

**TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING
OF AFFECT:
TRANSGRESSION, ABJECTION AND THEIR
LIMITS IN CONTEMPORARY ART
IN THE 1990S**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the concepts of affectivity and abjection in relation to contemporary art practice. Its main focus is the strategic use of notions of abjection by artists and theorists in relation to 'abject art', particularly in Australia, America and Britain, from 1989 to 1998. In particular, the thesis examines the limits of the application of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection in art practice and discourse. It argues that the development of a strategy of abjection in art presupposes that 'abject' bodily matter has a predetermined capacity to generate affect. This presumed capacity to affect audiences is regarded as investing the 'abject' with a kind of 'guarantee' of political efficacy. Thus, abjection has been understood as a template for a repeatable transgressive strategy for contemporary art practice.

The thesis argues that conventionally deployed notions of abjection are founded on essentialist ideas of the body, its materiality and its organisation. Such notions function to solidify the boundaries and capacities of bodies through figuring them in terms of 'nature', 'drive' and 'instinct'. The thesis argues that abject art, as an ongoing political strategy for contemporary artists, is narrowly prescriptive and forecloses on possibilities, actually limiting the capacities of art to generate new forms of affective encounter.

The discourse of affective art has been, by default, the discourse of abjection. The thesis attempts to shift the discourse away from 'abjection' and towards an understanding of affectivity which accounts for cultural contingencies, which de-essentialise understandings of the body and its political dimensions. To do this, it draws upon the work of Gilles Deleuze and his commentators, and ultimately works towards offering a set of ideas which will allow art theorists and studio practitioners to understand 'affective' art in more productive terms.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues, with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, during my candidature, is fully acknowledged.

I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

Christian David Messham-Muir

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The research and writing of this doctoral thesis has been a thoroughly absorbing process. I mean this in the sense that I have had the good fortune to spend three years totally immersed, day-to-day, in the questions addressed by this thesis. I also mean this in the sense that this thesis has absorbed fragments of ideas which have originated in different areas of my life, beyond the purely academic. So, in ensuring that credit is given where it is due, the acknowledgments and thanks enumerated here not only go to those who have aided me in an academic capacity, but also to those who have helped with their support, friendship and general discussions.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this thesis is to contribute an *effective* set of ideas with which to discuss the *affect* of contemporary art upon its audience. By ‘effective’ ideas, I mean ideas which may further allow art theorists and practitioners to understand affective art in ways which, rather than limit possibilities, open up more options towards a more speculative and generative discourse. By ‘affective’ art I mean art which seems to *act upon* the audience in a very direct sense; in a way which has been understood by some theorists as ‘bodily’. In art discourses of the 1990s, the capacity of artworks to ‘affect’ audiences has been understood as importantly relating to art’s efficacy within wider culture. This is seen at its clearest in the discourses surrounding ‘abject art’, which have been significant in the wider art discourse throughout the 1990s. In these discourses, art’s capacity to generate affect has been understood to endow it with a power to change the wider cultural and political discourse. This thesis will scrutinise the idea that ‘affective’ art can be politically *effective*. More importantly, it will examine the extent to which ‘abject art’ is useful as an ongoing means with which to disrupt conservative politics in wider culture. In this respect, it will be argued that certain nominally ‘abject art’ works have played politically significant roles in recent cultural discourses. However, it will further be argued that the strategies of ‘abject art’ have limitations. These strategies are founded upon particular understandings of bodies and their power relations, as fixed and determinate. As a consequence, these strategies are determining and restrictive in terms of the possibilities which are then left open for artists and theorists. They foreclose upon other strategies which allow for the contingencies of time, place and culture. Therefore, this thesis marks a trajectory away from the determining ideas which have been central to the discourses surrounding ‘abject art’, and formulates a different approach to ‘affective’ artworks.

Thus, this thesis will examine the works of certain contemporary artists between 1989 and 1998, which have attempted to gain efficacy within wider

culture through the deployment of 'affective' art. Particularly, it will examine the 'abject art' which came about following the United States' congressional debate over government funding of the arts in 1989. Indeed, it will question the prevailing assumption that 'abject art' is fundamentally transgressive and has a universal capacity to affect audiences and wider culture. Thus, I will look at relevant works by artists in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, which have attempted to engage audiences 'affectively'. I will critically examine the theoretical work which have been used to support what have become the dominant authoritative notions of 'abject art'; in particular, relevant aspects of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection.ⁱ In the course of questioning the usefulness of employing ideas about 'affect' derived from Kristeva, foundational beliefs of Kristeva's theory are examined. In this respect, the thesis looks at Kristeva's understandings of the formation of subjectivity,ⁱⁱ which form the basis of the Kristevan notion that 'the abject' is "neither subject nor object".ⁱⁱⁱ It is the idea that the abject is a third category in subject-object relations which has been most heavily drawn upon in the theorising of 'abject art'.^{iv} While this thesis investigates this theoretical model which underlies 'abject art', it does not attempt to engage with Kristeva's work as a primary text. That is, this thesis is not primarily about the Kristevan corpus itself, but is concerned rather with the points at which aspects of her theory of abjection have been taken up by artists and art theorists in the 1990s.^v The aim is to shed some light on the trend of 'abject art' in the 1990s, and to question whether or not the Kristevan model of 'abjection' is the most effective way of understanding 'affective' art. Ultimately, this thesis works towards formulating other, potentially more effective, ways of thinking about the 'affect' of contemporary art in wider culture. The concluding chapters of this thesis will propose ways in which some other notions of affect, significantly different from existing 'abjection' strategies, can be applied in contemporary art practice.

As this thesis will argue, notions relating to the capacity of images to ‘affect’ audiences have certainly been significant in the discourses of art as well as those concerning wider culture. As Brian Massumi notes:

There seems to be a growing feeling within media, literary and art theory that affect is central to an understanding of our information and image based late capitalist culture.^{vi}

It is important to note here that Massumi deploys ‘affect’ not as a transitive verb, as it is commonly used in standard English, but as a noun. Indeed, within Massumi’s Deleuzian philosophical register, ‘affect’ is discussed in terms of the qualities of an image or object; their capacities to affect and to be affected. As Massumi’s quote illustrates, in this discourse the term ‘affect’ can take on different but related functions. This thesis will talk about ‘affect’ in the sense that Massumi uses the term above; ‘affect’ as a quality of an artwork, its ‘affective capacities’. It will also refer to ‘the affect’ of an artwork; the impact made upon an audience. Moreover, the term ‘affect’ is also applied as a *process* in which a body acts upon another; the processes which bodies may undergo in being affected. This aspect of the term is most usefully employed in the final chapters of this thesis. For this reason the word ‘affect’ is used both transitively and intransitively throughout this thesis.

Despite Massumi’s claim, the critical responses which have come to explain the processes of affect within art discourse have been limited. Art theoretical discourse has gravitated overwhelmingly toward a notion of affect founded in abjection, in particular notions of ‘the body’ and its capacities to be affected. Therefore, the impetus behind this thesis stems from an observed lack of contention surrounding the use of notions of abjection as an explanation of the affective capacities of certain artworks, and the assumption that ‘abject art’s ‘affective’ strategy is politically efficacious and transgressive regardless of contingencies. This deployment of selected aspects of Kristevan ideas of abjection as transgression has predominated the discourses surrounding ‘affective’ art in the 1990s, yet any significant questioning of such strategies

within the field of art theory has been conspicuous by its absence. There has been surprisingly little critical consideration of the assumptions which underlie ‘abject art’, such as particular notions of power, subjectivity and the organisation of the body. Further, as a consequence of this discursive monopoly, discussions of other, potentially more productive, understandings of affect have been largely excluded. Thus this thesis comes to an art theoretical discourse with the intention of considering closely the present discursive conditions and finding their limits, and to work towards formulating a ‘vocabulary’, or a set of ideas, for dealing with the notion of ‘affect’ in art theory.

The time frame upon which this thesis focuses, 1989-1998, is chosen for reasons beyond the fact that this thesis aims at tackling the contemporary. This thesis is concerned with the affective capacities and cultural efficacy of contemporary art in a discourse which has thoroughly divested itself of the pretensions of avant gardism. Importantly, this thesis is about affective and efficacious art practice, but not in the sense of an artistic avant garde. In the 1980s, as the thorough dismantling of the dominant status of modernism reached its apex, the notions of avant gardism which had underpinned modernism in art, particularly in its Greenbergian form, were dissolved. The assertion by Clement Greenberg, of a transcendental distinction between avant garde and kitsch, between trash culture and transcendental “genuine culture”,^{vii} became increasingly untenable while its philosophical axioms, of an autonomous place ‘above’ low culture, of a transcendental universal humanity, of Platonic absolute form, were being so persuasively undermined by postmodernism and the influence of poststructuralism. In the 1980s, the crumbling idea of a culturally transcendent ‘outside’ could no longer support the notion of an artistic avant garde, native to that ‘outside’, working for some greater, extracultural purpose.

However, not only does this thesis come after the successful dismantling of avant gardism in art theory, but it also comes *after* the decade which presided

over its demise. In the 1980s, the rejection of avant gardism was on the agenda of many artists. In the 1990s, it is no longer a central issue, but this is not to say that this is because of a possible return to avant gardist notions of the efficacy of art. Rather, artists in the 1990s have begun to reconsider the wider cultural efficacy of their practice without recuperating the avant gardist belief that they are progressively leading culture into a transcendental domain. To this extent, while there has been no recuperation of avant gardism, there has been a considered reclaiming of art's efficacy which has tended to be dismissed with the wholesale rejection of avant gardism. In the 1980s, the imperative to reject avant gardism was such that art discourses tended to deny *absolutely* any kind of capacity for art to affect wider culture. To a certain extent, avant gardism had become conflated with the idea that art can be in some sense efficacious and affect its audience. Effectively, many artists in the 1980s tended to abrogate any agency within wider culture.

Combined with the theoretical rejection of avant gardism, the culture of the 1980s and its sense of impending culmination in global economics and politics, also influenced the declining political value of contemporary art. The aesthetics which dominated both art and mass cultural images in the 1980s were solipsistic and self-assured. Many artists, such as Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Richard Prince and David Salle, were largely concerned with the simulacral aspects of images and registering their waning of affect. Alongside this, the art markets in both the US and Australia experienced a boom. Consequently, the self-reflective discursive agendas of much art of the '80s were further reinforced with an examination of art's value as a commodity. This was the art world which spawned Barbara Kruger's famous slogans 'I shop therefore I am' and 'every time I here the word culture I take out my chequebook'. However, the global economic conditions suddenly changed after the 1987 stock market crash, and the consequent collapse of the art markets. Since art was no longer such a profitable commodity, artists'

preoccupations with issues of commodification quickly waned, or so it could be argued.

18 months after the stock market crash, in 1989, American contemporary art was drawn into the centre of American federal politics in the drawn out debate on the federal government funding of the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA). Thus, following the collapse of the art market, the metacritical agenda of the contemporary art arena shifted its focus more towards addressing the socio-political questions of wider cultural discourse. The curatorial aspirations of the Whitney Museum of American Art's 1993 Biennial exhibition demonstrate the extent of this shift:

Elizabeth Sussman, assisted by a team of staff curators and a formidable nationwide advisory board well acquainted with a variety of media and communities, has organised an exhibition loosely clustered around the theme of identity politics.^{viii}

Of course, it cannot be claimed that identity politics were wholly abandoned or ignored in 1980's art discourse. However, the faith in art's capacity to have any actual political effect had dissipated during that decade.

Conversely, the 1993 Whitney Biennial registered a resurgence in the faith that art could have a politically efficacious place within wider culture, which had arisen following the NEA debate. However, unlike the transcendental avant gardism of modernism, the capacities for 1990s art to be politically effective were seen to be based in the materiality of the body; in the dirt instead of the heavens.

As I have already indicated, while much art discourse in the 1980s thoroughly rejected fundamental tenets of modernism in art, the 1990s have seen a more measured reconsideration of what was previously thrown-out. Consequently, as John Roberts notes, the art of the 1990s has seen "a quite distinct reinvestment in the body" in art, of the kind which has not been seen since the early 1970s.^{ix} Indeed, this shift is registered clearly in 1990s art discourse, such as in articles by Roberts in *Art Monthly*^x and *Third Text*,^{xi} two dedicated issues of the art theory journal, *October*,^{xii} and in the curatorship of

exhibitions such as the Whitney Museum's 1993 Biennial, and their *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, 1993, and *Body* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, in 1997. We can also see this in aspects of the 1990s work of artists such as Hany Armanious, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Adam Cullen, Mikala Dwyer, Robert Gober, Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler.

In the 1980s there was an inclination in much art toward an over-zealous and vehement rejection of all possibilities of efficacy. Of course, some artists such as Barbara Kruger and Hans Haacke produced work throughout the 1980s which never abrogated their claims to the political effectiveness of art. However, with the hindsight of a decade later, the overwhelming tendency towards relinquishing claims to political efficacy in art is clear to see. Artists such as John Young and Matthys Gerber in Australia, and David Salle and Thomas Ruff in America, were among many artists in the 1980s concerned with the solipsistic, self-conscious impotence of art's self-cannibalisation.

Perhaps just as tendentiously, in the 1990s, artists have begun to reclaim some notion of efficacy in a post-avant gardist discourse. However, inasmuch as this reclaiming has taken the form of a 'reinvestment' in the body, it is highly problematic. In the 1980s, much art theory had attempted to dismantle essentialist notions of corporeality, and refigure 'the body' as culturally constructed. In the 1990s, this recuperation of 'the body', while remaining adverse to the "bruised but whole bodies of modernism",^{xiii} nevertheless has tended to recuperate notions of corporeality which are universalist and essentialist. Particularly, 'abject art' in the 1990s has thus combined a post-avant gardist rethinking of art's cultural efficacy with a critically unreconstructed model of the body. Abjection, and 'abject art' have been the centre of much art theoretical discourse. However, the way in which abjection has been used as the only, or default, explanation for the affect of art in the 1990s, has gone largely unchallenged. For example, Hal Foster does note that the use of Kristevan notions of abjection by 'abject art' is

problematic,^{xiv} however his criticisms, still adhere to the premises of abjection:

Can the abject be represented at all? If it is opposed *to* culture, can it be exposed *in* culture? If it is unconscious, can it [be] made conscious and remain abject?^{xv}

In relation to ‘abject art’, he does not question the notion that to be opposed to culture, it must be exterior, or indeed, anterior to it, neither does he challenge any of the universalising psychoanalytical premises of abjection.

Against the models of ‘abjection’ and ‘the body’ dominant in the 1990s, this thesis does not reactively revert to a dissolution of the body of the kind of much 1980s theory, nor adopt an essentialistic position. Rather, this thesis attempts to negotiate the complexities of the body in contemporary art. In adopting and adapting theories of ‘abjection’, much art discourse has uncritically accepted a universalising ‘default’ meaning of ‘the body’, which is, in actuality, specifically Cartesian and thus culturally contingent.^{xvi} While this thesis takes ‘the body’ into account throughout, I will question what we mean by ‘the body’. Further, while this thesis does not subscribe unconditionally to a universal transgressive power of the abject, neither does it argue that art should then resign itself to a completely ineffectual function within culture. Surely, there are more than these two options. Rather, the belief underlying this thesis is that art is one cultural practice, amongst others, which *can* be efficacious in wider culture, and can be so by affecting its audience. Thus the ultimate intention of this thesis is to consider the ‘affectivity’ of art, and its wider political effect, in a way which is more useful than the model given by ‘transgression’, ‘strategy’ or ‘abjection’.

As I have indicated, the artists upon whom this thesis focuses are predominantly contemporary practitioners from Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. It should be made clear here that this thesis does not attempt to, or hope to, account for *all* contemporary art in the 1990s. Sure enough, much contemporary art in the 1990s has not concerned itself

with seeking political effect through ‘affective’ strategies. Neither does this thesis attempt to account for *all* art in this period which employs an ‘abjection’ strategy. Rather, the artists discussed in this thesis are selected because at certain instances between 1989 and 1998 they have employed similar ‘abjection’ strategy, and aspects of their work exemplify certain characteristics of this strategy. The exclusion of the works of other 1990s art practitioners is not intended to falsely indicate that ‘abject art’ has been the only significant movement of art in this decade. Certainly, one could just as easily argue, for example, that neo-abstractionist art has also been significant in the 1990s. However, as this thesis is concerned with ‘affective’ art, and ‘abject art’ has certainly been significant in art discourse in the 1990s, it is ‘abject art’ which becomes the central object of this thesis.

Further to the ‘abject art’ of the 1990s, this thesis draws upon other ostensibly unassociated themes in the course of its discussion, such as ‘artificial intelligence’ or popular, jazz and classical music. It should be made clear that these themes are included in order to draw useful analogies or models from contemporary issues in other areas of Western culture. Certainly, the discipline of art theory does not in itself hold all the keys to approaching art theoretical issues. These themes external to art theoretical discourse are explored because they can often offer us productive leads, which would not necessarily be clear within the discourses of art theory.

More centrally, of contemporary Australian artists, works by Hany Armanious, Adam Cullen and Mikala Dwyer are discussed in this thesis. The work of these artists is considered mainly in the collected assemblage of Australian ‘abject art’, and in the first chapter in relation to ‘grunge art’. The American artists also considered are Robert Mapplethorpe, Mike Kelly, Tony Oursler and Robert Gober. However, of the Americans, it is Andres Serrano who figures most significantly in this thesis. Of course, it is no coincidence that most of these American artists (excluding Gober) featured in the Whitney Museum of American Art’s exhibition *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in*

American Art in 1993, which followed on as an effect of the NEA debate. In addition, there are a few British artists whose work has a place in this thesis, most notably, Jake and Dinos Chapman. It is worth mentioning too that there are other principal characters in this thesis who figure, not because they are artists but because of their various significant interventions. These include the conservative Australian parliamentarian The Reverend Fred Nile, and The Most Reverend George Pell, Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, and the US Senators Alphonse D'Amato and Jesse Helms.

It should be noted that this thesis particularly situates itself within the conditions of art discourse in Australia, in the respect that it not only looks at contemporary art which is produced in Australia, but also that which has bearing upon the production of contemporary art and culture of Australia. Consequently, certain events in the United States, such as the NEA debate, have had a significant bearing upon the conditions of art production in Australia, and its importance resonates throughout this thesis. The NEA debate is first dealt with in Chapter Two of this thesis and is referred to throughout. However, this thesis is not primarily about the events of the NEA debate as such, but rather some aspects of the art and theoretical discourses that have followed in the ten years following. The NEA debate catalysed discussion about the affect of artworks. As a result, a particular value was afforded to certain aspects of Kristeva's theory of abjection, as an ostensibly tried-and-tested strategy of transgression, and it became entrenched in contemporary art and art theoretical writing in the early 1990s.

Indeed, into the late 1990s, the NEA debate *continues* to bear upon the conditions of contemporary art in Australia. In October 1997, the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne, Australia, hosted 'A History of Andres Serrano', a retrospective exhibition of the work of Andres Serrano. The honorific political attribute of the artist-transgressor clearly resonates in the ebullience of the NGV's press release for the Serrano exhibition:

Confronting, shocking and compelling are just some of the words to describe the photographs of Andres Serrano on display at the National Gallery of Victoria from October 11.^{xvii}

The NGV's Public Relations Department was eager to promote Andres Serrano's role in the NEA debate, advancing him as an artist concerned with "transgressions and taboos".^{xviii} They obviously hoped to gain critical kudos, and boost attendances, by trading on the transgressive value which Serrano's name still commands.^{xix}

Chapter One will examine 'grunge art' in Australia, in early 1993, a moment which signalled something of a return to some notion that the materiality of art could be utilised for political efficacy. These artists used a similar aesthetic to the 'grunge' fashion of the time in clothing and music. To some extent, the 'grunge' aesthetic was a quotation of the raggedness of punk. I examine the political dimensions of this raggedness for punk in the 1970s, as well as for 'grunge' in the 1990s. Indeed, I will elucidate the very specific political character of 'grunge art's' quotation of punk's raggedness. 'Grunge art' used this materiality for very limited political ends.

Indeed, in the course of comparing the aesthetic politics of punk to grunge art, I will examine the politics of 'outsider' strategies of transgression, of which punk is an example. Thus, I will consider some examples of such strategies. In this context, I will first begin to approach some ideas of subjectivity by Julia Kristeva. Although I address Kristeva briefly in Chapter One in relation to her notion of transgression, some of the ideas which are touched upon in that chapter, have a bearing upon her later work on abjection. They are discussed in the context of my concerns in Chapter One, but are returned to again in greater detail in Chapter Two and Three, in relation to her ideas of abjection. In the section on 'outsiders' in Chapter One, I will examine the idea of exteriority and anteriority in relation to an 'inside' of power, the binary of inside/outside, the binary of the rage of the transgressor on the one side and the machinery of power on the other.

Following my discussion on ‘grunge art’, Chapter One will look at the broader issue of the operation of transgression as a value in wider culture, particularly in the places where it is popularly employed; in art, cinema and music. It examines the extent to which there is a strong imperative within contemporary art discourses to at least appear to be ‘transgressive’. The intention is not to account for all transgression throughout Western culture, but rather to examine certain strands within wider culture which bear upon the ways in which transgression is understood in contemporary discourses of art.

While Chapter One registers a return to an aesthetic politics in the ragged materiality of ‘grunge’, Chapter Two begins to focus upon the dominant manifestation of 1990s transgressive materiality in the shape of ‘abject art’, based upon Kristeva’s theory of ‘abjection’. In that chapter, I will begin by looking at the historical contexts leading up to the NEA debate and the use of Kristevan notions of abjection in art. I examine the claim made in the ‘80s by theorists, such as Fredric Jameson, that the capacity of images to affect had waned. I will argue that, if this was the case, it can no longer be said, as affect was well and truly on the agenda in the 1990s. Chapter two looks at the ways in which the notion of ‘abjection’ has developed as a dominant transgressive strategy in contemporary art’s discourses in the 1990s. It examines the rise of ‘abject art’ following the NEA debate. However, it is not the intention of this thesis to examine abjection merely to add to the already extensive field of work which *applies* theories of abjection to the field of contemporary art. Rather, during the course of this thesis I wish to undertake a discursive diversion away from abjection, and towards a more useful way of understanding the affect of artworks. However, this thesis is not simply working at concluding a null hypothesis. I am not setting up notions such as transgression, strategy and abjection, merely as straw figures. Rather, more importantly, the things of which this thesis is highly critical are vitally important to the formulation of the more speculative, and hopefully productive, ideas offered in the concluding chapters. In this respect, this

thesis examines existing understandings and models in order to identify concerns within current art practice and theory, and to provide an alternative approach for those concerns.

Chapter Three offers an exposition of the aspects of Kristeva's theory of abjection which form the kernel of 'abject art's strategy. It will embellish some aspects of Kristeva's ideas about subjectivity, which are touched upon in Chapter One. I identify Kristeva's theoretical lineage through Freud and Lacan, and begin a critique of 'abjection', which will be ongoing throughout the thesis. Since 'abject art' has largely focused upon the subjective relations of the abject (ie. 'neither subject nor object') it is this aspect of Kristeva's theory which mostly concerns this thesis. To that effect, I will look at the way in which this aspect of abjection is based on the axiom of a unified subjectivity as a universal human condition, and Kristeva's claim that those things that are considered 'abject' are feared by *all humans* regardless of the contingencies of culture, place or time.

In that chapter, I will largely question the universalism in Kristeva's theory of abjection in relation to different notions of subjectivity, particularly the dis-unified notion of self which operated in Medieval Europe. I look at aspects of the work of François Rabelais and, particularly, Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais' work in *Rabelais and His World*. I will examine the ways in which the notion of the 'grotesque body', which Rabelais extensively records, differs from rationalist ideas of subjectivity, and how this undermines the universalist claims of abjection. Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* would be an important text for any thesis hoping to address notions of transgression. Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais draws out the transgressive strategies which can be found in Medieval French folk culture, in opposition to the authority of the church. However, I do not call on Bakhtin or Rabelais to affirm the axiomatic notion of some transhistorical notion of transgression. Rather, Rabelais ultimately offers something more useful in considering the ways in which the organisation of the topography of bodies, and certain

models of self, might be useful in thinking about cultural efficacy in ways other than through a strategic ‘abjection’ model.^{xx} As I have discussed above, a useful model is found outside of the immediate discourses of art theory. Although the work of Rabelais may not seem initially to have any obvious value in relation to contemporary art in the 1990s, it provides us with the means to historicise Kristevan ideas of abjection, in order to challenge its use as a strategy for contemporary art.

Chapter Four of this thesis considers the effectiveness of ‘strategy’, as opposed to ‘tactics’. It examines these concepts, and contemplates the ways in which efficacy in contemporary art may be considered more usefully in terms of tactics. Further to this, Chapter Four explores certain aspect of power which underlie notions of transgression. This is touched-upon to a limited extent in Chapter One, but is considered more closely in the fourth chapter, particularly in the light of the distinctions between strategy and tactics. The character of power is also examined in relation to notions of micropolitics, resistance, intentionality and the axiomatising function of power relations. The intention of this chapter is to elucidate the character of the power model which operates throughout this thesis in anticipation of considering questions concerning the role of ‘the body’ in contemporary art. This is one of the points at which this thesis draws from areas outside of contemporary art’s immediate discourses. Particularly, it looks at music as well as ‘artificial intelligence’. A comparison is made between classical music and jazz, in terms of their alignment with ‘strategy’ and ‘tactics’, respectively.

Therefore, the fifth chapter takes further the question of corporeal topography and the ‘organisation’ of subjectivity. Indeed, from the fourth chapter, some aspects of the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari begin to figure as potentially very useful in formulating new ways of thinking about efficacious contemporary art practice. In Chapter Five, the organisation of certain models of subjectivity, bodies and power are discussed and critiqued.

Importantly, I begin to consider the ways in which fragmented or disorganised subjectivity may affect understandings of such models. I will discuss some of Deleuze and Guattari's notions of dealing with organisation, through concepts such as the Body without Organs, and 'molarity' versus 'molecularity'. Also Moira Gatien's deviations from Deleuze's work on Benedict de Spinoza prove to be quite useful at that point by allowing us to rethink what we mean by bodies, and the ways in which they affect one another.

Some important concepts which operate in the later chapters of this thesis take the work of Deleuze and Guattari as a point of departure. However, this thesis should not be read against some template of Deleuze and Guattari's work. As Elizabeth Grosz writes:

My goal is not to be in any way 'faithful' to the Deleuzian oeuvre but, on the contrary, and more in keeping with its spirit, to use it, to make it work, to develop and experiment with it in order to further develop theories and concepts that Deleuze and Guattari do not.^{xxi}

From Grosz, I would like to borrow these words, and agree with them to the letter. This thesis does not aim to read like a Deleuzian work, as such. Unlike Deleuze and Guattari's own work, it operates in a way which is more on a plane of organisation than a plane of immanence, it is more actual than virtual. However, the influence of Deleuze and Guattari spans this thesis, and perhaps only becomes explicit at certain points.

Although the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's work underlies this thesis, their work has not been treated as gospel texts. Their work has provided very productive beginnings and it is my hope with this thesis that, at various points, I have drawn on those beginnings, not simply to regurgitate or reconstitute Deleuzian ideas, but to actively put them to work in the further "creation of concepts."^{xxii} In the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari, this thesis does not ultimately provide a single 'answer' to the problems it addresses. Rather the purpose is to provide tactical beginnings for contemporary art practice, 'lines of flight'. It would be contra to the main 'thesis' of this thesis to seek to

produce a strategic, structured, programmatic manifesto of efficacious contemporary art practice. In a sense then, the thesis is always tactically provisional. This tactical approach underlies the entire thesis, but it is also discussed in detail in the fourth chapter.

The concluding chapters argue that an important tactic of cultural efficacy may be found in a notion of ‘affect’ which is not based on the Kristevan model. Indeed, Chapter Six re-evaluates the use of the notions ‘abject art’ of the 90s, away from its psychoanalytical foundations, and discusses the way in which it may be understood in terms of ‘affect’. Particularly, the sixth chapter will look at the ‘abject art’ in the Australian context and examine the controversy in 1997 surrounding the exhibition of Piss Christ in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. I will examine the ways in which Serrano’s *Piss Christ* may be thought to affect particular audiences in both America and Australia, and discuss the ways in which we may think about the operation of sacred symbols.

In the final chapter of this thesis I attempt to further develop ideas about ‘affect’ and the ways in which they may be deployed in tactics of cultural efficacy within contemporary art. I also acknowledge Brian Massumi’s call for a theory of affect not tied to structure. In this last chapter, I will look for a way of discussing the operation of ‘affect’, which is often understood as, in some sense, non-lingual and ‘bodily’. To this end, I consider the notion of an affective ‘language of the body’, identifying the ways in which this notion is highly problematic, but also investigating the extent to which we may usefully rethink such a notion. I will attempt to account for the role of corporeality in ‘affect’ without essentialising the body. The body will be considered in relation to the economic functionality which has been ascribed to it through ideas of instinctive human industriousness. In this regard, I will take up a line of inquiry from particular Deleuzian ideas of Moira Gatens, which consider Michel Tournier’s reprise of Daniel Defoe’s novel, *Robinson Crusoe*. While Defoe’s novel presupposes an innate capitalist humanism, Tournier’s

novel, *Friday*, provides an interesting re-reading, which thoroughly questions Defoe's presumptions. At that point the important question arises, that if we are to reject determining notions of 'the body' in a molecularisation of its functional 'nature', how then can we account for the culturally contingent character of affect? The answer lies in particular notions of 'habit'. Utilising Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ideas regarding 'carnal formulae' and 'habit', and recent innovative elaborations upon these ideas by Hubert Dreyfus, I will consider the determining role of 'habit' on the capacity for a body to affect, or to be affected. The final chapter will conclude with suggestions regarding the ways in which 'affect' may be employed and deployed, and it will examine the limits of the tactics of 'affect' in wider culture.

The ultimate intention of this thesis is to provide understandings of the affect of artworks in the 1990s which differ from the predominant models. There can never be a manifesto of transgression that has not defeated itself before its ink has dried. Any such intentions are bound to fail. Therefore, this thesis does not provide a model as such, but rather provides beginnings, which are substantial but not ossified. I hope that these beginnings may be fluid enough to be taken up and used in ways which may be different in each potential application. Indeed, although I have aimed at clarity in the exposition of my ideas, I hope that even any misapprehensions which may occur between myself and the reader can provide some productive points of departure.^{xxiii}

Ultimately, and in its entirety, this thesis takes some dominant concepts which have circulated and exchanged within contemporary art culture in the last ten years, and hopes, through critique and creativity, to generate a different range of ideas which may be of value to the discourses of contemporary art practice and theory. It is my hope that while this thesis is focused, the potential applications of its ideas may be wide.

Notes

ⁱ **Kristeva, Julia**, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudez, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982.

ⁱⁱ **Kristeva, Julia**, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, Columbia University Press, New York, 1984.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Kristeva, Julia**, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudez, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p. 1.

^{iv} For example, the Whitney Museum of American Art's publication, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, ed. Jane Phibrick, Whitney Independent Study Program, ISP Papers, vol. 3, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1993, was a very influential text which (as I will discuss in Chapter Two of this thesis) concentrates almost exclusively on this aspect of Kristeva's theory.

^v Certain aspects of Kristeva's theory of abjection are not primarily about subject-object relations and are not dealt with. For example, in her chapter on Celine (pp. 133-139), subject-object relations still have a certain bearing, but it is Celine's politically 'abject' Nazism which is of interest to Kristeva. Similarly, Kristeva points out in her introduction that the abject can be "[t]he traitor, the liar, the criminal with good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour" (p.4). While this aspect of Kristeva's ideas of abjection is still related to the of breach subjective boundaries, in that it problematises the logic of identity, theorising on 'abject art' tends not to concern itself with what we may think of as this kind of 'moral' abjection. Most likely, this is because much 'abject art' concerns itself with the corporeal, and with producing art objects which deal with corporeal boundaries. For this reason, these notions of 'moral' abjection are not of concern in this thesis.

^{vi} **Massumi, Brian**, "The Autonomy of Affect", *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton, Blackwell Publications, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, p. 221.

^{vii} **Greenberg, Clement**, "Avant Garde and Kitsch", *Clement Greenberg Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 1, Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*, ed. John O'Brien, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1986, pp. 5-22.

^{viii} **McGee, Micki**, "1993 Whitney Biennial", *Art + Text*, No. 45, May 1993, p. 84.

^{ix} **Roberts, John**, "Notes on 90s Art", *Art Monthly*, no. 10.96, pp. 3-4.

^x *ibid.*

^{xi} **Roberts, John**, "Mad For It! Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British Art" *Third Text* 35, Summer 1996, pp. 29-42.

^{xii} **Krauss, Foster, Buchloh, Bois, Hollier, Molesworth**, *October 61*, Winter 1994, and **Krauss, Michelson, Bois, Buchloh, Foster, Hollier, Kolbowski**, *October 78*, Fall 1996.

^{xiii} **Mc Neill, David**, "Body", *Art + Text*, #60, February/April 98, p. 82.

^{xiv} **Foster, Hal**, *Return of the Real*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Minneapolis, USA, 1996, p. 157.

^{xv} *ibid.*, p. 156.

^{xvi} By 'default meaning' here I mean the meaning of that term as it operates widely, in 'everyday' use. A 'default meaning' is the course which a meaning automatically follows in the absence of any specific alternative understanding. Of course, this is not that to say 'default meaning' is in any sense to say 'true' meaning. 'Default' meanings are transitory and contingent, not transcendental, ideal or

continued on next page

Notes continued

static. Simply, the changes within a dictionary from one editions to the next indicate this. Neither is this necessarily here to cede to the dominance of any particular hegemony over language. Also, I do not propose ‘default’ meaning to imply that such meanings are in some way *neutral*.

^{xvii} “A History of Andres Serrano”, Media Release, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, October 2, 1997.

^{xviii} *ibid.*

^{xix} This strategy backfired on the NGV. For further discussion see Chapter 6.

^{xx} I am concerned here with the idea of the ‘grotesque body’, and not specifically with ‘carnival language’. For further discussion on the ‘phonic’ and the ‘polyphonic’ in the Rabelaisian carnival culture, see **Kristeva, Julia**, “The Bounded Text”, and “Word, Dialogue and Novel”, *Desire and Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, 1980, pp. 36-91, also **Lechte, John**, “Word, Dialogue, Infinity”, *Julia Kristeva*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, pp. 91-122, and also **Moi, Toril**, “Word, Dialogue and Novel”, *The Kristeva Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford 1986, pp. 34-61.

^{xxi} **Grosz, Elizabeth**, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards, 1994, p. 166.

^{xxii} **Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix**, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Tomlinson and Burchill, Verso Books, London, UK, 1994, p. 2.

^{xxiii} Judith Butler concedes that misapprehensions are ‘destined’ to occur from writer’s intentions to the way they are perceived by readers, but also recognises that this can be a ‘productive’ and positive thing. **Butler, Judith**, *Bodies That Matter*, 1993, Routledge, New York, p. xii.

CHAPTER ONE: RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Hal Foster claims, in *The Return of The Real*, that contemporary art in the 1990s has returned to a preoccupation with materiality. He argues that this 'return of the real' heralds something of a return in art discourse to an avant-gardism of the kind which had lost its dominance in the 1960s:

For even as the avant-garde recedes into the past, it also returns from the future, repositioned by innovative art in the present.¹

As this chapter will accede through looking at the recent work of a group of artists working in Australia, there is certainly a return or refiguring of materiality in art in the 1990s. Indeed, in that work, materiality is deployed with some notion of 'transgression' in mind. However, this chapter will argue that this return to a kind of materiality is not simply a recuperation of avant-gardism. Rather, in the particular conditions of the 1990s, the use of 'transgression' does not necessarily entail a renewed faith in avant-gardism. For the 1990s, 'transgression' does not operate as a mode of avant-gardist practice, but rather as a value and a set of historical prescriptive models, which are selected and utilised for purposes which are not necessarily concerned with gaining any degree of political efficacy for contemporary art.

I will focus upon the work of a group of artists working in Sydney, from the early 1990s. These artists, up until mid-1993, were producing and collectively exhibiting work which has often been called 'grunge art'. This art draws on certain popular notions of transgression, but not as a strategy of rejecting the discursive historical imperatives of art, but rather with much more limited intentions. Later in the 1990s, these same artists reorientated their practices away from the limited strategies of 'grunge' to a more specific 'abjection' based strategy. This chapter looks at the first phase of these artists' production, before their adoption of the strategy of 'abject art'.

Importantly, this chapter provides a foreground for the more focused examination of abjection in the following chapters. It does this in a number of ways. It provides a picture of the theoretical conditions into which the crystallised notion of 'abject art' would arrive in Australia in mid-1993, immediately following the international critical attention given to the Whitney Museum of American Art's *Abject Art*

exhibition. It elucidates the very particular political character grunge art's aesthetic, particularly as a reactive rejection of the immediately preceding discourse of art. A return to a strategy of transgressive materiality was not simply a means through which these artists could create efficacious practice. Rather, the aesthetic politics of grunge art were more limited in intent, and trade on the operation of transgression as a value in our culture, which, as I will argue, ultimately works against the efficacy of contemporary art.

A Negation of Discourse

Throughout 1993 ‘grunge’ emerged as a new dominant fashion across Western culture, in art, music, clothing, literature and performance. As Jeff Gibson notes, “the illegitimate etymology of grunge leads us through grime, sludge, fungus, and scum”,ⁱⁱ and as its name suggests, the vital element of ‘grunge’ was an aesthetic of dereliction. To be clear, grunge was not so much an ‘apocalyptic’ fashion, heralding the end of fashion in cultural debris — rather it was much more recuperative, as Rhonda Lieberman says, drawing on the “aura-rich residue of yesteryear’s garment”.ⁱⁱⁱ Although it breathed life into old fashions, it was not simply a revivalist fashion, but a self-conscious assemblage of fashion’s past, of old fashions coloured by age, marked by the time that had past since their original incarnations.

Gibson notes that “part recession fashion, part obsessive recycling compulsion, grunge is also the (ideo)logical antidote to the crispy clean cutesiness of late-eighties yuppiedom.”^{iv} Indeed, ‘Grunge’ in the music and fashion of the early-1990s, seemed to arise as a reaction to the dominant aesthetics of the late 1980s. With its cheap, roughly finished, unpolished and familiar aesthetic, grunge superseded the executive-grey style, the New York city stockbroker image of Gordon Geko in Oliver Stone’s 1987 film *Wall Street*. While the shiny glass skyscrapers of the city-centre were the centre of the ‘80s universe, grunge decentred and dispersed fashion into the culture of suburban ordinariness. It sought to decentre mass culture, taking music into suburban garages and fashion into parents’ mothballed wardrobes and suburban second-hand recycled clothes shops. Grunge clothing was rough and ready-worn, in faded and washed-out colours. While the fashions of the ‘80s had swaggered down the catwalk on the athletic bodies of Cindy Crawford or Elle Macpherson, the fashions of grunge timidly hung on the wirey frames of Kate Moss and Emma Balfour, the ‘waif’ models of the ‘90s. The grunge aesthetic of low-tech, unfinished and unpolished production also ran through grunge music. Grunge bands, such as Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Hole and Garbage, began to emerge in the early 1990s, producing a raw, expedient and simplified sound, and dressed in worn-out and ordinary fashions. If the American home of the ‘80s’ ‘slick’ aesthetic had been New York, then the home of ‘90s’ grunge was on the West Coast, in

Seattle. The iconic image of the Wall Street stockbroker of the '80s was no longer heralded as the avatar of economic salvation, with the one commandment "Greed is good". Rather, in the grunge world of the 1990s, the stockbroker became the dark, evil and sadistic serial killer of Bret Easton Ellis' novel *American Psycho* in 1991.

