

VERTIGO

(THE TECHNOPHENOMENOLOGICAL BODY IN PERFORMANCE)

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Abstract

My project is a consideration of how new technologies impact on the body in performance. The affect of digital media and virtual reality on conventional notions of physicality and representation is initiating a radical rethink on how we define and understand body/performance art. The question of how and where we locate the internal and external self, an issue that is crucial for artists who use their bodies, is further emphasised through new technological mediation. This signals the possibility of new thinking about presence and exchange within body/performance art. I am primarily interested in how new technologies facilitate different sorts of exchange between artwork/artist and audience. I contend that when the performing body is immersed in new technologies its desires and anxieties are exposed. The intersubjective relation generated between the work and audience – the phenomenological experience of a public performance of self – is consequently revealed as erotic.

I aim to reconfigure contemporary ideas of performance as dependent on immediate presence (liveness). In the performance of self, as embodied by the artist in performance, the conventional distinction between fixed notions of subject and object is collapsed into an intersubjective dynamic. My analysis of this relation is informed by Merleau-Ponty's reading of the relationship between the visible and the invisible as a 'chiasmic intertwining'. Accordingly, rather than proceed from the idea of a split between artists and viewer/s, I examine the intersubjective dynamic as an exchange of *flesh*.

I use the term 'technophenomenological' to describe the enworlded nature of the relationships between bodies, machines and media. I extend this understanding by drawing on psychoanalytic concepts of incorporation and narcissism, on cinema and media theory and on theories of excess and waste. I endeavour to 'write through' my

practice, sometimes anecdotally and sometimes intuitively, to evolve a dialogue between my practice and theoretical concerns.

My work attempts to enter and navigate the perceived gaps between the artist/artwork/viewer. I understand these spaces not so much as gaps, rather as flow, or exchange or connection. This language that is available to us to articulate such perceptions is necessarily descriptive but it readily reveals the gap between self and other/s. When we feel the pull, the drag of the flesh it is because we think of ourselves as separate beings and in this way we reveal both our desires and our fears. I offer the argument that these vertiginous 'gaps' offer us creative spaces to explore and experience intersubjective exchange, an exchange that is non-hierarchical and non-linear, but that is always and ever immanent.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	p i
Image Table	p 3
Acknowledgements/Thanks	p 4
Dedication	p 5
Introduction	p 6
Chapter 1: Infernal Desire Machines	
Infernal Desire Machines	p 25
Freefall	p 30
Exchange	p 33
Chapter 2: Shape Shifters and Changelings	
Shape Shifters and Changeling.....	p 45
Disembodiment	p 52
Replicants	p 56
Chapter 3: Moving Pictures & Roving Eyes	
Moving Pictures & Roving Eyes	p 72
Norma and Me	p 74
Devouring Eyes	p 81
Blood and Guts	p 92
Hannibal	p 98
Au Lecteur	p 110
Chapter 4: Lovebites	
Lovebites	p 119
Dissolute Bodies	p 124
Public & Private Bodies	p 141
Skin (I've Got You Under My...)	p 141
Me, Myself, I	p 146
Conclusion	p 165
Endnotes	p 184
Bibliography	p 205

Image Table

Still from <i>Peeping Tom</i>	p 1
Voices: still from documentation.....	p 21
Cyberspace: still from <i>Hackers</i>	p 24
Fear of Falling: still from <i>Vertigo</i>	p 35
T1000 Morph: stills from <i>Terminator 2</i>	p 65
American landscape: still from <i>Psycho</i>	p 71
Norma & Norma: still from <i>Sunset Boulevard</i>	p 76
'I feel much better now. Clearer': still from <i>Terminator 2</i>	p 79
Hannah Wilke: S.O.S. and Intra Venus	p 82
Love of looking: still from <i>Psycho</i>	p 87
Franko B: Action 398 (1)	p 93
Franko B: Action 398 (2)	p 95
Hannibal Lecter: still from <i>Silence of the Lambs</i>	p 99
Hannibal meets Clarice: still from <i>Silence of the Lambs</i>	p 103
Armin Miewes: still from Channel 4 documentary	p 118
Bernd Brandes: still from Channel 4 documentary	p 121
Little excesses: still from documentation	p 133
Skin: still from <i>Brazil</i>	p 142
'I've Got You Under my...': still from documentation	p 148
Orlan (operation): still from documentation	p 153
Excess of self: still from documentation	p 157
Vito Acconci: Seedbed	p 160
Orlan (post-op): still from documentation	p 164
Devouring Eye: still from <i>Man With a Movie Camera</i>	p 169
Active Looking: still from <i>Peeping Tom</i>	p 172
Thrash: still from documentation	p 178
'They were all her pictures...that's all she wanted to see': still from <i>Sunset Blvd</i>	p 183

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For Nobby

Introduction

My project is a consideration of how new technologies impact on the body in performance. The affect of digital media and virtual reality on conventional concepts of physicality and representation is initiating a radical rethink on how we define and understand body/performance art. For artists who work with their bodies, the question of how one performs the self is crucial because, in situating the body as the site and the means to make or perform art, the artist's body is offered up as (simultaneously) subject and object. This issues a paradox. How can I, as an artist in performance, represent myself? Is there an internal existential self, a centre to my being, that I can reveal to the world? Or, is the self I sense as 'me' always occluded, something that can never be spoken of, a self that can only be manifest through representation? If so, does this not reinforce the idea of internal and external selves as discrete modalities and in turn fall in line with a subject/object dichotomy?

I understand performance art as being primarily shaped through ideas of reciprocity and exchange, and body art as a specific genre within the field of performance art, to be shaped broadly through a concern with situating the body as object and the flesh as process. Perversely, paradoxically, body art asserts intersubjectivity through what seems to be objectification. At its extreme, body art actions do harm to the artist's body – it can be cut, beaten, sliced, hung, squashed or penetrated – yet by placing it within the frame of art, it insists on those actions as exchange. However, through an act that some may call self-mutilation, as in the work of Franko B or Orlan for example, one can see instead of autistic self-absorption, communication and intersubjectivity. I take up this idea and analyse certain performances in terms of a 'Sadean paradox' (Franko B, chapter 3) and in terms of and active 'neo-narcissism' (Orlan, chapter 4). Before I explore these ideas and works, I analyse, in more general terms, the body's relationship to technology.

In performance art, the question of how one represents the self is further complicated by technological mediation and I contest that it foregrounds the question. For example, most of us know of performance actions through documentary record – the photograph, film or text – because most of us were not present at the event. This poses the question of is it possible to have a relationship to, or exchange with a work via its record. This has been demonstrated in performances staged for the photograph (for instance Hannah Wilke's photographs), texts given as performance (such as Fluxus scores) or – especially – video performance works (as in the video works of Vito Aconcci, Gary Hill and others). These works clearly generate an active dynamic through their record. The video performance in particular demonstrates the generation of a particularised subjectivity between artist and viewer. Into this complex it introduces an emphasised interobjectivity through the relation of the action to the bodies involved – the bodies of the artist, of the viewer/s, of the video tape and of the monitor/TV in physical space. The video performance not only gives a material existence to an ephemeral act but also brings into the 'now' an action long past. Constructed through analogue technology, video performance demonstrates a 'lo-fi' version of virtuality and raises the issues of disembodiment and presence at the same time as affirming the flesh of the body.

There are broadly speaking, two views on 'body' that have an ongoing impact on performance art: the first emphasises the primacy of live co-presence between the bodies of artist and viewer as the only 'now' that matters and that presence is assured through physicality. The second contends that the recording presents an appeal to body erasure (disappearance) and compromises performance's radical potential. Both of these positions are challenged or complicated by the incursion of digitality into performance. How then does the video streaming or live webcast impact on old distinctions of performativity and the documentary record? Significantly different to analogue technology, digitality raises the spectre of virtuality and facilitates a distinct sense of bodily disorientation in its users. For body/performance art in particular digitality signals the possibility of new thinking about performance and exchange and

about the primacy of live co presence. Furthermore it impacts on our understanding of the formation of self through identification (as with the study of film) and of the relation of bodies to one another in the (material) world. I am not proposing here to lay out a historical analysis of technology and performance art, rather I am primarily interested in what new technologies reveal about the shifting dynamic between self and other and consequently between artist/artwork/viewer.

I situate my critical and artistic practice within the field of contemporary body-based performance art practice and I put forward the idea that technological mediation of the body in performance questions and tests the viability of orthodox readings of the subject/object relationship as dichotomous, as they appertain to discussions on 'live art'. Reading through American contemporary performance art theorist Amelia Jones' notion of technophenomenology and the writings of seminal French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I analyse the nature of intersubjectivity. [Jones, 1998, Merleau-Ponty, 1992, 1973] Jones, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's proposal of subjective exchange as an 'enfleshed intertwining', argues that body art instantiates such an exchange. I extend Jones' argument to draw out an understanding of body/performance art as driven by and operating through incorporation, suggesting that incorporative (and erotic) desires and drives are exposed by the incursion of new technologies into the performative work of art.

Incorporation is a fantasy and is an aspect of introjection. Introjection is a key idea in psychoanalytic literature and is understood as normative in the processes of identification, which in turn is key in the issue of subject formation. Psychoanalytic writers Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, expanding on Sigmund Freud's fundamental theories of identification, argue that when introjection is either negated or fixed upon pathologically, it becomes incorporation, a potentially dangerous fantasy. [Abraham & Torok, 1994] For Abraham and Torok, the pairing of introjection/incorporation corollaries to Freud's theory of mourning and melancholia. Whereas mourning and introjection are normative for psychoanalysis, the pairing of

melancholia and incorporation is pathological. My argument refuses a 'blanket' pathologisation and I make the case for utilising the process of object fixation as a way of facilitating artistic focus in performance. The subject/object relation is further problematised through the phenomenological reading of intersubjectivity (outlined above). Similarly with narcissism, another important trope for my thesis, I argue against its negative connotations. Looking to American critic and writer Christopher Lasch, I unpack his relatively contemporary but conventional understanding of narcissism. [Lasch, 1991] Whereas his position is that the burgeoning of narcissistic disorders are symptomatic of society's illness, I find a narcissistic strategy very useful as an artist in its relation to the reading of intersubjectivity/intertwining that I draw from phenomenology. I argue that conventional pejorative associations with narcissism can be undone by certain body/performance art projects, insofar as narcissism is also a basis for fluid and multiple identifications that characterise the subject of performance.

I examine the dynamic of presence and absence. In this I read through American Virtual Worlds theorist Michael Heim's argument that cyberspace operates according to an erotic ontology [Heim, 1993]. Analysing the response of the 'bio-body' to virtual spaces, I look to American new media/cinema writer Vivian Sobchack's argument that proposes digitality as heterogeneous in form. [Sobchack, 2000] Whilst I am in accord with their ideas, I extend the argument – presence can operate on many levels but the self remains immanent (firmly situated within the flesh).

Merleau-Ponty's ideas of relationality as intersubjective and fleshbound contrast with French philosopher and writer George Bataille's theories regarding waste and the limits of 'the body'. [Bataille, 1985, 1987] Although Bataille argues for a better understanding of body limits through heterogeneity, he argues that we, as subjects, still perceive differences between self and other as a non-traversable gulf. He identifies this gulf or gap as vertiginous. I take up this idea and, through my reading of Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic intertwining, I argue that technologically mediated body/performance art can

reveal that, in stepping into these vertiginous 'gaps', our incorporative and erotic drives are creative, if difficult, vehicles for new artistic discourses.

I contest that the relation of bodies to each other, to technology and to the idea of fluctuating presence (informed as it is by the collapse of time and space afforded by new technologies) is an erotic relation. Furthermore I am suggesting that just as digitality operates through an oral logic, so too does body/performance art. I pose the question when we look at bodies in performance, when those performances are mediated, does the action of looking become more overtly incorporative? If it does, what then are the implications?

Orality and incorporation are important terms for this thesis because they offer me the means to (discursively) analyse subject/object relationality without effacing the flesh, blood and desires of the body. For example, I use the psychoanalytic term incorporation as ideas of objectification have been very influential in film and performance studies through considerations of identification and projection. Shifting from, for example, Laura Mulvey's critique of gender in film in which the objectification of woman relies on a dichotomy between object and subject positions, incorporation questions the tenability of this common orthodoxy. [Mulvey, 1991] I am suggesting that the relationship of the body in performance to technology (and especially digital technology) is an incorporative one. This idea arose for me following the webcast of some of my video performances and documentation. Watching the webcast I was struck by the significant changes it wrought in the material and in my relationship to it. Digitising and then webcasting the video works seemed to strip them of some of the opacity they had acquired through video documentation. The documentation pieces seemed somehow more 'live' and the video performances, without their monitor boxes as support, had lost (structural) context. More than this, the webcast revealed something at play at the heart of the performances, something to do with desire. So, just what does digital technology reveal about the nature of desire in a work of performance?

My methodology in this text is reflective of my methodology as an artist. In my professional practice I work across different disciplines – the momentum for my practice is not anchored to a single discourse. This text is part of the multiple aspects that shape the overall discourse of my work as an artist and within the writing, I draw on different sources and concepts. I aim to bring them into accord but to always relate them to my body of work

As I watched myself performing on the tiny screen-within-a-screen, again and again, I was struck by own narcissism, both in the performances and in the act of watching myself. Watching the performances in cyberspace seemed to amplify their narcissistic qualities. In the work, I use my body, my representation and my narcissism to engage a discourse with the spectator/s. Accordingly, when I speak of narcissism in this text it is not offered pejoratively but rather as a strategy for articulating both desire and difficulty. Initially I read narcissism through the Freudian model as this is the most common understanding of the term and one that still has currency. Throughout the text I return to narcissism but from different perspectives. My text attempts a new formulation of the subject/object complex and, in relation to body/performance art, the issue of narcissism is crucial.

Incorporation, consumption and narcissism are central tropes for my project, through which I read the performing body as a body in desire and argue the case for performance as a perverse act. I am claiming that there is a distinct, if not always acknowledged, erotic charge generated by what might be termed as extreme or excessive acts of performance. More than a physiological response in recognition of an intersubjective exchange between bodies, the erotic charge is generated by the performance's very excess and perversity. Performance understood as reciprocal and concerned with exchange is an enactment of relationality but we can see in the work of Orlan, Franko B and others (notably Bob Flanagan and Gina Pane) a distinct complication of straightforward exchange. Such practices can be described variously as narcissistic, masochistic or sadistic – conditions that are usually deemed to be

concerned only with the self and its existential (sexual) relation to self, at the exclusion of others. Offered up as works of art/art actions, excessive or extreme practices immediately throw up a paradox – how can something non-relational generate relationality? Furthermore, performance art's concern with process and concept, at the expense of the art object, is compromised by the recording and the photograph. Technological mediation facilitates concretisation of the action and instigates another paradoxical aspect of performance. As Peggy Phelan points out in 'Unmarked' [Phelan, 1993, 31-33] in trying to mark that which is unmarked we are faced with an impossibility.

I take up the term 'technophenomenological' from Amelia Jones as a way to describe the enworlded nature of the relationships between bodies, machines and media. She writes that it is '*a relation that intertwines intersubjectivity and interobjectivity.*' Technophenomenology is a way of recognising how we engage with the materiality of things and how '*it subjectively feels to be objectively embodied*' within a world saturated by technology. [Jones, 1998, 239] ¹

As well as drawing on psychoanalysis, I find it helpful to draw on phenomenology, specifically the later writings of Merleau-Ponty. His formulation of phenomenology rejects the more traditional Husserlian concept of a transcendental ego and stresses instead immanence and the flesh of the body. This allows me to draw out my arguments, without falling into an affirmation of a split between mind and body and reinforcing a phallogocentric dichotomy. In my insistence on the body and the experience of flesh and in my concern for situating body/performance art as a series of exchanges, I am faced with the question of how a non-relational performance (of self) impacts on my discourse and complicates its arguments.

So, what is a performance of non-relationality? In everyday society, any enactment of utter non-relationality is both unusual and extreme and is more often than not pathologised as autistic, perverted or criminal. Accordingly, I consider fictional and

actual performances of non-relationality in the form of cannibalism, analysing the fictional Hannibal Lecter and the real Armin Miewes. However, for the most extreme and self-conscious acts of non-relationality, I look to the Marquis de Sade. His ferocious rationalism pursues the annihilation of the other through a series of cruel, consumptive bodily exchanges. Sade's fictional bodies are reduced to fleshly producers of waste and excess in the form of bodily secretions and excretions, to a collection of orifices into which 'sovereign man' may thrust his (always erect) phallus. Key to understanding Sade is an understanding of the value of excess and waste propagated as a strategy and for this I look to Georges Bataille. A materialist, Bataille bids us take account of waste, of cruelty and perversion in order to reformulate the relationship of the self to the world. Rather than criminalising or pathologising such aspects of human behaviour, he argues that we must expose them as necessary to understanding human nature.

Have these issues moved on much from the time of Sade's and Bataille's writing? The world in 2005 still produces more waste than it can deal with and it produces real life monsters like Miewes, like Jeffrey Dahmer and for entertainment, Hannibal Lecter, a most glamorous cannibal. With Sade still a long way outside of the mainstream, it seems to me that Bataille's theories still have relevance today. By bringing Bataille into my equation, I remain firmly with the living flesh and contest the drive of psychoanalysis to 'cure' or repair, without rejecting the core concept. Furthermore, Bataille gives solid grounding to the phenomenological concepts taken up here. Towards the end of this thesis, I bring in two newer voices from psychoanalytic theory, French writer Didier Anzieu (*Skin Ego*) and the American writer Christopher Lasch (*Narcissism*). Based on (revised) Freudian concepts, their theories offer a way to articulate physical being in the world and the formation of self, within a changing and increasingly technologised world.

Before I outline the structure of the thesis I want to say something about my relationship to film. In the first place, I do not attempt to grapple with film theory,

with the one exception of using Laura Mulvey as a starting point to discuss objectification by the gaze of the camera. I do however take two filmic characters that have had a direct impact on my practice (Norma Desmond from the film *Sunset Boulevard* and Hannibal Lecter from the Lecter series of films). Try as I might, I have found it hard to be thoroughly objective about either character. I have watched them many times, long before I began to write about them. I let them slip into my practice and make their influence felt – not dumbly, but without the need to fully articulate in words what their impact might signify. Perhaps I keep them there for company but, all the same, I have incorporated my versions of these fictions. I love movies and all things cinematic and because I *love*, I incorporate them in my work, I let their shadows play out across the surfaces of my body.

In Chapter 1, I examine the relationship of computers and users in terms of the tactile, anthropomorphic and erotic dynamics that come into play in computer activity. Here I look to the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the French philosopher and phenomenologist who put forward a theory of immanent phenomenology. My main reference with Merleau-Ponty is 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm,' the final section of his book *The Visible and the Invisible* (published posthumously). [Merleau-Ponty, 1973] I also draw in part from his earlier work, *The Phenomenology of Perception*. [Merleau-Ponty, 1992] One of my other main sources for this chapter and for the whole thesis is American writer and performance theorist Amelia Jones from her book, *Body Art. Performing the Subject*. [Jones, 1998] Through American cyberspace theorist and teacher, Michael Heim's book, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality* [1993] I consider the impact of new technologies on the body at the console. Similarly, Margaret Morse's theories on interobjectivity and intersubjectivity in a technologised world have provided a useful background for my project. I refer to two of her works, *What do Cyborgs Eat? Oral Logic in an Information Society* [Morse, 1998] and *Virtualities: Television, Media Art and Culture*. [Morse, 1998]

Emphasising the oral logic of digitality, I put forward the argument that these dynamics are interrelated and attempt to articulate this by drawing on my *felt* experience of making a webcast performance. My experience demonstrated to me that certain expectations and claims about working with this new technology are confounded, some are confirmed and unexpected ambiguities emerge. Post-performance, the question remained how does virtual exchange occur? To articulate my thinking about this issue, I take up Merleau-Ponty's idea of the relationship of the subject to the world and to other subjects as an exchange of flesh ('a chiasmic intertwining'). I return to Merleau-Ponty throughout the whole text to reiterate my concern with the body as fleshbound and immanent.

The second chapter begins by endeavouring to unpack this issue with an analysis of absence and presence. Drawing on Michael Heim and his outline of telepresence, I contrast levels of technologised presence and ask what impact these new ways of connecting subjects have on our expectations regarding live, co-presence. Over the past two decades, cyberspace has had a powerful impact on modern cultures. As well as offering more efficient ways of disseminating and storing information and of communicating, it offers to the field of performance art the possibility of a virtual arena to interrogate the viability of disembodiment and remote presence (presence at a distance, or in other words telepresence). While the viability of cyberspace as a venue is still being tested and researched, we can perceive (albeit, in glimmers as yet) its radical potential in undoing conventional understandings of the relation of (flesh and blood) bodies to each other, to space and to presence. It is changing the way that we relate to the world and to other subjects.

The problem in analysing cyberspace is that it all too easily folds into a pursuit of the Cartesian ideal valorising mind over body. Navigating a position that neither folds back into this ideal, nor collapses into essentialism and biologism involves treading a fine line, if one is to avoid utopian speculation about cyberspace offering a solution to all the problems of the physical and everyday world. I maintain that there is no escape

from the drag of the flesh in cyberspace nor indeed in any technologised or other virtual space. No matter how much we may wish it, transcendence is a fantasy not a possibility. What interests me here is what occurs when one pursues, through performative practice, the disappearance of self (in representation). Is this an attempt to leave the flesh behind? When our bodies are tested and our flesh is stretched to its limits we feel the affect of its drag, but I contest that the key thing about performance and body art is that the self is marked as always and only ever immanent. In the last section of this chapter, I consider spectatorial pleasure and its connection to mimesis and transformation and contend that we, as viewers, are complicit with the technologised illusions that play out before our eyes. To explore this I find myself then looking back to cinema to unpack the idea of libidinal looking as it impacts on my ideas regarding the body (at times *this* body) in performance.

I start Chapter 3 with an anecdotal account of my relationship to a classic Hollywood movie and consider the incorporative action of the look in this and in a wider context. [*Sunset Boulevard*, Wilder, 1950] Drawing on psychoanalysis here, I argue that desire, in relation to the gaze, is not as Laura Mulvey argues identification maintained through gender polarisation. Rather it is incorporative through the action of the camera. I follow this with a comparison of relational and non-relational performances (from art and from literature) and find myself looking to extreme or excessive enactments. I make a case study of a performance by Italian/UK body artist Franko B, who is known for his blood letting and wounding performances. [*Action 398*, Feb 2001] I then look to the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), philosopher, politician, writer and avowed sexual outlaw, to try to unpack the rationale of non-relationality. French poet, writer and art critic Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) was writing on the cusp of modernism, staring down the new era of industrialisation with its machines and mass production. I take a single piece of his work 'Au Lecteur' from the preface to the series of poems, *Fleurs du Mal* to discuss his dystopic vision of the excesses of modernity. [Baudelaire, 1857] While I make reference to Marshall McLuhan in previous chapters, I take up his ideas about the anxious body in more depth, at the end of this chapter.

Canadian McLuhan (1911-1980) was a hugely influential thinker and writer on the impact of technology in modern cultures. I am drawing specifically on *Understanding Media*. [McLuhan, 1964] Echoing McLuhan, I make the argument that the 21st century body is an anxious body and, facilitated by new technologies, it is faced with a seemingly limitless extension of body and of presence. This challenges conventional perception of the distinctions between self and other and whether we like it or not, the processes of identification are changing. I compare performances of relationality and non-relationality in order to examine the creative illogic of certain body/performance art practices. Whereas the anxiety generated by the destabilising, extending action of technology on the formation of self is, in life, seen as uncomfortable or damaging, in art, anxiety, fragmentation and disordering can be used as creative strategies. New technologies – digitality specifically – not only posit a disordering of linearity in favour of multi-directionality and lateral simultaneity but they also promote connectivity and the possibility of a new level of interobjective exchange between remotely situated individuals. At the same time as connectivity is expanded, the subject at the console can become increasingly isolated, subject to what McLuhan terms a 'narcotic' narcissistic condition.

Taking the psychoanalytic concept of introjection as part of the normative processes of looking and of identification I explore how, when introjection is over invested with fantasy, it becomes incorporative. At it's extreme this fantasy can become cannibalistic in nature and in the concluding section of the chapter I analyse the fictional character of one of our most popular movie monsters, Hannibal Lecter to explore the implications of this.

The fourth and final chapter opens with a comparison of fictional and actual enactments of non-relationality, manifest as cannibalistic fantasy and actual cannibalism. Overall, the chapter takes a more historical viewpoint in order to explore my concerns from a different perspective. Anxiety is situated as excessive and consequently as erotic. One of my primary sources for this chapter is Georges Bataille

(1897-1962), the French writer and philosopher whose theories on waste, excess and sexuality have a significant impact on my argument. I am drawing in particular from his essay 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade' from his book *Visions of Excess* [Bataille, (1930) 1985] and in part from his book *Eroticism*. [Bataille, (1957) 1987] Following on from Bataille, I argue that erotic pleasure (jouissance) and anxiety are linked to the loss of self and as such are intersubjective. The spaces of the modern body are changing – what was once private is now public. Our perceptions of the physical 'edges' to being are similarly shifting and I examine this through the concept of a 'Skin Ego' from French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu (1923-1999). The Skin Ego is a psychically constructed extension of being, visualised as a kind of bubble, or a membrane that extends beyond the actual surface of the skin. It is both a protective response to anxieties regarding self and to desire for self extension and connectivity. [Anzieu, 1989]

From this perspective, I reconsider narcissism, reading through the book *Culture of Narcissism* by American social critic, Christopher Lasch (1932-1994) and I offer a case study of contemporary French artist Orlan, widely known through her surgery project, *The Reincarnation of Ste. Orlan*. [Lasch, 1979] [Orlan, 1990 – ongoing] Our concerns regarding self are most directly played out upon the surface of our bodies – Orlan's project demonstrates just how potent narcissism can be as a creative response to new ideas about how the self is shaped. Body/performance art is, I argue, a field where this question can be interrogated and experimented upon. More clearly and directly than any other art form it demonstrates that the limits of the body and of the self are no longer anchored in the same way.

Bataille, Anzieu and Lasch allow me to re-examine exchanges between subjects, between flesh and blood bodies, from a different perspective. Bataille and Anzieu in particular lead me to focus on the viscera, the specificity of the modern body, its needs, functions and drives. It is revealed as anxious about, yet desirous for the changes wrought by modern technologies. The modern body's reach is extended through time

and space by technology but at the same time it is troubled by modifications to the way we shape self-hood and by the gradual erasure of privacy.

Rather than proceeding from the idea of a split or a gulf between subjects I am concerned to unpack the dynamic of intersubjectivity and interobjectivity as proposed by performances of self. In the performance of self, as articulated through the body of the artist, conventional assumptions about fixed concepts between subject and object are collapsed by an emphasis on this intersubjective/interobjective dynamic. Staging the body (live or recorded) at once asserts a presence in time and space, only to undo that presence through the temporality of the flesh and of the action. The staged body paradoxically attempts to fix what is unfixable and to embody disappearance. In its defiance of conventional ideas about behaviour, the excessive performance of self sets in motion a line of reasoning that originates in a perverse rationality that has implications way beyond the facts of the action. Performance actions that do actual violence to the body bid us question the desires or needs that motivate such extremity and question also the desires of the viewer to vicariously share the experience.

Reading 'performance' as an exchange between two or more bodies/selves makes it possible to understand the self-conscious performance of self as the deliberate act of seeking satisfaction of the desire to efface the boundary between self and other. In an extreme non-relational aspect of the performative, the Marquis de Sade, libertine and philosopher, was always doomed to fail to make that connection but his fictional works tell of his ferocious attempt to pursue such effacement. To entirely efface the perceived boundary between self and other can only ever fail because the idea of boundary is formed through ideas of fixed and finite selves, related to concepts of difference. Frustration of this desire is manifest in Sade's depraved and vicious sexual fantasies. Sade used literary metaphor for the most part, but his writings speak of a man trying to fuck himself out of his autism. Extreme behaviour reveals much about human nature – it evidences the ends to which we (all of us) may be prepared to travel to satisfy our only too human desires. Accordingly, I look again to Georges Bataille to

discuss the ramifications of extremity on the limits of the body. He bids us consider waste or excess (the 'use' value of excess, in this instance the excessive and at times coprographic sexual practices of Sade) in order to expand our understanding of the limitations of body. [Bataille, 1985] In body/performance art there is a definite drive to test the limits of the self, to take things to a point at which a sensation of vertigo comes into play. This, I contest, is made conspicuous by the technological mediation of body based works of art. The question remains however – what is it that takes us to the limit, what is it that drives some of us to pursue an impossible logic that is paradoxical and perverse?

A note on the practice

Throughout the thesis I endeavour to 'write through' my practice, sometimes anecdotally and sometimes intuitively, to evolve a dialogue between my practice and my theoretical concerns. My practice explores different aspects of performativity, which I locate not just in the live presentation of a work to an audience, but also in video, film and broadcast/webcasts. Expressly, the origins of my work are located in the stilled moment. I explore ways of inhabiting or of working within a still image, sometimes culled from a movie, sometimes imagined. Integral to this I am staging myself as self, as artist, as woman – as such, I see my own performance as a kind of self-incorporation, in which I am ingested by other representations of self in the shape of alternate personae. As such my self is really nowhere to be seen – the idea of a whole, definitive self is rejected. These performed representations are given as fragmented and disordered identities, played out upon a disordered body. This disordering takes the form of 'over the top' and repetitive actions such as twitching, scratching, thrashing, weeping. I allow my body to approach a limit, to get to a point where it – the flesh – cannot help but respond and betray its difficulty. In other works, I deal with the body in terms of endurance, testing my strength, my focus, my balance and so on. The point at which the body begins to break down or exceed the parameters of the work, where the flesh takes over from psychic focus, is what I aim for in these



performances. Furthermore, at this point I make my audience complicit in my difficulty – when I begin to struggle physically, interest levels rise. I do not especially want to suffer but I do want to test my limits and, for the audience, the point at which my body begins to show signs of difficulty is the point at which it becomes compelling.

I posit self as shaped through desire but as always disordered. As a woman in performance my body cannot escape the performance of a type or types of femininity – the staging of woman as woman incorporates conventional signs of femininity by bringing them into my body and simultaneously 're-corporating' them and by playing them out upon my body. This is an unstable condition, in perpetual agitation or oscillation, and it is one in which the relationship between the work and viewer brings a particularised and similarly unstable reading of each work.

Voice too is askew in the work – often one (my) body appears to issue many voices, none of which are her (my) own. The stolen voice, imposed speech and silence are recurring motifs in my performances. Overwhelmed by speech, language always seems to fail this artist, or perhaps I/she fails it, and this failure is played out upon my/her anxious body. What I mean by this is that when spoken language fails, the performance of this failure restores meaning even as representation falters. The language of others (the voice sound clips are nearly all samples) fills my mouth and is spat back out, the soundtrack enfolds my body demanding a physical response. I allow these performances to make my body shake. It trembles and weeps in nervous reaction to being seen and in its display of obsessional tics it signals its resistance and its excess. It also signals its acute self-consciousness through the strain of enduring physical difficulty.² Often contradictory, the voices and my body enter an ambiguous state that encompasses aggression and submission – in performance, I/she languish masochistically and spoil for a fight simultaneously. The voices always indicate conflict and the desire for recognition.

Does a deliberate, narcissistic attempt to stage or display self, self and more self say anything at all to anyone but that self? If we listen harder to what is between, the thing left unspoken, the parts that cross over, then perhaps we can think of the 'text' of these performances as being in the *transition* between voices, in the multiplicity of voices and in the change in register. An abrupt change of register (from male to female voice for example) is a tiny shock or jolt – it is there for emphasis, for punctuation, as a cut or an edit. While I do not address 'voice' as a specific issue in my thesis, throughout the text there are different registers of voice. Given reign to speak, they are symptomatic of my desire to write 'through' the practice, to follow the (il)logic of my practice, in order to try to take the text into the same zone (at the very least) as my practice. Speaking of them here is to signal the parallel existence of an unspeakable text, one that, all the same, insists on acknowledgement. Or, better, on interruption.



Chapter 1

Infernal Desire Machines

Introduction

In this chapter I lay the ground for my reading of the ways that technology affects, alters or compromises the body in performance. Firstly I address the question of the impact of technological mediation on a performance work, by drawing on my own experiences of webcast and live performance. I question the viability of the object/subject dichotomy and take up the concept of 'subjectivised objectivity', making the argument that digitality is a technology that facilitates the processes of disappearance. I then introduce Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reading of the visible as embodied and the relation of bodies in space as 'enfleshed' and follow this by considering Amelia Jones' analysis of body art as generating an intersubjective relation between artist and viewer. In accord with Jones, I read this exchange as an exchange between particularised bodies and argue that it is possible to place digitality within this complex as it issues a specific form of representation. In considering the impact of new technologies on the body in performance, one is immediately faced with the issue of intersubjectivity and the relationship of the artist/work/viewer. I read this relationship as being broadly incorporative, as necessarily fleshbound and imbricated within a constant reassessment of identity.

Throughout this thesis my methodology is practice led and at all times I endeavour to 'write through' my artistic practice. The shifts and emphases within the text reflect my multi-disciplinary approach as an artist and I position my articulation here as shaping part of an overall critical and artistic discourse.

Infernal Desire Machines

Our relationship to computers is complex and anthropomorphic. We are in constant touch with them – we stroke the keyboard and hold the mouse, we even speak to them sometimes. We see the computer as a kind of external brain, a non-organic prosthesis and describe its operational functions in terms of neural networks.¹ We ask can it think? Can it feel?² The analogy is frequently folded back on itself with the brain being described in computer terms – a processor powered by electronic pulses. Our attraction to the computer isn't just to do with admiring its smooth lines, its cute flat screen and its ergonomic keyboard, shaped especially for touch. It is also tied in to our ideas of the potential it offers us. A vast realm of information at our fingertips, we dream of super-connectivity, anonymity, and freedom – freedom from the everyday, from this office, this chair, this body. We feel empowered; it can make us feel good. But is this a realm of utopian fantasy? Although the space and the characters in it seem real, cyberspace only offers virtuality, not actuality and like a hallucination it is experienced as 'real' and powerful. Significantly, the actions that occur in cyberspace are 'real' – financial transactions, communication, crime and sexual activity all occur in cyberspace and have an effect in the world that our bodies inhabit. As Margaret Morse points out *'even if the stakes are symbols and there is no intervention in the material world or physical body, virtual events can have actual consequences.'* [Morse, 1998, 21]

Morse also reminds us of our fundamental need to form a relationship with another being or thing in order to express ourselves. This need is directed at objects as well as people and the interobjective relation is particularly marked with computer users. She states that computer use demonstrates *'[the] human need for and pleasure in being recognised as a partner in discourse, even when the relation is based on simulation that is mediated or exchanged with machines.'* [Morse, 1998, 14] Furthermore, while the body may be a fantasy in cyberspace, enhanced presence at a distance stimulates a tantalising pleasure. Discussing what it means to *be* in a virtual world, cyberspace theorist Michael Heim argues that our fascination with technology is akin to aesthetic fascination but that it goes much deeper than just a play of the senses.

'We are searching for a home for the mind and the heart...The computers allure is more than just utilitarian or aesthetic; it is erotic...Rightly perceived, the atmosphere of cyberspace carries the scent that once surrounded wisdom. The world rendered as pure information not only fascinates our eyes and minds, but also captures our hearts. We feel augmented and empowered. Our hearts beat in the machine. This is Eros'.

[Heim, 1993, 85]

But this sparks a crisis for the body. Cyberspace, as Heim later points out, disrupts our 'bio-bodies' causing a form of bodily amnesia. The integrity of human experience is threatened by virtual worlds – this is evidenced by flight simulator sickness and the specific disorders associated with virtual reality (Alternate World Disorder and Alternative World Sickness). The bio-body refuses to co-operate fully with the idea of inhabiting a symbolic world and can become quite ill after prolonged exposure to virtuality.³

The fascinating allure that computers have for many of us is by no means a universal response. Many of us experience quite the opposite, reporting headache, backache, eyestrain, repetitive stress injury and utter frustration with the machine. What can be said is that computers elicit a strong and distinct bodily response in their users and my argument is that, whether it is manifest as revulsion or fascination, our response can be understood as being broadly erotic. A world perceived as pure information can be breathtaking and it can by equal measure be appalling. The 'crisis' this represents for the body is also a crisis of the self because Virtual Reality and cyberspace offer the potential of situating 'presence' distant to the bio-body and the possibility of affecting the actual world through virtual action. This disorders our usual understanding of our relation to the world but it also offers us new possibilities in analysing that relationship (I take up the issue of telepresence and its impact on the bio-body in greater detail in Chapter 2).

The creation of avatars, alternate and often multiple personae in cyberspace is, I contend, an articulation of the desire to extend our finite physical boundaries. To create another personae (in cyberspace) one must project something of the self, into a space that is beyond the body. This drive to extend the physical self, to heighten intensity, can be understood as part of the erotic drive and I am proposing that the desire to extend oneself through technology can be investigated through a idea of hunger, as an appetite for more than self (incorporation). Telepresence (presence at a distance) is just this – an extension of presence facilitated by technology. The body is in one space but feels *as if it were* in another.⁴ This sensation, of the mind leaving the body, is profoundly dislocating or vertiginous because the body remains seated at the console. I am interested in exploring how and why many of us become transfixed and caught up in a desire that can never be fully satisfied (transcendence) and subsequently I question how new technologies are shaped to facilitate the projection of self. Does cyberspace foster a belief in the potency of technological reproduction to facilitate new ways of being? Digital technology is a technology that facilitates the processes of disappearance – in a literal sense, it ‘disappears’ a notion of ‘the real’ by reconstructing materiality as virtuality. Digitality operates by subjecting data (in whatever form – image, text, sound) to a remediation by digital code, rendering it as a numerical representation (zeros and ones). In the action of ‘disappearing’ materiality, digitality reveals its inherent resistance to entropy.⁵ In the case of the individual body, digitality appears to offer solutions to the limitation of the flesh and to the finite nature of consciousness. It not only extends our reach but also appears to offer a non-biodegradable vehicle for thought (by extension consciousness).

