

Embodied Politics and Extreme Disgust:
An Investigation into the Meanings of Bodily Order
and Bodily Disorder, with Particular Reference to the
Work of William Burroughs and David Cronenberg

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the ways in which images of bodily disgust function in social conflicts. It considers the necessary embodiment of political struggle: that is, the ways in which inequalities are sustained and contested through the material forms taken by human bodies and the meanings attached to bodily states.

In chapter one I map out the theoretical grounding for an inquiry into embodiment, by showing how the physical forms taken by bodies are produced by social practices. I argue that ‘the body’ should be seen as a biological product, a ‘body project’, regulated and transformed by its environment. This in turn leads me to a consideration of how such body-shapings sustain regimes of power through constructing for subjects physical forms which are designed to maintain existing systems of inequality. Through a reading of Michel Foucault’s work, I show how such bodies are also able to resist power by making use of the material and discursive structures which seek, but fail, to render them wholly submissive.

In chapter two I look at the ways in which the body acts as a map of the psyche, producing a subject which understands itself in terms of its experience of its body parts. I also consider how the body acts as a social symbol, encoding anxieties about the society that it inhabits. By considering both psychoanalytic accounts, and the work of Mary Douglas, I interrogate how concepts of order, form, and integrity become central to embodied subjectivity.

In chapter three I consider how, in the *Naked Lunch* Quartet, William Burroughs represents the body as under threat from repulsive external substances, and how his depiction of such substances in fact relies on a notion of body matter itself as repulsive. I will show how this results from his conceptualization of bodily materiality as antithetical to freedom, and I argue that by demonstrating the impossibility of escaping from acts of invasion and possession, Burroughs’s texts in fact undermine the libertarian position that he adopts. In chapter four I develop this argument through a comparison with Julia

Kristeva's concept of abjection. I suggest that his representation of abject bodies enables Burroughs to critique the invasive mechanisms of authority, but requires that he collude with the stigmatizing discourses of authority in order to adopt such a position. In particular I consider how this affects his representation of gender.

In chapter five I show how David Cronenberg's *Shivers* may be read as a film that both sustains and critiques the notion of innate bodily disorder. I argue that this is derived from his reliance upon notions of a hierarchy of bodies derived from inequalities of race and class. In chapter six I develop this critique with a reading of Cronenberg's *The Fly*. I suggest that this film is much more explicit about the fact that bodily chaos is in fact a state experienced by the socially excluded. It offers a critique of the processes by which we are made to feel disgust at our bodies, suggesting that disgust inaugurates a logic of paranoid purification, which in fact impedes the possibilities of the acceptance of those bodies which fall outside certain social limits.

Finally, in my conclusion, I look at how Cronenberg's *Rabid* might be seen as a compendium of the issues of embodied politics, and use this to suggest possible directions in which the work of this thesis might be extended.

Acknowledgements

I had always - in a rather surly manner - regarded acknowledgements as another hollow academic ritual, to be viewed with scepticism. But coming to it now, it has instead been a great pleasure reflecting on everyone who sustained this project - giving me a sense of how lucky I've been to have people who would put themselves out for me. As well as a general indebtedness to all the friends who took the time to listen to me complaining or enthusing about my thesis, special thanks for support of many, many different forms go to the following.

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Above all, thanks to Bethany for being so good natured even while getting so much less of me than she wanted or deserved through most of her life - I hope the rest of it will be very different !

Abbreviations

The following frequently cited works have been abbreviated for convenience.

William Burroughs

NE *Nova Express*
NL *The Naked Lunch*
TTE *The Ticket that Exploded*
SM *The Soft Machine*

Mary Douglas

PD *Purity and Danger*

Michel Foucault

DP *Discipline and Punish*
HS *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*

Elizabeth Grosz

VB *Volatile Bodies*

Julia Kristeva

PH *Powers of Horror*
RPL *Revolution in Poetic Language*

Kaja Silverman

TVW *The Threshold of the Visible World*

Full references can be found in the bibliography at the end of the thesis.

Introduction

‘St Angela of Foligno’, Simone de Beauvoir tells us, ‘drank with delight the water in which she had just washed lepers’ hands and feet’.¹ In Angelina’s own words:

This beverage flooded us with such sweetness that the joy followed us home. Never had I drunk with such pleasure. In my throat was lodged a piece of scaly skin from the lepers’ sores. Instead of getting rid of it, I made a great effort to swallow it and I succeeded. It seemed to me that I had just partaken of communion. I shall never be able to express the delight that inundated me. (Quoted in *The Second Sex*, p.685)

I assume that, like me, you find such an image not only unsettling, but physically disgusting: I feel my stomach turn when I read it. Why should this be the case? One sort of answer would be that it is inherently so: that this physical event is one that naturally revolts and which we are biologically programmed to find disgusting as a means of self-protection. I want to begin from the position that it is not necessarily so - that the feelings which such an image generates are a complex response to the cultural concerns that the image mobilizes. After all, it is clear enough that the act does not simply revolt Angelina: she herself seems to experience a relationship of pleasure - if not ecstasy - to this particular interchange of bodies. At the same time her pleasure seems to rely on the relationship that she has to particular notions of bodily disgust: if the act were not already constructed as physically disgusting, she could take no pleasure in transcending the conventional limits of the body.² Rather than being inevitable, the distress that we attach to such a physical event then arises from its violation of a series of precepts about the body: that the body is a regular, integral object, its cleanliness maintained by precepts covering its behaviour and self-discipline. This particular act focuses on a point of extreme vulnerability, the mouth, through which the inner space of the body is reached by the outer world. The entry of food into the body questions the separateness of Angelina’s body, reminding us that it maintains its existence through absorbing alien

¹ On the life of this thirteenth century saint and her relationship to Christian traditions of bodily mortification, see Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, pp.103-113.

² For a statement of this process as a Christian virtue, see St Augustine’s ‘Patience’.

material - and that one volume of body matter (the leper's) may become imbricated with that of another (Angelina's). Then, the morsel of leper's flesh challenges the notion of the body's integrity, suggesting a body that collapses into pieces - unsettling any sense of a body as ordered and whole. And the contagion associated with leprosy suggests the ease with which an apparently beautiful or regular body might too become scarred and disorganized. The image thus mobilizes a series of tensions within notions of the acceptable forms, practices, and contours of the human body.

This thesis will explore how images such as this operate within a range of 'discourses of disgust': those collections of statements, images and conceptual structures regarding the human body which mark various of its attributes, activities and organs as repulsive. What psychic processes generate this disgust in the body of the observer ? What social processes invest some aspects of the body with disgust and not others ? What material situations organize these events and how does representation affect those material situations ? My aim is not to locate some final answer to these questions, but to explore a number of useful approaches, in order to show the variety of ways in which bodily disgust may be deployed and the range of social situations in which it plays a role.

This thesis began as an analysis of the ways that images of bodily disgust were used in various discourses to underwrite a language of purification and redemption, and in particular their function in sexual politics: homophobic imagery of sex between men as sickening; notions of bisexuality as an infectious plague; the pathologization of sado-masochism; gay male and lesbian constructions of the body of 'the opposite sex' as repulsive; the representations of transsexual surgery as a crime against nature. It was to rely heavily on the idea of a repressed natural body and was to seek out texts where this body was able to speak for itself, rather than being silenced by culture - a line of thought heavily influenced by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. However, I became increasingly interested in the ways that such a discourse of the natural served only to legitimate particular cultural priorities, and hence my enquiry moved towards viewing the body as a constructed object. Although I still have sympathies with, for instance, Deleuze and

Guattari's arguments for the body as a site of anarchic energy,³ it now seems to me untenable to think of the body as the site of essentially free impulses which are imprisoned by social conditioning and which struggle to get out: the 'hydraulic' or 'repressive' conception of bodily desires famously criticized by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Instead I am interested in the body as an object *all* of whose capacities, limitations, desires and practices emerge through a social matrix. While I still hold my initial position that disgust for aspects of the body is constructed in and through discourses of bodily stigmatization which serve forms of social power, I am now also arguing that those bodily forms and discourses of the body which resist that stigmatization are also and equally constructed through a social matrix.

As a result, my interest has shifted away from phenomenological approaches, in which the intentional desires and innate material capacities of the body are the originary forces that produce society, rather than being produced by the social milieu they occupy.⁴ The attempt to speak of fixed properties and experiences of the body, as phenomenology predominantly does, ignores the ways in which the body is malleable and the extraordinary range of different forms that it takes. Such considerations warn against typically phenomenological phrasing such as: 'hands inherently beckon to the phenomenal world as the phenomenal world invites the touch of hands' (Laura Doyle, *Bordering on the Body*, p.70). Such claims are written as if bodily experiences were immutable and universal and as if, as Carol Bigwood claims, bodily experience constituted 'a direct and primitive contact that goes on behind our everyday attitudes' ('Renaturalizing the Body (with the help of Merleau-Ponty)', p.61).⁵

³ Most obviously in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, the two volumes of their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

⁴ See for instance Laura Doyle, *Bordering on the Body*; Rosalyn Diprose, *The Bodies of Women*; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Sense and Non-Sense*; and Steven Shavero, *The Cinematic Body*.

⁵ This is not to say that phenomenology may not be developed in different directions, so as to avoid such problems. For phenomenological approaches to the body which focus on diverse body types within a political framework, see Nick Crossley, 'Body-Subject/Body-Power: Agency, Inscription and Control in Foucault and Merleau-Ponty'; and Iris Marion Young, *'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, esp. chs. 8-10. In particular, it is the current work of

One consequence of this shift was that it soon became obvious that to talk about 'the body' as a singular object was to participate in certain problematical foundationalist discourse (see chapter one), as if all claims about bodily experience and materiality were true for all bodies, rather than specific to certain bodies. As Elizabeth Grosz has observed 'there is no body as such - there are only *bodies*' (*Volatile Bodies*, p.19, emphasis in the original). I have therefore tried throughout to distinguish between 'the body', when I feel I am making general claims for all bodies - for instance, the Cartesian construction of the body as an obstacle to the mind's apprehension of truth; and to refer to 'a body' or 'bodies' where my claim depends on experiences and material features that differ from one body to another. This may at some points produce difficult or unusual grammatical constructions, but I believe that it makes an important point about the need to keep in mind the bodily differences that are occluded if one talks only and always about 'the body'.

Let us look again at Angela of Foligno. We might ask many questions of this image. Firstly, the event has particular material conditions which enable it to take place at all. How did the bacteria that cause what we now call Hansen's disease come to infect the bodies of the lepers washed by her? How did the living conditions of certain bodies cause them to be more prone or resistant than others to infection? What physical spaces were designed to separate these bodies and how did they experience this?⁶ What practices of seclusion served to protect other bodies but failed to protect this one? How does Angelina come to be in this space, at this time? Why is she washing? Is it a function of her gendered social position?

Secondly, this is an interaction between two bodies that have been labelled: a leper and a saint. We might ask: how did a certain biological condition come to be constructed as 'leprosy'? What meanings did it have?⁷ What meanings does it have

transsexual activists and theorists which is suggesting new ways of thinking about the role of phenomenology in the study of embodiment: see for instance Henry S. Rubin, 'Phenomenology as Method in Trans Studies', which challenges 'the fashionable prohibition against the use of phenomenology' (p.279).

⁶ See for instance Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp.195-200.

⁷ See Mary Douglas, 'Witchcraft and Leprosy: Two Strategies for Rejection'.

now ? How did those meanings translate into - and how were they produced by - the physical practices that separated lepers from the rest of the population ? We might also observe that this is a story. Why has this story been preserved ? In what different forms does it circulate ? What does the story mean to its different readers ? Beauvoir, for instance, quotes it to illustrate the ways that for female mystics the problematic status of women's bodies within Christianity is addressed when such a body is both chastized through subjecting it to such treatment and affirmed through a focus on its capacity to behave in such a miraculous fashion - but presumably the Church would use this incident to make very different claims.

Thirdly, we might ask why Angela is doing this. What does the leper's flesh mean to her ? What relationship does it have with her understanding of her own body ? Does she see this flesh as like, or unlike hers ? What pleasure does she take in it ? Was the act disgusting to her ? Was it disgusting to the person whose flesh she swallowed ?

Lastly, this is an interaction between two bodies: how do these two people come to be in the relationship of the one who washes and the one who is washed ? What did the body of the leper mean to Angela ? What relationship between the two does this act signify ? How does it enforce or resist other relationships that might exist between them ? What is achieved by enacting those relationships through this particularly bodily incident ?

This sketch of questions marks out for this thesis four areas of bodily significance, all of which are mutually overlapping, but which provide a plausible heuristic model for a study of the body such as this. They will set the terms for my subsequent explorations, and function as a temporary index to the areas which this thesis studies.

First: physical and somatic embodiment. I will argue that the body is shaped. Diet, clothing, and exercise shape the growth of a body, with different classes and genders being guided to develop different muscles and postures. The physical expressions of emotion are ordered by different cultural norms; the body is pierced or scarred, circumcized or banded. We might think of medical interventions to 'correct' disabilities, adults' efforts to quieten children's voices, school-codes disallowing certain

haircuts or body-piercings. It would be pointless to try and amass a comprehensive list, what Claude Lévi-Strauss has called 'an inventory of all the possibilities of the human body and of the methods of apprenticeship and training employed to build up each technique' (*Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, p.8). But I will offer a general theory of such a process of socially structured embodiment, in which the physical form embodies for the subject her or his social location, and the power-structures which define it.

Second: discursive representations of the body. In particular, I will be considering representations of normality and deviance. This field includes legal, literary, and medical images of the body - all those sites of the body's representation which offer an explicit or implicit set of meanings for the body, its zones and functions. Concomitant with that these sites offer firstly an implied set of practices (right and wrong) for different bodies (how should a woman speak ? how should a man walk ?), and secondly an implied range of social relations and limitations which affix to certain bodies (is the proper place for the epileptic body an asylum or a hospital ? is the proper destination of a hermaphroditic body male or female ?). Such representational discourses clearly play a part in transmitting disciplinary practices such as those within my first category: they set or question the acceptable range of bodily forms, thereby variously asserting and challenging the legitimacy and the goals of practices which shape the body. They also feed inwards, where the psyche is making what we shall see is its own very different picture of the body, which forms my third category.

Third: internal psychic and affective relations with the body. The image of the body which we carry within us and the feelings which we attach to the processes and organs of our own bodies not only support our sense of embodiment and reflect the bodily categories which we occupy, but also chart an endless process of libidinal investment and meaningful attribution. The most intimate and idiosyncratic rituals of washing or grooming carry the weight not only of the cultural histories which have produced them, but also of the personal histories which have led to their formation.

Fourth: interpersonal relations between bodies. This area covers the ways in

which individual physical embodiment and environmental pressure shape the possibilities for aggressive, co-operative, defensive or dominating interactions. Foucault's famous example of Bentham's Panopticon (*Discipline and Punish*, pp195-228), determines not only the bodies of prisoners, generating moods and postures of defence, until worn down to acquiescence, but, crucially, it also determines *the embodiment of the viewer*. From the mundanities of eye-strain and repetitive strain injury, it is productive of a straining, suspicious and dominating body, defined by a form of interaction: the gaze towards the prisoner. This is more than an environment which shapes the bodies of guard and prisoner independently - it is an environment which shapes bodily relationships. I shall be considering the relationships between bodies not simply as an effect of the power relationships that subtend them, but rather as an independent and indispensable element of embodiment, as generative of other structures as it is generated by them.

Such questions do not necessarily rule out a phenomenological enquiry - how do I experience these various aspects of embodiment ? - but they do insist on always returning such questions to a map of the particular contexts which determine what such an encounter means and by which it was made possible. Such an enquiry therefore requires a threefold methodology, taking into account the role of the *discursive*, the *psychic*, and the *material*. I shall be arguing throughout this thesis that we must consider all three levels. But while I view the separation of the social into these three domains as a useful method, I also argue that the three are indissociable: the discursive is also always the material (texts written down, books printed, television broadcast), the material is also always the psychic (the role that elements of our physical environment play in constructing desire and fear; the role that our desires play in generating physical events), and the psychic is always also the discursive (one thinks of Lacan's 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious'). While useful, the separation of the three is thus also always at best a simplification, and at worst substantially misleading. I shall therefore attempt to stress at all points the mutually constitutive relationship between the three, without assuming that any one is - as in the marxist formula - 'determining in the

final instance'.⁸

In Part One I consider two different ways in which the body is 'constructed': firstly, the physical forms in which it is produced, and secondly the different psychic and semiotic forms in which it is understood. I argue for a methodology by which we can interpret the different ways in which the body operates in culture, arguing that the material, psychic, and discursive elements of the body are mutually constitutive. Throughout this, I maintain a political focus on what it might mean for different bodies to be free and, drawing on Foucault, consider what freedom might be for the body. Having established some parameters for an analysis of the meanings of the body, in Parts Two and Three I consider the early *Naked Lunch* quartet of William Burroughs (*The Naked Lunch*, *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded*, and *Nova Express*) and three 'body horror' films directed by David Cronenberg (*Shivers*, *The Fly*, and *Rabid*) as demonstrations of how these bodily dynamics operate, enabling us to understand their forms in all their complexities. I argue that while these texts are founded on notions of the body as both disordered and disgusting, which are absolutely central to dominant modern body-discourses, they also effect a critique of the social structures that produce these ways of seeing the body and offer us promising alternatives. By refusing to avoid the ways in which bodies disturb and offend, they are texts from which we may learn to use bodily disgust, while they also suggest the limitations involved in using images of the disordered body as a vehicle for political intervention.

My accounts of these two bodies of work do not claim to be exhaustive - indeed, I necessarily neglect certain aspects of each: I do not, for instance, consider how Cronenberg's work is affected by his being Canadian⁹ or how Burroughs's writing engages with the concerns of Beat writers.¹⁰ Rather, I want to show how a concern with

⁸ For the initial marxist formulation of this much-discussed phrase, see Frederick Engels, 'Letter to Joseph Bloch'.

⁹ For work in this area see William Beard, 'The Canadianness of David Cronenberg'; Piers Handling, 'A Canadian Cronenberg'; Geoff Pevere 'Middle of Nowhere: Ontario Movies After 1980'; and Bart Testa, 'Technology's Body: Cronenberg, Genre, and the Canadian Ethos'.

¹⁰ For such a reading of Burroughs see Edward Halsey Foster, *Understanding the Beats*

the representation of the body may be viewed as a critical approach in its own right which, while not uninflected by such concerns, takes as its object embodied situations which have their own dynamics and their own histories. Moreover, I am concerned with how their works form a sustained inquiry into the uses of the body, and in doing so, I treat them as texts which may educate us, and as no less legitimate theoretical inquiries than those of the more conventional 'theorists' of Part One. I will therefore not use Foucault or Douglas to 'read' Burroughs and Cronenberg, but treat Burroughs and Cronenberg as equally valuable theoretical resources. Consequently, while recognizing that their work is shaped by a range of generic, economic, and historical forces, I will nevertheless treat them as the primary producers of the work to which their names are attached, just as I have done with Foucault, or Kristeva, while also studying the ways in which their work exceeds and frustrates any intentions that they may have had during its production.

In the final chapter I argue that the social production of bodies does not mean that the body is only ever a vehicle of power: rather, the processes by which social forces produce embodied subjectivities require bodies to be subversive as well. Looking again at Burroughs and Cronenberg, I suggest that in both cases these representations of bodily disorder offer not so much an image of a body *free from* the social, as a form of the body *constructed through* social terms in such a way that it displaces and reconfigures them.

I will conclude this introduction with five reservations - or qualifiers - about the particular directions that I have chosen to follow in this thesis. Firstly the body - as I have read in innumerable introductions to innumerable books on the field - is now a hot topic: the British Sociological Association's 1998 conference was entitled 'Making Sense of the Body', and featured nearly three hundred papers on aspects of research into the body, while a conference held at The University of Manchester in June 1998

pp.1-27 and pp. 149-189; David Glover, 'Utopia and Fantasy in the Late 1960s: Burroughs, Moorcock, Tolkien'; and John Tytell, *Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation*, pp.36-51 and pp.111-139.

suggested that the field is so saturated as to have reached the end of its life, and titled itself 'After the Body'. The study of the meanings, material forms and histories of the body is expanding rapidly, and during the writing of this thesis I have more or less kept up with a steady stream of texts which have variously confirmed or refuted my ideas, and by turns enriched my project or left it seeming outdated. On a more banal level, these texts have also deprived me of various possible titles. The past five years have seen the publication of: *Volatile Bodies*, *Deviant Bodies*, *Posthuman Bodies*, *Sexy Bodies* and *American Bodies*; of the more poetic *The Body in Parts*, *Corporealities*, *The Body Emblazoned*, *Bodies that Matter*, *Bodyscape*, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* and *Bordering on the Body*; of more prosaic titles such as *The Bodies of Women*, *Embodied Practices*, *Food, the Body and the Self*, and *The Perfectible Body*;¹¹ and finally of an entire journal on *Body and Society*, within whose past twelve issues I have watched a whole host of putative titles and promising puns fall into the hands of others. In a sense this was predictable: that I was interested in theorizing the body could hardly be an isolated decision. It is a symptom of the fact that the body is becoming an object of increased theoretical attention, as well as an increasing personal anxiety.¹² I have tried to maintain a balance between articulating my own theoretical position and accommodating this extraordinary wealth of material. I hope that my text has been able to move beyond the volume of other work on the body which has shaped it, while also acknowledging its precedents.

¹¹ The respective authors and editors are: Elizabeth Grosz; Jennifer Terry and Jaqueline Urla (eds.); Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (eds.); Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (eds.); Tim Armstrong (ed.); David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (eds.); Susan Leigh Foster (ed.); Jonathan Sawday; Judith Butler; Nicholas Mirzoeff; Vicki Kirby; Laura Doyle; Rosalyn Diprose; Kathy Davis (ed.); Deborah Lupton; and Kenneth Dutton.

¹² A brief survey of possible reasons for such developments include: the crisis in the organic definition of the body resulting from biotechnological advances; the renewed awareness of the impossibility of ever producing 'trouble-free' healthy bodies that has followed the so-called 'new diseases' such as HIV, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and BSE; the escalating emphasis - in the form of both celebration and hostility - on the body as the site for the development of new forms of pleasure (piercing, drug use, development of sexual possibilities).

Secondly, and perhaps equally predictable, was the fact that my two cultural resources, David Cronenberg and William Burroughs would also become objects of keen interest. Work on Cronenberg, as William Beard has recently observed, 'has centred on his astonishing co-incidence with the heavily theorized "hot topics" of gender, the body and technology' ('The Canadianness of David Cronenberg', p.115) - and we might say much the same of Burroughs.¹³ In an environment of interest in explorations of the body, it was inevitable that these two would figure strongly. When the recent collection *Posthuman Bodies* came out, nobody could have been less surprised than me to see that it contained the regulation one essay on Burroughs and one essay on Cronenberg, while a recent literature search showed that PhD theses on Burroughs had been submitted in 1991, 1992, 1993 and two in 1994. Less predictable was the fact that during 1997, in the final stages of this thesis, both figures would appear so spectacularly outside the academic arena: Cronenberg via the extraordinary - if short lived - debate over his film *Crash*, and William Burroughs through his death on August 2nd. I mention these two events here since they will hardly figure at all in the pages that follow. Although it seems crucial to acknowledge the visibility that has accompanied them, both events fall outside the periods in their careers that interest me in this thesis. These most recent bodily scenarios in the careers of the two must perhaps await a future project.

Thirdly, I offer a qualifier about my ambivalent attitude to the uses of history. It would certainly be possible to produce ever-more specific micro-histories of the body: 'The Homosexual Beat Body in William Burroughs' or 'David Cronenberg and the Postmodern Canadian Body'. And I certainly have considerable respect for work such as that of Hillel Schwartz, who takes bodily specificity to the level of the particular forms in which the shoplifting body was constructed in early twentieth century Britain ('The

¹³ As a result of this, interest in Burroughs has also been fuelled by his retrospective reconstruction as a forerunner of the 80s/90s science fiction sub-genre, cyberpunk. See Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism', p.42. Phrases from Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* quartet are used as titles for two key works on cyberpunk: Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* and Larry McCaffery (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodernism*.

Three-Body Problem and the End of the World'). But at the same time, one consequence of exploring the shared fields of the material, the discursive and the psychic, is that they operate with very different histories, some of which stretch over hundreds of years and some of which are much more historically and geographically specific. I hope that my analysis both documents such micro-histories to some extent, and makes more general claims at the same time. It may be that in assuming such an entity as 'the body' we betray a discursively and historically specific notion of the human - that in fact no such object exists for all cultures and at all times.¹⁴ It may be that a body threatened by discord and disgust is the product of a particular historical situation,¹⁵ rather than an ongoing problem for subjectivity (the position which we shall see has been adopted by Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva). Earlier drafts of this thesis contained such vague qualifiers to my comments about the body as 'in the West', 'under capitalism', 'within patriarchy'. But the very generality of those terms suggests the difficulty of pinning down concrete historical or cultural boundaries for the sorts of body that I consider here. While a project to determine exactly where and when such conceptions of the body have obtained, and where they have not, might be possible (although I remain agnostic on this question), this thesis is not such a project.¹⁶ Part of my interest in the image of the body

¹⁴ In an interview with the sociologist Bryan Turner (whose work I study in chapter one), Richard Fardon poses this difficult issue in the form of the following question: 'Could I ask you, to put it in a rather concrete fashion, if you are suggesting that - Buddhists who believe in reincarnation, Africans who think that different elements of their body, say blood, bone and flesh, derive from different parts of their kinship network, New Guinea Highlanders who must continue to make payments to specific kin throughout their lives on account of the debts that arise from their embodiment because of a network of kin to whom they are indebted - all share a common ontology arising from something they are calling "the body" which exists pre-culturally for them and can be recognised immediately and extra-texturally [*sic*] by us?' (Bryan Turner, *Regulating Bodies*, pp.254-255). I imagine that 'extra-texturally' is a misprint for 'extra-textually'.

¹⁵ The argument that pre-modern bodies are marked by a less intense anxiety about disorder is made in David Hillman and Carla Mazzio's 'Introduction' to their collection *The Body in Parts*, pp. xvii-xviii.

¹⁶ The classic text on the variability of the body is the three volume *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* (Michel Feher, ed.), which refuses to offer an overall account of the relationship between its dispersed studies of embodiment. A more recent and more linear sketch of the body's history is offered by Harvie Ferguson 'Me and My Shadows: On the Accumulation of Body-Images in Western Society: Part One - The

as an object of disgust is that it seems to stretch - albeit in different ways - throughout a considerable expanse of history and culture. Although this thesis situates its bodily problematics broadly within that confluence of conditions which we call 'modernity',¹⁷ I will therefore be arguing that we cannot define the particular point at which the concern for a body menaced by its own disgusting matter emerged, although we may consider the different forms that it has taken, and the different ends it has served.

Fourthly, although I will stress the ways in which the body is marked as repulsive, it is also true that the body is not only or always an object of disgust: consider the body sculpted in the gym or on the racetrack; the body bronzed on the beach; the body nurtured and softened through beauty products; the adored body of the film star or the model; the eroticized body of the pornographic performer. Yet we should remember that such bodies remain heavily marked by their relationship to disgusting bodily materiality. They are bodies achieved only through the active transcendence or elimination of less desirable bodily properties. They are bodies regarded as exceptional in their success at parting from the abject matter to which the rest of us are consigned ('If only *I* had a body like hers/his'). And above all they are haunted by the inevitability of their return to it, through disease, old age, and death. Although the body need not always be disgusting, the body is always defined by its relationship to the possibility of disgust, primarily because the construction of socially licit embodied subjects is constructed through a relationship to purity and order.

Finally, regarding the status of my own text, I will assume that, as Judith Butler has argued, any text that speaks about the body is 'at the same time a further formation of that body' (*Bodies That Matter*, p.10) - and that as such this thesis contributes to the processes that produce embodiment, rather than simply documenting them. As Jean-Michel Berthelot puts it, 'the lexeme "body" is an instrument rather than an object of

Image of the Body in Pre-Modern Society' and 'Me and My Shadows: On the Accumulation of Body-Images in Western Society: Part Two - The Corporeal Form of Modernity'.

¹⁷ On the case for a distinctively modern body see Frances Barker, *The Tremulous Private Bodies: Essays on Subjection*; and Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (eds.), *The Making of the Modern Body*.

knowledge' ('The Body as Discursive Operator', p.20). That is, the 'body' which I discuss is not simply an object to be scrutinized, but a concept which is transformed by its discussion - which in turn may transform our own experience and use of our bodies. I do not take this thesis to be a disinterested account of the body, but rather to be itself constituting the body in ways that I think are more beneficial, more just, and more hopeful for social change, rather than merely more accurate. For my reader, then, I can do no more than hope to invoke the bodily relationship to the text imagined by Roland Barthes:

Whenever I attempt to 'analyze' a text which has given me pleasure, it is not my 'subjectivity' I encounter but my 'individuality', the given which makes my body separate from other bodies and appropriates its suffering or its pleasure: it is my *body of bliss* that I encounter. (*The Pleasure of the Text*, pp.62-63)

And so this text is dedicated - in both senses of the words - to the bodies of its readers.

PART ONE

The Embodied Subject and the Intimacy of Power

Chapter One

The Body Project

I took the opportunity of being alone in the courtyard to look at my coarse hands and my common boots. My opinion of those accessories was not favourable. They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now, as vulgar appendages.

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (p.61)

We believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances.

Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (p.87)

(i) Starting Points

Pip, the protagonist of *Great Expectations*, is undergoing an experience with which many of us will be familiar: he is not happy with his body. Why not? We might answer this with reference to his ways of thinking about his body - of labelling and evaluating it - that result in distress. But such an approach leaps ahead, leaving unanswered two important, and more fundamental, questions. Firstly, why is it that Pip is so concerned with his body at all; why should the form of his body be so invested with emotion? It is this question that I shall focus on in chapter two. And secondly - which it is the aim of this chapter to consider - how has that body itself come about; how, as Foucault asks, was it 'molded' (*sic*), so that the texture of its hands might one day be an object of shame? The linking between the form that Pip's hands take and the emotions that they generate in him mark the two domains with which these first two chapters will be concerned. As the thesis progresses, my focus will be more and more on those particular bodies, body parts, and body activities that are imaged as repulsive, and the variety of sources and uses of emotions such as shame and disgust. But in this first chapter I

am concerned with more general theories of bodies' material forms. Before considering what aspects of embodiment are regarded as disgusting, by whom, and why, I will be considering how the different material forms that human bodies take are generated, and offering a general account of 'embodied politics': that is, the ways in which the interests of social groups amongst whom power is unequally distributed are served by the attributes and behaviours of moulded bodies.

Where does the forming of the body start ? I open with this question since it raises a key issue in many 'common sense' approaches to the body, but is also central to, and problematic in, more sophisticated sociological accounts. As we shall see, the assumption that there must be, in any account of the production of the cultural variability of bodies, a starting point which is the unsocialized, purely physical matter of a body, is not easy to dislodge - we may detect it even in Foucault's formulation of a body that is 'molded'.

Judith Butler has posed the problem in this form: 'we may seek to return to matter as prior to discourse to ground our claims about sexual difference only to discover that matter is fully sedimented with discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which that term can be put' (*Bodies That Matter*, p.29). Taking the configurations of sexual difference as her prime instance, she reminds us that any discussion of 'the body' must always be the discussion of a body of determinate sex - and by implication, of determinate age, and race, and shape. Consequently, when we talk about 'the body' as a physical object we inevitably find our language saturated with specific assumptions about what sort of body this is. She considers, for instance, how the apparently factual notion of inert body matter, acted on by transformative culture, itself betrays a gendered notion of the passive feminine mass which takes its shape from an active masculine intervention (*Bodies That Matter*, chapter one). By doing so, she invites us to question whether the body has a beginning, or whether it is the construction of such a point, of a founding moment for the body, which produces the

possibility of thinking about 'a' or 'the' body at all.

Faith in such a point is visible in many attempts to formulate a theory of the body. In his 1934 paper 'Body Techniques', Marcel Mauss enumerates the ways in which a body learns how to act and perform from the society it inhabits. Mauss moves through an extraordinary range of bodily activities, showing how running, walking, standing, sleeping, breathing, and swimming take different forms in different cultures, and for people of different genders and ages. The choice of such activities as examples is an important one, for it is an attempt to indicate, against claims that there are a basic set of instinctive, or given, bodily practices, that *all* bodily activities are social. Hence walking, standing or sitting - which might seem at first to be universal activities, undertaken by all bodies - in fact turn out to be 'assembled for the individual not by himself alone but by all his education, by the whole society in which he belongs' (p.105). As Mauss maps out culturally specific forms of bodily behaviour, his list expands to the point where he summarizes his position as being that: 'there is perhaps no "natural way" for the adult' (p.102).

To raise now the question that persists in this enquiry: what then is constructed? Certain practices? All practices? Mauss assumes that we know what the body is, and can therefore study its changes. But at the same time, in order to formulate such a study there are already a number of assumptions in place, setting the very terms by which we are able to ask such questions. Butler sketches out this problematic in some detail, and it is worth quoting her argument at length. Here, she is questioning whether we can ever appeal to the 'sex' of a body as, to some extent, a biological given:

The moderate critic might concede that some part of 'sex' is constructed, but some other is certainly not, and then, of course, find him or herself not only under some obligation to explain how it is that 'sex' comes in parts whose differentiation is not a matter of construction. But as that line of demarcation between such ostensible parts gets drawn, the 'unconstructed' becomes bounded once again through a signifying practice, and the very boundary which is meant to protect some part of sex from the taint of

constructivism is now defined by the anti-constructionist's own construction. Is construction something which happens to a ready-made object, a pregiven thing, and does it happen in *degrees*? Or are we perhaps referring on both sides of the debate to an inevitable practice of signification, of demarcating and delimiting that to which we then 'refer', such that our 'references' always presuppose - and often conceal - this prior delimitation? Indeed, to 'refer' naively or directly to such an extra-discursive object will always require the prior delimitation of the extra-discursive. And insofar as the extra-discursive is delimited, it is formed by the very discourse from which it seeks to free itself. (*Bodies That Matter* p.11)

Putting the *act of reference* back into the referent, Butler problematizes the possibility of ever locating such an origin except as a socially specific fantasy of what such an origin could be like.¹ We might object though, that such a linguistic problem has little bearing on the *physical* question of when the process of bodily production begins. It might be argued that it is the slippage between two senses of 'construction' - the social construction of meaning and the material construction of the body - which creates a problem where in fact none exists. For all the problems we may have in specifying whether there is a physicality the *idea of which* is not constructed through language, surely we can specify a physical *moment* at which the body has yet to be materially shaped by social forces?

To trace the problems of such an endeavour, I want to turn to Bryan Turner, whose work forms a protracted enquiry over several years into the sociology of the body,² and who, influenced by Mauss, adopts just such a position:

These practical activities [of walking, swimming, sitting etc.] require an organic foundation, but the elaboration of these potentialities requires a cultural context. It was for this reason that Mauss talked about 'body techniques' which, while depending upon a common organic foundation, are nevertheless both personal and cultural developments. (*Regulating Bodies*, p.36)

¹ Critical readings of Butler's text, insisting on the necessity of separating the material from the discursive - without, I would suggest, ever successfully achieving it - are offered by Pheng Cheah, 'Mattering'; and Teresa L. Ebert, 'The Matter of Materialism'.

² Turner's most important texts in this field are *The Body and Society*, 'Recent Developments in the Theory of the Body', and *Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology*.

I take Turner to exemplify a certain tradition in the theorization of the body, which assumes that while the activities of the body and the meanings assigned to it are culturally constructed and variable, there is a given, pre-cultural body, which learns physical behaviours from the society it enters. Although this may at first seem convincing, I shall be arguing that the body is not simply a given organic object which society shapes. What is Turner's 'common organic foundation' which is exempt from culture? Where can we locate the entry of this biological body into the social? Is there a moment of entry where it crosses from the domain of the untouched, into the domain of the malleable?

It is tempting enough to begin with the body at the moment of birth - the moment where Turner begins (*Regulating Bodies*, p.15).³ This is, after all, Mauss's starting point in his elaboration of a 'biographical list of body techniques' ('Body Techniques', p.110) - that is, a list that runs from birth to death. But the focus on birth is a product of the limited notion of 'technique' itself, since it presumes that what we must study is how a body learns to behave. After some reflection we must see that even at birth any particular body is *already* the result of countless social processes which affect firstly the sort of body on which Mauss's techniques act, and secondly where within the social order bodies are produced. The type and location of the body that is born has already been shaped by, for instance: the social organization of conception (who is allowed, obliged, and forbidden to get pregnant); the varying rates of fertility in both men and women, and the role of factors such as diet, stress, and healthcare in their change; the status of abortion (who can and cannot get one; who is encouraged or forced to get one; how competing ideologies encourage and discourage it; which types of fetuses are recommended to be terminated); intra-uterine 'care', a medical regulation of the foetus which may be harmful, or affect growth, and may

³ Similarly, Chris Shilling wrongly calls birth the point of 'human entry ... into social life' (*The Body and Social Theory*, p.203).

lead to recommendations of termination - all of which are variable across countries and classes; poisons, drugs and pollution - the likelihood of whose entry into, and shaping of, the body of the foetus are themselves socially differentiated, along with other influences on the body of the foetus such as diet and working conditions of the mother; the criteria for 'successful' pregnancy - those social and medical determinations as to what the end-product should (and should not) be, according to whose variability there are different chances of a foetus being produced with a particular body-shape, notably at the expense of bodies classified as having conditions such as Down's Syndrome, spina bifida, or cerebral palsy.

So the body-at-birth is itself only the end-point of an elaborate series of social processes, some of which have as their endpoint the production of a baby (and a baby of a particular form), but for others of which the birth is merely one point in a monitoring and disciplining of the meaning and the functioning of the body - a process which for any individual begins before their conception and continues after their death. In other words, we are not born with a body awaiting socialization - rather, *bodies are produced by which the subject may be born.*⁴

My goal in the rest of this chapter is to show how the experience of a particular type of body contributes to a particular type of subjectivity. I will argue that we cannot think of the body as vehicle or container for subjectivity, but must rather study the coterminous presence of body and subject in a relationship of mutual effectivity. 'The' body is always *a* way of being in the world, which, because it is physically produced in certain ways, both entails and prohibits certain forms of subjectivity.

⁴ Butler makes the claim in this form: 'the process by which a bodily norm is assumed, appropriated, taken on ... [is] not strictly speaking undergone by a subject, but rather ... the subject, the speaking "I", is formed by virtue of having gone through such a process' (*Bodies That Matter* p.3).

(ii) Embodiment

Embodiment is a crucial term for thinking about subjectivity as constituted through the forms our bodies take: it proposes that all subjects must be thought of as subjects with bodies, since we inevitably make sense of our world, and act in it, through the particular type of body which we have. Bryan Turner has argued that ‘embodiment has emerged out of a general dissatisfaction with the legacy of Descartes’ rational actor’ (‘Preface’ to Pasi Falk, *The Consuming Body*, p.xi). Descartes’s account draws on, and reworks, traditions that precede him: the Socratic account of the body as an impediment to knowledge ‘on the ground that it confuses the soul, and doesn’t allow it to gain truth and wisdom when in partnership with it’ (Plato, *Phaedo*, p.11) and Christianity’s account of the body as the source of sin from which the soul must separate itself (Anthony Synnott, *The Body Social*, pp.129-138).⁵ In this western philosophical tradition, the mind is separate from and superior to the body. Consequently, Descartes’s proposal is that ‘the mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body’ so that ‘even if the body were to cease, it [the mind] would not cease to be all that it is’ (*Discourse on Method*, p.54). In this account, the body can be detached from perception, consciousness, and awareness, all of which are not physical events, but events of the mind, leaving ‘the philosophizing *ego* in its disembodied solitude’ (Haw Yol Jung, ‘Phenomenology and Body Politics’, p.4).

As Elizabeth Grosz says, what is missing from this account of the body is the body’s ‘constitutive role in forming thoughts, feelings, emotions and psychic representations’ (*Volatile Bodies*, henceforth *VB*, p.10). But we should not forget

⁵ Although it is also important to note that neither of these generalizations adequately describes the complexities of Classical and Christian thought about the body. Foucault’s second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* record how the Classical body is also - if problematically - an object of value, while Caroline Walker Bynum’s ‘The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages’ challenges the notion that Christianity views the flesh only as sinful.

that Descartes is interested in escaping the body precisely because he regards the body as productive of knowledge - and thereby as capable of misleading him: 'our senses sometimes play us false', he notes (*Discourse on Method*, p.53). He seeks to produce a bodiless subjectivity because he recognizes that embodiment prevents the subject-with-body (who is always, we must remember, a subject *by means of* the body) achieving a secure objective epistemology. His fault lies not, as Grosz puts it, in ignoring the effectivity of the body *per se*, but in imagining the possibility of some mode of consciousness which was not conditioned by the body.⁶

Against this, the concept of embodiment relies on the argument that it is *always* through the body that awareness takes place, and that the body plays a crucial role in determining how we see the world. One easy example of this would be the presence of bodily metaphors in speech, defining the unconscious role that the body is playing in our capacity to make sense of our experiences.⁷ In reaching for a state of pure mind, Descartes writes that 'examining attentively what I was, and seeing [*voyant*] that I could pretend that I had no body' (*Discourse on Method*, p.54). The casual reintroduction of a bodily activity ('seeing') into the very activity that negates the body reminds us that in fact forms of thought must always take place with reference to bodily experiences on which they are modelled.⁸ For Descartes, thought is a linguistic and visual phenomenon, but in

⁶ This aspiration towards dis-embodied consciousness is also part of a wider political problem since, as Laura Doyle has argued, when mind is classified as the superior function, 'dominant groups associate themselves with mind or spirit and associate subordinate groups with body or matter' (*Bordering on the Body*, p.28).

⁷ For other studies of the physical connotations and social assumptions of terms such as 'up' and 'down', 'heavy' and 'light', see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, pp.467-484; Arthur Frank, 'Bringing Bodies Back In: A Decade Review', pp.156-159; and Jean A. Laponce, 'Relating Biological, Physical and Political Phenomena: The Case of Up and Down'.

⁸ For critiques of Descartes's use of sight as the privileged metaphor for knowledge, see Hwa Yol Jung, 'Phenomenology and Body Politics'; and Suren Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies*, ch.1. It might be argued that phenomenology finds its roots in a break from the Cartesian separation of the viewing subject from her/his world: see for instance Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*.

representing these elements as disembodied, he suppresses any recognition of the necessary physicality of its being so. After all, just as thought may take the form of 'seeing', so too for each of us the interior voice of inner speech will always be imagined along bodily lines: its volume and modulation, its tone and pace, its inflection and accent. Moreover Descartes's entire 'disembodied' state of radical scepticism is itself only enabled by particular physical conditions: 'now therefore, that my mind is free from all cares, and that I have obtained for myself assured leisure in peaceful solitude, I shall apply myself seriously and freely to the general destruction of all my former opinions' (*Meditations*, p.95). It is the environment of the body that generates this particular state of mind.⁹

Indeed Mauss argues for just such a notion of subjectivity, since he stresses the ways in which the variable physical experiences which he describes also shape the forms taken by thought. Mauss insists that 'different psychological states arise' from different forms of bodily activity ('Body Techniques', p.111).¹⁰ Attempts to separate out bodily and mental activities are therefore inevitably unsuccessful. Since the forms that bodily activity takes vary from body to body, so too the modes of mental activity that accompany them must change, suggesting the limitations of Descartes's conception of a mind which, without a body, 'would not cease to be all that it is'.

But against the fact of embodiment, the dream of the bodiless subject persists, our Cartesian legacy constantly returning. This belief in the possibility that the body might be eliminated resurfaces, for instance, in much recent writing on cyberspace and hyper-reality. The argument goes, broadly, that in a world of text exchanges, where subjects are free to devise their own identities, to assign

⁹ Indeed, as Mary Russo suggests in another context, it may even be that the desire to transcend the body and reach a state of pure mind is itself the expression of a bodily craving: the desire to recapture the oceanic formlessness of the womb (*The Female Grotesque*, pp.35-36 and p.51).

¹⁰ Ian Hunter and David Saunders offer a more detailed account of how Mauss's body techniques might be seen as determining different forms of mental activity ('Walks of Life: Mauss in the Human Gymnasium').

themselves new genders or physical attributes, the body as we know it ceases to be relevant. Symptomatic of this approach is an essay by Juniper Wiley titled, appropriately enough, 'No BODY is "Doing It": Cybersexuality as a Postmodern Narrative'.¹¹ For Wiley, cyberspace is 'the contradictory, ambiguous, and fragmented world of computer-mediated-communication among disembodied, voiceless, faceless text-producers' (p.161). Since, Wiley argues, reality exists here only as the text produced by communicating terminal-users (p.150), a user may adopt any body, claim any gender, imagine any physical act, so that by 'dematerializing the corporeality of the body' (p.157) a world is produced in which 'newly generated personas - faceless, voiceless, bodiless - displace history with a timeless present' (p.152).

Yet we must ask: in what sense are these participants in such exchanges 'bodiless'? For their text input issues from fingers tapping on keyboards, it is through their eyes that the text messages are received, and it is their spines which protracted terminal-use is gradually reshaping. The fantasy of the disposable body is a sign of the constant need to return to the question of the body's presence. How, I ask myself, can a serious analysis of cyber-sexuality ignore the bodies who type or who masturbate while engaging in textual encounters? For it is their postures, their images and their feelings which interact with the new possibilities of cyberspace. This supposedly 'bodiless' territory comes into being only by means of the actions of bodies, and through subjects whose experience of their world - including the experience of their computer-interactions - is mediated by those bodies. Such users bring with them the histories of the body techniques they have learned - histories which shape the very ways in which they communicate via their terminals, and histories which, in stark contrast to Wiley's claim, cannot simply be 'displaced'.

¹¹ For similar celebrations of technological disembodiment, see Cynthia J. Fuchs, '“Death Is Irrelevant”: Cyborgs, Reproduction, and the Future of Male Hysteria'; and Sandy Stone, 'Split Subjects, Not Atoms; or, How I Fell In Love With My Prosthesis'.

As Nick Crossley has put it: 'our body is our way of being in the world, of experiencing and belonging to the world. It is our point of view on the world' ('Merleau-Ponty, the Elusive Body and Carnal Sociology', p.48). This is what Mike Featherstone and Bryan Turner have referred to as 'sentient embodiment' - that mode of knowledge which is always already bodily ('Body and Society: An Introduction', p.3). The different mouldings of our bodies constitute different ways of seeing the world (and vice-versa). Crossley takes his cue from Merleau-Ponty's juxtaposition of Western and Japanese styles of anger: 'the angry Japanese smiles, the Westerner goes red and stamps his feet' (Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, p.189). Crossley argues that our different bodily styles both give rise to, and themselves rise out of, different understandings of the world. Refuting the idea that emotion takes place in the interiority of consciousness, Merleau-Ponty argues that 'anger, shame, hate and love are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another's consciousness: they are types of behaviour or styles of conduct which are visible from the outside' (*Sense and Non-Sense*, p.52). The physical presence of emotion in the form of heartbeat, posture, facial expression, tone of voice, and body temperature, all suggest that the different physical forms that emotion takes constitute different experiences of the world. Crossley points out that we do not simply 'have different ways of expressing anger or love. We have different ways of being angry and in love ... Differences in affective styles amount to existential differences' ('Merleau-Ponty, the Elusive Body and Carnal Sociology', p.53).

And it is not, therefore, just 'affective styles' which construct such existential differences. Our bodies are moulded by diet, by clothing, by learned posture, by medicine, by culturally specific forms of facial expression or gesture, all of which give rise to particular perceptions and particular modes of relating to the world. Whether that be camp or machismo, there can be no mode of thinking without a body. From such an argument it becomes clear that, returning to our disembodied cybernauts, however much it may be true that computer interfaces

enable the timid to post hectoring rants, the embarrassed to engage in sexually explicit exchanges, and straight men to pass as lesbians, it is nevertheless from the embodied world-view of a subject seated at a keyboard that these possibilities emerge. The keyboard posture - relaxed and in control, crouched and anxious, slow and heavy with food - cannot be eradicated from such an equation.¹² And with that posture come the attendant histories of race, class and gender privilege which have constructed it.

(iii) Sport and Class: A Case Study

The costs and benefits of social hierarchies and conflicts are central to the processes that generate, shape and distribute human bodies. How can we analyze these histories of privilege that accrue to bodies? In what ways does a body carry the marks of its social location, and in what ways is social power dependent on particular bodily activities? Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Chris Shilling has analysed sport in terms of its stratification of body types according to class.¹³ For Bourdieu and Shilling, the body is a vehicle for the expression of class-power, in whose postures and practices, and through whose socially-specific skills, spaces such as the polo-ground or ballroom are demarcated according to class interest, and forms of consciousness which maintain class interests are rehearsed and consolidated through the pleasures and pursuits of the physical.

Like Mauss, Bourdieu argues that in the process of its education, the body acquires a particular physical form. Skills are developed through their being

¹² Fortunately, more recent theorizing of cybernetic embodiment has responded to this line of argument. See Anne Balsamo, 'Forms of Technological Embodiment'; Vicky Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*, ch.5; and Deborah Lupton, 'The Embodied Computer/User'.

¹³ Bourdieu's work offers an analysis of the process by which the social determinants generate diverse body-forms. See *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*; 'Men and Machines'; *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; and 'Sport and Social Class'.

imprinted in muscles and ligaments; reflexes are sharpened and senses are encouraged to focus on particular signals. Our physical form, says Bourdieu, is a 'political mythology realized, em-bodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of feeling and thinking' (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pp.93-94). The cultivation of what Shilling calls the 'relative intractability of corporeal habits and customs' (*The Body and Social Theory*, p.133) is a learning process which fits (or fails to fit) the body for certain social spaces. One location where a given bodily form is acquired is at school, in sporting activities. Such activities, Shilling points out, are class-specific: 'while polo and golf may be available to pupils in elite private schools in England, those in state schools are more usually channelled into playing soccer or netball' (p.137).

Shilling points out that this aspect of learning plays a role in the body's physical construction. Skills, postures, and musculature are all developed in and through the body - and they bring with them access to particular social settings. For in adult life these class-specific bodies are the bodies which will be both skilled at the practices of, and at ease with the mood of, the milieux of golf-clubs and polo tournaments. He points out that 'developing a taste for elite sporting and leisure activities is important as while these activities may not always represent a *direct* route to a career for the dominant classes, they can lead to social situations which indirectly facilitate entry into a profession or allow business contacts to be forged' (p.137) - or indeed, he adds, facilitate economically advantageous marriages. So these webs of class-power are secured by, amongst other things, bodies which are fitted for certain events - events whose value as a site of the distribution of jobs, contacts, and sexual alliances within a class depends upon the guarantee that members of other classes are excluded. And such exclusions are maintained not just by virtue of unreachable prices, but by bodies which have not been fitted to the physical practices which will take them there.

Shilling stresses that as well as having this instrumental value, the

socialization of the body into class-specific activities is a means by which those differences are naturalized, since they are so intimately felt in the contours of the body: 'the significance of this is not simply that the lifestyles of women and men from different social classes become inscribed within their bodies, but that these bodies 'fit' people for different activities' (p.135). Thus the difference between, for instance, manual labour and 'the professions' is made to seem natural because it is encoded within the experience of the body - with the result that attempts to cross these boundaries are fraught with the shame and discomfort attendant on the recognition that one has the wrong body for a given social domain.¹⁴

In Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, from which I take one of this chapter's keynote quotations, this use of the body to mark class boundaries structures the young working-class Pip's visit to the wealthy Miss Havisham's house. In the house, Miss Havisham's adopted daughter Estella taunts Pip about his clothes, his social skills, and his body. Pip comes to see himself in a new light: 'I took the opportunity of being alone in the courtyard to look at my coarse hands and my common boots. My opinion of those accessories was not favourable. They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now, as vulgar appendages' (p.61). Crucially, it is at the level of the body that Pip experiences shame. His body has not been 'fitted' for the space of Satis House, while Estella's has. And it is the particular discomfort of its being his *body* which is unfitted that makes the slight so intense, resulting in a particularly bodily expression of frustration and humiliation: 'I cried, I kicked the wall, and took a hard twist at my hair; so bitter were my feelings, and so sharp was the smart without a name, that needed

¹⁴ According to Bourdieu, 'the dispositions durably inculcated by objective conditions (which science apprehends through statistical regularities as the probabilities objectively attached to a group or a class) engender aspirations and practices objectively compatible with those objective requirements' (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p.77). See also Bourdieu's 'Men and Machines', which argues that industrial labour is sustained by bodies whose physical condition makes their entry into other spaces or their adoption of other practices difficult both materially and psychologically.

counteraction' (p.61). The impossibility of naming the feeling is again a function of the felt intimacy of its bodily character - so inward and intense that it seems to belong to the realm of the physical, the natural, and hence the unchangeable, rather than to the domain of language, culture, the symbolic order (the place from which may yet issue a 'counteraction').¹⁵ As Bourdieu says, in a different context: 'his body, which contains a history, espouses his function' ('Men and Machines', p.309).

Dickens's elision of the difference between boots and hands, marked by their both being 'accessories' and 'appendages', indicates both the extent to which all class-specific structures are felt to be as fixed to the subject as the body (boots are just as much appendages as are hands), but simultaneously how all class-specific marks are equally socially determined (hands are no less accessories than are boots).¹⁶ For Dickens, this complex social moment becomes the narrative of the story - spurring on Pip's desire for personal transformation so that he can be worthy of Estella, and find a way to refit both his body and his wardrobe, thereby crossing the lines of class. Crucially, without a bodily change he can never achieve the transition.¹⁷

Beyond their instrumental value in securing jobs or closing the doors of educational establishments, forms of embodiment define broader outlooks: complex networks of emotions and values may be sustained by the activities in which a body engages and the physical sensations and changes that result from them. Thus Shilling, drawing on Bourdieu, suggests that bodily experiences are made available in order to consolidate class-specific outlooks:

¹⁵ If one were writing a history of embodiment then the question of whether the body is necessarily our most intimate zone, or whether this is a consequence of one particular way of constructing its meaning, would be an interesting test-case for the diversity of bodily experience.

¹⁶ We might also add that boots can affect the shape that feet grow into, the posture that their wearer adopts, the relative risk and pain of walking through different physical environments.

¹⁷ On the varying cultural roles of hands, see Bryan Turner, 'Reflections on the Epistemology of the Hand'.

For example, fitness training for its own sake is often engaged in by the upwardly mobile middle classes who 'find their satisfaction in effort itself and ... accept - such is the meaning of their existence - the deferred satisfactions which will reward their present sacrifice' ... In contrast, professionals in the field of cultural production such as university teachers, tend towards activities which combine the health-oriented function of maintaining the body with 'the symbolic gratifications associated with practising a highly distinctive activity' such as mountaineering or walking in remote places. As Bourdieu notes ... this combines the 'sense of mastery of one's own body' with the 'exclusive appropriation of scenery inaccessible to the vulgar'. (*The Body and Social Theory* p.132)¹⁸

In these activities the body is not merely *expressing* a class-specific attitude, rather it is being directed into activities which will *generate* such attitudes. As long as these bodies keep to their appropriate spheres, their activities will produce the requisite sense of endeavour or superiority which shores up their location in the economic structure. So we can see that forms of embodiment produce outlooks which are not just - as we saw earlier - 'different existential perspectives', but are rather structures which maintain relations of power.¹⁹ As Bourdieu says of taste:

Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*, helps to shape the class body. It is an incorporated principle of classification, which governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates, physiologically and psychologically. It follows that the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste. (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, p.190, emphasis in the original)

What Bourdieu makes clear is that the practices of the body are entwined with the social orders in which those bodies lie. And I would argue that we must extend this to apply not only in the sense that a given body is shaped in particular

¹⁸ Shilling's two quotations are from Bourdieu's 'Sport and Social Class', p.839.

¹⁹ Shilling also discusses how, for instance, the decisions that working-class mothers often take to 'sacrifice their own bodily needs .. in order to fulfil those of their husbands and children' in the face of a limited household budget, generate forms of embodiment (p.131). There is both the measurable physical effect in terms of 'the disproportionately high incidence of physical illness among mothers with children' (p.131), and also the symbolizing in that bodily deprivation of an entire mode of being, whose orientation away from pleasure and towards service articulates a place, and with it a social order, in this economy of scarcity.

ways in the course of its lifetime, but also in the sense that *any* event which affects bodies is inevitably governed by the physical conditions and physical locations of bodies - phenomena produced by the social arrangements which have guided the development of those bodies, determined their distribution in space, and created the physical environments in which they live. The direction of this model of material bodies insists, for instance, that the tsetse fly, the earthquake, or the gene for eye colour, are no less social phenomena than the plastic surgeon. From the gradual northward spread of malaria in response to global warming, through to the ways in which homophobia has encouraged health professionals to permit the spread of HIV, we must remember that the various physical states through which bodies pass never have the status of the purely natural. And yet, as I want to suggest by looking at the work of Bryan Turner and Susan Bordo, the hope of defining just such a distinctive realm of unsocialized biology persists in much theorization of the body, at the expense of this more accurate model in which the materiality of the social is coterminous with the materiality of the virus and the gene.

(iv) 'I Refute It Thus': Social Constructionism and Its Discontents

In general terms, we can define social constructionism as 'a position within the sociology of knowledge, which claims that our knowledge of reality is the consequence of social processes' (Bryan Turner, *Regulating Bodies*, p.105). However, to speak of 'the social construction of the body' is to invoke two distinct - but, I will be arguing, inseparable - objects. On the one hand, it refers to the various discursive models of what the body is, how it works, and what it means - what we might call *the constructed epistemology of the body*. Here we might think of the division of the body into the four humours of medieval medicine or the one-sex model of Galenic biology (Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex*). These are ways of conceptualizing the body which vary from culture to

culture. But at the same time, the phrase also refers to the ways in which the material body is, as we have seen, quite literally socially constructed by the physical environments in which it is situated - what we might call *the constructed ontology of the body*.

In the remainder of this chapter I will be arguing for the inseparability of the two fields, and arguing that the practices which produce differentiated bodies are entwined with those that produce knowledge of them, and vice versa. But in this section, I want to focus on certain resistances to a radical constructionist account such as that offered here. In the case of our knowledge of the body, it might be asked: is it really the case that all forms of knowledge are equally socially constructed? Aren't molecular biology and genetics better models, more accurate models, and therefore less ideological models of the body than their predecessors? And in the case of the physical construction of the body, while the fact of a social *influence* on bodily activities of all sorts seems clear enough, does it not seem that certain biological events are less affected by society than others? While the physical event of, say, the cutting open of a body's skin by a plastic surgeon is very obviously determined by culturally specific notions of what body types are desirable, what scientific research should be funded, and how access to surgery should be organized, surely the rate at which blood pumps out of the cut - or the fact that the body has blood at all - is not a social product in the same sense?

Both these objections to a radically constructionist account of embodiment attempt to define a certain material stability by which the body might be assessed: either a way of knowing the body whose epistemology is not socially constructed or a biological fact about the body whose ontology is not socially constructed. They look to materiality because, as Jacques Derrida says, matter conveys 'values associated with those of thing, reality, presence in general' (*Positions*, p.64): the stable, the real, the definite. I want here to consider, and challenge, two attempts to determine just such a point of material stability, one by Bryan Turner, and the

other by Susan Bordo - theorists whose general position is to stress the social variability of bodily phenomena - in order to show the consequences and problems of an investment in a grounding biological facticity. My argument here will be rather that in different situations there are particular biological stabilities, the condition of whose becoming stable should be interrogated rather than accepted as a given. I suspect faith in corporeal material stability because attempts to *claim* any particular physical features of the body as stable necessitate marking them as self-evident because they are material, as if the material were not changeable. Consequently such arguments exempt some aspect of the body from the possibility of change - paralyzing politics in the process.²⁰ Against this, I shall argue that both the meanings of body material and the state of that material itself - even its most inward biological components - derive from social processes.

Turner's account assumes, as we have seen, that 'fundamental aspects of embodied activity, such as walking, standing or sitting, are social constructions' (*Regulating Bodies*, p.36), but against the claim that everything about the body is *equally* constructed, Turner invokes the possibility that: 'some things ("hysteria") may be more socially constructed than others ("gout")' (*Regulating Bodies*, p.26). In which sense is Turner using the word 'constructed' when he makes his distinction? If by 'constructed' he means physically produced, then he would seem to be performing an untenable about-face, since his own work describes precisely how and why gout is socially constructed through different physical influences (*The Body and Society*, pp.220-222). As an illness 'associated with poor diet, lack of exercise and alcoholism' (p.220) it is the product of certain lifestyles, particularly associated with leisure and consumption: 'gout, like melancholy, was a disease of affluence, leisure and urban civilisation' (p.221). A set of economic conditions, a configuration of class, a certain distribution of wealth, a specific way of displaying wealth such that it acquired social meaning: these are the determining

²⁰ The search for a gay gene would seem to be a case in point.

conditions for this supposedly 'less constructed' condition.

On the other hand, we might assume that by 'constructed' he refers to epistemology - yet even here the claim seems equally untenable. Again, his own work has documented how the meaning of gout too is constructed, for it came in the eighteenth-century to connote 'personality and social status' (p.221), a disease with some prestige which marks one as leisured. However, as the Protestant work ethic displaced the cultivated idleness of the gentry, gout has come to signify not dignified leisure, but contemptible laziness. And there is another sense in which Turner's own example serves to disprove the very case he is trying to make. The very fact that 'gout' is recruited by him to act as the example of a relatively 'less constructed' bodily state is an instance of its construction as meaningful in a particular way - that is, an instance of its social construction. Turner's sentence, apparently an objective observation *on* gout, is in fact a discursive production of a new significance *for* gout. We are back with Butler's insistence on the discursive construction of that which is referred to as unconstructed.

Why, I am drawn to ask, of all the conditions to oppose to hysteria, does Turner choose one whose social variability his own work has charted? It seems to result from a desire to distinguish between conditions that have a quantifiable organic existence, and those which are, as he says of hysteria, 'a psychosomatic expression' (*The Body and Society*, p.125). Yet while they may emerge through different social conditions, gout, no less than hysteria, is the physical inscription onto the body of a socially specific position, and the classification of this physical inscription with a term which sustains particular social meanings. In using an example whose thorough sociality he himself has *already* demonstrated, Turner attempts to make a theoretical distinction which requires an unnecessary qualitative distinction between the different routes by which bodily states are generated: those that are primarily physical, and those that are primarily psychic but are expressed through the physical. Yet if we recognize that the psychic is always and necessarily embodied, such an attempted division seems to make little

sense: the embodied subject is a mass of different bodily states resulting from the different processes that transform it, none of which are in any meaningful sense more or less constructed than any other.

This confrontation within Turner's own discourse, his attempt to go against the grain of his work, reveals some of the problems in theorizing embodiment. For by reworking his own material, Turner's aim would seem to be to suggest that even in what is acknowledged to be constructed (in both senses of the word), there is a fundamental grounding in an asocial biology. Turner makes his own investment in such a notion of an element of asocial material stability in the body clear enough: 'I want to retain the foundationalist view ... in order to have a politics ... of human rights' (*Regulating Bodies*, p.256). Turner argues that rights require a transcultural concept of the body in order to recognize the universality of physical problems like hunger and ageing.²¹ He wants to retain certain physical properties of the body as natural facts which will secure a political programme of basic rights. But against this, I would offer the quotation from Nietzsche with which Turner ends *The Body and Society*:

For there is no such thing as health as such, and all attempts to define a thing that way have been wretched failures. Even the determining of what is healthy for your *body* depends on your goal, your horizon, your energies, your impulses, your errors and above all on the ideals and phantasms of your soul. Thus there are innumerable healths of the body; and the more we allow the unique and incomparable to raise its head, and the more we abjure the dogma of the 'equality of men', the more must the concept of a *normal* health, along with a normal diet, and the normal course of an illness, be abandoned by the medical men. (*The Gay Science*, quoted in *The Body and Society*, pp.234-235)

If Turner is unable to pursue Nietzsche's radical anti-normativity, it is because he does not believe that it will yield a workable model of human rights. The fact of

²¹ A position which he develops in 'Outline of a Theory of Human Rights'. For a critique of Turner's position, and the outline of an alternative notion of rights which embraces the changeability of human life, see Malcolm Waters, 'Human Rights and the Universalisation of Interests'.

the body's physical malleability must be used by him to indicate, not its variability, but its continuity, via the invocation of a 'common ontology' (*Regulating Bodies*, p.254): we all need food, water, air. I, though, am arguing that the radical physical variability of bodies renders any return to what is unconstructed a dubious dream, which will take us nowhere. For even our most apparently basic biological conditions are not the fixed raw material for society, but are themselves already the result of evolutionary processes that take place within, and have been responsive to, social organization.²² 'The human body' is not a finished object with fixed needs, but a work in progress whose needs are themselves in constant alteration. It would seem far more useful to remain sensitive to the diversity of all aspects of human embodiment and, furthermore, to recognize that any given bodily configuration is only a point of temporary stability within a process of change. Rather than deciding in advance what 'the body' is and what it needs, we might then interrogate the temporarily stable facts of our differential embodiments and ask what politics they might entail. This is not to say that the health of certain bodies does not require particular physical resources. But I would argue that it is only by *refusing* to decide in advance what physical resources 'the body' requires that we may enable the most open recognition of the different resources that might benefit different bodies.

But the invocation of bodily *differences* may also result in a flawed vision of material stability, if the variation in material bodies is taken as the ground for certain *unchanging* differences. I therefore want to offer, alongside Turner, Susan Bordo's equally problematic use of the body as marked by persistent differences between essentially fixed biological forms. In her *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Bordo makes similar objections to radical

²² On the debate about how biological evolution has responded to social change, see Ted Benton, 'Biology and Social Science: Why the Return of the Repressed Should Be Given a Cautious Welcome', and 'Why the Welcome Needs to Be Cautious: A Reply to Keith Sharp'; and Keith Sharp, 'Biology and Social Science: A Reply to Ted Benton'.

constructionism, but from a different perspective. Like Turner, Bordo is not making an unproblematic assertion of biological fact, but rather arguing for a mediated position in which the body has a natural, organic existence upon which culture acts. Thus while Bordo wants to recognize the diversity of meanings that may be assigned to the body, and the diversity of experiences that accompany them, she insists that there are fixed points of biological stability. Taking issue with the position that reproduction does not constitute an adequate grounding for a binary division of the experience of gender, she is sceptical about the idea that:

the differences in various social constructions of reproduction, the vast disparities in women's experiences of childbirth, and so forth preclude the possibility that the practices of reproduction can meaningfully be interrogated as a source of insight into the difference gender makes.
(p.230)

She responds: 'I find this conclusion remarkable. Women's reproductive experiences do, of course, differ widely, but surely not as widely as they do from those of men, none of whom (up to now - technology may alter this) has had even the possibility of carrying a child' (p.230). Like Turner, Bordo takes 'social construction' as a discursive phenomenon, which determines 'experience', and which affects certain aspects of the body's physical condition, but leaves untouched a core of physical events on which that experience and condition are based. But in fixing 'reproduction' as the brute biological given which, while amenable to different experiential interpretations, represents a point of shared experience amongst women, she produces a particular - and limiting - definition of the female body.

Reproduction is in no sense a universal fact for women. A consideration of the ways in which infertility rates vary by class and geography, of women either born without wombs or who have had them removed through hysterectomy, of intersexed and transsexual women, suggests that the notion of pregnancy and/or

childbirth can hardly be plausibly recruited as a marker of a biologically guaranteed femaleness.²³ Bordo's figuration of reproduction as a shared reality amongst women thus elides particular women from the category 'woman'. As Judith Butler has suggested, the attempt to define a shared essence produces 'domains of exclusion' with 'coercive and regulatory consequences' (*Gender Trouble*, p.4).²⁴ For instance, transgender theory would suggest that Bordo's insistence that men have never yet been able to bear children is itself a construction of the meaning of 'man' and 'woman' at variance with that argued for by the transgender liberation movement: that the identity 'man' is entirely compatible with biological bodies which Bordo's position would insist on labelling 'woman'. Such men have borne children - often against their will - while living within a regime of sex-gender regulation which insists on regarding them as women. By such a definition there are many men who have been pregnant: it is simply that Bordo needs to define 'man' in a way that writes them out of existence.

Childbirth is thus a capacity which, again, varies as body-forms vary. It is not the case that bodies are born with fixed capacities which social forces then inflect, modify or adapt. Rather, the capacities which any given body has are as thoroughly determined as the meanings with which they are invested. Yet even

²³ As well as this biological account of the production and distribution of fertility, we might also think of Pierre Bourdieu's account of how 'practices of fertility' in the petit-bourgeoisie mime their economic commitment to prudence, frugality, and measured expenditure (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, pp.331-338).

²⁴ Another perspective involving similar tensions is offered by Dennis W. Allen, 'Homosexuality and Narrative'. Allen looks at how Hawaii's House of Representatives attempted in 1992 to pre-empt the possibility of the state's legalization of same-sex marriages by declaring that marriage was intended only for 'couples who appear, by virtue of their sex, to present the biological possibility of producing offspring from their union' (p.617). But as with Bordo's example, the attempt to ground a social constituency ('heterosexuals') in a biological invariant ('the biological possibility of producing offspring') soon unravelled the very constituency it was attempting to maintain, since such a definition excludes those male-female couples who are biologically unable to produce children and therefore, by such a definition of the institution of heterosexual marriage, renders them unfit to partake in the institution (p.618).

calls for complex positions of mediated embodiment may nevertheless search for biological footholds which fit ill with my argument that all bodily forms are produced. Despite these various attempts to exempt some aspect of our biology from social influence, none of these biological footholds prove secure. Even Shilling's assertion that 'we cannot escape from the inevitability ... of death' (*The Body and Social Theory*, p.187) must be treated sceptically. The designation of 'death' as a universal experience is itself a social figuration. I am thinking here not simply of the fact that, as Barthes points out against the naturalization of death, we all die at different times and for different reasons²⁵ - but rather that the supposed 'fact' of death is itself a particular cultural interpretation of the body. Caroline Walter Bynum, for instance, records the medieval argument that the corpse should be regarded as merely one stage in the material process from human birth to rebirth, and as such should be treated as being in a state that might be more properly considered a continuation of life, rather than its cessation,. She observes that 'the event we call death is not a radical break' if the underlying model is of a material continuity of the body that must, necessarily, continue until Judgement Day ('Material Continuity, Personal Survival, and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in its Medieval Contexts', p.77). It is thus not even the case that we all 'die'.²⁶

But this is not to deny that in particular social formations, at particular times, commonalities exist. On the contrary, my argument is precisely that the forms, meanings, experiences and relationships of the body are, to the extent that

²⁵ As Barthes has it: 'must we really celebrate its essence once more, and thus risk forgetting that there is still so much we can do to fight it?' ('The Great Family of Man', p.109).

²⁶ This problem of the clash between bodily events that one culture regards as unchanging, but which another culture views as non-existent, is a recurrent problem for the analysis of embodiment. For instance, in his *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, Zygmunt Bauman finds himself in the difficult position of asserting that death is universal, while documenting cultures in which its inevitability is not accepted. His solution is to argue that the belief in immortality can only be grasped as a self-deluding attempt to manage the fact of mortality.

they are produced, necessarily recurrent and stabilized.²⁷ Indeed, the fact that we can specify the continuity of an experience like death is possible only for this reason: in this society, at this time, we do all die, even if elsewhere, at other times, such a statement would be - and will be - ludicrous.²⁸ But within a given social formation accounts such as these, all of which speak about our bodies to us, play a role in the construction of our sense of what our bodies are through the assumptions they make about what is unchanging. As Butler points out, 'the assumption of a certain contoured materiality, is itself giving form to that body' (*Bodies That Matter*, p.17). These statements of what the body 'is', how it works, what it can do, produce a regime of bodily accounts which in turn generate the practices that produce that body. Bourdieu's reading of the body is also helpful here, since he emphasizes the way that bodily stabilities achieve the naturalization of the political (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p.94-95). Where we inhabit a body whose physical form and social meaning seems unchangeable, an equally unchangeable political claim is being embodied in it. This might offer us a useful way of understanding the investment in the assertion of a site of bodily stability such as we see in Bordo and Turner. We should therefore always ask: what stabilities does the assertion of a bodily stability attempt to assert? What is at stake in this notion of the corporeal?

I have suggested that Turner uses bodily stability as a guarantee of an embodied humanism. The reasons for Bordo's assertion lie in her search for the grounds of a feminist politics which, in its commitment to the struggle for the rights of 'women' must constitute the form 'woman' to defend, a construction

²⁷ I say 'stabilized' rather than 'stable', to emphasise the active force that is necessary to maintain given material forms: insofar as the social order is partially stabilized, it produces bodies which are also partially stabilized.

²⁸ As Linda F. Hogle recounts, the gradual technological intervention into states that would once have been terminal is steadily eroding the possibility of declaring the point at which a body becomes dead. ('Tales from the Cryptic: Technology Meets Organism in the Living Cadaver').

enabled by Bordo's invocation of a fixed biological fact.²⁹ There may well be points where such political stability is the most useful tactic - but as we have seen in the case of Bordo's invocation of childbirth, it is not unproblematic. I would therefore argue that Bordo's argument proceeds in the wrong direction. The assumption of her argument might be paraphrased as: 'Given that there is a political movement organized around the identity "woman", what grounding can be found to maintain it?' But I would pose the question in the opposite form: given that certain bodily forms (not only gender) are socially organized in temporarily fixed forms, what social unities result from them, what political action do they enable, and how can we alter those socio-physical fixities even as, necessarily, we deploy politics on the basis of their existence? Bordo's parenthetical concern to register the possibility of male pregnancies ('up to now - technology may alter this') displaces into the future the need to think about the different physical forms that bodies take, as does her concern with experience, not matter, as the variable element of her account of childbirth. Her account uses the image of a changing future as the contrast for an unchanging past (women have always had babies *until now*), when in fact pregnancy should be analyzed in terms of the constant *changes* in who has the capacity to reproduce, in the course of which certain consistent and stable material bodily conditions do indeed emerge - but they emerge as produced, regulated and contested, rather than as natural and immutable. Thus the question of how and why a certain material form exists should be the object of an enquiry, rather than the assumption on which a theoretical claim is based. In other words, we must ask: what political projects follow from the forms of materiality that we are currently obliged to assume, and how can we pursue those projects while still seeking to alter the material forms

²⁹ On the debates over the legitimacy, and political consequences, of the deployment of the terms 'woman' and 'women' see also Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women*; Denise Riley, *Am I That Name?*; and Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind' and Other Essays*, especially 'The Category of Sex', 'One Is Not Born a Woman' and 'The Straight Mind'.

that found them?

As a result of the attempt to use the body as a guarantee of stability, a particular anxiety attends to Bordo's use of 'body' - one that appears in her hostile rebuttal of attempts by Donna Haraway to assert the body's malleability. Haraway argues, via the figure of the cyborg, that the body is malleable, mobile, and not bound to one physical form or location ('A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century'). Bordo reacts scornfully: 'What sort of body is it that is free to change its shape and location at will?' she asks, and answers: 'no body at all' (*Unbearable Weight*, p.229).

Resistant to - and perhaps unnerved by - the fact of the body's malleability, Bordo is quick to reduce the sophistication of Haraway's arguments, treating Haraway's work as if it were an account of voluntaristic bodily transformations which altogether ignores the material facts which constitute - and limit - the body.³⁰

Haraway in fact argues for no more than the possibility of changes in the material form of the body which, while far-reaching, are constrained at all points.

Moreover, she is particularly attentive to the fact that such changes takes place not at will, but via a dangerous, if constructive, engagement with body-shaping forces which are outside our control. She is explicit that 'the main trouble with cyborgs of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism', who may nevertheless be used for 'a subversion of its teleology as star wars' ('A Cyborg Manifesto', p.151).³¹ The 'subversion' of embodied power

³⁰ For a similar critique of the supposed tendency to disembodiment in postmodern theory see Somer Brodribb, *Nothing Mat(t)ers: A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism*, which reads postmodernism as a 'politics of discarnate desires' dreaming of a world in which 'mind will no longer need to make reference to the body in its identity claims: unchained at last from the sensations and limitations of the flesh' (p.144). As my earlier critique of Wiley suggests, I am sympathetic to such a reading, but I do not believe that we stand to gain by making the flesh more rigid than it in fact is, and thereby contributing to a naturalizing of the social which sustains the regimes of domination that we are supposedly resisting.

³¹ In 'Envisioning Cyborg Bodies' Jennifer Gonzalez gives a particularly strong account of different forms of the 'cyborg of slavery', the (usually female) figure whose bodily transformations are in the service of masculinist power and corporate technology.

is very different from an assumption that such power is largely ineffectual, which Bordo imputes to her; and the seeking out of bodily changes is not the same as a failure to recognize oppressive bodily stabilities. An insistence on the different experiences and different physical capacities of the body is not, as Bordo argues, an attempt to dematerialize the body and to replace it with a disembodied politics. Rather, it is to argue for an analysis of the concrete materialities as which we exist, while simultaneously holding on to the practical possibilities for their change.

The trajectory of my own work is, clearly enough, to suggest that these oppositions between biology and discourse, between what is changeable and unchangeable, what is constructed and what is not, are unsuccessful. The zero-degree of physicality remains a fantasy, the asocial body a myth, and the purely biological phenomenon impossible to find. Like Descartes's attempt to define a consciousness without a body, these dreams of a body without a society that produced it are doomed to failure. For inevitably, the existence of a human body is always the sign of a functioning society which brought it to birth and beyond. Just as no body is ever without race or sex, so no body is without sociality. There is no body of which we cannot ask: how did it come to be like this? What actions of other humans brought it to be in this place, at this time, in this state? Who fed or did not feed it, and on what? Who taught or did not teach it a posture, and how? Who sustained or did not sustain its health, and why? And what assumptions about what the body is, how it works, and what it means, do these other practices entail?

In order to understand how these relationships of body-knowledge and body-practice are interrelated, it is useful to look at the work of Michel Foucault, according to whom any theory of 'an intelligible body' is always bound up with the production of a particular type of 'useful body' (*Discipline and Punish*, henceforth *DP*, p.136). For any accounts which seek to explain the materiality of a referential body - Turner's, Bordo's, and mine as well - all have their correlative

social practices which act on such bodies, and for which such explanations fit the bodies in question.

(v) Foucault's Docile Bodies

Central to my own thinking about bodies has been the work of Michel Foucault, and it is to this work that I wish to turn now: both because it remains such a useful resource for thinking about the social conditions of embodiment and because in addressing the various debates that his work has generated it will be possible to define my own position more clearly. In doing so, I find myself in agreement with Nancy Fraser's description of Foucault: 'I believe that Foucault does not really have a single consistent position' ('Michel Foucault: A "Young Conservative"?', p. 37). It is possible to construct several different Foucauldian theories of the body with, as Fraser says of Foucault's theories of power, 'some textual evidence in favour of each reading' (p.37). For instance, it is certainly possible to argue - as I will systematically refuse to do here - that at some points in these texts Foucault believes in a pre-social bodily materiality that provides an untouchable site for resistance to socialization. But my interest here is to account for how the matter of the body is formed, governed, and ordered. This then is an attempt to construct, out of the volumes of material signed with Foucault's name, a particular theory of embodied subjectivity which develops my line of argument about the production of the material body, and attempts to account for the possibility of such a body resisting the power structures by which it is constructed.

For Foucault, thinking and talking about the body is part of the insertion of the body into a field of power, for 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (*DP*, p.27). The question of how particular material bodies emerge (the social construction of their ontology) is therefore inseparable from how those bodies are talked about (the

social construction of their epistemology). Foucault insists that knowledge about the body can never be innocent or factual - as I have tried to show in the cases of Turner and Bordo - but is always part of attempts to orchestrate and resist power and the physical forms of embodiment that it produces.

This linking of power and knowledge has been taken as indicating in Foucault a concern only with how the body is rendered in discourse, since that is the domain in which knowledge would seem to operate. Shilling claims that in Foucault's writing 'society is brought so far into the body that the body disappears as a phenomenon ... As the body is whatever discourse constructs it as being, it is discourse rather than the body that needs examining in Foucault's work' (*The Body and Social Theory*, p.81). It is certainly true that Foucault describes his own project as one which will 'substitute for the enigmatic treasure of "things" anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse' (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.47).³² But for him this implies looking at how those objects are brought into being through their material regulation as well, since to speak about an object is also to designate how that object should be treated. Foucault's account of the body is then as much concerned with the material consequences of discourse for the body - such as its postures, diet, exercise and medical treatment - as with discourse in Shilling's reductive sense of it as only the ways in which the body is discussed. In his own sceptical dismissal of the study of discourse solely as ideology, Foucault specifies that different discourses of the body 'were not to be joined at the level of a speculative discourse, but in the form of concrete arrangements' (*The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, henceforth

³² Foucault is distancing himself here from his first book, *Madness and Civilization*, which attempts to offer just such a history of phenomena outside discourse. Derrida famously asserts the impossibility of this project in 'Cogito and the History of Madness' - a critique which, as Robert Young has observed, Foucault vehemently refutes in 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire', but whose repudiation of the possibility of speaking in the name of an outside of discourse Foucault was quick to adopt (Robert Young, *White Mythologies*, pp.71-73). For an account of the work's reception see Georges Canguilhem, 'Georges Canguilhem on Michel Foucault's *Histoire de La Folie*'.

