (*Rockingmouth*, see fig. 47), or stand before a room-size projection, hovering on the threshold of the world that contains the figure (*Pre-Loved and Ex-Display*, *I could stay here forever and I would never die. But like the flowers I would never have been alive.*, *d.a.n.c.e. f.o.r. y.o.u.r. d.a.d.d.y.* and *Creepers*).

The figure under house arrest is contained by multiple limiting systems. She is contained by the narrow gestures she can perform; by the specific requirements of

each object which set her gestures; by the limits of her surrounding space; by the video frame which further marks the limits of her physical space and adds another condition to the range of gestures she can perform; and contained by the structure of video, by the position and rate of the cut that place her in a binding that is temporal as well as spatial.

Key Themes

My aim in writing this thesis was to conceive a plot through which the figure could leave the house, could break out of house arrest. Instead, I reveal the ambivalent tension that plays out on the surface boundary between a figure and her containing environment as a fever dream of desire, a desire contained in her body that, if released, might return her home, a desire that vibrates on the paradoxical surface of her skin, at once how she meets the world and remains separate from it. This thesis elaborates on figure under house arrest, haunted by an impossible fantasy and an inexhaustible desire, in relation to my practice and through specific works by three artists: Lili Dujourie's black and white video *Sonnet*, 1974, Francesca Woodman's series of black and white house photographs, 1976, and Jayne Parker's black and white 16mm film *K.*, 1989. I connect the figures in these works to the figure who recurs in my videos. I look to them for strategies to return home and, in the frustration of each of their attempts, reveal three aspects of house arrest. The figure moving against the gold surface of *Pre-Loved and Ex-Display* serves as a through-line to the thesis and is to be kept in mind for the duration of this text. Midas, though not the central figure, is not to be forgotten. Though my thesis looks specifically at representations of women,

considering resistance to a proscribed femininity and a maternal role against a back-drop of second-wave feminism, Midas is also to be kept in mind as I suggest that house arrest is the condition of every subject, constituted by loss and trying to shore up a fragile sense of self with decoys and consolations.

This thesis reaches in two directions. It reaches for the beginning, the very beginning, or rather for *something* before there was a beginning. This *something* is taken up in my thesis as a fantasy home, a pre-Big Bang imagined oneness that I read in Sigmund Freud's conjuring of the *death drive* in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle."⁵ Here Freud asserts that all organic life "must aspire to an old, primordial state from which it once departed, and to which via all the circuitous byways of development it strives to return,"⁶ an aspiration that is "a manifestation of inertia in organic life."⁷ "The aim of all life is death," Freud concludes, because "the inanimate existed before the animate."⁸ There are parallels between Freud's rendering of the primordial inanimate, Jacques Lacan's prelinguistic *Real* and Georges Bataille's *informe*. Lacan identifies the Real as "the beyond-of-the-signified," outside language and outside the unconscious.⁹ It is the lost object of desire that must be re-sought and re-found. It is the prehistoric, unforgettable Other. For Bataille, writing in 1929, the *informe* is "a term that serves to bring things down in the world," before the universe took shape, where "the universe resembles nothing and is only formless."¹⁰ I define the fantasy home that precedes the

⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," (1920) in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. John Reddick (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 43–102.

⁶ Freud, 78.

⁷ Freud, 76.

⁸ Freud, 78.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 2008), 54.

¹⁰ Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 31.

beginning as a formless, primordial, inanimate state that, once lost, is the sole object of desire. The animate subject comes into being through, and following, separation from this inanimate state. This separation is originary trauma. I align this originary trauma, the loss of an originary home, with the binding of the subject under house arrest. Here house arrest is the inability of the animate subject to experience a living return to a primal inanimate state, told through Dujourie's figure in *Sonnet*.

I align this originary trauma to Freud's formulation of melancholia, paraphrased by Christine Ross in *The Aesthetics of Disengagement*, as the "inability to grieve the loss of a loved object whose loss, however, can never be clearly identified."¹¹ There is, however, a founding paradox of the melancholic's relationship to the lost object. Ross draws on Jacques Hassoun's *La Cruauté Mélancolique* to assert that the melancholic's "inability to grieve the lost object comes precisely from the consistent experience of the object as not lost, in the sense that it never happened, was never made alive and present, and therefore was never subject to loss."¹² It appears, then, that loss is not the loss of an object, but the loss of a state before there was a subject and object. Melancholia is the experience of absolute loss, of absolute absence of meaning, of a lost sense of meaning before the separation of the subject from its objects. As such, according to Ross, "the melancholic subject attempts to recover a meaning that is impossible to recover in any symbolisable form" but all she can do is "brood over fragments."¹³ The melancholic subject is a subject-as-fragment trying to piece together an impossible whole out of other fragments. It appears that is not just the melancholic

¹¹ Christine Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 21.

¹² Jacques Hassoun, *La Cruauté Mélancolique* (1995; repr., Paris: Flamarrion, 1997), 44, quoted in Ross, 22.

¹³ Ross, 23.

subject, but the subject *tout court* that is defined by loss, defined through loss. The becoming of the subject can, necessarily, only follow the sense of loss of a prior plenitude. Sensing this loss as fundamental, as an originary trauma, the subject constitutes herself as loss. There are two senses of loss at stake in the subject: the loss through which she becomes animate through her separation from a prior plenitude, and the loss that she internalises, sensing herself as less than whole. Reaching back, clutching at fragments, the subject of loss, subject to house arrest, tries to return home. Yet now she is cast as separate there is no easy return, only a thwarted homecoming. She inhabits the essence of nostalgia, where nostalgia comes from the Greek compound of *nostos*, meaning homecoming, and *algos*, meaning pain or ache. Hers is a longing for a return home that cannot be achieved.

The separate subject tries to shore up her sense of loss by casting herself as whole. I link this casting to the conjuring of the ideal self Lacan describes in the *mirror stage*.¹⁴ This ideal self is traced through the externally posited contours of a bodily totality, a bodily totality apprehended first by the subject as her own reflection, then through identification with an other.¹⁵ This is her entrance into the Imaginary that takes place when the infant subject is around six months old.¹⁶ In her capture as this ideal, she is frozen before her projected totality, like a statue.¹⁷ Something inside her is at odds with and inadequate to this ideal, cast in “rigid armour.”¹⁸ It is her “organic

¹⁴ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function (1949),” in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, N.Y.; London: W.W. Norton, 2007), 75–81.

¹⁵ Lacan, 76.

¹⁶ Lacan, 75.

¹⁷ Lacan, 76.

¹⁸ Lacan, 76.

inadequacy,”¹⁹ an inadequacy that I align with her internalised sense of loss. This “organic inadequacy” persists as a wound that threatens to split out of, spill over, and shatter the ideally contoured subject. The vulnerable subject, lesser than her projected ideal, encounters a second pressure, a second external posited ideal that is cast on her through the social. As Will Storr elaborates in *Selfie: How We Became So Self-Obsessed and What It’s Doing to Us*, the ideal subject is neither timeless nor ahistorical.²⁰ At any given moment, she is subject to the expectations of her contemporaries, framed by and through culture, formed by the stories that surround her and by the image the subject has of herself. In both externally posited ideals, she is captured as a projected object with which she can never coincide. Both ideals are plotted on her skin, a “rigid armour” that is reflected back to her and seen by others as her. Her skin marks her as separate and reveals her distinguishing features – young, white, female in the case of this thesis’s figures – that serve to shape her particular role: adult woman, wife, mother.

The nostalgic separate subject, cast into the animate, failing to return home, failing to meet the ideals projected onto her, is subject to depression. Ross draws on Tom Pyszczynski and Jeff Greenberg in *Hanging On and Letting Go: Understanding the Onset, Maintenance, and Remission of Depression* to posit depression as “the result of the individual failing to give up on an unobtainable goal when it would be adaptive to do so.”²¹ The unobtainable goal appears twofold: the lost wholeness from which the animate subject has been separated, and the failure of this subject of loss to

¹⁹ Lacan, 77.

²⁰ Will Storr, *Selfie: How We Became So Self-Obsessed and What It’s Doing To Us* (London: Picador, 2017), 18.

²¹ Tom Pyszczynski and Jeff Greenberg, *Hanging On and Letting Go: Understanding the Onset, Maintenance, and Remission of Depression* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992), 8, quoted in Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 86.

correspond to an external ideal. Ross reveals “the female subject as a body that is ‘not whole’” to define depression as “an insufficiency of the self.”²² She considers depression as both a coping mechanism against, as well as, a manifestation of the subject’s failure to live up to an ideal role.²³ I look to mobilise depression beyond Ross’s failing and coping mechanism to activate another possibility for the subject of loss, as a way for her to return home. Ross refers to Pierre Fédida who describes depression as “the conservation of the living under its inanimate form.”²⁴ Depression, he continues “is this experience of disappearance (of self) and this fascination with a *death state* – perhaps a *dead person* – which would then be the sole capacity to stay an inanimate being.”²⁵ Here depression appears as a way of copying the imagined conditions of the unobtainable home. To conserve the living under an inanimate form, to imitate a death state, to act like a dead person, all coincide with the Freudian death drive, the powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior inanimate state.²⁶ There is a problem with the strategy chosen by the depressed subject who will not give up on an unobtainable goal and who imitates death. The problem is one of rehearsal. The subject has been cast into an animate role that she has no desire to play. Refusing to perform what is expected of her, refusing to take up any responsibilities her current state might demand, she turns to inertia. In her refusal, she adopts inertia and imitates being inanimate. But, to imitate being inanimate is not to be inanimate. To imitate the conditions of the imagined home is not to be home. The subject rehearses one set of conditions under another set of conditions. Here I

²² Ross, 80.

²³ Ross, 83.

²⁴ Pierre Fédida, *Des bienfaits de la depression* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 2001), 14, trans. Christine Ross quoted in Ross, 40.

²⁵ Pierre Fédida, *Des bienfaits de la depression* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 2001), 16, trans. Christine Ross quoted in Ross, 42.

²⁶ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 86.

connect rehearsal to re-staging. The animate subject tries and fails to re-stage the imagined conditions of her lost home. In line with the French, where a rehearsal is a *répétition*, I connect rehearsal to repetition through “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” in which Freud unpacks repetition in two distinct accounts. The first account of repetition is the famous *fort | da* game. Observing a child disappearing (*fort / gone*) and reappearing (*da / here*) a wooden reel tied to a string over the side of their crib, Freud took the game to stand for the disappearance and reappearance of the child’s mother that, in repeating through their own restaging, gave the child a sense of comforting mastery.²⁷ The second is the repetition he observes in elementary organisms which “did not start out with any desire to change, and given the continuance of the same circumstances would have constantly repeated the self-same life-cycle,” a compulsion he formulates as the death drive.²⁸ I connect the subject’s rehearsal with the compulsion to repeat as both a compulsion to mask loss and a compulsion to return. She is imitating a dead person, repeating a lost inanimate state under the wrong circumstances in a bid to mask this loss while her repetitions of this imitation mark her restorative bid to return. Her doomed to fail rehearsals bind the subject in a depressive mechanism of compulsive repetition.

If the return to the inanimate, the shortest path home, is not available to the subject through this mechanism of depressive rehearsal, what other decoys or detours might she try? I read in Freud’s “The Uncanny” another compulsion to repeat and another incarnation of home. In his 1919 essay, Freud summarises *the uncanny* as “that class of

²⁷ Freud, 53.

²⁸ Freud, 78.

the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”²⁹ I connect this “known of old and long familiar” to the “old, primordial state”³⁰ from which all organic life departed and to which it strives to return that he describes in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.” Freud gathers a history of the uncanny, first through definitions then through occurrences. Uncanny in German is *unheimlich*, unhomely, the opposite of *heimlich*, homely. He begins with definitions of *heimlich* as “belonging to the house, familiar, and intimate,” then expands belonging to the house to cover “secretive, concealed, and withdrawn from the eyes of strangers.”³¹ He outlines *unheimlich*, as something “eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear.”³² Eventually, he asserts *unheimlich* “is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light.”³³ For Freud then, “*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*.”³⁴ According to Freud, the first *unheimlich* place is the female body, the womb as “the former *heim* (home) of all beings where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning.”³⁵ He later identifies that, for many, the idea of being buried alive while appearing to be dead is the most uncanny thing of all, but held this terrifying fantasy to be a transformation of the blissful fantasy of intra-uterine existence.³⁶ I notice in Freud’s description of the first home, the use of the fairy tale term “once upon a time,” a turn of phrase that Marina Warner suggests “promises an unbroken link with the

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XVII (1917-1919) An Infantile Neurosis, The Uncanny and Other Works.*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1978), 220.

³⁰ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 78.

³¹ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 222–23.

³² Freud, 224.

³³ Freud, 224.

³⁴ Freud, 226.

³⁵ Freud, 244.

³⁶ Freud, 244.

past.”³⁷ I cast the former home back further than the womb and align the lost prior inanimate state with an originary *heim*.

Freud links the compulsion to repeat that he associates with both the death drive and trauma in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” to the uncanny, saying that “whatever reminds us of this inner repetition-compulsion is perceived as uncanny.”³⁸ For Freud, uncanny repetition is the same situation recurring or returning but, most frightening, is “something repressed which *recurs*.”³⁹ This repressed recursion makes good the extension of *heimlich* into *unheimlich* and returns Freud to his opening definition of the uncanny as “in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.”⁴⁰ Following the logic of the Freudian uncanny, there is a mechanism, powered by repetition, to return to an originary *heim* which is now, by definition, *unheimlich*. It has become *unheimlich* because there has been a casting out from and a separation with the *heim*. This separation is linked to a change in state, from the inanimate to the animate. What was once familiar, the *heimlich heim*, is now unfamiliar, *unheimlich*, because it can no longer be accessed. The lost home appears unfamiliar to the subject in her animate form, it haunts her as a persistent interruption, a recursion of the repressed and drives her longing to return.

There are clear links between the Gothic plot and the story played out in this thesis.

Though the figure of the young woman is the focus of each chapter, the spectre of the maternal runs throughout. The figure imitates inertia to avoid assuming a maternal

³⁷ Marina Warner, *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 53.

³⁸ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 238.

³⁹ Freud, 236–37, 241.

⁴⁰ Freud, 241.

role. She tries to return home through a merger with a maternal body while also resisting engulfment by the maternal body to establish her own boundaries. I suggest the subject is trapped in a haunted house and read this house through the typical features of the Gothic plot, summarised by Clare Kahane in “Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity” as a young woman whose mother has died seeking out the centre of a mystery within an imprisoning structure while subject to, usually, sexual threats from a male figure.⁴¹ This imprisoning structure is, according to Kahane who cites Leslie Fiedler, “the womb from whose darkness the ego first emerged, the tomb to which it knows it must return at last.”⁴² Kahane links the maternal spectre at the centre of the Gothic plot with the period of early infancy psychoanalysts call primary unity, during which “mother and infant are locked into a symbiotic relation, an experience of oneness characterized by a blurring of boundaries between mother and infant—a dual unity preceding the sense of separate self.”⁴³ Through Woodman’s figure in *House, Space²* and *My House*, I consider a merger with the maternal body, a return to the first *heim* of the womb that simulates the state of primary unity, as a strategy to return to the lost originary home. Primary unity emerges as a fantasy, as does the sanctuary of merger. The womb is not a static environment that holds an inanimate subject in a constant state. It is *the* developmental space *par excellence*. All is change in gestation. All is division and multiplication. The womb is a space of separation rather than merger. Even at the point of connection of foetus to placenta to mother, there is still a separation. It is two cells thick. This separation is another aspect

⁴¹ Claire Kahane, “Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity,” *The Centennial Review* 24, no. 1 (1980): 45–46.

⁴² Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Dell, 1966), 132, quoted in Kahane, 47.

⁴³ Kahane, 48.

of house arrest. The subject confuses the decoy of the maternal body with lost inanimate wholeness and remains arrested by her separating skin.

It is through the interplay between the figure and the maternal body that I focus on the physical and psychic properties of the separating skin. In *The Skin Ego*, Didier Anzieu describes the 'Skin-ego' as "a mental image used by the child's Ego during its early stages of development to represent itself as an Ego containing psychical contents, based on its experience of the surface of the body."⁴⁴ The skin-ego is supported by the functions of the skin, simultaneously "a system for protecting our individuality and a first instrument and site of interaction with others."⁴⁵ In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud suggests that the skin is a necrotised outer receptor layer that protects an organism's deeper receptor layers from the powerful excitations of the outside world. As part of the psychic apparatus, according to Freud, it aspires to "keep the quantity of excitation present within it at the lowest possible level, or at least to keep it constant."⁴⁶ The skin not only marks a physical boundary, it is inherently linked to a psychic boundary, it is a psychic and physical apparatus that sits at the border between the external and internal. It is in relation to maternal care that this internal/external boundary is first established. For Anzieu, maternal care is an "external envelop"⁴⁷ made of messages which leaves space between "the inner envelope, the surface of the baby's body."⁴⁸ For him "if the external layer sticks too closely to the child's skin ... the child's ego is suffocated, it is invaded by one of the Egos in its environment; ... if the outer layer is too loose, the ego lacks consistency."⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Naomi Segal (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 43.

⁴⁵ Anzieu, 3.

⁴⁶ Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)," 47.

⁴⁷ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 62.

⁴⁸ Anzieu, 62.

⁴⁹ Anzieu, 62.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes the role of maternal authority in establishing the subject's boundaries, first through oral frustrations then through sphincteral training and excremental prohibitions. Maternal authority shapes the infant's body "into a territory having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows."⁵⁰ She describes *the abject* as a kind of ambiguous border which threatens the certainty of the subject's boundaries.⁵¹ For Kristeva, milk appears as the first sign of maternal authority that penetrates the infant and is emblematic of the abject, crossing the boundary of her clean and proper body, threatening her autonomy.⁵²

It is in relation to maternal care, whether in excess or in its absence, that the animate subject first becomes aware of her "organic inadequacy,"⁵³ her "irritable matter,"⁵⁴ a force inside her I align with desire. In the extra-mural environment, the infant feels hungry. Her hunger is felt as an empty stomach, as an emptiness. Her hunger for milk launches a need that is satisfied by her mother. This need is a gap. Even if satisfaction is given and received in a nanosecond, there is still a gap. This gap is desire. This need, as a gap, ignites the chain of desire for the other. To close the gap through fusion is the refrain for wholeness, constantly broken at the meeting of the boundaries of mother and infant, at their surfaces of separation. This gap as desire opens in originary trauma. What follows the separation of the animate from the inanimate is desire. What appears in the gap between lost home and subject is desire. Desire drives the subject to close this gap, to undo separation, but desire is contingent on a gap, on a

⁵⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 72.

⁵¹ Kristeva, 9.

⁵² Kristeva, 2–3.

⁵³ Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function (1949)," 77.

⁵⁴ Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)," 66.

separation. Each attempt to close the gap is caught against the separating surface of the skin. Desire is contained by this surface boundary.

It is from this containing surface boundary of skin that this thesis reaches in another direction. It reaches forward, driven by desire. In *Aurelia*, Carol Mavor draws on Lacan to describe desire as a weapon against nostalgia.⁵⁵ Desire, like a carrot on a string, “is always before us, ‘eternally stretching forth towards the desire for something else.’”⁵⁶

Desire, according to Lacan, is a metonymy, a displacement. The lost state appears to be positioned ‘behind’ the subject, as a before-the-beginning. Desire, as a stretching forth, could propel the subject away from this loss, away from exposure to the impossibility of her return. However, each displacement, each encounter with an object can only fail because the separate animate subject can never find inanimate wholeness with another separate object. Desire is born at the moment of originary trauma, driven by nostalgia for a lost home. It reaches in two directions at once for something that is always out of reach. Each reach forward is really a displaced attempt to reach the before-the-beginning again. It is a reach toward a lost past that has been miscast, rendered unfamiliar as it appears as a graspable future. Desire is an inexhaustible force contained by the boundary of the skin.

In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Freud asserts that the pleasure principle serves to “render the psychic apparatus completely free of excitation, or to keep the quantum of excitation within it constant, or to keep it at the lowest possible level. [...] [It partakes] in that most universal endeavour in all living matter to revert to the quiescence of the

⁵⁵ Carol Mavor, *Aurelia: Art and Literature Through the Mouth of the Fairy Tale* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), 59.

⁵⁶ Mavor, 59.

inorganic world.”⁵⁷ I equate this excitation with desire but question why he deems this constancy to be at a low ebb. I imagine desire as a level of excitation breaking out from its enclosing layer to join its mirror intensity in the external world. I think of this desire as under compression using a spatial metaphor in relation to Gordon Matta-Clark’s work as described by Anne Carson in *Float, Cassandra Float Can*: “He spoke of “liberating” the compressed force of a building simply by making a hole.”⁵⁸ I explore releasing compressed desire contained by the boundary of skin through Parker’s figure in *K.*, proposing two ways of releasing desire from the boundaried body: sealing the body further, putting desire outside and becoming impenetrable like a stone; and by dissolving the skin, becoming a no-body in which no desire can be contained. By sealing herself, the subject presses inwards, creating a wholeness-unto-self. The subject as a stone is a movement towards immobility. Her stasis and sealing suggest a way of blocking external stimuli, of being a self-sufficient self-unto-self, a primary narcissism of onanistic need satisfaction rather than any primary unity between self and other. This stone state of stasis is the physical echo of the subject who rehearses inanimacy through a performed refusal. The stone is impenetrable, impermeable. Her stone-like narcissism tends her unto a withering death. The isolated subject withers in her meagre oneness, her desire still pressing for release against her isolating boundary. The subject looks to release her persisting desire by dissolving her boundary, a dissolution I think through in relation to Freud’s *oceanic feeling*. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud outlines the oceanic feeling as a “sensation of eternity,” “a feeling of an

⁵⁷ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 101.

⁵⁸ Anne Carson, “Cassandra Float Can,” in *Float: A Collection of Twenty-Two Chapbooks Whose Order Is Unfixed and Whose Topics Are Various* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016).

indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole.”⁵⁹ He works through this feeling in relation to the demarcation of the ego, stating “normally, there is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego” that this ego “appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else.”⁶⁰ He concludes that “originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself”⁶¹ and links the oceanic feeling to a primary ego-feeling that is a “much more inclusive – indeed, an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it.”⁶² This limitless, unbounded feeling sounds similar to originary, inanimate wholeness, now rendered as watery. But it also recalls the fantasy of primary unity and can be read as another maternal metaphor. As Astrida Neimanis points out in “Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water,”⁶³ a watery commons is made of connected, but separate bodies. She asserts that “bodies need water, but water also needs a body,” that bodies are always differentiated, ultimately insisting that “any body still requires membranes to keep from being swept out to sea altogether,” fundamentally resisting total dissolution.⁶⁴ The oceanic feeling is revealed as limited, another decoy for a return that remains contingent on a separating boundary.

If a total dissolution of her boundary proves possible, I consider the consequences of the subject’s return to wholeness, what happens to ‘her,’ where ‘she’ goes in the

⁵⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), 12.

⁶⁰ Freud, 12.

⁶¹ Freud, 15.

⁶² Freud, 15.

⁶³ Astrida Neimanis, “Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water,” in *Undutiful Daughters : New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 96–115.

⁶⁴ Neimanis, 103–4.

absence of her distinguishing boundary, through Roger Caillois' essay "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia."⁶⁵ He names a disturbance in relations between personality and space legendary psychasthenia. These relations are undermined when someone can no longer distinguish themselves from their surroundings nor attach their consciousness to a specific point in space. Caillois asserts that life depends on maintaining a sense of the boundary containing the self, the loss of which leads to a merger between self and setting, a dispossession or derealisation, through which the subject is "not similar to something, but just similar."⁶⁶ Though this becoming similar appears to offer the release of desire in the return to wholeness, I suggest that it must always be beyond the subject's reach. In *Language of Psychoanalysis*, Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis assert that "the very concept of an organism implies the permanent maintenance of an energy-level different from that obtaining in the environment"⁶⁷ against the tendency to inertia Freud posits through the death drive, a tendency that would make the animate subject "just similar." The undifferentiated body is an oxymoron, an impossible fantasy. The subject remains caught under house arrest, caught on the skin as an impossible threshold, caught under the conditions of being animate from which she cannot return. Through each strategy of return she played out in the animate, she can only be established as boundaried and her desire can only persist in her containment, never to be released.

⁶⁵ Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia (1935)," trans. John Shepley, *October* 31 (1984): 17–32.

⁶⁶ Caillois, 30.

⁶⁷ Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac, 1988), 349.

Rationale

This thesis completes an investigation I began 15 years ago when I first considered the figure who returns in my practice as performing inertia to return to the state of quiescence Freud describes through the death drive in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.” The figure then often appeared with her double, or indeed with multiples, and it is from this angle that I first approached “The Uncanny.” I found, at the time, the figure to be bound in failure, bound to fail, failing to escape from or through her repeating gestures. My practice shifted to installations that denied the presence of the body, indeed obliterated knowledge of the body, and my line of enquiry became phenomenological and temporal. However, the body continued to insist, the problem of the failing body persisted and my unresolved questions returned. I took up this unfinished business and returned to the same Freudian texts, the core texts discussed in this thesis, to see if I might uncover a different possibility.

It is for this reason that I have chosen a Freudian psychoanalytic approach for my investigation. The story of house arrest I tell shares parallels with other Lacanian terms beyond the use I make of the mirror stage to describe a boundaried subject at odds with a projected ideal with which she can never coincide. The lost home from which the subject has been separated could be aligned with the lost fullness and completeness of the Real. The gap between the subject and the lost home that sets desire in motion and constitutes the subject as a subject of loss could be aligned with *objet petit a*.⁶⁸ In *Beyond Pleasure*, Margaret Iverson unpacks Jacques Lacan’s *objet*

⁶⁸ See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX Encore, 1972-1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998) and *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*.

petit a as that which “sets desire in motion and which, paradoxically, represents both a hole in the integrity of our world and the thing that comes to hide the hole, both the blot in the landscape and its dissimulation.”⁶⁹ This object cannot satisfy desire, merely reveal it through revealing an absence or void. She references Lacan’s pun on a *sujet troué* using an *objet trouvé*. The subject full of holes, neither fully rendered in the Imaginary nor fully rendered in its own organic inadequacy, uses a found object “to figure both the hole and the missing bit.”⁷⁰ However, I find a greater relevance for my investigation in Freud’s terms. As such, I have chosen to frame the formation of the psychic and physical boundary of the subject and her separation from originary wholeness in relation to the trajectory of the simple organism Freud describes in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” and the decoy of the maternal body as an object that complete the subject of loss through a temporal play with the *heim* in “The Uncanny.”

As noted in the Practice Overview, the house is a vital, shifting, metaphor throughout my work. The house is also a key concept running through this thesis, appearing in combination with, or in juxtaposition to, a home. The play between these terms is the tool through which I approach the core texts this thesis considers. In my reading of “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” I align the primordial state that precedes the inanimate that Freud describes with a home that has been lost. The simple organism Freud defines as “a vesicle of irritable matter”⁷¹ is distinguished by a membrane or, as I term it, contained in a house traced by the contours of her skin. The lost home reappears in “The Uncanny” as the *unheimlich*, “that class of the frightening which

⁶⁹ Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 65.

⁷⁰ Iversen, 66.

⁷¹ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 66.

leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”⁷² It returns to haunt the subject, trapped in the house of her body. Freud terms the womb “the former *heim* (home) of all beings where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning”⁷³ but I consider this a false home, a decoy that does not lead to the lost home. The maternal body is another, separate body, boundaried by skin, another house that cannot offer the unity of home. In *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, Freud conjures unity through the oceanic feeling as “an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole” that is a “residue of a much more inclusive—indeed, an all-embracing—feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it.”⁷⁴ I find in this watery unity another maternal metaphor, another false home, another house that cannot lead to a lost home. In line with Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis’ assertion that “the very concept of an organism implies the permanent maintenance of an energy-level different from that obtaining in the environment,”⁷⁵ the animate subject can only appear as a house and can never go home.

This thesis uses the house in relation to the boundary that contains the animate subject and in relation to her separation from an originary home. It uses the image of the house as a container to explore the establishing of the animate subject’s psychic boundary and sense of self in relation to her physical boundary, in line with Freud, Kristeva and Anzieu. My thesis moves between the psychic and the physical, drawing out the interrelation between the two. As such, together with the works by Dujourie, Woodman and Parker, I use examples from sculpture and architecture to illustrate

⁷² Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 220.

⁷³ Freud, 244.

⁷⁴ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 12, 16.

⁷⁵ Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 349.

how different psychic states are determined in relation to the body. The container the subject encounters may be psychic, spatial or temporal.

The figure who recurs in my practice is central to the conception of this thesis. I have chosen to analyse works by Dujourie, Woodman and Parker, looking for strategies to return home in each, due to the connections I see between their practices and mine, together with between my figure and their represented figures. Each performs in the works I discuss, but not literally as 'herself'. Rather, each performs a persona, typically a 'young woman.' All three artists are present both in front of and behind the camera, staging their bodies as both subject and object of the work. This mode of production makes for works that feel immediate and intimate. I make reference to particular contexts in which the different artists were working but link all the represented figures together through house arrest as a shared condition before noting their diverging strategies and frustrations in their bids to return home.

I choose not to focus on the different histories of the media they use, video for Dujourie, photography for Woodman and film for Parker. Instead, I connect their disparate practices by unpacking how each artist responds to the constraints of their chosen medium, and how each response expands a facet of house arrest. Through Dujourie's use of the single take of early domestic video technology without editing facilities, I read a staging of the constraints of linear temporal parameters and teleological plotting together with a performance of resistance. Through Woodman's use of the serial instants of photography together with the capture of stillness and movement by variable shutter speed, I read a resistance to the same temporal parameters by sliding out of the frame and a bid for merger through the frame. Through Parker's framing and cutting of 16mm film, I read a body that is at once

fragmented and confirmed. I use the tools and constraints of HD video to manipulate the representation of time and movement, disrupting the flow of continuity, stilling and moving a body, staging reversals and returns, and combining multiple temporalities in the same frame.

I consider all three artists to be using a time-based surface medium. Though they all stage their bodies for the camera, their presented bodies are held at a distance. Even if they are imagined as co-present by a viewer, each medium stages a separating skin, a disconnection. In each work an encounter is missed. Each surface medium creates a partition or impenetrable barrier between figure and viewer. Each acts as an obstructing surface that serves to keep the other at distance. Each medium as a barrier makes evident the narcissistic withdrawal of the figure from the external world. The viewer is called before this barrier as a witness or is physically implicated in relation to the figure but they are not recognised, contacted or held by her. Figure and viewer are both protected and isolated by the obstructing surface of the screen. Neither can threaten or penetrate the boundary of the other, but neither can nourish the other. A gap persists between figure and viewer in which a desire to meet emerges in tandem with a fear of engulfment. There is no meeting and a vertigo is set in motion. Both figure and viewer try to ward off but are subject to a loss without a restoration that is elaborated through this thesis.

Through close readings of well-trodden Freudian texts, I try to understand the figure and the house that recur in my practice. The precision with which I unpack specific terminology in each text, to draw out any theoretical problems or discrepancies and to elaborate the condition I call house arrest, constitutes the original contribution of this research. Key examples of this textual analysis are: the distinction between inertia as a

tendency and a property in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” the temporal and spatial difference between the former *heim* of the womb and “once upon a time and in the beginning” of “The Uncanny,” the contradiction between the sensation of eternity and the threat from the external world in *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, and the nuances of the forms of repetition Freud conceives in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” “The Uncanny,” and “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through.”

The thesis is divided into three chapters, each one analysing a single artist’s work, reading a strategy to return and its frustration through a psychoanalytic framework to reveal an aspect of house arrest. Each chapter begins with a detailed description of a specific work or series, using evocative language to draw out the minutiae of what is represented in relation to the body and a container. Each description operates as a projection, generating a closed single reading of each work, sealing them in this way to build the story of house arrest. This description is followed by a brief contextualisation of the artist and the specific work. The rest of the chapter is a close analysis of the work in a tandem with a close reading of a specific Freudian text with key points illustrated using sculptural works by other artists together with other psychoanalytic sources including Kristeva, Lacan, Laplanche and Pontalis, and Anzieu. Practice intertexts sit between the chapters linking six of my works to the themes discussed in each. These are deliberately written in different register to the chapters, offering description rather than analysis. This is because I resist a closed or proscribed reading of my work, instead using this resistance as a strategy to generate ambivalence in the viewer as to whether they are witnessing an agent or a victim and whether any suggested closure is a reality or a fantasy. The thesis is accompanied by seven HD videos to view, documentation of my PhD exhibition and an illustrated videography

spanning 2015 to 2019.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One uses Lili Dujourie's 1974 black and white video *Sonnet* and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" to frame house arrest in relation to a lost home and through a separating skin. I argue that the figure caught on tape in Dujourie's *Sonnet* has been cast out of an originary home of inanimate wholeness. She is cast as a separate animate subject defined by her surface boundary and the roles that can be inscribed on it. This boundary, her skin, marks the distinction between her and her environment and makes a separation between internal and external forces. She rehearses inertia to return to a lost originary home, without the pressure of a prolonged detour of the plot of life. Her return to inanimate wholeness is blocked by being an animate subject, distinct from her environment by definition. She is left far from home and subject to two house arrests, by the framing parameters of her lifespan and by the rigid armour of her skin. Chapter One is followed by intertexts on videos *I could stay here forever and I would never die. But like the flowers I would never have been alive.* and *I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me.*

Chapter Two uses Francesca Woodman's three black and white photographs from 1976, *House*, *Space²* and *My House*, and "The Uncanny" to look for a merger with the maternal body as a possible, ultimately false, return home. I argue that Woodman's figure, dis/appearing in dereliction in these photographs, is trying to stage a return home in relation to the photographic frame. Her figure sliding to evade capture by the framing parameters of the camera shutter is a metaphor for the framing parameters of

her lifespan. I find her trying to return home through merging with a derelict house as a metaphor for the maternal body. She can find no return home through the maternal body, a developmental space intrinsically marked by time. She can find no merger with the maternal house as the bodies of mother and child are always defined as and held as separate. Woodman's figure, like Dujourie's, is arrested by her separating skin. She persists in repeated returns to a maternal house that can neither make her whole nor halt her plot. Her failed returns are marked by ambivalence. She longs to return but fears her surrender now she is an animate being. The maternal house offers her no transformation, no return to wholeness because it is a false stand-in for the lost originary home. Chapter two is followed by intertexts on videos *d.a.n.c.e. f.o.r. y.o.u.r. d.a.d.d.y.* and *Tablemouth*.