This new '90s aesthetic in wider culture found its corollary in art discourse. In America, for example, the work of Cary S. Leibowitz, a.k.a. Candyass, put the aesthetic and spirit of grunge to work. In *Candyass Kitchen*, 1990, (*plate 1*) six old porcelain dishes are scrawled upon with handwritten text. The text is rough, with mistakes simply scribbled-out. This work draws upon domestic materiality, the kitchen, and a ragged expedient home-made aesthetic. The work is heavily dosed with an ineloquent pathos: one dish begins with the words "A whiney

Plates 1 &2

assholeÖ I hate myself”. The appearance of the text, and its content, are certainly a long way from the clean typefaces, and the measured calculated wording, of textual works in the 1980s by Barbara Kruger or Jenny Holter. Similarly, Mike Kelley’s work from the early 1990s employs the grunge aesthetic. Kelley’s *Proposal for the Decoration of an Island of Conference Rooms (with Copy Room) For an Advertising Agency Designed by Frank Gehry*, 1991, (plate 2) reproduces scratchy and deteriorated photocopies of poorly-drawn office jokes. He proposes that one conference room be decorated with the text “If assholes could fly - this place would be an airport!”. The images are amateur and familiar, in contrast with the homogeneous order of the corporate board room. These kinds of photocopied office jokes are found in backrooms of big business, the side the clients rarely see, the office kitchens, the secretarial cubicles and typing pools. They are the underbelly of corporate life, excluded from the slick corporate image portrayed in the 1980s. Indeed, much of Kelley’s work in the 1990s has employed this kind of “pathetic and often home-crafted” production.^v

Grunge’s “loser aesthetic”^{vi} manifested in the art practices of a number of Australian artists early in 1993. Jeff Gibson registered emergence of the grunge aesthetic in Australian art in his commentary in *Art & Text*, May 1993, *Avant-Grunge*.^{vii} Gibson identifies Hany Armanious, Adam Cullen, Mikala Dwyer, Nikki Savvas, Troy Skewes and Justene Williams as Australian artists dealing with this aesthetic. In early 1993, these artists appeared variously in group exhibitions, *Shirthead*,^{viii} *Rad Scunge*,^{ix} *Scrounge Time*,^x *Monster Field*^{xi} and *Adams*.^{xii} The work in these exhibitions also shared the ‘grunge’ aesthetic of the dirt and grime of everyday experience, the threadbare, the local, the amateur and homespun, unfinished and unpolished, and so it quickly earned the appellation of ‘grunge art’^{xiii} Gibson was not the first critic to attach the label of ‘grunge art’ to these artists. However, he somewhat solidified the term, and placed their work in a more direct relation to the fashion of grunge in mass culture. As Gibson notes, titles of these exhibitions (particularly *Rad Scunge* and *Scrounge Time*) share the same grimy etymology as ‘grunge’ fashion and music.

Not only did these artists share similar aesthetic concerns, but, in exhibiting together, they presenting themselves as a unit, if not a movement. ‘Grunge art’ arrived at its

greatest point of coherence in the exhibition *Rad Scunge*, at Karyn Lovegrove Galley in Melbourne, from March 3rd-26th 1993, curated by the “proto-grunge”^{xiv} artist, Dale Frank. From May 7th-21st, 1993, *Shirthead* at the Mori Annexe, Sydney, was regarded as a “sequel”^{xv} to *Rad Scunge*, exhibiting the work of the same group of artists.^{xvi} Of the artists in these exhibitions, Hany Armanious, Adam Cullen and Mikala Dwyer received the greatest amount of critical attention.

Following Gibson’s article, the label of ‘grunge art’ became quite a contentious issue. As Judy Annear notes in her review of Australian art in 1993, the debates surrounding grunge were “ferocious”.^{xvii} Advocates for the artists argued against the use of the “not entirely appropriate rhetorics of ‘grunge’ and ‘scunge’ that have been attached to [these works]”.^{xviii} Notably, the ‘grunge’ artists themselves displayed a dislike for the term. Dwyer states that ‘grunge art’ is “a really unfortunate term” to be applied to her art, “because it trivialises the work”.^{xix} However, there is a certain validity in the term ‘grunge art’ in relation to the work of these artists. Not only does this term recognise an aesthetic lineage of this art to grunge in wider culture, but this term also highlights important ways in which the fashions and values of wider culture inevitably have a bearing upon contemporary art practice.

In both wider culture and art, grunge’s aesthetic was a distant quotation of the aesthetics of punk, an aesthetic which has held a certain currency as a transgressive strategy for 20 years preceding grunge. As Gibson argues, this aesthetic has descended through a lineage of white radical sub-culture, and can be traced to punk in the 1970s.^{xx} Indeed, Christopher Chapman identifies the grunge aesthetic as being particularly “post-punk”.^{xxi} The hole-ridden clothes of Kurt Cobain, Nirvana’s lead singer, and the threadbare second-hand dresses of Courtney Love, the lead singer of Hole, were clear, if mutated, echoes of the clothes of punk in the late 1970s. The music of grunge bands, the raw, percussive and distorted guitar sounds, the crashing drums and the rough vocals, also descended from punk. However, grunge was not merely a recuperation of punk. Rather, from punk in the ‘70s certain codes passed into other kinds of music, into rock, thrash-metal and the American ‘college bands’ of the ‘80s, like The Pixies and The Breeders, and into the music of grunge. With grunge, there was a thorough reinvestment of some of the

codes which punk employed. Punk's safety-pins, spiked hair and ripped clothes resurfaced, in a mutated and hybridised form, in the tattoos, lank and unkempt hair and holey sweaters of grunge.

It is useful here to briefly consider punk's strategic deployment of this aesthetic. Punk was not concerned with dismantling the established dominant social system and replacing it with an alternative. Rather, punk's anti-establishmentism was concerned with providing no alternative, the negation of any system, the anarchy which is suggested in punk's "no future" aphorism. Punk sought to dismiss the future by resisting the past. Its music sought to negate the imperatives of the discourse of music to which it belonged. Its disdain for the recording industry is clearly symbolised in the film *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, 1979, when the Sex Pistols' bass-player, Sid Vicious, defecates on a vinyl record, shitting on the central icon of the music industry. Punk consciously rejected the standard notion of musicianship. To make music one did not have to know how to play an instrument, let alone be musically literate. It attempted to negate things such as musicianship, the music industry, and the British 'establishment', with their opposites, the amateur, the home-made, and the anarchic. The primary organising principle of Punk was to provide a negative picture, as though the power of the establishment could be cancelled out by punk's equal and opposite reaction. If law and order were on the establishment side of this equation, then anarchy was on the punk side. If professionalism was on one side, amateurism was on the other. Punk's politics were reactive, and more concerned with undoing 'the system' rather than replacing it.

Importantly, the aesthetics of raggedness were vital to punk's negationist strategy of transgression (*see Plate 3*). Anyone could rip a t-shirt and add some safety-pins and chains. Punk

Plate 3

hairstyles didn't need a hair salon, they were hacked, messy, spiked and coloured with food dye. Punk did not require a knowledge or interest in any music that had gone before, it needed no tutoring or recording deal. All punk required was a guitar, three chords and anger. Despite its repellent image, punk was open to anyone who wanted to be part of it, without qualification. In this way it attempted to cut out the imperatives of economics and education in producing culture, undercutting the centralised fashion and music industries.

However, this home-spun impoverished and ragged aesthetic was not simply a strategy of reclaiming culture. Importantly, it was a strategy which hoped to transgress society by attempting to go 'below' it. Despite its pretensions to social outsidership, punk was not a culture *from* the lumpenproletariat, the social 'underclass' which falls *below* the opposition between the low of the proletariat and the high of the bourgeoisie, outside of the common economy. Rather, punk was a culture from working class and lower middle class Britain, that strived to *create* a position in the lumpenproletariat. Punk could never be considered the culture of the economically disenfranchised. Rather, punk was the culture of the enfranchised which had elected to drop 'down' below economic enfranchisement, to 'drop out'. This was the politics of punk, its strategy of transgression. Its raggedness was adopted by volition, new t-shirts were ripped, coiffured hair was hacked.

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx identifies the 'lumpenproletariat' as "vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley-slaves, swindlers, impostors, lassaroni, pickpockets, bamboozlers, gamblers, maquereaux, brothel keepers".^{xxiii} Punk appropriated the personae of the lumpenproletariat. By playing a shabby Victorian vagabond, a criminal, a tramp or a whore, punk identified with archetypal outcasts, in the hope of being cast out, a strategic downward social mobility. It attempted to undercut music, fashion and society by going beneath them. The simple reactive gainsaying of negation was the strategy by which punk sought to find a way out of society, like a prison escapee digging a tunnel, out through the dirt, under the structures of society, below the powers that be, to the 'outside'.

Following the aesthetic of the '80s yuppie – the young upwardly mobile professional, grunge breathed new life into punk's strategy of downward mobility. Grunge too seemed to want to drop 'below', by dint of association with the raggedness of the lumpenproletariat. Sure enough, grunge's use of punk's codes was considerably softer, less vicious, less vehement and more apathetic. This 'quotation' of punk is an important aspect of grunge which I shall return to later in this chapter. By quoting punk, grunge in wider culture signalled a bourgeois 'opting-out'. Grunge art, like grunge in wider culture, also quoted punk's ragged aesthetics in the gallery space. It used the materials of cultural debris, the detritus of suburban life, garbage, the cast-off of society, old styrofoam packing, an old beer keg, plastic bags, broken furniture, old stockings, a dead cat. Gibson writes, in a review of Hany Armanious's exhibition at Julie Green Gallery, Sydney, 1992, that the artist employed:

used and abused materials—'crippled' armchairs, discarded appliances, packaging, plastic utensils and so on. Their distinctively scungy and unsavoury materials make a lot of other work in the junk-art genre look positively hosed down.^{xxiii}

One work in this exhibition, *The Witness*, (*Plate 4*) is a small human figure moulded from foam and paint, "unmistakably resembling an appallingly huge and lumpy turd",^{xxiv} lying on top of an old plastic fruit-packaging tray. Likewise, Adam Cullen's *The Otherness When It Comes*, exhibited at Black Gallery, Sydney, 1993, is a dead cat bound with masking tape and foam. Mikala Dwyer's *Woops*, 1994, (*Plate 5*) exhibited at Sarah Cottier Gallery in June 1994, is a scattered array of old cosmetics, worn stockings, broken electrical appliances and tubes. These are things that have been depleted, drained of life, which have outlived their common use value in our culture and are no longer economic exchangeable. They are materials which have dropped below the common economy of use value. They possess a kind of lumpen-materiality.

Indeed, the way in which these materials were often installed in the gallery space was characteristically scattered. That is, the elements of the works were often fragmented, without clear boundaries, dispersed about the gallery space in 'lumps'. In Dwyer's *Woops*, nail polish bottles are assembled in small piles, tubes were scattered across the floor, stockings are stretched across the beams above. The dimensions of the work are amorphous and scattered. One could walk amongst the

hanging fabrics and stretched stockings. Likewise, stray ‘turds’ from Armanious’s *The Witness*, lie in lumps on the floor, away from the work. Similarly, Mike Kelley’s *Arena #1 (Blue and Red)*,

Plates 4 & 5

1990, and *Lumpenprole*, 1991, are scattered within the gallery space. The homogeneity of the artwork is dismantled and disorganised. Rosalind Krauss proposes that there is a resonance between the scatteredness of works such as these and the notion of ‘lumpenproletariat’, further to the one I have already suggested. She suggests that the use of ‘lumps’, the ‘ragged’ and scattered form of the kind employed by Kelley, Armanious, Cullen or Dwyer, aims at a political position ‘below’ political dialectics, to be lower than low, by resisting formality.^{xxv} The dispersed and decentred aesthetic of grunge resists shaping. Its raggedness, scatteredness, and cobbled informality invades the homogeneity of the gallery space, rupturing the aesthetic of the white cube and undermining its intellectual authority.

Along with this ragged and dispersed materiality, grunge art’s aesthetic was particularly concerned with the suburban and domestic. Gibson notes in 1994, “generic suburbanism is currently hot cultural property for slackers and artists alike”.^{xxvi} A review of *Shirthead* observes that domestic material are central to the “brutal signature ‘style’” of Dwyer’s work.^{xxvii} Indeed Dwyer’s work particularly features the materials of the domestic and private domain, the socially ‘abject’ brought into the sterility of the gallery. Likewise, in Dwyer’s work for the survey exhibition, *Australian Perspecta 1993*, an array of shower-caps, rubber bath mats and toilet seats were installed in the marble foyer of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, seeking to decentre the authority of the State’s public gallery, and rupture it with fragments of the private and suburban. The grandiose marble of the public gallery was effectively transformed into the generic disinfectant-scorched marble of a suburban public toilet.

Grunge art self consciously adopted this aesthetic suburbia, of the streets, as Chapman notes, “the term itself [grunge] has its origins in popular music and street culture, and here it is most at home”.^{xxviii} For grunge art, this adoption of a ‘street’ aesthetic, has a corresponding function to its lumpen-materiality and its scattered aesthetic. Like much new art of the 1990s, grunge art sought to take art discourse “out of the domain of academic reference onto the ‘streets’”.^{xxix} If the fashion of grunge across wider culture could be seen as a reaction to the ebullience of the late 1980s, then, in addition, grunge art deployed its strategy against the dominance of cultural theory in art discourses in the 1980s. John Roberts notes:

Playing dumb, shouting ‘ARSE’ and taking your knickers down has become an attractive move in the face of the institutionalisation of critical theory in art in the 80s.^{xxx}

Inevitably, it seems simplistic and reductive to take such an arbitrary marker as the turn of a decade as a significant point of demarcation, a historical fissure and say that the art of one decade is characteristically different from another. However, when one compares art discourses in the 1980s to those of the 1990s, there certainly seems to be a significant shift from the art of one decade to the next. Between the late 1960s and the 1980s, contemporary art experienced a slow but certain paradigmatic shift. The axioms of Modernism in art gave way to the more fragmented tenets of postmodernism. By the 1980s, this paradigm shift had gained momentum in art theory, particularly with the added weight of postmodernist and poststructuralist theory which had more thoroughly weighed into art discourse. For a time in the ‘80s, cultural theory seemed to set the agenda for art practitioners, and provided the dominant frameworks for critical understandings of art.

In Australia, in 1981, the international journal *Art & Text* was launched by Paul Taylor. It effectively drew a stronger connection between the postmodern, poststructural and psychoanalytical theoretical discourses of the time, and its artistic contemporaries.^{xxxi} Interest in the new cultural theory of the ‘80s was already intense by the time of the *Futur*Fall* conference in July 1984, at The University of Sydney,^{xxxii} which further bolstered the interest of Australian artists in cultural theory. Theorists themselves were invested with star status: Jean Baudrillard, who was at *Futur*Fall* to give his paper *The Year 2000 Will Not Take Place*, was mobbed by fans at the conference.

By the late ‘80s, cultural theory formed a face similar to that of the slick fashion of the time. Cultural theory of the ‘80s was characteristically cool, reserved and cerebral, with a distinct air of professionalism, intellectual propriety and academic rigour. Despite any of the intentions of the protagonists of the new theory, by the end of the 1980s it had established a significant level of acceptance within academia, to the point that it became not only institutionally validated, but hegemonic. Of course, it cannot be said that postmodernism or poststructuralism has found no resistance from longer established strands of academia. Take the contention in the University of Cambridge in 1992, when it was proposed that Jaques Derrida should

be awarded an honorary degree. The disciplinary demarcation of Derrida's concerns were problematic to some Cambridge academics who could not decide whether Derrida's discipline was literature or philosophy. Nevertheless, Australian art institutions were particularly receptive to the new theory, and it quickly became institutionalised to a significant degree, becoming central to their lecturing programs in the late '80s.

Indeed, the such theory became, for want of a better word, trendy, with its own fashionable idiosyncrasies. The correct pronunciation of French names became a weighty issue in itself: Was 'Lacan' pronounced as "la-can" or "la-con"? Did one pronounce the 'd' at the end of 'Baudrillard'? Certainly, pronouncing his silent 'll's was a major academic and social *faux pas!* Published art theory essays favoured unwieldy titles such as *On Some Alternatives to the Code in the Age of Hyperreality; the Hermit and the City Dweller*,^{xxxiii} and as Roberts notes, exhibition titles were "serious, vaguely poetic, [and] intellectually authoritative."^{xxxiv} However, Roberts argues that;

To organise a show today [in the 1990s] entitled 'Identity, Representation and the Dialogic' would seem as smart and vital a move as Tachisms' existentialist gibberings did to many Seventies conceptualists.^{xxxv}

The contemporary art discourses of the 1990s seemed to abandon the seriousness of the preceding decade:

Throughout the 1990sÖ we have become familiar with the contra or anti-exhibition title, the title that mocks the assiduousness of theory led-curatorship.^{xxxvi}

Roberts illustrates this point with the titles of some 1990s British exhibitions, *Minky Manky, Sick, Gang Warfare* and *Brilliant!*.

The same can be said of *Shirthead, Rad Scunge* and *Scrounge Time*. Whereas the titles of exhibitions in the 1980s aimed towards a lofty intellectuality, many exhibitions of the mid-'90s aimed at the base. Much grunge art demonstrates this position of post- or anti-theory and, indeed, this was registered by art journal critics at the time. As Eve Sullivan notes, grunge art was regarded as "an antidote to the rigid theorisation" of art.^{xxxvii} It was noted that, unlike the theory-based work of the 1980s, "the work does not speak to a secret group of initiates", and it "marks a break with those uses of objects in art of the preceding decade".^{xxxviii}

Adam Cullen's work, in the early to mid-1990s, parodied the verbosity of 1980s art theory with absurdly lengthy titles, such as *Residual paroxysm of unspoken and extended closures interrogated by a malady of necrogenic subterfuge with a nice exit*. Here, Cullen attempts to use the verbosity of theory against its intellectual authority. Cullen's *Cosmological Satellite Mother Denied Depressed Speech*, 1993, (Plate 6) is a beer keg with a glass encased umbilical chord attached to its side. In this case, Cullen seems to equate theoretical prolixity, particularly that of psychoanalysis in this case, with that of a babbling and effusive drunk, exaggerated and "drunk' with hyperbole".^{xxxix} To paraphrase Benjamin D'Israeli, Cullen's works are inebriated on the exuberance of their own verbosity. Cullen's titles attempt to negate perceived intellectual pretensions of theory with the jumbled idiolect of a drunk — sophistry versus sophistry.

Cullen's 'drunken logic' aims to undermine the authority of theory by attempting to close-off the avenues through which the work may be theoretically engaged, to negate the discursive

Plate 6 & 7

imperatives of the art which came directly before. By attempting to put his work ‘outside’ of the reach of theory, Cullen’s negationism seeks a position of stubborn muteness, a strategic ‘dumbness’. Cullen’s *Residual paroxysm of unspoken and extended closures interrogated by a malady of necrogenic subterfuge with a nice exit*, 1993, (Plate 7) is a ‘machine’ assembled from an old bath, medical tubing, diapers, and broken equipment, such as an old television. The tubes run from one part of the ‘machine’ to another. Cullen’s “machines”^{xli} have no moving parts and no function. They are dumb machines, ungrammatical, resisting flow and function. His “creatures”,^{xlii} such as the cat in *The Otherness When It Comes*, 1993, (Plate 8) is dead. It sits up, but does nothing. Its eyes will not see, and it will not hear, and it will not move. This obstinate, self-imposed dumbness is characteristic of Cullen’s work in the early ‘90s. Like Cullen’s ‘dumbness’, Armanious’s claim to acid-induced inspiration seems to attempt to put their work beyond commonly experienced language.^{xliii} The use of drugs attempts to disengage common discourse.

However, this brings us to crux of the matter of grunge art, which defines its particularly strategy differently from that of punk. As John Roberts suggests, there are two kinds of ‘dumb’ strategies in 1990s art:

there is the *unthinking* stupidity of the philistine who sees his or her rejection of the dominant discourses of modern art as univocally true and [in contrast, there is] the *thinking* stupidity of the philistine who sees the rejection of the dominant discourses of art as a matter of ethical positioning.^{xliiii}

Plate 8

Sure enough, punk belongs to Roberts' category of 'unthinking' stupidity, in the sense that it uncritically believed that it could actually reject the history of music. With grunge art, I have shown that it drew upon punk's strategy of downward mobility by use of punk's politics of lumpen-materiality. I have noted that grunge art's materiality reiterates some political aspects of punk's ragged aesthetic. In addition, with Armanious's use of LSD in producing some works it could be argued that Armanious is attempting to 'break through' to a raw space 'outside'. A similar conclusion could be deduced from Cullen's reference to alcohol, and the use of a kind of babbling drunken logic in many of his titles.

However, does this necessarily mean that the position of grunge art was also one of an 'unthinking' dumbness, which seeks to achieve some position 'outside' of culture through wholesale negation of its discursive historical imperatives, or is it a 'thinking' dumbness, which is deployed with limited intention, for short-term political ends, never actually attempting to genuinely drop-out of culture? Alternatively, one could ask the same question with different terms: Does grunge art deploy a strategy of negation with the belief that genuine transgression is possible? Or, does grunge art merely quote negationist strategies for other reasons, without any faith in the notion that power can be genuinely transgressed? To begin to answer this question, I shall examine examples of 'outsider' positions, in which there is a certain faith that one can transgress power and negate historical discursive imperatives.

Outsiders

‘Outsider’ positions seek to employ transgressive strategies on the basis of a metatopography in which power covers only a limited area, the outside of which is a natural space beyond the jurisdiction of power. This is apparent in punk’s intentions to ‘drop-out’ of society via an ‘outside’ situated below culture.

‘Outsider’ positions attempt to recover an authentic natural space which has been corrupted or overwritten by culture. In this section of this chapter, I will examine various examples of ‘outsider’ strategies which seek to establish a position of exteriority opposite to the ‘inside’ of power in the various forms of authority, culture or language. Indeed, notions of *transgression* tend to be predicated on a spatial metaphor of ‘interior’ versus ‘exterior’. For example, consider the Pocket Oxford Dictionary’s entry for ‘transgress’:

transgress’ (or -z-), v.t. &
i. Infringe (law &c.), outstep
(limit laid down); sin.
transgre’ssion
(-z-, shn) n., (esp.) a sin;
~’ or (-z-) n., (esp.) sinner.
[L *transgredior*, -gress-]^{xliv}

This is not to say that dictionary definitions encapsulate any essential meaning of transgression. However, the Pocket Oxford’s definition is interesting: to transgress is to ‘infringe’ and ‘outstep’, broadly, a ‘limit laid down’. The dictionary’s definition of the term necessarily invokes a spatialised metaphor of interior/exterior.

Although the forms which ‘outsider’ positions take are varied, they share the foundational axiom of an ‘inside’/‘outside’ topography of power. There are certain strategies of transgression which are based on the idea that language is identical with the domain of power. Further, certain ‘outsider’ positions regard sanity as the acculturated ‘inside’, and others seek to achieve a ‘primitivism’ which is set against the ‘inside’ of ‘culture’. I shall address each of these positions, and then examine the ways in which such positions which employ this ‘interior’/‘exterior’ model are problematic.

Julia Kristeva’s notion of transgression, elucidated in *Revolution in Poetic Language*^{xlv} argues for a transgressive position that is not only exterior, but *anterior*

to culture. In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva discusses transgression in relation to subjectivity and language. Her conception of the subject derives closely from an orthodox Freudian premise that to be human is to be a psycho-biological entity that is formed from 'raw' material into subjectivity. When a human child is born it exists in a pre-cultural state, its subjectivity has yet to be formed. At this pre-cultural point, the child is a bundle of unorganised drives and instincts, all id and no ego. Like Freud, Kristeva regards the process of ego formation to be the Oedipal drama. It is not until the child has gone through this process that the child becomes a subject proper. Kristeva identifies the drives of the pre-cultural, pre-subject and pre-Oedipal self as the drives of the *chora*. The *chora* is the pre-socialised pre-organised body, consisting of instinctual drives which predicate the kinds of subjective articulation and identification which follow in the formation of the subject. The *chora* is the space of the operation of sensory impulses and the rhythms of motility. Its sensations are organised along a simple binary of positive or negative. Thus, in this pre-cultural state, subjective patterns may form, yet are constantly changing. There is no stable or unified subject at this stage. The pre-Oedipal child consists of the rhythms of its drives, which are natural and unacculturated. Kristeva calls these pre-cultural rhythms of the *chora* the 'semiotic'. The 'semiotic' is the product of vocal and gestural modulations, but is anterior to language, while being a precondition for the later adoption of symbolic language. Even as the child becomes subjectivised, the fundamental patterns of the 'semiotic' persist into the acculturation of the subject, and underlie the 'symbolic' cultural language which is layed over it in the formation of subjectivity. It will always accompany speech, underlying it and forming its basis.

However, Kristeva claims that in states in which this acculturated unity of subjectivity is disrupted or fragmented, such as in certain mental illnesses, or in states in which it becomes momentarily unstable, such as in dreams, the underlying 'semiotic' rhythms become dominant and break through the 'symbolic' part of language. She claims that this rupture in symbolic language can also be found in certain avant garde literary texts and is transgressive in a fundamental, universal way, as Leslie Hill notes:

If the avant garde is disruptive, Kristeva maintains, it is not because it transgresses one or other of the conventions attendant on writing as a social practice, but because

it transgresses the closed rationality of the thetic, or that symbolic moment or instance which corresponds to positionality, to acts of judgement or intention.^{xlvi}

In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva offers a reading of the work of Mallarmé in terms of the underlying ‘semiotics’ of its phonetics, which operate independent of lingual signification, separate to ‘symbolic’ language. For Kristeva, some works by Mallarmé rupture the thetic, symbolic conventions of acculturated language.^{xlvii}

Transgression then, for Kristeva, is the transgression of the Oedipalised, acculturated unified subject, by the natural rhythms of the chora. As the title of that work suggests, she regards this transgression of acculturated language as revolutionary, especially when combined with revolutionary intentions in the ‘symbolic’ part of a text. In such cases, the ‘semiotic’ and the ‘symbolic’ can harmonise in the one text to produce a literary work that is powerfully disruptive and subversive.

Kristeva’s notions of transgression conceive of an ‘outside’ of culture that is more raw, essential and universal than the contingencies of culture — the ‘truth’: ‘out of the mouths of babes’, or indeed the insane artist, for that matter:

As art, this shattering can display the productive basis of subjective and ideological signifying formations — a foundation that primitive societies call ‘sacred’ and modernity has rejected as ‘schizophrenia’.^{xlviii}

Her claim that schizophrenia ruptures common signifying formations demonstrates a widespread understanding of madness as a passage to truth. The pre-cultural exterior, the chora, is revealed — rhythmic, primal, and unintelligible, but naturally signifiant and true.

In the early 1970s, following a resurgence of interest in the work of Georges Bataille on transgression and taboo, and the writing of Antonin Artaud, Kristeva was amongst a number of theorists in France closely considering the character of power and the rule of law. As Leslie Hill notes:

In the early 1970s in France there was much debate on this topic, which ended with some writers, like Kristeva, redefining and maintaining the concept of transgression with regard to the avant-garde, while others, such as Deleuze and Guattari in the *L’Anti-Oedipe* (1972), or Michel Foucault in *Surveiller et Punir* (1975) or in the first volume of his *Histoire de la Sexualite* (1976) embarking on a fundamental critique of the concept of transgression and the dialectical repression and subversion it implied.^{xlix}

While Kristeva's considerations of power and transgression tend to reinforce an ontological notion of subjectivity and power relations, Gilles Deleuze with Félix Guattari, and Michel Foucault attempt to think about power relations by destabilising given notions of subjectivity. Indeed, these notions become quite important in later chapters of this thesis. However, it is interesting to note here that on the matter of mental illness, there is remarkably little difference between Kristeva's valorisation of schizophrenia and Deleuze and Guattari's own glorification of schizophrenia in their schizoanalysis strategy, in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

In this work, Deleuze and Guattari tend to regard psychosis as transgressive, as a 'breakthrough'. Of course, unlike Kristeva, they are expressly against the use of the Oedipal triad as the foundational organising model of understanding power relations. Without the same faith as Kristeva in the importance of the Oedipal, Deleuze and Guattari do not regard children as particularly closer to an 'unacculturated' position, in fact they argue that the art of children somehow lacks the qualities of great art. In *What is Philosophy*:

[w]e may admire children's drawings, or rather be moved by them, but they rarely stand up and only resemble Klee or Miro if we do not look at them for long.¹

This is, of course, held in contrast to Deleuze and Guattari's ideal of the insane, for whom they reserve a particularly high esteem:

The paintings of the mad, on the contrary, often hold up, but on condition of being crammed full, with no empty space remaining. However, blocs need pockets of air and emptiness, because even the void is sensation. All sensation is composed with the void in composition itself with itself, and everything holds together on earth and in the air, and preserves the void, is preserved in the void by preserving itself.ⁱⁱ

Here, while Deleuze and Guattari reject the notion that the art of children is unacculturated, and that an 'exterior' place to culture comes from an anterior 'nature' from their 'anti-Oedipal' position, nevertheless, they do suggest that a transgressive exterior to culture may be tenable, in the case of psychosis. They maintain this position in *Anti-Oedipus* where Deleuze and Guattari set the art of the neurotic against the art of the psychotic:

The hypocritical warning resounds: a little neurosis is good for the work of art, good material, but not psychosis, especially not psychosis; we draw a line between the eventually creative neurotic aspect, and the psychotic aspect, alienating and destructive. As if the great voices, which were capable of performing a breakthrough in grammar and syntax, and of making all language a desire, were not

speaking from the depths of psychosis, and as if they were not demonstrating for our benefit an eminently psychotic and revolutionary means of escape.^{lii}

For Deleuze and Guattari, the literature of Malcolm Lowry, Henry Miller, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac are important points where the breakthrough—not the breakdown— occurs. The reputed madness of the English Nineteenth Century painter J.M.W. Turner is another example Deleuze and Guattari use in their discussion of this aspect in visual arts. They talk about Turner’s “third period” as being the point at which his paintings become “pierced by a whole, a lake, a flame, a tornado, an explosion” The canvas is truly broken, sundered by what penetrates it”^{liii}.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, their exemplary transgressive schizophrenic is Artaud:

Artaud does not belong to the realm of literature, he is outside it because he is a schizophrenic.^{liv}

Indeed, Artaud himself regards himself as being ‘outside’ of literature, or even language:

All writing is pigshit.

People who leave the obscure and try to define whatever it is that goes on in their heads are pigs.

The whole literary scene is a pigpen, especially this one.

All those who have vantage points in their spirit, I mean, on some side or other of their heads and in a few strictly localised brain areas; all those who are masters of their language; all those for whom words have a meaning; all those for whom there exist sublimities in the soul and currents of thought; all those who are the spirit of the times, and have named these currents of thought — and I am thinking of their precise works, of that automatic grinding that delivers their spirit to the winds — are pigs.^{lv}

For Artaud, writing crystallises the metaphysics of thought into the physical, at which point it becomes valueless. For Artaud, language acts like a reversed Midas’ touch — thought is more precious than gold, but the touch of language turns it to pigshit. The sanity and faith in symbolic language of Artaud’s ‘pigs’ corrupts, meanwhile Artaud regarded his own madness as bestowing him with an obscure insight which would take ten years for other people to decipher and understand.^{lvi}

The notion that madness is next to genius, a conduit to divine and ideal truth, has been popular in the mythology of our culture throughout this century. Within

Western art, the notion of madness as a transgression of acculturation, and a conduit to truth, has held a great deal of value. A clear example is the way in which the work of Vincent Van Gogh has been commonly regarded as inextricable from the biographical details of the artist as a madman. In the case of Van Gogh, the mad-genius myth is often employed, placing his madness as the motor which, beyond the volition of the artist, advances the course of art and culture as a whole. His madness is regarded as the tool by which he was able to breach “an invisible iron wall” — to break through, not to break down.^{lvii} Both the madness and genius of insane artists are often regarded as something outside of the control of the subject who suffers with his or her gift. Their subjectivity is regarded as a mere conduit between some ‘higher’ metaphysical being, in touch with the world of ideal forms. The mad-genius is the ‘idiot savant’, the *fool-in-the-know*. Indeed, it seems to be the implication that the more vacuous or fragmented the subject, the better: like a pipe, it must be a vessel with a containing shell, but the more free space on inside, all the better for conduction. What is being conveyed by the mad genius are transcendental values, above and beyond culture. Their wild, crazy, unacculturated and fragmented subjectivity creates the cracks in culture through which truth and beauty shine.

The mythology of Van Gogh was largely constructed after the fact, in Modernist revisions of his work. In contrast, Jean Dubuffet’s entire artistic practice was itself preoccupied with the notion that the art of insane is non-intellectual and unacculturated, and thus closer to transcendental truth and beauty. For Dubuffet, art should have nothing to do with intellectuality:

And art is precisely a chewing-gum that has nothing to do with ideas. We occasionally lose sight of this. Ideas, and the algebra of ideas, may be approaches to knowledge, but art is another means of cognition, and its ways are totally different: its ways are *clairvoyance*. And a clairvoyance has no use for scholars and thinkers, it doesn’t even know those areas. Knowledge and intelligence are weak fins in comparison with clairvoyance.^{lviii}

For Dubuffet, ideas are a different language to art. Art of intellectuals is “false art”, while “true art always crops up wherever you don’t expect it”.^{lix} With the art of the insane, Dubuffet claims that we “witness the pure artistic operation, unrefined, thoroughly reinvented, in all its aspects, by the maker, who acts entirely on his own impulses.”^{lx} The insane artist is seen as the subject of his [sic] impulses, or as

Kristeva may say, the subject's choric rhythms. In 1945, Dubuffet began a systematic search for art of the insane, which he termed "Art Brut", 'raw art', of which he says:

We have been lead to conduct at least part of our research by this unique desire to encounter works representative of a cerebral creativity surging forth in total spontaneity and ingenuousness, in all its raw, *brute* purity.^{lxi}

Evidently Dubuffet, regards madness as a means to puncture culture, to transgress its imperatives, and break through to a raw transcendental domain outside of language.

In this century, insanity has been held in an ambiguously privileged position, subject to a mix of revilement and romanticism in our culture. Certainly the vestiges of the punitive institutions of the asylums of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century persist into the continuing degrees of alienation which the mentally ill suffer from the 'mainstream' of our culture. However, paradoxically, the Twentieth Century has recuperated an understanding of madness which was dominant in Europe during the Renaissance, where it was regarded, as Michel Foucault notes, as "an experience where man [sic] was confronted with his [sic] moral truth, and the rules proper to his nature and his truth".^{lxii} Dubuffet clearly adopts this idealised understanding which, while not singling out madness for revulsion, still alienates it as a transcendental other.

Indeed, this idea of an '*ascent* to madness' to the natural and true, continues to be a popular myth within contemporary Western culture at the end of the Twentieth Century. For example, briefly consider the brochure to launch Apple Computer Inc.'s 1998 advertising campaign, *To The Crazy Ones*:

To the crazy ones.
Here's to the crazy ones.
The misfits.
The rebels.
The troublemakers.
The round pegs in the square holes.
The ones who see things differently.
They're not fond of rules.
And they have no respect for the status quo.
You can praise them, disagree with them, quote them,
disbelieve them, glorify or vilify them.
About the only thing you can't do is ignore them.

Because they change things.

They invent. They Imagine. They heal.
They explore. They create. They inspire.
They push the human race forward.

Maybe they have to be crazy.

How else can you stare at an empty canvas and see a work of art? Or sit in silence and hear a song that's never been written? Or gaze at a red planet and see a laboratory on wheels?

We make tools for these kinds of people.
While some see them as the crazy ones,
we see genius.

Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.

Apple Computer, Inc.
Think Different.^{lxiii}

We cannot ignore the 'crazy ones', "because they change things". In this popular mythology, the 'crazy ones' are the motor of change on the predetermined linear path of natural progress, "they push the human race forward" because they can see the truth behind culture.

For Dubuffet, the 'rawness' of the insane is similar to the perceived innocence of the 'primitives'. With both insanity and 'primitivism', Dubuffet sets up a dichotomy between the Western as acculturated and intellectual, and the 'other'. In the case of 'primitivism', or the art of "savages" (as he is fond of saying), Dubuffet adopts a Eurocentric 'noble savage' mythology, applying the same condescending notions of non-cultured purity to these "savages" as with the insane:

I, personally, have a very high regard for the values of primitive peoples: instinct, passion, caprice, violence, madness.^{lxiv}

Like the insane, he regards the 'primitives' as closer to instinct. Although his reasoning is somewhat less complex than that of Kristeva, he too sees symbolic language as standing in the way of the expression an exterior and fundamental universal human purity:

our culture is based on a complete trust in language (particularly written language) and on a belief in its capacity to translate and elaborate thought. Now this strikes me as a mistake. Language, I find, is a gross, extremely gross stenography, a system of highly rudimentary algebraic signs, damaging rather than serving thought.^{lxv}

He believes that Westerners privilege elaborate thought above all else, that Westerners tend to analyse and dissect, to break down the subject of their interest into its atoms. He continues:

One of the chief traits of the western mind is its habit of ascribing to humankind a nature quite different from that of all other creatures.^{lxvi}

And:

Savages' feel that there is something weak about reason and logic, they rely on other ways of gaining knowledge of things.^{lxvii}

Against this pure culturally immobile 'ground-zero' of the 'primitives', Dubuffet regards the transient acculturated West as a perversion from the natural. Dubuffet's interest in the 'raw' also leads him to an interest in states of delirium.^{lxviii} As with the infantile, the insane and the primitive, states of delirium, induced by drugs and alcohol, hold the same transgressive value in our culture, as breaches of in the armour of acculturation, which open opportunities for the 'raw' to break through.

Of course, 'outsider' positions in this century are not peculiar to philosophy and art discourses. Within contemporary mass culture, the 'outsider' and its attendant notions of power and subjectivity operate popularly. For example, in 1993, the American band *Rage Against The Machine* released their first album (titled *Rage Against the Machine*), and the debut single *Killing in the Name* from that album. The lyrics of *Killing in the Name*, among other songs on the album, caused the CD cover to carry the "Parents Advisory: Explicit Lyrics" sticker. The song *Killing in the Name* was a protest song about war and the fascist character of the US military:

Some of those that work forces
Are the same that burn crosses^{lxix}

Stylistically, the music to these lyrics was a heavy metal/rap, thudding beat, distorted guitar, jarring chords, with a tempo in fits and starts. The vocal was rap, injected with a lot of anger. The anger and energy of *Killing in the Name*, and particularly the sentiment, made it both a controversy and a hit.

However, beyond of the main thrust of the lyrics of the individual songs on album, the underlying yet forcibly put position was one of a particular form of dissent:

Fuck You I Won't Do What You Tell Me^{lxx}

“Fuck You I Won’t Do What You Tell Me”, is repeated over and over (sixteen times, to be exact) in *Killing in the Name*. Similarly, in *Take The Power Back*, the song following *Killing in the Name* on the same album, the lyrics say “So-called facts are fraud, They want us to allege and pledge”.^{lxxi} An unspecified “they” features across the album, for example, “They said it was blue, When the blood was red” in *Bullet in Your Head*, and “They’re sending us to early graves”, in a song called *Freedom*.^{lxxii} Although “they” are never specified, everything else about the lyrics tells us “they” are “power”: the “machine” against which to “rage”.