HS, p.140), and makes his aim clear:

I do not envisage a 'history of mentalities' that would take account of bodies only through the manner in which they have been perceived and given meaning and value; but a 'history of bodies' and the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested. (*HS*, p.152)

His construction of such a history begins with his argument that 'in concrete terms, starting in the seventeenth century', two movements to organize the body are visible (*HS*, p.139). One 'centred on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities ... its integration into systems of efficiency and economic controls' (*HS*, p.139). This regime of power is achieved by 'the disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body' (*HS*, p.139). Here, the focus is on the styling of individual bodies, and is compatible with Mauss's argument for the social specificity of bodily practices. The other 'focused on the species body', and is concerned with the biology of entire populations: 'propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity' (*HS*, p.139). Into this category come eugenics, vaccination campaigns, birth-control, sanitation, all those technologies which aim to organize the health of the nation, and which are maintained through 'an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population' (*HS*, p.139). By focusing on these two processes - which he characterizes as 'two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations' (*HS*, p.139) - Foucault makes the physical condition of the body crucial in his analysis of modern social formations.³³

Such an analysis builds on the account of modern subjectivity which

³³ My focus on his analysis of the body should not be taken to erase Foucault's other contributions to post-structuralist thought, most notably on the problem of knowledge. It may be, as Christina Crosby has argued, that an interest in Foucault's genealogies as an assemblage of sociological facts is a convenient way of avoiding engaging with the challenges he poses to the problem of knowledge itself ('Dealing with Differences').

Foucault offers in *Discipline and Punish*, where his focus was the concept of ‘discipline’, a distinctive modern form of bodily attention ‘which the whole of society pursues on each individual through innumerable mechanisms’ (*DP*, p.303). The practices that make such demands on the body are dispersed through a frightening array of modern institutions, producing power in a range of everyday locations: the school, the hospital, the office. As he breaks these domains down into their component practices (e.g. the examination, the seating arrangement, the lecture), Foucault reminds us that we must consider these practices as ‘techniques possessing their own specificity in the more general field of other ways of exercising power’ (*DP*, p.23) not just effects of some larger social order - and in doing so moves us some way from Bourdieu’s account of the body as simply the materialization of class interests. But at the same time Foucault asks us to consider how such techniques may well also participate in shared histories, so that, in the case of the prison for instance, the autonomous techniques of psychiatrists, doctors, parsons, penologists, judges and philosophers converge in ‘a single process of “epistemologico-juridical” formation’ in which may be found ‘a common history of power relations’ (*DP*, p.24), marked on the one hand by a shared form of rationality, and on the other by ‘the coherence of its results’ (*DP*, p.26). Foucault terms his method of analysis an investigation of the ‘micro-physics of power’ (*DP*, p.26).

As we can see, such an analysis considers not only the shaping of particular bodies, but also the shaping of the social landscape that encourages and discourages the production of different bodies, that monitors their health or their growth. Such an analysis requires us to consider the architecture of the buildings designed to house bodies (*DP*, pp.141-149; *HS*, pp.27-29); an analysis of the social programmes of eugenics; the regulation of diet; or the distribution of different populations through city-planning. These are all exercises of social power which, as we have seen with Bourdieu, are materialized in the form of particular body-

types. Such a production of active, healthy, useful bodies leads to a concern with classifying body attributes along the axis of normality and deviation, since ‘a normalizing society is the outcome of a technology of power centred on life’ (*HS*, p.144). This concern with utility is expressed through the promotion and preservation of sanctioned bodily types, and the correction of others, producing what Foucault calls ‘docile bodies’ (*DP*, pp.135-169): bodies that are socially useful, that follow the practices prescribed for them, and that maintain those practices through self-scrutiny. Foucault’s account thus enables us to consider both how individual bodies become the objects of attention, and how larger physical forces simultaneously result in and are maintained by the formation of particular body-types. He offers us both a number of historically specific processes by which the modern body is produced, and a general theory of the importance of the body as a site of the maintenance of all social organizations.³⁴

Foucault’s account should warn us against designating, as Turner and Bordo do, certain phenomena as outside the concerns of an enquiry into the material and discursive construction of the body. His position reminds us that no analysis can in advance rule out the possibility that certain events may be sites through which power operates. Nor does it allow us to accept certain bodily formations or biological facts as natural or unproblematic. Rather, if a body has reached a certain disposition, Foucault reminds us that we must ask what processes of power and control brought it to such a point: ‘one needs to study what kind of body the current society needs’ (‘Body/Power’, p.58). It is the complexity with which he treats the mechanisms through which power is brought to bear that makes Foucault most compelling for me. Both *The History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish*, make the case that as long as power is conceived of as ‘a limit set on freedom’ (*HS*, p.86), we only have a partial picture of its operation,

³⁴ On the debate over which aspects of Foucault’s claims about power are historically specific and which cover more general philosophical terrain, see Nancy Fraser, ‘Foucault’s Body Language’; and Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp.266-293.

and ignore the ways in which power also operates as a proliferation of possibilities and an incitement to pursue them. In the case of *The History of Sexuality*, this resides in the famous claim that ‘we must not think that in saying yes to sex, one says no to power’ (p.157), since the domain of sexual science already encourages us to focus our time, energy and speech on sex, and, as we do so, to become further enmeshed in procedures of self-scrutiny, and normalizing judgement.³⁵ In making a similar argument in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault speaks of the way that carceral thinking encourages new types of deviance in its designation of a norm, whose result is ‘the formation of delinquency on the basis of subtle illegalities’ (p.301). Delinquency, as the sign of the ever-present risk that any subject might lapse into criminality, is not simply an object that carceral law must deal with, but is rather its product. Delinquency exists because the penal system encourages us to be always watchful for signs of it.

But in both cases power’s productivity enables it to operate more effectively. Delinquency and sexuality, although posed as problems for these systems to solve, are in fact the necessary objects by which these systems function. They encourage a constant self-scrutiny which is one practice in the social network of the monitoring and assessing by which interventionist techniques are legitimated. Such self-monitoring fulfils our fear of error, while all the time generating only more signs of that error: ‘you will end up in the convict-ship, the slightest indiscipline seems to say’ (*DP*, p.299). As Jacques Donzelot says, wherever the sociologist is asked to explain some ‘social problem’, they should instead ask: what need for social control is being met by the simultaneous invention of this ‘problem’ and the generation of a concomitant regime of professional and governmental solutions to it (*The Policing of Families*, p. 220) ?

For Foucault, power thus operates in the form of what I shall call ‘regulated production’. Particular sites of discipline generate new actions in those

³⁵ I explore this argument in more detail in chapter two.

on whom it operates, and consequently Foucault's 'docile bodies' are not passive bodies - they are bodies that exercise, that write, that labour in factories, that take aerobics classes, that cook particular types of food. And those practices are inseparable from an embodied subjectivity that scrutinizes itself, assesses the meaning of its actions, and in doing so subjects itself to particular institutional exercises of discipline. So the production of such active bodies is also the production of regulated bodies: the embodied subject is only active in certain ways and to certain ends (it exerts itself to eat certain foods, to undertake certain physical activities), and understands its activities in a certain light (as enabling utility rather than pleasure) - an understanding which, as we have seen, in turn gives rise to new bodily activities (it feels shame at its weight and so goes on diets). Bodies are thus active in the service of the forms of construction that limit them.

I would accept the criticism that Foucault's work does not always consider how these practices are stratified by gender³⁶- and equally would add that they do not consider how they are stratified by race. But I would add that Foucault never claims that his work is an exhaustive account of the forces that shape bodies, and he concludes *Discipline and Punish* by describing it as 'a historical background to various studies of the power of normalization' (p.308).³⁷ We might well want to

³⁶ On the debates around Foucault's limited consideration of gender see Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (eds.), *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*; Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, p.3; Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism*, pp.11-47; Meaghan Morris, *The Pirate's Fiancee*, pp.55-56; Elspeth Probyn, *Sexing the Self*, pp.112-117; Caroline Ramazonoglu (ed.), *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*; Margrit Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* pp.46-49; and Kate Soper, 'Forget Foucault?' pp.26-27.

³⁷ Other researchers have extended the Foucauldian critique into new domains: Suren Lalvani's *Photography, Vision and the Production of Modern Bodies* considers how photography became a potent institutional force for regimenting the postures, arrangements and conceptions of nineteenth century bodies; and Jacques Donzelot writes on the management of the family (*The Policing of the Family*). The contributors to *Deviant Bodies* (Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, eds.), consider the way that the different sciences construct notions of deviance; and

ask of his analyses: what social practices are particular to the bodies of women and what are particular to those of men ? What social practices are particular to black bodies and what are particular to white bodies? But while we will inevitably need to consider practices which Foucault does not, and this may result in arguments for substantial modes of modern power which Foucault's account does not consider, it is Foucault's own arguments on the twin domains of 'an anatomo-politics of the human body' and 'a bio-politics of the population' that will enable such an analysis. To identify other techniques of body-fashioning does not mean that such modes of domination have an altogether different logic to those particular modern forms of power that interest Foucault, nor does it mean that these bodies are subject to greater (or lesser) degrees of bodily intervention. Against claims that Foucault overlooks the possibility that some bodies are more constructed than others, we must bear in mind that, as Elizabeth Grosz has said:

women are no more subject to this system of corporeal production than men; they are no more cultural, no more natural, than men. Patriarchal power relations do not function to make women the objects of disciplinary control while men remain outside of disciplinary surveillance. It is a question not of more or less but of differential production. (VB, p.144)

Embodied subjects are located in a network of obligations and prohibitions, encouragements and discouragements, within which they orient themselves, and through which they are situated. As malleable bodies are arranged in prisons and

those writing in *Foucault's New Domains* (Mike Gane and Terry Johnson, eds.) extend his work to new areas of governmentality and professionalization. It is important to bear in mind the open-ended form of Foucault's enquiry, precisely as a resistance to the regularity with which critiques of Foucault accuse him of neglecting some important social domain (Judith Still, ' "What Foucault Fails to Acknowledge": Feminists and *The History of Sexuality*'). While we may, for instance, accept Sandra Lee Bartky's point that *Discipline and Punish* does not consider the difference that gender makes to punishment, and that 'to overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom the disciplines have been imposed' ('Foucault, Femininity and Patriarchal Power', p.64), there is nothing in Foucault's methodology which makes it *unable* to analyze gender, even if that is not always a field on which he focuses.

classrooms, subjectivities are produced which are tied to regimes that make sense of bodies and that order their physical matter. We have moved from Mauss's anecdotes about how different nationalities walk, to a model of the body in which the smallest physical motions - and even the very matter of the body itself - are securing points for regimes of palpable misery.

This raises a number of questions, to which I will be offering provisional answers - and which perhaps constitute an entire discourse around Foucault in themselves. Does this account of power as regulated production enable us to ask in whose interests power operates ? How does such a theory of the total production of bodies account for everyone who does not behave in these ways ? Can such a model enable us to judge between desirable and undesirable uses of power ? If the body is always styled, are some styles preferable ? Are some damaging ? Is there a Foucauldian body politics ?

From the outset, such a project faces a series of problems. Foucault's account of all history as 'the various systems of subjection' and 'the hazardous play of dominations' ('Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p.85) has led many critics to argue that in the very moment that the body is made the central domain of power, it becomes impossible to analyze what would constitute a desirable form of resistance: if the body is simply shaped in many different ways, how can we judge which of those ways are more desirable than others ?³⁸ Then, as we saw in Bourdieu's account of the body, to theorize its physical malleability may render it so completely a product of the social order that the body would seem to have no capacity to alter the social scenes in which it is located.³⁹ Thus for Pasi Falk, in

³⁸ Habermas regards this as leading Foucault into an ethical cul-de-sac (*The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp.279-282), in which his position requires us to see no difference in freedom or autonomy between, say, a body shaped by Olympic training and one shaped by a concentration camp. For a similar account of this aporia see Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political*, pp.112-116; and Rudi Visker, *Michel Foucault: Genealogy as Critique*, pp. 123-124.

³⁹ For a critique of some of the problems of resistance in Bourdieu's work, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp.50-60.

Foucault's work 'the subject is reduced to a mere product' (*The Consuming Body*, p.6), a set of effects unable to act back. For some this is his strength: he gives an account of the terrible fact of humanity's absolute submission which may rouse us to action (John O'Neill, *Five Bodies*, pp.140-147). And yet to accept such an account of complete docility would seem to preclude the very possibility of action - a position which, for others, is his limitation.⁴⁰ Against this Foucault is often invoked the Foucault of the second two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, who seems to offer an account of 'self-fashioning' in which the subject is an active creator of her or his own body.⁴¹ Foucault is thus represented - whether positively or negatively - both as the pessimistic historian of absolute oppression and as the anarchic theorist of absolute liberty.

But these attempts to slant Foucault in favour of *either* liberty *or* domination are made possible only by the systematic neglect of Foucault's careful situating of the two as necessarily dependent. Accounts of their mutual incompatibility would seem to entail a wilful elision of this position, such as Edward Said's extraordinary claim that in *The History of Sexuality* Foucault's 'profoundly pessimistic view' is that power is 'irresistible and unopposable' because of his 'singular lack of interest in the force of effective resistance'

⁴⁰ See for instance Peter Dews, 'Power and Subjectivity in Foucault'; Bryan Turner, *The Body and Society*, pp.172-174; and Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, pp.80-81. Nancy Hartsock suggests that Foucault views power as a force which one cannot change for the better ('Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?'). She sees this as a consequence of Foucault's position as a man, which makes him a beneficiary of power. The best he can hope to be, she suggests, is 'a colonizer who refuses' (p.164), but never a victim of power. This attempt to carve the world into 'colonizers' and 'colonized' fails precisely because it cannot take on board Foucault's account of the dispersal of power. When Hartsock ('Associate Professor of Political Science and Women's Studies at the University of Washington') places herself on the side of the victims, and claims that she therefore has a superior faith in the value of resistance, one longs for an interrogation of her own privileges, and perhaps some recognition by her of Foucault's homosexuality.

⁴¹ See for instance Arnold I. Davidson, 'Archaeology, Genealogy, Ethics'; Paul Patton 'Taylor and Foucault on Power and Freedom'; and Elspeth Probyn, *Sexing the Self*, pp.128-137. For a critique of the attempt to recuperate Foucault for a liberal notion of agency, see Toby Miller, *The Well-Tempered Self*, pp.173-180.

resistance' ('Foucault and the Imagination of Power', p.151). Said's apparent authority for such a reading of Foucault is this paraphrase: 'power, he writes in his last phase, is everywhere' (p.150). But Said's paraphrase erases the other formulation that accompanies this: 'points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network' (*HS*, p.95). What the elision of this phrase - which even an inattentive reader could hardly miss - suggests is that at stake in these figurations of Foucault is the difficulty of accommodating his insistence that power and resistance are interminably complicit. Instead, he is reworked so as to appear to believe more in the force of one or the other.

I am equally uncomfortable with the argument that, as Kate Soper has suggested, Foucault's claims for practices of freedom are contradicted by the theoretical models he uses, with the result that Foucault's 'libertarian impulse is sustained only through an autotelic or existential conception of the subject which is belied by the radical anti-humanism of the account which is given of social process' ('Forget Foucault', p.25), leading to an insoluble aporia or tension in Foucault's work. Here, rather than privileging one aspect of the critique over another, the two are assumed to be contradictory: since Foucault's account denies human agency and progress in the traditional humanist conception, how can he make claims for possibilities of freedom? But at the same time, if he believes in the possibility of freedom, how can he offer us an account so antithetical to agency and progress?

In Soper's reading, Foucault is divided between offering and foreclosing the possibility of social change - a recognition of the difficulty of his account which is at least more satisfying than the attempt to reorganize it in favour of one or other pole. But Soper's vocabulary of 'tensions', and her figuring of Foucault as situated in a paradoxical contradiction of impulses only reinstalls the logic by which these accounts seem incompatible. We should not simply lament this position as a contradiction. Rather, we must account for Foucault's own stress on the mutual interdependency of domination and resistance, in which power is not a

property held by some against others, but is rather ‘a way in which certain actions modify others’ (‘The Subject and Power’, p.218), available to us all, I shall argue, through those very processes which might at first seem to deprive us of agency. Although an account of the tensions between submission and agency in Foucault’s writing has become an almost inevitable part of any account of his work,⁴² it is nevertheless important to chart Foucault’s position here in some detail since, firstly, his arguments form one of the central strands of this thesis and, secondly, I will argue, it is at the level of the body that Foucault himself most often locates resistance.

Insofar as the body is encouraged to act in particular ways, it is an object on which power acts and, as we have seen with Bourdieu, may make that power particularly difficult to resist since the body’s entire physical bearing acts to naturalize those effects. But Foucault insists that power is not simply ‘a physical determination’ (‘The Subject and Power’, p.221) because it always entails the possibility of a response which will resist its effects. Power ‘is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free’ (p.221). In this account the opportunity for resistance is always present. As if to push this claim to its limit, he takes as an example the concentration camp to show how even in that most restrictive and damaging of locations there is room for what he terms a ‘practice of liberty’, since ‘no matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional grouping’ (‘Space, Knowledge and Power’, p.339).⁴³ His analysis seeks out the sites where alternative actions may take place and where alternative ideas may be formulated

⁴² It is, for instance, the central question in almost every one of the fourteen essays in David Couzens Hoy (ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader*.

⁴³ One detects perhaps both some justifiable frustration, and some recognition of the apparent pessimism of his work, when Foucault tells one interviewer that ‘what I’ve said does not mean that we are always trapped, but that we are always free’ (‘Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity’, p.386). We might even go so far as to say that Foucault takes what is most debilitating in his early work - power’s omnipresence - and makes it in his later work the set of conditions that enables freedom.

which do not simply reproduce the conditions of domination - but which equally, as we shall see, do not simply break from them. Where then does this freedom emerge from? In this analysis I shall be looking at two areas in which freedom is exercised: the material space, where particular actions are enforced and/or restricted (often simultaneously), and the discursive space where ideas, values, and practices are conceptualized. I shall also consider two different ways in which Foucault conceives of possible exercises of freedom: immediate resistance to particular acts of coercive power, and the exercise of self-fashioning in pleasurable styles, both of which I will argue, must be seen in terms of their ambivalent resistance to domination.

(vi) Foucault's Resistant Bodies

I want to begin with Foucault's account of resistance to the regime of the prison in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. 'All these movements' argues Foucault 'have been about the body and material things' (*DP*, p.30). He is particularly concerned with the fact that resistance within the prison takes the form not only of demands by inmates for change in particular practices, but also of a more general opposition to the fact of the disciplinary environment itself. They were 'revolts at the level of the body against the body of the prison' in which 'what was at issue was not whether the prison environment was too harsh or too aseptic, too primitive or too efficient, but its very materiality as an instrument and vector of power' (*DP*, p.30). The coterminous materiality of body and environment - the meshing of bodies with discipline and the exercises of micro-power over them - then become the site of an opposition by the body, which seems to stage its own resentful resistance to the forces that press on it. While the charge of the impossibility of resistance has been levelled at Foucault's account of the subjectivization of persons, who cannot resist because they are unable to imagine actions outside the horizons of the subjectifying discourse,

Foucault's own examples of resistance seek to locate it in sites of material action, where new practices might emerge out of the very bodies upon which power acts.⁴⁴

Does this mean that Foucault sees the body as an independent force, a source of transcendental values? Nancy Fraser certainly thinks so, and declares Foucault's invocation of the body as a material site of resistance to be naive ('Foucault's Body Language', pp.62-63). Moreover she argues that in and of itself the body cannot be the source of some spontaneous political revolt: 'here is where my capacity to imagine a plausible Foucauldian response runs out. I can form no concrete picture of what resistance ... in the name of bodies and pleasures would be like' (p.63). But, I wish to argue, it is precisely in his interest in concrete instances of resistance that Foucault's theory of the body becomes most useful. We need not assume that the possibility of bodily resistance indicates some spontaneous freedom housed within the body, if we imagine that when power demands particular bodily movements, postures and practices, in doing so it recognizes at the physical level the possibility that these bodies may act otherwise. For Foucault, power is conceived as 'always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action' ('The Subject and Power', p.220), an exercise of force which imposes one set of actions at the expense of others, and which therefore produces subjects who have the opportunity of acting otherwise precisely because such possibilities are internal to and installed by that exercise of power.

The physical force of the prison thus becomes a site of resistance because the prison assumes subjects who are free to act otherwise - not because the body is a natural source of resistance, but because the body is *produced as insubordinate*

⁴⁴ What is perhaps missing from such an account of resistance as the material reaction of the body, is a formulation of resistance on behalf of others. The missing term might be *empathy*: the capacity to act so as to preserve the bodies of others. Perhaps the most interesting direction in which to extend Foucault's work would be to offer a bodily account of empathy.

by the material practices of power that produce it there.⁴⁵ The demand to be silent contains within it the recognition of, and therefore the production of, the possibility of speech - just as the obligation to speak produces the possibility of silence. The physical practices through which such docile bodies are produced are simultaneously training those bodies in postures of refusal, installing in their gestures the capacity to defy, and invoking in their muscles alternative movements. Power is thus actively installing such possibilities within the subject even in the act of foreclosing them. The body that is structured by disciplinary techniques is thus a body able to conceive of itself as performing possible practices other than those which are required. As Crossley notes, Foucault 'does not adopt the behaviourist option of viewing the result of training as simple propensity to repeat certain actions' ('Body-Subject/Body-Power', p.109). Rather, any body-training itself generates conditions antithetical to the social domains of power which produces it. Thus while, as I have argued so far, embodiment constitutes an experience of the world in terms of its dominant power structures, it also enables a critical purchase.

It is thus not the case, as Peter Dews has argued, that 'without some evocation of the intrinsic forces of the body, without some theory which makes the corporeal more than a malleable *tabula rasa*, it is impossible to reckon the costs imposed by "an infinitesimal power over the active body" ' ('Power and Subjectivity in Foucault', p.90). For Dews, Foucault's failure is that 'he has no positive libidinal theory of the body', which invalidates any political possibilities since 'only if we can produce a counterfactual, specifying how a situation would change if an operation of power were cancelled, or a repressed desire made conscious' can there be any meaningful notion of freedom (p.92). But in arguing for the thoroughly material force of freedom, we can see how Foucault figures

⁴⁵ For alternative materialist accounts of Foucault and power see Paul Patton, 'Taylor and Foucault on Power and Freedom', and Ann Game, *Undoing the Social*, who relates Foucault to Henri Bergson's arguments about the material continuity of the body with its environment.

freedom not as the retrogressive search to regain repressed desires, but rather as the future-oriented development of new possibilities.⁴⁶ Dews conflates the future possibilities that might follow ‘if an operation of power were cancelled’ with a notion of repression in which the only imaginable outcome of the lifting of power is the freeing of an innate desire. But if we think in terms of *new* bodily possibilities, we can see how escape from any given practice of power’s control calls not for the return of the repressed, but rather for the creation of body-forms and practices which may previously never have existed - some of which may have been explicitly forbidden, but others of which have simply been overlooked because the body has been actively producing itself in forms which unwittingly preclude any such alternatives.

And yet at the same time, the actions that resist power are not only opposed to it in some straightforwardly liberatory way. As we have seen, the penal society requires delinquency, rather than being undermined by it, and the heteronormative state requires the figure of the pervert. These actions that unsettle any given site of authority may also reinforce it. But rather than assuming that resistance may therefore only take the form urged upon us by Jean Baudrillard - absolute apathy⁴⁷ - Foucault instead invites us to consider resistance as an act whose meanings and effects are only ever provisional. Power overthrown at one point by a given action may be reinstalled at another as a consequence of the same action. The resistant body thus appears in his writing not in the form of the privileged revolutionary agent, but rather as the site of a provisional opportunistic stand against power, which offers us little in the way of long-term strategy

⁴⁶ At the same time, it is important to recognize that Foucault’s own position here has changed over time - *Madness and Civilization* makes the attempt to think just such a resistant repressed force. My sense of the importance of thinking in terms of future possibilities for new bodily forms has been confirmed by my recent discovery of Kathryn Bond Stockton’s ‘Bodies and God: Poststructuralist Feminists Return to the Fold of Spiritual Materialism’, a particularly impressive argument along very similar lines.

⁴⁷ See Baudrillard, ‘Fatal Strategies’ and ‘The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media’.

because the long-term is never within our sight: it is only as a new configuration of exercises of power comes to act upon us that we can develop our new responses to them.

My Foucauldian position on embodiment and its relationship to power would argue as follows. The body *must* be styled in particular ways, for instance through exercises of force which teach it how to move, how to talk, how to eat. The body that is free from power is not an option. As a body is shaped, it is also bound to particular regimes of domination - as both their beneficiary and their victim. The physical production of differentiated bodies is therefore one which limits what those bodies can do, but even in doing so it makes new opportunities and physical capacities available to them. In taking my lead from Foucault, I therefore assume that it is possible for any body to act against instances of power which order its life through domination and inequality, and in doing so to exercise power itself. The adversarial relationships in which a body is situated - productive, regulative, coercive - may yield the potential for struggles in which that body can act otherwise than required. However, it is also the case that in doing so it may also consolidate the regimes that it resists, or that it may itself enter into other bodily regimes in which it is a body that dominates, even as it seeks to stop being a body that is dominated. Following such an argument, 'freedom' is not simply the opportunity to undertake a greater range or number of actions (as it is for libertarianism), since this account recognizes that these may be no more than multiple oppressive obligations.⁴⁸ Rather, 'freedom' as such is replaced with a notion of temporary situated struggles for alternatives to given practices of coercion. And the long-term effectivity of such struggles should be judged by the extent to which they themselves produce or evade new forms of coercion.

Crucial to such a theory is the recognition that it may well be impossible to

⁴⁸ The 'free market' being a case in point, where what is called 'free' is in fact a series of elaborate obligations.

separate in any straightforward way acts which ‘empower’ from those which ‘disempower’. If this has distressed critics hoping for some guide as to which practices should be preferred over others, this is precisely because Foucault’s work insists upon a complex interweaving of dominations and freedoms, both discursive and material, in which few acts are unproblematically acts of liberation, and all acts take place within contexts in which they are implicated with regimes of authority.⁴⁹ Let us consider this case:

In a great many cases power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom. To take what is undoubtedly a very simplified example, one cannot say that it was only men who wielded power in the conventional marital structure of the 18th and 19th centuries; women had quite a few options: they could deceive their husbands, pilfer money from them, refuse them sex. Yet they were still in a state of domination insofar as these options were ultimately only stratagems that never succeeded in reversing the situation. (‘The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom’, p.442)

While we can account for these actions partly in terms of material possibility, these examples of resistance are suggestive of Foucault’s entire treatment of power. Although he does not present them as such, we may notice how these forms of resistance are crucially predicated on aspects of modern embodied subjectivity. Stealing money is related to that juridical product ‘delinquency’ which, as we have seen, is generated by a penal scrutiny that asks all subjects to consider of themselves what crimes they might be on the point of committing. We might even go so far as to say that the penal system produces subjects who are more likely to consider crimes than other systems: it is the penal system that enables the consciousness that conceives of resistant criminal possibilities. And abstinence from sex, while making a claim outside the discourses of domestic duty, is at the same time produced by the Christian tradition of chastity (see for

⁴⁹ Foucault distances himself from notions of ‘liberation’, warning that any so-called moment of liberation ‘is not in itself sufficient to define the practices of freedom that will still be needed’ (‘The Ethics of the Concern for Self’, p.433).

instance Foucault, 'The Battle for Chastity').⁵⁰ It would not therefore be going too far to say that this resistant figure is the product of discourses which enable her to resist one site of power - that of her husband - even as she consolidates others. We must view this possibility as operating through two types of mobility: the mobility of physical possibility and the mobility of relations of discourse. That is, the material possibilities of taking actions, and the discursive possibilities of articulating what so many of his critics suppose that Foucault cannot account for: demands or ideas that do not serve the interests of a particular locus of power.

Describing the investments of power in a healthy body, Foucault points out that 'once power produces this effect, there inevitably emerge the responding claims and affirmations, those of one's own body against power, of health against the economic system, of pleasure against the moral norms of sexuality, marriage, decency. Suddenly, what had made power strong is used to attack it' ('Body/Power', p.56). Here the desire for physical health, inculcated by capitalism's need for a vigorous workforce, may be used to counter the capitalist demands for labouring bodies, since such labour damages the body. The desire for sexual pleasure, installed as a way of encouraging contentment in marriage and reproductive utility, becomes the origin of claims for the right to alternative sexual pleasures.

We can see how this process of bodily resistance is not only physical, as in the case of the prison, but also discursive. Foucault's language suggests that the ways that the languages of power incite us to obey ('health', 'pleasure') cannot be contained within the horizons that those discourses use to construct them. The discourse of pleasure which grounds the subject in late capitalism cannot absolutely determine those physical acts which might be situated in the discourses of pleasure: anal sex, recreational drug use, joyriding. Transgression is achieved

⁵⁰ Elspeth Probyn's 'The Anorexic Body' offers a similarly Foucauldian analysis of anorexia in the nineteenth century as achieving a provisional limited power through its deployment of Christian doctrine and mythology against domestic duty.

by positioning new material possibilities within the discursive slots occupied previously by acceptable practices - possibilities that exist not in spite of their prohibition, but because of it. Similarly the notion of a reverse discourse assumes that discourse entails a certain flexibility: to say that something is bad or forbidden entails the possibility of saying it is good or desirable.⁵¹

Thus, as V.N.Volosinov has argued in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*,⁵² we must see discourse not as an unchangeable artefact which, in the structuralist formulation, 'speaks us', but rather as a collection of living utterances which engage with and dispute one another. Volosinov insists that even a given word does not have its meaning fixed, but is capable of being re-oriented to enable alternative meanings to circulate. 'Any real utterance, in one way or another or to one degree or another, makes a statement of agreement with or a negation of something' and so exists in 'a state of constant tension, or incessant interaction and conflict' (p.80). This 'multiaccentuality' means that words do not fix meanings in an absolute form whose accompanying subject positions we are then obliged to enact.⁵³ Rather, the particular uses of language that take place enact the discursive and material conflicts of the speakers.⁵⁴ We might, for instance, think of

⁵¹ Foucault's best known example of a reverse discourse is the one by which, in the late nineteenth century, the medical category 'the homosexual' enabled those classified as such to formulate claims on their own behalf thereby 'using the same categories by which it [i.e. homosexuality] was medically disqualified' (*HS*, p.101). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault makes a similar case for the way that radical nineteenth century critiques of the penal system indict the rich by refiguring them as the criminals - responsible for crime, and therefore deserving punishment - so that 'a whole effort was being made to reverse this monotonous discourse on crime' (p.288), enabled by the terms that it is challenging.

⁵² There is some debate as to whether this text is to be considered as the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, writing under Volosinov's name, as a collaborative effort between Bakhtin and Volosinov in which Bakhtin plays a major role, or as the product of a school of thinkers whose mutual influences are not easily calculable. See Nina Perlina, 'Bakhtin-Medvedev-Volosinov: An Apple of Discourse'.

⁵³ This is the essence of Volosinov's critique of structuralism: 'individuals do not receive a ready-made language at all, rather they enter upon the stream of verbal communication' (p.81).

⁵⁴ For two particularly striking examples of such an approach see Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*; and Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*.

the ways that Pip's hands can be reaccentuated so as to indicate not the clumsiness of a subject who is to be excluded from the refined bourgeois world, but rather the heroic virility of the labourer.⁵⁵

However, where more rigidly materialist theorists such as Volosinov and Bourdieu⁵⁶ treat the material as the site of conflicts which are then manifested in discourse, Foucault insists that we see the relationship between the material and the discursive very differently:

Instead of having to deal with an economic, social or political history which encompasses a history of thought (which would be its expression and something like its duplicate), instead of having to deal with a history of ideas attributed (through a play of signs and expressions, or by relations of causality) to extrinsic conditions, one would be dealing with a history of discursive practices in the specific relationships which link them to other practices ('Politics and the Study of Discourse', p.64).

Although he explicitly rejects an expressive model of language, in which discourse is merely the superstructural 'duplicate' of the power relations of any particular material situation, he is equally careful not to offer in its place an idealist model of discourse as an emanation of isolated consciousness. Discourse takes place as a number of material forms of utterance, and is interwoven with other practices: the forms in which the body is imagined are inseparable from the technologies of the medical examination, the structure of the prison, the architecture of the school.

At the same time discourse is a site of freedom, since its meaning is not fixed in any simple way. Foucault refers to the 'polyvalence' of discourse (*HS*,

⁵⁵ 'Images of class struggle, in contrast [to images of elite bodily refinement], give a sense of the class for itself, and the most direct and worldwide way of doing this is through images of physical strength, the working man's muscles or clenched fists. Against this iconography of mass class interest, the rulers become portrayed as fragmented, obese or effete' (David Morgan and Sue Scott, 'Bodies in a Social Landscape', p.17).

⁵⁶ Bourdieu follows a similar line of thinking, regarding language as a site of 'incessant struggles over the classifications which help to produce the classes' although he insists that conflicts in language 'are the product of the struggles between the classes and depend on the power relations between them' (*Distinction*, p.481).

pp.100-102), the capacity of a given discourse to operate otherwise than in tandem with a particular exercise of power, since 'discourses are not once and for all subservient to power' (*HS*, pp.100-101). Thus while discourse constrains how we attribute significance, it is not a force which defines the absolute limits of thought, since the power relations which sustain it are themselves 'mobile, reversable, and unstable' ('The Ethics of the Concern for Self', p.441). As Toby Miller argues, although Foucault has a notion of an underlying *episteme* in any given period - the distinctive relationship between its various discursive practices⁵⁷ - he characterizes it as a dispersed space of practices which are related but not unified, enabling opportunities for pleasure within the social which do not simply reinforce systems of domination (*The Well-Tempered Self*, pp. 175-176) and also, I would add, acts of resistance which may enforce the system but are resistance nevertheless: the actions of Foucault's hypothetical eighteenth-century wife sustain the power of penology (her guilt sustains her penal subjectivity) and Christian chastity (the refusal of sex confirms sex as a site of sin) even as they challenge the power of her husband. We must therefore think of the body simultaneously as sustaining and transgressing, affirming and subverting.

Foucault's account of power clearly places the capacity for agency at the centre of his account of the subject, so that, in Jana Sawicki's summary, he is 'presupposing the existence of a critical subject, one capable of critical historical reflection, refusal, and intervention. This subject does not control the overall direction of history, but it is able to choose among the discourses and practices available to it and use them creatively' (*Disciplining Foucault* p.103). For Sawicki, as for Foucault, 'choice' here is not voluntarist, but rather the constrained, limited and always compromised choice of constructed capability.

We might then argue that even as *The History of Sexuality* declares that the constant interrogation of sexuality perpetuates subjectivities that enmesh us in unwelcome power-structures, Foucault's theoretical position entails the possibility

⁵⁷ See Foucault, 'Politics and the Study of Discourse'.

of a resistant sexual discourse, through the necessary caveat that no form of speech can have its final meaning defined but rather, even as it sustains relations of domination, must also be able to overthrow them. In a culture where we are expected to talk and think about sex in particular ways, we can always talk about sex more than we are supposed to, or less; talk about it where we are not supposed to, or not talk about it where we are; talk about it but not in the way that we are supposed to; talk about it when we are supposed to be doing it, or do it when we are supposed to be talking about it.⁵⁸ This places me in agreement with Leo Bersani's reading of Foucault as calling for a sexual politics that takes the form 'not of a struggle against prohibition, but rather a kind of counter-productivity' involving our 'deliberately playing on the surfaces of our bodies with forms or intensities of pleasure not covered, so to speak, by the disciplinary classifications that have until now taught us what sex is' (*Homos*, p.81). We can extend Bersani's account further than merely pleasure, as a reminder that resistance may also involve the invention of new forms of *unpleasurable* struggle, and may include pleasures rather less deliriously masculinist than Bersani's - such as, to invoke once more the eighteenth-century wife, the pleasure of finding the freedom to say no.

To turn to a final area of Foucauldian enquiry: Foucault's account of power as the solidification of mobile relations of force opens up, in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, another space of bodily possibility - one that has been particularly provoking for a number of theorists otherwise sympathetic to his work⁵⁹ - and that is the space of freedom achieved by means of adherence to socially legitimated body practices. Indeed, I would even go so far as to suggest that Foucault's work is precisely a sustained meditation on this question: how can

⁵⁸ This is, of course, the very condition of Foucault's own *History of Sexuality* which, as Leo Bersani has said, 'conforms to the cultural imperatives it denounces', by writing extensively on sex in the process of critiquing the compulsion to document sex ('The Subject of Power', p.5).

⁵⁹ See for instance Jean Grimshaw, 'Practices of Freedom'; and Kate Soper, 'Forget Foucault?'.

ethical freedom be experienced within the social order as opposed to being theorized as necessarily outside of it? Having tried - and failed - in *Madness and Civilization* to articulate the project of rescuing an insurgent, asocial force from the social by which to oppose it, Foucault's work turns increasingly to the question of power as the necessarily social. His last two published volumes of *The History of Sexuality* take this process to their necessary conclusion: asking how pleasure and freedom might be achieved not by resistance against, but by adherence to, the rules and codes of particular cultures.⁶⁰

In these texts, Foucault describes ancient Greece and Rome as governed by an ethics in which a bodily styling - of sex, of diet, of exercise, of sleep - produces citizens who have available to them a range of pleasurable practices which enable them to live their lives with both pleasure and, perhaps more importantly, with the power over their bodies lying in their own control. This is an account of a society that Foucault is careful to stress he does not find admirable and does not believe we can return to ('The Return of Morality', pp.465-470). But what particularly interests him about it is its production of body styles as an open-ended range of practices, rather than, as in Christianity, a single norm of bodily obedience to which all subjects must aspire (Rudy Visker, *Michel Foucault: Genealogy as Critique*, pp.91-95). This aspect of past embodiment enables us to reflect on the conditions of contemporary freedom: the rise of new sexual styles, the prominence of a diversity of subcultures, and consequently the articulation of a multitude of possible pleasurable bodily governmentalities without a single law of particular practices for all ('The Return of Morality', p.473).

As Terry Eagleton has pointed out, in these texts Foucault's account of autonomy seems alarmingly close to his account of domination: self-monitoring,

⁶⁰ For a slightly different account of this train of thinking in Foucault see Rudy Visker's *Michel Foucault: Genealogy as Critique*. Visker views this as a problem which Foucault never solves, and argues that in all his texts the trace of a desire to assert an asocial force remains to trouble his accounts of the discursive production of the social.

detailed bodily surveillance, the selection of particular practices, the physical styling of the self through corporeal discipline (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp.391-393). It may thus be the case that, as Jean Grimshaw has argued, this account does not enable us to ask the question: 'when should we see a concern for one's own body, a programme of monitoring one's fitness or concern for one's appearance, as an exercise of creative self-mastery rather than as the result of the internalisation of norms of bodily appearance which serve to undermine other forms of autonomy?' ('Practices of Freedom', p.67). But where for Grimshaw and Eagleton this amounts to a failure in Foucault's later work, what I have been concerned to show here is the impossibility of conceiving of agency other than through the exercise of power through bodily stylization. In answer to Grimshaw's question - which would seem wilfully to ignore the effort Foucault has made to counter such reductive accounts of politics - the unfortunate fact is that it is rarely likely to be either one or the other. The search for discourses which speak for the body against particular exercises of power over it may then - and we shall see this recurring with Burroughs and Cronenberg - derive their force from their deployment of established, if not conservative, discourses on the body.

But this should not deter us from acting now - indeed, Foucault's argument is that we *must* act now: 'my point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but a hyper- and pessimistic activism.' ('On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress', p.343). If, as we have seen, the body must always be styled, then to claim that stylization is 'a highly masculinist view of ethics' (Grimshaw, 'Practices of Freedom', p.70) would seem to have missed the fact that we do not have a choice about whether to adopt bodily styles, and nor do we have a choice about whether we learn those styles from a place in a network of power.

Grimshaw claims that in Foucault's analysis 'he writes of an elite class of

males who are simply *assumed* to be free; whether their self-mastery and self-surveillance is really that, rather than an internalised disciplinary technique ... is wholly evaded' ('Practices of Freedom', p.67) Closer to the mark is Toby Miller, who points out that in Foucault's analysis 'the relative autonomy within particular fractions of particular social formations to manufacture and manage oneself is dependent on the institutions of those formations' (*The Well-Tempered Self*, p.178), which, as Foucault makes clear, must be oppressive to others and damaging to oneself even as they are enabling (*The Use of Pleasure*, pp.65-77; 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', pp. 344-351). Power enables us to act. For Grosz 'its enmeshment in a disciplinary regime is the condition of the subject's efficacy, as either conformist or subversive' (*VB*, p,144). Grosz's 'either/or' puts the case too strongly since, as I have insisted, it is rarely the case that a subject is wholly one or the other - and rarely even the case that any particular practice, event, or discourse can be decisively reckoned as achieving only conformist or subversive ends.

At the level of the body this call for resistance may mean developing physical styles which do not suit the docile body perpetuated through discipline, and which take their cue from finding alternatives to the particular bodily styles that are most demanded. Such resistances take place at the level of muscles trained to act in new ways (so as to be more able to resist assault, for instance) or at the level of molecular biology (the rejection of social utility produced by heroin). And it means pursuing the legitimated physical practices made available within a culture, which nevertheless challenge its structures of power. For instance, one thinks of the way that gay male culture's excessive investment in a conventionally attractive male body, while drawing heavily on a general body fascism, nevertheless pushes it in a direction that discomforts heterosexual masculinity, by creating male bodies which perform a double violation of acceptable codes by basking passively in the male gazes which are directed upon

them.⁶¹ But it also means speaking otherwise about bodies - invoking not the discursive forms of utility and pleasure which have so far prevailed, but forms which alter the object in question.⁶² In altering the knowledge of the body, such forms must also alter the practices by which the body is shaped and the physical environment which orders it.

None of which, for Foucault, is in any simple way guaranteed to be effective - all forms of resistance and pleasure can be recuperated. Asked 'can we be sure that these new pleasures won't be exploited in the way advertising uses the stimulation of pleasure as a means of social control?', Foucault answers firmly: 'we can always be sure *it will happen*, and that everything that has been created or acquired, any ground that has been gained will, at a certain moment, be used in such a way' ('Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity', p.385, emphasis in the original).

Foucault's vision of bodies as absolutely produced and yet also needing to resist contemporary forms of that production has posed problems for many writing on him. Nancy Fraser has suggested that Foucault must have an unstated normative ethics:

Foucault calls in no uncertain terms for resistance to domination. But why? Why is struggle preferable to submission? Why ought domination to be resisted? Only with the introduction of normative notions could he begin to tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it. ('Foucault on Modern Power', p.29)

While with somewhat more venom, Stephen White tells us that Foucault's politics 'provides us ... with no way of distinguishing the resistance of the women's movement ... from, say, the Ku Klux Klan' ('Foucault's Challenge to Critical

⁶¹ On the rise of the assumption that the male body was not an appropriate object for a consuming gaze, see Kaja Silverman, 'Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse'.

⁶² It is as examples of such a discursive shift that Barbara Freeman reads Hélène Cixous ('Plus Corps Donc Plus Écriture: Hélène Cixous and the Mind-Body Problem'), and Jane Gallop reads Luce Irigaray (*Thinking Through the Body*, pp.91-99), as philosophers whose new imaginings of the body are effective in producing new physical forms.

Theory', p.430). But in spite of such appeals for a formula to assess what acts of resistance are desirable and what are not, Foucault's work will not provide us with a revolutionary programme - indeed, he insists that he won't ('The Concern for Truth', pp.462-463). After all, who is this imaginary figure who requires such distinctions? It is not as if either the women's movement or the Ku Klux Klan is asking for Foucault to help them make these decisions. It is only a political philosophy that has divorced itself from the fact that these struggles are already taking place, and do not themselves ask for such legitimation, that regards Foucault's 'failure' to offer it as politically paralyzing. Instead of trying to prescribe struggles for us, he offers a method which can identify and interrogate the conditions of knowledge and power, and which may make available to those of us *who are already embarked on such struggles* an understanding of the role of the body in them. For Foucault's method is precisely one which does not need to provide us with an overarching model by which we may decide what to do, since it is rather an account of how and where resistance is already taking place - and it is, in that sense, a method which does not need political philosophers to decide what is good or bad, what strategies to adopt, what values to espouse, since such decisions are already taking place in the daily material struggles by which we seek to carve out more freedom: our bodies are already making those decisions.⁶³ Perhaps it is for this reason, because his is a theory that sees power from the perspective of those who act against it, rather than from that of those who lay down methods by which to act, that so many political philosophers seem to treat it with such ire.

⁶³ Asked 'have you written these books for the liberation movements?' Foucault replied: 'not for, but as a function of the situation today' ('The Concern for Truth', p.461).

(vii) Conclusion

Although part of the value of Foucault for an account of the body is his reorganization of our conceptions of where power operates, displacing conventional political categories of race, class and gender, this has also been a consequence of his work for which he has been particularly condemned.⁶⁴ I would therefore suggest that my reading of Bourdieu's account of class and the body be taken not as a supplement to Foucault, but rather as demonstrating through their connections that a class-based analysis is not ruled out by Foucault's work - although it is substantially complicated by it. Foucault's work suggests the breadth of forms of social organization that might need to use the body in particular ways: the carceral imagination; the great god sex; the medical establishment. Alongside these ominous new configurations of modernity Bourdieu's work fixes our attention on the bodily presence of more conventional power-structures of class - just as it would also have been possible to use other approaches in order to insist on the importance of gender or race.⁶⁵ What I want to note here are the necessary connections between the 'micro-physics of power' which Foucault asks us to analyze, and the macro-structures of domination which

⁶⁴ In addition to the feminist critiques which I have already referenced, see Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, (pp.243-247), which accuses Foucault of an approach which 'causes him to obliterate the role of classes, the role of economics' (p.244); and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for whom Foucault's concern with micro-locals is seen as taking place at the expense of an analysis of Western domination: 'the clinic, the asylum, the prison, the university - all seem to be screen-allegories that foreclose a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism' ('Can the Subaltern Speak?', p.86).

⁶⁵ Not that Foucault is uninterested in such concerns. Robert Young has argued for the centrality of a concern with colonialism and ethnography in 'Foucault on Race and Colonialism'; Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow insist that class domination remains a central concern in Foucault's work (*Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, p.186); while Frances Bartkowski has argued that we see Volumes Two and Three of the *History of Sexuality* as an engagement with the meanings of masculinity ('Epistemic Drift in Foucault'). For a less sympathetic reading of Foucault as offering a 'universalising and gender-blind conception of the human subject' (p.26) see Kate Soper, 'Forget Foucault?'.

they produce.

Rather than applying Foucault's particular categories - the docile body, the disciplinary society - I am therefore more concerned in this thesis with a network of conceptions of the body, which interlock in different ways with the range of body-forming practices which I have outlined here. Although the importance of those particular discursive practices which interested Foucault will be evident in the thesis, I am also concerned to outline other fictions of embodiment and to subject them to these Foucauldian questions of how power operates through them, and how we may best turn them towards aims of freedom and resistance. I wish to retain a strong emphasis on the complicity of power and resistance, and on the necessity of enunciating bodily resistance through the very forms of bodily discourse that have caused the most harm.

As we have seen, the body's regulation fits it not only to bear meanings, but to sustain the social conditions of the production of those meanings. There are no aspects of the body which just 'happen'. The body is encouraged and discouraged, obliged and hindered, to produce itself via disciplinary practices. The body is not simply made meaningful, but is rather the means by which the conditions that make meaning possible are sustained: languages, social relations, economic structures, institutions. The body perpetuates these conditions whether casting down its eyes in deference or staring fixedly in revolt; whether building hospitals and palaces or manufacturing the explosives to destroy them; whether symbolizing culturally proscribed activities through its stigmatization or affirming culturally sanctioned practices through its celebration. But it is precisely because the body is the site for the maintenance of these structures, that it is also the place of their subversion. And it is in this sense that we must understand embodiment: the occupation of a corporeal subject-position, whose perceptions of the world, whose capacities in the world, and whose meanings for the world, are the result of the ongoing engagement with the body by diverse social practices, which may be both sustained and contested by the body which bears them.

I have been concerned here to chart how different physical bodies are produced, how power-relations are sedimented by them, and how they also operate as a site of resistance to domination. Central to the utility of the body is its orchestration of a network of emotions, which a material-discursive account of embodiment can only partially account for. Thorough and incisive though the various bodily theories I have used are, their focus is not the intensity of emotion concentrated on the body - on, for instance, Pip's tears. In the next chapter, I therefore wish to turn in more detail to the psychic dynamics of embodied subjectivity and the way in which the particularly intimate experience that each of us has of our body is traversed by lines of power.

Chapter Two

Discord and Disgust

What is being carved in human flesh is an image of society.

Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (p.116)

(i) Writing on the Body, or Writing the Body into Being ?

In his short story 'In the Penal Settlement', Franz Kafka describes a machine which physically etches the sentence of the law onto the flesh of the condemned prisoner. The sentence, explains the device's operator, does not need to be explained, justified, or read to the prisoner since 'he'll learn it corporally, on his person' (p.174). As Elizabeth Grosz has suggested, in her reading of the story as an allegory of the physical operations of power, it is not just pain that results from such a device, but a mode of knowledge (*VB*, pp.134-37). Kafka stresses that the goal of the process is the final moment in which 'enlightenment comes even to the most dull-witted' ('In the Penal Settlement', p.180). Through marking, the prisoner learns his place in society, so that 'his consciousness is the end result, an effect, of the deepening inscription of the surface of the body' (*VB*, p.136).¹

Such an account recapitulates some of the key points of my discussion so far: the role of a physical environment in making, maiming, and ordering the body; the inscription of power relationships directly onto the body so produced; the emotional states and modes of subjectivity produced by such a body-writing. It also raises the problem of resistance: how can the body thus inscribed read its text

¹Other readings of Kafka's story - which is also translated as 'In the Penal Colony' - have been offered by Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* pp.131-153; Roy Pascal, *Kafka's Narrators: A Study of His Stories and Sketches*, pp.60-89; David Porush, *The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction*, pp.41-44; and Steven Taubeneck, 'Irony, Contingency and Postmodernity: "In the Penal Colony" '.

otherwise ? If, in Kafka's account, the inevitable result of this body-writing is the subject's reading of the body as affirming the text which writes subjectivity, then we can ask: under what conditions might this text be read otherwise ? When can the multiaccentuality of the sign unsettle the text of the sentence carved into the body ?

But at the same time, Judith Butler cautions us about the usefulness of Kafka's image, observing in her discussion of it that if we understand the body as that upon which subjectivity is inscribed, then we make the erroneous assumption that 'there must be a body prior to that inscription, stable and self-identical' (*Gender Trouble*, p.130). She remains suspicious of theorists who, while reading the body as saturated with social meaning, treat such meaning as mapped onto a body which, like Kafka's prisoner, exists prior to the writing. She takes issue with Foucault's formulation that 'the body is the inscribed surface of events' (Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p.83) and criticizes its unanalyzed assumptions: 'by maintaining a body prior to its cultural inscription, Foucault appears to assume a materiality prior to signification and form' (*Gender Trouble*, p.130).

Butler's choice of words is important for her project. I have already shown in the previous chapter how she is concerned to question the ways in which theory produces the foundational entities that it claims to find, and her description of Foucault is marked by such an intent. To say that he is '*maintaining* a body' is not only to say that he is taking an intellectual position, but also to point out that his own text *renews* its fiction, reproduces it as fact, keeping it in circulation. Moreover, for him to '*assume* a materiality' is not simply to believe in it, but to adopt it, to wear it, to constitute himself as formed from such a materiality. These moments of assumption and maintenance in Foucault's text create 'the body' as a foundational entity when there cannot even be said to be 'a body' prior to its production as such.

Similarly, Grosz suggests that we must read Kafka's story not as symbolizing the event which inscribes meaning onto the *tabula rasa* of the awaiting

body, but rather as an allegory which begs the Derridean question: 'how and in what terms to think that writing which is prediscursive, that writing or trace which produces the page to be inscribed?' (*VB*, p.119).² The goal of this chapter is to consider how the body comes to be produced as *matter awaiting inscription*. For the writing traced over the prisoner's body is a physical form of a conception of the prisoner's body which *already* exists in the law and in the minds of those who enforce and transgress it. In the law, the body has therefore been already written as in need of writing, already inscribed in such a way as to prepare it for further inscription. I shall be arguing that the psychic, discursive, and material mappings of the body which make it thinkable produce it in the form of both *a discord in need of organization*, and *a disgusting object in need of cleansing* in which discord and disgust are the fictions which permit the thinking of the body in terms of its capacity for being ordered and purified.

Central to this portion of my enquiry will be psychoanalysis, since it is a discipline that has often been concerned with the processes by which an image of the body develops for the subject, and is sensitive to the fact that, in Lacan's words, 'it all happens as if [*sic*] the body-image had an autonomous existence of its own, and by autonomous I mean here independent of objective structure' ('Some Reflections on the Ego', p.13). Psychoanalysis is thus an indispensable resource for those of us interested in how the body is lived through a series of images shaped by fear and desire, mapping out for us our most intense emotional experiences. At the same time, psychoanalysis is also guilty of prescriptive developmental narratives, casual disregard for historical changes in structures of subjectivity, and an investment in masculinity as a psychic norm. All of which, I shall be suggesting, make it a field whose claims need to be treated with some caution, but which at the same time make it an accurate account of - at the very least - the psychic structures that obtain in the period over which it has flourished.

² A question pursued more recently in Vicki Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*.

(ii) The Bodily Ego

In the conventional psychoanalytical account, says Grosz, 'the subject only gradually acquires a sense of unity and cohesion over and above the disparate heterogeneous sensations that comprise its experiences' (*VB*, p.31). The sensations of light, temperature, sound and smell that arrive from the outside, and the pains, pleasures and motions that it feels inside, form an undifferentiated sensory space.³ Moreover, while we might now - as subjects securely ensconced in our bodies - apply that inside/outside distinction to the experiences of the young child, it makes no such distinction itself, but only enters into a flux of experiences. Its own heartbeat, the voices around it, the movement of its limbs, the objects that move near to and far from it, are all alike. They comprise a synaesthetic panorama of mobile, discontinuous sensation. It is out of this that the subject emerges, with a sense of itself as whole. Where does the model for this unification come from? From the body.

For Freud, 'a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start' ('On Narcissism', p.69). With its integrity and coherence it is a systematic structure that must develop over time, and which must find a model for the unity which enables it to emerge. 'The ego' says Freud, 'is first and foremost a bodily ego' ('The Ego and The Id', p.364). Its sense of itself as whole, as singular, as separate from its world, and as surrounded by others, is modelled on its apprehension of its body and the environment surrounding that body. For Freud, this awareness of the body is not simply a sensory awareness - what he calls 'an

³ In the course of this chapter I shall be focusing on touch and sight as the means by which the subject grasps her/his own body and makes sense of the surrounding world. But as Paul Rodaway has shown, the body orients itself through the complex interaction of all the senses (*Sensuous Bodies: Body, Sense and Place*). Theoretical work on smell, taste and sound is far less developed compared to that on touch and sight, a lack which Rodaway's work goes some way towards remedying.

indifferent psychological energy' ('On Narcissism', p.70) - but is erotic: 'we can decide to regard erotogenicity as a general characteristic of *all organs* [of the body] and may then speak of an increase or decrease of it in a particular part of the body. For every such change in the erotogenicity of the organs there might then be a parallel change of libidinal cathexis in the ego' ('On Narcissism', p.77, my emphasis). Although I shall be challenging this assumption later, it is useful to note now that as the body becomes an object of desire, so too does the ego, finding itself only through the body. The ego is thus coterminous with the body, and the varying cathexes of the one operate also as the varying cathexes of the other: the ego's first love object is itself, grasped through - or rather, grasped *as* - the body.⁴

In her analysis of this Freudian model of the corporeal subject, Grosz points out that if the ego is modelled not simply on a physical body, but on the body as grasped through libidinal cathexis, then 'the ego is not a point-for-point projection of the body's surface but an outline or representation of the degrees of erotogenicity of the bodily zones and organs' (*VB*, p.37). Rather than being modelled on an objective image of the body, the ego becomes aware of the embodied self as the body becomes an object of sexual pleasure. She takes up Freud's analogy of the 'cortical homunculus': this was the nickname given by early neurologists to the distinctive pattern formed by their mapping of sensory responses in different portions of the brain, and was earned by virtue of the map's apparent resemblance to a small, inverted, distorted human (Warren Gorman, *The Body Image and the Image of the Brain*, pp.17-20). Freud argues that the bodily ego has the same form as this creature ('The Ego and the Id', p.365), and Grosz's analysis of images of homunculi shows how with their large eyes, mouths and genitals, Freud's analogy suggests that the body image is marked by the biologically variable intensities of the body's sensations, with the points of the body

⁴ In his paper 'On Narcissism: An Introduction' Freud makes a provisional distinction between what he calls 'ego-libido', a love of the self, and 'object libido', the desire that goes outwards to other objects (p.68). The body, as both self and object, troubles this distinction.

that produce the most intense physical sensations being the most marked on the homunculus. And yet we might extend this analysis in another direction: for is it not also the case that these points which draw Freud's attention could be read not simply as points of extreme biological sensitivity, but also as sites of extreme cultural fascination ? Freud's bodily ego should perhaps not be read simply as a biologically sexualized experience of embodiment, but rather as a map of the socialization of the sexed body, its various zones more marked not only according to their biological sensitivity, but also their cultural sensitivity. His use of the image of the cortical homunculus suggests that the model for the ego, while it is constructed through an awareness of sensations both from outside and from within, is not a simple reconstruction of the self-as-body, but is rather a self forged from a representation of the *varying* ways in which different zones of the body come to be objects of awareness.

We should at this stage be clear about five issues. Firstly, the ego is not prior to the awareness of the body, not a psychic object that seizes on the body as a mode of expressing itself. Rather, the ego takes shape as a body. The generation of a sense of bounded physical form is the event which enables the ego to come into being, not an act which the ego performs. Having founded itself thus, it then seems necessary that subsequent physical identifications will be made by the ego, but the initial, founding event is *an action without a subject*. It may therefore be difficult for us to conceptualize or discuss it accurately.

Secondly , Freud is not simply arguing for a biological libido which is a natural property of the body. Although Freud's own treatment of this idea changes through his work,⁵ the key term here is *Trieb* (rendered by translators as both 'instinct' and 'drive'),⁶ the difficulty of defining which Freud recognizes when he

⁵ See Editor's Note to 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes'.

⁶ For James Strachey's explanation of his choice of the term 'instinct' see *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol.1, pp.xxiv-vi. Lacan explains his rejection of the translation in 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious', p.301.

describes this as a term which is 'somewhat obscure, but which is indispensable to us in psychology' ('Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', p.114). Freud describes *Trieb* as 'on the frontier between the mental and the somatic' ('Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', p.118) and, as Anika Lemaire argues, the biological connotations of the term instinct are 'to be explained precisely by the difficulty of grasping what lies before the unconscious' (*Jacques Lacan*, pp.126-127). The possibility of a sexual instinct or libido that pre-exists the social forms in which it exists in the subject 'is part of the unknown dimension of truth and cannot be the object of any knowledge' (*Jacques Lacan*, p.128). For Freud it is only these social forms of the sexual that we may grasp, and so the drive 'is provisionally to be understood [as] the psychical representative of an endosomatic, continuously flowing source of stimulation' ('Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', p.82-83).⁷ Thus although 'libido' occupies an ambivalent place between biology and culture, psychoanalytic theory has stressed that we must never simply read these as innate biological processes. In Lacan's re-reading of Freud, this sexual cathexis of objects is precisely not biological, but rather 'that part of sexuality that passes into the networks of the constitution of the subject, into the networks of the signifier' (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, p.177). As Charles Sheperdson has argued, 'to speak of the "drive" as constitutively detached from nature is to stress the imperative of inscription ... the structural inevitability of representation which characterizes human sexuality' ('The Role of Gender and the Imperative of Sex', p.161). The libidinal cathexes that take place are not biological events, but are rather psychic acts which take place through socially structured situations - through the forms of signification by which they are grasped, but also, as I shall be insisting here, through the material practices which surround the infant's body.

Thirdly, and following from my last point, this bodily mapping makes the development of the body crucially bound up with its whole environment. The

⁷On the social character of the drives see also Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, pp.20-22 and p.21, n.4.

mapping of a body is not a solipsistic process, but is the development of a sexualized self-awareness generated out of the sensory experiences of early childhood: sights and sounds, smells and sensations. As such the precise environment of the child will determine the erotic experiences that it encounters, as well as providing the psychic structures with which to make sense of them. Freud's model is on the one hand prescriptive, insofar as the ego is modelled on a biological notion of uneven erotic intensity, where certain zones (eyes, head, genitals) are necessarily privileged erotic zones, as we can see in the case of the homunculus; but at the same time it allows - indeed, it assumes - that each body has its own erotic history, formed out of different cathexes.⁸ The desires of others will mark themselves in the way a body is touched, talked to, and moved:

In this sense, the ego is an image of the body's significance or meaning for the subject and for the other. It is thus as much a function of fantasy and desire as it is of sensation and perception: it is a taking over of sensation and perception by a fantasmatic dimension. (*VB*, p.38)

These libidinal investments are not, in Grosz's account, the natural expressions of an uncivilized body. They are the contours of a subjectivity formed through social interaction, whose form is that of the environment through which it is produced:

The psychic investment in the body as a whole and in its various parts is as much a function of the subject's relations with others as it is the result of the subject's own sensations and libido. In this sense, the body image is the result of shared sociocultural conceptions of bodies in general and shared familial and interpersonal fantasy about particular bodies. (*VB*, p.84)

Those libidinal investments which are socially awkward thus prove not to be the stubborn residues of the presocial, but rather the enacted desires *of* the social, routed through fantasy.

Fourthly, as Pasi Falk has pointed out, although Freud stresses the bodily

⁸ Here it follows the model of much Freudian psychoanalysis: a rigid normative model, often with a biological underpinning, which in fact opens up into an account of how every subject deviates from the account in different ways. Freud's theory of sexual development is perhaps the most obvious example of this structure.

ego, this process might be more accurately understood as the formation of a bodily *subject* or bodily *self* (*The Consuming Body*, pp.8-9, n.3). As well as mapping out a conscious sense of self, the body serves to map out those experiences which will later be rendered unconscious, since certain zones of the body are invested with a libidinal intensity which is later repressed. We can therefore already see that what emerges in such a modelling of the subject on the experience of the body, must also be a cultural map of taboos and proscriptions.

Lastly, Grosz has reminded us that this 'body image', which she describes as a 'corporeal mapping' of subjectivity, alters over time (*VB*, p.62) . Grosz stresses that this map is changeable, a sensitive register of the events which mark the body. As such it undergoes constant modification: any given mapping may be remade.⁹ The 'body image' is thus not a fixed sense of the corporeal self, but a contingent sense of what that self is at a given time. Moreover, Grosz insists that in spite of the visual connotations of 'image' the body image is synaesthetic (*VB*, p.67). It is the sense of being a physical presence in a world of other physical presences.

I have already argued in chapter one for the body as a socially produced object. What Freud offers us is an understanding of the psychic processes by which the subject is modelled on that body. Sociological accounts of the body can explain to us how economic inequalities are sustained through bodily differentiations; how physical attributes are shaped and ordered by organizational forces; and even how subjects grasp their sense of their role in the world through the different bodily modalities that result from these social forces. But Freud suggests that there may be a radical discontinuity between the physical shape of the body and the body image by which each subject conceives of their embodied self. Rather than seeing

⁹ She is perhaps influenced here by Deleuze and Guattari, who resist reading the map as the authoritative interpreter of space, and remind us that: 'the map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation' (*A Thousand Plateaus*, p.12).

the subject as emerging through a simple mapping of the regulated production of the body, Freud suggests a body image which is both dreaded and desired - which may appear monstrous or seductive, exaggerated or physically extraordinary at the points where it is touched by a society's greatest concerns.

It is not, however, necessary to agree with Freud's strictly sexualized account of this process. What Freud achieves in his attempt to sexualize the grasping of the body is precisely the introduction of the socially and personally specific into what might otherwise be assumed to be a natural and invariant process of self-recognition. The Freudian concepts of drive and libido are the means by which any idea of a natural or physical sense of body-mapping is displaced by the idea of a conflictual, personal, socially inflected, variable, and unique cluster of corporeal intensities. In spite of Freud's insistence, there is no reason for us to regard such an imaginary anatomy as solely or primarily sexual.

Moreover, although such an anatomy enables the unity of the subject to come into being, we might already notice the extent to which this body verges on disunity: in its flexibility, its distortions, and its amenability to becoming monstrous or grotesque. How each of us grasps our body is predicated on the disorder which bodily unity displaces - but in a strange sense the possibility of disorder lingers on in this supposedly unified body, in the form of its plasticity. It is to this persistence of disorder within and across the body that I wish to turn now. I will go on to interrogate some of the assumptions of the psychoanalytic narrative of bodily coherence, asking how, at the level of material and discursive practices, such a coherent subject is achieved, how the possibility of bodily disorder and disunity is produced through them, and also how psychoanalytic theory might occlude what is at stake in those practices even as it highlights them.

(iii) Ordering the Body / Embodying Order

The question of the acquisition of body-image has been explored in detail by Kaja Silverman. Silverman calls this process of the organization of a bodily subject 'imaginary captation' (*The Threshold of the Visible World*, henceforth *TVW*, p.32) - referring to both the way in which a body is grasped only as an imaginary anatomy, and the extent to which such a figuration is a forcible capture and control of the subject. She relates the process to three domains: the visual, the physical, and the cultural. Crucially, these shaping influences persist and change over a lifetime. Silverman's tripartite construction of the bodily ego involves:

- (i) a visual grasp of the body as a whole object, coterminous with the self;
- (ii) a physical sense of the contours of the body;
- (iii) a culturally ratified sense of the meaning of that body.

Following such a division, I wish to consider how each of these three areas might be used in developing my account of embodiment, and how we might see social inequality being both reinforced and confronted within such processes.

Lacan's account of 'the mirror stage' is perhaps the best known explanation for the visual dimension of the process by which the disunified subject becomes whole, and it forms the starting point for Silverman's enquiry. In 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' Lacan sees the human subject as passing from 'a primordial Discord, betrayed by the signs of uneasiness and motor unco-ordination of the neo-natal months' and on to 'the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity' (p.4). Alienating though it is, this assumption nevertheless takes place 'in a flutter of jubilant activity' (p.1), welcomed by the subject precisely because it seems to offer an escape from the intolerable primordial Discord. Lacan's account therefore depends on the assumption firstly that this chaos is experienced as undesirable, and secondly that the visual image which greets the child is already unified. Given that the form of

recognition is, by Lacan's own account, 'an illusory unity ... which is Man's particular and tragic destiny' ('Some Reflections on the Ego', p.16), why does it take place? Is the rejection of bodily discord for bodily unity an inevitable step, perhaps even the natural destination of the subject? Certainly the spontaneous moment of jubilant assumption is presented by Lacan as inevitable: the child who looks into the mirror 'brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image' ('The Mirror Stage', p.2), its apparent wholeness.

Yet the convenient resemblance of this narrative to other cultural narratives (perhaps most obviously the creation myth from Genesis) makes it seem like the recapitulation of certain cultural assumptions about the body. As Laura Doyle has shown in *Bordering on the Body*, this discourse of the body as matter in need of order plays a key role in modern hierarchical discourses, where the social status of a ruling class, race or gender is both guaranteed by harnessing the energy of materiality - in the language of nineteenth century eugenics, by 'blood' or 'vitality' - and simultaneously defined by ascendance over such materiality: the ruling classes' social ascendance over those classes, races, and genders supposedly more in the thrall of the material, and their individual ascendance over the pull of their own material desires. As Doyle says of Romanticism's defining construction of the body, from this conception of the ordering of the material there emerges a particular tension:

Nineteenth-century science would also inherit the tension or contradiction that issues from this subsumption of a materiality which is at first celebrated. Both the poets and the scientists sense and cautiously circle the irony teetering in the balance. They must 'descend' into the world of soil, cottages and children; they must privilege, study, listen to, even submit to the feminized and other-racialized material world in order to build their visionary fortress firmly upon it. To gain the metaphysical - to become elite in a secular word - they must trek through the blood and mess of the physical ... But they must not lose themselves in it. (*Bordering on the Body*, p.53)

Psychoanalysis would seem to inherit this conception of a body which must be ordered, and whose materiality is the source of subjectivity only on the condition

that it is transcended. Consequently, it adheres to a suspicion of bodily disorder, which it imagines as a natural and undesirable organic condition, and one that is destined to be replaced by a more regulated form.

We must also recognize here that the psychoanalytic narrative is not the only account of subjectivity available to us.¹⁰ The insistence on a body which emerges as order out of chaos may be no more than the maintenance of an ideological fiction. It may therefore be, as Charles Levin has argued, that this is precisely the weakness of Lacan - that his account maintains a mode of understanding the body which is in fact an unnecessary, if not damaging, mode of teaching us how to interpret our own bodies ('Carnal Knowledge of Aesthetic States', pp.100-101). But conversely - as Juliet Mitchell has said of Freud - psychoanalysis is concerned with accounting for 'how we acquire our heritage of the ideas and laws of human society within the unconscious mind' (*Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p.xvi). It is an analysis of the processes by which subjectivity is produced, which are also the processes by which particular *social* forms of subjectivity are regulated. While it may not necessarily be the case that, as we see Lacan claim, these are invariant stages in the formation of *every* subject, it may yet be the case that this narrative records accurately the processes of modern embodiment precisely because psychoanalysis is a product of the same socially shaping forces through which such embodiment takes place. I therefore want to retain these accounts of the bodily ego and the mirror stage not because I assume that they are an accurate account of the *necessary* processes of the production of subjectivity, but because they offer such a thorough account of the processes by which subjectivity is produced for us *now*.

We might start to make the shift to such a diagnostic - rather than

¹⁰ For a summary of alternative positions on the infant's sense of its body see Charles Levin, 'Carnal Knowledge of Aesthetic States'. For an analysis of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the embodied infant see Laura Doyle, *Bordering on the Body*, pp.76-80. For perspectives from child psychology see Margaret Bullowa (ed.), *Before Speech: The Beginnings of Human Communication*.

normative - account by considering that the stability of the body is not only produced through the visual image. Our sense of the body as a whole form is also created by our tactile experience of it: as a thing that we touch and touch with; as a thing that is touched by others; as a thing whose posture we shape, and whose physical presence in space, as extended matter, we learn through our motion. To explore this sense of integral self as learned rather than automatically adopted, Silverman draws on the work of Viennese neurologist and psychoanalyst Paul Schilder, who argues that the bodily ego is produced not only through sight, but also through physical contact and movement. The development of posture is vital in such a sense of self, for it enables the subject to define how s/he takes up space, and thereby is the process by which the subject comes to conceive of her or himself as occupying space in the first place. Body posture is not a given, nor can it be acquired in a moment of jubilant assumption. The gradual awareness of a physical self thus comes when the body is touched and shaped by those around it. Schilder's work thus strengthens my argument that the bodily ego emerges over time, and is open to alteration.¹¹

But more radically, Silverman makes the point that these touches are necessarily social. They are not neutral biological events which merely help to define a 'real' bodily territory. They are the social interactions through which the subject comes into being and which carry with them the imprints of desire and loathing. Looking at the production of the sense of a racial body, Silverman argues that 'the way in which the body is touched (or, for that matter, not touched) can also communicate love for, or revulsion against, its color' (*TVW*, p.231, n.21). Thus the physical sensations which produce a sense of bodily integrity simultaneously imbue that body with meaning. They help the child not merely to (mis)recognize their physical contours, but also to make (social) sense of the body

¹¹ As ever, it is important to remember that the body is not simply touched in a way that makes us aware of 'it', but is touched, looked at, talked about in a way that makes the 'it' of the body come into existence.

that is thus produced, and to mark particular bodily attributes as desirable or undesirable, welcome or unwelcome, ordered or disorderly.

Silverman stresses that this sense of acquired self is also present in Lacan's account, in that the visual scenario in which the child sees itself recalls that other staple of Lacan's work, that fantasized omniscient scrutiny which defines for each of us who we are and which 'no look can actually approximate: the gaze' (*TVW*, p.18). Since the child is caught up in familial structures that watch it, she suggests that in its moment of self-recognition we should be aware of the extent to which its apparently natural and personal witnessing of its own body must in fact derive from its being caught in such a gaze, whose terms the child's own look merely emulates. Although we look upon our own bodies and make sense of them, Lacan

sharply differentiates the gaze from the subject's look, conferring visual authority not on the look but on the gaze. He thereby suggests that what is determinative for each of us is not how we see or would like to see ourselves, but how we are perceived by the cultural gaze. (*TVW*, p.19)

Over and above how I see my body, is my awareness of how my body is seen.

Visual apprehension, physical sensation and cultural meaning all work through and with one another. Alongside the physical messages of love and hate come opportunities for the child to be apprehended by itself as an image: both in the eyes of others around it, and before its own eyes. The vocabulary that surrounds a child makes it visible to itself: 'now see what you've done' and 'just look at yourself', are phrases with a mirror-function that contributes towards the always-unfinished process of captation. They invite the child to see itself in terms of dominant values which ascribe to its body a place. The presence of cultural surveillance is thus paramount in both Lacan's and Shilder's accounts. Whether physical touch or parental gaze, the meaning of the body is shaped by patterns of condemnation and praise which make sense of body types, body parts, and body acts.

Silverman points us towards one particularly useful theorist in this area, Frantz Fanon. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon gives an account of the

experience of blackness, and relates it to the experience of ‘ a slow composition of my self as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world’ (p.111). For Fanon, this composition is not jubilant, but haunted by the possibility that such a composition will take place on the terms of the white onlookers whose gaze forces a meaning onto his body. ‘As long as the black man is among his own’ says Fanon, ‘he will have no occasion ... to experience his being through others’ (p.109). But then ‘the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man’s eyes’ (p.110). As bearer of the culturally legitimate gaze, the white man’s eyes have the force of authority, to which Fanon returns again and again in his account: ‘already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed’ (p.116). Fixed by the racist gaze, Fanon’s sense of self undergoes a physical transformation as ‘the corporal schema crumbled’ (p.112).

Such a body, says Fanon, ceases to be ‘a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations’ (p.111). These roles suggest the calm and logical functions of the ideal body. This is a physical self whose role is ‘to balance’, orienting itself in the world, and ‘to localize’, drawing differentiated information out of sensory diversity. It is an ordered and ordering body. But under white eyes, instead of a comfortable physical propriety, it experiences itself as physically improper because of its culturally condemned corporeality: ‘I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors’ (p. 112). The self is no longer an integrated wholeness, but becomes a carnal disorder: ‘what else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?’ (p.112) The fixing of this body by a gaze thus simultaneously effects its reduction to a singular meaning - faced by the white man’s gaze, Fanon finds that ‘I ... made myself an object’ (p.112) - and the disordering dissolution of the black body into a catalogue of racist images:

I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics, and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism [*sic*], racial defects, slave-ships, and above all: “Sho’ good eatin’ ”. (p.112)

Fanon is keen to preserve the possibility of a body which is not fixed/disordered by such a gaze, a body which is free. His commitment to a certain Sartrean Hegelianism gives him faith that the self may constitute itself apart from the objectifying gaze of the other, may be a self only for itself. His image of the black man 'among his own' invokes a utopian space of mutual acceptance, suggesting that an otherwise comfortable body image is marred only in those situations where 'not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man' (p.110). All of which begs the question of absences from Fanon's work which have often been queried: what must the black woman be and for whom must she be it ? What must the black gay man be and for whom ?¹² Fanon's account skirts the possibilities that there might be numerous gazes operative in any space, and thereby forestalls a consideration of the way in which his own gaze might legitimate some bodies over others. Responding to an account of the black male body as sensual, Fanon replies: 'I have never been able, without revulsion, to hear a *man* say of another man "He's so sensual!" ' (p.201, emphasis in the original). Fanon invokes a legitimate bodily response in order to pathologize the bodily response of another, situating his body as properly revolted, and the body of the speaker as improperly aroused. Fanon's own gaze thus offers a homophobic scrutiny, catching out other bodies which betray their impropriety through illegitimate physical attributes.

This is in no way to undercut the radical value of Fanon's account, and it certainly does not diminish the political efficacy of his work. Indeed, we must remember, as Diana Fuss has pointed out, that Fanon's homophobia is structured by a racist context in which the imputed sensuality of black men is a colonialist device for dismissing their rationality, and in which the imputation of sodomy functioned in colonialist discourse to image non-white peoples as morally and psychically undeveloped. Fanon's body politics is reactionary because it is a

¹² See for instance Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, pp.344-347; and Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* pp.141-165.

calculated response against a prior discourse.¹³ Fanon's own account of how, when a body is marked as deviant by the gaze of others, it is thrown into a sense of corporeal disarray, is useful in determining the meanings of his own lacunae.

Furthermore this account should not be seen solely as rendering objects of such a gaze as powerless victims since, as we have seen in Foucault, the designation of a body as unacceptable constitutes not only a trauma, but also a site of possible resistance, whereby the body may assert its very disorder as a form of rebellion. Commenting on the figuring of blackness as animality - as less than the order of the legitimate human body - Charles Johnson describes the possibility of such a response to white racism:

The situation of the black-as-body possessing non-cognitive traits is not rejected in this most recent variation of cultural nationalism, but stood upon its head ... 'Yeah', I scream at my white friend in the Village, 'we're naturally superior to you at sports. Uh huh, and we satisfy our women better *too!*'. ('A Phenomenology of the Black Body', p.131)

And yet it would be wrong to assume that the existence of these processes that produce deviant bodies thereby implies that there is also a perfect body which some do in fact attain. Although this goal structures bodily apprehensions, no body is ever perfect. Fanon's own text bears witness to the multiple gazes which play over the body, by which approval from one quarter may be accompanied by condemnation from another. Although it is essential that we keep in mind how some bodily attributes are validated over others - white skin over black, manly rigidity over limp wrists (in men, at any rate), the continent over the incontinent - we must not forget the ways in which *all* bodies are marked as deficient. There are

¹³ 'Fanon's resolutely masculine self-identifications, articulated through the abjection of femininity and homosexuality, take shape over and against colonialism's castrating representations of black masculinity' (Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers*, 160). On colonial figurations of an effeminate and bisexual or homosexual racial other see Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-male Sexual Behaviour Outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination 1750-1918*; and Merl Storr, 'The Sexual Reproduction of "Race": Bisexuality, History and Racialization'.

three principal areas of concern here.

Firstly, bodies are experienced as deficient because the criteria for the perfect body are both inexhaustible and contradictory. While I have stressed our bodies' capacity for transformation, they are also always limited in their achievements, and faced by punitive regulatory standards of hygiene, beauty, health and behaviour, which they often fail to reach. However privileged whiteness is in the West, it is not enough just to be a white body, nor even a white male body, nor even a white male heterosexual body: any body is less than perfect because there is always more work to be done.¹⁴ Is this a clean body ? An attractive body ? A healthy body ?

Secondly, even to take on the work of improving the body plunges it into contradictions. A male body which gains praise for its musculature - such as those of Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, or Jean-Claude van Damme - may, in the very act of displaying its hyper-masculinity, come to evince a homoerotic context through its iconographic pose, a camp playfulness in its self-conscious over-signification of gender, or an unexpected femininity in its offering of itself up for erotic consumption.¹⁵ All of which act as inappropriate significations to the heterosexual audiences for whom the performance is primarily intended.¹⁶ Thus for a body to be 'licit' or 'successful' by one set of criteria may only serve to render it tainted or inadequate according to others.

Lastly there is, as we have seen throughout these two chapters, a certain

¹⁴ See Kenneth R. Dutton, *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Physical Development*; and Mary G. Winkler and Letha B. Cole (eds.), *The Good Body: Asceticism in Contemporary Culture*.

¹⁵ See Brian Caldwell, 'Muscling in on the Movies: Excess and Representation of the Male Body in the Films of the 1980s and 1990s'; Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*; Steven Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle'; and John Stratton, *The Desirable Body: Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption*, pp.178-207.

¹⁶ Conversely, as Eric Clarke and Matthew Henson note, there is also room for an increasingly explicit appeal by such bodies to gay audiences, as a sensible economic move on the part of Hollywood publicists ('Hot Damme! Reflections on Gay Publicity').

discomfort about the fact of the body itself, whose materiality is always a source of anxiety. While the act of becoming a fully human subject relies on the mastery of body matter, the body never ceases to be matter, for all its Cartesian ambitions. The body thus remains a site of unease for even those subjects whose bodies are the most heavily ratified and endorsed.

What is striking in these problems of body management is that the body is experienced as simultaneously self and other. It is on the one hand my self: that from which I take my identity. Yet it is at the same time that against which I must struggle to define my identity when I am 'held by the gaze to an unpleasurable identification' (*TVW*, p.20). It is thus engaged in attempts to free itself from the inadequacy of its materiality, and to aspire to being the ground for a more perfect self. Silverman can thus refer to 'the consequent self-hatred into which self-love constantly threatens to devolve' (*TVW*, p.46), because even to succeed in valorizing the body momentarily is to do so by reference to a bodily ideal against which one must at some point be found lacking. The desire for that moment of jubilant assumption is the same desire which leads to self-hatred.

Why should the body be a focus for such intense hatreds? One answer is that the body is haunted by that primordial Discord into which it threatens to relapse. For Lacan, the fearful figure of the 'fragmented body' ('The Mirror Stage', p.4) returns in dreams to haunt the subject. But Silverman refuses to see the fear of bodily collapse as a natural or innate response:

Lacan suggests that it is 'organic disturbance and discord' which prompts the child to seek out the form of the 'whole body-image'. However, it seems to me that the reverse is actually true: it is the cultural premium set on the notion of a coherent bodily ego which results in such a dystopic apprehension of corporeal multiplicity.¹⁷(*TVW*, p.21)

While Lacan's reading of the bodily ego sees such emotions in terms of unresolved dread of the past bodily chaos, Silverman insists that the past body is rather the

¹⁷ Silverman's reference is to Lacan's 'Some Reflections on the Ego', p.15.

figure of present values. What threatens the body is not a biological threat, but the threat that the *proper* body will take on the characteristics of the *improper* body. She stresses that the body image is produced through social interactions, inscribing it as flawed in culturally particular ways, motivated by social inequalities.