Chapter Three uses Jayne Parker's 1989 black and white 16mm film *K.*, Freud's oceanic feeling and Kristeva's abject to reveal desire contained in a separate body that looks to release it, first by sealing the body against any intrusion, then by dissolving the separating boundary of the skin. By removing her intestines, she denies having a surface in conflict with an inner force by becoming a single, filled-in mass, a stone. I consider this figure-become-stone in relation to fullness and emptiness, too much or too little maternal care and Julia Kristeva's rendering of abjection. I conjure a turn to stone as a short circuit return to inanimate wholeness, both through readings of Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." By framing fragments of her body repeatedly diving into water before the final shot freezes on a full-body dive, I suggest Parker's figure is attempting to dissolve her surface of skin, releasing compressed desire into equilibrium with its environment. I consider Parker's "dissolving" figure by contrasting the watery maternal environments of Astrida Neimanis's *hydrofeminism* with Freud's

oceanic feeling. I find an ambivalent subject who trembles between wanting to dissolve her “I” as much wanting to prove herself to be concretely impermeable. I link this trembling to Roger Caillois’ “just similar” subject in “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia.” Chapter Three is followed by an intertext on video *I would tell you everything but there’s no room*.

In my Conclusion, I draw together the three figures in the works I analysed by Dujourie, Woodman and Parker to contextualise house arrest as the defining condition of every animate being. I recap the story of house arrest. The subject, separated from her ordinary home of inanimate wholeness, finds herself contained in a house, performing a role she had no desire to be cast in. Her desire is only for her lost home. She tries to reach for her lost home but her way back is barred. She is driven forward by desire, moving from object to object to try to find her way home. No encounter with an object can ever return her home. She remains separate. Caught by her skin, which marks the boundary of “her,” she remains under house arrest. I expand on this story, taking each step of its arc as a theme common to each work and artist, moving through: house, medium, figure, desire, and repetition. I return to my practice through *Pre-Loved and Ex-Display* to reveal an ambivalent figure whose desire can only persist before introducing new work that expands beyond the thesis of house arrest.

Chapter One

Lili Dujourie's *Sonnet*: Rehearsing Inertia

A Fidget in Time

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Figure 2: Lili Dujourie, *Sonnet*, video, 1974

Fade up from black.

An interior shot of a bay window made of three windowpanes: a large central pane flanked by two smaller panes. Outside tall trees fill the frames created by the windowpanes, limiting the view onto the world. It is impossible to gauge the distance between the window and the trees.

A woman wearing a long pale dress, fitted at the waist with broad lapels, sits against the centre pane. She rises to her feet. She walks slowly to her right, to the left of the screen. She holds a cigarette. She stands in front of the left pane. She touches the pane with one hand. She smokes. She turns to her right. She looks away from the window. She fidgets with her fingers. She leans her head against the glass. She runs a hand through her hair. She holds her lit cigarette. She walks slowly to the right pane. She looks out. She shifts her weight to her left leg. She turns to her left. She looks out of the centre pane. She smokes. She walks to the middle of the centre pane. She is reflected in the pane. She looks left. She walks slowly to the left to the left pane. She shifts her weight to her right side. She stands between the left and centre panes. She is reflected in all three panes. She folds one arm in front of her. She smokes. She shifts to her left. She smokes. She traces the window frame with her fingers. She walks along the centre pane. She flicks ash into a glass bottle. She fidgets her fingers that hold her cigarette. She stands. She turns to her left. She walks slowly with her back to the centre pane. She fidgets her fingers that hold her cigarette. She slowly touches her hands. She turns away from the pane. She walks slowly to the left pane. She moves onto one foot. She moves onto the other foot. She turns to her right. She walks slowly right to the centre pane. She puts out her cigarette in the glass bottle. She turns to her right. She walks to the right pane. She presses her fingers into a thing that might be a bridle. She turns to her right. She leans against the gap between the centre and right panes. She walks away from the window to her right. She leaves the video frame by the left pane. Her reflection moves slowly across the centre pane. Her reflection slowly rubs her hands together. Her reflection runs her hands through her hair. Her reflection stands in the

centre pane. Her reflection paces in the centre pane. She barely re-enters the video frame where she exited. Her reflection walks closer to the centre pane.

Fade to black.

The above is a description of Lili Dujourie's 1974 black and white silent video *Sonnet* that runs in a single shot for 7'18" (see fig. 2) I have written it in the simple present using short sentences. There are no conjunctions linking her actions, only prepositions describing her position in space. I have done this so that her actions may be read as discrete, disconnected and discontinuous. I have described her actions with no sense of purpose or narrative direction. If I were to adapt my description to the structure of a story, it might read something like this:

Once upon a time, there was a woman in a house. Her name was Lili. Her dress was as pale as her hair was dark. She lived alone surrounded by a vast forest. Every day, she wandered aimlessly in a room. She touched magic objects as she wandered: a cigarette, a glass bottle, a bridle. She wandered and she wandered. And she wandered until she left the room. So the story is told, and here it ends.

In this chapter, I trace one aspect of house arrest in relation to the linear structure of a story. The story is a common one. It is the account of a subject's life and its plotting from birth to death. It begins with a house arrest as the subject is cast into animacy and separated from her originary home. The beginning of each subject's story is this originary trauma. Through Dujourie's figure in *Sonnet* and with reference to Sigmund Freud's 1920 essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle,"¹ I tell the story of a fantasy to return to this lost home, plotted against the limiting parameters of life. I read, in

¹ Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)."

Dujourie's figure, a performance of inertia as a strategy of refusal. She refuses the normative pressures, expectations and responsibilities that construct each lifetime, that are externally imposed on the subject. The animate subject is trapped, in another aspect of house arrest, in her body, a skin onto which a set of roles and responsibilities are written. I read, through Lacan's mirror stage, a rift between the "alienating identity"² her "rigid armour"³ performs and her internal "organic inadequacy."⁴ I connect her indoor idleness to a *corps*, including Herman Melville's scrivener Bartleby and the adolescent shut-in *hikikomori* of Japan,⁵ who refuse to be cast in a prescribed role. I argue that Dujourie's figure is rehearsing inertia, waiting, withdrawing and refusing, to avoid being drawn into a plot and frame this rehearsal through Freud's death drive. I read the desire for the shortest detour back to quiescence of the death drive against the plotting of meaning in narrative through Peter Brooks 1977 essay "Freud's Masterplot."⁶ Finally, through a close reading of "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," I tease out a number of problems and paradoxes in relation to inertia, repetition, animacy and inanimacy.

A Length of Tape

Video and its technologies were new at the time of the making of *Sonnet*. Its production equipment, though still bulky and heavy, could be operated by a single

² Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function (1949)," 76.

³ Lacan, 76.

⁴ Lacan, 77.

⁵ See Herman Melville, *Bartleby, and Benito Cereno*, Dover Thrift Editions (New York: Dover Publications, 1990) and Tamaki Saitō, *Hikikomori: Adolescence Without End*, trans. Jeffrey Angles (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

⁶ Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot," *Yale French Studies*, no. 55/56 (1977): 280–300.

person, without the need for a film crew or professional studio. Dujourie, along with other artists exploring moving image on video, could work alone in her home or studio.⁷ Video tape could be erased or recorded over but could not easily be edited.⁸ Even in film and television production studios, editing video was discouraged due to the difficulty of the process and the fragility of the cut tape.

Sonnet is filmed in a single, silent, take using a camera on a fixed tripod. The work is made in real time from the single vantage point of Dujourie's camera onto an intimate domestic interior. Dujourie, unseen, starts and stops the tape recording. No cut could be used in the interest of montage. There is no sense of editorial control offering a series of events strung in a meaningful, teleological chain of cause and effect. Instead, there is what Dirk Lauwaert's describes in "Unresisting Defences" as "a shortfall of meaning."⁹ This shortfall is enhanced by the single point of view onto the scene. There is no movement to shift focus onto any aspect of the *mise en scène* over any other. The point of view, given by the fixed camera, is depersonalised and disinterested. Indeed, Dujourie's decision to start and stop recording when she does might also appear arbitrary, having only "a weak relationship to what is being recorded."¹⁰ She creates a frame that is both a deliberate choice, as it shapes a precise window onto the world contained within, and an indistinct demarcation, described by Lauwaert as "not 'this is what I want to see', but 'this is how long I let the camera roll.'"¹¹ For him, "both the insisting recording and the neutral allowing of something to be seen" activate an

⁷ Catherine Elwes, *Video Art: A Guided Tour* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 17.

⁸ Elwes, 4.

⁹ Dirk Lauwaert, "Unresisting Defences," in *Lili Dujourie Video's 1972-1981* (ARGOS Editions: Brussels, 2002), 110.

¹⁰ Lauwaert, 113.

¹¹ Lauwaert, 114.

imbalance in the axis between the camera and the figure, creating a “sadistic tension between camera and body.”¹²

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 3: Andy Warhol, *Screen Test: Edie Sedgwick*, 1965, 16mm film

Dujourie was not alone in her experiments with the tension between camera and body. As Rosalind Krauss details in “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” in the early 1970s, artists including Vito Acconci, Lynda Benglis and Bruce Nauman were also staging their bodies for the camera.¹³ She proclaims “self-encapsulation – the body or psyche as its own surround – is everywhere to be found in the corpus of video art”¹⁴ and asserts that video describes a psychological medium an assertion, I unpack in the

¹² Lauweart, 114.

¹³ Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” *October* 1 (1976): 51–64.

¹⁴ Krauss, 53.

section “Refusing an Encounter.” Here, I focus on the staging of bodies in relation to the apparatus of video. In the works Krauss cites, the artists’ bodies were often “centred between two machines that are the opening and closing of a parenthesis”¹⁵: the camera and the monitor, using the instant feedback between recording and transmitting to create spatial or temporal disruptions. I suggest that these parentheses are different to the parameters Dujourie draws attention to in *Sonnet* which share more in common with Andy Warhol’s 1960s *Screen Tests* (see fig. 3).¹⁶ Her figure and Warhol’s subjects are both exposed to a particular duration except Dujourie’s figure, captured in a long-shot, is afforded more space in which to drift than in Warhol’s close-up model. For Lauwaert, this durational exposure to an insistent but disinterested camera melts away the usual cooperation in the recording process between camera and figure.¹⁷ By this melting, I understand the parameters of the take and single point of view of the camera as creating a stark open space; a space that does not support the figure it contains as a player on the stage it proposes. The figure-turned-player is offered no directions or shortcuts. Instead, she is helpless in her exposure, caught in open space. I suggest that Dujourie is not trying to control a plot or play a particular role, but merely call attention to a given (camera) roll, capturing herself as a figure in its duration. I align her choice of parameters, the space of the take, with an excerpt from a lifespan. I will connect her figure’s behaviour within these parameters to the death drive and suggest there might be a strategy at stake in her lack of role that might

¹⁵ Krauss, 52.

¹⁶ Callie Angell, *Andy Warhol Screen Tests: The Films of Andy Warhol* (New York: HNAbrams: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2006).

¹⁷ Lauwaert, “Unresisting Defences,” 114.

help her to find something 'beyond' them. I now trace the context in which Dujourie's figure performs and the role she might be playing or refusing.

Fighting the Problem With No Name

I consider Dujourie's figure in relation to her artist and activist contemporaries' responses to the normative roles imposed on women. Writing in 1963, Betty Friedan captured the feelings of a generation of American women who abandoned college educations and career ambitions to live their 'dream lives' as suburban housewives in *The Feminine Mystique*: "Freed by science and labour-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfilment."¹⁸ Except this fulfilment sat on a very fragile surface, underneath which lay a problem that had no name but drew together a set of shared feelings and concerns: "There's no problem you can even put a name to. But I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality. I'm a server of food and a putter-on of pants and a bedmaker, somebody who can be called on when you want something. But who am I?" and "I seem to sleep so much. I don't know why I should be so tired. This house isn't nearly so hard to clean as the cold-water flat we had when I was working. The children are at school all day. It's not the work. I just don't feel alive."¹⁹ Friedan's suburban housewife performed a "dependent, childlike, passive role," undertaking work that "does not require adult capabilities; it is endless,

¹⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, Pelican Books (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 15-16.

¹⁹ Friedan, 19.

monotonous, unrewarding.”²⁰ She is “an anonymous biological robot [...] preyed upon by outside pressures.”²¹ Promised only the magical fulfilment of marriage with no personal identity beyond this role, her development arrests at an infantile level. Clinging to the childlike protection of the housewife, shielded by her outward-bound husband and the conveniences of her home, she cannot and will not grow.^{22 23}

Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* was one of the works to ignite second-wave feminism, a movement that continued from the late 1960s to the end of the 1980s. Women began to question the limited roles in which they felt trapped by sharing what they had considered as isolated experiences in consciousness-raising groups. Referenced in *Video Art: A Guided Tour*, film-maker Sally Potter expressed the infiltration of politics into the private realm in these terms: “In order to mobilise women to rise out of

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Figure 4: Renate Eisenegger, *Hochhaus (Nr.1)*, 1974, photograph

Figure 5: Martha Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, 1975, single-channel video

²⁰ Friedan, 266.

²¹ Friedan, 267.

²² Friedan, 248-252.

²³ I look at growth in relation to the death drive in the section “An Inert Subject”

oppression and win equality in public life, feminists employed a method that politicised women in the heart of their domestic confinement, in the family home.”²⁴

In keeping with this politicised domestic sphere, numerous female artists took up the new media of photography, film or video, using performance or action-based art to critique stereotypical roles of women through subversion and parody. They transferred their defiance of these stifling, unnatural roles to their exaggerated incarnations of domestic figures, demolishing the illusion of the virgin bride, the selfless mother, the perfect woman. *Sonnet* was created in 1974, the same year as Renate Eisenegger’s *Hochhaus* and one year before Martha Rosler’s *Semiotics of the Kitchen*. In a black and white photograph series, Eisenegger irons the already-perfectly-smooth linoleum covered floor of German *Hochhaus* (high-rise) building (see fig. 4). Her gesture can be read as “a metaphor for ‘smoothing things over’; a world in which conformism is normative has no room for a woman to make her individual dreams and wishes come true and ‘flattens’ her desires.”²⁵ Martha Rosler assumes the role of an apron-clad housewife, parodying the television cooking demonstrations popularised by Julia Child in the USA (see fig. 5). Her choreographed kitchenware alphabet “dispels the illusion that domesticity, femininity, or motherhood are domains unaffected by political conflicts and exempt from the social responsibility for them.”²⁶ She refers more to her mother’s generation than her own as the utensils she uses had been superseded by electric devices by the mid-1970s. Indeed, a box with letters spelling “Mother” appears on a shelf behind her.²⁷ Dujourie’s figure appears in what could be

²⁴ Elwes, *Video Art*, 39.

²⁵ Gabriele Schor, “The Feminist Avant-Garde: A Radical Revaluation of Values,” in *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s The Sammlung Verbund Collection* (Munich: Prestel, 2016), 37.

²⁶ Inka Graeve Ingelmann, “Martha Rosler: The Home As Battlefield,” in *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s The Sammlung Verbund Collection* (Munich: Prestel, 2016), 246.

²⁷ I unpack the relation between the figure and her mother in Chapters Two and Three

believed to be her own domestic space. Her dress is fitted and feminine, but it does not appear to be a housecoat or another kind of domestic uniform. The domestic setting revealed by her camera frame is sparse, lacking typical furnishing or appliances. Does she join her feminist colleagues in using lens-based media “to both reveal and rethink what it means to be both subject and object — in private and public, in one’s own body and its attendant images, in concept, aesthetic, and gender,”²⁸ and to “address the signifiers of domesticity, the ties that bind woman to unpaid reproductive and maintenance labour?”²⁹ Dujourie’s figure does not appear to be enacting some kind of domestic drudgery nor referencing the narrow identity of the housewife. What, then, does the figure of Dujourie reflect?

The video shows the artist but, as Marianne Brouwer notes in “Hommage à...: The Pensive Images of Lili Dujourie,” there is no self-conscious soul-baring, “all of that is absent; instead there is just the pose, the framing.”³⁰ Jan Avgikos concurs in “Lili’s Motion,” aligning her practice with a genre of self-portraiture in which there is “no self at home.”³¹ Lauweart’s reading is similar, for him Dujourie’s “body is empty. It is an instrument.”³² Brouwer describes Dujourie’s oeuvre as “recordings of waiting, of the imperceptible passing of time, of a Proustian sense of ennui.”³³ Avgikos sees Dujourie as “doing nothing, or filling time by doing what she might be doing anyway. [...] [Her]

²⁸ Emily LaBarge, “The Photographers’ Gallery, London, Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s: Works from the Verbund Collection | Esse Arts + Opinions,” accessed December 14, 2018, <http://esse.ca/en/photographers-gallery-london-feminist-avant-garde-1970s-works-verbund-collection>.

²⁹ Schor, “The Feminist Avant-Garde: A Radical Revaluation of Values,” 35.

³⁰ Marianne Brouwer, “Hommage to...: The Pensive Images of Lili Dujourie,” in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, in, of, and from the Feminine* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 265.

³¹ Jan Avgikos, “Lili’s Motion,” in *Lili Dujourie: Jeux de Dames* (Brussels: Mercatorfonds; Centre for Fine Arts, 2005), 53.

³² Lauweart, “Unresisting Defences,” 120.

³³ Brouwer, “Hommage to...: The Pensive Images of Lili Dujourie,” 265.

concrete actions don't represent anything but themselves."³⁴ Lauweart adds that she is "simply not taking action. The movement of this body is not purpose-orientated or fused with intent. There is neither an internal nor an external driving force."³⁵ Her figure is, then, as undetermined as the starting and stopping of her video tape. Dujourie is not offering up some kind of confession through her encounter with a video camera in an intimate space. Nor does her figure appear to be adopting a clear role. Her body is neither particularly unruly nor disciplined. I assert that there is a very deliberate self at home that is making a strategic decision to offer up her body as "empty." In Dujourie, I read a figure whose self is very much *not home*, who is subject to a number of external forces that compel her to fulfil a certain role and conflict with her desire to *return home*. I will argue she "does nothing" with her "empty body," in the first instance to avoid being caught in a role, to avoid being caught up by representation and, in the second instance, to try to find equilibrium between external and internal forces as a way out of her containment.

External Ideals

I begin by considering two externally posited ideal subjects, tracing how she first apprehends herself as a subject, with a role to play between the beginning and ending of her life, and how her social and cultural setting inscribes this role on her skin. Dujourie's figure, walking slowly, turning, shifting and fidgeting, sees herself, her gestures, reflected back to her in the three windowpanes. It is through her reflection that, according to Jacques Lacan in "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function," a

³⁴ Avgikos, "Lili's Motion," 54.

³⁵ Lauweart, "Unresisting Defences," 117.

subject first comes to constitute herself.³⁶ Writing in 1949, Lacan describes an infant, between six and eighteen months old, beholding her reflection in a mirror. The infant, trapped in the motor impotence of her early developmental stage, finds in her reflected image an ideal “I.” This is her entrance into the Imaginary, a coherent image into which the Real cannot be assimilated. The total form of the body, by which she apprehends herself is found in her reflection, in an “exteriority.”³⁷ This reflection offers her a sense of herself through the “contour of her stature” but “freezes it [...] in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels she animates it.”³⁸ Lacan describes the mirror stage as a “spatial capture” that reveals the “organic inadequacy” of the subject.³⁹ It establishes a relationship between the subject and her environment, one that exposes a “certain dehiscence at the very heart of the organism, a primordial Discord betrayed by the signs of malaise and motor uncoordination of the neonatal months.”⁴⁰ For Lacan, the subject “caught up in the lure of spatial identification” proceeds from a fragmented image of her body to “an “orthopaedic” form of its totality – and to the finally donned armour of an alienating identity that will mark her entire mental development with its rigid structure.”⁴¹ The mirror stage ends as “the specular *I* turns into the social *I*,” when the child moves from her reflection to other people, another kind of *semblable* or near-likeness of herself, as her Imaginary terms of reference.⁴² Dujourie’s figure captures herself in her reflection.

³⁶ Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function (1949).” It should be noted that Roger Caillois’ essay “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” first published in Surrealist publication *Minotaure* in 1935, played a crucial role in Lacan’s conception of the mirror stage. Lacan makes specific mention of Caillois describing “the derealising effect of an obsession with space.” I take up Caillois’ essay in Chapter Three in relation to a subject becoming ‘similar’ to her environment.

³⁷ Lacan, 76.

³⁸ Lacan, 78.

³⁹ Lacan, 77.

⁴⁰ Lacan, 78.

⁴¹ Lacan, 78.

⁴² Lacan, 79.

She sees herself as separate, as perfect, as whole. But this image is illusory and easily shattered. Her rigid armour of skin acts as a correcting surface, masking her inner insufficiency. Frozen as it is in her reflection, this skin armour can only be at odds with the turbulence of her inner insufficiency.⁴³ Caught in the lure of spatial identification her reflection offers, Dujourie's figure externally constitutes herself as a performing skin. Watching her reflected performing skin, she is watching a double, a near-likeness, a *semblable* of herself. The mirror stage is, paradoxically, vital in the process of becoming a subject while making the subject appear as an object to herself. Under these terms, her sense of self-mastery can only be illusory. As such, I argue Dujourie's figure sees herself as an automaton, a mechanical being obeying externally programmed instructions, whose performing skin cannot correspond to her messy interior.

I suggest that this automaton figure performs an alienating identity whose terms are dictated by the social conditions that contain her. This is her second encounter with an externally constituted ideal subject. In *Selfie: How We Became So Self-Obsessed and What It's Doing to Us*, Will Storr traces the model of the ideal self from Ancient Greece to the twenty-first century. For Storr, "when people feel like failures, they're comparing their own self to an ideal of what a self *should* be like and then concluding they somehow come up short (as) most of us feel pressured, in some way, into living up to this cultural model of perfection."⁴⁴ In "Notes on the Perfect," Angela McRobbie focuses this model of perfection onto women specifically, describing the perfect as "a heightened form of self-regulation based on an aspiration to some idea of the 'good

⁴³ I frame this insufficiency through the melancholic subject in the section "A Subject of Loss" and as a force that threatens to spill out of the ideally contoured subject in Chapter Three.

⁴⁴ Storr, *Selfie*, 18.

life.”⁴⁵ The ideal self or perfect woman is culturally defined in media, entertainment and advertising. She is neither timeless nor ahistorical. At any given moment, she is subject to the expectations of her contemporaries. She is framed by and through culture, formed through the stories that surround her and by the image she has of herself.

In 1974, the year of *Sonnet*'s creation, German-American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger first applied the term 'burnout' to the increasing number of cases he encountered of "physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress."⁴⁶ He attributed burnout specifically to those in "helping" professions, such as doctors and nurses. Those he saw as sacrificing themselves for others became exhausted, listless, and unable to cope. I broaden this helping role, replete with self-sacrifice, to include the "perfect" housewife suffering from her problem with no name. As "an anonymous biological robot ... preyed upon by outside pressures,"⁴⁷ she is an automaton, who has "no 'inside' apart from her mechanism,"⁴⁸ who denies any messy interior to play an external role. When she does not coincide with the limits of the "perfect" housewife, she falls into depression, an illness that first emerged in Western societies in the 1970s.⁴⁹ And it seems that she cannot coincide, she can only fail in her "effort of alignment with discourses of femininity that one can never *be* and that are always necessarily limited by material and physical resources."⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Angela McRobbie, "Notes on the Perfect," *Australian Feminist Studies* 30, no. 83 (January 2, 2015): 9.

⁴⁶ Freudenberger Herbert J., "Staff Burn-Out," *Journal of Social Issues* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1974): 159–65.

⁴⁷ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 267.

⁴⁸ Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 50.

⁴⁹ As Christine Ross, drawing on sociologist Alain Ehrenberg, notes in *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxiii.

⁵⁰ As Ross, drawing on Janet Stoppard's *Understanding Depression: Feminist Social Constructionist Approaches* notes in *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 73.

The subject is externally constituted, apprehended by herself as an image, her body contour a rigid armour onto which she projects an ideal self at odds with her inner insufficiency. It is onto this external image that a further alienating identity is cast, one dictated by the social conditions that contain her. Messy and inadequate, she tries and fails to coincide with the external image she has of herself. Messy and inadequate, she tries and fails to coincide with external expectations placed on herself. Her body is a finite resource, it can never do enough or be enough. She inhabits a circular failure of identity. She erases her messy inadequate identity by trying to perform her expected identity. She creates her identity through performing this role and destroys her created identity through her failure to fully inhabit her performance. She cannot conform herself to the shape of her rigid armour. Her role is written on this armour, plotted on the skin that contains her, plotted across her lifespan. Playing the role of happy wife and perfect mother, she is herself a story. Depression emerges in her failure to perform the correct script. Depression is a surface affliction, played out on her skin as a limit where the conflict between internal and external play out.

Preferring Not To

I return to Dujourie's figure's empty body and cast her in relation to these two externally constituted ideals. Dujourie stages her figure as an image, offered up on-screen through video and its associated technologies. I suggest the screen-as-surface coincides with the skin-as-surface, both of which create the illusion of an externally constituted whole body, both of which project an "ideal" exterior over an

“inadequate” interior.⁵¹ In staging herself, she wants us to look at her but whom or what does she want us to see? She might be depressed, caught in a circular failure of external ideals or she might, in her way, be offering a feminist critique of normative femininity.

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 6: Lili Dujourie, *Sonnet*, 1974, video

She is confined indoors, neither mindfully occupied nor subordinated by mindless drudgery (see fig. 6). This appears to be of her own volition, though the emotional life of her figure is impossible to read. Her expression remains neutral and there are no tonal shifts in her actions nor in response to her actions. She could conceivably be someone recovering from mental exhaustion or collapse, moving at low ebb in the privacy of her home. She might be drained from a fruitless search for an elusive identity. She might be performing mindless leisure. Where Eisenegger and Rosler are

⁵¹ I develop the screen as a separating skin in the section “Screening Failure”

performing exorcisms of the perfect wife and mother, I suggest Dujourie's figure is shucking off this role altogether. I argue she is neither enacting enforced positivity nor subject to a depressive fatigue wrought through failure. Her isolation is chosen and strategic. Her self-absorption is not a depressive effect but a resistant strategy.

Recalling my opening description of *Sonnet*, using no conjunctions to make connections between her actions, I suggest that Dujourie constitutes *Sonnet's* duration through her refusal to link her figure's separate actions in a chain of purposive movement. She suggests a structure to which she then refuses to adhere. She remains confined and unoccupied as a refusal to cast herself within the parameters of an externally dictated narrative. She refuses the expectations that could be plotted on her skin. She performs an occupation of nothing to resist taking on any imposed role. I add her figure to a wider cast of refusers.

One of Western culture's most famous refusers is the eponymous scrivener of Herman Melville's 1953 short story, *Bartleby*. Bartleby first utters "I would prefer not to" to the request to perform a simple task of copying by the lawyer who employs him as a copyist.⁵² On my first encounter with this refusal, I assumed the story would unfold to reveal that Bartleby could not read or was masking some other fault. Why else would he refuse to perform his titular role? His preference not to continues in the face of every request, entreaty, threat or demand until he remains "standing immobile in the middle of the room."⁵³ Eventually the lawyer quits his own chambers while Bartleby remains, insisting that he "would prefer not to make any change at all."⁵⁴ This preference continues as he is forcibly imprisoned and, refusing to take any food, dies

⁵² Melville, *Bartleby, and Benito Cereno*, 10.

⁵³ Melville, 26.

⁵⁴ Melville, 30.

curled up facing a wall. Refusal unto death is an extreme strategy for resisting an externally cast role. Bartleby may have refused everything he preferred not to take on but, with his refusal leading to his death, what could he possibly gain?⁵⁵

I look at Dujourie's figure's slow moving wanderings, her absentminded fidgeting, her general lassitude in relation to a less extreme example of resistance through refusal. In *Hikikomori: Adolescence Without End*, psychologist Saito Tamaki describes a phenomenon that was, at that time of writing in 1998, typically linked to adolescent men. The hikikomori are reclusive shut-ins who avoid social contact, who are in an acute state of social withdrawal. Seemingly paralysed by the illusion, propagated by the Japanese education system within a system of consumer capitalism, that they have infinite possibilities, they refuse to make a single choice. Instead, these adolescents remain at home, in an immature position of emotional and economic dependence in relation to their parents. They persist in an artificially prolonged state of adolescence. I consider this prolonged state of adolescence to both share similarities with the perfect housewife and open a sphere of resistance to this narrow role. Friedan's housewife was confined in a dependent, childlike, passive role, infantilised by her domestic enclosure and denied any opportunity for autonomous development. She could never grow into an "adult" woman. The hikikomori refuse adulthood rather than having the possibilities of adult maturity externally denied. I look for a performance of femininity through which Dujourie's figure could refuse the infantilising pseudo-adulthood of the happy housewife, the only role that she appears allowed, and find it in the *femme-enfant*.

⁵⁵ In the section "An Inert Subject" I explore Dujourie's figure performing a refusal unto death as a return, following the logic of the death drive against the teleological demands of the life drive

The figure of the *femme-enfant* is tied to Surrealism. She first appears in Bréton's photograph *l'Écriture automatique* in 1927 issue of journal *La Révolution Surréaliste* (see fig. 7). The photograph shows a woman dressed as a schoolgirl.⁵⁶ She is "a recording machine [...] closer to the unconscious than men."⁵⁷ There is a question as to the extent "she is primarily a symbol for male poets of *their* production and therefore little different from a stereotypical muse figure."⁵⁸ I retain this figure as liminal player between childhood and adulthood who, according to Breton, opens a space of potential and can revolutionise the traditional male-female hierarchy.⁵⁹

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 7: Andre Bréton, *L'Écriture automatique*, 1925, photograph

According to Christine Ross in *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, the *femme-enfant* is a "mimicking of childhood, a form of disavowal of

⁵⁶ Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Women in Surrealism* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 1.

⁵⁷ Rudolf Kuenzli, "Surrealism and Misogyny," in *Surrealism and Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 19.

⁵⁸ Conley, *Automatic Woman*, 2.

⁵⁹ Conley, 123.

adulthood.”⁶⁰ While, for Ross, this mimicking “corresponds to the ideal of feminine malleability, fragility, and inferiority,”⁶¹ I suggest that the *femme-enfant* refuses to grow up, voluntarily remaining in one kind of juvenile role to refuse being forced into another, externally imposed, kind of juvenile role. Like Bartleby and the hikikomori, the *femme-enfant*’s existence is not complicated by the pressures of a normative role. She stands as a compelling disruptive force, breaking the perpetuation of external expectations. I align Dujourie’s figure’s adolescent-like idleness with the *femme-enfant*. Doing nothing with her empty body, she refuses to be drawn into a more complex plot of femininity, into productive activity, into any responsibility. The roles she may be called to play are adult woman, wife or mother. Opting out of this roll call, where the verisimilitude of her performance is inspected on the regulation uniform of her skin, as the *femme-enfant* she resists the pressures of a prescribed femininity. In her languor, Dujourie’s figure refuses to perform the mechanical pleasure of any prescribed role. She succumbs neither to the pressure to enjoy a robotic domesticity nor to enjoy the harder to define role that also emerged in the 1970s, typified by the dictum “it’s my choice,” producing “individual beings in a search for identity.”⁶² She is not the performing automaton of a Stepford Wife⁶³ nor entrapped by any other obligation to enjoy herself.⁶⁴ She is not truly an automaton with an empty body. There

⁶⁰ Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 107.

⁶¹ Ross, 107.

⁶² Ross, xxiii.