So, what impact does technological extension and mediation have upon the dynamic of identification? To address this question, I look to psychoanalytic theories. According to contemporary psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, when the ‘normal’ processes of identification (introjection and projection) become over-invested in fantasy, psychoanalysis maintains that introjection becomes incorporation. [Abraham & Torok, 1994] Introjection and projection are parts of the processes of identification –

introjection being counter part to projection. I unpack this issue more fully in Chapter 4 but briefly, when introjection is over invested in fantasy it is more accurately described as incorporation. When fantasy dominates, rather than identification being shaped in conjunction with the 'outside' world it becomes shaped entirely in relation to self. That which is taken in (introjected) is now understood as an object and becomes subjected to an oral logic that reads it in terms of consumption. The abstract idea of introjection is made literal, incorporation being the taking into the body. When mediated by technology, body/performance art's concomitant insistence on the body as site, surface and process is clearly suggesting an incorporative methodology.

I hold that because of its apparent promise of virtual transcendence and bodily extension digitality uncovers certain incorporative predilections and desires. In the Judeo-Christian world conventional thinking teaches us that in order to enter the 'higher' realm of concept, one must leave behind the body, abandon the flesh.⁶ Dominated as we are by the triumvirate of Christian, Cartesian and Platonic philosophies, the contemporary mind is still generally considered to be the prisoner of the body. However, *there is no escape from the drag of the flesh in cyberspace*. New technologies are provoking us to question conventional discourses on mind/body relations. The wide investment in the creation of alternate personae, as an attempt to extend the boundary of self, does achieve a certain level of additional presence even when the flesh remains stubbornly parked in front of the screen. This non-visceral presence, born of the aspiration to transcend the body, impacts on the body in marked ways. Gazing into this tangible yet entirely virtual space can provoke a powerful sense of disorientation – reality is altered in a way that the body struggles to understand. There is no horizon in cyberspace, nothing against which the body can measure itself and know its physical relation to the space it perceives surrounding it. Extreme or over exposure to Virtual Reality can cause a significant and lasting physical disorientation and while everyday exposure to cyberspace is markedly less dramatic, I contend that it nonetheless stimulates a discernible disorientation of one's psychical and physical

perception. If the lack of physical parameters disorients us and the potential of non-physical presence thrills us, it is our body that experiences these sensations.⁷

My project began with thinking about what happens to my work once it is mediated by cyberspace. This followed a webcast of my performance documentation and works made for video. As I wrote previously, many of my expectations were confounded when I watched the webcast, which had distinctly altered the nature of the recordings. It prompted many questions, such as what happens to the recorded image once it is remediated? What is the difference between a recording of performance and a live performance when it is webcast? Moreover, what difference do cyberspace and, by extension, digitality make to the idea of performance? What happens to the body? How can it remain a live performance when the body is absent? I looked again at the work of Peggy Phelan and her assertion that once performance is documented, it becomes something else, and it loses its radical and subversive edge once filmed or otherwise recorded.⁸ How then can the performance work relate to a viewer or audience if the performer is virtual? Specific technologies have specific effects on the work made – what then are the specific impacts of different technologies on the performing body? Is there a 'common ground' that can tell us anything new about the body in performance? In 1999, I was given the opportunity to test these questions by participating in a live webcast performance.

Freefall

I'm going to shift my perspective here. I'm in free fall, suddenly unanchored. A few moments ago I was on the second floor of a brick built Victorian school somewhere deep in Salford, a blighted satellite town just outside of Manchester. The building, a solid brick and tile structure, sits on the edge of a large area of wasteland and is surrounded by broken down homes and boarded up businesses. To get to the nearest restaurant (a proper northern chippie) you have to cross the wasteland, a desolate area by no means empty of activity. You don't cross it after dark. It's just after 8pm, it's

dark, a light wintry drizzle is falling outside, but inside the building is a flurry of activity. All the lights are blazing. I'm about to experience a live webcast performance for the first time and I know it's serious because the big cameras have arrived, the director and the guy who winds cable are here and most importantly the technicians are here. Several large men, with a vast bank of equipment and cabling, with beards and incomprehensible lingo, have set up a control room just across from the studio. They take up more room than the performers. The show is a group performance called Net Congestion running over two nights and organised by the Chameleons performance group, led by Steve Dixon.

As a guest performer I have been given a short solo live spot and I am prepared. Although this is a new experience for me I am practised in working with a camera, in making video performances and live works so I'm confident. I have chosen to make a lip-sync piece (using my own voice) and intend to direct it straight at the camera. When working with video there is a way of getting your focus just right so that the final recording in playback seems to speak directly to a viewer. It's more than just staring at the lens – you have to direct your presence somehow through the lens. This I accept is not an empirical assertion or technique but it is comparable to theatrical performance in which you have to project your voice and gesture – video just needs a different, more subtle kind of projection. My choice of lip-sync is deliberate – in web streaming, often the audio and video will come in at a different rate. The chances of the sound and the visuals marrying up identically are remote, even if I do manage to render the lip-sync perfectly. I have in mind films in which the dialogue is dubbed in different languages so it sits across the performances quite strangely and it's this I want to explore in the performance.

In the hallway, numerous people scurry anxiously back and forth between studio and control room, a delay is occurring due a sudden loss of internet connection about 10 minutes before the show is due to be webcast. For a moment the entire project is in jeopardy, but men in beards run about and things get fixed – suddenly we are in the

studio and it's all happening. I am told to wait on my spot. Immobilised, I watch the production around me and the first thing that strikes me is the large amount of crew and camera people, the mass of equipment and the way I suddenly feel like a very small component in a very grand enterprise. Secondly it occurs to me that this must be just like a television broadcast. I get my signal, the camera turns onto me, the red light goes on and I start the performance.

A few moments ago I knew where I was but now I'm not so sure. As I am doing it, the performance, I begin to feel a bit dizzy, slightly panicked. I'm holding onto the lip-sync well enough but this is not what I was expecting. It's not at all like making a video performance and there is no audience present, I feel as if there is nowhere to direct the performance. I try to imagine an audience 'out there' at their computer screens but they feel too far away, the air feels dead. I'm still holding on to the lip-sync but now it feels like my feet are no longer on the floor as I search for a place to put the performance, for something to connect with. Is it really like this with television I wonder? I think of myself, I am acutely self-conscious, my heart is beating fast, my eyes are watering, my mouth is getting dry. I try to extend myself not just through the camera lens but out through cyberspace but I'm having trouble imagining just where it is and how it is contrived. I feel like a phantom, formless and searching for a lost horizon. Yet all the time I am mesmerised by the camera and the sensation of a vast space opening around me. Then suddenly I'm done. The light goes out on the camera, attention switches away to another part of the studio. I feel very strange, as if the performance hasn't quite finished yet, as if it hasn't yet arrived.

Shortly afterwards I got the chance to know exactly what our remote audience were thinking. Alongside the video play-ins and the live section, there was a section in which the group improvised and in which the opportunity to suggest direction and dialogue was offered to the audience. This section was a new experience for the participants because integral to the show was an IRC set-up (Internet Relay Chat – live, text-based conversation). We had two screens hooked up in the studio, out of the camera's vision

and the performers were able to read the audience's comments. This turned out to be a strange experience for the performers and we found ourselves fascinated by the somewhat banal chatter. We, for the first time, were able to see/read our audiences thoughts as they occurred. In a live show, one can sense the level of attention of an audience and it is fairly easy to tell if they are enjoying or hating it – more than this, you must elicit later. You can never really know what they are thinking about and perhaps this is necessary in order to focus otherwise your own thoughts can become crowded with those of others. Remarks about making the dinner, tending the baby and watching Eastenders made it very clear that the performers didn't necessarily have the audience's undivided attention. They were talking amongst themselves. Sometimes this was undercut by a particularly lucid comment or question, creating a level of connection and interaction that neither performer nor audience had experienced before. These intense but tiny moments were instantly dissolved once the chatting started again. Reading their comments and thoughts served to make the performers experience of their relationship to the audience disarming and disorienting. Similarly, one audience member when questioned stated that her sense of what was 'actual' and what was 'virtual' kept slipping, making her feel very 'peculiar'. Virtually present and physically absent both audience and performers experienced a disorientation and strangeness that cannot simply be explained away by virtue of the newness of the medium.⁹

The experience turned out to be significantly different to television because of the fact of its reception – watching a small window on a computer screen requires different functions and states of mind to watching television. Computers require activity but televisions do not. It was also substantially different to making a performance for video or film as there was no recording as such (and any editing had been done before the show was webcast). Lack of a co-present audience meant it wasn't like a live show either. A live webcast performance makes particular demands of its participants and it operates under parameters that are both familiar and strange but the way these parameters are configured is new to all of us. Cyberspace exposes us in unexpected

ways – the Net Congestion audience revealed fairly intimate thoughts and information about themselves. They also revealed that their attention was very distracted. The opportunity to chat amongst other viewers and the demand of the show for an active participation ironically led to the audience being somewhat less involved than they would be in more conventional situations. However when a connection was made between performer and audience, this direct feedback had a profound effect – both more ‘actual’ but less physical. It follows on that the audience position in relation to the performer fluctuated constantly. Simultaneously absent and present, new levels of presence offered themselves up fleetingly and unsettlingly. These elements, along with the sense that the performance hadn’t quite ended, that it had somehow escaped containment and was still ‘out there’, created moments that were akin to vertigo. Why vertigo? Because the ground fell away from our feet, because time and space seemed to slip and elide and because the relationship of the performers to the audience was destabilised in a fundamental way. Viewer and performer alike were distracted, yet (physically) held in a place, at a specific geographical location, each remote to the other. That distance was at times collapsed and at times it seemed immeasurable.

Exchange

In cyberspace, many things that seem important to a performance work – live presence, a co-present audience, physicality and the familiar parameters of performing on a stage, in a gallery, even in a public space, are lost. Only traces remain, ghosts of older media, other spaces. But the creative potential of cyberspace (for performance art) lies in the way it offers a new complication of the idea of self and the relation of that self to others through virtuality. By identifying what is lost and what is specific to the medium, we can then explore and attempt to understand the intersecting (and



diverging) relationships of technology to the body, specifically the artist's body in performance and its relation to the physically distant viewer.

In order to understand how cyberspace (and digitality in general) impacts on the relation of self to others, firstly one must consider how that idea of self is shaped. In a world of other beings, objects and energies, in which the body is reviled or idealised, self-hood and flesh (mind and body) always seem to be in conflict. The implication of conflict is that there are two distinct entities at odds with each other, but this is not how I understand the world, my body or my self. Accordingly I look to existential phenomenology to find a way of articulating, or expressing, or renegotiating the relation of my body to the world that engulfs me.

'We are involved in the world and with others in an inextricable tangle' according to phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. [Merleau-Ponty, 1992] Merleau-Ponty is useful for my project as he insists upon bodily experience and not only vision in his understanding of subjectivity; moreover, he articulates it as inter-corporeal. He emphasises the sexuality of the body (notwithstanding his phallogocentric subject position). For Merleau-Ponty, the flesh as (eroticised) visible being is not separate from the world. The tangible and the visible merge, just as the flesh of a carnal being merges and intertwines with the world. This suggests that the world is flesh too and that there is no boundary or limit between these 'bodies'. Moreover, the 'lived body' is both (fleshly) subject and object simultaneously but this is not to suggest a binary opposition. Subject and object (like perception and expression) are different modalities and are experienced relatively – self is imbricated in other rather than being oppositional. We experience the world and our relation to others as flow and this flow is multi-directional and adventistic – it is more than simply reversible between two positions.

In his final and unfinished writings 'The Visible and the Invisible' (published posthumously), Merleau-Ponty talks of the world as flesh, about the look as a caress, a touch of flesh on flesh.

'Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh?... There is a double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable. Hence without even entering into the implications proper to the seer and the visible, we must know that, since vision is a palpation with the look, it also must be inscribed in the order of being that it discloses to us; he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at.' [Merleau-Ponty, 1973]

The stroke of my gaze upon your body is as much tactile as it is visible. For Merleau-Ponty we cannot experience these things as separate (although they are not the same it is impossible to say that one comes before the other). If the relationship between one thing or person and another is one that is constantly reshaped and reformed intersubjectively, what then is the difference when one or both are telematic presences? Even if we construct our relationships to things or to other people intersubjectively and interobjectively, in what Merleau-Ponty calls an 'intertwining', is there any special truth to be found in immediate physical co-presence? Indeed can any work of art/art action be described as im-mediate, as truly unmediated when we understand the world through a series of mediations, interpretations and decisions?

If my body and the body of the world are intertwined through a reciprocal flow, as an enfleshment, how then does that accord with the virtual realm, where no bodies exist? If, as I argue in the next chapter, presence can be effected at a distance, if virtual actions produce actual results and communication is a continual and multi-directional flow, then cyberspace offers to individuals interaction, connection and consequence. However, the flesh is absent and if consciousness is embodied, do we have a paradox?

Not necessarily – the flesh may not be present in cyberspace but presence is not the same thing as consciousness. The seeing body at the console is not necessarily seen but it still perceives and expresses. Its virtual presence can 'carry' or even embody that expression and become the site for (virtual) exchange. Even so this exchange can still make us feel uneasy or strange because our usual spatial and psychic relations with other bodies are disrupted. We perceive and express from within our flesh but in cyberspace there is nothing to touch – could it be that the urge or reflex to touch is folded back on itself, folded back onto our own flesh? Are we effectively touching ourselves?

All acts of vision are embodied – speaking of the reciprocal intertwining, Merleau-Ponty is describing the symbiotic interdependence of the seer and the thing or person seen. He stresses that the look is not all there is – it is merely a component of vision and vision comprises an accretion or synthesis of perceptual senses. In his final chapter 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm', Merleau-Ponty argues against the principle of phenomenological transcendence although he ultimately suggests a transcendence within immanence by emphasising reversibility – indeed the Chiasm is just this, always reciprocal, a space of reversibility. [Merleau-Ponty, 1973]

Merleau-Ponty's concept of existential phenomenology moves on from the earlier model proposed by Edmund Husserl that relied on the concept of a transcendental ego.¹⁰ In brief Husserl's phenomenological model takes the phenomena of consciousness and brackets off belief and pre-supposition to gain the distance necessary for analysis. That which is left over is intuited, explicated and named. These 'left-overs' are, for Husserl, the correlation of intentionality. Furthermore, intentionality as it is bracketed off shows that subjectivity is actually intersubjectivity because subjecthood is always formed in relation to other subjects. This however relies on two questionable positions – that there is a 'natural' attitude and that reality is a pre-existent given and in turn this allows for the concept of a transcendent ego. Merleau-Ponty accepts the idea of bracketing and taking the 'left-overs' but rejects

Husserl's essentialism and the transcendental ego. Merleau-Ponty situates intentionality in the embodied and immanent subject; moreover, it is always in flux.

The term 'flesh' is used by Merleau-Ponty to indicate the shared material nature of the lived body and the world of objects and other bodies. Through vision, intersubjectivity and interobjectivity are demonstrated as being exchangeable and reversible modalities of the experience of being. One implicates the other, just as visibility implicates invisibility without replacing or eclipsing it. As the perceiving and expressing subject I am also potentially seen, becoming perceived object. In my experience, I am constantly commuting between modalities, often simultaneously.

All art practice demands a viewer or audience. Body/performance art in particular insists on reciprocity and contingency, situating the body, the flesh, as the site for exchange. The body in performance instantiates this relation as reversible, as an exchange between bodies. In what way then does the body in performance demonstrate a particularised subjectivity? Amelia Jones in *Body Art, Performing the Subject* argues that body art is '*specifically antiformalist in impulse, opening up circuits of desire informing artistic production and reception.*' Additionally, she writes '*body oriented projects by otherwise non-normative artists that particularize their bodies/selves*' have the potential to '*eroticise the interpretive relation to radical ends by insisting upon the intersubjectivity of all artistic production and reception.*'¹¹ Jones argues that it is the particularised, exaggeratedly narcissistic body that has the potential to demonstrate the non-universality of relations between the work of art and its audience/viewer. [Jones, 1998, 5,] Modernist models of evaluation rely on the artist embodied as white, western and male (this still has currency within post modernism, which does not so much break with modernism but responds to it). The modernist model ensures the claim that the artist/genius 'transcends' *his* body through artistic creation but in contrast, Jones writes:

'...the narcissistic particularised body both unveils the artist (as body/self necessarily implicated in the work as a situated, social act), turning her inside out, and strategically insists upon the contingency of this body/self on that of the viewer or interpreter of the work. As the artist is marked as contingent, so is the interpreter, who can no longer (without certain contradictions being put into play) claim disinterestedness in relation to this work of art (in this case the body/self of the artist).'' [Jones, 1998, 9]

Reading through Merleau-Ponty's concept of subjectivity and embodiment, Jones takes the position that the intersubjective relation is key to understanding certain 'body art' projects from the 1990's. Rather than illustrating *'...Merleau-Ponty's conception of the embodiment of the subject and theories of the decentered self that we are now familiar with from post-structuralist theory; [...] it enacts or performs or instantiates the embodiment and intertwining of self and other.'* [Jones, 1998, 38] This is useful for my project because I am attempting to speak from within this intertwining. The term body art is also useful as it moves away from the rather indistinct term 'performance'.¹²

Through her analysis of Merleau-Ponty's 'chiasma', Jones' argues that *'...the self as a performance in relation to others involves complex intersubjective cues and behaviours.'* [Jones, 1998, 38] The self is no longer derived from (self) possession but from the scene of action, from the (moment of) relation. It is embodied and intersubjective, moreover it engenders a contingent and reciprocal exchange between artist/self and interpreter/other. For Merleau-Ponty, we are enfleshed within each other, within the exchange between things and beings. Jones, reading through Merleau-Ponty writes:

'There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of the seeing body in the visible body: we are both subject and object simultaneously, and our flesh merges with the flesh that is the world. There is no boundary between the body and the world since the world is flesh.' [Jones, 1999, 41]

Furthermore, modes of vision can be understood as tissue '*a possibility, a latency, and a flesh of things.*' [Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 135] It was Simone de Beauvoir who exposed Merleau-Ponty's gender blindness in his understanding of 'the body', and Jones points out that contemporary feminist readings of Merleau-Ponty (notably by Judith Butler) build on this: '*...de Beauvoir's paradigm [outlined in 'The Second Sex'] accounts for the masculine project of disembodiment by which men transcend their bodies by projecting their otherness (their immanence, their contingent corporeality) onto women.*' [Jones, 1998, 43] Historically, immanence has been designated as feminine but Jones suggests that transcendence is a desire not an actual condition and that immanence should now be understood as a condition for both male and female. Immanence rather than transcendence – from within the flesh, as flesh, means that we cannot escape our visceral condition. The flesh here is both the meat of the body and the '*element of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to location and the now.*' [Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 139-40] The body is not an essential and fixed entity rather it is a manifestation of limitless subjectivity in process.

With regards to the impact of technology on human experience, there has been a tendency to see things in polarised terms. Specific to cyber technologies we have, on the one hand, those who see the web and virtuality as a short cut to transcendence for the spirit or mind, as promising the freedom from the body. This works ostensibly as a form of atheism as it does not so much cut 'God' out of the equation. Rather it opposes the concept of 'God' and, at the same time, it embraces the concept of transcendence as the ultimate good. On the other hand Jones notes '*one tendency has been to lament the incursion of technological forces into a presumably previously unmediated and more wholesome experience.*' [Jones, 1998, 205] This too has overtones of religious belief, of dogmatism– suggesting that technology is somehow bad for us and that we should remain 'natural'. However this 'natural' state has tyrannical implications – how can we refuse new technology without the term 'natural' being understood with essentialist connotations?

Our bodies – we – are always, already technologised. To refuse technology or to suggest that technology is unnatural or bad for us is specious. With regard to body/performance art, the recording, the webcast and the live performance are all specifically staged by the artist and although live performance seems to be unmediated and more 'authentic' it is always '*thoroughly mediated as communication.*' [Jones, 1998, 213]

The technologically mediated body in performance demonstrates its particularised subjectivity through its manifestation of disembodiment. Disembodiment is not the same thing as transcendence although it may seem to imply it. A video performance, for example, may offer the disembodied presence of the artist but that is not to say that it demonstrates transcendence of consciousness. In the video work, the artist's body sits astride the paradox of being (there) and not being (there). The desire to disappear flesh, to turn it into art as a conflation of the material into gesture and action is also and paradoxically an assertion, an insistence on physicality and presence. When I am in performance I seem to represent myself – 'I' am incorporated by my representation and yet I embody that representation. I become self-conscious – extremely so – caught in the sightline of the viewer. At times this viewer is not a person but a camera lens but, in any case, in my return of the gaze, I struggle with the sensation that I might lose myself in the exchange.

In highly mediatised projects such as Net Congestion the body in performance is given as dispersed and fragmented and an active engagement is encouraged in its audience. At once intersubjective, mediatised body-based artwork also insists upon interobjectivity by asserting a reversible logic, in which subject and object cannot be clearly differentiated and in which the subject is simultaneously interrelated to other subjects and objects in the world. Mediatised artworks can operate as a kind of 'interface' between viewer and artwork and in this way it is possible to see the artwork as the site for intersubjectivity becoming simultaneously interobjectivity.¹³

Remediation of the body in performance by the camera, by the recording, by the broadcast and webcast, exposes its intersubjectivity and interobjectivity as imbricated. Different modes of performance offer differing levels of exchange, intersubjectively and interobjectively but rather than these levels occurring as separate or discrete conditions, they are more like areas within a multi-directional flow. For example the live body in performance and the webcast performance may occupy different points within the flow but this is not to say that they are totally distinct from one another. The live body in performance is not a given – it can take many shapes and occupy many situations. It may involve elements of recording and amplification, it may draw on theatre or dance, it can be elaborately staged or take place in a box. The webcast performance may be either recorded or live, it could address its audience directly or not and it could offer different possibilities of interaction. These modes of performance are not mutually exclusive. Technology in general and recording and digitality in particular offer body/performance art different levels and subtleties in which to operate from. Furthermore, new technological innovation brings with it new complications and possibilities to our understanding of the limits of body and of consciousness and it uncovers the intersecting desires that underpin the performance of 'self' as an art action. In the next chapter, I consider the idea of levels of exchange in more depth, articulating it through an analysis of absence and presence.

Chapter 2

Shape shifters and Changelings

Introduction

Taking up the dynamic of disappearance and appearance, I begin this chapter with an analysis of presence and absence and I consider how the body in performance, as mediated by digital technologies (and by cyberspace), impacts on a conventional understanding of presence and absence as discrete conditions. I follow this with a comparative analysis of telepresence through the writings of Michael Heim and Vivian Sobchack. I am suggesting that there are different types of presence, degrees of 'being there', and make the claim that technology, per se, does not obliterate presence, rather that new technologies afford us multiple levels on which to understand and explore a concept of bodiless presence.

Cyberspace can be utilised as a venue for an event or for an act of performance and I am implying that there is a particular form of intersubjectivity in play within this technologically constructed space. This relation is not the same as that which operates within a live presentation of a performance work but it has parallels and similar attributes. I take the position that there is no escape from the flesh in cyberspace and that the persistence of the body, when immersed in digital and cyber technologies, means that it is possible to understand touch (tactility) and perception of presence in radically different ways. I am suggesting that if cyberspace operates multilaterally then it is in accordance with the concept of a dispersed and disordered body. Finally, I explore the concept of transmutation via the morph and a concept of spectatorial pleasure.

Shape shifters and Changelings

'...in the case where the self is merely represented and ideally presented (vorgestellt), there it is not actual: where it is by proxy, it is not.' Hegel, Phenomenology of Mind [Hegel, 1897] ¹

'The terms absence and presence are...conceptually problematic. As the kind of terms they are, they repress interrogation of their existential use and the existence of their users. That is, they are objective theoretical constructs that do not acknowledge or call into question the subjective existence and experience of those who use them. Thus they are both impossible and imprecise, articulating no concrete existential modality through which they might be experienced and explored. Indeed, they are informed by and implicitly articulate the philosophical and empirical tradition that falsely splits subject/object relations, and the like.' [Sobchack, 1992, 291]

This chapter is an examination of the multiple ways of reading or understanding performance through mediatised intervention, beginning with work that utilises digitality and following it with work that uses older, analogue technologies like video or film. Live (with or without technological intervention) and mediatised performance works evidence similar drives and desires and they form aspects of the same thing. Digital technologies do however allow us to shape an expanded understanding of presence through the act of performance. This accords with Sobchack's argument and complicates Hegel's assertion (above). To understand the impact and action of new media on the body in performance and how it differs from older media, it is appropriate to look to cinematic discourse and rhetorics. Cinema is fundamental in the shaping of new media insofar as it has both influenced and reconfigured new technologies of reproduction.

The assertion that Hegel makes about representation is both pragmatic and concrete. It refers to the experience of 'being'. 'I' can only be in one place or another, for I am

situated within my flesh. I am, after all, immanent and have just the one body. I am not and cannot 'be' my representation, my representation can only stand in for my 'being' as I can only exist where I am conscious of myself. For Hegel, the self is the result of recognition by another. In desiring recognition, through the action of this desire, 'I' am constituted. If being is shaped through action, then it follows that being is of time rather than space. However, the conventional dichotomy of absence and presence is compromised the moment communication becomes technologised. Our experience of presence has become increasingly unstable following the advent of electronic technology and in particular the advent of digital, wireless and cyber technologies. If my 'being' is shaped intersubjectively, as the result of recognition by another, then when I have a conversation on the telephone, to a degree my being is shaped in a space distant to my physical body, in the space of the body of my conversation partner. An online conversation, especially if both parties use webcams, similarly confuses ideas of absolute presence because of the powerful sense of (virtual) reality that is generated by cyberspace and the added component of vision. Live interaction with another person at a distance, when supported by live images reinterprets physical distance as virtual presence producing an experience for both parties that is concomitantly real and virtual. For instance, 'I' am not my representation, my image, but if I place my body in performance (as art action, not dramatic characterisation) I pose the questions of whether I can embody my own representation and if my physical presence is absolute or a matter of degree. As Sobchack points out, the terms absence and presence are problematic and insufficient, if we understand them as absolute and discrete.

Presence in the 21st century now occurs on different levels, at different removes. In terms of human communication, space and time have been condensed and we can now have an actual encounter with another person that occurs at a location remote to both individuals. This encounter occurs in a space that is a no-space, a virtual space, but it is a space in which presence is experienced, in which events have actual consequences in the physical world. For artists who work with the body and whose practice is

concerned with issues of presence, representation and physicality, virtual space offers the opportunity to test the anomalies and paradoxes inherent within performance art.

The presence/absence dichotomy has been successively undone in the past century – Derridean deconstruction for example posits presence as a series of deferrals and absences. [Derrida, 1978, 351-70] Writer and philosopher Maurice Blanchot, whose work was very much concerned with the presence/absence dynamic describes presence as discontinuous, ascribing little concrete presence to absence. What can be said here however is that presence and absence are no longer understood as dialectically opposed to each other and can no longer be considered as absolute and discrete conditions. Performance art is understood here as an especially pointed complication of the binaric understanding of presence and absence. There are different types of presence, varying degrees of 'being there', and I make the claim that technology, per se, does not obliterate presence. My argument is that new technologies afford us multiple levels on which to understand and explore the idea of bodiless presence, which is nonetheless embodied.

Cyberspace can be utilised as a venue for an event or for an act of performance and within this technologically constructed domain, there is a particular form of intersubjectivity in play, between audience/user and the work. In her book *Zeros and Ones*, Sadie Plant insists on the persistence of the body (in relation to cyber technology) throughout her text. She argues that, in the digital age, we are beginning to understand touch (tactility) and perception of presence in radically different ways.² [Plant, 1998, 161, 178-80] Her point is that if cyberspace operates without a centre but with interconnected multiplicities, then it is in accordance with contemporary ideas of the body as dispersed and disordered. [Plant, 1998, 131-7, 166-7] Extending this it is possible to argue that cyberspace offers a new space in which to develop different modalities of performance that test the viability of a virtual body in a virtual space. I do feel however that it is too soon to make a definitive analysis of the impact of cyber-

performance works but one can point to its potential and possible pitfalls, the challenge being avoidance of falling into utopian speculation.

To make a performance action (as an act of art) can be read as the attempt to enact a disappearance. In particular here I am thinking of Peggy Phelan's argument that live performance art is a means to resist the reproductive ideology of representation.³ [Phelan, 1993,31] Performance's 'being' becomes itself through disappearance for Phelan, and she argues that performance cannot be filmed or otherwise recorded and retain its potency as an unmediated performance.⁴ However, this argument discounts the possibilities of presence or 'being' in something other than the direct live encounter and in particular, it doesn't take into account the powerful performativity of the video or virtual performance. Furthermore, direct live co-presence is not an unmediated experience and it is a form of representation. Phelan's argument represents contemporary conventions in thinking about performance and provokes a consideration of our desires regarding performance. For the artist they provoke fundamental questions about representation and although I don't agree with all of Phelan's conclusions, her argument about representation is useful.

How can I represent myself? When, as an artist, I place my body in the 'frame' as both object and subject of art, do 'I' become a representation of an artist? I am read in the first place as representation of woman and only subsequently as an artist.

Paradoxically, the performance both represents and is the work of art. So where is the 'I' in all of this? 'I' becomes 'she', marked as 'woman' and in keeping with tradition woman is always marked as object. As an artist, 'I' am nowhere to be seen and this insistence, within my performance work, upon my own subjectivity provokes instability within the normative subject/object relation. In this I am enacting a constant disappearing but to enact a disappearance is to try to represent that which resists representation. Here I am caught up on the horns of a dilemma, or better, within a circling paradox.

The promise of the performance action itself – that actual presence is assured in the form of the live body in front of the viewer – is always countered by the knowledge that this promise will fail to deliver. It fails to deliver in that, as representation, the body in performance can only ever offer a strong level of presence (the actual self is occluded). It can only ever tantalisingly offer the promise of total unmediated presence. Framed by the distinction between art and life, the body in performance represents variously art, process, gender, sexuality, identity and so forth but in every sense it posits these representations as conditional and contingent. Furthermore, the multiplicity of possibilities brought to the scene by the involved subjects suggests a chaotic break with absolute ideas of fixed meanings and identifications. Performance in this way reveals itself as representation, that it is never complete and it reveals its incompleteness through its chaotic excess. Phelan writes:

'Representation follows two laws: it always conveys more than it intends; and it is never totalizing. The 'excess' meaning conveyed by representation creates a supplement that makes multiple and resistant readings possible. Despite this excess, representation produces ruptures and gaps; it fails to reproduce the real exactly...'

[Phelan, 1993, 2]

I take the position that the presence of the artist's body in performance is an additional but mediated presence – it is mediated by art, by any technology utilised, by the space and the time frame in which the performance occurs. The viewer also brings their own subjectivity into their experience of the performance, mediating the work existentially on several levels, but by staging presence physically, paradoxically we speak also of absence. Firstly the absence of the (artist's) self and secondly, the presence of the body in performance is marked by impermanence – the body always leaves or vanishes and the performance always ends.

The representation of the self by the self points up the failure of representation to be totalising and indicates the disjunction between presence and representation. In

literally stepping into the place of the artwork, the artist emphasises and agitates this failure. The multiple staging of artist as body, as work or process, as site and as self resists a collapse into a singular reading because that reading is always subjective and always contingent and unfixed. The deliberate staging of the artist's body as site and material for the work, combined with the impossibility of effacing the person (self) into the role of objective artist, makes for a process of collapse and continuous reformation – the issue is never resolved because the artwork is condensed into pure action.⁵

Phelan reads this as a shift from the metaphorical (reduction of two into one) to the metonymic (displacement without reduction), with the shift marking the body as loss. *'Performance is the attempt to value that which is nonreproductive, nonmetaphorical.'* [Phelan, 1993, 152] The body in body/performance art is metonymic of self – it is present as both representation *and* self. In this way we can read the physically co-present body as being hyper-visible, apparently available but always disappearing.⁶

Presence operates on different levels and the incursion of new technologies into performance practice introduces new complexities into readings of presence. In his essay 'Photographic Activity of Postmodernism', Douglas Crimp discusses presence in relation to certain performance works from the 1970's – work made for a specific situation/place and time, work in which the spectator 'had to be there'. [Crimp, 1993] For Crimp, this issues a problem of presence and I find his definitions are useful in relation to Phelan.⁷ He describes presence as defined by two primary attributes, firstly the 'being there' (in front of something) and secondly a ghostlike presence (not really there) such as a disembodied voice. To these he adds another concept of presence, namely excess presence, as an increment to being there, a kind of shadow that is supplemental to the first two attributes. He points to Laurie Anderson as an example and suggests that through her use of 'reproductive technologies' she effects this form of supplemental presence – the various levels of technological mediation such as recorded images, delayed and pre-recorded voices and sound effects, combine with her

live presence and her stage presence as 'Laurie Anderson' to give multiple levels of presence. Its ghosts and shadows reinforce her actual body.

The issue of presence provokes for Crimp the question of how one gets '*from the condition of being there (as necessitated by performance) to the kind of presence, only possible through the absence of what we know to be the condition of representation.*' [Crimp, 1993,2] I do not read this as suggesting that the self is absent in live performance, rather that the multiple manifestations of the body in performance (in this case, Anderson's actual body and mediated representations of that body), complicate an understanding of presence that relies on an absolute and clear distinction between 'being there' and 'not being there'.⁸ The physical and representational aspects of presence are already in conflict in a live work and this conflict is compounded by the inclusion of a technologically invested or virtual aspect. It is not simply a question of either being there (present) *or* being representation (absent). The additional presence of the video image or recorded voice (or even visual/audio delay) signal this very strongly and render a collapse in the binary of presence/absence and this, in many ways, parallels Phelan's idea of a shift from metaphor to metonym.⁹

To extend this a little further, if the body in performance operates metonymically then it does not propose a truth or concrete meaning to be discovered at the heart of the artwork. Moreover, it questions the very possibility of a fixed meaning. If we accept that the body in performance, mediated by technology, disavows the primary importance of live co-presence between performance work and viewer then it follows that this body strongly implies that meaning is shaped intersubjectively and interobjectively.

Disembodiment

Does the supplemental presence that Crimp talks of have any currency when unaccompanied by the body?¹⁰ Can a stand-alone video recording be understood as effecting or facilitating presence? When writing of Gary Hill's video installation work, Amelia Jones notes that the technologised body is '*literally fragmented and dispersed across space*' and the mediation through video technology '*aggressively marked*'.¹¹ [Jones, 1998, 199] Further,

'No 'original' body is assumed at any point of such a project, no body to be 'freed' from oppressive representations...As Jacques Derrida has observed of Hill's work, it reveals 'that there is not and never has been a direct live presentation'. The multiplied video images mark the body as having always been both an instantiation of the self and yet never fixable or present in any securable way; further, Hill produces the body/self as deeply inflected by and through technology: the video screen becomes the skin/the body (the skin is 'stretched across the screens like a tight membrane').' [Jones, 1998, 200]

The piece in question is 'Inasmuch as it is Already Taking Place'. [Hill, 1990]¹² It is a 16-channel video/sound installation, with 16 modified monitors recessed into a wall. Close-ups of various body parts (the artist's) play across different screens. Rather than following the organisation of the human body, the monitors are stacked and stripped of their casings, the body parts moving continuously, to give us a body as fragmentary (without a central torso) and as simultaneously occupying different moments in time (each monitor shows a looped video between 5 and 30 seconds). Whether or not one reads this work as a metaphor for the soul as invisible existential centre for the self, it nonetheless posits the self as shaped through multiple permutations and the body as occupying many spaces and times.¹³ If we (the spectators) operate existentially as both object and subject of vision then so too must that which we view. Shaped intersubjectively and interobjectively the recorded micro-performances operate as a

continual becoming, yet they are simultaneously demarcated by the duration, editing and framing of the work.

The monitors become the site for the body, as something that is outside of the (actual) time of the performance and of the viewing, but present nonetheless. This presence is only effected through absence because the actual live body has never performed the work 'live' in front of another, only for the camera. In front of the viewer for the first time, this accumulation of supplemental technologised representations effects a level of presence only achievable through the absence of Hill's body. The video monitors as sites for the dispersed body insist that the electronically represented body is present *and* absent simultaneously. It has been argued, by Vivian Sobchack amongst others that electronic representation denies fleshly presence, but this work by Hill emphasises that disembodied representation relies on the remote presence of the body (in space or in time). [Sobchack, 1994] This is not a denial, rather it is affirmation at a distance.¹⁴ The body is represented in such a way that it creates a supplemental presence, exceeding the figure it represents.

The idea that electronic representation denies a kind of presence refuses the possibility of levels of presence and instead reiterates the binary of presence/absence (one or the other). For the viewer, potential engagement with the work is certainly no less achievable than with a live presentation. A video performance action like Hill's, despite the absence of a direct live presentation, articulates the desire for recognition by another, across the screens. The images persist, looping, rewinding, worrying at the viewer, they display this desire and mark it as contingent.

As I have written, what we understand as presence is not necessarily dependent on physical immediacy – a voice on the radio or the talking head on television are familiar forms of disembodied presence. I can effect at least two types of presence whilst I am on the telephone, for example, or in a MUD (multi user dimension) or chatroom in cyberspace – where I am in physical space and where I am heard/responded to in

another space. These mediated or telematic presences are usually referred to as telepresence, especially when in relation to computers or cyberspace.

Telepresence can be defined as working on (at least) four levels, according to virtual worlds theorist Michael Heim. [Heim, 1993, 114-126] His arguments form a pragmatic approach to cyberspace and whilst he sees enormous possibilities for expanding human potential in cyberspace, he counsels against utopian claims for it offering a means towards transcendence. Particularly he is concerned with the effect of cybertechnologies on the 'lived in' body. The four levels he outlines begin with the telephonic. This applies to the kind of telepresence achieved when we converse on the telephone, or when a television broadcasts a live newscast into our living room.¹⁵ This thin level of telepresence is insidious but powerful and (in the West) we have learned to operate comfortably with it on an everyday level.

The second level of telepresence involves the Internet. In an expansion of the telephonic, this level allows for global exchange, not just of conversation, but also of business, images, sounds and in its most popular aspect, sex.¹⁶ Internet telepresence is evident in live conferencing between groups of people but, importantly, all of the above takes place across time zones. This live presence happens now, in time, but not physically in space. This goes against or is supplemental to what we expect from live presence – the 'in front of me' that is presumed in the fleshbound encounter.