Although Silverman offers her position as a deviation from Lacan, it is also the case that Lacan's account in fact invites such an interpretation throughout. It may be true that there are elements of his account which treat the growing sense of a separate body as a developmental process, a gradual acquisition of a more sophisticated and more accurate picture of the world in which the competing sensations of infancy give way to an organized sensorium which is said to both issue from, and make one aware of, the body. But Lacan is also more suggestive in his very hesitation to clarify where this sense of bodily integrity comes from. Lacan says that the infant which sees itself in the mirror 'brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image' ('The Mirror Stage', p.2) - thereby suggesting that this bodily image is itself already seen as integral. But he also refers to 'the inexhaustible quadrature of the ego's verification' ('The Mirror Stage', p.4) that takes place when the body-image provides the ego with the model for its own unity. 'Verification' occupies a curious double-position, meaning both the confirmation of a truth already known (the ego thought of itself as integral before it encountered the mirror) and a truth that could not be known until that moment (the ego could not see itself as integral until the mirror verified the possibility). In effect, 'verification' becomes a fiction - a truth which in fact could not come into being until imagined, and which did not precede the moment of its imagining.

Similarly, at the same time as suggesting that the body automatically appears as unified, he also suggests that it is the body itself which unsettles this body-derived wholeness. There are thus two forms of bodily self-consciousness at work: awareness of the image of the body as integral, and of the sensory body as fragmented. The body operates in these accounts as both a guarantor of stability and the means of its perpetual deferral:

The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*, that is to say, an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him. ('The Mirror Stage', p.2)

Here the body appears both as 'turbulent' and as the 'contrasting' image to that turbulence; both discordant and 'in a symmetry'; both in a 'total form', a 'Gestalt', and, by appearing as such, an 'illusion' or 'mirage' whose reality is chaos. Lacan's most telling phrase here is that this total body is 'more constituent than constituted', which, in a typically Lacanian manner, proves more ambivalent the more we attempt to unravel it. For it might mean: this form of the unified body creates the subject, rather than itself being created - that is, the subject is a fiction but the unified body is not. Or it might mean the opposite: this form of the body produces the subject but is not itself fully or finally constituted through such a process - that is, it is a myth which enables a unified ego, but which is not itself fixed in the process. For Lacan, the unified body is both fact and fiction, both the real object which impels the subject into being and a fantasized creation which achieves its effect only through its being imagined.

And yet before we assume that the body's chaos is any more of a reality, we should note that about this too he remains ambivalent. Lacan tells us that there is a 'succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic' ('The Mirror Stage', p.4), suggesting that none of these body images has the status of reality, but are only projections of psychological states. Lacan's account thus accords with Silverman's assertion that 'the body does not exist even as a tenuous unity prior to its constitution through image, posture and touch. Indeed, it cannot even be said to be "in pieces", since that implies that once assembled they would add up to a "whole" ' (*TVW*, p.22). Lacan's account, for all its apparent invocations of a given body - orderly or

disorderly - thus also enables a reading of the experience of the body as at all points socially produced. His argument, even as it offers us a developmental narrative, carefully refuses the possibility of locating an origin - even in a text whose entire focus is a single moment at which, supposedly, the constitution of the subject occurs.

When Freud refers to the libidinal investment in physical sensation as ‘the way by which in general we arrive at the idea of our body’ (‘The Ego and the Id’, p.364), he might be seen as referring to the final realization of truth, the gradual cartographic achievement of an accurate depiction of the physical form. But if we read this integral body as a regulated - and regulatory - fiction in the light of his own insistence on our complex libidinal investments, I suggest that we read ‘the idea of our body’ as purely fictive. Moreover, a central part of that ‘idea of our body’ is the presence of a potential chaos which it keeps in order - a chaos which, as Silverman stresses, is produced through the situations in which the body is located. The body is thus made meaningful through, and as the bearer of, the terms of the social order and the fears that haunt it - of collapse, of loss of security, of physical chaos, of a bodily subject which is no longer mappable.

(iv) The Making of the Meaningful Body

Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* has come to be seen as an exemplary work in the formulation of ideas of risk and danger to and from the body. Her structural anthropology has been extended to look at a dazzling array of body anxieties attesting to its ongoing usefulness: babies, bisexuality, puberty and oral sex all seem equally amenable to her method.¹⁸ Douglas enables us to see the zones

¹⁸ For these uses of Douglas see, respectively: Anne Murcott, ‘Purity and Pollution: Body Management and the Social Place of Infancy’; Jo Eadie, ‘Activating Bisexuality: Towards a Bi/sexual Politics’; Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, ch. 8.; and Celia Roberts et al., ‘“Going Down” : Oral Sex, Imaginary Bodies and HIV’.

of the body as patterns of social anxiety, with a particular focus on limits, margins, and points of exit and entry. I will be suggesting how her work can be strengthened by relating it to the issues within embodied politics that I have already raised, and finally I will show how it can help us to understand the function of fictions of bodily integrity.

Douglas begins with the famous proposition that 'dirt is matter out of place' (*PD*, p.35). That is, substances, acts and persons which are seen as defiling, polluting or harmful acquire that character because they are not where they should be. This formulation then enables Douglas to analyse the cultural construction of a geography of hygiene, in which objects are assigned to particular locations (physical, temporal, conceptual) and barred from others. From such a position, she can then argue that 'dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter' (*PD*, p.35). Whenever a particular aversion is expressed it is because a particular classificatory grid is at work, such that an object is defined as being in the wrong place. We might say that Douglas rejects biology in favour of semiotics: there are, she insists, no rational grounds to claims about what actions and substances are reviled and what are revered, rather they exist only as a function of their structural meaning.¹⁹

'Dirt' in this sense covers a wide range of objects, places and actions which are treated with aversion, and Douglas moves through muddy boots, corpses, sexual secretions and forbidden foods - objects which are treated with various degrees of revulsion. She traces this aversion to those objects and events which are anomalous to a system, whose presence threatens to disrupt symbolically the social order which classification maintains, and are therefore antithetical to the successful functioning of a particular society. For instance, she offers her famous analysis of

¹⁹ One ongoing debate around Douglas's work is whether she downplays the extent to which such demarcations may in fact be rational material calculations rather than symbolic structures. For instance: are certain animals forbidden to be eaten because of their symbolic function, or because of their specific economic role in the maintenance of food supplies? For an account of this debate see John O'Neill, *Five Bodies*, ch.2.

the prohibitions from Leviticus regarding which animals could not be eaten, such as pigs, crocodiles, and eels. Behind these, Douglas discerns a classificatory system which constructs particular classes of animals as possessing definite characteristics: animals that fly are also classified having two legs; animals that are cloven-hoofed are also ruminants; animals that swim are also classified as having scales. This set of ideal animal-types is then confronted by certain anomalies: pigs and camels, which have four feet and are cloven-hoofed, but do not chew the cud; crocodiles and mice, which appear to have hands, but nevertheless walk on four feet; eels, which live in the water, but do not have scales. It is those certain animals which fall outside the classification systems that are designated unclean, because of their capacity to unsettle symbolic divisions central to a culture: 'if penguins lived in the Near East I would expect them to be ruled unclean as wingless birds' (*PD*, p.56).

Developing her argument from this general proposition, she then moves to suggest that these divisions which generate the prohibition on disorder are not simply arbitrary, but encode survival strategies essential to a particular social order, representing the sites of social, sexual and economic tension which must be managed in order to guarantee social stability. The taboos of any culture are survival strategies, which stigmatize those who endanger the smooth functioning of any given social arrangement.²⁰ For instance, Douglas offers a range of interpretations of accusations of witchcraft in different cultures. In each society, she suggests, the accusation may demonize an apparently different target - a neighbour who is an economic rival; a family member whose sexual liaisons disrupt rules of kinship and inheritance; a religious group who refuse to accept dominant religious practices (the Jews in medieval Europe) or a secular institution which refuses to endorse religious authority (the Catholic Church's resistance to the rise

²⁰ Douglas does not apply these later arguments to her initial example of Leviticus - but from her stress on the way that the prohibitions create a regular reinforcement of the power of Mosaic classification, we might surmise that the abhorrence attached to creatures which transgress religious classification results from their capacity to challenge the totalizing claims of religious authority.

of the civil authorities in France); a ruler who refuses to accept new social requirements.²¹ But in every case such accusations target some individual or group within a community which violates, and therefore threatens to undermine or expose as arbitrary, its sexual, economic, or hierarchical conventions. Thus medieval European accusations against women manifest not an irrational dread of femininity, but a rational fear of single, sexually and economically independent women, whose presence is both anomalous (since they do not fit within the conventions of societies structured around a notion of a woman as dependent on a husband) and, in a very real sense, dangerous (since they challenge the conventions which have enabled that culture to function) (see Brian. P Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, pp.154-159). Consequently while at one level Douglas refutes attempts to rationalize ritual - the Mosaic laws do not, she insists, forbid certain animals because they are genuinely unhealthy²²- at another level she reintroduces the rational: every perceived risk is the expression of a genuine risk to the social order.

I want to stress here that Douglas's account must, to offer its full efficacy, be taken in its strongest form (stronger, perhaps than that in which she herself uses it): there are no real dangers, only symbolic dangers. A 'common sense' objection to this position is that some activities really are dangerous - and certainly are dangerous to the body. And yet such a claim hardly enables us to distinguish between the function of assertions that there are objective risks to the body involved in walking in front of trains, using heroin, and allowing HIV positive doctors to work with patients. The increasing visibility of the ideological force of each of my examples is meant to suggest precisely that all declarations of danger are situated within regimes of power/knowledge through which events are made

²¹ For Douglas's various examples see *Purity and Danger*, pp.102-113; *Natural Symbols*, pp. 110-125; and 'Witchcraft and Leprosy: Two Strategies for Rejection'.

²² Although, as Douglas notes wryly, 'pharmacologists are still hard at work on Leviticus XI' (*PD*, p.31).

dangerous.²³ If we recall the figure of St. Angela, her drinking of the lepers' water exemplifies how 'danger' is a constructed and symbolic situation. She sees herself as in no danger, precisely because in her particular discursive regime those who swallow a leper's flesh are safer in their guarantee of eternal life than those who avoid it, who by doing so show an adherence to the temporal world which compromises their chance of salvation.²⁴

With her emphasis on danger as a form of disturbance, we might then say that what interests Douglas is mess: the epistemological untidiness of objects which do not fall within easy classification translates into the organic messiness of substances which provoke disgust. In particular, she is concerned with the relationship of these forms of mess to the body: as both disorderly and disgusting. It is, for instance, the body of the witch that both proves and intensifies the accusations - the marks and deformities that are taken as evidence of evil, the sexual contacts or other acts of bodily invasion which are the witch's most feared activities. Douglas argues that the human body 'is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious' (*PD*, p.115). As such it is a body that is always under the threat of pollution - which may become dirty through contact with other instances of dirt. As we have seen, 'each culture has its own special risks and problems', the bodily correlative of which is that 'to which particular bodily margins its beliefs attribute power depends upon what situation the body is mirroring' (*PD*, p.121). Fanon's

²³ More recently, Douglas has resisted this line of thinking, saying of her work that 'it is a bad joke to take this analysis as hinting that the dangers are imaginary'; she insists that the discourse of threat 'links some real danger and some disapproved behaviour, coding the danger in terms of a threat to valued institutions', and she appeals to the examples of famine and mortality rates (*Risk and Blame*, p.29). But her own analyses problematize the definition of 'real danger', even as they fall back on the concept.

²⁴ My position here has been partly influenced by the debate over whether anorexia should be read as 'an embodied strategy' that earns - albeit at a high price - a mixture of psychic and social gains (Elspeth Probyn, 'The Anorexic Body'); or as a condition which, viewed as physically damaging, if not fatal, can never be regarded as any sort of victory (Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, pp.139-164; and Bryan Turner, 'The Talking Disease: Hilda Bruch and Anorexia Nervosa').

analysis of the experience of the black body, for instance, may be read in this way, as the experience of a body that is radically anomalous to white culture: a body that is visibly human, articulate, and independent, but is not entitled to assert such attributes within the space of white civilization, and is therefore rendered as disordered, as what we earlier saw Fanon describe as ‘a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood’.

Crucially, Douglas is not simply arguing here that the body is used as an abstract symbol, but rather that each of us experiences in our bodies the cultural categories that organize the society in which that body has been produced. Any social order is inscribed on the bodies of its members, who experience at the daily level of shame, disgust and discomfort a set of values mediated through the anxiety about how the body is at risk of itself becoming dirty, through contact with places, objects, or events that can render it polluted because they are problematic for the structure which that body symbolizes.

Douglas’s analysis therefore enables us to see how social problems are figured in terms of their problems for the body: such problems are manifested via the imagining of bodies whose presence cannot be accommodated, as bodies whose own physicality is disordered, and as sites on the body that are dangerous or abhorrent. Proximity to this disorder endangers whoever is near it, threatening as it does to disarticulate certain defining categories - hence the constant threats of pollution attributed to them. We should therefore ask of stigmatized bodies: how does a particular class of people come to be so problematic for a society that their bodies are imaged as dangerous and disgusting ? But we may also ask how in every body, certain practices or organs, particular sites of exit and entry, and specific bodily substances, carry the weight of the regulation of the social order within which they are located.

I will consider some of the implications and limitations of Douglas’s approach via her recent work on HIV and Aids.²⁵ In her essay ‘The Self as Risk

²⁵ The use of capitalization has been retained for HIV and not for Aids, in keeping

Taker: A Cultural Theory of Contagion in Relation to AIDS', Douglas offers a reading of responses to Aids based on her model of the social symbolization of the body. As we would expect, in this argument the body appears not as a physical object, but as a complex symbol for social anxieties which are played out through it. Aids is thus an exemplary instance of Douglas's formulation of the linking of 'some real danger and some disapproved behaviour'.

In Douglas's model there is a cultural core, those who are 'well-endowed with symbolic and economic capital' ('The Self as Risk Taker', p.107), whose professional status is secure, and whose beliefs and practices find themselves confirmed by the culture around them. But Douglas's failure to specify who this core is - we presume they are heterosexual, we guess they may be the middle-classes - will prove to be a point of difficulty in the terms of her analysis. Douglas argues that mapping out the views of this segment of society is the medical profession, whose status as guarantors of stable knowledge, and as the final arbiters of public health policy, is a function of their class-alliances with a group which values stability and tradition. But the security of this social position is achieved only by exclusions and boundaries: at the level of the nation, the community, and particular institutions. As long as those who are outside this core demand alternative structures, operate through alternative practices, and espouse alternative values, the security of this core is under threat, and these alternatives, and the subjects who embody them, must be excluded.

Douglas then reads medical and popular accounts of the body - and particularly the body as under threat from HIV - as sharing the features appropriate to the situation of this group, whose cultural centrality is threatened by the disenfranchised and by dissident groups: 'their idea of the body includes a weak immunity conferred by a double envelope, the body's own skin, and the

with current medical practice. However, in quotations and titles I have retained the capitalization used in the original - a difference that is itself a marker of the degree to which the conceptualization of the phenomenon is changing.

community's skin' (p.115). Hence both informed 'scientific' accounts and non-scientific lay accounts share a metaphorical language which mirrors a social situation: the fragile threatened body represents the community anxious about whether its boundaries too are permeable. The biological figuration of infection which accompanies this is 'miasma', a fear of infection by mere proximity or by contact with objects - such as glasses or toilets seats - that have been touched by the bodies of those who are (imagined to be) HIV positive. While such a position is recognized as scientifically inaccurate, it is nevertheless used even by the medical profession because of its capacity to symbolize the social anxieties which affix to certain abject constituencies:

Miasma is an instrument of total rejection. The mere physical presence of the unwanted Other is dangerous. Their use of the same spaces and times and their breathing the common air is a menace to the rest of the community. The miasmatic danger of AIDS is a reason for expelling foreign workers, restricting immigration, prohibiting sexually deviant practices, and of course, drugs. (p.115)

The image of a vulnerable body is thus a figure for the fears of a vulnerable community, and through its use the community asserts the centrality of what Douglas calls 'a territorial community envelope' (p.119), which defines as medically dangerous the presence of those groups whose social status is also problematic: foreigners, gay men, sex workers, intravenous drug-users.²⁶

However, while Douglas stresses the ways that an understanding of the body is produced through socio-economic concerns about the stability of a particular class-fraction, other accounts of HIV/Aids and the body read these events differently. I want to consider two objections to Douglas's account, which complicate our understanding of the meaning of the body, while also building on her key arguments. Firstly, I will consider how the experience of the body might

²⁶ On the use of languages of health to demonize the socially marginal, see also: Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS*.

exist in a mutually constitutive, rather than merely reflective, relationship with material conditions; and secondly, I will consider the psychic dynamics which might also play a role in Douglas's example.

The role of the imagining of the body in the Aids crisis has also been explored by Simon Watney, who suggests a different way of reading the role of the body in Aids discourse. For Watney, figurations of bodily disgust and bodily danger are a mobilization of anxieties about the body's desires. He suggests that HIV infection is imagined as an indicator that gay male bodies are at the most fundamental biological level different from heterosexual bodies, so that an unstable entity called 'heterosexuality' is made secure via the supposedly stable figure of 'the homosexual body':

the very notion of a 'homosexual body' only exposes the more or less desperate ambition to confine mobile desire in the semblance of a stable object ... The social sight lines of sexuality are thus permanently tensed against 'mistakes' that might threaten to undermine the fragile stability of the heterosexual subject. ('The Spectacle of AIDS', p.79)

Similarly, in the case of the conjunction of Aids and race, Cindy Patton has argued that while we should be alert to the ways that Aids has been used as a device for racist stigmatization, we should not make the mistake of treating racism as a concrete, if unequal, confrontation between 'races', conceived of as discrete entities that have some objective existence. Rather, HIV has enabled the myth of racially biological difference to be sustained by white subjects anxious to assert stable distinctions.²⁷ Patton shows how through claims made about HIV, 'sociobiologists have argued that race already stands as a marker for genetic propensity to behaviours which are related to HIV transmission' (*Inventing AIDS*, p.113). Here, spurious claims about rates of infection and modes of transmission in so-called non-white populations enable the maintenance of the myth of a biology of

²⁷ For more general accounts of the problems in defining any biological grounding for notions of 'race' see the essays in Sandra Harding (ed.) *The 'Racial' Economy of Science*, particularly Frank B. Livingstone, 'On the Nonexistence of Human Races'.

absolute racial difference.²⁸ In both cases, fears around HIV do not so much express existing differences as provide a new arena in which fictional differences can be (re)produced.

What such accounts show is that missing from Douglas's description is the way that a bodily experience is a complex transcoding of different registers. The body image is part of the processes which ground the social, which determine the forms of its institutions and practices, and which therefore reproduce the social landscape which, in Douglas's account, they merely reflect. By structuring her account of Aids around the existence of a supposedly real group, which keeps out unwelcome aliens, Douglas reproduces, uncritically, the assumptions of her imagined cultural core: namely, that such an intact and separate group in fact exists. In her account there is a 'centre community' which is 'well-endowed with symbolic and economic capital' ('The Self as Risk Taker', p.107), and which is thus secured by Douglas's own description as a real, integral, self-contained community. This reliance on a determining material situation is a recurrent problem in Douglas's work on the body, for it does not reflect on the difficulties of interrogating the interaction of the discursive and the material - although it certainly bears witness to them.

I am suggesting that we should be more cautious in attempting to define such material situations. For Douglas's epistemological account of a certain cultural self-perception doubles as an ontological account of the objective economic existence of such a group. Her language of 'enclaves' and 'social divisions' ('The Self as Risk Taker', p.108), while it functions as an apparently plausible description of a heterosexual world separated from a gay subculture, does not account for the fact that some of its members may be secretly gay or bisexual; or the fact that some of them may use prostitutes, or be prostitutes; or that they

²⁸ For an account of the mobilizations of racism within research on HIV see Richard and Rosalind Chirimuuta, *AIDS, Africa and Racism*.

may use or sell illegal drugs.²⁹ Following these other arguments on the meanings of Aids we should rather see such a group as a fantasmatic construction, produced by, rather than simply producing, accounts of itself as threatened. Like the body marks and body practices considered in chapter one, these fears produce a dream of social cohesion via one of bodily specificity, a dream played out through public policy and social interaction. It is thus a fantasy of bodily integrity which underwrites Douglas's own argument, constructing as it does a 'centre community' free from homosexual desire, drug-use and foreignness, which can operate by keeping those elements outside itself. No such group exists.³⁰ Rather, it is an imaginary figure of cultural anxiety whose presupposition depends - as much for Douglas as for its members - upon the fantasy of the integral body which is invoked to defend it.

This is not to reject the validity of Douglas's descriptions of the forms of thought about Aids, or the uses to which it is put - part of the power of her work is that it enables us to read the macro-events of material configurations as operating through the micro-events of the experience of bodily rituals. It is, however, to question the normative role that such an account plays. IV drug use and anal sex are not only dreaded because they metaphorically represent other sorts of invasion, but rather because of their real and imagined presence within those groups which would disavow them. It is only through these interdictions that heterosexuals and non-IV drug users can be imagined into being. We must therefore supplement Douglas's account of the body as 'mirroring' a particular concrete situation, with one in which it in fact produces such situations. To return to Kafka's fable, we might now say that society does not so much etch its image onto the body, as has its own possibility produced when a body is etched into being in the form of a set of fantasies about the sort of society that such a body inhabits.

²⁹ On the social sciences' uncritical reproduction of myths of discrete populations see Simon Watney, 'Aids: The Second Decade: "Risk", Research and Modernity'.

³⁰ Such a reading of Douglas is indebted to the interrogation of epistemology found in Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, *Modes of Production and Social Formation*, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*.

But also, as well as complicating Douglas's account with the mutually constitutive role of the material and the discursive, it is important to see how instances of bodily anxiety are affected by psychic dynamics which are not simply particular to specifiable material situations. Leo Bersani's 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' argues that the associations of sex and death in the HIV pandemic are structured around anxieties about the autonomy of the subject which, while they are inflected by particular socio-historical conditions, are not reducible to them. Bersani, like Douglas, is interested in the construction of an 'ideological body' (p.209), but for him the fantasies and fears which produce it are not only an image of social inequalities, but also of the psychic disruptions of subjectivity.

Bersani's account is based on what he describes as 'the shifting experience that every human being has of his or her body's capacity, or failure, to control and to manipulate the world' (p.216), an experience that is not only bodily, but that also marks the psychic attempt to maintain the ordered, controlled, and controlling self that is grasped in the mirror-stage. In particular, Bersani is interested in the ways that sex functions as a place where control may be lost: an instance of the body's control over its environment giving way to the body's submission to the intense sensations that overwhelm it, a temporary psychic collapse 'into which the human organism momentarily plunges when it is "pressed" beyond a certain threshold of endurance' (p.217).

Bersani's invocation of 'the human organism' and 'every human being' sits uneasily with the position of bodily specificity that I have been arguing for, and perhaps, as with Lacan, we must read him as accounting for a particular cultural experience of the sexual.³¹ His own texts waver on this, offering both this general narrative of the psyche, but also insisting that we must recognize these processes

³¹ A reading which he would strenuously resist. In *The Freudian Body*, Bersani traces the psychic dynamic of the sexual as the violent collapse of self back to Assyrian frescoes of the 9th - 7th centuries B.C., to secure for his position a deliberate foothold in the earliest known cultural artefacts. For a historicist challenge to Bersani's work, see Jeffrey Masten, 'Is the Fundament a Grave?'.

as understood through the dynamics of gender, hence his use of 'shifting' to mark the range of culturally specific ways in which this experience occurs. Thus while he is interested in a certain broadly trans-historical anxiety - that of the loss of identity - he also attends to history by arguing that in all societies we know, this loss of identity is associated with femininity. He stresses that the phallogentric 'denial of the *value* of powerlessness' (p.217, emphasis in the original) leads to the experience of the body's vulnerability being troped as its feminization: the body that becomes powerless is a body that is imagined as occupying the position of the socially disempowered. Terms like 'phallogentric' and 'patriarchal' thus bridge the gap between the psychically essential and the socially specific, by identifying a mode of social organization that has always produced such dynamics, while nevertheless leaving open the possibility that some sufficiently different form of social organization might transform them beyond recognition.

Bersani argues that this notion of an overwhelmed and penetrated body and psyche has come to be seen as the dominant attribute of both women and gay men, who, in the patriarchal imaginary, are those subjects who yield up their claim to mastered subjectivity since '*to be penetrated is to abdicate power*' (p.212, emphasis in the original).³² The psychic significance of aversive declarations about the imagined dangers of gay male promiscuity and female prostitution is then not, as in Douglas's account, a marking of socio-economic differences, but rather a hostility towards sexual subjectivities which have come to be connected with 'an unquenchable appetite for destruction' (p.211).³³ The psychic significance of the sexuality of the penetrated as symbolic of the collapse of the ego is joined with their social demonization as both victims and carriers of HIV. Consequently, the

³² Bersani uses a cross-cultural survey of the meanings attached to sex between men to suggest that even where such sexual practices are not homophobically indicted, there is a general approval for the act of penetration and a general suspicion of the act of being penetrated ('Is the Rectum a Grave?', p.212).

³³ A similar argument might be made about the representation of drug use, envisioned as a constant assault on the body, pushing it past fantasized 'natural' limits and into the realms of an ecstasy bordering on death.

symbolic self-destruction which penetrative sex has come to represent is transformed into the notion of sex work and gay sex as leading to biological destruction through Aids. The significance that attaches to sexual acts, and the body-boundaries that they disrupt, is therefore not simply a mapping of material divisions and economic inequalities - although, as Bersani stresses, it is always that as well - but is a general psychic fantasy of bodily dissolution figured through gay men and female sex workers. The consequence of this potent mix of the social and the psychic is that the HIV pandemic has 'literalized that potential as the certainty of biological death, and has therefore reinforced the heterosexual association of anal sex with self-annihilation originally and primarily identified with the fantasmatic mystery of an insatiable, unstoppable female sexuality' (p.222).

Bersani is careful to specify that these gendered dynamics affect the specific forms that psychic anxiety about self-integrity takes. But he also stresses that these dynamics are not simply the products of the material situations of patriarchal social organization. Rather, they are an inflection of those structures through psychic dynamics which pre-exist them. He thus demonstrates a tendency visible in all of these various accounts of the ways in which the body is made meaningful: the attempt to specify an original point for such a process - and in particular an origin for the point at which a desire for bodily integrity becomes paramount. Whether treated as an organic necessity, a psychic inevitability, or a product of particular material conflicts, they all invite us to determine a single governing force which produces this sense of an integral body. However, in bringing them together, I hope to have demonstrated the need to suspend such a line of inquiry. In place of this attempt to specify a before and after in the development of the desire for bodily integrity, I want to stress here again the importance of thinking of these fields as *co-constitutive*. If, as in Silverman's account, the psyche is mapped out through a bodily experience which is determined by practices which constitute the social values of those around that child, then the structure of the psyche is always already social. We must therefore seek to combine the body's capacity to both

symbolize and produce particular social situations with an understanding of the psychic dynamics with which such conflicts are interwoven: the attempt to produce an integral, ordered subjectivity through a body which experiences itself as also disordered and dis-integrated.³⁴

In other words, these charged bodily locations are not simply the ascription by culture of meaning, with the body's openings and margins being granted significance. Rather, the body is the site of the (re)production of culture, a process in which it plays an active part. Even though the lines of pleasure, discomfort, fear, defence, and pride that are traced across the body are, as we have seen, the messages by and as which the body is grasped; and even though no portion of the body comes into consciousness except insofar as it becomes the site of an erotic cathexis or intersubjective struggle over meaning, it is also the case that *at the same time* the experience of embodiment provides the ground for the fantasies of integrity and vulnerability that are the terms in which culture is conceived. We must try to hold onto this double orientation: these states *both are and are not* the pre-existing material realities which the body mirrors. The earliest moments of the psychical mapping of an embodied self are, if not pre-social, at least para-social: developing in tandem with the socialization of the body, but contributing their own dynamics to such a process.

It is essential that we think of these three domains - the psychic, the material, the discursive - as interrelated and mutually constitutive. Sue Best reminds us that we must not read such body-mappings simply as metaphors, in which the body is used to represent concepts, but rather as a result of the material forms that bodies take: 'ideas are not given primacy, they do not simply imprint passive matter but rather are entailed or entwined with body-matter' ('Sexualizing Space', p.190). As a result, she argues, a body 'is not simply compared' to other social formations, but is itself 'integral to the production of these concepts'

³⁴ Steve Pile makes a sympathetic attempt to extend Douglas's work in this direction (*The Body and the City*, pp. 185-187).

(p.186). For Best this form of corporeal thinking entails a constant interplay between body and discourse in *both* directions. Hence we may say that since the material, discursive, and psychic forms of any given social order are not fixed, but must be continuously reproduced, they all remain dynamic, never finalized, but in a process of mutual influence on one another.

Such a sense of the body's role as an active participant in the making of meaning is lacking in Douglas's account, in which the body appears as senseless matter which takes all of its meanings from culture. This is not to say that Douglas does not consider the extraordinary emotional intensities invested in the body. Indeed, the strength of her work is its capacity to account for these violent feelings. But these feelings emerge solely from the interpretative role of culture. Douglas's description of the body as a 'natural symbol' suggests certain limitations: as a symbol, the body is merely a receptacle for meaning, used by culture.³⁵ Her description of the body itself is curiously flat, an affectless space onto which meaning is grafted, an approach most visible when, considering why the body should be such a privileged symbol, she suggests that 'the structure of living organisms is better able to reflect complex social rituals than door posts and lintels' (*PD*, p.114). Its importance then is treated by her more as a product of the useful fact of the body's physical complexity rather than of its own capacity to generate emotional conflicts. Absent is any sense that bodies are never without such emotional charges, having been marked from birth with fantasy and desire. It is therefore important that we read culture as written not *onto* an awaiting body but *via* a body which only comes into being through the injunctions of ordering cultural systems, even as culture only comes into being through the repetition of bodily dynamics.

These accounts weave together a number of important bodily domains, and when juxtaposed we can see the problem of assigning priority to any one. While

³⁵ *Natural Symbols* is the title of Douglas's second book on the body. For her defence of this view of the body see pp.xxxi-xxxvii.

for Lacan the unified body seen in the mirror is the model for a unified self, it is simultaneously the case that paradoxically, the unitary self projects its own (imagined) attributes onto the body that is seen in the mirror. Similarly while, for Douglas, an ordered culture is mapped onto the body, it is simultaneously the case that the psychic fantasy of bodily order generates the illusion of stable social forms. Silverman's account helps to dissolve the opposition between these two accounts: the body comes into consciousness through processes which already invest it with meaning. It is not that the body is apprehended and then interpreted, but rather that the possibility of thinking about the body at all is achieved through a process of what we might call *interpretative perception* - or, if 'interpretative' seems too intellectual a term to apply to the earliest stages of this process, *evaluative perception* (an awareness of the body which, as we have seen, is both conscious and unconscious).

There is thus no neat sequence: from bodily disorder, through the cohesion of the mirror stage, and on to fully-fledged socially meaningful embodiment (a trajectory whose theoretical witnesses would run: Freud, Lacan, Douglas). The body is always the form through and as which culture elaborates itself, rather than which either precedes culture (as in Bersani) or which is preceded by it (as in Douglas). In all its physical activities and discursive deployments, the fact of a body is being thought out, its meanings being reconfigured. In such processes its flesh is always being identified as disordered, always being re-ordered in resistance to that. These are not two reactive processes alternating in dialectical fashion, but are mutually implicated, operating through one another.

(v) A Body Without a Culture

While I have insisted that it is processes of social production that create different bodies, the spectre of instinct perhaps remains to be exorcized - particularly in light of its difficult articulation within psychoanalysis. Are there

innate instincts which culture then transforms, or is it possible to sustain the argument that I am offering here, that every aspect of a body is not simply modified, but produced by the social situations of that body? At the most general level, Freud has argued that 'it is impossible to overestimate the extent to which civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct' ('Civilization and its Discontents', p.286). Similarly, there is a broad trend within the sociology of the body which accepts that the body is socially regulated in different ways, but which argues not simply that in different cultures it is regulated to different ends, but that it is regulated to different *degrees*. Stephen Mennell, for instance, offers an historical account of social change from the Middle Ages to today, in which anger, appetite and sexuality are all 'manifestations of affect over which people came gradually to be subject to increased pressures to exercise greater self-control' ('On the Civilizing of Appetite', p.131).

Exemplifying the persistence of this model, the key text for sociology in this area has been Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process*, an elaboration of the argument that there is an instinctual body which culture must bring under control. Elias's text is an extraordinarily thorough documentation of his claim, and it is worth considering here whether it can reasonably be disputed. For instance, analyzing the changes in table manners from the Middle Ages onwards, Elias notes that as civilization progresses, distinct changes occur. The more bodily aspects of eating are downplayed - spitting, picking one's teeth, sharing plates - and, importantly, the use of the knife diminishes: from an extravagant tool which is brandished, hacked with, and used to threaten other diners, it becomes a genteel artifact. Elias sums up the changes as follows: 'the regulation and control of emotions intensifies. The commands and prohibitions surrounding the menacing instrument become ever more numerous and differentiated. Finally the use of the threatening symbol is limited as much as possible' (*The Civilizing Process*, p.102).

This language of limitation, prohibition and restraint clearly invokes the notion of a natural body, whose expression is curtailed. And it is a plausible

argument. Surely we can measure here the increases in restraint, the gradual dwindling of freedoms, the limitations on what practices may occur around the space of the dining table ? In his discussion of Elias, Turner notes how even the architecture of the dining room changes, as the spittoon and the vomitorium are banished (*The Body and Society*, p.170).

I am not disputing here the account that part of the avowed project of modernity is to tidy and order bodily activities: the documentation on this point is exhaustive and persuasive.³⁶ However, the assumption that this is an encounter between a cultural order and a disorderly nature is misleading. In accounting for this shift in terms of an innate body which is restrained, we are only reproducing the terms of the discourse itself, whose project is precisely the instantiation of a language and a practice on the one hand of bodily disarray, and on the other of orders, schematics and discipline. Yet this is not a conflict between two opposed bodily states, each belonging to a historically distinct period; rather, both are aspects of a new bodily order which is maintained by the production of such a conflict. In what sense is the 'new body' more ordered ? In what sense does it make sense to see the 'old body' as disordered ? 'All societies and all social situations' argue David Morgan and Sue Scott, 'make their own particular demands upon the deployment of the body such that bodily performance is consistent with the requirements of time and place' ('Bodies in a Social Landscape', p.14).

We can approach this field in a different way by returning to Foucault, whose notion of the 'repressive hypothesis' (*HS*, p.10) allows another reading of these phenomena. Although Foucault's account is concerned primarily with the discourse of the sexual, I have tried to extend it beyond that, to show how such a language is part of a wider discourse of bodily control in which sexuality is only

³⁶ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*; Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*; and Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*.

one element. Indeed, Foucault's emphasis on the history of the sexualized body is intended to achieve the function of alerting us to the ways in which the assumption that sexuality is the central feature of embodiment is itself an effect of regimes of power that we need to dislodge.

For Foucault, bodily phenomena that are supposedly being repressed are in fact installed as part of a complex new arrangement of embodiment - whose regulation of the body is *different from* rather than *greater than* previous regimes of bodily production, and whose new practices of what Elias figures as 'restraint' are themselves sites for possibilities of bodily pleasure. An account such as Elias's therefore eclipses three important facts: the presence of the orders and structures which organize the older, supposedly more instinctual, body-forms;³⁷ the bodily aspects of the pleasures that are deployed in the name of the supposedly more restrained new order; and the structured production of those practices that are supposedly being repressed.

Following on from my arguments in chapter one, we must argue that what we see in Elias's account are two different forms of social regulation. The medieval use of the knife is in no sense natural, but is the product of a codified incitement to emotions: the knife must be carried, must be brandished. The table is a tightly regimented field in which certain conflicts are required, certain emotional displays expected. Vomiting and spitting are not 'natural' bodily events which later culture banishes, but produced bodily events which culture has transformed in different ways - in his inventory of bodily differences Mauss recounts the story of a village where 'people did not know how to spit' ('Body Techniques', p.118). The requirements to restrain burping and farting, or to avoid spilling food, are in no way 'more' repressive than the cultural requirements to eat to the point of

³⁷ Although, at the same time, Elias also attempts to construct such an argument, but struggles to integrate it with his larger claims, expressing some uncertainty about whether the phenomena he is studying should be regarded as increases in social restraint, or merely as changes in the form of socialization (*The Civilizing Process*, p.131).

vomiting. Turner describes these requirements by saying that 'an elementary code was sufficient' (*The Body and Society*, p.170) - but with Mauss and Foucault in mind, it is not clear that this code is, in its own way, any less elaborate than any other.

The second Foucauldian objection is that it is not clear that the new domains of bourgeois civilization are any less of a site for the exercise of bodily pleasure. In his account of the role of the modern concern over masturbation, Foucault has argued that: 'to intervene in this personal, secret activity, which masturbation was, does not represent something neutral for the parents. It is not only a matter of power, or authority, or ethics; it's also a pleasure' ('An Ethics of Pleasure', p.376). At home, just as in medicine, sexology, psychiatry, and penality, 'the power which took charge ... set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces ... It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace' in 'a sensualization of power' (*HS*, p.44). If, with Foucault, we read the practices of authority and restraint as exercises in pleasure, then we must question the construction of a disorderly body coming under the sway of an ordering and disembodied civilization. Instead, we should see the practices of restraint as themselves a domain of bodily indulgence.

Thirdly, Foucault has made us alert to the fact that the seemingly most taboo desires must in fact be socially produced - that the erotic, the transgressive, and the forbidden are central products of a given social order. Power does not simply forbid a presocial libido since, as we have seen, the different psychic forms that bodily pleasure takes are always already social. Rather, power produces pleasures that are regulated in the service of a particular social order. I want to stress here that this does not mean that certain types of speech or action are not repressed, but simply that repression is not the governing logic of power - instead it is only one tactic in the field of its deployment.

Yet Foucault's own work seems close to invoking such an unsocialized body at times. After all, he envisions a world which is free from the injunction to

dwell on sexuality: 'perhaps one day people will wonder at this' (HS, p.157) he suggests 'and what we now perceive as the chronicle of a censorship and the difficult struggle to remove it will be seen rather as the centuries-long rise of a complex deployment for compelling sex to speak' (p.158). Similarly, he looks back to times when such structures of thought about sexuality might not have operated:

One day in 1867, a farm hand from the village of Lapcourt ... was turned in to the authorities. At the border of a field, he had obtained a few caresses from a little girl, just as he had done before and seen done by the village urchins round about him: for, at the edge of the wood, or in the ditch by the road leading to Saint-Nicolas, they would play the familiar game called 'curdled milk'. So he was pointed out to the gendarmes, led by the gendarmes to the judge, who indicted him and turned him over first to a doctor, then to two other experts who not only wrote their report but also had it published. What is the significant thing about this story? The pettiness of it all: the fact that this everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality, these inconsequential bucolic pleasures, could become, from a certain time, the object not only of a collective intolerance but of a judicial action, a medical intervention, a careful clinical examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration. (p.31)

Whatever we may think about Foucault's invocation of this incident (which as one critic says, 'today we would have to regard as a case of child sexual abuse'³⁸) its pastoral setting should not deceive us into thinking that Foucault is invoking a world before culture. Suren Lalvani reads this incident as the evidence that Foucault still 'makes reference to prediscursive sexual energies and a materiality in his evocation of "bucolic" and "innocent" bodily pleasures that prefigure the introduction of regulative regimes' (*Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies*, p.32).³⁹ But the fact of this being, in Foucault's words, a

³⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, 'Experimental Desire: Rethinking Queer Subjectivity', p.144. But Grosz's language here is curious: 'have to' in what sense? 'Have to' because now we know better, or 'have to' because now prevailing sexual discourses enforce such an interpretation? See also Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, p.94.

³⁹ Elizabeth Grosz makes a similar reading of the same passage, accusing Foucault of imagining this as an act that is outside power/culture ('Experimental Desire: Rethinking Queer Subjectivity', p.144). See also Toril Moi, 'Power, Sex and Subjectivity: Feminist Reflections on Foucault', pp.96-97.

‘familiar’ and ‘an everyday occurrence’ already signals that it is routinized, and the invocation of a ‘game’ should remind us that for Foucault a game has been the predominant metaphor for the most structured of situations: ‘the word “game” can lead you astray: when I say “game” I mean a set of rules ... It is not a game in the sense of an amusement: it is a set of procedures’ (‘Ethics of the Concern for Self’, p.445).

While Foucault’s example may be intended to assert the existence of a body which is not caught up in the particular *scientia sexualis* of the nineteenth century (which is compatible with Foucault’s claim that such a mode of knowledge has a history that can be traced) or as asserting the existence of a body which is not exercising coercive force (which is compatible with Foucault’s claim that while relations of power are inevitable, relations of oppression are not), neither of these constitutes a claim that this body is outside culture. Equally, although he imagines a future with ‘a different economy of bodies and pleasures’ (HS, p.159), Foucault’s language does not suggest that such a world is any less coded - it still operates through an ‘*economy*’ - only that it is coded differently. We may then, with Foucault, ask what the themes of purity, disgust and redemption can tell us about the possible consequences of different systematizations of bodily experience, but always with the proviso that ‘different’ - or indeed ‘better’ - cannot mean less socialized.

We can thus summarize a Foucauldian analysis of the notion of a presocial body as follows:

(i) There is indeed repression of certain aspects of the body. Although he disputes the treatment of repression as the primary form in which sexuality is treated in the West, there is no reason to assume that Foucault is arguing that there is no such phenomenon as an act of repression with the force of an injunction of disapproval. Foucault certainly sees power as involving a system of prohibitions - he simply argues that this is not a total account of power, for it is equally a system of

incitements. He makes the role of repression explicit, stressing that in the monitoring of sexuality 'there was a policing of statements' which 'almost certainly constituted a whole restrictive economy' (*HS*, p.18). Foucault is clear on this point: 'it is not a question of denying the existence of repression. It's one of showing that repression is always part of a much more complex political strategy' ('An Ethics of Pleasure', p.375).

(ii) Such repression only takes place as an element of a system in which bodily pleasure is in fact encouraged. These prohibitions intensify and produce bodily pleasure. What the Victorians designated perversions were not simply expunged, but were 'solidified' and 'intensified' (*HS*, p.48). Such a process is simultaneously in the service of power - reminding us that *any* bodily order is always a social order - and, as we saw in the previous chapter, may be deployed against it.

(iii) There is another realm of bodily pleasure, which is that of those who exercise this apparently disapproving power: what Foucault calls 'a sensualization of power' (*HS*, p.44). The activities directed at repressing particular practices are sites of physical pleasure in themselves, and may therefore operate as sites of tension for the claim that the body is being transcended in such practices.

In summary, we might say that what is repressed must first be produced.⁴⁰ The notion of repression that Foucault critiques is the 'hydraulic' one advocated by, amongst others, Reich and Marcuse - that the body's natural and spontaneous energies are being pushed down by society. For Foucault what is pushed down (but never only pushed down) is a complex of bodily practices and desires that must always be thought of as socially determined. Foucault's work thus enables us

⁴⁰ This had seemed a useful epigram by which to grasp Foucault's notion of power, but I was particularly gratified to find recently that Gilles Deleuze offers an almost identical summary of Foucault: 'power "produces reality" before it represses' (*Foucault*, p.29).

to read social change as a series of historically different forms not of repression, but of the exclusion of practical possibilities.

This is very much the position taken by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, which offers a useful example of the possibility of deploying a model of social prohibition which does not involve the repression of a natural body. Stallybrass and White study the processes by which the practices of popular working class culture have been systematically marginalized by the bourgeoisie, the process by which 'its feasting, violence, drinking, processions, fairs, wakes, rowdy spectacle and outrageous clamour were subject to surveillance and repressive control' (p.176). The bourgeois revolution thus structures itself as a series of acts aimed at organizing a chaotic body.

But what is being repressed are historically specific class practices. What is being forbidden is not any innate bodily instinct, but rather those bodily activities which have come to be associated with spaces, occupations, and languages antithetical to the economic interests of the bourgeoisie. 'What is in question' they insist 'is not some abstract "repression of instinct" but the validating of one set of social practices over against others' (p.197). In persecuting gypsies, closing down market fairs, training children in hygiene, or systematizing city-wide sewerage, the bourgeoisie are therefore not denying the spontaneously libidinal, but rather policing those bodily practices which are laden with 'semantic material from cultural domains ... extraterritorial to their own constructed identities as socio-historical subjects' (p.196).

I believe it would be precipitate to claim that this bourgeois history accounts for all forms of bodily disgust - indeed, as Tony Bennett has recently pointed out, much of the reception of Foucault during the 1970s and 1980s was problematic in its attempt to overlook his stress on the diverse and non-unified character of modern practices of power, and to refashion his writings as unwittingly offering a coherent account of a unified bourgeois state (*Culture: A Reformer's Science*, p.63). But such a history does offer a particularly useful

illumination of the way that a symbolic grasp of the body is always enacted through a set of material practices. Like Doyle's reading of the attempt to master the body, Stallybrass and White show how such practices become linked to an attempt to transform this unruliness into order. They record, for instance, how the seventeenth century essayist Thomas Browne describes his own personal meditative practices aimed at transforming the physically disordered experience of tavern music into a new spiritual order:

For even that vulgar and taverne musicke, which makes one man merry, another mad, strikes me into a deepe fit of devotion, and a profound contemplation of the first Composer; there is something in it of Divinity more than the ear discovers. (*Religio Medici*, quoted in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.198)

Here, the bodily experience is both removed ('more than the ear discovers') but also remains indissolubly bound to it - Browne's new-found spiritual state is still a state of the body. Thus the attempt to hierarchize practices (contemplation elevated over merry-making) still implies a dependency, a connection which threatens to disrupt the dominant logic.

What a Foucauldian reading adds to such an account is the possibility of considering how this then generates new bodily pleasures (which may be in the service of systems of domination, but may also undermine them), identifying how in the process of this ordering, modernity both remains endlessly productive of new bodily pleasures, and also generates and maintains those bodily practices which are supposedly excluded (even to the point of reactivating them in pursuit of the desired, but reviled, alternatives). But, as in Foucault's portrait of the confessional society, such a recognition of modernity's insistent bodily pleasures - which may of course include the reading of Burroughs or the watching of a horror film - does not make the body an automatic good; rather, it recognizes the ways that these different incitements to focus on the body produce embodied subjectivity in the service of domination.

For out of these arguments we can see how the idea of the body as unruly

organic matter plays a crucial role in the maintenance of the modern social order. The fiction of organic pre-social energy both stigmatizes the social practices which might disrupt particular institutions (such as the bourgeoisie's need to exert control over certain sections of the population) and also justifies the presence of controlling technologies of surveillance. But more insidiously, this entire arrangement serves to confine our notions of transgression to those practices whose necessity is already contained within the dynamic of scrutiny and discipline. What the myth of the chaotic state within us serves to achieve is the occlusion of those altogether more dangerous bodily possibilities: not those which are imagined as dragging society back into some primal chaos, but rather those as yet unimagined possibilities that would take it forward into new, and more just, forms of organization.

We can see why the notion of a libidinal body has such an appeal - indeed, as we have seen, Peter Dews regards it as the indispensable element in any theory of political liberation - since it may well seem that unless there is something to liberate, the concept cannot make sense. But as I have argued in chapter one, we should instead envision freedom as a future-oriented practice. In believing that we undergo a bodily repression which facilitates the operation of society we imagine either that in overthrowing this lies our liberation, or that in maintaining this lies our duty as citizens. But, inflecting Foucault's argument, my central claim here is that the construction of a presocial space is an extremely effective mode of power, by which practices which threaten a particular social order are brought under control, not least because insofar as they are required by the system which represses them, even in resisting such policing they will reinforce its very functioning.

(vi) The Use of Disorder

I will conclude this section with a return to the primal Discord from which Lacan asserts the unified body emerges. Such Discord, we may now suggest, is a retrospective construct that is imagined as the subject defines itself as dependent upon a process of ordering. Indeed, by definition the infant cannot regard certain aspects of the body as threateningly disordered until a notion of bodily unity has begun to form, until the situation is generated in which there is a clash between the image in the mirror (imagined as unified) and the physical sensations of the body (imagined as disunified).

I would suggest that there are three central concepts which define all these different notions of the unified body: *form*, *integrity*, and *order*. Perhaps these are the necessary conditions for the body to exist as an object - and perhaps there might be conditions in which the body will no longer be imagined as 'an object', and can then do without them. I will not offer exhaustive definitions of these terms here, since it will be the goal of the remainder of this thesis to demonstrate the different meanings that these bodily states may convey, but I will offer a brief definition of each. *Form* is the shape that body matter may take: in order to count as a body, there must be a recognizable shape of limbs, torso, head - certain bodies are designated as approaching formlessness, requiring medical intervention to restore them to legitimate form⁴¹ or even as approaching a state of formless matter, at which point they would presumably cease to be bodies at all. Once it is established as having a definite form, the body must then have *integrity*, which fixes it as a single object: for integrity is both a definition of bodily permeability (at what points other objects may enter into or exit from a body, what different objects

⁴¹ For an example of such a process see David L. Clark and Catherine Myser, 'Being Humaned: Medical Documentaries and the Hyperrealization of Conjoined Twins'.

may and may not enter particular sites) and bodily unity (what may be detached from a body and what may be attached to a body). A body with form and integrity is, however, defined even further: as having a particular order amongst its constituent parts. *Order* is the condition of a body divided into regular and recognizable units, zones, and organs, with defined functions, and a definite set of relationships to one another and to the world they inhabit.

We have seen how these terms are opposed to alternative values, so that the body is experienced as being the site of a conflict between order and disorder, form and formlessness, integrity and dis-integration. But, as I have stressed throughout, these concepts of formlessness and disorder are always regulated forms - the taboo animals in Leviticus are not examples of some inherently chaotic nature, but are rather objects mapped out by a very specific cultural grid: what walks on the earth / what flies; what has wings / what has no wings. Such entities are, as Pasi Falk says, 'still conditioned by and related to those culturally constituted boundaries which are trespassed' (*The Consuming Body*, p.2). They are rigidly defined and regulated - either in terms of their meaning or their materiality - by the culture which regards them as indefinable and unregulated. As such they are 'formless' and 'chaotic' only in the sense that these operate as terms which designate unwelcome forms and orders. The body which experiences itself as disordered must therefore be understood as an ordered body which is problematic for a given social system. And, as we have seen, this disorder may be a characteristic of the way in which the very materiality of the body is designated as extraneous to, but capable of being made amenable to, the cultural order of society itself.

Douglas invites us to ask what bodily activities, organs, and substances are thought of as orderly, and which are thought of as disordered, a distinction which amounts to: which are thought of as dangerous, and which are thought of as safe. Her work is extremely valuable in understanding the centrality of this aspect of the body, since at the heart of her analysis is the assumption of social systematicity. In

her account, the imputation of bodily danger ‘works because a community of believers has developed a consensus on the kinds of solidarity that will help them to cope collectively with their environment’ (‘Risk and Justice’, p.29).⁴² As I have already indicated, the assumption of a single form of systematicity that is mapped onto the body needs to be replaced with the idea of multiple and contested systematicities, which the body generates as well as being that by which the body is experienced. This insistence on relating the experience of the body to social systems must always be connected, as in Foucault and Bourdieu, to the material systems by which such bodily experiences are enforced. At the same time, a psychoanalytical inflection of Douglas enables us to see how bodies are experienced - both consciously and unconsciously - in terms of their relationship to structures of order and disorder that found the possibility of subjectivity. Fanon’s experience of his body as undergoing ‘an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage’ thus both mimes his location as outside the acceptable white European social order, while also suggesting the infantile fear of his own body matter’s refusal to remain ordered. We must therefore always ask: for whom is a particular body safe, and for whom is a particular body dangerous ?

With her stress on cultural consensus Douglas, as we might expect, prefers stability over chaos: ‘in a chaos of shifting impressions, each of us constructs a stable world’ (p.36).⁴³ Even though her own work diagnoses chaos as an effect of structure, it appears in this formulation as an independent state, prior to the formation of categories. Perhaps we might even venture to suggest that in making such a statement she is doing what Silverman shows we are brought up to do: she

⁴² We might see this as representing the functionalist strand in Douglas’s structural anthropology: in her accounts, any society is functioning relatively efficiently, and whatever rituals it engages in are the necessary symbolic forms that maintain its stability. ‘It is part of our human condition’ she tells us, as Lévi-Strauss might also have done, ‘to long for hard lines and clear concepts’ (*Purity and Danger*, p.162).

⁴³ Such a formulation might remind us of the way that structural anthropology plays an important role in shaping Julia Kristeva’s notion of the interplay between the joyful chaos of the semiotic *chora* and the necessary but restrictive order of the symbolic (see chapter four).

is thinking with her body - and in doing so, she naturalizes 'chaos' as a function of her own corporeal perception of chaos as a real state, against which her body stands. Thus while I agree with Douglas that structure and demarcation are necessary for subjectivity, thought, discourse and society, her figuration of this as a contrast between order and chaos - the one within culture and the other outside it - is less tenable. If order is produced, then chaos is no less so: chaos is not the residue that precedes order and is left over after it but, as we have seen in my reading of Lacan, and as Douglas's own work suggests, is produced simultaneously along with the definition of an order. Each 'order' has its own 'chaos'.

We can therefore say that if the body is produced as order, we must always ask not only, as Douglas does, what form does it take, and what relationship does it occupy with that which cannot be accommodated by such an order, but also: how do such processes enable the very concept of 'order' to operate? And we may ask, as Douglas does, under what circumstances such a bodily disorder is dreaded, and under what circumstances it is welcomed. But, rather than reading such moments as indicative of an experience that affects an entire culture evenly, we must ask what she does not: what are the different consequences for different social groups of such dread and such welcomes?

At the same time, I agree with Douglas and Lacan that 'the body' cannot be thought apart from an idea of form, order and integrity. As Butler has argued, the body as a distinct and integral object may be one of 'those constructions without which we would not be able to think, to live, to make sense at all ... which have acquired for us a kind of necessity' (*Bodies That Matter*, p.xi). Although it is always precipitate to declare any principle constant, or transhistorical, it is also important to recognize that the psyche has its own laws and histories which are not simply those of culture. Although her account insists that different conceptualizations of the body accompany different regimes of inequality, Silverman alerts us to the need to retain a sense of the dynamics that accompany

such change. Criticizing attempts to produce an account of the historical relations between the gaze and the various media which incarnate it (painting, the camera lucida, the cinematic camera) she suggests that it is a mistake to use 'an exclusively historical lens' to analyze this subject, since this position 'fails to discern that the camera derives its powers to coerce and define through its metaphoric connection to a term which is much older than it'. Such an approach 'neglects to distinguish what is socially and historically relative about the field of vision from what persists from one social formation to the next' (*TVW*, p.131). Thus even the most scrupulously historical account of the changing boundaries of the body must consider psychic structures which, if they change at all, change at a different pace.⁴⁴

Against this assertion of the necessity of such an ordering of embodied subjectivity, we must also ask: to what extent is such a body unavoidable ? Discussing the way that subjectivity takes place through identification with images both of one's own body and of culturally validated bodies around it, Diana Fuss has noted that metaphors of rigidity, stability and hardness prevail in this field. 'Identification' she argues 'is a phallicizing process' (*Identification Papers*, p.48). As phallic, this subject is clearly the product of a particular, and limiting, social order: patriarchy. But whether it is possible to have instead a non-phallic notion of unicity, or a non-unified notion of subjectivity, or a non-subjectified notion of self, is beyond the limits of this thesis - and, I would suggest, certainly beyond the limits of human thought at the moment (postmodernism, technoculture, and *écriture féminine* notwithstanding). It is possible to argue that we are coming to the end of the era of such subjects, and approaching the time of the 'posthuman', a time of bodily configurations so radically different as to inaugurate a new order of being.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ For an attempt to mediate between what is historically contingent (the 'construction of subjectivity') and what is psychically inevitable (the 'constitution of the subject') see Charles Sheperdson, 'The Role of Gender and the Imperative of Sex'.

⁴⁵ See Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (eds.) *Posthuman Bodies*; N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman'; and Margrit Shildrick, 'Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body'.

But so-called posthuman figures such as cyborgs remain defined by the anxieties about their ruptured boundaries and compromised integrity. As such they are sites of sustained assault on integral subjectivity, but remain within its logic, which is already the logic of an assaulted body. Even those bodies which might seem to have left traditional notions of order and integrity behind, as we shall see in the work of Burroughs and Cronenberg, are bodies that stage a negotiation between the culturally defined domains of bodily order and bodily chaos, rather than ones that transcend such defining concepts altogether. My preference is therefore to hold onto precisely this tension between what sorts of bodily mappings and orderings are necessary and what are not. Even if we argue that some version of a sense of bodily integrity is foundational for subjectivity, what may vary is the meaning and experience of a body's apertures and limits, a body's relationship to what falls outside it, the conflicts within the cultural categories through which it is established, the material situations that such notions of order help to secure, and the meanings of bodily disgust within those.

(vii) Reading Repulsion

Given the tenacity with which such disgust secures regimes of inequality, our logical next question is to ask: how can we reconfigure our sense of our bodies so that they are no longer dominated by such experiences of their own materiality? How is it possible to speak back against these other forces that set the terms of our understanding of our bodies? In the second and third parts of this thesis I will consider texts that resist or challenge various dominant conceptions of the body. In doing so I will not be assuming that there is any one overriding conception of 'the body' at work, or any single primary locus of power (such as race or class) which defines the experience of embodiment. Rather, to speak back against instances of power over the body is to engage with numerous bodily fictions, deployed through a range of discursive sites, by varying constituencies and for different ends.

We might think here of two political strategies that have predominated: that of recoding previously despised and illegitimate bodies as in fact attractive and legitimate (Gay is Good, Black is Beautiful); and that of embracing the shock of the despised body for representing an alternative set of values which, in a political sense, a horrified normalcy is right to find threatening (a position exemplified by, for instance, *Queer Politics*). The two sets of work which I explore in the second part of this thesis might easily be - and indeed often have been - taken to exemplify just such strategies. 'I've often thought there should be a beauty contest for the insides of bodies', says one of the protagonists of David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (1988), sentiments which would seem to echo those of the director, who says: 'most people are disgusted - like when they watch an insect transform itself. But if you develop an aesthetic for it, it ceases to be ugly. I'm trying to force the audience to change its aesthetic sense' (Alan Stanbrook, 'Cronenberg's Creative Cancers', p.56). Similarly, William Burroughs has been taken as a defiant advocate of the unacceptable: the unapologetic titles of his semi-autobiographical fictions *Junkie* and *Queer*; his refusal to sanitize sex, disease, or addiction; his apparent pleasure in graphic accounts of violated and unruly bodies. This has been read as a strategy of resignification, which celebrates the terrifying revolutionary potential of repulsive bodies (Kendra Langeteig, '*Horror Autotoxicus* in the Red Night Trilogy: Ironic Fruits of Burroughs's Terminal Vision').

However, following the trajectory initiated by my reading of Foucault in chapter one, I will be taking a rather different route through each body of work. Given that there is no simple 'outside' to power, I will be asking: how is it possible to resist from within? Rather than studying texts that attempt to take the body out of the realms of disgust, I am interested in texts that exacerbate bodily disgust. These texts are situated firmly within discourses of abhorrence: texts nauseated by the images that they construct, and which expect their audiences to be nauseated too. But in articulating this nausea, they manage at the same time to question and fracture it: to mock, interrogate, and unsettle its social functions. Even as they

speaking repulsion, they demonstrate that a critique of the logics which sustain, and are sustained by, such repulsion, can nevertheless be wrought out of even the most entrenched languages of horror.

PART TWO

Constitutive Possession: William Burroughs and the Invasion of the Body

Chapter Three

Fantasies of Physical Possession in the *Naked Lunch* Quartet

All monopolistic and hierarchical systems are basically rooted in anxiety.

William Burroughs, *The Soft Machine* (p.143).

(i) Introduction

Although there is a substantial body of work written by William Burroughs, and although much of it makes use of extreme bodily imagery, there is a group of four texts in which the interrogation of various forms of abject matter, disorderly bodies, and repulsive corporeality takes centre stage. In this section I shall be concentrating on the four texts by William Burroughs that constitute the *Naked Lunch* Quartet: *The Naked Lunch*,¹ *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded*, and *Nova Express* (first published in 1959, 1961, 1962 and 1964 respectively).²

¹ American editions are titled *Naked Lunch*. Critics have typically followed the designation used by the country in which they are writing or the edition which they are using, hence my own use of *The Naked Lunch*.

² Henceforth abbreviated to *NL*, *SM*, *TTE* and *NE*. I shall also be using material from *The Job* (first published in 1970), a collection of interviews with Burroughs in which he reflects back over the period in which he wrote these texts. While I am grouping the four texts together, as some other critics have done (see for instance John Tytell, *Naked Angels*, and Eric Mottram, *William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need*, who both call it a 'tetralogy') it is worth remembering that not all readers of Burroughs divide the texts in this way. Edward Halsey Foster sees *SM*, *TTE* and *NE* forming the first of Burroughs's subsequent trilogies (*Understanding the Beats*, pp.165-166); Jennie Skerl similarly places *The Naked Lunch* on its own, with the later texts as a self-contained trilogy, while nevertheless offering a larger grouping in which 'all of Burroughs's novels from *Junkie* to *Nova Express* constitute a major series of novels based on his experience as an addict' (*William Burroughs*, p.48). Robin Lydenberg sees *The Naked Lunch* as standing on its own, as a work that sets out the analysis of a problem to which the 'Nova Trilogy' provides a solution (*Word Cultures*, p.19) Perhaps, as Jeff Bryan does, it is best to read the texts both ways : 'the Nova Trilogy consists of *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded*, and *Nova Express*. With *Naked Lunch* they comprise the

Without wishing to elide their differences, I shall be arguing here that these four texts form a sustained reflection on Burroughs's central concerns: the production of the human subject in conditions of domination, and the possibilities of freedom from such a condition. In particular, they are concerned with social power as it is expressed through its impact on the body. More than his other work, the quartet is fuelled by a hatred of the forms that bodies take and prioritizes the rendering of such body matter visible in order to engage the reader's perception of their own embodiment. I shall not be offering a biographical account of Burroughs's role in the production of these texts.³ I will, however, be concerned to document Burroughs's own account of the goals of his writing, since his strongly didactic voice is such a marked feature of these texts and also of their critical discussion. Moreover, I shall argue that these texts' most rewarding engagement with embodiment emerges through the relationship which they have to the polemical voice that argues through them.

Due to their persistently experimental form, and because of the shift that I am making here from conventionally theoretical texts to ones more usually designated 'literary', it is worth spending some time providing both a provisional map of the texts for the reader and indicating what reading practices I intend to use here.

The Naked Lunch is composed of a series of what Burroughs calls

Naked Lunch Tetralogy' ('William Burroughs and His Faith in X', p.79). In the end, perhaps these different attempts to formulate how to organize the texts should be seen as indicative of the difficulty of situating the work within such categories. 'All my books' as Burroughs often says, 'are all one book' (quoted in Philip Mikriammos, 'The Last European Interview', p.16).

³ For biographies of Burroughs see Barry Miles, *William Burroughs: El Hombre Invisible*; Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*; and Graham Caveney, *The 'Priest' They Called Him: The Life and Legacy of William S. Burroughs*. Burroughs's letters from the period in which he wrote much of the material that forms the basis for the quartet are collected in *The Letters of William S. Burroughs: 1945 - 1959*. For two indispensable guides to material by, and of relevance to, Burroughs, see Michael B. Goodman, *William S. Burroughs: An Annotated Bibliography of his Works and Criticism*, and Michael B. Goodman with Lemuel B. Coley, *William S. Burroughs: A Reference Guide*.

'routines'. As described by David Glover, the routine is 'a sketch, a kind of exaggerated or highlighted burlesque with vivid theatrical qualities, originally devised to be read aloud or acted out before others ... with a strong oral dimension, reflecting the Beat preference for public performance' ('Utopia and Fantasy in the Late 1960s: Burroughs, Moorcock, Tolkien', p.197).⁴ These are narrated by a range of different speakers, some identified and some not; some of these narrators are anonymous and omniscient, others are themselves distinctive characters within a routine. There are twenty-two such sections, each self-contained, although certain characters (Lee, Carl, Doctor Benway) and places (Interzone, Tangier, Mexico) may recur. Some are brief and relatively straightforward narratives - although their material ranges from the mundane to the surreal (for instance, 'Coke Bugs' recounts the meeting of two junkies, Joe and the Sailor, in a bar; whereas 'Hassan's Rumpus Room' describes in detail a sex-party involving various alien life-forms). Others contain strings of apparently unconnected phrases and sentences (such as the concluding section 'Atrophied Preface: Wouldn't You ?'). Many sections contain a mixture of the two, alternating between the realist language that Burroughs adopted from hard-boiled detective stories (and in which he wrote his two earlier novels *Junkie* and *Queer*), and more disordered linguistic material.⁵

The Soft Machine takes a similar form, comprising 18 sections, many of which are routines again - often focusing on journeys in contemporary Central and

⁴ As Jeffrey Dunn suggests, the routine was also developed as a seduction strategy: a witty, provocative, and complex demonstration of Burroughs's own skills which he developed as a means of maintaining the attention of men he had fallen in love with ('William S. Burroughs and Technologizing Literary Studies in the Industrial Age', pp.183-186). It is in this form that Burroughs describes the routine in the semi-autobiographical *Queer*: 'he invents a frantic attention-getting format which he calls the Routine: shocking, funny, riveting' (p.12).

⁵ Given Burroughs's idiosyncratic prose, all quotations have been carefully checked. Any apparent spelling mistakes or irregularities of grammar are in the original texts. Where I have used an ellipsis, it is marked [...]. All other ellipses are Burroughs's own. So too all italicizations and capitalizations are as Burroughs uses them, unless indicated otherwise.

South America and journeys by time travel into the pasts of those subcontinents. This, and the two texts that follow it, are partly derived from unused material from the manuscript of *The Naked Lunch* (Jennie Skerl, *William S. Burroughs*, p.48). However, in an important stylistic shift Burroughs now starts to use material produced by the 'cut-up' and 'fold-in' methods he developed with the Swiss-Canadian painter Brion Gysin following their meeting in 1959 (Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw*, pp.321-325). Modelled on Dadaist experimentation,⁶ Burroughs's cut-ups involve, as the name suggests, cutting up pre-existing pieces of text, and arranging them - through a mixture of chance and intention - to form new texts. The fold-in involves taking two pages of text, folding them in half and then placing them side by side, with the lines of text aligned, to produce a new text that can be read across the lines. Burroughs also regularly combined the two: for instance, two cut-ups might be typed out and then folded into one another.

Although critical evaluation of these practices ranges from the devout to the dismissive,⁷ Burroughs himself seems always to have spoken of them with the utmost seriousness. In their collaborative collection of cut-ups and associated theoretical material, *The Third Mind*, Burroughs and Gysin published an essay by Gérard-Georges Lemaire, locating their work in a line from Gertrude Stein,

⁶ Brion Gysin contributed to a 1935 exhibition by the Surrealist Group, alongside Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte, and Man Ray, before André Breton ordered his drawings to be removed from the exhibition (Jeffrey Dunn, 'William S. Burroughs and Technologizing Literary Studies', p.255). Burroughs indicated his willingness to place himself in such a lineage when in 1958, at Allen Ginsberg's suggestion, he received a kiss from Marcel Duchamp 'in a symbolic passing of the mantle from the great French surrealist to his contemporary American successor' (Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw*, pp. 290-291). Although Burroughs is not named in it, Daniel Cottom's analysis of surrealism, 'Purity', argues for the centrality to the movement of many of the concerns to be found in Burroughs: the attempt to overturn a stifling regime of truth (p.175) and to free the body from language (p.185); the problems of designing a manifesto to bring down society which does not rely on charismatic prophets (pp.192-193); and misogyny (pp.191-192).

⁷ Belief in the efficacy of the cut-ups as aesthetic and political strategies is argued by Jeff Bryan, 'William Burroughs and his Faith in X'; David Ingram, 'William Burroughs and Language'; and Michael Skau, 'The Central Verbal System: the Prose of William Burroughs'. A sceptical dismissal is offered by Laszlo K. Géfin, 'Collage Theory, Reception, and the Cutups of William Burroughs'.

Raymond Roussel, and James Joyce, and welcoming 'the Burroughs machine, systematic and repetitive, simultaneously disconnecting and connecting - it disconnects the concept of reality that has been imposed on us and then plugs normally dissociated zones into the same sector' ('23 Stitches Taken', p.17).⁸

The cut-ups that appear in Burroughs's writings from *The Soft Machine* onwards draw on a mixture of conventional literary sources (Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, Rimbaud), popular culture (science-fiction and detective serials from magazines), non-literary materials (newspapers, government bulletins, medical manuals), and also both Burroughs's own work and those of his friends and collaborators. At some points Burroughs has described cut-up and fold-in techniques as simple adjuncts to a controlled writing process: 'In using the fold-in method I edit, delete and rearrange as in any other method of composition [...]' What does any writer do but choose, edit and rearrange material at his disposal?' (*The Third Mind*, p.96). But at other points he acknowledges the random nature of the choices made - both in terms of the material selected to be cut, and also in terms of which selections finally saw print (*The Job*, pp.29-31). Similarly, Burroughs has written of *The Naked Lunch* that 'I was just typing it out and giving it to Beiles⁹ with the idea that when we got the galley proofs I could decide the final order. But he took one look at it and said leave it the way it is. So it was just really an accidental juxtaposition. And the book was out a month later' (quoted in M. Skau, 'The Central Verbal System', p.412, n.19).

Although I do not wish to analyze the cut-up practices in detail here, they nevertheless mark a number of important concerns in Burroughs's writing. Firstly, Burroughs claims a democratic effect for them, both because the cut-up is a

⁸ After writing the quartet, Burroughs came to regard his experiments with more hesitation. Although cut-up materials appear throughout his subsequent work, in 1972 he noted of *SM*, *TTE* and *NE* that 'I feel that in all those books there was too much undifferentiated cut-up material' (quoted in Jennie Skerl, *William Burroughs*, p.76).

⁹ Sinclair Beiles was a poet whom Burroughs met in Tangier and who contributed to Burroughs's and Gysin's *Minutes to Go*.

practice available to all people, and because it refuses to respect the status of sanctified art:

Fill a page with excerpts. Now cut the page. You have a new poem. As many poems as you like. As many Shakespeare Rimbaud poems as you like. Tristan Tzara said: 'Poetry is for everyone'. And André Breton called him a cop and expelled him from the movement. Say it again: 'Poetry is for everyone'. Poetry is a place and it is free to all cut up Rimbaud and you are in Rimbaud's place. (*The Third Mind*, p.31)

Secondly, Burroughs places these practices in a political context, claiming that the scrambling of words into unpremeditated forms liberates their producer and their reader from the rules of thought and language which they have acquired. The cut-up thus marks his belief that true freedom is achieved through practices that distort the substance of consciousness, language - and, as we shall see, the body - beyond recognition. Thirdly, at his more enthusiastic moments, he also claims supernatural efficacy for them: they may predict the future or bring about unexpected events (*The Job*, p.28). They are thus a reminder of his faith in language to effect extreme psychological and social, and even physical change.

At the same time as noting the distinctiveness of the cut-up sections, it is also worth noting their resemblance to so much material in *The Naked Lunch* which is not cut up: composite and mis-spelt words, arbitrary punctuation, unfinished sentences, and apparently random strings of words, do not suddenly appear in Burroughs's work with the advent of the cut-up technique - although in the case of these later texts they are produced by a particular method and they increase in number. The practice should thus be seen as a development in a project which was already underway in his writing: to create an accurate picture of the world, unbound by those conventional linguistic rules whose function, Burroughs argues, is to limit perception in such a way as to maintain existing social structures.¹⁰

¹⁰ One crucial context for the logic of Burroughs's style is thus the Beat movement, whose writing practice centred on attempts to express truth unspoilt by conventional language (see John Clellon Holmes, 'Unscrewing the Locks: The

The Ticket That Exploded contains twenty-one sections, with a higher proportion of cut-up material. It presents a conflict between two mythological organisations: the Nova Mob, a group of alien criminals intent on enslaving the earth by means of addiction, and the Nova Police, an interstellar agency whose duty is to capture and try them, thereby liberating the people of Earth. *Nova Express* consists of much shorter sections, forty two in number. It takes up the mythological environment of *The Ticket That Exploded* and depicts a war of resistance against the Nova Mob, replaying in various - and again, often cut-up - versions their final overthrow, without, crucially, ever depicting the world that might come after it.

In all four texts, narratives begin only to be abandoned and never concluded, characters recur without any obvious connection between their

Beat Poets') . Although Burroughs distances himself from the movement, saying 'I don't associate myself with it at all, and never have, either with their objectives or their literary style' (*The Job*, p. 52), the literary historian will find such a claim unconvincing. In his 1952 *roman à clef*, *Go*, John Clellan Holmes defines beat as 'a weariness with all the forms and conventions of the world' (quoted in Paul George and Jerold Starr, 'Beat Politics: New Left and Hippie Beginnings in the Postwar Counterculture', p.195). Beat draws its resistance to social control and its weariness with the world from its adoption of the language, style, attitudes and cultural forms - particularly jazz - of the black hipsters of the 1940s (George and Starr, 'Beat Politics', p.191), a position exemplified by Norman Mailer's 'The White Negro'. Beat follows a recurrent pattern of bohemianism, the adaptation of Romanticism to the urban, technological, and commercial landscape of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries: 'the notion that every human's potential should be allowed to develop freely; adoration of the "primitive"; the celebration of fraternity; the beauty of nature; wanderlust and the lure of the exotic; the transformative power of art; free love; the quest for intense experience; and above all, living uncorrupted by bourgeois materialism and unrestrained by bourgeois convention' ('Beat Politics', p.190). While such a list bears obvious affinities to Burroughs, it also brings out a number of his deviations from such a model: although his sexually explicit writing is enabled by the beat tradition of the celebration of the body, he uses such possibilities to indict, rather than celebrate, bodily activities; his visions of fraternity see male camaraderie as destructive as often as it is redemptive; the 'exotic' and the 'primitive' do indeed function in Burroughs as objects of fascination, but more often they operate as sites of threat and terror. For an account of Burroughs as the inheritor of the Romantic literary tradition - language having a power of social and spiritual transformation, faith in transcendence through the imagination - see Duncan Wu, 'Wordsworth in Space'.

different appearances, events take place in locations that are never specified, conversations occur between unidentified speakers, incidents are described whose events are never mentioned again. These texts are therefore not novels (although they are often called such both by Burroughs and by writers on his work), but perhaps should rather be considered as collections of units - perhaps prose poems¹¹ - whose overall form is not linear but which may, on some occasions, (appear to) develop truncated narratives across several such units. As Burroughs says: 'You can cut into *The Naked Lunch* at any intersection point' (NL, p.176).¹²

We should then read these texts as an assemblage of verbal material, which we *may* choose to read in terms of narratives, characters, and incidents, but which we should also read precisely *not* on such terms. Rather, we should read them as an open literary space, in which meanings may appear as effects of the reading experience, and which seeks to generate particular perspectives on the world through a variety of literary strategies. To analyze those generated perceptions will be one goal of these chapters, reading them in terms of the vision of bodily invasion that they strive to bring about in their reader. On the other hand, this body of writing should also be considered as a cultural artefact produced under determining ideological and material conditions. Burroughs's picture of the body is not so much unique, as it is a particularly intense crystallization of the anxieties about the social production of the embodied experience which I have outlined so far: what does it mean for a body to retain or lose its purity and its coherence ?

(ii) The Body Under Attack

Drawing together two of the central figures of this thesis, Gilles Deleuze writes: ' "Control" is the name Burroughs proposes as a term for the new monster,

¹¹ A suggestion made to me by my supervisor, Judith Still.

¹² At the same time, some critics have argued for a linear reading of either the quartet or of individual texts: see for instance William S. Stull, 'The Quest and the Question: Cosmology in the work of William S. Burroughs, 1953-1960'.

one that Foucault recognizes as our immediate future' ('Postscript on the Societies of Control', p.4). The linkage of the two makes sense, for it certainly seems that Burroughs's texts, like those of Foucault, offer an analysis of domination in terms of both discourse and bio-power: control achieved through language, and control achieved through the materiality of the body.¹³ Before exploring these two domains in detail, I wish to outline some of the key dynamics of this Burroughsian perspective on power, and the role of language and the body within it.

These four texts are, as so many critics have noted, marked by an awareness of the particular susceptibility of the body to physical influences. Such influences make the body a docile worker or obedient slave: 'the subject is far enough along with the treatment to accept punishment as deserved' (*NL*, p.33), 'I recall this one kid, I condition to shit at the sight of me. Then I wash his ass and screw him' (*NL*, p.36). But, more alarmingly, they also transform the very material of the body:

They rolled on the flower bed crushing out clouds of odor - color fingers through his larval flesh feeling along his fish spine - Spasms shook his body and green erogenous slime poured from glands under his gills covering the two bodies with a viscous bubble - softening flesh and bones to jelly - He sank into the client - Spines rubbed and merged in little shocks of electric pleasure - He was sucked into other testicles - A soft pearly grotto closed around him pulsing tighter and tighter - He melted to sperm fingers caressing the penis inside - Quivering contractions as he squirmed through pink tumescent flesh to a crescendo of drumbeats shot out in a green flare falling into slow convolutions of underwater sleep - (*TTE*, pp.71-72)

We can recognize in this passage the key attributes of bodily disorder which I have already enumerated as points of particular anxiety in imagining the body: the loss of the body's independence from others; the loss of the body's physical integrity; the transition from ordered solid to formless liquid; the invasion of the body by external objects. The bodily disorder is heightened by the impossibility of

¹³ Scott Bukatman makes a similar linkage: ' "The perfection of power," Michel Foucault wrote, "should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary". Or, as William Burroughs observed, "A functioning police state needs no police" ' (*Terminal Identity*, p.38).

identifying exactly what biologies are represented here: what process takes place when 'he melted to sperm fingers' or 'he was sucked into other testicles' ? Should we read the orgasmic language of melting as literal or metaphoric ? To whom does 'the penis inside' belong - and what, and whom, is it inside ? Is it inside the body of another, or is it an internal organ ? This sense of bodies without identifiable order is heightened by the uncertainty of the repeated pronoun: does 'he' refer always to one particular character, or at different points to different characters ?

The body of such a scene is marked by four features which recur in the representation of the body in Burroughs's writing: invasion, transformation, abject materiality, and bodily susceptibility. The invasion of the body is so central to Burroughs's representation of corporeality that, as Arnold Weinstein has observed 'the structure may be played out in terms of drugs, sex, disease, or ideology, but the structure remains the same: the opening of the body by a foreign object' ('Freedom and Control in the Erotic Novel: the Classical *Liaisons Dangereuses* Versus the Surrealist *Naked Lunch*', p.35). The use in the above extract of passive and intransitive verbs ('sank', 'melted'), or verbs where the body is the object ('shook', 'covering') are characteristic of Burroughs's prose, and its location of the body as a site of powerlessness in the face of the action of others. The foreign object that enters the body renders it, as Weinstein says, 'open': opened *by* other influences, but also expressive of its own material openness *to* invasion. The next sentence in the text reads 'Shifting dominion of the other inside', which might be said to encapsulate the notion of embodiment at work here: something 'other' finds its way 'inside' the body so as to effect 'dominion'.

Secondly, we see what Ihab Hassan calls 'the spontaneous transformation of the human body into lower forms of life' ('The Subtracting Machine: The Work of William Burroughs', p.12). This scene is a stage in a process in which a human body gradually becomes amphibian in response to sexual stimulation and alien technology. The transformation of the body into the sub-human ('larval fingers', 'fish spine', 'gills') and finally towards 'underwater sleep' marks the

transformation into marine life.

But more particularly - the crucial third feature of such scenes - the body is changed not only in the direction of lower forms of life, but also in the direction of abject matter. As the process begins, we are told that 'Bradly could feel stirring response in the liquid medium of his body' (*TTE*, p.70), rendering the body already close to a material form imagined as a devolution away from solid matter, and marking again the body's own betrayal of its autonomy. The outpouring of 'green erogenous slime', the softening of bones into jelly and the moment of ejaculation, which here seems to transform the matter of the entire body into semen (as indeed in some points in Burroughs's writing it does) is the transformation of the body into viscous organic material. Mary Douglas has observed that such matter is peculiarly disturbing to systems where the body is thought of as integral and self-contained (*PD*, pp.37-38), and we may think of this spectacle of bodily liquefaction as one in which the distinctness of the corporeal self - and the possibility of a distinct identity which is predicated upon that - becomes lost. Hence Burroughs's nightmare of domination is represented by 'the Liquefaction programme' which 'involves the eventual merging of everyone into One Man' (*NL*, p.120).