⁶³ *The Stepford Wives* is a 1972 novel by Ira Levin and a 1975 film directed by Bryan Forbes in which women are replaced by robots. As Catherine Grant notes, the perfect woman, though a particularly twentieth century invention, arises from earlier precedents including Olympia, the automaton object of affection who appears in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *The Sand-Man* and in Freud’s rendering of the uncanny, both of which I explore in Chapter Two. For Grant, “perfection is equated with uncanniness; an image that is not natural, but is created, mechanised, disavowed.” See Catherine Grant, “The Effort of Perfection: Performing Adolescence,” in *On Perfection: An Artists’ Symposium*, Critical Photography Series; 6 (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 107–10.

⁶⁴ Nina Power considers the neoliberal pressure of a false rendering of contemporary feminism: “Feminism says that you have a right to enjoy yourself. An obligation, even.’ An obligation to enjoy

is “something left over in the subject that resists such a capture,”⁶⁵ an inner messiness that both collides with and is occluded by her rigid performing armour, a turbulence that drives her resistance.⁶⁶ How does Dujourie’s messy armour-covered figure come to be in her house of refusal?

A Subject of Loss

In the section “A Length of Tape,” I aligned the arbitrary duration of *Sonnet* with an excerpt from a lifespan. I suggested that Dujourie’s refusing figure might be reaching for something “beyond” the limiting parameters of beginning and end. Here I detail what came “before” and how a melancholic subject comes to be under house arrest.

Her story begins with an originary trauma. Before her beginning, before this traumatic beginning there was *something*. This something is a fantasy home, a pre-Big Bang imagined oneness that I read in Freud’s conjuring of the death drive in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.”⁶⁷ Here Freud asserts that all organic life “must aspire to an old, primordial state from which it once departed, and to which via all the circuitous byways of development it strives to return,”⁶⁸ an aspiration that is “a manifestation of inertia in organic life.”⁶⁹ “The aim of all life is death,” Freud concludes, because “the inanimate existed before the animate.”⁷⁰ The animate subject comes into being

oneself? Few things are more menacing.” See Nina Power, *One Dimensional Woman* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 35.

⁶⁵ Power, 26.

⁶⁶ I unpack this inner turbulence in Chapter Three through desire

⁶⁷ Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” (1920) in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. John Reddick (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 43–102.

⁶⁸ Freud, 78.

⁶⁹ Freud, 76.

⁷⁰ Freud, 78.

through, and following, her separation from an inanimate state. Her separation from her, now lost, home is her originary trauma.

I align this originary trauma to Freud's formulation of melancholia, paraphrased by Christine Ross as the "inability to grieve the loss of a loved object whose loss, however, can never be clearly identified."⁷¹ There is, though, a founding paradox of the melancholic's relationship to the lost object. Ross draws on Jacques Hassoun's *La Cruauté Mélancolique* to assert that the melancholic's "inability to grieve the lost object comes precisely from the consistent experience of the object as not lost, in the sense that it never happened, was never made alive and present, and therefore was never subject to loss."⁷² It appears, then, that loss is not the loss of an object, but the loss of a state before there was a subject and object. This loss is felt by the melancholic as an experience of abandonment or betrayal. This loss, this sense of not feeling whole, can only be felt in relation to separate and distinct objects now the organism is no longer whole in the inanimate but part of the animate, a subject among many objects, an object to other subjects. The coincidence of melancholia with originary trauma is framed by Ross with reference to Julia Kristeva and Max Pensky. She highlights Kristeva's understanding of melancholia in *Black Sun* as "the most archaic expression of the unsymbolisable, unnameable narcissistic wound"⁷³ and summarised by Pensky in *Melancholy Dialectics* as "the self-lacerating longing for the prelinguistic Thing, obsessive-repetitive, necessary, and impossible search for the metalinguistic in

⁷¹ Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 21.

⁷² Jacques Hassoun, *La Cruauté Mélancolique* (1995; repr., Paris: Flamarrion, 1997), 44, quoted in Ross, 22.

⁷³ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 5, quoted in Ross, 22.

language, for the unpossessable in desire, for meaning beyond any signification.”⁷⁴

Melancholia is the experience of absolute loss, of absolute absence of meaning, of a lost sense of meaning before the separation of the subject from its objects. As such, according to Ross, “the melancholic subject attempts to recover a meaning that is impossible to recover in any symbolisable form” but all she can do is “brood over fragments.”⁷⁵ The melancholic subject is a subject-as-fragment trying to piece together an impossible whole out of other fragments. It is not just the melancholic subject, but the subject *tout court* that is defined by loss, defined through loss. The becoming of the subject can, necessarily, only follow the loss of a prior plenitude. Sensing this fundamental loss, the subject constitutes herself as loss. There are two losses at stake in the subject. The first loss is the loss of a state before there was a subject and object. The first loss inevitably propels the subject to the second loss. The second loss is the subject’s internalised sense of being less-than-whole.

The separate subject, cast into the animate, tries to shore up her sense of loss by casting herself as whole. This casting coincides with her conjuring of an ideal self through her reflected bodily totality that Lacan describes in the mirror stage.⁷⁶

However, as Alexandra M. Kokoli asserts in *The Feminist Uncanny*, the mirror image, as the image of a double frozen in a rigid armour at odds with the subject’s inner turbulence, can only “point to a fundamental absence in one’s core.”^{77 78} This “orthopaedic” form of totality cannot correct her deformity, cannot suture her less-

⁷⁴ Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 2, quoted in Ross, 23.

⁷⁵ Ross, 23.

⁷⁶ Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function (1949).”

⁷⁷ Alexandra M Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 32.

⁷⁸ I explore the lost home through the Freudian uncanny in Chapter Two

than-wholeness, the “dehiscence at the very heart of the organism.”⁷⁹ The fragile subject, clutching at fragments, needs constant shoring up, constant affirmation of her “wholeness” through external recognition, through her reflected gaze or in the gaze of an other, with the first other usually being her mother.⁸⁰ With external recognition comes external pressure to perform. Separated from, what I conjure as, the inert continuity of her ordinary home, the subject is cast into the parameters of beginning and end of animate life. Within these parameters, she has a plot to stage and a role to play.

Life as a Masterplot

I return to my second description of *Sonnet*. Beginning with “once upon a time” and ending with “and here it ends,” I wrote it to narrate a meaningful 7’18” duration, to lend purpose to the figure’s gestures, to give her a plot to follow. I align this attempt at plotting with the goal-oriented *life drive*, *Eros*, Freud describes in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” that bars all possible means of return to the inorganic other than through its own developmental plotting. Eros takes the form of “sexual drives that continually seek and achieve the *renewal* of life.”⁸¹ These drives compel the organism “to take ever greater diversions from its original course of life and ever more complex detours in achieving its death-goal,” giving the “present picture of the phenomena of life.”⁸² In

⁷⁹ Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function (1949),” 78.

⁸⁰ I expand on the maternal role in establishing the boundaries of the infant subject in Chapter Three

⁸¹ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 85.

⁸² Freud, 79.

his essay, "Freud's Masterplot," Peter Brooks finds parallels between the restorative aim of the death drive, the detours of the life drive and the structure of narrative. He describes "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" as *a masterplot*, "a theory of comprehension of the dynamic of the life-span, its necessary duration and its necessary end, hence, implicitly, a theory of the very narratability of life."⁸³ Brooks plots meaning in narrative both in relation to and traced backwards from an anticipated ending.⁸⁴ He equates the detours of the life drive with the middle of a narrative.⁸⁵ For Brooks, narrative begins with an awakening, or arousal,⁸⁶ one that align with the subject's movement from inanimacy into animacy. He references Lacan who says that "desire must be considered the very motor of narrative, its dynamic principle."⁸⁷ Narrative movement plays out as a chain of linked metonymies, or displacements, driving a narrative towards, and then back from, the final coherence of its ending, with this ending conferring meaning on that which came before.⁸⁸ This chain of displacements is the plot, "a kind of arabesque or squiggle" between the otherwise "quiescent" poles of beginning and end.⁸⁹ Plot is a necessary process, marking a deviation from "the straight line, the shortest distance between beginning and end which would be the collapse of one into the other, of life into immediate death."⁹⁰ It enters as "a kind of divergence or deviance, a postponement in the discharge which leads back to the inanimate."⁹¹ The necessary deviation of plot can be

⁸³ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot," 285.

⁸⁴ Brooks, 283.

⁸⁵ Brooks, 295.

⁸⁶ Brooks, 291.

⁸⁷ Brooks, 281.

⁸⁸ Brooks, 281.

⁸⁹ Brooks, 292.

⁹⁰ Brooks, 292.

⁹¹ Brooks, 291.

linked to Freud's assertion that the life drive prevents the death drive from short-circuiting the life of the organism before it has passed through the correct detour of reproduction.

Through my second description of *Sonnet*, I tried to make a "squiggle" of its duration, to plot Dujourie's figure's disconnected gestures as chain of linked metonymies leading to an end and its retroactive shaping of meaning. But, even after trying to forge together her wanderings, her plot is threadbare and a correct detour is hard to identify. However, the correct detour of reproduction, following marriage, appears exactly what was expected of Friedan's happy housewife. This was her allotted plot. Mapped from girlhood, her desire for an end was for the romantic happy ending. Remember, however, she fails to conform with the role written on her rigid armour. Messy and inadequate, she tries and fails to coincide with the external image she has of herself and with external expectations placed on her.

I suggested, in the section "Preferring Not To," that Dujourie's figure is refusing to perform a prescribed role. I will argue that she refuses to be caught up in narrative plot and is instead plotting a return home, strategically mobilising inertia, which could appear as depression, in relation to the death drive. First, I unpack, through other video artists, how the failing subject copes when she cannot live up to the story written for her.

Screening Failure

In *The Aesthetics of Disengagement*, Ross describes a trajectory of contemporary art that features "an acting out of states of depression encompassing boredom, stillness,

communicational rupture, loss of pleasure, withdrawal, the withering of one's capacity to remember and to project, to dream, desire, and fantasise."⁹² With reference to performance and media works, she links these features as much to their formal structures as to their subjects.⁹³ Playing out "in the slowing down, near immobility, opacity, and looped repetition of the image"⁹⁴ these features, for Ross, shape the relationship between the viewer and the work as one of loss in terms of the sense of time and in relation to the other. In works whose structure mirror that of my videos, she describes subjects who are "imprisoned in time; unable to learn from their failures, self-absorbed, and disengaged from the other."⁹⁵ Comparing them to the mythic figure of Sisyphus, she describes these subjects as expending huge effort in unproductive, repetitive actions; actions that produce nothing but repetition. She notes that the looped structure and close framing of the works add to the isolation of the subjects and frames repetition as a binding and separating force that operates on an indefatigable yet disengaged subject. Ross draws on Tom Pyszczynski and Jeff Greenberg in *Hanging On and Letting Go: Understanding the Onset, Maintenance, and Remission of Depression* to posit depression as "the result of the individual failing to give up on an unobtainable goal when it would be adaptive to do so."⁹⁶ The unobtainable goal appears twofold: the lost wholeness that the animate subject has been separated from and the failure of this subject of loss to correspond to an external ideal. The subject is isolated by socially imposed individualising norms and exhausted

⁹² Christine Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press), xv.

⁹³ For case studies on Vanessa Beecroft, Ugo Rondinone and Liza May Post see Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*.

⁹⁴ Ross, xv.

⁹⁵ Ross, xvi.

⁹⁶ Tom Pyszczynski and Jeff Greenberg, *Hanging On and Letting Go: Understanding the Onset, Maintenance, and Remission of Depression* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992), 8, quoted in Ross, 86.

by her inability to fix her identity in line with expectations imposed on her. Ross aligns the emergence of depression with this insufficiency of the subject. In every instant of her attempt to perform an expected role the subject loses something of her identity through her act of conforming and in every instant her performance is never sufficient. For Ross, turning to depression is both the result of this failure and the subject's way to cope with her failure. As such, the artists she cites are mobilising the symptoms and effects of depression as a coping mechanism against depression inducing conditions. Before I consider *Sonnet* against this depressive coping mechanism, I would like to add one more layer of failure and one more strategy for coping, again in relation to video. I look at Ross' claim that these depressive video works stage loss between the viewer and the work, asking why the other is excluded and how this can be staged through the mechanisms of video.

I return to Krauss' essay, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," to explore the defensive possibilities of narcissism. For Krauss, the potential of video is not a shared temporal or spatial situation, but the exposure of a psychological condition, the terms of which are "to withdraw attention from an external object – an Other – and invest it in the Self."⁹⁷ This situation aligns video with "the condition of someone who has, in Freud's words, 'abandoned the investment of objects with libido and transformed object-libido into ego-libido.'"⁹⁸ This is the specific condition of narcissism.⁹⁹ Video stages an encounter of exclusion. The figure bound in the video image is turned inwards. There is no focus on an external object, just themselves. This is particularly apparent in Vito Acconci's 1973 *Air Time* where he sits between a camera and a mirror

⁹⁷ Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," 57.

⁹⁸ Krauss, 57.

⁹⁹ I consider narcissistic withdrawal as a strategy in relation to the figure of the stone in Chapter Three.

repeating “I” and “you” in a monologue for thirty-five minutes (see fig. 8). This set-up recalls the infant subject in the mirror stage. Acconci uses this narcissistic feedback loop to both stage his own recognition and reveal how fragile it is. Even if he endlessly repeated the terms “I” and “you,” he would never be able to shore up the space between them, the space that is the “dehiscence at the very heart of the organism,”¹⁰⁰ the fissure between the illusory wholeness of his frozen reflection and his inner insufficiency. He both stages a narcissistic self-reliance, a lack of a need for an other to affirm him, and the inexorable futility of this gesture.

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 8: Vito Acconci, *Air Time*, 1973, video

I see another defensive possibility in this narcissism. Recalling Freud’s formulation of melancholia, referenced through Ross, as the “inability to grieve the loss of a loved

¹⁰⁰ Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function (1949),” 78.

object,”¹⁰¹ I suggest melancholia can be folded into narcissism. Acconci’s focus on himself is not just about withdrawing from an other, from the vulnerability of a lack of external recognition or the pressure of external expectations, it is also about turning away from any object as a way to create a protection against the lost object. His focus has shifted internally because, following the loss of an object, the melancholic, according to Freud in “Mourning and Melancholia,” does not displace their libido investment onto another object.¹⁰² Instead, it is withdrawn into the ego, transforming an object-loss into an ego-loss. Through narcissistic feedback, Acconci tries to shore himself up to avoid acknowledging this loss. But, as I stated in section “A Subject of Loss,” it is not an object but the state of prior plenitude that has been lost. Acconci is constituted through this loss, as loss. His shoring up can only fail.

I turn now to the technologies of video, to consider how the screen stages both the failures and the coping strategies of the subject of loss. Recall that, for Krauss, the potential of video is not a shared temporal or spatial situation. Even though viewer and work may appear co-present in a moment of encounter, as Catherine Elwes asserts in *Video Art: A Guided Tour*, there can be “no real-time, face-to-face encounter with the figure nor can the viewer physically access the world the figure is revealing through the video image.”¹⁰³ Viewer and work are separated by the time between the recording of the work and its playback, and by the space between the work’s creation and its installation. More importantly, viewer and work are separated by the very image on screen. Ross describes the video image as “more an obstructing than an obstructed

¹⁰¹ Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 21.

¹⁰² Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia (1917),” in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV: On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement: Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 249.

¹⁰³ Elwes, *Video Art*, 13.

surface,” that “as a partition or impenetrable barrier [...] keep[s] the other at distance as though in fear of identity collapse.”¹⁰⁴ In the section “Preferring Not To,” I suggested the screen-as-surface coincides with the skin-as-surface, the rigid armour the reflected subject encounters in the mirror stage. Both skin and screen-as-surface create the illusion of an externally constituted whole body and project an “ideal” exterior over an “inadequate” interior. I now consider this surface in relation to shoring up the subject of loss. Video is a medium of surface, reinforcing a boundary between work and viewer. The screen is a separating skin. It blocks any moment of recognition or exchange between the figure represented in a work and a viewer. As such, the screen might protect the figure, either from a failure of recognition, wrought by the absence of an other’s gaze, or from the pressure of their demands. On the other hand, isolated from the viewer, the narcissistic figure can only persist in a depressive state. Held apart from any possible connection with an other, her self-absorption endures as a weak defence against her inability both to inhabit her image and to shore up her constituting loss.

Returning to Dujourie’s figure in *Sonnet*, I suggest that, rather than staging a narcissistic coping strategy, she wanders behind the separating screen as a figure of loss. Though her reflection appears in the windowpanes that frame her, she does not engage with it. She accepts herself as a figure whose inner insufficiency cannot be sutured by a frozen image. She does not attempt to shore up her loss in this way because another strategy is at play in *Sonnet*. She remains isolated behind the screen

¹⁰⁴ Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 103.

to conserve her energy and mobilises 'depression' in her wanderings for another purpose: to return to her lost originary home.

An Inert Subject

Ross offers another definition of depression in *The Aesthetics of Disengagement*, citing Pierre Fédida for whom it is "the conservation of the living under its inanimate form."¹⁰⁵ For him, "depression is this experience of disappearance (of self) and this fascination with a *death state* – perhaps a *dead person* – which would then be the sole capacity to stay an inanimate being."¹⁰⁶ Rather than being caught up in an imposed plot, rather than coping with her failure to perform and conform to an ideal, Dujourie's figure turns inward so that she might outwardly appear in a "death state." She refuses to perform any role in any plot because she knows that these detours do not lead to the shortest way home. For her, the correct role is not the perfect wife and mother. The happy ending of marriage is not the aim of life. As Freud asserts, the aim of all life is to restore a prior state, is death."¹⁰⁷ Dujourie's figure is plotting her return to inanimate wholeness through her idle wanderings.

I return to "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" to unpack how an organism might resist the necessary duration, or narratability, of life through the death drive and consider how Dujourie's figure's gestures might function as restorative and as resistance. Freud begins by describing a regulatory system, responsible for the management of

¹⁰⁵ Pierre Fédida, *Des bienfaits de la depression* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 2001), 14, trans. Christine Ross quoted in Ross, 40.

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Fédida, *Des bienfaits de la depression* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 2001), 16, trans. Christine Ross quoted in Ross, 42.

¹⁰⁷ Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)," 76,78.

excitation, present in any organism whereby “unpleasure corresponds to an increase in that quantity, and pleasure to a decrease.”¹⁰⁸ The pleasure principle is “the aspiration of the psychic apparatus is to keep the quantity of excitation present within it at the lowest possible level, or at least to keep it constant.”¹⁰⁹ This regulated excitation is termed quiescent. He links the pleasure principle to the constancy principle and scientist Fechner’s principle of the tendency to stability, a link I will reveal as the animate subject’s trap in the section “Rehearsing a Return.” Freud describes the pleasure principle as a tendency to achieve a goal but one that may not be achievable given the challenges posed by the external world. The pleasure principle is thus displaced by the reality principle which postpones gratification and demands the “temporary toleration of unpleasure on the long and circuitous road to pleasure.”¹¹⁰ A further unpleasure is also caused by a conflict in the aims and demands of drives where conflicting drives are denied gratification and repressed. If these conflicting drives manage to later find a direct or indirect form of gratification, it is experienced by the ego as unpleasure. As such, for Freud, “all neurotic unpleasure,” marked by a compulsion to repeat, “is ... pleasure that cannot be experienced as such.”^{111 112} From the assertion that pleasure is derived from constancy and from noting repetition as a key mechanism, Freud posits a primary conservative tendency of drives.

In contrast with previously thinking of the drives as pressing for change, Freud suggests a drive might “be seen as a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state, which prior state the organism was compelled to relinquish due

¹⁰⁸ Freud, 46.

¹⁰⁹ Freud, 47.

¹¹⁰ Freud, 48.

¹¹¹ Freud, 49.

¹¹² I frame Dujourie’s figure’s gestures through the compulsion to repeat in the section “Rehearsing a Return”

to the disruptive influence of external forces.”¹¹³ This is “a manifestation of inertia in organic life.”¹¹⁴ Note that, for Freud, inertia is both inherent to a prior state and performed in organic life. The elementary organism, therefore, does not begin with a desire for change but, rather, “given the continuance of the same circumstances would have constantly repeated the self-same life-cycle.”¹¹⁵ As it assimilates and preserves any externally imposed modification to this life-cycle to limit unpleasure and maintain constancy, it can give the misleading impression of drives “bent on change and progress, whereas they merely seek to achieve an old goal by new means as well as old.”¹¹⁶ Given its conservative nature, all organic life “must aspire to an old, primordial state from which it once departed, and to which via all the circuitous byways of development it strives to return.”¹¹⁷ Therefore, “the aim of all life is death”¹¹⁸ or “the inanimate existed before the animate.”¹¹⁹

This is the death drive. Its conservative aim is a reaction to the external forces that aroused life in non-living matter. It is a drive to release tension and achieve equilibrium, to return to a state of quiescence that I align with the lost ordinary home of inanimate wholeness that came before the subject was cast as separate and animate. Though it is a drive towards dissolution rather than development, external factors compel it “to take ever greater diversions from its original course of life and ever more complex detours in achieving its death-goal.”¹²⁰ Freud introduces the self-preservation and reproductive drives as guards of the organism’s path to death.

¹¹³ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 76.

¹¹⁴ Freud, 76.

¹¹⁵ Freud, 78.

¹¹⁶ Freud, 78.

¹¹⁷ Freud, 78.

¹¹⁸ Freud, 78.

¹¹⁹ Freud, 78.

¹²⁰ Freud, 79.

Collectively these make Eros, or the life drive. The life drive bars all possible means of return to the inorganic other than through correct detour of development and reproduction. As such, Freud's revised conclusion is that the organism "wants only to die in its own particular way,"¹²¹ resisting any short-cuts in the form of external dangers to the correct detour dictated by the life drive that might help it reach its life's goal of death sooner. This gives rise to the complex conflicting dance between the life and death drives, between detour and quiescence.

Here I add a note on inertia that serves as the hinge of my argument in the section "Rehearsing a Return." Freud has connected both the organism's regulation system and its primary drive to constancy and inertia, but what is meant by these? Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis work through Freud's definitions in *Language of Psychoanalysis*. In physics, inertia is a property of a body "which is unaffected by any mechanical force, and which is the object of no action, [which] permanently conserves a motion constant in both velocity and direction (including the case where the motion is zero, i.e. where the body in question is at rest)."¹²² A body subject to no external influence continues as it is, whether at a constant rate or in a zero state. This is inertia. For Freud, inertia is a tendency in organic life to discharge excitation and to return to a prior state. There is difference here between a *property of* and a *tendency to*. Freud is attracted to constancy, which describes the property of inertia. Freud's discharge would require an amount of energy, whereas inertia is a property of an unaffected body. Freud later abandoned the term inertia, a decision that Laplanche and Pontalis support because otherwise, they ask "how could an organism functioning according to

¹²¹ Freud, 79.

¹²² Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 348.

this principle survive? How could it even exist, for that matter, for the very concept of an organism implies the permanent maintenance of an energy-level different from that obtaining in the environment.”¹²³ For me, their question both marks and misses the central aim and paradox of the death drive. Under the death drive, an organism no longer wishes to function at a different energy from its environment. The goal of the death drive is death, characterised as an impossibility to distinguish internal and external excitations or an organism from its environment. The impossibility to distinguish between an organism and its environment is, in other words, the loss of distinction between subject and object or, rather, the continuous wholeness of the inanimate.

For Freud, the story begins with the inanimate and is powered by the death drive as the shortest way to return home. Dujourie’s figure once belonged to an inanimate wholeness. Her separation from the inanimate is the beginning of her story. She was cast into the animate and constituted as separate through the rigid skin contour of her body. Cast out of home and cast as a subject, she is subject to the narrative expectations of the life drive. Her story is plotted within the starting and stopping of a video tape, within the containing frame of her containing interior, within the frame of the video camera, a frame that coincides with the limits of the viewing monitor. Rather than persisting as trapped by these containers, I return to my opening descriptions of *Sonnet* to ask how Dujourie’s figure plots her return to inanimate wholeness through her idle wanderings.

¹²³ Laplanche and Pontalis, 349.

My second description draws the scant actions of *Sonnet* into a connected chain of events, proposing a plot, a detour to take Dujourie's figure from beginning to end. My first description refuses this plotting, indeed presents *Sonnet* as illegible as plot, and offers a different motive to Dujourie's figure. She is not exhausted by her inability to live the correct life, to perform the correct role and follow the correct path dictated by her socio-cultural context. Instead she short-circuits plot, looking for the ultimate short-cut back home, back to an inanimate state. She remains in a space of indifference to any external demands, to justify any means towards any imposed end. Refusing to become another fatigued subject, she resists the life drive. She meanders until she leaves the scene, undeterred by any demand for the correct detour to a satisfactory end. Resisting the detour plotted by the life drive, she lives instead as if she were already at the end, as if the end and the beginning were collapsed into one. She lives, following the model of the death drive, as a figure of inertia.

The bare minimum she performs is her conjuring of inertia. By moving at such a low ebb, I suggest Dujourie's figure is revealing her "fascination with a *death state* – perhaps a *dead person*,"¹²⁴ conserving herself as "living under [her] inanimate form."¹²⁵

I see another rendering of the automaton in her figure. Rather than being a mechanically performing skin, as an automaton she blurs the "distinction between the inorganic and the organic."¹²⁶ I suggest this turn to the inorganic allows Dujourie's figure to disavow the normal maturing tendency of life, to reject growth, to reject ageing, to refuse any "circuitous byways of development."¹²⁷ Further, staging herself as

¹²⁴ Pierre Fédida in Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 42.

¹²⁵ Ross, 40.

¹²⁶ Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 51.

¹²⁷ Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)," 78.

a blurry automaton, between the organic and inorganic, allows her to keep excitement at a constant level, the essence of the pleasure principle. In this form, she might then balance internal and external excitations, achieving equilibrium and a living return to a state of quiescence, to the inanimate.

I link this figure of inertia to the *femme-enfant* role I read onto Dujourie's figure. The *femme-enfant* refuses to grow up, remaining in one kind of limited juvenile role to refuse being forced into another infantilising limited role, that of the happy housewife. I see a further refusal to grow in the *femme-enfant* that is not the same as the housewife who cannot and will not grow through her role. The *femme-enfant* refuses to grow, to reach maturity, to resist being pulled into the longer detour of development and reproduction. Remaining a woman-child appears less of a detour than reaching full adult maturity. In trying not to travel too far away from her beginning, she hopes to follow a shorter path home. I look again at Dujourie's wandering figure and ask if she is thriving in her refusal, if she is getting closer to her goal of return. I find a problem in the terms of her inertia, it is a problem of rehearsal.

Rehearsing a Return

I have suggested that the duration of *Sonnet* be read as a lifespan, with the starting and stopping of the tape aligning with the beginning and end of life. Rather than plotting a story, Dujourie marks a set of parameters, framing a stark open space of performative potential. Her figure refuses to perform to a set of expectations, offering, instead, a bare minimum, ultimately copying the low ebb of inertia. I argue that, in copying inertia, Dujourie's figure runs aground. It is not her performance

within these parameters that could open a way home. Home is to be found outside of these parameters, before there was a beginning. She tries to go beyond the framing parameters of beginning and end, life and death, by performing “a manifestation of inertia in organic life.”¹²⁸ She adopts inertia and imitates being inanimate. To imitate being inanimate is not to be inanimate. To imitate the conditions of the imagined home is not to be home. She rehearses one set of conditions under another set of conditions. Before I unpack a rehearsal under the wrong conditions using Laplanche and Pontalis’ observations on inertia, I press further into rehearsal in relation to both repetition (in French a rehearsal is a *répétition*) and to re-staging.

I connect rehearsal to repetition through “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” where Freud unpacks repetition in two distinct accounts. The first account of repetition is the famous *fort | da* game. Observing a child disappearing (*fort / gone*) and reappearing (*da / here*) a wooden reel tied to a string over the side of her crib,¹²⁹ Freud took the game to stand for the disappearance and reappearance of the child’s mother that, in repeating through her own restaging, gave the child a sense of comforting mastery.¹³⁰ The second is the repetition he observes in elementary organisms which “did not start out with any desire to change, and given the continuance of the same circumstances would have constantly repeated the self-same life-cycle,”¹³¹ a compulsion he formulates as the death drive. I connect the subject’s rehearsal with the compulsion to repeat as both a compulsion to mask loss and a compulsion to return. She is imitating a dead person, repeating a lost inanimate state within the parameters of

¹²⁸ Freud, 76.

¹²⁹ I have changed the gender in line with the female figure who runs throughout the thesis

¹³⁰ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 53.

¹³¹ Freud, 78.

beginning and end of her animate condition in a bid to mask the loss of her ordinary home, the loss of inanimate wholeness that constitutes her. She is repeating her short vocabulary of gestures – walking, smoking, fidgeting – in a bid to repeat the “self-same life-cycle,” to make her gestures restorative, to make them perform her return. Her rehearsals are doomed to fail. Even in their abridged and languorous form, her gestures exceed inertia, where inertia is a property of a body which “permanently conserves a motion constant in both velocity and direction (including the case where the motion is zero, i.e. where the body in question is at rest).”¹³² Her gestures do not maintain her at a constant, neither at rest, nor in motion. She is starting, stopping, shifting, changing. Each of her gestures, however slight they may be, plays out as a change in plot, a deviation from “the straight line, the shortest distance between beginning and end which would be the collapse of one into the other, of life into immediate death.”¹³³ The role she plays within this plot is also excessive. The resistant regression of a pre-marital *femme-enfant* may be a stunted role, but it too marks a detour from quiescence, from and through which she cannot return. She is trying and failing to re-stage the conditions of her lost home. She is performing a poor imitation of the conditions of the inanimate, a rehearsal under the wrong conditions.

It is inevitable that her rehearsals fail because she rehearses under the wrong conditions. I return to “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” and the critique made by Laplanche and Pontalis to show why. Recall Freud’s assertion that all organic life “must aspire to an old, primordial state from which it once departed, and to which via all the circuitous byways of development it strives to return,”¹³⁴ an aspiration that is “a

¹³² Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 348.

¹³³ Brooks, “Freud’s Masterplot,” 292.

¹³⁴ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 78.

manifestation of inertia in organic life,”¹³⁵ that “the aim of all life is death”¹³⁶ as “the inanimate existed before the animate.”¹³⁷ This is the death drive. It is not the same as the pleasure principle which is “the aspiration of the psychic apparatus is to keep the quantity of excitation present within it at the lowest possible level, or at least to keep it constant.”¹³⁸ However, Freud, in some way confuses aspects of the two. He considers inertia as both inherent to a prior state and performed in organic life. In defining inertia, Laplanche and Pontalis urge that a distinction be “preserved between a tendency to reduce the quantity of excitation to zero on the one hand, and a tendency to keep this quantity at a constant level on the other.”¹³⁹ Recall their assertion that inertia is a property of a body “unaffected by any mechanical force,”¹⁴⁰ that is, subject to no external excitation. Regulating and maintaining the quantity of excitation is the pleasure principle. The death drive is the *tendency to* reduce the quantity of excitation to zero. Inertia cannot be manifested in the pleasure principle. Nor can it be manifested in the death drive. Inertia is only manifest in the inanimate wholeness that existed before the animate. There is no constant level of excitation in the pleasure principle. The organism is always adjusting, always changing in response to external excitations. This is not the constant, unaffected property of inertia. The tendency towards zero of the death drive requires a discharge of energy. Again, this is not the constant, unaffected property of inertia. In attempting to repeat a state that has gone before, the animate organism is trying to rehearse a *property* as a *tendency* in an environment shaped by completely different terms. The animate organism has

¹³⁵ Freud, 76.

¹³⁶ Freud, 78.

¹³⁷ Freud, 78.

¹³⁸ Freud, 47.

¹³⁹ Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 345.

¹⁴⁰ Laplanche and Pontalis, 348.

been externally stimulated into life and is now caught up somewhere in the squiggle of plot. Excitation and differentiation are, by definition, present in the system. The organism may resist or deny these effects, but it cannot undo them. Inertia is not marked by repetition; it is characterised by continuing without change. To repeat is not to continue. The animate organism can repeat cycles marked by no more than small energy shifts but it cannot continue. As such, Dujourie's figure, as an animate subject, can only imitate inertia as a "tendency to," to resist a plot, to refuse a role, to return to the zero excitation of the inert lost home. The property of her body is not inertia. Cast into the animate, her properties are separation and change. She cannot mobilise inertia and she cannot rehearse her way outside of her current conditions or beyond her containing parameters.