Both the name of the band and their lyrics invoke “The Machine”, the big, solid, great, heavy, grinding, hot, steaming, relentless, merciless, *inhuman, faceless, powerful machine*. It takes everything you have, even your life according to the song *Killing in the Name*, then crushes you. The band’s implicit manifesto is that the only way to stop it is to “rage” against it, to say “Fuck You I Won’t Do What You Tell Me”. The way to throw a spanner in its mighty works is to say “fuck you”. That is, refusing to comply by putting the obscenity of “fuck” to work against the powerful, but delicate sensibilities of “the machine”, thus, refusing to engage “the machine” in the accepted limits of its own language. Further, the “Fuck you” is active and aggressive. It would not be drawing too long a bow to say that it may be seen as a violating “fuck you”, penetrating the machinic ‘inside’ from the ‘outside: an *invade* you and a *destroy* you.

‘The machine’ is a popular analogy of a notion of power which operates, discourses and circulates throughout Western culture, particular in our mass culture. The monolithic faceless machine of power: “They”, “power”, “authority”, “the establishment”. Within the popular culture of the West, this “machine” acts as a major axiom, determining how power is understood, discourses, and importantly, how it is challenged. Variations on this monolithic machine model are a popular trope in contemporary culture, but none perhaps as explicit as with the example of Rage Against The Machine. Implicit is the notion that the ‘rage’ which is against the ‘machine’ is outside of its cogs and pistons. Rage Against The Machine clearly purport to be on the exterior the ‘machine’, attacking power from the outside, from a transcendental space.

Greil Marcus, in his *Lipstick Traces*, also argues for the notion that there is a transcendental transgressive space to which universal spirit of resistance subscribes, regardless of cultural or temporal contingencies. Marcus argues that this spirit of transgression merely changes to different arenas of culture, changing tack throughout the course of the Twentieth Century. Marcus's 'secret history' traces the "single, serpentine fact"^{lxxiii} of a kind of avant-gardist cultural critique throughout the Twentieth century. "Serpentine" because it starts with the anti-war motives of dada, particularly Richard Huelsenbeck, Hugo Ball, and Tristan Tzara, re-appears in the Situationist International, particularly in the writings of Guy Debord, and Paris in May '68, then manifests in London in '76 with the explosion of punk. His narrative plots a spirit of transgression that comes from other areas of culture to congeal in the music culture of the late Twentieth Century, in the music of bands such as the Sex Pistols, whose kind of dissent continues to be produced in the 1990s by bands like Rage Against The Machine:

My conviction is that such circumstances are primarily odd. For a gnomic, gnostic dreamed up by a handful of Left Bank Cafe prophets to reappear a quarter-century later, to make the charts, and then come to life as a whole new set of demands on culture—this is almost transcendently odd.^{lxxiv}

Marcus's narrative quietly invokes a kind of Jungian mysticism to conjure up something of an essential spirit of transgression, which he sees as spanning, in very 'serpentine' fashion, from the Dutch heretic, John of Leyden in 1534, to John Lydon, "Johnny Rotten" of the Sex Pistols, in 1976.^{lxxv}

Marcus's 'secret history of the Twentieth Century' starts with dada, and while it progresses 'down' culture, to punk in the 1970s, he claims that art was divested of its power to subvert:

Smashing the faith in genius, the belief that God blessed the artist with special powers and guided his hand toward some transcendent revelation, dada had revealed the process. After dada, all art sat in a compost pile, its mystifications sucked into the methane.^{lxxvi}

For Marcus, Dada helped to dismantle the common transcendental claims for art, but consequently art lost its power of resistance and handed-on the reigns of avant-gardism:

Thus 'Lettrism': 'the avant-garde of the avant-garde'.^{lxxvii}

Thus art: the dead avant-garde. For Marcus, the politico-theoretical avant-garde thus leads to the Situationist International, and then to punk. So, 'art' (particularly Dada) leads 'culture' at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, but by the 1970s, 'culture' leads art. Marcus's narrative of avant gardism, (adopting the Situationist style sloganism) runs from "The Art of Yesterday's Crash" to "The Crash of Yesterday's Art".^{lxxviii} For Marcus, this shift of resistance testifies to a universal spirit of transgression, of a consistent 'rage' against the same ongoing powerful 'machine'.

The 'interior'/'exterior' model of power, which underwrites all of the notions of transgression above, is established upon a 'juridico-discursive' model of power which, according to Foucault, is the modal understanding of power in our culture. The juridico-discursive model is supported by a set of common assumptions made about power, which Foucault enumerates: First is "the negative relation", that is, "power can do nothing but say no",^{lxxix} it can operate only by refusal. Next is "the insistence of the rule", that is, power places everything in a binary system of permitted or forbidden. It operates only through the rule of law, "[t]he pure form of power resides in the function of the legislator".^{lxxx} The next assumption made by a juridico-discursive model of power is "the cycle of prohibition", that power's prohibition forces the forbidden into secrecy, out of the sight of power. Then there is "the logic of censorship", that is, power imposes silences, it censors and denies, and finally "the uniformity of the apparatus", that is, power "operates according to the simple and endlessly reproduced mechanisms of law, taboo and censorship: from state to family, from Prince to father".^{lxxxi} This particular aspect of this understanding of power operates in the psychoanalytical understanding. That is, that Oedipal power relations within the family are continuously reproduced at all other levels.^{lxxxii}

For the juridico-discursive model, power is monolithic, a legislative power on one side, and its obedient subjects on the other. Power is unoriginal, only able to reproduce its effects, and only able to negate. It can not produce: "it is basically anti-energy".^{lxxxiii} Foucault says that this dominant understanding of power was developed and established in the theory of public law that was constructed in the Middle Ages.

In Western societies since the Middle Ages, the exercise of power has always been formulated in terms of law.^{lxxxiv}

Since the Middle Ages, power has been given the representation of a “pure and simple edifice”.^{lxxxv} Of course, Foucault’s analytics of power rejects the juridico-discursive model of power. His entire oeuvre endeavours to rid analysis of:

a juridical and negative representation of power, and cease to conceive of it in terms of law, prohibition, liberty, and sovereignty.^{lxxxvi}

The idea of an ‘outside’ position to an interior of power can *only* function conceptually if power is understood as juridico-discursive. That is, if we regard power as monolithic, as prohibitive, as working only through the machinery of societal conventions and juridical laws, then freedom is on the exterior of that machine, outside of power. However, as Foucault argues, “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.”^{lxxxvii}

For Foucault, power runs throughout the discourses of culture because power *is* the discourses of culture. If discourse is power, ‘power-knowledge’, there can be no discourse outside of power, and there can be no ‘freedom’ from power. This is not to say that the power of the law reaches into every inch of life, that it “embraces everything”, but rather the conventional or juridical power of legislation or some kind of ‘moral code’ is only one very visible way in which power operates in culture. To be outside of its domain is by no means to be outside of power: “Resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power”.^{lxxxviii} Transgression regards conventional and juridical law as identical with power. Yet, transgression is always within power, inasmuch as one can speak of a ‘within’ in the absence of any inside/outside binary. Thus:

there is no single locus of Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary.^{lxxxix}

The notion of transgression is immediately problematic when one attempts to think of it in terms of a Foucauldian notion of power.

Of the ‘outsider’ notions that I have looked at above, Kristeva’s notion of transgression is surely the one most thoroughly embedded in a complex theoretical discourse. For Kristeva, the rhythms of the chora are not obliterated by the organisation of the ego, but rather act as an unconscious support to symbolic

language. To some extent she regards this primal outside as merely held at bay by acculturated language. For Kristeva when an artist or writer breaches symbolic language with choric rhythms the transgression of symbolic language is also revolutionary. Transgression of symbolic language is thus political transgression. Kristeva equates the interior of symbolic language with the interior of power, and establishes the pre-cultural chora as a place outside of culture and power. To a significant extent, Kristeva inherits the interior/exterior model from her Freudian orthodoxy, which posits the exterior of power with the pre-Oedipal. The child only becomes subject to powers of 'law' with the introduction of the Father, and the attendant introduction of symbolic language. In this way, Kristeva's work reproduces a juridico-dicursive model of power which is itself inherent in psychoanalysis.

Dubuffet's notions of 'raw' art are also predicated on a conception that culture and power have an anterior exterior, although for Dubuffet this pre-culturality is not so much a place anterior to the formation of subjectivity. For Dubuffet, the anterior of culture is exemplified in 'primitive' peoples, and that 'primitive' rawness is also to be found in the art of the insane. The problem with Dubuffet's reasoning is that he suggests that if we don't understand 'others', it must be because we collectively no longer understand the elements of our heritage, that we have moved too far ahead of our natural selves which are personified in the insane and the primitives.

With incommensurability:

Things which have nothing in common cannot be understood, the one by means of the other; the conception of one does not involve the conception of the other.^{xc}

That is, in this case, if there can ever be said to be an absolute outside of Western culture, it can only be a culture which has no connection whatsoever with our culture. At the point at which two incommensurate cultures meet, and begin to having meaning for one another, there is an instant commensurability, but with the important qualification that each culture accommodates its understanding of the other in ways which are entirely of its own. A cultural 'outside' can never be understood to be outside, that is an 'outside' relative to the 'inside', because, as Judith Butler suggests:

A constitutive or relative outside is, of course, composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless *internal* to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity.^{xci}

For the sake of clarity here, once an outside is conceived of, it is no longer outside culture. Thus, when Dubuffet appropriates images from other cultures, he understands those cultures in terms which are specific to his own European heritage. When he appropriates the art of the insane, he understands that art in ways specific to the normalising discourses of psychiatry and psychology of his time. At the same time, in doing so, Dubuffet actually reinforces the particularly Western axioms which underwrite these normalisations. Certainly Dubuffet recognises that there is a specific rationalism which is dominant in the thought of the West. However, Dubuffet fails to realise that it is exactly this rationalism which determines his own understandings, and operates particularly in his understanding of ‘primitives’. He establishes ‘primitives’ as childlike, innocent, and closer to a set of fundamental truths that, in actuality, are truths very much founded on the dominant axioms of Western culture, particularly the axiom of the linear progression of time, which places Western culture as leading the way down the natural path of progress.

For Deleuze and Guattari, particularly in *Anti-Oedipus*, psychosis is presented as a privileged ‘outsider’ position, somehow outside of power and culture: as a breakthrough not a breakdown. Certainly Deleuze and Guattari’s romanticisation of the insane is problematic. Elizabeth Grosz notes :

Deleuze and Guattari invest in a romantic elevation of psychoses, schizophrenia, becoming, which on one hand ignores the very real torment of suffering individuals and, on the other hand, positions it as an unlivable ideal for others.^{xcii}

Indeed, psychosis is the foundation of their tactic of schizoanalysis. To be fair to Deleuze and Guattari, their intention is not to equate madness with genius. Rather, for Deleuze and Guattari, the psychotic finds his or her self in the position where they are outside of the socially reproduced ‘Oedipal’ power relations of capitalist society by virtue of their relative dislocation from culture. However, this is problematic to the extent that they unconditionally subscribe to the notion that insanity punctures a hole in symbolic language, through to the ‘raw’ outside. Again, this goes hand-in-hand with the idea that symbolic language corrupts the natural and impulsive by making it tame and acculturated. However, it is interesting to note that Deleuze and Guattari’s use of this interior/exterior model in

Anti-Oedipus is far more dispersed and scattered by the time that they produced *A Thousand Plateaus*' rhizomatic model.^{xciii} Perhaps between *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari, while continuing the schizoanalytic project, may have felt the need to re-conceive schizophrenia in more abstract terms, as nomadology, and avoid overstating the normalising discourse that attends the pathologising of schizophrenia, and allows it to be conceived of in relation to a monolithic inside/outside model.

With Artaud, there is an obvious, and apparently none self-conscious, irony that presents itself in his claim that "all writing is pigshit": Artaud *writes* these words. This simple irony illustrates the point that I am making about 'outsiders' here. Artaud uses the very materials of the discourse which he renounces, yet, while setting himself as being outside of that discourse, he is unaware of the paradox that he is wholly within it. At the same time, the only way to demonstrate that "all writing is pigshit" is to not write at all, to put down his pen and find some other avenue of expression. While Rage Against The Machine scream "Fuck You I Won't Do What You Tell Me!" they are not particularly renouncing their particular discourse, like Artaud, but nevertheless there is a similar paradox. Rage Against The Machine employ a lexicon and style that is entirely prescribed and handed to them by the culture and power that they are wholly a part of, which they decry and renounce. In a Foucauldian understanding of power, the 'you' and 'I' of their protest are indistinguishable. In a sense, Rage Against The Machine are doing exactly what they are being told to do, by themselves and their culture.

By invoking the 'machinery' of power, they further reinforce the understanding that power is a monolithic interior defined along juridico-discursive lines. In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari may talk of power in terms of a machinic analogy throughout *Anti-Oedipus*. However, for them there is nothing so simple as a singular "the machine" against which to rage. There are machines, and machines, and machines: "everything is a machine".^{xciv} Despite their romanticisation of the insane, in general, their conception of power is more Foucauldian, hence the endorsing foreword by Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*.^{xcv} Their machines are "desiring machines" which are fragmented, multiple and interchangeable, not a monolithic machine of power which crushes.

As I have shown, Foucault argues that there is “no single locus of refusal”.^{xvii} Contrary to this, Marcus’s narrative ties together miscellaneous points in history which share a spirit of transgression. However, in order for Marcus’s historical narrative to hold together and flow, even in the most serpentine way, it must exclude much of what is fragmented, chaotic and problematic in relation to transgression. Marcus assumes that there is a single ‘soul’ of transgression, a consistent rage against the same ongoing machine, some immutable drive which does not change from Münster in 1534 to London in 1976, even though the cultural differences between these two points would be inconceivable. These are two points in space and time, in different countries, in entirely different political and economic epochs, with paradigmatically different notions of selfhood and subjectivity. To ignore the importance of these differences, and to claim that their resistances are fundamentally the same, is to posit the notion of transgression itself as a universal.

These examples of ‘outsider’ positions are what John Roberts calls the rejection of art discourse founded on a notion of univocal truth, “unthinking stupidity”. This is not to say that there is no thought behind these ‘outsider’ positions. This is obviously not the case. What it does mean is that these ‘outsider’ positions are based in good faith on the axioms of truth, nature and singular fundamental humanity. In these instances, the rejection of the thetic, of common linguistic symbolism and of academic discourse is founded on a model which conceives of power and culture as having an interior and an exterior. With the first set of examples — that is Kristeva’s notion of transgression, Dubuffet’s Art Brut, and the valorisation of the insane — the ‘outsider’ positions that I have examined are organised on the model of ‘interior’ versus ‘anterior exterior’, an ‘outside’ that is considered pre-cultural or pre-Oedipal. For the second set of examples — characterised by Marcus’s notion of a spirit of transgression — the ‘exterior’ is not so much conceived of as anterior, but certainly, it is still regarded as an ‘exterior’ of culture and power which is founded on a notion of truth transcendent of culture.

A Discourse of Negation

In his book, *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster argues;

there is dissatisfaction with the textualist model of culture as well as the conventionalist view of reality—as if the real, repressed in poststructuralist postmodernism, had returned as traumatic. Then, too, there is disillusionment with the celebration of desire as an open passport of a mobile subject—as if the real, dismissed by a performative postmodernism, were marshalled against the imaginary world of a fantasy captured by consumerism.^{xcvii}

Sure enough, with some artists in the 1990s there is a dissatisfaction with the textualist model of culture proffered in 1980s postmodernism, and there is certainly a return to some form of materiality as a reaction to the consumerism of the 1980s. However, art discourse in the 1990s has seen more than a simple classical pendulum-swing from the ideal to the material by way of a ‘return of the real’.

For instance, Foster’s investigations accurately register that there is a characteristic lumpen-materiality operating in much 1990s art, including grunge.^{xcviii} However, he frames this ‘return to the real’ as a return to some unreconstructed notion of avant-gardism, in the form of a neo-avant-garde. Foster fails to understand that for these artists the transcendentalism of avant-gardism is still dead, that notions of transgression do not operate in the same way as they would have for Dubuffet or Artaud. Foster fails to recognise that the artists of the 1990s dealing with corporeality are not returning to some golden age of the real in art, while at the same time, they have not arrived on the scene with no knowledge or understanding of the discourses which have gone before. Thus the premise of *The Return of the Real* is;

If some high modernists sought to transcend the referential figure and some early postmodernists to delight in the sheer image, some later postmodernists want to possess the real.^{xcix}

It is not as simple as this. John Roberts’ understanding of the art of the 1990s is more accurate. Roberts recognises that the ‘90s ‘return of the real’ is, to some extent, a strategy with which to reject the immediately preceding discourses of the 1980s.

While much new art of the 1990s, including ‘grunge art’, resists theorisation and returns to some concerns with materiality, it does not do so in order to create or reanimate any ‘outsider’ position. Rather, this art is enacting that which Roberts

calls a “thinking stupidity”, which performs a negation of discursive imperatives as “a matter of ethical positioning”, from a political position which conceives of itself as wholly within power and culture.

In his discussion of this situation, Roberts principally focuses upon new art in Britain, in particular that of a group of artists called Bank. Bank’s work is similar to that of grunge art in Australia. Their work, *Natural History*, exhibited at Battlebridge Centre, London, 1993, (*Plate 9*) consisted of a large urban setting created from cardboard boxes. As with the materials of Australian grunge art, Bank uses cast-offs of urban consumer culture, the debris for which economic exchange value has expired. Like grunge art, Bank’s aesthetic codes are situated in everyday ‘low’ culture.^c They too employ a similar anti-theoretical position to that of grunge art, however, Roberts emphatically states that:

Plate 9

it is very short-sighted to talk about the anti-intellectualism of this new generation of artists just because they are not writing mountains of texts and quoting Fredric Jameson.^{ci}

Roberts argues that much of this new art, although it is against the dominance of cultural theory in art, nevertheless is not anti-intellectual. That is, the anti-theory position of Bank is not the expression of a wish to negate wholesale its discursive precedents.

The work of Bank does not attempt to find a place outside of 'discourse', that is 'raw', natural or true. Rather, this art wishes to find a means of expressing political positions in a way which is itself politically different from the methods employed in the preceding discourse, but is, nevertheless just as pointed. As Roberts says:

it would be mistaken to identify the new art and its fuck-you attitudinising with anything so simple-minded as the 'depoliticisation' of art^{cii}

To many new artists in the 1990s, postmodernism appears to have become as hegemonic as Greenbergian Formalism might have appeared to the artists of a generation earlier. According to Roberts:

in the hands of some, the dumb-routines, behaving badly and cheesiness have a specific aim: to unsettle the bureaucratic smoothness of critical postmodernism, particularly now that it has become the official ideology of our wider digital culture.^{ciii}

The parallels between grunge art and Bank, in 1993, are certainly not coincidental. A new generation of artists across Western culture were reacting to a similar homogenisation of art discourses by similar newly-canonised theory.

When considering grunge art's use of a punkesque aesthetic of raggedness, it must be taken into account that grunge art was drawing on punk a *decade and a half* after punk's advent. By the 1990s, punk's ephemeral aesthetic, and its provisional politics have fossilised into cherished relics and mythologies. The *Punkulture* exhibition held at the Australian Museum, August 1997, highlights an obvious irony. The exhibition came complete with documentary photographs, videos and artefacts of merchandise, and followed soon after the Sex Pistols own revival tour. If one takes Greil Marcus's claim that punk was a kind of dadaism, the irony of this exhibition is similar to the irony that Duchamp's *Fountain*, which sought to dismantle many constitutive notions of art, is now regarded as one of the most

significant artworks of the Twentieth Century. Similarly, a cultural form such as punk, which came to dismantle many constitutive notions of popular culture, has itself become part of that discourse's constitution. Punk's ephemerality and aesthetic expediency took what was at hand and employed it for a short term purpose, which was to dismantle notions of a long term purpose. Nevertheless, the "no future" of punk is given a very secure museologically sanctioned future.

Grunge, in both art and wider culture, did not employ punk's lumpen-materiality innocently, as though they had no knowledge of punk's now-canonised status. Rather, punk presented an historical moment, which has since established itself a secure place within contemporary culture. Its aesthetic politics arrive at grunge in a form considerably removed and mutated from punk in 1976. Thus, by the time grunge emerged in the 1990s, punk's aesthetics provided a tried and tested formula for 'signalling' a rejection of the past. This is to say, grunge art's deployment of a punk-like aesthetic did not take place with the same faith in the 'outsider' politics of punk. Rather, grunge art *cited* punk's dissenting aesthetic. This is not to say that punk was 'truly' transgressive, but rather that it held the model of 'interior'/'exterior' in good faith.

Grunge art's employment of the lumpen-materiality of punk was, in a hybridised form, a quotation of punk. That is, grunge art did not employ a lumpen-materiality simply in order to identify with the lumpenproletariat and transgress culture by going underneath it. Its strategy of negating the historical imperatives of its own discourse was deliberately limited. Certainly grunge art sought to "unsettle the bureaucratic smoothness of critical postmodernism",^{civ} but this was *the greatest extent of its negationism*. Beyond that, it did not seek to make a path 'out' of culture. It had no wish to negate history wholesale.

Indeed, quite the opposite can be said. By drawing on the established, canonical, even museologically sanctioned culture of punk, grunge art made good use of history. In a sense, grunge art 'performed' punk's aesthetics. As Judith Butler argues:

[N]o term of statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force.^{cv}

Grunge art's citation of punk's lumpen-materiality functioned as a way of feeding off punk's force, its value as 'transgressive' within wider culture in general. According to Butler, the subject who makes a reiterative utterance draws on the power of its history, while at the same time being constituted by the discourse of the utterance.^{cvi} Thus, while punk sought to negate all previous utterances, refusing to engage in power by refusing to play any performative part in the pre-existing discourses of culture, grunge art, on the hand, sought to draw on the powerful history of 'transgressive' utterances. Although grunge art was not a simple good-faith recuperation of punk, neither was its quotation ironic. Rather, grunge art's quotation was rhetorical. It did not seek an 'outsider' position for itself, but rather by a rhetorical quotation of an 'outsider' position, it sought to invoke a sense of transgressiveness for reasons which were far from subversive.

For what reasons would grunge art rhetorically quote a punk negationism, if it had no intention to transgress to an 'outside' position, or indeed, if it had no faith that such an 'outside' position was even possible? The rhetorical quotation of lumpen-materiality signifies 'dumb' dissent, even though in the act of quoting, it is anything but mute. The materials of grunge claim a limited and qualified association with punk. Punk provides a prescriptive and widely recognisable codification of resistance. Using these codes, grunge was able to cleave itself from its immediate past. Of course, as I have argued, it was only ever grunge art's intention to remove itself from its immediate predecessors, and not from the entire discursive history of Western art. Grunge art's *rhetorical* quotation allows it to signify a break, without thereby subscribing comprehensively to punk's negationism.

Transgression as a Value

Beyond the task of disassociating itself from the dominance of postmodern theory, grunge art's quotation of punk's aesthetic had other more pragmatic purposes. Transgressive strategies are quoted in much art of the 1990s for the reason that they have kudos within Western culture. As I have argued, the quotation of punk was a citing of an attempt to 'drop-out' of society by association with the lumpenproletariat. Punk's attempt to drop-out was an attempt to transgress. In quoting this attempt at transgression, grunge art also traded on the high currency which 'transgression' commands in contemporary art discourses, and has continued to command in mass culture for decades.

Indeed, there is a tendency within much contemporary art practice to couch itself in terms of 'transgression'. The imperative to attain the image of a transgressive artist is greater than that to achieve actual efficacy within culture. Indeed, it presents artists with a seductive diversion from actual effecting wider culture into deflecting resistant energy into merely appearing as the transgressor. As David M. Halperin notes:

the notion of transgressiveness operates less as a resistant ideology than as an imposing ethical standard by which proper behaviour can be measured and assessed.^{cvii}

The notion of transgression has become a means for artists who "want to lay claim to some honorific political attribute, such as 'radical'"^{cviii} This has effectively installed "a notion of transgression that now functions as a new kind of norm".^{cix} Within contemporary art, transgression not only operates as a cultural imperative, but as a cherished attribute.

Following the change in the cultural conditions at the end of the 1980s, and into the 1990s, contemporary art has seen a proliferation of practices of this kind. Yet, in quoting 'transgression' merely to 'lay claim to some honorific political attribute' artists merely reproduce a particular limited and limiting understanding of power and subjectivity which, rather than being in any way efficacious, merely reproduces impotent and ineffectual methods of dealing with wider culture.

Indeed, far from being in a dangerous element, transgression is highly commodifiable and sanctioned within Western culture. Indeed, the notion of transgression operates as a liberal humanist value *par excellence*, amongst the most cherished values of Western culture in the latter decades of the Twentieth Century. The ways in which notions of transgression operate in our culture are anything but subversive, disruptive or destructive. Rather, they are productive, in both a cultural and economic sense, and they are reproductive to the extent that they reproduce, and effectively bolster, some of the axioms fundamental to the liberal humanist foundations of Western culture.

Throughout our culture there is a particular sanction afforded to notions of transgression, and a special kind of kudos reserved for ‘outsiders’. The image of the transgressor as a rebel, a misfit, an outlaw, a ‘mixed-up kid’, ‘a cop who doesn’t play by the rules’, is undeniably popular within contemporary Western culture. The ‘outsider’ is very much ‘inside’ the values of our culture. There is a paradoxical tradition of radicalism, a vast range of prescribed tableaux and genres, valorised subject positions and styles, which utilise the notion of transgression.

Within entertainment in mass culture, the profitability of an entire industry is assured by the cultural value invested in transgression. In cinema, examples of this ‘tradition’ of transgression are manifold. ‘Road movies’ are an entire cinema genre based on narratives about transgressions of judicial law. The transgressors vary, but are often small groups, often pairs or lovers who, having committed a crime, must travel the highways across state lines to evade detection by the police. More often than not, the narrative culminates in the capture or death of the transgressive heroes, but not before the farcical character of the law has been exposed. This genre runs throughout postwar cinema, from 1960s b-grade movies, like *The Honeymoon Killers*,^{cx} to numerous commercially successful American and Australian road movies, such as *Mad Max*,^{cx1} *Thelma and Louise*,^{cx2} *Kiss or Kill*,^{cx3} *A Perfect World*,^{cx4} and *Drugstore Cowboy*.^{cx5} Oliver Stone’s *Natural Born Killers*,^{cx6} released in 1994, self-consciously acknowledges itself as a generic road movie. Its central characters are Mickey and Mallory Knox, a pair of young lovers. They murder Mallory’s family and take to the road, leaving a trail of murders, and are closely pursued by the police and the media. Indeed, the film acknowledges that the

persona of the transgressor, the fugitive outlaw, is much valorised within American culture. At one point of the narrative, a news program interviews members of the public about their opinions of the crimes of Mickey and Mallory Knox: one teenager answers “Mickey and Mallory are the best thing to happen to mass murder since Manson”, and his friend ads “Yeah! ButÖ they're way cooler!”

The road-movie genre owes a lot to a particular factual incident in 1958 in which two teenage lovers, Charley Starkweather and Caril Fugate, (*plate 10*) murdered ten people in Nebraska and Wyoming, including Fugate’s mother, stepfather, and baby half-sister. For American culture, Starkweather and Fugate were a post-war Bonnie and Clyde, but with a far more sinister streak. Unlike Bonnie and Clyde, they killed for recreation and their targets were often random. For a brief time, the press surrounding Starkweather and Fugate’s ten murders made their names the infamous, but memorable, centre of moral panic in America.^{cxvii} Starkweather and Fugate are where the fictitious Mickey and Mallory Knox began: killing for fun, on the run across State lines, the latest media fascination. As the poster for Stone’s *Natural Born Killers* says “The media made them superstars”. However, the ancestry of Starkweather and Fugate to Mickey and Mallory is not simply one of a dramatisation of life. Rather, it winds and resonates throughout decades of the road-movie genre, so that this heritage has become blurred. Hollywood simulacra of the Starkweather and Fugate story have continued to command such a popular currency in our culture that it was inevitable that a film would be made about Starkweather and Fugate. When “Murder in the Heartland”, the story of Charley Starkweather and Caril Fugate, was produced in 1993, the genre completed an ironic full circle. However, that which had been a source of moral panic in 1958, by 1993 had been glamorised, glorified, vindicated and valorised by three and a half decades of re-writing.^{cxviii}

Plate 10

Similarly, other news stories and moral panics of the post-war decades have found places at the centre of contemporary culture's value of transgression. In 1947, 4,000 motorcyclists held a party in Hollister, California, and partially destroyed the town. While in Jamaica in 1948, a 24 year old gunman, Ivan "Rhyging" Martin murdered three people and was pursued by police. A picture of him holding two guns made the front page of the *Kingston Gleaner* newspaper. Earlier in this chapter, I have criticised Greil Marcus for his belief in a universal 'spirit' of transgression, nevertheless his specific analysis of these events is very useful. According to Marcus, these news stories were "understood by young people eager for new myths as a promise of freedom".^{cxix} However, it is through the entertainment media that these stories are repackaged, popularised and manifested as images and styles:

In time movies would be made, songs would be written, iconographic books and sociological studies would be produced about all of these occurrences, from Laslo Benedek's 1954 film *The Wild One* to Bruce Springsteen's tune 'Nebraska'; far from merely trapped in legend, Rhyging's event was the founding crime of postwar Jamaican popular culture, and it was always understood as such. Rhyging was the ghost guiding the hand of every rude body, the voice of every reggae singer.^{cxix}

Not surprisingly, Ivan "Rhyging" Martin's story became a film, called *The Harder They Come*.^{cxxi} Although, in the film, Martin is a reggae singer trying to get a recording deal, who is forced to deal marijuana to make a living and, consequently, falls into trouble with the police. Just as with Starkweather and Fugate and *Murder in the Heartland*, *The Harder They Come* re-wrote Ivan Martin himself, embellishing him with the full stylistic attributes of a reggae singer, of which, according to Marcus, Martin was a progenitor. As Marcus suggests, the bikers' party that trashed Hollister, California, reappears in Laslo Benedek's 'The Wild One', and in Bruce Springsteen's 'Nebraska',^{cxix} or his song 'Born to Run', or in Iggy Pop's 'Real Wild Child'. The resonances cross back and forth throughout culture — not just through cinema, but through music, television, politics, print media, literature and art.

Over two decades after punk appeared, it remains upheld as a spectacular sociological aberration, an exemplar of transgressive culture, "the last great youth movement".^{cxiii} In a way punk is exemplary of the culture, and cult, of the 'outsider', not because it caused any significant cultural rupture, but because it too reinforced some conservative social axioms. Punk's protagonists wanted to negate

the history of a culture which they saw as putting them at a disadvantage. However, although its anti-historicist negationism and visual style seems to have few precedents in popular mass culture, its primary wish to transgress to the ‘outside’ shares similar values with those of the road-movies. Road-movie heroes gain kudos from breaking the law. Punk was not so much about breaking laws of the juridical kind, but about breaching laws of social convention. When Paul Cook of the Sex Pistols called the television presenter Bill Grundy a “dirty fucker” on prime time television in 1976,^{cxxiv} it is unclear if there was any breach of law, but it certainly made the front page of national newspapers, and the reaction throughout the United Kingdom was outrage.^{cxxv} The news media presented punk as a social disease, an omen of the-end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it, of youth-gone-wild. In actuality, it merely traded on, and in turn fortified, the cherished place of the ‘outsider’ and transgression in the values of our culture. Paradoxically, in screaming “anarchy!” it repeated and reproduced a mainstay of Western culture, and a tradition of postwar mass culture, yet while giving it a fresh new face and form, making it all the more seductive, punk was this conservatism at its most insidious. Like Starkweather and Fugate’s infamy, and Ivan Martin’s front page photograph, Cook’s expletive, and punk in general, was reported as a moral panic which could shake the foundations of society, and again, by implication, it offered a promise of freedom in a newer mythology.

Quite obviously, the idea that freedom can be attained through transgressions of juridical law by no means originates in the mass culture of the latter half of the twentieth century. However, it is this mass culture which has most effectively and widely established the popularity of the notion of freedom through transgression of conventional and juridical law. To be sure, this mass culture has developed and finely tuned this very model of transgression and, with it, provided particular prescriptive ‘outsider’ forms through which this model of transgression becomes manifest.

Despite the high value placed on conventional and juridical laws within our culture, transgression of these laws is commonly understood as being an even greater value. Conventional and juridical law is often understood as being culturally contingent, as an imperfect material manifestation of the ‘natural’ laws that embrace all of

humanity, which transcend culture, place and time. In this Platonic equation, the material laws inevitably lag behind the pure form of the fundamental ‘natural’ laws. As I have argued, transgression is understood as the means through which conventional and juridical laws are brought closer to the fundamental laws of humanity. Particularly, transgression’s value in our culture is underwritten by its promise of freedom. Thus transgression is understood as the means by which mere cultural laws are transcended, and the universal law of freedom achieved. It effectively claims for, and seeks to reaffirm, the undeniability of the transcendent human value of freedom, beyond the imperfection of culture’s juridico-discursive power.^{cxxvi} Rather than being subversive, transgression does not provide even a point of resistance against the dominant cultural axioms upon which normalisations are founded. It is wholly in harmony with the hegemonic axioms of Western culture, with the teleology of progress, with the idea of universal humanity, and with the concept of freedom.

It is important to remember that freedom is not a universal pan-cultural value. Rather, the notion is entirely cultural contingent, characteristic of the juridico-discursive understanding of power dominant in contemporary Western culture. As Foucault argues:

Power as a pure limit set on freedom is, *at least in our society*, the general form of its acceptability.^{cxxvii}

It may seem potentially fascistic to argue against the universality of the notion of freedom because, ostensibly, this undermines both the desirability and possibility for subjective empowerment. However the notion of freedom is problematic. It defines itself as separate from power, gives power a form and a face, and a delineated inside and outside. It gives the impression that power itself can be transgressed and left behind, that once one is outside of power, beyond its reach, that one does with freedom what one will, that one’s will and volition are disconnected from power. Despite its claims to universality, the notion of freedom can only operate as part of the particularly Western ‘juridico-discursive’ understanding of power. The notion of freedom is a foil which holds in place the common understandings that disciplinary power is only ever ‘juridico-discursive’.

Transgression operates as a value in our culture, which has ultimately a circular function. While one function is to produce transgression as a commodity in the interest of business, its second function is to reproduce constitutive normalising axioms about Western culture. In turn, by presenting transgression as perversity, deviation and exteriority the visible extent of power is kept to a minimum. Also by providing positions which appear to be ‘outside’ of power, our culture provides prescriptive deviations which are as disciplinary as any force of the state. Through ‘youth movements’, fashions, modes of rebellion, identity-politics, group identities and prescribed strategies of transgression, resistance is channelled, controlled and organised.

On one hand, transgression operates as a value which is fully at the service of the imperatives of capitalist economics. On the other, it provides subject positions which ensure disciplinary power and self-surveillance (indeed, the matters of power and strategy which this chapter considers will be returned to in greater detail in Chapter Four). Within the discourse of contemporary art, as again within the discourses of wider culture, to be transgressive is a standard, transgression is normalised, and the will to transgress is the result of discipline, self-discipline and normalisation. For contemporary art, transgression as a commercially exchangeable value is alive and well, and living in the gallery, while the value of transgression as a means of social transformation, of political efficacy, or affecting its audience, has become questionable.

Notes

ⁱ**Foster, Hal**, *Return of the Real*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Minneapolis, USA, 1996, p. x.

ⁱⁱ**Gibson, Jeff**, “Avant-Grunge”, *Art + Text*, #45, April 1993, p. 23.

ⁱⁱⁱ**Lieberman, Rhonda**, “Springtime for Grunge”, *Artforum*, April 1993, p. 8.

^{iv}**Gibson**, loc. cit.

^v**Powell, Corey. S.**, “Mike Kelley”, *World Art*, Vol 1, #1, March 1994, p. 103.

^{vi}**Lieberman, Rhonda**, “The Loser Thing”, *Artforum*, September 1992, p. 79.

^{vii}**Gibson**, op. cit., pp. 23-25.

^{viii}“Shirthead”, at *Mori Gallery* in Sydney, May 7-21, 1993.

^{ix}“Rad Scunge” curated by Dale Frank, at the *Karyn Lovegrove Gallery* in Melbourne, March 3-26,

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1993.

^x“Scrounge Time” curated by Edward Colless and David McDowell, at *Plimsol Gallery*, Centre for the Arts, Hobart, 1993.

^{xi}“Monster Field” curated by ADS Donaldson, at *The Ivan Dougherty Gallery* in Sydney, May 6-29, 1993.

^{xii}“Adams” curated by Hany Armanious, at *Kunst* in Sydney, March 21-April 17, 1993.

^{xiii}examples of the use of the term ‘grunge’ in relation to these artists can be found in the following: **Chapman, Chris**, “The Invisibility of Sculpture”, paper presented to *1993 Sculpture Triennial*, held in Melbourne, September 12th, 1993. **Fenner, Felicity**, “A genre beyond grunge”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3/6/94 p. 27. **Forsyth, Graham**, “Monster Field”, *Art + Text*, #46, September 1993, p. 74. **Forsyth, Graham**, “Standard Deviation”, *Art + Text*, #47, January 1994, p. 13.

^{xiv}**Gibson**, op. cit., p. 23.

^{xv}**Rankin-Reid, Jane**, “Shirthead”, *Art + Text*, #46, September 1993, p. 78.

^{xvi}Adam Cullen, Mikala Dwyer, Nike Savvas, Tony Schwensen, Troy Skewes and Justine Williams featured in both exhibitions.

^{xvii}**Annear, Judy**, “Money, Movements and Museums”, *Art and Australia*, Vol 31, No.3, Autumn 1994, p. 330.

^{xviii}**Sullivan, Eve**, “The artist as curator”, *Art Monthly Australia*, # 61, July 1993, p. 34.

^{xix}**Hutak, Michael**, “Body of decor in overdrive”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17/6/94, p. 28.

^{xx}**Gibson**, loc. cit.

^{xxi}**Chapman, Christopher**, “The Invisibility of Sculpture”, paper presented to the *1993 Sculpture Triennial*, held in Melbourne, 1993.

^{xxii}**Marx, Karl**, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”, as cited in **Krauss, Rosalind**, “Informe without conclusion”, *October* 78, Fall 1996, p. 100.

^{xxiii}**Gibson, Jeff**, “Hany Armanious”, *Art + Text*, #43, September 1992, p. 70.

^{xxiv}ibid.

^{xxv}**Krauss**, op. cit, p. 102.

^{xxvi}**Gibson, Jeff**, “Beuys in the hood”, *Art + Text*, # 48, May 1994, p. 29.

^{xxvii}**Sullivan**, loc. cit.

^{xxviii}**Chapman**, loc. cit.

^{xxix}**Roberts, John**, “Mad For It! Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British Art” *Third Text* 35, Summer 1996, p. 30.

^{xxx}ibid., p. 29.

^{xxxi}There are many examples of Art & Text’s interest in theories relating to postmodernity from the 1981 to 1985:

Annear, Judy, “Review of Michel Foucault's ‘The History of Sexuality Part 1’”, *Art & Text*, #4, Summer 1981, pp. 55-61.

Baudrillard, Jean, “The Precession of the Simulacrum”, *Art & Text*, #11, Spring 1983, pp. 3-47. This was first translated into English by the current editor of *Art + Text*, Paul Foss, along with Paul Patton.