The third level of telepresence expands on the previous one and occurs when we enter (have presence in) another, artificial, environment – a virtual reality (VR) environment. This level of telepresence is facilitated by the 'stimulation of mental data' rather than by a physical space. Usually, if one is represented onscreen it is by a graphic. There are currently two main forms of VR environment, firstly the familiar Head Mounted Display and secondly the CAVE system in which the images of the environment are projected onto screens which form the walls and ceiling of the space.¹⁷ The user enters the space, sometimes with others, wearing 3d glasses. The CAVE

system allows one to feel (kinaesthetically sense) the body in space and the presence of others whereas the HMD immobilises the body and shapes everything through the screen that is firmly fixed onto the head of the user. You only have one way of looking when using the HMD. This form of VR can be extremely disorienting, even to the point of causing sickness – it can feel desperately extreme and physically debilitating. When I tried the CAVE version of VR I found that it really aggravated my sense of where I was but what I found most interesting was the knowledge that there were other bodies besides mine in the space. The sense of my presence in one space with the others was fairly normal but simultaneously we felt that we were in another space, always oscillating back and forth, between the physical and the virtual. Whilst it did not stimulate such an extreme sensation as the HMD system it is impossible to say that I *felt that* I was definitively in one place or the other.

The fourth level of telepresence is termed artificial (most prominently in engineering circles). This level gives a broad band of telepresence and implies the capability for remote causation, usually using robots and animated agents (as stand in for the human body). It can occur in two ways. One can, for example remotely operate a robotic device to explore impossible terrain (Heim's example is the robot on the moon being operated by a human, on earth, and effecting real physical changes in the lunar landscape such as collecting samples). Another example could be microsurgery. Alternatively one can enter a simulated environment and behave as if one were actually there – just as pilots regularly train in flight simulators. It is useful to be clear about the differing levels of telepresence as things stand today. No doubt thinking around this field will change along with new technological developments, but my point is that it is possible to understand presence operating on differing levels, even as telepresence. It is also important to recognise that telepresence works differently according to circumstances and the technology employed.

Replicants

Technology and the body, especially its demise and breakdown, are always inextricably linked: technology is more than a question of logic (that which distinguishes one part from another), or a more efficient way to complete a task.¹⁸ It is also shaped and defined by the way in which it is put to use, in the marriage of technology to the action of a human operator. Technology needs to be applied and is shaped from the application of an action. To put it bluntly, a computer is just a hunk of metal and plastic until I press the 'on' button. Even so, when I switch on my computer I enter an interobjective relationship with the machine and its components and once I engage with its system that relationship is transformed. The introduction of the system provokes, in me, a sense of interrelation as well. The machine responds and seems to think for itself so I, in turn, respond to it. This is not quite the same thing as interaction that requires two or more sentient beings, despite the frequent application of the term to indicate human/computer use.¹⁹ However, the computer *seems* to operate like another being even though its limitations become clear quite quickly. As Vivian Sobchack points out, the algorithmic limitations of digitality do not preclude diversity or heterogeneity.

'What is historically and technologically novel about digitization is precisely its unique capacity to translate all other media representations into a homogenous algorithmic mode of expression; nonetheless, we have come to recognize that digital representations are extraordinarily heterogeneous in form, diverse in function, and specific in practice.' [Sobchack, 2000, xiv]

The action of digitality breaks the conventional indexical link of representations to their 'original'. There is no longer any direct contact, no matter how faint, with digital representation and its subject. Even a first generation image is immediately coded and interpolated. The lenses of conventional cameras do not significantly differ from those used in digital cameras, but the subsequent process of storing the image works very

differently. Every image generated through digitality is broken down into pixels – tiny squares of information laid out in a grid, framed by the lens. Each pixel contains a code and each pixel relates to the other pixels by means of an instruction. This instruction is an algorithm, a mathematical equation that says what happens. It is the code for transformation and change and as such it is possible to read the algorithm as a performative principle of digital technology – all computer operating systems and languages (HTML etc.) are based around it. Indeed every action taken digitally is 'scripted' through the algorithm. 'Algorithm' is a term originating in the 17th century and is the Arabic notation of numbers, a process or set of rules to be followed in calculations. It is the basis for computer programming and languages in that it is the code for any process or task executed by a computer and takes the form of a sequence of operations. An algorithm is basically a set of rules for solving a problem in a finite number of steps, but is the algorithm, as a code for an action, defined through a strictly binary logic? ²⁰ Although technology may, in one sense, be governed by binary logic this understanding is a limited one. Technology does not sit apart from human experience but is a symptom of it and enables elaborate prostheses of or for the human body.²¹ Plant, in *Zeros and Ones*, underlines the relation of body to machine. As we know, computer code comprises of zeros and ones, but all the same:

'These bits of code are themselves derived from two different sources and terms: the binary and the digital, or the symbols of a logical identity which does indeed put everything on the one hand or the other, and the digits of mathematics full of intensive potential, which are not counted by hand but on the fingers and, sure enough, arrange themselves in pieces of eight, rather than binary pairs. The techno and the digital are never perceived to run free of the co-ordinating eyes and hands of logic and its binary codes. But logic is nothing without their virtual plane.' [Plant, 1998, 50]

She is pointing here to our illusion – it is erroneous to understand the logic of digitality as being bound to binary logic – even binary systems are not based on binary logic, logic itself is the illusion. The computer 'byte' comprises eight 'bits' of information. This

fundamental building block of digital technology may well be arranged for the machine in ones and zeros but it reflects at its very core the way human beings learn to count, with four fingers on each hand. Hands, fingers and eyes remain at the core of digitality – the hardware and software of machines operates only in relation to the wetware that is the human body.²² Furthermore, we are not, as speaking, perceiving subjects, separate from the things we speak or perceive. We are implicated in them, observing them from the ‘inside’, as it were. How then can we understand the incorporation of technological artefacts and systems by the body? Feedback is the action facilitated by the algorithm and this action is marked through contingency (from one to another/s). Norbert Wiener’s pioneering work on cybernetics (from the 1950’s) points to feedback as the defining principle of the relation between human being and machine.²³ He posits the concept that

‘the physical functioning of the living individual and the operation of some of the newer communication machines are precisely parallel in their analogous attempts to control entropy through feedback...In both of them, their performed action on the outer world, and not merely their intended action, is reported back to the central regulatory apparatus.’ [Weiner, 2000, 54]

By responding to the physical parameters of the world, through communication and then action, the differences in the systems of the organism and of the machine are, as Sadie Plant puts it *‘merely a matter of degree’*. [Plant, 1998, 50] For Wiener the principle governing cybernetics is to *‘hold back nature’s tendency toward disorder by adjusting its parts to purposive ends.’* [Weiner, 2000, 54] It is not my intention here to explore the nuances of cybernetics or even the cyborg, but Wiener’s thesis suggests that the motivation for our obsessive creation of technological systems is to deny mortality. This denial of mortality is a resistance to entropy and to reiterate my earlier point, it arises from the idea that a code does not degrade. Furthermore, it suggests that the hardware of a machine is superior to the ‘wetware’ of the human body, in terms of strength, durability and infinitely replaceable spare parts. The promise of the

cybernetic enterprise is not so much to prolong life, but to transcend the flesh completely. It implies also that the flesh can be supplanted by hardware, becoming infinitely replaceable and permanent instead of vulnerable and finite. Subsequently this feeds (or is fed by) a logic that presumes that consciousness is able to go on 'being' forever, that it can be freed from the body, or in other words, it can transcend the body and enter the machine. Although the body is implicated within technology, all technologies, it cannot transcend them. Transcendence is the outcome of an illusory logic, ultimately it is a logic that seeks to comfort and reassure. This logic seeks to define things firmly on the one hand and on the other, to fix the world in a series of finite, fixed and distinct categories, to name things either 1 or 0. It reveals itself through and becomes undone by its Gnostic ambitions – it is a utopian logic and can be seen as the motivational factor that drives us to seek machine/human symbiosis.

However, feedback is what breathes life into computer systems and feedback is the most fundamental way in which we shape our identities, the way we learn from the world who we are in the world. Feedback is another way to speak of exchange. In the cybernetic enterprise it is an intersubjective and interobjective exchange between subject and machine. In the phenomenological enterprise, feedback is the exchange of flesh, between subjects and objects and, in performance, when we speak of reciprocity and contingency, we are speaking of intersubjective and interobjective feedback, with optional interaction. The principle of feedback is exchange and this principle is at the core of performative and phenomenological discourses. The response of the machine to our demands/actions simulates the response of one human to another and the action of feedback between machine and user gives a powerful sense of an exchange of consciousness. Belief in the potential of the machine to offer an answer to, or way out of mortality is not difficult to foster in such circumstances. I see it this way: technology exemplifies human desire – the desire for exchange with others, the desire to defeat mortality and the vagaries of the flesh, the desire to deny God and (paradoxically) the desire to find God in the machine. Finally it exemplifies the desire to be free from

desire although the desire to be free from desire is maintained technologically. Roy Ascott, an early pioneer of artwork created for cyberspace illustrates this position:

'The telematic process, like the technology that embodies it is the product of a profound human desire for transcendence: to be out of body, out of mind, beyond language. Virtual space and dataspace constitute the domain, previously provided by myth and religion, where imagination, desire and will can reengage the forces of space, time and matter in the battle for a new reality.' [Ascott, 2000, 315]²⁴

The piquant premise of digitality is that the second and subsequent version of a thing (an image, sound, or text) is not a copy but a clone. In this way, digitality differs from but expands upon filmic reproduction. It reproduces itself rather than producing a representation. Subsequent versions are not (or should not be, in theory) diluted or diminished.²⁵ Each version will theoretically be exactly the same, there is no longer an original, no longer any copies, but many of the one. Potentially, degradation of the material is no longer the issue in digitality. The claim made for it is that, so long as the code remains, the thing (image etc.) can be reconstituted exactly, in its original form, endlessly and forever. But this claim is specious. The hardware that facilitates our encounter with digitality is subject to break down, material degradation, to power surges, to infection from the outside in the form of viruses, glitches anomalies and most significantly to the vicissitudes of human action. Moreover, software compresses (or edits) the material recorded. Mistakes and accidents see to it that permanence is never really assured with the digital. Nor is perfection assured in the initial capture of information – a digital camera for example cannot see movement as well as the film or video camera. It always interpolates; it fills in the gaps. The image, as it is captured, is doubly mediated firstly by the camera lens and secondly through interpolation. By the first time we see the image in playback it has already 'deteriorated' and been modified. Even with digital technology, entropy is inevitable and although a code does not degrade as such, it can be lost or forgotten, both by machines and by humans.

All the same we maintain a strong incorporative urge to merge with or become subsumed by technology and it does offer us new possibilities for experiencing exchange and feedback. Shifts in our perception of how subjectivity and objectivity are shaped mean that we can explore the desire to merge body with technology without necessarily taking onboard utopian overtures. Our bodies experience the world kinaesthetically and technology emphasises this – our relation to the computer for example is initiated through touch. Using one of the most sensitive parts of the body, the tips of our fingers, we engage with other personae, concepts and space. This engagement is thus embodied even if our represented presence is virtual.

Furthermore, the gaze or the look has a tactile quality. Merleau Ponty describes it as a caress, a stroke of flesh on flesh. For Michael Taussig, writing in 'Mimesis and Alterity', it is the affect of the physical impact of light on the vitreous fluid of the eye. Similarly, the action of hearing is understood in physical terms – sounds jangle the tiny hairs in our ears that we then conceptualise as sounds. Sounds and images enter the body and are incorporated. Even in works that seem to be at some distance from physicality a tactile response is demanded – for works or events that are accessed via a computer such as webcasts or work made for the CD-ROM, touch as well as sight and sound are pre-requisite. Our fingertips on the keyboard, our bodies close to the machine, we press keys to make things happen – we look, we listen, we touch. If our relationship with technology is a tactile one and we accept the idea of varying levels of presence then we can read the relationship between the viewer and the technologised work of art as both contingent and embodied. Taussig writes of the mimetic faculty through physiology:²⁶

'To get hold of something by means of its likeness. Here is what is crucial in the resurgence of the mimetic faculty, namely the two-layered notion of mimesis that is involved – a copying or imitation, and a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived...Elementary physics and physiology might instruct that these two features of copy and contact are steps in the same

process, that a ray of light, for example moves from the rising sun into the human eye where it makes contact with the retinal rods and cones to form, via the circuits of the central nervous system, a (culturally attuned) copy of the rising sun. On this line of reasoning, contact and copy merge becoming virtually identical, different moments of the one process of sensing; seeing something or hearing something is to be in contact with that something.' [Taussig, 1993, 21]

The word representation makes a distinction between artistic activity and phenomenal reality. It separates the thing and its likeness and implies the absence of the original. However it does not preclude a connection with the thing represented, only that 'it' exists in another space to the representation. The Greek word for representation is *mimesis*, specifically meaning to imitate and in everyday terms we use the word 'represent' to indicate personification or impersonation. The 'thing' that is the representation in this way embodies that which is represented, although it still maintains a separation of the subject (the original) and the object (the representation). Through this reasoning it follows that the only thing that I cannot represent is myself but this is where body/performance art can begin, through a mimetic strategy, to undo concepts of a strict or fixed object/subject divide. If I, in performance, represent myself (in whatever way) I am signifying that, in this performance, there is no distance between the thing represented and the representation.

Taussig marks the mimetic faculty as a subjective experience in that one is neither object (*'of history'*), nor subject but both at the same time. Being the self, 'being like', 'being other' simultaneously is, for Taussig, a condition of maintaining sameness through the condition of otherness (alterity). Apparently paradoxical, this is a condition that we are mostly comfortable or even complicit with and is a somewhat introjected understanding or empathy. Writer and researcher on human-computer activity Brenda Laurel takes up the idea of *mimesis* in her book *Computers as Theatre*. Laurel analyses (theatrical) performance in relation to computer technology and pays

particular attention to representation, arguing that both stage plays and computer activity are mimetic in nature. [Laurel, 1991, 45]²⁷ Whilst Taussig warns that the mimetic faculty may be used as a tool of repression Laurel sees it in terms of exchange and complicity.²⁸

'The closed and knowable nature of a mimetic world provides a security net. People respect the limits of a mimetic world by refraining from introducing a new potential...In exchange for this complicity, people experience increased potential for effective agency, in worlds which the causal relations among events are not obscured by the randomness and noise characteristic of open systems (like real life).' [Laurel, 1991, 101]

The body in performance is broadly speaking mimetic, as it is, on one level at least, representation. When mediated by technology the emphasis shifts away from the body with the focus being the representation itself. When that technology is virtual the emphasis shifts again towards the dynamic or, better, what Roy Ascott termed the 'interface' between viewer and work. However, the representational value of the body in performance is never fixed and always shifting and mutating. It complicates the idea of immediate co-presence and the concomitant assumption that immediacy guarantees unequivocal truth or meaning. Our complicity with the mimetic world lulls us into an acceptance of the idea of unmediated experience, whereas everything is actually shaped through mediation in some form or another.

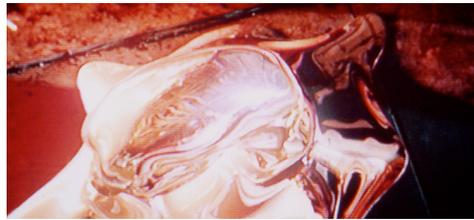
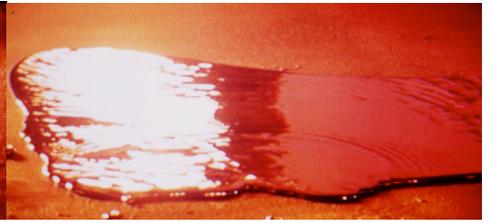
To paraphrase Phelan, representation in its familiar form comes 'unstuck' in the face of a live performance action. Representation relies on a hierarchical principle (like the metaphor), in that there is always an original thing/person that is being represented. The representation usually replaces the original (stands in for it) implying subordination or replacement. However, in body/performance art the body paradoxically both stands in for something and *is* itself.

To recall Taussig's words on the contact/copy, the thing we see is in direct contact with our body, as is the thing we hear. We take it inside the body, it impacts on our physical being, we process the information, decide what it is and declare it. Our existential experience may be unique but, like our bodies, it is not unchanging, discrete or finite.

Constant change is a marker for the human condition even though it occurs almost imperceptibly. We do not notice for example the day to day process of our skin renewing itself. The entire surface of our bodies will be renewed every seven years – we do not see, hear or feel this process but it happens all the same. Abnormally quick mutation or change, made visible by advances in image technologies, has offered us a glimpse of transformation in action and we find it mesmerising. From the image of a splash of milk frozen in time and space, to the liquid metal T100 morph (from the film Terminator 2), we take great delight in witnessing such (an uncanny?) transformation.

Mimetic and transformative actions exercise a compelling fascination for many of us and this is especially facilitated by technology through virtuality and image manipulation. In 'Metamorphing. Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change', Vivian Sobchack suggests that the action of change is one of the distinguishing features of digitality. She is talking about the morph and the fascination it exerts over us:

'In particular, as a visible figure, the morph confronts us with a representation of Being [via Heidegger] that is intellectually familiar yet experientially uncanny. It calls to the part of us that escapes our perceived sense of our 'selves' and partakes in the flux and ceaseless becomings of Being – that is, our bodies at the cellular level ceaselessly forming and reforming and not 'ourselves' at all. Thus the morph is not merely a visible representation of quick and easy transformations of matter in time and space: it is always an oxymoron, a paradox, a metaphysical object.' [Sobchack, 2000, 136]



The morph is a figure that can change its visual representation. It can look exactly like other things or beings and although the concept had its home in comics for a long time, the advent of computer generated imagery means the morph is today a familiar figure, in both cyberspace and in films. One of best known morphs makes his appearance in the 1991 film *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, as the T1000, a cybernetic being made from liquid metal. [Cameron, 1991] The T1000 can change into anything or anyone that it has physical contact and it morphs seamlessly into other beings. While it is fascinating to watch it contains elements of dread. For Sobchack, the morph demonstrates the flow from one to the other, simultaneous to eroding the idea of a separation between them.

'The morph's primary mode is to assert not only sameness across difference but also the very sameness of difference. While often representing cultural boundaries at its static end points... the process of the morph attempts to erase this binarism in the homogenous, seamless, and effortless movement of transformation and implied reversibility.' [Sobchack, 2000, 139]

The change from one to another, the confusion of bodies and the erasure of visual difference would very possibly appal us if it were to occur 'before our very eyes'. But we know we are looking at a movie or a computer screen and so we are able to circumvent dread, instead experiencing it as pleasure. We enjoy these illusions in the safe knowledge that they are illusions and we especially enjoy the moments when we are tricked and our expectations are confounded.

An important factor in the fascination exerted by technology is pleasure, according to Steve Dixon, director and co-writer of 'Net Congestion' (a project discussed in chapter 1). *Net Congestion* utilised video doubling and illusion extensively, predominantly setting up the live body in conjunction with its own video double. The actual live body of the performer could for example, emerge from the projected video image of their own represented body. Below Dixon is discussing a particular clip from the show called

'Priests', in which the performer is working live against a pre-recorded sequence showing him in close up. He took on the role of a priest and conversed with himself and the camera in a short pre-recorded sequence.

'...what we enjoy...is our own sophisticated understanding of media that allows us to differentiate between the live and the recorded. We derive pleasure from it precisely because we are in on the joke, and can share and enjoy the ingenuity and craft with which the actor maintains the illusion of liveness of his virtual doubles within the scene. This piece is not primarily concerned with virtuality and mediatisation. On the contrary, it is about sheer, self conscious 'theatricality' – the delight in presenting illusion and fantasy which goes beyond mundane, quotidian materiality.' [Dixon, 2002, www.mdx.ac.uk] ²⁹

When it appears as if there are two or more of the same being in the one space and time illusion is being utilised to fascinate and to pleasure the audience. It's a 'knowing' bit of trickery, one that the audience and performer are complicit with. According to Dixon, the series of interactions at play in the work seek to synchronise and meld the corporeal body to its digital double.³⁰ This questions the supposition that the virtual body is somehow detached or even independent of the flesh and blood body. This reciprocal awareness seems to make the experience even more uncanny or fascinating. We know that something cannot be yet, in front of our very eyes, it seems to be so, and it holds us mesmerised by its sway. Our delight at being 'fooled' is nothing to do with wishing to appear stupid. Illusion, like suspense, is the art of involving the audience. ³¹

My concern, in tracing the trajectory of presence through a bodily response to digital spaces, is to unpack how intersubjective and interobjective relations are altered by digital and virtual spaces. I feel that the creative use of digitality and of cyberspace amplifies the role, action and importance of incorporation to the processes of experiencing mediatised representations. But in order to articulate my concerns I find

myself always looking back to cinema in order to try to understand how mediated representations operate in principle. Moreover, by shifting the focus away from the issue of presence and onto a reading of visibility (as Sobchack suggests) I am able to begin drawing connections between certain considerations that arise directly from my practice and the theoretical concerns of this thesis.

The language of cinema grew out of a symbiotic relationship between the technology (cameras, celluloid) and the creativity of the strategies that were applied to it (directing, filming, editing and acting etc.). New media theorist Lev Manovich argues that making a comparison to the once new language of film benefits understanding the various languages of new media.

'One hundred years after cinema's birth, cinematic ways of seeing the world, of structuring time, of narrating a story, of linking one's experience to the next, have become the basic means by which computer users access and interact with all cultural data...And in contrast to cinema, where most users are able to 'understand' cinematic language but not 'speak' it (i.e. make films), all computer users can 'speak' the language of the interface.' [Manovich, 2001, xv]

Rather than make analysis of the language of film as it relates to new media, I look to film more instinctively. In chapter 3, I take up two cinematic scenarios that have had direct and indirect impacts on my practice and I discuss them in relation to ideas of narcissism and cannibalistic fantasy. These are extreme manifestations of 'self performance' and both of which exemplify (ultimately) a *performance of non-relationality*. The step from virtual space to the space of cinema is not a big one but it is a step into a place of virtual representations and ephemera but of a different quality and specificity to cyberspace. It is a step back to the source.

Chapter 3

Moving Pictures & Roving Eyes

In this chapter I make an analysis that draws on cinema and psychoanalytic theories about looking and incorporation in order to draw together the three fields of new media, cinema and body/performance art. Common to all three is a direct relationship with the devouring, incorporative eye of the camera. As digital/cyber technologies (new media) are immediate descendants of film and cinema (recording technologies) my analysis is formulated by examining libidinal looking.

By drawing on psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel's foundational theory of incorporation I examine the complex of pleasure/fear/repulsion/desire in relation to looking and its subsequent impact on the processes of identification and representation. I ask if the camera can be understood as a devouring eye how then does cinema shape or relate to the performance of self? Linking this to particular readings of narcissism (from Rosalind Krauss & Amelia Jones) I also ask in what respect does the mediated performance demonstrate the interconnectivity between internal and external self, between the self and other? As such I offer a positive reading of narcissism and I consider certain cinematic performances from well known, mainstream movies featuring 'monstrous' characters (namely Norma Desmond from 'Sunset Boulevard' and Hannibal Lecter from the Hannibal series of films). My chosen 'monsters' devour both literally and metaphorically and I argue that as popular archetypes they exemplify the incorporative drive as symptomatic of our 'perverse' desire to shape the self through destruction and consumption.

I am shifting my emphasis here. My mapping of the formulation of self relies on an intersubjective and interobjective exchange (reading through Merleau-Ponty and his concept of fleshly exchange) which operates as a kind of benign feedback. Norma and Hannibal are drawn admittedly with broad brushstrokes but neither could be described as benign. Indeed, they both represent negative human traits – they are both

voracious, self-serving and cruel – but they do represent aspects of humanity not addressed by Merleau-Ponty. Their identities are not shaped through reciprocity, through an equal balance of introjection and projection. Rather they are shaped uncompromisingly through incorporation – for both of them, this is both literal and actual.

Considering the negation of the object/subject split, via Merleau-Ponty's proposition of the chiasma, I offer up the case study of Franko B's performance 'Action 398' and suggest that his performance exemplifies a 'Sadean paradox' (the assertion of the mastery of self, concomitant to the negation of self).

I conclude the chapter with an analysis of the relation of these issues to a performance of 'non-relationality' as proposed through the writings of the Marquis de Sade and contrast this with the writings of Charles Baudelaire (specifically the series of poems 'Fleurs du mal'). Baudelaire forms a kind of 'hub' that links the issue of relationality to the collapse of distinction between author and reader, via the trope of incorporation. Furthermore, the crisis of identity he alludes to in the poems can be directly linked to Marshall McLuhan's assertion that modernity (the 'Electric Age') generates an abiding anxiety.



Chapter 3

Moving Pictures & Roving Eyes

'All right Mr. De Mille. I'm ready for my close up'

Rewind. Norma Desmond, in the film *Sunset Boulevard*, speaks her final words as, once again, she advances inexorably on the camera. So close, the focus fails and the film ends. In effect, she meets herself finally as pure image, the boundary between body and external image dissolved. It is as if, in her insatiable need to live up to her image, or rather to live as her image, she must consume any vestige of her lived in body. She merges her look with that of the camera, evaporating into it. It's a delicious moment, a classic scene from a classic Hollywood movie. Director Billy Wilder's deft orchestration of image and metaphor allows for different readings but, for me, the overwhelming metaphor of the film is consumption – consumption of the self, consumption of another. Even Norma's house can be understood as standing in for the (ageing) female body that takes in the young man and holds him there, sucks him dry and finally destroys him. She spits him out, leaving his body to float like a dry husk in that big pool of hers. [Wilder, 1950]

Why speak of this particular Hollywood film? I was brought up on a diet of television and movies and the American landscape, California in particular, has been familiar to me for as long as I can remember. Long before I ever travelled to the States, this part-imagined landscape shaped a kind of 'neutral' ground in which I played out my idle fantasies.¹ So when I drove around California for the first time and experienced a kind of *deja vu*, I felt as if I had travelled to a *place* in my memory, as though what was once inside me now surrounded me. It was not so much the feeling of having been there before, rather I had stepped inside the space of my own (unspecific) fantasy. I encountered a mess of fragmented memories at each intersection, at each vista, unsure if I had actually seen these places depicted somewhere or if they were part of a conglomeration of real and imagined images that inhabit my memory. All the same, it

felt as if I had stepped inside a gigantic movie, one shot in glorious Technicolor, naturally.

The feeling of being 'inside' memory, a memory shaped by and through fiction is a curious one. One of my strongest impressions is that my body felt more than usually visible, which means very little in itself. But the overall impression of the body feeling utterly out of place, kind of the wrong way round, led me to speculate on how much Hollywood imagery I have incorporated over the years and how, somehow, I have come to think of it in terms of being inside me, inside my body. It, the landscape, the object of my fantasy, now seemed to be looking back at me, it seemed to enfold me physically within it. Memory and vision, body and place now seemed to have no boundary, as if everything was reversible, as if I had stepped through the surface of the vision of my memory. Merleau-Ponty, in talking of the distinction between the visible and the invisible, considers the relation between the flesh and vision:

'The superficial pellicle of the visible is only for my vision and for my body. But the depth beneath this surface contains my body and hence contains my vision. My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this body and all the visibles with it. There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other.' [Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 138]

My experience of this confusion, probably initiated by the shock of recognising something that I had never actually seen before, prompts me to question how fictional memory impacts on the visible and the invisible.² Fictional memories merge with factual – memories derived from actual experience become representations, remembered imperfectly, reshaped with every remembering, begin over time to lose their distinction to memories derived from fiction. The way I identify myself is shaped out of different permutations within this conceptual landscape through the primary vehicle of vision. My confusion of vision, place and sensation, initiated by a powerful fictional memory is perhaps better understood as symptomatic of questioning of

identity. What kind of identification am I formulating for myself when I allow the fiction to overpower that small part of me that insists upon rationality?

I look and I see a back alley, some gang kids lurking at the end; I look out across the desert, the empty road like a grey ribbon disappearing into the heat haze; I'm looking over a small bay, a flock of aggressive seagulls circle overhead. These are scenes – I greet them with a shiver of recognition but I have never been here before. How can I be here in this scene now? Out of my usual environment, my estrangement from the culturally inscribed habits and roles I play at home, it seems to me that, now, who I think I am is constructed through what I see, how I am seen and where I am in the world, at any given moment. Of course this is fantasy – I have to go home eventually – but the idea of stepping into my own movie, serves as raw material for the performances and images that I make. I see the fiction and it is in me just as I am inside of it. To borrow a phrase from psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel (1897- 1945) '*That which my eyes pierce will pierce me. Just as I pierced it with my eyes, so the first thing it will pierce will be my eyes.*' [Fenichel, 1953, 387] ³ My understanding of this experience counters the concept of an alienation between subject and object, or indeed between fact and fantasy (in memory). Speaking of the relation between subject and object rather than defining a gap between them, Merleau-Ponty writes '*...since the seer is caught up in what he sees, it is still himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision.*' [Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 139] My narcissistic identification with the Californian landscape is merged with a similar identification with particular characters, or films as a whole. All of which brings me back to Sunset Boulevard.

Norma and me

So I'm driving up and down Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. Starting in downtown L.A. it works its way westward towards the ocean. As it sweeps and curves down through Hollywood it goes through poor Mexican/Filipino/Korean neighbourhoods with their tacky stores and sweatshops, through porno land and out into richer

pastures. It's much whiter out here, the houses are grander, larger, more discrete but no less tacky. Out here, where Hollywood becomes Beverly Hills, it becomes unreal, fact and fantasy start to merge in the mind's eye. In my fantasy, I'm William Holden playing Joe Gillis, careering down the boulevard, tyres screeching, trying to escape the bailiffs on his tail. The world turns to black and white. The film is *Sunset Boulevard*, starring Gloria Swanson, Hollywood diva par excellence and William Holden, established heartthrob and leading man. His is the voice that narrates the story. But he reveals to us that we are listening to a dead man, seeing through a dead man's eyes. The director is Hollywood legend Billy Wilder and the film features other Hollywood legends playing either themselves or fictional Hollywood legends. Clever casting merges the fictional with factual and we are presented with Cecil B. De Mille as himself, Hedda Hopper as herself, Erich Von Stroheim as a fictional character, based loosely upon his actual self, all inside a self-conscious fiction. Snap back to glorious Technicolor reality, I'm driving but craning my neck, peering up all the driveways just in case I can glimpse that house, the one in the movie. It might still be there, the actual one they used.⁴ But it isn't, or at least I couldn't spot it. I drive on to the beach.

I admit to taking pleasure in indulging such fantasy, being in the places where fictions were created as if I can somehow enter the film, just as it has entered me. Perhaps in my fantasy I am not Joe but the camera. Sometimes I film these journeys as if I could somehow film the film, or at least the search for the film in the vague hope I could catch a ghost of something that never really happened. Back in London I watch the film again – a far more satisfying experience – and I realise that I have been disingenuous. In my fantasy I am really Norma, neurotic murderous Norma Desmond. A creature so obsessed with her own image, with her own incarnation of movie star/diva, that her relationship with the real world is destroyed and replaced by utter fantasy. Her deranged narcissism is given full vent, nourished by being enveloped in images of herself, and she is utterly alone. Yet all about her is decay – her fame has faded, her house is decaying and her beauty crumbling. She is in the final stages of her madness and to sustain her fantasy she must be loved, but consummate narcissist that



she is, she can only understand love in terms of incorporation and fantasy. She can only love that which loves her but to do so she feels compelled to consume the object of her passion – in this case Joe Gillis as the embodiment of Norma's love for Norma. When he refuses to continue in the masquerade and tries to leave her she has only one resort – for after all '*no-one leaves a star*' – she must kill him. Mercifully for Norma, this does not bring her back into any sort of reality but it consolidates her fantasy, and her insanity. When the police arrive to question her, the only words she hears are '*the cameras are here*'. The cameras of the paparazzi, assembled to capture the arrest of a star, become movie cameras for her, and she is once again making a movie, alive onscreen once more.

My guilty pleasure in losing myself in this movie is discomforting – I enjoy the performance of tortured diva; too rich, too glamorous, too famous, yet grotesquely revelling in her excess. Is this not symptomatic of my own narcissism? Shouldn't I be ashamed of myself for wanting to watch? For wanting to be Norma just for a moment. There is something joyful about her wanton disregard for dignity and for reality. But the ugliness of excessive vanity and the descent into insanity is, for me, where the frisson of pleasure is felt most keenly, where her (Norma) and my narcissism are exposed. Archly melodramatic, *Sunset Boulevard* lets Norma off the hook in the end. Her absorption into fantasy, into madness, means that she is once more in the place that makes her happy. ⁵

'...they were all her pictures. That's all she wanted to see.' ⁶

Narcissism: noun [mass noun] excessive or erotic interest in oneself and one's physical appearance.

Psychology: extreme selfishness with a grandiose view and a craving for admiration, as characterising a personality type. *Psychoanalysis:* self-centredness arising from failure to distinguish the self from external objects, either in very young babies or as a feature of mental disorder. [Oxford, 2001] ⁷

In the Freudian model, identification is shaped primarily in two ways: identifying as (transitively) and identifying with (reflexively). It has two basic modalities, hysterical and narcissistic, which are analogous, respectively to the transitive and the reflexive. In the extreme, total (hysterical) identification with another is a psychotic condition. For example, if I believe that I am Napoleon, or for that matter, Norma Desmond, then I would clearly be quite disturbed. But identification usually occurs reflexively, or partially and from many sources, so that when I define my subjectivity as 'I', this 'I' is actually an accretion of partial identifications.⁸ In my Sunset Boulevard experience, I identify at times with Norma, with Joe and with the camera (along with other less specific partial identifications such as the American landscape, road movies and so on) but my reverie is easily interrupted by everyday life because it is only partial (and transitive). I know that I am not Norma, that I am not a camera, and I already knew that I was unlikely to find or see anything that I sought, not anything concrete that is. I am not exactly sure what prompted me to chase celluloid shadows through a Hollywood landscape, but I had allowed myself to over-identify with Norma, or with this movie as an accumulation of other movies, my over-identification edged knowingly towards the hysterical. Fast cut to the clear blue skies and sunshine of Santa Monica and Norma was, of course, nowhere to be seen. There was just me, sitting in my car feeling foolish, but still feeling as if I had lost something.⁹

My attempt to haunt the scene of a film would be futile if I wanted to 'see' Norma Desmond and insert myself into her (or rather Joe's) narrative but on reflection it seems that my curiosity was not driven by the desire to 'enter' the film as such. Rather it was the desire to explore the sense of loss generated by the accumulated experience of the film – that sense of loss I felt in me. It seems that I was attempting to recoup the loss I felt, and quite strongly, after watching the movie many times. In everyday terms I interpreted this desire as the need to actually go to the scene of the film – my reaction naively literal and physical. In Freudian terms,¹⁰ I had internalised



my lost object (the movie/ Norma). This internalisation of loss forms just a part in the complex processes of identification but, to remain with Freud for a moment and to

speak of identification generally, all identifications are shaped through the preliminary model of oral incorporation (via internalisation).¹¹ In the Freudian model of orality we return to primitive (libidinal) looking,¹² or to the 'oral stage'.¹³ I address the incorporative properties of the camera later in this chapter, but firstly I want to trace the process of incorporation and projection, through the deliberate embrace of narcissism (performances of 'self') in the field of performance art.

I should note that my use of the term 'narcissism' does not accept the conventional, pejorative connotations usually associated with it (in this I take my cue from Amelia Jones). The term narcissism has been frequently – and simplistically – used as a condemnation of performance/body art. However in performance/body art, 'a fixation in performing the self', narcissism has very different implications. Performance of the self by body/performance artists is an enactment of narcissism, but this is not to suggest that it necessarily implies a childlike inability to 'go beyond self-relation'. Rather, the narcissism enacted here is inter-subjective and contingent – it acts to reveal the self as artwork, as constituted only in relation to another/viewer/audience. Jones puts it this way:¹⁴

'Because of body art's exposure of the contingency of the performing self, the narcissistic focus on the self by body artists – including the male artists – hardly confirms in any simple way the heroic genius (and transcendence) of the artistic subject...Body art splinters rather than coheres the self, far from assuring some presocial coherence of the self, body art enacts narcissism as contingency'. [Jones, 1998, 51]

Certainly, the performance of 'self' as artistic practice raises the question of narcissism, not least because of extant critical orthodoxies surrounding and imbricated within performance practices. To stage the self publicly, to place oneself as the work of art seems, initially, to be an act of outrageous narcissism. On closer examination it is far more complex than that. Firstly, narcissism (as self-regarding) seems to suggest that

the rest of the world, anything that falls outside of the 'I', is excluded. Yet the deliberate staging of the 'I' publicly, on a stage or as a recorded image, demands the involvement of a viewer/s. It requires an exchange between the work ('I') and those who watch. The public performance act is not enclosed within its own self reflective world and as such, it contradicts, or at least problematises the idea of this narcissistic gesture as only self concerned and exclusive, precisely because it is made public.¹⁵ Similarly, influential film theorist Laura Mulvey understands identification in binary terms. In the model of the 'scopophilic' gaze she presents, the feminine is situated as passive, as object of the gaze, whereas the masculine is situated as active, as the subject and owner of the gaze. Accordingly, I read through phenomenology as a way to 'loosen' the hold of specific orthodoxies that influence the gendered politics of representation.

So how does the relational aspect of narcissism impact on the monstrous fantasy of narcissism that Norma Desmond presents? How does this reformulation impact on ideas about recorded performance? In what way can we understand video performance as demonstrative of interconnectivity between external and internal selves? Rosalind Krauss in her seminal 1976 essay 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism' considers video performance, pointing up narcissism as a key condition. Speaking of Vito Acconci's piece 'Centers' she says: *'In that image of self regard is configured a narcissism endemic to works of video, [almost]... the condition of the entire genre.'* [Krauss, 1990, 179-80]

Devouring Eyes

This narcissistic condition is the enactment of the dynamic between self and artwork and other, and it occurs regardless of whether the performance is made live or recorded. It occurs in photographs – if we consider the work of Hannah Wilke, her



photographs assume (are set up to initiate) an intersubjective relation between herself, as ironically and narcissistically posed, the artwork (photograph), and the equally narcissistic viewer. Or better, the viewer whose own narcissism has been exposed in this meeting.