But perhaps most importantly, the erotic context of the passage renders this not simply the violation of an unwilling body, but the response of one body to stimulation by another. At times, this may be an involuntary physical response - it is often hard to tell, as in the scene above where the word 'client' introduces an element of economic necessity into the encounter. The various outpourings and physical changes make the body complicit with, rather than merely a victim of, the forces that transform and invade it. This scene is thus already marked by the particular feature of Burroughs's bodies which will concern me in this chapter: the capacity of the body to demonstrate from within a response to what invades from without, so that the hostile forms of power which grasp, penetrate and transform the body, seem not to be dominating a victim, but to be acting on bodies which collude with, and even solicit, their intervention. Dominating the bodies of his

victims, Dr. Benway remarks 'some times a subject will burst into boyish tears because he can't keep from ejaculate when you screw him' (*NL*, p.36) - and the tears are as much an involuntary bodily act as the ejaculation.¹⁴

'The Land of the Free' declares one of Burroughs's visitors to America, 'is really free and wide open for any life form the uglier the better' (*NE*, p.10). These are texts in which planets, nations, minds, and bodies are open to entry, and in which power is conceptualized as the capacity to enter and transform the body of another: 'Invade. Damage. Occupy' is the creed of the forces of control (*SM*, p.6). However, where Foucault imagines the possibilities of limited but creative resistance, Burroughs envisages the possibility of the total withdrawal from a system of power, in favour of a new relationship to both language and the body. In a testimony to the possibility of salvation, Burroughs is interested in the experience of cure: the introduction to *The Naked Lunch* begins 'I awoke from The Sickness at the age of forty-five, calm and sane, and in reasonably good health except for a weakened liver and the look of borrowed flesh common to all who survive' (*NL*, p.9). With the heightened sense of freedom evoked by 'awoke', and the powerful adjectives 'calm and sane', this statement marks the possibility of absolute escape from the condition of invasion and possession. In 1956 Burroughs had undergone a programme of treatment for his heroin addiction at Dr. John Dent's clinic in London, involving the administration of the morphine derivative apomorphine.¹⁵ As Jenny Skerl notes, he was quick to locate this event within his own mythology (*William S. Burroughs*, pp.32-34), so that in these texts apomorphine becomes the miracle substance which will cure any addiction or possession: '*Peoples of the earth, you have all been poisoned [...] Apomorphine is the only agent that can*

¹⁴ Alfred Korzybski, the linguist whose work strongly influenced Burroughs, discusses physical reactions to language in terms of the body's involuntary control, arguing that when humans see symbols 'the majority of humans *identify* the symbol with actualities, and *secretions very often follow*' (*Science and Sanity*, p.196, emphases in the original).

¹⁵ See Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw*, pp. 257-258. Burroughs gives an account of his treatment in *The Job*, pp.139-158.

disintoxicate you and cut the enemy beam off your line. Apomorphine and silence' (NE, p.6).

The linking of this physical mode of salvation to silence is a recurrent tactic, for matching the desire to purify the body of contamination is a desire to purify the mind of discourse. Just as we are subject to physical invasion, we are also subject to the control of language. When 'Dr Paine of the Space Center in Houston' praises astronauts who 'aren't ashamed to say a prayer now and then' Burroughs responds:

Is this the great adventure of space ? Are these men going to take the step into regions literally unthinkable in verbal terms ? To travel in space you must leave the old verbal garbage behind: God talk, country talk, mother talk, love talk, party talk. You must learn to exist with no religion no country no allies. You must learn to live in silence. Anyone who prays in space is not there. (*The Job*, p.21)

Space here operates as the site for the possibility of a place beyond discourse, with silence its defining - and most hopeful - feature. And elsewhere, imagining, again, power as operating through an eradicable discourse, he locates power within the magical books in the possession of the boards of multinational conglomerates, and hopes for: 'Blanked out board instructions - Silence - Silence - Silence' (*TTE*, p.51). Hence for Burroughs the opposite of freedom is language - defined here as the medium by which thought is constrained.¹⁶

But even as it asserts a cure, the text undermines this apparent certainty. In describing his awakening into health, Burroughs's body is marked by a 'weakened liver' (the sign of a body once invaded) and by 'the look of borrowed flesh'. The semantic ambivalence of that phrase is crucial: does it mean flesh that looks as if

¹⁶ Susan Sontag and Ihab Hassan have argued that Burroughs is part of a tradition of 'literatures of silence' which offer freedom through the suspension of interpretation (Ihab Hassan 'The Literature of Silence'; Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence'). Robin Lydenberg extends this argument to a reading of Burroughs's work as an attempt to escape from meaning and towards a 'materiality of absence', in which the world appears as it is, undistorted by language (*Word Cultures*).

someone has borrowed it, used it, and now returned it ? Or flesh that looks as if he has had to borrow it in order to exist ? In either case, the flesh stands apart from the subject - a substance that can be transferred, moved: a point of vulnerability, since it can be traded amongst different owners. Even while he asserts ownership - either through reclamation or through temporary loan - the possibility of borrowing flesh marks its instability: the flesh is no guarantee of stability or safety for the subject who inhabits it. Even its apparently metaphorical status ('the *look* of borrowed flesh') offers no distance in a set of texts in which the body is so often literally borrowed.

Salvation from the forces of control is thus precarious. For instance, the Nova Police are not always the most reliable of saviours. We are told that they are 'galactic shock troops who never colonize' (*TTE*, p.81) and that 'the Nova Police have no intention of remaining after their work is done' (*NE*, p.51). Yet the need to deny such a possibility only raises it: these forms of resistance repeatedly need to differentiate themselves from the corrupt doppelgängers from which they are so hard to distinguish. In a move which we will find repeated in these texts - and much debated by their critics - Burroughs's dreams of salvation remain heavily marked by traces of that which they resist.

There are four distinctive types of body invader in these texts: junk,¹⁷ parasites, the virus, and language. Although these four terms operate as distinct substances, with their own peculiar features, the terms often appear in combinations like 'the junk virus' (*NL* p.11) or slide from one to the next, so that Burroughs moves swiftly from 'My basic theory is that the written word was

¹⁷ 'Junk is a generic term for all habit-forming preparations and derivatives of opium including the synthetics' (*The Job* p.149), the best known of which are morphine and heroin. Burroughs's use of the term, with its connotations of waste, is central to his construction of substances that enable domination as being absolutely without redeeming value: 'I have heard that there was once a beneficent non-habit-forming junk in India. It was called *soma* [...] If ever *soma* existed the Pusher was there to bottle it and monopolize it and sell it and turned it into plain old time JUNK' (*NL*, p.10). I have therefore chosen to retain the term.

actually a virus' to a definition of a virus as 'a cellular parasite' (*The Job*, p.12). Such interchangeability suggests their broadly similar operations: to invade and control the body via its materiality. Such a vision recognizes the constant social intervention that takes place through and upon bodies, and the extent to which this produces subjects amenable to the demands of various oppressive institutions. The military, industry, the medical profession, psychiatry, white culture, bureaucracy: all of these are indexed at various points in the quartet as the beneficiaries of a scrutiny and manipulation of our bodies, and Burroughs uses a language of purity to urge us to detach ourselves from those malign forces.

However, my concern here is not with the specific social institutions which Burroughs attacks. Rather it is with the general figuration of the meaning of 'the body' which subtends this attack. What meanings are we offered for our bodies in the course of this call to liberate them? In analyzing the discourse surrounding each of Burroughs's four key body invaders, I will argue that while Burroughs apparently designates each one as an exterior and invasive force, he also imagines each as the inevitable consequence of the nature of the body itself. Moreover his designated means of resisting these invaders (which include: silence, apomorphine, the Nova Police, the cut-up technique) will also prove again and again to be difficult to separate from that which they oppose. Thus rather than imagining a body under siege and in need of protection, he imagines a body which must be transcended altogether since both its materiality, and the means of saving it, prove too dangerous.

(a) Junk

Burroughs imagines junk as an invading presence taking up residence in the body, a resident whom he calls 'my old friend Opium Jones' (*The Job*, p.151). This inhabitant shapes and controls the body it possesses: 'I never took a bath. Old Jones don't like the feel of water' (*The Job*, p.151). But apomorphine 'evicts' Jones in a kind of exorcism: 'I boiled him in hydrochloric acid. Only way to get

him clean you understand layers and layers of that grey junk rooming-house smell' (*The Job*, p.152).¹⁸ The image of junk as physically dense ('layers and layers'), and existing as a pervasive smell suggest its capacity to penetrate and possess, the impossibility of escaping from it. Throughout these texts, it is junk that is the recurrent image for the susceptibility of the body to domination and its pliability as a metaphor for dependency provides Burroughs with a single formula for all forms of social control: 'Junk is the mold of monopoly and possession ... Because there are many forms of addiction I think that they all obey basic laws' (*NL*, pp.10-14). By making the body a slave to its addiction, junk traps the body in a network of control, the economy of supply by which the addict has access to it. In particular the junky is at the mercy of the pusher: 'waiting on the Man ... "What can we do ?"' Nick said to me once in his dead junky whisper "They know we'll wait ..." Yes, they know we'll wait' (*SM* p.5). But it is the hold of junk on the body in particular that concerns Burroughs, for - as in his account of apomorphine treatment - the body is not free until '*metabolically* cured' (*NL*, p.13), and it is this capacity of junk to achieve control via the biology of the body that is central to my argument here.

Like the 'verbal garbage' which threatens to contaminate the adventure into space, junk is useless: 'What is more UNNECESSARY than junk if You Don't Need it?' (*NL*, p.15). We might observe that this is the very force of the word 'junk' - to denote the useless, the wasted, the unwanted. Dead to the world and whispering, the junky is the site of a fading or emptying out of subjectivity: 'If a friend came to visit - and they rarely did since who or what was left to visit - I sat there not caring that he had entered my field of vision - a grey screen always blanker and fainter' (*NL*, p.12). Imaged as a physical absence, or deterioration, the

¹⁸At a purely factual level, hydrochloric acid refers to the chemical origins of apomorphine: 'the compound apomorphine is formed by boiling morphine with hydrochloric acid' (*NL*, p.11). Contrasted with the lingering 'junk rooming house smell', the association of apomorphine with acid strengthens its caustic, cleansing properties. But at the same time, its origin from within morphine already indicates a dubious connection to which I shall return.

junky is a subject who has less of a body than others. Burroughs's addicts have 'flesh that fades at the first silent touch of junk' (*NL*, p.22), and the 'cancelled eyes of junk' (*NL*, p.88), telling us that 'I am forgetting sex and all sharp pleasures of the body' (*NL*, p.63). Although the junky's body is saturated with raw need, s/he is simultaneously disconnected from desire, 'a ghost in the morning sunlight, torn with disembodied lust' (*NL*, p.58).

But junk is also the source of another bodily state. On the one hand, junk induces a state of fading, a waning of affect; on the other, it induces craving - the need for junk: 'the terrible urgency of that blind seeking mouth' (*NL*, p.21), 'his eyes burned in a hideous dry hunger' (*NL*, 52). The addict detached from the body is thus also the possessor of (and possessed by) a particular type of body: one which affirms its organs, and their insistent materiality.¹⁹ John Vernon has traced Burroughs's catalogue of dismemberments, the coming to life of individual body parts, the transformation of inert objects into living organisms and vice versa, arguing that we see in them a body separated into individual units, each with its own independent existence. But the overall effect, he insists, is that of a dead and wasted body, whose organs have no function or purpose except addiction, the drive that has rendered them mere tools for the fix (*The Garden and the Map: Schizophrenia in Twentieth-Century Literature*, pp.95-97 and pp.104-105). Because each part of the body has a life of its own, the body has become mere matter, since without any overarching consciousness to unify its components the embodied subject has lost what is taken to be the distinctive attribute of the human: the autonomy of rational agency. As Margrit Shildrick argues, to be defined as being more under the control of one's body is to be defined as less fully an agent,

¹⁹ Christopher Meyer argues that Burroughs also offers the possibility of a third state in which the body's libidinal energies are no longer paralyzed by pleasure, as in the case of the addict on junk, nor enslaved to need, as in the case of the addict without junk, but released into a frenzy of withdrawal in which 'the tightly regulated system of maintenance breaks down to allow for an unpredictable release of forces that have been carefully controlled and repressed' ('The Psychopharmacology of Everyday Life: William S. Burroughs and the Narcotic Regime').

unable to follow the path of rational calculation that modernity defines as the standard of full subjectivity (*Leaky Bodies and Boundaries*, pp.26-27).

Such a material body returns us to the associations of waste and junk since, in its invocation of bodily material, Burroughs relies on the associations of the material body with death and excrement, on the notion of a body which is itself an item of waste-matter. Littered as they are with carrion, sewage, and mold, Burroughs's landscapes remind us of a bodily corruptibility whose icon is the junky: 'Iris - half Chinese and half Negro - addicted to dihydro-oxy-heroin - takes a shot every fifteen minutes to which end she leaves droppers and needles sticking out all over her. The needles rust in her dry flesh, which, here and there, has grown completely over a joint to form a smooth green brown wen' (*NL*, p.101).

As Avital Ronnel has argued in her study of the place of addiction in western philosophy, the hostile representation of the addict 'posits the body as the no-return of disposability: the trash-body, pivoted on its own excrementality' (*Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania*, p.58).²⁰ Hence, she suggests, drug use is imagined as that process by which 'the body proper regains its corruptible, organic status' (p.7). It is as if to become too corporeal is also to become dead, since the body itself functions ultimately as the sign of the corpse: the inert matter which we revivify during our lives, but which will collapse upon our death. This frightening aspect of embodiment acts as a perpetual brake on the possibility of affirming the body through its material pleasures and pains. Rather than acting as signs of intensity or enlightenment - as the use of opium does in Romanticism - the drug addict's enslavement to the body seems to signify their becoming nothing but materiality itself and, as such, signifies death.

One reason for the horrific association of junk, then, is that the junky has

²⁰ More politically, as Ronnel reminds us, we might also want to note the way that in the twentieth century's dominant discourses on drugs, the junky is denounced socially as a waste of time, resources and money - as one who is outside the care of society. Burroughs, while hostile to these stigmatizing discourses, also uses much of their imagery to make his case for the destructive character of addiction.

had those supposedly defining human characteristics of will, independence, and rationality usurped by the demands of the body. We might even say that junk effects a shift back from *social* desire, to *physical* need. As Ronnel quips: 'the distinction, so rigorously maintained in the Hegelian Lacan, between need and desire, may be a luxury of the sober' (p.135). For the addict, what is desired is also that which is bodily necessary for survival. The junky is no longer the Lacanian adult, who is constituted by frustrated desire, but the child, who needs only immediate physical gratification, and whose needs can in fact be *met* by a purely physical act. Where in Lacan's formulation desire is forever deferred and unsatisfied, the junky has reached that enviable state of the child whose mouth can be entirely filled by the maternal breast.²¹

The junky's body is thus the sign of a double, and contradictory, colonization of the subject by their corporeality: they have been taken over by bodily hunger, and they have been restored to a sense of bodily bliss. They are overwhelmed by the sensations of their body and as such they are closer to inert matter. In both cases, it is the body itself that is at fault.²² As if in recognition that this final responsibility lies with our bodies, Burroughs attempts to recruit the body against addiction: 'on a deep biological level your body wants to be cured. Junk is death and your body knows it' (*The Job*, pp.150-51). But at the same time addiction is a risk of almost any substance in Burroughs, as if the very biology of the human body were primed for dependency. We find 'flesh addicts' (*TTE* p.45), 'control junkies' (*TTE*, p.108), 'orgasm addicts' (*TTE*, p.14). The junky's body becomes the incarnation of addiction: 'I have a place where I can slip the needle right into a vein, it stays open like a red, festering mouth, swollen and obscene ...

²¹ An analysis of addiction in terms of infantile regression is offered in Neal Oxenhandler, 'Listening to Burroughs' Voice', pp.136-138.

²² Derrida notes that at certain points both pro- and anti-drugs rhetoric share the investment in a fantasy of an original natural body. Such a body is viewed either as destroyed by the invasion of drugs and restored only through detoxification; or as alienated from itself by capitalism and restored to its originary biological unity only through intoxication ('The Rhetoric of Drugs: An Interview', pp.14-15).

The body knows what veins you can hit' (*NL* p.62). It is the body that colludes with the substances that addict and ensures their efficient possession. Hence Burroughs's war on junk is a war on access, an attempt to strengthen the borders which these substances too easily cross. Indeed, so prone is the body to take its pleasure that even the supposed ultimate weapon of cleansing, silence, can become addictive (*NE* p.124).

For Burroughs then, junk serves to suggest that invasion takes place at the level of the body, and that the body is all too easily invaded. The phrase which captures the need of the addict - 'In the words of total need: "Wouldn't you?" Yes you would' (*NL*, p.10) - might as well be that of the body's tendency to fall prey to junk in the first place: 'those become addicts who have access to junk' (*SM*, p.137). What we find as raw need in the junky is a tendency already present in everyone before they become subject to addiction. Hence the borderline between addict and non-addict grows thinner, with junk as the substance which exposes not so much the radically separate biologies of sickness and health, but the unexpected proximity of the two.

Moreover, as Avital Ronnel and Frank McConnell have both argued, drug use also has an unsettling affinity with literature: the external substance which, when absorbed, alters consciousness.²³ For McConnell the Romantic construction of a new sense of the expansion of consciousness which is claimed for poetry, is coupled with the equally Romantic interest in the use of opiates ('William Burroughs and the Literature of Addiction', pp. 673-675). For Ronnel, the delirious solaces of the text are imagined in the language of the opiate, as when Madame Bovary's pharmacist, Homais, 'has offered Emma the unlimited use of his library, inviting the addicted neighbour to mix pharmaceuticals and literature' (*Crack Wars*, p.131). So too Burroughs's texts offer such headily narcotic pleasures as extended transcripts of his own hallucinatory experiences with the drug yage in South America. Much of his audience thus creatively rewrite his work

²³ Derrida makes a similar argument in 'The Rhetoric of Drugs: An Interview.'

so as to engage with it less as the condemnation of the addict's state, than as the recreation of that narcotic bliss for the reader's pleasure (David Glover, 'Utopia and Fantasy in the Late 1960s: Burroughs, Moorcock, Tolkien', p.195; Frank McConnell, 'William Burroughs and the Literature of Addiction', pp.673-674). The figure of the pusher in the quartet is the one who holds court over those he supplies, the "marks" who shiver with withdrawal and cold, attentive on his every move or word - and we may glimpse in Victor Bockris's extraordinary description of Burroughs's devotees, the figure of the pusher who is the unmentioned intertext: 'Everybody who approached him did so with such a mixture of reverence and fear that they were often shaking and unable to speak' (*With William Burroughs: A Report from the Bunker*, p.xiii).

(b) The parasite

Burroughs writes: 'The soft machine is the human body under constant siege from a vast hungry host of parasites' (*SM*, p.130). These texts are full of entities which invade a host body and take up residence within it, while still maintaining - yet also distorting - the biological functions of that body. Parasitism serves here as the defining model for all relationships of domination: from 'the parasitic excrescence that often travels under the name "Police"' (*NE*, p.51), to the creatures that inhabit Burroughs's rivers and swamps - while in the *Biologic Courts of Nova Express*, a parasitic relationship constitutes 'the classic case presented to first year students' trying to learn 'the intricacies and apparent contradictions of biologic law':

Life Form A arrives on alien planet from a crippled space craft - Life Form A breathes 'oxygen' - There is no 'oxygen' in the atmosphere of alien planet but by invading and occupying Life Form B native to alien planet they can convert the 'oxygen' they need from the blood stream of Life Form B - [...] Health and interest of the host is disregarded (*NE*, pp. 133-134).

The primacy of this model of manipulation is marked by its rendering as an abstract

model: the legal use of the present tense, the representative 'Life Form A' and 'Life Form B', and the quotation marks around 'oxygen', where the word stands in for any and all biological necessities that might become sites of a conflict of interest. The parasite extends the model of control established with junk, while cementing even more firmly its bodily connotations. Like junk, the parasite is an invader of human biology, but this time is itself biological, repulsively organic. It serves to heighten in Burroughs's reader a distrust of biological processes, and to present them as dangerous and destructive.

At one point we are asked: 'You notice something is sucking all the flavor out of food the pleasure out of sex the color out of everything in sight ?' (*NE*, p.75). Lydenberg points out that this general diminution of the world can be traced back to the parasitic entities who live off it (*Word Cultures*, pp.40-41). Its draining away - or, as in the case of 'Life Form A', redirection - of the will and energy of the host, makes the parasite usefully emblematic of the conditions that define the meaning of freedom for Burroughs: nothing is more dreaded than the loss of autonomy of the subject ('the parasites occupy brain areas', *SM*, p.130), whose own body is no longer under their control, but under the control of someone else.

At the same time, this controlling aspect of the parasite also helps to encode it as inferior to the host, as that which depends on hosts who are themselves independent. The sense of the lesser taking over the greater thus enables both the possibility of escape - just as the addict can kick a habit, the host can expel a parasite - but also acts as an indictment of those who have allowed themselves to become thus inhabited. Like all these forms of control, the parasite survives by being ignored, so that as long as some force 'kept you from wising up to the sexual parasite' (*TTE*, p.109) it can go on operating, with 'wising up' as the activity which both promises imminent freedom, and as that which marks the failure of the host to grasp their real situation.

Since it is a lack of resistance or scrutiny which grants the parasite the opportunity to pass unnoticed within, the parasite may function as a metonymic

signifier for the host's own shortcomings. When we are told of addict/pusher the Sailor that 'when he moved an effluvia of mold drifted out of his clothes' (*NL*, p.53), the moldy man appears as repulsive and useless as the mold that encrusts him. Like it, he is parasitic - living on the subjects of economy of junk. We might then say that the parasite discloses the nature of the host it inhabits: that in Burroughs, we each get the parasite that we deserve.

Undermining our decisions, distorting our desires, the parasite in effect serves as Burroughs's call for a self of absolute autonomy, untainted by any trace of an otherness that has passed from without to within. Burroughs thus imagines a body which could be cleansed of invaders:

crab parasites of the nervous system and the grey cerebral dwarf made their last attempt to hold prisoners in spine and brain coordinates - screaming 'You can't - You can't - You can't'. (*TTE*, p.66)

These parasites are expelled by a 'blast of silence' (*TTE*, p.66), which removes and silences them. They are like the 'verbal garbage' which Burroughs wants to keep out of space, like all these figures of the unnecessary which saturate these texts. As we commonly assume: the parasite needs its host more than the host needs its parasite. And yet, like the junky coming off junk, that scream of 'you can't' might come from the host as well as the parasite, the anguish of liberation. If, as Burroughs says of addiction, 'of course the addict does not "want" to be cured ... since it is precisely the centers of "wanting" that have been taken over by the drug' (*SM*, p.135), then the same complicity is as true of parasitism. The parasite is thus that which undermines the possibility of a pure desire which originates solely from an uncontaminated self.

As such, Burroughs's construction of parasitism figures any contact between separate entities as a situation of risk, in which the desires of the one threaten *always* to undermine the purity of the desires of the other. Between self and parasite there is no hope of reciprocity, co-operation or love: 'There are no good relationships - There are no good words' (*TTE* p.67). What seems like co-

operation soon becomes domination. 'First it's symbiosis, then parasitism' (*TTE*, p.68). This impossibility of a good relationship between bodies becomes the foundation of Burroughs's paranoia. Against any possibility of benign contact, the parasite stands as the dangerous consequence of *getting too close*. In these texts proximity is always dangerous, precipitating infection or devouring. These unstable, flowing, viscous bodies cannot stay apart. We thus return to the nightmare vision of the liquefactionists where individual identity is lost in collectivity, the state that Burroughs urges us to avoid at any cost.

In this world where everything threatens to converge into that dreaded substance 'Undifferentiated Tissue' (*NL*, p.110), Burroughs is the prophet of differentiation and separation:

Hospital smells and the wooden numbness of anaesthesia - He saw his body on an operating table split down the middle - A doctor with forceps was extracting crab parasites from his brain and spine - and squeezing green fish parasites from the separated flesh (*TTE*, p.67)

The body must therefore be opened up so that safe and dangerous materials may be identified and separated. And yet, as with the junky, the biology that we discover is itself close to waste matter, its vivid materiality coded as possessing a corporeal affinity with these invaders. In the course of this parasite-destroying operation, details of physical change include 'the stretching membrane of skin dissolves', 'Magnified sperm drifted through water tape in silent explosions', 'gristle vaporizes': are these bodily materials also being removed in the process of eliminating parasites? Sperm, skin, blood, the spine, eyes: the lives which these organs and substances acquire in the quartet makes the entire body seem a composite of parasitic creatures on whom we have come to depend. Making the component parts of the body themselves into parasitic entities makes the body's most basic biological processes suspect: what is necessary and what is merely being performed for the convenience of the parasite? Like hapless Life Form B, we are oblivious to the extent to which our normal functions are merely responses to

parasitic occupiers.

Thus our biology may itself be the cause, not simply the victim, of these infections. Just as the junky is cured only until he tastes junk again, 'other parasites will invade sooner or later' (*TTE* p.68) because, like the junky, the body is always receptive to the parasite. The space cleared away remains always inviting, a hole at the centre of the subject as well as in the surface of the subject:

the candiru is a small eel-like fish or worm about one-quarter inch through and two inches long patronizing certain rivers of ill repute in the Greater Amazon Basin, will dart up your prick or your asshole or a woman's cunt *faute de mieux*, and hold himself there by sharp spines (*NL*, p.47)

This internal vacancy, complete with openings which signal its offer of a place to occupy, is the receptive space which the parasite seeks out. We are thus physically receptive to invasion because of the very structure of our bodies. It is their weakness that makes us unable to maintain autonomy.

The body is further indicted since the invading parasite takes over the functions of the body, to the extent that we can no longer know which activities or organs of the body are 'ours', and which are those produced by the parasite:

The realization that something as familiar to you as the movement of your intestines the sound of your breathing the beating of your heart is also alien and hostile does make one feel a bit insecure at first. (*TTE*, p.43-44)

The most basic organs of the body are thus rendered parasitic themselves - preying upon a free soul by requiring it to follow their rhythms and service their needs.

But while Burroughs may assert a fantasy of originary independence, against which parasitic incursions can be measured, his texts seem also to work in another direction. When Steven Shaviro writes his polemical 'Two Lessons from Burroughs', the first of these is that the body itself is nothing more than a series of parasitic entities living in communion, while DNA might be seen as nothing more than a virus that occupies our cells and uses them for its own replication. If Burroughs figures such everyday biological processes as breathing and the beating

of the heart as convenient adaptations, made by the body on behalf of a parasite, then we are left finally with the possibility that there is no originary uncontaminated body. Rather, the coming-into-being of corporeality is itself a series of negotiations between parasites. As Eric White has argued, 'the human body is an evolutionary assemblage', a composite of genes, cells and organs which may, parasitically, depend on one another, but which should not necessarily be regarded as serving the interests of the host body which they produce (' "Once They Were Men, Now They're Land Crabs" : Monstrous Becomings in Evolutionist Cinema', p.252).²⁴

The function of 'parasite' as a literary trope bears out this reading of the implications of Burroughs. Deconstructive criticism has famously deployed the parasite as a useful instance of the failure of apparently straightforward cases of stigmatization to successfully constitute themselves as separate from that which is stigmatized. J. Hillis Miller takes the claim that deconstruction is parasitic on 'the obvious or univocal reading' of a text ('The Critic as Host', p.278), and argues that parasitism is the necessary form of criticism - or indeed of writing itself. Robin Lydenberg quotes Miller with some approval, as sharing Burroughs's vision of a parasitic universe:

When Miller asks, 'can host and parasite live happily together, in the domicile of the same text, feeding each other or sharing the food?', one may hear the same tone as in Burroughs's ironic question: 'Would you offer violence to a well intentioned virus on its slow road to symbiosis?' Burroughs sees all relations as a 'symbiosis con' masking the parasite's intention to survive at the expense of the host. (*Word Cultures*, p.133)

But while for Burroughs this parasitic chain indicates an undesirable state which must be overthrown, for Miller such parasitism is rather the enabling condition of speech and thought. Lydenberg, like Burroughs, enlists the critique of parasitic inevitability as a condemnation of speech and thought - of a logocentric conspiracy in which the restrictions of language need to be overthrown to make

²⁴ A position in biology particularly associated with the work of Lynn Margulis.

way for some state that is not compromised by their incursions. But Miller's point is altogether more subversive: he does not hold out for a separate space to which we may retreat in order to escape from parasitic relationships. Rather, he insists that the denunciation of a parasitic relationship is no more than an attempt to conceal the necessity of the parasite-structure.²⁵

Indeed Burroughs's texts would seem to make the case argued by Miller rather better than they do that urged by Lydenberg, for his texts are themselves parasitic: they, as Miller says of Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', are 'inhabited ... by a long chain of parasitical presences, echoes, allusions, guests, ghosts of previous texts' ('The Critic as Host', p. 284). Who, we might ask, nourishes whom? Is Burroughs feeding off Eliot, Rimbaud and Shakespeare - or are they feeding off him, kept alive by his citation of them? Or, in the case of *The Wasteland*, by his citation of their citations? The voice which accuses parasitic presences of damaging the subject is a voice which is both a parasite itself, and riddled with other parasites.

If the call to expel the parasite is thus made by texts which are themselves such exemplary instances of parasitism, then it is hard to regard the parasite as being as disempowering as Burroughs argues. Instead, the texts seem to demonstrate that a subjectivity which speaks of itself as clean-but-contaminated, or integral-but-invaded, is in fact enabled to exist only by those processes which it denounces. The more that we accept the strength of Burroughs's denunciation, the less parasitism itself seems to be irredeemable, since his texts are strong precisely by virtue of their invasion. It thus seems to be the case that critique and resistance originate less from a point outside occupied territory, than from the conditions that themselves result from invasion.

²⁵ Miller begins his essay by quoting M.H.Abrams, who attacks deconstruction as parasitic. But Abrams - surely a hostage to fortune here - makes this claim by quoting Wayne Booth's description of deconstruction as parasitic, thereby himself inaugurating a chain of feeding which is very the parasitic process which he denounces.

(c) The Virus

Alongside the parasite, another alien organism enters into the body: the virus. It appears in a range of forms in these texts - 'Cold Sore ... Rabies ... Yellow Fever ... St Louis Encephalitis' (*TTE*, p.22). In this landscape of twitching, suppurating, ejaculating, leaking, gasping bodies, the physical transformations that result from more conventional viruses such as hepatitis ('you notice your eyes are a little yellower than usual', *SM* p.140) blend into the other bodily transformations I have charted, so that the body seems to be the site of a constant infection. Any aspect of human life might thus be diagnosed as an instance of a viral symptom, even speech - 'Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter an organism that *forces you to talk*' (*TTE*, p.43).

Within the representation of bodily invasion that Burroughs produces, the virus operates as an image of total disgust: 'an unwanted guest who makes you sick to look at is never good or beautiful' (*The Job* p.190). Its effectivity as a unit in Burroughs's writing is partly that it enables a language of disgust: at the symptoms that an infected body exhibits, at the unseen changes it makes within the body, at its own repulsive matter: 'Virus of rage hate fear ugliness swirling round you waiting for a point of intersection and once in immediately perpetrates in your name some ugly noxious or disgusting act' (*NE*, p.73). The idea of a body infected by viruses generates the necessary disgust to motivate human change - a change that must take place at the level of the body for it is insofar as we are bodies that we are suited to the requirements of the virus, which needs us 'to be an animal, to be a body. To be a body that the virus can invade [...] To be more animal bodies so that the virus can move from one body to another' (*The Job*, p.202).

The virus has key connotations that make it suitable for Burroughs's representation of compromised identity. Firstly the virus originates from outside, and is lodged within us. The discourse of viral infection therefore requires, as Donna Haraway suggests, a notion of an integral and separate body in order to

function: in order to define a virus, we must also postulate an originary uninfected body ('The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune Discourse'). At the same time, the particular characteristic of a virus is that it replicates itself throughout the body by means of the body's own conduits, materials, and replication processes. It enters from outside but becomes coterminous with the material inside the body. Consequently the virus is both absolutely Other and, at the same time, inextricable from our own corporeality so that, in Jean Baudrillard's definition of 'viral hospitality', between us and it 'there exists a total symbiosis and a radical incompatibility' (*The Transparency of Evil*, p.162). Thus even as it confirms the possibility of a body fundamentally separate from and opposed to infection, the figure of the virus confounds that possibility by conjuring the image of a body whose own physical functioning is already suited to the spread and perpetuation of the virus within itself. Moreover, in its replication of itself throughout bodies, the virus is an apposite image for the loss of individual identity: viral infection makes one body much like another, stricken with the same symptoms and riddled with identical viral organisms. When the Nova Police interrogate an invader called the Virus Power it describes how: 'our virus infects the human and creates our image in him' (*NE*, p.49).²⁶ The end result is a string of humans who are identical to one another, mere copies of an originating viral identity. The virus thus compromises the self-willing, autonomous agency that Burroughs seeks to reclaim for humankind, while also enabling the concept of its restoration.

Like all these substances, the virus engenders a crisis of permeability and of disgust. In all these ways the idea of the virus functions in a similar manner to that of junk and of the parasite: to define the body as the site of a biological invasion which usurps the body's functions to such an extent that the routine functioning of

²⁶ Perhaps then, behind the virus, there lurks the commodity. See David Ayers, 'The Long Last Goodbye: Control and Resistance in the Work of William Burroughs'; and Timothy S. Murphy, 'Wising Up the Marks: Amodernism in the Work of William S. Burroughs and Gilles Deleuze'.

the body itself becomes the form of social control. Consequently viral infection blurs the lines between three sets of bodily processes: harmless 'natural' biological processes; biological processes that, although natural, have been appropriated by bodily invaders for their own ends; and bodily processes which are produced solely by viral invaders. Once under threat from the virus, it becomes impossible to trust any biological process. Having established these recurrent features of pollution in the preceding sections, I do not propose to repeat those similarities here, but rather to consider how Burroughs's language of health and treatment enables his construction of a bodily cure.

Arthur and Marilouise Kroker have suggested of modern society, that 'if the body is marked, most of all, by the breakdown of the immunological order, this also indicates, however, that there is a desperate search underway for technologies for the body immune' ('Panic Sex in America', p.15). So too Burroughs's fear of the body's failure to defend itself generates the drive to find ways to protect it, so that the denunciation of the virus enables a language of medical intervention, whose promise is freedom: 'Poverty, hatred, war, police-criminals, bureaucracy, insanity, all symptoms of The Human Virus. *The Human Virus can now be isolated and treated*' (NL p.136).

And yet health also operates in these texts as the tool of domination. Dr. Benway, con-man and torture expert, proposes a plan for total control:

The subject must not realise that the mistreatment is a deliberate attack of an anti-human enemy on his personal identity. He must be made to feel that he deserves *any* treatment he receives because there is something (never specified) horribly wrong with him. (NL, p.31)

There is a moment of curious self-reflexivity here. For is not Burroughs precisely the diagnostician of the 'horribly wrong' in humanity? The purveyor of precisely that paranoia which renders Benway's subjects easy prey to 'the naked need of the control addicts' (NL, p.31)? In a world where any treatment might be an excuse for an attack on the body, Burroughs's own narrative of invasions, infections,

visitors, parasites, diseases and pollution might be seen as itself a dangerous and all-encompassing tool of power.

And indeed, in a sense it is precisely that, in that these texts seek to overpower their readers. What Burroughs requires these narratives to do is to produce a model of dirt which is as total as the power which they aim to uproot. Insofar as, for Burroughs, power is total, so must resistance be. Hence it is imperative to find forms of diagnosis which call us all to cleanse ourselves 'because there is something ... horribly wrong'. David Porush has summed up Burroughs's world-view with this definition of paranoia: 'paranoia is a sort of *epistemology gone wild*' (*The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction*, p.107, emphasis in the original). He discerns in Burroughs the need to investigate every aspect of the human society and the body, inquiring into all their attributes, and offering a malign diagnosis for each. But where Benway's health crisis is 'never specified', Burroughs specifies excessively - which may in the end have the same effect. The unremitting insistence that the institutions and habits of modern society are viral, parasitic and addictive sustains the urgency of the assault upon them. We might then say that the concept of the virus operates in these texts as an agent of panic, underwriting as it does an entire cellular economy of invisible danger.²⁷ To the extent that it acts as the explanation for every ill in these texts (and the extent to which other writers have taken it up beyond them) the warning against viral infection is then a viral figure itself, invading every possible site of discourse to replicate itself there, blending in to other pre-existing discourses of diagnosis, and

²⁷ That a would-be healer should peddle forms of knowledge that make the body a slave to paranoia is a suitably Burroughsian irony. After all, in his catalogues of possible addictions, we find also the possibility of being addicted to an opposition to addiction: 'take Bradley the Buyer. Best narcotics agent in the industry' (*NL*, p.26-27) who, with his addiction to his routine police contacts with addicts 'comes to look more and more like a junky'. Similarly, Ronnel remarks that 'to get off drugs or alcohol (major narcissistic crisis), the addict has to shift dependency to a person, an ideal, or to the procedure itself of the cure' (*Crack Wars*, p.25). Such a shift in investment might make sense of the particularly insistent way in which Burroughs's calls for cure and redemption seem to echo the most corrupt figures of domination in these texts.

reproducing itself through their channels.

So too we might want to suspect the medical role that Burroughs appropriates to his own diagnosis. However scathing it is of the use of medicine as a tool of oppression, Burroughs's own diagnosis still maintains that we cannot distinguish between treatment and mistreatment except by appealing to a better understanding of the body. Burroughs has described *The Naked Lunch* as illustrating 'some kinda redemption through knowledge of basic life processes' (*The Letters of William Burroughs: 1945 to 1959*, p.375) - but again, how different does this make him from Dr. Benway who declares: 'I'm a scientist. A *pure* scientist' (*NL*, p.39) ? Burroughs's appeal to 'basic life processes' uses biology to mark the good from the evil, where a model that is true to life, in the service of life, is positive - the model, of course, that Burroughs claims for his own analysis. But the quartet itself reminds us that the exhortation to health and cleanness, to well-being and recovery, pulls the subject into an array of interventionist technologies. The offer of a promised land just the other side of illness which opens *The Naked Lunch*, might usefully be set here against Foucault's observation that 'a normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centred on life' (*HS*, p.144).

We should therefore locate Burroughs's own language of health within the larger horizon of a language of medical embodiment. As Foucault has argued, modern medicine conceives of the body as a space open to the gaze of the clinician (*The Birth of the Clinic*). Exposed to this medical gaze, the body is a mass of spaces and organisms which become fully knowable to the expert who documents them, and whose power is secured by the capacity to describe the processes of the spread and impact of a disease. Burroughs thus deploys a terminology weighted with authority over the body: to name its illness and to promise a cure is to constitute the body as the object of a discourse to which it is forever indebted.

Forms of biological remedy are therefore crucial for Burroughs in imagining the biology of the body as a site of struggle. Apomorphine, for instance,

is used to argue the case for the biology of drug addiction: ‘apomorphine acts on the back brain to regulate metabolism ... it is the only known drug that acts in this way to normalize a disturbed metabolism’ (*The Job* p.153). Or more politically: ‘apomorphine precisely activates the resistance centers’ (*The Job*, p.148). Yet the fact that, as we saw earlier, it is derived from morphine marks an affinity between disease and cure: biological integrity is only to be achieved through the same sorts of processes and substances that first compromised that biology. It is thus necessary that Burroughs asserts that it ‘is completely non-habit forming’ (*The Job*, p.153) so that, like the Nova Police, its resemblance to the dangers that it opposes is noted even as it is forcefully denied, raising doubts in the mind of the reader even as s/he is being reassured.

Just as apomorphine is that contradictory substance, a non-addictive morphine derivative, Burroughs also comes up against the question of whether a virus is inherently dangerous, or possibly beneficial. His decision is that ‘it seems advisable to concentrate on a general defense against all virus’ (*The Job* p.190). And yet his own strategies for liberation remain curiously viral. The cut-ups which are advocated as terrorist strategies involve feeding one language or text into another, so that it becomes inextricably mixed, insinuated within the very sentences, a process which when used by the enemy is ‘like a virus in that they force something on the subject against his will’ (*The Job* p.185).

The stated goal of his own cut-ups is to intervene ‘so that the subject liberates his own spontaneous scanning patterns’ (*The Job* p.185). Like the junky’s rediscovered health, the subject free from viral influence recovers an inherent state. Yet the medical models at work thus occlude the viral logic of Burroughs’s own texts: for in the viral work that his texts perform, is his desired product not a new mode of embodied subjectivity riddled with his own infectious devices? Despite the appeal to a natural state awaiting liberation, the cured body is not a natural body, but one produced, like the bodies that Burroughs’s despises, through viral strategies of his work. Their aggressive proffering to the reader of languages of

purity ask us to seal our bodies against invasion, to keep our distance from others, and to eject acquired behaviours that conflict with a fantasy of originary purity. That is: to reorganize our bodies in ways urged upon us by Burroughs. In foregrounding this propagandist element of the texts, we therefore see in them the acknowledgement that any bodily state is itself only a response to a controlling presence - and that 'freedom' is the name not for a state outside viral infection, but rather for the particular disease that Burroughs carries.²⁸ In their attempt to return the body to integrity, the texts seem to suggest that any form of subjectivity is achieved by the generation of identities, bodily states, and psychic structures which have their roots in viral infection. Just like the invaders he opposes, the slogan of Burroughs's work might be: 'our virus infects the human and creates our image in him'.

(d) Language

These models of bodily invasion interlock with Burroughs's indictment of language, which works on similar principles to those established in my analysis of these other three invaders. 'The word itself may be a virus that has achieved a permanent status with the host' (*The Job* p.190), argues Burroughs. Similarly the word is junk - useless and addictive, cutting us off from the world - and parasite too. In one of his anti-evolution myths Burroughs draws all four terms together in his description of the transition from ape to human:

In the pass the muttering sickness leaped into our throats, coughing and spitting in the silver morning [...] We waded into the warm mud-water. hair and ape flesh off in screaming strips [...] when we came out of the mud we had names [...] And the others did not want to touch me because of the

²⁸ For readings of Burroughs which see his urgings as altogether more ironic and self-mocking see: John Guzlowski, 'The Family in the Fiction of William Burroughs'; Anthony Hilfer, 'Mariner and Wedding Guest in William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*'; and Michael Leddy, ' "Departed Have Left No Address": Revelation/Concealment Presence/Absence in *Naked Lunch*'. While these readings are persuasive in terms of their textual analysis, I would argue that the status accorded to the figure of Burroughs and his pronouncements suggests that the overall effect of his writing is to affirm, rather than undo, their status as prophecy.

white worm-thing inside but no one could refuse if I wanted and ate the fear-softness in other men. The cold was around us in our bones [...] And some did not eat flesh and died because they could not live with the thing inside. (SM, p.127)

Here, the acquisition of names, infection, parasite and substance-dependency are all linked together.

As I have already pointed out, language is a recurrent site of control in Burroughs. However, language appears not simply in the form of a discourse which commands thought, but as a material force which orders and organizes the body itself. For Burroughs, the impact of the word is threefold: firstly, within the quartet, language is productive of materiality itself - words have concrete effects on the body, not merely triggering responses in it, but making it real, writing it out through arrays of typewriters;²⁹ secondly, as a result of his commitment to a radical individualism, language is condemned for enforcing a shared perception of the world onto all its users (Ihab Hassan, 'The Literature of Silence: From Henry Miller to Beckett & Burroughs'³⁰); lastly, like the parasites which drain away the life of the hosts, the word is the entity that drains the life of the world, since it substitutes mere signs for any real contact with that world.³¹ The need to attain freedom from the controlling effects of language is offered by Burroughs as the

²⁹ His account of language draws heavily on the work of Alfred Korzybski, who argued for a 'neuro-semantics' which relates language to its biological effects on the human organism (*Science and Sanity*, p.19-34). Thus Korzybski, in a phrase that could have come directly from Burroughs, can say 'present day totalitarianisms were built by the dumping on the human nervous system of such terms as "communism", "bolshevism" etc.' (*Science and Sanity*, Introduction to the Second Edition, p. liii), where the linguistic 'terms' are themselves the source of a biological change, which in turn produces social movements.

³⁰ Hassan repeats his account of Burroughs - that he belongs to an honourable tradition of sceptical hostility to language and culture, but fails because he cannot imagine a creative alternative - in most of his subsequent writing on contemporary fiction. See for instance: *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times*, pp.140-141 and *passim*; *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, pp.259-251 and *passim*.

³¹ Again, Burroughs draws heavily on Korzybski here: 'an object or feeling, say, our toothache, is *not* verbal, is *not* words. Whatever we may say will not be the objective level, which remains fundamentally un-speakable' (*Science and Sanity*, p.34).

rationale for his cut-up experiments. In an enthusiastic endorsement of Burroughs's claims, Jeff Bryan has argued that: 'the cut-up exposes meaning that could not have been preplanned, or foreseen. Therefore the meaning is beyond any controlling force, and brings us closer to what we really are, and what a thing may really mean' ('William Burroughs and His Faith in X', p.84).³²

And yet this adversary of language is the one who declares: 'Now I, William Seward, will unlock my word horde' (*NL*, p.180). The invading horde of language surges like the organic tides which wash through the texts: 'a tidal river, carrying forms of survival armed with defences of poison slime, black, flesh rotting, fungus, and green odors that sear the lungs and grab the stomach in twisted knots' (*NL*, p.163). The caustic tide, both horde and hoard, figures the most organic, destructive, and adversarial force as the most inward and secret - locked away to be opened up. Rather than being any sort of positive prophetic discourse, this word horde appears elsewhere, more true to its origins in *Beowulf*, as 'Word Hoard', in a section of *The Naked Lunch* titled 'The market' (pp.96-99). Burroughs lampoons a series of religious prophets as con-men and addicts, who make the same declaration that he makes at the close of the book: 'And now I will unlock my Word Hoard' (*NL*, p.98). Invoking again the hoard/horde pun, when his audience responds 'I do fear it much', the generic prophet declares: 'nothing shall stem the rising tide' (*NL*, p.98). For the audience of this show, the unstoppable tide of language leads back to infection, conquest and waste: 'I tell you when I leave the Wise Man I don't even feel like a human. He converting my live orgones into dead bullshit' (*NL*, p.98). On the one hand the language that invades the body corrupts it, and on the other the noxious substances which invade the body trickle or surge out in the form of speech. As 'rising tide' and as hoard/horde, language is a hostile

³² More sceptically, Laszlo K. Géfin has insisted that the meaning imputed to a cut-up is not spontaneous or free, but 'culture bound and historically determined' ('Collage Theory, Reception, and the Cutups of William Burroughs', pp.98-99). Géfin argues that the social role and psychological effect of a cut-up is far more strongly related to its marketing and packaging, than to any inherent properties of its formal textual features.

organic substance, allied to other forces of control.

At its most extreme this control project does not simply invade the body, but produces the body: 'It is composed of thin transparent sheets on which is written the action from birth to death - Written on "the soft typewriter" *before* birth' (*TTE*, p.119). The body is produced by and as writing, a determined text spat out by machines, no more than an effect of word and image: 'The human body is an image on screen talking' (*TTE*, p.133), but saying only the lines that have been scripted for it already. 'Shut the whole machine off' urges Burroughs (*TTE*, p.132). For him, word and image are linked together as those things which freeze and limit existence: 'word begets image and image is virus' (*NE*, p.48), whereas 'apomorphine is no word and no image' (*NE*, p.48). The project to 'blanket the world in silence' (*NE*, p.39) thereby stands as the bridge to the other side, beyond word and image, and also as a return to an edenic state before infection.

The possibility of attaining such a state of liberation relies on the reclaiming of language away from its current controllers: 'Why not rewrite the message on "the soft typewriter" ? - Why not take the board books and rewrite all message ? - Why not take over the human body right down the middle line ?' (*TTE*, p.120). But if rewriting is a form of freedom, he is also clear throughout the quartet that such tactical uses of language are only a prelude to dispensing with language altogether:

Lovers exchange tapes - You understand nobody has to be there at all - So why ask questions and why answer ? - Why give orders and why make speeches ? - Why not leave your tape with her tape and dispense with sexual contact ? - And then ? - Since no one is there to listen, why keep running the tape ? - Why not shut the whole machine off and go home ? Exactly what i intend to do (*TTE*, p.125)

Such an account encapsulates in miniature Burroughs's attitude to language: contain it, manipulate it, break up its patterns, and finally renounce it:

'Communication must be made total. only way to stop it' (*TTE*, p.124).³³

³³ I want to retain this stress on the necessity of the elimination of language from

The suggestive example of the release from a sexual encounter, enabling situations in which 'nobody has to be there' links freedom from words back to freedom from the body. Explaining the goal of his cut-ups, Burroughs says 'Words - at least the way we use them - can stand in the way of what I call nonbody experience. It's time we thought about leaving the body behind' (*The Third Mind*, p.2).

(iii) The (Im)Possibility of a Cure

There is a strong tradition in work on Burroughs which reads all of the bodily changes which I have outlined above as an allegory for the degeneration of human society: a critique of humanity's descent into the sub-human, which is accompanied by a call for a revolution which will overthrow this process.³⁴ Adam Meyer, following Burroughs's references to Franz Kafka, takes these images as an allegory of the dehumanization of a species - like Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect (' "One of the Great Early Counsellors": The Influence of Franz Kafka on William S. Burroughs'). While for Tony Tanner, 'this idea of matter returning to lower forms of organization is at the heart of Burroughs's vision ... The brain taken over by the anus is only a paradigm for all the low forms of life which devour higher forms. So, humans become animals, then vegetables, and finally minerals: warm blood reverts to frozen metal' (*City of Words*, p.118). But Tanner's designation of the assumed superiority of the higher over the lower, and of consciousness over matter, should alert us to the social hierarchies encoded in 'high' and 'low', 'consciousness' and 'matter', and should prevent us from simply

this vision, in contrast to Lydenberg's argument that the texts merely advocate the possibility of becoming free to use language with impunity (and immunity) (*Word Cultures*).

³⁴ John Ciardi similarly reads the destruction of the body as 'one of the most memorable (and, ultimately, most moral) horrors of surrealistic writing' in its 'depiction of the destruction of depraved men by their drug lust' ('The Book Burners and Sweet Sixteen', p.22), and in a similar vein Mary McCarthy argues that 'these metamorphoses, of course, are punishments' ('Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*', p.38).

endorsing such a position as a legitimate lamentation over social decline. The inhabitation of these bodies by 'crab parasites' and 'fish parasites' (*TTE*, p.67), or by a 'cerebral dwarf' (*TTE*, p.68) suggests bodies filled with the grotesque contents of debased materiality: the evolutionarily prior and the deviant, those bodies whose materiality bars them from full human subjectivity. Which is to say: bodies and bodily-features designated as socially unwelcome as a result of those forms of power that benefit from the hierarchical organization of bodies.

It would therefore be easy to read Burroughs's desire for purification as amounting to a desire to redeem the materiality of the body. We might thus view it as nothing more than an agglomeration of, variously: a bourgeois repulsion at bodily differences of working class culture; a racist hatred of the attributes constructed as the animality of the body and defined by the white body's assumed transcendence of them; and a masculinist loathing of the body's feminized qualities, its porous, labile, liquid properties. But the force of Burroughs's work is not to locate some bodies as infected, as against other bodies which are licit. Rather it is to insist on the materiality of the body as undesirable in itself. His vision of degeneracy locates it in *all* bodies. Rather than conceiving of a body which might overcome these failings and thereby using this fear of bodily disorder to define the possibility of an orderly body, what distinguishes Burroughs's texts is their *absolute failure* to generate the possibility of imagining such an integral or ordered body. I want therefore to argue that these texts are more than an outpouring of a desire to cleanse and order the body. Rather, while they do indeed constitute an extended attempt to diagnose what it is in the body that must be purged, this is an attempt which reveals to us finally the impossibility of such an enterprise and which also depicts the full complexity of the body's social production as it does so. Rather than celebrating some purified body, the final effect of the texts is then to refute the possibility of an ideal body.

In order to see this, we need to read these bodies as the dramatization of the fact that all bodies - albeit to different degrees - are marked by their proximity

to reviled substances: their liquid outpourings and labile organs rendering them not ordered; their openings to introjects and substances making them not integral; their lack of defined borders, their capacity to shed old matter and acquire new matter, making them lacking in form.³⁵ But what I will argue Burroughs enables us to see with particular clarity is the all-pervading anxiety that ensues from the attempt to cleanse the body of such impurities - a cleansing which culminates in the desire to dispense with the body itself. Although Burroughs talks in terms of the removal from the body of its invaders, I will argue that in fact his texts register the awareness that our bodies can never get cleaned up without being cleaned away - because, as the quartet demonstrates, these things that seem external are in fact indistinguishable from the body. And that is, I will be suggesting, because they all stand in for the very materiality of the body itself.

As we have seen, the body, for Burroughs, is marked by its vulnerability, with the quartet constituting a call for its cleansing and defence. But in spite of the urgent prophetic tone of the texts ('These are conditions of total emergency. And these are my instructions for total emergency if carried out *now* could avert the total disaster *now* on tracks' *NE*, p.6), their imagined project (to cleanse the body) and their imagined means (cut-ups, apomorphine, silence) are both caught up in contradictions and self-defeating tensions. This is not to say that we should read Burroughs looking for a Romantic poet-prophet figure and then criticize him for failing to offer us a useful or practical vision, as so many writers on him have done.³⁶ Rather, it is to ask how the particular insistence with which he represents bodily matter might be used to suggest fractures and resources for resistance in these larger discourses of bodily disgust. I want to suggest here that there are two

³⁵All of these are those attributes of the body which Julia Kristeva has analyzed under the sign of 'the abject', and whose relation to Burroughs I shall explore in detail in the next chapter.

³⁶ See for instance David Ayers, 'The Long Last Goodbye: Control and Resistance in the Work of William Burroughs'; Ihab Hassan, 'The Subtracting Machine: The Work of William Burroughs'; and David Lodge, 'Objections to William Burroughs'.

features of these texts that provide such a perspective on attempts to engage with the problems of the exercise of power through embodiment: the inevitability of the body's succumbing to invasion and the problematic form taken by attempts to resist it.

The recurrence in Burroughs's writing of bodily penetration suggests the openness of the body to intrusion, the impossibility of sealing it against invaders. But, this vulnerability - whether in the form of a predisposition to addiction, a physical response to arousal, or even the physical capacity to be penetrated - are all present in the matter of the body itself. The form of the body renders it vulnerable in ways that cannot easily be dismissed. 'Word flesh group relying on rectum' (*TTE*, p.111), we are told, because the rectum, as the site of intense pleasure and a point of possible penetration, marks for Burroughs the body's own physical structure and response as one that is always already prepared for the forms of control which Burroughs describes.³⁷

Burroughs's dream of a cure to this world situation leads, as we have seen, towards empty space and silence: 'time to look beyond this rundown radioactive cop-rotten planet. Time to look beyond this animal body' he urges (*The Job* p.137). That familiar linking of power and the body's waste ('cop-rotten') with an invaded biology ('radioactive') makes the body itself the transcendable horizon. Too sick to be habitable, too infected to be cured, too dirty to be clean, the body which served as the impetus for this redemptive project ends up as the obstacle to its completion. And in these texts he insists that it is an obstacle because of its

³⁷ Burroughs's use of the image of anal sex between men as a trope for invasion and domination is often mentioned (indeed, a reader could hardly fail to miss it): see for instance Clive Bush, 'An Anarchy of New Speech', p.124; Edward Foster, *Understanding the Beats*, p.169; Ihab Hassan, 'The Subtracting Machine', p.7; Catherine R. Stimpson, 'The Beat Generation and the Trials of Homosexual Liberation', pp.380-382; Arnold Weinstein, 'Freedom and Control in the Erotic Novel'; and John Vernon, *The Garden and the Map*, pp.94-97. But one cannot help but feel that there is a homophobic delight in many of the commentators on this particular symbol, as if only too glad to see sex between men being presented as the epitome of loveless violence and exploitation.

biology:

I would say that free men don't exist on this planet at this time, because they don't exist in human bodies, by the mere fact of being in a human body you're controlled by all sorts of biologic and environmental necessities.
(*The Job*, p.37)

Control is imagined in the quartet as the body's Pavlovian susceptibility to pleasure and pain, with the body caught simultaneously between threats of abuse and promises of delight, so that between the two 'sex and pain form flesh identity' (*TTE*, p.98). Those who have bodies are thus 'collaborators with word with flesh, traitors to all souls everywhere' (*TTE*, p.129). Similarly, in a recurring phrase, when Burroughs wants to designate the moment of the fall of the human subject into control he asks: 'what scared you all into time ? Into body ? Into shit ? I will tell you: "*the word*" ' (*NE*, p.4). The naming which fixes the human subject does so by locating it within a solid body, imagined as excrement and waste. As we have seen, Burroughs envisions the possibility of the absolute ejection of all of these invading substances: 'out out out the whole fucking lot of you' (*TTE*, p.104). As Cary Nelson has suggested, that call for eviction resonates with the depiction of the world as excrement: the world has been 'sold out to shit forever' (*TTE*, p.106), and, like shit, can be expelled. The text is a form of enema, designed to shift the world from a place of degeneracy and corruption (as imaged in Burroughs's excremental vision) to one of cleanliness and redemption: in Nelson's memorable phrase 'scatology becomes eschatology' ('The End of the Body: Radical Space in Burroughs' p.127).³⁸

In their reliance on a language of purity and pollution, the insistent calls for cleansing would seem to invoke the possibility of cleaning up the body, but in fact lead to the call for the body to be cleaned away altogether. I have suggested throughout this chapter that these body invaders are themselves described in terms

³⁸ For Robin Lydenberg's Derridean analysis of Burroughs's imagery of digestion and constipation see *Word Cultures*, pp.143-155.

which renders them like, rather than alien to, the body. And this proves entirely appropriate for texts that rely on the fantasy of a non-corporeal consciousness which, because it is the only form of consciousness free from material restraint, is the necessary form of Burroughs's libertarian ideal. Within such a framework corporeal characteristics must necessarily be conceived of as the most limiting and damaging of attributes. This in turn means that the forms taken by the 'invaders' of the body do not figure the threats to our independence as coming from outside but, because their own characteristics are those of bodily processes, serve to disclose rather that the final identity of these threats is *the body itself*. Because the material form and the biological needs of the body are complicit with systems of control and domination, it therefore follows that a purified body is an oxymoron. The forms of bodily invasion which Burroughs imagines represent a disgust at the ways that the body itself is experienced as an invasion of independent subjectivity: a mass of organs that follow their own logic, an assemblage of needs and desires that are not under our conscious control, and a network of physical properties that have been produced by external forces in order to make the body docile and obedient. The acuity with which Burroughs diagnoses the body's production only serves to bring out how incompatible embodiment is with his vision of absolute independence. Consequently we may say that it is only because of his determination to find such independence that the texts are able to explore so carefully how the body is socially produced. And it is only because this exploration is so careful that the texts refute dreams of bodily purity, offering instead bodies that are absolutely impure.

Unsettling the attempt to cleanse the body, we find the human body in Burroughs both the source of the desire for these contaminating substances and their very double. So it is not simply the case that the body needs to be purified, for at times the invasion has so thoroughly conditioned the body that it must be entirely annihilated in order to be free. At one point the quartet's viral enemies explain how 'we first took our image and put it into code [...] This code was written at the molecular level' (NE, p.49). This viral image takes hold at the most

basic level of the body and in order to prevent escape from its hold 'it was important all this time that the possibility of a human ever conceiving of being without a body should not arise' (*NE*, p.49). Like silence, this clearing away of the very matter of the enemy takes us into new realms, figured as places of absolute absence, and hence cleanliness. Burroughs can serve to illustrate the inevitable conclusion of all cleansing projects: protracted warfare not simply with dirt, but with the conditions of being that make dirt possible at all. That is, with the body itself.

Nothing but an absolute purging of the infected world will satisfy Burroughs, whose image of the redemption of the world is that of its absolute destruction: 'The whole structure of reality went up in silent explosions' (*TTE*, p.30). While Mary Douglas is interested in the ways by which anxiety is managed - the rituals that neutralize the fears which bodily margins and body matter symbolize - Burroughs lets those anxieties have full rein. The quartet thus articulates the intensity of the horror with which the body is regarded, and which cannot be allayed by ritual purification. These texts enumerate the features of the body which make it an object of profound discomfort for a subjectivity based on integrity, form, and order: that it is open to penetration; that its shape is unstable; that its matter is responsive to external stimuli; that it has impulses not amenable to rational self-control; that it bears an affinity to waste matter - and, more unsettlingly, may itself shift to waste matter all too easily (death, the spilling of blood, excrement, ejaculation).

One approach to such an obsession with purity would be to read these bodily dangers as figuring other social dangers - for instance, the incitement to bodily pleasures generated by the rise of media advertising (John Tytell, *Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation*, p.116). But reading Burroughs makes it clear that we must go beyond any reading of bodily anxiety as primarily a metaphor for other social phenomena. The constant return of the texts to non-fictional materials, and in particular their use of autobiographical and

journalistic material, refuses to locate this language solely in a fictional domain.³⁹ Given that Burroughs provides, in interviews and associated writings, an insistence that his arguments are an accurate description of the workings of power, we are encouraged to read the body as in the grip of precisely these forms of invasive control: 'I have frequently spoken of word and image as viruses' he states, 'and this is not an allegorical comparison' (*The Job*, p.201). Thus, as a number of determinedly literalist readings of Burroughs have argued, the language of parasites and addiction is more than a series of apt metaphors: in Lydenberg's deconstructive account, language is a logocentric parasite which drains away the liberty of its users (*Word Cultures*); for Timothy Murphy, capitalism is a viral process which renders all its workers identical units and finally draws them into a single biological mass-entity ('William Burroughs Between Indifference and Revalorization: Notes Toward a Political Reading'); for Eric Mottram the modern state really is run by those addicted to power (*William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need*); and for Deleuze and Guattari, Burroughs's body whose organs imprison and dominate it is a physical reality which must be escaped (*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp.150-151).⁴⁰

Indeed, with the benefit of a Foucauldian perspective on the body we can see that the body is not simply used as an experiential model for the social relations of any given society because it is a useful symbol or metaphor. Rather, the imagining of social anxieties in terms of the body is a consequence of the material forms of social control which are indeed absolutely dependant upon the body. Because power is secured through the regulation of bodies, those bodies are in a

³⁹ It is, of course, possible to read these features in the opposite direction: a postmodern account of this cutting up of genres would stress their rendering of autobiography and journalism as no less fictional than 'officially' fictional modes of writing. See Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, pp.166-170.

⁴⁰ David Ayers offers an opposite interpretation: that Burroughs's work is politically vitiated because concepts such as parasitism and addiction are purely metaphorical, and are offered at the expense of any concrete social analysis of the real mechanisms of power ('The Long Last Goodbye', p.224).

very real sense a site of risk and danger, both to those in power and to those who are its targets. The anxieties about the forms that body matter might take are themselves part of a network of material practices by which a social order is maintained. Bodies thus constitute a genuinely material threat to any given social order, since they will not only or always be shaped to follow the dictates of that order; but the body also constitutes a threat to each embodied subject since it is precisely the site on which domination is exerted and which follows such acts of control.

Insofar, then, as the texts cannot imagine a purified body, they are enabled to represent the necessity that our embodied forms are derived from any of the particular instances of power that we might resist. We must then read bodily anxieties not simply as encoding other social tensions, but rather as a recognition of the ways in which the body is shaped and ordered by social processes - and remains fundamental to their organization. By placing Burroughs in such a context we can see that he develops two lines of anxiety about the ways in which the body functions. Firstly, he rehearses a number of anxieties about the necessity for bodily purity, which are derived from oppressive institutions of bodily scrutiny and which bear traces of the particular sites of discursive practice through which they have been developed - such as bio-medical discourse and socio-sexual hygiene. But secondly - and almost contrarily - he voices anxieties about the effects of such body-controlling technologies: he is repelled by bodies that are controlled or commanded. His particular horror is thus a welding of both a conventional stigmatization of the body and a resistant dread of the practices which such stigmatization serves to legitimate. However much his hatred at body material derives from those oppressive practices that generate a dread at bodily disorder, it is those very practices, and their consequences, that such a hatred serves to condemn. These texts, raging against the parasite, the virus, and junk, are thus enabled by their own parasitic dependence upon, viral contamination by, and unshakeable addiction to, the languages of the institutions that they denounce. And

this is not to repeat the language of purity by denouncing the quartet as 'contaminated': rather it is to show how a voice constructed out of such materials is in no way necessarily doomed merely to repeat them.

This takes us to the next central tension in Burroughs's work. Just as it fails to imagine the pure body which his project supposedly requires - a failure which, I am suggesting, is productive rather than limiting - so too he fails to imagine strategies of resistance in terms that would separate them from what they oppose. And here too, the failure is productive: both because it reminds us that we may fashion resistance even when absolutely constructed by hostile forces, and secondly because it offers a model for making creative use of imagery of bodily impurity. The second crucial tension in these texts, then, is the difficulty of differentiating between the technologies of liberation and those of domination. Burroughs's paranoia operates by an immense metonymic energy which reduces all events, all limits and all power to a single malign force opposed to a single absolute freedom. Susceptible to the most direct - but also the most banal - of total critiques, such 'conditions of total emergency' can be opposed only by a message of 'Total resistance' (*NE*, p.6). Thus we have on the one hand the creation of a 'them against us' situation, where evil has a relation of total Otherness to good, and where the dirty and the clean could be totally separated and destroyed - like Opium Jones being evicted and then boiled in hydrochloric acid. But at the same time this paranoia results in an implication of everything in the conspiracy to dominate: language, evolution, the body, sex, life. 'Death *is* orgasm *is* rebirth *is* death in orgasm *is* their unsanitary Venusian gimmick *is* the whole birth death cycle of action' (*TTE*, p.45). The 'gimmick' of domination, the alien con-trick imposed from the outside, encompasses 'the whole', for the goals and effects of each part of this equation are identical.

And while the enemy can be marked as 'unsanitary' and lined up for cleansing, a vision of such total saturation makes resistance seem very precarious. In a world where the solution to the Nova Mob is the Nova Police, where the cure

for morphine addiction is derived from morphine, where the way to resist our infection with images is to splice images into the enemy, all hope rests on solutions which occupy that interstitial place where they cannot simply be separated from the enemy - so that even silence can become an addiction. As we have already seen, in the case of each invading substance Burroughs's own writing would seem to share the characteristics that he denounces. The implacable hostility with which Burroughs draws the line comes up against its own uneasy resemblance to what it is fighting.

His own ambiguous allegiance to the forms which he denounces is also mirrored in the writing of his critics. Michael Skau, referring to Burroughs's splicing in of cut-up material, tells us that in cut-ups the text 'is violated by the intrusion of an alien phrase' ('The Central Verbal System' p.407). Similarly, Cary Nelson describes Burroughs's language in terms of parasitism: 'internalizing Burroughs' language, the reader finds it incompatible with his own speech. Yet the novels have entered the reader's experience: their language now exists in my body' ('The End of the Body', p.130). Similarly, in these texts which advise of the necessity of silence we find the sinister figure of the Old Doctor, summoned by the Board to pacify restless addicts:

So the louder they scream and the harder they push the stronger and cooler the Old Doctor is - [...] - And then they are quiet - They got nothing more to say and nothing to say it with - You've taken it all all all you got it ? (Good, save it for the next pitch) - So there they stand like dummies (they are dummies) and you let your heavy cold blue hands fall down through them - Klunk - cold mineral silence. (*TTE*, p.107)

The numbed silence of placid slaves thus haunts Burroughs's own vision of silence as a mode of liberation which he, another authoritative speaker, delivers to his audience. Indeed Burroughs's friend Alen Ansen quotes this passage, following it with the remark: 'this passage ... could serve as a description of the effect Burroughs can have on people' ('William Burroughs: A Personal View', p.49).

It is, of course, possible to attempt to resolve or mitigate these apparent

contradictions. Cary Nelson offers one common position amongst readers of Burroughs: that Burroughs recognises his limited complicity, but treats it as a necessary tactic: 'although Burroughs engages in a self-defeating paradox - using a defective instrument for redemptive purposes - he chooses the only conceivable solution' ('The End of the Body: Radical Space in Burroughs', p.128). David Ayers offers another, suggesting that Burroughs's texts simply come up against the harsh limitations of the real, which his texts cannot accommodate: we cannot do without bodies or language ('The Long Last Goodbye: Control and Resistance in the Work of William Burroughs'). But rather than attempting to resolve the contradiction, or to pass judgement upon it as a flaw, it seems more productive to me to insist on the impossibility of its resolution - to argue, as Pierre Macherey insists, that we must ask not how a work contradicts itself, but rather what is signified by the contradiction which it is itself unable to interrogate (*A Theory of Literary Production*). To look to the texts for a resolution of this contradiction is to avoid confronting it, and therefore to avoid an analysis of what we can learn from its insolubility: its illustration of that uncomfortable necessity which I shall call *constitutive possession*.

(iv) Constitutive Possession

What this insolubility represents is the impossibility of effecting the act of Cartesian transcendence by which the material world can be abandoned. Burroughs's work is thus a testimony to the impossibility of its own project not because it is a fact that defective tools are somehow inescapable, nor because it is simply evading an uncomfortable truth. Rather, its insoluble contradiction emerges because such Burroughsian concepts as parasitic possession or viral contamination are not so much restrictive structures that can be resisted, but rather are the form of embodied subjectivity itself. And the quartet, rather than being lacking in some way, is itself the best witness to this fact. Against Burroughs's libertarian vision of

an isolated, autonomous subject, free from possession, I would therefore set the form taken by Burroughs's own political interventions, which show how the production of any embodied state is always a result of forces acting on and within a body. Although we might use concepts such as 'inside' and 'outside' to designate what is proper to the body, and what is apart from the body, in fact every bodily state is attained only through the transformation of the body by what is supposedly outside it: the body is always possessed by that which is experienced as other.

What does it mean to talk of the body as possessed by otherness in this way? Dissonance between my perception of who I am, and what my body is and does is by no means uncommon. From such everyday instances as the forced smile of the employee⁴¹ to the supposedly more extreme instances of transsexuality, 'my' body often seems to be obeying the rules, and shaped by the dictates, of forces other than my own desire or self. It is to some extent this process that Marx designates 'alienation': that process by which one part of my life is made alien from me, is made into the possession of some other, or by which some other takes responsibility for that which is mine (my labour power, my emotions, my body).

As we have seen, this is partly because the body is moulded by so many different forces, so that an embodied subject is thus torn in several directions: towards the behaviour urged by a particular institution that employs us, towards the behaviour urged by the family in which we were raised, towards the behaviour urged by a central and traumatic childhood incident, towards the behaviour urged by certain genes, towards the behaviour urged by a drug (prescription or otherwise). But it would, I think, be quite wrong to insist that some of these states are original or natural, while others are imposed. If my body is torn between the impulse to smile at a customer, and to spit in their face in frustration, this is simply because more than one set of behaviours has been made available and appropriate to me, by means of more than one process of socialization - all of which are

⁴¹ On the regulated bodies of employees, see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

experienced as different bodily options. The very possibility of subjectivity is itself, then, an effect of the alien, just as the physical fact of my being is made possible by those other forces that act upon me, to shape musculature or to organize my cellular structure. In a very real sense my flesh and my emotions are not 'mine', in that they all have an origin which is not 'me': at any given moment 'I' am the endpoint of these processes, more than I am their originator.

What Burroughs's texts recognize are the problems that result from the fact that subjectivity itself is predicated on instances of possession. If, as we saw in chapter two, the subject comes into being only through a psychic tracing of the body - an act by which the body also comes into being - then subject and body are marked by their inscription: not in the sense that there is a writing of a structure onto their pre-existing raw physical and psychic material, but rather because the possibility of such an embodied subjectivity comes into existence only in the form of a site of inscription performed from elsewhere. Like the messages of the soft typewriter, the body is indeed possessed: by its sensations, and the meanings which those sensations have; by the designations of its parts and activities as licit and illicit; by the social demands that shape its musculature, its bone structure, its posture; by the technology that augments, reorganizes, and supplants its flesh.⁴²

While Burroughs dreams of the possibility of evicting these inhabitants of the body, his images of possession and invasion are in fact figures for the events that are constitutive of the process by which the body comes to exist physically, and by which the body is made an object of psychic comprehension and investment. We are indeed possessed by our bodies, and our bodies are indeed possessed by others: but there never was a point where the body was not possessed in this way. To be embodied is to be possessed.

The only way of living with this process is to recognize the need for some uneasy rapprochement between the forces by means of which I exist: to move from alien-ation, to being an alien nation. While I may experience alien-ation from 'my'

⁴² My thinking here has been strongly influenced by Pheng Cheah's 'Mattering'.

body, its composite form can nevertheless go on functioning. The conflicts and dissonances, while at times unpleasant and even debilitating, do not prevent my body as a whole from operating. Although - and we shall return to this in the next chapter - some would argue that a disunified subject is paralyzed,⁴³ if we look at the entire body-in-society, we find neither political paralysis nor total submission. While I have insisted that we think in terms of both the possession of the body, and the multiplicity of possessing forces, such an argument does not mean that what possesses us cannot be deployed by us - indeed, possession is as much the enabling condition of any politics as it is the situation against which politics struggles.⁴⁴ In the case of Burroughs, the persistent recognition that acts of invasion are constitutive of, not merely supplementary to, embodied subjectivity, may be a source of horror, but it also produces texts which depict the conditions of embodied subjectivity with unusual candour. With their constitution of a single authoritative diagnostic position, which depends on winning over his audience to accept the stigmatization of (our own) bodily substances, we might well say of his texts, as he does of the systems of power which he confronts: 'All monopolistic and hierarchical systems are basically rooted in anxiety' (*SM*, p.143). But it is an anxiety that produces resistance at the same time as submission. If these texts loathe the materiality of the body, they also bear witness to it in a way that, as was so visible on its first publication, scandalized a culture invested in its Cartesian divorce.⁴⁵ As such they demonstrate the way in which the loathing of the body

⁴³ See for instance Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, pp.86-91; and Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments*, pp. 216-221.

⁴⁴ Pheng Cheah offers a useful account of the process of possession in relation to the intertwining of nationalism, fundamentalism and feminism in Islamic states, in which competing instances of possession by various ideological and discursive practices produce political struggles, rather than merely being that against which political struggle is directed ('Mattering', pp.135-137).

⁴⁵ On the censorship of *The Naked Lunch* see Michael B. Goodman, *Contemporary Literary Censorship: The Case History of Burroughs's Naked Lunch*; and Thomas J. Main, 'On *Naked Lunch* and Just Desserts'. A collection of the *Times Literary Supplement's* outraged correspondence on *The Naked Lunch* is appended to the Paladin edition, and can also be found in Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg (eds.), *William Burroughs at the Front: Critical Reception, 1959-1989*.

may be used against a society that is invested in such a loathing - and ultimately, how the insistence on materiality that Burroughs's own loathing of materiality enshrines acts against his own attempts to imagine disembodied consciousness. It may then be that these texts are at their most political when they refuse to make the case that their author urges.

The political triumph of these texts, then, is that they defeat Burroughs's own attempts to imagine transcendence and in its place suggest that impurity is a condition of embodiment. In doing so they demonstrate how the deployment of bodily dread may lead both to pragmatic oppositions to sites of authority (we may denounce the ways that our bodies have been manipulated by the government or the police) and also to a radical affirmation of bodily materiality. I mean 'affirmation' not in the sense that it makes our bodies any more comfortable to live with, but rather in the sense that it affirms their absolute necessity in the face of the fantasy of the body's disposability. And insofar as the body exists only as a product, as the site of jostling forces that coerce, command, and constitute us, what is equally necessary is the inescapable fact of our being woven out of such practices and beliefs. They are embedded in our muscles and organs, in our postures and our shapes: in the bodily practices by which we maintain the social order and in the bodily metaphors by which we make sense of it. That these texts affirm such a position precisely by setting out to deny it is itself a reminder of the ceaseless productivity of speaking with the voices that one also opposes. At a time when 'political' literary criticism functions too often by its self-righteous exposing of the writings of others as being complicit with systems of authority, or as unwittingly shoring up destructive ideological positions, Burroughs is the necessary corrective: there is no alternative to absolute contamination - but equally there is no reason to assume that such contamination makes the opportunities for resistance any less effective.

Chapter Four

Burroughs/Kristeva: The Politics of (A)Social Bodily Disarray

(i) Introduction

This chapter emerges out of my dissatisfaction with the ways in which ‘the body’ in general, and Burroughs’s representations of the body in particular, have been viewed as staging a defiant celebration of materiality in the face of the totalitarian repression of disembodied culture (a position which, I should perhaps acknowledge, I had originally taken when approaching Burroughs). It is axiomatic within much modern Critical Theory that we should be united in our resistance to such dominant and dominating philosophical tendencies as logocentrism, Cartesianism, and phallocentrism. Such conceptual frameworks enshrine self-sufficient meaning over the instability of signification revealed by deconstruction;¹ a self-present ego over the misrecognitions and divisions in the subject highlighted by psychoanalysis;² masculinist values of rational disembodied consciousness over more emotional and fragmentary forms of knowledge which feminism points out have been denigrated as ‘feminine’;³ and absolute truth over the relative and

¹ See for instance Marcus Doel, ‘Bodies Without Organs: Schizoanalysis and Deconstruction’; Vicki Kirby, *Telling Flesh*; and Margrit Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries*, pp.91-113.

² See for instance Joan Copjec (ed.), *Supposing the Subject*; Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers*; and Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*.

³ See for instance Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo (eds.), *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*; and Toril Moi, ‘Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud’s Dora’.

contested local truths towards which postmodern genealogy guides us.⁴ Tensions and conflicts between and within these perspectives notwithstanding, they share a broad agenda of challenging the myth of a certain culturally sanctioned idea of well-ordered subjectivity, and replacing it with a notion of subjectivity as contingent, conflictual, and decentred. I want in this chapter to consider some of the problems of such an admittedly appealing refutation of the value of order, in relation to the ways in which such a challenge has been taken to be enacted through the body, and to ask how successfully Burroughs's writings can in fact accommodate such critical approaches.

Burroughs has often served as a recruit in this war: his texts seem to exemplify a refusal to adhere either to the dictates of culturally legitimate behaviour (his homosexuality, his drug use) or to aesthetically legitimate writing techniques. Rather, they seem to depict a world of constant flux and transgression. In particular, he has been claimed for this project because of the ways his texts seem to stress the violent materiality of the body.⁵ When Burroughs writes 'A coprophage calls for a plate, shits on it and eats the shit, exclaiming, "Mmmm, that's my rich substance"' (NL, p.43), Carol Loranger treats the scene as the

⁴ See for instance Judith Butler, 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism"' ; Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'; and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. More sceptically, see Jane Flax, 'The End of Innocence'.

⁵ Another figure often recruited to such arguments is Mikhail Bakhtin, and in particular his *Rabelais and His World*, whose distinction between the 'grotesque body' produced by the folk traditions of 'a second life outside officialdom' (p.6), and the orderly, isolated, classical body of officialdom, would seem to offer just such a model of bodily insurrection against cultural oppression. Bakhtin himself is clear, however, that for the modern world such bodily images have been robbed of their power by the bourgeois individualization of bodily experience: 'they are fragments of an alien language ... which at present conveys nothing but senseless abuse' (p.28). He also insists that his own separation of the two categories is an artificial one, and that in practice 'the two ... experience various forms of interaction: struggle, mutual influence, crossing and fusion' (p.30).

triumph of a purely material self over the attempt to impose a licit and socially meaningful identity. Against the orders of culture, the coprophage 'recognizes his own shit as ... self-generated, self-expressive, utterly concrete. By eating it he reaffirms his possession of his self, entering a state of true freedom' ('The Transcendent Postmodern: Noise and Free Agency in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon and William Burroughs', p.327). For Steven Shaviro, Burroughs's bodies are the proof that biology refuses to follow the laws of ideology ('Two Lessons from Burroughs'). When Deleuze and Guattari want to declare that their utopian Body Without Organs is a lived possibility it is Burroughs whom they cite (*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p.150). His texts would seem to remind a repressive culture of those rejected bodily practices and functions which it would prefer not to mention since they disrupt its logic.

In the same way his recurrent use of the imagery of the chaotic body would seem to flout the ordered and stable society symbolized by a well-ordered body, and the stable self that comes with it. When John Tytell celebrates Burroughs as a writer who has 'tried to redeem our repressed fears and desires' (*Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation*, p.123), his choice of verb is telling. For if the texts are said to 'redeem' what has been despised about the body, surely it is equally true that in such a formulation the body is assumed to redeem us: it is our experience of the corporeal (as the raw, the unsocialized) which will save us from the constrictions of the social.⁶

Faced with the Cartesian assumption that the mind is a unified, self-aware, coherent and disembodied site of rationality, the unruly body would seem to exemplify all that is non-self-identical, dispersed, fluid and irrational. There is thus a

⁶ For similar readings of Burroughs's work, see Christopher Ames, 'Calling for Ketchup in Burroughs and Pynchon'; and Allon Jonhston, 'The Burroughs Biopathy: William S. Burroughs' *Junky* and *Naked Lunch* and Reichian Theory'.

tradition within Critical Theory which takes the body to stand for what is outside of, antithetical to, or unintelligible for, culture. Thus in *Thinking Through The Body* Jane Gallop writes of the body as that which is 'not already rationalized and subordinate to discourse' (p.19), telling us that 'the body is enigmatic because it is not the creation of the mind' (p.18). Discussing the ways in which stereotyping diminishes the irreducible individuality of each person, Roland Barthes says 'the stereotype is that emplacement of discourse where the body is missing, where one is sure the body is not' (*Roland Barthes*, p.90).⁷ In such assertions the body comes to act as the sign of an escape from the rigidities of discourse and the social institutions which organize and are organized by discourse.

Such arguments begin from the assumption that the dominant feature of subjectivity is that 'the subject is the subject. Alone it stands. And in no need of skin, flesh, face or fluid. Body it never is. Bodies are the enemy of the subject' (Marcus Doel, 'Bodies Without Organs: Schizoanalysis and Deconstruction', p.230). It therefore follows from such a view of subjectivity that to insist upon the significance of the body is to unsettle the foundations of the subject and of the culture that shores it up. Hence the term 'the body' serves as a sign for a space that is not simply outside culture, but which is antithetical to it: whose violence, sexuality, and scandalous biological processes disrupt the norms of discourse, psychic regularity, and economic practicality.