The subject has been cast into animacy, cast out of inanimate wholeness. This is originary trauma. Trauma marks the beginning of the subject and the beginning of her story. She has been cast into the demands of plot and role that she was no wish to perform. She longs for, not the illusory totality of her body, but the inanimate totality she was forced to quit. To find her way home, she rehearses the inanimate conditions that came before her beginning. Her rehearsals fail and she is caught in house arrest. The first aspect of house arrest is the containing parameters of her linear beginning and ending, also rendered as the parameters of the duration of the video tape in *Sonnet*. The second aspect of house arrest is the containing rigid armour of her skin, also rendered by the video monitor as a separating surface in *Sonnet*. Both containers block her return home to inanimate wholeness. Bound in the parameters of beginning and ending, mourning her lost home, there is no easy return for the subject of loss. In trying to replicate her lost conditions, her attempted homecoming fails. Recall that

Laplanche and Pontalis describe an organism as necessarily distinct from its environment, another factor that alienated it from the constancy of inertia.¹⁴¹ She is this distinct organism. The rigid armour of her skin is not just the site on which her role is projected. Her skin is a limit. It marks the separation between internal and external pressures. She looks again to her current conditions for a possible strategy home, this time to her skin for a return, through merger with another body, a strategy that I play out through the photographs of Francesca Woodman.

¹⁴¹ Laplanche and Pontalis, 349.

I could stay here forever and I would never die. But like the flowers I would never have been alive., 2015



Figure 9: Katharine Fry, *I could stay here forever and I would never die. But like the flowers I would never have been alive.*, 2015, HD video

I could stay here forever and I would never die. But like the flowers I would never have been alive. is a 4:43 HD video made in 2015 that is staged at 1:1 scale with the base of the image projected at floor level (see fig. 9). A figure lies on a background of colourful flowers. These are not real flowers, rather a pattern-repeating photograph of flowers printed on vinyl. In a single, continuous, static shot, the figure slowly eats the golden words 'I am running.' As she eats, her hands swirl, emulating the gestures of an orchestra conductor. As she eats and swirls, no instruments swell to crescendo. Instead, a lone voice hums and sings, "Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that's all is my friend, then let's keep dancing [...]." Contrary to the words she eats, she appears pinned on the spot, running nowhere, while the perpetual motion of her hands powers nothing, changes nothing.

Three different temporalities are folded into the same scene. Her linear act of eating coincides with the linearity of recording and viewing video. Both are framed by the parameters of beginning and end. Her act of eating also coincides with, and complicates, her lifespan. Eating is an ambivalent act, simultaneously prolonging and protracting the parameters of her lifespan. As much as eating is fundamental to the maintenance of life, as Carol Mavor says in *Aurelia*, eating “keeps one close to death, in that a person must eat to grow older, grow towards death.”¹ This consumptive running-up and running-down of her vital clock sits at odds with the verb form she consumes. The present continuous describes an action that is happening now. Now, as if there were nothing beyond the present action, as if this action occupies a paradoxical constant instant. Her teleological devouring of continuousness contrasts with the temporality of her hands’ movement phrase. They swirl in a cycle of repetition, neither staging a return, nor admitting to moving forward, but, even in their cyclical arc, betraying, again and again, that to repeat is not to continue.

The words that play over this scene offer through-lines. “Is that all there is?” might offer a fixed point at which to rest and in which to celebrate, to “just keep dancing.” Or the deadpan lyrics, made famous by Peggy Lee, may merely poke at the figure and her chosen stuckness in the narrow conditions she has either built for herself or chosen to accept. Nothing is known about the inner life of this figure. No clues unfold. The two tasks she performs render her inaccessible, akin to a mechanical automaton. She is perpetually occupied while performing a bare minimum. This bare minimum is still too much to stage a return home. She has attempted to shrink the parameters of her world, to resist the complex plotting of the life drive, but her act of consumption

¹ Mavor, *Aurelia: Art and Literature Through the Mouth of the Fairy Tale*, 66.

serves to remind that there is no way out of the linear, that she can only be bound between parameters, pulled away from a beginning towards an end. Her swirling hands cannot rehearse her out of the limits of her animate condition. Her repetitions, each marked by an investment of energy, exclude her from the inert continuousness of inanimate wholeness. The fantasy return to quiescence eludes this scene.

I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me., 2018



Figure 10: Katharine Fry, *I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me.*, 2018, HD video

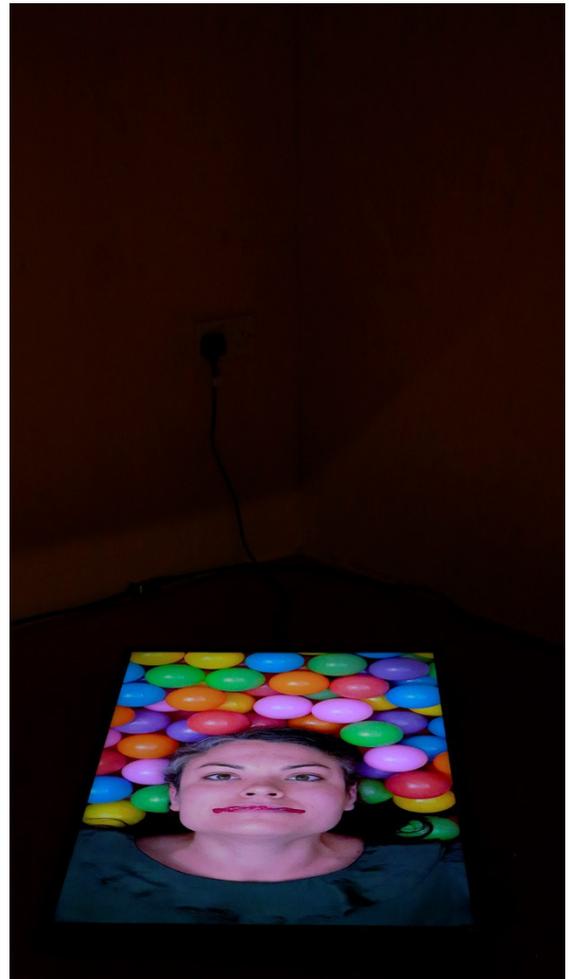


Figure 11: Katharine Fry, *I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me.*, 2018, installation shot, Deptford X

I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me. is a 3:31 HD video made in 2018 that is shown as an installation. The video is staged as a one-to-one encounter. The screen lays on the floor of a small, darkened space (see figs. 10 & 11). The viewer is positioned at the base of the vertically-oriented screen, standing over the image. There is a direct link between this piece and *I could stay here forever and I would never die. But like the flowers I would never have been alive.* The figure wears the same dress, a dark green baby-doll dress with a large collar like a clown's neck ruffle. She is pinned to a similar multicoloured background, this time a bright sea of plastic balls rather than flowers.

She appears barely alive, her only vitality registered by two blinks, one at the work's beginning and one at the end. Instead, she seems caught in an in-between state, between life and death, as two streams of "blood" spill out of her mouth, creeping across her cheeks and filling her ears one drop at a time. They trace a smile that spreads and fades in time to "Smile," a song from Charlie Chaplin's 1936 *Modern Times*, later covered by Nat King Cole and Judy Garland, sung here with a frailty that betrays no virtuosity. The figure, whose mouth scarcely moves as she smiles on command, does not appear to be the singer of this refrain. With her fixed smile in a frozen rainbow-coloured world, she plays the clown, a constant entertainer whose painted smile masks a tragic interior. She has nothing to say but joy, joy, joy, smiling her way to death. Grinning her guts out, she wears happiness as a gag. But, just one move, and the balls all fall.

In this linear work, whose inevitable plotting is interrupted, but not halted, by the reversals and repetitions of her death-bound smile, the figure here is even more motionless, doing even less. Gravity and the edit are the motors of the scene while her body performs a "dead person."¹ She appears as an image onto which any role could be projected, her "rigid armour"² set to meet any external demand, to "just smile" no matter what. She is an automaton, an externally constituted subject mechanically performing an unchosen script. Her static body is a reaction to her failure to perform an "alienating identity"³ that is at odds with her internal "organic inadequacy."⁴

¹ Christine Ross draws on Pierre Fédida's description of depression as a "fascination with a *death state* – perhaps a *dead person* – which would then be the sole capacity to stay an inanimate being." See Pierre Fédida, *Des bienfaits de la dépression* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 2001), 16, trans. Christine Ross quoted in Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 42.

² Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function (1949)," 76.

³ Lacan, 76.

⁴ Lacan, 77.

Exhausting herself through her “bad faith”⁵ roleplay, she tends to depression. She tries and fails to coincide with the external image she has of herself and with external expectations placed on her. Her turn to depression, imitating a “dead person,” emerges as a strategy through which she can bypass all the pressures a plotted lifespan implies. She imitates an inanimate state but this mimicry does not return her to inanimate wholeness. Her static illusion is ruptured by the spilling of her “blood,” the excess of her “organic inadequacy,” the force of her desire, that leaks out. She remains caught in the parameters of beginning and end, caught in the conflict between internal and external pressures. Her compressed desire cannot be contained by her rigid armour, it keeps spilling out, breaking the mirage of her surface control. The fragile illusion of her ideal self can be shattered at any time.

⁵ Will Storr draws on Sartre’s “bad faith,” acting inauthentically due to social forces, in relation to the setting and sharing of constructed images in “selfie culture.” See Storr, *Selfie*, 144.

Chapter Two

Francesca Woodman's Houses: Merging with a Lost *Heim*

Staging Immurement

A woman keeps appearing to disappear in houses of dereliction.

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 12: Francesca Woodman, *House*, 1976, gelatin silver print on paper

In this house, she is crouched under a window, sliding down a stripped wall towards the floor. Bare floorboards are strewn with torn off scraps of wallpaper, chunks of plaster and splinters of wood. A fireplace is blocked by bricks. Below her chin is an uncertain flurry. It may be her skin. It may be that her skin is that of a chameleon, now offering itself as irregular patches of greys and white, hiding her in sight in front of the torn and worn wall. It may be her body. It may be that her body is permeable. It may be that her body is permeated, no border to press against, no boundary to press into. There is a

question of where there is woman and where there is wall. There is no question of where there is woman and where there is wall. Below her chin is an uncertain flurry, reforming only from the tender impression of a bent knee to the clearer tip of a toe clothed in black. She rests awkwardly on that leg. No other leg, nor limb, is to be found in the dense shadow that is spreading out from under her body to the scuffed skirting board. She is caught in the act, but whether her act is a fixing or releasing is unclear.

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 13: Francesca Woodman, *Space²*, 1976, gelatin silver print on paper

In this house, she hides in plain sight. Peelings of paint from a chipped skirting board scatter across bare wooden floorboards. Above the skirting board, a wall is stripped bare bar a jagged patch of wallpaper. A pattern of large white open flowers begins on the jagged patch. The patch sits between two windows, both cut in half by the frame, closed to a bleached and unknown outside. In between the window halves, she presses her back into the wall. Her pale skin matches the stripped wall. Her navel is just one of

a number of dark marks punctuating the wall. She holds jagged patches of wallpaper in front of her. Her face, her hair, her sex are covered by large white open flowers. She is closed from view behind large white open flowers. She is open to the room like large white open flowers.

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 14: Francesca Woodman, *My House*, 1976, gelatin silver print on paper

In this house, she is a skin amongst other skins. Sheets of plastic twist on bare wooden floorboards like strewn skins. One skin grows up a small mirrored shelf cabinet. The shelves are empty. The cabinet tilts to reflect the ceiling. Its reflecting role is blocked by its plastic skin. Empty shelves line a closed door, creating a barrier to both entering and exiting. White felt cloths block and emerge from a square cut in the door. Soft skins. They twist up the shelves like clouds heading to the top of the sky but get caught on a line of hooks made of bent metal nails. Her skin is barely visible in the corner. She stands behind the empty cabinet, pressed between the closed-door shelves and a

closed window covered by a light gauze. Wrapped in a plastic skin, she wears a dark glove on her right hand. Plastic skin and dark glove obscure her face, her hair, her sex. Her pale body is the same tone as the stripped wall. Her plastic skin, at once translucent and reflective hides her. She could be strewn skin, or empty mirror cabinet, or gauzed window.

In the images and descriptions above, Woodman's figure appears again and again in a decaying house, in a domestic environment that appears to have been forgotten, neglected, or allowed to become unruly. In each photograph, the house is empty of life except for her presence. In every photograph, her body is pressed against a bare wall. In the first, *House*, she is part apparition. Her body is incomplete and indistinct. She moves in a blur. Where her body and her surroundings merge, she might be permeable (see fig. 12). In the second, *Space*², she has taken a pattern to hide under. Her face is hidden but other parts of her body remain exposed. She appears to be trying on another skin, the skin of the house, but her costume is incomplete. She is half-house and half-herself. She is half-safe half-vulnerable (see fig. 13). In the third, *My House*, she is covered by a second skin. It is not clear if this extra layer is a covering or a container. As a covering, the plastic skin is transparent leaving her exposed. As a container, the skin could be punctured and she could spill out over the floor (see fig. 14). In all three photographs, all ways in and out of each house are blocked by objects or bleached out by light.

At the end of Chapter One, cast out of her ordinary home of inanimate wholeness and into the animate, the subject emerged as subject to two aspects of house arrest. She rehearsed inertia as a strategy to return home but remained caught by one aspect of house arrest, being contained in the framing parameters of her lifespan. Her skin

emerged as a limit, marking her as distinct from her environment, framing the barrier between internal and external pressures, and as a site onto which a role is projected. The animate subject has been separated from inanimate wholeness. This separation is the defining aspect of house arrest. Her separation is made apparent by the limiting and distinguishing boundary of her skin. In this chapter, I look for a strategy to return to the inanimate through the conditions of the animate. Through Francesca Woodman's figure in three of her photographs from 1976, described and illustrated above, and with reference to Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny,"¹ I tell the story of a fantasy return to the lost home through the skin as a site of merger. The subject is an automaton, caught on her reflection as both a suture and a fissure, finding her body both familiar and strange, haunted by her lack of wholeness. The maternal spectre underpins this chapter. She is the womb and tomb of the Gothic house, the first home from which the subject emerges and against which she must establish her identity. The subject tries to restore her lost wholeness through merger with the maternal body. Her figure appears in dereliction because, though the lost home could be dreamed as an archaic mother link to the lost primordial state, no biological mother offers those same conditions. The maternal body cannot offer the same conditions as inanimate wholeness. It is a decoy, a false home, a house that cannot be returned to, that no subject can fit back into once they have left. The maternal body is a house of separation and development. In her false returns, the subject remains caught under house arrest, bound once more under her separating skin.

I begin by staging the terms of her strategy. Woodman, like Dujourie, is present both behind and in front of the camera, staging herself for it. Working in the same time

¹ Freud, "The 'Uncanny' (1919)."

period, she, too, appears concerned with the edge between subject and object, with staging her figure through and in contrast to a prescribed femininity. She too appears in relation to a house that I align with the parameters of beginning and end. However, the tone of her representations of a house and a contained figure is vastly different from Dujourie's figure's languor in a plain and uncluttered room. Woodman's figure is half-there in half-way habitable rooms. She is dis/appearing in houses of dereliction. I suggest that Woodman is staging her figure's immurement, as both a strategy through which to return home and as an ambiguous decoy she finds in her animate conditions. Woodman stages immurement both through what is represented in each photograph and through the medium of photography itself. Immurement, from the Latin *im* (in) and *murus* (wall), is a walling in, a form of life imprisonment, or even execution, in which a person is enclosed, often bricked in or buried, in a small space with no exits. I begin with its relation to the medium of photography.

Woodman captures her figure using a tripod-mounted medium format camera, flattening it into the instant of the photographic negative and its resulting print. I ask if the duration of the camera shutter opening and closing could be aligned with the starting and stopping of Dujourie's video recording, described by Lauwaert as "not 'this is what I want to see', but 'this is how long I let the camera roll,'"² or if there is something else at stake in her exposures. In *Death 24x a Second*, Laura Mulvey brings together André Bazin's 1945 "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" and Roland Barthes' 1980 *Camera Lucida* to describe the temporal conditions of the photograph. For Mulvey, *Camera Lucida's* emphasis is "on the index, on the 'physical connection,'

² Lauwaert, "Unresisting Defences," 114.

and on the trace and its inscription.”³ Barthes describes the photographic process as “the printing of luminous rays emitted by an object,” as such, “the photograph always carries the referent within itself.”⁴ The photograph has touched something from which it is now separate. According to Bazin, it carries “the object freed from the conditions of time and space which govern it.”⁵ However, the photograph persists within linear time, not outside these parameters, as for Bazin, “photography does not create eternity [...] it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its own proper corruption.”⁶ For Barthes, the photographic image is a simultaneous recording of presence and absence he sums up as “this was now.”⁷ Barthes, who was mourning his recently deceased mother at the time of writing *Camera Lucida*, sees the image as producing death while trying to preserve life.⁸ In every photograph there is the “return of the dead,” every photograph brings with it the “overwhelming consciousness of death,” as such, whether or not its subject is already dead, “every photograph is a catastrophe.”^{9,10} The photograph operates as a movement in time. A past is drawn into the present as a lost instant that is held onto, displaced and replaced, through the physical connection of the photograph. This movement seems to bring death closer to the viewer of the image, to remind them that, within the parameters of linear time, death is the inevitable end they are pursuing.

³ Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 55.

⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 1993), 5, quoted in Mulvey, 55.

⁵ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”, in *What is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA, 1967), vol.1, 15, quoted in Mulvey, 56.

⁶ André Bazin, 14, quoted in Mulvey, 56.

⁷ Roland Barthes, 77, quoted in Mulvey, 57.

⁸ Mulvey, 59.

⁹ Roland Barthes, 96, quoted in Mulvey, 60–62.

¹⁰ I unpack the return of the dead in the section “Uncanny Returns” and the dead mother in “Back to Mother’s Home”

I ask if it is this inevitable end that Woodman is staging through her derelict houses, using her figure in contrast with its surrounding decay to reveal that all life runs to death, with her camera as a neutral mechanism that captures these indifferent parameters. Mulvey notes that “both Bazin and Barthes dwell on the fact that the photograph is ‘not made by the hand of man’ and is ‘a mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part.’”¹¹ To me, Woodman’s photographs insist otherwise. In *House*, Woodman is using, and controlling, the variable duration of the camera shutter opening and closing and playing with her figure’s movement within these parameters to make part of herself unavailable, to hold part of herself out of reach, even in the fixed frame of the photograph. I suggest that she is using her command of photographic technology to open a set of parameters that cannot fully capture her, that she can evade through her movement, using her movement to open another way out. Her appearance is marked by disappearance. Her figure is sliding down the wall of the house while also sliding out of the frame.

In her doctoral thesis, "Skin Surface and Subjectivity: The Self-Representational Photography of Francesca Woodman," Harriet Riches asserts that Woodman uses her body “to rupture the photographic medium's limits,”¹² while Chris Townsend suggests that she is creating a “failure of space [...] to highlight the problematic status of the photograph as a fixing of time and space, a kind of immurement.”¹³ Both counter Rosalind Krauss’s contention in “Problem Sets” that everything Woodman “photographs is in fact “flattened to fit” paper, and thus under, within, permeating,

¹¹ Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 62.

¹² Harriet Katherine Riches, “Skin Surface and Subjectivity: The Self-Representational Photography of Francesca Woodman.” (PhD Thesis, University of London, 2004), 52.

¹³ Chris Townsend, *Francesca Woodman* (London; New York: Phaidon, 2006), 27.

every paper support, there is a body. And this body may be in extremis, may be in pain.”¹⁴ This body under paper is Woodman’s figure, fixed in the photographic instant, fixed as falling, fixed as incomplete, fixed against the walls of the house, fixed inexorably towards death. Against the finality of this deathly fixing, Townsend attests that Woodman is using “Gothic figures as metaphors for photographic encryption in order to stress her liberation from it.”¹⁵ However, he stresses that it is unclear whether her body is being “imprisoned within and then consumed by space, rather than being ejected from it.”¹⁶ I see Woodman rupturing the photographic medium’s limits to free her figure from her immurement in the linear parameters of beginning and ending, an immurement that is paralleled by her capture in the photographic print. I suggest Woodman is trying to open another set of parameters through the long exposure to make an opening for her figure to return home to inanimate wholeness. I see the ambiguity between imprisonment and ejection as key to reading the three Woodman works I have selected. Each conjures a different play on how her figure might fit into or out of the space and, by space, I mean both that of the photograph and the house captured in the photograph. I will use this ambiguity to reveal another failed homecoming manifest both in the photographic print and in what is represented in each. I will argue that in *House* she is caught in the act of coming and going, in *Space*² she is trying on a new-old skin, and in *My House* she is trying to implant herself into the wall. Finally, I will use this ambiguity to trace her figure’s dis/appearances on the

¹⁴ Rosalind Krauss, “Francesca Woodman: Problem Sets,” in *Bachelors* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 166.

¹⁵ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 27.

¹⁶ Townsend, 20.

surface of the house and the surface of the print as her ambivalent response to a failed return to a false home.

First, I ask what Woodman's figure is subject to in these images of derelict houses and what role she might be playing or resisting in her dis/appearances. Feminist scholars read an immured identity in Woodman's work, linked to her imagery of sacrifice and enclosure. For example, Abigail Solomon-Godeau sees her work as an inquiry into femininity, into "the grounds, the stakes, the apparatuses, the mechanisms of its construction and articulation."¹⁷ For her, Woodman's body is a surface, marked by patriarchal culture and, through her work, Woodman is trying to write her own scripts of femininity. Woodman's figure is met by menace in every one of her rooms, with all enacting "tableaux of entrapment, engulfment, or absorption."¹⁸ Solomon-Godeau sees Woodman being physically devoured by the house, "swallowed by the fireplace, layered over by the wallpaper, effaced, occulted, Woodman presents herself as the living sacrifice to the domus."¹⁹ Riches draws on Lucy Lippard for whom motifs of "veiling, confinement, enclosure, pressures, barriers, and constriction suggest both the physical and psychical states provoked by the restrictive role of domestic life,"²⁰ with domesticity being figured by Riches "as a geographical, architectural, and social space, a set of roles, and the physical and imaginary site of psychic development."²¹ It is easy to locate Woodman's figure in the context of second-wave feminist activism, art and scholarship that both revealed and resisted narratives of domestic confinement and

¹⁷ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Just Like a Woman," in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 239.

¹⁸ Solomon-Godeau, 252.

¹⁹ Solomon-Godeau, 252.

²⁰ Lucy Lippard, "Introduction," in *From the Centre, Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976), 7, quoted in Riches, "Skin Surface and Subjectivity," 50.

²¹ Riches, 50.

conformity. She could be a victim of “the problem with no name,”²² standing in the ruins of an impossible to achieve domestic perfection. I assert that the derelict domesticity that surrounds her is not quite hers. As in Rosler’s *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, with her mother’s utensils and her “Mother” in a box, I suggest that Woodman’s figure carries an absent mother with her. I argue that she stands in a maternal dereliction with two choices before her: to return to the mother, or not, and to become the mother, or not. She may be engulfed by the mother or absorbed by the role of mother. She may be veiled by the mother or constricted in motherhood. I will frame each of the works I have selected in relation to these choices, drawing the three works together into a plot. In line with Townsend and Solomon-Godeau, I find Woodman’s works rich with Gothic imagery and turn now to the typical Gothic plot to unpack Woodman’s figure’s dis/appearances in domestic dereliction.

In Gothic Ruin

The Gothic plot is haunted by a maternal spectre and saturated with questions of identity and immurement.²³ In her introduction to *Female Gothic Histories* Diana Wallace teases out a connection between the erasure of women in history and the importance of the literary Gothic mode for women. Gothic metaphors are used to figure women’s relation with history. Women are “outside, underneath,” or “hidden from” history, conjuring Gothic images of “a past which is obscure, dark, buried,

²² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 19.

²³ The first Gothic novel is Horace Walpole’s 1764 *The Castle of Otranto* and the first female Gothic novel is Sophia Lee’s 1783 *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times*.

needing to be unearthed.”²⁴ She refers to Ellen Moers who coined the term “female Gothic” in 1976, the same year Woodman’s figure dis/appears in various states of dereliction.²⁵ Wallace links the past of the Gothic to that of psychoanalysis, describing it as “aggressively mobile, prone to return, to irruptions into the present.”²⁶ I ask if it is the erased voices of women, or something else, that returns through the Gothic mode. Feminist and psychoanalytic critic Clare Kahane summarises the conventional Gothic plot in “Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity”:

Within an imprisoning structure, a protagonist, typically a young woman whose mother has died, is compelled to seek out the centre of a mystery, while vague and usually sexual threats to her person from some powerful male figure hover on the periphery of her consciousness. Following clues that pull her onward and inward—bloodstains, mysterious sounds—she penetrates the obscure recesses of a vast labyrinthian space and discovers a secret room sealed off by its association with death. In this dark, secret centre of the Gothic structure, the boundaries of life and death themselves seem confused. Who died? Has there been a murder? Or merely a disappearance?²⁷

I see in the Gothic plot a heroine both pursued and pursuing dark forces, a heroine who might disentomb a body, likely her dead mother’s, or be herself entombed, like her mother (see fig. 15). If the Gothic mode makes a place for the return of a female voice, this heroine might find her mother’s voice or, perhaps her own, in the secret room.

²⁴ Diana Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), 6.

²⁵ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1977), 90, quoted in Wallace, viii.

²⁶ Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories*, 4.

²⁷ Kahane, “Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity,” 45–46.

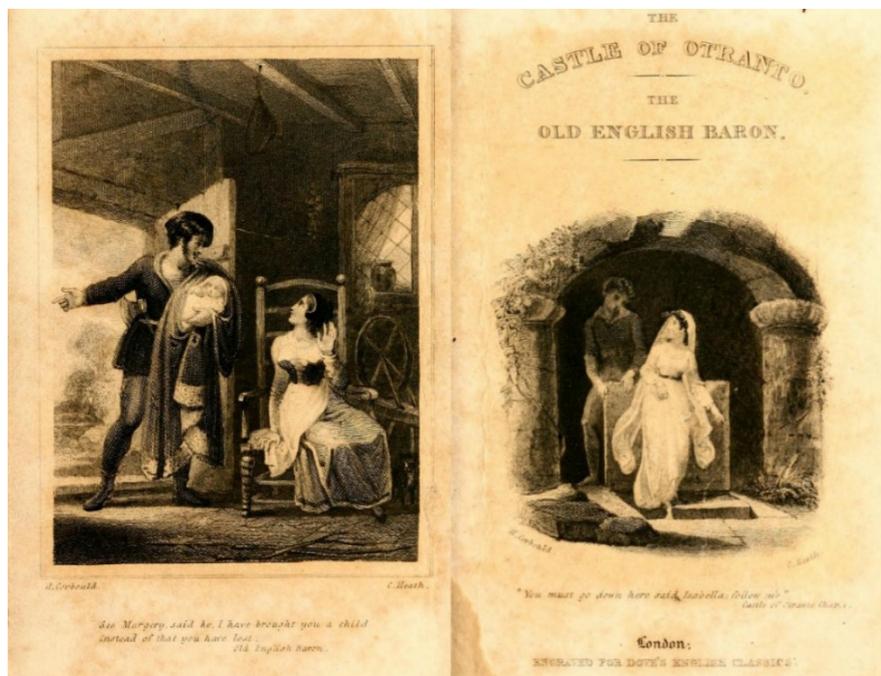


Figure 15: Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 1800, book illustrations

I press further into the Gothic domus with Kahane who cites Leslie Fiedler for whom "beneath the haunted castle lies the dungeon keep: the womb from whose darkness the ego first emerged, the tomb to which it knows it must return at last."²⁸ Kahane concurs, seeing at the centre of the Gothic "the spectral presence of a dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing."²⁹ She refers to the period of early infancy psychoanalysts call primary unity, during which "mother and infant are locked into a symbiotic relation, an experience of oneness characterized by a blurring of boundaries between mother and infant—a dual unity preceding the sense of separate self."³⁰ She describes the maternal body as "both our habitat and our prison"³¹ where separation and individuation, the establishing of a sense of self, "means breaking or loosening the primal attachment to the mother."³² She turns to Norman Holland and Leona Sherman

²⁸ Kahane, 47.

²⁹ Kahane, 47–48.

³⁰ Kahane, 48.

³¹ Kahane, 48.

³² Kahane, 48.

who focus on the early mother-child relationship in the Gothic text, describing the Gothic house as "all the possibilities of a parent or a body."³³ Holland looks to develop strategies to mitigate vulnerability to the menacing environment while Sherman goes to the heart of Gothic fear as a fear "of nothingness or nonseparation."³⁴

The Gothic house as a maternal spectre, an all-encompassing womb and tomb that both entices and threatens a Gothic heroine, is exemplified in a modern Gothic story Kahane offers a précis of Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House*. In Jackson's story, Eleanor, whose domineering mother has just died, joins a group interested in occult phenomena at Hill House. The house is identified as an antagonist, "seeking whom it may devour"³⁵ and Eleanor as its destined inhabitant. Following a failed lesbian relationship that mirrors Eleanor's relationship with her mother, "the force of her longing and her hatred,"³⁶ she is asked to leave the house and dies crashing her car into a tree. Now one of Hill House's ghosts, Eleanor "surrenders to the house, surrenders her illusory new autonomy to remain the child, dependent on the maternal, on Hill House as protector, lover, and destroyer."³⁷ (see fig. 16). I want to see how a Gothic plot might map onto Woodman's figure, if she is subject to a threat and, if so, what danger she is in and how she might escape. I start by drawing out the possibilities for a Gothic mother and daughter.

³³ Kahane, 49.

³⁴ Kahane, 49.

³⁵ Kahane, 53.

³⁶ Kahane, 53.

³⁷ Kahane, 54.

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 16: *The Haunting*, 1999, film still

The Victorian woman was considered civilly dead on her wedding day. Through a law that persisted for over two hundred years, from 1765, “by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything.”³⁸ Incorporated by her husband, the Gothic mother persists under erasure, buried beneath her husband. She is voiceless, denied any autonomy or self-determination, confined to her limited role of wife and mother, much like Friedan’s happy housewife two hundred years later. The Gothic daughter is born into a house where her mother, even if present, is absent. Without a voice or a chance to develop, her mother is a

³⁸ Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (7th edn, 1775), quoted in Mary R. Beard, *Women as Force in History* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 78-79, quoted in Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories*, 2.

spectre. The Gothic house, as a maternal body, both shelters and threatens the daughter. These opposites collide in the maternal assimilation of the daughter. The sheltered daughter learns from her mother to take on the same limited, passive, dependent role, under her own husband. The threatened daughter desperately resists the same burial as her mother, resists her own burial through marriage and motherhood. To ward off a plot that she has no wish to be cast in, she must escape the ruin of her mother, her ruin as a mother. She must assert her own identity outside of the maternal. Unfortunately, the average Gothic plot ends with the daughter escaping the crumbling domus through her own marriage, descent into madness, or death. The Gothic heroine's script is to either flee the dark house, or risk being destroyed by it, only to find her own destruction elsewhere.

I ask if this is what Woodman is staging through her figure or how might she write her plot otherwise. In *House*, where Woodman's figure appears clothed, she is wearing the black shoes, white socks and petticoats of an Alice-in-Wonderlandesque Victorian girl. A young woman dressed like a girl, she appears as another *femme-enfant*. She could be referencing the accepted role of the Victorian woman and the virginal Gothic heroine as an infantilised "good girl," who is seen and not heard, who is present in body but absent in voice, who is a living ghost. Her not-quite-there dis/appearance in *House* could be her acquiescence to an imposed feminine script of silent stasis. However, looking at *Space*², rather than seeing her "layered over by the wallpaper [...] as the living sacrifice to the domus"³⁹ as Solomon-Godeau does, I suggest this *femme-enfant* first tries on, and then resists, a maternal plot. Standing in the forsaken ruin of the maternal body, Woodman's figure hides her face and her sex under patches of

³⁹ Solomon-Godeau, "Just Like a Woman," 252.

floral wallpaper. The Gothic house is cast as a maternal metaphor, either a forsaken ruin, or a devouring enclosure, and often both at once. I conjure this wallpaper as the maternal skin. In one possible reading, Woodman's figure is stuck under the maternal skin, under maternal influence, from infancy into girlhood and beyond. As she grows, the older maternal skin splits and her young skin of possibility, ready to be written on, is revealed. In another, Woodman's figure picks up fragments of this old skin and holds it over her young woman's body. She tries it on for size, to see if a maternal role might fit her. Woodman's figure hides under the maternal skin. Wearing it as an extra layer of skin, it hides her from assuming any role herself. Wearing it as an extra layer of skin, it thickens hers, protecting her against external danger. Half-covered, half-exposed, I see her both returning to and moving out from under the maternal skin. She simultaneously seeks protection, resists maternal influence and resists a maternal role. As such, it is unclear to me if her concealment in *Space²* truly functions as a resistance to an unwanted role and whether her presence is enforced or self-compelled. In *House*, by blurring in the frame, by sliding down the wall, she might be slipping out of the photographic instant, releasing herself from the narrow confines of this plot. But, even blurring, dis/appearing, she is still contained, and in *Space²* and *My House* she is still returning to the maternal domus.

I look for another possibility in her return to the house as a maternal body. In all three works, every way in and out of each house is blocked by objects or bleached out by light. It seems that what is at stake here is not a plot to leave the house, that the outside world is sensed as a possibility but not one that is particularly sought. Instead, it is what happens inside the house that is important. Eleanor's "return" to the maternal body of Hill House coincides with the singular instance of her death.