In Krauss' model the medium of video is analogous to the idea of 'medium' in the psychological sense – as the receiver or sender of communications from an invisible source. The human psyche is described by Krauss as the conduit and the body (of the artist) as the control instrument. The artists' video that can record and transmit simultaneously, with the immediacy of the mirror reflection, gives endless technological reflections in which the self is surrounded by selves. She reads narcissism as a positive strategy for artists – the thing 'transmitted' is the fragmented and burgeoning self of the artist, demanding a response on multiple levels from the viewer. This presentation of the self as fragmented refutes the idea that the self is a given, a universal and coherent single unity.

Written in the mid-seventies, Krauss' reading refers to video works from the preceding decade, in which the video camera was a new instrument. In the 1970's Acconci and other performance artists were exploring the possibilities that video offered, experimenting extensively with feedback. Thirty years on, body and performance artists are utilising multimedia, photographic and digital technologies extensively and it is now possible to see video performance as a specific genre within the field of performance art. But the use of technology has continued to extend and reinforce the idea of identity as unfixable, mutating and multiple. As I discussed previously, Gary Hill's installation and video works, for example, point this up in particular.¹⁶

Video is the pre-cursor to new media and, if we take Krauss' position that video supports the psychological condition of narcissism, for both artist and viewer/s, then it is possible to reason that new media operates in a similar way. Lev Manovich takes the position that new media actually generates a new kind of narcissism:

'...most new media, regardless of whether it represents to the user her image or not, can be said to activate the narcissistic condition because they represent to the user her actions and their results. In other words, it functions as a new kind of mirror that reflects not only the human image but human activities. This is a different kind of narcissism – not passive contemplation but action. The user moves around the screen, clicks on icons, presses the keys on the keyboard, and so on. The computer screen acts as a mirror of these activities. Often this mirror does not simply reflect but greatly amplifies the user's actions – a second difference from traditional narcissism...'

[Manovich, 2001, 235]

Immediately this raises the question of how narcissism can be described as either active or passive. Although Manovich does not specify what he means by 'traditional' narcissism I take it to mean the classic Freudian psychoanalytic model.¹⁷ In this, narcissism is to a large degree unconscious but it is not strictly passive. However, the idea of an 'active' narcissism indicates a greater awareness of the condition and a marked willingness to enter the condition. 'Classic' psychoanalysis shows that the condition of narcissism is normal in the formation of subjectivity, but also that the condition can become more pronounced if the subject is insecure or unstable. The distinction between active and passive narcissism is a matter of degree or fluctuation rather than dualistic.

The narcissism 'endemic' to the medium of video and, by extension, new media, is an enactment of (previously repressed) narcissism although it offers no sense of safety or resolution (reparation). Rather than affirming the idea that one's identity is a mysterious and essential entity, something not of the body (or in other words, spirit), it posits subjectivity as unstable and conditional. For the performative work the site of resistance to fantasy is the artist's body. The presence of the body, especially when mediated (represented by, with or through new media, including video) is betrayed by the overwhelming sense of ghostly absence. The body persists, even though it is no

longer (often, has never been) in the space of the work. It persists in the media and is imbricated within the technology that makes it manifest.

Both mediatised performance work and cinema provoke scenarios in which narcissism is the dominant condition but they each shape a fundamentally different relationship between the thing seen, or experienced, and the bodies of those who watch. The cinematic aims to captivate and arouse, seducing the viewer into a semi-conscious, auto erotic state, offering guilt free fantasy through pleasurable viewing and stimulating narcissistic empathy. Mediatised performance 'buys into' conventions of pleasurable viewing (via screens and projections showing moving images) but immediately interrupts the fantasy when the body of the artist is placed in front of the camera (because it is an actual, not fictional body). This offers a viewing experience that is not necessarily pleasurable and is unlikely to be guilt free, in that it invokes the narcissist in its viewers/audience. Stalling an escape into the fantasy propagated by the fictional bodies of cinema, mediatised performance engenders a self conscious intersubjective and interobjective state because it induces the viewer to always consider their own subjectivity in relation to the work and to the means of viewing it. To a degree, it induces self-consciousness in the viewer. Simply put, you do not lose yourself in the performance in the same way as you might in a movie.¹⁸

However, rather than trace the differences between cinema and mediatised performance, it seems to me that it is more useful and certainly more interesting to consider what is common to both and their differing emphases. The associative trope here is incorporation – the *bringing into* the body of the thing seen – and the mechanism common to all moving images, the camera. It is the incorporative aspect of the look, or the gaze that is exacerbated or amplified by the camera.

So what is a gaze? When I look, the action I perform is not confined to my eye but experienced by my whole body, processed and felt within the flesh. For sure, light hits the vitreous fluid of the surface of my eye and is carried along my optical nerves into

my brain for processing, for 'reading'. But the soft grey matter, having only a barely tenable physicality, instead plays out my response across the surfaces and internal spaces of my body. I respond emotionally and physically to the things I see, at times (most times?) not even aware of my own looking. I can choose to direct my gaze. I may seek something out. That which I see is present to me. The objects I see present themselves to me and I am as much seen as seeing. We are, after all, bodies in space, my body as much an object as the desk, the pen, the paper before me as I write this. My gaze hits the side of your face. You are my object and I am subject in relation to you. In turn, simultaneously, I am object to you as subject. Do the atoms and molecules between us change, I wonder, as the result of my gaze? Does my invisible gaze touch the skin of your cheek, grazing its surface? I certainly sense you physically. And if you turn and your eyes meet mine there will be a kind of knowing, a recognition, even amongst strangers. When our eyes meet I will know you as subject too, myself simultaneously as your object. I look, you look, *we take each other in*. And when we part and are no longer visible to each other we will each retain, to some degree, a memory of the others image, stored somewhere inside. I now carry a sense of you inside me, represented by the memory of your image. And if your image should bring me pleasure, somehow spark up some desire, in me I may seek you, or your image, out so that I may increase my pleasure at the sight of you. So that, through vision I may feel you, so that in that act of looking I can have you as part of my flesh. You may not ever know I watch you but I touch you all the same. The gaze is an action, performed by the body at the behest of the self. The invisible is that which I cannot see, which is not to say that it is not visible only that it is not present to my vision. If light is made of particles then the visible is that which touches my eye, is that which enters me.

In speaking of Merleau-Ponty and his interrogation of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Jacques Lacan argues that, just as there is a distinction between the visible and the invisible, the distinction that matters is that between the eye and the gaze.



'[Merleau-Ponty] sets out to rediscover – this is the essential point – the dependence of the visible on that which places us under the eye of the seer. But this is going too far, for that eye is only the metaphor of something that I would prefer to call the seer's 'shoot' (pousse) – something prior to his eye. What we have to circumscribe, by means of the path he indicates for us, is the pre-existence of a gaze – I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.' [Lacan, 1977, 72]

For the structural psychoanalytic theory of Lacan, the visible is dependant on that which places us under the seer's eye – the eye here is the metaphor for the action of looking (the shoot) since a gaze pre-exists the eye of the seer. If this is so it is impossible to speak of because, as pre-existent to consciousness, it also pre-exists language. My concern with the matter (the fleshiness) of the eye, and the action that it performs falls somewhere between both positions. It seems to me that the 'pousse' that Lacan speaks of is the manifestation of intentionality. Pousse, in French, is 'shoot', but as in growth, as in to burgeon. Intentionality swells and erupts into the gaze, is tendril-like in its action and almost, but not totally, fleshly.¹⁹ I am attempting to speak of how it feels to be *in* the gaze, looked at and looking back, of an acute awareness of the desires inherent in the gaze. If it is possible to speak from within, can I speak *in* desire rather than *of* desire? Perhaps this is where words will fail me, where image and action become the only language that will do. But in speaking in desire, in which demand and need are constant, it is not possible to lay claim to objectivity. I can never be apart from my desires especially when my practice is a deliberate embodiment and staging of aspects of the condition. I worry at my desire, picking at it like a scab, but without wanting it to heal. Accordingly, my discourse speaks of the relation between things rather than seeking to identify definitive positions for those things. Within this relation flux is constant and for Lacan it is slippage that defines the gaze.

'In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted,

from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze. [Lacan, 1977, 72]

Can this relation be defined through its action? The relation, as an exchange 'in-between' two (or more) things or beings is elusive in that it is always going towards or away from that being or object, and is never static. It is a relation because of this action. Is the elusion that Lacan speaks of an elusion of the actual subject/thing? However, we know of the gaze (as relation) through an awareness of its motion. We know we see – we see ourselves seeing. This motility is always and has always been integral to primitive seeing²⁰ and persists (to a certain extent) in every act of seeing. It brings everything back to the body – in a sense one could say that primitive perception, and by implication scotophilia, is a *seeing with the body* in which sight becomes indistinguishable from sensation. This becomes discernible when we consider that the characteristics of primitive seeing are reproduced in libidinal seeing, with motor and kinaesthetic faculties being more prominent than in ordinary seeing. This is 'active' looking – we know we look because we feel it, it is sensate – and it is directed towards something particular for a particular purpose. That purpose is motivated by libidinal desire and its methodology is incorporative.

Where then can we see the evidence for this? It seems that cinema and the movie camera in particular gives us a clear indication. The fascination exerted upon us by moving pictures, as we sit in the dark, makes us like voyeurs peeping into another world – outside of but looking into a world that seems real, seems live, because it is moving. And whilst we are sitting still, the effects of the voyeuristic activity are played out upon the body when we weep, fear or become sexually aroused by the images in front of our eyes. Those images, it seems, caress us. They enter us through vision and metaphorically through representation, but all the same they go in. We take them in, we spread ourselves open to them, we demand to be penetrated by them.

There are three types of psychological apparatus— perceiving, recording and projection. Furthermore (to paraphrase Freud) seeing is an activity that is ultimately derived from touching. [Freud, 1905, 125] The things we see are psychic representations derived from direct contact (light upon the surface of the eye). The activity of seeing and of identification relies on the loop of introjection and projection of that which is seen. When the 'normal' processes of identification are interrupted or damaged introjection can become incorporative and one way of articulating this occurrence is through cannibalistic fantasy.

Otto Fenichel (psychoanalyst and writer) first published his thesis of incorporation in relation to looking (Scoptophilia) in 1939. In shaping his theories, Fenichel draws on Sandor Ferenczi's concept of introjection/projection (which is also in accord with Freud).²¹ In this, identification is situated as taking place through an act of introjection. This then provokes a psychological projection in which difficult emotions or aspects of the personality are displaced onto another (in the parameters of my argument, onto the filmic character). In the case of a disordered or disturbed personality this can take a neurotic turn and accumulate into a refusal to recognise the difficulties within the self, always investing or projecting them onto others, or onto fantasy images/characters.

Whilst not identical, perception and introjection are closely related as they are both elements of what was once a single process. *'...libidinal seeing as a regression to these archaic forms of seeing explains how it is that, as we have already noted, the aim of the scoptophilic instinct regularly includes elements of sadism and the desire to incorporate the object.'* [Fenichel, 1953, 381]

Introjection requires reversibility – we introject in order to project. In the rhetoric of vision, what we look at enters us through the eye and when we are looked at we enter another body – it is a reciprocal exchange. *'That which my eyes pierce will pierce me.'*

Just as I pierced it with my eyes, so the first thing it will pierce will be my eyes'

[Fenichel, 1953, 387]

Displacement is a dominant factor or principle in the act of libidinal seeing, a condition in which subject is confused with object and ego with the outside world. Fenichel argues that it is God, or rather the sight of God, that has a fundamental significance in *'the mechanisms of introjection or identification.'* [Fenichel, 1953, 390-1] To look at God is forbidden and sinful so, by implication, that act of looking itself carries with it the potential of sinfulness and shame. We are punished, or, better, we punish ourselves, for sacrilegious identification.²² Vision, in this way, is culturally conditioned and a concept of 'good' and 'bad' seeing is established (by way of religious hierarchy).

The consummate model of libidinal seeing is scopophilia²³ in which the seer loves to look, substituting looking for sexual participation. Enthralled by what they see, the scopophilic's experience of fascination is a bodily one, but it is not passive. As Fenichel points out, in the condition of scopophilic fascination, *'the whole muscular system becomes rigid (feeling of paralysis), especially of the respiratory muscles.'*

[Fenichel, 1953, 391]

The exploration of self, of the existential experiences of self and the convergence of self and other is a principle concern for much contemporary art, and especially for performative and filmic practices. Central to such practices is the exploration of the look and of the relationship of the work to the spectator, via the key instrument of incorporative or cannibalistic appropriation – the camera.

Fenichel describes the camera as 'a devouring eye'.²⁴ As an instrument of cannibalistic appropriation the camera is exemplary. It is an instrument that is designed to facilitate libidinal looking and sanction our oral sadistic fantasies.²⁵ To remain with Fenichel's terms, the image in entering the eye is destroyed. As it is consumed or incorporated it is changed into something else and reprojected out by the seer. As I understand it, the

camera is only an instrument but one that allows us to look at the world differently and to keep the images we see. It is more than just a prosthetic to the eye – it is designed to specifically enhance our incorporative desires through libidinal looking.

Stating that our unconscious processes have formed the basis of the plastic arts, Fenichel argues that the artist consumes the thing seen and then makes reparation in the shape of the work of art. What if the performance action or happening produces only an experience rather than an object? Virtually all performance actions (as artwork) have some relation to objecthood, if only in the form of documentation or other record.²⁶ But the performance that produces *only* a record of the experience (image of the action, written description, material trace etc.) greatly problematises the idea that the created object somehow concludes the process of artistic enquiry neatly. If the created object only depicts or describes the work of art, as it occurred elsewhere and at another time to the present, it leaves something unaccounted for. If we accept that experience can be understood as the work of art, this problematises the idea of reparation residing in an object.

Blood and Guts

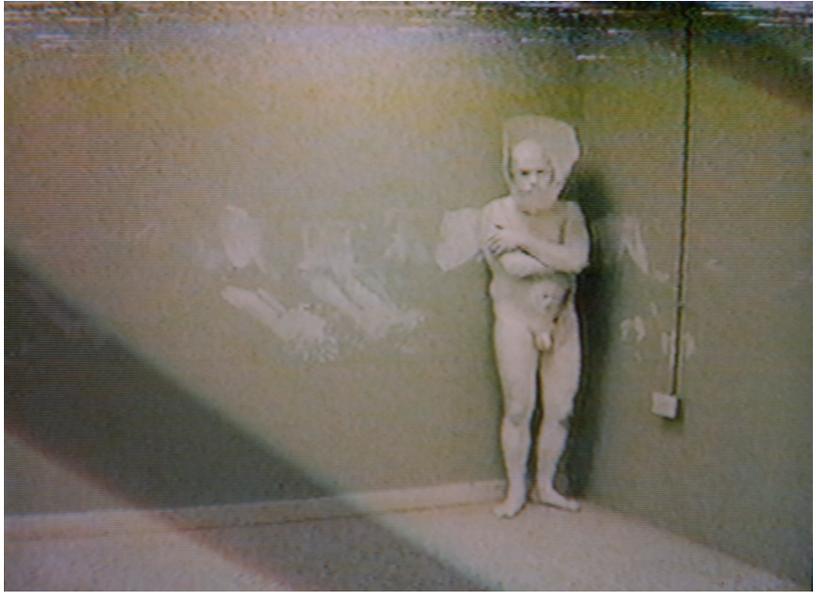
Certain body art projects engender a heightened self-consciousness in participants by situating the body, as living flesh, as the central motif of the work. But performance work generally emphasises the reciprocal relation, the gift, reparation of the gulf between self and other. As 'living flesh' the artist's body is often subject to painful or 'cruel' actions. If staged as ritual, as in the elaborate tableaux of Hermann Nitsch²⁷ or Ron Athey²⁸ for example, one can clearly read cathartic possibilities in the work. But what of the body artist who bids us look at the surfaces and vicissitudes of the individual body and who places that body at risk? Are pain and cruelty now what drives the art? If so, then the core of the work is not to do with reparation, rather it aggressively challenges conventional assumptions about self and other and about the limits of 'body' (I address the issue of body and its limits specifically in chapter 4). By



manipulating the relation/dynamic from within the intersubjective relation it interrogates the nature of relationality. Body centred work that utilises elements of cruelty can provoke a Sadean paradox (i.e. to be cruel is to a) negate the self and b) assert the mastery of the self). Again, I stress that the type of performance work I am considering here emerges from a fine art practice, situates the body as material, as process, as representation, and implicit within the work is a concern with staging the self. One performance by Franko B offers up such a paradox.²⁹

In a basement of the Arches, the performance space for the NRLA, Franko B shows an open wound in his side. He is standing naked, except for a giant collar around his neck – the type that is used on animals after an operation, to stop them from biting themselves and aggravating the wound.³⁰ His body is painted white all over and the room is white. It is empty and clinical. The audience comes into the room one at a time. They have five minutes to spend alone with him. The wound looks nasty – its deep, about three inches long and it looks to have been open for a while. There is no blood flow but it oozes. It is hard to look him in the eye, but then again it is difficult not to stare at the wound without feeling awkwardly prurient. It's almost impossible to look away. In contemplating his exposed and open flesh, I contemplate my own physicality. Confronting the gape of the wound sets my teeth on edge, I experience a curious flutter somewhere at the top of my stomach, I feel a little dizzy. Yet I remain fascinated.³¹

I offer up Franko as an example of body/performance art that is driven by a logic that demands that the body be taken to its physical limits, to the point where physical harm is done in the name of art. Pain and endurance are the vehicles for the work. The wound, in Sadean terms, is the fulfilment of the self through flesh (the flesh is violated, it's apparently closed surface is breached). To be wounded is not passively masochistic rather it is through the pain of the wounding, in the tearing open of flesh, that the tormentor and victim are united. So is Franko's wound an expression of



unification, this time between audience and artist/work? Or is it the negation of self and flesh? Or is it something of both?

Unlike the majority of the audience, one woman spent her allotted time holding Franko's hand – was she sharing his pain, empathising with his suffering?³² I am unsure – it seems to me that she made a deliberate performance of normality, or of a type of 'normative caring', in order to escape the self-conscious thrall that held those of us who kept a physical distance. The wound drew an intense response from those who looked into it, much of which was played out upon their bodies. Staring at an open wound has a powerful effect on the observing human body and in this case the wound/response was meticulously staged. The body of the viewer (this viewer) experienced excitement (anticipation), increased heart rate, and an intake of breath, widening of eyes, dilation of the nostrils, perhaps even an expression of horror or shock. Although I am not squeamish, it was an effort to keep these involuntary responses (including faint waves of nausea) under control. It was a direct physical response to an almost extreme performance. But the logic of extremes demands that one go as far as it is possible to go. Franko B tiptoes up to the very edge but he never lets go the control which would plunge him into certain death (and who can blame him after all?). Nevertheless, in opening his flesh to us he points to the edge, bids us look over, knowing that we have a fear of falling.

I read Franko's work in general (and this piece, 'Action 398', in particular) as being concerned with control. In his bloodletting performances, part of the shock or thrill for the audience is that, by opening his veins, Franko risks bleeding to death, and that his body suffers pain and trauma. But while I have no wish to diminish the potential danger in opening up one's veins, or the bodily trauma of losing a pint or two of blood, I have to insist that Franko is at no point out of control or ever truly in danger. His work is planned carefully in consultation with medical experts, one of whom opens Franko's veins, stands in the wings during shows and tends to him immediately afterwards. Franko knows how far he can push his body and remains within those

limits, but he also knows how powerfully these actions affect an audience. In this he is utterly governing and orchestrating audience response, his control extends beyond his own body. In the 'Action 398' he undoubtedly suffered pain from the wound but he displayed none of the classic symptoms of pain or suffering during the performance. He stands naked, wound exposed, but he is still and in total control of his body. His control is commanding, whether here or on the catwalk (in 'I Miss You').³³ Not only does he master the response of his body he masters his audience. In this, his work very much embodies the Sadean paradox I spoke of before. Furthermore, Franko stages himself ambiguously – his persona in performance is always the same. He neither plays a character nor gives his audience any clue as to how this male subject relates to an everyday self, one that goes shopping or does the laundry etc. In the cruel actions of his performance, self has no place (having been occluded or refused) yet at the same time he bids his audience respond to him empathetically. He makes of his audience sadists – without our enthusiastic response, his poor body would not need to be damaged. But Franko is no masochist – impassively in control of his own body, skilfully disguising control as potential disaster (the chaos of him actually bleeding to death on stage), he feeds our bloodlust, encourages it, makes a living from it. Concurrently he elicits sympathy, connectivity and a distinctly felt intersubjective relation from his audience. He both proposes the idea of self and negates it and he does so by appealing to our desire to watch a body suffer.

So what is this desire, this compulsion to witness extreme acts of cruelty or violence, whether as art action or cinema? Cinema especially facilitates voyeuristic or scopophilic tendencies but an important point in Fenichel's argument is that ocular introjection is a component of shame. As I noted previously, being blinded, turned to stone, even death are the metaphoric punishments for the scopophilic and if cinema can be understood as an example of the camera in scopophilic action, where does shame and punishment fit into this equation? Are there punishments for pleasuring oneself through cinema? Hardly, although we run the risk of being caught in an endless loop, in which the repressed is continually bounced back (via the screen) with

an amplified intensity. Most of us experience film as free from guilt, which is why, in the cinema, we are able to give free range to our fantasies, safely and unseen. But we *can* empathise, sympathise and identify, in safety, with the 'bad guys' and monsters. We can, for a moment, become as they are, circumventing guilty associations. Vicariously we experience their desire, their crimes, and their often outrageous cruelty. This idea of 'being like', of close identification with another's transgression is a major theme in the Hannibal Lecter stories – the preposition of the books and films is that to catch a serial killer, one must think like one and in this understanding lies one's complicity. The suggestion is that even watching the movie or finding sympathy with Hannibal the Cannibal is not 'safe' as it uncovers one's own base tendencies.

Hannibal

*'O he's a monster...'*³⁴

Lecter was recently voted the UK's number one favourite evil movie monster. He has become a rather appealing icon of evil within popular western culture and still exercises an appalling fascination for readers and filmgoers alike.³⁵ He murders his victims horrifically, prepares an exquisite gourmet meal of their flesh and eats them. The character of Lecter is all the more horrific because he is not driven by passion, because he has no motive. He finds the world tedious; he frequently kills people simply because they are rude or stupid. In the first two Lecter books, *Red Dragon* and *Silence of the Lambs*, written by Thomas Harris, Lecter's advice is sought on catching another killer, one whose actions are based, by the writer, on real cases. Lecter himself is more like an overlord of serial killers, an inspiration to killers and cops alike. Lecter knows that in order to catch a serial killer, one must be able to think just like a serial killer, one must empathise. This is dangerous - if you think like a serial killer, how close are you to becoming one? What divides you, apart from your actions? Are you the same under the skin? In *Red Dragon* (the book), the first encounter with Lecter ends when



he says to Graham (the cop that had caught him previously) *'The reason you caught me is that WE 'RE JUST ALIKE.'* Graham's curse is that he knows this too.

*'Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat.'*³⁶

The literary origins of Lecter are explored by David Sexton in 'The Strange World of Thomas Harris' and he points to Harris' influences which include Edgar Allen Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle and Patricia Highsmith, but especially and in particular, Charles Baudelaire. [Sexton, 2001] In the first place he points out that the name Hannibal Lecter is almost a direct transposition of 'hypocrite lecteur' – in French, lecteur means reader. Baudelaire's series of poems 'Fleurs du Mal' are addressed to 'hypocrite lecteur' – I discuss this connection later in this chapter. Lecter is also a reader; when complaining about a punishment to Clarice Starling he says *'Any rational society would either kill me or give me my books.'* It is boredom that makes him what he is, and it is what he uses as a threat. Physical pain makes no difference to him - there is no point in torturing him, but taking away his books upsets him. What his captors fail to understand is that boredom – l'ennui – consolidates the evil that creates a monster out of Lecter. One of our favourite monsters, his is the face that stares back at us from our boredom. While we watch we are entertained by his horrible actions. We have in this become Baudelaire's apathetic reader. As Sexton puts it *'He is our monster, the evil we embrace for our diversion. And he feeds on us.'* That Lecter eats other humans, digesting them with relish, is both appalling and fascinating. Who can resist a grim smile at the end of Silence of the Lambs (the film) when Lecter says *'...I have to go now Clarice - I'm having an old friend for dinner'?* Consider this from Hannibal (the book):

'The pinky-gray dome of Krendler's brain was visible above his truncated skull. Standing over Krendler with an instrument resembling a tonsil spoon, Dr Lecter removed a slice of Krendler's pre-frontal lobe, then another, until he had four. Krendler's eyes looked up as though he were following what was going on. Dr Lecter placed the slices in the bowl of ice water, the water acidulated with the juice of a

lemon, in order to firm them. "Would you like to swing on a star," Krendler sang abruptly, "Carry moonbeams home in a jar". In classic cuisine, brains are soaked and then pressed and chilled overnight to firm them. In dealing with the item absolutely fresh, the challenge is to prevent them from simply disintegrating into a handful of lumpy gelatin. With splendid dexterity, the doctor brought the firmed slices to a plate, dredged them lightly in seasoned flour, then in fresh brioche crumbs. He grated a fresh black truffle into his sauce and finished it with a squeeze of lemon juice. Quickly he sautéed the slices until they were just brown on each side. 'Smells great!' Krendler said. Dr Lecter placed the browned brains on broad croutons on the warmed plates, and dressed them with the sauce and truffle slices. A garnish of parsley and whole caper berries on their stems, and a single nasturtium blossom on watercress to achieve a little height, completed his presentation.' [Harris, 2000, 549]

I quoted Harris in extended form to example the fastidiousness of Lecter's crime, and also of the writer's description. Who is the monster here? Lecter, in his culinary skill and disregard for the human he is eating, literally alive? Harris, in his ability to describe such an act in great detail? Or the reader in delighting in the description?

The central motif for Lecter is a double take on the cycle of identification/incorporation/projection; the first aspect is a literal analogy, i.e. cannibalism as in eating the body of another (incorporation of the flesh). The second stresses the powerful, oral/sadistic nature of the look. At their first meeting, the relationship between Lecter and Clarice Starling, the other main character (set up as his nemesis) is outlined through a complex interchange of looks.³⁷ He fixes her with an unblinking gaze – is he compelling her to be like him? His eyes fixed on Clarice become his eyes fixed on the camera, fixed on us, the viewers. On the screen, in extreme close up, his gaze fills our field of vision and envelops us. His eyes are always in focus, focussing on us. In their subsequent meetings (in both films, 'Silence of the Lambs' and 'Hannibal') Lecter compels Clarice bit by bit – not only does he teach her things (about the serial killer she is seeking) he also challenges her mettle by asking frank questions about

herself, often sexual in nature. For example in the first meeting he coerces Clarice to say 'I can smell your cunt' when she is asked what it is that Multiple Miggs said to her as she passed. She struggles to return his gaze whilst speaking to him at first but finally she succumbs to it – his gaze compels her. When they talk he insists on an exchange of information. He repeats the phrase '*Quid pro quo, Clarice, quid pro quo.*' (Silence of the Lambs). As he watches her personal confession, he appears to suck in her words and when he blinks slowly it is as if he is swallowing them. If to look is to devour, then (here) to blink is to swallow. Additionally, during their exchange the camera cuts sharply back and forth (a staple cinematic device for dialogue). The cut point in a film is the place where we, the viewers, are directed to blink. It echoes the incorporative process – we take in, we 'swallow' and we start again.

If his gaze compels Clarice to be like him, Lecter also challenges her to flinch or to recoil from him, his questions and his actions. But Clarice stands firm (*'there's a clever girl'*) intensifying the tension between them. Yet the more she stands up to him, the more she becomes inured to the horror of what he does. She begins to understand his rationale. She can understand it because she is beginning to think like him, or perhaps she always has – this is her secret fear. In Silence of the Lambs the looking motif is further emphasised by the nature of the hunted serial killer, Buffalo Bill. Bill has been catching, keeping, then killing and skinning young women.³⁸ The key clue that Lecter gives to Clarice to help her catch him is that Bill is one who 'covets'. He wants to become what he covets – a young blonde woman. Lecter tells Clarice '*We covet what we see everyday*'. Through the 'sin' of covetousness, through looking and desiring incorporatively, Bill wishes to become what he sees.

The directors of both 'Silence of the Lambs' and 'Hannibal' use different but familiar devices to emphasise looking. In 'Silence of the Lambs', the first exchanges between Clarice and Lecter take place, separated by the glass walls of his cell. When we see Clarice stand up the camera is behind Lecter, showing his reflection. As she straightens up her image enters his. In this merging of images we are shown how to understand



their relationship. They are to become the same, imbricated within each other. In 'Hannibal', Clarice spends a large part of her time surrounded by images of dead and dismembered bodies – Lecter's victims – and images of Lecter himself. She listens to his voice on tape on headphones. He and his handiwork are constantly looking out at her as she peers at them, searching for clues as to how to find him. She is now enfolded by him.

Moreover, Lecter has an uncanny way of knowing when he is being watched. In 'Hannibal' Inspector Pazzi, who has found out who the mysterious 'Dr. Fell' really is (Lecter) and wants to claim the substantial reward, sees Lecter in front of him at the opera. Lecter makes him nervous, asks him tricky revealing questions, and after all as Pazzi has just discovered, he is a serial killer. As Pazzi recognises Lecter and before he can turn his gaze away Lecter turns to look him straight in the eye. Pazzi, startled by this turns his eyes away. When he looks up again (he couldn't resist) Lecter is still looking. Pazzi is obliged to look back and this time return Lecter's alarming but polite smile. Later when they meet in the bar, Lecter speaks with Pazzi's wife. They talk of Dante, of sight and consumption. When she asks him '*Do you believe that a man could become so obsessed with a woman from a single encounter?*' he replies '*Could he daily feel a stab of hunger for her and find nourishment in the very sight of her? I think so.*' As they end the conversation, he kisses her hand. His manners, like his words, are impeccable, seductive and compelling. [Scott, 2001]

Later in 'Hannibal', Mason Verger (a surviving victim of Lecter) has captured our hero – by this time it has been shown that his hunters are just as merciless and just as perverse as Lecter. They are perhaps worse because of their hypocrisy so we begin to really side with Lecter against the 'bad guys' just as Clarice is compelled to do. Verger plans to feed Lecter, feet first and slowly, to his pigs. This is to be a sweet revenge for what Lecter did to him (he made Verger cut his own face off and feed it to his dogs). But the pigs don't touch Lecter (he is able to control animals).³⁹ Instead they eat their keepers and Mason Verger in a particularly brutal scene. In this way the cycle of

consumption continues but is diverted by Lecter. He then introduces a new dish to the menu – Paul Krendler, the FBI official that has been the source of Clarice’s public shaming and downfall. Krendler wants Clarice sexually, just as Verger (who can no longer have sex) wants to watch his pigs have Lecter for dinner. And just as Lecter causes Verger to be fed to his own pigs, he goes one better and feeds (a little bit of) Krendler to Krendler. In the book, but disappointingly not in the film, Lecter also feeds Krendler to Clarice who willingly partakes. In this way she finally becomes just as he is.

I find that in describing the most awful and shocking aspects of the action I am describing Lecter’s most seductive powers. It is not so much that Hannibal is sexy, rather that the experience of being immersed in the overlapping complexes of consumption and incorporation is set up to be thrilling. Perhaps the most potent thing about him is his absolute implacability. We are told that his heart rate never went above 98 when he attacked a nurse, eating her tongue. He guts a man without batting an eyelid. He is not out of control, quite the opposite. He has no conscience and his rationality is Sadean in its intensity and intractability. As passive viewers, out there in the dark, even as we devour we are seduced by this personification of some of our darkest instincts.

'Don't you feel eyes moving over your body Clarice? Don't your eyes seek out the things that you want?' ⁴⁰

The onscreen character of Lecter has an incontrovertible potency that horrifies, fascinates and entertains. Hannibal Lecter neatly embodies the desires that underlie incorporative looking and, as he enjoys the luxury of having no conscience, he offers the audience the pleasure of vicariously acting outside of normal or acceptable behaviour without threat of punishment. We can, for a moment, be like him – guilt free and intensely powerful, monstrously narcissistic even. Lecter performs for us utter non-relationality, as does the character Norma Desmond although her non-relationality is shaped through psychosis and his through a warped rationality. Her

world is constructed through fantasy and the adulation of millions. In the 'real' world she can no longer be loved enough and this sends her over the edge. His is constructed through total lack of empathy, boredom and by equal measure violence (as a counter balance). Both Hannibal and Norma refuse the intersubjective relation and they do it furiously, with deadly results. To return to Franko B for a moment, his performances – as deliberate stagings of self, accompanied by pain and the evidence of violent action done to his body – offer themselves up to a reading of paradoxical relationality. By generating empathy, Franko simultaneously generates an extreme self-consciousness in his audience. Fluctuating between a heightened intersubjective relation and the vertiginous condition of (heightened) existential experience, his work appears also to allude to a pathological condition. But I read it as being driven by the cool rationality of the master/slave dynamic.

'Voluptuaries of all ages, of every sex, it is to you only that I offer this work; nourish yourselves upon its principles...' [Sade, 1990] ⁴¹

More extreme, more narcissistic and more cruel than Franko, Norma or Hannibal, in his performance of self (within his writings and philosophy), the Marquis de Sade violently and perversely rejects any idea of relationality (or intersubjectivity) with a relentless rationalism. ⁴² His extreme position, his heightened self consciousness and (self) distinction from the world isolate him within himself is revealed as autistic (in the psychological sense rather than the medical condition). How does one control or deal with non-relationality? Through writing it would seem, for both de Sade and Baudelaire. I consider Baudelaire later but first I want to consider desire in extremis, as enacted within the writings of the Marquis de Sade. Simone de Beauvoir writes:

'The curse which weighed upon Sade – and which only his childhood could explain – was this "autism" which prevented him from ever forgetting himself or being genuinely aware of the reality of the other person...Normally, it is as a result of the vertigo of the other made flesh that one is spellbound within one's own flesh. If the subject

remains confined within the solitude of his consciousness, he escapes this agitation and can rejoin the other only by conscious performance. [De Beauvoir, 1955, 22]

Sade's hyper self-awareness, his intimate knowledge of his drives, and his elaborate strategies at seeking satisfaction, blind him to communion and connection with another human being and refuse the idea of a relationship. This enrages him – in order to satisfy his desires it must be in relation to another person, but he cannot stomach the moral imperative implicit within normative ideas of 'relationship' – that of reciprocal dependency and care. Accordingly he perverts desire into a monstrous performance of destruction. The experience of vertigo caused by the other made flesh is the effect of desire. Dizzy and spellbound, we make a choice to escape into communion with another or others in order to remain 'normal' and to find fulfilment, temporarily losing oneself in another. Sade made a different choice. He took the liberty of remaining self referring (within himself), tantalisingly enclosed in his own self-conscious, pleasuring himself. This is his outrage – not to seek resolution but dissolution and to revel in it. He refused to *perform* normality.

Yet Sade's self-awareness was more than just a physical response to his autistic condition – it was also a social and political provocation. The need to obtain satisfaction and contentment via idealised love for another derives from a fantasy itself. The fantasy that teaches us to yearn, a fantasy that feeds desire, is in fact a fantasy that keeps us in order, keeps us behaving ourselves. The fantasy imposed by the new order of Sade's post-revolutionary France was little different to that of the old order in that it remained transfixed by the authority of the law. The judges may have changed but the law remained, constrained by what Sade considered to be an outmoded and corrupted morality. He scandalised his comrades with his lewd behaviour but outraged them even more by declaring that it was perfectly reasonable to kill for pleasure, but utterly immoral to kill in the name of justice.⁴³ De Sade is a writer whose life and work are inseparable. His writing is both the result and cause of

his imprisonment – imprisonment within himself and within the walls of the Charenton Asylum.

Sade's proclaimed perversity is built on a ferocious rationalism combined with an exaggerated emphasis on devouring (vis a vis coprophilia, multiple penetrations, emissions and swallowing). My point in discussing Sade is to analyse how the action of incorporation, performed as ferocious activity (for the libertine, fucking as an act of cruelty), drives us towards a vertiginous condition that is experienced as an intense physical sensation, in the face of potential self-annihilation. His work performs an intractable refusal of relationality in all its aspects. Sade, time and again, throughout his texts stresses that solitude is what defines the human condition and that no relationship or contact is truly possible between one person and another. Although his reasoning is contradictory and paradoxical, it is the very contradictions that, for Sade, are proof of his logic. Sadean thought is a philosophy or even a manifesto of destruction. In the Sadean model, humanity's power lies in its destructive potential – the true libertine negates firstly Man, then God and finally Nature, leaving a unique individual, one who is apart from the human race, a master utterly alone. This master is unfeeling. This libertine is one who inflicts pain and destruction without feeling, without passion. He would himself be destroyed ignominiously and violently, tried and hung for his crimes. Only in this would he find complete satisfaction and vindication. Sade suppresses the idea of desire throughout his writings and he never allows desire to be motivational. If passion or desire is manifest in one of his characters it is immediately chided or punished.⁴⁴

The unique being, unfeeling and alone in the world, can only maintain his non-engaged, apathetic demeanour through a tremendous effort of will, through generating an acute self-consciousness. Sade's libertine attempts to destroy any idea of a relation of self to others in the world by destroying all in his path. This destruction through incorporation requires others in order to perpetuate its appetite. The unique being is only powerful if energies are not wasted on others – the only feelings and

sensations he is interested in are his own and his withdrawal of empathy, sympathy or compassion serves to magnify them. The price the libertine pays for 'knowing' life and death, pleasure and pain so cruelly is an almost unbearable self-consciousness.