This politicizing of the body functions to exacerbate the tension of that particular split which Kaja Silverman describes as 'perhaps the most radical of all subject divisions - the division between meaning and materiality' (*The Acoustic Mirror*, p.44). If the body is to be recruited as partisan, then it is so that it might

⁷ On Barthes's use of the body as the route to effect an escape from culture see Jonathan Culler, *Barthes*, pp.91-100; Jo Eadie, ' "To Say How We Are Moved": Reading the Body of/in/with Roland Barthes'; and Leslie Hill, 'Barthes's Body'.

serve in the confrontation between an intelligible social order and a realm which has no inherent intelligibility. At stake would then seem to be the triumph of meaning over matter or that of matter over meaning - with the latter option being a pleasing prospect if we have come to regard meaning as tyrannical.⁸

How well does Burroughs fit with such a notion of the body ? Although I have suggested that his texts do indeed affirm various non-traditional notions of embodiment, I have also stressed that they depend heavily on the sorts of hostility towards the body that we here see him recruited to oppose. In this chapter, I wish to ask what is lost when we make his work a celebration of those bodily states that it is so disgusted by. I will consider whether an affirmation of bodily disorder is always a useful political strategy, and whether in fact Burroughs's work suggests that it may rather be a suspicion of bodily order that can enable our politics. And where Loranger, Shaviro, and Deleuze and Guattari read Burroughs as affirming a bodily alterity that subverts a set of dominant philosophical concepts, I shall suggest that his work is altogether less sanguine about the possibilities of using the body as a revolutionary resource - and is perhaps more useful as a result.

Burroughs's texts certainly recognize that certain groups in particular regard the body as dangerous and repulsive, and that this accompanies a desire to control and pathologize bodies which flaunt their socially illicit materiality. In the quartet, a particular scorn is reserved for those who loathe the body, and it is their fate to be humiliated or destroyed by its most extreme manifestations. In a science-fiction scenario, the military commanders who warn their troops against the

⁸ It may also be, as Terry Eagleton has argued, that this re-turn to the body is part of an attempt by postmodern theory to infuse theory with the specificities of the personal and the concrete world of the material - that the body is a theoretical palliative, reassuring us that our high theory has not lost touch with real life (*The Illusions of Postmodernism*, pp. 69-75). Rather than exacerbating the conflict between meaning and materiality, the body then becomes in Critical Theory a way of solving it.

temptations of sex with alien organisms - 'You boys going to stand still for this ? Being slobbered down and shit out by an alien mollusk ?' (*TTE*, p.11) - end up victims of those same creatures, driven insane by sexual hunger:

As I write this I have barricaded myself in the ward room against the 2nd Lieutenant who claims he is 'God's little hang boy sent special to me' that fucking shave tail I can hear him out there whimpering and slobbering and the Colonel is jacking off in front of the window pointing to a Gemini Sex Skin. The Captain's corpse hangs naked at the flagpole. (*TTE*, p.12)

Similarly those who find the body's biological functioning so unpredictable that they wish to dominate it end up being swamped by it: 'Americans have a special horror of giving up control, of letting things happen in their own way without interference. They would like to jump down into their stomachs and digest the food and shovel the shit out' (*NL*, p.170). The desire to control the unruly body thus ends up as the immersion in body matter, its uncertain consequences indicated by the ambiguous image of the shit-shoveller: in seeking to be in control of the body's waste matter, they have ended up being overwhelmed by it.

However, it would be wrong to assume from this that Burroughs therefore wants us to simply affirm or celebrate the body as an act of resistance against such authoritative loathing. At the same time as critiquing the pathologization of unconventional bodily pleasures, his position would also seem to be that it is precisely because the body can be made into such an object of loathing that we must dispense with it. The body is too convenient a resource for power to exploit - we are too easily programmed by revulsion, embarrassment, and shame, which makes us ripe for manipulation. Whoever has the power to shame, Burroughs suggests, is in the position of God (*The Job*, pp.19-20). That the army officers so easily descend to 'whimpering and slobbering' may well mock their hatred of the slobbering 'sex skins' that seduce their troops. But it also reveals such apparently

unruly bodily practices as in fact complicit with the lines of military authority. For even in this bodily anarchy the second lieutenant still has power over the private barricaded into his dormitory, and the Captain still occupies the place at the top of the flagpole. Similarly, while the image of the would-be shit-shoveller at first suggests the impossibility of entering one's own digestive tract in order to oversee its progress, placing the body beyond the reach of power, on reflection we see that such an intervention in biology is clearly entirely possible: drugs, dietary plans, rhythms of eating, induced vomiting, exercise, laxatives and enemas are routinely used to speed up, or slow down, the passage of food through the body.

It is a recognizable feature of satire that in order to achieve its mockery it must retain elements of the scenes that it satirizes: one thinks of images like the fool or animal crowned as a king at the medieval carnival. Read as satire, an image like the colonel's skin hung from the flagpole ridicules authority (the national flag) by associating it with the repulsive (the flayed skin). But Burroughs goes further than this, to suggest the messy body's association with authority: even flayed skin may be given a place of status or prestige and *sanction the hierarchical system of prestige as it does so*. These are not simply grotesque satires, but ambivalent images in which body matter - including its most visceral, excremental, and sexual aspects - is not simply an unthinkable or 'enigmatic' otherness which must be repressed, even though the texts resound with the efforts of repressive authority to exercise control over it. Rather, alongside this, the representation of even the most apparently anarchic of biological states reveals the body's complicity with forces of domination that operate through, rather than simply against, such states.

I regard this particular contradiction as central to Burroughs's work. In the last chapter, I considered this ambivalence about the body as indicative of the problems of attempting to imagine bodily transcendence; here I wish to use it as a way of approaching the question of the usefulness of deploying 'the body' as a sign

for a realm of experience outside the domination of culture, by drawing on one theorist whose work has been taken as central to such a line of thinking: Julia Kristeva. In particular, I am interested in Kristeva's focus on the split in the subject between a desire to transcend the body and the necessity of inhabiting it: a tension that she describes as 'impossible, irreconcilable, and, by that very token, real' (*Powers of Horror*, p.120). In terms of this thesis, Kristeva also offers a useful development of the model for embodied subjectivity and its representation that I have outlined in chapters one and two. She extends the Lacanian account of a body constructed as under the threat of disorder by emphasizing the psychic consequences of the condemnation - or 'abjection' - of body matter. Her work also makes a useful comparison with the Foucauldian account of the ordering of the body by social structures through her insistence that the body is a site both of resistance to power and disciplining by power.

Kristeva offers ways of understanding the ambiguity of Burroughs's images of bodily disgust: both dreaded and desired, both in the service of power and resistant to it, both a defiant expression of a marginalized aspect of human subjectivity and an alien matter that has colonized the human subject. Such an ambivalence is all the more important because in two striking applications of Kristeva's work to Burroughs, this ambiguity has been erased from both writers. Robin Lydenberg quotes Kristeva to lend weight to her argument that Burroughs's writing derives from 'a focus on that which threatens the seamless unity and autonomy of the symbolic body' (*Word Cultures*, p.141), and figures it as the realization of the Kristevan 'semiotic' or pre-verbal anarchy (pp.171-172). For Kendra Langeteig, Burroughs's characters are a celebration of carnal chaos and, punning on the title of the work by Kristeva that will be central to this chapter, she suggests that 'Burroughs invests them with the annihilating "powers of horror" that stalk the imagination' (*Horror Autotoxicus*, p.160), empowering them as chaotic

bringers of destruction to a stifling social order through their terrifyingly unruly bodies. For neither critic is there any sense that either Burroughs or Kristeva might in fact be doing something other than prescribing as a remedy for all ills a disorderly body which is the source of spontaneous revolutionary values.

(ii) Kristeva and the Abject Body

The central focus of Kristeva's theoretical work is the process by which the infant becomes a subject through its entry into culture, and the consequences (personal and social) of that process. She is concerned with what comes before that threshold, how early physical and psychic states persist into adult life, and how literary texts attempt to engage with such states. In response to her inquiry into these territories, there have been four recurrent criticisms of Kristeva's work, often regarded by her detractors as being so damning as to invalidate her entire theoretical project.⁹ They are: that Kristeva posits an unproveable pre-linguistic origin to subjectivity, which is in fact more a fantasy of her own ideological position than any psychic truth; that in so doing, she represents as biologically immutable a series of psychic states that are in fact culturally specific; that she misreads the relationship between aesthetic and socio-political revolution by assuming that textual transgressions constitute a substantive challenge to the social order; and finally, that she reifies the relationships of men and women to culture, and to each other, in such a way that women are robbed of agency, and men become the privileged agents of revolutionary praxis.

⁹ See for instance: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp.79-93; Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics'; Eléonor Kuykendall, 'Questions for Julia Kristeva's Ethics of Linguistics'; Gayatri Spivak, 'In a Word: *Interview*', p.17; Jennifer Stone, 'The Horrors of Power: A Critique of "Kristeva" '; and Allon White, '*L'Éclatement du sujet: The Work of Julia Kristeva*'.

These first two objections will be addressed in later stages of this chapter, but I want briefly to address the third and fourth objections now, since there will be no later possibility to do so. In a sense, this thesis has its own easy way of circumventing the final objection: I am not making any claims for the adequacy of Kristeva's theorization of female agency. My reading of Burroughs will show how her work can be usefully coupled with his texts precisely because of her recognition of the problems of embodiment for male writing. Whether Kristeva is as useful in reading texts by women writers is another question, which I leave open here. As to the issue of textual revolution, I would certainly agree that Kristeva's work does not often consider the precise social mechanisms by which textual innovation can lead to social innovation, preferring as she does to leave such assertions to be taken on trust.¹⁰ But, as this chapter hopes to demonstrate, it is possible to relate textuality and representation to larger political struggles in ways that actualize their revolutionary potential. If texts have a politics, it lies in the way that their readers use them - and it is perhaps in a piece of work like my own that we can build a bridge between formal textual features and the political struggles whose subjects might respond to the possibilities generated in such texts.

How might we start to make such connections between Burroughs, Kristeva, and embodied politics ? Influenced by the linguist Alfred Korzybski, one of Burroughs's central claims is that 'there are certain formulas, word-locks, which will lock up a whole civilisation for a thousand years' (*The Job*, p.49), chief amongst which are 'the Aristotelian "either-or" - something is either this or that' (*The Job*, p.48) and 'Aristotle's *is* of identity : this *is* a chair. Now, whatever it may

¹⁰ On the avant-garde contexts for this hope of textual radicalization, see Leslie Hill, 'Julia Kristeva: Theorizing the Avant-Garde ?'; and Suzanne Guerlac, 'Transgression in Theory: Genius and the Subject of *La Révolution du langage poétique*'.

be, it's not a chair, it's not the word chair, it's not the label chair' (*The Job*, p.49).¹¹ Such linguistic functions are part of what Kristeva calls the 'thetic' aspect of subjectivity: the state based on logic and maintained through the syntactical rigours of language.¹² The thetic consists of two operations: an act of denotation, by which particular objects are named and identified; and an act of enunciation, by which a subject-position is produced from which such utterances may issue (*Revolution in Poetic Language*, henceforth *RPL*, pp.54-56). Like Burroughs, she views such stabilization of identity as suspect, since the thetic position entails a reduction of the heterogeneity of the psyche. Such a position has been made most familiar within studies of Kristeva through her opposing terms 'semiotic' and 'symbolic': the one being the chaotic pre-verbal space experienced by the child, the other being the linguistic structure which orders subjectivity (*RPL*, pp.19-106). These overused terms will not play a part in the following discussion, but have been central to debates about Kristeva.¹³ Whatever the merits of her much-used, and much-reviled, terms, the speed of their dissemination within Critical Theory suggests the appeal of the formulation of a rigid imposition on an essentially free and pre-cultural psyche. But it is the very appeal of such a position that I wish to explore here: what if, in our apparent eagerness to accept a notion of the body's resistance to order, we overlook these insistent warnings from Burroughs - that at its most apparently chaotic, the body still follows the contours of authority? Is it possible to recognize

¹¹ On Burroughs's use of Korzybski's ideas, see David Ingram, 'William Burroughs and Language'.

¹² Kristeva's concept of the thetic derives from her reading of Edmund Husserl. See Michael Payne, *Reading Theory*, pp.171-176.

¹³ See for instance: Josette Féral, 'Antigone or the Irony of the Tribe'; Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* pp.161-173; Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-Bind*; Michael Payne, *Reading Theory*, pp.165-183; and Allon White, 'L'Éclatement du sujet: The Work of Julia Kristeva'. Despite this persistent interest, Jacqueline Rose has suggested that it is 'the least useful aspect of Kristeva's work, even though it is the concept for which she is best known' ('Julia Kristeva - Take Two', p.154).

the body's capacity to subvert regimes of propriety, while still being aware of its dubious allegiances to domination ?

To what extent, then, does Kristeva regard the body as outside the social order? In her book *Powers of Horror* (henceforth *PH*), Kristeva defines a process which she calls 'abjection', a process by which the subject attempts to split itself away from the acknowledgement of its corporeal existence. Kristeva is proposing a universal process in the constitution of subjectivity, based around exclusions charged with horror.¹⁴ She is particularly concerned with the corporeality of this horror: the way in which abjection involves disgust at the body, and particularly - for reasons which we will come to later - at the female body. Her arguments offer a way of understanding the unsettling potential of body matter, through mapping out abjection as a perspective on the body produced by a symbolic order which attempts to stand outside that body. But, we shall see, it is also a set of feelings which the body develops long before it can speak.

The abject is a part of ourselves - and particularly of our bodies - which we cannot be rid of, but which has been excluded or prohibited: it may take the form of culturally stigmatized body material (excrement, menstrual blood, spittle), or it may appear as an everyday substance whose viscosity or porousness reminds us of our own bodily material. Like Fanon's analysis of his own blackness, it is that part of us which is so far excluded from a definition of legitimate subjectivity that the recognition of its presence in our bodies places our sense of integrity and existence under threat. The body thus becomes a repository of organs and substances

¹⁴ 'I have sought in this book to demonstrate on what mechanism of subjectivity (which I believe to be universal) such horror, its meaning as well as its power, is based' (*PH*, p.208). Similarly, although she accepts that different forms of language may construct different forms of subjectivity, she nevertheless insists that she will only go so far as to locate any given symbolic system as 'a *possible variant*, within the only concrete universality that defines the speaking being - the signifying process' (*PH*, p.67, emphasis in the original).

deemed superfluous - if not antipathetic - to the subject. A 'German practitioner of Technological Medicine' suggests in *The Naked Lunch* that 'The human body is filled up with unnecessary parts', and calls for a body with 'lebensraum like the Vaterland' (*NL*, pp.145-146). The fascistic connotations which Burroughs gives to the desire to clean away 'unnecessary parts' of the body remind us that abjection is a violent process, whose condemnation of the body is intimately tied to social hierarchies which designate certain bodies as less valuable than others.

Although the object is excluded, it perpetually fascinates us. But it can never quite occupy a place in our world since it has been excluded in order that that world make sense. Consequently the object 'draws me toward the place where meaning collapses' (*PH*, p.2), where systems of order, with their clear boundaries, cease to hold power. The object thus defines a zone of experience that is antithetical to the social order and which erodes its dominant values. Through abjection, the subject is founded by systematic exclusions, and yet, as if conscious of the void left by those exclusions, we are drawn to the object matter that marks them, finding it 'as tempting as it is condemned' (*PH*, p.1). The object is not simply that which we repress or deny, for it persists: 'excluded but in a strange fashion: not radically enough for a secure differentiation ... and yet clearly enough for a defensive position' (*PH*, p.7). We can loathe the object but cannot separate it from us, it will not be brushed off. It clings, but it is too disgusting to ever be accepted as a part of us - 'to each superego its object' (*PH*, p.2), that loathed presence which enables the superego to effect a narcissistic version of the self: a self which is pure and a body which is clean.

The object thus has a double effect. On the one hand it stabilizes the subject, since it provides a structure to enforce our sense of distance from rejected body matter; on the other, it destabilizes the subject since it is the ever-present reminder of those excluded bodily forms which we might also be. As such, it may well seem

that the body is opposed to ordered subjectivity. And texts such as Burroughs's quartet would seem to verify this by their hostility towards its open, porous qualities: that is, all the ways in which corporeality refuses to follow a conventional logic of identity. If we think of the analysis of Burroughs made in the previous chapter, we can see how Kristeva's theory of abjection might be used to demonstrate that although Burroughs seems to want to mark off the alien substances from the clean body, the disgust attached to those substances is a product of our tortuous relationships with our own bodies. Reviled substances originating within our flesh serve as the model for all impurity. As such, he is compelled to condemn it and plan its elimination: the strength of the voice which speaks in the quartet is sustained by its conviction of its own purity, which in turn depends on its capacity to name, diagnose and expel the abject.

Moreover, abjection extends the argument about constitutive possession that I made in the previous chapter. Victor Burgin defines abjection as 'the means by which the subject is first impelled towards the possibility of constituting itself as such' ('Geometry and Abjection', p.115). This curious phrase suggests some of the problems of thinking about abjection and its relationship to subjectivity. It makes no sense to speak of a subject that can be 'impelled towards' its own constitution, as if it preceded its own existence.¹⁵ Rather, we should speak of the subject as that which comes into being as abjection takes place. Before it, there is 'no subject or personality, merely an unstable and provisional "beating out" (*frayage*) of certain pathways' (Allon White, '*L'Éclatement du sujet*: The Work of Julia Kristeva', p.70). Consequently, subjectivity emerges because of a series of demarcations in which bodily matter is declared taboo, with each stabilization of the subject

¹⁵ Kristeva encounters similar problems, describing how 'discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such' (*RPL*, p.25).

accompanied by acts of abjection which simultaneously render the subject unstable. The subject comes into being only by a process which makes it a subject-under-threat and a subject-needing-to-expel. In the process that brings it into being, it requires the fantasy that within its body is matter that is not its own, and from which it can separate itself. Building on Kristeva's account, we might even go so far as to say that one definition of the subject is: that psychic construct which maintains itself through attempts to expel unwanted parts of itself. Subjectivity is thus predicated on the experience of possession - of defining oneself as an integral body by attempting to expel parts of the body that are designated alien presences. Kristeva at one point defines the abject as: 'a possession previous to my advent' (*PH*, p.10) The subject thus comes into being only as the always already inhabited - contaminated by what it wishes to expel, invaded by what it regards as alien.

Such an account would certainly seem to promise a challenge to society issuing from the body, with Burroughs staging a futile resistance to its presence. His loathing of embodiment can be read as symptomatic of abjection, with his attempts to dismiss it proving unsuccessful. The body thus seems to stand as that unstable material which cannot be attacked with impunity, since it always promises to subvert the identity of its assailant. Such a promise appears borne out by Kristeva's insistence that the abject frustrates and undoes the possibility of a unified identity. If at the level of fantasy we imagine that unwanted body-substances are not in fact part of ourselves, at the same time we recognize that they do belong to us, and are never finally able to accept their separation. While abjection is the precondition for the narcissistic construction of a super-ego, we can never fully believe in such an image, for at the same time abjection spoils it: 'abjection is therefore a kind of narcissistic crisis' (*PH*, p.14) - that is a crisis for narcissism, a crisis for the image of the perfect self which is created. Abjection is thus a process of prohibiting what will not be prohibited, rejecting what will not be rejected - or

rather, of prohibiting that which is prohibited but *still* refuses the prohibition, and which is wholly rejected but *still* refuses to go: 'the abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them' (*PH*, p.15).

Thus what is abjected in this way does not simply become an external object which we regard with horror. In the object, says Kristeva, we encounter homology: a structure of differentiated entities (myself and the object) which enables me to construct a secure self. The *object* is separate from me, as I am from it. But the *abject* is never quite separate from me, and as such undermines the distinctions which enable meaning to operate and selfhood to be sustained. The most extreme example of this, argues Kristeva, is the corpse. In the corpse we encounter everything that has been excluded from our bodies - all the mess and waste - put together *as* a body. The border by which we separate death and decomposition from ourselves has been pushed inwards by the excluded waste until it is 'a border that has encroached upon everything' (*PH*, p.3) - and 'how can I be without border?' (*PH*, p.4). Without the border, the self cannot maintain its separateness. Hence that crisis which we see in Burroughs, where the entire body must be rejected because it has been abjected, is analogous to that state described by Kristeva as the end point of a gradual process whereby the entire body, part by part, gradually acquires the characteristics of those specific body substances which are most strongly abjected: 'such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit ... It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled' (*PH*, p.3-4).

Here too Burroughs would seem to bear out such arguments, for although he attempts to define and reject abject matter, his own self-advocated values constantly resemble what is abjected. As I have argued, Burroughs's fierce

denunciation of a state of invasion relies on a series of indicted enemies whose methods and characteristics always have an uncanny resemblance to his own.

Abjection is a structure that mocks us, because we constantly find that what we designate as the most odious will in fact prove to be inescapably bound to us.¹⁶

It is important that the abject does not just disgust or repel - it also fascinates and lures us. What seems particularly fascinating in the abject is that it offers us a promise of destruction, and not just individual destruction but - like those anomalous objects that intrigue Douglas - the dissolution of an entire cultural system which makes sense only through its exclusion. The abject thus violates both the integrity of the subject's identity - thereby rendering identity untenable - and along with that identity, the logic that subtends it. Hence it would appear to be a plausible reading of Kristeva to argue that the body is the site of the loss of integral subjectivity - a discordant site where meaning collapses, self-sameness comes undone and unified consciousness is disrupted. And the fact that Burroughs's encounter with abjection ends up undermining his own attempts to assert his distance from the body would seem to bear out the political capacity of abject matter to disturb any social system which attempts to dispel it.

But Burroughs also offers us a very different perspective on abjection, which challenges such an optimistic reading of its power to subvert, and one that will enable us to take Kristeva in a very different direction. In *The Soft Machine* a

¹⁶ In arguing this Kristeva seeks to use abjection as a means of understanding social and political acts of exclusion and stigmatization - a concern which her more recent work has extended to issues of racism and nationalism (see for instance *Strangers to Ourselves*). Kristeva's thinking should therefore be seen as an inquiry into how our relationships to our bodies determine social thought. As such, her focus on the instability of the exclusions required for abjection is necessarily a political argument about the impossibility of ever completely expelling stigmatized social groups and practices from the collective psyche of the nation state. For evaluations of Kristeva's attempts to extend her work in these directions, see Nöelle McAfee, 'Abject Strangers: Towards an Ethics of Respect'; and Norma Claire Moruzzi 'National Objects: Julia Kristeva on the Process of Political Self-identification'.

traveller, Carl, narrates the story of his journey to a South American village, Puerto Joselito. Its inhabitants are in stages of decay, 'eating handfuls of dirt and trailing green spit' (*SM*, p.63), described by a local official as 'backward ... uninstructed ... each living alone and cultivating his little virus patch' (*SM*, p.64). Some of those Carl meets, he later finds, are already dead, and the earth they eat is the remains of the graves out of which they have dug their way. They thus cross the line between life and death - just as the town crosses the line between the civilization above the surface of earth, and the raw matter below it: 'the town and its inhabitants were slowly sinking in wastes and garbage' (*SM*, p.62).

On an unstable border, rotting away, riddled with viruses and death, Puerto Joselito is the abject city, the place of bodily waste and wasted bodies, while its sexualized connotations are heightened by a cutup phrase that occurs at the end of the chapter: 'Puerto Joselito is located through legs' (*SM*, p.69). The town is thus a site of both repulsion and desire, for however repulsive, the place also attempts to appeal to Carl, as he walks past a series of ritualized sexual tableaux, in which sweat, semen, excrement and blood leak from ruptured bodies. Towards the end of the chapter the words 'suffocating town, this. ways to bury explorer' (*SM*, p.69) appear, echoing the narrative progress by which Carl is slowly buried by the text, as the rituals occupy ever more space on the page at his expense, until the signifier 'Carl' is simply an occasional word mixing with the others. The visit to Puerto Joselito thus mimics the process by which the abject is disavowed, but finally triumphs. At first active verbs are associated with Carl, which position him as distant observer, unattached to the events he witnesses: 'Carl could see people on a board walk' (*SM* p.63). In particular, it is the repeated word 'walked' that marks his detached progress through the geography of abjection: 'Carl walked through footpaths of a vast shanty town' (*SM*, p.66), 'Carl walked along a long line of penis

urns' (*SM*, p.67).¹⁷ But eventually the active verbs become passive, and he is lost in abjection: 'Carl is taken by the centipede legs and pulled into flesh jelly dissolving bones' (*SM*, p.69).

Before his final dissolution, Carl faces the first of his many trials of bodily disorder when he visits an official called 'The Commandante'. There again the verbs associated with him turn from active to passive, as 'an assistant ... removed Carl's clothes in a series of locks and throws' (*SM*, p.64) and the Commandante attempts to reshape his body from male to female:

The Commandante spread jelly over Carl's naked paralyzed body. The Commandante was moulding a woman. Carl could feel his body draining into the woman mould. His genitals dissolving, tits swelling as the Commandante penetrated applying a few touches to face and hair - (jissom across the mud wall in the dawn sound of barking dogs and running water -) Down there the Commandante going through his incantations around Carl's empty body. The body rose presenting an erection, masturbates in front of the Commandante. Penis flesh spread through his body bursting in orgasm explosions granite cocks ejaculate lava undersea black cloud boiling with monster crustaceans. Cold grey undersea eyes and hands touched Carl's body. The Commandante flipped him over with sucker hands and fastened his disk mouth to Carl's asshole. He was lying in a hammock of green hair, penis-flesh hammers bursting his body. Hairs licked his rectum, spiraling tendrils scraping pleasure centers, Carl's body emptied in orgasm after orgasm, bones lit up green through flesh dissolved into the disk mouth with a fluid plop. He quivers red now in boneless spasms, pink waves through his body at touch of the green hairs.

The Commandante stripped Carl's body and smeared on green jelly nipples that pulled the flesh up and in. Carl's genitals wither to dry shit he sweeps clear with a little whisk broom to white flesh and black shiny pubic hairs. The Commandante parts the hairs and makes incision with a little curved knife. Now he is modeling a face from the picture of his novia in the Capital. (*SM*, pp.64-65)

¹⁷ In a subsequent chapter, 'Last Hints', Carl appears again as the emblem of one who tries to pass unscathed through abjection, with the repeated verb this time being 'descended', a descent that once again leads to his disappearance (*SM*, pp.71-73).

On the one hand, the text seems intended to encourage the reader to identify with Carl, and to enjoy the disordering of the body that takes place. In that sense it is an extremely efficiently crafted erotic scene. It follows the conventional erotic writing practice of enumerating different erogenous zones as an invitation to the reader to objectify (by desire) and/or empathize with (by identification) the bodies that are depicted.¹⁸ In the course of the paragraph we move swiftly along the chain of key words: genitals, tits, erection, penis, hands, mouth, asshole, rectum, nipples, pubic hairs. Even though in each case the body part undergoes an unsettling change (for instance the genitals are ‘dissolving’ and the nipples are made of ‘green jelly’), the transformations are consonant with the erotic conventions of the representation of orgasm: liquefaction, loss of control, and loss of sense of time as marked by repeated use of present participles. Even the familiar Burroughsian imagery, rather than indicating dangerous biological changes, may be read as a mixture of the hallucinations that accompany heightened states of sexual arousal, and conventional metaphors for sexual pleasure, interspersed with other phrases that may be no more than new metaphors for orgasm: ‘penis flesh spread through his body bursting in orgasm explosions granite cocks ejaculate lava under a black cloud boiling with crustaceans’.

The passage evokes a range of sensory experiences in order to elicit a cathexis from the senses of its reader: visually it enumerates colours (‘he quivers red now’, ‘grey undersea eyes’, ‘pink waves’, ‘green jelly nipples’, ‘shiny black pubic hair’); while the kinesthetic (the senses of touch and movement) is aroused by

¹⁸ As Diana Fuss suggests, we must always be prepared to think the occurrence of both, rather than accepting the traditional psychoanalytic assumption that one either identifies with or desires for (*Identification Papers*, especially pp.11-14); we must also as Marjorie Garber says, recognize that gender and sexuality are no bar to such processes, with men and women, whether gay, lesbian or straight, identifying with and desiring bodies of any and all sexes (*Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*).

the text's deployment of a vocabulary of sensation: moulding, draining, swelling, flipped him over, licked, scraping, quivers. In its engagement of these tactile senses it also relies on the coupling of opposed sensory experiences, moving between words variously associated with heat (lava, boiling) and cold (crustaceans, undersea); softness (hair, tendrils, fluid, waves) and hardness (granite, hammers). Its alternation between these opposing sensory experiences acts as a kind of inventory of the kinesthetic. Its aim would seem to be to generate an array of forms of pleasure that would give every reader some point of erotic access to the scenario, while miming through its disconnected syntax the sensory and cognitive confusions of orgasm.

But Burroughs is quick to complicate such a response. Carl responds curtly: 'Most distasteful thing I ever stand still for' (*SM*, p.65). Carl's phrase is one that recurs in these texts - first appearing in *The Naked Lunch*, when an addict uses it of the sexual demands made of him by a narcotics agent. It indicates an assertion of power by its various speakers, who, while they have submitted to some act by standing still, may safely ridicule it afterwards after they have survived it.¹⁹ The addict who uses it first does so in a safe environment, joking with his friends: 'Later the boy is sitting in a Waldorf with two colleagues dunking pound cake. "Most distasteful thing I ever stand still for", he says' (*NL*, p.27).²⁰ If these texts constantly encourage distaste as a mode of resistance, it is perhaps because such an emotion represents the restrained and contemptuous tones of the discriminating critic, drawn from a distinctly bourgeois vocabulary: not retching or livid, but merely shocked, like the detachment Carl later shows towards the erotic rituals. To

¹⁹ See for instance the time traveller who infiltrates and then destroys a Mayan priesthood: 'In order to accomplish the purpose I prostituted myself to one of the priests - (Most distasteful thing I ever stood still for)' (*SM*, p.56).

²⁰ As if in recognition of its centrality, the phrase appears on that fragmentary summary of Burroughsian themes and devices, the back cover of the Paladin edition of *The Naked Lunch*.

find something 'distasteful' is not to be overwhelmed, but to position oneself as superior. As such it expresses that attempt to distance oneself from the body which defines abjection, but also, because of its politicized associations as a tactic of resistance and survival, acts as a reminder that there may be moments where it is our interests to adopt such a distance from the abject.

Carl then strengthens his rejection of abjection by an effort of will which does not derive from his compromised corporeality: 'Carl made words in the air without a throat, without a tongue' (*SM*, p.65). They are words uncontaminated by the body's materiality, existing only through the will of the speaker. The final part of this rejection of the bodily chaos that he has undergone comes when, asserting his intention to overcome this bodily disruption through the medical models so beloved by Burroughs, his effort results in the words: 'I hope there is a Farmacia in the area'.²¹ What we might initially have seen as a moment of delirious *jouissance* is now rendered as pathology. The heavily eroticized transformation of Carl's body then becomes read differently: it is an indication of the pleasure that may be involved in experiences which destroy us. Deliberately seductive, it exposes our capacity to be enthralled by the pleasures of a dominated body - indicting the ways in which our bodily pleasures have been constructed for us so as to render us submissive.²²

We might want to dismiss Carl as another of those despisers of the body

²¹ Unfortunately for Carl, Puerto Joselito is so lost to abjection that it offers no medical salvation. The pharmacist turns him away: 'He clanged an iron door and the sign Farmacia fell off the boat and sank in black ooze' (*SM*, p.65).

²² Edward Foster records Burroughs's hopes that these forms of writing might wear out the appeal of the erotic (*Understanding the Beats*, p.170); David Lodge suggests that Burroughs's sexual imagery is constructed so as to be non-erotic (*The Modes of Modern Writing*, pp.35-38) - but, caught up in the reversals central to this passage, he also accuses Burroughs's writing of making us attracted to the violence which is depicted by eroticizing it ('Objections to William Burroughs', p.207) .

whom Burroughs ridicules, his Germanic name linking him back to the 'German practitioner of technological medicine' from *The Naked Lunch*. In keeping with Burroughs's use of Germany to signify a fascistic order and cleanliness, the Commandante apologises to Carl for the squalor of Puerto Joselito: 'you must forgive my staff if they do not quite measure up to your German ideal of spit and polish' (*SM*, p.64). But it would be a mistake to read Carl's resistance as being ridiculed - primarily because it is depicted as a positive opposition to attempts to violate his freedom, all the more heroic because it is doomed to fail. The town is envisioned as a space of repeated attempts at control and domination, of which Carl's assault at the hands of the Commandante is only one example. Throughout the town, priests, puppeteers, con-men, and pimps attempt to recruit Carl for forms of physical transformation which require that he become abject: physically, in the sense of becoming liquid, infected, or decaying; psychically, in the sense of giving up any sense of clear self-definition; and, crucially, politically, in the sense of occupying a position of submission - to be a sacrifice, a prostitute, or a meal. For Burroughs, to be abject is to be enslaved - since, after all, the social correlation of abject matter is with those who are politically powerless: to be socially disenfranchised is to be socially abjected. It is no accident that the Commandante's expression of his power over Carl is to attempt to turn him into a woman: to push him from a position of social equality to one of social inferiority. It is the abject body that bears the signs of social submission and the clean body that retains power, as with the endangered employee who begs for his job with the words: 'Please Boss Man, I'll wipe your ass, I'll wash out your dirty condoms, I'll polish your shoes with the oil on my nose' (*NL*, p.28).²³

²³ In an instance of what Homi Bhabha has termed 'sly civility' ('Sly Civility'), it is in declaring his inferior situation that the speaker mocks his superior: in declaring his own willingness to perform the abject task of cleaning up the dirt of his employer, the employer's own body is exposed as equally repugnant.

The attempt to elicit from the body an expression of its own abject matter then stands as an act of domination: it is an attempt to make the body vulnerable. Similarly, psychic disorganization is also a liability - it is only Carl's capacity to maintain a sense of his identity that preserves him. Equally crucial to survival in Puerto Joselito is the ability to distinguish oneself from other substances, to define one's own body as integral, and to maintain a distance from the fascination of losing oneself in states of disorganization. Also, Burroughs suggests, we need to be able to recognize how our desires may be constructed against our best interests, encouraging us to submit to the pleasures of our own violation - secured here once more through the body's biological susceptibility to control, represented in Carl's case by reference to the brain's 'pleasure centers'. All of which is to resist the psychic dynamics generated by the appeal of the abject. The abject now seems not to promise a liberating access to a repressed corporeality so much as to invite us to surrender our capacity to resist domination. If abjection generates a crisis in the subject, we should not assume that freedom lies in resolving such a crisis in favour of the substances or activities that have been abjected. Rather, we must recognize the necessity of sometimes reasserting their rejection. Against Langeteig and Lydenberg, I would suggest that Burroughs's work in fact amounts to a constant reminder that the abject's unsettling of our borders, and disruption of our relationship to our sense of self, may not always be a route to new freedoms.

Such an analysis of the experience of abjection, as offered by the quartet, seems particularly astute. It recognizes that a sense of bodily integrity and psychic wholeness may facilitate social action. 'The human body' as Kristeva says:

is not a unity but a plural totality with separate members that have no identity but constitute the place where drives are applied. This dismembered body cannot fit together again, set itself in motion, or function biologically and physiologically, unless it is included within a practice that encompasses the signifying process. (*RPL*, p.101)

That is, without the ordering that language provides by socializing corporeal matter into a unified body, we are unable to take any actions at all.

In the same way, as we have seen, the quartet also recognizes that the body is not a space outside culture, but rather is thoroughly acculturated - and that the abject is not therefore a location outside the social order, but rather always within it, and hence able to serve its needs as well as oppose them. For instance, Margrit Shildrick offers a suggestive account of the medical monitoring of the body by the UK's Department of Social Services, showing how the questionnaires required in applications for Disability Living Allowance rely on the destruction of any sense of unity in the bodies of those scrutinized. Applicants face a process of questioning that reduces their bodies to a catalogue of disfunctions, wounds and leaks, whose final goal is to render the subject a catalogue of bodily deficiencies, by which they are placed within the finer control of a system which has catalogued their entire physical functioning, and weakened their sense of autonomy and dignity in the process (*Leaky Bodies and Boundaries*, pp.50-56). To be rendered abject may thus be to be rendered more thoroughly, and more conveniently, pressed within a network of power relations. To dismiss Burroughs's view of abjection as a mode of social control as no more than a reactionary attempt to stave off the revolution in subjectivity promised by the abject, would be to ignore the alternative political reading of abjection which he offers. We might then contextualize these texts' expressions of repulsion by situating them within their vision of power as enabled, rather than threatened, by the abject experiences which it generates. We might read their warnings against contamination not as defences against change, but as defences against the disruption of independence by acts of domination which are materially dispersed through even apparently abominated body processes, and which maintain their grip through the general recuperation of bodily disorder as a

mode of oppression. Faced with the prospect of dissolving identity in the abject, we could then recall the words of a street prostitute in *The Naked Lunch*: 'When some citizen start telling me about his cancer of the prostate or his rotting septum make with that purulent discharge I tell him: "You think I am innarested to hear about your horrible condition ? I am not innarested at all" ' (NL, p.103).

Kristeva too views abjection with some suspicion. In spite of the appeal of reading *Powers of Horror* as a celebration of the abject's resistant potential, any attempt to claim that her writings offer a delirious celebration of the body would have to ignore Kristeva's own position as a psychoanalyst. In her account, immersion in abjection is not a positive escape from social repression, but a traumatic clinical state, whose survivors Kristeva recounts working with (PH, pp.46-48). Thus, even while Kristeva recognizes the cost to the individual, in terms of their self-hatred of their own corporeality, and the cost to a society in terms of its demonization of social groups associated with the body, she also insists that abjection is a necessary process. This assertion of the necessity of a process of separation and rejection from disorder and otherness might make us query the possibility of constructing a liberatory politics out of such a position.²⁴ It would seem to demand that we never move too far outside the dominant psychic and discursive structure that we inhabit. Jacqueline Rose has argued that as a practising analyst, Kristeva has a very strong hold on the need for a subject to be able to

²⁴ See for instance Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, pp.120-131; and Paul Smith, 'Julia Kristeva Et Al.; or, Take Three or More'. We might even say that Kristeva's thinking has come in two phases: the first being her insistence on politics as an anarchic negativity which ruptures the symbolic order; the second on politics as the necessity of integrating negativity within the symbolic order. It is thus as common to find her being criticized for advocating a politically unfocused anarchism (on the basis of the texts from her first phase), as it is to find her condemned for advocating a conservative rapprochement (on the basis of the texts from her second phase). In such a narrative, *Powers of Horror* might be the mid-point between the two phases.

operate in the world - to be functional according to the current social order ('Julia Kristeva - Take Two').²⁵ But the need to achieve some sort of mental health, or functionality, leaves Kristeva treading a thin - if necessary - line between change and stasis, challenge and complicity.

Although she does not pose it in these terms, Kristeva seems quite aware of this problem, displaying it in all its conflicts via her deliberately problematic reading of Céline. In the final chapters of *Powers of Horror* she reads in his Nazism 'a *delirium* that literally prevents one from going mad' (*PH*, p.137, emphasis in the original). Through its rigid demarcations, its adherence to authority, and its phobic anti-Semitism, Nazism is a means of sustaining order for the subjectivity of its adherents, so as to prevent the collapse which the abject may produce, a strategy to 'thwart the disintegration of identity' (*PH*, p.136). These are what Kristeva describes as 'the benefits that accrue to the speaking subject from a precise symbolic organization' (*PH*, p.67) - the benefits of stability, coherence, intelligibility: identity and meaning. These are benefits linked always to the integrity of that organization, and with it of the body. Such a position is also useful in understanding Burroughs. As we have seen, Burroughs produces an unremitting critique of the institutions of multinational capitalism: its xenophobic nationalism, its routinizing medical procedures, its systematic production of desire, its reliance

²⁵ For Rose, this informs Kristeva's insistence on the need to articulate political demands in a form which is recognizable by - which must also mean at least partly complicit with - the current regime of power. In her explicitly political interview 'Woman Can Never Be Defined', Kristeva holds out for feminism a double orientation: to be able to accept situationally necessary political moves, while always looking towards a future where the subject might be rethought, because 'there can be no socio-political transformation without a transformation of subjects' (p.141). To political moves conducted within (as they must be) current systems of meaning and domination, Kristeva says 'it's better than nothing, but it's not exactly right either' (p.141). In that sense Kristeva's political project is to explore how far a demand issuing from within this symbolic order can push the limits of that order without falling into insanity.

on addiction. But he does so by recruiting hostility towards bodily fragility and the porousness of identity - that is, by deploying discourses that are already central to the system that he hopes to subvert. In a Kristevan reading, we should not simply dismiss these deployments as politically retrograde, but rather see them as the necessary reliance on given conceptual structures which we should expect in any would-be revolutionary text.²⁶ For it is only these structures - the logics of distaste - that enable abjection to be written, and thereby enable these texts to lament the occupation of the body.

Burroughs is able to explore abjection not because he is somehow free from social restraints, but because he speaks from a position so thoroughly constituted by such dominant discourses of bodily repulsion that he is able to negotiate his fascination - criticizing the body's abject attributes rather than revelling in them. For both writers, the abject body is to be kept at a distance in order to preserve particular forms of embodied subjectivity that have their value: those that enable a distinct identity, able to preserve its integrity, and modelled not on the porous or the fluid, but on the preservation of solidity.²⁷ The abject body may well be, as both Burroughs and Kristeva suggest, a challenge to certain rigidly organized modes of subjectivity. But they both insist that we also recognize its dangers, attesting to the

²⁶ We might compare this with Barthes: 'there are those who want a text (an art, a painting) without a shadow, without the "Dominant ideology"; but that is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity, a sterile text (see the myth of the Woman without a Shadow). The text needs its shadow: this shadow is a bit of ideology, a bit of representation, a bit of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds: subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro' (Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p.32).

²⁷ We might think here of Luce Irigaray's argument that identity is always thought in relation to solids, rather than fluids ('The "Mechanics" of Fluids'). My suggestion here is that however much the thinking of identity as fluid may have been marginalized, it also remains central to the processes of control. Perhaps where Irigaray suggests that the failure to think about fluidity is a proof of its subversive aspect, in fact the refusal to think about fluidity is a ruse for evading the recognition of its central role in technologies of power.

complexity of the experience of embodied social domination. It is not simply the case that a socially licit and integral body confronts a socially illicit and disorderly body: rather, the disorganized, invaded, and abject body is itself a tool of social control. Burroughs demonstrates the necessity for a suspicion of the abject body, a disgust at its malleability, and a resistance to its disruption, in order to resist the invasive technologies of power that benefit from abjection.

Once again, it is useful to consider the role that constitutive possession plays here. Since, for Burroughs, possession may be resisted, he insists that it is also possible to transcend the abject body altogether. But for Kristeva abjection is inescapable - an argument which I have tried to suggest the quartet also makes, even as Burroughs argues against it. So while Burroughs usefully shows how power may operate through abjection, in spite of the delirious pleasures that accompany the loss of self-proper identity, Kristeva enables us to see that the response to such a fact should not be an attempt to escape abjection, but rather to negotiate a provisional relationship with it. At times, abjection may well facilitate the forms of servitude described by Burroughs - but at other times it is also the source of their disruption. Social control operates both by discourses of integrity and of dis-integrity; both by hatred of invasion and by the incitement to receptivity; both by inviting us to stigmatize the body matter of others, in the name of our own purity, and by encouraging us to identify with abject body matter and thereby classify ourselves as social detritus. The abject body may therefore at times be a site of control and at other times a mode of resistance.

Burroughs's texts are models of such a process: they reject and despise abjection, while also ridiculing the desire for purity; they denounce the abject while engaging us in its pleasures. We should not regard this as a problematic incoherence in Burroughs, nor try to resolve this tension in favour of either element, either by phobically affirming the need to avoid abject matter or by

ignoring his desire for transcendence so as to celebrate him as a redeemer of despised corporealities (although given the psychic investment in the irreconcilability of these positions, we should not be surprised if we often feel pulled to do one or the other). Instead, the psychic inevitability of being caught up in these oscillations between fear of and desire for both the pure and the abject becomes in Burroughs's writing a political resource. In the landscape of the quartet we cannot transcend the abject body since possession is the only form that subjectivity can take. But nor can we simply embrace the abject as an affirmation of the socially and psychically marginal, since it also acts as a means of subjugating us to bodily invasion.

Such a conclusion is not necessarily comfortable if we are hoping that Burroughs will offer a political remedy for the disgust which maintains social inequalities, since his texts would seem to end up endorsing its necessity. To what extent, then, is it possible to write a liberatory politics from within such compromised territory? My treatment of Burroughs up to this point in the chapter has focused on the more general issues of abjection and its relationship to power. As an illustration of the more particular ways in which Burroughs's treatment of abjection may relate to questions of oppression and resistance, I propose to look at how his treatment of gender negotiates this confrontation between the necessity to question normative thinking about the body and the need to use such thinking in order to resist strategies of power.

(iii) Gendering Abjection

Kristeva reads abjection as intimately connected with gender, because it derives from the child's experience of the maternal body.²⁸ We have already seen, in

²⁸ For another instance of how this might be used to analyze cultural images, see Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*. Creed uses Kristeva's terms to analyze

the analysis of Lacan's 'The Mirror Stage', how psychoanalysis conceives of the subject as emerging out of the organization of bodily heterogeneity. Kristeva too is concerned with placing antipathy towards body matter within such a traditional psychoanalytical narrative, but she returns to the biological origins of the body. Because abjection is a process driven by the need for a distinct 'I' which separates itself by means of expulsion, she traces the origins of abjection in the infant's experience of fusion with the maternal body (*PH*, pp.12-15). Her argument here reveals her determination to return the psychoanalytic theory of the subject to its most biological moments. She insists that we account for the ways that subjectivity is formed not only out of the social organization of drives, but out of the biological rhythms and conflicts that originate with the body not only before it enters the symbolic order, but even before birth (*PH* pp.56-63).²⁹ Thus the particular intensifications of frustration which take place around the infant's interaction with the maternal body are important for Kristeva because they are the point where the very corporeality of abjection is established: it is in this bodily conflict between two organisms that the body of an other, and its hold over my body, come to be so dreaded. The emotions generated by this relationship thus form the basis for those other sites of abjection which Kristeva documents - from Céline's anti-Semitism to the everyday physical disgust at the skin formed on hot milk.

The child must struggle both to differentiate inside/outside, and pleasure/pain - two borders which can never be easily established in the mother-

images of monstrous femininity in the horror film. The major limitation of Creed's position, and one which this chapter tries to avoid, is that because she treats abjection solely as a process by which the female body is demonized, Creed is obliged to explain all instances of abject bodies with reference to an image of abject femininity. Her work thus evades issues of monstrous masculinity, or of demonized race and class antagonisms, even when they are central to the films that she is studying.

²⁹ Following my arguments in Part One, we should remember that such biological phenomena are themselves social products even before birth.

child dyad, for 'the subject will always be marked by the uncertainty of his borders and of his affective valency as well' (*PH*, p.63). The emotional uncertainty results from the fact that the child both loves the mother because it needs her, and hates her because she cannot satisfy it. 'Want and aggressivity', Kristeva argues, 'are chronologically separable but logically coextensive' (*PH*, p.39). That is, although it makes sense to say that we want before we are frustrated, in the practical realm of experience the two are inseparable. The other uncertain relation to the maternal body is the blurring of the inside/outside border, the difficulty the child has in defining itself as separate, and 'the subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother' (*PH*, p.63).

This relationship, simultaneously conflictual and fusional, sets up the particular resonances which will define how the body is viewed as a result of the process of abjection. The fact of our biological connection to another body, and the intimate bodily experiences which accompany growing up (such as breast-feeding, toilet training, learning to eat nicely) are the sites around which these first mixed feelings cluster - all of which link back to 'the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body' (*PH*, p.54). Abjection thus focuses on body matter since it is the matter of the body, the needs of the body, and the presence of an other body, which are the ground of our first struggles. In Elizabeth Grosz's summary: 'it is a response to the various bodily cycles of incorporation, absorption, depletion, expulsion, the cycles of material rejuvenation and consumption necessary to sustain [the subject] itself yet incapable of social recognition and representation' ('The Body of Signification', p. 88).

We must immediately recognize the limitations of such an account of maternity - not least its construction of a single, monolithic maternal narrative. Kristeva's description 'seems curiously abstract, caught ... in the conceptual system she wants to destabilize rather than open to new input from actual mothers facing

the socio-economic realities of childrearing or from the history of changing ideologies of motherhood' (Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics', p.63). We may well question Kristeva's reading of the figure of the abject mother in the Old Testament (*PH*, pp.99-106) or Sophocles's *Oedipus* dramas (*PH* pp.84-86), as if the particular child-rearing practices of those cultures were identical to our own, entailing identical psychic crises.³⁰

One recurring charge against Kristeva has been that she is so wedded to the conventional model of the bourgeois heterosexual nuclear family that founds psychoanalytic thought, that she unwittingly shores up its institutions since she is unable to see them as historically contingent. It is certainly a charge that much of Kristeva's writing would seem to bear out. An interview with Elaine Hoffman Baruch includes the following exchange concerning feminism's calls for a change in the parenting roles of fathers:

[Kristeva:] Up to the present, in the division of sexual roles, the mother takes care of the child, the father is further away. The father represents the symbolic moment of separation.

[Baruch:] And you feel that should be retained ?

[Kristeva:] If we do what they call for, that is, if the fathers are always present, if fathers become mothers, one may as well ask oneself who will play the role of separators.

(*Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, pp.118-119)

³⁰ On the difference that non-white non-bourgeois contexts might make to psychoanalytical accounts of the roles of mothers and fathers in the child's psychic development, see Elizabeth Abel, 'Race, Class and Psychoanalysis ? Opening Questions'; and Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments*, pp.164-178. For more general attempts to integrate psychoanalytic insights with historically specific configurations of the family see David Sibley, 'Families and Domestic Routines: Constructing the Boundaries of Childhood'; and Valerie Walkerdine, 'Subject to Change Without Notice'.

Psychoanalytic assumptions about the primacy of the mother, and the consequent need for separation via a distant father figure, make Kristeva reluctant to countenance a more complete break from these institutions.³¹ It is true that she does invoke history in accounts such as those of the changing role of women in 'Women's Time' or of the different ways in which the problem of the maternal body is negotiated through history in *Powers of Horror*. Yet such accounts co-exist with an uncritical faith in the persistence of certain psychic dilemmas, which is perhaps enabled by a view of history that Spivak has called 'banal historical narrative' ('In a Word: *Interview*', p.17) - that is, one in which claims for some forms of change are nevertheless held to operate in relation to certain unchanging psychic problematics, mapped onto simplistic metanarratives of the changing stages of societies conceived in essentially monolithic terms.³²

Perhaps the most acerbic attack on Kristeva along these lines comes from Jennifer Stone, who responds to Kristeva's work with the charge that 'she does not

³¹ As Ann Rosalind Jones has suggested, this may also in part derive from Kristeva's dependence on structuralism, and structuralism's problems with conceptualizing culture in terms of its diachronic movement, rather than as a synchronic set of relationships ('Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics', p.68).

³² As a defence against such charges of naiveté, we should consider Kristeva's *About Chinese Women*. Although this text has been repeatedly taken to task as orientalist and exoticizing (Margaret Atack, 'The Other: Feminist', Lisa Lowe, 'Des Chinoises: Orientalism, Psychoanalysis and Feminine Writing'; Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, pp. 134-135; and Gayatri Spivak, 'French Feminism in an International Frame'), its central goals are to argue that the Oedipal experience is absolutely historically specific, and to map out the possibilities of a non-Oedipal matrix of gender, desire and the body which might be found in cultures whose social arrangements for child-rearing are organized differently than those in the West. If Kristeva's failure here is that she produces two monolithic accounts of 'the West' and 'the Orient', her attempt to chart their psychic differences is at least an honourable attempt to write a genuinely historicist psychoanalysis. Moreover, we should remember that Kristeva opens the text by acknowledging that her views must inevitably be 'a western vision' (p.16), shaped by her own historical relationship to nationality.

apparently realise that ... she has invented this wonderful abject terrain in language. There is no such space as abjection, it is nothing more than a discursive effect' ('The Horrors of Power: A Critique of "Kristeva"', p.43).³³ Stone insists that Kristeva's analysis simply identifies a series of observable social phenomena (male anxiety about women's bodies, imperialist constructions of the non-white body) and then misleadingly constructs a model of the human psyche which treats such phenomena as immutable psychic structures, rather than as historically specific effects of a given social order.

And yet, as Jacqueline Rose has argued, even if the power that Kristeva accords the maternal body may be derived from such sources, her work is an important analytical narrative precisely because of the tenacity of those very emotions for us. Responding to Stone, Rose comments with some scorn that 'unlike some of her most violent detractors ... Kristeva at least knows that these images are not so easily dispatched. It is not by settling the question of their origins that we can necessarily dismantle their force' ('Julia Kristeva - Take Two', p.157).

Rose insists that we sidestep the question of whether the dread of the maternal body lies in an infantile experience or in the problems of biological reproduction within capitalist relations of economic production, and that we use Kristeva instead as a guide to the persistence of those fantasies, and the role that they play in the subject's relationship to language. Kristeva's account remains a persuasive description of *one* important way that children perceive the maternal body and its impact on the adult psyche, in spite of the fact that primary care by a biological mother is not the only way in which children are raised. To argue this is

³³ Judith Butler makes a similar point about the semiotic: 'How do we know that the instinctual object of Kristeva's discourse is not a construction of the discourse itself?' (*Gender Trouble*, p.88). Kristeva herself goes to some lengths to acknowledge the difficulties of choosing to 'borrow an ontologized term in order to designate an articulation that antecedes positing' (*RPL*, p.239, n.13) - but Butler makes no reference to her discussion of this problem.

to insist that we read psychoanalytic theory not simply as an accurate map of subject - although I would insist that much of it *is* accurate - but rather, as I have tried to suggest throughout this thesis, as a discourse that is a potent description of the subject to the extent that it shares in, and thus lays bare for us, the assumptions of the culture that produces it. Indeed, we could extend Rose's argument to argue that even if Kristeva's view of the centrality of the maternal body to every social formation is a fantasy, it is precisely the tenacity with which she pursues her fantasy that discloses its truth for *us*. Kristeva's psychoanalytic account of history is in that sense a more insightful narrative precisely through its errors, when compared with a rational account like Stone's which, while more accurate in an empirical sense, errs in its willingness to ignore the potency of emotion by virtue of treating it as explained away by history. Kristeva's text thus suggests, through its very inability to read texts other than through its own preoccupations, the psychic structures by which, here and now, the maternal body underwrites a conceptualization of femininity structured primarily through the experience of the heterosexual nuclear family. We might even say that the most interesting aspect of Kristeva's account is that it reminds us that the accumulated symbolic capital of the bourgeois nuclear family still defines the psychic life of even those who do not participate within it.³⁴ Consequently her work on abjection remains useful for a reading of Burroughs, and for that matter Cronenberg, even though these arguments might make us wary of using it to read other texts not embedded in the modern Western context which she shares with them. Abjection is thus one of those overdetermined concepts that psychoanalysis is so marked by: simultaneously an objective insight into the

³⁴ This might also be a rejoinder to Judith Butler's argument that Kristeva marginalizes lesbians through her stress on maternity (*Gender Trouble*, pp.79-93). Against such a reading, I would suggest that it is precisely Kristeva's stress on the fact that currently all women must deal with the consequences of being treated as potential mothers which is relevant to those women who are not.

fundamental dynamics of the psyche, an unselfreflexive universalization of a particular socio-historical obsession, and a fantasy which is the most useful tool for analyzing the culture out of which it is produced. That it can be all three at once is what makes it such a rich resource for a discussion of embodied subjectivity - as well as being somehow particularly appropriate for the discipline most insistent on the possibility of one's holding several contradictory positions simultaneously.

We see a demonstration of the strengths and weaknesses of Kristeva's particular reading of maternity when we consider her alongside Burroughs. At first sight Burroughs proves exemplary for Kristeva's account of abjection as a dread of the female body - not only in the sense that those attributes of the body which he finds most repulsive are those typically regarded as feminine, but also in his representations of the female body itself. The female body repeatedly appears in his writings as a dangerous and threatening presence - and it is a truism of writing on him that his texts are saturated by an unselfreflexive misogyny focused on the female body, insofar as his images of the female body would seem to conform to dominant abjecting conceptions of the feminine. Thus Catherine Stimpson argues: 'his dislike of the female body is cause, effect and sign of his *contemptus feminae*. He finds female sexuality a universe of fluids, mucus, holes and growths' ('The Beat Generation and the Trials of Homosexual Liberation', p.384).³⁵ In support of such a reading we might consider the following details of the quartet.

Burroughs deploys the female body as part of the gradual transformation of the world into bodily properties, which is a sign of its defeat - of its relentless reduction to base matter. A city in need of rescue has its dire state of invasion and decay marked by being named 'Cuntville USA' and is run by 'self-appointed

³⁵ See also Edward Foster, *Understanding the Beats*, p.23; John Guzlowksi, 'The Family in the Fiction of William Burroughs', pp.19-21; Robin Lydenberg, *Word Cultures*, pp.167-172; and Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw*, p.582.

controllers of “the Rotting Kingdom” ’ (*TTE*, p.104), whose subjects are said to suffer from ‘American upper middle-class upbringing with maximum sexual frustration and humiliations imposed by Middle-Western matriarchs’ (*TTE*, p.105). Maternal power is thus associated with a control over the male body, maintained through that body’s conditioned responses of shame.³⁶ The semantic flexibility of ‘matriarchs’ - able to include mothers and wives, older sisters and aunts, grandmothers and women in positions of authority - images women as a dictatorial community who restrict freedom at every turn, ruling over the ‘shattered male forces of the earth’ (*NE*, p.59). Strengthening this connection to domination, women appear as purveyors of those substances that compromise independence: ‘the nurse moved around the lawn with her silver trays feeding the junk in - We called her “Mother” - Wouldn’t you ?’ (*NE*, p.32). The maternal body is thus the body of addiction, marking the impossibility of escaping cycles of biological dependency.

In ‘The Case of the Celluloid Kali’ (*SM*, pp.42-49), a pastiche of ‘hard-boiled’ detective fiction, Burroughs deploys the image of the *femme fatale* from the genre in which, as described by Frank Krutnik, she expresses the male dread of the consequences of female power and sexuality (*In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, pp.42-44 and *passim*). Here, the figure draws together cannibalism, male sexuality, and physical invasion into a series of images of male vulnerability to female power. As the narrator follows his case, his contacts take him through human history, envisioned as a history of matriarchal control. One tells him: ‘Why I was a dancing boy for the Cannibal Trog Women in the Ice Age. Remember? All that meat stacked up in the caves and the Blue Queen covered with limestone flesh

³⁶ Burroughs amplifies on this view of women in *The Job*, pp. 116-118; see also his interviews in Victor Bockris, *With William Burroughs: A Report from the Bunker*, pp.41-51.

creeps into your bones like cold grey honey ... that's the way they keep them not dead but paralyzed' (*SM*, p.43).

The defining image of paralysis presents the female body as an invasive presence, before which males are passive victims awaiting consumption. In a scene marked heavily by the 'mucus' and 'holes' of Stimpson's description, the witness describes being 'paralyzed with this awful gook the Sapphire Goddess let out through this cold sore she always kept open on her lips' (*SM*, p.44). The narrative then shifts to the present where we encounter her modern form: 'This cunt undulates forward and gives me the sign and holds out her hand "I am the Countessa di Vile your hostess for tonight" - She points to the boys at the bar with her cigarette holder and their cocks jumped up one after the other' (*SM*, p.48). The narrative thus figures human history as the repetition of forms of female control, whose dominance centres - albeit in different ways - on the exploitation of the male body, which, whether as food or sexual flesh, appears as little more than raw corporeal matter, or 'meat'.

As well as being a source of inflexible authority, the female body is figured as a weapon in the arsenal of evil, an intentionally deployed pollutant. The enemy possesses 'bottled female smells' which can be released as 'ancient evil odors on trade winds' (*TTE*, p.100). Elsewhere, a maternity ward in a hospital seeps 'nameless female substances, enough to pollute a continent' (*NL*, p.60). The female body is marked in these texts by its size and omnipresence, its capacity to be everywhere and to dwarf those who resist it, its ability to make men reliant upon it: as such it reworks the child's primal view of the mother's body. The positioning of women in these texts always locates the female body in a cathartic narrative: one in which it is exposed in order to permit the reader to be purged of its appeal.³⁷ The

³⁷ Similarly, Kristeva argues that Aristotle's aesthetics of catharsis are produced by an attempt to represent abjection in such a way as to transcend it (*PH*, p.28).

reader is imagined as one of those male victims of patriarchy, whose devotion to a domestic world symbolized by women must be broken.³⁸

In all these ways the quartet clearly derives much of its outraged energy from conventional structures of male anxiety. But to point this out is, in a sense, intellectually redundant: it achieves no more than declaring that Burroughs proves something that we already knew - that men consolidate their power over women through fear and disgust. Can we rather ask what Burroughs might have to say that is new or unsettling? Can we claim that Burroughs's representations of the gendered body have several persuasive political points to make? I want to offer three avenues of thought which might make us view Burroughs's representations of women in a different light. In each case, I have highlighted the awkwardness of the term 'misogyny' to preserve its ambivalence: on the one hand, I will be arguing that Burroughs draws on, and adheres to, a conventionally misogynistic position; on the other, I will be suggesting that his use of such imagery of the female body as overpowering, abject and grotesque derives from other, and more interesting, sources than an uncomplicated desire to preserve male power.³⁹

a) 'Misogyny' as Hatred of Material Bodies

Firstly, we should note that if the female body is depicted as a site of devouring and pollution, so too is the male body. Stimpson's description of the female body imaged as 'a universe of fluids, mucus, holes and growths' is hardly

³⁸ A possibility which Burroughs goes on to imagine in his later texts *The Wild Boys*, *Port of Saints*, and *Cities of the Red Night*, which feature outcast communities of all-male revolutionaries.

³⁹ Other work in this direction has been offered by Edward Foster, who suggests that Burroughs's misogyny is part of an attack on conventional notions of heterosexual love (*Understanding the Beats*, pp.23-24); Robin Lydenberg, who reads it as an attack on the reproductive role allotted to women under patriarchy (*Word Cultures*, pp.167-170); and Catherine Stimpson who sees it as enabling Burroughs to affirm his homosexual identity ('The Beat Generation', pp.382-384).

any less true, as we saw in the last chapter, of the male body. It too devours and engulfs, invades and corrupts, infects and swamps. It too is composed of flesh that compromises the independence of those it touches. Indeed, one of the most striking images of submission in the quartet confronts Carl as he walks through Puerto

Joselito:

Carl walked a long row of living penis urns made from men whose penis has absorbed the body with vestigial arms and legs breathing through purple fungoid gills and dropping a slow metal excrement like melted solder which forms a solid plaque under the urns standing about three feet high on rusty iron shelves wire mesh cubicles joined by cat walks and ladders a vast warehouse of living penis urns slowly transmuting to smooth red terracotta. Others secrete from the head crystal pearls of lubricant that forms a shell of solid crystal over the red penis flesh. (*SM*, p.67).

These creatures face a range of fates. Some are massaged to the point of death by multiple orgasm; others, encased in crystal, are put on display in the Crystal Hall of Fame; while some are 'covered with terracotta and baked in red brick ovens by the women who pull the soft red meat out with their penis forks and decorate house and garden with the empty urns' (*SM*, p.67). Leaking, paralyzed, put on display, and reduced to no more than meat, these creatures have no control over their destiny or over their materiality. The essential signifier of male superiority has become the signifier of male materiality - and therefore passivity. The image of the body-as-penis/penis-as-body mocks the status traditionally given to the penis: whether used to decorate a house or placed in a museum, the men whose bodies have undergone this transformation gain prestige only through their destruction.

The organ taken to define the male body thus becomes that which renders it ridiculous - and also abhorrent. It renders the male body a mass of flesh. While in this case the male body appears as passive flesh, for which abjection is a form of submission, it may also appear as aggressive or dangerous. For instance, while for the urns, semen forms a crystalline prison, elsewhere it appears as invasive or

corrosive: 'Reminds me of an old friend of mine [...] He used to go around with a water pistol shooting jism up career women at parties. Won all his paternity suits hands down. Never use his own jism you understand' (NL, p.95). Burroughs's sense of the dangers of male biology also appear in the recurrent image of the male rectum, at some points the signifier of the vulnerability of the male body but at others of a dangerous hunger as threatening as any *vagina dentata*: 'he's got a prolapsed asshole [...] If he's a mind to it he can drop out a piece of gut reaches from his office clear over to Roy's Beer Place, and it go feelin' around lookin' for a peter, just afeelin' around like a blind worm' (NL, p.106).

Such representations of the male body break radically from the two dominant notions of the male body, namely: men as rational possessors of disembodied consciousness, whose bodies are occluded or ignored, and men as the proud possessors of bodies which they have shaped and which they use (David Morgan, 'You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine: Reflections on the Male Body and Masculinities').⁴⁰ If, as Grosz suggests, male power is partly dependent on the veiling of 'the unspoken and generally unrepresented particularities of the male body' (KB, p.198), which enables men to present themselves as unencumbered by

⁴⁰ The discourses of male embodiment are curiously contradictory. As we have already seen, in order to assert superiority over women men claim greater transcendence from their own bodies. But at the same time, the discourse of masculinity centres on its physicality: men are supposedly stronger, faster, more brave, more sexual, than women. Perhaps the crucial difference is that men are imagined as in control of their bodies, while women are imagined as being controlled by their bodies. Men regard their bodies as instrumental - to be used and deployed in a rational, calculated way; women are imagined to be guided by bodily impulses which they cannot control. On the other hand, of course, another discourse represents men as animals at the mercy of their instincts and women as the bearers of culture whose bodily impulses are weak and easily kept under control, so that women are the preservers of virtue. The difficulty of locating masculinity comfortably within these contradictory discourses is evident in, for instance, the fact that the attempt to celebrate the male physique runs into particular problems, since the celebration of masculinity *qua* physique, by emphasizing the embodiment of the male, runs close to feminizing him. See chapter two, p.94.

materiality, then these texts refuse to collude with such a myth. But they also refuse to enshrine the notion of the male body as heroically muscular, paternally protective, or potently phallic. Burroughs's radical move then is that his representations of female monstrosity function not to separate women from men as being more corporeal, more porous, or more threatening, but rather to subsume the differences under a shared physical composition. To be male *or* female is to be equally composed of abject matter and therefore equally dangerous to others and equally at risk of being possessed.

It would, of course, be possible to argue that the underlying dread of corporeal materiality results from the fact that body matter is gendered feminine over and above any of its particular appearances as a penis or male rectum. We might argue that these body parts are imaged as dangerous because of their resemblance to the abjected maternal body - and that if Burroughs renders the male body abject, he does so by feminizing the phallus. While it is of course possible to say that the penis urns are abject because they leak, and leaking is *necessarily* defined as feminine, or that the prolapsed asshole is horrific because it is an orifice, and that 'orificiality' is *necessarily* defined as feminine, this would seem to be only a very partial account of the texts. Such a reading would have to proceed from the assumption that matter is always and only gendered as feminine, rather than considering the lengths that Burroughs goes to to image forms of flesh that are abject in the very ways in which they are most conventionally masculine: their erectile rigidity; their determination to fertilize; their predatory sexual hunger. Burroughs's texts demand that we extend Kristeva's account of abjection to see that while abject flesh may often be gendered female, there also exists an entire vocabulary of the abject male. Such a vocabulary - and the more primal emotions that found it - originates not in an imitation of female body matter, but in a fear of the malleability of the body which emerges alongside the forms that embodied

genders may take, and is as central in shaping the meanings of gender, as the meanings of gender are in shaping it.

These texts then lend fuel to the argument that the maternal origin of abjection, which Kristeva stresses, is a culturally specific psychic configuration - a particular anxiety generated by certain child-rearing arrangements which place the burden of care on the biological mother. This is not to say that we should adopt the position that discomfort at one's own materiality is only an emotion which the subject develops once they have entered into the discourses of gender, as Stone suggests. Rather, I would suggest that we accept Kristeva's argument as a demonstration that while we do experience birth as a corporeal fact in conflict with the disembodied domain of language, we should also regard the degree to which language is taken to be disembodied as a variable phenomenon - variable both across history and across the different segments of any culture. Equally variable is the degree to which it is the mother's body that forms the object of a child's emotional ambivalence. We need to supplement Kristeva's account by asking what other early experiences might render body matter repellent. Rather than assuming that the maternal body inaugurates the fear of corporeality we might, if our enquiry were less determined by our own culturally specific assumptions about maternity, locate abjection as an effect of the dynamics of touch between siblings or between father and child; as embedded in the designs of architecture and in the ways a child is cleaned; or produced through the ways in which the bodily aspects of childcare are distributed amongst a community or across hierarchical lines of race and class. In such ways all the meanings of embodiment, beyond simply those of gender, may be inscribed onto a body by a network of other bodies and surroundings within which the infant is placed.

We should also, rather than focusing primarily on an assumed infantile origin for abjection, insist that subsequent discourses of corporeality play as great a

role in its production - such as the corporeal language of racism, or the faith in evolution as the gradual ascendancy of the human spirit over its animal matter. When 'the District Supervisor' asks a promising employee 'now kid what are you doing over there with the niggers and the apes ? Why don't you straighten out and act like a white man' (*SM*, p.107), it marks the process of abjection as one which may be produced via many different forms of hierarchically privileged embodiment, with the child's experience of the mother not necessarily the most potent, and with early childhood experiences not necessarily being foundational.⁴¹

I do not propose to elaborate on the range of mechanisms involved in such a process of subject-formation. I only wish to insist that Kristeva's account of abjection should be read as a detailed reading of *one* element of bodily discomfort, rather than, as she argues, the account of its defining factor. To use Burroughs to expand our sense of abjection is important since, as we have already seen, Kristeva has been criticized for her failure to historicize these bodies of which she speaks: in her texts women represent maternity and corporeality, while men represent separateness, rationality, the symbolic order.⁴² Burroughs insists on the materiality of the male body, depicting in detail its biology in order to show its failure to transcend the material real. In doing so, these texts restore the biological parity of sexed bodies that is missing from Kristeva. Where Kristeva seems to re-emphasize the different relationships to the symbolic order of men and women, Burroughs critiques the assumption that men have a greater distance from biology. Moreover,

⁴¹ Kristeva's own treatment of Céline's anti-Semitism, for instance, seems wanting in this area, insisting as it does that his anti-Semitism derives from the fact that Judaism symbolizes for him a parental relationship which she treats as the source of such prejudice (*PH*, pp.178-180).

⁴² Kristeva's maintenance of this model of gender results from the fact that she retains a Lacanian model of the development of the subject, insofar as she envisions a demand from the paternal Law to relinquish the maternal body, and infantile polymorphous perversity, and to take up a place as a speaking subject alienated from that earlier state.

he also challenges, by ridicule, the dominant notion of a phallic body as either heroic, sexually potent, or erotically attractive. Instead it leaves the male body abject.

b) 'Misogyny' as Critique of Gender

A second way to complicate Burroughs's 'misogyny' is to argue that it is part of his general concern to level out notions of power and to critique the interpersonal exercise of power to the same extent as the institutional. Thus the daily exchanges of hostility, shame, coercion, and abuse that constitute human relationships are equally central objects of his scrutiny. Read in this way, we may see Burroughs as concerned with the particular ways in which gender roles offer women opportunities to exercise power destructively and aggressively. Rather than treating the distribution of gender roles between men and women as operating solely for the advantage of men and at the expense of women, Burroughs takes what we might perceive to be a more Foucauldian route, reading the institution of gendered male-female relations as a site of shifting and coercive power relations, exercised by all parties.⁴³ While it is clearly the case that interactions between men and women are structured by male power, feminism has also been concerned to document the ways in which they are places where women may make use of the inequalities of race, class, age or disability to make their own equally destructive moves. But what is of interest in the quartet is its insistence not only on the way in which gender inflects such instances of power, but also the ways in which even

⁴³ Such a position is, of course, 'Foucauldian' in the sense that it seems to me to be the necessary model entailed by Foucault's theories of power, rather than in the sense that Foucault himself advances a consistent theory of gender along these lines. That Foucault's own work in fact fails to regard gender dynamics as sufficiently autonomous has been suggested by Toril Moi, 'Power, Sex and Subjectivity: Feminist Reflections on Foucault', and Larysa Mykyta, 'The Obscuring Clarity of Reason'.

within the inequalities imposed by gender roles, and even without such other forms of institutional power in place, it is not always the case that men are the only ones capable of inflicting damage.⁴⁴

When Carl (a different Carl ? the same Carl ? the text makes no attempt to help us decide this) attends 'the Ministry of Mental Hygiene and Prophylaxis', and is required to leave a deposit of semen, it is the specifically female power to shame him that he confronts:

'Something wrong?' said the nurse indifferently. She was holding a glass of water out to him. She watched him drink with aloof contempt. She turned and picked up the jar with obvious distaste.

The nurse turned to him: 'Are you waiting for something special?' she snapped. Carl had never been spoken to like that in his adult life. 'Why no' 'You can go then,' she turned back to the jar. With a little exclamation of disgust she wiped a gob of semen off her hand. Carl crossed the room and stood at the door.

'Do I have another appointment ?'

She looked at him in disapproving surprise: 'You'll be notified of course.' She stood in the doorway of the cubicle and watched him walk through the outer office and open the door. He turned and attempted a

⁴⁴ One much-debated phenomenon of recent years has been what Cynthia Fuchs refers to as the phenomenon of the 'whiny-whiteboy' (' "Beat Me Outta Me": Alternative Masculinities'). This is the phenomenon of those most privileged in the social scale - middle-aged, white, able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual males - lamenting their powerlessness at the hands of those whom they in fact possess power over, but whom they perceive as intimidating them. Its narrative of victimization is played out in films such as *Disclosure* (1994) and *Falling Down* (1992), and should be resisted as politically retrograde and intellectually unsubstantiated. But it is not necessary to adopt such a speaking position in order to critique the ways in which women may be enabled to exercise power in damaging ways. Indeed, I would suggest that a thorough reading of the impact of gender on social well-being would require that we look at how a fundamentally patriarchal organization of gender nevertheless generates particular moments, spaces, and forms of interaction by which some women damage some men. For accounts of *Falling Down* see Richard Dyer, *White*, pp.217-223; and John Gabriel 'What Do You Do When Minority Means You ? *Falling Down* and the Construction of "Whiteness" '; on *Disclosure* see Joanna Brewis, 'What's Wrong with This Picture ? Sex and Gender Relations in *Disclosure*'; on contemporary formations of male privilege see Fred Pfeil, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Difference and Domination*.

jaunty wave. The nurse did not move or change her expression. As he walked down the stairs the broken, false grin burned his face with shame. (*NL*, p.153)

At the intersection of the personal and the institutional, Carl's meeting with the nurse is governed by the official power enshrined in cubicle, office, and stairs - the markers that the nurse is allied to an institution that derives its power from the fact that before its medical gaze every subject is reduced to a knowable and malleable volume of body matter. But his discomfort may also be related to the ways in which the encounter mobilizes the dynamics of gender.

Semen, as several writers have noted, is a site of particular symbolic ambivalence: it is both celebrated as indicator of potency and source of life, and marginalized as an abject bodily product. Grosz suggests that much of this ambivalence stems from the way that it marks the unacceptably 'feminine' fluidity of the male body (*VB*, pp. 198-202). It is also the case that an anxiety adheres to the destination of semen: when ejaculated inside a vagina it fulfils a culturally sanctioned role that elevates its status; but deposited elsewhere it may be seen merely as biological detritus - the excessively valued body matter translated promptly into valueless waste (Celia Roberts et al., ' "Going Down": Oral Sex, Imaginary Bodies and HIV', pp.114-115).

When the nurse regards his semen with contempt and then wipes it away with disgust, she confronts Carl with the fact of these unwelcome properties of his body - the abjection of semen and with it the implicit abjection of his entire body. She is particularly well placed to generate such a reaction being both (as nurse) representative of disembodied authority and (as woman) representative of corporeality. We might then suggest that the particular anxiety that she provokes is a result of the fact that she, more than anyone else, recognizes the corporeality of the man, since she represents that corporeality herself. Her confrontation with Carl

is underlined by his recognition that he, like her, is a body.

Simone de Beauvoir has suggested such an antagonism over male corporeality is one feature of a distinctively female hostility towards men.⁴⁵ Beauvoir suggests that the violence of gendered relations is centred on a struggle over the right to transcend a limited material existence in which women, refused the chance of transcendence, are forced to take pleasure in limiting men's exercise of it. Woman, suggests Beauvoir:

wishes to deprive man of his projects, of his future. She triumphs when husband or child is ill, weary, reduced to mere flesh, appearing then to be no more than one object among others, something to be cared for efficiently, like the pots and pans. The heavy, fleshly hand on the sick man is intended to make him feel that he, too, is but a fleshly thing. (*The Second Sex*, pp.485-486)

We should not be surprised by the recurrence of the figure of the female nurse in the quartet, since she combines these two dangerous roles and thereby enacts that uncomfortable confrontation that marks the antagonism of gender: like the male doctors, her gaze transforms the body into malleable and limited flesh; while as a woman, she reminds men of the material body that they hope to disavow.

Equally central to her power is Carl's assumption that she will make the situation easy for him. Carl's 'jaunty wave' and 'false grin' assumes her reassurance: that she will perform the role of assuaging his anxiety about his body - a role which, to his obvious distress, she refuses to play. His inability to escape this knowledge - that he knows that she knows - is indicative of a second recurrent feature of male-female interaction. Central to the dynamics of interpersonal

⁴⁵ We might note that *The Second Sex* (1949) is roughly contemporaneous with *The Naked Lunch* (composed in the late 1950s), and we may see both as analyzing a particular moment in gender relations in the West which has persisted beyond the post-war environment, even if it was experienced then with particular intensity.

relationships within patriarchy is that the emotional labour of daily life is undertaken by women (Victor Seidler, 'Men, Heterosexualities and Emotional Life'). That is, women are expected to make the domestic, interpersonal, and emotional spheres - including relationships, sex, and conversation - effortless for men.⁴⁶ Since women's role is to make those situations unproblematic for men, it follows that men rarely develop the skills to ensure that they themselves manage those situations in ways that satisfy them - relying either on women's silently coerced support or on explicit threats and sanctions (financial, physical) to guarantee that support. However this leads to a situation in which, whatever the considerable risks of non-co-operation, women are in a position to withdraw the support which men are used to, often leaving men bewildered, disempowered, or hurt, and rarely with the skills to analyze the sources of those emotions.⁴⁷ The intensity of Carl's response to this failure to receive the expected reassurance ('the broken, false grin burned his face with shame') marks just such an interaction.

We might want to dismiss this as no more than a trifling degree of unhappiness, for which the benefits of being male more than compensate. We might also insist that the difficulty that men might experience in such situations is the result of their adjusting to a burden of truth (about, for instance, their bodies) and

⁴⁶ As economic changes bring women out of marriage and into the workplace, that obligation is then transferred to the emotional aspects of paid work: preventing conflicts in offices, reassuring angry male clients, taking notes and making tea. All the labour that enables the economic lives of men to run smoothly and which itself has little recognition.

⁴⁷ See for instance Lynn Chancer, *Sadomasochism in Everyday Life*, esp. pp.42-67; and Wendy Holloway, 'Heterosexual Sex: Power and Desire for the Other', p.138. Such uncertainty is a response which, as Lynne Segal notes, may quickly be transformed into compensatory aggression or violence (*Straight Sex*, pp.248-249). This dynamic of domination, hatred, dependency, and anxiety about an autonomy that can never be attained, has led several writers to treat gender as an instance of a Hegelian master-slave dialectic. See for instance Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*; and Jessica Benjamin, 'Master and Slave: The Fantasy of Erotic Domination'.

independent responsibility for their emotional lives which they should indeed learn to manage, and which women should not be obliged to ease for them. Or, to take such an argument further, that the deployment of such limited forms of power is a necessary survival strategy, or justified act of revenge, for women whose power is otherwise limited. Or indeed, that it is men's construction of a system governed by such logics that in turn leaves them in a situation which then causes difficulties for them, and that it therefore ill becomes them to lament it. These are not positions that Burroughs ever considers; and to the extent that Burroughs and his readers regard his project as a substantive political critique of power relations, this constitutes a serious lacuna. However, for all their accuracy these positions miss the problem of the misery of everyday life that Burroughs focuses on: the daily experiences of humiliation and defeat that shore up a system of social coercion. When Carl returns to the clinic for the results of his test, he is subjected to an interrogation which seeks to unearth, punish and cure traces of homosexuality in him. Placed in the context of this final examination, the nurse's actions become part of a gradual process that has worn away his confidence in himself and his capacity to determine the meanings of his own body. Whether or not they constitute part of an intentional strategy by the Department is, in an important sense, neither here nor there. For the sequence depicts the way in which daily incidences of shame and distress contribute to an overall loss of confidence and autonomy. To write these off as mere effects of larger structures is thus to refuse to face power in all its manifestations.