Woodman's figure returns again, appears again, disappears again, another time again, in each house. In each occurrence, her body feels a little less complete, a little less whole, a little less there than her containing space. Townsend saw Woodman's repetition as a device by which to keep stressing her liberation,⁴⁰ yet had she been liberated, she would surely not need to keep insisting. In repeating, I suggest she is insisting on a question that keeps returning, that plays out in her serial returns. I suggest it is this question that haunts Woodman's figure and that it is her figure, rather than her containing dereliction, that is the haunted house, that each of her dis/appearances raises the spectre of a body that is haunted. In *Surrealist Ghostliness*, Katharine Conley, too, finds Woodman's figure haunted. For her, Woodman's "domestic spaces map the most hidden, perhaps even terrifying aspects of living in a body as familiar and as strange as a childhood home – ostensibly the most intimately familiar place imaginable that just happens to be haunted."⁴¹

What haunts Woodman's figure is "a past which is obscure, dark, buried, needing to be unearthed,"⁴² is the same lost home that Dujourie's figure rehearsed a return to by imitating inertia, is the loss of prior plenitude that constitutes and haunts every animate subject. Where Dujourie's figure wandered in the framing parameters of her linear beginning and ending, parameters that are one aspect of house arrest, Woodman tries to open these parameters in the photographic frame so that her figure might slip free. As her returns to the house persist, it seems that she is unable to slip out of her animate condition through these means. Instead, she looks for a return home within the house, through the house. She adopts the guise of the *femme-enfant*

⁴⁰ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 27.

⁴¹ Katharine Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 156.

⁴² Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories*, 6.

to stage a regression, to try to open up the shortest path home within her animate conditions. The *femme-enfant* attempts to return home through a merger with the house as maternal body. I will show that Woodman's figure remains caught in house arrest, that her play with a maternal space is but a failed return to a false home and that her halfway presence in the house reveals the defining ambivalence of the animate subject. Before I do so, I unpack how the mechanism of returning to the haunted house and the maternal body coincide with the Freudian uncanny.

Uncanny Returns

Through the Freudian uncanny, I look at the coincidence of the maternal body with the lost originary state and the return of the repressed. I begin with Freud's definition of the uncanny. In his 1919 essay "The Uncanny," Freud summarises the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."⁴³ I connect his "known of old and long familiar" to the "old, primordial state" from which all organic life departed and to which it strives to return that he describes in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle."⁴⁴ I will find in the uncanny something that leads back, back to the beginning, back to before there was a beginning, back to the lost home. To begin, I follow Freud's path to his definition. He gathers a history of the uncanny, first through meanings then through occurrences. Uncanny in German is *unheimlich*, unhomely, the opposite of *heimlich*, homely. He begins with definitions of *heimlich* as "belonging to the house, familiar, intimate, agreeable restfulness and security," then expands

⁴³ Freud, "The 'Uncanny' (1919)," 220.

⁴⁴ Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)," 78.

belonging to the house to cover “secretive, concealed, withdrawn from the eyes of strangers.”⁴⁵ In “belonging to the house” and being “withdrawn from the eyes of strangers,” I see a subject attaching themselves to a home that in some way protects their skin surface from suffering, from a suffering brought about by being caught under the gaze of others, and a suffering created by the pressing responsibilities foisted on her by others.⁴⁶ I see Woodman’s figure hiding under wallpaper in *Space*², looking to a maternal body to both recognise and protect her, to shore up her fragile body that can only be externally constituted as whole, to safeguard her from external pressures and dangers.

Freud turns to *unheimlich*, beginning as something “eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear.” Eventually, he takes from Schelling, *unheimlich* “is the name for everything that ought to have remained [...] secret and hidden but has come to light.”⁴⁷ For Freud, “*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*.”⁴⁸ In *The Feminist Uncanny*, Alexandra M. Kokoli points out that this is poor scholarship. For her, *heimlich*, as the opposite of *unheimlich*, developing in the direction of ambivalence until the terms coincide “is only enabled by a deliberate selection of a specific range of meaning of each of the two terms.”⁴⁹ She also notes that, in highlighting Schelling’s definition of that which ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light, “Freud already casts the uncanny in terms of the return of the repressed.”⁵⁰ I take both of

⁴⁵ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 222–23.

⁴⁶ I expand on the subject merging with a *heim* as a form of surface protection in the section “Back to Mother’s Home”

⁴⁷ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 224.

⁴⁸ Freud, 226.

⁴⁹ Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice*, 49.

⁵⁰ Kokoli, 49.

these observations as a sign that Freud needed language to both play out and verify that which is already felt and known: that the loss of the *heim* is the making of the *unheimlich*, both in the house of the subject's body and in the house of her containing environment. The separate animate subject is haunted by the lost home of inanimate continuous wholeness, under house arrest in the *unheimlich* linear parameters of beginning and ending, under house arrest in her *unheimlich* separate body, marked as distinct by the boundary of her skin.

Freud goes on to identify instances of the uncanny. He begins with Jentsch's example: "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate," connecting this to waxwork figures, artificial dolls and automatons.⁵¹ Freud only makes brief mention of Olympia, the automaton who becomes Nathaniel's object of affection in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sand-Man*, a story he draws on in "The Uncanny" in relation to castration. Nathaniel falls for Olympia in spite of, or because of, her ability to sit silently "hour after hour with her eyes bent unchangeably upon her lover's face, without moving or altering her position."⁵² This dream-lover doll is echoed in *The Stepford Wives*, a 1972 novel by Ira Levin and a 1975 film directed by Bryan Forbes in which women are replaced by robots. While, in both these examples, the perfect women are actually robots, Friedan's happy housewife and the Gothic mother boundary both inhabit a blurred boundary between life and death, mechanically performing an unchosen script. The performance of an unchosen script is a further layer of automatism, applied to a subject who, as I discussed in Chapter One through Lacan's mirror stage, is already a

⁵¹ Freud, "The 'Uncanny' (1919)," 226.

⁵² E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Best Tales of Hoffmann* (New York: Dover Publications, 2012), 209.

frozen automaton, an externally constituted bodily totality at odds with her interior organic inadequacy. Kokoli adds that the uncanny is “the specular shadow of the mirror stage,” in play “whenever the interface between the ego and the reflected image is perceived as fissure rather than suture.”⁵³ The automaton subject, caught on her reflection as both a suture and a fissure, finds her body both familiar and strange, haunted by the lack of wholeness. I look at Woodman’s figure wrapped in plastic in *My House*. It is unclear how much room she has to move or breathe. As such, it is hard to gauge whether she is truly alive. Nude, under a clear wrapping of plastic, she could be a boxed Barbie doll, waiting for someone to play with her or, in her dereliction, she could be a doll that is no longer played with. I find another possibility in Woodman’s figure. Appearing as a *femme-enfant*, refusing her development into adulthood, she is an “eviscerated” automaton who can “repress the womb.”⁵⁴ She places herself under a plastic skin, covering and containing herself, blurring her position on the boundary between the animate and the inanimate, to surrender all responsibility and autonomy to the external control of the maternal body, a strategy I unpack in the next section, “Back to Mother’s Home.”

The next instance of the uncanny for Freud is repetition, the same situation recurring or returning. He connects these repetitions to the compulsion to repeat that he expands on in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” noting that “whatever reminds us of this inner ‘compulsion to repeat’ is perceived as uncanny.”⁵⁵ Here, I pause my journey through Freud’s uncanny instances to lay out the different functions of repetition he describes in both “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through” and “Beyond the

⁵³ Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice*, 32.

⁵⁴ Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 50.

⁵⁵ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 238.

Pleasure Principle.” In the first essay, written in 1914, he describes the goal of psychoanalysis: “to fill the gaps in the subject’s⁵⁶ memory.”⁵⁷ What the subject has forgotten has been shut out, but when they speak of their forgotten things they say, “‘I’ve always known that really, I’ve just never thought about it.’”⁵⁸ Freud adds that often what is “‘remembered’ can never have been ‘forgotten,’ since it was never at any point noticed, never conscious.”⁵⁹ Finally, Freud arrives at a psychosomatic method: “the subject does not *remember* anything at all of what he has forgotten and repressed, but rather *acts it out*. He reproduces it not as a memory, but as an action; he *repeats* it, without of course being aware of the fact that he is repeating it.”⁶⁰ The compulsion to repeat is, for Freud, the subject’s way of remembering. In second essay, written in 1920, Freud describes two strikingly different modes of repetition. The first is the *fort | da* game I detailed in Chapter One. Through repeating a game of presence and absence, a child is able to tolerate the disappearance and reappearance of her mother.⁶¹ The presence or absence of the mother appears vital at all moments of the subject’s life. The mother is the first other to recognise her, to shore up her fragile wholeness, in the mirror stage. From gestation to birth and beyond, it is literally the mother’s body which shapes her. Without the mother, it seems, the subject is at a loss. The sense of active control and anticipation in the game gives the subject a sense of comforting mastery over this possible loss. Here, then, the compulsion to repeat figures as an attempt at traumatic mastery. The compulsion to repeat then appears pages later, now in relation to the drives. This compulsion to repeat Freud observes in

⁵⁶ I have exchanged Freud’s term “patient” for the more contemporary and equitable term “subject”

⁵⁷ Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through (1914),” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. John Reddick (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 34.

⁵⁸ Freud, 34.

⁵⁹ Freud, 35.

⁶⁰ Freud, 36.

⁶¹ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 53.

elementary organisms which “did not start out with any desire to change and, given the continuance of the same circumstances, would have constantly repeated the self-same life-cycle,”⁶² a compulsion he later formulates as the death drive. Before I tangle Woodman’s figures into these threads of repetition, I will resume Freud’s journey through repetition in “The Uncanny” to the return of the repressed.

Freud finds, among instances of frightening things, “something repressed which *recurs*.”⁶³ This, for him, constitutes the uncanny, adding that “it must be a matter of indifference whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening or whether it carried some *other* affect.”⁶⁴ This is not merely a matter of indifference, however. Rather, it makes good the extension of *heimlich* into *unheimlich* and returns Freud to his opening definition of the uncanny as “in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.”⁶⁵ He continues that the most heightened experience of the uncanny is “in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts.”⁶⁶ As such, he suggests, our thoughts and feelings on our relation to death “have changed so little since the very earliest times”⁶⁷ with it coming as no surprise that “the primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us and always ready to come to the surface on any provocation.”⁶⁸ Recall that Barthes saw in every photograph the “return of the dead,” that every photograph brings with it

⁶² Freud, 78.

⁶³ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 241.

⁶⁴ Freud, 241.

⁶⁵ Freud, 241.

⁶⁶ Freud, 241.

⁶⁷ Freud, 242.

⁶⁸ Freud, 242.

the “overwhelming consciousness of death,”⁶⁹ an inevitable death that seems to permeate each of Woodman’s photographs.

I look for a link between the repressed that recurs and the strands of repetition I detailed above. Drawing these strands together, I find two senses of the compulsion to repeat. The first as a way to remember where memory itself fails, where repetition as an acting out stands for remembering; the second as a restorative tendency of an organism that seeks to constantly repeat the same life-cycle to “aspire to an old, primordial state from which it once departed, and to which via all the circuitous byways of development it strives to return.”⁷⁰ I find a relation between what returns in the first repetition compulsion and what is sought in the second. Before I reveal this relation, it is useful to consider the different possible tones of repetition. The first uncanny repetition Freud names is the recurrence of something in the external world. This strikes me as an accidental or involuntary repetition which is not the same as the deliberate repetition of the *fort | da* game, or as the persistent repetition of a restorative tendency, or as the eruptive repetitions of acting out. These latter repetitions appear insistent, defiant, comforting, controlling, anything but accidental, and they operate under the relationship of the two repetition compulsions. Where the first compulsion is a refusal to forget, the second is an attempt to return. While Freud suggests that what returns, that which cannot be forgotten, is the fear of death, I suggest otherwise. Referring to “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” death is a condition distinct to the animate organism. That which the subject “has always” known predates the animate organism and its potential towards death, it is the sense of before the

⁶⁹ Roland Barthes, 96, quoted in Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 60–62.

⁷⁰ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 78.

beginning, of the inanimate before the animate, of the home before the house. And it is to that home before the house that the subject wishes to return. In his introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, Mark Edmundson asserts “so, erotically we repeat. We continue time and again trying to regain an illusory former happiness.”⁷¹ This former happiness is, then, an unbroken inanimate continuity. This lost happy home is what haunts the subject’s body. The lost home appears unfamiliar to the subject in their animate form, it haunts them as a persistent forgotten thing and drives their longing to return. In Chapter One, Dujourie’s figure rehearsed the conditions of inertia but her repeated acting, mimicking the conditions of the lost home, could not return her home to inanimate inertia. In this chapter, I look to Woodman’s figure for a strategy to merge with the lost home under her current animate condition.

To unpack this strategy, I link the maternal body in the Gothic to the uncanny. In the section above, “In Gothic Ruin,” I unlocked the womb as the haunted house given form, as Rebecca Munford describes in relation to the writing of Angela Carter and its transfiguration of the European Gothic in *Decadent Daughters and Monstrous Mothers*, “in the threatening and claustrophobic spaces (the womb-like tomb-like castles, coffins and decaying houses) of the Gothic composition.”⁷² In *The Sadeian Woman*, Angela Carter characterises the womb as both longed for and feared, as “a fleshly link between past and future, the physical location of an everlasting present tense that can usefully serve as a symbol of eternity.”⁷³ Returning to “The Uncanny,”

⁷¹ Mark Edmundson, “Introduction,” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), xiii.

⁷² Rebecca Munford, *Decadent Daughters and Monstrous Mothers: Angela Carter and European Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 117.

⁷³ Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: And the Ideology of Pornography*, Reprint edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 108.

Freud finds in the tomb the most uncanny thing of all: “the idea of being buried alive by mistake.”⁷⁴ This terrifying fantasy quickly flips into another, unfrighting, fantasy, that of “intra-uterine existence.”⁷⁵ Female genitals are then swept into the realm of the uncanny. They are the entrance to the former home or *heim* of all human beings, “to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning”⁷⁶ but, following birth, recast as *unheimlich*. It is the site from which the subject first emerges, against which she must establish her own identity. I ask if this former *heim* aligns with the lost home, if the lost home can be returned to through the former *heim* of the maternal body.

Back to Mother’s Home

Here I consider Woodman’s figure’s dis/appearance in relation to a maternal *heim* in *My House* and find an ambivalent subject sliding between implantation and immurement. I begin with a general overview of her dis/appearances in dereliction. Riches emphasises the deep contrast between dark corners and bleached windows in Woodman’s work, “blocking access to the world outside, sealing up the interior to produce a sense of suffocating containment.”⁷⁷ Pedicini describes Woodman’s flesh as consisting of “everything around her, and yet it also dissolves. Her figure encompasses everything else, but it also loses itself amongst everything else.”⁷⁸ She observes Woodman’s figure’s desire to “blur into surrounding space and especially into the

⁷⁴ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 244.

⁷⁵ Freud, 244.

⁷⁶ Freud, 244.

⁷⁷ Riches, “Skin Surface and Subjectivity,” 49.

⁷⁸ Isabella Pedicini, *Francesca Woodman: The Roman Years Between Flesh and Films* (Rome: Contrasto, 2012), 92.

objects she approaches – the corners, doorjambs, gaps, and shelves,”⁷⁹ inserting herself in empty space as though she were another object in the composition. Conley also sees Woodman’s figure becoming “equivalent to the decayed, abandoned domestic interior, merging into its walls and fireplaces or easing out of them, disappearing into luminescence, or being made manifest by it, her silhouette erased by the clarity of sunlight.”⁸⁰ For her, Woodman’s blurring figure “highlights the experience of blending into one’s surroundings, of feeling at home in a space.”⁸¹ Pedicini reads a different tone into Woodman’s figure’s dis/appearances which “does not fit in externally, but seems to belong to the setting itself, searching for a symbolic link that at once recalls affection, panic, and metamorphosis.”⁸² I read a maternal undercurrent in each of these comments through *My House*. Woodman’s figure stands with her back to a bleached window, in a dark corner, by a blocked door, sealed under suffocating plastic. She has turned her back on her way out to a vast world of light beyond the dark cul-de-sac of the womb. Her pale body can barely be distinguished from the corner she has backed into. Her figure encompasses the wall, or the wall encompasses her figure. The lack of clear dominant or determinant in this dyad mirrors the symbiotic relation of primary unity, a “oneness characterized by a blurring of boundaries between mother and infant.”⁸³ Under the plastic sheet in the corner, one of three plastic sheets in the photograph, she blurs into her surrounding space, making herself equivalent to the decayed interior by merging into the wall. Under plastic, I see Woodman’s figure becoming one with the maternal body, not through an equivalence

⁷⁹ Pedicini, 93.

⁸⁰ Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, 7.

⁸¹ Conley, 167.

⁸² Pedicini, *Francesca Woodman*, 75.

⁸³ Kahane, “Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity,” 48.

of role but, through returning to the womb, to her former *heim*. As with her other returns, it is unclear whether her attachment to the wall, here conjured as the uterine wall, is enforced or self-compelled. If enforced then she is subject to an immurement, being drawn back into the womb after gestation, after birth, to a space that can no longer safely contain her, that will seal her in and suffocate her. If self-compelled then, by taking up a plastic skin and positioning herself against her chosen section of wall, she is staging her implantation in the womb, the moment of adhesion from which the embryo begins to receive oxygen and nutrients from the maternal body (see fig. 17). Through this implantation, she surrenders herself entirely to the maternal body. Woodman's figure is shut off from her wider external environment, losing herself to her intimate surroundings, flattening into the scene as if there were no difference to be drawn between subject, object and background. To resolve this ambivalent reading, between immurement and implantation, it may help to determine if the maternal body stands for the lost home, if the lost home can be reached through a return to this body.

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 17: *Embryo implanted in uterine wall*, 3D illustration

In *The Feminist Uncanny*, Kokoli looks at the position of the subject in the womb in relation to the external world. She draws on Emmanuel Levinas writing in *Totality and Infinity* for whom the womb figures as private domain, as a being-at-home-with-himself, a dwelling that is not situated in the objective world.⁸⁴ I see his description as obliterating the identity of the mother in favour of framing an absolute and exclusive home for man. Kokoli draws on Luce Irigaray to reveal a woman's homelessness as she morphs into a home. Her of-the-house-ness was presumed due to "her indispensable role in its maintenance" while the house's "'homeliness' is modelled after the primordial nostalgia for the maternal body and is guaranteed by the presence of the woman in/of the house."⁸⁵ Playing host to man's homelessness, according to Irigaray, "she lacks, notably, the power to fold back around the dwelling which she is. [...]" Tradition places her within the home, sheltered in the home. But that home [...]

⁸⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 21-30, quoted in Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice*, 96.

⁸⁵ Kokoli, 101.

encloses her, places her in *internal exile*.”⁸⁶ This sheltering mother, enclosed in the home, in internal exile parallels the womb and tomb of the Gothic house, the encompassing but voiceless Gothic mother. Kokoli goes further into the mother as a total home. She finds, in Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Roger Dadoun linking an archaic mother to “a wholly undifferentiated universe, ever-present even in her narrowly defined absence, ‘totalising and oceanic,’ ‘a mother-thing.’”⁸⁷ Kokoli identifies in this desire for a ‘being-at-home-ness,’ “a nostalgia for a proper place of his own,”⁸⁸ complete with a lack of division between the self and the archaic mother. Above, I looked at primary unity in relation to the gothic house which, in “Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity,” Kahane describes as “a critical period of early infancy, mother and infant are locked into a symbiotic relation, an experience of oneness characterized by a blurring of boundaries between mother and infant—a dual unity preceding the sense of separate self.”⁸⁹ Now I return to primary unity as a frame for being at home in a proper place. In *Individuation and Narcissism*, Mario Jacoby draws on Erich Neumann who explored the Great Mother as an image of the human psyche. In primary unity, according to Neumann, “what our differentiating consciousness terms ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are identical for the child.”⁹⁰ The subject’s earliest relationship with their mother is one-of-a-kind because “the opposition between automorphous self-development and thou-relation, which fills all human

⁸⁶ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone, 1993), 65, quoted in Kokoli, 101.

⁸⁷ Roger Dadoun in Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1993), 20, quoted in Kokoli, 58.

⁸⁸ Kokoli, 96.

⁸⁹ Kahane, “Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity,” 48.

⁹⁰ Erich Neumann, *The Child: Structure and Dynamics of the Nascent Personality* (New York: Putnam, 1973), 11-12, quoted in Mario Jacoby, *Individuation and Narcissism: The Psychology of the Self in Jung and Kohut* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 52.

existence with tension, does not normally exist.”⁹¹ Neumann develops the idea of unitary reality, where the opposites of inner and outer, psychical and physical, person and object become blurred. For him, “if you speak of objectless self-love you must also speak of subjectless all-love, as well as of a subjectless and objectless totally-being-loved.”⁹² I connect his subjectless all-love to Freud’s take on the female genitals in “The Uncanny.” Freud references a joke, “love is home-sickness,” referring to a man dreaming of a place that was once familiar to him, namely his mother’s body.⁹³ It seems as though the archaic mother-thing and its tension-free relation-without-distinction could offer the subject a return to the lost home, whether this return is gestational or neonatal. In *Beyond Pleasure*, Margaret Iversen refers to Rachel Whiteread’s 1993 *House*, a concrete cast of the interior space of a Victorian terraced house in London that was displayed for 80 days following the demolition of the house’s brick shell. With *House*, says Iversen, “everything was reduced to the same inert substance.”⁹⁴ This inert substance echoes the lost home the subject seeks merger with. By merging into any of her houses Woodman’s figure might attain this same inert singularity. This return to wholeness proves illusory. In *House*, says Iversen, “what we see is a space that is filled, negated – one to which we cannot return.”⁹⁵ Nostalgia is desire for the lost first *heim*, but the essence of nostalgia is that it cannot be satisfied. Nostalgia comes from the Greek compound of *nostos*, meaning homecoming, and *algos*, meaning pain or ache. It is a longing for a return home that cannot be achieved.

⁹¹ Neumann, 14-15, quoted in Jacoby, 52.

⁹² Erich Neumann, *Narcissism, Normal Self-formation and the Primary Relation to the Mother* (New York: Analytical Psychology Club, 1966), 108, quoted in Jacoby, 44.

⁹³ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 245.

⁹⁴ Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure*, 37.

⁹⁵ Iversen, 17.

What returns in the uncanny is the *heimlich*, now rendered *unheimlich*. The lost home is now unfamiliar and inaccessible.

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 18: Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (House)*, 1993

I now resolve why Woodman's houses are derelict. She photographs derelict houses, bringing death closer to her figure and the viewer of the image, because, within the parameters of linear time, death is the inevitable end both are pursuing. She photographs derelict houses because the familiar lost home that haunts the subject can only be conjured in a different form under animate conditions, in an unfamiliar form, as death. Her figure appears in dereliction because, though the lost home could be dreamed as an archaic mother, no biological mother offers those same conditions. The maternal body is a house that is being mistaken for a home. Woodman's houses are derelict because they are decoys in the wrong form. Each house, as a maternal body, is a false home, a space that cannot be returned to, that no subject can fit back

into once they have left. Freud may have correctly pointed out that the female genital organs are the entrance to former *heim* of all human beings but I find a confusion of temporality in his assertion that this is “the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning.”⁹⁶ I find the same confusion in Carter when she describes the womb as “the physical location of an everlasting present tense that can usefully serve as a symbol of eternity.”⁹⁷ The maternal body is conjured as a gothic house in ruin precisely because it belongs to linear time. It marks a particular beginning, a point of transition for the already animate organism, that has transformed from gamete to zygote to new-born. “Once upon a time” conjures the enchanted temporality of the fairy tale, as does “an everlasting present tense” whose “symbol of eternity” could very easily coincide with “and they all lived happily ever after.” The gothic house, by contrast, may have sheltered and surpassed generations of a family but it is ravaged by the passage of time. I also find confusion in the understanding of the function of a womb. It cannot stand for a return to the first lost home, to the inertia of the inanimate before the animate. Pedicini described Woodman’s setting in terms of metamorphosis.⁹⁸ The longing for a return to the womb may suggest a desire for stasis, for an inert wholeness, but that is not the role of the womb. The womb is a space of rapid division and development. This is no space of refusal. It is *the* developmental space *par excellence*. All is change in the womb. All is a shaping of the subject’s shell, a making ready for the role of extra-mural life. There is something else that is very important to note about the maternal body. The fantasy of a total being-at-home-ness without distinction is just that, a fantasy. The unity of a mother-infant

⁹⁶ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 244.

⁹⁷ Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, 108.

⁹⁸ Pedicini, *Francesca Woodman*, 75.

extended body is a fantasy. There is an unmistakeable and constant gap between them. The infant's desire for skin contact, for being held, might be comforting as it recalls the compression of the womb, a space where the infant fit 'perfectly'. But the womb space is one of all boundary, rather than no boundary, a boundary felt by total compression. Even at the point of connection of foetus to placenta to mother, there is still a separation. It is two cells thick. As such, the maternal body is a house of separation rather than a home of wholeness. Even within the mother, it seems, the subject is still at a loss, still separated from her lost home.

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 19: *foetus in womb at 28 weeks of gestation*, photograph

Ambivalent Dis/appearances

The maternal body may need to be given up as a possible return home but I am still intrigued by Woodman's play with this space, even as a false return. I work through Woodman's dis/appearances and reveal a lasting ambivalence in her figure. I ask why might she want to return to the womb-space-as-lost-home and what it might offer her. Merging with the maternal body would allow Woodman's figure to avoid taking on any role created by externally posited socio-cultural norms, ideals, expectations and responsibilities, preventing them being projected onto her body. As a figure who

appears “childlike,” she adopts the figure of the *femme-enfant*. The *femme-enfant* could correspond to an infantilised ideal femininity, a woman, according to Ross, “mimicking of childhood, a form of disavowal of adulthood that enables her to correspond to the ideal of feminine malleability, fragility, and inferiority.”⁹⁹ However, I see the *femme-enfant* as a liberating move. The *femme-enfant* does not have to become a subject. She can refuse any role or responsibility. She does so by surrendering her skin to another surface, a total compression that surrounds and contains her. Under this surface protection, her own surface disappears. No plot can be written on her skin. This surface merger offers a feeling of total care in conjunction with a total lack of responsibility. She thrives through being entirely dependent. She becomes a different tone of automaton, not one that is externally controlled through the pressure of performing but, one that is externally controlled through her surrender into total dependency. This automaton turns away from being a performing puppet towards a comforting stasis. The womb has, however, been identified as a place of development rather than stasis, suggesting that a comforting stasis is impossible to site here. The womb is not a space of eternity. It cannot offer an immortal inanimacy. The womb-as-ruined-house does not offer a way out of the parameters of linear time. Woodman’s figure cannot halt the pressures of her development in this space. The ruin of the mother is the space that she by default grows out of, leaving the mother for dead to obey the exactions of the life drive elsewhere.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 107.

¹⁰⁰ I note here that a form of mortal immortality is dreamt by Freud in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”. He says, “the germ-cells, however, are potentially immortal inasmuch as they are capable under certain favourable conditions of developing into a new individual, or – to put it another way – of enveloping themselves with a new soma.” Here then is kind of bodysnatching immortality that is not made in inertia but that relies on sloughing off the old body and the growing into a new one. See Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 85.

The maternal house, which does not coincide with the lost home, appeared to be a space in which the subject could hide from a plot, but her very plot is begun in this maternal house. In *House*, Woodman's figure tries to slip out of the photographic frame but she cannot, she is caught sliding down the wall, between coming and going. She is dissolving, blurring, making herself equivalent to a house that is not a home. This confusion of a house as a home creates tension in relation to primary unity.

Woodman's figure might seek out the safety of primary unity rather than deal with the painful reality of constituting the self, emblematised in the mirror stage. Riches offers Woodman's practice as an "ongoing process of self-creation," always on the brink of "assimilation into her surroundings."¹⁰¹ Each click of Woodman's camera shutter marks an incantation, "articulating a repetitive, reassuring and exhausting 'I am, I am, I am.'"¹⁰² This repeating, reassuring, exhausting self-creation displays a marked ambivalence to her identity. Where does Woodman's figure locate herself – on the inside, on the outside, where she is, where she is seen, where she touches, where she is touched? This staging of the self recalls a play of dis/appearance that grew out of the *fort | da* game. When the child's mother was gone, was she also gone? Was she still "I" when she was alone or only when she was recognised? The child found a way of staging her own presence and absence in the absence of an affirming other by playing with her reflection in a mirror.¹⁰³ Returning to the *heim* would allow Woodman's figure to avoid the anxiety of self-creation and to forgo taking up further strategies to allay its persistent effects. But, again, this house is not a home and therein lies the problem.

¹⁰¹ Riches, "Skin Surface and Subjectivity," 62.

¹⁰² Riches, 62.

¹⁰³ Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)," 53 note 12.

The fantasy of primary unity sours under these conditions. Kokoli describes the trope of the monstrous maternal in horror films, a destructively smothering figure that transforms the “blissful pre-Oedipal dyadic relationship between mother and child [which] petrifies into an abject nightmare.”¹⁰⁴ This shifts the totalising mother-thing into “the threat of dissolving the bodily boundaries of the subject.”¹⁰⁵ Kokoli draws on Elizabeth Bronfen to reveal woman as the “privileged trope for the uncanniness of unity and loss, of independent identity and self-dissolution.”¹⁰⁶ Remember, Kahane described the maternal body as “both our habitat and our prison.”¹⁰⁷ I play briefly with s|mother. If to mother is to offer a place from which to grow, to smother, as its opposite,¹⁰⁸ is to offer a place for stasis, a smothering that seems to be both deeply desired and deeply feared. Ambivalence sets in. Much as the biological mother cannot offer the lost *heim*, the animate subject cannot return to the condition of inanimate inertia. The subject trapped under house arrest in the animate condition persists in her attempt to return to inanimate wholeness through the false home of the maternal body. Her persistent encounters with a false home drive Woodman’s figure’s repeated dis/appearances and her ambivalence towards them. Much as she may wish to slide into stasis, she cannot. When she tries to slide into stasis, the threat of engulfment and fear of death prove too much so she tries to slide out again. When she slides out, she is caught up again in external pressures, so she tries to slide back again. She is held in a double-edged torture, that of being denied a return and being forced into dependency.

¹⁰⁴ Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice*, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Kokoli, 59.

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), quoted in Kokoli, 23.

¹⁰⁷ Kahane, “Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity,” 48.

¹⁰⁸ I perform a linguistic play with s|mother, creating a shared etymology that I take from Italian, where adding an ‘s’ makes a negative, e.g. *conosciuto* (known) to *sconosciuto* (unknown)

Sliding down the wall, or under paper, or under plastic, she flickers between mobility and immobility. She both yearns for and fears inanimate inertia. The lost *heim* is marked by ambivalence in its uncanny return under a different form as an *unheimlich* house. Woodman's figure's dis/appearances are marked by ambivalence as she wants to return to a whole before there was an "I" as much as she fears surrendering her "I" in her present animate condition. Her dis/appearances point to an impossible paradox of identity at play in her houses as she tries to relinquish, but can only assert, her external identity.

The Arresting Skin

I began by suggesting that Woodman's figure is trying to expand beyond the parameters of beginning and end, aligned with the parameters of photographic capture, so that they cannot fully capture her, using her movement to open another way out, marking the frame of *House* with her dis/appearance. Her figure was shown to be a haunted house, haunted by a lost home now inaccessible as she's trapped within the parameters of beginning and end and the surface of her skin. She is half in and half out, failing to access her lost inanimate wholeness by moving beyond her limiting parameters, she looks to her animate conditions for another way home.

Linking her derelict spaces to the Gothic plot, each house was revealed as a metaphor for the maternal body. She looked for a merger with the lost home through the maternal body, through the womb as her former *heim* (home) but was caught in a false return to an *unheimlich* house. The maternal body is a decoy, a house of separation rather than a home of wholeness. The maternal body is a space of development rather than stillness. It does not sit outside time. Rather it marks a

beginning and is marked by time. As a *femme-enfant*, she returns to and moves away from maternal ruin, trying on her mother's skin as a role to take on or resist. As an automaton, she looks to hide under the maternal skin, to be controlled by it, to give up responsibility. Ultimately, she has grown out of this former animate home and as such her return to it now is ambivalent. This ambivalence drives her repeating returns. She is perpetually caught in her animate condition between her desire to surrender her "I" and her fear of where she would go if she could. In each photographic instant, she is both constituting her self and trying to surrender her self. Her constitution and surrender are both necessarily incomplete, the former in its struggle between external apprehension and internal tension, the latter as it catches on her surface of separation. Her fantasy of return coincides with her fear of death.