Arthur, K., “Bakhtin, Kristeva and Carnival”, *Art & Text*, #11, Spring 1983, pp. 48-53.

Feyerabend, Paul, “Science as Art”, *Art & Text*, #12 & 13, Autumn 1984, pp. 16-46.

Foucault, Michel, “The Regard for Truth”, *Art & Text*, #16, Summer 1984/85, pp. 20-31.

Morris, M., “Postmodernity and Lyotard's Sublime”, *Art & Text*, #16, Summer 1984/85, pp. 44-67.

Lyotard, J-F., “Les Immateriaux”, *Art & Text*, #17, Spring 1985, pp. 47-57.

^{xxxii}“Futur*Fall” was a conference organised by Alan Cholodenko, Ted Colless, Elisabeth Grosz and Terry Threadgold, held at the University of Sydney, Australia, July 26-29, 1984.

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- ^{xxxiii} **Young, John and Blake, Terry**, “On Some Alternatives to the Code in the Age of Hyperreality; the Hermit and the City Dweller”, *Art & Text*, #2, Winter 1981, p.4.
- ^{xxxiv} **Roberts**, loc. cit.
- ^{xxxv} **ibid.**
- ^{xxxvi} **ibid.**
- ^{xxxvii} **Sullivan, Eve**, op. cit., p. 33.
- ^{xxxviii} **Butler, Rex**, “To Express the Object”, BARBERism, Sydney, Australia, 1993, p. 4. Catalogue essay for *Monster Field*, curated by ADS Donaldson, at The Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, May 6-29, 1993.
- ^{xxxix} **Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich**, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. HÈlene Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, USA, 1984, p. 307.
- ^{xl} **Colless, Edward**, “Adam Cullen”, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 1993, p. 24. Catalogue essay of *Australian Perspectives 1993*, curated by Victoria Lynn, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, November 1993.
- ^{xli} **Colless**, loc. cit.
- ^{xlii} **Loxley, Anne**, “Rococo Rubbish. The Art of Hany Armanious”, *Art & Australia*, Vol. 31, # 1, Spring 1993, pp. 84-88.
- ^{xliii} **Roberts**, op. cit., p. 34-35. Emphasis added.
- ^{xliiii} “The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary”, ed. Turner, George W., Oxford Univeristy Press, Melbourne, Austrlia, 1984, p. 752.
- ^{xliv} **Kristeva, Julia**, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, Columbia University Press, New York, 1984.
- ^{xlvi} **Hill, Leslie**, “Julia Kristeva: Theorizing the Avant Garde?”, in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, ed. Benjamin, Andrew and Fletcher, John, Routledge, New York, 1990 p. 146.
- ^{xlvii} **Kristeva**, op. cit., pp. 29-30.
- ^{xlviii} **ibid.**, p. 16.
- ^{xlix} **Hill**, op. cit., pp. 146-147.
- ^l **Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, FÈlix**, *What is Philosophy?*, Verso, London, U.K., 1994, p. 164.
- ^{li} **ibid.**
- ^{lii} **Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, FÈlix**, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1972, translated from French by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, 1983, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, p.134.
- ^{liii} **ibid.**, p. 122.
- ^{liv} **ibid.**, p. 134.
- ^{lv} **Artaud, Antonin**, “All Writing is PigshitÖ”, in *Artaud Anthology*, trans. Mary Beach and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, City Light Books, San Francisco, 1965, p.38.
- ^{lvi} **ibid.**, p. 39.
- ^{lvii} **Van Gogh, Vincent**, “Letter of September 8, 1888” cited in **Artaud, Antonin**, “Van Gough: The Man Suicided by Society”, in *Artaud Anthology*, trans. Mary Beach and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, City Light Books, San Francisco, 1965, p.150.
- ^{lviii} **Dubuffet, Jean**, “Art Brut preferred to the cultural arts”, in *Jean Dubuffet*, ed. M. Glimcher, Pace Publications, Minneapolis, USA, 1987, p. 102.
- ^{lix} **ibid.**, p. 103.
- ^{lx} **ibid.**
- ^{lxi} **Dubuffet, Jean**, “Make Way For Incivism”, *Art & Text*, #27, December-February 1988, p. 36.

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^{lxiii} Apple Computer, Inc., “To the crazy ones”, from the *Think Different* advertising campaign, launched in Australia in February 1998.

^{lxiv} **Dubuffet, Jean**, “Anti-cultural positions”, in *Jean Dubuffet* ed. M. Glimcher, Pace Publications, Minneapolis, USA, 1987, p. 127.

^{lxv} *ibid.* p. 128.

^{lxvi} *ibid.*

^{lxvii} *ibid.*

^{lxviii} *ibid.*, p. 127.

^{lxix} **Rage Against The Machine**, “Self Titled Rage Against The Machine Lyrics”, URL: <http://walden.mo.net/~holiday/lyrics1.html>, accessed 12/3/97.

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^{lxxi} *ibid.*

^{lxxii} *ibid.*

^{lxxiii} **Marcus, Greil**, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, Penguin Books, London, UK, 1993, p.18.

^{lxxiv} *ibid.*, p. 19.

^{lxxv} *ibid.*, pp. 90-93.

^{lxxvi} *ibid.*, p. 247.

^{lxxvii} *ibid.*, p. 248.

^{lxxviii} *ibid.*, pp. 187, 245. This is the title of the two chapters of *Lipstick Traces* in which Marcus implies that Twentieth avant-gardism started in art, and then abandoned art in favour of Lettrism.

^{lxxix} **Foucault, Michel**, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, Vintage Books, New York, USA, 1990, p. 83.

^{lxxx} *ibid.*, p. 83.

^{lxxxi} *ibid.*, p. 84.

^{lxxxii} **Deleuze, and Guattari**, op. cit., pp. 168-169.

^{lxxxiii} **Foucault**, op. cit., p. 85.

^{lxxxiv} *ibid.*, p. 87.

^{lxxxv} *ibid.*

^{lxxxvi} *ibid.*, p. 90.

^{lxxxvii} *ibid.*, p. 93.

^{lxxxviii} *ibid.*, p. 95.

^{lxxxix} *ibid.*, pp.95-96.

^{xc} **Spinoza, Benedict de**, *The Ethics*, trans. Bell and Son, 1883, Dover Publications Inc., New York, USA, 1955, Part I, Axioms V, p.46.

^{xci} **Bulter, Judith**, *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of sex*, Routledge, New York, USA & London, UK, 1993, p.39.

^{xcii} **Grosz, Elizabeth**, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a corporeal feminism*, Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards, Australia, 1994, p. 163.

^{xciii} **Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, FÈlix**, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1980, trans. Brian Massumi (1997), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, pp. 3-25.

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- ^{xcv} **Foucault, Michel**, “Forword”, in **Deleuze**, and **Guattari**, *ibid.*, pp. xi-xxiv.
- ^{xcvi} **Foucault, Michel**, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, Vintage Books, New York, USA, 1990, p. 95.
- ^{xcvii} **Foster**, op. cit., p. 166.
- ^{xcviii} *ibid.*, p. 164.
- ^{xcix} *ibid.*, p. 165.
- ^c **Roberts**, op. cit., p. 36.
- ^{ci} *ibid.*, p. 34.
- ^{cii} *ibid.*, p. 29.
- ^{ciii} *ibid.*, p. 35.
- ^{civ} *ibid.*
- ^{cv} **Bulter**, op. cit., p. 227.
- ^{cvi} *ibid.*, pp. 226-227.
- ^{cvi} **Halperin, David M.** “Normalising Transgression”, in *Transgression and the Culture Industry*, ed. Clare Williamson, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia, 1996, p. 50.
- ^{cvi} *ibid.*
- ^{cix} *ibid.*
- ^{cx} *The Honeymoon Killers*, directed by Leonard Kastle & Donald Volkman, Roxanne Production, United States, 1969.
- ^{cx} *Mad Max*, directed by George Miller, Kennedy Miller Productions, Australia, 1979.
- ^{cxii} *Thelma and Louise*, directed by Ridley Scott, United International Pictures/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/PathÈ Entertainment, United States, 1991.
- ^{cxiii} *Kiss or Kill*, directed by Bill Bennett, Bill Bennett Productions, Australia, 1997.
- ^{cxiv} *A Perfect World*, directed by Clint Eastwood, Warner Bros., United States, 1993.
- ^{cxv} *Drugstore Cowboy*, directed by Gus Van Sant Jr., Avenue Pictures Productions, United States, 1989.
- ^{cxvi} *Natural Born Killers*, directed by Oliver Stone, Warner Bros./IXTLAN Productions/New Regency Pictures/J D Productions, United States, 1994.
- ^{cxvii} **Marcus**, op. cit, p. 262.
- ^{cxviii} An interesting aside: the story for *Natural Born Killers* was written by Quentin Tarrantino. When he later wrote and directed *Pulp Fiction*, another Starkweather and Fugate-based couple appeared once again. Ironically, the ‘Starkweather’ character in *Pulp Fiction* was played by Tim Roth, who himself had just previously played the character of Starkweather in *Murder in the Heartland*. The cinematic resonates around and around with the news of 40 years ago.
- ^{cxix} **Marcus**, loc. cit.
- ^{cx} *ibid.*, p. 263.
- ^{cxxi} *The Harder They Come*, directed by Perry Henzell, International Films, Jamaica, 1973.
- ^{cxii} **Marcus**, loc. cit.
- ^{cxiii} **McCain, Gillian**, and **McNeil, Legs**, “The Birth of Punk”, *Vanity Fair*, July 1996, p. 34.
- ^{cxiv} “Today”, Thames Television, originally broadcast December, 1976, reproduced in “Arena: Punk and The Pistols”, London, UK, BBC2, August 20, 1995.

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^{cxxv} **Marcus**, op. cit., p. 3.

^{cxxvi} At the most strictly juridico-constitutional level this can be seen in the example of the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. It grants the right of any citizen to refuse to answer questions in any government proceeding, on the grounds of possible self-incrimination. Thus, in America, a witness in any legal proceedings can effectively stifle the course of the judicial law because the constitution places a far higher value on the freedom from self-incrimination.

^{cxxvii} **Foucault**, op. cit., p. 86. Emphasis added.

CHAPTER TWO: ABJECT ART

With grunge art in the early 1990s we can see an idea emerging that some kind of ‘return’ to materiality may be employed as a matter of political positioning. I have shown that in grunge art’s quotation of punk’s raggedness, it sought to react against the dominant art discourses of the 1980s. However, at a point, loosely in mid-1993, the practices of the Australian ‘grunge’ artists, Hany Armanious, Adam Cullen and Mikala Dwyer, appear to make a break from associations with grunge in wider culture, and reorientate themselves away from the label of ‘grunge’. Indeed, each of these artists began to refigure their practices in terms of ‘abject art’. With ‘abject art’ there is a deployment of materiality, particularly the materiality of the body, as a political strategy. Compared with the fairly limited concerns of grunge art, the strategy of ‘abject art’ was understood as being far more important and more politically efficacious within wider culture, outside of the limited realms of art discourse. As Hal Foster accurately notes, “abject art sought to represent the condition of abjection in order to provoke its operation”.¹ Through deploying the affect of the abject upon audiences, ‘abject art’ sought to provoke political reaction.

This chapter takes a close look at ‘abject art’, and particularly its political role in America in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and will lead into a critique in the following chapters of the use of notions of ‘abjection’ in this art. This chapter begins by looking at the cultural conditions which lead to the rise of ‘abject art’ as the dominant political strategy in art in the 1990s. I will examine the argument put by particular art theorists in the 1980s that the capacity for art to affect, and particularly for its audience *to be affected*, has waned over the course of the Twentieth Century. Importantly, this chapter looks at the way in which the economy of images has changed dramatically since the 1980s, and looks at some of the ways in which this has been manifested in images in both art and wider culture in the 1990s. The focus is then turned towards the notion of ‘abjection’, and look at the origins of ‘abject art’ in Australia, America and the United Kingdom. Rather than focusing on the binary of ‘inside’/‘outside’, which was examined in Chapter

One, the 'abject art' hoped that by complicating the boundaries of the body it could fundamentally disrupt the complacency of bourgeois conservative subjects.

The Waning and Waxing of Affect

In the 1980s, much art and cultural theory was interfused with a millenarianist ‘endgamism’: a preoccupation with the ‘death’ of master narratives. This took the form of a curious fusion between a demythologising deconstructivity and tendency towards a quasi-mystical ominous soothsaying. Yve-Alain Bois notes these “endless diagnoses of death” in *Painting: The Task of Mourning*, in the catalogue for the exhibition *Endgames*:

[The] death of ideologies (Lyotard); of industrial society (Bell); of the real; (Baudrillard); of authorship (Barthes); of man (Foucault); of history (Kojève) and of course, of modernism (all of us when we use the word post-modern).ⁱⁱ

This atmosphere of endings, of ‘endgames’, is strongly evidenced in much of the contemporary art of the Eighties, in the work of artists like Richard Prince, David Salle, Thomas Ruff and in the dead-pan appropriation paintings of Sherrie Levine, (*Plate 11*) who claimed that her paintings “are about death in a way: the uneasy death of modernism.”ⁱⁱⁱ Similarly, in Australia in the 1980s, this endgamism could be seen to be manifest in the work of, for example, Dale Frank, Imants Tillers and Matthys Gerber, the latter who describes his work in the 1980s as “the underbelly of modernist art... painting after modernism”.^{iv}

As Bois notes, the theoretical endgamism of Jean Baudrillard played a significant part in this spirit of the 1980s. Baudrillard simultaneously captured this *zeitgeist* and contributed to it with a body of work that, in both form and content, was ecstatic, hyperbolic and “manic”.^v His work in the 1980s presented an almost fictitious apocalyptic vision. *The Precession of Simulacra*,

Plate 11

first published in English by the Australian art journal *Art & Text* in 1983, is comparable to its Australian cinematic contemporary *Mad Max 2* (also known as *The Road Warrior*). Like the postapocalyptic world of *Mad Max 2*, Baudrillard seems to envision a world *after the end*, when all the *endgames* of the 80s are played-out to their ‘logical’ conclusion, and the world is merely cultural rubble, fragments and simulations of the past. For Baudrillard, this is a world *after* politics, *after* ideology, *after* humanism, *after* the relation of use value to exchange value, *after* the relation of sign to referent. For Baudrillard, since signification is our only way of having a world, this is no ‘real’ masked by the ‘symbolic’. Rather, in our postmodern world there are signs and *nothing but signs*. The relation of sign to referent is no longer operational in any simple binary sense. Rather, sign relates only to sign, *ad infinitum*. It is a world which has outlived fixed semiotic relations. Signs proliferate, and proliferate: “The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it.”^{vi} For Baudrillard, postmodern culture disconnects the Platonic relation of the simulacral to the ideal.

In earlier work, he questions the economic axiom that transcendental “use value” supposedly underlies “exchange value”.^{vii} Baudrillard claims that the notion of ‘use value’ assumes a universal and fixed idea of what societal ‘needs’ are, and assigns ‘value’ to ‘use’ along this essentialised scheme. The notion of ‘use value’ does not allow for the various and contingent ‘needs’ of different societies. Thus, there is a disconnection between use and exchange and, consequently for Baudrillard, among other things, a de-essentialising of a founding tenet of the Marxist analysis of capitalism. Likewise, Baudrillard’s work in the 1980s enacts a similar de-essentialising disconnection, but between the sign and referent. In *The Precession of Simulacrum*, as he disconnects sign from referent, he too disconnects subjectivity from corporeality. He attempts to dismantle this binary, and instead focuses upon the subjects ability to reproduce simulations of subjectivity. Subjects are themselves simulations of subjectivity; both simulated and simulatable.

Thus, in the hands of Baudrillard, the unified subject becomes a simulation of unity, and of subjectivity. Corporeality becomes the mere simulation of our ideas of corporeality. In turn, affects upon the body are simulated and simulatable. Illness,

an example Baudrillard uses, can be simulated, to the point that medicine loses its relation to reality:

if any symptoms can be ‘produced’, and can no longer be accepted as a fact of nature, then every illness may be considered as simulatable and simulated, and medicine loses its meaning since it only knows how to treat ‘true’ illness by their objective causes.^{viii}

This simulated and simulatable body dispenses with the ‘reality principle’ which, for Baudrillard, is replaced with further simulations, further signs. Baudrillard thus understands corporeality in a similar way to that in which he talks of the existence of God:

ultimately there has never been any God, that only the simulacrum exists, indeed that God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum. Had they [the iconoclasts] been able to believe that images only occulted or masked the Platonic Idea of God, there would have been no reason to destroy them. One can live with the idea of a distorted truth. But their metaphysical despair came from the idea that the images concealed nothing at all.^{ix}

Similarly, for Baudrillard, *all* subjectivity is a simulation, not masking an essential corporeality, but is rather *an image that conceals nothing at all*. In his discussion of subjectivity and the relation of signifier and signified, Baudrillard seemingly attempts to push the notion of subjectivity *beyond* poststructuralist pluralising of notions of corporeality: “it bears no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own simulacrum”.^x Baudrillard’s project in the 1980s is characteristic of that particular moment. His work exemplifies the atmosphere of a more general spirit of millenarianism of the time. He drew upon the 1980s spirit of ‘endgamism’, and manifested it in a theorising-away of corporeality, and a consequent loss of ‘affect’.

For Baudrillard, this is a cause for celebration which persists through his ecstatic register in the 1980s: when all signs are unanchored, there is nothing left to lose, the world can *celebrate* the freedom of subjectivity from any essential corporeality. Simulacral fragmented postmodern subjects can run free in a delirious hyperreal world populated with unfixed signs. To Baudrillard, the ‘orgy’ of the Sixties, was not the liberator of Western culture. It merely reinforced a notion of authentic humanism, which is inevitably tied to a reality principle of what it is to be ‘human’. Rather, the ‘disconnection’ of this reality principle, in conceiving of subjectivity as simulation, is liberating.

In the 1980s, Fredric Jameson similarly concerned himself with questions of postmodernity and subjectivity; however, he takes a far more melancholic tone. While Baudrillard's fragmented post-Marxist trajectory leads him to a particularly detached and speculative spectatorship, Jameson is anxiously concerned with recuperating some notion of efficacious political-theoretical intervention in postmodern culture. For Jameson the fragmentary world-views of much poststructuralist and postmodern theory are problematic.^{xi} For Jameson, to portray culture in a fragmented way, as is the tendency of postmodernism, is to trivialise notions of wider social transformation. Compared to Baudrillard then, Jameson endeavours to engage postmodernity at a more monolithic, 'molar' and macropolitical level.^{xii} Baudrillard's fatalistic celebratory tone would be somewhat problematic for Jameson. Rather, Jameson *laments* the theorising-away of the essential human body of modernism, what he calls "the human figure". He argues that with the disappearance of the essential modernist subject, the problems concerning subjectivity do not simply vanish:

Postmodernism presumably signals the end of this dilemma, which it replaces with a new one. The end of the bourgeois ego, or monad, no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego—what I have been calling the waning of affect.^{xiii}

For Jameson, the postmodern subject, since it is no longer a unified molar entity, and is disconnected from any essential certainty, loses its capacity to affect and to be affected.

Despite the differences in attitude between Baudrillard and Jameson, whether celebratory or melancholic, they certainly agree that within the endgames of modernity, our culture was experiencing a *waning of affect*. That is, in the 1980s they both regarded the capacity for images to affect, and the capacity for people to be affected by them, throughout contemporary Western culture, as significantly diminished. For Baudrillard, the reasons for this lay with the proliferation of signs upon signs, simulation upon simulation: visual overkill, desensitisation, a world of simulated and similar signs with no relation of exchange value to use value. For Jameson, the cause was a loss of the "bourgeois ego", the security of the unified subject that had operated within Western culture for over 300 years, an uncertainty of one's own subjectivity.

The notion of ‘endgamism’ is one of culmination. The term ‘endgame’ refers to the last few moves of a chess game, played with the surviving pieces. It is the penultimate point of the game, immediately prior to its logical conclusion of checkmate or stalemate. For Baudrillard, Jameson and other theorists of postmodernity, the culture of the 1980s was seen as the beginning of the endgame of modernity. It was seen as a point of culmination, just before the collapse of modernity throughout Western culture, before the end of all its rationalist axioms: authenticity, unified subjectivity, linear progression, liberalism, humanism, essential humanity, corporeality, political objectivity, empirical knowledge — the master narratives of modernity which have dominated Western culture for four centuries.

Indeed, modernity seemed to reach its apex in the second half of the Twentieth Century. Following the First World War, the master narratives of modernity became increasingly molarised. Politics ossified and became more global with the rise of International Communism on the Left and Nazism on the Right. At the end of the Second World War, global politics became all the more monolithic with two opposing hemispheric camps of East versus West. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the conclusion of the Second World War, indicated the force under which the tensions of endgame global politics were likely to be played out. In postwar Western culture, the fear of a nuclear war with The East had accumulated a peculiar popular currency. More and more, Western culture contemplated its own end. For example, the film *On The Beach*^{xiv} considers the scenario of a Naval submarine emerging into a postapocalyptic world, poisoned by radiation. Indeed, the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis brought this fear of nuclear war to the fore of popular consciousness. The crisis manifested itself throughout the popular culture of the rest of the 1960s, in films such as Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*,^{xv} which hypothesised what might happen if a lone ‘madman’, with a Howard Hughes style obsession with Communist germs, were to start a nuclear war. The British film *The War Game*^{xvi} attempted to show what the effect of a one megaton bomb would have on London.

Of course, this popular hysteria over nuclear warfare paralleled the fear of Communism. Likewise, this fear found popular cultural manifestation in numerous films about alien invasion — often from Mars, the *red* planet. The Martians in

Invaders From Mars^{xvii} secretly pulled their victims into a sand pit, from which they would emerge brainwashed, and in service of the Martians. The 1953 film, *The War of the Worlds*^{xviii} took H.G. Wells's Nineteenth Century novel and set it in coldwar America. The 13 part 1936 cinema series *Flash Gordon*^{xix} was resurrected for American television in 1955 and given the more staunchly militaristic title of *Space Soldiers*. Conveniently for an America still resounding with McCarthyist zeal, this piece of cinematic nostalgia was reinvested as a timeless warning against alien invaders, portraying Flash defending the Earth against the evil, and unmistakably Chinese-looking, Emperor Ming. Similarly, in *The Blob*,^{xx} a red blob, a thinly-veiled allegory of communism, landed in smalltown USA, like a missile in the night, and gradually grew and overtook the town: "Indescribable... Indestructible! Nothing can stop it!"^{xxi}

By the 1980s, this state of affairs had changed little in the preceding forty years. Only older generations could remember a time when the situation was different. "The Baby-Boomer" generation, those born in the ten years or so after the Second World War, had grown up watching *Flash Gordon*, *Dr. Stangelove* and the Cuban Missile Crisis on television news. To that generation the configuration of world politics, as two ideologically opposing pacts held at bay only by mutually assured destruction, operated as a self-evident truth. Global politics were frozen in a deliberate stalemate, held in place by ideological tensions which could only be resolved by Armageddon. Along with this ongoing stalemate, concern over the global ecology was gaining a popular currency. The two main degradations of the ecology were, and continue to be, global warming and ozone depletion. These really need no explaining to a contemporary reader — they are the great common apocalyptic neuroses of our age, playing the role the atomic bomb played in the popular culture of the 1960s.^{xxii} The degradation of the Earth added further weight to the popular apocalyptic vision.

In addition, in the 1980s, first-world governments increasingly deregulated commerce, and reversed some of the state altruism and utopianism of postwar social welfare policies. With a greater importance given to market forces and individualism, a quasi-Darwinian ethos of 'natural selection' superseded notions of societal wellbeing. For the wealthy, the contradiction between capitalist economics

and ecological imperatives created a atmosphere of *potlatch*, in which wealth is exercised and affirmed by wasteful expenditure: To take a metaphor from Marcel Mauss, ‘throwing fine copper into the sea’ operated as symbol of wealth.^{xxiii} Practically, the expenditure of the Earth’s resources combined with the excesses of one’s lifestyle only further proved one’s own wealth.

Within these circumstances, image producers throughout Western culture, whether working in advertising or within the discourses of art, had to negotiate a saturated economy of images. At the very end of the 1980s, the advertisements of Benetton, the international clothing manufacturer, were engaging with these conditions of image production in the wider culture of the time. The images of Western culture in the 1980s had been dominated by a clean, highly-finished, ‘slick’ aesthetic. Benetton’s advertisements in the mid-1980s bear this out: young, attractive, middle-class, healthy, slim models having fun in Benetton clothes (*Plate 12*). Many of Benetton’s advertisements, such as their ‘Pinocchio’ ad, in 1987 (*Plate 13*), certainly erred on the kitsch side of cute. In their place and time, these images had a high socio-aesthetic value which effectively translated into economic value for Benetton. These advertisements were quotations of the familiar, they were images of a solipsistic consumerism, referring safely within the bounds of Western culture’s comfort zone.

Plate 12 & 13

In the art of the 1980s, Sherrie Levine, along with Richard Prince, Thomas Ruff and David Salle, were most notably attempting to negotiate the exhausted millenarianist economy of images. Their works attempted to navigate these conditions carefully, with a calculated coolness, detached from the images they used. While Warhol in the 1960 and 1970s treated his subject matter with nonchalance, artists like Salle in the 1980s treated their images with an indifference bordering on contempt. For example, Salle's *Sleeping in the Corners*, 1985 (*Plate 14*), is typical of his work in the 1980s. The canvas is divided into sections in which incongruous images are juxtaposed. On the left half of this work there is a monochromatic image of the top half of a naked woman, and on the right half, a domestic interior. This second image is broken up with expressionistic strokes of orange paint, and an inset monochromatic image of the Crucifixion of Christ. The addition of a Christian image over the top of these images is not to rupture the banality of the other images with the sacred, but rather *all* of the images in this work were treated as banal. Salle's 1980s works are neither didactic nor heuristic. His choice of images is superficial, in the most literal sense. He often uses vaguely pornographic images, which could be from underwear advertisements, or images from the pages of *Penthouse* magazine. Unlike Warhol, Salle's 1980s works are not simply playing-down the affect of images. Rather they were engaging in a free play of images which have *already* been drained. There is an element of bad faith in the choice of images in these works. Similarly, Thomas Ruff's photographic portraits are presented in a banal

Plate 14 & 15

way, which drains the portraits of individuality. The faces of the sitters are deadpan, or rather, they look bored.

Similarly, the 1980s works of Sherrie Levine, such as *Check No. 2*, 1996, are intentionally cool, appropriated and drained of ‘affect’. This work is part of a series of very similar chequered paintings. They could be colour field paintings but, to the same extent, they could be simply coloured chess-boards. Unlike the colour field paintings of High Modernist artists such as Barnett Newman, there is no transcendentalism claimed for the form in the paintings, not even by the artist. For Levine, working in the 1980s, these images are choked by the weight of history, and the visual desensitisation of their audience:

The world is filled to suffocating. Man has placed his token on every stone. Every word, every image, is leased and mortgaged. We know that a picture is but a space in which a variety of images, none of them original, blend and clash. A picture is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers [sic] of culture.^{xxiv}

Like the images used by Salle and Ruff, it is not the case that spectacular images become banal, but rather the images are *readymade* banality. The only belief clear in these works is a faith that images in general are nearing their end, drained of life and capacity to affect, and that their audience is drained of the capacity to be affected by them. These 1980s works were dealing with the same economy of images as those of Benetton’s cutesy ‘Pinocchio’ advertisement. They responded to, and simultaneously created, a ‘flat’ space in the world for images. They celebrated and, at the same time, mourned the waning of affect.

This apocalyptic millenarianism throughout art and wider culture was the day-to-day world in which theorists like Baudrillard and Jameson wrote of the waning of affect. This popular millenarianism across culture resonated with the theorising of postmodernity and its dismantling of the master narratives, the axioms of modernity, performing the endgame, not necessarily of culture absolutely, but of modernity’s prevailing values within it. However, the certainty of this millenarianism was disrupted by certain events at the end of the 1980s, in particular, the stock market crash in October 1987 and the massive changes in global politics with the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. Accordingly, visual culture shifted. With these social, political and economic changes, the worn-out economy of images too

experienced something of a crash. There was a significant change in the way in which images operated across visual culture. The aesthetics of monotonous economic and political certainty, the clean, slick, young, attractive, middle-class, healthy aesthetic, were no longer appropriate.^{xxv} Benetton ceased using models or even directly representing their product in their advertisements. The new images Benetton used were value-loaded in a very particular way. These images directly drew on the ‘issues’ of violence, organised crime, war, racial tension, Catholicism, contraception and AIDS. While they manifested and distilled the sense of millenarianist despair which prevailed in the 1980s, their public reception throughout Western culture suggested that affect had certainly *not* waned.

Indeed, Benetton’s advertising in the 1990s offers a good example of a *waxing of affect* in wider culture, and is worth a closer look. Benetton is the company of Luciano Benetton. Its primary function is to manufacture clothes, which it sells through its own stores. However, Benetton regards its advertising as a fundamental part of what it produces. Indeed, a large part of Benetton’s World Wide Web site on the internet is devoted to the images of its advertisements, their history and their rationale. Benetton advertises in 120 countries, and according to its ‘Policy on Communications’, it did not want to waste this global scope “on self-serving product promotion”, rather;

Benetton believes that it is important for companies to take a stance in the real world instead of using their advertising budget to perpetuate the myth that they can make consumers happy through the mere purchase of their product.^{xxvi}

Benetton’s 1990s position is a stark contrast to their slick, kitsch and bourgeois advertisements of the mid-1980s. Into the 1990s, Benetton’s advertisements elide the product. However, this elision is not in the same sense that much advertising elides the product for a supposed lifestyle that a product complements or even offers. As their communications policy says “[these advertisements] do not tell anyone to buy our clothes, they do not even imply it.” These advertisements have no text or caption, except for the Benetton logo. The images which they use are taken from recent photo journalism. They have appeared previously in newspapers and magazines, and are reproduced usually as billboard and double-page magazine advertisements.^{xxvii} Benetton have used images of a car bombing (*Plate 15*), a

murder victim, a newborn baby with its umbilical cord attached, and a man on his deathbed, dying of AIDS, surrounded by his family.

Benetton strongly claim that their use of confronting images is not cynical. Rather, they say, the intention is to provoke discussion. They claim that the value of their images is social, rather than economic:

Our hope is that people will move from the sterile discussion of whether or not a company is entitled to illustrate its point of view in its advertising campaigns, to a discussion of the issues themselves.

We hope to become the vehicle for discussion and not its focus.^{xxviii}

Indeed, it is Benetton's argument that in using a less usual channel to approach certain issues, they create a greater degree of awareness than if the same issues were addressed in the standard news media.

All [our ads] attempt to do is promote a discussion about issues which people would normally glide over if they approached them from other channels, issues we feel should be more widely discussed.^{xxix}

Indeed, this tactical shift, against cultural habits, is effective in assigning these images a 'shock' value greater than had they simply appeared in the context of the news media.^{xxx}

Consequently, some of these images have attracted a lot of controversy. Benetton's first campaign of 'shock' tactics was the *Life itself becomes a scandal* series in 1991. Two images in particular caused controversy: an image of a priest and nun kissing, and an image of a newborn baby with umbilical cord attached. The kissing priest and nun caused the greatest amount of controversy in predominantly Catholic countries. In Italy, the advertisement was banned. The photo of the newborn, according to Benetton, "set off unprecedented controversy just about everywhere".^{xxxi} The city council in Milan removed billboards featuring the advertisement due to the "excessive impact and vulgarity of the subject". As Benetton note:

Negative reactions and criticism seemed to be triggered more by billboards than by the print campaign, as if the dimensions of the photo were what bothered the critics most. (Reality, perhaps, cannot be larger than life).^{xxxii}

Since 1991, Benetton have attempted to campaign against the spread of AIDS, through the subject matter of their advertisements, and in raising money for research

into the disease. They have continued to advocate the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV: one of their *The United Colours of Benetton* ads shows numerous and varied coloured condoms. However, in doing so they have again conflicted with Catholicism in some of their advertisements.

However, Benetton's most controversial advertisement relating to AIDS was part of their *The Shock of Reality* series in 1992.^{xxxiii} One advertisement showed an image of David Kirby, an AIDS activist, lying in bed, surrounded by his family (*Plate 16*). His bearded face is very thin, and he looks weak and exhausted. A man, possibly his father, hugs him, while a woman and a girl sitting next to him hold onto each other for comfort. The arm of a fifth person, out of shot, extends from off the left hand side of the image, and holds the dying man's hand. The bed looks like it is a hospital bed, and the room is white with only part of a door, and part of a print of Christ, visible in the background. Before it was officially released, this image was published by an English daily newspaper which, according to Benetton, was largely responsible for provoking the ensuing controversy. Once it was officially

Plate 16 & 17

launched, even with the support of David Kirby's family, the image was regarded as shocking enough to warrant censorship. In France, the BVP (the Commission for the Control of Advertising) asked the media to refuse to run the image of Kirby.^{xxxiv}

The photo of Kirby was taken by Oliviero Toscana (who had also taken Benetton's newborn baby photo). Toscana says:

I call this picture 'La Pieta', because it is a Pieta which is real. The Michelangelo's 'Pieta' during the renaissance might be fake, Jesus Christ may never have existed. That was real promotion. But we know this death happened. This is the thing. And the more real the thing is, the less people want to see it.^{xxxv}

Indeed, this image borrows a sense of martyrdom from Michelangelo's 'Pieta', c.1498-99 (*Plate 17*), in much the same way as does Jacques-Louis David's portrayal of the *Death of Marat*, 1793: the 'shock' is certainly fuelled by the invocation of the 'sacred'. Benetton often use images which are regarded as sacred, to a particular community (which, being an Italian company, most often targets the Catholic community). Indeed, to what extent could the shock value of the Kirby image be attributed to his Christ-like appearance? It is a pieta image saturated with a disease which, within Western culture, has been regarded as a predominantly gay disease. It is quite conceivable that, for many Catholics faithful to current Papal policies, this is a sacrilegious image, a sacred image permeated with the *excrement* of sexually perversity. Other images in Benetton's *The Shock of Reality* series target other contemporary points of political contention. One of the advertisements carries a photograph of the electric chair at Greenhaven Correctional Facility in New York

Plate 18 & 19

state, taken by Lucida Devlin (*Plate 18*). Similarities between Devlin's photograph and Andy Warhol's images of an electric *chair* (*Plate 19*) suggest themselves immediately. However, the use of these images, and their affects differ significantly between Warhol in the 1970s and Benetton in the 1990s.

For Fredric Jameson, Warhol's work provides an exemplar of the *waning of affect* in late capitalism. Jameson understands Warhol's selection of images as entirely indifferent.^{xxxvi} Despite Warhol's inclination towards using potentially strong images of death, such as in his works, *Saturday Disaster*, 1964, *Tunafish Disaster*, 1963, and the *Electric Chair* series, 1971, his mechanised, repeated and patternised use of those images effectively played-down their potential affect. As Warhol himself says; "When you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect".^{xxxvii} Warhol took death and, in the mechanical process of screening and repetition, flattened it out to the point of banality. That is, with Warhol's perfunctory mechanical process and aestheticisation of these images of death, he equates their significance to that of any other banal image of American mass culture, such as a Campbell's Soup can or a Brillo box. They are images which Warhol grabs from across the gamut of mass culture. In considering the way in which affect has waned, Jameson looks at Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (*Plate 20*) from the latter half of the Twentieth Century, and compares it with a painting of a pair of boots by Vincent Van Gogh produced at the end of the Nineteenth Century (*Plate 21*). For Jameson, Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* demonstrates a definite waning of the capacity of images to affect an audience in late capitalism. He

Plate 20 & 21

argues that Van Gogh's work conveys the autographic qualities of the artist's individual style, the materiality of the paint, and the *person-ality* of his subject matter. These are qualities which Jameson claims no longer figure in the culture of late capitalism, such as in the works of Warhol. To Jameson, Warhol's mechanically produced works are impersonal. He argues that, unlike Van Gogh's images, Warhol's images bear a distinct quality of the alienating mass production of capitalism. Warhol's shoes are anonymous, without individuality, and show no direct signs of human manufacture in their machined images. On the other hand, Van Gogh's old boots have character, and the facture of their rendering conveys something of a human touch. For Jameson, the absence of the 'human figure' in Warhol's work is responsible for the waning of affect in his image.^{xxxviii}

However, compare Warhol's images of the electric chair in the 1970s with Benetton's images of the electric chair in the 1990s. Warhol deliberately trivialises, patternises and aestheticises the lethal punitive purpose of the chair, and attempts to strip it of its social and political contexts. Like his multiple pictures of Marilyn Monroe, the electric chair becomes impersonal through its fame (or infamy). Like Monroe, death is a spectacle, and Warhol's treatment of the images makes the spectacular into the banal. In contrast, Benetton pastes this image on billboards in a world in which the death penalty is a far more contentious issue. Their image is singular, clear, stark and clinical. Similarly, compare Warhol's *Saturday Disaster* with Benetton's photo of a car bombing, or their photo of a murder victim bleeding on a pavement. Warhol offers a flattened aestheticised death. The facture and mechanical production of the image is apparent in its small mechanical imperfections, such as marks left by the squeegee, and the imperfections in the registration of the image on the canvas. Clear association can be drawn between the machine of the automobile and Warhol's machinic process: both machines are indifferent to the deaths that they respectively cause or register. Warhol offers us his indifference. On the other hand, Benetton offer crisp, clean, billboard-sized colour image. The facture of the mechanical process that produced it is virtually invisible by the perfection of its production. These images are not offered in indifference and, regardless of any moral issues one may take up with Benetton's use of them, it is certainly Benetton's intention to affect their audience with them — and

they have succeeded. Jameson may accurately claim that between Van Gogh and Warhol there is a waning of affect. However, between Warhol's 'flattened' pictures of death, and Benetton's advertisements of the 1990s, there is a certain change in the character of the audience.

As I have discussed in Chapter One, in contemporary art in the 1990s, there has been a return to a politics of materiality. The social, aesthetic and economic values in the images of the 1990s have moved from a valuing of homogeneity of surfaces, from slickness and flatness, from common economic values of exchange, from simulation of affect in images, and more towards heterogeneity, raggedness, a localised economy of images, and some notion of images acting upon bodies. This we have seen in the works of 'grunge art'. However, in particular, the most significant manifestation of this is found in 'abject art'. In the changed cultural conditions of 1990s, 'abject art' became the most significant strategy for artists for engaging audiences with affect.

Abject Art

Between 1985 and 1990, Andres Serrano produced a body of photographic works which form two overlapping series: *Bodily Fluids* and *Immersion*s. Serrano's *Bodily Fluids* works presented blood, milk, semen and urine as flat uniformed fields of colour, in much the manner of the hard-edged flatness of abstract painting. These fluids were presented variously as unbroken single colour fields, or juxtaposed with the plexiglass outline of their containers dividing the fluids. *Milk, Blood*, 1986, (Plate 22) is one work in this series, with the plane of the photograph evenly divided, blood on one side, milk on the other. The reference to the High Modernist colour field paintings of the mid-Twentieth Century is obvious, as is this reference to the transcendental idealism of hard-edged abstraction and its incongruity between the earthy materiality of the fluids depicted. Likewise, in Serrano's earlier *Tableaus* series, the artist produces a similar juxtaposition between the corporeal and the ideal with the work *Heaven and Hell*, 1984 (Plate 23). The work depicts a Cardinal dressed in the red cloth of the Catholic church standing next to a blood-splattered naked young woman hanging by her hands. This discordance between the cardinal and the carnal foreshadows, in figurative form, the transformation of bodily fluids into hard-edged abstraction in Serrano's *Bodily Fluids* series.