The case of Carl and the nurse, presented as it is in realist prose, is the most straightforward example of an analysis of male-female interaction as an expression of damaging female power. To map the monsters of the texts onto such concrete social dynamics is harder, but nevertheless Burroughs's writing here repeats these central male vulnerabilities, transforming these sites of everyday risk into scenes of

terror and physical danger.⁴⁸ For instance, as we have seen, his representations of gender conflict centre on paralysis, on male incapacity to deal with female power. Images of female monstrosity thus accompany images of male passivity, in which men find themselves unable to act because women have either rendered them, like Carl, abject and therefore powerless; or because they provide indispensable addictive substances - which often, like the 'awful gook' that oozes from the Sapphire Queen's cold-sore, occupy an ambiguous position combining nutrition and poison. In much the same way, Burroughs's maternal imagery of the nurse-mother as supplier of junk, or of female drug-dealers like 'Salt Chunk Mary' (*SM*, p.86), also acknowledges the role of women as providers of reassurance.⁴⁹ It images woman as the source of contentment and complacency - the creator of a home life that is comfortable, or a street-life that is anaesthetized. Burroughs relates such imagery to the role of the mother in the nuclear family, envisioned by him as one of Pavlovian conditioning: to supply the promise of happiness, accompanied by the threat of its withdrawal, thereby establishing a gendered dynamic which can never be left behind.⁵⁰ The capacity of the female body to enchant, overwhelm, or devour

⁴⁸ Although he is interested in power relations between men and women, and between men, Burroughs shows no interest in the quartet in power relationships between women.

⁴⁹ Other recurrent image of women are as landladies ('Mrs. Murphy's rooming house' appears several times in *The Soft Machine*), teachers ('trained with Ma Currie in the little blue schoolhouse [...] taught me everything I am', *SM*, p.81), or wealthy patrons (*NL*, 107-108). In all cases the scenes are again determined by the woman's capacity to provide or withdraw emotional and physical comfort. Behind Mrs. Murphy's call of 'Will you be settling your account today Mr. Jones ?' is the threat of eviction (*SM*, p.82).

⁵⁰ For a discussion of Burroughs's treatment of parents as the origins of a system of punishment/reward conditioning, see John Z. Guzlowski, 'The Family in the Fiction of William Burroughs'. For a biographical reading of the resistances to order and control of Burroughs, along with his fellow Beat writers Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady and Gregory Corso, in terms of their responses to their respective dysfunctional families, see Paul S. George and Jerold M. Starr, 'Beat Politics', pp. 197-204.

men relates the experience of gendered interaction back to the family and to the childhood experiences of inferiority which, Burroughs insists, prepare the subject for a life of submission. Again, I would suggest that this means that a critique of dispersed forms of social control leads Burroughs to the necessity of a hostility towards women. His critique is directed at the particular forms of power accorded to - or indeed, forced on - women within a patriarchal social structure, even if we might want to argue that such forms of power work also in the interests of men.

The other aspect of male-female relationships that interests Burroughs and which underlies his extreme images, is sex and love, which again is a nexus of mutual hostilities. In the middle of an erotic scene in *The Ticket That Exploded*, a voice interrupts, urging us to 'maintain alertness in the sex act and not be taken in by the sex agents of the enemy who move to soften you up with sentimentality and sexual frustration to buy ersatz goo of their copy planet' (*TTE*, p.61). It is the sexed body that succumbs to the abject 'goo' of desire, and which thereby impels us to accept the 'ersatz' promise of a viral 'copy planet' produced by the enemy. Similarly, the imagery of sexual dependency, such as the involuntary erections that follow the Countess di Vile, suggest that male sexuality is constructed as a form of mechanistic dependency. Since desire is experienced as outside of conscious control, the responses of the male body are a mark of its failure to have power over itself - and as such a sexual response to a female body is as much a sign of loss of autonomy as is the sexual response to death by hanging.⁵¹

Whether imaged as an artificial biological condition or as the 'ersatz goo' of romance, love is opposed here to autonomy, since the state of love is one of a wish

⁵¹ This is not to say, of course, that Burroughs sees male sexual arousal as innate, natural, and therefore uncontrollable - since the message of these texts is that it is implanted and controlled. In that sense, again, he offers a critique of a conventional construction of male sexuality as involuntary and therefore always beyond reproach: rather, it is involuntary because it is under the control of others, and is therefore always a legitimate object for critique.

to please the other, and a surrendering of one's own desires in favour of following their whims. Love, suggests Barthes, is that state in which every action of the beloved 'will bring me some new occasion for subjugation' since the beloved 'is assigned to a superior habitat, an Olympus where everything is decided and whence everything descends upon me' (*A Lover's Discourse*, pp.82-83). A cutup of the lyrics of love songs that Burroughs offers in *The Ticket That Exploded* emphasizes the subservience of the lover to the object of their desire: 'On my knees i hoped you'd love me too [...] Please don't be angry [...] Don't know how i'll make it, baby' (*TTE*, pp.39-40). Again, it is a commonplace within misogynist discourse that romance 'unmans': that it encourages emotions incompatible with aggressive masculinity. But Burroughs never offers that conventional image of an independent male ensnared for life by the wiles of female romance. Rather, he treats sex as, again, a place of *mutual* damage: 'all human sex is this unsanitary arrangement whereby two entities attempt to occupy the same three-dimensional co-ordinate points giving rise to [...] endless sexual conflict' (*TTE*, p.45). Even though there may be problems with Burroughs's sidelining of the coercive inequalities that structure such encounters, there remains something particularly incisive in his insistence that romance is merely the pretext by which both men and women have power over each other and enter into a series of manipulative strategies in order to gain a misplaced sexual satisfaction.⁵²

⁵² Burroughs's suspicion of heterosexual relationships does not lead him - in the quartet at any rate - to imagine a homosexual utopia (although there have been attempts to appropriate the quartet to such a tradition; see for instance Greg Woods, *Articulate Flesh*, pp.41-42). Burroughs makes it clear that he views all forms of sexual desire as both ridiculous and dangerous. In *The Naked Lunch*, one routine imagines a group of female prostitutes employed to seduce sailors who have taken up sex with men, and envisions *all* the different sexual possibilities and body parts depicted in the scenario as equally undesirable (*NL*, p123). For an interesting reading of the sole extended scene of heterosexual sex in the quartet as a possible utopia, see Jeffrey S. Dunn, 'William S. Burroughs and Technologizing Literary Studies in the Industrial Age', pp.142-150.

Via the critical aspect of such imagery these texts thus lay bare the destructive apparatus of gender relationships within a modern patriarchal society, even as they deploy conventionally misogynistic imagery. To say that these are all in fact astute observations on gender relationships is not to say that such limited opportunities for harm constitute a form of equal power in society. Whether Burroughs adopts such a position himself is more problematic. Although his use of terms like 'matriarchy' suggest as much, it is also true that situations in which women are in control, or exercising power abusively, are far outweighed in the quartet by those in which men exercise such power. Whatever the vehemence of his satires on female dominance, the overall effect of the texts is to represent this as a relatively minor part of a larger system of social suffering. To read the texts in this way is to do no more than recognize that Burroughs's concern to challenge all instances of physical, economic, and emotional violence between humans requires that he look at the damage that women may be capable of inflicting in their interactions with men. Although, as Jane Gallop suggests, 'it is difficult to think of women as disadvantaged and forceful at the same time' (*Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*, p.70), we can do so by thinking in terms of what Rosina Perelberg calls 'the power of the weak': those particular forms of power which, she points out, are exercised by those who are denied institutionally legitimated authority ('Equality, Asymmetry, and Diversity: On Conceptualizations of Gender', pp. 43-45). Such power is available for certain constrained uses, and within such constraints may have very strong effects - but the extent to which it is always located outside institutional authority limits the range of effects that it can have. To look at women's uses of power to damage men is thus not to dismiss the atrocities of male power, but to say that within the institution of gender a war of emotional, financial, sexual, and physical brutality goes on between all participants which makes Burroughs's images of female monstrosity consonant with his general

opposition to all those who deploy power over the bodies of others.⁵³

c) 'Misogyny' as Empathy

Finally, we should remember that to envisage the body as abject is not only to see it as dangerous, but also, for Burroughs, to lament its enslavement. In that sense, the images discussed above may also be read as signs of the colonization of women's bodies by forces outside them. This is certainly not an area that the quartet avoids, and the male figures of authority in his texts share a desire to dominate and abuse women: 'A pimp [...] leans in through the Country Club window. "Visit the House of David boys and watch the girls eat shit. Makes a man feel good all over. Just tell the madame a personal friend of mine"' (SM, p.68). The speech contains a series of features which recur throughout the texts as instances of strategies which sustain destructive authority: that patrician site of male power the Country Club, the appeal to a repressive fraternal solidarity ('boys'), the patriarchal biblical connotations of the 'House of David', and the atmosphere of secret networks which retain privilege ("just tell the madame a personal friend of mine"). By structuring such a scene around such familiar instances of authority Burroughs would seem to regard its misogyny with the same hatred as he does all desires to brutalize other human beings. Elsewhere we meet Iris, who at first seems the

⁵³ We might also follow the politics of Burroughs's hostility towards the female body in two other directions. In his comparison of Burroughs's work with Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, Tom Bowden suggests that femininity acts in the modern world as a trope for commodification: the adornment of the female body may thus operate as a defining instance of the take over of the body by the values and practices of commerce ('Postmodern Pope: *The Rape of the Lock*; or, Have a Nice Day'). Alternatively, we might regard Burroughs's hostility towards the female body as an attack on the ways that an idealized notion of female virtue has underwritten projects of political repression - such as the figure of 'Lady Liberty' in the USA. In either case, it may always be difficult to disentangle an attack on a particular symbolic use of the female body by modern capitalist societies from an attack on women themselves.

epitome of the abject female body when 'she makes some flat, factual statement relative to her own person. "My asshole is occluding." "My cunt got terrible green juices." '(NL, p.101). But her bodily state proves not to be an expression of an innate female monstrosity, but rather to be the result of Dr. Benway's experimentation. Her commodified body follows immediately after a routine featuring another commodified female body in which a boy, told by his father 'I want you to go to a good whore and get a piece of ass off her' returns to tell his father that 'I switch my blade and cut a big hunk off her ass, she raise a beef like I am reduce to pull off one shoe and beat her brains out. Then I hump her for kicks' (NL, pp.100-101). Again, it is the brotherhood of male complicity (father and son), at whose violent desires the female body is violated.

Such reductions of the body to a piece of meat rely on our hostility towards various recurrent symbols of abusive power within the quartet - such as the medical establishment and the client who assumes absolute power over the body that he has purchased for sex. If Burroughs's texts are misogynistic, they therefore do a very poor job of rendering men any less repellent than their female monsters. Perhaps, as Catherine Stimpson suggests, there is even a welcome levelling of the inequalities of gender in Burroughs's treatment of the monstrous female. For she ceases to be the cultural instance of the most extreme horror - as Kristeva suggests she is - and 'in his baroque landscapes, she is merely one grotesque amongst others' ('The Beat Generation and the Trials of Homosexual Liberation', p.392).

Burroughs's 'misogyny' thus follows a curious route - for however much it would seem to loathe the female body, it does so in order to assault the conditions under which women are oppressed: the female body as dangerous because it is required to reassure men of their anxieties; the female body as material because it is like, rather than unlike, the male body; the female body as repellent because it has

been invaded and controlled. His texts, once more, exceed the programmatic politics that they reach for, offering a critique of patriarchal gender roles which, if hardly feminist, nevertheless shares a number of important goals with feminism. The representation of the female body as monstrous is thus required by, and productive within, the quartet's critique of power, rather than merely being an unwelcome instance of patriarchal prejudice - even though at the same time it is just such a prejudice.⁵⁴

But more than this, we should also see the ambiguity of this writing as a problem of the writing of abjection. To identify body matter as abject is always to be caught up in the logic of condemnation and disgust, and to be complicit with the social processes that maintain such distinctions. That these texts nevertheless turn the abject body into a political weapon suggests that abjection is not only a process in the service of the construction of a physically regulated integral subject. The representation of the abject body may be turned back against the system that produces it so as to indict that system. In my reading of these texts we see three powerful strategies of politicized abject writing: revealing authority's investments in keeping the body vulnerable to control; indicting the ways in which one body may threaten and coerce another; and exposing authority as itself repulsively material. To render authority abject is to expose it, to seek to shame that authority, and to provide its victims with a position from which to reject it. And yet the power of such attacks relies on the intensity of the repulsion that resides in abjection, on its hatred of bodily forms not comfortably complicit with a purified social order. As we see in Burroughs's treatment of gender, to construct the body as abject in order to

⁵⁴ Eric Mottram offers another reading of Burroughs's 'misogyny': that insofar as he develops Korzybski's rejection of any form of strictly dualistic thinking, he regards the entire apparatus of gender as a divisive and simplistic imposition onto the human species (*William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need*, pp.167-175). My thanks to Jamie Russell for drawing my attention to this aspect of Burroughs's thinking about gender.

put it to such uses will always bring the text back into the ambit of dominant discourses of bodily disgust: a ridiculing of the male body for being unable to control its penis, a repulsion at the female body for daring to overwhelm the male.

(iv) No Way Out: Abject Politics

That Burroughs's writings should make such an exemplary case for the impossibility of making easy separations between the progressive and the reactionary, the liberating and the imprisoning, is particularly fitting, for his texts are full of reminders of the futility of trying to position oneself outside the system one resists. Writing of inevitable complicities, he tells us: 'To speak is to lie, to live is to collaborate' (*NE*, p.7). Language, that which seems to offer us a means of participating in these struggles, serves only to bind us more firmly into the hands of our opponents. Language is spoken not, as we might hope, as an expression of, but rather at the expense of, our independence.

Again, it is instructive to read him alongside Kristeva. Burroughs's central formulation comes close to - while diverging in some crucial respects from - Kristeva's formulation of the impossibility of finding in language some satisfying separation from the childhood terrors of the abject body. Her equivalent claim is that 'we speak only of anguish' (*PH*, p.42): that language itself is always spoken at the painful cost of cutting away our connection to the maternal body. What the two formulations share is that while language seems to empower us, it is also a form of alienation - not exactly from any originary self, but rather an alienation because it produces a self whose coherence is its limitation. Burroughs's warning that 'to live is to collaborate', again marks an affinity with Kristeva's sense of perpetual constraint and defeat in the conflict between different registers of subjectivity.

After his proclamation, Burroughs then explains that 'the enemy ... moves

always to push life into extreme untenable situations' (*NE*, p.7). But for Kristeva the 'extreme and untenable' situations into which language forces us are not to be escaped, but rather must be lived with, their impossibility the necessary condition of our being speaking subjects. If the Nova Mob, with their stifling logics and doxic proclamations are an embodiment of the thetic itself, and the conflicts, separations and wars which the games of language set in motion, then Kristeva laments their intolerable necessity ('we speak only of anguish'), while Burroughs condemns any form of collaboration with them ('to speak is to lie').

So if for Kristeva the two form an irresolvable contradiction, on which we are all crucified, unable to let go of our bodies so as to enter fully the symbolic order, but equally unable to renounce language and return to the pre-verbal, for Burroughs the two form an unholy alliance, language and the body working together to imprison us. This move enables Burroughs to achieve what Kristeva cannot - to propose a realm that is entirely beyond this current state. Where *Powers of Horror* presents history as a constant struggle to live with this division of the subject, Burroughs reads history as the constant repetition of a cycle which must, and can, be left behind. For Kristeva a radical future can be no more than one in which the subject can acknowledge the insolubility of its contradiction rather than trying to repress it (*PH*, p.87-89) - for Burroughs it is 'time to look beyond this rundown radioactive cop-rotten planet' (*The Job*, p.137).

There is, then, a fundamental philosophical incompatibility between the two. Burroughs conceives of freedom in absolute terms: freedom from any interference or constraint. Hence matter, language, and biology are all limitations on freedom. The processes of abjection in particular constrain freedom, since they produce both the most vulnerable bodily forms (the corporeal locations that are abjected) and the most rigidly constrained (the phobic body that abjects) leaving us in what Burroughs calls 'body prison' (*NE*, p.141). Kristeva, on the other hand, views

freedom as relative - in terms of limited gains that may be made, momentary disruptions of the established social, psychic, and linguistic order.⁵⁵ Since, in her account, subjectivity is necessarily a process of restraint, of the ordering and production of the body in particular ways, and could not take place by any other means, rejection of such norms in the name of absolute freedom makes no sense. Conversely Burroughs, who views such a form of embodiment as a destructive compromise, could never agree to the necessity of accepting such a body, since it is to surrender the possibility of freedom over to the forces of domination.

His texts, however, bear witness to the impossibility of any such absolutely independent subjectivity, insisting as they do that the subject is always produced by its interrelationship with other forces. As we have seen, his representations of the body derive from a precarious welding of incompatible positions, at war over the status of the abject. His texts are thus themselves a site of abjection: at one point rejecting the abject matter that enables them to be written and at another rebelling against the purity that they advocate. Even as his proclamations would seem to set him against Kristeva, we might still say that his texts follow her own lines of thinking: in a Kristevan sense, they speak their own anguish, locked in their own insoluble conflict, but producing more effective political critiques because of that. Since they are so contradictory, their political critique is rarely coherent and instead moves to indict one instance of power after another, without ever formulating a stable position - anything that might constitute a manifesto. In doing so, they create

⁵⁵ It is perhaps misleading to make such sweeping generalizations about Kristeva's notion of politics. Certain of her writings - 'Women's Time', 'Woman Can Never Be Defined' - are much more focused on the dramatic social changes that feminism has achieved. At the same time, her stress on the need to protect the psyche from a loss of the established boundaries which ward off insanity seems to me to entail a view of politics as cautious and as an arena for limited change. As Toril Moi suggests - without any apparent irony - what defines Kristeva's view of change is that whatever may take place, the final goal must be one in which 'anarchy will be avoided' (*The Kristeva Reader*, p.188).

perhaps the only approach which can adequately analyse the ways in which power, itself equally contradictory, acts on bodies.

I began this chapter by considering the proposal that bodily disorder was a way of challenging the logic of unity that constrains the subject. But if power itself functions through a disorganized body, then disorganization (under the sign of the unruly body) is not guaranteed to be an effective form of resistance. A hatred of disorder may then function as an attempt to free the body from the exercise of power over it. Authority and resistance would seem irredeemably complicit, speaking as they do with each other's voices. But this does not mean that texts such as Burroughs's are somehow ineffectual. Rather they demonstrate that political critique may be potent even though contaminated by what it resists. This may offer us a new way to make use of Kristeva's insistence on the necessity of abjection. Rather than either accepting her diagnosis of the psychic inevitability of the abjection of body matter, or condemning her argument as a *post facto* justification of an unwelcome political situation, we may instead accept abjection as a process which may facilitate our becoming resistant subjects. Wherever abjection originates from, and however unhappy we may be with some of its sources, it is not simply an unwelcome intruder, but is a part of the conditions that enable our resistant subjectivity. Indeed, Burroughs's writings are at their most effective not when they succeed in separating themselves from the objects of their critique, but when they are most caught up with them, so that the ambivalent political effects of these texts are a reminder of both the value and the costs of choosing to make use of repulsion rather than seeking in some way to renounce or redeem it.

Always already possessed, the body cannot be thought outside these logics of purity and pollution: we construct our positions out of the pull towards those two states. But rather than trying to adopt either one as the grounding of a political critique, we can only accept the necessary contamination of whatever position we

adopt, recognizing that even though this deprives us of any solely exterior language with which to critique authority, it also provides us with a more multiple language, which can adapt itself to the different strategies necessary for opposing. Rather than regarding our speech as being necessarily collaborative, and therefore fatally flawed, we might make the most of that compromise by deploying a language of bodily purity against attempts to render our bodies abject, and a language of bodily disorder against attempts to render our bodies clean. If we want a text which is fully engaged in this contradictory process, then Burroughs would seem to fulfil this role admirably.

PART THREE

Revolution from Within: David Cronenberg and the Possibilities of Bodily Insurrection

Chapter Five

Shivers :

Race and Class in the Imperilled Body

(i) Introduction: Situating Cronenberg

'This is a fusion of several things together: me and Burroughs for one thing', says David Cronenberg of his 1991 adaptation of *Naked Lunch* (Chris Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg* p. 163), a film which marks only the most obvious sort of fusion between the two and which follows a long recognition of Burroughs's influences on Cronenberg.¹ Indeed, it may be necessary to justify devoting space to *both* bodies of work when so much criticism readily assumes that, given their apparently similar subject matter and Cronenberg's statements of Burroughs's influence, the two offer virtually identical perspectives.² However, it is my intention here to suggest that these two bodies of work form radically different engagements with the consequences and strategies involved in representing body matter and disgust. Moreover, it is precisely the difference between the two that interests me: for where Burroughs treats the body as the vector only of control, so

¹ See for instance Christopher Sharrett, 'Apocalypticism in the Contemporary Horror Film' pp.101-102; and Amy Taubin, 'The Wrong Body'. Supporters of Burroughs largely despise Cronenberg's heterosexual - if not homophobic - version of Burroughs's text. See Richard Dellamora, 'Queer Apocalypse: Framing William Burroughs'; Timothy Murphy, 'William Burroughs Between Indifference and Revalorization: Notes Toward a Political Reading'; and Andrew Parker, 'Grafting David Cronenberg: Monstrosity, AIDS Media, National/Sexual Difference.' For a transcript of a meeting between Burroughs and Cronenberg, see Lynn Snowden 'Which is the Fly and Which is the Human? '.

² See for instance Scott Bukatman, 'Who Programs You ? The Spectacle of Science Fiction'; Peter Morris, *David Cronenberg: A Delicate Balance*, pp.29-30; and Steven Shaviro, 'Two Lessons from Burroughs'.

that resistance can lie only in escaping it altogether, for Cronenberg the body's materiality holds out the promise of being deployed in productive, if risky, forms of resistance. Nor am I simply arguing that in their differences Burroughs defines a 'problem' to which Cronenberg is the 'solution'. While I do indeed view Cronenberg as exploring abject materiality in a way that sees potentialities in it which Burroughs struggles to find, we might equally say that Burroughs's pessimism about the body enables him to maintain a critical interrogation of the body which is more muted in Cronenberg's work. This section of my thesis will therefore not attempt links, connections, or sustained comparisons - although I will raise some of these in my conclusion. Rather, it will pursue the question of what sorts of politics might be fashioned from the ordering and disordering of bodies, via the particular forms which it takes in a selected portion of Cronenberg's work.

Cronenberg has directed a group of films in which, from his first commercial feature in 1976, *Shivers*, through to his most recent film *Crash* (1996), bodies are imaged as a source of social disruption and personal anxiety.³ At the same time, the body is an object of fascination, whose capacity to disturb is desirable even as it is dreadful. I will be concerned in this thesis with three of Cronenberg's films - *Shivers*, *The Fly* (1986) and *Rabid* (1976), the last of which forms a conclusion to the thesis as a whole. All three are commercial horror features, located more specifically within the sub-genre of 'body horror'.⁴ Over the

³ He has also directed films in which that concern with the visceral body is muted (*The Dead Zone*, 1983), or altogether absent (*Fast Track*, 1979), and a range of material for television. For accounts of Cronenberg's life and the production history of his work see Chris Rodley (ed.), *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*; and Peter Morris, *David Cronenberg: A Delicate Balance*.

⁴ I discuss the history of the body horror genre and its relevance to Cronenberg in chapter six. I do not consider *The Brood* (1979) or *Videodrome* (1982). This is both a practical decision - reasons of space necessitate excluding some of his body horror features - and also because, as I worked on those films, I did not find that I could use them to add substantially to the arguments generated by *Shivers*, *The Fly*, and *Rabid*.

last ten years Cronenberg's work may be said to have decisively breached the boundaries of the horror genre with *M. Butterfly* (1993), while he has also written and directed works whose concern with horrifying bodies take place in films that might not otherwise be called body horror, in terms of their iconography, their narratives, their commercial status or their intended audiences: *Dead Ringers*, *Naked Lunch*, and *Crash*.

I will not be offering an auteurist account here, in the sense of treating these films as offering a unique vantage point on the body, since what interests me in Cronenberg's work is rather how it relies on common discursive tensions in the representation of abject body matter.⁵ These films chart a thoroughly conventional catalogue of those organs, activities, postures, and substances which render the material of the body problematic for a culture in which the body is figured as both a valued natural resource and a disgusting risk to one's status as civilized. But taken together, the films also offer a particular emphasis on the material conditions that produce such disgust, the ways that its different forms are all equally cultural, and the power relationships in which the body is located. If this effect is not in any straightforward way authored by their director, it is nevertheless a distinctive property of his work.

Why begin by looking at Cronenberg in terms of race and class? I want to use Cronenberg's work to show how the stigmatization of particular bodily substances, parts and activities, always takes place within a network of discourses which are socially specifiable. In particular I would situate myself as part of the recent move to reclaim Cronenberg from the largely humanist criticism which has championed him as an exposé of social artifice in the name of a general celebration of 'the body', regarded in such accounts as an authentic presence that is the victim

⁵ Also against an auteurist reading of Cronenberg, see Colin McArthur, 'Counter-Introduction: Limits of Auteurism'.

of a repressive culture.⁶ In its place, this more historically motivated criticism tries to locate the abject matter of Cronenberg's films as exemplifying particular forms of modern bodily anxiety,⁷ which are rather more specific than what David Chute describes as 'some vestigial kernel of mistrust in our relationship with our own bodies' ('He Came From Within', p.37). I want to turn these films back against such a formulation - to ask of such a claim: who is being spoken about through the term 'our' ? Which bodies experience mistrust ? What is it that they mistrust ? And what can be done with those feelings ?

(ii) Clean Bodies

Cronenberg's first commercial feature film, *Shivers*, became an object of some notoriety when, in 1975, Canadian film critic Robert Fulford, writing under the pen name Marshal Delaney, argued that the Canadian Film Development Corporation should not have funded the making of the film in his provocatively titled article: 'You Should Know How Bad This Film Is. After All, You Paid For It'.⁸ Outraged at its perceived violation of certain standards of morality, aesthetics, national prestige and taste, Fulford's response was to call for the film's sanitary

⁶ An approach exemplified by the essays in Piers Handling (ed.), *The Shape of Rage: the Films of David Cronenberg*, and which Cronenberg encourages in interviews (see Chris Rodley (ed.), *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*).

⁷ Steve Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body* is an interesting case, which appraises Cronenberg in an analysis based on Deleuze and Guattari, but remains wedded to general claims about the meaning of 'the body' as if such an object were static, and experienced in one way by all embodied subjects.

⁸ Sadly, I have been unable to obtain a copy of Fulford's original article, which is discussed in Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, pp.51-52; and Morris, *A Delicate Balance*, pp.68-73. For Cronenberg's own account of how Fulford's article impacted on his personal life, and the legend of how it lost him his accommodation, see David Cronenberg, 'The Night Attila Met the Anti-Christ, She Was Shocked And He Was Outraged'.

elimination (Morris, *David Cronenberg*, pp.68-74). Given that *Shivers*'s concern is with repression, liberation, hygiene and order, it seems almost too obvious to state that its reception is caught up in the dynamics which it interrogates. A cheerfully deconstructive reading might cast the film as itself a part of a horror narrative - whether as the unclean monster that is attacked, or as the hapless victim who is pursued. But what seems more to the point is the extent to which the film whittles away at those very terms, asking what price we pay for the fact that 'liberation' is not a term generated spontaneously by the oppressed, so much as one defined and bequeathed to us by the most powerful constituencies of the social hierarchy. Instead, therefore, I want to suggest that the film's interrogation of the limits of liberation leads us not to affirm it as other to a criticism such as Fulford's, so much as to place it as all the more firmly consonant with - but therefore, as we shall see, all the more insidiously undermining of - the stigmatizing voice that would name and eradicate it.

The narrative of *Shivers* covers a period of less than twenty-four hours, and recounts the spread of a parasite through the luxury apartment block Starliner Towers. The parasite is an artificial organism produced by Dr. Emil Hobbes and offered as a remedy for humanity's over-cerebral condition: 'Man is an animal who thinks too much', Hobbes's business partner Rollo Linsky reads in the deceased doctor's notes, 'an over-rational animal that's lost touch with its body and its instincts'. Hobbes's notes call the parasites 'a combination of aphrodisiac and venereal disease that will hopefully turn the world into one beautiful mindless orgy'. The film then follows the attempt, and eventual failure, of Linsky, and Starliner Towers's resident doctor, Roger St Luc, to avert the spread of the parasite, and charts the gradual transformation of the residents into bodies which desire nothing except sex. The film ends with the residents leaving the block to take the infection out into Toronto.

At one crucial point, St Luc's lover and assistant, Nurse Forsythe, begins to narrate a dream she has had:

Roger, I had a very disturbing dream last night. In this dream, I found myself making love to this strange man. Only I'm having trouble, you see, because he's old and dying, and he smells bad, and I find him repulsive. But then he tells me that everything is erotic, that everything is sexual. You know what I mean? He tells me that even old flesh is erotic flesh, that disease is the love of two alien kinds of creatures for each other - that even dying is an act of eroticism. That talking is sexual. That breathing is sexual. And I believe him. And we make love beautifully.

As Forsythe finishes speaking, she opens her mouth to reveal a parasite crawling out of it, reaching towards St Luc: he strikes her, rendering her unconscious, and then binds her mouth to keep the creature inside.

The alternation between close-ups of Forsythe's increasingly impassioned face, moving arms and neck, and St Luc's unchanging face and immobile torso, structures the scene in terms of the tension between two performances, which encode a key dynamic of the film - the confrontation between two modes of physicality. If, as Lucy Fisher has argued, the shot/countershot pattern is one which typically positions the woman as the object, not the initiator, of the look that passes between the two parties (*Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women's Cinema*), then St Luc's violent act brings to the fore the implicit power relationship embodied by that cinematic structure. As if to cement this, the shooting generates a discrepancy of status by positioning St Luc above Forsythe, so that while one shot looks up to him, the completing shot looks down to her. We may then read this as a confrontation in which the audience is invited to read his action as the fulfilment of visual logic of the scene: his mastery, her submission. By silencing her speech, and sealing her mouth, he puts a stop to the narrative by which she attempts to assign their positions, to determine the form of their relationship, averting the moment of

sexual union between them which would act as the climax of her sexual narrative, by realizing in the flesh the claims of her story.

But at the same time, his performance also compromises any position of mastery. His movement throughout the film is rigid, with his hands often noticeably failing to co-ordinate with his attempted postures of authority, gesturing helplessly, and his voice often mumbling or inaudible.⁹ Throughout the film, as Peter Boss has noted:

our engagement with him is limited in terms of actual screen time and by the camera strategy used to convey his presence to us: typically, he is anticipated rather than accompanied by the camera; framing is usually in long-shot to medium, and rarely close-up, and subjective angles are rejected. ('Death, Disintegration of the Body, and Subjectivity in the Modern Horror Film', p.128)

Consequently, the contrast between them may also be read in Forsythe's favour. Her voice has passion, its volume and tone modulating, while her body stretches and her eyes widen. The sound and image make her an object of fascination, while St Luc's practical beige clothes, his silence, and his impassive face, make him almost lifeless, so that the shot/countershot structure accentuates her cinematic vitality over the torpor of his performance and physical appearance.¹⁰ That her speech occupies a full ninety seconds of screen time without interruption locates it in a position of power, so that St Luc's silencing of Forsythe may then be read less the expression of a superiority which the scene endorses, than an assertion of a superiority that the scene has systematically denied.¹¹

⁹ It would perhaps be foolish not to credit this at least partly to the problem of using poor actors and sound technology in order to meet the constraints of a low-budget film. Nevertheless, the overall effect is to diminish St Luc's appeal for the audience throughout the film.

¹⁰ Similarly, earlier in the film Forsythe undresses provocatively while St Luc, unmoved, continues to make a business call on the telephone.

¹¹ For other readings of St Luc's compromised position see William Beard, 'The

We may therefore say that this event is posed as the conflict between two bodily styles, heightened also by their contrasting clothes (Forsythe has changed into a sleeveless black evening dress; St Luc still wears the suit he put on for work): one fluid, seductive, hedonistic; the other rigid, aggressive, ascetic. It is the difficulty of deciding how this contrast functions, and which set of terms it is attempting to privilege, that I want to explore here, since it concerns a bodily conflict which I will argue is embedded in the racial and class logics that produce the film, and whose tensions it so suggestively explores, perhaps nowhere more clearly than through the way in which this contrast of bodies is mirrored in the design of the building.

Cronenberg's concern with an austere geography has long been recognized, but it has typically been read as a visual detail symbolizing the undesirable restraint of the environments in which his films are set.¹² Summarizing its presence in Cronenberg's work, William Beard says: 'in these works society ... is presented as believing itself to be rational, ordered, coolly functional, under control. These qualities are signalled by architecture and decor, by the social behaviour of the characters and by the ambitious optimism of the high priests of modern society, the scientists' ('The Visceral Mind', p.3). Such a description obviously fits well with the image of St Luc that I have described, and Starliner Towers is indeed just such a rational, functional space. However, using the theoretical positions I have discussed in chapters one and two we can argue that the film not only uses

Visceral Mind' pp.19-20; Robert MacMillan, '*Shivers* ... Makes Your Flesh Creep' p.15; and Michael O'Pray, 'Fatal Knowledge', p.10.

¹² See for instance John Harkness, 'The Word, The Flesh and David Cronenberg', pp.91-92; and Robert MacMillan, '*Shivers* ... Makes Your Flesh Creep!', pp.14-15. The harsh, spacious, eerie settings have also been seen as Cronenberg's attempts to rework traditional gothic elements in his cinema: see Wayne Drew, 'A Gothic Revival: Obsession and Fascination in the Films of David Cronenberg', p.19; and Robert Haas, 'Introduction: The Cronenberg Monster: Literature, Science and Psychology in the Cinema of Horror', pp.4-5).

architecture as a visual metaphor, but also diagnoses the ways that the physical environment moulds the bodies and body images of its users, so that Starliner Towers is constructed as a form of bodily geography, whose contours provide a psychic pattern for the bodies of the inhabitants and also sustain the physical practices that maintain the physical shape of these bodies, rather than simply being expressive of them.

The building is marked firstly by a concern with enclosure and separation. Situated on an island, reached only by a narrow bridge, the building is separated both from the nearest city, and from the Canadian mainland.¹³ The film opens with an advertisement for the block, in which a voice-over account stresses its independence and physical isolation ('the noise of the traffic of the city might as well be a million miles away'), where the car park offers 'a space reserved for you', and residents of the block can be 'secure in the knowledge that it belongs to you and your fellow travellers alone'. The action then begins as a couple drive up to the block and, jokily, negotiate access past the security guard, who marks yet another boundary. Inside the building, new boundaries are in place, those of the individual apartments whose closed doors we see in endless rows down shots of corridors. Island, building, apartment: this series of Russian dolls that constitutes the space of the film ends with the most intimate sealed space - the body. The bodies that inhabit such a domain are structured by the visual language of closure and containment - which defines the building.

Hobbes's parasites enter the body through any opening available to them - visible at one point beneath the flesh, passing from throat to throat during a kiss. But their most graphic victim is Nick Tudor, a resident of the building, whose stomach bulges with the creatures living inside him and who retches up parasites into sinks, toilets, and off balconies - until finally we see one push itself out from

¹³ The building's real location is the equally suggestively named Nuns' Island.

between his lips. With its unseemly behaviour and unruly materiality, Nick's body thus violates the precepts of the well-ordered and well-demarcated space he inhabits. But Nick is also marked by other, less spectacular, violations: we soon find that he is having a secret affair with Annabel Brown, which marks his domestic marriage as a space whose security has been breached, while his wife is close to being seduced by their next-door neighbour, Betts. This series of bounded spaces therefore produces inhabitants who are both required to keep within the bounds of their proper spaces, and yet situated within spaces whose boundaries are permeable. The film stresses the porousness of both the body and the spaces on which it is modelled: just as Nick Tudor's name is punningly pronounced 'two-door', so too we see the parasites passing through the access-points of these architectural spaces - entering the building through a drain or leaving an apartment through a letter-box. When one parasite crawls up through the plug of a bath, and then into the vagina of the woman using the bath, the doubling of the two apertures bears witness to the mutual implication of bodily and architectural geographies. Hence, in binding Forsythe's mouth, *St Luc* exemplifies the logic of the space in which the film unfolds: guard the spaces of exit and entry. We may therefore read the particularly graphic trauma of parasitic invasion as a signifier of the environment's investment in neatly maintained bodies. When we see Nick in his kitchen, having disordered its contents, broken its appliances, and covered its surfaces in blood, the moment of textual excess should be read as deriving its meaning from its defiance of the corporeal logics of department and containment already in place in the building. His internal body matter has been expelled onto its surfaces, so that the lines of demarcation that define *Starliner Towers* are seen as under attack.

Alongside this stress on containment, as we have already begun to see, this corporeal logic is also one of order. Annabel Brown, the parasites' first victim, is

described by the apartment manager as a 'very civilized young lady' who 'never complained about anything', an apparently docile body who fits the ideal requirements of the block and the civilizing society that it regulates. The line of orderly residents seated in the surgery queue; Forsythe at work preparing food; Janine Tudor making breakfast; the unnamed waiter pushing his trolley down the corridors: these are docile bodies in Foucault's sense, actively pursuing the tasks required by this domain, and aware of the spaces within which they belong and the movements which they must make. But the images of routinized work also prepare for the reappearance of those characters after they have been entered by the parasites. Once infected, they no longer respect these other borders, pushing through the doors which once acted as secure boundaries, and into the bodies whose integrity those barriers underwrite. The soundtrack of laughs and screams - often indistinguishable, often unlocatable within the labyrinth of corridors - and the change in performance to deliberately slouched postures of hyperactive movement, marks the end of the sanctioned bodily forms demanded by Starliner Towers.

The narrative device of these docile bodies being systematically breached enables the text to indicate the constitutive role that architecture and decor plays in the structuring of the body, the way that bodies are fitted by and for the spaces they inhabit and the routines that they perform there. Walls whose white paint easily shows marks, doors that are always locked, barriers between apartments, security guards: the bodies moulded by such a domain are both physically and psychically marked by the requirement for containment and docility. What I want to emphasize here is the way that these structures of containment are essential for defining the form that such docility takes. Here, a body which is porous becomes defined as one that cannot be ordered. A porous body is one that does not follow the regulations of this environment. The structuring of sealed spaces thus figures the body as a place in need of ordering - in need of having its borders shored up so that it does

not violate the logic of Starliner Towers. Those events which indicate that its borders are indeed porous are the ones to be most dreaded. Consequently, the space of the body becomes vulnerable simultaneously to threats of invasion from without and disruption from within. But - and this is the ambiguity of Hobbes's parasites - the threat from without is always figured as dangerous because of its potential to activate a dangerous presence within the body. Certainly with their pulsating, organic appearance they look as much like organs of the body - which would, Rollo says, have been their intended medical function - as they do objects that are alien to it.

As the reader will, I hope, recognize, Cronenberg's work is here following similar contours to that of Burroughs - is, in a sense, inhabiting it and being moulded by it. If, in a similar way, he insists that the symbolic weight of the imperfections that accrue to the body render it forever suspect, *Shivers*'s marked diversion away from Burroughs is, as we shall see, to draw attention to, rather than to evade, the impossibility of solving such a tension. It is the very insistence of the alien disturbance within the residents that constitutes the alien disturbance within the film, preventing *Shivers* from merely duplicating the Burroughsian edifice that sustains it.

When the film opens with its commercial celebration of Starliner Towers, the series of slides display the facilities which the building offers. Strikingly absent from the shots are bodies themselves. These are empty rooms, empty beds, empty kitchens. These spaces, supposedly designed for bodily activity, are in fact so pristine that they can accommodate only the most regulated of bodies. The body is admissible only if it can merge with their precise functioning, and not disrupt it. But such a logic already situates the body as a threat which, in need of taming, is therefore always a risky presence. If, as Douglas says, the body may act as a model for bounded systems, what we see here is the way that the construction of the body

as permeable (unable to keep temptations out, unable to hold passions in) then makes it a problematic model, unable to secure a sense of bounded and ordered subjectivity (an instability which, I will be stressing later, may in fact be as much about the instability of the architecture of the building as it is about the body).

This environment therefore has a dual role: to define for each body what it can and cannot do, how it may and may not move, what it should and should not look at (a geographical map of bodily operations); to define for each subject what its body means, and how to feel about it (a semiotic grid of bodily significances). In Douglas's terms, we can therefore see how the building itself operates through a bodily metaphor of smoothly functioning components, securing its identity: it is itself the ideal body, whose perfection none of the real fallible bodies inhabiting it can ever match. But at the same time, that bodily model is undermined because in depending on an image of the body as ordered and controllable, it generates the possibility that these bodies may also be *disordered* and *uncontrollable*: if the bodies of the residents may fail to match up to the ideal, perhaps we shall eventually see that the ideal itself cannot sustain its own perfection.

Shivers thus enacts the bodily dynamic which I have mapped out throughout this thesis: the integrity of a subject is threatened by the presence of intimate bodily improprieties. While the extent to which the film endorses the fear of that threat remains to be decided, what is more certain is that it relies on the construction of a strong antithesis between the two bodily states. The architectural space is opposed to, and incompatible with, the new bodies that inhabit it. And those improper bodies - of both parasites and residents - seem constructed so as to evade any narrative sympathies. In terms of the residents' bodies, Nick Tudor's manic, aggressive, performance, with his eyes bulging and his mouth slobbering blood, culminates in a sexual assault on his wife which leaves her in tears; Betts's seduction of Janine Tudor is heavily referenced as horrific through the casting of

the well-known European horror performer Barbara Steele as Betts;¹⁴ infected residents are seen through hotel door spyholes, distorted threateningly by the lens; and the frighteningly overwhelming weight of the crowds who break through doors is accompanied by a harsh soundtrack of screams that makes for uncomfortable listening. As for the parasites, their appearance as pulsating brown slug-like forms, coated with blood, accompanied by discordant crashes of music, and wounding characters with whom our narrative sympathies have been aligned - an entire cluster of them, for instance, grips hard onto the amiable Rollo's face and have to be torn off with pliers - constructs them for us primarily as fearful. How can we account for the extraordinary fear that circulates around these bodily events? Robin Wood's 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film', with its unremitting hostility towards Cronenberg's imagery of bodily disgust, has the distinction of being one of the first serious critical engagements with *Shivers*, and although it now seems unconvincingly schematic in its analysis nevertheless offers a useful way into the question.¹⁵

Wood bases his critique on a reading of horror derived from Freud, by way of Marcuse, in which political oppression and psychic repression go hand-in-hand, to produce a society of orderly but neurotic subjects. Wood's much-anthologized essay argues that, as a genre, horror enacts a conflict between those forces that are both socially and psychically licit ('normality'), and those that are both socially and psychically illicit ('the monster'). Wood then divides horror films into those that are progressive (in which normality is recognized as coercive and the unleashed forces are seen as redemptive) and those that are reactionary (in which normality is upheld

¹⁴ On the impact of the casting of Steele, see William Beard, 'The Visceral Mind', p.21; David Hogan, *Dark Romance: Sexuality in the Horror Film*, p.178; David Sanjek, 'Dr Hobbes's Parasites: Victims, Victimization and Gender in David Cronenberg's *Shivers*', pp.65-66; and Wayne Drew, 'A Gothic Revival', p.19. Chapter seven of Hogan's *Dark Romance* offers an overview of Steele's career.

¹⁵ Wood repeats and extends his argument in 'Cronenberg: A Dissenting View'.

as benign and the unleashed forces are seen as evil). *Shivers* is placed firmly in what Wood calls 'the reactionary wing' (p.215) since it 'presents sexuality in general as the object of loathing' (p.216). In his reading of *Shivers*, Starliner Towers is presented to its audience as being overtaken by a disaster, and as such carries the political message of an indictment of sexual liberalism.

But while Wood is surely right when he says that *Shivers* figures sexual desire as disgusting, he has failed to consider that this may in fact be the most important point that the film makes: the association of sex and disgust cannot be banished in an environment where the body is the focal point for so many concerns with different types of mess. Hence I will suggest that Cronenberg's film is interesting precisely because rather than offering any palliative for the disgust that attaches to certain bodies, it offers an exploration of the various meanings of that disgust - an exploration that is at its most incisive precisely because it exacerbates the conflict between realms of bodily order and disorder so as to expose their implacable hostility towards one another. But at the same time it is too reductive to read this as *only* a text about sexual disgust - rather, I would suggest, sex is only one of a number of problems in the management of bodies.¹⁶ The power of sex to disturb lies in its invocation of the amenability of the body to improper practices - in which sexual impropriety is not necessarily the most significant instance. I suggest then that Wood's approach paralyses the debate on a number of levels. On the one hand it renders all physical activity sexual and so diverts critical attention away

¹⁶ It may be useful to consider Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* here, part of whose project is to recount the gradual shift away from a general concern (in ancient Greece and Rome) with a variety of possible disorders in the body, to a Christian focus on sex as the defining site of bodily disorder. For other readings of horror in which all bodily fears are fears of the sexual, see David J Hogan, *Dark Romance: Sexuality in the Modern Horror Film*, especially pp.286-290 on Cronenberg; James B. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*, makes a similar argument about horror in general, without addressing Cronenberg in particular

from the other meanings of bodily disorder.¹⁷ On the other it leads to endless rebuttals of Cronenberg's disgust at the sexual by critics wishing to reclaim him for a humanist agenda in which his films explore 'primal organic terrors' (Owen Gleiberman, 'Cronenberg's Double Meanings', p.39) or should be read so that 'sexuality seems like a metaphor for human nature' (Robert Macmillan, '*Shivers ... Makes Your Flesh Creep*', p.15). This critical discourse, while it may accurately identify the centrality of bodily anxiety in these films, fails to locate those fears within any particular culture: the body is essentially discomfiting and always for the same reasons.¹⁸ In its favour, Wood's Marcusean account of psychic repression as consequent upon social regulation at least has the advantage of a historically specific - if schematic - account of how the body is produced under capitalism.

I remain unconvinced that we should read this as a film in which images of sexual disgust are activated as an exploration of unchanging anxieties about the frailty of the body¹⁹ - both because it privileges the experienced frailty of certain constituencies (there is no one frailty of the body, but only different symbolic frailties for different groups whose authority is imperilled), and because it turns us away from the material question of how bodies are in fact rendered frail to different degrees through their material situations. Thus while I am happy to accept that much horror addresses social anxieties about sexuality, and that much of it addresses fears - such as age and disease - that, for particular social constituencies, have come to acquire the character of the seemingly immutable problems of

¹⁷ Which seems an unfortunate and unnecessary consequence, since Wood's general outline of a theoretical model locates sexuality solely as one site of oppression within a multidimensional picture of social conflict (pp.199-200).

¹⁸ It also takes up Cronenberg's own account of his work, in which he resolutely refuses to admit that there might be any cultural specificity in his representation of the body: 'It's an examination of what is universal about human existence' (in Chris Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, p.127).

¹⁹ The argument offered by David Chute in 'He Came From Within', p.38.

embodiment, I remain wary of attempting to define any single social origin for these images. The parasites are amenable to a number of different readings, some of which I shall pursue here, and this critical flexibility originates precisely because 'the body' is not located in a single discourse but is constituted out of many. I do not think that it is problematic that any account of body politics deals only with a limited number of such body discourses - indeed, the overdetermining terms 'race' and 'class' in my title should be read as indicating precisely such necessary limitations - but it is also important to recognize that such critiques of particular bodily anxieties should not be offered as overarching claims about 'the body' as a general human problem. What I am concerned to do is to shift away from the general claims of Cronenberg's work as dramatizing 'the explosive unconscious forces that lie within everyone' (William Beard, 'The Visceral Mind', p.2) and towards a consideration of the specific forms of power that might find this particular conjunction of bodily possibilities so disturbing, while at the same time making connections between different anxieties in order to demonstrate their complicities and contradictions. The most pertinent question would then be: can we specify more precisely what different *mix* of cultural tensions is being signified through the abjection of particular types of body material and bodily behaviour in this text ?

(iii) Bodily Improprieties / Improper Bodies

Shortly before he too is assaulted and infected, we see the unnamed security guard reading a book, entitled *Nurse in Arabia*. It seems planted there to make us think of the film's other nurse, Forsythe, and to ask ourselves what country *she* is in. If her logical location is 'Nurse in Canada', the book's title may point to the racial dynamics which underpin the film. For in its invocation of Arabia, the title

recalls the racist fantasies of threat and danger reworked in a cinematic tradition exemplified by films such as *The Sheik* (1921) and *Harem* (1985). The white woman in Arabia is a woman in danger, and her professional status here as nurse explicitly distances her from those racialized others who, in the scenario that we might imagine attending on such a title, would be figured as uncivilized, uneducated, and, in contrast to the caring role of a nurse, unfriendly. The conjunction of the two terms, posed here on the lurid cover of a cheap paperback, form a striking parallel with Forsythe's situation. At the most obvious level she too is a nurse in an environment of sexual danger, but the racial connotations of the book title guide us towards an analysis of the racialized elements in that environment.

It will not be my argument here that the film's figuration of 'Arabia' constitutes a specifically orientalist moment, in the sense of a set of associations that are specific to the Western construction of an exotic East, along the lines suggested by Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Rather, what interests me here is the way in which the film constructs an undifferentiated whiteness through its invocation of a non-white sexuality which is defined only by its being not-white, rather than being defined in its geographical/cultural specificity. This is not to attempt to homogenize racism, since racism also operates by means of a range of specific discourses in which differently constituted races are stigmatized in very precise ways.²⁰ Rather it is to argue that alongside this, racism operates through a refusal to specify - an invocation of a generalized racial otherness in which 'non-white' is an effective category precisely because it represents the general form of *all* non-white others.

As Richard Dyer reminds us 'trying to think about the representation of whiteness as an ethnic category in mainstream film is difficult, partly because white

²⁰ See Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Practice*; and Kernal Malik, *The Meaning of Race*.

power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular' ('White', p.141). This is a caveat that extends beyond mainstream cinema, and is particularly important in the case of *Shivers*. Dyer's point is that cinematic images, discourses, and practices specific to white cultures, are routinely described as not being ethnically specific, and it is therefore the responsibility of a politically focused criticism to draw attention to these features *as white*.²¹ In the case of *Shivers*, I will argue that it is important that we do not therefore erase race by reading this as a representation of a change in 'humanity' or in 'people' - as the disruption of what Beard calls 'everyday contemporary lifestyles' ('The Visceral Mind', p.18) - but as a change that takes place in a community of *white* people.

At the most obvious level, all of the featured residents of Starliner Towers are white - as indeed are all non-residents with speaking parts: the security guard, Rollo, Nick's secretary. The film marks their whiteness through their language, for while the residence is traversed by various dialects and languages, this is no postmodern display of endless difference: the languages are all European and the cast list marks the characters' Germanic, Anglophone, and Francophone origins (e.g. Guilbault, Parkins, Sviben, Olive). But whiteness is also an insistent visual motif of the film. I have already stressed how the environment of Starliner Towers demands both order and integrity: there is a third term central to its representation of the civilized body, and that is cleanliness. The intrusion of the parasites is visually signalled by the trails of blood that they leave on the white surfaces of the building: on the porcelain of the toilet; inside the bath; down the walls of the rooms. Nick and Janine's bathroom is constructed as a space of white objects (toilet, bathroom, walls, tiles, sink) brightly lit by fluorescent lighting, which visually

²¹ For other attempts to render whiteness visible, see Diana Jeater, 'Roast Beef and Reggae Music: The Passing of Whiteness'; and Vron Ware and Les Back, 'White/Whiteness'. Dyer has developed the work from his seminal article in the book *White*.

echoes other clean, square spaces throughout the film: St Luc's hygienic surgery or the luminous cavity of the fridge in front of which Nick's body is sprawled. His tangled limbs and lolling head contrast with the regular arrangement of straight lines and ordered food that is behind him, marking the space of whiteness as the space of order, while the darkness that surrounds and accentuates the white square, positions it as a space under siege, whose light pushes some small way into the darkness around it before fading.

Food, medicine and ablution are drawn together as practices of cleanliness, whose goal is the production of white environments, achieved by the banishment, destruction, and re-ordering of substances which dirty them. Emphasizing this concern with purity, we also have a lengthy scene set in the laundry room, where the rituals of the measuring out of powder indicate the steady project of purging. As the scene progresses we see, across the white wall at the back of the room, a long red trail of blood, to indicate the desecration by the parasite of this pristine territory. Moreover, while the brown parasites have been taken as resembling body organs or faeces,²² what has not, to my knowledge, been commented on is the implicit racial dynamic in having white residents struggling to keep brown bodies under control.

White is the colour of domestic hygiene, and the process of civilization is represented here as the process of keeping things white. But the effect of this insistent whiteness is to underline the metaphor of the change as one of cultural regression. The shock of the residents' transformation relies on their being the representatives of white civilization, for whom this 'going native' is a transgression of the lines of their collective racial identity. The whiteness of the towers and its furnishings are thus analogous to the bodies of the inhabitants, part of the process

²² See for instance David Sanjek, 'Dr Hobbes's Parasites', p.60; and Robin Wood, 'Cronenberg: A Dissenting View', p.129.

of geographical subjectivization which I outlined earlier. But this whiteness will not survive: the trails of blood left by parasites, Forsythe's bloody handprint left on a wall after touching a corpse, Nick's blood smeared across the kitchen. And in this annihilation of the whiteness of the walls, we see the annihilation of the whiteness of their inhabitants.

Writing in 1897, one Victorian explorer gave this account of the white presence in Africa: 'I have been increasingly struck with the rapidity with which such members of the white race as are not of the best class, can throw over the restraints of civilisation and develop into savages of unbridled lust and abominable cruelty.'²³ Sander Gilman has pointed out that imperialist narratives stage blackness as both an alien otherness which supposedly has no affinity with whiteness, and also as a site of possible doubling - for instance tropes of degeneracy and atavism picture blackness as, in evolutionist accounts, the possible site of the origin of the white race, and, in alarmist warnings of western social decay, as the image of the future of a degenerate white civilization.²⁴ Gilman's work is scrupulous in its distinctions between the ways that different racisms (American, European; nineteenth century, twentieth century) with different targets (black, Jewish) have their own specific dynamics and languages, all of which are complexly inflected by class and gender. But he also stresses 'the interrelationship of images of difference' by which for instance, 'the categories of "black" and "Jew" ... became interchangeable at one point in history' (*Difference and Pathology*, p.35). His work thus argues for a central dynamic of difference by which white culture constructs racial others as the sexualized embodiment of a fear of their own bodies so that, as in his formulation of the construction of white European masculinity, 'the "white

²³ Sir Harry Johnston, quoted in Patrick Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent' (p.213).

²⁴ See his work 'Black Bodies, White Bodies'; *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*; and *The Jew's Body*.

man's burden” thus becomes his sexuality and its control, and it is this which is transferred into the need to control the sexuality of the Other’ (‘Black Bodies, White Bodies’, p.256).²⁵

Similarly, Robert Reid-Pharr has suggested that as white people we ask ourselves the question: ‘what do we think when we fuck?’ (‘Dinge’, p.41). His answer is that we think about whether we are black. Reid-Pharr argues that ‘blackness is indeed the “always already” lurking in the netherworld of the white consciousness’ (p.41), so that white sexuality is haunted by the fear that its sexual desire signals the descent into the realm stigmatized as animalistic black passion: for the white man, Reid-Pharr says, ‘desire is the process by which he might lose access to his whiteness’ (p.43).

Shivers charts the gradual waning of whiteness as the transformation of ordered bodies into disordered bodies - asexual bodies into hypersexual bodies. The whiteness of the walls is compromised - and with it the whiteness of sunlight and daytime, as the film marks the eclipse of white restraint through the gradual transformation of day into night, the (white) time of work and restraint into the (black) time of atavism and sex.²⁶ The collective whiteness of these bodies is thus mapped onto a structural anxiety about blackness, and about the loss of their membership of civilization.

There are two black performers in the film. The first is the nameless menial

²⁵ See also Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion*; and Barbara Omolade, ‘Hearts of Darkness’. This connection between the hidden ‘truth’ of sexuality and the hidden racial origins of the white subject is also visible in the idea of ‘fetishism’ as both a sexual and a racial phenomenon, which, at both the level of cultural development and individual sexual development, white people have seen themselves as both transcending/evolving from and threatened by a return to: see Anne McClintock, ‘The Return of Female Fetishism and the Fiction of the Phallus’; and Alasdair Pettinger, ‘Why Fetishism?’.

²⁶ On the figuration of the meeting of the racial identities of white and black as that of light and darkness, see Patrick Brantlinger, ‘Victorians and Africans’ pp.197-198.

(who appears in the cast list only as 'Garbage Room Man') whom we first see crouching under the security guard's desk, repairing some portion of it. If his posture already marks his marginality, his being 'below' the white figures in terms of status, this relation returns with more force when we see him for a second time, when he attacks St Luc in the basement. Located in the basement, the black figure is also the worker, and his geographical location as below the habitations of privilege marks him as both their economic foundation, whose work enables their luxury, and the psychic foundation, whose repression enables their cleanliness. In a graphic literalization of the violence of such power relations, St Luc grabs a crowbar and beats him to death.

But having been killed by St Luc, the nameless black man appears in the film for a third time, attesting to the particular difficulty in erasing him. Forsythe, looking for St Luc, has also come down to the basement - the place where her infection will eventually be disclosed - and calls his name. As she turns a corner, the words 'Roger' are met not by a glimpse of her lover, but by the body of the dead janitor: running into the room in which she expects to find the one, she falls instead over the body of the other. The sudden juxtaposition of the white doctor's name with the black janitor's body facilitates a reading of doubleness in which she does not so much fail to find St Luc, but rather finds the truth of the one whom she was looking for: the murdered black body on whose brutal regulation St Luc's ordered white subjectivity relies.

The second black performer is similarly confronted by St Luc at a crucial moment. Her character, like that of the other black performer, is nameless. She comes out of a room, struggling with a man. From her attempts to escape, and his uncoordinated violence, it is clear that he is infected, and she is not (yet). St Luc raises his gun, as if considering either saving her by killing her assailant, or shooting both of them. Instead, he turns away and moves on, going to the aid of his friend

Rollo. This marks the moment in the film when he recognizes his powerlessness - when, given his single real opportunity to make a difference by saving someone, he turns away. If at one level his refusal marks the relative worth of the black woman (no effort will be expended on her behalf), at another it suggests the particular suggestiveness of the black body: she is already relegated to the order of sexuality and barbarism, beyond help because in a sense she is already on the other side of the racial line of civilization.²⁷ St Luc's refusal to go to her aid, and his decision instead to attempt (but fail) to help Rollo, marks his alliance with whiteness, as opposed to the black figures against which St Luc is defined - the racial others that he manages in order to manage himself. St Luc's resistance to infection is no guarantee of his success, and his increasingly incompetent attempts to save the residents again compromise his standing as hero. Finally, he leaves the building, crossing the line with whose demarcation the film began. He runs up the slope outside the building, and is about to disappear into the darkness. But this environment is already heavily coded in terms that have come to be associated with the infected residents. Between the organic presence of grass, and the dark of the night, we might already suspect this location to be less than welcoming. Just as he is about to disappear from sight, St Luc backs down the slope, and we see that the residents are no longer inside the building, but rise over the edges of the lawn, out of the dark (to which they now belong), accompanied by an indecipherable murmuring, and shuffling with an almost prehistoric simian gait.²⁸ They force St Luc back into the building, and down into the swimming pool, where Forsythe gives him the kiss that the film has so far never shown. Gilman records how white

²⁷ In a still from the original set, the half-naked performer is wearing different props that highlight her construction as primitive/savage: heavy loops of wooden beads and large hooped earrings (Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, p.46).

²⁸ Intertextually, it is also a quotation of a similar scene in George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*. Cronenberg comments on this quotation in John G. Harkness, 'David Cronenberg: Brilliantly Bizarre', p.16.

fears of blackness focus repeatedly on 'the swamp', an image which unites a series of significant racial tropes: blackness as prehistory, blackness as nature, blackness as feminized (*Difference and Pathology*, p.99 and pp.194-195). The final descent into the pool would seem to push this evolutionary decline back to its furthest point: the return to the ocean, with all the bodies merging into an indistinguishable sea of protoplasm. St Luc's final conversion then seals the submergence of white civilization beneath the flood of water and bodies.

And yet it is in this moment that we also see the film unsettling its own dominant imagery. For in its watery evocation of baptism does it not become possible that it is the 'St' who must be saved by the sinners, and that it is perhaps whiteness that must be washed clean away? While the force of the film as, generically, a horror text, lies in its evocation of the vulnerability and destruction of a community, St Luc's ambivalent location within the narrative suggests, conversely, that we should welcome the destruction of white culture's stifling conformity. Whiteness is here figured as an overly ordered ethnicity, which produces subjects deprived of many bodily pleasures, and for whom the threat of change is also the promise of freedom. In his own account of the film, Cronenberg argues that 'to me, those people have been liberated' (David Chute 'He Came From Within', p.37), regaining a physicality that has been withheld from them. But this is still to read the text within its racial dynamics, for as Gilman has observed, the black body has often 'represented sexual expression untrammelled by the repressive conventions of European society' (*Difference and Pathology*, p.120), an exotic object which embodies freedom for its white audience precisely insofar as it connotes the pre-social, the natural, the child-like. The black body's capacity to act as a site of pleasure for the white imagination therefore inflects - but nevertheless depends upon - the terms which maintain white supremacy. If the residents of Starliner Towers - and indeed Canada as a whole - are to be 'liberated', this utopia

is imagined only within the terms of a racist dynamic in which white culture is the subject of the liberatory discourse and black culture can figure only the vehicle for our salvation - the price for which is that black subjects feature only marginally, and always so closely allied to a pre-cultural chaos as to reaffirm the threat that they pose to, and their essential incompatibility with, the white culture that speaks about them.

This analysis of the racial dynamics of the text should not be taken as claiming that the film is, in any straightforward sense 'racist': it is not, after all, as if we have the option of *not* deploying the codes of bodily meaning through which our understanding has been constructed. *Shivers* is an attack on whiteness that issues from within whiteness and which must therefore necessarily conceive of the destruction of whiteness in the very racialized terms that produce blackness as horrific. At the same time as indicating so clearly the limitations of such a project in terms of its construction of the meanings of race, it still illustrates the possibility of deploying a given understanding of the body against itself. From within the white body's horror of its racial other, come the possibilities of grasping at the horrific force of whiteness itself.

But the full scope - and the even fuller limitations - of such a critique will only emerge if we recognise that race never takes place on its own. I want also to argue that the film enables us to extend this brief account of racial dynamics into new areas, as an important reminder that the body is always a nexus of interests, rather than only ever serving one type of power relation.

(iv) Hobbes's Bodies, or: Why Are White People So Afraid of Shopping ?

Although, as I have stressed, 'the body' must always be treated as a particular body, what we see in *Shivers* is that it is also the case that any given body is haunted by the possibility that other forms of body might manifest through it. The white body's fear of becoming black suggests a bodily mutability, in which the flesh is open to sudden transformations. And I mean this not only in the sense that the meaning of these bodies changes, but also that their physical form alters: their behaviours and postures, their voices and pleasures. The figuring of the invasion of the parasite grounds these alterations in the biology of the body - an act which does not simply make the body a metaphor for other social relations (such as race), but reminds us that it is through the regulated materiality of bodies that these differences are maintained.

This would concur with my reading of embodiment in chapters one and two: the form of an achieved body is maintained through a process of both psychic identifications and physical states, which are never final or conclusive. We might say that the body image is only ever a commitment to the embodiment of an ideal, whose maintenance over time is never guaranteed. We must then consider the child's jubilant grasp at the mirror as a position that is always under threat, and which seeks constantly to renew itself through environments that facilitate the re-routing of bodily activity through socially sanctioned forms. 'Chaos' is not an object with invariant features - any more than is 'disgust' - but is rather the particular type of chaos or disgust needed to sustain a particular type of social and bodily order.

In the face of such claims, Cronenberg's figuration of the parasites as a purely bodily phenomenon, who replace the socially limited forms of desire with a

more expansive biological lust, might seem like a regressive step which attempts to escape the socialized condition of desire by dreaming of a purely biological desire uncontaminated by the social. But in spite of the weight of the coding of the racial atavism of these bodies, Cronenberg's text pushes in other directions as well which take the film beyond a simple celebration of the rescuing of whiteness from itself through bodily joy. As I have already suggested, the biology of the parasites operates as a reminder of the human biology through which social norms are incarnated. But they are also an *artificial* biology, engineered in Hobbes's laboratory, a reminder that the body is not given, but is manufactured. When he describes Hobbes, Rollo tells us that 'he had a genius for one thing, and that was getting grants'. Hobbes makes spurious research applications, so that he can live on small grants from wealthy companies, a description which is very close to that of the parasites which he is developing - as Rollo says: 'it takes a little blood for itself once in a while - what do you care? You got enough - you can afford to be generous'.

We can therefore see the parasites not simply as enabling a reclamation of the natural, but rather as an expression of Hobbes's own location - his parasitic location within the bodies of other institutions. As such they constitute not a return to natural material, but rather the imposition of a particular conception of the body. This coercive element of bodily becoming is confirmed when, as Forsythe narrates her dream, she duplicates the violence of Hobbes's own journals: both the old man who instructs her, and the words that she attempts to impress on St Luc, make a claim on what the body is, offer an assertion of how it should behave, and deliver an analysis of its biology. The pedagogical and authoritarian tones of both proclamations ('Man is an animal who thinks too much', 'He tells me that even old flesh is erotic flesh ... And I believe him') highlight the power relations at work through the language: these are not simply descriptions, but attempts at conversion.

As the dream is realised in the form of her attempt to infect St Luc, the violence of the attempt is suddenly made visible.

It therefore seems that alongside a narrative of regression, and the return to nature, there is a narrative of artifice, production and technology - in which the biological changes are not the unleashing of a natural predisposition, but acts of enforced cultural change.²⁹ While it might seem as though Cronenberg's vision deploys a vision of the white body as overcivilized, and in need of a (racialized) regression, *Shivers* also offers an account of the body as that which is always the target of cultural pressures, from which some pure bodily state can never be rescued. I want to argue that if we pursue this thread, we must think again about the architecture of Starliner Towers, and think again about how the body seems to be constructed by this space.

Cronenberg's own account of the building is suggestive here. Speaking of the experience of making *Shivers*, he tells an interviewer: 'Living on Nuns' Island we all wanted to rip that place apart and run, naked, screaming through the halls' (Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, p.50). Such a desire seems, I suggested at the start of this chapter, to be antithetical to the environment. As in Foucault's account of the prison, it is the revolt of the body against the materiality that it encounters. But as I suggested there, resistance is not simply some spontaneous bodily force that challenges repression. Rather, resistance is always an exercise of power enabled by the situation which is resisted. It may therefore also be that the desire to transgress the environment is itself produced - not simply by some external force opposed to that environment, but by the very contours of that

²⁹ My reading here is thus a refutation of the position recently taken, that 'in ... *Shivers* ... scientific experiments on women's bodies result in consequences that have much more to do with the female body as a site of disgust than with male science as a source of horror' (Lianne McLarty, ' "Beyond the Veil of the Flesh": Cronenberg and the Disembodiment of Horror', p.236).

apparently lifeless domain, a point suggested by another account he offers: 'I lived there when I was doing the film, as did most of the crew, and it drove us *crazy*. It's a totally planned, sterile environment' (David Chute 'He Came From Within', p.37, emphasis in the original). The syntax suggests the possibility that the physical exuberance of the crew is not simply a resistance to the place, but is generated by that place, so that the environment plays an active part in the process by which 'it drove us *crazy*'. Just as the prison produces delinquency, perhaps we might see Starliner Towers as producing sexual anarchy. This is of course to read against the narrative of the film, in which the sexual change is the product of the parasites. But there is more than enough evidence to suggest that the film connects this sexual revolt to the very materiality of the apparently repressive structure, so that in its contoured geographies Starliner Tower produces erotic bodies even as it restrains them. That is to say, chaos is produced and positively invested by the process of ordering.

While it may indeed be 'planned' and 'sterile', the environment of Starliner Towers is more ambiguously coded in the film. As Nick leaves his apartment he goes to the lift, a location which serves as a convenient alibi for his visit to Annabel since in its sheer multiplicity of stops the other occupants of the lift cannot know which floor he is going to. When Brad Parkins goes to the doctor and informs him that he too has been having an affair with Annabel, the first image is a momentary flashback to her door, its sudden redness marking her sexualized habitation at the centre of a network of affairs enabled by the anonymity of the block. The proximity of the residents thus facilitates the illicit erotic liaisons amongst them, which are already functioning extremely effectively before the arrival of the parasites.

Soon these spaces will become more explicitly sexualized, as encounters take place in the territories which they make available. The gym lockers become a sexual maze in which bodies are entangled by the opening and closing of doors, and

limbs push through the wooden slats. The plush red carpets mark a blood-like trail throughout the building. The swimming pool becomes a place of sensual pleasure, the white floors a place on which bodies may stretch and writhe. As the camera ceases its static framing of the block, it winds up staircases and peers around corners, so that we now see that this is an architecture that incites. The camera reworks the corridors that were formerly places of containment into zones of incitement: potentials for voyeurism emerge through the peepholes in the doors; the lift is an erotic space that confines people too closely together; the manager's office becomes the ideal place for an orgy.

While we could read these actions of the residents, and interventions of the camera, as subversions of the intended use of the environment, it is as important to consider how the desires played out in these spaces act also as the bodily form demanded by these spaces. Violent desire is here not the return of the repressed, but a consequence of the environment which is in some way necessary to its function, so that Hobbes's parasites, rather than introducing an alien element into the territory, are in fact the narrative alibi for the film to expose the eroticism which already proliferates in the bodies that inhabit such a geography. That the geography of Starliner Towers is already one of desire suggests that bodily pleasure is not simply an envied absence, but rather a structural requirement. So while at one level the film marks the absolute transformation of the residents, at another it merely recounts the elaboration of the logic that already defined their lives.

This is a possibility that the film offers us in its opening sequence, a series of slides advertising Starliner Towers. Over them we hear the voice of the manager, Merrick, inviting the viewer with an ever-increasing spectacle of pleasure and utility, the slides becoming slightly faster towards the end of the sequence as even more recreational possibilities are proffered: a shop; a restaurant; a golf course. Earlier, I suggested that these were spaces without bodies, emblematic of the

expulsion of carnality from the building. But now I want to read them as objects displayed in order to incite the body.³⁰ For while Merrick's voice is calm, reassuring, and benevolent, the logic of consumption also provokes a more ambivalent response. Writing in 1958, John Galbraith gave the following account of capitalism:

Were it so that a man on arising each morning was assailed by demons which instilled in him a passion sometimes for silk shirts, sometimes for kitchenware, sometimes for chamber pots, sometimes for orange squash, there would be every reason to applaud the effort to find the goods, however odd, that quenched his flame. But should it be that his passion was the result of his first having cultivated the demons, and should it also be that his effort to allay it stirred the demons to even greater and greater effort, there would be question as to how rational was his solution. Unless restrained by conventional attitudes, he might wonder if the solution lay with more goods or fewer demons

So it is that if production creates the wants it seeks to satisfy, or if the wants emerge *pari passu* with the production, then the urgency of the wants can no longer be used to defend the urgency of the production. (*The Affluent Society*, p.127)

Galbraith figures consumption as a demonic presence, produced and installed within the subject, and figured as a series of bodily desires: the hunger of the skin for silk, of the bowels for a chamber pot, of the mouth for orange squash. Capitalism is here experienced as a corporeal phenomenon - the body's immediate desire for pleasure. The very calmness of Merrick's voice is then a duplicitous disavowal of the frenzy that the slideshow both constitutes and evokes.

Consumers, as Toby Miller has argued, constitute a point of some concern in liberal social theory because of their production as subjects who desire, and who consequently are consumed by passions that defy altruism in favour of self-

³⁰ The possibility of reading the slide-show as a critique of capitalism is offered in a different form by Dana B. Polan, 'Eros and Syphilization: The Contemporary Horror Film', p.205.

gratification (*The Well-Tempered Self*, pp.129-172). Even though, as John O'Neill says, Adam Smith and other laissez-faire economists hoped 'that if men would only restrict themselves to trading in their *private passions*, there would result a *public order* more secure than anything church or state could guarantee' (*Five Bodies*, p.94, emphasis in the original), Marx and Engels's description of competitive capitalism as leading into the 'icy water of egotistical calculation' (*The Communist Manifesto*, p.82) suggests that we should regard consumption rather as the province of rapacity and selfishness. At the beginning of the rise of modern capitalism, the author of *Leviathan* asserted: 'a man ... cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more' (p.161). He was, of course, Thomas Hobbes, whose name - as many commentators on the film have noted³¹ - chimes conveniently with that of the producer of Cronenberg's parasites. If, as I have suggested, Hobbes's parasites should be read as marking a presence already active in these inhabitants, which they render graphically visible, then perhaps we must understand that presence not only as a racially stigmatized sexuality, but also as the capitalist impulse to escalating consumption in the name of enhanced pleasure.

As the opening sequence makes clear, the environment of Starliner Towers is one of an incitement to pleasure which, for all its apparent disembodied order, is in fact directed at the body. Just as the cinematics of a sexualized architecture reveal the productivity of the building, so too it reveals the spaces of the building as designed to facilitate other forms of immediate bodily gratification: Nick's whiskey bottle sits beside his chair, Betts's wine beside her bath. As these bodies reach, turn, and move, they encounter at every point the objects of their desire, located in a physical space which encourages their expectation for immediacy and pleasure.

³¹ See for instance David Sanjek. 'Dr Hobbes's Parasites', p.60; Maurice Yacowar, 'The Comedy of Cronenberg', pp.82-83 and 'You Shiver Because It's Good', p.54.

The emphasis on the easy access to shops, and the tracking shot of room-service with a trolley of food making its way along the corridors, figures bodily appetite as the requirement, not the antithesis, of the building. As the waiter walks down the corridors, infected residents watch him hungrily through the cracks of their doors, and when a door opens and a (sexually) voracious resident attacks him, the moment foregrounds the bodily hungers by which the lives of the inhabitants have already been constructed. They always were ravenous guests awaiting the delivery of consumable offerings, and the change of object in question from a body delivering meals to a body providing sex involves barely any change in roles - not least, we might think, because the economic pressures that lead to taking such jobs abolish the concept of consent every bit as thoroughly as the sexual assault (a point foregrounded by the predatory gazes which, even as they pursue him, remind us that he always has been situated as the object subservient to their desires).³²

The disgust which we feel at the parasites then fuels the critique of capitalist greed. While in my account the film erases any distinction between how these subjects are produced by their environment (bourgeois conformists) and how they are produced by Hobbes (libidinal anarchists), the potent repugnance of the parasites should not be ignored. But what it now enacts is the horror of recognizing a physical presence of consumption which is at work generating bodily desires: wanting objects of pleasure, missing them, going out and getting them. Janine's weeping face as the parasite pushes out of Nick's mouth, Doris Guilbault's shocked paralysis as one climbs onto her arm, or the children's disgusted shrieks as one crawls from the letter box, are the revulsion that Galbraith voices at the bodily needs already imprinted on our consuming bodies. The horror at the openness of

³² Similarly, when an infected Merrick lures two potential guests into his office for sex, we may recall his equally 'seductive' - but, in practice, coercive - sales pitch to which he subjected them earlier. Now, instead of pressurizing a lease onto them, he is pressurizing his new commodity, a parasite.

the body may then be read as the horror of the ease with which what Galbraith calls 'demons', but Cronenberg figures as parasites, find their way into a system which, for all its border guards and perimeter fences, is in the process of preparing from the outset for their residence.

The bodily metaphors that underwrite such accounts of capitalism - rapacious, hungry, devouring - alert us to the racial structuring of capitalist appetite as a lapse backwards into the realm of the appetites so that, even as, in Hobbes's account, civilization is the guarantee of a movement away from unfettered appetite and towards ordered society, we can see, as Terry Eagleton has noted, that such an account of 'human nature' is in fact a transcoding of the values of nascent capitalism (*Ideology*, pp.180-181). Thomas Hobbes's racial politics, in which civilization must be preserved from a lapse back into barbarism, thus struggles with the problem that the social order which it offers as the solution - the brake on aggressive rivalry - is in fact predicated on the values that ensure such savagery. In asking where this bodily anxiety resides, we might therefore rephrase Reid-Pharr's question as: what do we think about when we shop ?

Shivers closes with a series of cars pulling out of the car-park, in which we see the new sexual family-units, now calm and satiated, as if leaving after a hard day's shopping: first Forsythe and St Luc, united at last; then Betts and Janine; then a father and daughter from one of the apartments; then a threesome whose sexes are not determinable. As they travel out into Montreal, we hear a radio broadcast recounting, from some future vantage point, the attacks that mark their infection of the city. The voice-over on the closing scene links back to the voice-over that accompanied the opening scene, the slide-show: this last, no less than the first, is the parade of the commodities that Starliner Towers offers the world, carrying desire into the bodies of others. Capturing consumerism's bodily doubleness as both systematic conformity and incitement to desire, the final image of rolling cars

reinserts these bodies into the production line as docile products, while the soundtrack recounts 'a city wide wave of sexual assaults'. They are simultaneously products (disgorged by the machine), consumers (who have incorporated the parasitic product), producers (whose bodies will generate new parasites - one for every household) and advertisers (carrying desire to those so far untouched): the entire economic apparatus is consolidated in their bodies. If now the products have become dangerous and shopping is savagery, the point would seem to be that it was always like that anyway. Which might go some way to explaining the extraordinary change in the performances of the survivors. No longer shuffling and moaning, they are now sedate, unruffled, and driving cars: the characters that we see leaving the building are entirely indistinguishable from those who we saw in it at first.³³

Forsythe, a flower tucked behind her ear, even leans over to light St Luc's cigar for him, as if the entire experience had never happened, a telling reminder of the minimal difference that the parasites make: the unresolved tension at the heart of capitalism still haunts the body.

Even here, the logics of race persist: to reveal capitalism as 'barbaric', or as 'rapacious' may shift *Shivers* from being read either as simply racist (a horrified depiction of the white body under threat) or as simply another exercise in a white fantasy of joyful regression (whose position is little more than a sophisticated version of that perennial white construction of bodily racial otherness: 'if only we had their wonderful sense of rhythm'), but it still shifts it only to a satire on white culture which nevertheless installs the logics of race. The terms in which libidinal capitalism is indicted are still the logics of the perils of appetite, so that *Shivers* operates like *Heart of Darkness* revealing only that 'we' are as barbaric as 'them', that the heart of darkness is still at home - and thereby ratifies the necessity of the

³³ My thanks to Clare Hemmings and Ann Kaloski for drawing my attention to this.

project of civilizing the chaotic even as it indicts it.³⁴

However, where the film goes beyond such a reading - and perhaps this is as far beyond such entrenched logics as is possible - is in its capacity to disarm those concepts. If the awful spectacle of barbarism is meant to shock, we are hardly able to resist it in the name of civilization, whose precepts have been rendered all but indistinguishable from the barbarism that it might oppose. And if we were to celebrate libidinal liberation against imposed and repressive order, we can hardly do so when such apparent bodily spontaneity has been revealed to be as regulated, ordered, and determined as any other bodily state. If the body operates as thoroughly in the service of modernity when carnal and rhapsodic, as it did when docile and sexless, what purchase is left by which to formulate a critique of either?³⁵

These ambivalences are not soluble - they are a modern problematic of the body which is hardly likely to be solved here, and I have no intention of offering a utopian programme of social policy as if that would do the trick.³⁶ It therefore comes as no surprise that so many writers on Cronenberg should focus on the ambivalence of his films, and the difficulty of deciding whether they trace anything

³⁴ Such an account of Conrad's text has become fairly widespread. For instance, in Terry Eagleton's words: 'the "message" of *Heart of Darkness* is that Western civilization is at base as barbarous as African society - a viewpoint which disturbs imperialist assumptions to the precise degree that it reinforces them' (*Criticism and Ideology*, p.135). For a rebuttal of Eagleton's phrase see Cedric Watts, ' "A Bloody Racist": About Achebe's View of Conrad', pp. 203-204.

³⁵ Readings of Cronenberg's work as distinctively Canadian take this as one of its Canadian features: the recognition that one is already colonized, and can become only more like the colonizer in attempting to overthrow its influence. See for instance Wood, 'Cronenberg: A Dissenting View', p.126; and Geoff Pevere, 'Middle of Nowhere: Ontario Movies after 1980', pp.19-20.

³⁶ John O'Neill suggests that rapacity is soluble by social policy: a global agreement on minimum standards of healthcare and nutrition (*Five Bodies*, pp.115-117). His is an entirely sensible political proposition, but the sheer improbability of its being implemented reminds us how far away we are from a solution to desire's modern incitement.

recognisable as progress or liberation,³⁷ when the substance of his critique is to disarm the terms by which to make such claims. We might condemn his constant figuration of these conflicts as insoluble, and of the language by which to engage with them as irrevocably disarticulated, as an abdication of political engagement in favour of resignation.³⁸ Instead, I want to suggest that it marks a specific point in the current development of a new understanding - and a new politics - of the body. For we are at the stage where the questioning of Cartesian dualism in favour of embodied subjectivity seems only to be offering us new recognitions of the role of the material in defining our subjectivity, and therefore only the most precarious hold on autonomy, agency, and choice, which all Foucault's claims that 'wherever there is power, there is resistance' do little to soothe. Yet at the same time the beginnings of a more hopeful politics are also there in the very recognition that bodies are always artificial. For this is to bring to bodies the possibility of transformation, removing them from the ambit of 'the natural' or 'the given'. A social body is precisely a body that speaks to us of our political situation, and which can be read in terms of its location within a web of competing strategies of power. It is a body which, however much it enmeshes us within these repetitive and contradictory logics, is also the place from which to rework and resist them. In the next two chapters I shall argue that Cronenberg also offers us ways of reconceptualizing bodily order and bodily disgust which make the meaning of resistance more focused and the physical possibilities for the body's deployment of power outside domination more explicit.

³⁷ See for instance Piers Handling, 'A Canadian Cronenberg', p.113; and Christopher Sharrett, 'The Shape of Rage', p.174.

³⁸ A reading which would no doubt delight Cronenberg, who is always swift to assert that art should have no politics. 'You don't have politics in the viscera', insists Cronenberg (Chris Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, p.60); a claim which, of course, this thesis would dispute.