Her return to the lost home through the maternal body is impossible, was always impossible. Mother and infant are always separate, are always separated by their skin. The subject's animate condition blocks her return to inanimate wholeness. Her skin blocks her return. She is immured or arrested by her skin, just as she is immured or arrested by the parameters of beginning and end. She stages this immurement on her skin that is at once separate from and similar to her surroundings. She stages this immurement through photography as a medium of surface, each print a body flattened under a separating skin, held in extremis, away from home. To break out of house arrest, to return home, the subject must slip out, not of the frame, but of her skin. She looks for a way out of her skin through Jayne Parker's *K*.

d.a.n.c.e. f.o.r. y.o.u.r. d.a.d.d.y., 2017



Figure 20: Katharine Fry, *d.a.n.c.e. f.o.r. y.o.u.r. d.a.d.d.y.*, 2017, HD video

d.a.n.c.e. f.o.r. y.o.u.r. d.a.d.d.y. is a 7:40 HD video made in 2017 that is staged at 1:1 scale with the base of the image projected at floor level. A figure “dances” in a windowless attic. Clad in a black lace circle, she appears at once woman, creature and form (see fig. 20). She is flung round the room by an unseen force, recalling poltergeist activity. Her rigid body performs an indecipherable semaphore mirroring the shapes of her containing environment. She moves over a soundtrack of bumping and moaning. A woman’s voice whispers, “he’s on his way, he’s coming home” and sings “she-bop, she-bop,” punctuating stages of the figure’s movement without stemming its frenetic rhythm. The figure stills as a shadow enters the scene, first unseen and then seemingly greeted by a slow turn of her head. “She-bop, she-bop” emerges as the harmony to

the same voice singing “I only have eyes for you,” made famous by The Flamingos. The shadow and figure ‘dance’ together to an ambiguous climax.

The figure’s movement is created entirely by the cut. Through a process of “knitting” several short sequences together, she appears stretched into five different postures, flung into five different parts of the attic, in the space of a few frames. The cut holds her body in seeming stillness while generating the impossible acrobatics that propel her. These acrobatics stand apart from the soundtrack of bumping and moaning that conjure a figure dragging and falling round a space. This diegetic sound does not correspond with the fleeting appearances of the figure who floats over the room rather than seeming part of it. Rather than unfolding through the duration of the video, her figure appears in instants that create a false continuity through the speed of the jump cuts.

Carried by the cut, the figure is rendered unstable. She has a constant presence in the scene but cannot be held in any particular place. Her spatial positioning is unpredictable. This unpredictability allows her to evade spatial capture, to avoid being pinned in place by the gaze of an other, to slip out of their projected expectations. Yet it also reinforces the instability of her identity. Attached to nowhere, she becomes a less material presence, a ghost in the attic. She does not haunt the house, however. She is a haunted house, haunted by the loss of inanimate wholeness that constitutes her as a separate being. To make good that loss, to find a way home, she mirrors the attic’s triangular spaces with her body, trying for merger into a new wholeness but she remains entirely in flux and entirely separate.

The appearance of an other in the form of a shadow offers another chance for merger but her fate through this union is ambiguous. The voice sings of the gaze’s strong pull,

everything else disappears from view because “I only have eyes for you.” Even in the intensity of this transfixion, separation persists between “I” and “you.” The figure in flux displays her ambivalence in relation to her separate condition and possible merger. She tries to outdo her containment as an incomplete being by refusing to be caught in her limiting skin or by becoming part of a larger body. She can do neither and remains “dancing” in-between

Tablemouth, 2016



Figure 21: Katharine Fry, *Tablemouth*, 2016, HD video, composite still



Figure 22: Katharine Fry, *Tablemouth*, 2016, HD video, installation view Alchemy Film Festival 2018

Tablemouth is a 21:48 HD video diptych made in 2016 that is staged at 1:1 scale as an installation for one viewer in a confined space. The height of the space corresponds with the height of the screens and the width to the span of the diagonally facing screens. Across the two screens, a figure appears framed by a patch of light between two low wooden beams in a red brick attic. Wearing a bright green 1950s tea dress and bright red shoes, she provides the supporting balance for a small, round wooden table, either by crouching beside it and biting its rim or by lying under it and swallowing one of its legs in her mouth. Without her intervention the table would fall. Sometimes her mouth trembles, sometimes she bares her teeth, otherwise her mouth is still and concentrated on its task. Whether crouching or lying, she taps her hands against the

floor, creating a percussive rhythm akin to a heartbeat. While lying, she opens and closes a bright red fan, setting up another pulsing heartbeat. Her percussions do not set up a regular rhythm, her tapping is not constant in each scene, does not sync with the second screen and is not reset by the cut. The rest of her body is immobile, held in position by the constraints of her labour. A female voice, transformed into a chorus in 4:1 surround sound, sings variations of *Summertime* lyrics, either signalling or following a cut between scenes.

In jump cuts, the two screens change between crouching-biting and lying-swallowing scenes. The table is a constant through each scene, but it is also an unstable object, appearing with two, three or four legs. The scene is rendered unstable by mirror flips in the cuts between crouching-biting and lying-swallowing sequences. The attic sometimes appears as two distinct spaces sharing a boundary wall and sometimes as a single space spread across the two screens. Due to these flips, the figure also appears unstable. It is unclear whether she is a single figure repeating, a double created by reflection, or doppelgangers sharing the same fate. The screens refuse to reveal a “true” table, a “true” room, a “true” figure. The shifting scenes do not offer the viewer any reassuring identification with the reality of their projected images, rather, as in Surrealist film, they reveal the fragile illusion of the constructed image and “expose the very misrecognition at the heart of the film’s resemblance to the [Lacanian] Imaginary.”¹

The jump cuts between sequences interrupt the duration of the scene, suspending linear continuity. The viewer witnesses periods of extensive duration but the cut

¹ Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Urbana, Ill.; London: University of Illinois Press), 41.

disrupts any possible shared continuity, ejecting the viewer from the flow of the sequence while holding the figure in an unknowable duration. The figure labours under this duration and the cut offers no relief from her table-mouth task. There are no easy beginning and end points to her supporting task, no room to rest from the world that she maintains through her mouth. She marks her own call to labour with her hands, performing an uneven clock that will not wind down.

The lyrics that run over the crouching-biting and lying-swallowing scenes are ambiguous. They may offer comfort, a promise of some future change, or they may act as a cruel taunt to the pinned figure who is unable to “rise up singing.” She inhabits a bare life, a fulcrum of strategies and frustrations. She immobilises her body in a bid to rejoin lost inanimate wholeness, her red shoes, a symbol of desire played out as choreomania, from sixteenth century “Dancing Plague of Strasbourg” to Hans Christian Anderson in nineteenth century, now stilled.² Her vitality persists, however. She cannot stop the tapping of her hands, the opening and closing of her fan. The pulse of life that is desire cannot be stilled. Even the desire for no desire betrays a desire. She turns to another possible wholeness. Connecting herself to the table, she creates a co-dependent system, attempting a merger with another body and collapsing the distinction between figure, object and background. Though she may provide the balance the table-minus-one-legs lacks, she is not the table, nor part of the table. She remains bound to the table but distinctly separate from it.

² See Kéline Gotman, *Choreomania: Dance and Disorder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) and Hans Christian Andersen, “The Red Shoes (1845),” in *Fairy Tales*, trans. Reginald Spink, Everyman’s Library Children’s Classics (London: Everyman Library, 2002), 279–87.

Chapter Three

Jayne Parker's *K*: A Separating Skin

Surface Tensions

Part One: A woman seals her body

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 23: Jayne Parker, *K*, 1989, 16mm film

The image is black and white. The frame is tight. A woman's face is caught in profile, bounded above her eyebrows to above her chin and before her ear. A black frame with the title "K." Her fingers deep in her mouth, she is routing, reaching for something. She finds, grasps and pulls the beginning of what appears to be her intestines from her mouth. Her innards fall between her breasts. She pulls with her right hand, drawing her innards further out. She pulls with her left hand, her innards fall further down. Her face

framed in profile again, the tunnel of her guts stretching out of her mouth, out through the bottom of the frame. Her innards fall in front of her sex. She pulls, her insides fall. Her innards fall between her breasts. She pulls, her insides fall. Her fingers deeper in her mouth, she reaches for more of her insides, pulling them further, falling them further. Her feet framed in profile step gently behind her pile of insides growing in front of them. She pulls more of her insides out through her mouth. More of her insides fall out from her mouth. More of her innards fall in front of her sex. She pulls, more falls. She pulls, more falls. More of her insides pile in front of her feet. She pulls more of her insides out through her mouth, working her lips to aid her extrusion. More of her innards fall between her breasts. She pulls, more falls. More of her innards fall in front of her sex. She pulls, more falls. The end of her innards falls in front of her sex in close-up. She purses her lips, licks her lips, wipes her mouth. Her feet step and her hands gather up her intestines. She holds her insides in her arms framed in close-up. She puts her insides down. Bending over her pile of insides in profile, she casts her rope of innards onto her arms. Bulbous folds and drapes of her insides are framed in close-up while her casting on continues beyond the frame. She knits her intestines with her hands framed from above. She looks down at her labour. She knits more of her insides. Her knitting covers her sex. Her collar bone fills the frame as she continues knitting in and out shot. Framed from her forehead to her mid-thigh she continues knitting her insides. She continues knitting her intestines over her sex. She holds her knitted intestines across her hands hanging at her sides, draping her insides from her knees to the floor. She lifts her hands above her shoulders, jutting her elbows out, her draped knitted innards cover her from her breasts to knees. Black frame.

Part Two: Frustrated by her sealed body

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 24: Jayne Parker, K., 1989, 16mm film

A black frame with the title "2." Feet framed standing by the edge of a swimming pool, her toes stepping and curling over the side. Her feet leave the frame, she dives into the pool, a splashing sound. Her hands, knees and feet pass through the frame as she climbs out of the pool to stand up, turn around and dive in again. She climbs up a ladder framed in profile and out of the pool. Her head framed from behind, she pushes her hair out of her face, she lifts her arms up to dive and dives out of shot. She climbs up a ladder and out of the pool, head to mid-thighs passing through the frame. Framed in full, from the front, she walks along the poolside beside a run of empty changing rooms. Her face framed in profile, she wipes her face with her hands and pushes her hair out of her face. Rippling water plays over the brick swimming pool, punctuated by

the spreading circles from falling water drops. Her face framed in profile, she wipes her face with her hands and pushes her hair out of her face, looking down, almost closing her eyes. Feet framed standing by the edge of a swimming pool, her toes stepping and curling over the side. Her feet leave the frame, she dives into the pool, a splashing sound. Her hands, knees and feet pass through the frame as she climbs out of the pool. Framed from the top of her head to her mid torso, she walks along the poolside, turning to profile to face the pool, making prayer-like gestures as she wipes her face. Rippling water plays over the brick swimming pool, framed from above, her head enters from the bottom right of the frame, her arms outstretch to dive in, her body shown in full making, contact with the water. Black frame.

This is *K.*, a 1989 black and white 16mm film by Jayne Parker (see figs. 23 & 24). *K.* follows the works of Dujourie and Woodman by more than a decade, made at the end of second-wave feminism. Parker, like Woodman and Dujourie, is present both behind and in front of the camera, staging herself for it. She, too, frames her body in relation to an interior. There is a shift in Parker's *K.* in relation to the works I chose by Dujourie and Woodman. Her film is separated into two parts with the addition of a second location and action, moving from an institutional interior to a public swimming pool. This shift creates a marked contrast between parts one and two of *K.* as well as in relation to Dujourie and Woodman's works. A.L. Rees describes the climate in which Parker began to make films while at art school in the late seventies. He sees her work as echoing the "new intimacy and subjectivity [...] of 'room films'" created by a number of young filmmakers who made "a turn to towards the interior."¹ A "room film" he

¹ These include Penny Webb, Nick Collins, Will Milne and Nicky Hamlyn see A.L. Rees, "The Artist as Filmmaker," in *Jayne Parker: Filmworks 79-00* (Exeter: Spacex Gallery, 2000), 9-10.

describes as revealing an intimate, quietly eroticised, reflective space together with the incorporation of the artist's own body.² I see *K.* as a room film in a different way. I suggest Parker's focus is on the body as a room or a container. It is her figure's body, as an intimate and eroticised space, that she is sealing and unravelling across *K.*'s two parts. She draws attention to her figure's body as a house, a separating boundary, first and foremost, before then considering the impact or potential of her containing spaces on this body-as-house.

In their foreword to *Jayne Parker: Filmworks*, Zoe Sherman and Tom Trevor describe Parker's films as giving form "to intense inner feelings, which by their very nature defy re-presentation," through "a process not so much of externalisation but of embodiment," whereby Parker's works give "a visible *presence* to the invisible emotions and sensations that constitute subjective experience."³ Rees concurs with their embodied reading, adding that "the body, its form and fluids and intimacies, its inner tangles and drives are given external shape in stark and sharp images" and Parker's films "deal with sensations and ideas at the borderline of naming, or maybe with namelessness itself."⁴ In "Poetry as Film" in the same volume, Anthony Howell opens Parker's work to psychoanalytic theory. Noting that, "the issue in Jayne Parker's films is often an internal one, despite a predominance of physical activity."⁵ He recalls Freud's assertion that "what we know of the psyche is derived solely from symptoms."⁶ As such, "what cannot be shown cannot be known."⁷ Of her practice in

² Rees, 10–11.

³ Zoe Sherman and Tom Trevor, "Foreword," in *Jayne Parker: Filmworks 79-00* (Exeter: Spacex Gallery, 2000), 5.

⁴ Rees, "The Artist as Filmmaker," 9.

⁵ Anthony Howell, "Poetry as Film," in *Jayne Parker: Filmworks 79-00* (Exeter: Spacex Gallery, 2000), 31.

⁶ Howell, 31.

⁷ Howell, 31.

general, Parker describes her concern with “things being out of their element,” through which she is “looking for some sort of transformation.”⁸ On *K.*, she says, “I bring out into the open all the things I have taken in that are not mine and thereby make room for something new. I make an external order out of an internal tangle.”⁹ And, “I dive into the pool, attempt to enter into a new space,” adding, “and so I feel I could make myself dive in, again and again and again and never truly enter the water.”¹⁰ I suggest Parker’s practice embodies, makes present, the interiority of subjective experience. The “internal tangle” she “brings out into the open” through her figure is, I argue, the search for wholeness in the return to inanimacy of the death drive. I see her skin as the *mise en scène* for an irresolvable conflict. I assert the conflict is between her skin as a container and desire as a contained force. I argue that the *first compression* is of desire into the body and arrive at this compression through an architectural metaphor. Through Chapters One and Two, I arrived at a subject who has been separated from an originary home of wholeness. Now an animate subject, her boundary of skin holds her as separate and marks her as distinct from her environment. In this Chapter, I look for strategies to rupture her container of skin, releasing her contained desire, breaking her out of house arrest and returning her to the continuity-without-differentiation of the originary home.

Through my reading of *K.*’s two parts, I conjure two possibilities for undoing the subject’s surface tension and releasing compressed desire. Above I gave my own titles to my descriptions of the two parts of *K.* to assert that I am drawing from, then elaborating on what is represented by Parker. Through Part One, *A woman seals her*

⁸ Video interview in *The Frame - Jayne Parker* (BFI, 2005).

⁹ Jayne Parker, “K.,” LUX, accessed March 10, 2019, <https://lux.org.uk/work/k1>.

¹⁰ Video interview in *The Frame - Jayne Parker* (BFI, 2005).

body, I suggest that, by removing her intestines, she denies having a surface in conflict with an inner force by becoming a single, filled-in mass; a mass that makes her surface and interior one. I connect this filled-in mass to the figure of the stone. As a stone, she can deny any surface tension. Desire no longer plagues her. She feels whole, self-sufficient. From being open, she becomes closed. From being penetrable, she becomes hermetic. From being vulnerable, she believes herself invulnerable. But the stone's sealing is a withering one. She is vulnerable in her isolation. I consider this figure-become-stone in relation to fullness and emptiness, too much or too little maternal care and Julia Kristeva's rendering of abjection.¹¹ I work through petrification – becoming stone – as a strategy to protect the subject from the trauma of her constituting loss, and a turn to stone as a short circuit return to inanimate wholeness, both through readings of Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle."¹²

In Part Two, *Frustrated by her sealed body*, by framing fragments of her body repeatedly diving into water before the final shot freezes on a full-body dive, I suggest Parker's figure is attempting to dissolve her surface of skin, releasing compressed desire into equilibrium with its environment. Even as a sealed figure who becomes stone-like, desire pierces her indurate enclosure, pushing her towards an opposing limit state. From a turn to stone, she turns to water. She is in a public swimming pool, a place that, by definition, suggests the presence of other bodies. She might be seeking other bodies, a body of bodies greater than her single body, or a bodilessness, a no-body, seeking to dissolve her body in the waves. Beyond her edges is beyond the bounds of desire, beyond herself. But where is "she" if she is no longer bound by her

¹¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

¹² Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)."

limits? 'She' is vulnerable in the absence of her delineation. I link her diving body, framed only in fragments by the camera, to skin removal in art and myth. I suggest that desire is a force greater than the limits that contain it, referencing again the "organic inadequacy" of Lacan's mirror stage, and the "astronomical force" that threatens to explode out of Leonora Carrington, destroying her and the world in her account of madness, *Down Below*.¹³ I consider Parker's dissolving figure by contrasting the watery maternal environments of Astrida Neimanis's hydrofeminism with Freud's oceanic feeling.¹⁴ I find an ambivalent subject who trembles between wanting to dissolve her "I" as much wanting to prove herself to be concretely impermeable. I link this trembling to Roger Caillois' "just similar" subject in "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia."¹⁵

I read in Parker's *K*. an initial gesture to preclude access to herself followed by a withering isolation which she seeks to undo through a movement towards dissolution, ultimately a failed dissolution that catches on her skin. I use its two-part staging to reveal a cycle of ambivalence inherent to the animate subject in relation to two opposing approaches to inanimate wholeness. Wholeness as self-sufficiency transposes wholeness as merger. The subject is first concretely here, in a suffocating burial of stony non-existence, then expelled into nowhere. My story, from stone to dissolution, follows the order of *K*., from a subject closing off to opening up but it could be played in reverse. An attempt to dissolve strikes fear in the subject, sensing the loss

¹³ See Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, N.Y.; London: W.W. Norton, 2007), 75–81 and Leonora Carrington, *Down Below (1942)*, ed. Marina Warner, New York Review Books Classics (New York: New York Review Books, 2017).

¹⁴ See Astrida Neimanis, "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water," in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 96–115 and Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989).

¹⁵ Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia (1935)."

of her edges so she attempts to regroup, to pull back, to make solid what has melted. It is this inextricable cycle, the frustration of desire that drives it, and the opposing strategies which ultimately prove futile that are key to my account of house arrest. She finds her separating skin at once too rigid and too porous.

A Separating Skin

I begin with the mise en scène of the skin. In *The Skin-Ego*, Didier Anzieu asserts that question of topography was left incomplete by Freud, both in the analysis of fantasies of the container and of the contained, and in issues of touch between mother and baby.¹⁶ He continues that “the thing that has been misunderstood, denied or entirely absent – in education, in everyday life, in the rise of structuralism, in the psychologism of many therapists and sometimes even in child-rearing practices – was and to a great extent still is, the body.”¹⁷ The *skin-ego* is “a mental image used by the child’s Ego during its early stages of development to represent itself as an Ego containing psychological contents, based on its experience of the surface of the body.”¹⁸ It is supported by the functions of the skin. The skin is simultaneously “a system for protecting our individuality and a first instrument and site of interaction with others.”¹⁹ It is a containing and retaining sac inside which fullness made through feeding and care accumulates. It is “the interface which marks the boundary with the outside and keeps that outside out.”²⁰ It is a barrier that protects against penetration

¹⁶ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 3.

¹⁷ Anzieu, 23.

¹⁸ Anzieu, 43.

¹⁹ Anzieu, 3.

²⁰ Anzieu, 40.

though it can be represented as penetrable through wounding, through an opening or orifice, through being permeable without clear boundaries.²¹ It is an inscribing surface that is marked by projections of responsibility, role and plot as I have argued in Chapters One and Two. The skin concurrently hides and reveals, separates and communicates, focuses and distances. It makes clear the boundary of the subject and marks that subject as separate. As such, the skin, as a continuous surface, renders the subject discontinuous, that is distinct, from its surroundings.²²

I look back to Freud from Anzieu. In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” I see a clear topographical argument. It is apparent that the skin not only marks a physical boundary, it is inherently linked to a psychic boundary. Freud describes an organism in its simplest form as an “undifferentiated vesicle of irritable matter,”²³ that is, a kind of membranous fluid sac, where its surface is its sole receptor organ. This organism must be equipped with some form of protection against stimulation to not be destroyed by the powerful energies, or excitations, of the outside world. Its outer layer becomes necrotic, that is, it hardens and deadens, becoming less sensitive to stimulation while protecting deeper receptor layers. According to Freud, “in highly developed organisms the stimulus-receiving cortical layer of the erstwhile vesicle has long since retreated into the inner depths of the body, but parts of it have remained on the surface immediately beneath the general protective barrier.”²⁴ The surface stimulus-receivers are the skin and sense organs, taking in samples of the external world. The samples, energies or excitations, are processed by both the surface and deep layers but, due to

²¹ Anzieu, 34. These representations of penetration are drawn from the 1958 research on body image and personality of two American scientists, Seymour Fisher and Sidney Earl Cleveland who isolated “Barrier” and “Penetration” scores among responses to Rorschach inkblot tests.

²² I unpack this play on dis/continuity in relation to the figure of the stone in the section “Fill Me Up”

²³ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 66.

²⁴ Freud, 66–67.

the protective barrier of the surface, affect the deeper layers on a regulated and reduced scale. This processing, passing from coming into consciousness at surface level to leaving a lasting trace at a deeper level, is memory formation. In trauma, for Freud, the excitations from outside are strong enough to break the protective surface barrier.²⁵ The skin is a psychic and physical apparatus that sits at the border between the external and internal. In *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, Jean Laplanche draws on Freud's "The Ego and the Id" to link the formation of the ego to the skin: "the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may be thus regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body."²⁶ However, the ego must be instituted before a boundary of inside and outside can be established, together with the articulation "I want to take this into me and keep that out of me."²⁷

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 25: Pipilotti Rist, *Mutaflor*, 1996, video

²⁵ I develop trauma as a surface rupture through the figure of the stone in the section "Fill Me Up"

²⁶ Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 81.

²⁷ Laplanche, 81.

Working through this play of boundary origin, I consider the physical make-up of the skin and its penetrability. As Klaus Biesenbach points out in exhibition catalogue *Into Me/Out of Me*, it is important to note that the human body has two kinds of skin: the visible dry outer skin and hidden wet inner skin.²⁸ The mouth and anus are the meeting points of these two kinds of skin. They act as control mechanisms, regulating the physical introduction and rejection of objects, framing both the body's ability to give and take. I see the connecting wet inner skin between them as a tunnel, via which the body performs circuits of filling and spilling. The body as tunnel recalls Pippilotti Rist's 1996 work *Mutaflor* where a camera appears to travel in through her mouth and out through her anus, as if swallowed and expelled repeatedly (see fig. 25). Her body appears as a constantly penetrable passage, a site of looping where something neither stays in nor stays out. I contrast this with Parker's figure's removal of her guts. I suggest that in removing this passageway from her body, she halts the flow of ingestion and egestion that would otherwise course incessantly through her. In attempting to unravel this gesture, I question the above skin distinctions. I suggest the visible outer skin is felt to be both public and private. Public because it is the surface through which interactions with others are conducted. Private because it is felt as a sensitive and vulnerable boundary. I position the hidden inner skin in the same way. It is felt to be deeply private. No one is ordinarily witness to another's gastrointestinal processes. But, I argue, this inner skin could also be public. The mouth and anus, sphincters of circular muscle, are thresholds, portals to the body that can be squeezed open or shut. If held open, then the tunnel of the body is open, open to the outside, open as a tunnel of outside passing through the body. I argue that, what are generally

²⁸ Klaus Biesenbach, *Into Me/Out of Me* (Ostfildern: Maidstone: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 12.

termed “insides,” from the oesophagus to the guts, are really an inside-outside, or an outside-inside. This “inner” space is then a “public” space. There is, I suggest, no difference between the outside world in contact with the outer skin and that which is in touch with the inner skin. The skin, then, could be said to meet the same energies and excitations of the external world on two fronts instead of one.

The skin is the subject’s protective boundary. As part of the psychic apparatus, according to Freud, it aspires to “keep the quantity of excitation present within it at the lowest possible level, or at least to keep it constant.”²⁹ The skin is the subject’s distinguishing boundary. Her survival and basic definition are dependent on her skin. Here I recall Laplanche and Pontalis for whom “the very concept of an organism implies the permanent maintenance of an energy-level different from that obtaining in the environment.”³⁰ The skin contains the subject of house arrest. It separates her “organic inadequacy,” her “irritable matter,” from inanimate wholeness. Before I work through strategies to seal or rupture the surface of the bounded subject, I pay closer to the “irritation” within the subject that wants to return home. I call this irritation desire.

The First Compression is Desire

In Chapter One, I highlighted the relationship between a melancholic subject and a lost object. The melancholic’s “inability to grieve the lost object comes precisely from the

²⁹ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 47.

³⁰ Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 349.

consistent experience of the object as not lost, in the sense that it never happened, was never made alive and present, and therefore was never subject to loss.”³¹ I argued that the loss is not the loss of an object, but the loss of a state before there was a subject and object. I connected this lost state to the inanimate that, as Freud asserts in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” existed before the animate. He posits the death drive as “a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state, which prior state the organism was compelled to relinquish due to the disruptive influence of external forces” where the death drive is “a manifestation of inertia in organic life.”³² I argued that this restoration cannot be made by an animate subject that is, by definition, distinct from her environment. She can only rehearse inertia. Her sense of loss, of not being whole, can only be felt in relation to separate and distinct objects. She can no longer be whole in the inanimate, only part of the animate, a subject among many objects, an object to other subjects. Her separation from the inanimate is originary trauma.

In Chapter Two, referring to Freud’s “The Uncanny,” I suggested the subject is haunted by “something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression,”³³ the *heimlich* (familiar) returning as something *unheimlich* (unfamiliar). He suggests that the strongest experience of the uncanny is in relation to death and the return of the dead.³⁴ I argued that death is a condition distinct to the animate organism and that which is “familiar and old-established” predates the animate organism and its potential towards death. It

³¹ Jacques Hassoun, *La Cruauté Mélancolique* (1995; repr., Paris: Flamarrion, 1997), 44, quoted in Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 22.

³² Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 76.

³³ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 241.

³⁴ Freud, 241.

is the sense of before the beginning, of the inanimate before the animate, of a home before house arrest. I considered the maternal body as a possible site of return to the inanimate, as Freud describes the womb as “the former *heim* (home) of all beings where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning.”³⁵ I found the maternal body to be a space of development rather than inertia and a house of separation rather than a home of wholeness.

Desire, I now argue, emerges in Dujourie’s unsuccessful rehearsals of inertia in Chapter One and in Woodman’s false returns home in Chapter Two. Desire is the mechanism that drives the house arrested subject’s attempts for home. But the homecoming is always thwarted. Remember, it is the essence of nostalgia that it cannot be satisfied. There is no going back to the lost home. But desire might offer an alternative route. In *Aurelia*, Carol Mavor draws on Lacan to describe desire as a weapon against nostalgia.³⁶ Desire, like a carrot on a string, “is always before us, ‘eternally stretching forth towards the desire for something else.’”³⁷ Desire, according to Lacan, is a metonymy, a displacement. The lost state appears to be positioned ‘behind’ the subject, as a before-the-beginning. As shown in Chapter One, the beginning is a movement from inanimacy into plot while metonymy is a key figure of movement in narrative. A chain of linked metonymies, or displacements, drives a narrative towards, and then back from, the final coherence of its ending, with this ending conferring meaning on what came before. Brooks, paraphrasing Lacan, states that “desire must be considered the very motor of narrative, its dynamic principle.”³⁸ What happens if

³⁵ Freud, 244.

³⁶ Mavor, *Aurelia: Art and Literature Through the Mouth of the Fairy Tale*, 59.

³⁷ Mavor, 59.

³⁸ Brooks, “Freud’s Masterplot,” 281.

desire is not just a force driving plot towards an end but a force driving forwards, driving away from the lost state, away from nostalgia? Desire, as a stretching forth, could propel the subject away from loss, away from exposure to the impossibility of her return. As a way of not turning back, or looking back, it could be a weapon against nostalgia. However, desire cannot reach the satisfying ending of a plot. Desire tries to cover over the loss that constitutes the subject through a chain of linked displacements. Each displacement is an object that could offer the subject a substitute encounter with their lost wholeness. Each object fails, as did the maternal body in Chapter Two, and is replaced by another in an inexhaustible chain. Each encounter with an object can only fail because the separate animate subject can never find inanimate wholeness with another separate object. Desire is inexhaustible. It is driven by nostalgia. Each reach forward is really a displaced attempt to reach the before-the-beginning again. It is a reach toward a lost past that has been miscast, rendered unfamiliar, as it appears as a graspable future. Desire then reaches in two directions at once for something that is always out of reach. Returning to Mavor, desire is an insatiable appetite. She reads Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, where there may be "jam to-morrow and jam yesterday – but never jam *to-day*,"³⁹ to remind that "if it's always tea-time, then we are always hungry, always wild with desire."⁴⁰ The subject is left with her desire, a desire that makes her guts ache.

I suggest that the subject contains inexhaustible desire. I stay with hunger and the maternal body to unpack this contained desire in terms of separation, gap and compression. I return to primary unity as an illusory state. In the extra-mural

³⁹ Mavor, *Aurelia: Art and Literature Through the Mouth of the Fairy Tale*, 56.

⁴⁰ Mavor, 59.

environment, the infant feels hungry. Her hunger is felt as an empty stomach, as an emptiness. Her hunger for milk launches desire that is satisfied by her mother. In primary unity the infant is supposedly unaware of a distinction between her self and an other, because a (m)other satisfies her needs instantly or she understands her mother to be an extension of herself.⁴¹ This lack of distinction and immediate satisfaction are but fantasies. For there to be satisfaction, there must be something to be satisfied, a need. This need plays out as the infant's emptiness. This need is a gap. Even if satisfaction is given and received in a nanosecond, there is still a gap. This gap is desire. This need, as gap, ignites the chain of desire for the other. To close the gap through fusion is the refrain for wholeness, constantly broken at the meeting of the boundaries of mother and infant, at their surfaces of separation. This gap as desire opens in originary trauma. What follows the separation of the animate from the inanimate is desire. What appears in the gap between the lost home and the subject is desire. Desire drives the subject to close this gap, to undo separation, but desire is contingent on a gap, on a separation. Each attempt to close the gap is caught against the separating surface of the skin. Desire is contained by this surface boundary.

Returning to the definition of an organism as that which maintains "an energy-level different from that obtaining in the environment,"⁴² I consider the containing of desire within the surface boundary of the body as directly subsequent to originary trauma. I call this containing the first compression, that is, of desire into the body. I call it a compression as I imagine desire to be an interior force that exerts a pressure to escape from within its boundary. In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud asserts that the

⁴¹ Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, 20.

⁴² Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, 349.

pleasure principle serves to “render the psychic apparatus completely free of excitation, or to keep the quantum of excitation within it constant, or to keep it at the lowest possible level [...] [it partakes] in that most universal endeavour in all living matter to revert to the quiescence of the inorganic world.”⁴³ I question why he deems this constancy to be at a low ebb. Though through the skin and sense organs, Freud posited a number of barriers and protections to guard against the excessive excitations of the external world, I imagine a level of excitation that wants to break out from its enclosing layer and join its mirror intensity in the external world. Desire as a pressure seeking discharge builds under compression. I think through this compression using Gordon Matta-Clark’s work as described by Anne Carson in *Float, Cassandra Float Can*: “He spoke of “liberating” the compressed force of a building simply by making a hole. He hoped to “retranslate” the space into something he could “taste.”⁴⁴ In *The Aesthetics of Disengagement*, Christine Ross draws on Edward Casey who asserts that the lived body “is the subject of space” and, without bodies, space “would be merely a neutral absolute block or a else a tangled skein of pure relations built up from pure positions.”⁴⁵ In Matta-Clark’s case it seems that, before architecture, he could posit space as a “neutral absolute” force. It was only the building of walls and divisions that led to the compressing of space into containers. This compression and containing brought with it the emergence of qualitative differences between inside and outside. The compressed force of space, now held captive by a container of walls, could only rejoin its absolute neutral origin through occasional temporary openings facilitated by

⁴³ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 101.

⁴⁴ Carson, “Cassandra Float Can.”

⁴⁵ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 204 quoted in Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 124.

doors and windows. When Matta-Clark punctured the structure further, the compressed space could escape in a rush (see fig. 26).

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Figure 26: Gordon Matta-Clark, *Conical Intersect*, 1975

I think of desire, caught on the boundary of the subject, in much the same way. If desire could be released, it would create a “neutral absolute” between the animate subject and its containing world. This balancing of “interior” and “exterior” could neutralise desire and extinguish separation. If desire is for an absence of distinction between interior and exterior, it ceases in this absence of distinction. The joining of mirror intensities sees desire undoing its compression and escaping to a glorious return, to reunion. The excitation within matches the excitation without, alleviating the double-sided pressure on the boundary and the charged force, that once contained is called desire, spills out in sweet relief. Desire, now free, now unnamed, floats without a boundary.⁴⁶ What the subject wants is to not want. Desire is ultimately

⁴⁶ I unpack the dissolution of the body through Freud’s oceanic feeling in the section ““I” Dissolves”

the desire for no desire. I turn back to Parker's figure for two strategies to do away with desire. I start with removing desire by removing her capacity for hunger and by filling her up like a stone.