Ultimately I read Sade's philosophy as motivated by an incandescent rage at life itself because the outrages he describes can and do happen in actuality, because his cruelty knows no bounds. In pursuing the destruction of another, the libertine has made the decision to destroy, rather than to accept, his own need for others (the only means by which to identify himself). As Maurice Blanchot points out (in his work 'Sade' that prefaces *Justine* and *Philosophy in the Bedroom*) '*Cruelty is nothing more than the negation of self, carried so far that it is transformed into a destructive explosion.*'

[Blanchot, 1990, 68]

In 1857, 43 years after the death of the Marquis de Sade, Charles Baudelaire published his infamous series of poems 'Les Fleurs du Mal' (Flowers of Evil).⁴⁵ In them, he takes up Sade's theme of apathy, in relation to evil, as an erotic devouring and posits all of humanity as being subject to extreme and terrifying impulses, insisting that our desires, if we act on them all, are deadly. I consider Baudelaire here because in the poems he takes a distinctly sensual delight in detailing the excesses of modern times, and because he posits humanity as being equally parasitical, equally monstrous, in contrast to Sade's unique being. Further, his consideration of the axis of inaction (apathy) and excess (desire) is couched in terms of bodily incorporation (for example, feeding on remorse, death in our lungs, swallowing the world with a yawn etc.). Given the context of this thesis, I read Baudelaire's poem as standing as an important literary marker of the changing concepts about society, in the face of increasing industrialisation and rampant technological innovation. The shift into a world of industrialisation and mechanical reproduction is imbricated within the crises of identity of Baudelaire's modern man. The following section comprises a transcript of *Au Lecteur* (the preface to the book of poems), a translation into English and analysis of the work, in relation to my argument here.

Au Lecteur

La sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine,
Occupent nos esprits et travaillent nos corps,
et nous alimentons nos aimables remords,
Comme les mendiants nourrissent leur vermine.

Nos péchés sont têtus, nos repentirs sont lâches;
Nous nous faisons payer grassement nos aveux,
et nous rentrons gaiement dans le chemin bourbeux,
Croyant par de vils pleurs laver toutes nos taches.

Sur oreiller du mal c'est Satan Trismégiste
Qui berce longuement notre esprit enchanté,
Et le riche métal de notre volonté
Est tout vaporisé par ce savant chimiste.

C'est le diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent!
Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas;
Chaque jour vers l'enfer nous descendons d'une pas,
Sans horreur, a travers des ténèbres qui puent.

Ainsi, qu'un débauché pauvre qui baise et mange
Le sein martyrisé d'une antique catin,
Nous volons au passage un plaisir clandestin
Que nous pressons bien fort comme une vieille orange.

Serré, fourmillant, comme un million d'helminthes,
Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons,
Et quand nous respirons, la Mort dans nos plumons

Descend, fleuve invisible, avec de sourdes plaintes.

Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l'incendie,
N'ont pas encor brode de leurs plaisants dessins,
Le canevas banal de nos pitieux destins,
C'est que notre âme, hélas! n'est pas assez hardie.

Mais parmi les chacals, les panthères, les lices,
Les singes, les scorpions, les vautours, les serpents,
Les monstres glapissants, hurlants, grognants, rampants,
Dans le ménagerie infâme de nos vices,

Il est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde!
Quoiqu'il ne pousse ni grands gestes ni grands cris,
Il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris
Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde;

C'est l'Ennui! – l'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,
Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.
Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat.
– Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère!

[Baudelaire, 1973, 5-7]

Translation:

The following translation is a combination of my own translation and in part taken from David Sexton's 'The Strange World of Thomas Harris' (he translates a few verses only). [Sexton, 2001, 91-3] It was important for me to work with a translation that reflected the feel and rhythm, and particularly the inflection of the original poem.

Many of the existing translations seemed to miss the viscerality of Baudelaire's language by quite some way, so I have constructed my own. The poem begins almost in mid stream with a fiercely inclusive 'we'...

Stupidity, error, sin, and meanness
Possess our minds and work on our bodies,
And we feed our fond remorse
As beggars suckle their own lice.

Our sins are stubborn, our regrets cowardly,
We pay handsomely to make our confessions,
And we gaily return by the muddy path,
Believing that our vile tears wash away all our stains.

This pillow of evil is Satan Trismegiste
Who for a long time has cradled our enchanted spirits,
And the precious metals of our will
Are all vaporised by this clever scientist.

It is the Devil who pulls the strings that make us dance!
We take delight in loathsome things;
Each day we take a further step towards Hell,
Yet we feel no horror as we descend through the stinking gloom.

Like this a poor corrupt one who kisses and bites
The martyred breast of an ancient courtesan,
We willingly partake of this hidden pleasure,
Which we squeeze hard, like an old orange.

Tight, swarming, like a million tapeworms,

The matter of our brains is populated by demons,
And, when we breathe, Death is in our lungs
Descending, an invisible river, with muffled groans.

If rape, poison, dagger, fire,
Will never again embroider their pleasant designs
On the banal canvas of our pitiful destinies,
It is our soul, alas! that is not bold enough.

But among the jackals, panthers, bitch-hounds,
Monkeys, scorpions, vultures, snakes,
And monsters that scream and howl and grunt and crawl,
In the sordid menagerie of our vices,

There is one even uglier and more wicked and filthier than the rest!
With no grand gesture nor a great cry,
He would willingly lay the earth to waste
And swallow the world in a yawn:

It is boredom! – the eye filled with an unwitting tear,
He dreams of scaffolds and smokes his houkah.
You know him reader, that fastidious monster,
– Hypocrite reader, – my similar, – my brother!

The last two lines mark a sharp change from the inclusive 'we' to a direct and confrontational 'you'. Evil is no longer an abstract, an outside entity, issuing from an indistinct crowd – now it becomes personal. It issues from, and belongs, as much to me as to you. For Baudelaire, 'c'est l'ennui' (it is boredom) which is at the root of our wickedness. It is the condition by which 'evil' manifests itself.

The city of Paris in Sade's day was wild and convulsive – at one point in the midst of the Revolution, during 'The Terror', the streets literally ran with blood.⁴⁶ Some eighty years later when Baudelaire ran his eye over the city skyline it was an altogether different place. Now the streets ran with a multitude of people, businesses, and vehicles and yet more people. Post revolutionary, post 'The Terror', Paris had become the very epitome of a modern city, a hub of western modernity. If in 'Au Lecteur' Baudelaire gives us a body as a metropolis of vice, a menagerie of monsters, in 'Crepuscule Du Soir' (a poem later in the series) he gives us the city as a body, infected with the virus of humanity. As night falls prostitutes and their customers issue from the depths, like ants swarming out of an anthill that bursts, like a sore, swarming through the city streets, which are likened to the veins of a body.⁴⁷ Baudelaire speaks from the cusp of modernity, halfway between the 19th and 20th centuries, and he is dystopic about the future of newly modern humanity. The new industrial age is seen as giving the opportunity for man to indulge his every vice and desire, hence his use of the metaphor of the city as body, the body as city. Taking up Sade's notion of apathy, Baudelaire posits that our over-indulgence and our over-exposure to vices, desires and the horrors that surround us lead us to perpetrate more wickedness and to be concerned less and less for our fellow citizens. But unlike Sade, who proposes that one should make the effort to stay indifferent, to ensure that one has no relation to another, Baudelaire seems to warn us that apathy is the result of our vices and perversions. My interest in Baudelaire lies in the way that he posits the body as site for his poetic discourses and in the way that his discourse is an articulation of the crisis of identity that faced modern man. It functions as a precursor to a different understanding of the changing relationship of individuals to each other. Marshall McLuhan, one hundred years later, pointed to the final line in 'Au Lecteur' as being a reading of the imminent collapse between author and reader.

'The involvement of role creates the image that is collective process. Baudelaire's hypocrite lecteur, mon semblage, mon frere, is itself an image that compresses the entire process in question. It is the recognition that there is no more division between

the poet and his audience, between producer and consumer. The reader puts on the audience as his corporate or tribal mask. The audience creates the author as the author shapes the awareness of the audience.' [McLuhan, 1969]

The significance of this feature in our understanding of the actions of new media is something I will return to later in the thesis. Fast forward to the end of the 20th century and Baudelaire's poetic discourse, along with a Sadean rationale are now manifest in the popular fictional character of Hannibal Lecter. But now it is incorporation as cannibalism, rather than sexual excess/promiscuity that shapes his character.

The characters of both Norma Desmond and Hannibal Lecter are shaped through a violent eroticism – hers is suicidal and narcissistic and his murderous and oral. And whereas Norma's isolation from the 'real' world is emphasised, the emphasis for Hannibal is that we, the (real) viewers are the same as he because we can not only empathise and understand his rationale, but that we can take pleasure in cannibalistic actions. We are looking at things in the same way; the monster we see on the screen is an accumulation of our reflected, monstrous selves. Sade proposes a destruction of any belief in the necessity for relation with others in the world – his extreme rationalism situates cruelty as 'natural' and declares that to be unique one must be cruel, even to the point of death. In contrast Baudelaire posits 'human nature' as the source of 'evil' but he concludes that there is a collective responsibility for such evil. You and me, reader and author alike have gone as far as we can go as separate and distinct individuals. Whether we like it or not, newly technologised humanity, with everything that is available to it, can no longer sustain the fantasy of the individual as alone and irresponsible in the world without terrible consequences.

The resolutely non-relational performances as embodied by the Norma Desmond and Hannibal Lecter characters, and in the writings of Sade, offer us a bleak vision of humanity. It is obviously not the whole picture, anymore than the phenomenological

position of Merleau-Ponty. Despite his gender blindness, he designates objects and subjects in the world – and even the spaces in-between – a kind of utopian equality. However, I contest that there is a productive tension between relationality and non-relationality. I return time and again to Sade and to these films, to suck up, or to appropriate, or, better, to incorporate a creative response to these depictions of utter isolation. I use it, like an ingredient, in my performance work that I situate firmly as reciprocal and as relational exchange. The non-relationality exposed in the examples I give, are all extreme responses to relationality, but as a form of rejection. Norma goes insane in her isolated and fake existence, refusing the 'real' world. Hannibal is constantly pursued and imprisoned because of society's anathema to his actions, yet he continues his attacks. Sade, also imprisoned for his excesses (in reality), relentlessly amplified the perversion and cruelty in his work – always turning up the heat, so to speak.

In the next chapter, I remain initially with non-relationality in a consideration of the correspondence between sex and cannibalism. Subsequently I draw out a consideration of the limits and attendant anxieties of the technologised body in the 21st century and discuss our variable responses to a world saturated by technology.

Chapter 4: Lovebites

This chapter is a reading of bodily excess and appetites and questions how the performance of desire is choreographed. If one posits the mind as organic and body as a technology of desire can we understand performance as cannibalistic, as perverse? My argument here is concerned with shaping ideas of vertigo and desire in relation to the anxious subject.

I consider cannibalistic fantasy and its relation to incorporation through a comparative analysis of Abraham & Torok's writing on introjection/incorporation and Georges Bataille's concept of appropriation and of waste (the excess of the body). Reflecting upon contemporary ideas of the limits of 'body', I link this to Didier Anzieu's formulation of a fantasy surface to the Ego (Skin Ego) and offer up a consideration of private and public spaces and bodies. I contrast this with the arguments of Marshall McLuhan, specifically his paradigm of anxiety as a cultural model. I expand on the significance of narcissism here and explore the issue, through a critique of Christopher Lasch (*The Culture of Narcissism*), and through an examination of the surgery project of the French artist Orlan.

I conclude with speculation about conventionally defined limits of the body, via Bataille's argument that proposes heterogeneity as a more effective means of understanding the body and its shifting boundaries. This allows me to address the problem I have uncovered in my previous chapters. It differentiates between the affirmative value for technologised performance through a phenomenological understanding and the negative value of a non-relational performance of incorporation. I attempt here to consider, through Bataille, the potential for understanding and reconfiguring this polarity through his ideas of excess and heterogeneity.



Lovebites

'Incorporation denotes a fantasy, introjection a process.' [Abraham & Torok. 1994, 125]

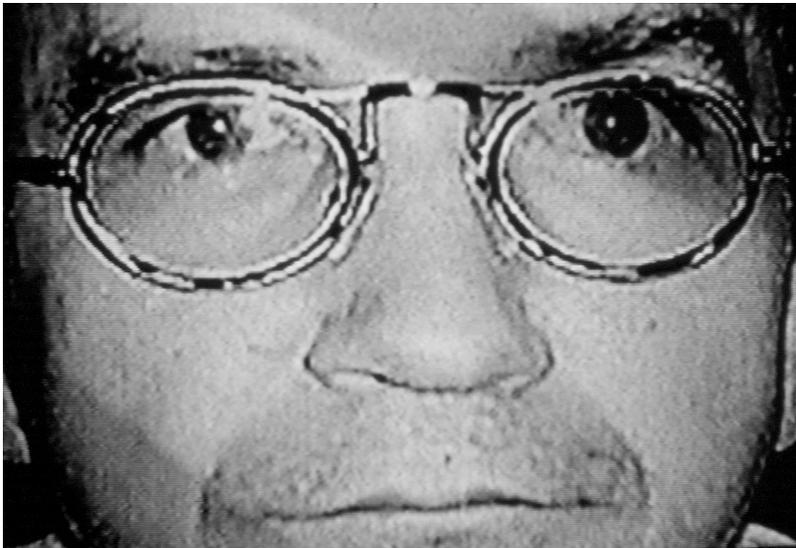
The fantasy that is Hannibal Lecter doubles back on itself. As a fantasy character he embodies the fantasy of incorporation and literally enacts it through cannibalism. This is metaphor deftly turned on its head (through metaphor made literal in action). In the real world, Armin Meiwes who was recently imprisoned for eating the body of another man (Bernd Brandes), presents us with a non-fictional example of cannibalism that represents only itself.¹ Although many media reports described him as a real life Lecter, Armin Meiwes is a very different sort of cannibal. The character of Lecter is a metaphorical representation of the fantasy of incorporation – a fantasy of a fantasy depicted through literal action – and as such the idea of incorporation is reinforced or doubled.² Through ingestion of human flesh, guiltlessly dispatched, the metaphor is loaded – it posits the idea that not only are we more or less the same, all capable of extreme and self serving acts of cruelty, but also that this cruelty is intrinsic to human nature. As an extreme fictional embodiment of incorporation, it also ensures a distinction between artifice and literal enactment. Cannibalistic fantasy symbolically enacts or performs non-relationality whereas Meiwes literally ate his own fantasy. The act of cannibalism was the relationship between Meiwes and Brandt.

Real acts of cannibalism take different forms. There are three primary forms of cannibalism – spiritual/ritualistic, survival and criminal. Spiritual cannibalism takes two forms: exo-cannibalism (the culture of eating members of another group or tribe, associated with power and aggression) and endo-cannibalism (the consumption of members of one's own group, tribe or family, usually post-mortem and occasionally referred to as compassionate). Survival cannibalism is possibly the only accepted form of cannibalism, in which a person eats another in order to survive. However consumption of human flesh remains socially unacceptable even if justified – many countries legislate against cannibalism and in those that do not, participants may find

themselves charged with another related crime such as necrophilia or murder. Criminal cannibalism itself has four main forms although they often overlap or combine. They are sexual, aggression, ritual and epicurean.³

Understood mainly as a psychosexual disorder, sexual cannibalism is the sexualisation of another's flesh. Sexual gratification is sought in the consumption of flesh but usually there is a combination of factors at play. Associated with necrophilia, murder and with sadism, sexual cannibalism often includes all four forms. Ed Gein (a notorious American serial killer) had sex with corpses, he peeled his victims skins away and wore them (he was the prototype for Buffalo Bill in the Lecter stories). He cannibalised some but not all of his victims. Another American serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer's sexual cannibalism was aggressive and more ritualistic in nature. He also claimed to have also achieved sexual gratification from eating the flesh of his victims. Armin Miewes seems to fall completely within the sexual cannibal category – he was sexually aroused by the fantasy of eating another person's flesh although the actual act was not to his liking. He only achieved sexual gratification through reliving the event via video playback and in the consumption of (parts of) Brandes' body. Perhaps in watching the video he was able to restore (to a degree and only for a moment) the fantasy and its erotic charge. The ritualistic element of his action was (sexually) sadistic although overt aggression seems to have played little part (Brandes consented to the whole scenario, it would seem). Although Miewes is/was a surprisingly non-aggressive cannibal, many acts of cannibalism (if not all) have to some extent an element of aggression to them. The desire to control or to have ultimate power over another person, motivated by fear or hostility, has its ultimate expression in the murder and consumption of another human being.⁴

Ritualistic cannibalism, in its modern manifestation is most often associated with satanic or cult groups. Usually the practice is founded on the belief that by consuming a person one absorbs their energy or power and in this is the echo of a tribal cannibalism. Jeffrey Dahmer claimed that his victims became part of him spiritually



through his consumption of their flesh and he constructed altars out of their body parts. Epicurean cannibalism, in its pure form, is perhaps the least usual form of cannibalism. The term refers to the consumption of human flesh on nutritional or taste values. Often it is as a result of other forms of cannibalism that the taste for human flesh is uncovered and most high profile epicurean cannibals are motivated initially by sexual, sadistic or ritualistic desires. All of which makes Hannibal Lecter a most unusual cannibal and quite different to Miewes, Miewes' motivation was sexual and sadistic whereas Lecter's cannibalism is driven by taste. Lecter is an aggressive, epicurean cannibal with no real reason/excuse for what he does, other than an abiding distaste for other people and an abiding taste for their flesh. Miewes, as sexual cannibal is unusual in his lack of aggression and is quite unlike the fictional Lecter. There are no real Lecters out there (so far as we can tell) – he is a mythic but modern monster, a metaphorical mix of fact and fiction. Yet he represents for us some of our incorporative instincts and his actions are based on very real things that human beings do to each other.

In fantasy, incorporation can be taken to its extremes (shaped into the fictional character of Lecter for example) without necessarily harming the subject that shapes it. However, incorporation is not the same thing as cannibalism – it denotes a fantasy, essentially a narcissistic one, whereas cannibalism is a real and deadly action performed by a real person in the real world. The character of Hannibal Lecter is not defined through actual cannibalism but what it represents through fantasy. When we look into Lecter's eyes, we are looking at ourselves. In the actual world fantasy and reality often combine and collide intrapsychically but an imbalance or a failure to distinguish between the two can be dangerous. Psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok, in their exploration of the relation between incorporation and introjection, speak of the role of fantasy in the process:

'When it is not truncated or deformed, fantasy can be doubly telling as regards both the subject and the danger to be parried. This is so because fantasy is inseparable from

the intrapsychic state of affairs it is supposed to protect as well as from the metapsychological reality that demands a change. [Abraham & Torok, 1994, 126]

Fantasy protects but it also signifies the acceptance of a desire for a change in the subject's state of being and it has a phenomenal power because it is fantasy. In Meiwes' case, it seems that his fantasies had become inverted somehow, to the extent that he was compelled to enact them, that is he took a fantasy literally. No longer protected by his fantasy he had to become it, or rather, the fantasy inverted and he became subject to it. He really ate someone. He went to jail. He made his cannibalistic fantasy, whatever its causes or origins, real and thus destroyed its representational value. On the other hand, Lecter is not meant to represent a real individual as he is not based on actual serial killers.⁵ He is an accretion of literary and ideological references to a post-industrial, post-colonial identity crisis in Western culture. A modern day Lycaon and popular archetype, he stands for identity as emptied out of any compassion or empathy for others in the world, as shaped through consumption.⁶ Like the Marquis de Sade's libertine he puts forward an extreme rationalism constructed through a dispassionate violence that culminates in a condition that is not so much existential as autistic.⁷ This is a dystopic vision of modern man as beast, a creature driven by fantasy and the refusal to care for or relate to the actual world.

Incorporation itself is a kind of inverted metaphor that speaks of the actual act, as well as of the thing that it represents. Further, it (as fantasy) occurs in response to a gap or a loss – at the point where introjection (as normative process of identification) should have taken place. Abraham and Torok describe this in terms of a refusal to mourn the loss of a desired object.

The fantasy of incorporation is the introduction of all or part of a love object or a thing into one's body, possessing, expelling or alternatively acquiring, keeping, losing it... The fantasy of incorporation reveals a gap within the psyche; it points to

something that is missing just where introjection should have occurred.' [Abraham & Torok, 1994, 126] ⁸

In psychoanalytic thought, perception and introjection are the primary processes of identification; incorporation is a fantasy that comes into play when there is a refusal or inability to introject spontaneously, or when one becomes aware of the introjection process. When a gap in the psyche is revealed it also indicates a refusal of the 'normal' intersubjective relation, and is manifest as a refusal to care for others or, in psychoanalytic terms, a refusal to mourn. In this way, we read the over-determined fantasy as damaged or damaging to 'normal' behaviour. But is over-determined fantasy always a bad thing? When the difference between reality and fantasy becomes indistinguishable, as in Miewes' case, it is fair to say that it is wholly damaging (not least to the man who was eaten). But what of popular fantasy like Lecter? Lecter is the heir to Baudelaire's dystopic vision of humanity and he carries with him a great disturbance because of what he implies. ⁹ Rather than conclude that cannibalistic fantasy is a manifestation of humanity's sickness it is more productive to question how this particular exhibition of desire is performed and identify what it signifies.

Dissolute Bodies

As an embodied representation of oral incorporation that actually eats the bodies of other human beings, Lecter literally turns the world to shit. This 'wasting' of another body disorders ideas of a homogeneous and contained system of being and it is precisely this disordering or disturbance that is the source of fascination. The horror of the observer, when the act is represented rather than actual is intertwined with pleasure. Humans from all cultures have always taken great delight in tales of monsters, in bloody and outrageous acts of cruelty. As George Bataille points out, in 'The Cruel Practice of Art',

'When horror is subject to the transfiguration of an authentic art, it becomes a pleasure, an intense pleasure, but a pleasure all the same.' But, he asks later *'what are our reasons for being seduced by the very thing that, in a fundamental fashion, signifies damage to us, the very thing that has the power to evoke the more complete loss we undergo in death?'* [Bataille, 1985]

Bataille's question is important – what is it about horror that seduces us? What is it we recognise and become fascinated with? It's hard to speak of and if we do we may find ourselves publicly censored. No stranger to controversy, Baudelaire attempted to articulate his experience of facing the delights and horrors of excess and the subsequent sense of losing oneself in them.¹⁰ In *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, Baudelaire speaks from the position of being both fascinated and horrified by the results of, in the first place his own excess and in the second the excesses of the society around him. His perspective is dystopic, yet like the addict, he cannot quite help but betray the pleasure he takes in speaking of terrible things. He speaks – exquisitely and seductively – from experience. For Baudelaire, excess is necessarily a bad thing – its consequence is apathy and in apathy is damnation.

'Il ferait volontiers de la terre un debris. Et dans un baillement avalerait le monde...'
[Baudelaire, 1972, 7]

This representation of *l'ennui* or boredom signals apathy or indifference. For Baudelaire, apathy drives modern man to horrendous acts and the inaction alluded to in the poem – that we can be unmoved and at a distance whilst observing the death or suffering of a fellow human – is symptomatic of the 'evil' within us. Describing the one that is *'more evil than all the rest'*, the one who would *'voluntarily reduce the earth to waste, swallow the world in a yawn'* he implicates not only himself as writer but us as readers. That we could create such imagery or consider such sights as pleasurable, that we could remain impassive to them, he implies, is symptomatic of our own diseased natures. In Baudelaire's poem (*Au Lecteur*) the one that watches impassively, takes on

his hookah sucking in the (hashish?) smoke.¹¹ The body is not only distanced from the crowd – the world of social beings – observing voyeuristically, but it is in a state of torpor. Inhalation of smoke and incorporation of imagery are the only deeds of this otherwise inactive body. Whilst the lyricism of Baudelaire’s language in the ‘Fleurs du mal’ series of poems gives us the unmistakable taste of sensuous bodily pleasure, his imagery is bleak, speaking of death and horror. The words speak of enslavement by that infernal chemist, the devil, who concocts substances that alter our consciousness and who bewitches us with baroque and horrific imagery. All of which cause intense bodily pleasure, but the price to pay is a loss of sovereignty.¹² The awful horror of things is revealed in Baudelaire’s realisation that it is we who are responsible. For Baudelaire, modern man stared into the mouth of hell, a hell of his own realisation, fantasy and desire. A century later we have a different reader. Lecteur becomes Lecter as we find ourselves reflected in the face of the beast.

Baudelaire’s positioning of excess as ‘evil’ is ultimately a moral position. The logic we employ to designate good/bad and positive/negative values to human activity reveals its inadequacy when it seeks to homogenise being and relies on spurious universals to do so (monotheistic morality/scientific objectivity/the body). In his consideration of the ‘use value’ of the Marquis de Sade, Georges Bataille argues that humans and their societies are composed of two contending drives – appropriation and excretion. [Bataille, 1985] Sade’s proffered excesses are positioned both literally and metaphorically as waste. Sexual activity in Sade’s writings is not productive in that it has nothing to do with reproduction – for example, pregnancy nearly always means death – and in this it is entirely excessive. Furthermore Sade’s insistence on coprophagy suggests more than an exceptionally exotic perversion – the body, for the coprophile, functions as a means of production, nothing must be wasted, not even the waste of the body. Bataille asserts that the body is subject to socially imposed limits but these are limits that the body continually resists in its production of waste. In his model, waste and excess reveal the failure in systematic thought and its philosophies. Systematic thought, as it fails, demonstrates entropy precisely because it is homogenous and

homogeneity is aimed towards perpetual modification of individual elements. For Bataille, the unsustainability of the homogenous, systematic model is exposed, because it cannot account for excess. He defines appropriation as the defining characteristic of homogeneity and excretion as the result and proof of heterogeneity. Whilst there are definite parallels here with the psychoanalytic readings of introjection and projection, he does not argue towards reparation of the unified individual (as this would be homogeneous). Instead, his main focus is the economy of consumption (incorporation) and the body as heterogeneous entity.

'Man does not only appropriate his food, but also the different products of his activity: clothes, furniture, dwellings, and instruments of production. Finally, he appropriates land divided into parcels. Such appropriations take place by means of a more or less conventional homogeneity (identity) established between possessor and the object possessed...In this respect, production can be seen as the excretory phase of appropriation, and the same is true of selling.' [Bataille, 1985, 95]

Homogeneity relies on individual, discrete components that operate within a single system – a system that contains everything. For example, in Bataille's reading, religions such as Islam, Christianity and Buddhism are homogeneous systems. They place a single deity 'above' the world, a deity who encompasses everything and every being in the world. In this way 'God' becomes the name for a system that contains everything in the world (God contains the world).¹³ Likewise for Bataille, scientific enquiry is a homogeneous system because it isolates individual phenomena, analyses and then collates the individual elements into a single result. However, the law of this system means that first the system must be maintained. That which does not accord with prescribed scientific thought will always be discounted (from science). Indeed the methodology of scientific enquiry is to isolate phenomena and to discount all but the individual components. The homogenic system cannot account for the actual individual body because not all bodies are the same. The individual body resists

systematic thought – it resists because it always exceeds homogeneity through its production of waste and through its erotic drives.

Psychoanalytic thought reads incorporation as fantasy (as impaired introjection) and understands it as a refusal to mourn loss. The substitution of fantasy is read as a regression to a narcissistic condition, it is played out on the body (at times to extremes) and is read as abnormal or unusual – it is a problem to be solved. In contrast, Bataille reads excretion as the main drive accompanying appropriation (broadly equivalent to the psychoanalytic concept of introjection) and uses this economy as a means to subvert preconceptions about the limits of the body. Appropriation read through the trope of consumption, emphasises the materiality of the human condition. In considering the actual experience of an individual's body rather than a single and abstracted idea of 'the body', incorporation necessarily produces waste.

Bataille reads the body as being in conflict with the limits set by the social configuration of 'normal' subjectivity. In modern capitalist societies, the body exposes the limitations of an exchange-value system because its bodily functions exceed the governing ideas of exchange and profit. The waste products of the body are accorded an entirely negative value in a homogenous system, whereas Sadean thought ascribes bodily waste and other emissions as productive (positive). Reading through Sade, Bataille contests that by considering waste and excessive sexual practices (i.e. biologically non-reproductive and cruel) we can better understand what is at stake when we speak of 'the body'. He takes examples of the enactment of excess, in this and other writings, not so much to celebrate such practice but rather to show the limits in our conceptualisation of life. It is in this way that he argues that philosophy is an appropriation that necessitates waste.

'The interest of philosophy resides in the fact that, in opposition to science or common sense, it must positively envisage the waste products of intellectual appropriation. Nevertheless, it most often envisages these waste products only in

abstract forms of totality (nothingness, infinity, the absolute), to which it itself cannot give a positive content; it can thus freely proceed in speculations that more or less have as a goal, all things considered, the sufficient identification of an endless world with a finite world, an unknowable (noumenal) world with the known (phenomenal) world. [Bataille, 1985, 96]

The philosophical desire to appropriate exposes nothingness, infinity and the absolute, as its own particular waste products. It ultimately accords a negative value to waste and reveals its homogenous structure in its allocation of void as nothingness when, according to Bataille, nothing *is* excess. Every modern society, every city, every human being produces waste but Bataille bids us to take account of it as he reads this waste as revealing a resistance to the homogenous, normative and dominant system of capitalism. Capitalism generates a throwaway culture but it discounts the importance of waste, waste is counted as nothing, is designated as void. However, the by-products of any society, or for that matter any body, do not simply disappear or vanish. They have a material and psychic presence, even if we choose not to look at, or to account, for them. For artists, debris and waste have been a rich source of inspiration and raw material – the history of the found object in art attests to this. Artistic practice can be heterogeneous because it (sometimes) uses waste productively. Waste, for Bataille, insists on heterogeneity. He defines heterology, in the first place, by what it is not. It is not a science, which can only apply itself to homogenous elements.

'Above all, heterology is opposed to any homogeneous representation of the world, in other words, to any philosophical system. The goal of such representations is always the deprivation of our universe's sources of excitation and the development of a servile human species.' [Bataille, 1985, 97]

Bataille argues that we rethink the parameters of what we understand by transgression and excess in order to escape an oppressively constant condition of servility.¹⁴ Rather than seek to erase the idea of transgression he bids us look closer at

our excesses so that we may discover better what it is to be human in an age of global capitalism. In Bataille's terminology psychoanalysis is a science of the mind and therefore homogeneous, but it uncovers the importance of incorporation in shaping our understanding of being physically in the world. Further, Abraham and Torok's reading of incorporation as anti-metaphoric indicates that the concept itself resists the limits of the psychoanalytic 'system' and what we consider to be 'normal'. The remit of psychoanalysis is to identify our limits and then to attempt to repair the damage done when they are exceeded.¹⁵

As I have argued, the trope of incorporation is fundamental in shaping identity and is especially significant in the investigation of the excessive vagaries of the flesh, as evident in specific art practices. I do not necessarily situate excess (or narcissism) as a problem to be solved or effaced but rather as an issue that can be productively and creatively explored. Concerning the specifics of my particular interest – the body in performance – the excess I speak of is understood broadly. Hyper-visibility, harm, or violence done to or by the body, public display of the body or sexual activity are immediate examples. I also locate as excessive less obvious responses or strategies. The body that bleeds, that sweats, spits or weeps, that shakes and shivers, the body that endures physical or mental stress, the body that behaves badly or madly, all in the name of art – these traits are also evidence of excess (excess of the contained and of the ordered).

Positioned as productive, waste and excess signal resistance to conventional understandings of the limits of the body. Earlier in this chapter I wrote, in relation to Baudelaire, that the price for total sensuous indulgence is the loss of sovereignty and implied that this logic does not stand up. This is not to dismiss the actual experience however. This loss of sovereignty equates (metaphorically) to the idea of selling one's soul. It implies that there is a price to pay, that there is an exchange value for bodily indulgence. That a body may be led into addiction or disease is not the point though – it is rather that we are products of our culture and as such we have been schooled to

believe that the axis of pleasure and bodily desire is an axis of evil. We believe in exchange value even if our bodies resist a closed (homogenous) system and we maintain an economy that cannot account for the waste it produces. As psychoanalysis has demonstrated the degree of prohibition attached to an object of desire is related to the intensity of desire for it. A body in the throes of desire is an anxious body in many ways. This anxiety is to some degree generated by a fear of losing control of oneself, of letting something/someone else take control. Rather than read anxiety as a toxic signifier, rather than turn away from it, if we explore that anxiety it is possible to see it as symptomatic of the assumed limits set on the body. The fear of 'losing oneself' becomes a crisis of identity and subsequently a crisis of the body. In this crisis we can detect not a response to 'evil' but rather a response to the potential for change, a response to the limits by which we judge who we are in the world becoming uncertain, with the potential to be redrawn.

In *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan describes the late twentieth century as an 'Age of Anxiety' and analyses the effects of 'electric media' on contemporary society. [McLuhan, 1964] I do not intend to engage in a detailed analysis of McLuhan's body of work here, but I do want to take up his point about anxiety, in relation to media, and question how this impacts on our ideas of identity. For McLuhan this age of anxiety is precipitated by a shift away from the idea of self as a detached observer of the world, an idea shaped through Renaissance theories of perspectival vision.¹⁶ He argues that electric media has radically altered global societies through the rapid compression of time and space that it effects. As such it threatens our ideas of self because it demands inclusion and participation – the world is now a global village – and we can no longer take refuge behind the fantasy of a self apart from the world. The following quotes come from the introduction to the book.

'After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the western world is imploding. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology,

we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as the planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man – the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses our nerves by the various media... Any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex.' [McLuhan, 1964, 3]

'To behold, use or perceive any extension of ourselves in technological form is necessarily to embrace it...It is this continuous embrace of our own technology in daily use that puts us in the Narcissus role of subliminal awareness and numbness in relation to these images of ourselves.' [McLuhan, 1964, 50]

Written forty years ago, McLuhan's remarkably prescient argument pre-dates personal computer use and the advent of the Internet by two decades, yet his argument is still both provocative and relevant. Two things in particular strike me when thinking about McLuhan's theories. The first is his position that anxiety is the symptom of this radical shift in understanding identity and consciousness – this accords with an understanding of body/performance art as symptomatic of a contemporary crisis of identity and body, played out publicly and anxiously. Secondly, his concept of narcissism, described as a 'narcosis', a condition that he argues we must escape from or snap out of, can be contested through examining the positive aspects of a deliberate act of narcissism (as in certain practices within body/performance art). I take up the point about narcissism later in this chapter but first I consider his concept of the Age of Anxiety.

Public & Private Bodies

McLuhan's understanding of the mechanical age as defined through fragmentation – the machine being a congregation of discrete parts and functions – posits fragmentation as a consequence of the alphabet and print technology as fostering a



process of specialisation and detachment. Like literature, the machine operates on the principle of a linear sequence or series of fragmented parts. One word follows another, just as one process follows another. However, there is *'no principle of causality in a mere sequence'* even if we assume it so. For McLuhan, the advent of electricity irrevocably altered the association of sequence with causality because it made things instant. The radio, the telegraph, the telephone and then television gave us communication and information in an instant. Just as the world has flooded into our personal spaces we have become exposed to and implicated in the lives of others in a way that, for McLuhan, is akin to that of tribal societies. If the Renaissance gave us the detached observer and mechanisation emphasised individual self-contained components functioning separately, the electrical age reversed the effect and what was once private became public. As he points out, we still try to make the new media work according to older ways of thinking that cannot account for change. This poses for us a serious dilemma – consider contemporary concerns about surveillance for example. We have to balance our claims to privacy against society's need to know and governmental demands for ever greater security. Increasingly we encourage each other to be fearful. Our traditional ideas about private thoughts, movements and transactions are *'very seriously threatened'* by systems of surveillance and immediate electronic access to personal information. In a modern city like London, even before I leave home my whereabouts can be traced via my mobile phone or if I use the Internet. The moment I leave my house, I am tracked and watched. On a typical day, in theory, all of my movements, transactions, personal thoughts as expressed in emails or by phone, can be monitored. I am overlooked constantly, I can feel electronic eyes upon me at all times and it makes me feel self-conscious. It is as if the point of view has been reversed – the screens are now watching me. If we take up McLuhan's point that our nervous system now extends in a global embrace, then it is no wonder that we feel so exposed.

'This is the Age of Anxiety for the reason of the electric implosion that compels commitment and participation, quite regardless of any 'point of view'. The partial and

specialized character of the viewpoint, however noble, will not serve at all in the electric age. [McLuhan, 1964, 5]

The erosion of private spaces is nothing new, as I will discuss later, but in the forty years since McLuhan's book was written his arguments about surveillance have been vindicated. It is now the case that privacy has, in effect, been abolished. The satellites in the skies above our heads have effectively seen to that. Someone is always watching you and we are always watching ourselves. The system by which we have traditionally – mechanically and systematically – ordered the relation of private thoughts and communication with others is vanishing. The diminishing phenomenon of the hand-written letter is symptomatic of this change. When time and physicality are effaced, when meetings between people are virtual, it is hard to know where 'I' end and where 'you' begin. Another person's thoughts and feelings can be communicated instantly, flickering before our eyes on tiny screens in the shape of words or images. Likewise, my consciousness can be represented or simulated in a physical space distant to my body.

Considering the mass of information pumped at us daily through our TV sets, newspapers, the Internet, advertising hoarding and televisual advertising on buses, informational noise becomes cacophonous and stressful. Its effect is cumulative – I have no need or want for all that information but all the same it gets in my eyes, in my head, and becomes part of me whether I like or not. Constant monitoring and increasing noise are features of our contemporary world, as are the contraction of time and space. Through electricity, through electronic media, our world has evolved from a system of separate and uninvolved entities connected by mechanical sequences into a place where connectivity itself and inter-relativity are now the dominant principles. Even if I accept that this is symptomatic of a fundamental change in human relations and that it is part of a new way of thinking about myself and my relation with others in the world, I am aware of a deep-seated anxiety. This anxiety, in part, arises from the question of how we reconcile our traditional ideas of homogeneity, a mechanised culture comprised of separate autonomous components, with heterogeneity, the world

experienced immediately as flow, as non-sequential, as parallel processes. Loss of sovereignty is a real and palpable experience because I am no longer sure where the boundaries of self and body are. I can no longer be sure that I am in control of myself.