Serrano's *Immersion*s series combines the figurativeness of his *Tableaus* with the abstracted fluids of the *Bodily Fluid* series. The *Immersion*s series includes works such as *Black Jesus*, *Black Mary* (Plate 24), *White Christ* and *Black Supper*. These works are

Plate 22 & 23

Plate 24

photographs of sacred Christian symbols immersed in fluids. For example, *Black Mary* and *Black Supper* are figurines of the Virgin Mary and of Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* immersed in water which has covered the figures with aerated effervescent bubbles. Combining the *Bodily Fluids* series, *Immersion*s also included Christian icons immersed in bodily fluids. Most notably *Piss Christ*, a Cibachrome print, 152.4 x 101.6 cm,^{xxxix} produced in 1987 (*Plate 25*), depicts a crucifix emerged in an slightly effervescent amber fluid of urine. As the artist explains:

Piss Christ is the first [work in which] I decided to refer back to some representation with the fluid work, and in doing so, in selecting a crucifix or religious object, I was simply combining two different directions in the work before I started on the fluids. I was working with religious scenarios, and so 'Piss Christ' for me is like the coming together of two different directions in one image.^{xi}

Piss Christ was only one of a series of photographs in which Serrano combined bodily fluids with Christian iconography. Yet it is *Piss Christ* that fuelled the 'Culture Wars' in 1989, the "firestorms over funding and censorship".^{xli}

Piss Christ was part of the *Awards in the Visual Arts 7* touring exhibition in 1988-89. The exhibition was sponsored by the Southeastern Centre for Contemporary Art, which had received funding from the American government through the National Endowment for the Arts.^{xlii} Shortly after the exhibition closed in its final venue in Richmond, Virginia, USA, *Piss Christ* drew the attention of the conservative US Senator Alfonse D'Amato.^{xliii} On May 18th 1989, D'Amato condemned Serrano and *Piss Christ* in the US Senate, arguing that "this so-called piece of art is a deplorable, despicable, display of vulgarity."^{xliv} For additional

Plate 25

dramatic emphasis, he then tore up a copy of *Piss Christ* from the exhibition's catalogue.^{xlv} Senator Jesse Helms joined D'Amato's attack on the "blasphemous"^{xlvi} artwork, saying of Serrano, "he is not an artist he is a jerkÖ let him be a jerk on his own time and resources."^{xlvii} The National Republican Congressional Committee's (NRCC) added their weight to D'Amato and Helms, calling *Piss Christ* "taxpayer-financed obscenity".^{xlviii}

In June 1989, a month after D'Amato had ripped-up *Piss Christ* in the US Senate, and in the midst of the ensuing controversy, The Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington was scheduled to run *The Perfect Moment*, a retrospective exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographic works. Less than a week before the exhibition was due to open (which had been planned for two and half years prior), the gallery's administration decided to cancel it. The Corcoran Gallery had received \$110,000 from the NEA during the 1988, and was fearful that its funding would be cut if they continued as planned, and showed the exhibition (even though they had actually received no money from the NEA specifically to host the Mapplethorpe exhibition).^{xlix} The Corcoran Gallery is only a short distance from Capital Hill in Washington. Representative Dick Armey had already seen the catalogue for the Mapplethorpe exhibition before it was due to open, and had complained to the gallery. The interest in the debate at the time of Nichols Fox, a freelance art writer, is a useful source. He notes in the *New Art Examiner*:

The prospect of a line of congressmen traipsing through the exhibition to check out what federal money was fundingÖ would have been enough to give the most seasoned arts administrator sweaty palms.¹

The Corcoran Gallery's cancellation of the Mapplethorpe exhibition was taken by many in the American art world as a capitulation to the conservatives in Congress. Nichols Fox notes further, "the reaction in the arts community was almost unanimous disapproval" of the Corcoran's decision, to the extent that more than 1000 people turned out to protest outside the Corcoran on June 30th, 1989.^{li} Fox says of the protest:

Among the speakers at the June 30 protest, art dealer Harry Lunn called the action 'cultural McCarthyism'. The Corcoran caved in at the weakest suggestion of pressure.' Washington artist and critic James Mahoney said, 'The Corcoran's intellectual act of cowardice has brought shame to our cityÖ'^{lii}

Eventually, the Washington Project for the Arts (WPA) volunteered to show the Mapplethorpe exhibition, and it is estimated that 47,000 people attended.^{liii}

Piss Christ thus polarised American politics. It became the catalyst of a congressional debate and the “culture war”^{liv} which led to Senator Helms’s amendments to the legislation regarding NEA’s funding, prohibiting the federal funding of “obscene and indecent art”.^{lv} The conservative Senators mobilised The American Family Association, who in turn organised a mass lobby sending 180,000 letters to the church and Congress. In reply, supporters of freedom of expression in the arts were mobilised by a group called the City of Imagination to stage a series of demonstrations, marches, petition drives and phone campaigns.^{lvi}

From what grounds did the most notable and vociferous objections to Serrano’s *Piss Christ* come? The very public reaction of Helms to *Piss Christ* was primarily one of Christian-based disgust: “blasphemous”,^{lvii} “obscene and indecent”.^{lviii} Helms does not elaborate upon or explain his reaction much further, because to Helms this reaction is self-evident. To the particular assemblage of axioms held by Helms, his own set of ‘truths’ about the world, these qualifications are not visible. *Piss Christ* was considered “blasphemous”, “obscene and indecent” when set against the standard axioms of conservative American Christianity. To those who objected on moral grounds, *Piss Christ* was irrefutable proof of moral decline within American contemporary art, if not American society as a whole. Reverend Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association argued that;

the bias and bigotry against Christians, which has dominated television and movies for the past decade or more, has now moved over to the art museum^{lix}

The conservatives may well have asked, rhetorically, ‘how can someone even *think* of dipping a crucifix in urine?’. Against a set of perceived ‘universal’ morals, of common decency, *how could such a thing happen?* The NRCC considered the work to be “taxpayer-financed obscenity” for the same religio-political reasons, but also combined with the axioms of the fiscal conservatism of the US Republican Party: ‘how can *public* money be spent in *such a way?*’

Further to these religio-political objections, many of the objections against *Piss Christ* attacked the work in terms of its status as ‘art’ in the first place. Senator D’Amato denounced *Piss Christ* as “trash”,^{lx} “garbage”,^{lxi} and a “*so-called* piece of

art”.^{lxii} Meanwhile in the *Washington Post*, Patrick Buchanan (“not so much neo-conservative as neo-lithic in his cultural views”)^{lxiii} called the work “cultural trash”.^{lxiv} The work possibly attracted such criticisms, again, mainly from religio-political motivations (in fact, one may suppose cynically that Helms may well have been motivated more here by populism and opportunism). Nevertheless, here, these objections from D’Amato, Buchanan and Helms were that *Piss Christ* was not worthy of the label of ‘art’. For them, it did not fit essential axiomatic criteria and protocols, of what art *is* and what it is *not*. Art is not “cultural trash”,^{lxv} that is, it is a culturally transcendent thing, and unlike ‘trash’, a rarefied thing.

For D’Amato, Buchanan, Helms, and many others beside, the term ‘art’ operates to mean exactly a cultural transcendence. To them, it is self-evident that art is something *other than* ‘cultural trash’, or ‘obscenity’. Art is thus something above the petty concerns of mass culture, above the “garbage” of pornography, or the “vulgarity” of bodily fluids. It is *high* culture, autonomous of *low* culture, divine and free of the profanities of everyday culture. ‘Art’ proper is allied with the mind and heaven, and “culture” or “trash” with the body and earthly. In the case of this kind of objection to *Piss Christ*, bodily fluids are aligned with base instincts, while ‘art’ proper is aligned with the intellect. Thus for Buchanan, D’Amato and Helms, Serrano’s *Piss Christ* fails even to *be* ‘art’.

For the same reasons, the works of Robert Mapplethorpe also came under attack from Helms during the NEA debate. Again, Helms places art with transcendence, with the intellect, and pornography is placed with the bodily, the carnal. This is the very principle which assigns ‘art’ and ‘pornography’ as mutually exclusive terms. It is the principle which enables the question: ‘is it art, or is it pornography?’ Consider Helms’s letter to his congressional colleagues around the time of the cancellation of the Mapplethorpe exhibition and Corcoran Gallery in Washington, as cited by Fox:

[Helms] has sent a letter to his congressional colleagues enclosing copies of *Man in a Polyester Suit*, *Mr. 10^{1/2}* (which was not included in the exhibition), and two photographs of children—one young boy naked, astride a chair, and the other of a young girls in a flowered dress sitting cross legged in a position that reveals that she is not wearing underwear. The letter graphically described photographs which Helms did not include in the mailing. The text cited, among others: ‘1) Photo of a man’s arm up (to the forearm) in another man’s rectum’; ‘5) Close-up of a man sticking his ‘pinkie’ finger *up his penis* [Helms’s italics].’ The letter ends by asking

the recipient to make a ‘call’ as to whether the taxpayers’ money should be used to ‘fund this sort of thing.’^{lxvi}

For Helms, such images are so self-evidently unworthy of taxpayers’ money that he needs not even appeal for this work to be condemned. For Helms, a man hanging his penis out of his pants (*Plate 26*), a man ‘fisting’ another man, or a man inserting a finger into his penis, is pornography (and, moreover, gay porn at that, heaven forbid), and photos of naked or partly-naked minors is paedophilic, *kiddie-porn*. His position here is governed by mutually exclusive and unequivocally defined terms: porn is trash-culture, art is high culture, porn *cannot* be art, and vice versa, therefore photographs of naked bodies or sexual activity *are* porn and *not* art. Thus, for Helms, Mapplethorpe’s photographs are pornographic expositions of immoral sexuality, merely masquerading as art.

Jeff Jacoby, writing regularly in *The Boston Globe*, has published numerous articles on the NEA since this debate sparked in 1989.

Plate 26

Jacoby dislikes the NEA to the extent that he regularly calls for its abolition: he says “arts need the NEA like a fish needs a bicycle”, adapting (or rather, bastardising) Gloria Steinham’s iconic feminist motif.^{lxvii} Similarly to Helms, D’Amato and Buchanan, Jacoby argues that the NEA is complicit in the ill-use of ‘taxpayers money’. Like Helms, Jacoby also seems to wish to avoid accusations of philistinism, indeed, he wishes to appear as though, unlike Mapplethorpe and Serrano, he knows what art, *good art*, is. So, again, the status of works by Mapplethorpe or Serrano as ‘art’ proper is questioned:

In short, when Congress created the NEA in 1965, it was violating a two-century-old tradition of keeping art government-free. The gamble didn't pay off. Art in the last 30 years has grown not better, but more politicized. NEA money hasn't inspired artists to reach new heights of expressiveness, truth, or beauty; it has incited them to noisome depths of coarseness and banality. Like most other kinds of government welfare, NEA handouts have fostered whining claims of entitlement -- and frenzied warnings of doom if the entitlement is cut off.^{lxviii}

For Jacoby, reaching “new heights of expressiveness, truth, or beauty” is the primary function of art. Therefore art is not “obscene and indecent”,^{lxix} that is, rather than ‘obscene’, art is ‘scenic’, a thing of common beauty, and within common bounds of decency. Such criticisms fail to comprehend that contemporary American art ‘fails’ to reach such expectations, not because contemporary art is *wrong*, but because these expectations are entirely inappropriate. That is, the axioms, the self-evident truths, that Jacoby or Helms hold in relation to art simply *do not* fit with many of the axioms operating within American contemporary art. Analogously, they are, in effect, getting angry with a cat for not barking.

However, to many art theorists and critics, the vociferous public reaction to the *Piss Christ* by Buchanan, D’Amato, Helms and Jacoby could be seen as merely an exteriorised manifestation of something far more profound. To some, the conservative objections could be explained in phobic terms,^{lxx} in terms of a deeper ineffable subjective psychological *abjection* of the work, underlying the superficial verbal and political objections. The psychoanalytical ‘abjection’ readings of the NEA debate were framed mainly in relation to Kristeva’s theory of abjection, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.^{lxxi} In these terms, the conservative protests seemed to be a political expression of something far more instinctual; a

gagging at the very sight of Christ immersed in piss manifest as verbal disgust at this *display of vulgarity*, this “obscene and indecent art”^{lxxii}.

Kristeva’s theory of abjection, *Powers of Horror*, became a seminal text in the art theoretical discourses following the role of *Piss Christ* in the NEA debate in 1989, to the extent that Frazer Ward comments:

More than a decade after the translation into English of *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva presides over what Rhonda Lieberman has called the ‘rich flowering of abjection in the artworld.’ So it is to this book [*Powers of Horror*] that we must turn for the dominant account of abjection.^{lxxiii}

This discursive dominance was somewhat crystallised four years after the NEA debate by the Whitney Museum of American Art’s exhibition in 1993, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*.^{lxxiv} Of course, the Whitney’s *Abject Art* included Serrano’s *Piss Christ*. However, the exhibition’s scope was far wider than the events of the NEA debate. *Abject Art* included many other art works which seem to have, at various times, transgressed the status quo with the use of the abject. Thus, the exhibition included works such as Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain (second version)* 1950 (Plate 27), Andy Warhol’s *Oxidation Painting*, 1978, and Lynda Benglis’s gallery advertisement in *Artforum* 13, 1974. The essays in the *Abject Art* catalogue publication also cite examples not included in the exhibition in order to further illustrate a fundamental political quality of abjection, for example, the 1960s happenings and body art, the Fluxus activities of Yoko Ono, and the performances of Carolee Schneemann.^{lxxv}

The curators claimed that across the contingencies of time and place within the 20th Century, the abject has been a consistent, effective and repeatable strategy of transgression. The exhibition sought to reinvest some “familiar icons” of 20th Century art as essentially transgressive in the light of their reference to abject matter:

By recontextualising art works from the Whitney Museum’s Permanent Collection, ‘Abject Art’ allows us to see familiar icons in unexpected, transgressive ways.^{lxxvi}

The Whitney’s *Abject Art* exhibition granted abjection an even greater authoritative position within art discourse as a politically effective mode of cultural production. To a large degree, it distilled the turbulence of the NEA debate into a tempered art theoretical methodology, based in psychoanalytical theory. Indeed, the exhibition more definitely consolidated the category

Plate 27

and definition of ‘abject art’ in a generic sense, wider than the specific works in the exhibition, or cited in the catalogue.

The widespread deployment of Kristeva’s theory of abjection subsequent to the NEA debate had two functions. Firstly, and most immediately, in response to criticism by Helms, D’Amato, Buchanan and Jacoby that the work of Serrano or Mapplethorpe is ‘not art’, to contextualise their work in terms of ‘abjection’ would add force to the argument in favour of the validity of such work as ‘art’ proper. Employing Kristeva’s theory of abjection as a context to Serrano’s work placed it within the greater security of an academic and intellectually valid structure. Indeed, Serrano’s *Piss Christ* has become embedded at the centre of the debate on abjection subsequent to the NEA debate.

Discourse on abjection had been steadily gaining currency and circulating in American contemporary art discourse over the course of the 80s, since the English language release of Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* in 1982. As Simon Taylor notes in his essay for the Whitney’s *Abject Art* 1993 exhibition:

Since the English translation of Julia Kristeva’s ‘Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection’ in 1982, the concept of ‘abjection’ has entered the critical syntax of contemporary art. Scatological assemblages, bodily fragments, and base materials—dirt, grunge, and traces of sexual difference—have defiled the white cube^{lxxvii}

An example Taylor notes, which applied this Kristevan thesis to cinema in 1986, was Barbara Creed’s essay *Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection*:

a desire not only for the perverse pleasure (confronting sickening, horrific images, being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, having taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator’s seat).^{lxxviii}

So, certainly *Piss Christ* and the NEA debate were not a point of genesis of the use of notions of abjection in contemporary art. However, the NEA debate, to some degree, forced the hand of the American art world to justify and validate itself, particularly in defence of the work of artists such as Serrano and Mapplethorpe, and in defence of government funding of the NEA. Thus, notions of abjection already circulating within art discourse, became the prime defence and explanation, *as well*

as suggesting itself as a repeatable political strategy. Hence, the NEA debate was the catalyst, causing an apparent synthesis in theory and criticism of contemporary art between abjection and politics. The NEA debate in turn seemed to witness the reification of this synthesis, as it seemed to thrust the psycho-micropolitical strategy of abjection into the tangible Congressional macropolitical sphere.

Which brings us to the second, and most important, function of the widespread deployment of Kristeva's theory of abjection in this debate. In the analysis of the NEA debate, Kristeva's theory of abjection seemed to provide a sound psychoanalytic explanation for the disgust of the conservative Senators to the image of Christ immersed in an excremental bodily fluid. Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, particularly its chapter on "Semiotics of Biblical Abomination", argues for the correlation within the bible between the impurity of bodily excrement, with a "whole range of moral prohibitions",^{lxxix} which dovetails perfectly with the reaction of Helm *et al* to *Piss Christ*. Kristeva illustrates this with examples from the biblical books of Prophets, Zechariah and Ezekiel:

Thus Zecharia (3:1-4) presents the high priest Joshua as 'clothed with filthy garments' that the Angel orders to be taken away from him, saying, 'I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee; the word for 'filthy' is here *so'im*, excrementious.^{lxxx}

"As I see it," says Kristeva "biblical impurity is permeated with the tradition of defilement."^{lxxx} With Serrano's *Piss Christ*, the repulsion from "what goes out of the body" [that] gives rise to abjection"^{lxxxii} can be seen to be doubled with abominable defilement of the crucifix with this 'filth'. From this point of view, read against Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, Serrano's *Piss Christ* was exemplary of abjection in art: abjection to the power of two. The title of *Piss Christ* must take a significant amount of the credit for this double abjection. The actual cibachrome print of *Piss Christ* merely shows a crucifix immersed in a slightly aerated amber liquid. The image of the fluid does not necessarily in itself constitute piss. It could just as easily be *Beer Christ* (although, of course, this itself would open a whole different set of reactions and debates).^{lxxxiii} The title ties the whole thing together; along the lines illustrated by Kristeva, *Piss Christ* is an abominable oxy-moron.

The events of the NEA debate, and the rationale provided by the Whitney's *Abject Art* strongly suggested abjection as an effective psycho-political strategy for artists, to the extent that:

the work collected under the rubric 'abject art' constitutes a trend, if not a movement.^{lxxxiv}

In Australia, the discourses surrounding 'abject art' began to have a strong bearing on Australian contemporary art, particularly in the early 1990s. The NEA debate could be followed closely through *Art in America*,^{lxxxv} *New Art Examiner*,^{lxxxvi} *Arts Magazine*,^{lxxxvii} and any number of other American newspapers and magazines distributed in Australia. For Australian artists, the validity of 'abject art' as an efficacious discursive strategy within contemporary art was seemingly assured and underwritten by its American precedent. Furthermore, via the catalogue essays, and international critical attention, the Whitney Museum's *Abject Art* exhibition found its way into contemporary art discourse in Australia. Abjection in art came to Australian artists ready-bundled in its consolidated form as 'abject art'. Following this exhibition, a crystallised notion of 'abject art' began to be adopted by artists who were dealing with corporeality, or with aesthetic forms which seemed to refer to the visceral.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, in early 1993, Hany Armanious, Adam Cullen and Mikala Dwyer had been loosely associated under the disputable category and definition of 'grunge art'. In early 1993 the practices of these artists were at their most concerted in their resistance to theory, particularly in *Rad Scunge*^{lxxxviii} in March, *Adams*^{lxxxix} in March and April, *Shirthead*^{xc} and *Monster Field*^{xcii} in May of that year. However, in mid-1993, 'grunge art' appeared to make a volte-face, and reposition itself away from the street culture of 'grunge' and more in line with emerging art theory discourse. At that point, Armanious, Cullen and Dwyer appear to reframe their practices more in terms of 'abject art'. As Chris Chapman notes in late 1993:

I find it interesting how the art-form I am referring to [grunge art] has appeared to pose so many problems in terms of interpretation. In a very short space of time the work has been approached from the angle of popular street culture (or grunge), comedy and irony, and now art history as filtered in through French philosophy.^{xcii}

Indeed, it was shortly following the Whitney's *Abject Art* exhibition, in June to August 1993, that the work of Armanious, Cullen, Dwyer, and some other Australian artists, were refigured as an extension or extrapolation of the concerns of the 'abject art' in the US since the NEA debate. A review in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by Felicity Fenner notes this appropriation of the 'abjection' *package*:

When grunge was declared dead just months after its incarnation, the term 'abjection' was adopted to describe the grungey-looking art that continued to flourish.^{xciii}

In the same review, Fenner describes 'abject art' in Australia as an "unabashed absorption of America[n concerns]", and as "the abject sensibility which grew out of last season's grunge culture". Similarly, and significantly, *Australian Perspecta 1993* in October-November 1993, a biennial survey show of new contemporary Australian art, attempted to record and account for the role of abjection in recent Australian art. Victoria Lynn, the curator of *Australian Perspecta 1993*, writes in her curatorial introduction:

There has been much fixation in recent years on the 'abject' (neither subject nor object) in art. Taken from the writings of French feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva, the term refers to those aspects of existence that culture chooses to clean up, hide away or make invisible.^{xciv}

Lynn then cites the works of Adam Cullen and Mikala Dwyer to demonstrate 'abjection' in recent Australian art: she talks of "Cullen's objects of hygiene and deceit",^{xcv} and Dwyer's work "[i]mplicating the Gallery in the realm of abjection and domesticity".^{xcvi}

Cullen himself, discussing his work for *Perspecta '93* in late 1993, contextualised it in terms of Kristeva's theory of abjection. Indeed, despite his earlier strategic 'dumbness', he makes a point of claiming that his concerns with 'abjection' go back further than he had previously indicated:

The Australian Feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz had a large influence on his earlier work, claims Cullen. 'Her work on abjection and Kristeva still has traces in the *Perspecta* [1993] piece — it's trying to extract and distil an imaginary visceral fluid.'^{xcvii}

Further cementing the work of these closely associated artists to notions of abjection was the use of a full-page image of Armanious's *Snake Oil* work as the leading illustration to *Art + Text's* feature article, *Abject Lessons*, in May 1994.^{xcviii} This

article by Frazer Ward, then a doctoral candidate in art history at Cornell University, discusses the relation of Kristeva's theory of abjection to the NEA debate in the US. The use of Armanious's *Snake Oil* as the leading illustration of this article indicates the close correlation that was seen to operate between the NEA/abjection debate in the US, and 'abject art' in Australia. It clearly demonstrates that, to the editorial team of *Art + Text*, and to the gallery representing Armanious (Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney, Australia), who granted permission to use this illustration, Armanious's work was seen at that time to be a direct corollary of the NEA/abjection debate upon which the article itself focussed.^{xcix}

Internationally, the movement of 'abject art' has been central to a general preoccupation throughout the 1990s with the materiality of 'the body', particularly in Australia, America and the United Kingdom. These particular explorations of 'the body' have sought to rethink the place of corporeality following the dominance of postmodernism and explorations of the cultural constructivity of the body in the 1980s. In art's discourses of the 1980s, essentialisms in general were rigorously attacked:

They [artists] thought that the Romantic belief in the unity of spirit or meaning in art had been given up, that art enabling us to understand the invisible 'spirit' in the world did not exist anymore.^c

As I have discussed earlier, the agenda of contemporary art in the 1980s had other matters to deal with. Take, for an example here, a sample of the numerous catalogue essay titles which accompany the 1996 Biennale of Sydney: Nick Waterlow's *Origins, Originality and Beyond*,^{ci} Rosalind Krauss's *The Originality of the Avant Garde: A Postmodern Repetition*,^{cii} and Roberta Smith's *What's New: Originality, Appropriation and So Forth*.^{ciii} For this international survey exhibition, contemporary art's foremost concern was with notions of appropriation and originality of the image in Western culture:

Baudrillard states — together with artists such as David Salle, Cindy Sherman, Dara Birnbaum, Bertrand Levier and Julie Opie — that an original statement is impossible.^{civ}

To address issues concerning 'the body' was to court accusations of essentialism, and other potential subscriptions to modernist master narratives.

However, the matter of corporeality became conspicuous by its absence from art and theoretical discourses at the end of the 1980s. The escalation of the HIV/AIDS crisis made it all the more conspicuous. The crisis was met by widespread intransigent conservatism, particular from the Reagan and Bush administrations in the USA. As Robert Hughes notes:

in the eighties, [the] call for government action on AIDS got nothing from Washington; Reagan did not pronounce that monosyllable in public once, and from Bush they received little but vague wafflings.^{cv}

This intransigence led to the organised activities of ACT UP, Gran Fury and the AIDS-concerned works of artists such as David Wojnarowicz, Keith Haring and David McDiarmid. The brute reality of death and prejudice prompted contemporary art discourse to rethink the direction of art's discourses, to reconsider the very political importance of the body in the midst of a theoretical milieu which had ostensibly elided or ignored the body. As Paul Foss notes in *Art & Text's* 1991 AIDS issue (*Plate 28*):

there seems to be a virtual moratorium on AIDS in Australian art magazines and spaces right now. 'Beauty', craft, and Aboriginal painting continue to dominate — can this actually be happening? Then again, is it surprising that 'everyday' culture is far more saleable than the *perversity* of merely trying to survive it? How many will have to die before 'AIDS' enters the curriculum of critical agit-prop?^{cv}

To Foss, explorations in contemporary art of 'everyday' culture, and by this I take it that he refers to art dealing with issues of the contemporary image, simulacrum, originality, and so forth, exclude the more present everyday problem of AIDS. They merely served as "the surrounding languages of disempowerment

Plate 28

and sobriety”,^{cvii} while this worldwide epidemic progresses. Alongside this (and to some extent entwined with it), the NEA debate placed corporeality more at the centre of contemporary art discourses. The question begged itself in more assertive terms: “What about the materiality of the body?”^{cviii} In some contemporary theory this question has been approached in various generative reconsiderations of the body, for example, in recent work by Moira Gatens,^{cix} Judith Butler^{cx} and Elizabeth Grosz.^{cxii} In contemporary art, ‘abjection’ and the AIDS crisis put corporeality back on the agenda, perhaps in some instances to recall art and theory back from the ‘ideal’, to the materiality of the body. On primarily Kristevan terms, the 1990s has experienced a proliferation of artists dealing with ‘abject’ bodies, with fragmented deviations from a normative model of ‘the body’, beyond those shown in the Whitney’s *Abject Art*.

Indeed, in the United Kingdom there are numerous artists which have emerged in the 1990s concerned primarily with the fragmented body as an agonistic state, such as Ron Mueck’s grotesque and life-like latex bodies, and perhaps to a lesser extent, much of the work of Damien Hurst and Marc Quinn has addressed the brute materiality of corporeality. Certainly the work of Jake and Dinos Chapman has explored ‘abject’ bodies. Works such as *Zygotic Acceleration*, 1995, *Two Faced Cunt*, 1997, and *Doggy*, 1997 (*Plate 29*), are mannequins which depict life-sized conjoined twin bodies, with orifices displaced onto unfamiliar parts of their bodies:

Drawing on psychoanalysis, ‘ÖThese objects are *simulacra* or bad copies of the ideal, they are puerile, slippery and annoying. Here are entities with no fixed identity or allegiance to the ideal, nomadically breeding in an unlimited becoming.’^{cxii}

Similarly, in the United States, Tony Oursler’s work envisions the fragmented body as an agonistic state. “Vivid, hyperreal”^{cxiii} human faces are projected upon bodies which are contorted dolls, cylinders and cubes: “The heads are blown up and distended, the bodies limp, crushed or prone”^{cxiv} For example, *Horrorerotic (from system for dramatic feedback)*, 1994 (*Plate 30*), is a small and crudely constructed fabric doll with an agonised face video-projected onto its head. Similarly, *Instant Suckling*, 1994, is a glass cylinder stuffed with cloth, and bearing a ‘live’ human face. They are inanimate bodies which, by virtue of the motion and human features of their faces, take on a zombie-like ‘undead’ character, like living dolls feeling the

agony of their stitched and stuffed bodies. In Australia, Patricia Piccinini's *Lifeform with Unevolved Mutant Properties (LUMP)*, 1995 (*Plate 31*), is similar to Oursler's "techno grotesque".^{cxv} The image of Piccinini's LUMP is computer rendered. Like Oursler's dolls, LUMP is a grotesque toy-like monster with distinctively foetal characteristics, large head, big eyes, and a small indeterminate torso with only arms and a mouth. LUMP is cutsey and toylike, but in some pictures in this series, the head of LUMP is ripped open to reveal a ancephalic cranium packed with viscera resembling a heart, kidney and intestine. LUMP is, again, an agonistic 'abject' body.

In the United States, Robert Gober's work has been squarely and directly placed in the art discourses of 'abjection'. Indeed, Gober's *Leg with Candle*, 1991, was selected as the cover illustration for the Whitney Museum of American Art's *Abject*

Plate 29 & 30

Plate 31 & 32

Art catalogue.^{cxvi} *Leg with Candle* is a single dismembered leg, dressed in its single trouser leg, sock and shoe. The leg itself is rendered in wax, minutely detailed with individual human hairs which lend it a realistically fleshy character. Through the knee of the trousers, a candle protrudes seemingly equating the dead fatty wax of the candle with the human fat of the leg. In another of Gober's works, *Man Coming Out of Woman*, 1993-94 (Plate 32), a similarly hairy leg, dressed in sock and shoe, extends from the vagina of a smooth waxy torso, which itself disappears into the walls of the corner of the gallery space. This work was included in the Art Gallery of New South Wales' *Body* exhibition, September-November 1997. The Curator's catalogue essay explains the work thus:

Robert Gober's *Man Coming Out of Woman* is a wax sculpture which disturbingly simulates flesh, although the waxwork quality lends it a macabre effect that jars with the subject of an improbable birth. This fantastic scenario seems to link the original object of fixation, the mother, with the artist's sexual investment in the male body.^{cxvii}

For Anthony Bond, the exhibition's curator, this work is read, unquestioningly, in direct relation to notions of the 'abject'. Not only is the work described as agonistic, that it "*disturbingly simulates flesh*",^{cxviii} but it is explained exactly in line with the Kristeva's own Oedipal orthodoxy, with the belief in the subject's original fixation with the mother.

For artists in the 1990s, the fact that a little-known New York artist could provoke the wrath of conservative America, with a fairly aesthetically seductive image, contradicted everything artists like Salle, Levine and Ruff, and theorist like Bois, Jameson and Baudrillard, had been discussing up to that point. Kristeva's theory of abjection not only allowed art discourse to account for the emerging affect of images in the 1990s, but also accounted for a materiality of the human body at the centre of this *waxing* of affect.^{cxix} With *Piss Christ* as solid proof, for artists and art theorists, abjection offered a tried-and-tested way of understanding the affect of images, as a psycho-political strategy of transgression. Further to this, many contemporary artists have been concerned with notions of the body in their practice.^{cxx} The new economy of images in the 1990s has meant that the concerns of much art has shifted, to some extent, from the 'optic' to the 'haptic', that is, from images as visual surfaces to a more 'bodily' relation of artwork to audience.^{cxxi}

However, in favouring the abjection account of affect in art, too much is critically ceded to the psychoanalytic paradigm. To talk consistently of the materiality of human bodies in terms of the ‘abject’ is to grant an unqualified predominance to psychoanalytical understandings of the self and bodies. Indeed, in much contemporary art discourse the terms ‘visceral matter’ and ‘abject matter’ have been conflated as though they are exact synonyms. Art theoretical discourses have established ‘abjection’ as a naturalised and virtually unquestionable axiom, as the *only* explanation needed of the affect of images of visceral matter upon the bodies of an audience. In explaining the affect of images upon bodies in art, abjection has not been merely a dominant notion amongst others, but rather it has held a discursive monopoly.

Certainly, notions of corporeality beg to be addressed by contemporary art theory, and not merely in response to the increasing interest in the body by artists in the 1990s. However, we need to examine Kristeva’s notions of abjection more closely in order to understand the degree to which ‘abjection’ may be useful in terms of the cultural efficacy of art practices in the 1990s. That is, we must examine the extent to which ‘abjection’ can be considered a strategy of cultural and political efficacy, which entails an examination of its foundations and axioms.

Notes

ⁱ**Foster, Hal**, *Return of the Real*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Minneapolis, USA, 1996, p. 157.

ⁱⁱ**Bois, Yves-Alain**, “Painting: The Task of Mourning”, in *Endgame: reference and simulation in recent painting and sculpture: September 25-November 30, 1986*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1986, p.29. Another example which could be added to Bois’ list, which is more specific to art theory, is **Mann, Paul** “The Theory Death of the Avant-Garde”, Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1991.

ⁱⁱⁱSherrie Levine, quoted in **Bois**, *ibid.*

^{iv}**Lumby, Catharine**, “Hot Market”, *Rolling Stone*, #473, p. 56.

^v‘Manic’ in the sense to which Bois refers in **Bois, Yves-Alain**, *loc. cit.*

^{vi}**Baudrillard, Jean**, “Precession of the Simulacrum”, trans. Paul Foss and Paul Patton, *Art & Text*, #11, Spring 1983, p. 3.

^{vii}**Baudrillard, Jean**, *The Mirror of Production*, St. Louis, USA, 1975.

^{viii}**Baudrillard, Jean**, “Precession of the Simulacrum”, trans. Paul Foss and Paul Patton, *Art & Text*, #11, Spring 1983, p. 4.

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^{ix}ibid., p. 6.

^xibid., p. 8.

^{xi}I will return to Jameson's reservations about postmodernity in Chapter Four.

^{xii}**Jameson, Fredric**, *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, New York, USA, p. 6. Again these are notions which are returned to more fully in Chapter Four.

^{xiii}ibid., p. 11.

^{xiv}*On The Beach*, directed by Stanley Kramer, United Artists, USA, 1959.

^{xv}*Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, Stanley Kubrick, Hawk Films, UK, 1964.

^{xvi}*The War Game*, directed by Peter Watkins, BBC, UK, 1965.

^{xvii}*Invaders from Mars*, directed by William Cameron Menzies, 20th Century Fox Film Corporation, USA, 1953.

^{xviii}*The War of the Worlds*, directed by Byron Haskin, Paramount Pictures, 1953.

^{xix}*Flash Gordon*, directed by Frederick Stephani, Universal Pictures Company, USA, 1936.

^{xx}*The Blob*, directed by Irvin S. Yeaworth Jr, Tonylyn Productions Inc, USA, 1958.

^{xxi}Caption from American film posters for Yeaworth's *The Blob*.

^{xxii}Interestingly enough, the 1990s have seen a resurgence of a genre of American natural disaster movies, such as *Twister* (Jan de Bont, Universal Pictures, USA, 1996), *Dante's Peak* (directed by Roger Donaldson, MCA/Universal Pictures/Pacific Western, USA, 1997), *Volcano* (directed by Mick Jackson, Moritz Original/20th Century Fox/Donner/Schuler-Donner Productions/Fox 2000 Pictures, USA, 1997) and *Deep Impact* (directed by Mimi Leder, Zanuck/Brown Productions/DreamWorks SKG/Paramount Pictures, USA, 1998). Richard Lacayo, writing in Time magazine says:

Beyond the obvious reason that the year 2000 is at hand, there's the end of the cold war, which threatened for a while to deprive us of imagined annihilation. Even Hollywood has had to resort lately to wayward asteroids, space invaders and Godzilla as a way to provide that strangely agreeable image, civilization getting wrecked.

Lacayo, Richard, "The end of the World as we know it?", *Time*, January 18, 1999, pp. 46-47.

^{xxiii}**Mauss, Marcel**, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison, Cohen & West Ltd, London, UK, 1966, p. 13.

^{xxiv}**Levine, Sherrie**, "Five Comments by Sherrie Levine", *The Biennale of Sydney (Sixth)*, Sydney, Australia, 1986, p. 180.

^{xxv}This is discussed in considerable detail in Chapter One of this thesis, in relation to the rise of the popularity of the 'grunge' aesthetic.

^{xxvi}Benetton, "Policy on Communications", URL:

<http://www.benetton.com/benetton-web/advertising/communications.html>, accessed 4/8/97, 5.49pm.

^{xxvii}Benetton, "1992: The Shock of Reality", URL:

<http://www.benetton.com/benetton-web/advertising/shock2.html>, accessed 4/8/97, 5.19pm.

^{xxviii}Benetton, "Policy on Communications", URL:

<http://www.benetton.com/benetton-web/advertising/communications.html>, accessed 4/8/97, 5.49pm.

^{xxix}ibid.

^{xxx}Incidentally, however, in terms of Benetton's claim that their advertising is not about their product, it is quite likely that the social value of these image effectively translates into economic value for Benetton. In one sense, Benetton's 'shock' ad images of the 1990s similar to their 'fashion-shoot' ad images of the 1990s. In both instances they have chosen images which have a currency, a high socio-aesthetic value, in their particular time. In this way, a healthy, middle-class, young person is to the socio-aesthetic values of the 1980s as a car-bombing is to the socio-aesthetic values of the 1990s.

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Indeed, Benetton have continued to employ this ‘shock’ advertising strategy throughout the 1990s, so one may assume the use of these images benefits Benetton economically.

^{xxxix}Benetton, “Life itself becomes a scandal”, URL:

<http://www.benetton.com/benetton-web/advertising/life1991.html>, accessed 4/8/97, 5.21pm.

^{xxxix}ibid.

^{xxxix}Benetton, “1992: The Shock of Reality”, URL:

<http://www.benetton.com/benetton-web/advertising/shock2.html>, accessed 4/8/97, 5.19pm.

^{xxxix}ibid.

^{xxxix}**Toscana, Oliviero** “Benetton Advertising: Intro”, URL:

<http://www.benetton.com/benetton-web/advertising/intro.html>, accessed 4/8/97, 5.52pm.

^{xxxix}It must be noted that there are fundamentally contrasting readings of Warhol’s images which certainly do not see them as indifferent. For example, in “Art in America”, Thomas Crow argues this position, claiming that contrary to the accepted readings based on Warhol’s supposed indifference and banality, these images actually reveal Warhol’s neuroses concerning death. **Crow, Thomas**, “Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol”, *Art in America*, May 1987, pp. 129-136.

^{xxxix}Warhol, Andy, cited in **Foster**, op. cit., p. 131.

^{xxxix}**Jameson**, loc. cit.

^{xxxix}Dimensions of *Piss Christ* as cited in *Art & Text*, #41, January 1992, p. 33.

^{xl}**Serrano, Andres**, unpublished recorded telephone interview with Christian Messham-Muir, Melbourne, Australia, 19/10/97.

^{xl}**Messer, William**, “Update”, *The New Art Examiner*, November 1994, p. 52.

^{xl}**Fox, Nichols**, “NEA under siege: Artwork sparks congressional challenge to agency’s reauthorization”, *New Art Examiner*, Summer ‘89, p.18.

^{xl}Following his loss at the 1998 congressional mid-term elections, Alphonse D’Amato is no longer the Senator for New York.

^{xl}US Senator Alphonse D’Amato, quoted in **Vance, Carole S.**, “Issues and Commentary: The War on Culture”, *Art in America*, Volume 77, September 1989, p.39.

^{xl}**Todd, Stephen**, “Serrano’s Calvary”, *Art & Text*, #51, 1995, p. 44.