Fill Me Up

K. opens with Parker's figure routing in her mouth (see fig. 27). She finds, grasps and pulls what appear to be her intestines out of her mouth. She keeps pulling until her innards appear to have been completely removed, now sitting in a soft pile at her feet. In the section "A Separating Skin," the digestive tract was conjured as a tunnel with the mouth and anus acting as entry and exit barriers. As a tunnel passing through the body, I argued that this 'inside' of the body could be considered as an outside-inside. Her body is then boundaried on two fronts, by the dry "outer" and the wet "inner" skin, that protect her from the "excitations" of the external world. On her gesture of removal, Parker says, "I bring out into the open all the things I have taken in that are not mine and thereby make room for something new."⁴⁷ I ask what she may have taken in that is not hers and question her claim to make room for something by seeing her intestinal extraction as a sealing. I read this sealing as a turn to stone and work through her petrification in relation to two strategies: warding off engulfment and stilling desire. Her strategy begins with the removal of her "tunnel." Through her extraction, Parker's figure removes one of the boundaries against which her contained desire presses to meet the outside world. I question whether this removal serves as a strategy to remove desire from the body. I start with how this removal might make her

⁴⁷ Parker, "K." LUX. Accessed March 10, 2019.

less vulnerable to the external world, first in relation to the maternal and the abject. In Chapter Two, Woodman's figure could not return to inanimate wholeness through a merger with a maternal house. Above, desire was conjured through a maternal metaphor. The gap that sets off desire in the animate being is the emptiness of hunger that the infant must fill, must have filled. I now consider what is at stake in maternal fillings and failings, how these fillings and failings shape the infant subject's awareness of her boundaries, how the subject might later attempt to fill her own gap, and how the filling of emptiness relates to the return to inanimate wholeness.

'Image removed due to copyright'

Figure 27: Jayne Parker, *K.*, 1989, 16mm film

In *The Skin Ego*, Anzieu describes primary unity, the infant's sense of wholeness, as the

sharing of a common skin between mother and infant.⁴⁸ Above, I revealed primary unity as illusory. Hunger disrupts the infant's self-contained unity and opens it to the fears of being a vulnerable autonomous entity. Maternal care fills the gap created by hunger but her care must be neither too little, nor too much, but just enough. In *Mad Men and Medusas*, Juliet Mitchell describes the effects of these extremes of maternal care on the infant's sense of self. She says the neonate must "submit to the penetration of caring (feeding, cleaning) and incorporation of holding (as an extension of the womb)."⁴⁹ For her, "caring for the infant's body and the traumatic absence of caring coincide as an experience."⁵⁰ That is, "if no one answers the cry of the baby, its body may be felt to fragment, but if the carer does clean and tend the child then there is also intrusion into the body."⁵¹ Similarly, if the infant, held protectively, is held too tightly, she is at risk from suffocation or incorporation. The infant's sense of self is vulnerable to the surface attention she receives. Anzieu further unpacks the link between care, skin and ego. He describes maternal care as an "external envelop" which is made of messages and leaves space between "the inner envelope, the surface of the baby's body."⁵² For him "if the external layer sticks too closely to the child's skin [...] the child's ego is suffocated, it is invaded by one of the Egos in its environment; [...] if the outer layer is too loose, the ego lacks consistency."⁵³ In *Individuation and Narcissism*, Jacoby draws on Heinz Kohut's 1977 *The Restoration of the Self* when he notes that a child whose self has not been securely established due to a lack of maternal empathy defensively turns inward to the stimulation of its oral and anal

⁴⁸ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 44.

⁴⁹ Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 138.

⁵⁰ Mitchell, 138.

⁵¹ Mitchell, 138.

⁵² Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 62.

⁵³ Anzieu, 62.

erotogenic zones. This turn inwards is an attempt to reassure itself that it is alive, or that it even exists at all.⁵⁴ Anzieu equates this narcissistic withdrawal with the image of the shared common skin turning to an individual invulnerable skin.⁵⁵ Maternal care emerges as a threat, either in its excess or in its absence. I suggest that, in removing her digestive tract, Parker's figure is asserting her invulnerability to external penetration or neglect. She refuses to house the "shared" skin of her intestines and seals herself off as an individual invulnerable skin.

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Figure 28: Michelle Hines, *World Record #4: Peristaltic Action*, 1995, staged video stills

I pursue her gesture in relation to hunger and fullness. Her defensive turn does not stimulate her oral or anal zones. Rather, as the entryways to her now-extracted tunnel,

⁵⁴ Jacoby, *Individuation and Narcissism*, 64.

⁵⁵ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 44.

it eliminates them. Where hunger and desire both point to an empty space, a gap to be filled, she finds her own version of fullness. In the usual flow from ingestion to egestion, fullness is always transitory. I think of Michelle Hines' 1995 performance-as-documentation series of staged video stills *World Record #4: Peristaltic Action* where she egests a 23-foot faeces down a lane of a bowling alley, 23 feet corresponding to the length of her colon (see fig. 28). This javelin-like extrusion is the solid complement to her hollow inside. If she could hold it in place, she could permanently stop her passage. But she cannot. She cannot stop at fullness. Fullness is forever out-of-reach. Hunger always haunts. The mouth, as Mavor suggests in *Aurelia*, is held open in anticipation, both full and empty, like a zero.⁵⁶ In removing her digestive tract, I suggest that Parker's figure finds a way to stop desire by making her fullness her own and making it permanent. Rather than attempt the impossible, to hold her fullness inside, she removes her tunnel to create her fullness. This removal puts the space of hunger fully "outside" her. By extracting her intestines, she reveals her "insides," a part usually never seen by an other. In doing so, however, she is not sharing more of herself, nor making herself more available. Quite the opposite, she has removed the part of herself that kept her "open," shoring up her vulnerability. There is no space left "inside" her that can be filled or emptied. She has ensured that she can be neither over- nor underfed. She now feels the pleasure of repletion which Anzieu, drawing on Freud, describes as a "durable experience of a central mass, a fullness, a centre of gravity."⁵⁷ She has "closed" her body by removing the interior frontier of her body,

⁵⁶ Mavor, *Aurelia: Art and Literature Through the Mouth of the Fairy Tale*, 9, 37.

⁵⁷ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 36.

leaving only one surface of encounter. She is now all body and no orifice. Her body is no longer tuboid, it is a sealed solid.

I align Parker's sealing with becoming stone. I suggest that as a "stone," she finds permanent fullness. She is a single mass, identifiable and contained by a boundary that, in her petrification, is felt as part of her mass rather than separate from it. This means that she senses no difference between her surface and her interior. There is no space for desire, for penetration or neglect because she is a single stony wholeness. I recall Rachel Whiteread's *Ghost*, a filled in mass of solid concrete (see fig. 18). Parker's figure, like *Ghost*, is a solid with a surface, not a sac with a separating skin layer. I suggest that, through her self-made fullness, a fullness I extend to petrification, Parker's figure tries to make herself invulnerable. In her stone fullness, she can forget her need, the emptiness that threatens her survival. A stone needs no nourishment. The fullness of stone then becomes a way to ward off death. A stone neither offers nor receives nourishment. By becoming stone, she makes herself full. In becoming full, she can forget the need or emptiness that threatens her survival. The fullness of stone then becomes a way to ward off death. However, she will soon discover, a petrified subject tends toward death.

I consider Parker's figure's sealing as a boundary reinforcement. In Chapter One, the subject's sense of self was revealed as vulnerable due to an inner inadequacy at odds with her ideal, externally posited, rigid armour. It is now clear that the vulnerability of her sense of self is also linked to the inattention her rigid surface armour receives. I argue that, by shoring up access to her "insides," by becoming stone, Parker's figure is trying to fortify her rigid armour. She is fortifying it against penetration, against the things she has taken in that are not hers. She is performing a boundary gesture. What

is outside her is not her. What is inside her is her. I think through this boundary gesture and its impact on her sense of self in relation to the abject. In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva describes the abject as a kind of ambiguous border against the skin as an essential boundary of “biological and psychic individuation.”⁵⁸ The subject’s secure differentiation depends on the fundamental opposition between I and Other, between Inside and Outside, but the abject threatens the certainty of these distinctions.⁵⁹ The abject does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it. On the contrary, it puts the subject, and her boundaries, in perpetual danger.⁶⁰ Kristeva describes the role of maternal authority in establishing the subject’s boundaries.⁶¹ In the gap between hunger and its satisfaction, the infant becomes aware of her dependence on a separate other. First, through oral frustrations, then, through sphincteral training and excremental prohibitions, maternal authority shapes the infant’s body “into a territory having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows, where the archaic power of mastery and neglect, of the differentiation of proper-clean and improper-dirty, possible and impossible, is impressed and exerted.”⁶² The infant knows herself as separate and boundaried, but she does not appear to be in control of her boundary. She starts to assert her control over her own boundary in relation to feeding. Milk appears as a sign of maternal authority, imposed upon the infant. The maternal offer of nourishment must penetrate the infant, crossing the boundary of her clean and proper body, threatening her autonomy. The infant refuses the milk by vomiting. In vomiting, the infant establishes herself even at the possible risk of her death, asserting

⁵⁸ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9, 101.

⁵⁹ Kristeva, 7.

⁶⁰ Kristeva, 9.

⁶¹ Kristeva, 71.

⁶² Kristeva, 72.

her own mastery of her boundaries.⁶³ I suggest that Parker's figure takes this assertion one step further. The extraction of her digestive tract is a total refusal of externally imposed hunger and sphincteral control. She has left no potential space for these. Her intestines sit in a soft pile at her feet. She has put outside her body, jettisoned, what she cannot take in, what she refuses admittance to her sense of self.

I find another possibility for Parker's figure's removal as a maternal refusal, this time in relation to the expected feminine role Dujourie and Woodman's figures were refusing in Chapters One and Two. Sealing access to her means she cannot be choked by a role that is not hers. It is possible that she is confusing her bowels with "maternal bowels," a confusion Kristeva highlights.⁶⁴ In putting her "womb" outside her body, she refuses the possibility of a maternal role. Or, in removing her digestive tract, she denies herself nourishment, refusing to physically develop, to grow into the expectations of womanhood. Both moves to reject adult womanhood stage her as another *femme-enfant*. Further, by removing or repressing her womb, she appears as another rendering of the automaton. Where Woodman's automaton figure sought to hand control over to the maternal skin covering her, Parker's figure, in removing her "inner" space in which maternal care intrudes, removes the maternal potential for control. Her sealed body cannot be made to dance by an external puppet master. But, regardless of eschewing maternal control, she stills experience herself as an automaton, as a performing skin at odds with her internal tangle, her contained desire.

I find an earlier rendering of emptiness in relation to the abject. For Kristeva, the abject does not begin with the distinction between mother and infant. It is something

⁶³ Kristeva, 3.

⁶⁴ Kristeva, 101.

much older than that, “a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A “something” that I do not recognise as a thing.”⁶⁵ This familiar, not-nothing-but-something that returns in a loathsome form is none other than the archaic pre-objectal relationship, inanimate wholeness, returning as “the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be.”⁶⁶ For Kristeva, the abject is “the violence of mourning for an “object” that has always already been lost.”⁶⁷ The abject returns as the gap, the want, the loss by and through which the subject is constituted. For the subject to be separate, she must be separate from something, set her boundaries in relation to something, set something apart from her. Once separate, her boundaries are fragile, her bodily totality threatened by the very thing she uses to set herself apart. The subject perceives the maternal body as this threat to her totality and sets her apart, but the mother is not the real threat. Her setting apart cannot offer the subject solace, just as a failed attempt at merger could not offer her solace in Chapter Two. The threat to the subject is the realisation that there is no totality of being once she is animate. The abject returns to reveal her “fundamental incompleteness: [her] “gaping,” “less One.”⁶⁸ As much as the abject provokes horror in the subject, it “fascinates desire,”⁶⁹ simultaneously revealing her “internal haemorrhage” and offering “an attempt at stopping the haemorrhage.”⁷⁰ The abject reveals the subject’s wound but could also offer her a plug for that wound, a

⁶⁵ Kristeva, 2.

⁶⁶ Kristeva, 10.

⁶⁷ Kristeva, 10.

⁶⁸ Kristeva, 27.

⁶⁹ Kristeva, 1.

⁷⁰ Kristeva, 55.

way to be whole. If the abject was what was there in the inanimate, in the pre-subject/object then it could appear as the subject's solution to being whole. Approaching the abject might be a way for her to close the gap of desire. She is attracted to the abject but, to make her approach, she would have to collapse her fragile container of skin. Her collapse could not make her whole. The abject can only threaten her under her current condition as an animate being who cannot return experience a living return to animate wholeness. I suggest that what Parker's figure tries to put outside her is this sense of her incompleteness by sealing herself into a self-sufficient haven. In her fragile belief in her own totality, she is too wedded to her subjecthood, to her distinctness, which she wants to confirm and shore up, knowing that a threat is always possible. She is putting outside herself the incomprehensible tangle of her inner inadequacy that she tries to resolve through her knitting. She holds her knitted intestines in front of her body, making a covering (see fig. 29). I suggest that this is not a second skin like the one that Woodman's figure tried on in Chapter Two. Parker describes this work as making an external order out of an internal tangle. In line with Kristeva who asserts "that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded,"⁷¹ I see Parker's figure trying to transform or mask her inner tangle of desire under and through a "language" she writes both with and over her body.⁷² What she puts outside, what she refuses to recognise as intrinsic to her by making it external, what she tries to sew up, is the shameful essence of her subject, the vulnerability of her hunger, her desire, her want,

⁷¹ Kristeva, 5.

⁷² Rather than develop desire in relation to language through Kristeva's chora or Lacan's Symbolic Order and name-of-the-father within this thesis, I took up this research through practice in a new body of work that begins with *Before her investiture, the novice must hear what she has to, learn what she has to, shape what she has to, say.*, 2019

her gap. She is not making space in herself but, rather, trying to reinforce herself against her own wound.

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Figure 29: Jayne Parker, *K.*, 1989, 16mm film

The dual skin surfaces of “outer” dry and “inner” wet establish the subject’s psychic and physical boundary, protecting her from the excitations of the outside world. There is an excitation, or irritation, within the subject. It is her desire for the lost home of inanimate wholeness contained in her separate, house arrested, body. Parker’s figure looks to remove desire, to put it outside her body. She equates desire with hunger, with an emptiness that must be filled, with a gap between need and its satisfaction, a want in both senses. She is vulnerable to maternal care which emerges as a threat, either in its excess or in its absence. To avoid the possibility of being over- or underfilled, she removes her intestines, putting her space for hunger, for possible

intrusion outside her body. Her gesture of putting outside serves to establish her boundary, in theory shoring up her identity. However, there remains a threat to her identity “within” her. The desire created by hunger, temporarily satisfied by the fullness of food, is a decoy for a more essential desire, a more essential lost fullness. The gap between the subject and inanimate wholeness that creates the subject as, by definition, separate returns as the abject. As the abject, it returns as all that is not the subject, all that she puts outside her to establish her boundaries, all that threatens the stability of these boundaries. Rather than take in the abject, I suggest Parker’s figure tries to shore up her boundary, to make herself whole, through sealing her body.

This sealing, effected by putting the tunnel that runs through her outside her, is her strategy for removing her desire, her sense of loss. Recall that, for Freud, trauma occurs when excitations of the external world are strong enough to break the subject’s protective surface barrier. Trauma is also in the very formation of the subject, in the forming of that separating barrier. I argue, that by sealing her body, Parker’s figure is trying to reinforce her boundary so that it cannot be ruptured by the shock of trauma, of the trauma of her constitution as loss returning. I align this sealing gesture with becoming stone. As a stone, she imagines she has no “inner tangle” at odds with her surface, pressing for release. She has forced desire outside her body. She is a single mass, full, whole. The stone figure is held as an ideal. She is impervious to the temporality of hunger and, as such, positions herself “outside” time. She is free from any excess, either as spilling and filling. Nothing can get in, no influence from an other, no contaminant. Nothing that can escape either, her “inner tangle” of desire now subsumed into her stony mass.

I suggest that her turn to stone is an imitation of wholeness and link her drive to stoniness to the death drive's return to the inanimate. Her imitation is flawed. Sealed, as an animate being turned stone, she might ward off "death" through penetration or engulfment, but she simultaneously tends towards death. She might imagine she escapes the painful space of desire by retreating behind a hardened camouflage but her self-sufficiency is self-limiting. The wholeness of her stone figure is one of isolation. There is no whole that she is part of, rather, she is a whole alone. Her continuous surface renders her a discontinuous subject, distinct from her surroundings. Her discontinuity is her downfall as she can receive no energy from her environment, but, feeding on her own reserves, can only wither unto death. Her death comes sooner through her sealing-off, but her death cannot return her to a continuous inanimate ideal. She remains a discontinuous, hardened mass. A body emptied of desire is a lifeless stone, its liberation is illusory. Much as rehearsing inertia did not serve Dujourie's figure, nor a false merger serve Woodman's, imitating inanimate wholeness as a sealed, but animate, subject does not serve Parker's.

She confuses physical and psychic space. To ward off the threats of hunger and engulfment by becoming impenetrable does not remove the desire linked to the loss of inanimate wholeness that emerges in the formation of the separate subject. This desire remains absolutely trapped in her body. Recall the figure of Midas. Through his consumption he becomes a more "filled in" figure, his tunnel of hunger permanently stopped with gold fullness, but he persists as separate. He is still a figure of desire, a desire that remains contained in his body-as-cylinder, a desire that presses against his surface boundary. In her narcissistic sealing, her turn into her self, Parker's figure absolutely retains her surface boundary. It does not divorce her from the external

world. She remains subject to its energies and excitations. She cannot escape from the (m)other. Her withdrawal which denies any dependency does not undo the presence of the other, the other who affirms or negates her identity through recognition, the other who may tend to or neglect her needs, the other that her desire catches on as they stand as false decoys in her return home. Her strategy to still desire by sealing herself plays out in a container, plays out under the gaze of the other. I look to part two of *K.*, where her body meets the public container of the swimming pool, for a final strategy to overcome her fear of boundary loss in her animate form, by letting her self dissolve into oceanic wholeness.

“I” dissolves

In playing out a final strategy to make a living return to inanimate wholeness, I assume continuity between parts one and two of *K.*, that is, I assume the figure who is framed in fragments by the camera diving into a swimming pool has removed her internal skin boundary. Where part one dealt with an interior alienation, part two returns to the external perspective of the body in relation to its external environment. However, this (re)turn to the external is performed entirely in relation to internal pressure. Parker’s figure has removed one front of her surface boundary, her remaining skin a smaller surface area meeting the external world. She feels her contained desire straining for release against this remaining boundary. Remember in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” Freud’s assertion that the pleasure principle serves to keep “the psychic apparatus completely free of excitation, or to keep the quantum of excitation within it constant,

or to keep it at the lowest possible level.”⁷³ In the section “The First Compression is Desire,” I questioned why he deemed this constancy to be at a low ebb and imagined a great, internal, excitation that breaks out from its enclosing layer and joins its mirror intensity in the external world. This is contained desire is under compression and, against a smaller container, the pressure is building. Parker’s figure senses this build-up inside her. I imagine the force inside her as larger than her skin’s capacity to hold it. I liken her sense of a larger internal force to that of Leonora Carrington’s protagonist in *Down Below* who howls:

“I don’t want that unclean force. I would liberate you but I will not be able to do so because that astronomical force will destroy me if I don't crush you all ... all ... all. I must destroy you together with the whole world because it is growing ... it is growing and the universe is not big enough for such a need of destruction. I AM GROWING I AM GROWING ... and I am afraid, because nothing will be left for me to destroy.”⁷⁴

There is an overwhelming internal force that must be released. It must be released by the rupturing her surface boundary, by doing away with her skin. She has a rich mythology of skin removal to draw inspiration from. Anzieu focuses on Marsyas in *The Skin Ego*, who loses his skin in a contest with Apollo. Marsyas is flayed alive and his skin is nailed to a tree. Beneath the tree, the river Marsyas gushes, bringing life to the surrounding region. For Anzieu, the metaphor is clear: the river represents the life drives that are only available to those who have preserved the integrity of their Skin-

⁷³ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 101.

⁷⁴ Leonora Carrington, *Down Below (1942)*, ed. Marina Warner, New York Review Books Classics (New York: New York Review Books, 2017), 40.

ego.⁷⁵ I suggest that what rushes out in the river Marsyas is none other than the desire that was once contained by his skin. Anzieu recalls fantasies of skin removal in the guise of anatomical art from the fifteenth century onwards; one of the most well-known appearing in Juan Valverde de Amusco's 1560 *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano* (see fig. 30). He also mis-names and falsely mythologises Viennese Actionist artist Rudolf Schwarzkogler, citing the inaccurate reporting by critic Robert Hughes that Schwarzkogler had died in an act of self-mutilation, amputating his own skin inch by inch until he died.⁷⁶ In this mis-rendering, I see a piecemeal strategy, a way of releasing the pressure one fragment at a time.

⁷⁵ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 46–52.

⁷⁶ Anzieu, 20.

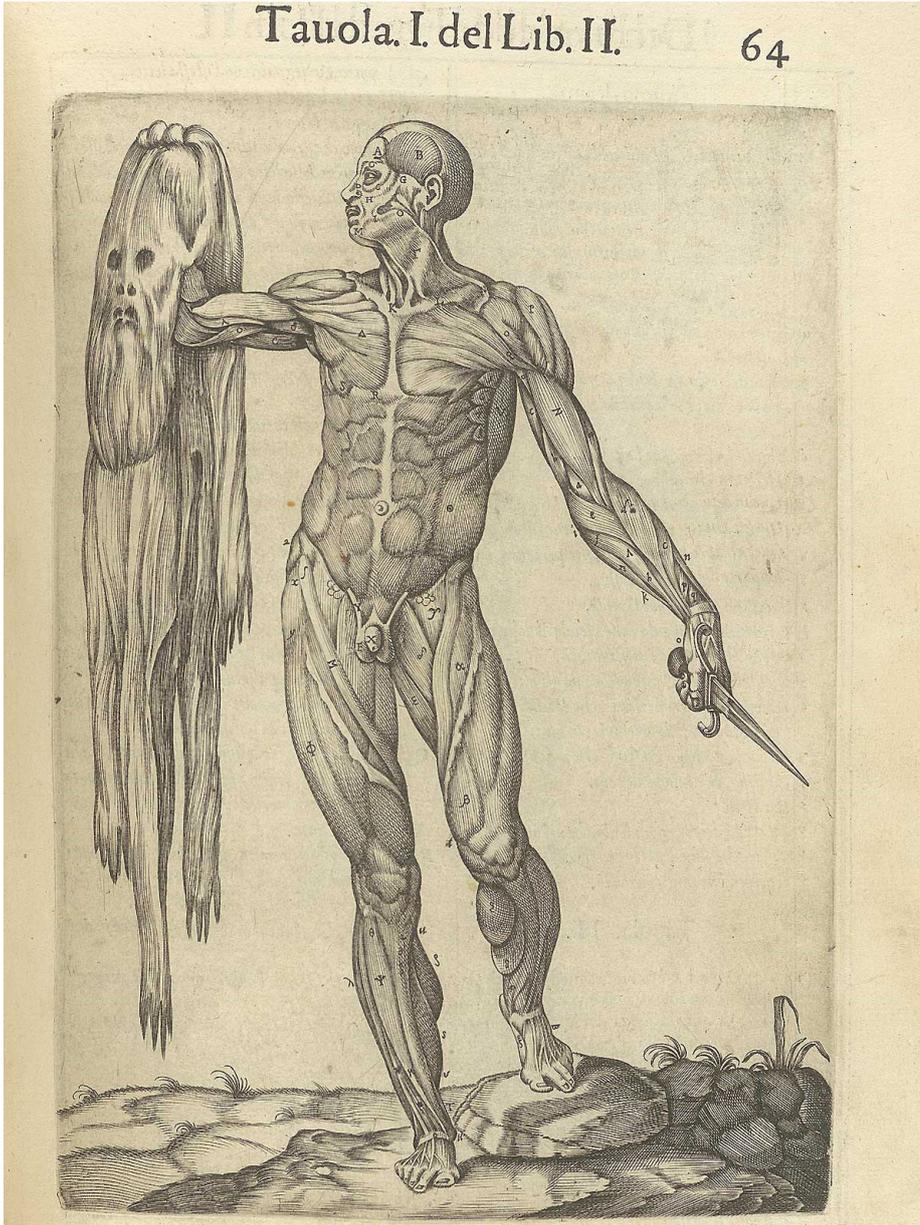


Figure 30: Juan Valverde de Amusco, *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*, 1560, copperplate

Parker's figure is in fragments in part two of *K*. She knows herself as a separate fragment, an isolated, incomplete whole. I suggest she realises the withering condition of her sealed body. She wants to return her body to life as much as she wants to return to inanimate wholeness. Her sealed skin impedes either option. She turns to the pool and dives. Through her repeated diving, I see Parker's figure between trying to

revitalise herself by letting the water in or, ultimately, trying to discharge contained desire by dissolving her body in water.

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Figure 31: Jayne Parker, *K.*, 1989, 16mm film

I look to Astrida Neimanis's "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water"⁷⁷ to contextualise her turn to water. Neimanis recalls that human bodies are 60%-90% water and the two waters that humans are born from: the gestational and the amniotic. Water is fundamental to life. She points to Luce Irigaray in *Marine Lover* reminding her male interlocuter who fears drowning in a mother-sea that what he should really fear is desiccation.⁷⁸ No body can come into being or survive without water.⁷⁹ Water might then counter and save Parker's withering stone figure. Neimanis draws on scientists Mark and Dianna McMenamin to describe "Hypersea," which arose when life moved out of marine waters and by necessity folded a watery habitat "back inside of itself."⁸⁰ Hypersea suggests the first containing of watery-being within a separating boundary and, as such, might be a route back to inanimate wholeness. The fantasy of return to inanimate wholeness Freud develops in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" might aim for the pre-Big Bang unknown or may be satisfied in a terrestrial

⁷⁷ Neimanis, "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water."

⁷⁸ Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), in Neimanis, 102.

⁷⁹ Neimanis, 98–102.

⁸⁰ Mark and Dianna McMenamin, *Hypersea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5, quoted in Neimanis, 97.

primordial soup. Neimanis suggests that we live in a watery commons where distinctions between human and nonhuman are blurred, in an Eco Tone (Eco: home, Tone: tension) where “we must learn to be at home in the quivering tension of the in-between.”⁸¹ A watery commons might appear as the joyful return to wholeness but, I assert, Eco Tone is just another name for house arrest, another not-quite-whole where the subject trembles between wanting to let go and wanting to hold on. Further, Neimanis’s watery commons is made of connected, but separate bodies. She asserts that “bodies need water, but water also needs a body,” and that bodies are always differentiated.⁸² She limits the connections between bodies to travelling across permeable membranes, insisting that “any body still requires membranes to keep from being swept out to sea altogether,” fundamentally resisting total dissolution.⁸³

Parker’s figure is looking for a connection far greater than one filtered by a selective separating membrane. Further, she will not be taken in by water as a false home, another separating maternal body, cast here as the waters of the womb. She looks for her own solution in water. If, as Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss assert in *Formless: A User’s Guide*, “liquid is precisely what is always everywhere the same,” then falling into water could mean “falling into indifference” for Parker’s figure.⁸⁴ She must dissolve altogether if she is to release her contained desire into wholeness. Only in total dissolution can the tension generated, in what was previously inanimate quiescence, achieve equilibrium. Her dissolution unites her with what Georges Bataille

⁸¹ Neimanis, 105, 108.

⁸² Neimanis, 103.

⁸³ Neimanis, 103–4.

⁸⁴ Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (New York: Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books ; Distributed by MIT Press, 1997), 181.

termed *informe* in 1929.⁸⁵ She is no longer she, but a universe resembling nothing, a vast continuous sameness.

I return to Freud to unpack her dissolution through what he termed the oceanic feeling. In December 1927, shortly before the publication of *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud's friend Romain Rolland wrote to him describing an "oceanic feeling," "a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded."⁸⁶ Freud works to untangle this "sensation of eternity" which he understands as a consolation – that we cannot fall out of this world – offered to a figure facing a self-inflicted death.⁸⁷ The oceanic is "a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole," though it "brings with it no assurance of personal immortality."⁸⁸ This limitless, unbounded feeling, sounds similar to originary, inanimate wholeness, now rendered as watery. In not being able to fall out of the world, it seems to offer the reassurance that there can be expansion into eternity without an actual loss of the self. As such, the "personal" is no longer operative here because the subject is transformed in some way, at one with a whole. I pursue this feeling of wholeness and ask if Freud is positing it as a possibility of return for an animate subject. If so, the oceanic feeling could be integral to the return Parker's figure seeks and then plays out in the literal, material waters of the swimming pool.

I explore how Freud deals with the subject's containing boundary. He counters the subject's oceanic "connection with the world around them through an immediate feeling"⁸⁹ with the demarcation of the ego, stating that there is nothing of which "we

⁸⁵ Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 31.

⁸⁶ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 11.

⁸⁷ Sigmund Freud, 12-13.

⁸⁸ Freud, 12.

⁸⁹ Freud, 12.

are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego” and that this ego “appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else.”⁹⁰ But, he quickly adds that the ego “is subject to disturbances and the boundaries of the ego are not constant.”⁹¹ This coincides with the abject as vital to establishing the demarcation of the self while also threatening this demarcation, revealing the sense of self as fragile and vulnerable. Freud then works through the ego’s development from primary unity to the first recognition of external objects. He concludes that the ego at first includes everything, later separating off and shrinking. As such, it is a “residue of a much more inclusive – indeed, an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it.”⁹² Freud concludes that the oceanic feeling can be traced back to an early phase of ego development,⁹³ later appearing as a way of “disclaiming the danger which the ego recognises as threatening it from the external world.”⁹⁴ It seems, then, that Freud’s oceanic feeling is no different from primary unity. Its later restaging merely conjures the same illusion that counters the subject’s insecurity linked to its fragile boundary. It does not dissolve the subject’s psychic or physical boundaries but rather reassures her that, even though she is constituted by loss, she will not be lost through her sense of fragmentation. The oceanic feeling offers the subject’s wound an illusory dressing rather than a return to wholeness. Parker’s figure stands by the edge of the water. To dive in under these terms would lead her nowhere. Perhaps the oceanic feeling fails her because it is a feeling, rather than a property. She does not need an illusory feeling

⁹⁰ Freud, 12.

⁹¹ Freud, 14.

⁹² Freud, 16.

⁹³ Freud, 20.

⁹⁴ Freud, 21.

to cover over the loss at the core of her being. She knows herself to be a fragment. She is framed by the camera as fragments of a body, each part diving in to try to find a whole. Her move is not the narcissistic withdrawal of the stone, nor is it a move to be narcissistically all-expansive, everywhere her. Rather she dives to dissolve her boundary, to achieve equilibrium by releasing her desire into wholeness.

Assuming this dissolution is possible, I now consider the consequence of her return on her self. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva asks, "How can I be without border?" looking to a hallucinated elsewhere, beyond the present.⁹⁵ In *Formless*, Bois and Krauss draw on Bataille who asserts that "to break up the subject and re-establish it on a different basis is not to neglect the subject."⁹⁶ I explore, then, what happens to "her," where "she" goes, if she dissolves into a "universe that resembles nothing."⁹⁷ I do so in relation to Roger Caillois's essay "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" in which he asserts that, among distinctions, the most clear-cut is between the organism and its surroundings.⁹⁸ Where Freud's considers the energetic distinction between organisms, Caillois focuses on the visual. He traces a history of mimicry as a subversive tactic in several species before he shifts his focus to spatial relations. Caillois describes space as both perceived and represented. Perceived space is formed by and in relation to a person, "the horizontal plane is formed by the ground and the vertical plane by the man himself who walks."⁹⁹ In perceived space, a person is the point of origin for all

⁹⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

⁹⁶ Georges Bataille in Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 21.

⁹⁷ Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 41.

⁹⁸ His essay was originally published in Surrealist publication *Minotaure* in 1935 and played a crucial role in Lacan's conception of the mirror stage. It was also taken up by Rosalind Krauss in *L'Amour Fou* in terms of depictions of invasions of the body by space in Surrealist photography. Krauss, amongst others, has taken up this essay in relation to Francesca Woodman's work. Rather than restage that argument, I am tracing it onto Parker's figure.