My body, our bodies have become more exposed, more extended and more augmented than ever before. The burgeoning visibility of the body is eroding the idea of privacy and the private is increasingly becoming public. In this next section I explore how we have shaped the idea of privacy, firstly through fundamental changes in ways of seeing the world during the Renaissance. Secondly I analyse the relation of the subject to his/her skin and I read this through Didier Anzieu's concept of a 'Skin Ego'. Privacy is not something that has always been with us; privacy as a concept and reality has evolved over the past four and a half centuries. For McLuhan this evolution has been occurring since the Socrates warned of the dangers of writing things down (and Plato ignored him), but the key evolutionary 'leap' came with the Renaissance. The way that we saw the world and the way we communicated with each other changed fundamentally during the 16th and 17th centuries. The Renaissance was the defining period wherein visibility fractured – rather than the visible being all-that-there-is-to-be-seen it became solely defined by the point of view of the detached observer. The Renaissance legacy here is the vanishing point, at which point the self is effaced from the scene and placed outside of the frame. From this point on everything is determined visibly and through the eye of the beholder. McLuhan writes:

'Art, or the graphic translation of a culture, is shaped by the way space is perceived. Since the Renaissance...this conception of space was in terms of a perspective projection upon a plane surface consisting of formal units of measurement...'
[McLuhan, 2001,]

The separation of the viewer from the scene thus engenders the idea of privacy through the act of seeing but not being seen. The reproduction of actuality, through perspectivalism also gives rise to the idea of forgery or the counterfeit. Thus the

concepts of the false and the natural are born of the Renaissance and the idea of a *natural* point of view is established.¹⁷ In Britain, ideas about public and private spaces began to change due to the influence of the Italian renaissance, which permeated English culture during the sixteenth century. The 'Elizabethan Style' in architecture was the transitional stage of the English Renaissance, retaining some characteristics from the Tudor style but tending towards symmetry, in the classic style.¹⁸ Buildings, once communal spaces were now divided up into separate (enclosed) rooms. As the living space of the Elizabethans began to change so too did attitudes about the bodies that inhabited them. Frances Barker, in *The Tremulous Private Body*, makes the argument that the body first enters the realm of privacy during the Elizabethan age, as demonstrated by the subsequent publication of diaries by Samuel Pepys.

'The enclosure of the Pepysian moment is its decisive quality. The text itself rehearses the situation it discloses as it inlays seclusion within seclusion. The very writing, which as its epistemological principle grasps the outer world as an accessible transparency, recedes from that world towards an inner location where the soul – or as modern terminology has it, positionality in discourse – apparently comes to fill the space of meaning and desire.' [Barker, 1984, 9]

Writing, as an expression of 'inner space' first becomes apparent during the 17th and 18th centuries. In his diaries, Pepys speaks at some length of his torment with regards to his body but his situation is not unique. It articulates a social condition that had hitherto not been spoken of before (in print at least).

'...In [the Pepysian condition] a complex of over-determined relations coalesce, governing bourgeois subjectivity at its founding moment. By no means the tortured predicament of a single, aberrant individual – even its individuation is historically produced – this situation is the result of the revolutionary process that preceded it...in the space of a relatively few years, a new set of relations between state and citizen, body and soul, language and meaning was fashioned. The older sovereignty of the

Elizabethan period was disassembled and in its place was established a conjunction of novel social spaces and activities, bound together by transformed lines of ideological and physical force, among which new images of the body and its passions were a crucial, if increasingly occluded element. [Barker, 1984, 10]

'Crucial yet increasingly occluded' is the significant phrase for me here. Over the preceding years individuals have learnt to navigate the necessary yet denied body through a series of strategies. It was in the 17th century that attitudes to the body, to secrecy, began to change.¹⁹ By the time the Victorian era arrived, sexuality was being confined to the brothel or home, hidden behind the closed doors the bedroom. The whore and the wife occupied distinctly separate situations – pleasure was divorced from procreation. Homosexuality was criminalised and, according to (Victorian) Royal decree, lesbians simply did not exist. It is now generally accepted that by the mid 20th century this era of repression was beginning to reverse and although we are still haunted by our (relatively) recent Victorian past, sexuality *'far from undergoing a process of restriction, on the contrary has been subjected to a mechanism of increasing incitement.*' [Foucault, 1990, 3] In these early days of the 21st century, we sit astride a new dilemma, that of the newly revealed body. This is a body that is inundated with information, a body always watched, a body whose limits are no longer determined by the skin that covers it, a body whose sexuality is no longer solely defined through procreation or gender stereotypes but through pleasure.

'Unlike the secret half-life to which the Pepysian corporeality has been assigned, but from which it continues nevertheless to agitate the newly sovereign speech of a disembodied and Cartesian subjectivity, this early body lies athwart that divide between subject and object, discourse and world, that characterizes the later dispensation.' [Barker, 1984, 24]

Our 21st century bodies, now unsupported by the *'deleterious separations'* upon which modernity was erected, are vulnerable. Successive innovations in technology, and in

particular the shift from mechanical to digital, have peeled back our skins and exposed us. The body is now a host for both object and subject and is laid open to a relentless struggle for sovereignty. Historically and culturally constructed, today's body is in dispute with the unrealistic limits that define it. The idea of 'body' is becoming more and more illusory – body can now only be defined as this body in (temporary) relation to that body. We no longer lie 'athwart' the divide between subject and object (as Pepys did), there is no longer a clear divide. The relation between subject and object is *of the body*, it has collapsed into the body, and attendant on this vulnerable and exposed body is a deep and abiding anxiety. For Barker, the modern body is 'forced down' in the face of discourse because unlike the older body, it can no longer bear the central signification that we demand of the body, as flesh. The body as self-centre, as unity, as truth, has become indiscreet and public. Private spaces are disappearing and now the body as the ultimate private space is under threat. Meanings in this new age are changed but the body is also being transformed and relocated. Prior to this change, the body was the measure by which we understood immediacy and the unmediated; it was both the site of desire and of penalty.

'The carnality of the body has been dissolved and dissipated until it can become reconstituted in writing at a distance from itself...as the flesh has become de-realized, representation which becomes at last representational is separated from it and puts in train a mode of signification for which, to borrow a word from Derrida, the body has become supplementary. Neither wholly present, nor wholly absent, the body is confined, ignored, exscribed from discourse, and yet remains at the edge of visibility, troubling the space from which it has been banished.' [Barker, 1984, 64]

Although Barker's analysis focuses on text and the impact of writing on ideas of individuality, her words are apt if we understand our bodies to have been inexorably approaching a vanishing point. However, contrary to disappearing we have never been more visibly represented. Indeed, we seem to have multiplied – as I argued in chapter 2, more levels of simultaneous presence are now available to us. More than this, the

contemporary and supplemental body is now hypersensitive, subject to more sensory input than ever before. It is more tangibly present, yet more noticeably absent, through the various forms of telepresence, than the older bodies of modernity and the Renaissance. Troubled and troubling, this contemporary body no longer fits with existing assumptions about presence. Alluquere Rosanne Stone, in her influential work *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* makes the case that the 'virtual age' offers something new in terms of communication and presence. The shifts in the relationship of body and self, and of self and the world, call into question the location of agency and in doing so, reveal that *'the accustomed grounding of social interaction in the physical facticity of human bodies is changing.'* [Stone, 1995, 17] We now communicate according to the principles of parallel processing – we network and we do it virtually. This immateriality feels strange – it feels as if we have become unanchored but always when the connection is broken, we snap back into 'reality', we are slapped back into the flesh. It's a tiny shock, a lurch back into viscerality that provokes uncertainty about my body's relation to the virtual encounter. At moments I can no longer say for sure where I am in the world – it seems that I am constantly redrawing my relation with the world with increasing acceleration.

'One factor that bears importantly on the emergence of virtual systems is a change in the character of public space and the development and articulation of particular kinds of private space.' [Stone, 1995, 18] ²⁰

For the early Elizabethans, the emergence of privacy came with the development of separate interiors within small dwellings. Four and a half centuries later, privacy has begun a rapid disintegration through the development of technology. This occurs clearly with surveillance, and in the increasing control that governments exert over their citizens' bodies. Covertly and indirectly it occurs in the dissolution of the idea of the individual. As I said previously, we have within us a powerful need for connectivity, for communication and company, not to mention physical contact, but this is always

tempered by anxiety about the loss of self/loss of sovereignty. Connectivity can be understood as systemic – as affecting the bodies of those who connect. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological interpretation of connectivity between subjects writes of it in terms of the Chiasm, as I discussed earlier, but he does not fully account for the anxiety and resistance attendant in giving oneself 'over to the flow'. The fear of losing a sense of oneself originates in the belief that beings are separate and discontinuous (to use Bataille's term). The affect of connectivity on the subject, on the subject's body, can then feel like a loss of control because the body responds reflexively. The sensation of a loss of sovereignty can be experienced as loss and anxiety, it can also be experienced as *jouissance* – the breathless pleasure of losing oneself *in* another accompanies trepidation at the thought of losing one's autonomy.

This contemporary identity crisis, whether we consider it to be engendered by the industrial revolution and modernity, or by the advent of the electrical age and new technologies, has evolved into a crisis of the body. Not only are we anxious because we are unclear as to where the divide between subject and object occurs, but we are anxious also because we no longer know what the limits of the body are. I can effect an immediate presence in another part of the world without leaving my chair but the implication of this reaches much further than the odd experience of online communication. We must rethink what we mean by the limits of the body, and if we take McLuhan's line that we are in the final stages of the extensions of humanity, we have to consider if the body any longer has any quantifiable limit.²¹

Skin (I've Got You Under My...)

How do we reconcile the idea that our bodies are infinitely extendable with the sure knowledge that our flesh is mortal, finite and vulnerable? Given that I accept Merleau-Ponty's concept of an immanent phenomenology, and given that technology extends the reach of my body, can I say where my body begins and ends? Where are my edges? Is my skin a surface that separates me from the world? The skin is the only organ that



covers the whole body. Touch is the only one of the external senses that possesses a reflexive structure. If I touch myself, my skin is both touching and touched. Touch doubles back on itself, is both feeling and felt.

Psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, in *Le Moi-Peau (Skin Ego)* reads skin in two ways: firstly as the basic 'datum' for both the organic and imaginary order and secondly as the first '*instrument and site of interaction with others.*' [Anzieu, 1989, 7] This is broken down as follows: the psyche (psychical functioning of an individual) has its support in both the biological and social bodies and the relation of that support is mutual – the psyche needs the body as flesh and the social group to function healthily. It requires the physical and the immaterial fused together and it needs other psyches by which to measure itself. In this reading fantasy has two functions – as the bridge or screen between psyche and body, and as the bridge or screen between the body, the world and other psyches. The Skin Ego is, for Anzieu, a principle, specifically a containment principle. '*A serious pathology of the Skin Ego would be an autistic envelope.*' [Anzieu, 1989, 7] This autistic envelope is shaped through a fixation on the idea of a common skin (an inter-uterine or infant fantasy) and this is, for him, proof of the existence of a Skin Ego.²²

He suggests that there has been a significant sea change in the human psyche over the past century, citing the increase in borderline/narcissistic cases since Freud's time. During that period, disturbances of the psyche were classified either as hysterical, phobic or obsessional, or as a combination of the three. It may be that we now categorise (the same) neuroses differently but whether the neuroses are the same or not, the fact of our changed understanding of them remains. Anzieu's understanding of this change is this; we no longer know what belongs to the self and what belongs to others and we are uncertain of the frontiers between psychical and physical (bodily) egos. This fluctuation and uncertainty can be accompanied by depression and the inability to distinguish between drives, between pleasure and pain. This can lead to a person experiencing '*a drive not as desire but as violence.*' [Anzieu, 1989, 8] Anzieu's

job as psychoanalyst is to restore these damaged and confused 'psychical envelopes'. My interest here is the trajectory he draws between the physical (skin) and the psychical (Skin Ego) as necessary for communication and how we distinguish the boundary between body and world. Our skin is the boundary of our physical body and we imagine it is a finite surface that keeps the outside out and our insides in. Through this, we understand the world in terms of finite (homogenous) entities sealed off from each other, in which inside and outside can be clearly defined. In this way, we define for ourselves 'personal space' and, if I consider myself a finite entity, I am at the centre of my universe. After all, if there is an inside and an outside there must be a centre – but in this we delude ourselves.²³

In a finite entity, the physiological centre is supposedly the brain but the centre of things turns out not to be a centre at all. Anzieu considers the physiological nature of the surfaces of the body and points out that the cortex (the grey matter of the brain where all the activity occurs) sits over the white matter inside like a cap. Our constant striving towards the centre, the origin, via the shell is undone as here, in the human brain, under the bone *'the centre is situated on the periphery.'* [Anzieu, 1989, 9] We are then faced, if not with a paradox, then with a mistake. This line of argument allows him to pose the following question: *'What if thought were as much an affair of the skin as of the brain? And what if the Ego – now defined as Skin Ego – had the structure of an envelope?'* [Anzieu, 1989, 9] The body here is understood as surface that folds in on itself like a Mobius strip.

'The brain and the skin are both surface entities, the internal surface (internal, that is, vis a vis the body as a whole) or cortex being in relation to the outside world through the mediation of an external surface or epidermis, and each of these two 'shells' consisting of at least two layers: the outer one protective, and the other, lying beneath it or in its orifices, serving to gather information or to filter exchanges. Thought, then, following the model of organisation of the nervous system, no longer

appears to be a process of segregation, a juxtaposition and association of kernels, but a matter of relations between surfaces, inserted one inside another.' [Anzieu, 1989, 9]

If the body is comprised of a Mobius strip-like surface this is not to say that the surface is sealed. Rather it is a porous, two-way system. Anzieu points out that cells have cytoplasmic membranes and that these membranes have pores, thus facilitating exchange. *'The physico-chemical exchanges required for maintenance of life occur through the cytoplasmic membrane.'* [Anzieu, 1989, 9] Even the smallest particles that shape surfaces are porous, so at no point can we consider the human body as a sealed container – the outside not only seeps into, but also shapes the inside as integral to it. Any idea of a boundary now seems irrelevant and the issue is rather one of interrelation and exchange. However, we need to maintain the idea of our self as individual, conditioned by an (unconscious?) understanding that other psyches and physical entities shape and influence that self – that is if we are to remain stable (or in other words, what is conventionally considered to be 'sane'). When we perceive the self as fractured or separated from the world and others in it, we run the risk of entering an autistic condition, of damaging our 'psychic envelopes' by blocking exchange and sealing ourselves off from the world.

We carry with us the memory of fusion and of connectivity from infancy and as we mature it can become a conflict that emphasises our uniqueness and individuality and our desire for fusion with others. In Western cultures, we have been taught through Platonic, Renaissance and Cartesian discourses that our bodies and minds are separate entities. Religious thought also asserts this distinction (necessarily, otherwise our 'spirits' could not ascend). It is unsurprising then that we should attempt to locate not just the division between our own minds and bodies but also between others and ourselves in the world. Our conflict is that our *being* in the world is shaped through communication and exchange (or feedback and interaction) and this makes it unclear as to where we mark those boundaries. What is now clear to us however, is that even if we mark out boundaries they are never fixed, just as surfaces are never quite sealed.

'As regards content, the Ego feeling consists of both a mental and a bodily feeling...also by a third feeling, that awareness of the fluctuating boundaries between the psychical Ego and the Bodily Ego.' [Anzieu, 1989, 91]

The sense of a boundary between types of Ego (psychic and bodily, Ego and Super-Ego) is often understood as a conflict between the perceived boundaries within the self and this conflict can be discomforting. It is something that we attempt to resolve by reading the boundary as difference, and by understanding different elements as separate fragments rather than aspects of the one. The fluctuation of such boundaries troubles the attempt to resolve the conflict and in order to turn away from discomfort, we turn towards fantasy. *'It is in fantasy that the dissociation of the two feelings reaches its height, a dissociation responsible for the illusion of the separate existence of body and soul.'* [Anzieu, 1989, 93]

The idea of a separate self in the world, physiologically and psychically distinct, cannot be upheld if we accept the porosity of the body and the necessity for exchange in shaping a perception of self.²⁴ The concept of a Skin Ego is a real enough symptom of anxiety – the protective bubble that we form (through fantasy) is an attempt to prevent invasion of the outside world and to preserve personal, private space. If it is the new technological age that compels commitment (McLuhan) and, in effect returns us to a (global) village situation, if we yearn for connectivity and involvement with others (society and intercourse), if isolation and existentialism make us miserable, what then is our big problem?

Me, Myself, I

In chapter 3, I addressed narcissism and was concerned with looking in relation to cinematic performance and performance art. In the following section, I reflect again on

narcissism, but from a different perspective, this time with regards to the anxious, technologised body.

Identification conventionally depends on distance – we seek out others distant from us physically and measure ourselves against them, in order to shape the self. As technology collapses time and space, this reduction of distance between selves dissolves the idea of the finite individual. Identification in this virtual age now becomes more readily understood through the trope of oral incorporation, precisely because technology induces in us 'a *more than closeness*'. Incorporation as *bringing inside the body* of something outside is a manifestation of the erotic drive. Indeed new technologies are enhancing our incorporative urges. We have embraced technology's incursion into the body and our bodies are increasingly augmented by prosthetics. Even so, the relationship of the body to the machine remains ambiguous – the emergence of machinic desire seems to give rise to body loathing with new media. When we create avatars or alter egos and other fantasy or virtual characters, it is not that we are simply extending the idea of ourselves in the form of an ideal. In these constructions we reveal a desire to be a subject who is not inextricably bound by the flesh. This is a double-headed desire. As Margaret Morse argues, not only are we subject to the desire for incorporation by the machine, but we are also subject to the desire to bring the machine into the body. [Morse, 1998, *Cyborgs*] Paradoxically and confusingly, even though this desire emanates from our erotic drives, it seems at times to disavow the body.

The desire to create a virtual being or self is not a new phenomenon. In 'What do Cyborgs Eat? Oral Logic in an Information Society' Margaret Morse points to alchemical experiments aimed at the creation of the homunculus, a being created in a bell jar with a separate (and artificial) intelligence as signalling the desire to immerse or dissolve in an ocean. [Morse, 1998, *Cyborgs*, 130]²⁵ For Morse this is both a death wish (the desire to be absorbed) and an erotic desire to fuse with the idea of nature itself, to force the unnatural upon nature in an unholy coupling. It can be understood as analogous to a contemporary desire to become immersed in the vastness and the



'undifferentiated space of a digital sea.' [Morse, 1998, *Cyborgs*, 130] Her assertion is in accord with McLuhan's concept that electrical circuitry 'orientalizes' the western legacy of the contained, the distinct and the separate, replacing it with the flow, the unified, and the fused.²⁶ Both positions however retain the concept of bodily transcendence. As Morse points out, *'...the virtual realm is tied symbolically to immersion and all its attendant hopes for transcendence and, in this case, inorganic birth.'* [Morse, 1998, *Cyborgs*, 130] But is the desire to immerse oneself always only about the desire to escape the body? Or can we understand it as a drive towards enhanced physical experience? After all fantasy exerts a powerful influence upon our bodies.

A consideration of immersion of the self, in the self, to the point of annihilation, again provokes the issue of narcissism. Narcissism is not just self-obsession – drawing on a tradition of studies by anthropologists, sociologists and psychoanalysts, Christopher Lasch, in his seminal book *The Culture of Narcissism*, posits narcissism as a specific condition of modern life. [Lasch, 1991] Classic neuroses have increasingly given way to narcissistic personality disorders. More than just a renaming of neuroses or modification of theory, Lasch traces a trajectory through education, sport, literature and technology to make the point that narcissism is symptomatic of an attempt to bridge, or repair, or alleviate the solipsistic condition, with all its attendant anxieties, that dominates modern culture. He unpacks the Freudian concept (of narcissism) and identifies, through an analysis of primary and secondary narcissism, two different concepts. Briefly, Freud proposed a libidinal economy in which narcissism takes two main forms – primary and secondary. The primary form is normal in the processes of identification and is noticeable especially in children (autoeroticism). In 'normal' healthy subjects the libido evolves from an autoerotic state into an 'object-libido' in which desire is directed out onto (ideally) another person. The ability to fall in love with another person is seen as evidence of a healthy object-libido. The secondary form of narcissism is considered to be unhealthy and abnormal and arises in the pathological states of megalomania and schizophrenia. This is where the libido is withdrawn from the external world and instead desire is directed inwards, at the subject's ego.

Superimposed over primary narcissism it is the condition in which object libido becomes ego-libido and in its extreme form is manifest as paranoid schizophrenia.

[Freud, 2001 (1915)]

Secondary narcissism negates the intersubjective dynamic whereas primary narcissism is relational and this distinction is significant. In attempting to articulate how a subject negotiates the issue of self in performance I have found that narcissism sits at the heart of the question. Body/performance artists often utilise narcissism as a strategy to negotiate and trouble conventional understandings of self and body. In so doing, this strategy frequently offers up a simultaneous embodiment of both forms of narcissism (relational and non-relational). On the one hand is a fully rounded intersubjective and interobjective relationality, corresponding with Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic intertwining. On the other, is the utterly isolated and distinct individual, corresponding, in the extreme with de Sade's performances of non-relationality, of autistic cruelty. This offers up an uncomfortable paradox in which discomfort and pleasure are different notes on the same scale. Lasch emphasises the connection of narcissism to the Nirvana principle (itself a derivation of the Pleasure Principle) when he states:

'Except that it is not an instinct and that it seeks not death but everlasting life, primary narcissism conforms quite closely to Freud's description of the death instinct as a longing for the complete cessation of tension, which seems to operate independently of the 'pleasure principle' and follows a 'backward path that leads to complete satisfaction.' [Lasch, 1991, 240-1]

Narcissism is thus a desire to be free from desire, a longing for need to be obliterated. Further it aspires to spiritual perfection (absolute peace) and disavows materiality (in the form of the body) in particular. In this way, we can distinguish narcissism from ordinary egoism and the survival instinct.

'The awareness of death and the determination to stay alive presupposes an awareness of objects distinct from the self. Since narcissism does not acknowledge the separate existence of the self, it has no fear of death. Narcissus drowns in his own reflection, never understanding that it is a reflection. The point of the story is not that Narcissus falls in love with himself but, since he fails to recognise his own reflection, that he lacks any conception of the difference between himself and his surroundings.'
[Lasch, 1991, 241]

Although in Lasch's reading of narcissism there is a desire to end desire and a disavowal of the body, the narcissist of the 21st century still yearns to return to the body – to the maternal body and to one's own body in the shape of the '*omnipotent foetus*'. If primary narcissism is the condition of the human infant it '*makes us see the pain of separation, which begins at birth, as the original source of the human malaise.*' [Lasch, 1991, 240-1] He also underlines the paradoxes inherent in the condition of narcissism. On the one hand is a desire for union and on the other the 'fact' of separation that seemingly offer only a stark binary choice – either (in fantasy) one regresses to a time before birth, or one denies the need for others, fabricating a '*solipsistic illusion of omnipotence*'. [Lasch, 1991, 242]

In the spirit of disavowing binary choices, a different reading of the relationship of the self to the world is found in Merleau-Ponty's theory of the chiasma that posits the recognition of others in the world as conjoined to the self. Narcissus neither recognised his reflection nor did he distinguish between himself and his surroundings. Rather than self-love, his rapture is caused by his inability to distinguish the (actual) world from the virtual world of reflection. Captivated at the edge of his pool, Narcissus plunges to his doom in his attempt to be as one with his reflection, to touch the body of an illusion.

French artist Orlan has operated in an overtly narcissistic way throughout her career, transforming and mutating not just her imagery but her body too. She says that '*Being*

a narcissist isn't easy when the question is not of loving your own image, but of re-creating the self through deliberate acts of alienation.' [Rose, 1993, 83] She is firmly advocating narcissism as a transformative strategy, at the same time she acknowledges the complexity that such alienation introduces. In the famous surgery project, one could read her work as an enactment of female submission, akin to female mutilation. However, as Barbara Rose points out '*...actually she aims to exorcise society's program to deprive women of aggressive instincts of any kind. During the process of planning, enacting and documenting the surgical steps of her transformation, Orlan remains in control of her own destiny.*' [Rose, 1993, 125] Orlan's practice is an enacted embodiment of the mortal and finite self, mediated through bio and communication technologies. Her body/self is socially engaged and enacted always in relation to others and the work challenges normal or conventional criteria that define beauty and, by implication, femininity. Her position is that our bodies have long been alienated by the patriarchal conventions of the church and state and by contemporary culture in the shape of sport and fashion. According to Orlan, cosmetic surgery is evidence of the power of man over woman, but in her surgeries she is in control. She is not playing the victim, rather she is intentionally transforming herself into a not-normal being, through technology.²⁷

'Orlan's medium, finally, is media. If that sounds redundant, she means it to be. Her critical method is based on a sophisticated feedback system, a vicious circle of echoing and self-generating images, spawning a progeny of hybrid media reproductions.' [Rose, 1993, 125]

She overloads us with the viscosity of the images and videos and gains the distance necessary for interpretation as beauty is transformed into the grotesque. Furthermore in this action, she denounces traditions that uphold the body as sacred and wilfully breaks the taboo against mutilation of that body. She uses narcissism as a strategy and while her work is often considered as extreme or excessive, she demonstrates that an 'excessive' response to narcissism



can be productive. In Orlan's work one can, by equal measure, read the work as being concerned with an attempt to transcend the image/s of femininity and as being imbricated within abnormal self-involvement. The technological mediation and intervention that her practice and her body are subjected to underline the paradox. Filmed and recorded, edited and webcast, the action as a proliferation of images of a woman immersed in images of herself speaks of a deep narcissistic impulse, looking in, disconnecting even. Yet, in offering them up confessional style, she initiates a relation. She is conscious during the surgery, quoting poetry and answering questions, but as she smiles at us, her poor lovely face is subject to a terrible act of (self-inflicted) violence. It is sliced open, peeled back, lopped off and stitched up, in the name of art, in response to the idea of beauty. She performs what to many of us seems like a disturbing act of self-mutilation but in some of us, she incites a strong sense of empathy.²⁸ When we engage in this way, this relationality is intersubjective. This is the point when our own narcissism meets hers and exchanges a glance of recognition, the point when preconceptions about the body and its image (in this case Orlan's actual body and feminine representation) become undone. Orlan is a neo-narcissist – in contrast to Norma Desmond, she is not a victim of narcissism. Norma is driven inside herself and ultimately can only respond to herself as fantasy. Orlan uses narcissism to provoke a discourse, of which she, as subject, is co-respondent with the viewer.

Orlan's practice may be transgressive but it situates the self as in and of the flesh. Moreover, if we accept Merleau Ponty's reading of the world as flesh then there is no tenable finite boundary between the world and the body, rather an organic interconnection and relation. Contained by the skin, a porous membrane that continually sheds and reconstitutes itself, the flesh is enveloped both metaphorically and materially, but it is not sealed off from the world. The skin is the site of the joining of the flesh of the individual and the flesh of the world. It is also the site of desire. So, while Orlan may aim for transcendence from the images of femininity, she repeatedly underlines our fleshly immanence.

By colliding the orthodoxies of psychoanalysis (Freudian concepts of narcissism) and phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty's concepts of a chiasmic intertwining), we can provoke a reading of narcissism that is creative and in constant interrogation of the limits of the self, in relation to the world and to others. Deliberately activated narcissism recognises our desire for and dependence upon others, but it also recognises that others, like the self, are shaped into discrete psychic entities. Deliberate acts of narcissism like Orlan's acknowledge the limits of the body and exhibit the desire to exceed them. By setting up a dynamic between primary and secondary narcissism one creates excess. This excess can be manifest as a shiver, tic or tremor or it can be dramatic, as in the slicing of skin or cutting of the body. In the action of constantly approaching the contingent and subjective limits of self and body, the body/performance artist inhabits and performs a desire in the knowledge that it cannot be satisfied. Furthermore, this understanding of excess (in performance) accords with Bataille's model. Conventional (homogenous) consensus about what a body can or should do, about where we draw the limits of a body, are undone entirely by excessive performance actions like Orlan's, or Franko B's, and also in the excessive displays of Hannah Wilke. Such actions, as acts of art, challenge where we draw the line between art and life, between what is accepted and what is not.

The paradoxical action of performing or demonstrating a desire that cannot be satisfied, or by deliberately embracing a strategy that troubles and disturbs, that is almost certainly going to be denigrated, echoes separation anxiety. It is an action that is aggressive and combative but one that is also demonstrative of anxiety and of desire for connectivity. It generates the 'defensive' mechanism of narcissism and can be understood as a struggle against nature – a struggle against dependency on the mother – alongside the desire to return to (her) womb and preserve the 'natural' state in which desire no longer has meaning. Invention of technologies is, according to Lasch, a way to deny or to circumvent our dependence on nature, a way to master nature. Or, in other words to avert entropy.

*'In psychological terms, the dream of subjugating nature is our culture's regressive solution to the problem of narcissism – regressive because it seeks to restore the primal illusion of omnipotence and refuses to accept limits on our collective self-sufficiency. In religious terms, the revolt against nature is also the revolt against God – that is, against the reality of our dependence on forces external to ourselves.'*²⁹ [Lasch, 1991, 244]

Consummate narcissist that I am, I speak only of myself, my needs and my pleasures. But this does not mean that I speak only to myself – in speaking of myself I measure myself against the world about me. I offer myself up as an example of that world. In speaking of my experience I am trying to make sense of my experiences of others and, in this, I may find out who I am. McLuhan is not keen on narcissists, reminding us that the root of the word comes from narcosis, meaning numbness. He reads the sense of the Narcissus myth as a blocking of perception. Narcissus didn't love himself because (for McLuhan) he didn't recognise his image as an extension of himself. What he was experiencing was inertia due to the shock of self-amputation. Is he speaking of boredom, of ennui, here? McLuhan may be alluding to Baudelaire's 'lecteur' – the one that can watch impassively whilst the world around convulses becomes symbolic of humanity's diseased nature. However, the idea of disease or damage is morally pejorative and, as certain performative practices demonstrate, narcissism is not necessarily inert. In McLuhan's terms, electrical networks are extensions of the nervous system and he warns that an overload or an overexposure to stimulation is a danger to us. He compares this to our physiological response to immediate physical danger – we go into shock, we do not feel pain (until later) because we have to numb ourselves to protect ourselves. However, while a person may withdraw into the self, in instances of feeling overwhelmed by the external world, this is not to say they inevitably become inert. A narcissistic condition is signalled by the symptoms of anxiety and for McLuhan, narcissism has an entirely negative connotation. However, psychoanalysis has shown that while unusual or anxious behaviour may take the form of a higher or lower self-regard, or of paranoia but, whatever the symptom, it is not usually expressed as inertia.



McLuhan reads the electrically engendered 'Age of Anxiety' as a period defined by the unconscious and by apathy. In comparison to Baudelaire who maintained that the dangers of over stimulation result in moral apathy and physical decline, McLuhan suggests that we respond with a strategic numbing of the senses as necessary to avert breakdown. However, consciousness of the unconscious allows us to be more fully aware of our technological extensions as bodily extensions, and of the functions they perform in lieu of the body. Reading through this and drawing on Amelia Jones' positive reading of narcissism in relation to body/performance art, I propose that a strategic and deliberate use of narcissism, rather than effacing all feeling, allows us to feel the world differently, or with different emphasis. Narcissism can and has to be re-thought given this currency – when used as a strategy, it is not just self-enclosure.

Deliberate displays of narcissism speak of anxiety and body ambiguity and of previously unacknowledged desires. Importantly they test and question our ideas of where self begins and ends in relation to others; moreover, they test our assumptions about body and presence. Indeed an exuberant display of narcissism not only tests those assumptions but, shockingly, it seems to suggest that testing the limits is pleasurable. In contemporary art, this strategy has been used to good effect by Orlan and other artists such as Vito Acconci, Annie Sprinkle and Hannah Wilke. Annie Sprinkle's public displays of self-pleasuring – come look at my cervix, watch me cum – place the issue of feminine subjecthood and overt sexuality firmly as the concern of art, without effacing its connection to pornography. Hannah Wilke used narcissism as a way to re-articulate feminine power and identity, using her (beautiful) body and face, in an ironic display that mimicked conventional imagery of women. King narcissist Vito Acconci's display of self-involvement, as performed so dramatically in 'Seedbed', initiated an intersubjective relationship with members of the viewing public as he masturbated under the floorboards.

Conventional understanding of the limits of the body is tested and ultimately belied by the excesses of the body. Those excesses are enacted both by the body (in the form of

pleasure and waste) and upon the body (in the shape of information and visibility). The concept of normality relies on the assumption of an inviolable homogenous system, of self-contained and distinct psyches (following on from the assumption of the body as similarly contained and separate). Today we have reached a point where ideas of normality have come undone and the system by which we organise our societies is heterogeneous in nature. Our overloaded bodies are now subject to a breathtaking amount of information, every pleasure imaginable is available to us, but all of this is at a price (indeed, as the children of Capitalism, we are accustomed to paying for things). The perceived price is loss of sovereignty, the loss of a means to shape a definitive idea of self – as Bataille argues, in a homogenous world pleasure is something only available to 'sovereign man'. We are anxious – the dismantling of deleterious or binary separations in post-modernity has left us with no concrete and permanent markers by which to calibrate the self. Further, science and psychoanalysis have shown us that surface is not necessarily a finite boundary and that psyche and self are shaped through and by relation to others in the world. We now know courtesy of quantum physics, that observation can change the outcome of an event and even effect physical change. Technology watches over us, invades our every moment and shrinks time and space, it even takes over the work of the body and identifies us through an apparently irrefutable genetic code. We have been uncovered, codified and made public by new technologies, our nervous systems extended beyond our physical reach, we know we no longer can say where or what our limits are and it is gradually dawning on us that there is no centre, there is no definitive point at which I can locate Me.

Is the concept of a Skin Ego a response to the erosion of personal space? The need for the society of others, the desire to merge with the crowd constantly fights with the need for personal private space. The body that was hidden in the shadows of the bedchamber for the past 450 years has now been forced out into the open by the convulsive impetus of electric and subsequently electronic technologies. The fact of today's body is now different, it is no longer universalised and objective and with the



relation between subject and object collapsing into that body, we are at a point where we have to reassess how we constitute the self. 'I' am constituted through desire – if we trace the paths of desire then perhaps we can negotiate new strategies for understanding the formation of self.³⁰

Nearly all cultures retain the ideal/desire for transcendence of the body, through religious and ritualistic practices and beliefs. These beliefs are echoed within the seemingly secular world of new technologies. However, along with an increasing understanding that immanence is not just the condition of women and slaves, we are beginning to realise that it is no longer possible to assign sovereignty, truth or presence in the same way that we have historically. Indeed, it may be that it is no longer possible to assign sovereignty at all – this is our nightmare. While technology offers us ways to extend, enhance and stimulate the body it overloads us with possibilities. The implications of which, combined with a deep unease about the way that subjectivity seems to have turned itself inside out, have shocked us into a fascinated inertia.

Now that we have encountered our reflections, now that we have been fixated by them, in order to make sense of what subjectivity means in the age of the virtual, we must first examine those anxieties that keep us looking only at the surface of things. To a certain extent, this is the job of the work of art in the 21st century. In body/performance art, an intentional strategy of intense self-reflection recognises narcissism as a creative field in which to explore these issues – it produces the conditions for a creative discourse on the issues of body, self and representation. Such strategies are facilitated (if not demanded) by a practical engagement with the technologies for recording and communication.

Likewise, immersion can be understood positively. It does not have to mean the loss of self or the distancing of the psyche from body – immersion can also be understood as additive, a condition of more-than-self. Through narcissism and immersion we can

point up that immanence does not have to be understood as a condition to which we are all condemned, rather it is an active and creative condition/space that tests our understanding of the body's limits and at times exceeds them.

I began this chapter with a discussion about cannibalism to explore how the fantasy of oral incorporation operates at its fictional and factual extremes. In the cannibal's objectification of the victim is an absolute refusal of relationality or of reciprocity. The victim's status is reduced to the lowest level, that of merely dinner. *Something* to be eaten and turned into shit, made into waste. In its fictional aspect an extreme performance of non-relationality reinforces, or better, proclaims the dichotomy between object and subject, between master and slave and between good and evil. However, it does so with an elaborate perversity, with such violence and with such excess that it allows us to see its close relation to waste. As Bataille pointed out, if one considers waste and excess through a concept of heterogeneity then these dichotomies can be undone. Waste can now be understood as a kind of creative debris and by extension, anxiety and/or eroticism can be seen as a manifestation of the excess of the intersubjective relation between subjects, between us. Moreover anxiety and jouissance are closely linked and easily fold back into each other. Appropriation and consumption as incorporative tropes necessitate waste – for example, incorporative looking produces something more than just a look. It generates a dynamic that is felt erotically or anxiously because it is directed by desire and because this dynamic is the excess of the look.

Excessive consideration of self (narcissism) and the literal excess of selves (multiple representations, avatars etc.) facilitated by new technologies, reveal the distinctly marked oral logic that drives the subject's relation to technology as a form of neo-narcissism. Exposed by surveillance and extended through instant communications the 21st century subject experiences an amplified self-consciousness, but this self-conscious narcissistic state does not just begin and end in the self. Our sense of privacy is changing but we have a choice – we can use our narcissism and anxiety positively, as a

vehicle for provoking new readings of the self and the body as existentially contingent and for questioning existing preconceptions of the limits of the flesh. Alternatively, we can choose to confirm our isolation, to fear incursions of our personal spaces and to attempt to hold onto the idea of a homogenous ideology to describe our experience of the world. However, this position is becoming increasingly anachronistic. Our skins, as we now know, are permeable surfaces. Enabled by machines that can manufacture our virtual doubles, that can clone presence (or so it would seem), our sense of self is not just invaded – in turn it invades the world. Whether we like it or not this is a realm of reversibility and reversibility indicates heterogeneity. Digital technology and computers seem to promise a solution to the problem of entropy – by implication they offer the possibility of extending consciousness beyond the confines of the flesh – but they are all too easily seen as a means to confirm transcendence, without the inconvenience of a God. These infernal desire machines confuse our sensibilities – their promise of everlasting life and vigour and of all the pleasures that we can stand, literally at our fingertips, is at odds with the body stuck at the console, trying to penetrate the screen. We can choose to be like Baudelaire's hypocrite lecteur, condemned by our excessive desires and pleasures, or we can choose to consider the excessive and the unspeakable in fantasy as a means to extend our understanding of subjectivity. Only by doing this can we begin to understand our anxious relation to an increasingly technologised world and only then can we realise a new understanding of the body.