^{xl}US Senator Jesse Helms, quoted in **Fox**, loc. cit.

^{xl}US Senator Jesse Helms, quoted in **Vance**, loc.cit.

^{xl}A press-release from the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), quoted in **Fox Nichols**, “Helms ups the ante”, *New Art Examiner*, October ‘89, p.20. Interestingly, the NEA funds which were received by Andres Serrano to produce ‘Piss Christ’, came via a grant which SECCA had received from the NEA, of \$15,000. Andres Serrano received \$5000 of this money, which, by the estimates provided by Robert Hughes in “Culture of Complaint” (p. 137), works out to be a tax contribution of about a 360,000th of one cent for every man, woman and child in America. As Serrano said in the telephone interview, Melbourne, 19/10/97, the money he received “a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a penny”.

^{xl}**Hughes, Robert**, *Culture of Complaint*, Oxford University Press, London, UK, 1995, p. 137.

^l**Fox Nichols**, “Cultural cowardice, conservative clout”, *New Art Examiner*, Summer ‘89, p. 38.

^{li}ibid.

^{lii}ibid, p. 39.

^{lii}**Fox Nichols**, “Helms ups the ante”, *New Art Examiner*, October ‘89, p.23.

^{lii}**Hughes**, op. cit., p. 133.

^{lii}US Senator Helms’s amendments to the funding of the NEA, quoted in **Fox Nichols**, op. cit., p. 20.

^{lii}Editorial, *New Art Examiner*, October ‘89, p. 7.

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- ^{lvii}US Senator Helms, quoted in **Fox Nichols**, “NEA under siege: Artwork sparks congressional challenge to agency’s reauthorization”, *New Art Examiner*, Summer ‘89, p.18.
- ^{lviii}US Senator Helms, quoted in **Fox Nichols**, “Helms ups the ante”, *New Art Examiner*, October ‘89, p.20.
- ^{lix}Reverend Donald Wildmon, quoted in **Hughes**, op. cit., p. 135.
- ^{lx}US Senator Alphonse D’Amato, quoted in **Vance**, loc. cit.
- ^{lxi}US Senator Alphonse D’Amato, quoted in **Fox, Nichols**, “NEA under siege: Artwork sparks congressional challenge to agency’s reauthorization”, *New Art Examiner*, Summer ‘89, p.18.
- ^{lxii}US Senator Alphonse D’Amato, quoted in **Vance**, loc. cit. Emphasis added.
- ^{lxiii}**Hughes**, op. cit., p. 142.
- ^{lxiv}**Buchanan, Patrick**, “How Can We Clean Up Our Art Act?”, *Washington Post*, June 19, 1989, n.p.
- ^{lxv}*ibid.*
- ^{lxvi}**Fox, Nichols**, “Helms ups the ante”, *New Art Examiner*, October ‘89, p.23.
- ^{lxvii}**Jacoby, Jeff**, “The Framers would have voted to abolish the NEA”, *The Boston Globe*, July 3, 1997. This type of rhetorical adaptation of liberalist and leftist terminology employed with right-wing intentions, is discussed in **Vance**, op.cit., p.41.
- ^{lxviii}**Jacoby**, *ibid.*
- ^{lxix}US Senator Helms, quoted in **Fox**, op cit., p.20.
- ^{lxx}**Taylor, Simon**, “The Phobic Object: Abjection in contemporary art”, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, ed. **Philbrick, Jane**, Whitney Independent Study Program, ISP Papers, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1993, pp. 59-83.
- ^{lxxi}**Kristeva, Julia**, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 1982.
- ^{lxxii}US Senator Helms, quoted in **Fox**, op cit., p.20.
- ^{lxxiii}**Ward, Frazer**, “Abject Lessons”, *Art + Text*, #48, May 1994, p. 48.
- ^{lxxiv}“Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art”, Whitney Museum of American Art, June 23-August 29, 1993.
- ^{lxxv}**Jones, Leslie C.**, “Transgressive Femininity: Art and Gender in the Sixties and Seventies”, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, ed. Philbrick, Jane, Whitney Independent Study Program, ISP Papers, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1993, p. 49.
- ^{lxxvi}**Ben-Levi, Jack, et al.**, “Introduction”, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, ed. Philbrick, Jane, Whitney Independent Study Program, ISP Papers, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1993, p. 8.
- ^{lxxvii}**Taylor**, op. cit., p. 59.
- ^{lxxviii}**Creed, Barbara**, “Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection”, *Screen 27*, January-February 1986, p. 48, cited in **Taylor, Simon**, “The Phobic Object: Abjection in contemporary art”, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, ed. **Philbrick, Jane**, Whitney Independent Study Program, ISP Papers, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1993.
- ^{lxxix}**Kristeva**, op cit., p. 110.
- ^{lxxx}*ibid.*, p. 108.
- ^{lxxxi}*ibid.*, p. 91.
- ^{lxxxii}*ibid.*, p. 108.
- ^{lxxxiii}Indeed, in 1997 Germaine Greer made a comment to this affect, which was reported in Melbourne’s *The Age*;

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‘There’s nothing to say that Piss Christ was actually in piss’ she said. ‘It was probably, you know, in Budweiser. Well, that’s just piss, anyway.’

Greer, Germaine, quoted in **Sheil, Fergus**, “Greer shoots from the lip”, *The Age*, 14/10/97, p. 1.

^{lxxxiv}**Ward**, op. cit., p. 47.

^{lxxxv}Some examples of *Art in America* articles on the NEA debate are **Robinson, Walter**, “Congress Rejects Helms Amendment”, *Art in America*, vol. 77, November 1989, p. 41, **Wallis, Brian**, “Fallout from the Helms Amendment”, *Art in America*, vol. 77, October 1989, p. 29,

^{lxxxvi}Some examples of *New Art Examiner* articles on the NEA debate are **Fox, Nichols**, “Helms ups the ante”, *New Art Examiner*, October ‘89, p.20, **Fox, Nichols**, “NEA under siege: Artwork sparks congressional challenge to agency’s reauthorization”, *New Art Examiner*, Summer ‘89, p.18.

^{lxxxvii}An example of *Arts Magazine* articles on the NEA debate is **Mattick, Paul**, “Field Work (Senate vote against the Helms measure concerning the NEA)”, *Arts Magazine*, vol. 66, January 1992, p.17.

^{lxxxviii}*Rad Scunge* curated by Dale Frank, at the *Karyn Lovegrove Gallery* in Melbourne, March 3-26, 1993.

^{lxxxix}*Adams* curated by Hany Armanious, at *Kunst* in Sydney, March 21-April 17, 1993.

^{xc}*Shirthead*, at *Mori Gallery* in Sydney, May 7-21, 1993.

^{xc1}*Monster Field* curated by ADS Donaldson, at *The Ivan Dougherty Gallery* in Sydney, May 6-29, 1993.

^{xcii}**Chapman, Chris**, “The Invisibility of Sculpture”, paper presented to *1993 Sculpture Triennial*, held in Melbourne, September 12th, 1993.

^{xciii}**Fenner, Felicity**, “A genre beyond grunge”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3/6/94 p. 27.

^{xciv}**Lynn, Victoria**, “Curator’s Introduction”, *Australian Perspecta 1993*, The Art Gallery of New South Wales, October 1993, p. vii.

^{xcv}*ibid.*, p. viii.

^{xcvi}*ibid.*

^{xcvii}**Lumby, Catharine**, “The Readymade Saboteur”, *World Art*, #1, November 1993, pp. 34-37.

^{xcviii}See page 46 of the article, **Ward**, op.cit., pp. 46-53.

^{xcix}The editorial team of *Art + Text* at the time were Paul Foss (editor), Jeff Gibson (senior editor), and Jane Rankin-Read (senior editor overseas). I was *Art + Text*’s editorial assistant on that particular issue, and I recollect the editors’ intensions of using Armanious’s “Snake Oil” in this instance. Further, at that time, Armanious was represented by Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney, who gave permission for Armanious’s work to be used, as the ‘courtesy’ note indicates.

^c**Von Graevenitz, Antje**, “The Gap Between The Art of The Seventies and That of The Eighties — Reality or Myth?”, *The Biennale of Sydney* (Sixth), Sydney, Australia, 1986, p. 32.

^{ci}**Waterlow, Nick**, “Origins Originality and Beyond”, *The Biennale of Sydney* (Sixth), Sydney, Australia, 1986, pp. 10-15.

^{cii}**Krauss, Rosalind**, “The Originality of the Avant Garde: A Postmodern Repetition”, *The Biennale of Sydney* (Sixth), Sydney, Australia, 1986, pp. 16-17.

^{ciii}**Smith, Roberta** “Originality, Appropriation and So Forth”, *The Biennale of Sydney* (Sixth), Sydney, Australia, 1986, pp. 41-43.

^{civ}**Von Graevenitz**, op. cit., p. 33.

^{cv}**Hughes**, op. cit., p. 29.

^{cvi}**Foss, Paul**, “Introduction: Body Positive”, *Art & Text*, #38, January 1991, p. 2. Foss’s italics.

^{cvi}*ibid.*

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^{cviii}Judith Butler provides an amusing observation of this trend in her preface to *Bodies That Matter*: “Actually, in the recent past, the question was repeatedly formulated to me this way: ‘What about the materiality of the body, *Judy*?’” I took it that the addition of ‘*Judy*’ was an effort to dislodge me from the more formal ‘*Judith*’ and to recall me to a bodily life that could not be theorised away. There was a certain exasperation in the delivery of the final diminutive, a certain patronizing quality which (re)constituted me as an unruly child, one that needed to be brought to task, restored to that body being which is, after all, considered to be the most real, most pressing, most undeniable.” **Butler, Judith**, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Routledge, London, UK, 1993, p. ix-x.

^{cxix}**Gatens, Moira**, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*, Routledge, London, 1996.

^{cx}**Butler, Judith**, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Routledge, London, UK, 1993.

^{cxii}**Grosz, Elizabeth**, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, Australia, 1994.

^{cxiii}Catalogue essay to “Chapmanworld”, cited in *Body*, Bookman Schwartz, Melbourne and Sydney, Australia, 1997, pp. 172-173.

^{cxiiii}**Welchman, John C.**, “Tony Oursler: Angels of the Techno Grotesque”, *Art & Text*, #51, 1995, p. 25.

^{cxv}*ibid.*, p. 26.

^{cxvi}*ibid.*, p. 25.

^{cxvii}**Ben-Levi, et al.**, *op. cit.*, cover.

^{cxviii}**Bond, Anthony**, “Embodying the Real”, *Body*, Bookman Schwartz, Melbourne and Sydney, Australia, 1997, p68.

^{cxviiii}*ibid.* Emphasis added.

^{cxix}In some respects, the shift from the dominance of postmodernism to that of psychoanalysis seems somewhat paradigmatic: Kristeva’s psychoanalytical perspective offered a universalising human certainty after the dominance of the pluralisms of postmodernism. However, in another respect, the popular adoption of Kristeva’s abjection into contemporary art was more a *dialectical* shift than a complete philosophical *volte face*. Postmodernism had provided reasons for why images had lost their capacity to affect, based upon the centrality of signification. In the 1990s, Kristeva’s theory provided reasons for the ways images do affect, but still provides a theory rooted in signification.

^{cxx}Moreover, even later into the 1990s, psychoanalytical theories have continued to dominate art theoretical discourses on affect. In 1996, The Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, held the exhibition, “Informe: mode d’emploi”, which was accompanied by essays by Yves-Alain Bois, Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster, published in the journal *October* #78, ed. Krauss et al., MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1996, pp. 21-124.

^{cxxi}Haptic, from the Greek *h-ptein* to touch. Jill Bennett recently discussed this distinctions in relation to the “Body” exhibition, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 12/9/97 to 16/11/97. **Bennett, Jill**, “Kama and Eroticism: The Five Senses in the Work of Francesco Clemente and Pierre Klossowski”, in *Body*, ed. Anthony Bond, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 1997, p. 129.

CHAPTER THREE: HUMOUR AND HORROR, ABJECTION AND THE GROTESQUE

In the previous chapter I discussed the return to concerns of materiality and the body in contemporary art in the 1990s and, particularly the strategy of ‘abject art’ adopted by many artist internationally following the NEA debate in America in 1989.

Ostensibly, abjection provided a way of affecting audiences through a psychopolitical strategy based in the universal human instinct to ‘abject’, to cast away visceral matter. In that chapter, I discussed the central theoretical role of Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection, and briefly touched upon aspects of this theory. In this chapter, I will begin to examine this metacritical framework of ‘abject art’.

This chapter will look at Kristeva’s theory of abjection in depth, and examine the axioms which underlie ‘abjection’. I shall elucidate the ways in which the quasi-universal foundations of ‘abjection’ are rather specific to a particular understanding of subjectivity dominant in Western culture. I shall compare such notions of subjectivity with particular ideas which belong to medieval ‘selves’ in the work of François Rabelais, and examine the ways in which these other ‘selves’ problematise Kristeva’s notion of abjection.

Kristeva's Horror

The underlying notions of subjectivity which predicate Kristeva's theory of abjection are apparent in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.ⁱ However, Kristeva makes a clear exposition of these foundations in her earlier work, *Revolution in Poetic Language*.ⁱⁱ I have briefly mentioned *Revolution in Poetic Language* in Chapter One of this thesis, but I shall provide some further details of that work here, because Kristeva's account of the formation of subjectivity in that work forms the foundation of the notions of subjectivity which she puts to work in *Powers of Horror*.

Starting with the pre-subjective self, Kristeva states:

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body—always already involved in a semiotic process—by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'physical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*.ⁱⁱⁱ

Kristeva borrows the term 'chora' from Plato's *Timaeus*.^{iv} The chora is the space of the operation of sensory impulses, it is ephemeral, provisional, inconstant and volatile. Patterns that form during this stage are constantly negated as they change:

the semiotic chora is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where this unity succumbs before the process of charges and stasis that produce him.^v

Thus for Kristeva, there is no subject or personality at this stage: "The chora is not yet a position that represents something for someone".^{vi} The choratic infant is constituted by biological impulses and rhythms, particularly the oral and anal ones.^{vii}

Allon White notes:

The chora is the pre-socialised space of motility which makes gesture, phonic articulation and chromatic identification possible. Gradually, under the constraints of biological growth and family structure, this chora becomes limited and provisionally fixed into the different semiotic materials - sound, movement, colour and shape.^{viii}

In contrast with structural linguistics, Kristeva calls the natural choratic rhythms of the pre-cultural infant the 'semiotic'. It is anterior and genetic.^{ix}

Genetic programmings are necessarily semiotic: they include the primary processes

such as displacement and condensation, absorption and repulsion, rejection and stasis, all of which function as innate preconditions, ‘memorable’ by the species, for language acquisitions.^x

And:

Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment.^{xi}

Kristeva’s premises for the foundation of subjectivity are explicitly Freudian, particularly in her subscription to the essentiality of the ‘Oedipus complex’ in the formation of subjectivity.^{xii} For Freud, the infantile self is a disorganised bundle of active drives, its libido is ‘polymorphous perverse’,^{xiii} not yet organised or gendered by culture:

The sexual function, as I found, is in existence from the very beginning of the individual’s life – it has to pass through a long complicated process of development before it becomes what we are familiar with as the normal sexual life of the adult. It begins by manifesting itself in the activity of a whole number of *component instincts*.^{xiv}

The pre-Oedipal self goes through a process of auto-erotic stages, through which the mouth and then the anus are the dominant erotogenic zones, finally “the primacy of the genitals is established and – sexual function begins to serve the ends of reproduction”.^{xv} In addition:

The process of arriving at an *object*, which plays an important part in mental life, takes place alongside of the organisation of the libido. After the stage of *auto-eroticism*, the first love-object in the case of both sexes is the mother; and it seems probable that to begin with a child does not distinguish its mother’s organ of nutrition from its own body. Later, but still in the first years of infancy, the relation known as the Oedipus complex becomes established: boys concentrate their sexual wishes upon their mother and develop hostile impulses against their father as being a rival, while girls adopt an analogous attitude.^{xvi}

The Oedipus complex processes this unorganised self into subjectivity, and polarises its sexuality along normative lines: “The task before each new human being is to master the Oedipus complex; one who cannot do this falls into a neurosis.”^{xvii}

For Kristeva, Jacques Lacan’s notion of the ‘mirror stage’ becomes important here. For Lacan, the pre-Oedipal self does not regard itself as a *subject*. Indeed it does not properly speaking ‘regard’ its ‘self’:

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, in

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 (un relief de stature) that fixes it in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him.^{xviii}

The child merely feels the “turbulent movements” of its body, within the continuum of the world. In *The Mirror Stage in the Formation of the ‘I’*, Lacan talks of ‘mirror stage’ in the development of subjectivity:

I am led to regard the function of the mirror stage as a particular case of the function of the imago, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality.^{xix}

For Lacan, the ‘mirror stage’ produces the child’s “spatial identification”^{xx} and ‘spatial intuition’ (indeed, White suggests that this is why the spatial metaphor is the dominant organising metaphor in language^{xxi}). The ‘mirror stage’ occurs at an age of around 6 to 18 months, when a child recognises a reversed image of a self. This is the stage that a child conceives of itself as a totality, separated from the rest of the world. It is preconditional for the child to differentiate itself and say “me” or “I”, and is also the visual image which “stands as a prototype for the world of objects”.^{xxii}

The mirror stage can be broken down into three separate moments. Firstly, the child sees the mirror and recognises another being, he or she tries to approach it. At this stage the child recognises the body image of another as a whole. Secondly, the image of the other body is quite different from his/her own feeling of “turbulent movement”. The child does not attempt to approach the image as he/she now recognises it as just an image. It is at this point that the *third* stage takes place. The child recognises not only an image, but his/her image. “In this moment of recognition he has to a degree which is close to being literal, realised an image of himself, he has grasped his own appearance, the image that he makes for/of himself, as a produced identity, a conquest of his body as a unity and as an image.”^{xxiii} For Lacan, the transcendental ego that is necessary to logical and rational communication comes into play at this stage.

Thus, the choratic infant passes through the mirror stage, and this process of forming of subjectivity is closed with Freud’s castration complex. This is important for Kristeva as:

the mirror stage... produces the ‘spatial intuition’ which is found at the heart of the functioning of signification—in signs and in sentences.^{xxiv}

The mother, until the ‘mirror stage’, has been the receptacle of all that is needed and desired by the child. However, the mother becomes an “other” in the process of the subject’s psychological separation from itself and objects, opening up a “lack”:

Castration puts the finishing touches on the process of separation that posits the subject as signifiable, which is to say separate, always confronted by the other: imago in the mirror (signified) and semiotic process (signifier)... This is a decisive moment fraught with consequences: the subject, finding his identity in the symbolic, separates from his fusion with the mother, confines *jouissance* to the genital, and transfers semiotic motility onto the Symbolic order.^{xxv}

Language is fully formed when the absence of the thing desired can only be represented by an image or word. Speech arises to attempt to fill this lack. The lack of unity with objects is what the subject seeks to fill at the level of the signifier. Thus, the ‘mirror stage’ coincides with the child’s initiation into Symbolic language, at which the self regards itself as a unified subject. This is affirmed by the way in which images of the fragmented body accompany certain types of schizophrenia, dreams, fantasies, experience on drugs, art and literature: “This corporal disintegration is the reverse of the constitution of the body during the mirror phase”.^{xxvi}

The speech that comes at this point is what Kristeva terms the symbolic. The symbolic is the domain of propositions and judgements, it allows the subject the ability to adopt positions, and thus with it, identity is installed. The infant becomes a speaking socialised subject. Thus, for Kristeva, language can be divided into two realms: The semiotic— the pre-cultural biological rhythms of sound and gesture, and the symbolic— the language which is overlayed onto the semiotic, that comes to satisfy the lack that is caused by the loss of unity with the mother.

However, the semiotic is not replaced by the symbolic, but rather enables it and underlies it:

At the same time, however, this completion of the Oedipal stage and the genitality it gives rise to should not repress the semiotic.^{xxvii}

It is at the point of entry into symbolic language that the rigid binary of subject-object relations formed during the ‘mirror phase’ are established. As the subheading of the first chapter of *Powers of Horror* suggests, the abject is “neither subject nor object”.^{xxviii} For Kristeva, the horror of abjection is predicated on the

normalised operation of the notion of the self as a unified *subjectivity*, which is encapsulated, interiorised, organised and contained, in strict opposition to *objectivity*: “The object has only one property of the object—that of being opposed to *I*.”^{xxxix}

Kristeva’s consideration and formulation of her theory of the object, in part, comes to resolve a question concerning the last part of the mirror phase in the formation of the subject:

The object confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archaeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language.^{xxx}

Kristeva’s formulation adheres strictly to the Oedipal drama. As the infant forms itself as a subject, its unity is no longer with the mother. At the same time, the introduction of the father, entwined with the entry of the subject into the symbolic, through speech, leads the subject to reject the mother:

In such close combat, the symbolic light that a third party, eventually the father, can contribute helps the future subject, the more so if it happens to be endowed with a robust supply of drive energy, in pursuing a reluctant struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an object. Repelled, rejecting; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Ab-jecting.^{xxxi}

The primary prohibition, “the primal repression” of the incest taboo is, for Kristeva, the foundation of abjection.^{xxxii}

It follows then, according to Kristeva, that Judeo-Christian morality is closely linked to purity from object matter, that cleanliness is next to Godliness. Indeed, in the Old Testament of the Bible, there are numerous examples of this, some quoted here from Deuteronomy:

You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever; for that is an abomination to the Lord your God.^{xxxiii}

A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.^{xxxiv}

‘Cursed be he who lies with his father’s wife, because he has uncovered her who is his father’s.’ And all the people shall say ‘Amen’.

‘Cursed be he who lies with any kind of beast.’ And all the people shall say ‘Amen’.

‘Cursed be he who lies with his sister, whether the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.’ And all the people shall say ‘Amen’.^{xxxv}

Likewise, for Kristeva, Christian confession is an attempt to externalise in speech the iniquities of sin, to cast out sin from the body in order to purify the spirit:

Sin, even if its remission is always promised, remains the rock where one endures the human condition as separate: body and spirit, body jettisoned from the spirit^{xxxvi}

With the iniquities of the flesh on one side of the boundary and the purity of the spirit on the other, the body of the Christian, who can never rival Christ's own "body without sin",^{xxxvii} is bound to duality — this, according to Kristeva is 'the human condition'.

Thus, alongside the 'primal repression', Kristeva posits the abject as a universal drive, which spans from the iniquity of Joshua's filthy garments in Zecharia 3:3-4^{xxxviii} to Kristeva's own repugnance with the skin on the surface of milk.^{xxxix} For Kristeva, then, the abject is thus an instinctual drive, constitutive of human nature. Its initial teleology is to enable the newly formed subject to enter into the realm of the symbolic. However, it remains as the force which allows the subject to withhold those things that are not of it. The abject are thus those things which do not adhere to the boundaries of interior and exterior. They are the discharge, the leakage, the things that spoil the strict boundaries of the subject.

As in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty on the part of death.^{xl}

Importantly for Kristeva, the abject does not merely "represent" death, thus evoking repulsion. Rather, the abject falls outside of the symbolic linguistic system that arises from the lack which language comes to compensate. It is without a signifier within the symbolic system.^{xli} It can thus not be represented, and does not represent anything as such. It is "a weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me".^{xlii}

At the site of reception for the 'abject', Kristeva regards the horrified manifestation of abjection in the subject to be a 'phobic' reaction. For Kristeva, at the moment at which the abject invokes horror there is a psychic disconnection which occurs at the level of language. That is, the horror inherent in the act of abjecting is the result of a psychotraumatic dysfunction of the natural symbolic relationships of signifier and signified, sign and referent. In order to argue this, Kristeva refers to Sigmund

Freud's well-known case study of Little Hans.^{xliii} Little Hans presented to Freud with a phobia of horses:

[Freud] detects the fear of castration—of his own mother's 'missing' sexual organ, of the loss of his own, of the guilty desire to reduce the father to the same unmaning or the same death, and so forth.^{xliv}

In addition to Little Hans' fear of horses, Kristeva notes that Freud was astonished by the child's extraordinary verbal skills:

So eager is he to name everything, that he runs into the unnamable—street sounds, the ceaseless trade activity involving horses in front of the house, the intensity with which his father, a recent convert to psychoanalysis, is interested in his body, his love for small girls, the stories and fantasies that he (the father) sexualises to the utmost; the somewhat elusive, somewhat frail presence of his mother.^{xlv}

Little Hans has a sense of these things "without having found its *significance*".^{xlvi} For Freud, the horse demonstrates Little Hans' lack of language which, of course, triggers a fear of castration. Kristeva claims that the horse is a "phobic object" for the child.^{xlvii} That is, the object of the horse is a referent for which the sign is dysfunctional; the signifier (the sight and sounds of the horse) has no signified, since Little Hans has not been able to establish one. Thus, the horse signified *nothing*, except for a heavy absence.

Similarly, Kristeva argues, with the phobic reaction to 'abject' matter, this fear results from such a disconnection between sensation and meaning, between signifier and signified. The abject 'object' comes to stand for a terrifying nothingness. The symbolic disconnection caused by an encounter with the abject momentarily returns the subject to a point just before subject/object differentiation occurs, before language is initiated, and when the infant is in the process of breaking away from the mother.^{xlviii} This disconnection not only entails a disempowerment in language, but also of castration. 'Abject' matter's disconnection makes it a kind of terrifying 'free' signifier, signifying an absolute nothingness. One could say that abject matter is a symbol with no symbolism. However, more faithfully to Kristeva's characterisation, it is a *part*-symbol in the sense that it presents only part of the 'normal' symbolic relationship. The signified exists only as a kind of phantom limb of the abject referent; weighing heavy and terrifying in its absence.

For Little Hans, the horse becomes emblematic of all of his fears, or, as Kristeva

puts it;

the phobia of horses becomes a *hieroglyph* that condenses *all fears*, from unnamable to namable.^{xlix}

Accordingly, when one is presented with abject matter, one cannot properly incorporate sensations of its contact into meaning. Just as Little Hans could not incorporate the unnamable street sounds into his vocabulary, thus abject matter also becomes a ‘hieroglyph’ into which all fears are condensed. Kristeva’s abject ‘hieroglyph’ of fear is the signifier of an ‘abject’ referent, and an absent signifier. Importantly, Kristeva’s hieroglyph of fear does not relate to any contextual or relative notions, it is a ‘pure’ fear which draws its terror from nothing other than an innate fear of castration. It is transcendent of the contingencies of values and ideas, that is, it precedes the ‘thetic’ (the order of acculturated thought, speech and positionality) and thus does not embody any values.

For Kristeva, the ‘natural’ symbolic relationships of sign to referent and signifier to signified are essential to the asymptomatic operation of language. This referent/signified/signifier relation operates as a quasi-reproduction of the Oedipal triad in the sense that if these relations are complicated, the affect is necessarily negative. Indeed, as the case of Little Hans demonstrates for Kristeva, dysfunction of this ‘normal’ operation of language is not merely symptomatic of psychic pathology, but is itself psychopathogenic.¹ Kristeva applies the pathologising paradigm of psychoanalysis to a structural linguistics model of the ‘natural’ operation of signification. As a result, this quasi-naturalised model becomes a normalisation in a clinical sense. With the operation of the abject ‘hieroglyph’ of fear the opposition of signifier and signified is complicated, at least to the extent that it eliminates one category (the signified) in its entirety, while leaving the other (the signifier) intact. Indeed, the eliminated category (the signifier) remains present under erasure and, by proxy, it becomes the fears to which the abject ‘hieroglyph’ refer. For Kristeva, this operation creates a dysfunctional symbolic relation by virtue of the lack of normal symbolic connection. Of course, the relations fundamentally remain intact because the sign is merely replaced by the surrogate category of fear.

While Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* is fundamentally an essay about the policing of subjective and categorical boundaries, at a metacritical level her work itself is

concerned with adherence to categorical boundaries. This is apparent when it comes to her notion of the hieroglyph of fear. Whereas the object 'object' is the negative manifestation of the dysfunction of objectivity and subjectivity, the object hieroglyph of fear is the negative manifestation of the dysfunction of signifier and referent.

Indeed, the fundamental and governing principle founding Kristeva's notions of the object, from the notion of 'neither subject nor object' to the pathologising dysfunction of symbolic relation, is the 'logic of identity'. The three laws of the 'logic of identity' can be summarised thus:

- (1) The law of identity: 'whatever is, is.'
- (2) The law of contradiction: 'nothing can be and not be.'
- (3) The law of the excluded middle: 'everything must either be or not be.'ⁱⁱ

Within Western culture, anything which does not adhere to this tends to be regarded as illogical, contradictory and problematic. The logic of identity is treated as God-given, and object's complication of symbolic relations becomes necessarily negative by virtue of its perversion from this apparently ontological relation. This is a condition of this theory of abjection's preoccupation with unity which is borne in its molarised corporeal scheme. As Brian Massumi says, "[m]olarity's plane of transcendence promises two things: oneness (unity in identity) and rest (heaven)"ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time, molarity threatens that deviation from unity in identity jeopardises rest. That is, breaches of subjective unity and complications of the logic of identity are paid-for by some kind of cosmic disturbance which denies rest. It is as though deviation from its 'natural' logic is inevitably subject to some kind of divine retribution.

For Kristeva, anything other than perfect symbolic function, unity of subjectivity and the pure subject-object division is inevitably invariably negative, and variously symptomatic. As White states:

Any disturbance of syntactic order or its elements destabilises the relations of reason and calls into question the fixed boundaries of the subject and object... It is on this account that the loss of syntactic coherence has been taken as an indication of insanity.^{liii}

Thus, the breach of the subjective unity is regarded, at the very least, to be problematic and more commonly, to be symptomatic of a negatively connoted

degeneration. It is this rupture of the unity of subjectivity, that bears the consequence of horror. For Kristeva, the unity of the subject, as constituted through language, is dis-organised, fragmented and complicated by the abject. Consequently, the breach of the boundaries of the body correlate to, and at the same time actualise, the disintegration of the subject.

Given this, it could be argued that the NEA debate stemmed from the fundamental psycho-political affect of *Piss Christ*: the abject matter of urine, and the defilement of Christ. Certainly, this was the way in which the role the work of Andres Serrano, Robert Mapplethorpe, and others were analysed by the curators of the Whitney's *Abject Art*.^{liv} The Whitney Museum of American Art's *Abject Art* exhibition in 1993, consolidated the notion of 'abjection' as a contemporary concern, and even a genre, within art in the 1990s. *Abject Art* plotted an emerging focus more general throughout much contemporary art practice.

The psychoanalytical understanding of the formation of the ego, which is the basis to Kristeva's position, constitutes abjection as a pre-cultural, instinctual and universal drive. Thus, the employment of notions of abjection in art discourses has tended to subscribe unconditionally to abjection as an axiom of the 'human condition', universal and immutable. This is clearly the case with the Whitney Museum's *Abject Art* exhibition. The exhibition included work by a loosely defined generation of abject artists, that is, the artists who had produced work throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s which seemed to be dealing with abjection. Examples here, from this exhibition are Serrano's *Piss Christ*, John Miller's simulated pile-of-shit, *Untitled 1988*, Mapplethorpe's *bullwhip* picture, *Self-portrait, 1978*, as well as works by Cindy Sherman, Robert Gober and Kiki Smith. However, *Abject Art* also included the work of (amongst others) Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, Claes Oldenburg's *Soft Toilet*, and other works by Jackson Pollock, Jasper Johns, Yayoi Kusama, Eva Hesse and Andy Warhol: works preceding the NEA debate in 1989, and Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* in 1982. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the curatorial strategy was to "recontextualise art works from the Whitney Museum's Permanent Collection", thus the exhibition "allows us to see familiar icons in unexpected, transgressive way." In other words, the works of earlier artists, which dealt with bodily matter, were reappropriated and, not so much injected with *new life*

but rather, given the right context for their dormant ‘abject’ properties to resonate.

The curators sought to demonstrate that ‘abjection’ was not merely a recent concern of contemporary art, but rather that it spans from Duchamp to Warhol to Serrano. To the curators, Duchamp’s urinal, Warhol’s *Oxidation Paintings*, produced by urinating on a canvas coated with copper-based paint, and Serrano’s *Piss Christ* share a concern with abjection:

Starting with Marcel Duchamp, a number of artistic practices have incorporated or referred to the abject in their artistic practices in order to confront dominant culture.^{lv}

The implication is that across the Twentieth Century, abjection operates in the same psycho-political way, regardless of context.

In effect, the defensive use of theories of abjection in this debate has a double-edge. Sure enough, it validates ‘abject art’ as ‘art’ in the face of accusation of being ‘not art’,^{lvi} and provides one explanation of the affect of such work, while at the same time it universalises the understanding of this affect. To say that Senators Jesse Helms and Alphonse D’Amato’s disgusted response to *Piss Christ* is provoked by the ‘abject’ fluid of piss, may be valid in the isolated case of the NEA debate. However, to say that this reaction happened because piss is universally abhorrent is much more questionable.

At this time, art theory certainly needs to find different ways of thinking about bodies in order to rethink the role of bodies in culturally efficacious art practice, while at the same time not merely reverting to a material essentialism (indeed, this issue is addressed more thoroughly in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis). However, the notions of abjection that have circulated within recent art discourses, stemming largely from *Piss Christ* and the NEA debate, The Whitney’s *Abject Art* and from Kristeva’s theory of abjection, are problematic. At best, Kristeva’s theory of abjection provides one set of default responses (horror) to a specific stimuli (externalised bodily matter). The primary abject response is a pre-cultural one, that is, the instinctual abjection of those things which are neither subject nor object, which comes from the primal abjection of the mother as the subject forms and enters into the symbolic order.

By implication, regardless of culture, the primordial drive of abjection persists across

humanity, indeed, this drive is partly responsible for the entrance of a subject into culture itself. Thus Kristeva sets a very clear and limited trajectory of response and stimuli: shit will make you want to reject it time and again. Your response to shit is instinctual, immutable, the same response as mine or that of anyone else. You are always subjugated to the drive to abject excrement and any other response is symptomatic and pathological. If you do not abject excrement, if you do not cast aside that matter which life withstands, then, by inference, you have not established normal subject-object relations, you have not been normally subjectivised, and indeed, you may well have not been normally and fully Oedipalised. As Ward notes:

bearing in mind her Oedipal orthodoxy and the primary abject, Kristeva may be seen to naturalize, if not ontologize, abjection as a condition of subjectivity.^{lvii}

For Kristeva, abjection initiates, organises and perpetuates subject-object relations, and thus maintains the state of subjective unity, and consequently enables the symbolic order of culture to take place. The implication through and through is that abjection lies central to the very nature of humans, distinguishing us and unifying us. It is the principle by which our *selves* are defined, and the universal drive which maps a single trajectory of all human subjectivation: *homo abjectus*.

However, the notion of abjection is contingent upon the axiomatic operation of the of the notion of unified subjectivity, without which it is problematised. The unified subject is very much the default self of Western rationalism which continues to dominate the axioms of subjectivity in contemporary Western culture, but it does not operate *absolutely* across cultures and throughout time. At the foundation of the notion of the unified subject is the founding Cartesian tenet, *cogito, ergo sum*: “I think therefore I am”.^{lviii} For Rene Descartes, the self that declares “I think”, is established in relation to the extended matter of the body, as the commander of its “motor force” through the nerves which “derive their origin from the brain”.^{lix} Together, “it is a single agency”. Descartes establishes the notion that the mind is distinct from the body, but dependent on the existence of the body, thus, this affirmation of existence, *cogito ergo sum*, depends on the totality of the self as a ‘single agency’: singular, embodied and closed. Descartes notion of *self* predicates Emmanuel Kant’s “transcendental unity”, which establishes the self in terms of *subjectivity*, as *subjective unity* in contradistinction from *objective unity*.^{lx} This

notion of *subjectivity* is fundamentally characteristic of rationalist philosophy, and has monumental significance in terms of the normalising discourses it has generated throughout Western culture.^{lxi}

As Kristeva herself indicates, the biblical accounts of the body of Christ can be regarded as a prototype and model for the unified subject of rationalism. Within the boundaries of Christ's body resides the Holy Spirit, and not the visceral matter of organs and fluids:

See my hands and my feet, that is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see I have.^{lxiii}

Yet this material body is a mere vessel for a sacred interior, of the Holy Spirit and, as we see with the resurrection, can be vacated and re-occupied at will. The body of Christ is only breached at his martyrdom: the nails through his hands and feet, the thorns cutting into his scalp, and the sword wound in his side. These breaches of the divine subject are the ultimate abomination against which the capacity of God to forgive is measured: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."^{lxiii} The early Christian body is thus a vessel for the spirit. It's materiality consists of its skin, like a balloon filled with the spirit. Indeed, this dualised notion of the body as the vessel of the spirit predates the foundational model for the Cartesian duality of mind and body. However, it was not until the emergence of rationalist notions of subjectivity that the unified subject becomes established as the dominant notion of selfhood, and the 'official' Western ideology of the self since the Enlightenment. The notion of subjective unity as the default axiom of selfhood has, over four hundred years, permeated throughout Western culture. Kristeva's notions of subjectivity, which found her notion of abjection, are characteristic of this particular rationalist discourse of the self. While unified subjectivity is certainly axiomatic in Western cultural discourses it is, nevertheless, historically and culturally contingent; thus the universalism to which abjection claims is, at least, questionable. In order to illustrate this, I shall examine a notion of selfhood which operated in the work of the French novelist, François Rabelais (c1490-1553), writing in the mid-Sixteenth Century, a century before Descartes (1596-1650).

Rabelais' Humour

François Rabelais wrote his monumental novel, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, in five books, between 1532 and 1551.^{lxiv} His novel is written in an exuberant style, with absurdly detailed exaggerations^{lxv} and enumerations,^{lxvi} with narratives which meander in the most periphrastic way. It is from Rabelais that our contemporary lexicon gets the adjective of 'Rabelaisian', meaning bawdy and exuberant humour, and 'gargantuan' meaning gigantic after Rabelais' giant, Gargantua. Indeed, Rabelais' is regarded as an author of "gigantic laughter".^{lxvii} His novel is replete with images of bodily functions, fluids, and the carnivalesque and grotesque.^{lxviii} The focus of his novel is the French folk culture of his time. Although, strictly speaking, he did not belong to that culture, which was predominantly illiterate, he draws;

the picture of an age or, to be more exact, of a time when two ages overlapped, the new age of research and individualism, with which he was in intellectual sympathy, and the age of the fixed world-order, to which he owed emotional loyalty.^{lxix}

Rabelais was a Franciscan then a Benedictine friar, before eventually becoming a physician in his thirties, which supported his writing until his death in 1553. He very much belonged to the emerging discourses of rationalism, "the new age of research and individualism",^{lxx} yet his novel can be regarded as a significant record of a kind of humour and, importantly here, a kind of notion of selfhood, which belonged to the illiterate oral folk culture of France, which had virtually disappeared by the time of Descartes.^{lxxi}

The notion of self which operates within the culture which Rabelais records is not that of the unified subject; completed, singularly embodied and finished. Rather it is the indistinct and indeterminate self, contingent on the metamorphosis of the body, and of social relations, in flux. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the notion of self that operates in the work of Rabelais is:

in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body.^{lxxii}

The *self* operating within French folk culture of Rabelais' novel (which I shall refer to as the 'Rabelaisian' self) did not necessarily encapsulate existence distinct from the world. Self, did not necessarily mean *the subject*, individually internalised in a

strict Kantian opposition to the world of *objects*. The self was not a capsule which passed through the world of objects:

Moreover, the body swallows the world and is swallowed by the world.^{lxxiii}

The Rabelaisian self was understood in terms of the world passing through it. Thus, what may be perceived as breaches of corporeal boundaries under the model of unified subjectivity were, to the Rabelaisian self, a mere fact of selfhood.