⁹⁹ Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia (1935)," 28.

spatial co-ordinates. This is not the case in represented space where a person “is no longer the origin of the coordinates, but one point among others.”¹⁰⁰ He names a disturbance in relations between personality and space legendary psychasthenia. These relations are undermined when someone can no longer distinguish themselves from their surroundings nor attach their consciousness to a specific point in space. Caillois asserts that life depends on maintaining a sense of the boundary containing the self, again echoing Freud, Laplanche and Pontalis, Kristeva, and Anzieu. This distinctness is self-possession, the loss of which leads to a merger between self and setting, a dispossession or derealisation, a sensation typified by schizophrenics for whom space becomes:

a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put. He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar.¹⁰¹

This “similar” appears to be the desired dissolution. Dissolving into the pool, Parker’s figure breaches the separating boundary of her body, separating herself from thought and sense, becoming just “similar.” Caillois notes that, alongside a self-preservation instinct that orients a creature towards life which plays out in his summary of defensive mimicry, there must be an “instinct of renunciation that orients it toward a mode of reduced existence.”¹⁰² This is the tendency towards the inanimate of the

¹⁰⁰ Caillois, 28.

¹⁰¹ Caillois, 30.

¹⁰² Caillois, 32.

death drive. I ask now if the tendency to becoming “similar” opens a return to inanimate wholeness for the animate being and if Parker’s figure becomes “similar.”

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Figure 32: Jayne Parker, *K.*, 1989, 16mm film

In the final shot of *K.*, her body is seen in full, in long shot, jumping into the pool (see fig. 32). The film freezes on that frame before cutting to black. She is whole and clearly distinct from her containing body of water. Out of the water, it seems she is “out of her element,” but, diving in, she stills persists as separate, as an animate body that continues, trapped, out of her lost element, out of wholeness by definition. She jumps and she jumps but she cannot dissolve. Her repetitions have a two-fold effect. In each dive, rather than remembering her lost home, she is acting out the trauma of her

separation from inanimate wholeness through striking the body of water, repeating again and again without being aware of it.¹⁰³ This trauma catches on each fragment of her body, captured in a separate frame on a 16mm film roll, as it hits the water on each jump. Each jump, each hit, prove her bodily totality, a proof that she both clings to and despairs at. The undifferentiated body is an oxymoron, an impossible fantasy. *K.* plays out the animate subject's endless cycle of ambivalence. Each of her dives reveals both her frustration that her desire can only remain bound in her current animate trajectory, and an affirmation, "the old brag ... I am, I am, I am,"¹⁰⁴ a separate melancholic brooding over her fragments.

¹⁰³ Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through (1914)," 36.

¹⁰⁴ Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, Faber paper covered edition, Faber Paper Covered Editions (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 233.

I would tell you everything but there's no room, 2016



Figure 33: Katharine Fry, *I would tell you everything but there's no room*, 2016, HD video

I would tell you everything but there's no room is a 19:25 HD video made in 2016 shown at 1:1 scale on a screen that sits on the floor (see fig. 33). In a red brick windowless room, a figure rolls her head from side to side, her chin pressed against a mirrored table. As she rolls, gravel pours out of her open mouth, connecting with and obscuring her reflection in the tabletop. A single female voice, layered into a chorus, sings over the returning sequence. Some hum repetitive do wop style melodies, “ba-da-daa-ba-da-daa,” “ha-ha-haa-a-ha-ha-haa-a” and “ooo-oo-oo-ooo-ooo-oo-oo-ooo-ooo.” Others sing fragments of a narrative in canon, “Just put your feet down child. He said, you’re all grown now. Just put your feet down child because you’re all grown up now. The water is only waist high. I’ll let go of you gently, then you can swim to me.”¹ The scene does not resolve, it restages the same rocking and pouring, her full mouth

¹ Lyrics from Kate Bush’s 1989 song *The Fog*

never emptying or stilling. The video cuts to black followed by the same voice speaking, "You see, I'm all grown up now."

The dynamic of the cut creates the return to the mouth-gravel-mirror-gravel-mouth event. The duration of the video is established by creating a sequence of every possible in and out point for the same piece of footage. Every permutation for the figure's rocking head is shown: down left, up left, down right, up right, middle down left, middle down right. Against this linear sequencing, the mouth-gravel event persists. It does not move in time, rather it returns. The effect of the edit is an image of trauma. The figure turning in her mouth-gravel event is a figure in trauma. Trauma has broken her protective surface barrier and now, according to Breuer and Freud, acts like a foreign body as an agent of the present.² The figure can only, returning to Freud, reproduce what she has repressed, not as a memory but as an action.³ The trauma that returns is the one that constitutes her. It is the loss of inanimate wholeness, the sense of emptiness that runs through her separate boundaried being. This trauma does not fade into the linear store of memory but haunts her fragile self. She is full to overflowing with something she cannot digest. Her trauma, like the gravel she emits, is unmetabolisable, cannot be metabolised.

The do wop vocalisations allude to an earlier time, to a pre-verbal moment when her mouth was full of either hunger cries or satisfying nourishment, a fullness following an emptiness. In their repeating brevity, they also frame the protracted present of her gravel-mouth event, turning her in the same constant instant, the persistence of her own lack. The sung lyrics act as a through-line to the returning event, trying to draw

² Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. James Strachey (Charleston, S.C.: Nabu Press, 2015), 3.

³ Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through (1914)," 36.

the figure into a developmental plot through a call for her to become separate by being “let go of,” to “put her feet down” and reach independence. The final spoken refrain of being “all grown up now” could be her claim to self-reliance, to taking responsibility for her own boundaries but it reads as a lie, a salve to a fragile self, constituted as a fragment.

She keeps herself full to overflowing to try to mask her lack, to assert her own wholeness. Her emesis could also be a reaction to something foreign that she has taken in, that she must reject to establish her own boundaries, even if this rejection implies that she is empty. Her sense of emptiness collides with her over-spilling, a force inside her pressing for release, her desire for wholeness rupturing her fragile surface. She pours herself into a narcissistic system, affirming herself as whole, full, a complete bounded being, denying the presence of an other or any need for that other. She is caught as a separate animate being constituted through loss, caught repeating false returns, caught repeating her failure to master an impossible return, caught in her inconsistent boundaries, caught as an illusory surface image pressing against another surface.

Conclusion

Desire Persists

This conclusion draws together the three figures in the works I analysed by Dujourie, Woodman and Parker to contextualise house arrest as the defining condition of every animate being. I began this research by looking at the female figure who recurs in my videos, performing a limited series of gestures in relation to a set of objects and a containing space. I posed the question, "What is this figure doing in this house?" My answer, "She is under house arrest." Through my readings of works by Dujourie, Woodman and Parker, I elaborated on house arrest as an animate subject's inability to experience a living return to a primal inanimate state, to the lost wholeness of an originary home. Her desire to return is contained, under compression, by the surface boundary of her skin.

This thesis, I believed, would write a plot for my recurring figure to escape the house. Instead, it widened to tell the story of every animate being through this figure as a cipher. I return to her now to trace this shared trajectory. Her story begins with her separation from home. She finds herself contained in a house, performing a role she had no desire to be cast in. Her desire is only for her lost home. She tries to reach for her lost home, but her way back is barred. She is driven forward by desire, moving from object to object to try to find her way home. No encounter with an object can ever return her home. She remains separate. Caught by her skin, which marks the boundary of "her," she remains under house arrest.

I now use this story to link these figures, expanding each step of its arc as a theme common to each work and artist. The order in which the works are discussed in this

thesis is deliberate. It places the represented figures, whose strategies and frustrations may vary, in a three-part movement that I now play out through the themes: house, medium, figure, desire, and repetition. Throughout, I use an undefined “she” to draw these figures together as a single subject under house arrest.

The lost home she has been separated from is the “primordial state” from which all organic life departed and “to which via all the circuitous byways of development it strives to return,” it is the “inanimate that existed before the animate” that Freud describes in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.”¹ The now-animate being grieves for her lost home. She cannot grieve properly though, because her lost home was never an object that was lost, “was never made alive and present, and therefore was never subject to loss.”² A melancholic subject separated from her originary home, from a state before there was a subject and object, from inanimate wholeness, she wants to return home. This is what desire is for, for a lost home that must be re-sought and re-found. Born at the moment of originary trauma, desire follows the separation of the animate from the inanimate. It appears in the gap that opens between the animate subject and her lost home. Desire drives the subject to close this gap, to undo this separation. She tries to reach back, to return home, but can only inhabit nostalgia, the pain of an impossible homecoming.

She finds herself under house arrest, in two “houses” which stand for two aspects of house arrest. One “house” is the parameters of beginning and end. This linear temporality blocks her from the continuity of inanimate wholeness. Within these parameters, she looks to another “house,” now a separate body with which to merge,

¹ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 78.

² Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics* quoted in Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 22.

through which to go home. The merger of two separate bodies cannot recreate her lost wholeness. They remain separate skins pressing against each other. She is caught in the “house” of her body. I read these “houses” through Dujourie, Woodman and Parker’s works, framed by the specifics of their different chosen media. Dujourie’s barely furnished room suggests the temporal parameters of the beginning and end of life, a set of parameters that she marks with the starting and stopping of the video tape in *Sonnet*, both blank durations waiting to be filled in with plot as “a kind of arabesque or squiggle towards the end.”³ The linear teleological drive of these parameters, as a lifespan, as a necessary duration, threaten to pull Dujourie’s figure into a plot she has no wish to live out. Woodman’s house photographs evoke the same temporal parameters. In their dereliction, they suggest an old house, built long ago, that is no longer inhabitable, a house that is “known of old and long familiar,” now *unheimlich*, unhomely, unfamiliar.⁴ She uses the variable duration of the camera shutter to open another set of parameters. Using this temporal apparatus, she opens a space in the photographic frame for her figure to move through. This movement lends her figure, who appears in strong visual contrast to the decay surrounding her, the opportunity to slip into or out of the room that might engulf her. Parker’s house is a more intimate one. Though she is contained in the two parts of 16mm film *K.*, first by a plain, institutional environment, then by a swimming pool, her focus is on the body as a container. The house is her figure’s body, a skin boundaried “system for protecting our individuality and a first instrument and site of interaction with others.”⁵ Parker uses the cuts in her film, together with tight framing by the camera, to test her

³ Brooks, “Freud’s Masterplot,” 292.

⁴ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 220.

⁵ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 3.

perceived bodily totality, which may prove as fragmentary as her internal “organic inadequacy.”⁶

She is trapped in the framing parameters of her lifespan and by the surface boundary of her skin. She wishes only to “restore a prior state, which prior state the organism was compelled to relinquish due to the disruptive influence of external forces.”⁷ She has no desire for change but, rather, “given the continuance of the same circumstances would have constantly repeated the self-same life-cycle.”⁸ Until she can bring about such a restoration, she must tolerate the disruptions of external forces, she must survive under the conditions of the animate. She assumes a role, both as a way of coping with her unwanted circumstances and a way of resisting some of their effects. She understands herself as separate from the moment she first apprehends her reflection as an infant. She is frozen before this image of her bodily totality. She projects an ideal self onto the “rigid armour”⁹ of her body contours, an ideal at odds with her inner “organic inadequacy.”¹⁰ She is externally constituted, apprehended by herself as an image. It is onto this external image that a further “alienating identity”¹¹ is cast, one dictated by the social conditions that contain her. The roles she may be called to play are adult woman, wife, or mother. To opt out of this roll call, she plays the role of the *femme-enfant*, resisting the pressures of a prescribed femininity while “mimicking of childhood, a form of disavowal of adulthood that enables her to correspond to the ideal of feminine malleability, fragility, and inferiority.”¹² To cope

⁶ Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function (1949),” 77.

⁷ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920),” 76.

⁸ Freud, 78.

⁹ Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function (1949),” 76.

¹⁰ Lacan, 77.

¹¹ Lacan, 76.

¹² Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*, 107.

with the lack of correspondence between her external idealised shell and her messy interior, she adopts the guise of the automaton who “has no ‘inside’ apart from her mechanism.”¹³

Dujourie’s figure, caught in the linear parameters of beginning and end, in the teleological plot of her lifespan, watches herself, through her reflection in the windowpanes, mechanically performing an unchosen script, even if the script she adopts is a minimal one of fidgets and paces. An externally constituted subject, it is as though she were always watching a double, a near-likeness or “*semblable*” of herself.¹⁴ Under these conditions, any sense of self-mastery appears illusory. However, through her adolescent-like lassitude, she asserts her refusal to be drawn into a more complex plot of femininity, into productive activity, into any responsibility. Further, her rehearsal of inertia is her way to mobilise the automaton as a disavowal of her body as a site of linear development. Woodman’s figure furthers this refusal of development. Finding her own body to be uncanny, as the “interface between the ego and the reflected image is perceived as fissure rather than suture,”¹⁵ she returns to the refuge of the ruined room, the womb and tomb of the Gothic plot. Here, her childlike figure is haunted both by her lost sense of wholeness and by a maternal spectre. Refusing to develop, refusing to assume a maternal role, as a *femme-enfant* she is an “eviscerated” automaton who can “repress the womb.”¹⁶ Instead she turns back to another maternal body, to the womb, “the former *heim* of all human beings.”¹⁷ Being engulfed by the womb, she becomes an automaton under the control of another body. Through her

¹³ Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 50.

¹⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, N.Y.; London: W.W. Norton, 2007), 79.

¹⁵ Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice*, 32.

¹⁶ Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 50.

¹⁷ Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” 245.

total dependence on another skin that covers and manipulates hers, she can abdicate all responsibility. Parker's figure rejects this skin performing under maternal authority. By removing her digestive tract, she removes her "inner" space in which maternal care intrudes. This removal casts her as another *femme-enfant*, another automaton repressing her womb as, in her child-like guise, she confuses her bowels with maternal bowels. Her sealed body cannot be made to dance by an external puppet master. However, regardless of eschewing maternal control, she still experiences herself as an automaton, as a performing skin at odds with her contained desire. Whether an automaton trying to exert more control over her own body or hoping to surrender her skin to the control of another, she remains a separating surface against which internal and external forces press. She saw the role of the *femme-enfant* as a liberating move. She could refuse a radically uninhabitable gendered ideal, she could short-circuit the detour of any role or responsibility and look for the shortest path home. Yet the regression of the *femme-enfant* proves a false return, a trap in the animate condition. She remains a lost girl, no closer to autonomy, no closer to wholeness, no closer to home.

All desire is desire for this lost home, expressed as a reach forward that reaches for a return. Her desire appears first as desire for the lost conditions of inanimate wholeness, for a continuousness punctuated by no desire. Under the conditions of the animate, her desire is directed at another body through which to play out a return to her lost home, to a lost inanimate state. Her desire can only persist, contained by the boundaries of her separate body. Her desire for no desire becomes a desire to have no body. Dujourie, Woodman and Parker's figures each play out a different aspect of the same desire for return, employing a different strategy, each a nuance of repetition.

Dujourie's figure tries to short-circuit the stretching forth of desire, by performing "a manifestation of inertia in organic life,"¹⁸ in resistance to her teleological framing parameters. Her desire is simply to maintain "the continuance of the same circumstances [...] [to] repeat the self-same life-cycle."¹⁹ But, repeating the self-same cycle is not a manifestation of inertia. Inertia is not marked by repetition; it is characterised by continuing without change. Dujourie's animate figure only rehearses inertia, only performs a poor imitation of the conditions of the inanimate. Each of her repeating fidgets plays out as a change in plot, reinforcing her containing linear parameters. Woodman's figure tries to resist the developmental pull of these parameters through her desire for merger with the maternal body. Her turn to this body is also her bid to return home. It is the lost home that haunts her, the "something repressed which *recurs*."²⁰ In her serial returns to the former home of the womb she reaches again and again for wholeness. The sought for maternal body can only reveal itself as a separate space of development out of which she has already grown. Her serial returns are marked by the ambivalence of her now separate body that both seeks and fears engulfment. Parker's figure turns to her body as the container of her desire. She tries to put desire outside her body by sealing herself. She withers in stone-like isolation, her sealing gesture to no avail against her persisting desire. Her desire is now for no body. She jumps into the pool again and again in a bid to dissolve but her repetitions have a two-fold effect. In each dive, rather than remembering her lost home, she is acting out her separation from inanimate wholeness through striking the body of water, repeating again and again without being aware of it.²¹ But, as she

¹⁸ Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)," 76.

¹⁹ Freud, 78.

²⁰ Freud, "The 'Uncanny' (1919)," 241.

²¹ Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through (1914)," 36.

repeats her impossible dissolution, she affirms, again and again, her fragile not-quite-wholeness. Her body is bound to repeat. The state of inanimate wholeness is unchanging continuousness. No repetition performed by her animate figure could recreate these conditions. Instead, each repetition further separates her from her desired return.

She is caught in the conditions of the animate, between the parameters of beginning and end, against the containing boundary of her skin. This separating skin that both protects her and isolates her, that blocks her return, is echoed in each artist's chosen medium. Each figure is caught on a medium of surface, each one staging a separation between figure and viewer. Dujourie's figure, caught on magnetised tape, is bound by the video monitor. Woodman's figure, caught on medium-format roll film, is bound by the photographic print. Parker's figure, caught on 16mm celluloid, is bound by the projection screen. Now a fragile subject cast in the animate, she cannot let go of her separating surface against which her desire presses.

The figure who recurs in my practice is caught under house arrest. In *Pre-Loved and Ex-Display*, she is pressed against a skin of gold. Lyrics of desire might permeate the scene, but her desire cannot be released from her body. Pressed against the skin of gold, her skin persists as separate. She keeps moving, keeps turning, keeps trying to return home. A frustrated automaton, her compressed desire can never undo her performing skin. She is caught between the same linear parameters, caught by her separating skin, caught on the surface of a digital screen, caught trying and failing to return.

This thesis has shown, through linking the figure who recurs in my practice with the figures framed by Dujourie, Woodman and Parker in their chosen media of separating

surfaces, that to be an animate being is to be under house arrest. An animate being can only be separate, can only be established as animate through differentiation from her environment. Her skin holds her as distinct and her survival is contingent on this distinction yet she is ambivalent about her containing skin. Held by it as separate, she is caught in a mechanism of inescapable, inexhaustible desire. There is no way to exit the chain of desire; a chain that tries to reach back to inanimate wholeness, driven by a nostalgia for an impossible homecoming to a lost home; a chain that stretches endlessly forward, from object to object, trying to close the gap that separates the animate subject from the inanimate, the gap in which desire emerges. She can only be bound by house arrest because there is no way home. She tries to close the gap, to still her desire through refusal, through mimesis of her environment, through performing objecthood. She surrenders to her desire for no desire, compromising her agency and vitality through her self-imposed limiting conditions. She appears to set the terms of her world only to be bound by them as her desire persists regardless. She remains caught in an ambivalent subjectivity where she persists as both a fragile subject needing to constantly affirm her precarious wholeness and as a subject constantly trying to surrender her fragile identity to the relief of inanimate wholeness. Her ambivalence cannot be resolved. My videos do not resolve, or rather, any represented resolve offers only a false consolation. Contained under house arrest, desire persists. What next for the figure under house arrest? She is revealed as neither a failing subject, nor an impotent victim. She persists under house arrest because it is impossible for her to do otherwise, to be otherwise. This realisation marks a different form of escape. Her desire persists in returns. Her sense of loss persists in returns. However, her relation to these returns alters. In accepting the impossibility of leaving

the house she claims her agency, undoing the hold of house arrest. I mark this shift for the figure through a new body of work beyond this thesis that focuses on the skin as a site of expulsion, return and renewal, beginning with *After the transformation I was just the same*.

After the transformation I was just the same. captures messy desire pressing for release against the surface boundary of skin. It plays out in a typically feminine world of soft light, pastel pink and purple. In an intimate to-camera, a girl presses a brightly coloured layer of purple, pink and green to her face. This could be a bedroom make-up tutorial, a new sheet mask treatment perhaps. But it's not. The bright layers she adds do not make for a more flattering complexion. Instead, to a soundtrack of damp subterranean echoes, piece by piece, she presses on her new skin for a different purpose.

What hides underneath her skin, what she tries to cover under this thicker skin, is the messiness of her desire. The force of desire within her presses against the too-neat container of her skin. Her skin feels alien to her. It contains her and limits her but doesn't correspond with her. Like the print of her dress, her skin is an alien surface that can't quite contain her. Adding one skin on top of another might build some distance between her and the irrepressible force she hides. Or, like the blush-covering properties of foundation, this extra skin layer might mask her shame at her messy interior. It rushes out. A rupture. A gush. A purge. Again and again, her messy interior floods out. It washes over her skin barrier, pulling off pieces in its wake. Seemingly emptied out, she shakes off her second skin, like a new-born opening her eyes in the afterbirth. But she is still the same. Her same skin still holds her while the pressure of her desire builds once more.



Figure 34: Katharine Fry, *After the transformation I was just the same*, 2019, HD video

Practice Submission Links

1. *Pre-Loved and Ex-Display*, 2017: <https://vimeo.com/252686183> (password kfry)
2. *I could stay here forever and I would never die. But like the flowers I would never have been alive.*, 2015: <https://vimeo.com/151293489>
3. *I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me.*, 2018: <https://vimeo.com/280182350>
4. *d.a.n.c.e. f.o.r. y.o.u.r. d.a.d.d.y.*, 2017: <https://vimeo.com/217982799>
5. *Tablemouth*, 2016: <https://vimeo.com/175189587>
6. *I would tell you everything but there's no room*, 2016:
<https://vimeo.com/167335299>
7. *After the transformation I was just the same*, 2019:
<https://vimeo.com/351151565> (password kfry)

Exhibition Documentation



Figure 35: Katharine Fry, *I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me.*, 2018, HD video, and *I could stay here forever and I would never die. But like the flowers I would never have been alive.*, 2016, HD video, installation view, Goldsmiths University, 2019

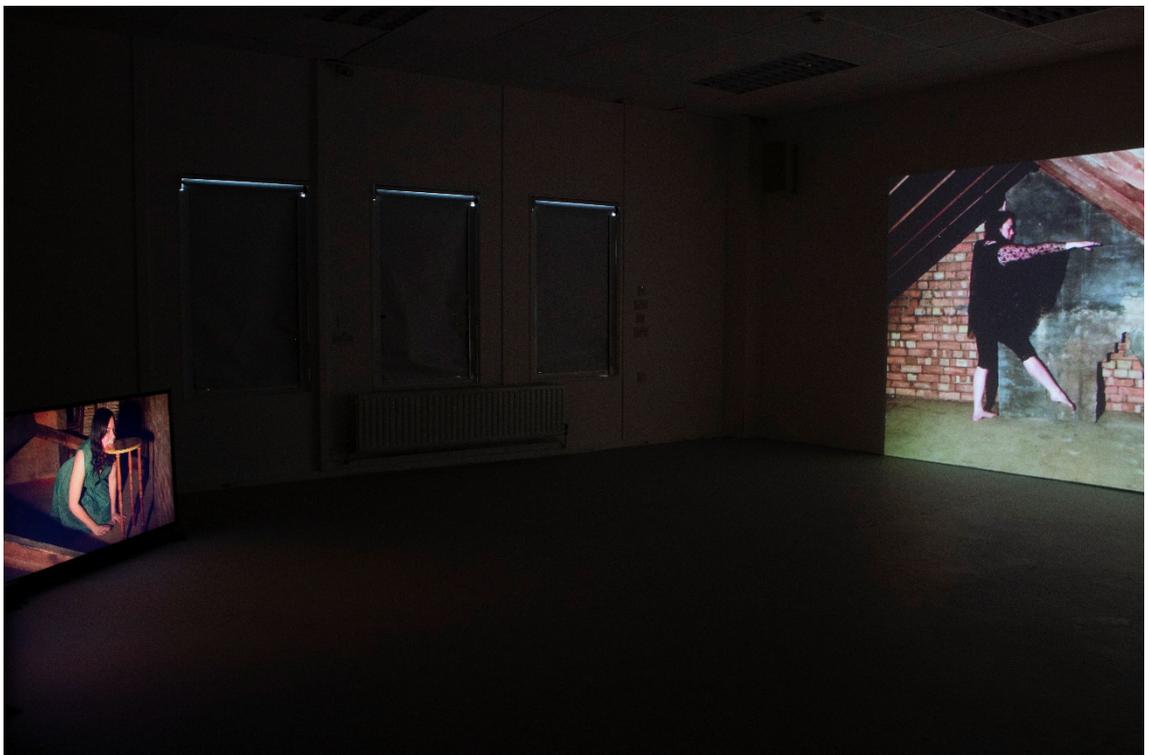


Figure 36: Katharine Fry, *d.a.n.c.e. f.o.r. y.o.u.r. d.a.d.d.y.*, HD video, 2017, and *Tablemouth*, HD video, 2016, installation view, Goldsmiths University, 2019



Figure 37: Katharine Fry, *Tablemouth*, HD video, 2016, installation view, Goldsmiths University, 2019

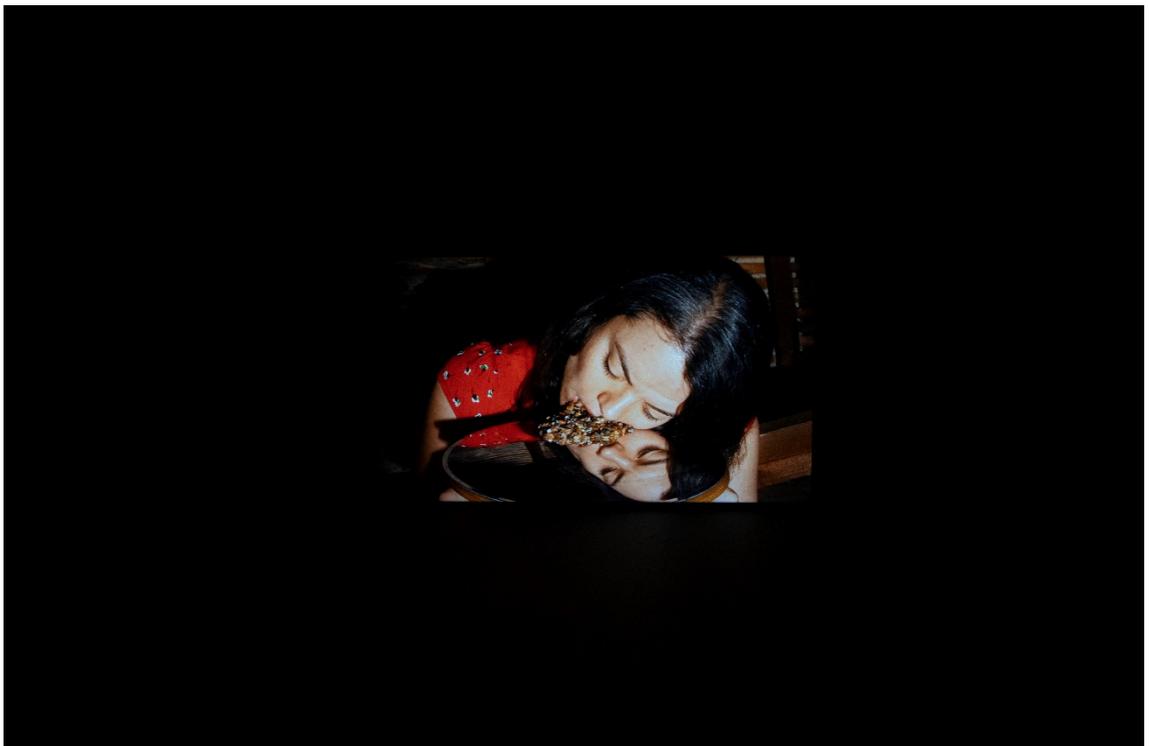


Figure 38: Katharine Fry, *I would tell you everything but there's no room*, HD video, 2016, installation view, Goldsmiths University, 2019



Figure 39: Katharine Fry, *Pre-Loved and Ex-Display*, HD video, 2017, installation view, Goldsmiths University, 2019

Illustrated Videography

2019



Figure 40: *After the transformation I was just the same*, HD video

2018

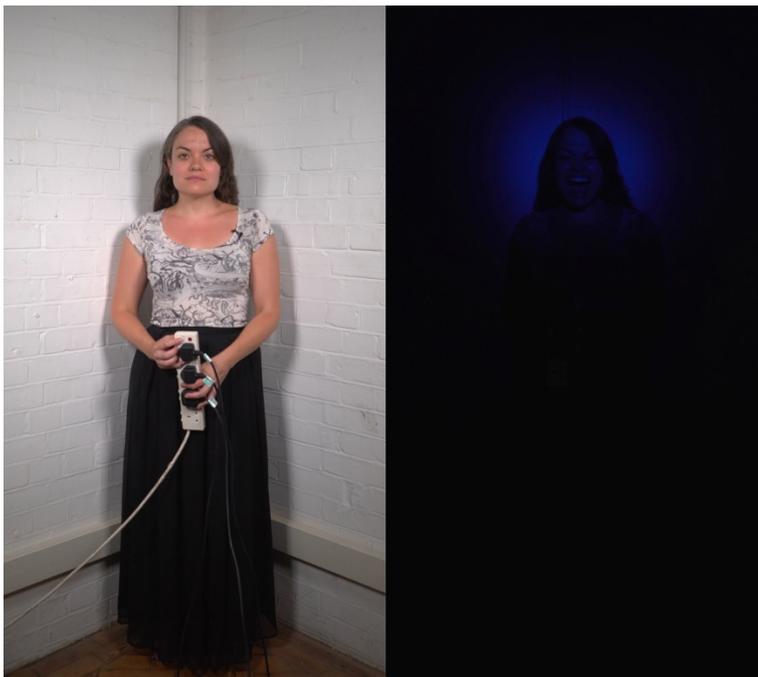


Figure 41: *You call it a bedtime story but you fell asleep long ago.*, HD video



Figure 42: *Before her investiture, the novice must hear what she has to, learn what she has to, shape what she has to, say., HD video*



Figure 43: *Before her investiture, the novice must hear what she has to, learn what she has to, shape what she has to, say., installation view Ann Arbor Film Festival 2019*



Figure 44: *I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me., HD video*

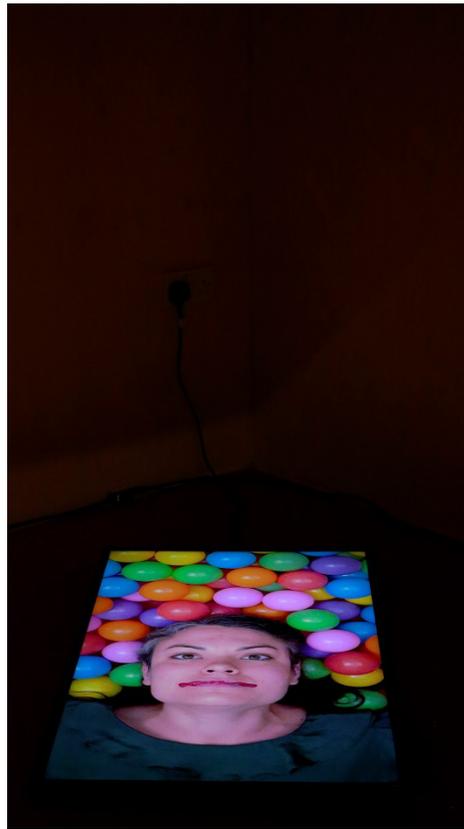


Figure 45: *I can sing a rainbow. Sing along with me., installation view, Deptford X*

2017



Figure 46: *Pre-Loved and Ex-Display*, HD video



Figure 47: *And you want*, HD video



Figure 48: *And you want*, installation view, Deptford X



Figure 49: *Creepers*, HD video



Figure 50: *Prenuptial Hydra / How can I want what will destroy me?*, HD video



Figure 51: *d.a.n.c.e. f.o.r. y.o.u.r. d.a.d.d.y.*, HD video



Figure 52: *Rockingmouth*, HD video

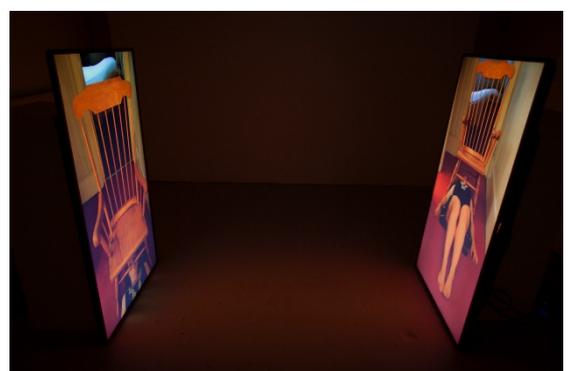


Figure 53: *Rockingmouth*, installation view

2016



Figure 54: *Tablemouth*, HD video, composite still



Figure 55: *Tablemouth*, HD video, installation view Alchemy Film Festival 2018



Figure 56: *I would tell you everything but there's no room*, HD video



Figure 57: *I could stay here forever and I would never die. But like the flowers I would never have been alive.*, HD video

2015



Figure 58: *Did I get rid of it or are we just pretending not to notice?*, digital video



Figure 59: *I'll wait like this until I see you again*, digital video



Figure 60: *It could be a bossa nova*, digital video



Figure 61: *Again, again, we can make this look like fun*, digital video



Figure 62: *Flat Line*, digital video



Figure 63: *In this time, I don't think so*, digital video

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