Conclusion

The term 'technophenomenology' offers a new means to understand the intertwining relation between intersubjectivity and interobjectivity. Following on from Amelia Jones, I use it to define the way it feels when the body is enveloped and saturated by technology. The techno-phenomenological body is remarkably conspicuous in performance and body art, although one could apply the term more generally. New technologies may heighten and overload the senses, even to the point of numbness, but they always change our relation to things. A constant reassessment of our subjective relation to a world that is no longer understandable in purely objective terms, brings with it an attendant anxiety that paradoxically speaks of enhanced sensation. My reading of technophenomenology has attempted to draw out what I perceive to be a strong undercurrent of erotic desire in performances that are embedded within technology and driven by a strong narcissistic impetus. The technophenomenological body in performance provokes and experiences a heightened awareness of the body in space and, even if that feeling is uneasy or vertiginous, the drag of the flesh is more distinctly felt through technological mediation. In this way, I read the technophenomenological performance as an act of desire.

'There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of the seeing body in the visible body: we are both subject and object simultaneously, and our flesh merges with the flesh that is the world. There is no boundary between the body and the world since the world is flesh.' [Jones, 1999, 41]¹

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's reading of the world as flesh, one can situate the exchanged look as a meeting of flesh. But the self is not transcendent of the body, rather the flesh extends into and merges with the world surrounding the body – the self does not migrate. We are enfleshed within each other, within the exchange between things and beings. We may experience the drag of the flesh, a desire to let go the body in a final orgasmic gasp, but we are always and only ever immanent.

In chapter 1, I laid the ground for my understanding of our relationship to computers as anthropomorphic, erotic and by extension incorporative. I introduced my reading of Merleau-Ponty's 'chiasm' as a way to unpack interobjective and intersubjective relationality and to somehow speak of the *felt* relation of the human subject to new technologies. Specifically I attempted to speak from inside a performance made for cyberspace. It was a curiously unsatisfying experience for both artists and audience alike – in the audience's use of the Internet Relay Chat facility one could sense a palpable level of disinterest or distraction. However, the whole show elicited a new experience and a curious sensation – the gap between the physical and the virtual as well as the gap between expectation and actuality, was distinctly disorienting and for this artist it was distinctly vertiginous. While new technologies may mark or initiate a reassessment of identity the body betrays its immanence through anxiety.

Speaking more broadly of technology and the body, in chapter 2 I argued that presence operates on different levels. In my consideration of telepresence and electronic representation, I focus on the significance of telematic presence (telepresence), when it is introduced into the performative, as issuing the idea of disembodiment. This in turn requires that we consider the question of whether a disembodied figure can participate in embodied exchange and ask how a disembodied subject relates to another subject.

Amelia Jones argues that, in the exchange between the artist in performance and viewer, transcendence (of the artist/genius from the body) is refused because of the reciprocal nature of that exchange and especially because the work issues from the visible body of the artist. If we accept that a level of exchange can occur in the recording or photograph of performative action and that presence can be affected virtually then we can also accept the idea of disembodiment as an active condition. This (tele) presence is effected through implication and is of a different modality to immediate physical co-presence. However disembodiment is not the same thing as transcendence. Rather, the disembodied subject demonstrates the impossibility of

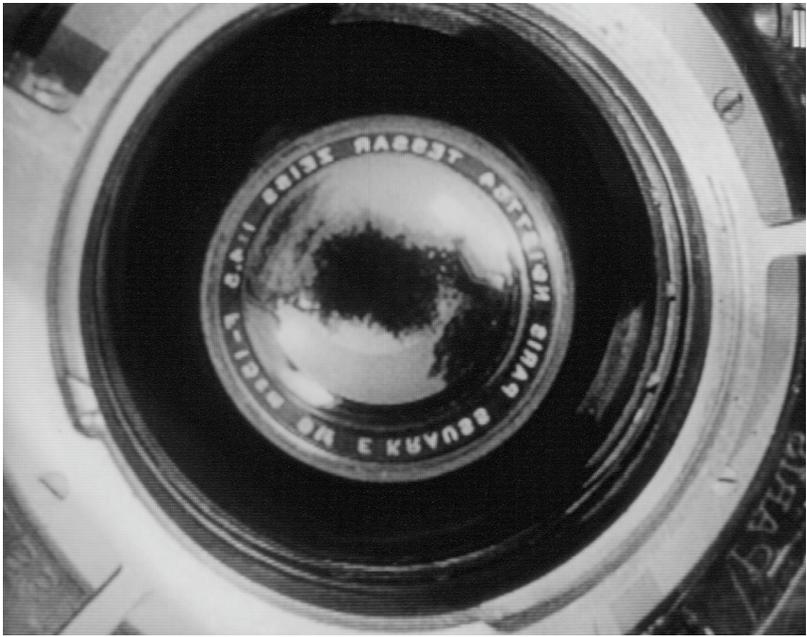
transcendence because it suggests the absent body and implies that it is present elsewhere. Transcendence means beyond or above the range of ordinary physical human experience.² Disembodiment implies a return to the body, a physical trace and a connection with the body whereas the transcendent implies something distinctly different – that the soul/spirit/psyche/self completely evacuates its body container, its flesh. This requires belief, or at the very least a suspension of disbelief. We can make the psychic leap between actuality and virtuality, by responding to telematic presence 'as if' it was immediate. It gives us an often powerful illusion but the point about illusion is that it is emphatically not the 'real' thing. Specifically, I argued that we are complicit with such trickery – the delight we take in morphs and Computer Generated Imagery reveals our complicity with illusion and by implication, virtuality.

Consciousness cannot exist outside of the body. The idea that consciousness can exist after the death of the body and ascend to some other non-physical plane of eternal existence, or that it can migrate into a machine remains a fantasy. The body stays in its seat/place when navigating virtual spaces and the artist is a real person with no special (God-given) insight to eternal 'truths' – neither cyberspace nor art offers transcendence, only the illusion of it.

However this presents me with a difficulty. Art, as a form of communication, is related to meaning and through meaning it is related to 'truth'. Because all forms of communication aspire to truth via meaning, its (truth) value is transcendent. Clearly, if art is related to transcendence in this way, then I, as an artist who makes claim for reciprocity and contingency within the practice, cannot easily refuse it. But am I permanently enslaved by the aspiration for an elusive objective truth within my art practice? Or, is it enough to simply ask the question 'whose truth?' Perhaps a practice that signals its awareness of being bound to questionable concepts of truth and reality can reveal a different reading of this paradox. It seems to me that only body/performance art can do this effectively because it uses the 'value' of body presence ambiguously and provocatively.

As I have argued previously, our bodies are always, already technologised. New technology, specifically digitality, emphasises a drive towards fleshlessness, in the way it re-interprets and re-presents physical bodies in space and de-values the importance of immediate co-presence in time, as a way to measure our existential relation with the external world. It is possible that digitality's inherent emphasis on the idea of being 'freed' from the material world results from the break that it effects between the recording and the actual event or thing physical world. While the photograph, analogue sound recording, the film and the video are perceived to maintain a direct link (akin to a contact print) between the thing being recorded and the image/sound produced, digitality 'reads' an image or sound and converts it into code. It then (instantly) reconstitutes this code as an interpretation of the original image/sound. It remakes rather than records. Thus, it makes a significant break with the 'original' object even though the original object remains important to us. Consider, for example, the differences between analogue video (VHS) and digital video (DV). A VHS (and for that matter a film) records the duration of an event but a DV records a still and updates any changes (movement) to that image. For instance a one-hour recording of say, a cup on a table in an artificially lit room – the VHS records each moment of that hour. The DV will register a single image and update it periodically. In effect, the DV result will be an hour-long single image – it cannot record time passing.

Performance/body art, despite its affirmation of body (flesh), embodies a drive towards mortality. This is not literally death, rather a fascination with facing a metaphoric (and at times metonymic) death as a consequence of the loss of the sense of an 'absolute', coherent and whole self.³ The idea of a whole and unchangeable, autonomous self is made difficult by the paradoxes inherent within performance art, in its attempt to represent the self, through the presence of the (artist's body) in and as the work of art. The act of performance (art) breaks down, or at the very least, makes problematic the idea of the fixed and undivided self, through performance's emphasis on the reciprocal relation between bodies. In particular, it reveals that this relation is not universal but contingent and subjective. The very fact of the disappearance of the



(performing) body – an act of performance is, after all, temporal and it ends, leaving only traces – reminds us of the temporal nature of being and that the body always 'disappears' in death. Further, an act of performance that places centre stage the question of self is doing so as an act of narcissistic desire (I accept that not all performance work does this, but I am only interested in that which does here). Furthermore, as psychoanalysis has shown, the death drive (Thanatos) is part of the sexual instinct (Eros). If 'I' am shaped through Desire, the performance action that is driven by questions of identity and of flesh is an act of desire and sets up the possibility of an erotic exchange.⁴ This desire does not necessarily seek satisfaction. It cannot necessarily be satisfied. In extremis, performance's pleasures are not always comfortable, nice, or pleasurable (consider the work of Bob Flanagan or Orlan, for example). Works that foreground discomfort, pain or 'unpleasure' and that posit the body as vulnerable and limited emphasise the body's temporality in the appearance and subsequent disappearance of flesh.

Chapter 3 is the key chapter of the thesis. I began by outlining cinematic looking as libidinal and incorporative. Using personal anecdote I attempted to articulate how my experience of a film – in this case, *Sunset Boulevard* – can impact on my whole discourse as an artist. In my practice, I eventually developed a performance as a direct result of the film/experience and, through the character of Norma Desmond, I was able to begin to think and write about narcissism in relation to libidinal looking. Throughout the chapter I try to speak from the cusp, as it were, moving from things that spark my curiosity as an artist to issues that drive the theoretical aspect of my discourse, and back again.

The character of Norma Desmond functions within the trope of incorporation and is the embodiment of an out of control and monstrous narcissism. In the film, Norma is held up as a tragic example of what happens to a woman when she looks back at herself as (beautiful) image, the implication being that she must only ever be looked at. Norma is condemned and finally undone because she believes in her image more

than she does in herself and thus fulfils the patriarchal convention that dictates that a woman who transgresses must be punished. Granted, the film is of its time (1950's America) but I do not read it as overtly misogynistic, largely due to the performance of Gloria Swanson. From the first moment she appears onscreen, to the final shot, her performance is pitched at full intensity – her mania, her narcissism never lets up. In its ferocity is a kind of power. At times, with the character of Norma matching almost exactly the character of Gloria, I am not sure if I am looking at Norma, or Gloria, or at myself. I admire her, then, me and I perceive that within the narcissistic is an unruliness, a possibility to break out of convention. The metaphor can become overloaded and shatter. Unlike Norma or Gloria, I am not bound (as an artist) by the conventions of cinema or of 1950's America. I work in the field of performance because I consider it to be a wide-open field and if I want to use narcissism I can do so here as an active and creative strategy. I refuse to apologise for my narcissism, or for my immanence for that matter, and as such I consider it a strategy that is broadly feminist. Of course the world about me is not so forgiving. Our reality is still determined through the (rough) terms of masculinity – through the language of patriarchal power – but subversion of those terms is possible. Narcissism, likewise is a potent strategy if it acknowledges itself (something Narcissus was unable to do). It offers women in particular a means to overload and breakdown the conventions that still surround representations of femininity. Rather than stasis it acknowledges and offers change or transformation and this invites a response. In this way narcissism can be a reciprocal and creative condition.

I discussed libidinal looking, reading through a foundational text from classic psychoanalysis (Otto Fenichel on scopophilia). This concept remains profoundly influential in the wider understanding of film and of the relation of looking to technology. With regards to technological influence on the shaping of images of the self in performance, there is a relation that goes beyond documentation. Initially, on a literal and mechanical level, they are related through the 'devouring eye' of the camera



– a camera of some sort is rarely absent from works of performance. It quietly amplifies libidinal looking in relation to the performance. In its cinematic aspect, it incorporates an image that is subsequently projected as fantasy.

From another perspective – a consideration of intersubjectivity – I argue that certain extreme body/performance art actions exemplify a 'Sadean paradox'. Contrasting empathy and extremity I examined Franko B's performance 'Action 398' and gave it as an example of an extreme performance that speaks equally of relationality and of non-relationality. It is Franko's flesh, his wounded body, that gives his audience difficulty. The display of his wound or of his blood makes him the victim of our gaze, of our cruelty and our need to alleviate our own fear and suffering by inflicting it upon another. Then again, we may empathise with him, we may feel pity at his suffering, we may feel *for* him. By appropriating his suffering, we incorporate his pain and in this we can also be his 'victim'. His wounding is an aggressive action – in this aggression he asserts his mastery over his body and by implication he defies its apparent limitations. Yet in offering up his body as vulnerable, by giving himself over to his audience, he seems to simultaneously negate his self-hood. To be sure, this is not the only way to 'read' Franko's work but the paradoxical positioning of his performing body in relation to the desires and bodies of his audience is what principally concerns me.

Reading through psychoanalysis and phenomenology, the action of self-identification (through introjection/projection) and the experience of being in the world (enworlded/enfleshed) are situated as comparative means to 'get at' performances of self. I argued that certain cinematic performances posit incorporation as central to their construct and attempted to draw a parallel with what I identify as the incorporative desire of certain practices within performance/body art. Again I declare my vested interest as a practitioner and whilst I have attempted to avoid explanation of my own practice, I have unapologetically and subjectively drawn on ideas, performances and strategies that interest me and inform my practice. In this way I have attempted to write 'through' (but not about) my practice. The 'larger than life'

and the excessive interest me greatly – magnification of human behaviour and desires reveals our incorporative impulses and inclinations. For instance, Thomas Harris' creation Hannibal Lecter is the multiple magnification of Baudelaire's proposition that non-empathetic observation of horrific and deadly scenes or events reveals our own implication within them. Introjection intensified becomes incorporation (with all its bodily connotations) and incorporation intensified becomes cannibalistic fantasy – again Lecter personifies this. Through the fictional Lecter, Harris presents us with a model of monstrous non-relationality and proposes that, under the skin, we are potentially the same, all always disconnected and subject to fundamental desires that we will not/cannot admit to.

Perhaps it is the writings of the Marquis de Sade that offers us the most extreme model of non-relationality and who, despite a wealth of theoretical literature still remains socially unpalatable and subject to censorship. His violent rejection of any idea of relationality is still shocking in its extremity. Utterly isolated from the world, the Sadean libertine is situated as a superior, unique being whose pleasure is a measure of sovereignty. For the libertine the degree of pleasure experienced is commensurate with the suffering of another – the greater the libertine's pleasure, the greater the suffering for the victim. The ultimate pleasure in Sadean thought is death, in the first place of the victim and finally of the libertine him/herself. It may be that Sade used his monstrous narcissism creatively to make the case for his philosophy, but the libertine's pursuit of pleasure through cruelty and destruction seeks the end of desire. The desire to end desire is here perpetuated by sexual desire and the libertine is caught in the loop, unbearably self-conscious, furiously excited.

I followed my speculation on Sade with a consideration of the preface of Charles Baudelaire's series of poems, 'Fleurs du mal'. Written less than a lifetime after Sade's demise, Baudelaire's poem looks out onto an industrialised and increasingly technologised world with a dystopic eye. His vision of a world on the cusp of a new century is one that sees humanity as bloated through its excessive pursuit of the

pleasures of the flesh. He implies that humanity is becoming dissolute – the final line of the poem asserts this emphatically. There is no longer a clear distinction between the author and reader, between the one who witnesses and the one perpetrates the act. In this, in a poem that posits the world as a hell on earth, he prefigures the dissolution of subject and object (deconstruction) and the blurring of distinction between the sender and receiver of information – a distinguishing feature of digitality. Marshall McLuhan was to pick up on this in the 1960's and as such, we can read Baudelaire as being the link between Sade and Lecter, between modern technology and the performance of self.

While I acknowledge that relationality and non-relationality seem to form an opposition, I contest the idea of such a dichotomy. Even the most violent philosophies of non-relationality (for example, Sade's) are responses to the world of other beings and are devised in relation to them. Sade's furious perversions are directed against others – his *raison d'être* is opposition and rejection – but Sade's libertine needs his slaves and victims in order to know himself as 'sovereign man'. Much of the potency of Sade's writings lies in the fury expressed at the hypocrisy and corruption of the Church and the State and his disdain for essentialism and morality. In his rejection of these institutions, Sade ends up speaking for the individual as outlaw. At the other end of the scale, McLuhan argues that new technologies offer greater connectivity and he describes the modern world as a global village. His philosophy of relationality embraces the idea of extension and communication but he acknowledges that enhanced relationality can stimulate self-enclosure (narcosis). Relationality, it would seem, is a matter of degree, a matter of intensity.

Taking the idea of incorporation to its limit (cannibalistic fantasy) in chapter 4, I considered the distinction between actual and fictional acts of cannibalism. The metaphor that is Lecter becomes folded in on itself in the real world and the fantasy is consumed, as in the case of the contemporary epicurean duo, Miewes and Brandes. In relation to the fantasy of incorporation, I analysed the psychoanalytic perspective,

reading through Abraham and Torok. Following on from this I looked to Georges Bataille and asked what it is that fascinates us about extreme, almost unspeakable actions. His position is that waste or excess provide us with a different understanding of the subjects relation to the world and to others and reminds us that we are not independent of our passions, rather they are *of us*.

Bataille, as a materialist, attempts to negotiate connectivity between beings through the idea of heterogeneity. The subject perceives him/herself as distinct and contemplation of the distance between one distinct individual and another can be experienced as vertigo. This experience is immersed in the erotic drive.

'But I cannot refer to this gulf which separates us without feeling that this is not the whole truth of the matter. It is a deep gulf, and I do not see how it can be done away with. None the less we can experience its dizziness together. It can hypnotise us. This gulf is death in one sense, and death is vertiginous, death is hypnotising.' [Bataille, 1987, 13]

Bataille emphasises the distinctness of subjects, but in contrast Merleau-Ponty emphasises their imbrication within each other. Both attempt to articulate the relation between beings/subjects and both acknowledge the subjects' existential experience of being although Bataille sees the individual as irredeemably distinct. Merleau-Ponty on the other hand argues that we are unfixed within our (enfleshed) subjectivity. It is eroticism that, for Bataille, points up the discontinuity of being *and* continuity (through its intimate relation to death). Following on from both positions, the fascination engendered by contemplating discontinuity, or in different terminology, non-relationality, is experienced erotically and is understood here (non-theoretically) through an aesthetics of excess. In Bataille's model, eroticism takes three forms; physical, emotional and religious. Each of the forms substitute 'individual, isolated discontinuity' with a sense of relationality, connectivity and continuity. Reading through this model, one can posit fascination with new technologies, those that offer

us an extension of presence and of self, as being concerned with a similar substitution. Just as Bataille's forms of eroticism are 'sacramental' in character – a belief in the possibility of continuity – technological fascination also relies on belief, a belief in the virtual, a belief in the representation and a belief in the continuity of being. As such, it is possible to read it as a form of eroticism. For Bataille, death is the apogee of continuity. Contemplation of the imminent destruction of our individuality (death) jerks us violently out of our discontinuous state, for a moment. The religious, physical, emotional and technological forms of eroticism rely on moments of 'violence' (a psychic wrench or jerk) to stimulate or to *simulate* continuity. We are still subject to this *as* desire.

'What we desire is to bring to the world founded on discontinuity all the continuity such a world can sustain.' [Bataille, 1987, 19]

My position is that technologies of communication both facilitate connectivity on one level and, at the same time, they emphasise the separation between individuals, accentuating both aspects. When we recognise a gulf between individuals, between 'I' and Other, we are faced with a potential loss of self and this equates to death. We define ourselves utterly in relation to others in the world – when that relationship is perceived to be broken (in fantasy) we are horrified, nauseated even. How can I define myself as 'I' if there is no other to relate this to? This existential realisation is both appalling and arousing in that we feel that we are now in and of our own body and we either yearn for connection or localise desire in the form of self pleasure. It is a vertiginous condition and it makes us think of death (through the types of excess described).

I also addressed the theme of continuity/discontinuity from a different point of view. Following on from Marshal McLuhan's concept of anxiety in the face of technological innovations, I argued that anxiety indicates a crisis and that this crisis is, to a certain extent, the result of diminishing private space and extended bodies. This crisis is of the



body and space and of identity – I traced it through the emergence of the concept of private space, drawing on Frances Barker’s proposition about the separation of the viewer from the scene. The emergence of perspectival viewing during the Renaissance marked an evolutionary leap in looking and has conditioned the way we envision the world ever since. While the body’s relation to space may have been changing over the proceeding years, the emergence of new technologies (digitality in particular) has accelerated the change, provoking another significant evolutionary leap in the way that a subject measures his/her relation to the world. That which was conventionally considered private is now thrust into the public sphere.

I followed this by addressing the (private) space of the body through a consideration of Didier Anzieu’s concept of a Skin Ego. Anzieu’s Skin Ego marks the body’s psychic limit as a fluctuating fantasy and his argument spins out and away from ideas of a fixable physical limit – he both upholds and undoes the presumption of an intact personal space. My analysis puts forward the idea that at the same time as we affirm the distinct and existential individual, we psychically extend our physiological being beyond the surface of the skin. The Skin Ego is about self-protection and at the same time about facilitating kinaesthetic connection with the world. As new technologies have collapsed our concept of time and space, the distance between bodies seems also to collapse. Digitality gives reign to immersive desires which, even though it extends our connectivity with the world, gives rise to a kind of neo-narcissism (immersion in the virtual self).

I then reconsidered narcissism, but this time with regard to our anxiety about desire. I took up Orlan as a case study and argued that her positive and defiant use of narcissism undoes pre-conceptions about feminine representations and agency. Our sense of self and of personal space changes constantly but those transformations are often imperceptible. When that transformation is highlighted (as in for instance Orlan’s body of work) or deliberate, we are forced to consider the impact of transformation on ourselves. Both Orlan (and other women artists like Hannah Wilke

for example) greatly problematise the imposition of identity (and notably of femininity) and they offer up a narcissistic strategy as a creative force, eliciting a narcissistic response in return.

While I do not accept a definitive 'split' between subjects and the world, I have attempted to articulate what it means to be held in thrall by the perception of a gulf between subjects. Performance (art) steps into this vertiginous gulf and renames it 'relation'. Whereas performance implies the gulf can be bridged, (digital) technology produces subjective ambivalence in that it both emphasises our isolation from each other at the same time as increasing our connectivity. It both bridges and widens the gulf. It can be confusing – when we are communicating online we can *feel* connected when we are actually alone and untouched. I think that both performance (art) and (digital) technology engender a sense of vertigo in the sense that it is no longer clear where the horizon is nor how the body is positioned in space and time. However, in contemplation of the relation between self and other, we have a choice – we can read it as a gulf or as a kind of becoming. Both performance and new technology reveal this relation in a new light and emphasise the contradictions in understanding the subject/object as dichotomous. Furthermore both fields greatly amplify the significance of orality and desire in the relation and when conjoined, they amplify it further.

...

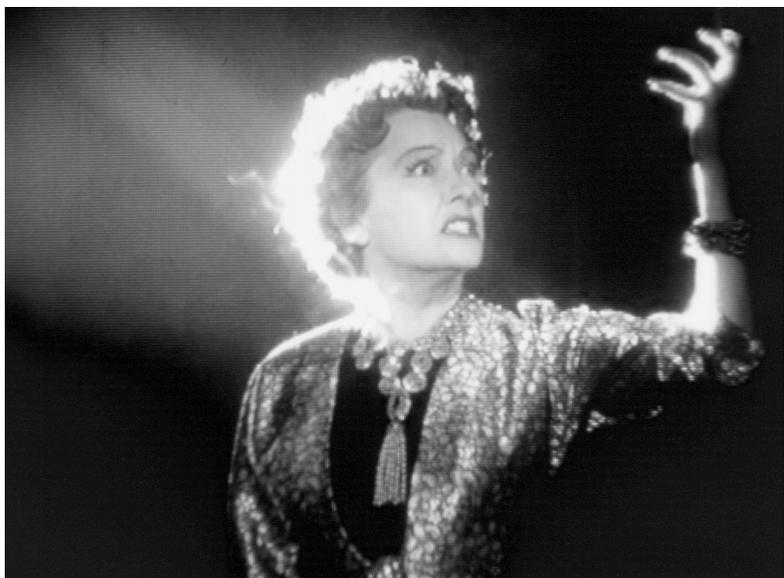
When I began this project I expected to find myself making work devised for cyberspace. However, it quickly became clear to me that my interest actually lay in exploring the impact of technological mediation on a performance work and in what this reveals about the formation of self and our desire to test those limits. In this, I followed the direction of my practice. What happens in cyberspace is radically different to anything we have experienced before. It throws up complications and paradoxes that compromise long held ideas about presence, about the way one body relates to

another and about identification. It reveals the incorporative drive of desire and upsets prevailing understandings of the physical relation between bodies in space and in time. As a new space there is no template for its use – originally developed as a military application, creative users of cyberspace have been making up the rules as they go along. Business and government have finally caught on and we are currently in a phase of increasing regulation of the Internet. It remains to be seen if the more creative and radical strategies, such as peer to peer file sharing or the free use of intellectual property can continue to undermine ideas about ownership, with all that it implies. If anything, the most important property of cyberspace is what it implies and how this demands a new reading of the way we understand the relationship of object to subject and of subject to subject. For me, a consideration of cyberspace, in relation to my practice as an artist, led me to attempt to articulate how technology impacts on the body in performance and to reflect on the possibilities it offers us to say something new about art, about body and about the performance of self.

For this we need something that might be termed a new technophenomenology of identification that draws out the productive tension between relationality and non-relationality. It means that we must look to how new technologies are affecting the way that we shape ideas of self. We must also look to the spaces of excess to test the limits of the body, of identification and of creative potential.

Finally, I used the word 'vertigo' as the title for this thesis because it is a term that recurs time and again when I am thinking of and talking about my artistic practice. As a word, it has served to remind me how this text is anchored by my practice, or better, how they are imbricated within each other. When I step into the space of performance, I feel like I have stepped up to the edge of a very high place. My pupils dilate, my heart beats faster, my stomach turns and my breathing quickens. For a moment I am appalled. For a moment I contemplate the 'gulf' between myself and the spectator/s and just for a moment it makes me dizzy. But, as Bataille wrote, we can experience the dizziness together. The tics, the shaking, the tears and the tension of my performances

are direct physiological responses to contemplating the space between myself and those who watch, but I try to use them. I offer them up, these little excesses of the body, as a means to generate an intersubjective relation between us. I am aiming for recognition, not for myself, but for a shared cognition of excess as a vehicle for connectivity, for relationality. When Bataille describes the gulf between subjects as 'death' in one sense, he leaves unsaid what it might be in another. In another sense, it is distance we contemplate and, as cyber technologies have demonstrated, physical distance no longer has to be the key factor in relationality. In a techno-phenomenological sense, what we contemplate may instead be an enhanced and potent relation, an inevitable connectivity and continuity between existential subjects.



ENDNOTES BY CHAPTER

INTRODUCTION ENDNOTES

¹ Second quote from Vivian Sobchack 'The Passion of the Material' unpublished manuscript quoted by Amelia Jones [Jones, 1998, 239]

² Certain of my performance works involve a degree of physical endurance. For example in one work I may hang suspended by my hair, my toes just touching the floor, held somewhere between the two, unable to let down my heels. I hold this position for as long as possible, approximately 20 minutes. In another work I may throw my body from side to side repeatedly, moving only from the waist up. My new project involves striking 12 different poses, each held for 10 minutes, whilst nailed to the wall by my hair. Other works signal excess on a smaller scale through nose bleeds, through tears, through shaking – these works position themselves as just about to go over into excess, they are the beginnings, hovering on the edge.

CHAPTER ONE ENDNOTES

¹ If, as Marshall McLuhan argues, all technologies and tools are direct extensions of our bodies or our senses, with the computer being an extension of our brains, it is possible to understand the computer as an elaborate prosthesis, offering 'a new intensity of perception and action.' [McLuhan, 1969, 38]

² This should not be surprising – the very first computers were made of flesh and blood, real people employed literally to count.

³ see Michael Heim, [Heim 1993, 109-116] Also chapter 2 for my discussion of the disorienting effects of Virtual Reality

⁴ Talking about the relationship of users to their computers, Deborah Lupton in her essay 'The Embodied Computer User' states '*Computer users are...attracted to the promises of cyberspace, in the utopian freedom from the flesh, its denial of the body, the opportunity to obtain a cyborgian seamlessness and to 'connect' with others, but are also threatened by its potential to engulf the self and expose one's vulnerability to the penetration of enemy others.*' Likening cyberspace to the female body she calls it '*a site of intense desire and emotional security but also threatening engulfment, the inside of the computer body is dark and enigmatic, potentially leaky, harbouring danger and contamination, vulnerable to invasion.*' Eros. Death. Maternity. These are metaphors of the body – birth, death and sex. In our struggle to articulate our relationship to new technology, we return to the body again and again. But as we struggle to understand, digital and cyber technologies are changing the way we communicate and the way we understand information. The ground is constantly shifting under our feet. Some of these changes have profound implications on how we understand time, space and reality. Lupton is Professor of Sociology and

Cultural Studies at Charles Sturt University, Australia. She has published numerous books and papers on the medicalisation of the body, on Michel Foucault and subjectivity. She is also author of 'Risk' (Routledge, 1999) and editor of 'Risk and Sociocultural Theory: New Directions and Perspectives' (Cambridge University Press, 1999). Deborah Lupton: *The Embodied Computer User, Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk*, 1995, UK, pubs. Sage Publications

⁵ In her book *The Dematerialisation of the Art Object*, American critic Lucy Lippard discusses entropy as being the mark of time, the increasing disorder to which our system tends. The disappearance of materiality facilitated by digitality resists entropy through its investment in the code as everlasting, suggesting that the virtual replaces the faulty and degrading object. The code here is analogous to the idea or to the concept and in this way digitality echoes Lippard's definition of conceptual art. [Lippard, 1973]

⁶ 'The West' as a meaningful term is currently under debate but it is still in common use. I use the term here to indicate the cultures of European/North American/white Antipodean nations. They are, broadly speaking, defined through Judaeo-Christian ideologies. While these nations are also the worlds richest, in economic terms one must include Japan, India and China (I don't make an economic reference). However, when I speak of religious belief in I use the term 'Judaeo-Christian'.

⁷ For analysis on the 'Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace' and 'Altered World Disorder' (sickness suffered after over exposure to VR environments, such as pilot training) see Michael Heim. [Heim, 1993]

⁸ For Peggy Phelan, performance implies an ontology that relies on liveness and the primacy of immediate co-presence. I find this problematic in the face of discussing work that is filmed, or otherwise recorded. Much contemporary performance theory is strongly influenced by Phelan's work and frequently situates presence as a synonym for immediacy, asserting the ephemeral live moment as radical, unique and unrecordable. This reduction (which is not necessarily Phelan's doing, rather the quote is often taken out of context) raises for me a number of contentions. *'Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performances being, like the ontology of performance proposed here [in Unmarked], becomes itself through disappearance.'* [Phelan, 1993, 146]

⁹ Walter Benjamin famously talks about distraction in the face of a new artistic medium. *'Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise. The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway. The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of the critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.'* Walter Benjamin, *'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'* from *Illuminations*, (1936) 1999, pubs Pimlico, UK

¹⁰ Born in 1859, Edmund Husserl was the principal founder of phenomenology. His system was based upon the idea of a transcendental self and posits intentionality as the *essential* structure of consciousness., infusing it with a static originality. Merleau-Ponty developed Husserl's concept of phenomenology but rejected both the essential and the transcendental aspects of it.

¹¹ Jones is speaking from a broadly feminist position – 'woman' is situated as non-normative in body/performance art actions. She cites the work of Carolee Schneeman and Hannah Wilke as examples of artists who deliberately eroticised the presentation of their work as a way to confront gender prejudice.

¹² Concerning the terms performance art and body art – throughout the thesis I refer variously to performance art, to body art and to body/performance art. I am reading body art as a specific form of performance art, which in turn is understood as a specific form of artistic practice evolving out of fine art practice. This is to distinguish these particular forms from the somewhat generic term 'live art'. Live art is a useful term, especially for funding purposes, that covers all performative and time-based practices, but for my purposes it lacks specificity.

¹³ I am drawing again on Amelia Jones here. She is speaking in relation to the mediated posthumous projects of Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose. '...art historians, theorists and critics can learn from the very technologies that have informed and have been formed by younger generations of artists who present 'posthuman', dispersed subjects in their work: high tech media act via interfaces that mark the artwork as a site of the exchange between subjects, the site of joining between subjects and objects, the locus where intersubjectivity reverses into what Vivian Sobchack has called interobjectivity and vice versa.' [Jones, 1998, 236]

CHAPTER TWO ENDNOTES

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, 'The Phenomenology of Mind', (C: Free Concrete Mind: (BB) Spirit B: The Spirit in Self-Estrangement III. Absolute Freedom & Terror translated by J. B. Baillie, 1807, online edition www.marxists.org, date accessed 22.08.05. Also quoted by Guy Debord in the preface to 'Society of the Spectacle', 1983 (1970), pubs. Rebel Press/Dark Star, UK

² Digitality is not only concerned with cyberspace. Cyberspace has its own specificity although it is shaped through digital technology. Similarly, a digital camera (for example) is an example of digital technology that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with cyberspace. When I speak of 'digitality' I am referring to the general properties of this technology and when I mark the distinction 'cyber', as I do here, I am emphasising the specific properties or qualities of online or Internet technologies.

³ Phelan goes on to point out how performance works of art literally vanish. 'This particular cultural moment exerts an urgent pressure to account for what cannot be reproduced. As those artists who have dedicated themselves to performance continually disappear and leave 'not a rack behind' it becomes

increasingly imperative to find a way to remember the undocumentable, unreproducible work they made... [Phelan, 1993, 31]

⁴ I am referring again to Phelan. See Chapter 1, endnote 8

⁵ I equate this process with the action of desire for recognition – this is the incorporative action that I posit as being fundamental within performance/body art and reveals that the body in performance is a body in desire.

⁶ The metaphoric representation of self becomes overloaded and unstable within performance work – the dialectic between self and representation becomes undefined and unstable, making it impossible for metaphorical representation to function, i.e. to fully replace the thing it represents.

⁷ Crimp's discussion is useful to me in terms of describing levels of presence. Presence, (on whatever level) is by no means assured through the immediate co-presence of an audience. Amelia Jones takes up this point and argues against the necessity for a co-present audience in the formation of an intersubjective relation. This relation is not a discrete space that one can step into and out of at will. See chapter 1 'Postmodernism, Subjectivity and Body Art: A Trajectory' [Jones, 1998, 21-52]

⁸ Ultimately I feel that Crimp's argument is unresolved regarding presence. However, given that virtual reality and cyberspace were not major issues for artists in the 70's (perhaps with the exception of the early work of Lynn Herschmann), his argument begins to question the *effects* of technology on performance works and provides a 'way in' to a discussion on virtual presence and what that means. If one accepts in principle the idea of differing levels of presence then it is possible to read virtuality as offering a distinct degree of presence, not physical and not imaginary but actual, if ephemeral.

⁹ Classic structural linguistics posits metaphor as the dominant model for language, a system with a bipolar structure. Metaphor is here read as the subordination of one term for another and metonym is understood as a part standing in for the whole. According to Roman Jakobson '*Metonymical responses [to the same stimulus] combine and contrast the positional similarity with semantic contiguity.*' In other words, the metonym denotes one thing by referring to something similar. The metaphor replaces one thing for another (love becomes a red rose for example) and it operates on a hierarchical principle – one goes 'on top' of the other (vertical). Furthermore it privileges the thing replaced (love) as an absent truth – the rose is not love, it only represents it, it aspires to it. In this action the metaphor echoes the principles of transcendence. The metonymic principle is multiplicity – like appears alongside like, or one is embedded within the other. If a live, unmediated performance can be understood as metonymic, then a mediated performance containing multiple versions/aspects of the artists body amplifies or enhances the metonymic and undoes the binaric structure of the metaphor. Metonym resists the idea of a replacement – the thing represented *and* the representation remain concurrently available. As such it can be understood as working horizontally and rhizomatically. [Jakobson, 1956]

¹⁰ The terminology is tricky here – according to Crimp’s model presence is described in stages: actual presence, disembodied presence (absence) and supplemental presence (technologically present but also physically disembodied – the paradox being that there is bodily representation).

¹¹ She is referring to ‘Inasmuch As It Is Always Taking Place’, see note 21

¹² Hill. *Inasmuch as It Is Always Already Taking Place*. 1990, MOMA, New York

¹³ MOMA publicity accompanying exhibition, possibly originating with Hill, posits this reading. See www.moma.org [date accessed 24.09.05]

¹⁴ This work by Hill is a good example of metonym in this context – the various body parts denote Hill’s body.

¹⁵ Of course the telephone conversation is a two-way affair, whereas the television broadcast goes one way. Interactive television has, I would argue, limited appeal and usefulness. One of the appealing features of TV is that it is presented to us with a minimum of choice. However, the issue at stake here is presence, not interactivity.

¹⁶ As is well known all manner of sexual activities take place on the Net, from masturbatory aids to contact sites.

¹⁷ The CAVE system was developed by the Electronic Visualization Laboratory at the University of Illinois (Chicago) in 1991. A new desktop version of the system has since been developed – ‘ImmersaDesk’ which is more portable and can be used with (relatively) sophisticated desktop computers. See www.evl.uic.edu [date accessed 24.09.05]

¹⁸ Cyberfeminist writer Donna Haraway says we are all cyborgs now. ‘*By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs.*’ From spectacles and walking sticks to pacemakers and plastic hips, humans have constantly augmented themselves – the age of the cyborg began when human beings began to wear shoes. Advances in genetic engineering and plastic surgery offer us the potential of an endless renewal of body parts and the opportunity to extend our physical lifetimes, but the human body retains its in-built obsolescence. The anxiety generated by our inability to overcome this process of decay leads us to consider and desire the extension of consciousness through technologies. Here I am referring in particular to the popular fantasy that consciousness can exist inside a computer, whether initially human or mechanical. For her analysis on machine/subject consciousness see Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’ [Haraway, 1991]

¹⁹ The use of the term ‘interactive’ has been applied to almost anything that requires an action in response to a work or programme and is often not just incorrect but downright misleading. In his article on cyberspace as venue, Philip Auslander discusses this issue. ‘*Writing about television in the late 1970’s, Raymond Williams made the salient point that most systems promising interactivity are really reactive rather than interactive. For Williams, a genuinely interactive system is one in which responses freely*

chosen by the user can influence the system in substantive ways. Any system that engages the user by offering choices from a menu is reactive, not interactive. It seems to me that actual interaction could only result from an artificially intelligent system, able to respond to infinite possibilities, able to learn and formulate an autonomous rejoinder, one that has not been pre-selected and programmed by another individual or machine. It would also need to be self-aware. The idea of interaction here has its basis in infinite openings not determined by finite possibilities. However, the technology for such a system is still in its research stages. [Auslander, 2001]

²⁰ If one thinks of a Rubik's cube for example – an algorithm in this situation is the string of moves (notation) that does a certain thing to the cube. For example the formula U © ~ F L ' D B is an algorithm (it represents a series of actions that change the faces of the cube).