Chapter Six

Embodying *The Fly*: Carnal Order and Carnal Disorder

(i) The Meanings of Monstrosity: Cronenberg and Body Horror

Printed overleaf is the image which perhaps came to define Cronenberg's position in horror: a head exploding in *Scanners* (1980). Although generically Cronenberg's science-fiction thriller falls outside the conventional parameters of horror,¹ this has been described as an image by which '*Scanners*, alone, could rest as the penultimate Body movie' (Philip Brophy, 'Horrority - the Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films', p.8). The *mise-en-scène* systematically connotes the antiseptic order of science and business: men and women sit in suits in a clean lecture theatre, their bodies virtually unmoving, their faces expressionless; the grey, white and tan shades of the decor provide a featureless backdrop for these featureless bodies; the rows of seats offer a geographical order which arranges them in a mimicry of their own inner and outer systematicity. But before them the head of one man in a suit explodes, scattering blood and brains in slow-motion. The sudden screams and movements of the audience break up their order, just as the order of an individual body has been broken by the explosion. The body is turned inside-out and the matter contained within it is redistributed outside, violating the spatial regulations that organise it and becoming a gloriously graphic interpretation of Douglas's 'matter out of place'.

¹ Narratively it does so through the careful rationality of its explanations, the avoidance of any single monstrous figure, the sympathy the film shows for its outcasts, and the lack of an everyday community under threat; visually it relies on bright lighting and camera angles which keep scenes clear and unobstructed, and emphasizes the everyday appearance of the scanners; and thematically, as Beard notes, its conclusion stresses the optimistic possibility of human perfection through technology ('The Visceral Mind', pp.49-50). Provocatively, Bart Testa suggests that *all* of Cronenberg's work be reclassified as science-fiction rather than horror ('Technology's Body: Cronenberg, Genre and the Canadian Ethos').

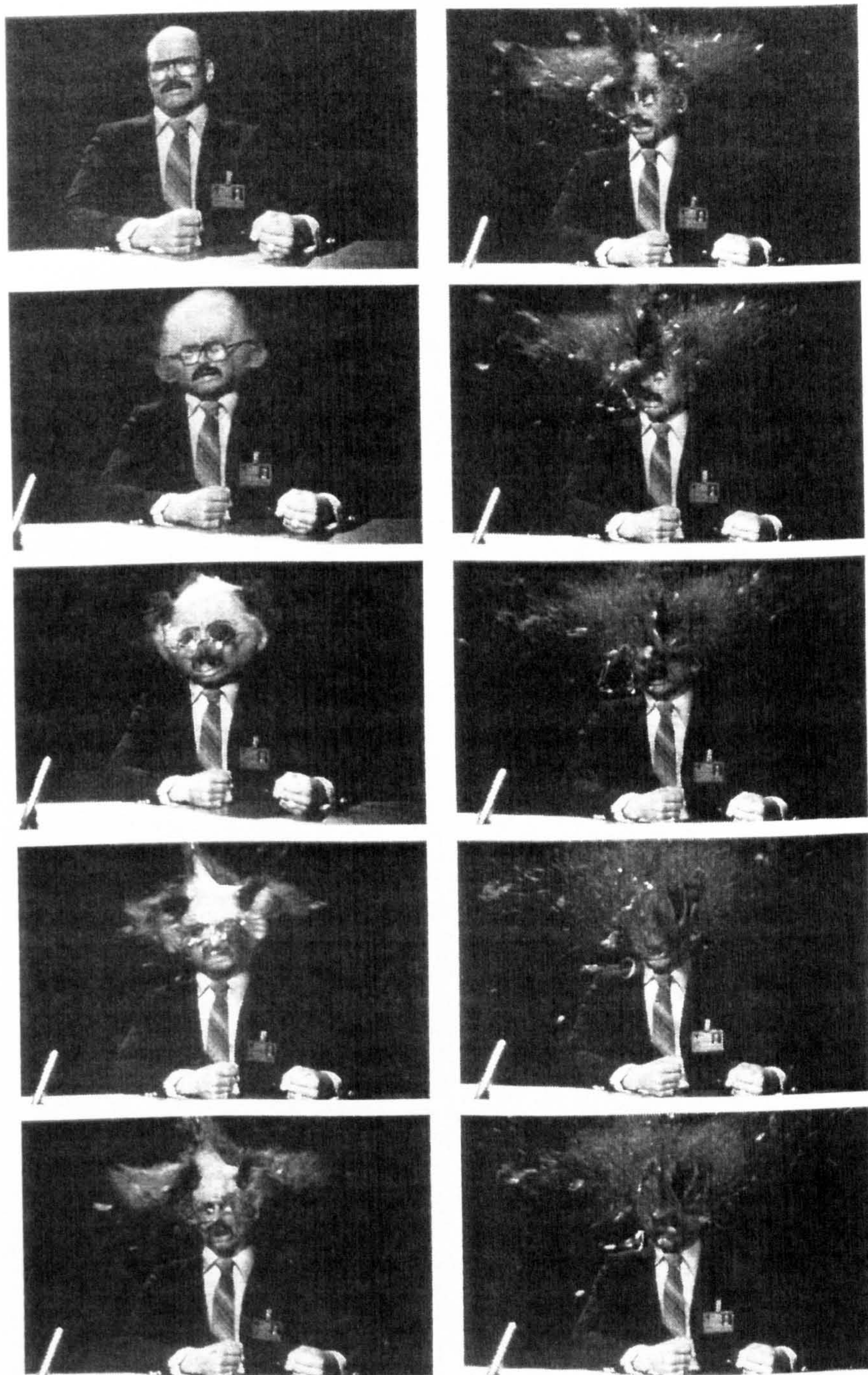


Figure 1: Matter Out of Place,
from *Scanners*.

Reproduced from Chris Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, p.91.

This contrast is repeated by Cronenberg fifteen years later in *The Fly*. Here the scene is the attempted teleportation of a live baboon by scientist Seth Brundle. Brundle has attempted to transport the baboon from one matter-transportation device ('telepod') to another. As the door of the telepod opens, white mist drifts out: it is reminiscent of both steam and dry-ice vapour, thereby simultaneously suggesting the purifying effects of both extreme heat and extreme cold. As the mist clears, we see the brightly lit white circle of the floor of the telepod: a perfect geometric shape, gleaming and clean. In it is the baboon, its body turned inside-out by the experiment: a twitching mass of matted flesh and hair. Again, it is watched by well-groomed, besuited professionals - Brundle, and the journalist who monitors his experiments, Veronica Quaife. Again, the contrast between the respectability of their physical forms and the bloody mess before them suggests a pointed reminder of the body matter that lies beneath their skins and their suits.

On the basis of such scenes, Steven Shaviro has argued that Cronenberg seeks to 'affirm the impropriety of the real body' (*The Cinematic Body*, p.155). Examples such as those above certainly demonstrate a cinematic coding of body matter as shocking and as intrusive into spaces from which it has been banished, so as to shatter an illusory denial of their civilized facade. But rather than assuming that such shocking asociality is a given characteristic of what Shaviro calls 'the real body', we must rather ask how a fiction of the body is constructed along such lines, with such a status, and with what results. This language of the superior reality of body matter is a familiar one in the discourse of modernity, sitting, as I have argued throughout this thesis, in tandem with a dismissal of the importance of the body. Attempts to undo that stress on the transcendence, remodelling, or control of the power of raw body matter, are nevertheless still obliged to rework these terms, with the result that an affirmation of the legitimacy or potency of a disorderly body, such as Shaviro's, still relies on a fiction of its biological facticity. In attempting to rework their relationship to the need for transcendence - which is itself the origin of the definition of the body as so 'real' - significant elements of its logic remain in place. How successful are such attempts? What are the consequences of attempting to 'affirm' the body, when the notion of the body as a pressing reality has historically been bound up with its denigration? In order to understand the relationship between these questions and Cronenberg's work we

must situate his films within one recent appearance of this problem: the genre of body horror.²

In asking how we might analyse a genre, Stephen Neale insists that we must consider not only the more traditional concerns of its distinctive iconography and narrative, but also the economic value of genre as a marketing device, the particular pleasures made available for the spectator, the expectations of audience and reviewers, and the impact of technological change (*Genre*). This is a lengthy list and it would be foolish to privilege any one of these areas. Therefore, before offering my analysis of one particular feature of this genre - that of body horror's roots in a discourse of the body's alterity, and its particular inflection of that discourse in Cronenberg - I wish to outline two other important criteria by which we might specify the nature, and account for the rise, of what Peter Boss has described as 'a genre presently devoted to the construction of explicit and detailed instances of assault, mutation, dissection and decomposition of the human - or occasionally alien - anatomy' ('Death, Disintegration of the Body and Subjectivity in the Contemporary Horror Film', p.49). I will therefore briefly consider firstly the economic conditions that facilitated the emergence of body horror and secondly the role of new audience expectations in securing its existence.

Gareth Sansom and Peter Boss have both convincingly argued that body horror should be seen not as a development out of the mainstream horror traditions of the 1930s - such as Universal Studios' cycle of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* films - but rather as the co-option of techniques and images from so-called 'exploitation cinema'. Faced with the decline in audience figures over the 1950s, major Hollywood studios responded by 'having to transform their strategies for audience construction which had been oriented by the concept of a homogeneous audience toward a strategy for capturing a more heterogeneous set of specialized audiences' (Sansom, 'Fangoric Horrality: The Subject and Ontological Horror in a

² A more complete account of Cronenberg's relationship to the genre would also encompass his films *The Brood* and *Videodrome*.

Contemporary Cinematic Sub-genre', p.165). One element of this strategy was to draw on the audience that had built up around 'exploitation cinema', those cycles of quickly made low-budget films produced by the small companies outside the Hollywood studio system, capitalizing on events that held current public interest (such as notorious crimes or currently debated social issues), and whose material was regarded as sensationalist or tasteless ('Fangoric Horrality', pp.163-165). As Boss observes 'unlike the restraint and frequent concern for good taste which accompanies much early horror, the exploitation market relied heavily upon the promise of precisely the most disreputable and lurid elements of the genre' ('Death, Disintegration of the Body and Subjectivity', p.46). But as the audience for the graphic imagery of exploitation cinema consolidated around these products, they provided a niche market with a guaranteed return for the investment of larger studios, who then also came to produce films containing the elements that would be consumed by this specialist audience. What we might call the 'apparatus' of body horror thus originates with these earlier cinematic texts, before moving through a series of groups of films which consolidate and rework its significance. Firstly the lurid low-budget films of the sixties, such as *Blood Feast* (1963) and *Two Thousand Maniacs !* (1964), in which narratives serve primarily as contexts to enable the depiction of bodily violation; then films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Last House on the Left* (1972) in the seventies which rapidly develop a new special effects technology which facilitates the representation of the abject body, and which in turn give rise to products like *Videodrome* and *Poltergeist* (1982), which are situated between the two sets of conditions of production, taking advantage of both new technologies of the depiction of the body and their audience, but without heavy backing from major investors. Finally, even as low-budget body-horror persists, its imagery, its technology and, crucially, its audience, are incorporated into heavily marketed high-budget films like *Alien* (1979), *Gremlins* (1984), or *Seven* (1995). For both Boss and Sansom, the formal features of body horror must be understood as deriving from a distinctive

economical and historical form whose elements have now come to dominate contemporary horror - to the extent, I would suggest, that 'body horror' as a distinctive genre in fact no longer exists: rather, an apparatus of repulsive carnality now defines horror as a genre, such that it is no longer possible to think of the existence of a horror film without its requisite moment of the body's graphic display.

In preference over 'body horror', Sansom coins his own term 'fangoric horrrality' as a description of the graphic textuality of films consumed by these specialist audiences. He derives it from the title of the horror film magazine *Fangoria*, since he wishes to stress that we can understand the genre only by reference to its particular audience, and not simply by reference to its formal features. Similarly, Boss insists that what marks these films is 'a reading context, a particular hermeneutic capable of uniting *The Wild Bunch* ... *Blood Feast* ... and *Pink Floyd: The Wall* ... based around the imagery of the body's destruction' ('Death, Disintegration of the Body and Subjectivity', p.52).³ This hermeneutic is articulated in a range of magazines - from the glossy *Fangoria* and *Samhain*, to the often short-lived horror fanzines⁴ - which focus specifically on the technology, the imagery, and, perhaps most importantly, on the emotional impact of seeing what Sansom refers to as 'the transformation of the body into flesh' (p.167), by which he means the graphic on-screen transformation of an integral body into substances such as blood, bones, mucus, and vomit. This emotional response combines both an intense physical revulsion, and a distancing humour, both of which are mediated through the pleasure of familiarity. The iconic status that Brophy accords the

³ *The Wild Bunch* (1969) constitutes a point of debate in what is distinctive about body horror. While Sansom excludes it from his category of 'fangoric horrrality' on the basis of its lack of other relevant narrative features, Boss's account clearly places the focus on the audience. Edward Lowry offers an interesting intervention in this debate, by suggesting that horror should be seen not as a genre, but as a mode of enunciation which may be deployed in any one of a number of other genres ('Genre and Enunciation: The Case of Horror').

⁴ See David Sanjek, 'Fans' Notes: The Horror Film Fanzine'.

exploding head in *Scanners* evinces precisely this mixture of familiarity, pleasure and disgust which marks body horror's horizon of reception.

Brophy, Boss and Sansom all stress the visibility of bodily destruction in these films, but the genre's focus on the body goes much further than that. I would argue that the emphasis is rather on abject carnal matter, which need be neither human nor destroyed or damaged in order to be an object of disgust (for instance, the creature in *Alien* or the parasites in *Shivers*).⁵ I would therefore want to extend their account of how the *violation* of the human body is depicted into an analysis of how the *materiality* of the body is figured as shockingly inappropriate for social spaces because of its disorderly organic substance. It is the meaning of this organic matter that interests me here. Therefore, while I do not wish to downplay the significance of these other considerations in locating where and how the meaning of this imagery is negotiated, my interest here in body horror focuses on two particular textual features: an imagery of the human body as disgusting and disordered in its carnality which links it to other non-human bodies, and the figuring of that body as the site of the collapse of culture into barbarism. It is this second device in particular that concerns me here: what concept of embodiment is achieved by the figuration of the body as improper and as antithetical to culture?

Towards the end of Tom Savini's 1990 remake of George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Barbara, a survivor of a house besieged by zombies, finds herself in a camp of zombie hunters. Part of an American survivalist response to the zombie hordes, they have turned their undead enemies into sources of pleasure. As Barbara looks around the camp she sees first a wrestling match, where drunken heavy-metal fans cheer on a competition between one of their number and a lurching zombie (although at first it looks as though it might be two zombies - a doubling which is crucial). She then sees a row of thrashing zombies hanging from a tree by their legs and necks, and set up as target practice for the

⁵ For an account of the depiction of living grotesque bodies in horror, see Michael O'Pray, 'Carnival Time: Cinema, Society and the Body Business'.

survivalists. As bullets and arrows send the animated corpses jerking, they do not die, but go on providing moving targets which will survive indefinitely. Turning to face the camera, Barbara says: 'they're us'. And then, just in case we might have missed it, she repeats the line: 'we're them and they're us'. Two of the survivalists look at her in disbelief and laugh.

At this moment, the film repeats an established critical position on the contemporary horror film - that it is concerned with eroding the difference between the monstrous and the human, and exposing their shared identity. In her article 'Aliens', a reading of *Alien* and its sequel *Aliens* (1986), Jane Goodall notes horror's abiding concern with a struggle to keep a monster out of a sealed space. Locked doors, bolted windows and barricades are stock features of horror - from the locked bathroom door Jack Nicholson smashes open in *The Shining* (1980), or the boarded windows in *Night of the Living Dead*, to the electronically coded doors of the *Alien* series. The terror of the film resides in the question: can the monster be kept out? But, notes Goodall, this obsession with locks, welded barricades, and electronic keycards is rendered ineffectual by a series of affinities between the aliens and those who are trying to keep them out. These affinities include the shared egg-like structures out of which both crew and alien hatch in *Alien*, the carapace-like exoskeleton which Ripley wears in *Aliens*, and, most importantly, the shared qualities of the aliens and the company which employs these characters: a ruthless, devouring approach to the world, in which all subjects are simply means to their final end. Goodall suggests that the deeper horror of the film is therefore that 'seals, barriers, systems and structures cannot keep out the vampires within' (p.81): for all the array of monitoring equipment which attempts to mark out, and separate us from, the monstrous, it exists all the time inside the human. In such a reading the barrier between self and other is always already breached, making a mockery of any other barriers that might be constructed.

Goodall is not the only writer to offer such an account of horror - we have already considered Robin Wood's claim that in horror we see a return of the

repressed. But we might also consider Stephen Prince, who argues that by problematizing this line of difference, horror has 'a profoundly conserving, rather than radical function', whose goal is to ask 'the persistent question of what must be done to remain human' ('Dread, Taboo, and *The Thing*', p.28). For Prince, horror thereby invites the audience to make an effort to reaffirm the collective values of their culture in order to restabilize the line that is shown to be under threat. Or we might think of Barbara Creed's argument that horror replays a primal psychic fear of the body matter that we must break away from in order to become conscious subjects (*The Monstrous-Feminine*). For Creed, the abject matter of horror films is the reminder that our bodies too are made of such matter, try as we might to forget it. Like Barbara in the camp of the barbarians, these arguments all claim that: 'They're us and we're them'.⁶

The ability of horror to absorb and redeploy the critical apparatus directed at it, as demonstrated by Savini's film, is hardly new - and Wes Craven's recent attempts to push horror towards the most relentless self-referentiality in *Scream* (1996) and *Scream 2* (1997) are only the most visible expressions of a recurrent trend. But this might also make us pause to reconsider this sense of 'us as them', given that while this notion of the erosion of difference has hitherto been viewed as the final hidden and horrifying truth to be wrested from the text by its critics, it

⁶ Along similar lines Andrew Tudor distinguishes between what he terms 'secure' and 'paranoid' horror on the basis that in paranoid horror 'the disordering unknown [is] often located deep within the commonplace' (*Monsters and Mad Scientists*, p.215). In her thesis 'A Cultural Analysis of the Horror Film as Genre' Isabel Pinedo argues that there has been an erosion of the barriers between human and monster in post-1960s horror. She lists such features as: the rise of the popularity of the psychotic human as monster (monstrosity located within seemingly normal people); the failure of expert knowledge to resolve threats; an avoidance of narrative closure; monstrosity as a function of, rather than an exception to, the status quo. She argues that: 'as the genre draws further into the present, the narrative categories and binary differences (like normal/abnormal) become increasingly indistinct and interchangeable' (p.50). For similar arguments see also Mary Campbell, 'Biological Alchemy and the Films of David Cronenberg'; and Dana Polan, 'Eros and Syphilization: The Contemporary Horror Film'.

now seems to be the self-knowing manifest content of the horror genre.⁷ Rather than viewing these claims as a final resting point of an analysis, should we not consider this entire trope rather as the symptom of a wider, unanalyzed discourse, which constructs both the horror genre and the work of its critics ?

If the structural principle of body horror is this erasure of a barrier, then the image by which this barrier is both installed and breached is the body - usually the human body but, as Boss says, not always. Sansom calls these moment of bodily impropriety 'the body to flesh transformation', a phrase that makes clear the implicit logic behind these films: the body is not the flesh, and the flesh is not the body. On the one hand there is that unified whole, the body, with its demarcated social functions; on the other there is the flesh, disordered matter which threatens the stability of the spaces which depend upon the body that is composed of just such matter. And yet Sansom's language also indicates the uneasiness of this process: can there ever be a body which is not also flesh ? Is the possibility of becoming flesh not always present in the body ? As Laura Doyle argues, the attempt to assert a civilized subjectivity by ordering the flesh, leads to a need to erase the body altogether, with the result that 'disembodiment seems preferable to mastered embodiment' (*Bordering on the Body*, p.33), because mastery is always threatened by failure.

If we try to specify what qualities 'flesh' in Sansom's sense possesses, we might begin by looking at *Alien*, 'the film in which *the body* invades the pristine and sexless rational spaces of the science fiction film' (Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, p.267, emphasis in the original). The two attributes which make the alien

⁷ A theme treated with particularly offensive conservatism in *The 'burbs* (1988). There, white American suburban householders persecute Eastern European neighbours in the belief that they are a family of cannibals. Initially 'proved' mistaken, the white Americans are arrested by the police and intone the regulation litany: 'It's not them who are the monsters - it's us'. And yet, warding off this indictment of the racism and masculinist aggression of middle-America, in the final minutes of the film the suburban residents turn out to be right: the disabled, non-English speaking, older East Europeans are indeed cannibals - we are not, after all, them; we are us, and they should clearly be imprisoned or deported.

an object of terror are its instinctuality (it is dangerous because its only concern is to hunt, eat and reproduce) and its organic substance (its claws, the saliva that runs from its mouth, its acidic blood, the double rows of teeth in its mouth). Both attributes focus our attention on its body as an object that cannot be accommodated within the ordered (technological, corporate, domestic) space of the starship *Nostromo*, whose functioning the creature disrupts. However, as Goodall points out, these attributes are then repeated by the company that employs the crew, and sends them to their death: the Company too is instinctual in its goals (greedy, unfeeling, ruthless) and biological by virtue of its products (the ship, with its vein-like corridor; the android Ash, with his bubbling milky inner organs). As Goodall says: 'the technological forms and functions we witness schematically duplicate the alien manifestations that instil such terror' ('Aliens', p.77).

The language of Goodall's analysis reveals that underlying this anxiety about the untamed body is its barbarism. Describing the resemblance of the Company to the alien in *Alien*, she says that : 'it is the devouring principle that drives man [*sic*] into ever-expanding technological conquests and impels him to try and harness the energy of his savage double' (p.81). Goodall's point would seem to be that it is 'man' who is the 'savage', and whose dangerous body ('the devouring principle') is denied, while it in fact motivates 'his' behaviour. Tied to the material alterity represented by the alien body is a moral alterity: because flesh is a form of matter that is antithetical to civilization, it also represents a mode of behaviour that is *uncivilized* or barbaric - the behaviour of a savage. Exemplifying such a reading of horror, Christopher Sharrett defines the thrust of the modern horror film as a depiction of 'society's return to barbarism' ('Apocalypticism in the Contemporary Horror Film' p.56).⁸

Thus, like Wood, these explorations - critical and cinematic - of horror circle around the assertion of an unsettling truth that is denied: that supposedly

⁸ The racialized logics of such a position might be explored further, as a way of developing the arguments about whiteness from the preceding chapter.

bodiless culture is in fact embodied. For what constitutes the (falsely asserted) difference between 'us' and 'them' is that 'they' are supposedly material while 'we' have supposedly transcended our body matter in order to become cultured. Wood's position is, as we have seen, to celebrate this recognition that 'they' are 'us' as a rapprochement with those aspects of self and the social order that have been abjected, while Goodall and Prince dread the possibility that 'we' could turn into 'them' and see the horror film as the location of a resistance to such a transformation. Nevertheless, in all these cases the denial of difference - the claim that 'we' are turning into 'them' - sustains the notion that the two are somehow potentially radically separate since it appeals to the fantasy of an uncontaminated 'us' acting as a benchmark by which to make such judgements. Such a logic of difference operates strongly even as, ironically, the claim seems to be asserting that the two are in fact identical. The possibility of identifying that difference itself assumes a capacity to rise above it, one recognized in the identificatory process of these films - so that as Ripley destroys the corporate wealth of the *Nostramo* in *Alien*, or Barbara surveys the survivalist camp in *Night of the Living Dead*, these films offer the critics the detached position from which they may, with the characters, make such a judgement. The visual separation of the witness from the scene which they survey, and their explicit disengagement from those on whom they pass judgement, preserves the possibility of transcendence: we may be them, but *some of us* may also choose not to be them. That is - some of us may keep control over our bodies.⁹

But Savini's *Night Of the Living Dead* also offers a critical purchase on this account of the body, for Barbara's statement is spoken precisely in the context where the film's *mise-en-scène* also visibly disputes it: the survivalist camp. Here we see a whole range of activities which, while she reads some of them as

⁹And, we may note, both spectators are women: if materiality is itself coded feminine, then Ripley and Barbara become protagonists only by triumphing over their own bodies, disavowed in the abject bodies on which they gaze.

signifying our identity with the zombies, might also be read to signal our difference. The humans are using guns, radios and tools - whereas the zombies never use implements or technology, only their bodies. The humans have a social structure, marked out by sheriff's badges on some of the survivalists - the zombies have no structure, they are an undifferentiated mass. The wrestling ring within which human and zombie seem to resemble one another is itself a proof of a capacity, not just for technology, but also for humour, which the zombies lack. The humans are shown in heterosexual relationships at several points - the zombies have no sexuality and no relationships. And, crucially, there is a shot of a pig being spit-roasted: within Barbara's gaze, which locates human/zombie commonalities, this roast meat recalls the zombies feasting on roast meat earlier - namely the charred remains of two humans trapped inside a car which exploded. But while there are affinities between the acts there are also crucial differences - for while the humans actively select and deliberately cook their meat, for the zombies the cooked flesh is purely accidental: they usually eat flesh raw. And it is perhaps around the raw and the cooked that all the differences cluster: the zombies are asocial, acultural, atechanical - the humans are social, cultural, and technical; the humans are rational, the zombies instinctual; the humans have minds, the zombies have bodies. Even Barbara's final, purely vindictive, shooting of an erstwhile companion, which in the 'we're them' reading would function as the sign of her own descent into zombie-like barbarism, is rather, I suggest, indicative of a complex network of emotions which the zombies never exhibit.

Commenting on Romero's 1968 original, Isabel Pinedo has stated that humans 'take on the function of marauders, killing indiscriminately, virtually indistinguishable from the zombies' ('A Cultural Analysis of the Horror Film as Genre', p.37). But that 'virtually' marks the attempt to deal with the difference between the two groups by erasing it altogether. Barbara's claim - like Pinedo's, like Creed's, like Goodall's - thus overestimates the similarity, and thereby exempts the processes of acculturation from analysis. In doing so it deprives us of

an analysis which would chart where and how these various aggressive behaviours were formed, since it imputes all of them to an essential bodily violence. Its apocalyptic vision of an irredeemably 'zombified' humanity - while operating as a salutary critique of capitalism, masculinity, and racism¹⁰ - erases the specific processes through which culture produces those behaviours which are here imagined as acultural. Rather than attending to the different routes by which these aggressively cultural practices come about, it maps a division between the social and the asocial onto two types of body, the orderly and the disorderly (or, in Sansom's terms, 'the body' and 'the flesh'), and then projects all that is destructive back onto the asocial body, imagined as always ready to break through the veneer of civilization.

We need to consider how the idea of an uncivilized body operates in these texts, and I want to focus here on these two important features of this discourse of the horrific body. Firstly, it occludes the fact that these destructive behaviours are in fact culturally specific forms, rather than buried instincts which resurface. Unlike Goodall I read the creature in *Alien* not as the revelation of some savage instinct that propels corporate technology, but rather as the doubling of an entirely cultural set of practices, a corporate rapacity which is only naturalized by the film's rendering it in the form of an instinctual, organic creature. Secondly, in figuring bodily disorder as asocial, these accounts ignore the ways in which the experience of bodily disorder is in fact not originary, but is rather an effect of the process of the body's inscription by culture, as we are made to experience various socially produced bodily states as disorderly. What is at stake in denying the difference between human and monstrous are the specificities by which culture works to produce the body, so that in their place is the Hobbesian notion that we are all material flesh, acting out barbaric desires, and in need of order: in need, that is, of

¹⁰ As George Romero's original trilogy - *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead* (1979) and *Day of the Dead* (1985) - does so insistently. See Richard Dyer, 'White', pp.157-160.

having our 'flesh' turned back into 'body'. But there is no natural body buried beneath civilization - rather the apparently disordered body which requires mastery is produced by culture in order to legitimate control over it. Where Creed and Wood would have us recover our lost bodies, I suggest that the idea - and the physical experience - of disordered flesh is already central to practices of domination.

These different ways in which the body is used to represent benign liberated instincts (Wood) or the barbarism of culture (Goodall) should remind us that abject flesh may be used to represent different sorts of 'monstrosity' - it is important not to assume it always has only one meaning. However, what particularly interests me here is the way that bodily disorder comes, in all these accounts, to mean the absolute displacement of culture. When Barbara declares 'they're us', she does not mean that the zombies have taken up reading and writing, but rather that humans have been revealed as stupid and barbaric. While the precise meaning of that barbarism may be inflected differently to suit the particular ideological agendas of the critics who identify it - barbarism as US militarism; barbarism as masculinist aggression; barbarism as white supremacy; barbarism as instinctual emotion - it is important to recognize the affinities in these different meanings: they all figure the carnality of the body as that which culture tries, but fails, to transcend. They deploy a language in which the body is a materiality which is incompatible with culture, and which represents a state of instinct and barbarism back to which we may at any minute regress.¹¹ The pointed dismissal of the difference that culture makes - as witnessed by the activities in the survivalist camp - is then to insist that it in fact makes no difference: culture is only ever a thin veneer over an unruly and natural materiality. In a sense then, these various texts - and body horror itself - all share in that modern project: to constitute a notion of 'the body' as that which we

¹¹ For readings of horror as effecting a necessary repression of unruly desire see James B. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*; Leonard G. Heldreth, 'The Beast Within: Sexuality and Metamorphosis in Horror Films'; and David J. Hogan, *Dark Romance: Sexuality in the Horror Film*.

must transcend, and to affirm the existence of a bodily order that is itself untouched by culture. Against this, I shall suggest that we might also discern in body horror an alternative discourse about the body, which I have suggested in my reading of Savini's *Night of the Living Dead* and which I hope to elaborate upon in this chapter: one which suggests a more precise indication of where and how those thoroughly *cultural* practices came about which we here see posed as barbaric - and how, and in whose interests, they come to be offered to us to read as aculturally corporeal.¹²

In understanding body horror we must therefore consider its dependence on the notion of the body as an object that is incompatible with culture, and only ever precariously socialized. The sudden splattering of blood across the conference room in *Scanners*, or the thrashing baboon on the floor of the telepod in *The Fly*, are orchestrated to represent the body as inappropriate, suggesting that it has a volatility and a disorder which do not belong in the realm of technology, hygiene, and business, but which may be ordered so that it *does* belong. And the chaotic panic of the audience in *Scanners*, or the subsequent narrative twists of *The Fly*, suggest that the ordered bodies may at any minute regress back to a state more closely resembling that of the material bodies which revolt them.

And this is just how Cronenberg's work has been read, as displaying 'an insistence on the physical, unknowable, untameable half of the human animal - an aspect that lies forever in wait beneath the bland assumptions of control, and the airy cerebrations of the conscious mind' (William Beard, 'The Visceral Mind', p.4). As we saw in the last chapter, the idea that it is this mastered body that stages a rebellion in Cronenberg's work is a major critical commonplace, with the emblematic moment coming in Cronenberg's *The Brood* where a patient, displaying the extraordinary cancerous growth on his neck, declares: 'I have a

¹² In a similar vein, Sumiko Higashi traces the human violence of Romero's original to the specific concerns about the behaviour of American soldiers during the Vietnam war ('*Night of the Living Dead: A Horror Film About the Horrors of the Vietnam War*').

small revolution on my hands and I'm not putting it down very successfully'.

The idea that the clean, ordered, civilized body has in fact an unnerving proximity to a disordered, messy, barbaric body is hardly specific to body horror, and might be read as equally central a theme in Hobbes, St. Augustine or Darwin. While I think it is absolutely essential to consider the determining forces of recent technology and economic situations on body horror, it is also important to treat it as the inflection and modification of a discursive dynamic with much older roots. We must thus consider it not only as a historically original form, but also as a form of corporeal nostalgia predicated on a strong strain in Western thought: that the body poses a threat to civilization, and that unless it is suitably controlled it will break the rules that enable a society to function. Bryan Turner describes this position as 'the argument that there is a fundamental incompatibility between the satisfaction of human instinctual needs and the requirements of society' (*The Body and Society* p.62). Tracing this argument back to Christianity, he links it to such modern commentators as Hobbes (for whom without social restraint, life must be destructive), Durkheim (for whom without socialization there must be suicide), and finally, of course, Freud (for whom without sublimation bodily desire will destroy civilization). It is impossible to understand the force of Cronenberg's work without understanding this context, as I have outlined it in chapter two. I will, however, be arguing here that what makes *The Fly* such an interesting film to study is that it works to undermine these oppositions of instinct and civilization, nature and culture, the body and society, by imaging the process of bodily disordering as a thoroughly cultural one, which we are invited to reread in a critical and sceptical manner, seeing the notion of a naturally disorderly body as a tool of political disempowerment.

(ii) New Flesh, New Bodies, New Pleasures - Old Power

Pasi Falk suggests, following Foucault, that the modern processes of power produce new and intense forms of bodily sensation:

We may even claim that only in modern society has the individualized body, with all its restricting networks, been able to enjoy the full scale of sensory pleasures in all its richness, be they erotic, gastronomic, visual or combinations of all these. (*The Consuming Body*, p.65)

We might think here of Roland Barthes's account of Sade not as a transgressor of order, but as the compiler of a regular and orderly grammar of sex acts - a kind of geometric libertine 'who, through writing, constructs extremely well-made novelistic structures that are also erotic structures' ('A Great Rhetorician of Erotic Figures', p.253).¹³ In the rest of this chapter I want to argue that carnality may operate as just such an intensified site of pleasure-through-order, but also that this does not prevent it from offering a politically effective intervention.

Brundle, the protagonist of *The Fly*, begins the film as the very figure of the Cartesian scientist - but he will end it as a geometric libertine. How far, we might ask, is the gap between the two? Brundle is building a teleportation device because - as we are shown - he is travel sick, and is therefore attempting to produce a technology which will circumvent the problems of having a vulnerable body.¹⁴ His project is thus presented as antiseptic, ordered, and disembodied: when Ronnie, a journalist documenting his project, opens his cupboard she finds there a row of identical suits, one of which he wears every day, his practical determination circumventing any considerations of tactile pleasure in favour of the arrangement that will least interfere with his thought processes.

But this failure to account for the body is the flaw in his project: like him,

¹³ An argument that Barthes develops at greater length in his *Fourier/Sade/Loyola*.

¹⁴ See for instance Allison Graham, 'Motion Sickness: Strangers in Our Own Dying?'; and Helen Robbins, '“More Human Than I Am Alone”: Womb Envy in David Cronenberg's *The Fly* and *Dead Ringers*'.

his machine is unable to understand flesh - hence the accident with the baboon.¹⁵ Later, he attempts to transport a steak, and cooks it for Ronnie, who tells him that 'it tastes synthetic', the machine having destroyed what is alive, organic, and carnal in it. But when Brundle and Ronnie begin an affair, his newly aroused sexuality gives him the capacity to communicate to the computer the experience of the body that he has lacked - the one rediscovery of the body acting as the impetus for the other. 'I haven't taught the computer to be made crazy by the flesh' he tells Ronnie, 'I must not know enough about the flesh myself - I'm going to have to learn'. Brundle teaches his new-found body-consciousness to the computer, and the machine becomes able to teleport living creatures.

The film then shifts into a more sustained tone of body horror as Brundle, experimenting with the machine, is unwittingly merged with a fly that enters a telepod with him. At first he is unaware of the change, but gradually he becomes stronger, acquires an appetite for sex and sugar, and eventually begins the physical transformation into a human-fly hybrid, a new entity which he nicknames 'Brundlefly'. Along the lines of thinking which we have seen associated with body horror, this transformation is heavily coded as the extension of the rediscovery of carnality that begins in his affair with Ronnie: his body grows, it starts to secrete new substances - eventually it splits open and a new body emerges from within, pushing aside the old, scientific Brundle to make way for a new, more carnal form.

The transformation of 'body' into 'flesh' is also indicated by the social markers of race and class. As Andrew Knee has remarked, when Brundle's transformation begins he moves from his scientific world and onto the streets, heading straight for a working-class bars where he arm-wrestles, and picks up a woman whose accent, make-up and sexualized clothing overcodes her class

¹⁵At the same time, in its failure to understand it, the machine may also be seen as displaying Brundle's understanding of the flesh: disordered, disturbing, messy. In turning the baboon into a carnal mess, it reproduces the form in which he himself experiences the body.

location ('The Metamorphosis of The Fly', pp.27-28).¹⁶ This shift marks his devolution down from the more ordered forms of bodily matter to the more disordered, and therefore the 'natural', allied to the class hierarchy down which he travels. It is while he is arm-wrestling in the bar that the film's second moment of graphic body horror occurs, when he snaps the wrist of his opponent and the fractured bone breaks out through the skin. The working class men of the bar are thus linked - with Brundle and the baboon - to an intensified, and reviled, carnality. So too the link back to the disordered matter of the baboon implicitly locates Brundle's change as an evolutionary descent (the first sign of his transformation is the growth of thick black hairs), in which Jeff Goldblum's Jewishness - emphasized by having him play a character named Seth - may play the role of a deployment of racist discourse to signify Brundle's predisposition to lapse back into a subjectivity more in the thrall of the body.

And yet it may be through this question of ethnicity that the film also reminds us that the horrific body is only ever a body *socially designated* as horrific - rather than being inherently so. If it is his name (Seth) which first indicates his Jewishness (echoing as it does the Jewishness of the name of the performer, Jeff Goldblum), then it is an identity that is marked physically by a series of signifiers that have come to be associated with Jewish difference: his prominent nose, dark skin, curly black hair and bright staring eyes. The construction of his scenes with Ronnie are used to stress this. In bed, the pallor of Ronnie's skin is used to accentuate the darkness of Seth's when the two bodies are pressed together; while in conversation, the cross-cutting between their faces highlights the fact that her equally thick and curly hair is so very like his - accentuating the connoted femininity of the Jewish body. If we take as our touchstone Sander Gilman's

¹⁶ 'The film can barely repress its animosity/fear of the economic others who frequent this establishment, using stereotypical representations to suggest they are generally unclean, lacking in manners and intelligence, and possessing an animalistic sexuality almost commensurate with Brundlefly's' ('The Metamorphosis of *The Fly*', p.28).

seminal text *The Jew's Body*, we could work through Gilman's series of portraits of anti-Semitic discourse and apply each in turn to Brundle: Gilman's 'The Jewish Genius' outlines the stereotype of a lonely scientific genius ('an inch away from the nobel prize for physics', says Borans) who is nevertheless not really a creator, but only a skilful compiler of the work of others (as Brundle points out - 'there's a lot of stuff in there I don't even understand. I'm really a systems management man - I farm bits and pieces out to guys who are much more brilliant than I am ... I just stick 'em together'); from Gilman's chapter on sexual rapacity and the figure of the murderer who preys on the inhabitants of run-down areas precisely because he too is degenerate (a figure which Gilman connects to the anti-Semitic representations that clustered around Jack the Ripper), we have Seth stalking the streets in search of working-class women to take home; and from Gilman's chapter on syphilis, Aids and anti-Semitism, the deviant figure who brings illness into the healthy community ('it could be contagious', warns Ronnie's outraged WASP employer, Stathis Borans).

Similarly, Seth's characteristics as socially insecure - from his isolation in his apartment through to his terror that Ronnie might have left him - recall the stereotypical Jewish intellectual, cinematically associated so heavily with Woody Allen: lonely, shy, lacking social skills.¹⁷ Hence the particular irony of his ascendancy to a language and a physique of physical purity which, based on his first appearance, is precisely what one would least expect. Even here, we might hear the echo here of that discourse, variously deployed both by Zionism and by voices less sympathetic towards Jewish bodies, for the Jews to rework their supposedly weak physical shells and to form new and more powerful bodies (Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, pp.157-58).

Brundle's trajectory is thus from the stereotypical Jewish genius, through this reformed physical body, and then to a monstrous body - a change that seems

¹⁷ Indeed they are characteristics which, to varying degrees, Goldblum now enacts in all his performances.

itself to recall the problems of passing in its insistence that the Jew cannot transcend or remake his body: can never assimilate, but will always be outcast by those who disapprove and always betrayed by a physicality that cannot be concealed. When Brundle's skin finally falls away piece by piece to reveal the hideous monster beneath, it is the abject materiality of an anti-Semitic construction of the Jewish body that is displayed. The importance of this ethnic coding is, then, not only that it locks into these other notions of materiality - that the body is perpetually vulnerable to those features which it cannot make fit - but also that it alerts us to the fact that this horrific bodily ethnicity is only the product of a socially constructed set of meanings, and that the body which suffers at the hand of such meanings does so because its own matter too is regulated and shaped so as to enable those meanings to function.

But I want also to insist that at the same time, none of these ethnic features signify *only* Jewishness. Indeed, it would be easy enough to turn many of these features around to the encoding of Brundle as gay: his feminized good looks, his lonely bookishness and lack of social skills, his solitary work-outs in the gym, his hunger for anonymous sex. Indeed, as Warren Blumenfeld has argued, the Jewish and the homosexual bodies regularly find themselves imaged through shared tropes of bodily degeneracy ('History/Hysteria: Parallel Representations of Jews and Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals').¹⁸ The body in question thus acts less as the body of any single social marginality, but rather stands for the marginality of materiality itself, but only as imaged through those marginal socialities to which such grotesque materiality is attached. To read this body only as any one of these is to miss out its force precisely as the conflation of them all: the assertion of all the forms in which the body has been condemned. To read *The Fly* as either an indictment or a celebration of an innately dangerous materiality is to ignore the

¹⁸ On readings of *The Fly* as a homophobic representation of Aids, see Edward Guerrero, 'AIDS as Monster in Science Fiction and Horror Cinema'; and Knee, 'The Metamorphosis of *The Fly*', p.25.

film's elaborate indexing of bodily impropriety as a phenomenon more social than biological. And to read Seth as definitively other for the viewer is to overlook the extent to which, through all these various codings, he is made a body in which many of us may recognize our own stigmatized materialities.¹⁹

The fact that we are enabled to find such recognition is crucial here, for I want to argue that the film enables us to make this identification: it offers a multiplicity of points where we can see our own despised material bodies spoken of through Brundle. It may be at this point that Cronenberg's Jewishness is so important in demanding that we view the film as self-conscious about these processes. Critics reading Cronenberg's films as an expression of misogyny may simply place him as male, critics of his films' homophobia may place him as straight, and critics of his films' orientalist and colonialist tendencies may place him as white; but to unpick the film's systematic exploration of monstrous Jewishness requires that - unless we simply want to write him off as self-hatingly anti-Semitic - we recognize that his texts are aware of the social processes that lead to stigmatization of certain forms of body.²⁰

¹⁹ Such a reading of Brundle as a figure in whom the audience recognises themselves is very different from Noël Carroll's reading of Brundle as a figure to whom 'the ideal audience' will respond 'with sympathy and care', overcoming their disgust in order to recognise his plight - an instance of our ability to overlook the 'monstrous' so as to recognise the 'human' (*The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*, pp.35-36). My point is, to the contrary, that our moment of greatest identification with Brundle may come when we are least able to overcome our disgust.

²⁰ Cronenberg's treatment of his own Jewishness is interesting here. On the one hand he comments that as a result of his anti-religious upbringing 'I just don't feel a part of it' (Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, p.3). On the other, his recurrent use of Jewish performers to play his protagonists suggests more of an investigation of Jewish identity than he acknowledges, as does his use of Jewish history to frame the meanings of his work. For instance, he compares *Videodrome's* Max Renn (played by James Woods) to 'people in prison camps' (Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, p.96). And describing the hostility he himself faced after the release of *Shivers*, he wrote in a letter to his local newspaper: 'I was not, it seemed, to be exempted from the fabled insecurity of the prophet, the seer, the Jew, the alien who can live happily in someone else's house until he is recognized. Then it's the knock on the door in the middle of the night' (Cronenberg, 'The Night Attila Met the Anti-Christ'). Although I am not aware of any sustained work on Cronenberg

And it is insofar as the production of both the matter and the meaning of these stigmatized bodies is recognized by the film that we may come to notice how it does more than simply offer some notion of carnal revolution. For at the same time that *The Fly* leaves itself open to a reading of Brundle's transformation as an increasing assertion of the reality of a bodily existence which he had previously avoided, we should also note that his new understanding of the flesh appears as a site of orderly social production, confirming this sense of the horrific body as a social product. Brundle says that his computer needs to understand 'the poetry of the flesh', and he reprograms the machine to have just such an experience. But this new grasp of the flesh is represented as a series of numbers flashing across the terminal: the body as an ordered and definable flow of information.²¹ Viewed in this light, the term 'poetry' acquires a different resonance: although it might be read as the signifier of the disordered and the spontaneous - those traditional attributes of the Romantic conception of poetry - as the new figures flash over the screen we may think of poetry too as a geometric form, whose rules, patterns and pulses encode experience no less rigidly than science. Indeed, the very fact that Brundle is capable of taking his new bodily consciousness and, in the form of poetry, making the computer able to reproduce it and 'taste' the flesh returns us to the thoroughly ordered form that such knowledge takes. Similarly Brundle's tastes in clothes are apparently depicted as going from ordered to spontaneous, but in forms that always reinscribe their spontaneity simply as a new order: he makes the shift from identical suits to designer clothes. When Brundle suggests that his

as a Jewish director, there are brief references in Ira Livingston, 'The Traffic in Leeches', pp.530-531; and David Chute, 'He Came From Within', p.36. Richard Dellamora ('Queer Apocalypse') advances what seems to me to be a potentially anti-Semitic argument, that Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* relies on a homophobic diminution of Burroughs's queerness in order to shore up 'the remnant of the alienated East Coast male intellectual elite who once dominated liberal thinking in the United States' (p.154), and who Dellamora represents as heterosexual and Jewish.

²¹ On *The Fly*'s encoding of the body as a distinctively postmodern phenomenon see Peter Boss, 'Death, Disintegration of the Body, and Subjectivity' pp.245-246; and Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, p.267.

condition may be 'a disease with a purpose' he reinscribes its physicality within the terms of logic and intentionality.

The film plays with the sociality of this change by imaging his new found strength as a conventional attribute of contemporary masculinity. His muscular body resembles the disciplined body of an athlete, and we see him exploring his new strength through a series of exercises and performances in an airy, gym-like section of his apartment. By troping his change as body-building, the bodily changes are connected to other social body transformations, reminding us that culture is not a disembodied zone which the body disrupts, but is rather a space of embodied practices, which Brundle's change closely resembles. Brundle's transformation, rather than taking him away from culture by taking him into the body, in fact meshes him only in new culturally determined bodily forms. The creature that finally emerges must be seen not as a spontaneous celebration of instinctual carnality, but rather as the outcome of a constant process of bodywork. Brundle's ethnic identity is thus heavily intertwined with these other forms of social embodiment, and the differing faultlines of cultural acceptance across which they lie.²²

I have stressed this aspect of the film to show how it draws attention to all body forms as regulated rather than spontaneous, and relates those forms of regulation to a hierarchy of bodies. While it might be possible to read the film as rehearsing a fear of evolutionary degeneracy, I want to suggest that it also offers a more political purchase on the body, which recognizes that different bodily forms are located in a field of social power in which some bodies are privileged over others. By challenging the representation of bodily disorder as a natural overthrowing of order and picturing it instead as the transgression of particular social demarcations held in place by the moulding of the body into appropriate

²² Similarly, Brundle's monstrous offspring is spoken about in terms that connect it to other, more familiar, socially stigmatized bodies, when a doctor is told: 'we have reason to believe the baby will be born deformed'.

forms, the film suggests that we must read the body in terms of the organized social situations which regulate its forms and meanings. How then can we relate the monstrous images of Brundle's transformation to the social conditions from which the film emerges ?

(iii) Socializing *The Fly*

Two recent accounts offer just such a reading of *The Fly* as staging various forms of social experience. Both Peter Boss and Andrew Tudor have considered the film as using the body to symbolize the experience of contemporary subjectivity. Boss, drawing on Mary Douglas, argues that the changes in the image of the body which the film displays symbolize particular changes in experience: in this case, the experience of an increasing loss of the distinction of a separate and integral self in the postmodern environment of media saturation, escalating cultural transformation, and international commodity exchange. In such a reading Brundle's body is invaded by a computer code which disrupts his body and intermingles it with other stimuli, so that its final transformation is into a symbol of a socially overstimulated subject, which has lost any sense of its differentiation from its environment ('Death, Disintegration of the Body, and Subjectivity', pp.244-256). Working with a similar model of the body as symbol, Andrew Tudor has argued that the film's 'bodily disintegration gives expression to people's experiences of social fragmentation' ('Unruly Bodies, Unquiet Minds', p.40). The disintegrating body symbolizes the disintegration of a series of other heretofore stable objects - the nuclear family, the nation state, binary gender roles (pp.39-40).

Neither of these are readings that I would disagree with - indeed, it has been central to this thesis so far that the body maps out changing social forms. But what is perhaps most striking about these accounts is the way that the materiality of the body disappears from them, even as they foreground the psychic and discursive significance of the body. The bodily images on the screen seem not to be

about the body at all: the body is a symbol for the unsettling of a series of other heretofore stable objects. Consequently the images do not relate to the physical processes of the audience's own bodies: the 'unruly bodies' of Tudor's title are only textual images, and it is the 'unquiet minds' which are the reality that they depict.²³ Rather than seeing such imagery as solely figurative, I want to suggest that it is the fact that the body itself is materially changeable which makes it such an ambivalent object. Its mutability is threatening not because it is a useful figure for threatening non-bodily social transformations,²⁴ but because the physical changes of the body itself carry a discomfiting psychic valency in that they alter the capacity of the body to fit with the social situations to which it is accustomed. Brundle's increasing social isolation might be read as an image of any one of a number of modern anxieties - but what concerns me here is its operation as an index of the impossibility of his body inhabiting its familiar social milieu. Not, I will stress again, because he passes into a state of bodily asociality, but because he becomes aligned with those social bodies which are no longer legitimate for a prestigious scientist. It is surely significant here that the film opens with Brundle at a scientific convention, where he meets Ronnie - confident, articulate and clean, they both have bodies that fit them for this social space.

Boss and Tudor thus make two assumptions which I want to challenge. Firstly, they assume that we are dealing here with socially reflective images: that is, that the relationship between body and society is an expressive one, in which an image of a body is the passive medium through which cultural tensions are represented. Instead, I am arguing that the physical body, and the ways it is thought about, maintain and produce that cultural situation. Secondly, they view the physical body as essentially unchanging: a biological given which may be

²³ For a similar reading of the carnal imagery of body horror as being reflective of anxieties about everything except, apparently, the body itself, see Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, pp.211-213.

²⁴ Of course, these social changes that Boss and Tudor describe also take place through the bodies of those affected, a consideration which both writers omit.

symbolically represented in a variety of forms, but is not itself physically variable; whereas I am arguing that these images must be related to physical changes in the body. In pursuing the question of how the film speaks to and of our bodies, we must ask not what issues are metaphorically imagined through these bodies, but rather what physical changes in the body, and what psychic mappings of the body, it addresses.

More successful in accounting for the film as an engagement with the physical problems of materiality are two recent texts by Scott Bukatman and Helen Robbins, which read Brundle's body not as metaphoric but as metonymic. Robbins and Bukatman both recognize that the bodily transformations of *The Fly* should be related to other bodily transformations. For Bukatman, the bodily experience in question is the gradual technologization of the postmodern body (*Terminal Identity*, pp.267-268). Brundle's new physical state - transformed by a computer, spliced with foreign matter, genetically altered - is linked by Bukatman to such other bodily changes as prosthetics and genetic engineering. Experiencing new and more drastic alterations in its form, such a body recognizes its own situation in Brundle. Robbins treats Brundle's body as a representative of the male body, focusing on the imagery of pregnancy and masturbation in the film: pregnancy, because the male scientist envies and attempts to duplicate it through his womb-like telepods; masturbation, because it is the adolescent crisis which he relives before the mirror as his body alters (' "More Human Than I Am Alone": Womb Envy in David Cronenberg's *The Fly* and *Dead Ringers*'). Both states highlight a masculine unease at embodiment, and a constant returning to and questioning of its limits, risks, and discomforts. For Robbins, Brundle's seeping, swollen body marks the distinctively masculine dread at any recognition of the biological reality of the body.²⁵ It recounts the failure of a rational, disembodied, masculine science

²⁵ On debates about Cronenberg's misogyny see Barbara Creed, 'Phallic Panic: Male Hysteria and *Dead Ringers*'. For a more reductive interpretation of *The Fly*'s treatment of gender see Cynthia A. Freeland, 'Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films'.

to evade the everyday realities of a physicality which is necessarily perceived as feminine.

But while Robbins is right in drawing attention to the ways in which such bodily attributes are designated repulsive as part of their social construction, in order to join her argument to mine it should be extended to reflect the ways in which these are not simply naturally occurring bodily functions, but rather are themselves generated out of a mesh of cultural conditions. Pregnancy and masturbation do not simply 'happen': they are concrete bodily possibilities that are brought about through the pressures that guide bodies through living. What the organic changes of *The Fly* invoke then are not so much, as Robins suggests, inherent body properties, but are rather those particular bodily practices which are *produced as problematic*.

To approach *The Fly* from these perspectives is to read it not only as an account of body-metaphors which reflect economic or environmental anxieties, but also as an account of the daily physical experiences which generate their own anxieties. Hence what horrifies is not some innate or spontaneous physicality, but rather, as Christine Ramsay rightly suggests, the physical possibilities 'constantly welling up from the enabling conditions of body and psyche' ('Male Horror: On David Cronenberg', p.89). In re-using a phrase so heavily associated with the notion of an organic or originary force, I suggest that we read Ramsay as reaccentuating the prevalent meaning of 'welling up', so as to show us instead that it is not from below or outside of the social that this new body matter 'wells up', but from it and as its product. We must therefore see in these forms of illegitimate matter not any innate biological resistance, but rather the practical possibilities of corporeal change as determined by a set of social conditions.

We have seen how the body should be viewed as the expression of the social location of a subject, a physical form which fixes subjects into social structures. But I have tried to suggest that we must grant the body more flexibility than this - with the possibility of bodily transformations which will themselves

change the social structure. Brundle's bodily changes delegitimize him on the one hand - destroying his relationship and his career and leading eventually to his death. But in doing so, they may also be read as making him unfit to maintain the forms of social power from which he had previously benefited. As such, they are a reminder that the possibility for bodily change may unsettle a social order that relies on bodies to take - and remain in - particular physical forms.

Approaching *The Fly* like this, we must re-work notions of the body as dangerous matter placed under social control. Instead of viewing the film in terms of a parable about the risk that the shaped body (whose order enables it to master its materiality) may also always become the unshaped body, we can see it as stressing the ways in which those terms 'shaped' and 'unshaped' are no more than the hierarchical cultural alibi for different bodies that are all *equally* shaped. What differentiates such bodies is a perpetually unstable cultural transcoding. The malleability of the body makes it always open to changes, which may un-fit it: but these are not changes in which some inherent bodily disorder arises - rather, they are changes towards particular social bodily forms which are designated illicit. As such, the monstrous body is represented as the deployment of existing bodily possibilities in the service of resistance. The transgressions of race and class which Brundle's body enact offer a constant emphasis on the rise of new possibilities which, even as they emerge from patriarchal technology, also threaten to overturn its conventions. In such a reading, Brundle's entire technological project then stands for the social apparatus itself, which produces bodies so as to punish them, and then frames its punishment as an attack not on the possibilities that the apparatus generated, but rather on what is claimed to be rebellious raw material.

The organic revolution which Cronenberg imagines in *The Brood* is thus not so far from the truth: the relations of force which constitute the body enable it to transform its physical matter into forms that may no longer consolidate the social order. The fact that such changes are figured as a form of regression may bear the traces of a degenerationist view of the subject's physical desires but, as I

have argued, this is no more than a means of stigmatizing particular social possibilities. It is to this marking of the material possibilities of social transgression that I will turn in the final section. Where Knee reads in *The Fly* an uncritical disgust at various abject socialities, in which the text is little more than a hysterical symptom of white masculinity in unwelcome crisis, I will be suggesting that the film offers a rather more insightful interrogation of such a horrified response to unacceptable bodies.²⁶

Any account of the social, such as that which I am offering, which emphasizes the overwhelming construction of the subject might seek one avenue of escape in an exploration of the possibility that there is a way of circumventing the social altogether, irredeemably tainted and tainting as it is. As Biddy Martin argues of recent queer theory, such a position leads to ‘a romantic celebration of queerness or homo-ness as the very demise of current forms of societalization’:

in some queer work, the very fact of attachment has been cast as only punitive and constraining because already socially constructed, so that indifference to objects, or the assumption of a position beyond objects - the position, for instance, of death - becomes the putative goal of queer theory. (‘Extraordinary Homosexuals and the Fear of Being Ordinary’, p.123)²⁷

Steven Shaviro advocates just such a position in his reading of *The Fly*. For Shaviro, Brundle’s transformation takes him into a ‘hell of embodiment’ in which his ‘excruciating materiality’ sets him apart from the society in whose power structures his body is caught: ‘Seth is free from social control only in the sense that he cannot be part of any society’ since his ‘becoming-fly is ... always pulling him

²⁶ As Kelly Hurley so neatly puts it, Cronenberg’s work ‘exposes (or manifests, if one doesn’t like Cronenberg) the cultural repression of [the] non-normative’ (‘Reading Like an Alien: Posthuman Identity in Ridley Scott’s *Alien* and David Cronenberg’s *Rabid*’, pp.211-212). For a debate between representatives from the ‘exposes’ and the ‘manifests’ camps see Linda Haas and Mary Pharr, ‘Somatic Ideas: Cronenberg and the Feminine’.

²⁷ Although she does not mention him by name, the reference to ‘homo-ness’ indicates that one of her targets is Leo Bersani, who argues in *Homos* that (male) homosexuality enables a ‘*refusal to participate in any sociality at all*’ (p.168, emphasis in the original).

further and further away from any community, any identity' (*The Cinematic Body*, p.148).²⁸ But against reading the social as a destructive force from which the only escape is death, I am arguing that the social also supplies our best opportunities: it provides us with resources for pleasure, resistance, and power. I believe that it is therefore possible to discern in *The Fly* a proposal of social transformation whose nexus is precisely the social construction of the flesh, rather than its asociality.

(iv) Embodied Alliances

As the film approaches its conclusion Brundle kidnaps Ronnie and tells her that he intends to fuse her, and her unborn child, with him: 'we'll be the ultimate family - a family of three joined together in one body'. Robbins analyzes the scene as an expression of a patriarchal power which imagines that the incorporation of a woman and child are a guaranteed male right - their bodies will be subordinated to his needs in a grotesque re-enactment of the patriarchal dynamics of the nuclear family (' "More Human Than I am Alone" ', p.142). But we must also recognize the force that the scene takes from its generic features. If we were to draw up a Proppian account of the recurrent narrative units of the horror film, one of them would be: 'The Full Extent of the Monster's Intentions Are Revealed'.²⁹ I am thinking of such incidents as the realization in *The Thing* (1982) that if the creature leaves the military base it will take over the entire world in 2700 hours; Barbara's realization in *Night of the Living Dead* that in fact the entire human race might as well already be zombies; or in *Alien*³ (1992) when Ripley realizes that she is the bearer of the new Alien queen. Structurally, this is not simply the moment at which the tension reaches a new peak, and the narrative enters its final stretch (the unit:

²⁸ For a reading of the film's nihilism which sees no productively critical force to such a vision, see Mary Ferguson Pharr, 'From Pathos to Tragedy: The Two Versions of *The Fly*'.

²⁹ Vladimir Propp's *The Morphology of the Folktale* argues that it is possible to draw up an inventory of narrative units, not all of which will appear in any given folktale, but from which all the units of a tale must be drawn.

‘Can the Danger Be Averted in Time?’) but is also the moment at which the possibility of the monster’s redemption is destroyed. The revelation is one of such absolute depravity and malice that the only option is the monster’s destruction (although it should be noted that redemption may yet follow - as in, for instance, *The Fly 2* (1989) where the emotional force of the redemption is precisely the fact that its possibility had apparently been renounced). More particularly, in body horror we can connect this device to the revelation of the body’s uncivilized carnality, since it enables a film to announce the final irrecoverability of the monstrous body by the claims of culture.

And that is just how the scene operates in *The Fly*: it indicates Brundle’s final loss of humanity, as an index of which, moments later, he sheds the remnants of his body and becomes the wholly monstrous fly-creature who is soon to be destroyed. The revelation of psychological monstrosity and narrative shock is doubled with the revelation of physical horror: we know that he can no longer go back, because the last traces of his old body have been shed. Brundle’s announcement of his plans bears the traces of its generically determined - if not overdetermined - status: the orchestral score rising to a crescendo; Ronnie’s screams of desperation; the ominous close-ups of the telepods; Borans, the putative hero, unconscious and unable to help. Brundle’s final bodily transformation follows, and it too carries such features: a new score to announce the moment of the most extreme graphic display of the body; more screams from Ronnie; a series of sudden cuts between Ronnie’s horrified face and the different parts of Brundlefly’s body as it sheds its human skin.

I want to stress the formal, generic features of these two linked scenes because the film shows a consistent sensitivity to its generic devices and a concern to highlight and interrogate them, particularly as regards the assertion of the monstrous dangers of the body. In the key scene with which I opened this chapter, when the baboon is shown in all its horror, Ronnie is videotaping the scene for the benefit of her planned book on Seth’s project. Similarly, as his transformation

increases, Seth videotapes himself, preserving his transformation to display to visitors. While these two incidents show a self-reflexive concern with the way in which the monstrous body is made into an image for its audience, there is another even more interesting scene in which Ronnie plays Brundle's tape to Borans: it shows Brundle dousing a tray of donuts with an enzyme that liquidizes them, and then sucking up the resultant liquid. When Borans views the tapes he acts as if he is watching a horror film: rigid in front of the screen, the camera zooms in on his face to show us that his eyes are wide and unblinking, his mouth open, as with increasing dismay and disgust he says 'My God ... Oh my God!' The audience's response to monstrosity is thus part of the film's focus, in its dissection of the techniques by which disgust is orchestrated and then displayed to an audience in order to shock them. In this last case, the audience has already seen Brundle requesting that Ronnie carefully arrange the camera for his performance, which he enacts smoothly as if rehearsed, while offering a running commentary as if he were a television presenter.

In fact, the moment of greatest disgust is erased: although we hear Brundle tell us what he is about to do, and hear the sound of it as Borans watches, we do not see the event at all. The audience knows so well what it would see, as it occupies so completely the position of the nauseated Borans, that a 'graphics of non-representation'³⁰ merely alerts us to the fact that we are already subjects-who-know. We are so familiar with - and so well installed within - such structures of disgust that the scene's omission hardly registers.³¹

These two moments of self-reflexivity are not atypical in Cronenberg: Robbins considers certain key moments in his work as offering the devices of patriarchal technology 'carefully labelled and exposed to the eye of the self-

³⁰ I take the phrase from a very different use of it by Sandra Buckley in her discussion of contemporary Japanese comic book pornography, ' "Penguin in Bondage": A Graphic Tale of Japanese Comic Books'.

³¹ Indeed, some critics seem to believe that they did in fact see such a scene. Alan Stanbrook refers to the 'spectacle' of 'an insect ... vomiting over its food before ingesting it' ('Cronenberg's Creative Cancers', p.56).

conscious viewer' (' "More Human Than I Am Alone" ', p.146). Nor are they unusual in body-horror as a genre because, as Brophy notes, it is acutely aware of 'the saturation of all its codes and conventions' ('Horrrality', p.12). But the particular concerns of these moments of self-reflexivity are with the ways in which a set of representational practices constructs the horrifying. They index the devices by which bodily discord is put on display so that it carries a set of particular connotations. We can identify four key moments in this process of the staging of disgust:

(i) *The moment of revelation.* Consider these moments: Brundle putting on a show for Ronnie; the door being opened to let us see the dead baboon; Ronnie showing her tape to Borans. In each case monstrosity is a staged event in which abject flesh is put on show in order to affirm its abnormality. It is a spectacle which showcases the body, and which is textually constructed to have the status of a key demonstration of the truth.

(ii) *Abnormality indicates the need for action.* In all of these cases abject flesh initiates a decision to act. Borans watches the videotape immediately before switching in role from the corporate villain to Ronnie's protector/assistant, who takes on the responsibility of destroying both Brundle and his child. Brundle's witnessing of the failure of the baboon propels him into the affair that will enable him to perfect the process. The display of monstrosity thus calls for an act of recuperation - either the eradication, or the sublimation, of what is disgusting.

(iii) *A fear of one's own carnality.* As Boss has noted, Borans is systematically connected to forms of organic disgust ('Death, Disintegration of the Body and Subjectivity', pp.252-253): he tells Ronnie that he is 'feeling a bit scummy', while she refers to him as 'personal bullshit ... the residue of another life', a substance of which she says: 'I have to scrape it off and get rid of it'. To which I would add that

if Borans's own organic connotations link him to the abject matter he sees on the screen, the affinity is heightened by the fact that their names mark them as doubles - the 's' and 'th' sounds of both Stathis and Seth, the 'b', 'r' and 'n' sounds of Borans and Brundle. Borans's shock can be read as a confrontation with, on the screen, the double of his own 'scummy' self. The display of monstrosity is intended to depict not just a revelation of the truth about a body which needs to be resolved, but a truth about *one's own* body.

(iv) *Purification of the self*. The moment of revelation hence fuels the project not only to deal with the alien object of disgust, but also to purify oneself. This is the point where Borans becomes hero - transformed by the vision of Brundle into the white knight who does the right thing, in a determined effort to reject his own scumminess. Brundle's failure with the baboon is what propels his attempt to reprogram his other self, his computer, with the geometric grasp of the poetry of the flesh, which has hitherto been missing - a gesture, as I have argued, not of the carnalization of the machine, but of the organization of the body by rational technique.

These introspections of the text represent attempts by the film to account for its own procedures. They thereby enable the audience to distance itself from the structures which produce disgust - from the routinized display of monstrosity as an index of what is to be avoided, purged, or redeemed - and to consider instead the wider social motivations and effects of those daily events which index monstrosity for us: the incitement that we tidy up our own bodies, before they too follow such a path.³² It is in this light that we must read Ronnie's final encounter

³² Hence the text on the poster for the film reads 'Be Afraid. Be Very Afraid': both an injunction to fear, and an acknowledgement that fear needs to be demanded and installed by the cinematic apparatus in order to operate. It is Carol Clover who draws our attention to the way that the slogans on horror film posters situate the audience as potential victims of the films they promote (*Men, Women and Chainsaws* p.201).

with Seth, with its construction as the epitome of a generic display of monstrosity. Hedged around by reflections on its own operations, this must be read not simply as an indictment of the horrific, but rather as an invitation to scrutinize the depiction of the socially dangerous as the physically horrifying. We are encouraged to recognize that certain social groupings have an investment in marking out some bodies as horrific even as the film activates those traditional horrors. And if what this particular scene activates is Ronnie's fear of coming into contact with Brundle, I will be suggesting that it also activates, and thereby critiques, the fear of what might result from their union.

Brundle initially imagines that the process of merging will purge him of impurity, with the combination of human matter driving out the fly to make him, as he says, 'more human than I am alone'. But against such putative purification, there are a number of textual cues that point towards the production of a still more monstrous hybrid. Most obviously we must think of the effects of Brundle's previous experiment, which has given the telepods the status of a dangerous device, whose utopian aspirations have deteriorated into the generation of monsters. Moreover, in spite of the pseudo-science that motivates the computer's analysis, narratively what we have seen so far in the film is the combination of Brundle and fly into one single hybrid organism, and Brundle's vision of a combined body hardly seems likely to be the creation of a normal human body. The wish for purity thus turns - as it does throughout the film - into the threat (or promise) of an even greater intensity of impure carnality, signified here by the language of corrupted purity. Echoing as it does a nightmare that Ronnie has in which she gives birth to Brundle's child, a giant maggot, this union seems destined not for a body that is 'more human' but rather one that is thoroughly post-human. Like the absent shot of Brundlefly eating, it need never be shown to us because, primed as we are to read the generic conventions, we already know what we would see.

There are thus a host of strategies by which the result of this experiment is

set-up to be the display of another horrific body. But, pursuing the film's dissection of the social conventions that designate certain bodies as horrific, we can ask: what is it about this unrealized body that is stigmatized? I want to suggest that we might see in the monstrous figure which never materializes a concrete political opportunity that also never materializes: that of an alliance between Brundle, Ronnie and their child against the technologies of purification.

As I have argued, this film explores the tensions in a range of practices whose goal is the production of a superior body, free from the discomforting carnalities of motion sickness, and experiencing the body not as matter but as poetry. Perhaps their most ominous convergence is when they are marshalled around Ronnie in her dream that, in the course of her abortion, she gives birth to a giant maggot. Surrounded as she is by surgical technicians, the abortion is figured as another attempt to orchestrate a well-functioning body. One reading of the gendered implications of the scene would be that it expresses a male fantasy of the horror of the female body in which, along the lines suggested by Kristeva, the repulsive nature of this birth functions as a version of the repulsion with which masculinist culture regards birth in general.³³ Conversely, we might read it as a more knowing analysis of Ronnie's situation: Boss points out that throughout the film technological masculinity treats the body as its proper possession, over which to exercise its control - as Borans says to Ronnie: 'do I have permission to claim your body when this is all over?' - so that the horror of the scene may lie rather in the extent to which the birth is horrific for Ronnie herself because of the male power which, as Boss points out, she herself may be being said to critically interrogate precisely because it is in the form of a nightmare that she relives ('Death, Disintegration of the Body, and Subjectivity', p.253).

But by relating this moment of masculinist regulation to the other, equally

³³ The theme which Cronenberg unpicks with such rigour in *Dead Ringers*. See Linda Badley, *Film Horror and the Body Fantastic*, pp.125-136; Barbara Creed, 'Phallic Panic'; Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film*, pp. 58-89; and Helen Robbins, ' "More Human Than I Am Alone" '.

disastrous, attempts to refine the body, it might also remind us that these manipulations of body matter yield unnerving results. And here I hope that my reader will recognize that we can add the birth scene to the gallery of Cronenberg's characteristic set-pieces with which I began this chapter: the unruly body shattering the antiseptic domain. By virtue of its textual excess, its function as a kind of bravura spectacle of special effects, and its coding of opposed terms (science/carnality, horrified observers/horrific display, order/disorder) it belongs alongside these other attempts to speak about our relationship to horrific bodies. As with the other examples, I want here to refuse to follow the easy path of celebrating this as a triumph of bodily spontaneity over a repressive culture.³⁴ Rather, I want again to stress the extent to which this moment is marked as produced. The properties of Ronnie's body are not somehow the antithesis of those who observe it, but are rather intimately related to their own practices. Insofar as they oversee the birth, its result should recall Brundle's own technological disciplining of the body, so that what is horrific about the event is less the workings of Ronnie's body, than the contexts within which the working of her body is co-opted by the men around her. It is they who assign its meaning, just as it is Brundle whose genetic marking is most prominent in the offspring. Famously, the presiding gynaecologist is played by Cronenberg himself, suggesting that we should therefore read this as another self-reflexive comment on the ways in which narrators of narratives of monstrosity position and display the body as disgusting in order to elicit a response of horror. Crucially, then, it also makes us aware of the fact that the forces that orchestrate Brundle as repulsive may need to render Ronnie repulsive as well.

But before this risks rendering Ronnie merely a passive vehicle for male activities, I want to argue that her becoming-monstrous takes place as the

³⁴ Not least because to do so entails us reading the abortion as a destructive attempt to purify the body of what in fact belongs to it - a reading that colludes with anti-abortion positions.

consequence of her own series of decisions. Although I have suggested that horror is particularly concerned with the possibility that the apparently normal might in fact be the monstrous, it is Carol Clover who has offered a particularly astute analysis of how this has recently been deployed in horror in the form of the figure which she has named 'the Final Girl' (*Men, Women and Chainsaws*). This figure is a female hero who survives the other characters and finally defeats the forces of monstrosity. She makes her first appearance in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, rises to prominence in *Halloween* (1978), and has now become a staple figure in contemporary horror - from Barbara in Savini's remake of *Night of the Living Dead*, to Sidney in *Scream*.³⁵ Ronnie conforms to this model on a number of counts: her ambivalently gendered name; her short hair and trousers; her constant assertive refusal to concede to any of Borans's demands; her professional status as investigative journalist; her usurpation of the prerogative of the male gaze through her use of video; her decision to instigate sex with a confused Brundle; her determination to manage her own body through an abortion, with the concomitant refusal of a traditionally female role as mother; and at the end of the film, wielding the phallic gun, her roles as executioner of Brundlefly and saviour of the by-now symbolically castrated Borans.³⁶

Yet while the Final Girl figures as female hero, the films in which she appears also register an ambivalence about her usurpation of the gendered attributes usually reserved for male heroes - all the more so, suggests Clover, as she moves from the less tightly regulated domains of low-budget low-culture

³⁵ For Clover, she is able to occur because of the particular flexibility of the sexed body evident in horror films. Clover argues that horror sees the recurrence of ambiguously gendered figures, of which feminized monsters and effeminate men are both instances. The Final Girl is another: a girl who acts like a boy. Clover regards this as a result of horror's inheritance of certain recurrent anxieties about the stability of gender, a position which Mark Jancovich has criticized as failing to consider the particular historical conditions behind any given text's deployment of gender ambiguity (*Rational Fears*, pp.225-226).

³⁶ Linda Badley offers a reading of Ronnie's monstrous masculinization in terms of her usurpation of the male gaze via her filming of Brundle's experiment (*Film Horror and the Body Fantastic*, p.129).

horror to the more heavily regulated domain of heavily marketed cinema (*Men, Women and Chainsaws*, pp.231-236). Bearing testimony to her power to unsettle, high-budget horror like *The Silence of the Lambs* (1990) or *Aliens* goes to great lengths to resorb the Final Girl and reproduce her in a less threatening form: Ripley as maternal protector or Clarice Starling as loyal servant of the FBI. There is thus a crucial sense in which Ronnie too is a monster - a gender deviant, whose body violates the traditional roles of femininity.

Power thus produces the bodies which it dreads - the bodies which are excluded and stigmatized, and which carry with them the threat of overturning the order which keeps them in those places. It is surely also significant that while she is in hospital, Brundle arrives through the window to - depending on our interpretation - abduct or rescue her. We may certainly read this as representing a continuation of Ronnie's enmeshment within oppressive male power, in which she passes from the hands of one figure of male power to another. But it also operates as the moment of her liberation from this territory in which she is shown as powerless. His abduction of Ronnie resonates symbolically with such monstrous liberation-abductions as Quasimodo and Esmeralda, or King Kong and Fay Wray, and as such figures him not only as monster but as rescuer, facilitating not just her abduction but also her escape. Hence it marks not her passivity but the extent to which the monster of the horror film may - either phobically or affirmatively - stand in for the outlawed needs of the woman in question. In that sense, it may be that in his abduction of her Brundle signals not so much his opposition towards her as her oppressor, so much as an affinity between them: as Linda Williams suggests, the gaze of the monster's victim discloses her own recognition within the monster of herself ('When the Woman Looks'). Thus if I have so far read these scenes as an encounter between 'monster' and 'girl'/victim/heroine this has occluded an account of the scene as a meeting between two monsters. Ronnie figures as monster both because of her defiance of dominant gender conventions and yet at the same time, as we have seen, the film also return us to the fact of her female

body - in its references to wombs, abortions, pregnancy, it maintains her connection to a more traditional femininity only to figure that too as a monstrous bodily state. Indeed, the double-monstrosity of Ronnie's position thus neatly figures the double-bind in which women are located: to be marked as female by giving birth is to be corporeally alien to the order of rationality; to seek an abortion and thereby refuse that image by refusing that biological event is to be monstrous by being masculinized.³⁷

Brundle's imagined 'family' can thus be read also as the utopian site for the meeting of those who have all been, in different ways, targeted by male technology as objects of assault: Brundle, the physical alien targeted for execution; Ronnie, the 'final girl' whose femaleness constantly usurps the signifiers of masculinity; and the unborn child targeted for destruction because biologically undesirable. If, as I have stressed, Goldblum's Jewishness is linked to his status as bodily alien, the convergence of his body with that of the illicitly masculine Ronnie and her biologically disallowed child makes for a suggestive coalition of the socially stigmatized, whose monstrous fusion may be dreadful to some groups within the audience precisely insofar as it represents the dreadful possibility of an alliance against their culture, but is also welcome to others insofar as it constitutes a point of recognition and a call to resistance. Bearing in mind his openness to incarnating a range of stigmatized bodily socialities, we should then read Brundle as a form of monstrous hero - his story indexing the various means by which his body is delegitimated, the forces that act to achieve this, the strategies that they deploy, and our own complicity with these as the audience of the horror genre. In Brundle's monstrous body, we are encouraged to recognize the traits of our own bodies that are designated repulsive - and by implication, invited to extend our

³⁷ A double-bind which we might understand as encompassing the two forms of grotesque body as defined by Stallybrass and White: 'the Other', the body which is the hated binary opposite of the legitimate body and which is seen as revolting because it is on the *wrong side* of the line; and 'the hybrid', which combines attributes of both poles of the binary and is seen as revolting because it *flouts* that very line (*The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.193).

recognition to other bodies which suffer the same treatment. We are, moreover, invited to imagine the possibilities of a revolutionary fusion and to overcome the learnt repugnance that impedes it.

Fusion, as Andrew Knee has noted, is a key term in the film ('The Metamorphosis of *The Fly*'): Brundle begins to lose his integrity when he is fused with a fly, and in the final scenes he loses his life because he is fused with the mechanical segments of one of the telepods. Fusion leads finally to such a state of disorder that it is impossible to go on living. Knee reads this fear of fusion as the film's anxiety about emotional intimacy - the other fusion that takes place in the film, that of Seth and Ronnie's affair. In keeping with his general account of *The Fly*, Knee reads this - like all the film's sites of horror - as expressive of an uncritical dread of certain challenges to a rigid and pathological status quo, which the film seeks to preserve. But if we read the film as inviting an interrogation of such sites, as encouraging the viewer to ask for whom and by whom certain bodily configurations have been rendered horrific, then we may instead see that fusion is offered as a provocative possibility, revealed to be branded horrific insofar as it represents a real threat to a particular social order, but which can be welcomed by those of us wishing to challenge such an order.

Knee points out that Ronnie and Brundle are both corporate tools - he in the service of Bartok Enterprises, she in the service of Monolith Publishing, both of whom have legal rights over their work. But we should also note their resistance to this situation. Ronnie risks breaking free of her contract by electing to write up the story of Seth's invention in a book of her own - and is quickly threatened back into submission by Borans, her boss: 'I'm your editor, and I'm shaping your material into a story'. Similarly Seth - not unlike *Shivers*'s Dr. Emil Hobbes - is using Bartok's resources to fund a project which attempts to ease his own personal anxieties. The relationship between them thus marks a fusion between rebellious corporate employees - what Luce Irigaray might call a getting together of the

goods.³⁸ For as part of his constant attempts to exert his control over them, Borans takes care to try to keep them apart. At the moment of their most romantic promise of unification, when Seth observes that they are becoming 'old and married', it is Borans's intervention that separates them - a logic of division that will reach its apotheosis in Borans's categorical command to Ronnie: 'don't go back to him'. Thus Borans's heroic arrival, while generically marked as the unit 'The Girl is Rescued from the Monster', must also be read as the determination of an employer/investor to reassert his corporate rights over these various wayward products: Seth/Brundlefly, the telepods, Ronnie, and their child.³⁹ What prevents such an alliance is precisely the horror that parts them - that intervenes between Ronnie and her child, between Ronnie and Brundle, a horror which, as the film replays the narrative unit of 'The Full Extent of the Monster's Plans Are Revealed' is not recruited as the natural disgust for what is physically dangerous, but rather exposed as the social abhorrence of what has been disallowed by a culture of bodily purification and control.

The ways in which communities are constructed along the lines of bounded bodies makes it clear that social power is thought in terms of bodily contact: what must be kept inside the body, what must be kept outside it. And this is to argue more than that the body operates as a metaphor, but to insist on the irreducibly physical experience of such contact - our daily experience of what substances must be kept away, what bodies must be avoided. When lines of social demarcation are crossed, it is at the level of the body that anxiety emerges. At the political level, bodily disgust thus operates to segment and compartmentalize communities through physical disgust which sustains social demarcations.⁴⁰

³⁸ The title of Irigaray's 'Des Marchandises entre elles' has various translations: I prefer Claudia Reeder's colloquial 'When the Goods Get Together' to Catherine Porter's rather literal 'Commodities Among Themselves'.

³⁹ *The Fly 2* spells out this appropriative logic, with Ronnie's son placed in a laboratory by Bartok Science Industries as their legal property.

⁴⁰ For instance, Steve Pile makes this case for the hostile representation of the unwelcome bodies of travellers and gypsies (*The Body and the City*, pp.3-6).

It has been argued by Bernice Johnson Reagon that one site where such discomfort is particularly problematic is in the formation of political alliances between subjects who have been segregated, and who find that, because of their differences, coalition building is an unpleasant experience: 'most of the time you feel threatened to the core, and if you don't you're not really doing no coalescing' ('Coalition Politics: Turning the Century', p.356). Brundlefly, Ronnie and the child are indeed 'doing coalescing' - doing that terrifying mixing of bodies of which Reagon says: 'we are at the point where in order to take the next step we've got to do it with some folk we don't care too much about. And we've got to vomit over that for a little while' (p.368). A coalition is not a comfortable meeting place, says Reagon, rather 'it's a monster' - and so, I would suggest, we need resources that will enable us to negotiate its monstrous becomings.