Importantly, for the Rabelaisian self, existence was not affirmed by definition of self as a subject distinct from objects, but rather to this self, existence, if affirmed at all, occurred as the world, food and fluids, passed through it.

In considering the work of Rabelais, where Bakhtin talks of *the body*, he is not talking of it as extended matter of the mind, in terms of the duality of mind and body. Bakhtin notes that the understanding of bodies for Rabelais is not the same as that which operates commonly in the mid-Twentieth century, the time of Bakhtin's study: "This is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualised"^{lxxiv}.

The body of the Rabelaisian self, through social relations, was not strictly distinct from others:

The individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people's mass body. In this whole the individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself.^{lxxv}

The Rabelaisian self is understood by Bakhtin in terms of what he calls the "grotesque body"^{lxxvi}. To stress the importance of its materiality, Bakhtin also refers to it as "grotesque realism"^{lxxvii}.

The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal and abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.^{lxxviii}

Bakhtin claims that grotesque notions of the self operated in the "preclassic" times of the ancient Greeks and Romans, but were then largely expelled:

During the classic period the grotesque did not die but was expelled from the sphere of the official art to live and develop in certain 'low' nonclassic areas.^{lxxix}

The etymology of the term 'grotesque' goes some way to elucidating the notion of the grotesque self. In the late Fifteenth Century, a certain style of ornamental

Roman painting, unknown at that time, was found during the excavation of Titus' baths:

This style consisted of graceful fantasies, symmetrical anatomical impossibilities, small beasts, human heads, and delicate, indeterminate vegetables, all presented as ornament with a faintly mythological character imparted by representations of fauns, nymphs, satyrs, and centaurs.^{lxxx}

The word 'grotesque' itself first appears in the English language around 1640. It appears as 'crotisque' in English and French as early as 1532.^{lxxxi} When these frescoes were excavated in the 1480s they were called the *grotesca*, from the Italian word *grotta*,^{lxxxii} pertaining to underground caves.^{lxxxiii}

In 64 A.D. a huge fire nearly destroyed the whole of Rome. Following the fire, Emperor Nero confiscated a large part of the burnt area, and built a large palace on the land known as the *Domus Aurea*, 'the Golden House'.^{lxxxiv} After Nero's death in 68 A.D., Emperor Vespasian decreed that the *Domus Aurea* be converted into public leisure buildings.^{lxxxv} Following him, Emperor Titus constructed baths on part of the site. The Colosseum was also constructed on the same site, a short distance from the baths of Titus. Both Nero's *Domus Aurea* and the baths of Titus, which took its place, were decorated with frescoes by a Roman artist, Fabullus. After another Fire in 104 A.D., the baths of Trajan were built on the same site. In the building of the baths of Trajan, many of the passages in the remaining parts of *Domus Aurea* and the baths of Titus were bricked up for structural reasons. Thus, the walls carrying Fabullus's frescoes, were sealed away, protected from the air, light and Barbarian sackings. One and a half millennia later, long after the fall of Rome, the sealed passages had become underground caves, and the frescoes were preserved in the darkness and still air. When the *Domus Aurea* and the baths of Titus were rediscovered and excavated in the 1480s, the frescoes on their walls remained reasonably well-preserved.^{lxxxvi}

The *grotesca* of Titus' baths (*Plates 33 & 34*) depict human bodies

Plates 33 & 34

in a way which, in terms of Twentieth Century physiology, could be thought as being deformed. Human forms are incoherent, hybridised, mixed with each other, and with plants and animals. The boundaries of bodies are indeterminate, limbs are dismembered or growing from parts of bodies that defy normative Twentieth Century physiological expectations of bodily forms. Bakhtin, describes the significance of these frescoes:

[their] free and playful treatment of plant, animal and human forms. The forms seem to be interwoven, as if giving birth to each other. The borderlines that divide the kingdoms of nature in the usual picture of the world were boldly infringed. There was no longer the movement of finished forms, vegetable or animal, in a finished and stable world; instead the inner movement of being itself was expressed in the passing of one form into another.^{lxxxvii}

The forms of the *grotesca* found at Titus' baths made no claim to being stable or unified, and were not contingent on the tenets of an object/subject binary. Thus, the notion of self operating in Bakhtin's 'grotesque body' is analogous to the bodies depicted in the *grotesca*. It was *not* a body of *subjectivity*. The term *subjectivity*, which is often conflated with the notion of *self*, pertains only to the particular notion of the self as rationalist subject. The rationalist self merely represents one notion of the self amongst other possibilities which may not necessarily conceive of the self as *subjectivity*, unified and distinct from *objectivity*.

The greater role of rationalism, particularly in the age of the Enlightenment, combined with the Christian notion of the individual, played an instrumental role in the demise of the self of the grotesque body.^{lxxxviii} As Rabelais' own biography indicates, the grotesque notion of the self coexisted with the emergence of the rationalist unified subject. It also existed in an ambivalent, often antagonistic, relation with the Christian Church, and its attendant notions of the self. In contrast to the grotesque self, the Christian self was individualised, and that individuality is in turn dualised into body and soul. It is a static self, whose sins are internalised and lie embedded in the self, until repentance. Indeed, Christianity polices the boundaries of the individualised body, defining the interior as sacred, and breaches of this self, of sins of the flesh, of fornication, of suicide, are deemed an abomination before God.

According to the biography provided by Jaques LeClercq, Rabelais also had an

ambiguous relationship with the church. His move from serving as a friar in the Franciscan and Benedictine orders, to practicing medicine seemingly founds his background in the literate culture of both the Christian and physiological subject. Yet his sympathy with the grotesque body of folk culture in his novel conflicted with the church to the extent that the work was censured by the Faculty of Theology of the University of Paris.^{lxxxix} Ironically, Rabelais would have likely owed his literacy to the organisation of the church, yet the culture of grotesque realism which was the focus of his writing applied the humour of the grotesque against the authority of the church.^{xc}

The rich folk cultural source which Rabelais drew upon was without its own literacy. The character of illiterate oral folk history is reflected in Rabelais' hyperbole and exaggeration. A clear example of the oratory tone of Rabelais can be found in his "Author's Prologue" to the first book:

Now be cheerful, my dear boys, and read joyfully on for your bodily comfort and to the profit of your digestions. But listen to me you dunderheads — God rot you! — do not forget to drink to my health for the favour, and I'll return you the toast, post-haste^{xc}

Bakhtin notes that Rabelais' familiar tone is characteristic of "the announcement of a barker speaking to a crowd gathered in front of his booth".^{xcii} Rabelais' readers are not treated as 'readers' as such, rather, more correctly, they are *listeners*, "since the style is that of oral speech".^{xciii}

It would have taken someone with Rabelais' literate theological and academic background to actually write about the oral folk culture. Moreover, literacy, which belonged to the culture in which Christian and rationalist notions of the self operated, enabled the development of the unified subject more thoroughly throughout Europe. Indeed, it outlived the grotesque self of the folk. The Christian self belonged to the literate church, and the unified subject belonged to the emerging literate culture of rationalism. The unified subject was the *self* of the literate, and the grotesque self the self of oral folk culture. Almost literally, the literary-based notion of subjectivity indelibly *wrote-over* what other notions of the self may have operated in the illiterate, folk culture, colonising that culture, and abolishing its polyvocal oral culture. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari point-out:

It is these assemblages, these despotic and authoritarian formations, that give rise to

the new semiotic system the means of its imperialism, in other words, the means both to crush the other semiotics and protect itself against any threat from outside. A concerted effort is made to do away with the body and corporeal coordinates through which the multidimensional or polyvocal semiotics operated.^{xciv}

Thus, the indefinite grotesque body, and the non-literate oral culture of the Rabelaisian folk, were ‘crushed’ by the despotic authority of the literate order: “bodies are disciplined, corporeality dismantled, becomings-animal hounded out”^{xcv}.

For Bakhtin, rationalism, especially its notions of subjective unity (that which Bakhtin refers to as the “completed unit”^{xcvi}), closes this off:

In the new official culture there prevails a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness.^{xcvii}

The possibilities for the humour of the grotesque are closed-off simultaneously with the closing-off of the grotesque self into the closed subject. The culture of rationalism imposed a set of values which have long since eradicated the culture of Rabelais’ folk, and re-inscribed bodies. The dominance of the rationalist axiom of subjective unity physiologised and spiritualised bodies, organising them in an opposition of mind and body.

In addition to this, other developments ensured the demise of the Rabelaisian grotesque self. Bakhtin notes that the “stabilization of the new order of the absolute monarchy” superseding the dominance of the church in European social life.^{xcviii} With it a “‘universally historic form’ was created and was expressed in Descartes’ rationalist philosophy and in the aesthetics of classicism”.^{xcix} He continues, the literate cultures were reinforced as the dominant “official” cultures:

Classicism and rationalism clearly reflect the fundamental traits of the new official culture; it differed from the ecclesiastic feudal culture but was also authoritarian and serious, though less dogmatic.^c

The effects of this were important as;

New prevailing concepts were established which, according to Marx, the new ruling class inevitably presented as eternal truths.^{ci}

The notion of unified subjectivity was one such “eternal truth”, the axiom of selfhood belonging to the new literate ruling class.

Further, as bodies became individualised, so too they became privatised. The individual of the unified subject is only connected to other bodies through

interchangeable social connections which are primarily governed by the private economy. The corporeal interconnectivity of the *peoples' mass body* thus fragments into a *social mass of people's bodies*. Within the peoples' mass body of folk culture, the social and productive 'function' of a self was fluid, contingent, slippery and indeterminate. For example, an entertainer in pre-capitalist French culture, although having a definable 'role', had a indefinite 'function'. As Jaques Attali notes:

The term *jongleur*, derived from the Latin *joculare* ('to entertain'), designated both musicians (instrumentalists and vocalists) and other entertainers (mimes, acrobats, buffoons, etc.). At the time, these functions were inseparable. The *jongleur* had no fixed employment; he moved from place to place, offering his services in private residences.^{cii}

According to Attali, the *jongleur* could very well perform in a peasant festival one day and at noble banquets at a chateau the next. However:

Within three centuries, from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth, the courts banished the *jongleurs*, the voice of the people, and no longer listened to anything but scored music by salaried musicians.^{ciii}

Thus the indeterminate 'function' of the *jongleur*, disappeared with the early signs of capitalism and the privatisation of the self as individual and subjective. Indeed:

the term *jongleur* was no longer used to designate a musician, but rather *mÈnestrel* ('minstrel') or *mÈnestrier* (also 'minstrel'), from the Latin *ministerialis*, 'functionary'.^{civ}

For French folk culture at the time of Rabelais, a person's social function was not strictly fixed, but rather it was highly contingent. This indeterminate self does not have a clearly demarcated role. This fluidity of social and productive functions operated seamlessly in pre-capitalist folk culture. However, in early capitalist culture, the fluidity of the *jongleurs* 'function' complicates the division of labour. The division of labour requires a set function from a subject, and that his or her function be definitively connected to other determinate functions within the broader economy. With the loss of the peoples' mass body into the fragmented mass, each subject's function is only exchangeable in terms of the force of its labour, and its fluidity becomes fixed, labour is divided, and the subjects 'role' becomes its 'function'.

In summary, rationalism individualised the subject and the body, and fragmenting

the peoples' mass body. The rise of scientific physiology dissected the body, organised its parts and announced the function of these organs. The Christian tradition within the otherwise secular culture of the Enlightenment made sacred the materiality of the interior of the subject. In turn, the rise of capitalism reinforced the individuality of subjectivity, regarded those subjectivities in terms of their definite and determinable role within capitalist production, and privatised the body. Thus the culture of rationalism established the axiom of subjectivity which dominates contemporary Western culture, and which is constitutive of the notions of subjectivity at the foundations of Kristeva's notions of subjectivity and the theory of abjection upon which it is based.

The paradigmatic difference between these notions of the self is further demonstrated by the way in which breaches of the grotesque self were understood. Rather than the foundation of an alienating horror, the bodily matter of the grotesque body was the foundation of a socially-bonding humour. Rabelais is primarily regarded as a comic author, an author of "gigantic laughter".^{cv} Bakhtin defines the source of this laughter as the very points at which the world and the body merge, and particularly, it is concerned with the actions of orifices of the lower body.

The people's laughter which characterized all the forms of grotesque realism from immemorial times was linked to the bodily lower stratum. Laughter degrades and materializes.^{cvi}

Rabelais presents many comic images organised around the humour of the lower bodily stratum. The "tossing of excrement"^{cvi}, according to Bakhtin, forms an important element of Rabelaisian humour: "Öscatological images nearly always accompany the gay monsters created by laughter".^{cvi} Rabelais concludes his Fourth Book thus:

'Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho! What the devil is this?' Panurge shouted. 'Do you call this ordure, ejection, excrement, evacuation, *dejecta*, fecal matter, *egesta*, *copros*, *scatos*, dung, crap, turds? Not at all, not at all: it is but the fruit of the shittim tree. 'Selah! Let us drink!'^{cix}

This humorous scatology is further played out with frequent images of "tripes". According to Bakhtin the use of tripe in Rabelais corresponds in similar Latin literature with the term *viscera*. Tripe is a food-stuff, which is the stomach and bowels of a cow, prepared by being simply cleaned and salted:

Moreover, it is believed that after cleaning, tripe still contained ten per cent excrement which was therefor eaten with the rest of the meal.^{cx}

Thus, eating tripe, which is effectively eating shit. As Rabelais' character, Grandgousier says of tripe:

'Anyone who eats the bag', he said, 'might just as well be chewing dung.'^{cxii}

Indeed, tripe features as a plentiful food source throughout Rabelais novel, playing a comical and scatological role. In addition, syphilis is the subject of Rabelaisian comic dialogue. It is a specifically "gay disease"^{cxiii} It is a sexually transmitted disease, and is thus taken as some indication of sexual indulgence;^{cxiii} indeed, "Pox was still a fashionable disease in those days."^{cxiv}

Bakhtin notes, "in Rabelais' novel drenching and drowning in urine is commonly described". He demonstrates this with numerous examples in such as "the famous episode in the first book, where Gargantua drenches in urine the curious Parisians who have thronged around him":^{cxv} As Gargantua enters Paris, he is greeted by a welcoming crowd:

Then, with a smile, he undid his magnificent codpiece and, bringing out his john-thomas, pissed on them so fiercely that he drowned two hundred and sixty thousand, four hundred and eighteen persons, not counting the women and small children.

A number of them, however, were quick enough on their feet to escape this piss-flood; and when they reached the top of the hill above the University, sweating, coughing, spitting, and out of breath, they began to swear and curse, some in fury and others in sport (*par ris*).^{cxvi}

In Rabelais' novel, drenching in urine is a positive and 'sporting' gesture, a kind of abundant showering in gold.

The humour of Rabelais employs the very matter, the excrement of the human body, which Kristeva claims we are all compelled to reject, to *abject*, by our nature. The Rabelaisian uses of excrement, of the indeterminate body, and of the grotesque self are so much the less agonistic because they are not founded on the self and 'the body' as naturally and ontologically unified and subjectivised. The 'insides' of the grotesque body were not strictly 'inside' because it was not conceived on the same interior/exterior model. The orifices of the grotesque body *connected* the people's mass body, rather than being points at which an interior is alienated. Kristeva's

notion of abjection is founded on the strict closing-off of the body, and the strict subjectivisation of the self. As Kristeva states, the ‘abject’ is “neither subject nor object”.^{cxvii} However, for grotesque bodies, ‘selves’ were not defined as ‘subjects opposed to objects’. Thus, the grotesque body does not lend itself to support Kristeva’s notion of abjection. It strips abjection of the fundamental foundational axiom of subjectivity.

As I have shown, Kristeva posits the force of abjection with the drive to break from the mother at the infant’s point of entry into symbolic language.^{cxviii} Along these lines, the indeterminacy of the grotesque body would be understood as symptomatic, as not properly Oedipalised, as problematic. However, as Rabelais’ novel clearly demonstrates, in the culture of the grotesque body, the character of bodily orifices and fluids are anything but repulsive, or horrifically abject. Whether or not one is repulsed by bodily fluids is culturally contingent, not universal.

Read through a Rabelaisian understanding of the body, Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ* could be regarded more as an affirmative and humorous and, indeed, respectful crowning of the figure of Christ, bathed in the golden light of piss. As Bakhtin reminds us:

In grotesque realism and in Rabelais’ work the image of excrement did not have the trivial, narrow physiological connotation of today.^{cxix}

Also:

these images, such as the tossing of excrement and drenching in urine, become coarse and cynical if they are seen from the point of view of another ideology.^{cxx}

That is, from a different ideology, with different axioms of the self, the body and physiology, of social and economic relations between bodies, the humour of the grotesque does not necessarily translate. Indeed, for the ideology of conservative America, this grotesque humour becomes grotesque obscenity. This is not to say that Serrano is a misunderstood latter-day Rabelaisian. Rather, the condemnation of *Piss Christ* by the conservatives, who condemned it as ‘obscene,’ is founded on the contingencies of values common only to certain people.

When it comes to the relation of referent to sign, and signifier to signified, we can see here that Kristeva’s adherence to the logic of identity eliminates the

consideration of the possibility that there is something other than either ‘normal’ symbolic relations or ‘dysfunctional’ symbolic relations. Similarly, the grotesque self of Rabelaisian folk culture complicates all three laws of the logic of identity. With the grotesque body, the opposition of subject and object is complicated, yet, unlike Kristeva’s ‘abject’, it does not do so by establishing another category which merely reinforces the subject/object binary as a naturalised and normalised categories. Rather, the grotesque body dissolves categorical boundaries and pays no heed to the logic of identity.

Curiously, Kristeva actually played an instrumental role in introducing Bakhtin’s work to the Western world in the late 1960s, and was very familiar with Bakhtin’s reading of Rabelais. Given this, one would imagine that the universality of the model of body which enables abjection would be challenged for her. However, Kristeva uses the notion of the grotesque self merely to reinforce universalistic notions of subjectivity. For Kristeva, the polyvocality of the grotesque self problematised the ‘I’.^{cxvi} However, for Kristeva, this did not mean that her underlying model of the ‘I’ was simply inappropriate, rather the grotesque body was seen as a deviation from this normalised ‘I’.

In this chapter, I have shown that the notion ‘abjection’ has been deployed in contemporary art as if it were a fundamental and immutable political strategy, with a determined capacity to affect its audience. Indeed, as the catalogue accompanying the Whitney Museum’s *Abject Art* exhibition claims, this fundamental transgressive deployment of abjection is effective across art, despite the contingencies of place and time. However, I have argued that this ignores the conditional character of the foundational concepts of the cultural conditions in which this work was produced. Indeed, at a practical level, the NEA controversy can only testify to the political effects specific to its own circumstances, and not necessarily beyond. It did not necessarily demonstrate any universal psycho-political affect of ‘abjection’. This is not to say that the sight of Christ immersed in urine did not affect many people and have wide political effect. Notwithstanding the potential politically expedient opportunism in the outrage of Senators Helms and D’Amato, I do not doubt that there was a certain amount of sincerity in their disgust at Serrano’s *Piss Christ*. They were certainly affected by this image. However, to declare that this affect can

be entirely explained through notions of abjection is not only problematic, as I have argued in this chapter, but also tends to exclude considerations of other ways in which an artwork may be thought to have this kind of capacity to affect. Indeed, I shall return to this issue in the later chapters of this thesis, in which I will closely consider the capacity of artworks to affect.

Notes

ⁱ**Kristeva, Julia**, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 1982.

ⁱⁱ**Kristeva, Julia**, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 1984.

ⁱⁱⁱ*ibid.*, p. 25. Kristeva's italics.

^{iv}*ibid.*

^v*ibid.*, p. 28.

^{vi}*ibid.*

^{vii}*ibid.*, p. 29.

^{viii}**White, Allon**, *Exposition and Critique of Julia Kristeva*, Stencilled Occasional Paper SP no.49, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, The University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK, n.d., p.5. White's emphasis.

^{ix}**Kristeva**, op. cit., p. 27.

^x*ibid.*, p. 29.

^{xi}*ibid.*

^{xii}*ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

^{xiii}**Freud, Sigmund**, "Infantile Sexuality", *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, trans. A.A. Brill, Ph.B., M.D., Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co., New York and Washington, USA, 1930, p. 51.

^{xiv}**Freud, Sigmund**, "An Autobiographical Study", *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay, W.W. Norton & Co. New York, USA and London, UK, 1989, p. 21. Freud's italics.

^{xv}*ibid.*, p. 22.

^{xvi}*ibid.* Freud's italics.

^{xvii}**Freud**, "The Transformations of Puberty", *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, trans. A.A. Brill, Ph.B., M.D., Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co., New York and Washington, USA, 1930, p. 83.

^{xviii}**Lacan, Jaques**, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience: Delivered at the 16th International congress of Psychoanalysis, Zurich, July 17, 1949", *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., New York, USA, p.2.

^{xix}*ibid.*, p. 4.

^{xx}*ibid.*

^{xxi}**White**, op. cit., p.9.

^{xxii}*ibid.*

^{xxiii}*ibid.*, p.10.

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^{xxiv} **Kristeva**, op. cit., p. 46.

^{xxv} *ibid.*, p. 47.

^{xxvi} **White**, loc. cit.

^{xxvii} **Kristeva**, op. cit., p. 51.

^{xxviii} **Kristeva, Julia**, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Colombia University Press, New York, USA, 1982, p.1.

^{xxix} *ibid.*

^{xxx} *ibid.*, p.13.

^{xxxi} *ibid.*

^{xxxii} *ibid.*, p. 12.

^{xxxiii} Deuteronomy 17:1, The Old Testament, *The Holy Bible*, revised standard version, 1971, Collins Clear-Type Press, Sydney, Australia, p. 170.

^{xxxiv} Deuteronomy 22:5, *ibid.*, p. 174.

^{xxxv} Deuteronomy 27:20,21,22, *ibid.*, p. 179.

^{xxxvi} **Kristeva**, op. cit., p. 120.

^{xxxvii} *ibid.*

^{xxxviii} *ibid.*, p. 108.

^{xxxix} *ibid.*, p. 2.

^{xl} *ibid.*, p.3.

^{xli} *ibid.*, p.36.

^{xlii} *ibid.*, p.2.

^{xliiii} **Freud, Sigmund**, “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five Year-Old Boy”, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Hogarth Press, London, 1974, 10:83.

^{xliv} **Kristeva**, op. cit., p. 34.

^{xlv} *ibid.*

^{xlvi} *ibid.* Kristeva’s italics.

^{xlvii} *ibid.*, p. 35.

^{xlviii} *ibid.*, p. 108.

^{xlix} *ibid.*, p. 34. Kristeva’s italics.

^l Likewise, for Jacques Lacan, whose notions of subjectivity are important in Kristeva’s own formulations, any break-down of these binary symbolic relationships, in which one comes in ‘contact’ with the Real, is dangerous. This has been discussed recently, specifically in relation to contemporary art in **Foster, Hal**, “Obscene, Abject, Traumatic”, *October #78*, ed. Krauss et al., MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1996, p. 107-124.

^{li} **Russell, Bertrand**, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, London, UK, 1973 p. 40.

^{lii} **Massumi, Brian**, *A user’s guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1992, p. 115.

^{liii} **White**, op. cit., p.1.

^{liv} **Ben-Levi, Jack, et al.**, “Introduction”, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, ed. **Philbrick, Jane**, Whitney Independent Study Program, ISP Papers, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1993.

^{lv} **Ben-Levi, et al.**, *ibid.*, p. 8.

^{lvi} This is discussed in the previous chapter.

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^{lvii} **Ward**, op. cit., p. 49.

^{lviii} **Descartes, Rene**, “Discourses on the Method, Part IV”, in *The Essential Descartes*, edited by Margaret D. Wilson, Meridian, New York, 1983, p.127.

^{lix} *ibid.* p.76

^{lx} **Kant, Emmanuel**, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, Britannica Great Books, Chicago, USA, 1952, p. 51.

^{lxi} **White**, op. cit. p.1.

^{lxii} Luke 24:39-40, The New Testament, *The Holy Bible*, revised standard version, 1971, Collins Clear-Type Press, Sydney, Australia, p. 86.

^{lxiii} Luke 23:34, The New Testament, *The Holy Bible*, revised standard version, 1971, Collins Clear-Type Press, Sydney, Australia, p. 84.

^{lxiv} **Cohen, J. M.**, “Translators Introduction”, in **Rabelais, François**, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen, Penguin Books, London, UK, 1955, pp. 29-30.

^{lxv} There are a multitude of examples throughout Rabelais’ novel, so, as a randomly chosen example, in his third book, Rabelais writes “The office was worth 6789106789 gold reals in fixed revenue”, **Rabelais**, loc. cit, p. 292.

^{lxvi} **Bakhtin, Mikhail MikhaĖlovich**, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. HĖlene Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, USA, 1984, p. 177.

^{lxvii} **Greene, Thomas M.**, *Rabelais: A Study in Comic Courage*, Prentice-Hall Inc, New Jersey, 1970, p. v.

^{lxviii} **Bakhtin**, loc. cit., p. 18.

^{lix} **Cohen**, op. cit, p. 21.

^{lxx} *ibid.*

^{lxxi} **Bakhtin**, op. cit., p.320.

^{lxxii} *ibid.*, p. 317.

^{lxxiii} *ibid.*

^{lxxiv} *ibid.*, p. 19.

^{lxxv} *ibid.*, p. 255.

^{lxxvi} *ibid.*, pp. 303-367.

^{lxxvii} *ibid.*, p.18.

^{lxxviii} *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

^{lxxix} *ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

^{lxxx} **Harpham, Geoffrey Galt**, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradictions in Art and Literature*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA, 1982, p. 26.

^{lxxxir} **Thomson, Philip**, *The Grotesque*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, UK, 1972, p. 13.

^{lxxxii} **Bakhtin**, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

^{lxxxiii} In actuality the baths of Titus were not intended to be underground, so *grotta* is a misnomer. Harpham notes;

this naming is pregnant with truth, for although the designs were never intended to be underground the word is perfect. The Latin form of *grotta* is probably *crupta* (cf. ‘crypt’), which in turn derives from the Greek *Κρυπτη*, a vault; one of the cognates is *Κρυπτειν*, to hide. *Grotesque*, then, gathers into itself suggestions of the underground, of burial, and of secrecy.

Harpham, op. cit., p. 27.

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^{lxxxiv}**Bandinelli, Ranuccio Bianchi**, *Rome: The Centre of Power*, trans. Peter Green, Thames and Hudson Ltd., London, UK, 1970, p. 130.

^{lxxxv}**Harpham**, op. cit., p. 25.

^{lxxxvi}Indeed, the frescoes have deteriorated a great deal since the Fifteenth Century due to exposure to air. However, in 1781 Nicolas Ponce made detailed engravings of these frescoes, which are the most useful records remaining of the grotesca. **Harpham**, *ibid.*, p. 26.

^{lxxxvii}**Bakhtin**, op. cit., p. 32.

^{lxxxviii}*ibid.*, p. 124.

^{lxxxix}**LeClercq, Jaques**, “Translators Introduction” in *The Complete Works of Rabelais: The Five books of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, translated by Jaques LeClercq, The Modern Library, Random House, New York, 1936.

^{xc}**Bakhtin**, op. cit., p. 79.

^{xc}**Rabelais, FranÁois**, “The Author’s Prologue” in *The First Book, Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen, Penguin Books, London, UK, 1955, p. 39. Indeed, the entire prologue is written in the style of a familiar oration, as the quoted line suggests, shared amongst friends over drink.

^{xcii}**Bakhtin**, op. cit. p.168

^{xciii}*ibid.* Emphasis added.

^{xciv}**Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, FÈlix**, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1987 pp. 180-181.

^{xcv}**Deleuze, and Guattari**, *ibid.*, p181.

^{xcvi}**Bakhtin**, op. cit., p.26.

^{xcvii}*ibid.*, p.101.

^{xcviii}*ibid.*

^{xcix}*ibid.*

^c*ibid.*

^{ci}*ibid.*

^{cii}**Jaques Attali**, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi, The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1985, p. 14.

^{ciii}*ibid.*

^{civ}*ibid.*, p. 15.

^{cv}**Greene**, op. cit., p.v.

^{cv}**Bakhtin**, op. cit., p. 20.

^{cvii}*ibid.*, p.148.

^{cviii}*ibid.*, p.151.

^{cix}**Rabelais, FranÁois**, “The Fourth Book”, cited here in a different translation from the one above, *The Complete Works of Rabelais: The Five books of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, translated by Jaques LeClercq, The Modern Library, Random House, New York, 1936, p.681. Authors emphasis.

^{cx}**Bakhtin**, op. cit. p.162.

^{cx}**Rabelais**, *The First Book, Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen, Penguin Books, London, UK, 1955, p. 38.

^{cxii}**Bakhtin**, op. cit., p.161. ‘Gay’ here in the sense of ‘joyful’.

^{cxiii}*ibid.*, p.168.

^{cxiv}*ibid.*, p.161.

^{cxv}*ibid.*, p.147.

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^{cxvi} **Rabelais**, op. cit., p. 74.

^{cxvii} **Kristeva**, op. cit., p.1.

^{cxviii} *ibid.*, p.13.

^{cxix} **Bakhtin**, op. cit., p. 224.

^{cxx} *ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

^{cxxi} **Minow-Pinkney, Makiko**, “Virginia Woolf ‘Seen from a Foreign Land’”, *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The work of Julia Kristeva*, ed. John Fletcher & Andrew Benjamin, Routledge, London, UK, 1990, p. 160.

CHAPTER FOUR: STRATEGY AND TACTICS

It emerged in the previous chapter that the strategy of abjection in art is problematic. Indeed, I will continue to argue this throughout the remaining chapters. Thus, in the course of working toward more useful ways of thinking about the affects of artworks, and their political dimension, this chapter begins to mark a trajectory away from strategies of transgression and abjection, to find a more contingent and tactical approach.

In Chapter One, I briefly looked at some question concerning power in relation to notions of transgression. In Chapters Two and Three, I examined the notion of 'abject art' as a dominant political strategy in contemporary art in the 1990s. In order to begin a productive reconsideration of the cultural efficacy of contemporary art in ways different from the structures which support abject art strategies, it is important to return to some questions of power. This fourth chapter begins to consider at a more abstract level the character of power which underlies my examinations so far, and which become more important in the remainder of this thesis. This chapter establishes some notions which need to be addressed in order to reformulate an understanding of affective artwork, and its political dimension in a way different from those which have been examined hitherto.

This chapter begins by examining the important distinction between the ostensibly similar notions of strategy and tactics. Leading on from this examination, I will consider certain aspects of power relations and their relations to notions of strategy and tactics, in anticipation of the following chapters, which will consider the ways in which certain tactics may contribute to a theory of political efficacy in contemporary art.

This chapter also establishes some notions of power which are important in the chapter which immediately follows it, in which attention is again turned towards 'the body', and in which I examine the matter of bodily topography in terms of organisation and structure, and consider other ways in which one may think of 'bodies' and power. The politics of bodily topographies should be considered with the tactical character of power in mind. The way in which power is characterised

has an inevitable and important bearing upon the ways in which ‘bodies’ in turn are understood. Thus, it is important that power is addressed and characterised in this chapter before moving onto matters concerning the body in the next.

Strategy and Tactics

It is the belief of this thesis that any ‘system’ of cultural efficacy within contemporary art and theoretical practice can only ever work as a fragmented and fluid ‘tactical’ system, and not as a structured ‘strategic’ system (such as abjection). Practically, there can never be a successful manifesto of affect, there can never be a textbook of “Strategies of Transgression”, there can never be a *thesis* of the efficacy of art in wider culture, in the strictest sense of the word. There can be no simple structured models, no reproducible route, and no fixed and mapped topography. As Brian Massumi makes clear:

For structure is the place where nothing ever happens, that explanatory heaven in which all eventual permutations are prefigured in a self-consistent set of invariant generative rules.ⁱ

In the first chapter of this thesis, I have shown that the notion of transgression manifests itself throughout our culture as a set of definable values, which are in turn dependant on certain humanist axioms of progress and freedom. Wherever transgression declares itself in these ways, shows a ‘face’, it becomes structural. That is to say, to deploy a strategy of transgression is, from the first moment, to pre-determine one’s own capacity to affect.

Not surprisingly, the distinctions between strategy and tactics have been the focus of ‘military’ theorists, such as Carl Von Clausewitz, Scott Sigmund Gartner and Paul Virilio. Virilio says:

There are three phases of military knowledge. The *tactical* phase is the first, since it goes back to hunting societies. Tactics is the art of the hunt. *Strategy* appears along with politics—politics in the sense of *polis*, the Greek city—the strategist who governs the city, the organization of a theatre of operations with ramparts and the whole military-political system of the traditional city. Of course, tactics continue, but now there is, let’s say, a supremacy granted to strategy over tactics. [The third phase is *logistics*.]ⁱⁱ

For Virilio, tactics is an ‘art’, that is, like Michel Foucault’s *ars*;ⁱⁱⁱ it has no prescribed plan, it employs a kind of creativity, rather than the predeterminate structure which characterises strategy. Meanwhile for Virilio, strategy is the method of the government of policing the city, a political plan, a plan of policy: strategy is policy, politics is strategic.^{iv} Tactics, for Virilio, are characterised by a

methodology which is expedient, which is employed against the indeterminate capacities of a hunted animal body.

Similarly, for Clausewitz, strategy is policy, and long-term decision, while tactics are the expedient, short-term decisions taken on-the-spot for the most appropriate form of action at the time:

The conduct of war is the arrangement and conduct of combat. If this combat were a single act, there would be no necessity for any further subdivision. But combat is composed of more or less large numbers of single acts, each complete in itself, which we call engagements and which form new units. From this two activities spring: *individually arranging and conducting* these single engagements and *combining* them with one another to attain the object of war. The former is called *tactics*, the latter, *strategy*.^v

For Clausewitz, in war both strategy and tactics run together, without tactics, strategy cannot work. Without strategy, tactics *can* work, but there is no coordination towards the object of war.^{vi} Like Virilio, Clausewitz argues that strategy is the method of politics: “For Clausewitz, strategy links military actions to political objectives”.^{vii} For this reason he places strategy, as does Virilio, as superior to tactics.

Gartner, makes a similar distinction between strategy and tactics in war:

Whether to use bombers to attack civilian or military targets is a *strategic* decision. How each bomber attempts to avoid enemy anti-aircraft fire is a *tactical* decision.^{viii}

However, Gartner does not necessarily subscribe to the favouring of strategy over tactics. He notes the potentially high-price of *sticking to ones guns* on the point of principle or policy:

In World War I, British admirals refused to alter their naval strategy, despite the increasing losses incurred by British and Allied merchant shipping.^{ix}

The structural character of strategy is constant, and can only be readjusted with deliberation. Tactics constantly readjusts itself. Strategy is singular, tactics are multiple. Strategy is habitual, tactics is contingent. Strategy relies on prescribed systems of offence and defence, while tactics can only succeed by taking unprescribed courses. The characteristics of strategy are entirely different from those of tactics, but at the same time, tactics are not merely chaotic. Tactics are contingent, but are always partial and directed. Tactics perform a continual ongoing

repositioning which, while perhaps holding a succession of different temporary objectives in mind, are nevertheless at all times directed.

To demonstrate this distinction, for example, the system of a bureaucracy, or a large corporation is a system of structured *strategy*. Such systems tend to be organised on a rather Cartesian model, as a stratified vertical structure. Each such system has a ‘head’, a minister, a director, a CEO, or a board who presides over a ‘body’. The *head* is in charge of the *corporation*, in much the same way as Descartes conceives of the mind as the director of the body’s motor force.^x The ‘head’ can change the structure of the ‘body’ in order to change direction, but, for very practical reasons, this takes time. A semi-hypothetical example: HIV/AIDS became a concern to insurance companies in the 1980s. The CEO of a large insurance company decides that the company will stand to make massive losses if it has to pay out for claims by clients who die from a disease they might not know they have at the time that they take out a life insurance policy. So, the CEO puts it to the board that the company should require a blood test from its clients, in order to screen for HIV, and maybe other diseases. The board agrees, and the new rule is put in place. But in the meantime, for the new rule to be realised, the direction must descend down the ‘body’ of the company. Indeed, there are likely to be many steps, even before the appropriate stationary is designed, printed and distributed. Actual physical restraints inherent in the corporate organisation impede the change. In a centralised bureaucracy, the ‘body’ turns much slower than the ‘head’.

The constituent parts of the ‘body’ cannot be partial and contingent in themselves, but can only operate according to policy. Indeed, if any non-executive parts do become in any way autonomous they are disciplined. Structural strategic systems *can* change to meet demands made upon them, but the whole structure must be moved. In the case of the insurance company, new forms must be printed, new computer software must be written. Indeed, going back to Gartner’s example, by April 1917, the British admirals in World War I were eventually forced to change strategy, but this was only when they were nearly forced to surrender due to massive losses.^{xi}

A quite different, but perhaps more illustrative example of the problems with structure and strategy, can be found in music. In March 1997, Jean-Yves Thibaudet

released a recording of songs which were originally ‘written’ by the jazz pianist, Bill Evans, titled *Conversations with Bill Evans*^{xii} (named after Evans’s original recording in February 1963 titled *Conversations with Myself*^{xiii}) (Plates 35 & 36). Thibaudet is a French concert pianist whose large repertory of performances and recordings covers major works by classical composers such as Claude Debussy, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Maurice Ravel and Peter Tchaikovsky. Evans, who died in 1980, was a jazz pianist credited for his fluency and improvisation. Some of his jazz improvisations can be compared to the styles of classical composers such as Ravel, Chopin, and Debussy. However, importantly, jazz is based in improvisation, in a fluid and expedient progression, while classical music, almost without exception, is played from scored notation.

Indeed, classical piano is entirely different in this respect from jazz piano. A classical pianist plays exactly what *is* there in the music score. There is *some* minor degree of interpretation for a classical pianist, but at an entirely different level from that of a jazz player who, as Miles Davis famously said, plays what *isn’t there*. As Thibaudet notes:

Plates 35 & 36

They're not like classical compositions where every note, phrase and dynamic is set in stone.^{xiv}

For a classical pianist, there is little room for interpretation. The complexities of the music, the variables of tone, tempo, dynamics of volume and even the fingering, are pre-set and pre-determined in the score. It is a determinate form. For a classical pianist, playing a piece is thus a process of rote-learning in order to habituate his or her self into particular actions. The music tells the fingers what to do. For a jazz pianist, the parameters are far wider. Sure, there are conventions which are inherent in the capacity of the piano to produce sound. The piano still has only 88 keys, and a prescribed timbre and tonality, with notes at predetermined tonal intervals, and indeed, Western conventions of key and time signatures still prevail, but the process of producing the music of jazz is entirely different. Jazz piano is a far more *tactical* form of playing than classical piano. For a jazz pianist there is an expediency and a degree of indeterminacy not found in classical music. For a jazz pianist, the fingers tell the music what to do.