²¹ For example, mechanical devices such as computers or cameras can be understood as prostheses. Marshall McLuhan argued this idea in 1964. *'Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man – the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media.'* [McLuhan, 1964, 3]

²² Indeed, microchips are manufactured (for the most part) by the small hands of children and women, in third world sweatshops.

²³ The term 'cybernetics' originates with pioneer Norbert Wiener and is derived from the Greek 'kybernetes' meaning steersman (of a ship) or governor. [Weiner, 1954]

²⁴ In the 1980's, computer art pioneer Roy Ascott developed a body of artwork based on the idea of 'telematics' that prefigures much web-based art of the 1990's. Telematics *'involves the technology of interactions among human beings and between the human mind and artificial systems of intelligence and perception'*. It is configured through telecommunications, specifically global networking. The telematic artwork positions the artist as facilitator and encourages the viewers creative input, with the interface as a dynamic between the two and the point at which content is created (in contrast to the object status of conventional artworks). [Ascott, 1990]

²⁵ As Lev Manovich (in *The Language of New Media*, 2001) points out claims for digitality currently refusing degradation of the source are deceptive. Even state of the art digital tools/programmes automatically compress, and thus degrade, the information contained within the code. The difference in image quality between digital footage and film remains vast (at this moment in time at least).

²⁶ Another factor affecting this issue concerns the site specificity of the work in question. Work devised to be experienced live does not guarantee the formation of an intersubjective relation between work and audience. The live work viewed live does not offer any greater definitive and objective truth to its

individual audience members than other methods of experiencing a work of art. For example, I am affected, intrigued and moved by Hannah Wilke's photographic works. But for this to occur I do not need to have been present at the taking of the photograph. Indeed I do not even need to 'see' the original photographs because I can relate to her work just as well through reproduction. On the other hand I know that my experience of her live performance works, would have been quite different to the one I have now if I had attended in person (they have a kind of partial life in my head/consciousness. I imagine them). Different maybe, but no more or less imbued with objectivity (or truth). Physical proximity to another body may potentially intensify one's experience, but only if one chooses. It is by no means a guarantee of a significant experience. I have been present at countless live performances that hardly touch me at all – I merely register their occurrence. The ones that do 'touch' me loiter in my memory and it ultimately seems that it makes very little difference whether I encountered them live or in a form of recording. However, with regards to the post-performance encounter with the documentation, I know that I have missed the opportunity to read it kinaesthetically and this is often the point of such work. Ideally, I think it comes down to experiencing the work in the form in which it was intended to be seen although encountering the work in another form, such as documentation, does not prevent the formation of the intersubjective relation on some level.

²⁷ Laurel's argument is grounded within Aristotelian theories of theatre and she seeks to make parallels between these two seemingly disparate positions, attempting to fit digital theories into an Aristotelian framework. [Laurel, 1991]

²⁸ Taussig warns that the mimetic faculty may be used as a tool of colonial repression '*Where not repressed, the mimetic faculty may serve as a tool of oppression in the 'civilising' project of Enlightenment.*' [Taussig, 1993, 254]

²⁹ See Steve Dixon for an extensive online analysis of the Chameleons project
www.mdx.ac.uk/www/epai/presencesite/html/dixchamel.html [date accessed 22.08.05]

³⁰ Steve Dixon says '*This sequence melds and synchronises the corporeal bodies of the performers to their digital doubles. The composite imagery concerns the coalescence and indivisibility of the two. This process runs very much contrary to dominant assumptions within critical theory which defines the virtual body as different, separate and detached (as discussed in the 'Theory section').*'
www.mdx.ac.uk/www/epai/presencesite/html/dixchamel.html [date accessed 22.08.05]

³¹ The kind of similitude put into play by the video double and the morph implies reversibility and is distinct from resemblance. Michel Foucault argued that resemblance '*presumes a primary reference that prescribes and classes*' copies according to the rigor of their mimetic relation to the thing itself. (Michel Foucault '*This is not a Pipe*' 1983, pubs. University of California Press, USA) It is defined through representation. However with similitude things become almost the same – the privileged status of the

original being rendered pointless. In 'Priests' the performer sets up an unstable equilibrium between levels of presence (in this case recorded and live).

CHAPTER THREE ENDNOTES

¹ I'm not suggesting here that the American landscape is neutral, or even a universal given, rather that the continual stream of imagery set in America has created, in my imagination, a generic American place in which my own (filmic) fantasies begin.

² The shock I speak of was a subliminal one, registered through a mild but perpetual sense of queasiness. However it was not unpleasant.

³ Otto Fenichel, born 39 years after Freud, was part of the third generation of psychoanalysts (born in 1890's and 1900's) and like Freud he was forced to flee from Nazi Germany during the Second World War. He wrote a comprehensive textbook on psychoanalysis, still considered to be a reliable benchmark for classical psychoanalytic terminology and ideas. For my purposes, his work on the scopophilic instinct and incorporation is most pertinent as I am seeking a classical psychoanalytic perspective. He draws on Sandor Ferenczi's (an earlier, pioneer psychoanalyst) work on introjection.

⁴ The address given in the movie is 10,086 Sunset Boulevard. In fact, the house used for the exterior shots was the John Paul Getty mansion on Wilshire Blvd. Sadly, it was torn down in the late 1950's and is now a gas station.

⁵ My narcissistic identification with Norma both troubles and intrigues me. On one level, Norma is portrayed as an empty but voracious husk – surely I do not think this of myself? I am anxious to redeem the character of Norma from this simplistic reading – something draws me to her but it is something much more positive and complex. Although Norma has been forgotten by Hollywood, she is not unloved. Max, her butler, used to be her director and her first husband. Consumed and discarded by Norma, he still loves her. So much so that he will be her faithful servant, take care of her, just to be near her. He no longer has a career or even an identity outside of that of servant (but not slave) to Norma. Even Joe Gillis becomes fond of her despite his entrapment and her mania – he comes back when she attempts suicide and becomes her lover. His apparent sympathy – '*poor devil*' – and Max's love make us aware that there is more to Norma than googly-eyed self obsession. The ending too allows us to see Norma escape punishment as such. She is already lost to the 'normal' world, lost in her madness her fantasy has finally come true – she is once more Norma Desmond, 'Star', in her own never-ending movie. It is the only place she can find happiness because Hollywood, her image has eaten her up. For me, this redeems the film from what could be read as a misogynistic portrayal of femininity as defined in and through the image of 'woman' as young and beautiful. The film is more complex than that. That Norma escapes punishment (she is saved from the painful reality of the everyday world) at the end is unusual in a film so overtly

melodramatic. In the genre of melodrama, transgressive women, women who sin in some way are punished, usually with death. But in *Sunset Boulevard* it is Joe who is punished, he is the one who dies. His sin was to fall in love with his best friend's girl. The film places Norma's dilemma centre stage. Age is the Hollywood actress's nightmare and youth still determines who works and who doesn't but as all actresses know, the camera can be deceptive. What the film does is to make an issue of the tyranny of the image. It shows how destructive Hollywood film can be, how dangerous it is to be lost in one's own image.

⁶ Joe Gillis about Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*

⁷ Definition of narcissism from *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2001, pubs. Oxford University Press, UK

⁸ *'Partial identifications in normal persons are of common occurrence. They reveal with particular clearness their character as a substitute gratification, since they usually follow upon a real object loss.'* Otto Fenichel in 'Identification' from *The Collected Papers*, [Fenichel, 1953, 107] See also Sigmund Freud 'The Interpretation of Dreams, Standard Edition Volume 4, [1955] and for the reading of identification as an 'accretion' see Victor Burgin, 'The World Behind the Mirror' from 'In/Different Spaces' [1996]

⁹ As I wrote previously consumption is the main metaphor of the film and this implies loss through the destructive action of consumption. In *Sunset Boulevard* Norma loses her mind, Joe loses his life, Max loses the love of his life (Norma), Betty Schaefer loses her love (Joe) and Artie Green loses his girl (Betty) and his best friend (Joe). Even the monkey dies.

¹⁰ See Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' [2001]

¹¹ We internalise the things we see, prior to shaping our (necessarily) narcissistic self. Freud first outlined the processes of identification as oral in origin – [Freud, 'Group psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', 1959]

¹² Primitive seeing is the way we see prior to defining subjectivity. Primitive perception is a *seeing with the body* in which vision is not distinguished from sensation. The characteristics of primitive seeing are reproduced in libidinal seeing in which physical sensation is more prominent than in ordinary seeing. Whilst not identical, perception and introjection are closely related as they are both elements of what was once a single process. *'...libidinal seeing as a regression to these archaic forms of seeing explains how it is that, as we have already noted, the aim of the scopophilic instinct regularly includes elements of sadism and the desire to incorporate the object.'* [Fenichel, 1953, 381]

¹³ As is well known, psychoanalysis uses the image of the baby at the breast, sucking and looking simultaneously, with the infant unaware of a difference between the baby's and mother's body. In the separation of baby and mother – the emergence of a narcissistic awareness of self – the connection between the satisfaction of physical hunger and looking has to change. As the narcissistic self evolves so too does the sexual drive. Even as adults we retain memories of our earliest sensations but as adults we are likely to reinterpret them through our sexual drives, even if this is barely perceptible. The pleasure we

derive from looking, in particular at movies and television, is akin to the primitive pleasures we felt as a baby being fed. On various levels we temporarily forget the distinction between our body and the thing that we look at, yet we *feel* pleasure (or pain, or fear, or horror etc.). This momentary return to 'primitive' looking is termed libidinal looking by Fenichel – see note 12 above

¹⁴ For an expansion of my analysis of narcissism see chapter 4 of this thesis. For a definitive modern work on narcissism, see Christopher Lasch, 'The Culture of Narcissism' [1979]

¹⁵ Another factor in narcissism is the illusion of mastery – the denial of dependence on another and mastery over the involuntary movements of the body, in the sense that one claims that the source for such movement is in the self and not another. Live performance work plays on this in two ways. Controlling the body in difficult situations is a factor in endurance performance works and involves mastering the physical response and discomfort of the body in order to maintain the pose/work. It means that one must refuse the body's normal response to pain or even danger, which is one of retreat. The endurance performance artist must overcome the urge to withdraw from the source of pain/discomfort/danger and it is this struggle for control that is at the core of the work. For example, if we consider some early works by the Australian performance artist Stelarc (in which he hung variously from a crane or a high ceiling, held up only by hooks that pierced his skin), we can read the body as being the site of a struggle for control between mind and body. Alternatively, in American artist Chris Burden's performance works that invoke danger ('Shoot' being the most infamous) we see an aggressive show of mastery over the body, an insistence on the physical limitations of the body that falls somewhere between triumph and defeat. But the idea of control does not just concern the flesh and blood of the artist, it concerns also the audience. In performance works that utilise the stage, borrowing from theatre, the issue of control is still palpable. Whilst the audience has a degree of control – they can, after all, throw things at you, insult you or leave – it is the performer who can control their emotional response. For example, someone who pisses onstage (Leigh Bowery and others) or who vomits (Ian Hinchcliffe) can revolt the audience – make them feel physically sick. Franko B bleeds and people faint. On a less visceral level, I recently watched a performance by Bobby Baker who, at one point, talked of the death of her father – she pitched it beautifully so that the audience, almost as one, gasped. We can employ even the most unsophisticated devices to manipulate an audience.

¹⁶ 'Inasmuch as it is Already Taking Place' (1990). I discussed this work in chapter 2.

¹⁷ My presumption is based mostly on his non-pejorative use of the term narcissism

¹⁸ The deliberate embrace of narcissism means it cannot be contained within the idea of a solipsistic self – it implicates the Other. Use of technology (within mediatised performance) amplifies the narcissistic condition, and as the self 'turns itself inside out' it is devoured by the camera and returned, augmented by technology and changed through his action. The narcissistic, mediatised image (of body, of action), offered up to others is a form of communication particularly powerful as it is directed straight at the heart

of the viewer's narcissism. So when Vito Acconci is caressing himself under a table and telling his fantasy to the camera, he makes us acutely self conscious because we cannot help but enter into his fantasy, and by implication our own, usually hidden, auto-erotic fantasies [Vito Acconci 'Undertone', 1973, Video, B&W, 34.12 mins]

¹⁹ I understand Lacan to mean the shoot as a growth (pousse), as more like a tendril, snaking out and never disconnected from the seer.

²⁰ The modes of seeing I describe here are based on descriptions provided by Fenichel in 'Scotophilic Instinct and Identification'. *'When looking has become libidinized, so that the aim of the person who looks is not perception but sexual gratification, it differs from the ordinary kind of looking. Libidinal looking often takes the form of a fixed gaze, which may be said to be spastic, just as the act of running, when libidinized is spastic. (Libidinization has the effect of impairing an ego function.)'* [Fenichel, 1953, 379]

²¹ Sandor Ferenczi (1873-1933) was a Hungarian psychoanalyst and close colleague of Freud, until they fell out over Ferenczi's theory that childhood abuse accounts for many neuroses manifested later in life (Confusion of Tongues Between Adults and the Child & The Language of Tenderness and of Passion). It is his work on introjection that was most influential on Fenichel. [Ferenczi, (1954) 1994]

²² Is it possible to speak of the relation of the look/gaze to death, to God and to punishment, shame and pleasure without being caught up in the castration complex? It seems that one way to do this is to speak through introjection and incorporation and the subsequent action of reprojecting. The action of the libido within active looking can be understood by returning to Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia, in which states we respond to the loss of a loved one by making, of them, an object. The 'object' is symptomatic of our need for something to replace the one who has been lost (to the Ego). Freud describes this in terms of mourning and melancholia. Melancholia is where the ego is perceived as being separate from the self and is understood as object, which is then subject to (sadistic) violence. When the libido is hurt it is displaced onto an object (or person as object of desire). When the object dies the result is normally mourning but when the object is lost to us, melancholia results. The libido has to cathect somewhere, some how, onto something – melancholia and mourning are attempts to circumvent the anxiety that would ensue from a 'free ranging' libido with no direction. For Lacan, it is the 'split' between the eye and the gaze that reveals the possibility of eluding castration. *'The split between the gaze and vision will enable us...to add the scopophilic drive to the list of drives...and it is this drive that most completely eludes the term castration.'* [Lacan, 1977, 78] see also Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' [2001]

²³ Laura Mulvey's term 'scopophilia' has been taken up by many to describe, in particular, the masculine gaze of traditional cinema. I am using the term 'scotophilia' here, in accordance with Fenichel, to specify a broader understanding that includes but is not confined to cinematic (and masculine) viewing. [Mulvey, 1991]

²⁴ Fenichel describes it in this way: '*Finally let me remind you that man's mechanical ingenuity has actually created a 'devouring eye' which looks at and incorporates the external world and later projects it outward again. I refer of course to the camera.*' [Fenichel, 1953, 395]

²⁵ Following on from Freud, in the words of Laplanche and Pontalis, The oral stage is '*the first stage of libidinal development: sexual pleasure at this period is bound predominantly to that excitation of the oral cavity and lips which accompanies feeding.*' [Laplanche & Pontalis, 1998, 321] In the early development of the subject (first 18 months of life), life is driven by the relationship of the source (mouth) to the aim (incorporation) and to the object (ingestion of food). In this way the object relationship is organised through nutrition and influenced by fantasies that acquire meanings of eating and being eaten (cannibalistic impulse). The emphasis is on the erotogenic zone (orality) and the relational mode is incorporation. Karl Abraham posited the term oral sadistic as a sub-division of the oral stage. Firstly there is sucking and secondly biting as its aggressive counterpart. The experience of satisfaction is posited by Freud as being in the image of the external satisfying object, in that it is seen to be able to end hunger. This image is responsible for constructing the subject's desire and continuing quest for an object to replicate the primal experience of satisfaction. [Abraham, 1927], [Freud, 1992 (1905)]

²⁶ A video performance for example is treated as an object in the final analysis. Usually a limited edition is made and priced in the same way as one would price a print.

²⁷ Principle member of the Viennese Actionists, Nitsch stages elaborate rituals that include animal carcasses and dousing his performers in blood. He describes these actions, which are based in Dionysian mythology, as cathartic.

²⁸ Ron Athey, American artist, creates live tableaux, often based on his early experiences within a strict Pentecostal family. Originally he made work in strip clubs and S&M venues. His intensely beautiful performances often include sexual penetration, cutting, tattooing and loss of blood. As such, Athey's HIV status has also been a cause for much criticism from the mainstream media, but his positioning of his so-called 'sick' body as sexually active aggressively questions our assumptions about how a body should behave, what its limitations should be.

²⁹ Franko B, 'Action 398', live performance

³⁰ National Revue of Live Art, annual platform for performance and live art. Since 1987, the revue has been based at The Arches performance space in Glasgow. For more details see www.newmoves.co.uk [date accessed 24.09.05]

³¹ Far be it from me to suggest that the live art crowd have a particular taste for blood, but Franko's session was fully booked almost instantly causing a stampede that rivalled the rush for Kylie tickets.

³² This anecdote was related by Franko B in conversation with me at NRLA, Glasgow, February 2001. The conversation was in general about the non-predictability of an audience reaction to work.

³³ 'I Miss You' performed by Franko B at Beaconsfield, London, 14.04.00

³⁴ Spoken by the character Doctor Chiltern in the film *Silence of the Lambs* [Demme, 1991]

³⁵ Total Film Movie Poll, published 26.09.02, The Top Ten Movie Serial Killers as voted by the readers of Total Film are: 1. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) in *The Silence Of The Lambs* (1991), *Hannibal* (2001), *Red Dragon* (2002), 2. John Doe (Kevin Spacey) in *Se7en* (1997), 3. Michael Myers in the *Halloween* series (1978 – ongoing), 4. Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) in *Psycho* series (1960-90), 5. Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen) in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). At the time of writing it has not been superseded. [Total Film Magazine, October Edition, 2002, UK]

³⁶ Charles Baudelaire [1973]

³⁷ In the film *Silence of the Lambs* [Demme, 1991]

³⁸ Bill fattens his victims up and conditions their skin. In this he echoes the Hansel and Gretel story in which the witch catches and then fattens up her victims before cooking and eating them. This underscores one of the many connections with myth in the Lecter stories.

³⁹ This is another mythic underscoring. Lecter's power to control animals is unexplained and is left as a kind of magic. It maybe an ironic reference by Thomas Harris to St Francis of Assisi or perhaps to the story of Circe (she turned Odysseus' men into pigs).

⁴⁰ Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* [Demme, 1991]

⁴¹ Quotation from the preface of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (addressed 'To Libertines') [Sade, 1990 (1965)]

⁴² Relationality denotes kinship (in general terms) and intersubjectivity denotes something understood or existing between two or more subjects.

⁴³ *'...Sade as Grand Juror almost always dismissed the charges against the accused. Holding their fate in his hands, he refused to harm...in the name of the law. He was even led to resign from his office of President of the Piques section. He wrote to Gaudy: 'I considered myself obliged to leave the chair of vice president; they wanted me to put a horrible inhuman act to a vote. I never would.' In December 1793, he was imprisoned on charges of 'moderatism'. Released 375 days later he wrote with disgust 'My government imprisonment, with the guillotine before my eyes, did me a hundred times more harm than all the Bastilles imaginable.'* [de Beauvoir, 1955, 16]

⁴⁴ As Maurice Blanchot points out, one of Sade's heroines, Juliette, in the novel of the same name, is thoroughly reprimanded by Clairwill for her enthusiastic passion that drives her debauchery. Desire is seen as weakness by the libertine. *'These are dangerous and facile tendencies. Crime matters more than lust, and the cold-blooded, the premeditated crime is greater than the crime committed in the heat of passion.'* [Blanchot, 1990, 68]

⁴⁵ Baudelaire, 'Fleurs du mal' [1972]

⁴⁶ The Reign of Terror was a period during the French Revolution prompted by the ascent of Robespierre, according to whom 'La terreur n'est autre chose que la justice prompte, sévère, inflexible.' (Terror is

nothing other than prompt, severe, inflexible justice.). Lasting from September 1793 until the summer of 1794, during the Terror, between 18,000 and 40,000 lost their lives. In the last month alone, 1300 people were executed. At one point, the good citizens of Le Place de la Concorde complained to the City Council that they were unable to go about their daily business, on account of the invasive stench of blood and death that permeated the area, following the numerous daily executions (by guillotine). The Council duly shifted the guillotine to another part of town – the garden of a prison. The prison garden in question was overlooked by Sade in his cell.

⁴⁷ 'A travers les lueurs que tourmente le vent
La Prostitution s'allume dans les rues ;
Comme une fourmilière elle ouvre ses issues ;
Partout elle se fraye un occulte chemin,
Ainsi que l'ennemi qui tente un coup de main ;
Elle remue au sein de la cité de fange
Comme un ver qui dérobe à l'homme ce qu'il mange'

Translation:

'Across them who are tormented by the wind
Prostitution lights up in the streets
Like an anthill she opens up her exits
Everywhere she forces her hidden ways
Like the enemy who attempts a sleight of hand
She stirs in the breast of the city
Like a maggot who undresses the man it eats'

Extract from *Crepuscule du Soir*, Charles Baudelaire, 'Fleurs du mal', [1972, 101] Baudelaire constantly makes viral metaphors within the poems echoing his own illness (syphilis) which was untreated.

CHAPTER 4 ENDNOTES

¹ In January 2004, a German court convicted self-confessed cannibal Armin Meiwes of manslaughter and sentenced him to eight years and six months in prison. Meiwes admitted killing and eating Bernd Juergen Brandes three years previously, after a sado-masochistic sex session. He met Brandes after placing an advert on the Internet for "young, well-built men aged 18 to 30 to slaughter". Meiwes told investigators he took Brandes back to his home, where Brandes agreed to have his penis cut off, which Meiwes then sautéed and served up for them to eat together. Meiwes says he then killed Brandes with his consent. Meiwes ate the flesh of Brandes over several months, defrosting cuts from his freezer. It was only after

Brandes was dead that he could gain sexual satisfaction from eating his flesh. Source

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3443803.stm> (date checked 26.08.05)

² *'Incorporation denotes a fantasy, introjection a process...[drawing on Melanie Klein]...fantasy is essentially narcissistic; it tends to transform the world rather than inflict harm on the subject.'* [Abraham & Torok, 1994, 125]

³ Information about cannibalism was drawn from different sources. They are: Oxford Reference Dictionary, 1982, 126, Rachael Bell, *The Ancient Taboo in Modern Times*, www.crimelibrary.com/criminal_mind/psychology/cannibalism date checked 26.08.05, Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannibalism#Modern_cannibalism date checked 26.08.05

⁴ Miewes, convicted of manslaughter in 2004 is to face a retrial for murder. Source:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4472593.stm> date checked 26.08.05

⁵ Of course, what I say here about Miewes is speculation. In the same spirit, I am considering a theory that suggests a possible candidate as base for the character of Lecter. Thomas Harris is indulging in a literary game. Is it possible that the French writer/artist Pierre Klossowski is the basis for Hannibal Lecter? Hypocrite lecteur means reader. Harris is already playing word games with the characters (see chapter one notes about Baudelaire and Lecter). Klossowski is well known as reader of Sade, more than once he has been called an apologist for the Marquis. The clue is in his relation to the painter Balthus – they were brothers. In the novels, Harris mentions that Lecter is the cousin of the painter Balthus. This seemingly insignificant fact sits oddly within the text. It adds nothing to the character of Lecter for the reader, but in this way de Sade is alluded to, if not mentioned, making it clear that Harris meant for us to know that Lecter is not de Sade. But the odd family fact, the connection between Lecter and an artist known for his darkly sexualised images of young girls (it is also clear that Lecter is not primarily a sexual predator, he doesn't rape) points us to who he is. However, Harris' motivation will always remain a mystery as he refuses to discuss Lecter's origins.

⁶ Lycaon is the Arcadian tyrant, featured in Ovid's *'Metamorphoses*, who killed, cooked and ate a man. For this crime of blasphemy, Zeus turned him into a werewolf (he was a prototype for subsequent were-creatures). Other mythical precedents inform the character of Lecter – Baba Yaga, Tantalus in the Underworld and the witch in Hansel and Gretel also spring to mind. For an interesting exploration of mythical monsters and their origins, see Marina Warner, *'No Go the Bogeyman'* [Warner, 1998]

⁷ See chapter 3 for my comments of autism in this respect. *'The curse which weighed upon Sade – and which only his childhood could explain – was this "autism" which prevented him from ever forgetting himself or being genuinely aware of the reality of the other person...Normally, it is as a result of the vertigo of the other made flesh that one is spellbound within one's own flesh. If the subject remains confined within the solitude of his consciousness, he escapes this agitation and can rejoin the other only by conscious performance.'* [de Beauvoir, 1955, 22]

⁸ The extended quote is helpful here: *'The fantasy of incorporation is the introduction of all or part of a love object or a thing into one's body, possessing, expelling or alternatively acquiring, keeping, losing it – here are varieties of fantasy indicating, in the typical forms of possession or feigned dispossession, a basic intrapsychic situation: the situation created by the reality of a loss sustained by the psyche. If accepted and worked through, the loss would require a major re-adjustment. But the fantasy of incorporation merely simulates profound psychic transformation through magic; it does so by implementing literally something that has only figurative meaning. So in order to have to 'swallow' a loss, we fantasise swallowing (or having swallowed) that which has been lost as if it were some kind of a thing. Two interrelated procedures can constitute the magic of incorporation: demetaphorization (taking literally what is meant figuratively) and objectivation (pretending that the suffering is not an injury to the subject but instead a loss sustained by the love object.). The magical 'cure' by incorporation exempts the subject from the painful process of reorganization. When in the form of imaginary or real nourishment, we ingest the love object we miss, this means that we refuse to mourn and that we shun the consequences of mourning even though our psyche is fully bereaved. Incorporation is the refusal to reclaim as our own the part of ourselves that we placed in what we lost; incorporation is the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognised as such, would effectively transform us. In fine, incorporation is the refusal to introject loss. The fantasy of incorporation reveals a gap within the psyche; it points to something that is missing just where introjection should have occurred.'* As inverted metaphor, incorporation is the 'not putting into words' of something – it becomes 'anti-metaphor' (a term introduced by Abraham & Torok). In psychoanalytic terms, this annulment of figurative language signals regression to a kind of infantilism. As infants we learn to fill the empty, open and hungry mouth with cries, at first, and then with words. This desire or need for food is not initially distinguished from the desire or need for comfort. The adult who suffers the loss of a desired person/object may develop an incorporative fantasy, but that fantasy is kept secret because of the inability or refusal to speak of the loss. When words fail to fill the subject's void an imaginary thing must be 'inserted into the mouth in their place.' This is simultaneously a move away from introjection towards incorporation and a denial of the problem. *'The desperate ploy of filling the mouth with illusory nourishment has the equally illusory effect of eradicating the idea of a void to be filled with words...Born of the verdict of impracticable introjection, the fantasy of incorporation appears at once as its regressive and reflexive substitute. This means of course that every incorporation has introjection as its nostalgic vocation.'* [Abraham & Torok, 1994, 127-8]

⁹ See chapter 3

¹⁰ Following its initial publication in June 1857, *Fleurs du mal* attracted much criticism from certain quarters. It was deemed as being obscene and in defiance of the laws that protected religion and morality. Baudelaire was fined and six of the poems removed from the series. The full work was re-published posthumously.

¹¹ Baudelaire's experiments with hashish are well known and it is worth pointing out that he speaks of hallucinating whilst being under the influence, meaning that either his intake was prodigious or that the hashish available in Paris at that time was considerably stronger than it is now. Most likely the resin would have been soaked also in opium to produce such an effect – a common practice in the last century.

¹² Here Baudelaire is referring the allegory of selling one's soul to the devil, although the devil in the poem represents not just the evil within all men and women, but the machinic, capitalistic 'God' of modernity.

¹³ Patriarchy, as formulated through religious concepts of God the father, is homogeneous and systematic.

¹⁴ Here Bataille draws on Nietzsche's arguments about the domestication of the body by culture. For Nietzsche, the individual is controlled and disciplined by the mechanisms of social control and the sublimation of bodily drives leads to the weakened individual. This leads to a reversal of the master/slave relationship in that the master is supplanted by the slave, but the new master brings with him a slave mentality. This slave morality resents the individual body and any threat to the 'herd', as Nietzsche describes it. The asceticism of Christian morality is an example of herd mentality and morality – submitting to (bodily) discipline leads to eventual reward (in heaven). *'Herd instinct. — Wherever we encounter a morality, we also encounter valuations and an order of rank of human impulses and actions. These valuations and orders of rank are always expressions of the needs of a community and herd: whatever benefits it most—and secondmost, and thirdmost—that is also considered the first standard for the value of all individuals. Morality trains the individual to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function. The conditions for the preservation of different communities were very different; hence there were very different moralities. Considering essential changes in the forms of future herds and communities, states and societies, we can prophesy that there will yet be very divergent moralities. Morality is herd instinct in the individual.'* Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Gay Science', ed. Bernard Williams, 2001 (1887), pubs. Cambridge University Press, UK

¹⁵ Even though psychoanalysis identifies 'excessive' behaviour and works with that. It seeks to heal, or to restore the subject to 'normality'.

¹⁶ *Perspectiva* (Latin) means seeing through, it is the 'science of sight' and is linked to Renaissance concepts of humanism. Originally applied to optical devices, also came to mean the art of delineating solid objects on a plain surface, producing the impression of apparent relative positions, distance, sizes as do the actual objects when viewed from a particular point. This creates a reproduction of the 'actual', through representation, relative to and marked by distance. If you construct a perspectival grid over an image, the place where receding lines meet – the vanishing point – is in exact proportion to the point of the viewing eye. An eye is thus outside the field of its own vision. *Perspectival viewing is a cultural practice to which we have become habituated.*

¹⁷ I am drawing on Jean Baudrillard here: *'It is in the Renaissance that the false is born along with the natural. From the fake shirt in front to the use of the fork, as artificial prosthesis, to the stucco interiors and the great baroque theatrical machinery.'* [Baudrillard, 1983, 83]

¹⁸ Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (1508-80) greatly influenced subsequent English architecture. The term Palladin derives from his work.

¹⁹ As Michel Foucault points out *'At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century. It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies 'made a display' of themselves.'* [Foucault, 1990, 3]

²⁰ She takes this further: *'The development of a palpable awareness of the self can be followed through the changes by means of which it is produced, beginning in the Middle Ages when information begins to accumulate – the increasing number of family and self portraits; the increasing popularity of mirrors; the development of autobiographical elements in literature; the evolution of seating from benches to chairs; the concept of a child as a stage in development; the ramifications of multiple rooms in small dwellings; the elaboration of a theater of interiority in drama and the arts; and most recently, psychoanalysis.'* [Stone, 1995, 19]

²¹ The Internet throws up many questions about morality. If we look for long enough on the Internet we can find examples of the most extreme physical behaviour (usually in full colour with animation). Whilst writing this I was making some enquiries into serial killers and the camera. What I wanted to know was if they took photographs/filmed their actions and how significant the camera was to their fantasy. It took me three hits to get from a Google page about Jeffrey Dahmer to colour photographs of his victims in situ. What I found was that the camera was not especially significant to him, but what I have in my mind now is a gruesome array of dismembered corpses, something that I could well do without. To reconsider Meiwes (who did film his action) for a moment though, his fantasy was facilitated almost entirely by the Internet. And as McLuhan asserts it is not what we do with the medium but the medium itself that is the message, what we can draw from this is that on the internet, morality has no place. Some Internet users find it hard to distinguish between fantasy and actuality, and not only do some people perpetrate the most atrocious crimes against others, many of us have the appetite to consume images of these acts.

²² The idea of Skin Ego began in abstract form with Anzieu drawing on Freud (especially 'Notes on the Mystic Writing Pad, 1925 and the writings of Paul Federn 1871-1952). *'Freud was principally interested in the nucleus or kernel, in the unconscious as the kernel of the psyche, in the Oedipus Complex as the kernel of upbringing, culture and neurosis. Federn by contrast directed his attention...to the outer surface or*

shell and phenomena of the periphery...in Federn's view the boundaries of Ego are perpetually changing.'

[Anzieu, 1989, 90]

²³ Our striving towards a centre is generated by the idea that the self is somehow centred and relies on the concept of structure. Further, this logic is reversible. '*...the entire history of the concept of structure...must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of center...Its matrix...is the determination of Being as presence in all senses of the word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence - eidos, arche, telos, energia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject) alethia, transcendentality, consciousness, God, Man, so forth'* [Derrida, 1978, 353]

²⁴ I read Anzieu's argument as concerned with marking the limit of the body, even though the Skin Ego is a fantasy or principle. He also marks the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of fantasy versus physical reality and describes the Skin Ego in terms of the pellicle. Does this not reinforce the idea of an edge to my being? '*Pellicle: a fine membrane protecting and enveloping living organisms, a 'film' on the surface of liquid, the fine surface of a solid.*' Additionally a '*pellicle means the film used in photography*'; the base for photosensitive coating. For Anzieu, '*A dream is a pellicle in both these senses.*' It is a shield that protects the sleeper's psyche, a fine membrane that places internal and external stimuli on the same thin and fragile plane, levelling out their differences. This membrane is fragile and is broken when the sleeper awakes and it is ephemeral because it only lasts for as long as the dream lasts. '*Moreover, the dream is an impressionable 'pellicle'. It registers mental images which are usually visual in nature, though they do occasionally have subtitles or a soundtrack; sometimes the images are stills...but most of them are strung together in an animated sequence as in cinematography or...a video film.*' The 'dream pellicle' is a psychic construction that represents our response to a powerful perception (fear?) that the skin enveloping the body is deficient. It is deficient because, as a porous surface, as a system that works according to tactile exchange and feedback, skin cannot truly separate our bodies from the world, from other bodies. Therefore we construct a new covering which is visualised yet invisible. Not only does this fantasy pellicle help us to come to terms with or to make sense of the strangeness of dreams in that liminal state between waking and sleeping, but it also shapes our understanding of the limits of personal body space. [Anzieu, 1989, 211-14]

²⁵ She understands this a '*pure realm clearly indicative of the feminine body*' because, in the attempted creation of the homunculus, the (always male) alchemist reveals a desire to not only become mother but also to return to the womb. The 'foetus' becomes an extension of himself. [Morse, 1998, 130]

²⁶ '*Electric circuitry is orientalizing the West. The contained, the distinct, the separate – our Western legacy – are being replaced by the flowing, the unified, the fluid.*' [McLuhan, 2001 (1967)]

²⁷ Orlan in conversation with Lesley Aiello at the Ego Symposium, held in the Old Operating Theatre, London, 08.05.01

²⁸ Orlan is firm in saying that her work is definitely not mutilation. See <http://www.orlan.net> for her thoughts on 'Carnal Art' and details about her practice [date accessed: 29.08.05]

²⁹ Our dependence on nature thus renounced means that we look to technology to provide the ways and means to be independent of it. But in our attempts to master nature we damage the very thing on which our species depends for survival. The invention of the car, the plane, the rocket and the nuclear bomb may, through pollution, accident or aggression become the things that may annihilate us. Concomitant to the desire to master nature through technology is the revival of interest in ancient superstitions and Gnostic belief systems. As Lasch puts it, '*the anxieties peculiar to the modern world seem to have intensified old mechanisms of denial*'. These revived beliefs reject the body and deny the flesh, turning always towards spirit, unable to reconcile it with matter. [Lasch, 1991, 245]

³⁰ That desire is what constitutes the self is a Hegelian premise. Hegel reads the 'I' as being shaped through desire. '*The conscious Desire of a being is what constitutes that being as I and reveals it as such by moving it to say I...It is in and by – or better still, as – 'his' Desire that man is formed and is revealed – to himself and to others – as an I, as the I that is essentially different from, and radically opposed to, the non-I. The (human) I is the I of a Desire or of Desire.*' [Hegel/Kojeve 1980 (1947), 3]

CONCLUSION ENDNOTES

¹ Also quoted in Chapter 1

² Source New Oxford English Dictionary, 2001, pubs. Oxford University Press, UK

³ Performance *can* be metonymic of mortality in two ways it seems to me. In the first place we can read the 'death' of the body as enacted/performed/embodied in the live presentation of a temporal work, with the body as site. The performance, like the body, exists for a mere moment (in the greater scheme of things). However, I do not mean to imply that *all* performance is a rehearsal of death. Rather that performance art, in general terms, can be read as concerned with mortality and entropy, with the end of things. However, my specific concern is a particular mode of performance art, that of the sole body in live or recorded performance driven by questions of identity and the nature of flesh/body, a performing body mediated by or immersed in technology. The relation to ideas of death is more apparent here. To paraphrase Norbert Weiner, the pioneer of cybernetics, all technology is an attempt to circumvent death and entropy and it is this context in which the work comes to be made. These performances, these little existences, begin and end leaving nothing but a trace, usually the photograph, the video or the film and sometimes a physical mark. Little existences inevitably become little deaths, the photograph becomes memento mori. The performance that considers the body's mortality and then further emphasises this through photography, film and video, is metonymic in that it places a performance of mortality as representing mortality. Secondly, with specific reference to the work of Hannah Wilke and Bob Flanagan,

their performances, especially towards the end of their lives become concerned with mortality, with pain and with representations of bodily decay and ultimately death. But although I do not wish to conflate their respective practices, the images that remain from both artists do more than just document the process of their dying. They present to us, the viewers left behind, an image that demands we engage with death and the decay of the body through a performance of self, within the contexts of their overall practices, and through the images or videos that remain, constantly reminding us that the performing body is not just absent, but that the self (Hannah Wilke, Bob Flanagan) represented no longer exists.

⁴ See note 32, chapter 4

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Additional Documentation

CD Rom, attached to back cover, contains a Powerpoint presentation of stills (documentation of performance/installation/photographic works) and a Quicktime movie showing documentation of the live performance made for the Viva Voce (20.01.06)