The Fly's unseen monstrous family is just such a map. For all Brundle's threat and terror he and Ronnie need each other - because as Reagon says, 'the only reason you would consider teaming up with someone who could possibly kill you, is because that's the only way you can figure you can stay alive' (pp.356-357). The interweaving of bodies that is prevented from taking place is thus a promise whose possible resistance to power comes through its uncomfortable crossing of the enormous barriers of disgust that stand in its way. Against those barriers stand the results of Brundle's machine, which he calls 'the one that ended all concepts of ... borders and frontiers' - the project that holds out the promise of erasing barriers and dividing lines. The horror of the resultant meldings and interweavings of bodies is the horror of joining in with those unlike us - of politics itself. If Brundle goes out of his way to dismiss the possibilities that such alliances might usher in, with the declaration 'insects don't have politics', we should conversely be reminded that it is in the very place that politics is disavowed that it needs to be reasserted. This insect *does* have politics - and it is the role of the critic as consciousness-raiser to restore it against Cronenberg's own wishes.

If our bodies map out the social structures - both micro and macro - within

which we are situated, then the film's figures of authority (its gynaecologists, Borans cleaning away his scumminess in the shower) stand as models of conflict and separation, for whom and by whom certain zones are marked as illicit (but incited) and others as licit (but pleasurably scrutinizing the illicit). Authority lies in the hands of those who sanction, purify and punish body types, and who stand watch over forms of biological - and therefore political - fusion. The fused family is an altogether different imaginary anatomy from this authorized one, in which different bodies mingle, their boundaries no longer clear. The feminized man and the masculinized woman, the fly and the child, merged like the flickering data that flashes across Brundle's computer screen. The genetic map that has operated in the film as the index of technological power, and whose current role in biology is precisely to shore up such specious notions of biological singularity and irreducible difference (Donna Haraway, 'The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies', pp.215-217), is now redeployed as the model of an interlocking - but never unified - conglomerate of disenfranchized others. As such, it is the reminder that bodily disorder is not in any necessary sense liberating or revolutionary - but rather becomes so when harnessed to demands for a world in which power has been taken away from the forces that render its difference *as* disorder.

The Fly thus rehearses these conventions of stigmatization not because they can be sublated into moments of more comfortable rational choice; nor because, as in Wood's or Knee's readings of Cronenberg, they are offered in a spirit of outright rejection which endorses such a stigma, but rather, as in Reagon's account, in the acknowledgement of the revulsion that attends the production of new socialities, and the uncomfortable routes down which they lie.

Conclusion: Between Bodies

(i) Introduction: Body Fundamentals

In Cronenberg's *Crash*, the charismatic 'mad scientist' figure, Vaughan, explains the motivation behind his recreation of car crashes: 'There's a benevolent psychopathology that beckons towards us. For example, the car crash is a fertilizing rather than a destructive event: a liberation of sexual energy that mediates the sexuality of those who have died with an intensity that's impossible in any other form. To experience that, to live that - that's my project.' 'What about the reshaping of the human body by modern technology?', asks his interlocutor, Ballard, referring back to the explanation that Vaughan had given earlier in the film; 'I thought *that* was your project.' 'That's just a crude sci-fi concept', replies Vaughan. 'It kind of floats on the surface and doesn't threaten anybody. I use it to test the resilience of my potential partners in psychopathology'.

We might well want to read this as Cronenberg's characteristic push away from any attempt to locate his film within a historically specific problematic, and towards a reading of it as the dramatization of some timeless human dilemma. Rejecting an explanation for the impact of the car crash on the body in terms of technology, he offers instead one in terms of the body's own innate capacities to experience and interpret trauma as ecstasy. Whatever the problems with this attempt to dehistoricize his own text, I would also suggest that Cronenberg's sceptical account of the appeal of postmodern technology as a new phenomenon is absolutely right. While technology may well seem to be a promising new phase in the experience of embodiment, it may in fact be no more than a new site for a more general problem of embodiment: the difficulty of defining what constitutes a proper and integral body, and the pleasures and

dangers of the states enabled by such uncertain boundaries. If techno-culture confronts us with this problem with particular forcefulness, it does not change the fact that this is a problem that is central to embodiment itself: the question of which aspects of the body are legitimate and which are alien; and the question of what sorts of social identities are effected by changes in the form of the body. This thesis is therefore sceptical of the idea that techno-culture will inaugurate some new relationship to the body, since it seems rather to be the site of the playing out of much older anxieties.

My scepticism about the radical impact of technology derives from two positions central to this thesis. Firstly, the question of the material properties of the body, as we have seen, is always a vexed one. Insofar as no body simply exists in itself, but is brought about, maintained, and regulated by the society in which it operates, the question of how a body should be, what strains it can be subjected to, and what reformings it may endure, is central to the anxieties attendant on being an embodied subject: it is not a new problem for the body, but is rather the necessary condition of embodied subjectivity. Secondly, the idea that technology is for the first time subjecting a fantasy of an integral body to intolerable strains seems unconvincing in the face of a psychoanalytical literature which documents how few of us in fact experience our bodies as integral. Didier Anzieu's *The Skin Ego*, a commentary on a collection of psychoanalytic case-studies, offers a series of instances of our bodies being experienced as invaded or disorganized, their component parts becoming detached, and the relationship between inside and outside being permanently unstable.

Focusing in this way on the fact of a routine sense of bodily disorganization should remind us that the disruptions of the boundaries that maintain a sense of integral selfhood are not confined to the more spectacular instances of body modification. Rather, the body is always that object invoked as needing to be released from contamination, and unable to exist without it; as

threatened by invasion, and as always already invaded. Thus when Max Renn, the protagonist of Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, goes in search of an invasive video signal which he believes will change his life in the future, he in fact finds that even before the narrative of the film, he had already been exposed to the signal and been physically altered by it: the film thus dramatizes the proposal that our physical invasion and transformation has always already taken place.

The texts of Burroughs and Cronenberg that I have studied here constantly straddle these two contradictory positions: an attempt to defend against invasive transformation, and an acceptance that such an invasive transformation founds embodied subjectivity. Simultaneously occupying both positions, these texts then speak perhaps more than anything else of the position of the embodied subject, which exists only by virtue of its simultaneous and contradictory colonization and fortification: by virtue of its definition of itself as a self-contained unit at the same time as by the generation of its varying forms through invasion. This necessary placement of the integrity of the body in high risk situations is neatly summed up in a briefing given to one of Burroughs's agents by his controllers: 'as you know most existing organizations stress such primitive reactions as unquestioning obedience. Their agents become addicted to orders. You will receive orders of course and in some cases you will be well-advised not to carry out the orders you receive' (*TTE*, p.15). Such an impossible position serves in many ways as an account of the body as I have described it in this thesis: both obliged to be transformed, and revolted by those transformations; both addicted to the necessity of following its orders and resisting them; imagined to be demonstrating freedom through rebellion, but in fact rebellious only as a by-product of its programming. What the work of both Burroughs and Cronenberg depicts is how the body is caught up in, and enabled by, these tensions between regulation and transgression.

In this conclusion I wish to return to the four aspects of embodiment as detailed in my chapters on Burroughs and Cronenberg, and to suggest that these

four aspects of bodily anxiety may all be read as central problems within the experience of embodiment. They are not an exhaustive account of the experiences of embodiment, but they do sketch out aspects of embodied subjectivity that are experienced with particular intensity, and that underpin, as I hope I have demonstrated, a wide range of the material, psychic, and discursive conditions of embodiment today. Thus although there are many different situations or texts in which the body makes an appearance, this account attempts to sketch a set of fears, desires, and social dynamics which are not the defining problem for the body, but rather represent a set of particularly persistent problems for many of the bodies we might document.

At the risk of imposing an over-simplified grand narrative on this range of perspectives of the body, I would suggest that the body as described in this thesis looks like this. It is a body that has been *shaped by social processes* so that it is constantly confronted by the fact that its material form is in no way natural, even though the supposed naturalness of the body continues to be the dominant concept through which it is thought (chapter one). It *is confronted by a process of the designation of certain bodies as dirty, grotesque, or disordered, and others as clean and tidy*, and experiences this conflict in terms of an attempt to transcend materiality in order to become clean, while perpetually, and ambivalently, being attracted to/repelled by the aspects of its own carnality that connote those stigmatized attributes (chapter two). The body produced by such a system *seals itself up against invaders*, but cannot evade the fact that it is only through acts of invasion that it exists (chapter three); it *defines itself against what it regards as abject*, but in doing so may seek a sense of integrity by regarding as abject not its own social marginality, but rather the institutions that attempt to control it (chapter four); although caught between the desire to transcend its materiality and the desire to affirm it, it *remains unable either to abandon its carnality in the name of civilization, or reject civilization in the name of carnality*, since both positions are in fact entailed in

each other (chapter five); finally it *finds in its abjection the signs of its own relationship to those power structures which shame it*, and consequently may become able to interrogate both the ways in which such shame determines its choices, and the legitimacy of those power structures which so construct it (chapter six).

In these last pages I will offer a reading of Cronenberg's *Rabid* as a representation of the body focused on the four strands of the problems of embodiment that I have mapped out in the last four chapters of this thesis. I suggest that the film offers a useful analysis of the strengths and limitations of each strand as resources for political resistance. Moreover, *Rabid* suggests two important aspects of embodiment: firstly, that central to our understanding of what our body is, is its relationship to the bodies around it, those networks of meaning and desire, coercion and incitement, that pass between bodies; and secondly, that in a sense each subject is itself 'between bodies', moving between different bodily forms and meanings, without ever coalescing finally into any one.

In this final chapter, I want to suggest the range of the directions in which thinking about the body in these terms might be taken. In trying to suggest the full range of possibilities that my approach opens up, and the sheer diversity of sites of bodily change which might be incorporated in such an analysis, I offer readings of *Rabid* which often only touch briefly on some possible avenues, or which race through a number of equally plausible possibilities. I hope that these readings manage to be both provocative and speculative, since I want them to open up the arguments of this thesis even as they attempt to summarize and, to some extent, close it down. It is in the very failure to suggest some final, overarching textual emphasis derived from the arguments that I have made so far, that I intend this agglomeration of ways of reading *Rabid* to demonstrate conclusively the richness of thinking about the ambivalences of the social production of the body.

(ii) Four Aspects of Bodily Ambivalence

(a) Necessary Invasions: Revisiting Chapter Three

‘I’m hideous, doctor. I’m crazy. I’m a monster’. The resentful address of monster to mad scientist, creature to creator, is a familiar one within texts on unconventional bodily production - epitomized by the words spoken to Victor Frankenstein by his creation: ‘at first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification’ (*Frankenstein*, p.114).¹ In this case, it is spoken by Rose in Cronenberg’s second commercial feature, *Rabid*. Rose is the survivor of a motorcycle crash who has been rescued from death by the surgical techniques of Dr. Daniel Keloid, near whose plastic surgery institute the accident occurs, and to whom she will later speak these words. Keloid takes skin from Rose’s body and - via an unseen form of treatment - transforms it into ‘morphogenetically neutral tissue’: tissue able to imitate the functions of whatever part of the body it is grafted onto. In Rose’s case, however, she emerges from a month in a coma to find that the tissue has evolved into a new organ: under her arm is an opening, within which lies a fleshy protuberance tipped with a sharp spike, through which she drinks the blood of other humans.

‘His depiction of physical aberration and change is always metaphorical, never realistic’ says Mark Kermode of Cronenberg (‘David Cronenberg’, p.13).²

¹ Although *Rabid* is not one of her examples, Linda Badley gives an interesting account of the range of cinematic derivatives of *Frankenstein* (*Film Horror and the Body and Fantastic*, pp.65-100).

² Cronenberg, however, resists the metaphoric reading of his texts: ‘when I did *Shivers* and *Rabid*, any of the medical people we connected with thought it was realistic, not ridiculous’ (John G. Harkness, ‘David Cronenberg - Brilliantly Bizarre’, p.17). His own accounts of his work stress, as I have done in this thesis, the proximity of his imagery of physical change to the physical realities of the human body. See for instance his comments in Alan Stanbrook, ‘Cronenberg’s Creative Cancers’; and Mark Kermode, ‘David Cronenberg’.

And, in support of such a reading, *Rabid* has spawned a series of articles - all reasonably convincing - which explain the precise nature of the metaphor. For Andrew Parker, the libidinal graft is a figuration of the relationship between Canada and Quebec, that sexualized, exoticized, feminized other intimately grafted onto - but somehow alien to - the Anglo-Canadian sense of self ('Grafting David Cronenberg: Monstrosity, AIDS Media, National/Sexual Difference'); for Robin Wood, Rose is the embodiment of a heterosexual male terror of female independence, her vampiric potency a phobic representation of the imagined threat that women pose to men used rather to living off them ('David Cronenberg: A Dissenting View'). Perhaps most ambitiously, Ira Livingston has juxtaposed Rose's implant with the film's first shots of Keloid, in which his business partner, Murray Cypher, puts a business proposition to him: to expand his hospital into a series of franchised plastic surgery clinics, funded by interested speculators. As Livingston points out, Keloid is concerned not to become transformed, mutated, or monstrous as a result of such an operation. He declares to his associates, 'I sure as hell don't want to become the Colonel Sanders of plastic surgery', only to recognise that such economic necessities are out of his hands. Keloid's imminent fate thus suggests both the impossibility of independence and the inevitability of mutant growth: the logic of capitalism is the constant renewal, take-over, reappropriation and reinvention of existing products. In Livingston's reading Rose's bloodsucking new product thus exemplifies the logic of capitalism itself ('The Traffic in Leeches: David Cronenberg's *Rabid* and the Semiotics of Parasitism').

Such readings offer us a vision of Rose's new body as located within two discourses, each implicated with the other: the one which differentiates her (hideous, crazy, a monster) from the other normal humans and settings of the film; and the one which erases her difference from them, insisting on the arbitrariness of the differentiation. For this second discourse, Rose is only made monstrous as a displacement of the monstrosity that sustains the society which

produces her, which requires parasites, infection, and mutations in order to survive, so that in a sense the film turns her self-accusation against those who have produced her: you're hideous, you're crazy, you're monsters.

However imprecise, I want here to retain the polyvalence of that term 'the society which produces her', rather than to identify any particular aspect of it (its economics, its gender relations, its investment in national identity). For all of these readings suggest less the desirability of relating such images to any one facet of modern society than the general importance, across a range of social phenomena within modernity, of the concern with infection and mutation. However appealing these ideological diagnoses are, I want to suggest here, as I will repeat throughout this conclusion, that what interests me about this text is less its amenability to this or that ideological reading than its capacity to generate such readings. The recognition that all cultural artefacts are overdetermined makes it quite legitimate to go on producing new explanations for *Rabid*'s bodily imagery, but I am suggesting here that it may be possible to restore that perhaps discredited structuralist project of asking not *what* a text means, but *how* it means. In the case of *Rabid*, its repetitive structure of transformative invasions may certainly be welded to any particular cause, but like Rose's own skin graft, it may mutate in directions beyond that, and not necessarily consonant with it. Just as *Rabid* is about monstrous growths, so too we should not expect the film itself to remain attached to any particular critical project, any more than Rose's new skin obeys Keloid's intentions.

Rabid itself insists on making this point about the necessity of the invasive process by repeating its own central motif again and again: Rose, having acquired the graft that renders her hungry for blood, goes on to infect each of her victims with what appears to be a strain of rabies. Like her, her victims then infect others, their own biology transformed by the introduction of a new appetite. In its production of a chain of events which themselves each resemble one another, the film seems to play with the inescapability of its own

representation of modernity as a space of transmission, mutation and reproduction. Indeed, I would suggest that it even goes so far as to suggest that there can be no social phenomenon which does not follow the logic of infection/mutation. For in response to the plague, the authorities react by propagating a 'plague' of their own - they inaugurate a vaccination programme, accompanied by an unstoppable spread of identity cards used to indicate successful immunization. Like Rose's plague both cards and cure are pressed onto unwilling subjects, imposed by border guards onto untreated citizens who pass through checkpoints. The biological intervention of the vaccination, the viral spread of cards, and the grafting of a new identity (as vaccinated) onto the old one recall the surgical procedures that inaugurated the crisis and the infectious practices that maintain it - so that we may reasonably read the film's representation of the World Health Organization as indicating a doubling of Keloid's medical institute. But if we do so we must also in turn read it as a double of Keloid's other double - Rose.

The film, then, is particularly unremitting in its representation of all forms of action as versions of the infectious dynamic. We might want to explain this in terms of an underlying social situation which generates such a view of the world. If we prefer a marxist explanation, that it is the commodity structure of capitalism; if we tend towards deconstruction, to argue that it is in the never-ending signifying chain of language; if we are postmodernists, to see in it the endless proliferation of the image heralded by Baudrillard and Debord.³ Yet in a sense to follow such paths is only to follow the path of the authorities in the film itself: the search for a founding point for the chain of contamination.⁴ I want to insist rather on the undecideability of this question, and to stress instead the

³ See Jean Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Simulations'; and Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*.

⁴ Bart Testa has suggested that the search for the origin of a bodily transformation is the central obsession of Cronenberg's films ('Technology's Body: Cronenberg, Genre, and the Canadian Ethos').

impossibility of defining any starting point, any 'Patient Zero', for this condition. Rather than asking the diagnostic question 'why?', let us ask a question more appropriate to this thesis: what can we do with this situation? Rather than decoding the metaphors of the text, let us ask how we might encode our own bodily possibilities in their terms.

The film's stress on invasion and mutation as the incessant logic of modernity is a reminder that Rose does not simply become a rebellious figure by her actions, but embodies the conventions of the society that produces her. As such, her monstrosity is not simply a sign of transgression, of bodily difference, but also of her sameness - her conformity to the monster that is modernity. The film thus dramatizes that particular political question that this thesis has focused on: the problems of staging acts of transgression or resistance while necessarily deploying resources produced by that which one would resist. In confronting both the damage that Rose does to the society around her, and the extent to which she resembles it, *Rabid* would seem a hopeful text precisely because it insists that the latter in no way limits or inhibits the effectivity of the former: to live via enforced forms of embodiment does not curtail the possibilities of our damaging the system that enforces them.

Infection is, then, figured on the one hand as the destructive condition of the modern body, depicted here as the site of the replication of biological properties which may not be of any benefit to the bodies possessed by them; and simultaneously as an assault on the integrity of the systems which require such biologically ordered subjects in order to go on functioning. When one of Rose's victims' victims' victims goes berserk on an underground train, her interruption of the smooth flow of commuters and consumers around the arteries of the city - itself suggestive of the inhabitants of the city as cells in circulation, some of them infected and some of them not - is as effective as any terrorist attack. The crowds that flood, terrified, from the open doors of the carriage are a sudden disturbance within the order, a torrent of those misplaced, thrown out at the

wrong stop - and therefore, we might suppose, late for work, for school, for meetings, for church. The body's openness to invasion, and its own invasive position vis-à-vis the bodies around it, is then - as perhaps any Foucauldian position must always end up arguing - both the form of power, and the form of resistance. *Rabid* warns both against the hope of some revolution which is not fashioned out of what it opposes, and also against assuming that change cannot come about through such a heavily determined practice. While the film thus stresses the pain of being invaded, in the form of Rose's self-denunciation with which I began this section, it also insists on the necessity of such invasions in order to exist at all, and the possibility of deploying them creatively. If, in this way, the body is always both invaded and invading, then rather than constructing a politics primarily around a denunciation of those who invade us, I suggest that we recognize that we too are invaders of the bodies of others. Perhaps politics is simply the acceleration of our invasions.

(b) Abject Heroism: Revisiting Chapter Six

Rabid closes with Rose's corpse, lying amongst garbage bags, with a dog pulling at its leg. Waste disposal men, deployed as part of the imposition of martial law on a plague-ridden Montreal, retrieve her body, unaware of its importance, and throw it into the back of a garbage truck. Credits roll over the closed maw of the vehicle.

Rose's death signifies her final abjection, her reduction to the waste body. This end-point fulfils the logic of a process of abjection which has dominated the film: her becoming corporeal. Rose's descent into materiality is, in one important sense, prepared for even before the film begins: her part is played by porn star Marilyn Chambers whose status - as stressed by the suggestive marketing stills used to promote the film (see Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, p.55) - already functions to suggest that Rose is a character

more marked than others by her use of, and involvement with, her body.⁵

Her route into the final abjection that is death passes via other signposts of the dangers of being lost in embodiment: the increasing visibility of her naked body while other characters always appear clothed, her growing enslavement by her appetite, her associations with death, blood and plague. Our last view of her feeding comes when her lover, Hart, surprises her over the body of her friend, Mindy. The camera frames her entire body, one arm raised to display the protuberance which, before our eyes, slides back into the body as if in shame. The double close-ups of facial horror - his disgust at seeing what she has become, her shock at realizing that she has been seen by Hart for what she is - would seem to invite the audience to join in moral and physical repulsion.

Such a representation of abjection will not, however, serve to make the simple case that the film constructs body matter as undesirable, in an unproblematically phobic way; nor, equally, the reading that I have disputed in chapter four, that abjection is a promising liberation from stifling convention. Rather, Rose makes again for us the point that I have stressed in my reading of Burroughs: an abject body is both the body at its most vulnerable and the body at its most potent. It is both a suffering body that is unable to escape its location as socially marginal, and a defiant body that refuses to hide the corporeality that certain bodies are obliged to symbolize so that others may deny their materiality more easily.

If the abject body is a body that, in spite of its weaknesses, achieves social change, it may be that in fact these images are less aversive than is often assumed. Too many accounts of horror routinely assume that a hated and monstrous otherness can be read unproblematically from the diseased or

⁵ On Cronenberg's use of Chambers see John Harkness 'The Word, the Flesh, and David Cronenberg', p.92; and David Sanjek, 'Dr Hobbes's Parasites', p.65. Cronenberg discusses the casting of Chambers, over his initial choice of Sissy Spacek, in Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, pp.45-56. For an analytical account of Chambers's career in pornography see Linda Williams, *Hard Core, passim*.

suppurating flesh of a monster.⁶ In fact, I have sought with my reading of Seth Brundle to argue the opposite: that such a figure is the all too familiar materialization of our routine fears about our bodies, namely that they are ugly, unwelcome, and uncomfortable. Rather than seeing monstrosity as otherness, it may be more plausible to suggest that we see the monstrous body as very much like our own, and that rather than distancing ourselves from such images with dread, the dread that we experience in fact forms the ground of our identification with them. I have, though, steered clear of the notion of redeeming our dreaded materialities, since the force of these texts is to remind us that such an option is not (yet?) possible. The attempt to overcome bodily discomfort seems fated to fail. Instead, though, we may identify the structures that encourage us to see ourselves as monstrous and the zones of privilege that they are connected to. We may deploy our discomfort as a resource, and through it come to ask: for whom am I disgusting, such that I have been made by them to feel also disgusting to myself?

The case most commonly made by critics to explain Rose's construction as horrific is that her phallic protuberance marks her as usurping a male role - in particular through her appropriation of aggressive sexual appetite. In such a reading, Rose violates gendered norms, stepping outside her boundaries to become phallic woman extraordinaire. It is a critical commonplace to assume that her designation by the text as monstrous is an ideological strategy to render us hostile towards her: for men in the audience, to affirm the dangers of female autonomy; for women in the audience to warn against aspiring to such a monstrous status.⁷ But, as Carol Clover has insisted, the audiences of horror show few signs of such complacent identificatory practices (*Men, Women and*

⁶ See for instance Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*; Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*; and Stephen Prince, 'Dread, Taboo and *The Thing*'.

⁷ See for instance Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, p.196; Michael O'Pray, 'Primitive Phantasy in Cronenberg's Films' p. 50; and Robin Wood, 'Cronenberg: A Dissenting View', pp.130-131.

Chainsaws). Indeed, more recent writers on Cronenberg have moved away from the comfortable assertion of Rose as ideological pawn and towards a sense that she offers rather a defiance of male power - that her transformation suggests a refusal to be the passive recipient of the technology which attempts to appropriate her.⁸

I would therefore suggest that we see in Rose a form of abject heroism, in which the audience may exult. Kaja Silverman has remarked that 'the unconscious manifests a striking indifference to the question of what is conventionally assumed to be important or worthless' (*The Threshold of the Visible World*, p.180), instead investing devalued or loathed objects with positive emotional meanings. Nor is such a process solely unconscious, since creative audiences can selectively edit out, or re-accent, aspects of Rose represented as abhorrent: we may for instance read her violence as comic rather than horrific; find her graft erotic rather than repellent; or rejoice in the destruction of Montreal as a welcome violence against the modern urban order.⁹ Even if Rose's monstrous body is an image which derives from a dread of female power, there is no guarantee that the audience will read it in such a light.

The appropriation of Rose for any given audience is thus not simply a function of the text. Our role here is not to read off its encoded messages (to be infected by it), but rather to insinuate our own interests into its images (to infect

⁸ Kelley Hurley, 'Reading Like an Alien', p. 214; and Ira Livingston, 'The Semiotics of Parasitism', p. 522.

⁹ This would suggest another limitation to Robin Wood's account of the horror genre, 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film'. Wood treats the question of the appeal or repulsion of monstrosity as a purely formal feature of the text, objectively embedded in its use of image, narrative, and sound, rather than negotiated creatively between audience members and their films (for a psychoanalytic account of film more along such lines, see David Rodowick, *The Difficulty of Difference*). It should also be acknowledged that part of the force of Wood's account is his insistence that monstrosity may represent a desire for revenge against a repressive culture, but he limits such an argument by seeing it as active only in those films that contain a set of relevant textual features that constitute an intentional critique.

it in return). Against the question of whether a text has anything to teach us, I am offering the question: what can we teach it? Can we make Rose's story an affirmation of the overthrow of heterosexual monogamy in favour of bisexual promiscuity?¹⁰ Of the refusal of patients to adhere to medical prescriptions of 'health' (which might include the affirmations of bodies that are fat, suicidal, or anorexic - or, as in the case of Kathy Acker's refusal to submit to orthodox medical treatment, cancerous)? Of the pleasures of addiction? Of the right to perpetual travelling over a settled residence? Of the 'mixing of blood' between cultures invested in the myth of racial purity? Within the constraints of academic discourse, we may be limited by certain interpretative rules (even though the last thirty years have seen those parameters stretched productively). But in the conversations that we may have with our friends about film the rules are, if not more flexible, at least flexible at different points. That is to say, while popular discourse rules out certain interpretations that academia may sanction ('that's going too far'), it also allows interpretations based on much more casual evidence ('well, what the film made me think about was ...'). Our exposure to images that are designated repulsive may therefore motivate us to resist the larger structures that sustain such repulsion, rather than merely reinforcing our feeling stigmatized. Indeed, perhaps to the extent that those targeted by oppressive exercises of power live with the knowledge that our bodies carry the signs of our monstrous alien-ness, it is such monstrous images which will most secure our identification, as reminders of the ways in which we too may be marked as monstrous.

Yet for both Rose and her progeny, the film offers no happy ending: the state moves quickly to treat the disease, to impose martial law, to secure its

¹⁰ I retain - without any tone of disapproval - 'promiscuity' over the currently popular 'polyamory', whose ideological complicities with notions of love, responsibility, and fidelity, seems to me to be a particularly distasteful sort of failure to challenge the wider terms in which 'sex' and 'love' are conceptualized.

boundaries. However much we re-imagine the film, we are still left with Rose's corpse removed by the garbage men. It is, though, the very difficulty of integrating this image with these more affirmative readings - its refusal to graft comfortably - that makes it such an important moment. For also, I now want to go on to argue, a more exhaustively politicized reading of the film in fact requires this reminder of the force targeted against abject bodies: firstly as a reminder of what is at risk in refusing to denounce the abject, and secondly as a reminder of what is at stake in how we choose to position ourselves with respect to abject bodies.

That the film ends with Rose's death, her return to the status of waste, testifies to the dangers of occupying the place of the abject: in celebrating our monstrosity or marginality we make ourselves targets for sanitation. The garbage truck has appeared already in the film. Rose's lover, Hart, and Keloid's business partner, Murray, have arrived in Montreal looking for Rose. They are stopped by police to allow the garbage trucks to pass, which have been sent out to collect the corpses of those shot down under martial law. As they wait, we watch the procession of trucks going past them - four, then six, then eight. Eventually Hart and Murray turn away to find another route, as the garbage trucks still file across the road, leaving us to register the impossibility of ever fully measuring the resources at the disposal of the state. To be abject is to be the target of such apparatus.

At the same time, Rose's abject body is also an important image, since the terror attached to such an image, and our concomitant experience of the risks that we run if we are unable to deny our proximity to the abject, has inaugurated an entire history of attempts by the marginalized to shift away from the site of such dangers, and towards constructions of identity which might enable them to be regarded as clean. For instance, sadomasochists, bisexuals, and transgendered people found themselves swiftly marginalized by lesbian and gay communities throughout the 1980s, as the hope that some had of becoming

acceptable bodies became mounted on the construction of other bodies as less worthy.¹¹ Hence, I suggest, to desire to be clean is also to be a cleaner - to be one of the garbage disposers who throw Rose's body away. One becomes a clean body only through participation in the logic of bodily waste, leaving the dynamics of shame and transcendence untouched - or merely transferred onto another. If, in Douglas's formulation, dirt is matter out of place, one only becomes clean by defining that place in which others are designated dirty. Such a problem focuses us on one of the key questions explored by this thesis: in spite of all the ways in which to be stigmatized as monstrous are disabling, how is it possible to dismantle the efficacy of such stigma by occupying, rather than distancing ourselves from, the sites of abjection? Such an approach suggests that it is most effective to initiate perspectives that will unsettle the discourses of stigmatization from within, since a more precipitate move simply to deny the experience of oneself as disgusting remains within the structure of an overriding faith in purity.

The mobility of the meanings of Rose's monstrous body offers an audience the chance to sense the limitations of a contemporary social order, while fully aware of the terrible penalties attached to transgressing it. It eschews false promises of revolution as joyful, while also inviting us to develop new relationships between our own bodies and the bodies that surround us: new forms of desire, new forms of hostility, and new forms of consumption. Perhaps then it is the audience who are Rose's final victims, and it is we who are the monsters, our own insurrectionary fantasies stirred to life by Rose's biology. Perhaps we should say that her own monstrous biology is 'morphogenetically neutral' in the sense that it is stripped of any particular meaning, so that we may graft it onto any part of ourselves, in the hope that it will take root.

¹¹ On attempts by communities to render themselves more acceptable through a process of disowning, see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp.18-19 and pp.36-37; Mark Simpson (ed.), *Anti-Gay*; and Anna Marie Smith, 'Resisting the Erasure of Lesbian Sexuality: A Challenge for Queer Activism'.

(c) Avoiding Abjection: Revisiting Chapter Four

Yet for all the necessity to find ways beyond faith in purity, it is also the case that the discourse of purity may itself be a valuable tool for an embodied politics - albeit at a price. Thus the third strand that I would suggest here is that of Burroughs's insistence that the abject body cannot operate in any simple way as a trope for liberation from an oppressive social order. The pleasures of the body - and more than this, the absolute phenomenological affirmation of the materiality of the corporeal - do not supply, stresses Burroughs, some primal grounding outside the ravages of culture, which we can affirm as an escape route. Our physical being is rather a site through which power struggles are enacted, and which is itself amenable to the demands of authority. Hence, of course, his proposal that we renounce embodiment altogether.

If for some theorists cyberspace seems to offer just such a fantasmatic space of pure agency, shorn from a body weighed down by forces outside our control, then I am insisting that we remember that once we surrender the territory of embodiment, we have not escaped it, but have merely given up fighting for it: how then to make the most use of the desire to reject repulsive materiality? Since materiality in itself can be neither embraced nor rejected - being a contested site rather than one that is in some essential sense either within or outside operations of domination - I have read the *Naked Lunch* Quartet as offering us an alternative way of politicizing our discomfort with our materiality. *Rabid* offers an impressive development of the strategy pursued by Burroughs: that it may be possible to return abjection back against a dominant order in an act of strategic hygiene; it may be possible to affirm one's own cleanness not by stigmatizing the powerless, but by indicting the powerful.

Barbara Creed has suggested that Cronenberg's films display and/or diagnose 'phallic panic' - the male dread of female bodily otherness (Barbara Creed, 'Phallic Panic: Male Hysteria and *Dead Ringers*'). But, I would suggest,

Rabid displays a different sort of phallic panic - a panic at the horror of the phallus itself. As we have seen Rose herself has been read as a 'phallic woman': monstrous because her body has dared to appropriate male-ness to itself. At the most obvious level, Rose's protuberance is marked as phallic by its conventional resemblance to a penis: its shape and size, its sudden transition from passive to erect, its penetration of the bodies of others. Moreover, Rose's heavily sexualized encounters invite us to read her penetration of desired bodies not simply as an act of feeding, but of sexual congress.¹²

What is Rose's relationship to this organ that her body bears? Piers Handling suggest that 'Rose's attacks can be read as being directed against the traditional male predator - the truck driver, the doctor' ('A Canadian Cronenberg', p.112). But such a claim is, in one crucial respect, a serious misreading of Rose's encounters: many of the men she meets are not predatory, but are in fact heavily coded as un-masculine. Her encounter with the truck driver appears at first to belong to a conventional pornographic narrative (the single female hitchhiker picked up by the truck-driver). In fact, the scene undermines such assumptions. The truck driver's first action is to offer Rose food, without any hint of innuendo or seduction strategy. However, when Rose reacts to the sandwich by becoming ill (since, as we know, she can only ingest human blood), he is quick to help her out of the truck, concerned about her health, supporting her as she leaves the truck, again without any traces of what we might read as an ulterior motive or attempted seduction. We then leap forward in time, to find the truck driver alone and asleep at the wheel of his

most are the sex murderers

¹² More creatively, Livingston suggests that the organ's sucking of blood constitutes 'an ecstatic kind of reverse ejaculation' ('The Traffic in Leeches', p.518). In an altogether more straightforward fashion Cronenberg describes his own doubts during the script-writing stage: 'At one point I said, "John, I just woke up this morning and realized this is nuts. Do you know what this movie's about? This woman grows a cock thing in her armpit and sucks people's blood through it. It's ridiculous ! I can't do this." '(Rodley, *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, p.53).

stationary vehicle, having presumably been penetrated by Rose: but through its temporal leap any scene of an encounter between them has been erased, so that rather than suggesting pornographic or predatory codes, the sequence invokes them only to refuse them systematically at every available point.

The truck-driver's concern, generosity, and worry on Rose's behalf should be seen as opposed to Rose's non-consensual appetite for blood, so that his (feminine) economy of a freely offered gift counterpoints her (masculine) economy of nutrition taken by force. The phallic aspect of Rose's graft is thus heightened by its systematic targeting of those marked as feminine: not only the female victims Mindy and Judy, but also the virginal Lloyd (first seen in the feminine position of examining his face anxiously in a mirror), who responds to Rose's embrace with a coy 'this is really weird - are you sure you know what you're ..', followed by his dismayed shedding of what we might read as hymeneal blood, after which Rose consolingly strokes his head; Dr. Keloid who, when he pulls away Rose's sheet to disclose her naked torso, looks not at her exposed breasts but only at her surgical scars; the fey, long-haired, young man who approaches Rose in a shopping mall.

Rose's organ serves to remind us that the phallic exists only by virtue of objects gendered - and I mean here, gendered rather than sexed - as non-phallic; as vulnerable, as passive, as caring, as weak: that is, as feminine. Rose's transformed body thus depicts phallic sexuality not as exciting, but as dependent on victimization. Rather than simply reading her attacks as acts of revenge between equals (one phallic body takes revenge on another), we should read them as acts constrained by - and revealing of - the destructive logic of heterosexuality itself.

Nevertheless, Handling's comment does point us towards another strand in Rose's attacks - against characters defined as conventionally masculine and predatory. However, I would suggest that such encounters should not be read simply as a female revenge against male power, but also as reinforcing our sense

of the horrific nature of the phallic power which Rose's own body displays. In these encounters the film repeatedly deploys phallic tropes: the drunken farmer who attempts to rape Rose, announcing his attentions with the line 'I've got something you can drink off - and it ain't no whiskey neither'; the man at a porn cinema whose gaze moves casually from objectification of the actresses on screen to objectification of Rose in the seat in front of him.

If these victims are deliberately offered to us as casualties of an ironic reversal - that they hope to penetrate, possess, and assert their power over a female target but end up penetrated, possessed and feminized - then the point is surely to underline the violence of their mode of embodiment, the violence of the phallic. This process reaches its apotheosis when an infected road-repair crew attacks representatives of the health authorities. Their weapon: a long road drill. Their attack would seem designed to recall Rose's mode of attack: the rigid protuberance that penetrates through the skin to draw blood. In shape, in function, in its associations with aggressive masculinity, it is the distillation of the phallic into the horrific: the phallus as the bloody, violent weapon, shorn of social utility.

The film thus - almost excessively - marks phallic masculinity, and Rose's acquisition of it, as itself monstrous, and the phallus as an object of fear and repulsion. It is not my aim here to make a more detailed argument for why the phallus might be amenable to refiguration as monstrous. A list of possible topics for future inquiry might include: that because he can never possess this fantasmatic organ, the sight of the perfect phallic creature provokes intense shame in the male viewer, and is therefore to be dreaded; that the phallus stirs homoerotic desires in the heterosexual male viewer which he transforms into horror in order to repress them; that the phallus denotes the fact that we are all forced to submit to the law of the father, and it is therefore the signifier of his hated domination; that the power of the phallus is also a displacement of the physical vulnerability of the penis - and so the very physicality, the fleshiness of

the monster, is a horrific reminder of everything about it that is not symbolic and transcendental (Rose's protuberance, for instance, appears as raw red flesh surrounded by a thin glistening membrane, suggesting that it might be easily cut, and it might easily bleed).

It is not my intention to expand on any of these, but my overall point is this: *Rabid* depicts Rose's transformation as bad to the extent that it makes her like men - in the sense that male power is itself bad. I would insist that reading Rose's male attributes as being monstrous insofar as they are illegitimately possessed by a woman, along the lines that other critics have suggested, overlooks the ways in which they are systematically represented to us as monstrous in and of themselves. And this is achieved through the film's unremitting deployment of the most stereotypical definitions of the phallic: piercing protuberances; rigid tools; cylindrical weapons; tumescent organs; throbbing motorcycles - all coupled with aggressive, gazing, possessive, domineering, authoritarian behaviours. Yet their systematic distribution through the text serves, ultimately, not to confirm the meaning of the phallic, but rather to disorganize its meaning. It is precisely insofar as we recognize at every turn the familiarity of the phallic that we are enabled also to recognize the relentless assault to which its more conventional meanings are submitted, as they are stripped of any positive valency and replaced by the figure of the abject phallus.

To cement this abjection of the phallus, *Rabid* also offers us men whose positive connotations lie in their refusal to possess its characteristics.¹³ The opening shot of the film shows Rose walking out from a bar towards a motorcycle. The camera circles her, starting from behind: in doing so it inscribes her within a system of vision which is both omnipotent (it can watch her, she cannot watch it), and omnipresent (it can see her from every possible angle), a textbook case of that staple of feminist film theory, the male gaze. There is an

¹³ It thus evinces that capacity for gender mutability which Carol Clover has insisted is central to horror cinema (*Men, Women and Chainsaws*).

immediate cut to Hart who also steps through the door, standing now in the place from which the camera began its journey, occupying the site of that omnipotent gaze. But rather than registering control, sexual objectification, or authority, Hart's face crumples into a smile: as he stands fixed to the spot, his wide, mournful eyes, his adoring gaze, and his gentle, sheepish grin signify adoration and tenderness. His expression marks him not as the possessor of that circling gaze, but as its antithesis, a utopian possibility of unoppressive romance signalled by the pastoral soundtrack which plays over the opening scene, and which accompanies Hart throughout the film - a possibility most obviously marked by the pun associated with his name.¹⁴

This failure to occupy the conventional position of male authority recurs throughout the film: just as Hart's name places him not in the realm of intellect or action, but in that of emotion, so too other men are removed from positions of conventional masculinity. I have already noted the way that the truck driver fails to occupy the traditional pornographic role assigned to him, and in the same way we see Murray awake at four in the morning, nursing his baby, and holding a bottle - a kind of feminization of the phallus. Hart's investment in traditional masculinity extends to working ardently on repairing his damaged motorcycle, but he never in fact manages to fix the machine - just as he never manages to fix Rose's predicament; instead, he travels to one scene after the next, on each occasion arriving only after Rose has left. They thus join Lloyd and Kelpid in the film's litany of harmless, well-intentioned, thoughtful male figures.

If the film opposes this benign masculinity to the phallic aggression that it indicts, it does not do so by offering such warmth as a narrative solution to the problem of destructive masculinity embodied by Rose: none of these men

¹⁴ William Beard reads Hart's name as a commentary on the fact that in Cronenberg's work love fails to make any real difference to events ('The Visceral Mind', p.29).

prevent or impede the phallic violence that devastates their lives. The litany would run: Lloyd, Keloid, the truck-driver, all killed by Rose; Murray killed by his infected wife; Hart wandering ineffectually from one scene to the next. It seems that to be a benign male is to be unable to defend oneself - that self-preservation is incompatible with abdication of the phallus. Indeed, such an incompatibility would seem to be particularly forcefully literalized when an over-zealous guard guns down a Father Christmas in the shopping mall.¹⁵ Between masculine versions of ruthless efficiency and benign sentimentality there can only be eternal conflict.¹⁶ Insofar as this masculinity is in any sense marked as preferable, it is not in the sense that it is figured as a source of alternative achievements to violence, but only as its likeable, if useless, other. Given the curious fact that it is Rose who wields the phallus, we should perhaps offer a more nuanced term for the inability of these men to wield power: impotence. Which might, in a sense, constitute the most absolute rejection of virile notions of 'heroism' that we could propose: to affirm the anti-masculinist possibility of being absolutely ineffectual.

We can read the film's juxtaposition of these two alternatives in either of two ways. We can read it as an act of ideological recuperation: the presence of these benign men serves to make Rose even more repellent to us, replacing her

¹⁵ Santa's death has drawn its fair share of critical attention. Other writers on this incident include: Piers Handling, who sees it as an attack on 'traditional bourgeois patriarchal morality' ('A Canadian Cronenberg', p.111); Ira Livingston, who views it as a symbol for the auteurist position that is inevitably destroyed by heavily generic cinema ('The Traffic in Leeches', p. 528); and William Beard, who sees it as part of the film's insistent comic undermining of the stability of apparently normal situations ('The Visceral Mind', pp.29-30).

¹⁶ Of course, we might also want to argue that the sentimentalized figure of the benign male and the aggressive figure of the violent phallic male may collude as well: one thinks of the way that violent partners, abusive employers, and sexual abusers of children, play out the two roles, sustaining a system of punishment and reward which disempowers those whom they abuse by making it difficult for them to construct a coherent and oppositional image of their abusers as wholly bad. Considerations such as this might be the starting point for an altogether less sympathetic reading of *Rabid's* systematic confusion of gender codes.

more radical message of the horror of the phallic with a promise that in fact some men are not phallic after all - they are considerate, well-meaning and friendly. In such a reading the text in effect suggests not so much that male power is repulsive, but that women have no need to aspire to it since in fact aggressive heterosexual masculinity is itself becoming a thing of the past.

On the other hand, we can see that through this juxtaposition the film strengthens the reading of Rose as possessed by a phallic invader, since it marks the absolute incompatibility of benign masculinity and phallic authority. There cannot be, this film insists, some sort of remaking of phallic masculinity into something positively potent: the choices are to be violent and aggressive, or to be kindly and therefore not always - not ever? - competent. In a sense, the manner of Rose's death follows this position through to its point of necessary confusion: hoping to prove that she is not the source of the plague, Rose chooses a new victim, drinks his blood, and then locks herself into an apartment with his sleeping body. If, she reasons, she is not the source of the plague then she has nothing to fear from him when she awakes. Narrating her plan to Hart over the telephone, she has become the rational planner, in charge of her destiny, executing her own plan by means of the bodies of others. Minutes later she becomes the screaming feminine victim, calling 'I'm afraid, I'm afraid' into the receiver as her victim/victimizer awakes: Hart, on the other end of the line, also screams and sobs, now her equally impotent mirror image. In these final moments Rose has plunged into the absolute indeterminacy of the gender codes mobilized by the text. Insofar as she has adopted a masculinized body she has received not only a violent phallic identity, but has also taken herself into that other male possibility of the film marked by Hart and Lloyd, so that she now also embodies impotent masculinity. Her rationality proves fatally flawed and, like Keloid's medical rationality which inaugurates the narrative, leads only to her destroying herself. Which of these choices if any, lead to bodies that we might feel happy with?

The undecideability of the text on this question mimes the undecideability of corporeality. Like the text, the body is torn between the impulses to constitute itself in any of these forms: abjectly phallic, abjectly feminine, aggressively masculine, aggressively feminine, benignly masculine, benignly feminine. *Rabid* reminds us that any given form of embodiment is not simply located within a definite ideological project, but is rather a contested site pulled between different bodily possibilities. The competing connotations of all the ways in which a body might be gendered, and all the physical forms through which that gender might be expressed, suggest a more fluid reading of the body's movement through gendered positions which are not in any simple way aligned for or against some hegemonic notion of corporeal gender.

Such complexities all derive from the film's attempt to indict authority as abject. If the film at times seems like a celebration of fascism, with martial law the preferable alternative to impotence, then this is because it is unable to extricate itself from these impasses. For insofar as it seeks to condemn power as a sort of chaotic monstrosity it is indeed allied with a fascistic wish for control and purity. But insofar as it has figured authority as itself abject, the film simultaneously militates against such desires. And it is in its rendering it impossible to affirm any single form of ideal embodiment that *Rabid* suggests its own type of bodily freedom: there is no ideal bodily form - no body that guarantees liberation. There is only the politics of body's failure to occupy any one form or category.

As I stressed throughout my earlier reading of Burroughs, these are the insoluble problems of attempting to articulate a political vision in terms of abjection: Rose's biology represents both the form of the modern body, and the form that resists it; it is both the promise of a different form of embodiment, and a descent into the embodied norms of masculinity; it encourages her to act in ways that are celebrated because they transgress bodily norms, and are hideous because they merely repeat the logic of those oppressive bodily norms. The text

thus encompasses, simultaneously: a representation of Rose as monstrous because she exceeds permitted female bodily forms; a representation of Rose as monstrous because she typifies oppressive male bodily norms; a representation of Rose as appealingly transgressive because she defies a whole range of bodily norms; and a representation of Rose as appealingly conservative because she embodies an acceptably potent masculinity.

It would be too easy simply to lament the limitations of these visions of gender, abjection and transgression, and to offer in their place some new casting of the non-object non-phallic body: the body that gets outside these repetitive circles. But what interests me is precisely the entrenchment of these positions. Even though they so obviously offer no decisive break from dominant conceptions of gender, they also suggest that it is not necessary to make such a break in order to push the codes of the gendered body towards uncertainty and confusion. Indeed, we might even say that it is only because *Rabid* is so relentless in its deployment of a set of conventional and reactionary images (warning against weak men and strong women), that it can make its equally insistent, and more subversive case - for the appeal of weak men and strong women. It therefore seems to me important not to try to elaborate some alternative that enables us to step outside of such codes, but rather to persist in working inside them, to see what sorts of resistance they may open up for us from within.

(d) The Body Modelled: Revisiting Chapter Five

What Rose helps us to resist - purity, invasion, aggression - then is, curiously, also that which she serves to celebrate or affirm. In a sense it does not matter whether we attribute this to the multivalence of the text or to the fact that I am deploying several (incompatible) reading strategies: either way, the encounter with *Rabid* yields both an image of the possibility of bodily insurrection as an anarchic assertion against a repressive social order, and

equally the fact of invasive aggression as repulsive precisely because it fulfils the most destructive and unjust facets of such an order.

This is the fourth aspect of bodily logic, which I have argued in my reading of *Shivers*: that modern embodiment involves both incitement to desires which are figured as animal/material, and condemnation of and warning against such desires. Modernity seems haunted by this fact: that which it warns against our ever being is that which it requires us to become. The modern construction of the desirable seems always to resemble the modern construction of the dreaded. When Joseph Conrad's definitive modern subject, Kurtz, names his own abjection with the words 'the horror, the horror', he does not assert that horror is the recognition that a culture shames itself when it regresses to forbidden practices which it should have evolved beyond (which would be an essentially Enlightenment account of *Heart of Darkness*). Rather, he defines horror as the recognition that what is supposedly forbidden is in fact already at the heart of the routine practices of the culture that forbids.

Rabid takes care to indicate that the pleasures of materiality are pleasures firmly within culture. Just as, as we saw in *Shivers*, alongside exhortations to eat, enjoy sex, shop and exercise, there exists the fear of becoming a dangerously material creature in the process, so too *Rabid* transposes this process onto other trappings of modernity: the libidinal roar of the motorcycle that accompanies the opening credits, the fetishistic leathers in which Hart and Rose are dressed, the bodily pleasures of plastic surgery, the jacuzzi in which the unfortunate Judy Glasberg takes her last bath. But even more than this, it locates such ambivalently regressive yearnings at the heart of modernity: in the violence of the bureaucratic state which legislates over its citizenry.

Just as Rose has most often been read as a version of modern medicine - her bloodletting and bloodsucking a parodic re-enactment of that of the doctors

who transformed her¹⁷ - we might also compare her to various other of the institutions in the film. 'The city is a complex machine' declares the mayor's assistant, explaining his unwillingness to intervene - but the persistent suggestion of the film is that the city is less a machine than an organism. Against this attempt by the servants of the state to frame it in terms of the disembodied, mechanical world of modernity, *Rabid* restores to modernity the biology that it is attempting to deny. 'I've got a pack of hungry investors waiting for me' quips Murray, inaugurating a chain of physical imagery associated with the apparatus of this world. Appetite is the recurrent concern of the film - from Rose's own bloodthirsty desires to the repeated observations regarding her glucose drip that 'that juice is keeping you alive' - stressed in order to remind us that the appetite is never unproblematically modernized, but remains susceptible to connotations of animal impulses. Central to the film's elaboration of such a position is the scene in which Rose tries, but fails, to drink the blood of a cow in a barn. Once we begin tracing the film's interest in the bodily and appetitive operations of modernity, then this incident connects to the extended later scene at a roadside diner, in whose kitchen the sign 'HAMBURGERS' is prominently displayed. The earlier rural scene transcribes into this modern, technological site a reminder of the origins of the meat that the customers eat (as it will again, when the truck driver offers Rose 'steak on a bun'). It thereby marks as carnivorous the appetites of the customers, whose proximity to cannibalism will be underscored when the infected farmer - who interrupted Rose during her attempt to ingest the cow's blood - grabs first a piece of roast chicken and then the human arm of the waitress. *Rabid* thus folds one notion of meat onto another - marking the human body both as consumer and as consumed, but in

¹⁷ Ira Livingston amplifies this reading via an extended etymology of the term leech. Just as in the Middle-Ages medicine was synonymous with the leech, medicine may now be regarded as leechlike in another way: because private medicine siphons away the resources of its users and the obligations of the state. Rose's own leeching capacities thus doubly resemble the Keloid Clinic ('The Traffic in Leeches').

either case as simply one point in an essentially animalistic food chain. The ramifications of such a suggestion reach even further when we recall Keloid's fear of becoming 'the Colonel Sanders of plastic surgery', a phrase which now seems to make medicine and fast food simply two sorts of commercial delivery of meat. And in turn both of these may seem in this film to be figured as versions of a more animalistic impulse to rend or devour the flesh of other creatures.

In my general concern to point out the ways in which modernity is rendered horrifically bodily, we should not ignore all the other ways in which it might also be figured as horrific. I am not suggesting that fear of the body constitutes the defining, and all-explanatory, case for horror. I am only offering a reading based on temporarily suspending an enquiry into those other anxieties. However, it may also be that we can find another productive route into the construction of the body through those very moments at which it seems least central. We might, for instance, consider the way in which accompanying these images of modernity as a place of bodily drives is the unmasking of its calculated cruelty - a streak which, while it might at first appear to have little to do with this more bodily side of modernity, nevertheless constitutes an important variant of the representation of modernity as destructive. But here too I want to suggest, the film offers the possibility of reading a more visceral element into it. If the Keloid Clinic is one form of modern monstrosity, and Rose its embodied emblem, then the medical officials who monitor the spread of the plague are another. As Andrew Parker observes, 'the director of the WHO, intoxicated with his own powers, is clearly a monster himself' ('Grafting David Cronenberg', p.219). This character's defining (televised) speech runs: 'what I am saying is very simple, and it may not be very palatable for your viewers: shooting down the victims is as good a way of handling them as we've got'. But Parker could perhaps have taken the argument further by defining the particular connotations that cling to this figure: his being the only character in the film

with an English accent, his careful distancing of his own cultured presence from the plebs who are 'your viewers', and his pointed surname of Dr. Gentry, surely invite us to read his callous willingness to countenance the extermination of the masses as an echo of the class structure that sustains the West - a connection surely even more pointed in a Canadian context, where the English overseer acquires a distinctively colonial cast.¹⁸

Such an account reminds us that modernity appears not only as horrifically bodily, but also as horrifically disembodied: as the calculating cynicism of authority, and rationally organized bureaucratic cruelty. Yet even here *Rabid* also offers a reminder that the suspiciously libidinal body is never absent from modern power. For *Rabid* insists on posing the question of the bodily pleasures that might drive such attitudes. Its representation of modernity is as that which is driven by destructive hunger. Such a construction of the body as the driving force of the disembodied is the reminder that behind the cold calculations of the businessman is the endless hunger of the profiteer - and, as in this case, behind the detached façade of the international bureaucrat is the murderous megalomania of transnational government. Whatever the problems of collapsing these various forms of violence into one another - and, as I suggested in my readings of *Night of the Living Dead* and *Alien*, there are many - it is this systematic erasure of the differences between these various institutional forces that makes the film able to mobilize its central trope of bodily greed. It is as if under every aspect of the modern economic-political order, from aristocracy to shareholders, corporate chairmen to middle-class consumers, over-paid professionals to legislating bureaucrats, is this single bodily impulse: appetite. And such a critique is wholly appropriate, since those who have benefited economically from the state's uneven distribution of wealth - whether the indulgent aristocracy, the affluent middle-classes or the supposedly parsimonious petit-bourgeoisie - have traditionally been the targets

¹⁸ Full Canadian independence was not secured until 1982.

of a critique of carnal excess, enunciated by those at whose expense they possess their wealth. The bodies of the privileged display the signs of their prosperity and are the targets of hostility - or indeed envy - directed at their possession of an excessive material wealth which is derived from the consuming of the energy and well-being of the bodies who maintain that affluence.

Such a critique of class structures as essentially cannibalistic - which finds its most visceral expression in the body horror film *Society* (1989), where the grotesque upper classes are revealed as surviving because they dissolve and devour their proletarian inferiors - thus runs alongside this other critique of modernity. The over-rational, disembodied, cold expression of power doubles with the aggressive, visceral, appetitive expression of power. *Rabid* is thus a reminder of the ways in which the figuration of bodily desire as the expression of destructive authority imbricates itself with these other, less explicitly organic, representations of evil.

Composed of this assembly of violent parts, the state finally fulfils its brutal promise through the imposition of martial law. Where Wayne Drew reads such a process as one in which 'the mechanisms of the state collapse and fragment when faced with the horror of a disease infested city' ('A Gothic Revival', p.20), I would argue that the all-too thoroughly effective imposition of martial law signifies rather the proximity of the democratic state to efficient totalitarianism. The linking of these less explicitly bodily indictments of state brutality should, I suggest, be taken in parallel with the more obviously embodied forms of business - hungry investors, leeching doctors, carnivorous fast food franchises - as a picture of modernity imaged as animalistic or barbaric,

Again, we should not try to read any single one of these power structures as the ground, to which the others are figures. Rather, the entire thrust of the film is to level out these differences, representing the modern state as a conglomeration of technologies working in tandem. The Foucauldian

settings of the film - a prison, a hospital - combine with the shifting of scenes between porn cinemas, hamburger bars, shopping malls, military units, health officials, garbage disposal crews and bureaucrats. All suggest that modernity is a combination of monstrous bodily functions: appetite, aggression, bloodsucking, excretion, rape. But, as I have stressed throughout this thesis, I am not arguing that any innate biological instincts are in fact the origin of these social structures. Rather I am suggesting that *Rabid* invites us to take the entire language of monstrous biology that is conventionally used to define the parameters of ab/normal bodies, and to turn it against the structures of the modern state - a gesture which should be read as a political strategy of dethroning their supremacy, since that supremacy is based on the myth of their disembodied rationality. And it is on these terms that I suggest that we may make the best allegiance with Cronenberg: to take his films' figurings of the body as the hidden truth of modernity and read it not as an insight, as we have seen so many critics do with his work, but rather as an ironic and provocative reversal which is at its most effective when, as in *Rabid*, we can simultaneously see any myth of a natural corporeality being dismissed by the film's insistence that the body is as much produced by the conditions of these institutional apparatuses as it is productive of them.

Produced by the forces which she antagonizes, rendered variously as a futuristic promise of modern technology, a regression backwards to animal passion, and a contradictory trope for the dependence of the modern (disembodied) state on those attributes most conventionally designated excessively bodily, Rose remains a difficult object for the text - and, I hope, for its audience: again, we are left wondering in which of these possible ways to read her. That the ways in which our bodies are physically shaped, psychically invested, and discursively defined, are never totalizing or final, has been one of the abiding concerns of this thesis. And it is, I would suggest, at the heart of *Rabid*, which plays with the tension between the image of the body as matter

under control, and matter refusing to follow orders: the difficulty of knowing which way to read Rose is a function of the difficulty of pinning down the meaning of bodies themselves.

One innovation brought into textual analysis through Critical Theory is the liberty to seize on some almost incidental device of a text and to use it to open up an entire new current in its reading: a mis-spelt word or muffled line, a pun or echo of another text, a single ambiguous word or punctuation mark. Although I have some reservations about such a route, its appeal lies in its capacity to heighten a text's amenability to the network of uses to which it might be put by its readers (and perhaps, in the case of this text, it suggests an echo of the rabid process itself - the meanings of one moment spreading, unstoppably, to infect other moments, images, characters, scenes, camera movements, and narrative devices in the film, which might have hitherto seemed immune to such an interpretation).¹⁹ It is in that spirit of pandemic semiosis that I conclude this analysis of *Rabid* with a poster seen briefly outside a pornographic cinema which Rose enters. Waiting to enter the cinema, in search of a new victim, Rose looks momentarily at a poster that reads 'Models for Pleasure'. And it is this question of the models available for pleasure that the film seems to address: where does desire originate? What is it in the body that seeks out disruptive pleasures? If Rose's body exceeds conventionally conceptualized forms of embodiment, is she then a representation of a new form of pleasure?

Such a position has certainly been taken by Kelly Hurley, who argues that the film explores the desire to exceed our received notions of biological pleasure ('Reading Like an Alien'). She suggests that for all its passing

¹⁹ As Rita Felski has suggested, this willingness to find new meanings in any text should be regarded not as an essential feature of some entity called 'textuality', but rather as a historically specific effect of the way that the construction of the category of 'the aesthetic', and the freedom to interpret texts in that category, has been produced through bourgeois notions of a public sphere of multivocal cultural debate (*Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*).

resemblances to a penis, Rose's development of a new organ exceeds any hitherto imagined sexual organ, while its invention of new modes of accessing the bodies of others (through an eye, an armpit, an elbow, the neck, the hand, a cheek) shows a disregard for conventionally sanctioned modes of sexual contact and offers the invention of original bodily possibilities. But despite the appeal of such a reading, the poster would conversely suggest that perhaps pleasure can only exist *with* a model: that there is no original pleasure, but only pleasure that is modelled on some other form. Certainly Rose's pleasure, for all its apparent biological innovation, can also be read, as I have stressed throughout this chapter, as an expression of other sorts of relationship. It is this capacity of Rose to resemble so many other forms of institutional interchange that has led critics to suggest that the film's titular adjective, 'rabid', be applied to the workings of the film itself.²⁰ The film thus maps out processes that are themselves rabid: the endlessly infectious nature of signification, whose meanings transfer from one object to another without any one term having priority, and the appetite's hungry pursuit of the next object to devour.²¹

This ceaseless transmission of meaning should also, I want to suggest, be read as a ceaseless transmission of physical change. For it is fundamental to bodies that they are in a process of becoming, that they learn from and react to those bodies around them. Our bodies are always in search of the models by which we make them comprehensible both to ourselves and to others around us - always enacting the repetition of norms and the absorption of physical conventions by which the body's place within the social is regulated. To

²⁰ See Tania Modleski, 'The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory', p.161; and Ira Livingston, 'The Traffic in Leeches', p.527.

²¹ 'This indeterminacy of the metaphorical order, usually overlooked by the psychology of archetypes, in fact merely reproduces the random character of associative fields, as established so forcefully by Saussure: there is no giving pre-eminence to any of the terms of a declension' (Roland Barthes, 'The Metaphor of the Eye', p.123).

reiterate the tripartite division that I made at the start of this thesis, this necessitates: the harnessing of opportunities to regulate the physical form of bodies, the maintenance of a psychic body-map invested with fear and desire, and the constant discursive definition of a body's meanings. In looking again at these processes, I want to emphasise the extent to which, in all of these domains, they take place through the body's imitation of other bodies around it.

Such imitative re-production includes those material changes by which the body is refitted for new functions and activities, and their concomitant social domains: the development of a new body shape through exercise, or of new body movements and postures to facilitate the inhabitation of particular subcultures (one thinks for instance of the way that gay men newly coming out may develop camp as a means of defining a relationship in and to gay - and for that matter straight - culture). It includes psychic changes, by which the imaginary body which models subjectivity is remade to enable different desires. This body-image, as we heard Lacan say earlier, has 'an autonomous existence of its own, and by autonomous I mean here independent of objective structure' ('Some Reflections on the Ego', p.13), and as such might include: the anorexic's dependence on a psychic body-map that borrows fat from the bodies of others; those psychic re-imaginings of the human body as an animal body, which so fascinate Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, pp.232-309); or the more prosaic absorption of everyday objects (from wedding rings and wheelchairs to body piercings and handguns) which become so intimate as to be psychically fitted into the conception of one's own body. And it includes discursive transformations by which one set of meanings attached to a body are reaccentuated in favour of another: for instance, the transformations in the namings of skin colour, physical impairment, and genitals, that are so vehemently being fought around those contested words 'nigger', 'cripple', and 'cunt'. In all these cases, bodies change through the other bodies that they come into contact with - absorbing and transferring their characteristics, their outlines,

their meanings, into the psychic-material-discursive substance of that phenomenon called the body.

In my insistence on the malleability of the body at all levels, I have tried to stress both the body's amenability to control and its capacity to exceed control. It is regulated by being offered the conventions of other bodies to follow but, as we can see from the preceding list, bodies become unstable through their very eagerness to attain the stability promised by absorbing the properties of those other bodies. In re-producing themselves bodies absorb not only the permitted possibilities of the right posture or voice, but also other materials, any one of which may be legitimate in the location at which it is first noticed, but becomes illegitimate when taken on by a body for whom it was not intended. That is, I am suggesting, Rose's annexing of the phallic should be seen as the appropriation of a legitimate bodily possibility, which becomes illegitimate in the act of being located in a new place - both on the body of a woman, and indeed under the armpit ! As such, I would want to read it in conjunction with other bodily borrowings, such as: white youth's co-option of dance forms from black culture; drug users' demands that when their bodies become unwell they receive the same healthcare routinely accorded to bodies injured in the pursuit of other equally pointless leisure activities; or lesbian culture's annexation of the poses, styles and codes of male bodies. These are all acts which relocate in inappropriate bodily places certain forms or meanings which had been entirely sanctioned, if not compulsory, in their original locations. Such an account finds a way of granting agency, rebellion, innovation, and resistance to the body - goes beyond treating the body merely as the passive matter on which culture writes - while avoiding the temptation of granting the body some sort of originary or independent life. As I have sought to do throughout this thesis, it situates the body's capacity for innovation as a condition of its dependency on what surrounds on - on its very malleability.²²

²² This is one crucial way in which my account differs from the work of Judith

Yet, as the above examples should all indicate, it reminds us of the extent to which in doing so bodies become enmeshed with the regulatory power of forces such as medicine, racism, and masculinity, which may do as much damage as they enable opportunities for pleasure and resistance.

It is thus fitting that *Rabid* stages a thorough disarticulation of attempts to pin down the form or meaning of the body - the project which defines martial law within the film. The law's attempts at separation, identification, and elimination are confronted by the ways in which various forms of classification prove unstable throughout the film. For all the apparent success of identity cards, vaccinations, and checkpoints, the film is more pointedly about the collapse of various crucial epistemological distinctions: between male and female, between civilization and barbarism, between human and non-human - social categories which are, after all, only sustained through regulatory practices that are more socially acceptable versions of *Rabid*'s martial law. The movement between those terms is rendered through the bodies on display, reminding us that it is through the material and psychic forms taken by bodies that such systems are destabilized. Attempts to keep bodies separate founder on this problem: that they borrow from one another. Rose's acquisition of the phallus - like her lover's becoming all 'h[e]art' or Murray's acquisition of maternity - suggests the body's mutability in terms of its adoption of other models of being and pleasure. The possibility of defining and sustaining difference, and with it purity, is thus constantly compromised by the rabid transmission of corporeal forms from one embodied subject to another.

Butler. For Butler, illicit body forms emerge through the body's failure to adequately incarnate the injunctions directed at it. In her account such failure seems to be an inevitable instability within all attempts to duplicate an original model, and as such is almost magically fated to happen by itself (see for instance 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', where we are told that heterosexual gender 'is bound to fail'(p.21)). I am suggesting that alternative possibilities emerge rather from the inappropriate imitation of bodily possibilities that are licit for certain bodies, but not for all those bodies who adopt them.

But the most important aspect of *Rabid* - and beyond that, I have suggested, of the work of Burroughs and Cronenberg in general - is its refusal to render such bodily becomings as benign or welcome. The film documents Rose's distress - in her cries, the pain of her hunger, her self-loathing. In doing so it is careful not to render this merely as a regrettable resistance to a desirable evolutionary shift, but rather as the crisis of recognizing that change involves a painful annihilation of the old self. In this sense, such bodily becomings are parasitic - nourished by us, but at the expense of our own identities. Murray watches, horrified, as the rabid Dr. Keloid snarls and slavers through the window of a police van. 'Will you confirm the identification of this man as Dr. Daniel Keloid?' asks the investigating policeman - but in spite of Murray's silent nod, we can see that the creature bears only a passing resemblance to that subject previously called Dan Keloid, just as later, to her claim 'I'm still me, I'm still Rose', Hart will shout back: 'You're not Rose ... What did he turn you into?' Echoing down the intertextual trail which the name 'Rose' belongs to in English, we must then hear Juliet's claim that 'that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet' (*Romeo and Juliet*, II.ii.43-44). With its privileging of the physical matter of the rose over whatever identity it may assume, Juliet's claim is not a recognition of the truth so much as an attempt to argue away from the truth that confronts her: that Romeo is more than the physical matter - the body - which she desires, but is rather a product of the name that he has, the social location that he occupies. Attempting to separate his (welcome) body from his (unwelcome) name she states:

What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man.

(II.ii.40-42)

But in the face of her disavowal, matter and meaning, biology and identity,

interfere with one another to the dismay of those who would try to hold onto any one aspect of either term: the purity of the smell of a Rose is infected by the other conditions of its possibility.

This stress on the open-endedness of any aspect of embodiment invites us to challenge those discourses which would seek to define for us once and for all the meanings of our bodies: the body has no final form or final meaning that issues from some defining location. Exemplifying this instability, in her final words to him Rose turns the blame for events back onto Hart: it is not she who is responsible for the plague, through her actions; nor Keloid, through his surgery; but Hart - because of the crash. The biological plague which Hart tries to lay at the doors of others, is finally returned to him: his gaze, with its attempts at mastery, collapses, like all his attempts at mastery, like all those attempts made by any of the characters in this film to control the events, the meanings and, crucially, the bodies around them.

The film's general suspicion of the effectiveness of authority - a suspicion, let us remember, which does not say that authority is ineffectual or not dangerous but, on the contrary, insists that it is capable of inflicting extraordinary amounts of damage while still never being infallible - then centres on this unpredictability of the body. At its most pessimistic, *Rabid* imagines forms of state power able to produce docile and obedient bodies: bodies that file through checkpoints, that accept immunization programmes. Early on in the film there is a brief cameo of a drunk driver being breathalysed. Located to one side of the screen and almost inaudible over the more narratively central conversation between Murray and Hart, it is nevertheless a reminder that the biology of the modern body is already under routine scrutiny. But these passive bodies may also seem haunted by the spectre of Rose: if her body develops unexpected responses to this surveillance and control, might not theirs too? The apparent narrative closure achieved by Rose's death, by the WHO's announcement that it has an effective vaccine, and by the passage of the

narrative through night and into the dawning of a new day, is undercut by this more enduring logic: that the body is not the passive recipient of commands, but rather becomes more dangerous through the attempts to control it (a process that should herald as much dismay for projects of liberation as it does for repressive institutions).²³

Caught up as it is within a network of injunctions, whose conflicts produce a body whose polyvalence borders on incoherence, the body is an apt reminder of this impossibility of producing subjects which will conform to any one set of regulations. Since bodies absorb models from around them, we cannot simply harness them to a particular project of resistance, since their tendency is to take up the regulatory injunctions that surround them. But we may also find that following prescribed models to the letter is as difficult for the dominant social order as following proscribed ones: one thinks for instance of Burroughs's point that the state's antipathy to narcotics is in fact largely due to the fact that narcotics simulate so completely the logics of late capitalism - the quest for compulsive leisure products. Similarly, if defiantly abject heroism is one mode of resistance, then so too is Rose's hyper-real simulation of legitimate behaviours. In its representation of the monstrosity of the state, we are invited to read Rose as incarnating both an absolute opposition to that state, which then dreads and tries to annihilate her; and as the inevitable fulfilment of the violence, parasitism, and aggressive infectivity of the state itself.

These then are the particular problems in embodiment that have driven this thesis: that the designation of bodies as socially licit, and their material construction as such, entails equally their being constructed as illicit and dangerous. Not only in the sense that they are constructed as chaotic so that

²³ Moving away from more obviously embodied scenarios, we might also note that the current political scene is dominated by a particular horror at the unexpected directions that projects of supposed liberation have led to: between gay men and queers, between second and third wave feminists, between socialists and New Labour.

they can be ordered but, more radically, that the process of the ordering, civilizing, or disciplining of the body itself both exhibits in its own technologies, and encourages in the bodies that it moulds, attributes that remain indistinguishable from those which it initially claimed to extinguish.

It seems to me worth ending this reading of *Rabid* on this insoluble tension between these pairs of terms that have been central to my thesis - orderly/disorderly, bodily/disembodied, dirty/clean. It would seem that the logic that orchestrates them entails that the deeper we move into one, the deeper we move into the other, finding in each their unexpected - or perhaps, post-deconstruction, their all too expected - complicity with one another. I want to close, however, by suggesting that this is more than an ironic textual dead-end, but that in fact it is central to the mutable political valencies of the body. The sheer excess of meaning that attaches to the word 'body' makes it difficult to figure it solely in any one form, constantly absorbing as it does other models for embodiment. Such an excess of meaning also, I suggest, adheres to our physical bodies: they are texts which signify overabundantly and which, for all the physical attempts to render them fit only for one role, one meaning, or one subjectivity, sprout others.

(iii) Our (But Not Only Our) Bodies, Our (But Not Only Our) Selves

Such a notion of the indeterminacy of meaning has clearly become something of cliché within postmodern literary theory - exemplified perhaps by Roland Barthes's call for a text whose plurality 'does not mean only that it has several meanings but that it fulfils the very plurality of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not just acceptable) plurality' ('From Work to Text', p.59, emphasis in the original). And Barthes follows his line of thinking to make the political claim that to the extent that there is no dominant meaning, there can be no dominant

social group or ideology. But plurality of meaning has come increasingly to seem suspect - as so many critics have noted, no degree of indeterminacy of meaning will necessarily diminish existing power structures. And yet, before we dismiss these texts as naive in their validation of indeterminacy, we should note that Burroughs himself makes just such a critique of radical pluralism. One recurrent location in his quartet is Interzone, a place where buildings, bodies, and practices constantly merge and permute.²⁴ Architecturally it is composed of 'houses of bamboo and teak, houses of adobe, stone and red brick, South Pacific and Maori houses, houses in trees and river boats' (*NL*, p.92); geographically it is a mixture of 'minarets, palms, mountains, jungle' (*NL*, p.91); while ethnically 'the blood and substance of many races, Negro, Polynesian, Mountain Mongol, Desert Nomad, Polyglot Near East, Indian - races as yet unconceived and unborn, combinations not yet realized pass through your body' (*NL*, p.91)

This space is clearly figured as utopian in a number of ways: its celebration of different musics in which no one instrument or style predominates, its availability of sexual liaisons without any hegemonic normative sexual standard, its conglomeration of races without conflict or hierarchy. To produce Interzone Burroughs takes the areas in which hierarchies have been established and refigures them as horizontal displays of possibility, rather than vertical instances of domination. Meanwhile the disorganization of its institutions erodes the power of authority: criminals 'are escorted by a drunken cop to register in a vast public lavatory. The data taken down is put on pegs to be used as toilet paper' (*NL*, p.92). Institutional power thus finds itself unable to impose order, since it too has fragmented into a range of practices which do not cohere into a single police state.

²⁴ Burroughs writes of this imagery as originating with hallucinations resulting from the South American drug *yage* (*The Yage Letters*, p.21). See also his letter of July 10-1953 to Allen Ginsberg (*The Letters of William S. Burroughs: 1945 - 1959*, pp.182-184).

But Interzone is equally clearly marked as a space of domination and violence, its proliferation of characters including 'investigators of infractions denounced by bland paranoid chess players, servers of fragmentary warrants taken down in hebrephenic shorthand charging unspeakable mutilations of the spirit, bureaucrats of spectral departments, officials of unconstituted police states' (*NL*, p.93). The fertile chaos of the city generates new oppressions as well as new liberties. The seamless transition from the lists of forms of freedom and pleasure to the lists of forces of domination captures the doubleness of Interzone: both place of endless possibility, and regimented by forces of authority, 'the Composite City where all human potentials are spread out in a vast silent market' (p.91).²⁵

Interzone is the reminder that a space of infinite diversity is not a space free from power relationships, and it would be foolish to imagine the Burroughsian body as exempt from such a critique. Burroughs's texts, like Cronenberg's, stress that these bodies exist only through the actions of aggressive power over them. The fact that the body appears in so many forms should not then be taken to indicate that the body is being presented as outside, or free from, ideology, discourse, and their concomitant regimes of material inequality. Rather, we should read it as demonstrating that in the variety of socially produced forms that it takes, the body is never simply governed by any one regime. Here, we may read the heterogeneity of the body as rendering it problematic for any particular formation of authority: that is, that faced by any given configuration of power, the body must also incarnate values, practices,

²⁵ As such, it clearly corresponds to Burroughs's experience of living in Tangier (1954-1958), a city which he recognized as both a place of sexual and economic freedom, and also a society whose forms of freedom were carefully orchestrated initially by the coalition of Western governments which administered it after WWII, and subsequently, following Moroccan independence (1956), by a government eager to maintain the advantages of retaining the interests of those governments (Jeffrey S. Dunn, 'William S. Burroughs and Technologizing Literary Studies in the Industrial Age', pp. 197-200).

states, and possibilities that such a configuration does not endorse.

Again, this does not mean that bodies do not also incarnate values, states, practices and possibilities which sustain inequality - indeed, one consequence of the body's polyvalence is that it is necessarily *always* available in support of such regimes. But it will never function only in their support, and never mean only what it is called upon to mean. As a privileged symbol for the social order, the body is subject to an extraordinary range of competing discourses which construct it in different forms. Thus, rather than imagining that the body must be outside culture because it is resistant to certain social structures, I am suggesting that the body is resistant only because it is always *within* culture.

And such a reading may return us - in a very different way - to Kristeva. It is the body's entry into culture which enables us to talk about it, to debate its significance. If the body is often disruptive that is not, I would suggest, because of its acultural properties, but rather because it is culturally produced, but not always necessarily meaningful in any coherent way as a result. The ruptures in syntax and logic which so enthrall Kristeva might be read not as biological explosions, but rather as tensions within the psychic organization of a social body, whose heterogeneity is guaranteed, rather than forestalled, by its acculturation. Perhaps the paradigmatic example of this in Burroughs is his own hostility towards the body. According to Eve Sedgwick, the desire for bodily and social purity leads to a genocidal fantasy, which we should oppose out of sanity and self-preservation (*Epistemology of the Closet*, pp. 127-130). But it is precisely Burroughs's use of such a fantasy that leads to his more radical vision of embodiment. This is not to say that genocidal fantasies are not dangerous - but it is to remind ourselves that they may have effects which they cannot calculate. The heterogeneity of texts on the body is then less, as in Kristeva's account, the originary heterogeneity of the psychic, but rather the heterogeneity of the psychic as generated in tandem with the heterogeneity of the social.

The possessed body is a useful image for this indeterminacy. Porous, the body is always open to control - but as such it is always also open to new forms of control, new possessors: it is the exemplary illustration of the Burroughsian maxim 'all Agents defect and all Resisters sell out' (*NL*, p.163). Its openness makes it impossible that the body ever be simply in the service of one controller, since it is always open to other influences; because it changes so much at the behest of power, it also always changes at other behests. Consequently, bodily disorder is never only the heterogeneity of the drives, and always also the heterogeneity of the social - the mixture of discourses available to think embodiment. It is thus the unstable double agent that best sums up the body as I have theorized it here: a collection of disparate goals which cannot be harnessed to any one particular project and which will not serve as the model for any one particular society or identity. And yet which may also be appropriated to model any number of possible societies - more or less free, more or less unequal.

If these texts then enable the expression of a certain truth about the body's refusal to remain stable, they do so not so that a system of power can be overthrown by that truth, but rather in recognition of the ways in which that truth is thoroughly complicit with power, but never only complicit with one single monolithic instance of the exercise of power. Rather, the body is the site through which moments of power are exercised in different directions. It is not then the asocial or acultural body that will enable liberation, but the body so saturated by culture that it is not bound to any single destination.

That the meanings of the body never settle into any one uncontested 'discourse on the body' is not to say that we should not offer detailed histories of the ways that particular sites of the body are invested with meaning. Points of embodiment clearly are, as I have insisted throughout this thesis, the focus for temporary stabilizations - both in terms of their meaning and their materiality - to various degrees of success. But such an affirmation of the semantic and physical mutability of bodies should be a reminder of the ways in which the

attempt to claim any solid material form or meaning for the various bodies in the world founders on the body's own amenability to change. A (post)modern list of such opportunities might include plastic surgery; the sexual/racial phenomenon of 'passing', in which the body displays, deploys, and is perhaps undone by, its capacity to adopt a new corporeal identity; the increasingly diversified forms of transgendered bodies (hermaphrodyke, shemale, F2M, chicks-with-dicks); bisexual theory's insistence on the instability of sexual attraction, and the possibility of a predominance of desire for one sex being unsettled by the arrival of desires for another. The relative prominence within contemporary critical theory/cultural studies of these forms of bodily change should not detract us from those altogether less sexy, less heavily theorized, but perhaps ultimately more effectual, bodily changes that surround us: the investment of the disenfranchised in body-changing activities which might (but rarely do) offer a way out of economic marginality (dance classes for working class girls, sports for young black men); the transformation of the postures, defences, and 'learned attitudes' of women's bodies to develop physical responses which will diminish the danger of rape;²⁶ the alterations in gay and bisexual men's eroticizations of our own, and other men's, bodies so as to facilitate safer sex practices; the retraining of the human appetite's learnt preference for the consumption of meat.

At all these points bodies are changing in ways that are never unproblematically beneficial, but which bring with them opportunities to destabilize and confirm given notions of appropriate forms of embodiment, and the psychic and material structures that come with them - from extreme poverty to fleeting emotions. Such body-changes are not, I want to stress again, simply

²⁶ See Sharon Marcus, 'Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention', in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political*.

volitional - although the adoption of a particular body-changing practice may contain an element of choice. Rather, they are imposed on and ingested by us as the condition of our embodiment: we absorb messages about the meanings and uses of bodies, and our bodies then adopt and transform them.

It is this elaboration of the meanings and capacities of our flesh that makes it such an important site for conflict. Whether we are challenging the ways in which it is used as a metaphor to underwrite particular political projects, or the forces that encourage us to treat particular of its processes in ways that we are unhappy with, the body will never belong wholly to any one. And this includes to those who might make the claim: 'this is my body'. For my body will never simply belong to me, but can be assumed to prove resistant to my every desire, even as it is the vehicle of their fulfilment. It will never be fully captured by authority nor ever simply stand outside it; indeed the reflections of future historians may yet suggest that the moments where I believe it is most doing the one are in fact those at which it is most doing the other. It is thus the site of a constant vacillation, a constant unmaking and remaking of meaning - not because of an originary psychic heterogeneity, but because of its social heterogeneity, and the psychic heterogeneity which is co-extensive with, co-constitutive of and co-constituted by such social heterogeneity.

The body is then that most utopian place - the place where no absolute authority can hold sway - precisely because authority of many different forms seeks to exert control, and often succeeds. It is utopian not because it is the fulfilment of any one particular dream of social cohesion, but because of its refusal to do so: my body refuses the authoritarianism of any particular set of meanings that I may hope for, and so holds open the possibility of change - it refuses to become static, to ossify, even as it so often seems absurdly static in its refusal to adopt those new meanings or potentials that I might desire for it. The body is in all these senses the guarantee of the open-ness of being embodied and of embodied societies; the guarantee of the erosion of structures that damage

bodies, and that promote the well-being of one body over another or the idea of one form of well-being over the diversity of other physical forms of well-being that proliferate. It is the guarantee of such a resistance to the stability of the social not because it is naturally resistant, not because it has natural desires, not because it is naturally good - but precisely because the human body never is, and never has been, naturally anything.

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