Classical music's heritage derives from the chants of the Gregorian monasteries, and the minstrels of the courts of European monarchs. Since the Fourteenth Century,^{xv} it has allied with the literate, and thus the socio-economically advantaged. From that time, since the illiterate and nomadic folk jongleurs were replaced by the literate and salaried minstrels, the 'classical' tradition has been the written and privileged, while the 'folk' tradition has been the improvisational and popular. Jazz descends from the latter tradition. Like other forms of popular music in the Twentieth Century, such as blues, rock 'n' roll, ragtime and folk music, jazz has its heritage with the jongleurs, and its background in the culture of the wider population, in the 'lower' socio-economic strata. Thus, for the tradition of jazz, there is not the same kind of process of learning music in a classically 'literate' way. Jazz, rock and blues are traditionally untutored genres. Sure, there are formulas, such as the pentatonic scale of blues (which is also the scale used in much contemporary rock music), but not an extensive notational convention. Therefore, learning to play jazz, or blues, is a process of 'learning' a high degree of fluency and variation given limited tonal resources: variation within a given key is valued over faith to any score.

For Thibaudet's recordings of Evans's jazz songs, the songs were transcribed into scored notation from the original recordings.^{xvi} Thibaudet then rendered Evans's songs faithful to the score. In this way, he could play Evans's songs in a way which he would be accustomed, applying his familiar classical methodology to a jazz piece:

I approached the notes literally, as if I was playing a piece of classical music, and played exactly what was on the page.^{xvii}

The success of the resulting record is disputable. One music reviewer, Mark Stryker, maintains that;

Here is one of the silliest CDs in recent memory. Jean-Yves Thibaudet, a gifted classical pianist, performs transcriptions of songs and improvisations by jazz great Bill Evans. These beautiful tunes underscore the influence of Debussy and Ravel on Evans, but the performances are lifeless, like art-school copies of famous paintings.^{xviii}

Of course, Stryker may be employing a fundamentally Platonistic criteria of 'original over copy' in his evaluation of Thibaudet's recording. Nevertheless, by comparing Thibaudet's Evans recordings to "art-school copies of famous paintings", Stryker indicates that these recording are perhaps like a painting-by-numbers version of Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles*. That is, to extrapolate from Stryker's criticism, the fluency of improvisation, and all the danger of indeterminacy, has turned into structure:

Thibaudet doesn't improvise, but that's just part of the trouble. The pulse at the heart of jazz — even rubato ballad playing — is absent, and in those few spots where Thibaudet is supposed to swing he sounds like a clumsy robot.^{xix}

Indeed, Thibaudet himself admits that achieving the 'pulse' of jazz was the most difficult aspect of the recording:

The main challenge for me, in retrospect, was that of assimilating jazz rhythm. Rhythm in jazz is quite different from rhythm in classical music, and functions like a heartbeat. Much of the time rhythm is implied rather than stated, and you can't lose the pulse for a split second.^{xx}

The structure of Thibaudet's 'classical playing' of jazz turns this 'pulse' into a *beat*. In Thibaudet's recordings, the tempo becomes more accurately measured. Again, this is problematic for another reviewer of the recording, Don Heckman. Heckman comments:

His performances of transcriptions of such Bill Evans numbers as ‘Waltz for Debby’ and ‘Peace Piece’ make for an interesting marketing concept but not particularly absorbing music.^{xxi}

Heckman concedes that Thibaudet is “a highly regarded classical pianist with a taste for [and, by inference, a sympathy for] jazz”, yet;

the immediate temptation to compare Thibaudet's versions with the originals simply underscores Evans' genius, not solely as a composer but also for the delicate sensitivity of his touch.^{xxii}

For Heckman and Stryker, Thibaudet’s rendition loses *something* in its process; a fluidity and an expedient spontaneity which is replaced by rigidity and a predetermined ‘robotic’ stiffness.

Of course, whether one regards Thibaudet’s rendition of Evans’s songs as successful or not depends upon one’s own criteria. For Stryker, Thibaudet lacks Evans’s nuance, sounding “like a clumsy robot”. For Heckman, Thibaudet lacks Evans’s sensitivity. Sure, these are all quite conditional. However, what is certain from this, is that for Thibaudet to change his tune, the transcription must be altered, and the new version of the piece has to be rote-learned. Thus, Thibaudet trades Evans’s fluidity for structure, his versions are strategic, which Evans’s are tactical.

Learning to play classical piano in the ‘standard’ way is to establish a *strategic* system, a system governed and organised by policy and rules.^{xxiii} In the milieu of classical musicianship, once a piece is learned, it is considered undesirable to change the music which is played from that of the score. In contrast, in the course of recording *Conversations With Myself* in 1964, if Evans wished to change the direction of a song, he could simply just do it. In Deleuzean terms, with jazz, the plane of immanence is always present. Effectively, Thibaudet’s transcriptions ossify the fluency of Evans, they turn flesh into bone, fluidity into rule, and tactics into strategy.

Strategy is rule-based, governed by policy which is intended to stifle any deviation from a path which is set. Composing music through transcription is similar to composing a manifesto, as many hopeful ‘revolutionary’ art movements of the Twentieth Century have done. In doing so the intentions of the day are set. Expediency is traded for certainty. Manifestos are not written so that those who follow them can explain why they act, but rather to tell those who follow them how

to act, so that the intentions of the moment of the manifesto are not lost. Indeed, the adherence to the policy of manifestos has proven as near-fatal for some art movements as the stubborn adherence to strategy of the British Navy in 1917. In 1909, Filippo Marinetti wrote *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, which was the *de facto* constitution for the Futurist art movement in Italy at that time. The manifesto lists, in numbered form, the policies of Futurism which extol the virtues of war in the modern age. The first policy is thus:

We intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness.^{xxiv}

Ironically, the Futurist movement, based on this love of danger, and the idealised glory of war, virtually ceased to exist after World War I, which fragmented the movement and depleted its ranks. Indeed, Umberto Boccioni, one of the movement's major protagonists, died in 1916 in the course of the war. Manifestos establish rules in the hope of overriding contingencies, rather than engaging with them.

Indeed, even when rule-based strategies are massively accommodating of contingencies, their capacity to engage with them remains fixed, structured and determinate. Such complex strategic systems can be found in rule-based 'artificial intelligence' (AI) in computers. Such 'intelligence' is based on the massive calculational power of computers which allows them to process a list of rules for a given situation. The 'intelligence' is thus not an actively learning intelligence, but one determined by the computer's programming. Such rule-based AIs work by being programmed with a set of immutable rules which they simply follow indifferently. The 'intelligence' of the computer is thus entirely dependant on the structure it is given by its programming, and its capacity to put that structure into action. Hubert L. Dreyfus compares the rule-based artificial intelligence of a computer to a learner driver, or novice chess player:

The beginner is then given rules for determining actions on the basis of these features, like a computer following a program. The novice chess player learns a numerical value for the pieces regardless of position, and the rule: 'Always exchange if the total value of pieces captured exceeds the value of pieces lost.'^{xxv}

Similarly, a learner driver learns some basic rules, for example, on acceleration, he or she is to change up to second gear when the speedometer reaches 10mph. In many situations in which a novice chess player, or a learner driver, may find

themselves, the basic set of rules they are given will be sufficient for dealing with that situation. This is the way in which rule based artificial intelligence, such as chess computers, approach a problem.

Dreyfus's example is a good one and, although it may seem rather trite to draw on chess as an analogy, it is very appropriate here. There are limited ways certain pieces may behave, numerous but finite positions, and only a single desired outcome for the player, yet the game is not played by grandmaster chess-players simply as a structural strategic system of calculating possibilities and planning action. Rather, it is more tactical and 'intuitive':

The expert chess player, classed as an international master or grandmaster experiences a compelling sense of the issue and the best move. Excellent chess players can play at the rate of 5-10 seconds a move and even faster without any serious degradation in performance. At this speed they must depend almost entirely on intuition and hardly at all on analysis and comparison of alternatives.^{xxvi}

At the time of writing, Garry Kasparov is the current reigning world chess champion, and has held this title for 11 consecutive years. In October 1989, Garry Kasparov played an IBM computer, which was programmed to play chess by Nathan Divinsky, a chess commentator and Professor of Mathematics at the University of Vancouver. The computer was 'Deep Thought', named after the fictitious supercomputer from the Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* novels. Adams' fictional 'Deep Thought' was a computer built for the single purpose of answering the question of 'life, the Universe, and everything'. It took seven million years to calculate the answer, which turned out to be "42". In referring to the Adams' supercomputer, Divinsky's Deep Thought made pretensions to being something of similar power in the world of chess. Yet, in its match with Kasparov in 1989, it did not even get to play 42 moves: it lost in only 41!^{xxvii}

Following Deep Thought, IBM developed the chess computer further with a team of five computer scientists who worked on 'Deep Blue' for five years. IBM invested millions of dollars into this project, to create a computer that was 1000 times faster than Divinsky's Deep Thought.^{xxviii} For the researchers, Deep Blue was an experiment in 'parallel computing'. For a computer to make massive calculations in a short time, several micro-processors are needed, but they must work simultaneously. Until recently in the field of computer science, it was thought

unfeasible to have numerous processors working in parallel. With Deep Blue, the research team developed a computer that could process data through 32 general purpose processors, which were in turn each attached to eight special purpose processors.^{xxix} So, the computer was running millions of calculations per second. This computer was then programmed on the principles of four basic rules: ‘material’, ‘position’, ‘King safety’ and ‘tempo’.

With ‘material’, a simple value-based set of rules is applied to each piece:

The rule of thumb is that if a pawn is considered to be worth a value of 1, pieces (knights and bishops) are worth 3 each, a rook is worth 5, and the Queen 9. The King, of course, is beyond value, since his loss means the end of the game. This varies slightly in certain situations — retaining the Bishop pair in the end game generally increases their value beyond 6, for example — but the laws are fairly constant.^{xxx}

The second main rule, position, involves evaluating the opponent’s safe squares on the board, and positioning one’s own pieces to attack those squares. For the safety of the King, which is the third main rule, the computer must assess and assign the value of the King’s position at every move in the game. The fourth rule, ‘tempo’, concerns the rate at which the game develops:

A player is said to ‘lose a tempo’ if he [sic] dilly-dallies while the opponent is making more productive advances.^{xxxi}

This kind of pre-set configuration of hardware and programming is characteristic of ‘rule-based’ artificial intelligence.^{xxxii}

Deep Blue uses the brute force of its calculating power to process each of the numerous possibilities of moves, and evaluate them in terms of these pre-set values. Dreyfus says that this kind of ‘artificial intelligence’ is not at all like that which would be commonly called ‘intelligence’ in a human. Rather, Dreyfus claims that human intelligence, in situations such as chess-playing, is based on a more fluid and tactical readjustment, based on the embodied experience of the player, on a kind of ‘carnal formulae’ which is often spoken of as ‘intuitive’.^{xxxiii} Indeed, IBM agree that no such unstructured ‘intuitive’ element figures in the ‘thinking’ of Deep Blue:

Earlier computer designs that tried to mimic human thinking haven’t been very good at it. No formula exists for intuition, so Deep Blue relies more on computational power and a simpler search and evaluation function. ‘Artificial Intelligence’ is more successful in science fiction than it is here on earth.

‘There is no psychology at work’ in Deep Blue, nor does Deep Blue ‘learn’ its opponent as it plays. Instead, it operates much like a turbocharged ‘expert system,’ drawing on vast resources of stored information (For example, a data base of opening games played by grandmasters over the last 100 years) and then calculating the most appropriate response to an opponents move. Deep Blue is stunningly effective at solving chess problems, but it is less intelligent than the stupidest person.^{xxxiv}

So, at the time of writing, Deep Blue is possibly one of the most powerful computers in existence, but it cannot ‘learn’, and indeed such ‘learning’ is not possible in any of its computer contemporaries. Thus, at the present time, a computer must perform a task, such as playing chess, based on a pre-set program. Deep Blue is a massively powerful calculating machine, which is applied to the task of playing chess, but the way in which it plays is always structured by its immutable programming and predetermined calculational capacities; it is strategic, and never tactical. It can be reprogrammed to readjust its strategy, but at any one time its programming works as a ossified molar block, never able to adjust itself to absorb contingencies. As numerous are the positions it can recognise, they are finite. Deep Blue cannot extrapolate or generalise from its four rules, to account for moves by its human opponent which are more ‘intuitively’ tactical than simply logical. This hard-logic programming is supplemented with a data-base containing the opening games played by grandmasters over the last 100 years, but again, it cannot extrapolate or generalise from this stored data, other than to apply its four rules to it and the data input from the current game in play. Regardless of whether it is reprogrammed periodically, Deep Blue’s chess-playing is always determined by an invariable set of rules and data. It is probably for this reason that Garry Kasparov beat Deep Blue in a series of chess matches, in Philadelphia, 1996.

In response, a re-match was organised between Deep Blue and Kasparov for May 1997, in New York. Playing against Deep Blue the second time, Kasparov abandoned his usual methodology in the first game of the series. Instead of playing his usual ‘intuitive’ tactical grandmaster game, he adopted a plan to make deliberately novice-like moves early on in the game. His reasoning was that the computer, with a bank of 100 years of grandmaster opening games, would not be programmed to deal with elementary, novice-like, rule-based opening moves. This reasoning succeeded in winning Kasparov the first game of the series.

However, in the following game Kasparov got into trouble:

Game 2 created an enigma for me that I never solved and from which I never recovered.^{xxxv}

In Game 2, Kasparov claims that Deep Blue made some decisions which showed “a very human sense of danger”.^{xxxvi} The Deep Blue team leader, C.J. Tan claims that the computer was programmed specifically for Kasparov’s playing.^{xxxvii} However, it is important to note that the Deep Blue team were allowed to readjust the computer’s programming between games. It seems that Kasparov, in adopting a *strategy* in Game 1, of playing simple ‘computer chess’ with a sophisticated chess computer, made a fatal error for the tournament as a whole. This strategy won him the first game, but by adopting a determinate methodology and abandoning his usual tactical play, he opted to play the computer at *its own game*. Once he had chosen to stay with this policy, from Game 2 until the end of the tournament, it was a match of strategy versus strategy, and Kasparov lost the series.

The point here is not to say that Deep Blue is ‘smarter’ than Kasparov or, in general, that computers can, or cannot, replace humans. This is irrelevant here. Rather, the important thing is that the match of Deep Blue versus Kasparov illustrates that structural strategic systems, which are finite, highly organised, pre-set and prescribed, fine-tuned and immutable, are inevitably limited from the first instance. I am not particularly talking about computer systems. They are merely an illustrative example. Any ‘body’ with fixed capacities to affect and to be affected, any *strategy*, any structural system, any prescribed formulated attempt at transgression, has, built into its very structure, the determinacy of structure.

With strategy versus strategy, an important deciding factor in the outcome seems to be the determinate capacity of each system to affect, and to be affected. Wherever one has a strategic, rule-based system in operation (such as the computer program, or a bureaucracy), it can always engage with, and if it has a greater capacity it can co-opt, any strategy set against it. The variables which determine the outcome are few, and the primary variable is, as Deep Blue demonstrates, brute force. If Deep Blue were to play chess against its predecessor, Deep Thought, which is 1000 times slower and does not have the brute calculational power of parallel computing, only a foolhardy gambler would be found putting money on Deep Thought. With strategy

versus strategy, structure versus structure, determinate capacity versus determinate capacity, it is most often the differential in their masses which is the determinant of the outcome. The greater capacity co-opts the lesser.

Interestingly, one of the reasons why IBM chose to create Deep Blue for the task of playing chess in particular, is that there are no indeterminate elements to it:

There is no scientific interest in pursuing games of chance, like Roulette or Backgammon, since 'meaning' is reduced to the vicissitudes of the wheel or dice.^{xxxviii}

On the other hand, games such as chess, checkers and tic-tac-toe "can easily be co-opted by a computer program".^{xxxix} If Deep Blue were reprogrammed to play a game of chance, such as Roulette, no matter how capacious its calculational powers may be, or how extensive and accommodating the rules of its programming, it would be no more likely to win at Roulette than a pocket calculator. Chance cannot be easily co-opted into structure *because it is indeterminate*. A computer may be able to work out the simple odds of a particular number coming up, but by which law of chance? There is no law of chance that can predict the outcome. If, after 2,999 spins, the number '1' has not come up at all, does this mean it is more likely, *or* less likely, to come up on the 3,000th spin? There is no definite answer. Fluidity resists structure like water passing through a net.

The Tactical Field of power

Strategy, like transgression, belongs to the vocabulary of the ‘outsider’ and the juridico-discursive model of power. Michel de Certeau argues, similarly:

I call ‘strategy’ the calculus of force-relations which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an ‘environment’. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, ‘clients,’ ‘targets,’ or ‘objects’ of research) on this strategic model.^{xi}

De Certeau rightly allies the notion of strategy exactly with the model of a power that can be “isolated from an ‘environment’”. To his list of “a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution”, one could add the more abstract ‘machine’, and one could likewise add ‘Rage’ to the list of “competitors, adversaries, ‘clients,’ ‘targets,’ or ‘objects’ of research”. De Certeau continues:

I call a ‘tactic,’ on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance.^{xii}

The tactical is always and already ‘inside’ or, to be more accurate, the tactical conceives of itself wholly as part of the system in which it operates.

With this in mind, the limitations of general strategies of ‘transgression’ (explored in the first chapter of this thesis), and the particular political strategy of abjection in art (discussed in Chapter Two), become all the more apparent. Such ‘strategies’ conceive of power as monolithic, with limited reach, outside of which there is some natural transcendental realm of freedom. In Chapter One, I have briefly mentioned Foucault’s analytics of power, in order to argue that the notion of transgression is problematic, because the operations of power are far more complex than simply ‘rage’ of the transgressor on one side versus the ‘machine’ of power on the other. In the light of the definitions of strategy and tactics, I will now return again to consider some notions of power more closely. I will elucidate the understandings of power which underlie this thesis, which consider power as a tactical field. Also, importantly I will consider the ways in which consensual intentions exist despite the tactical character of power in contemporary culture. Again Michel Foucault’s

‘analytics’ of power provide a vital key here. So, I will recapitulate some significant and relevant elements of Foucault’s ideas on power, and consider them further here particularly in relation to the notions of strategy and tactics which I have provided.

The large extent of Foucault’s body of work is concerned to some degree with questions of power, or rather, the ways in which power is discursively represented. However, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* he takes the opportunity to clearly explain, firstly, the ways in which power is commonly perceived in Western culture and, secondly, the ways in which power in our culture may be more usefully understood.

Foucault states that;

By power, I do not mean ‘Power’ as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule. Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body.

The understanding of power which Foucault here disavows, underpins the vast majority of conceptions of power throughout European political thought since the Middle Ages,^{xliii} and across politics, from Machiavelli’s proto-Fascist figure of ‘The Prince’ ruling over his subjects,^{xliiii} to Marx’s conception of the bourgeoisie above the proletariat.^{xliiv} This common representation understands power primarily in terms of the rule of law.^{xliv} Thus, Foucault identifies this understanding of power as the ‘juridico-discursive’ model.^{xlvi}

In Chapter One, I briefly touched-upon the way in which power is often characterised as operating through juridico-discursive strategies. To reiterate, the juridico-discursive model understands power as a static monolithic structure, as a “pure and simple juridical edifice”,^{xlvii} in pyramidal form, with ‘Power’ at the apex, and its subjects below. It rules by prohibition, dictating what is *not* allowed through law, as though “the pure form of power resides in the function of the legislator.”^{xlviii} It produces nothing but restrictions, absences, gaps and limits, it imposes silences and stifles movement.^{xlix} Thus, while power is defined as identical to the extent of the law, the institutions of the state are regarded as the centres of power, and the

reach of their power is understood as being limited. The juridico-discursive understanding characterises the intentions of power as strategic, driven by the policies of the state. It operates vertically and hierarchically, dictating from the ‘head’ to the ‘body’ below. It works through the homogeneity of policy, defined by the ‘head’, which is carried out like the program of Deep Blue. The ‘size’ of ‘Power’ is determinate, for example, it is determined by legislative permissions, the size and number of government bodies that exist to enforce it, and how the legal system deals with offenders. Thus the extent of power’s reach is determinate. Like Deep Blue’s ability to play chess, its capacity to affect is determined by its sheer size. It is ‘powerful’ because it is massive.

Contrary to these juridico-discursive conceptions of contemporary power, Foucault offers his analytics of power. It becomes immediately clear that, for Foucault, power is not characterised as a structure or strategy, but as fluid and tactical. For Foucault, power is not the static and monolithic edifice of ‘Power’, but a nexus of relations between “innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations”.ⁱ Indeed, power is dynamic. This is meant in two senses; that power is not a thing possessed by any exclusive group of people, a dictator or leader, or any oligarchical or parliamentary legislature:

Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or something that one holds on to or allows to slip away.ⁱⁱ

Rather, Foucault considers power more in terms of a flow between related points. In the second sense, power is dynamic in that the points within power relations are mobile, insofar as all relations are transient and contingent. Thus, for Foucault, power is characterised by varying intensities, perpetually in motion, at all times within all relations, and at all times subject to the changes within those relations. Even as a dynamic, power does not travel along pre-set cables but rather, to take this electrical-power analogy one step further, like lightening, it zaps through the air from one point to another, never by the same route and never between exactly the same points.

For Foucault, power is not structural, working through policy. It is not centralised, radiating out, but is “everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere”.^{lii} There is no interior realm of power distinct from its

‘outside’. Indeed, this is because power relations are within *every* relationship, throughout *every* discourse, and within *all* knowledge. As Foucault claims:

Relations of power are not in exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations)^{liii}

Rather than a pyramidal analogy, Foucault’s understanding of power relations is very similar to Gilles Deleuze and FÈlix Guattari’s analogy of the ‘rhizome’.^{liv} For Deleuze and Guattari, structure is like the root system of a tree. It is centred around the main stem of the tree, which bifurcates into smaller and smaller roots. All roots lead to the centre. On the other hand, a rhizomatic root system, such as that found in couchgrass, has no centre. It has no uniformed structure or hierarchy.^{lv} Rather, it spreads out across a plane. There are varying intensities within any rhizomatic field, but no centre, no stem from which all roots emanate. Foucault conceives of power throughout our culture as operating in this rhizomatic way. Like the rhizome of couchgrass, power does not emanate from a central arboreal ‘root’. Rather, because it comes from everywhere and is within all relations, it is a non-centred field.

The Foucauldian conception of power, then, imagines it as a tactical rhizomatic field. In addition to this, power is not the anti-energy of prohibition that simply applies the breaks to desires and polices actions, but rather power *produces* actions and discourses. Indeed, I would add that the tactical field of power is constantly at work, weaving new parts of itself, creating new axioms which both produce, and are produced by, discourse. As Foucault argues, power is not a thing to be possessed,^{lvi} indeed, it is a process, and part of that process is the constant process of *axiomatisation*; creating truths, dismantling truths — weaving the field of axioms upon which power relations are stand.

Deleuze and Guattari indicate the axiomatising power process in *Anti-Oedipus*:

It is these quantities that are marked, no longer the persons themselves: *your capital or your labour capacity*, the rest of you is not important, we’ll always find a place for you within the expanded limits of the system, even if an axiom has to be created just for you.^{lvii}

As I have suggested, once an ‘outside’ is conceived of, it is within power, but power does not co-opt it. Rather the discourse that produces the ‘new’ position simultaneously produces axioms that relate it to existing axioms.^{lviii} Thus, power

will always accommodate the ‘rage’ of the transgressor, not because power is the ‘machine’ that swallows everything, but because power will always weave another axiom to fit any ‘rage’. Or rather, more accurately, the rage inevitably weaves its very own axioms, which merely form part of the tactical field of power. The capacity to produce axioms is not exclusive. It is not a special function of ‘Power’. Indeed, it is identical to the capacity to engage in relations and affect/produce discourse. Axioms can be, and in actuality are, formed, amended, circulated and mutated constantly within the multiple points of power relations.

The axiomatising function of power has a direct and important relation to the processes of normalisation. Normalisations are dependant on axioms. It is the ‘truths’ of our culture that give bases to normalising discourses. Axioms enable normalisations, forming their foundational concepts and allowing them the stability to function. An ‘axiom’ is a self-evident truth and, similar to normalising discourses, are to a large extent ‘invisible’ because they are constitutive of the very discourses they enable. If a particular discourse identifies its founding axioms, then its foundation has already moved on to other axioms. A practical example of this is the way in which the axiom of ‘the divine creation of the human race’ only becomes differentiated as a position and becomes ‘visible’ with the common axiomatic acceptance of the Darwinian evolutionary thesis. As this example also demonstrates, axioms are invariably contingent. However, importantly all axioms seem to share one characteristic; that regardless of their inevitable ephemerality, they maintain a belief that the axiom itself is stable and eternal.

If we adopt this Foucauldian understanding of power, and from it infer that our culture is not governed by the very visible juridico-discursive institutions, then it may be contended that notions of social transformation become trivialised or in vain. How can we think of political efficacy when there are no static and clear points in culture to affect? Fredric Jameson argues that this is a common problem within much poststructuralist thought, in fact, he specifically cites Foucault. Jameson argues:

If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable. ^{lix}

For Jameson, Foucault provides such a model of power. As a result of eliminating “a cultural dominant” and regarding power as heterogeneous, political efficacy is no longer possible.

However, in defence of Foucault, he does *not* say that all relations are equal in force and all power is indifferent: “power relations are intentional”.^{lx} Indeed, this is clear in *Discipline and Punish*, in which Foucault characterises the intentionality of power as like that of the ‘carceral’.^{lxi} In short, the very direct movement of bodies and disciplinary surveillance of their actions within European penal systems is analogous to the disciplinary power of normalisations in our culture, except that the surveillance is not carried out by an external authority, but from self-comparisons to normalisations. With disciplinary power in our culture, it is not necessary to impose discipline from ‘above’. Power in our culture does not need panoptic surveillance from a central point in order to ensure that certain intentions and directions are infused throughout our culture. Rather, certain intentions are conveyed throughout power relations via normalisations, and are enforced through self-surveillance and self-discipline:

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the ‘social-worker’-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based.^{lxii}

Normalisations do not need a master plan or a coherent policy emanating from a ‘head’. Yet the production of normalising discourses is certainly intentional:

There is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject^{lxiii}

Therefore, even though power is a tactical and mobile field of relations, there are dominant (one may even venture to say ‘consensual’) intentions running across it. These intentions are not carried out by any institutions, through strategy. They are far more resilient. The consensual intentions of culture operate tactically, therefore they change and mutate to fit any changes in conditions.

One may further argue that Foucault ignores the obvious fact that common experience shows that power does not simply act invisibly through discourse. Certainly, one can point to obvious examples at which there seem to be points at which power relations sound in concert, instances in which the points of power plug

in to one another to ultimately lead to the actual and grievous movement of bodies. One may ask, ‘how can Foucault claim that our culture is not governed by those institutions of capital ‘P’ ‘Power’ when the effects of such power are so brutal and obvious?’ Indeed, one might say, even if one agrees that power operates through a rhizome of relations, that there is a point at which they congeal, at which the flows of power relations solidify to the extent to which they can wear boots, build walls, lock doors, write laws and codify values.

However, these institutions, the monoliths of the juridico-discursive model in the form of state bureaucracies, ministries, legislation and law enforcement, are merely “knots of arborescence”^{lxiv} at which power becomes visible. Foucault argues:

‘Power’, insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert and self-producing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities^{lxv}

That is to say that ‘Power’, as one might think of it in terms of institutions, laws, police or armies, are the points at which dynamic power relations form organisational constellations. They are points which congeal within the varying intensities of a rhizomatic field, but these are never a central root for the rhizome. In general, such ‘knots of arborescence’ neither threaten nor reassure the rest of the rhizome. They do not control the rhizome, and they can only affect it to a limited degree.

Moreover, the intentionality in normalisations should not be confused, or equated, with the ‘Power’ of the state. As brutally *real* as these ‘knots’ may seem, if anything, their *reality* masks the *actuality* of ‘truths’ in creating the normalisations which permeate power relations. In this way, such ‘knots’ provide potential *visible* diversions for any forces resisting the intentions dominant in the field of power. The institutions of capital ‘P’ ‘Power’ are quite visible. They do not present themselves as self-evident truths of our culture.

For example, the judicial system is founded on the notion of justice, and may self-consciously admit to a lack between the merely cultural judicial system and the ideal of a transcendent justice. While the judicial system is enabled and validated by the notion of justice, justice has no foundations of its own, because it *is* foundational. It is an axiom; self evident, and virtually invisible or impossible as a notion *in itself*, because it is inextricable from all notions which follow from it. The

abstract notion of justice, as an axiom, has far greater efficacy in terms of creating self-discipline, self-surveillance and normalisation than any judicial system based upon it. The brutality of ‘Power’ institutions will never match the pervasive efficacy of the power which cannot ever be seen. The harsh, brutal and visible tanks that rolled into Tianamen Square in Beijing, China, on June 5th, 1989, may have crushed the student protests. However, the axiomatic notions of justice and liberty, which lead the students to the protest, and founded the condemnation of China by the Western world following the protests, is more pervasively ‘powerful’. Indeed, the axioms of justice and liberty became all the more obvious and ‘self-evident’, and their position more *invisible*, after the tanks had rolled in.

In terms of resistance, Foucault argues:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.^{lxvi}

While there is no centralised ‘machine’ of ‘Power’, neither can it be said that there is a singular ‘rage’ of ‘Resistance’:

there is no single locus of Refusal, no soul of Revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary^{lxvii}

Foucault does not deny the notion of resistance. Indeed, while there is intentionality in ‘power-knowledge’, while there are dominant intentions running throughout the rhizomatic field of power, resistances are inevitable. They operate as points, no more or no less ‘knotted’ or monolithic as all power relations:

there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial.^{lxviii}

Resistances are simply intentions which are at odds with those dominant in the field of power. Importantly, ‘resistance’ is still ‘power’, indeed, the definition between ‘resistant’ and ‘dominant’ intentions are ultimately arbitrary. All intentionality is made of the same ‘matter’. It is not the case that there is a polarity between ‘Power-power’ and ‘Resistance-power’ (or, indeed, that ‘Power-power’ is inherently and necessarily strategic, and ‘Resistance-power’ is inherently tactical). Sure enough, there can be no effective ‘radical’ resistance in the sense of ‘uprooting’ power, to change it from its base, as if power has single root.

Indeed, the interplay of consensus and resistance becomes more complex when one considers the actual character of the ‘points’ of power to which Foucault refers. One may understand these ‘points’ to be synonymous with ‘subjectivities’. Indeed, this is perhaps implied in *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, although Foucault is never specific on what exactly he means by ‘points’. However, it would seem that a ‘point’ of power is *not necessarily* identical with a single individual subject. In his later work, particularly in the last completed volume of *The History of Sexuality*,^{lxi} and in some work published posthumously, Foucault becomes increasingly concerned with the technologies which subjects *apply to themselves*, in spite of themselves, which follow the intentions of more dominant values and normalisation in culture and form the habits of the subject’s own subjugation.^{lxx} Self-surveillance is an important technology of the self (although, it is certainly not the only one). Sandra Lee Bartky explains the ways in which certain intentions are carried out through self-surveillance with this example:

The woman who checks her makeup half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara has run, who worries that the wind or the rain may spoil her hairdo, who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at the ankle or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely as the inmate of the Panopticon, a self policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance. This self-surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy.^{lxxi}

In this way, the contemporary self has absorbed the functions of some technologies of power into technologies of the self.

Interestingly, self-surveillance implies that there are *at the very least* two contradictory intentions within the one subject: one which is directed in compliance with hegemonic intentions (the patriarchy, in Bartky’s example), and one which is resistant. Indeed, it is quite conceivable that the woman exemplified in Bartky’s example, while keeping herself so closely in-check, in complicity with patriarchal intentions, may very well and validly complain about earning less than a man doing the same job as her. This is not to say that such a woman is simply naïve, contradictory, or deluded under some phallogocentric false consciousness. Rather, it is quite conceivable that the values of wishing to ‘look good’ (regardless of the subjugating intentions underlying it and the self-surveillance it requires) and those of being fairly-paid may exist within the one subject. In terms of the technologies of the self, points of dominant intentionality which are embodied in the habits of

self-surveillance *and* the points of resistance to those same intentions, exist within a single subject.

Bartky's is just one example of one technique of the self which implies multiple 'points' of power in a single subject. Surely it can just as accurately be said that *every person*, each contemporary subject, has multiple and mobile points of power 'within' them. No subject is absolutely coherent in terms of the intentions inherent in their actions. *Moreover*, how we regard the relation of apparently contradictory points within one subject depends entirely on the political molarity which is being applied to the one subject and their actions. For example, a trade unionist man may beat his wife. Wife-beating and trade unionism are not essentially contradictory actions and intentions. The principle of the defence of workers' rights has no essential relation to the principle of a man not beating his wife. However, under the broader political molarity of socialism these two actions may seem entirely contradictory. Indeed, the degree to which one may say that this man's actions are incongruous, or not, depends on the character of the political molarity which one applies in the comparison. 'Socialism' (and this is no special example here) exists as a catalogue of axioms from which its principles derive and form a coherent constellation with as few points of contradiction as possible. *So, under the ideology of socialism*, defending workers from subjugation under the bourgeoisie is in apparent contradiction to the violent subjugation of women. Under a different ideological set of axioms and principles, such things may not be quite so contradictory.

Single subjectivities are not coherent reflections of molar ideologies. They are not single political positions. Rather, within one subject there may be multiple 'points' of power. There may operate many, often contradictory, normalisations, intentions and resistances. The wife-beating trade unionist does not fit a clear molar politics, but his actions are certainly political.

The single word 'politics' becomes inadequate at this point. It is for this reason that the distinction between *macropolitics* and *micropolitics* is very useful. The politics of molarities, which conceive politics as 'identical', as a molar set of policies adhered directly onto molarities of identity, are macropolitical. Or, put more simply, 'politics' in its most common meaning is macropolitics. Macropolitics

operate at the level of molar aggregates. Micropolitics, on the other hand, operate on the level of molecularities. One could look at it this way; macropolitics are the points at which various micropolitics congeal. For example, although Foucault never put it in these terms, his understanding of power is concerned with the micropolitics of power. Perhaps it can be said that macropolitics is the realm of ideology, while micropolitics is the realm of 'idiology'. The structural organisation of molar politics, political parties, organised protests, marches, and ballots, become inapt for the character of micropolitics. Rather micropolitics are more fragmentary and tactical. Under the standards of other macropolitical ideologies, politics pursued primarily through micropolitics may appear contradictory, inconsistent and transient.

It must be made clear here that it is not the case that politics are *either* micropolitics *or* macropolitics. It is not the case that macropolitics is aligned with structure and strategy, and micropolitics is aligned with fluidity and tactics. Rather, all politics operate at both the macropolitical and micropolitical level:

In short everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a *macropolitics* and a *micropolitics*. Take aggregates of the perception or feeling type: their molar organization, their rigid segmentarity, does not preclude the existence of an entire world of unconscious micropcepts, unconscious affects, fine segmentations that grasp or experience different things, are distributed and operate differently.^{lxxii}

The macropolitics of parliamentary or congressional party politics are underwritten to some extent by the micropolitics of their individual members. Political parties and ideologies attempt to keep the micropolitical level in check. In this way, they operate on both a macro- and micropolitical level, but primarily pursue their politics through macropolitics.

It will have become apparent by this point in this thesis that, in considering political efficacy in contemporary art, I wish to avoid a politics which is primarily macropolitical. The politics of strategy of transgression are primarily macropolitical in operation. Its vocabulary is juridico-discursive, and its world view is made up of edifices. It attempts to hide any inconsistencies which may exist at a micropolitical level. It is a politics of 'common sense', 'freedom', 'universal values', consistency, policy, determinate capacity, habit and unified subjectivities.

The attempts within 1990s Western contemporary art to gain some degree of political efficacy in wider culture have been hobbled by the ‘transgressive’ prescription which comes packaged and refined in the form of ‘abjection’. It has become a game of positions, prescribed actions and predefined responses. From the first chapter, I have made it clear that this thesis is not concerned with ‘getting-out’ of power. Indeed, the remainder of this thesis is concerned with *getting-into* power, that is, with engaging in the power relations produced in art practice to greater effect, through the affective capacities of artworks. One does not particularly have to do *anything* in order to engage with the tactical field of power relations. By simply existing as a point within it, regardless of whether one is (in the most obvious senses) producing discourse or producing silences, one is fully engaged in power relations. In these abstract terms, this thesis is concerned with the extent to which one can affect other points within a field of power relations. Practically, an artist inevitably enters into the power relations of wider culture in the production of any work. Whether artists seek to stifle discourse with their work, as in some of Adam Cullen’s work, or produce discursively engaging works, they nevertheless engage in art and wider cultural discourse.

If the intention of any artists is to affect wider culture, then their practice must resist the tendency towards *strategic* practice. If one adopts a strategy in order to deal with power, then one is at an immediate disadvantage. If one writes a manifesto, or declares oneself a revolutionary, a punk or a radical, then one’s agenda is set. Such subject positions establish molar ossified structures out of tactical intentions. Political subject positions demand uniform noncontradictory positions, acting through macropolitical strategies. On the other hand, if one adopts a micropolitics of tactics, contradiction and expediency become possible, indeed, they become tools which can be used with resistant intentions. To do this, art practice must work against the habits of its own discourse, to resist its own self-disciplined imperative to transgress. Art, or any other cultural activity for that matter, does not need to *smash the system*, or to rage against the machine. Rather, at a micropolitical level it needs to resist the rage that has become habitual.

This chapter has concentrated on elucidating the notions of power which found my examination of abjection, and which also found the ideas on ‘affect’ which I propose

in the final two chapters of this thesis. I have discussed the tactical rhizomatic character of power and the fragmentary fluidity of micropolitics. One may contend that in discussing notions of strategy versus tactics, macropolitics versus micropolitics, molarity versus molecularity and corporeal dys-organisation versus becoming-other that I have simply established binary terms. However, the intention is not to establish these as binary sets, and this should be made clear. I have not intended to provide simple choices of ‘a’ versus ‘b’. Rather these ‘binaries’ should be thought-of more in terms of the determinacy of ‘a’ versus the indeterminate potential of ‘∞’. I have attempted to strip-back the universalising notions which have dominated the discourses on the affect of artworks in the 1990s, to take the determinate aspects of strategy which underwrite the deployment of abjection as an art strategy, and subject them to a process of liquefaction. These notions may seem somewhat abstract at this point. However, in the light of these investigations on the tactical field of power, in the next chapter I will return to notions of the body. I will examine the ways in which the topography of the grotesque body was understood to be organised, and the ways in which its organisation was deployed politically.

Notes

ⁱ**Massumi, Brian**, “The Autonomy of Affect”, *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton, Blackwell Publications, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1996, pp. 220-221.

ⁱⁱ**Virilio, Paul**, *Pure War*, trans. Mark Polizotti, Semiotext(e), New York, USA, 1983, pp. 14-15.

ⁱⁱⁱI am thinking here particularly of the comparison Foucault makes between *scientia sexualis* and *ars erotica*, which is, in effect, a comparison between structure and tactics respectively. **Foucault, Michel**, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, Vintage Books, New York, USA, 1990, p. 70.

^{iv}I specifically mean ‘politics’ here in the sense of ‘macropolitics’, which is discussed later in this chapter.

^v**Clausewitz, Carl Von**, *On War*, trans. O.J. Matthijs Jolles, The Modern Library, Random House, New York, USA, 1943, p. 62.

^{vi}*ibid.*, p 64.

^{vii}**Gartner, Scott Sigmund**, *Strategic Assessment in War*, Yale University Press, New Haven, USA, and London, UK, 1997, p. 20.

^{viii}*ibid.*

^{ix}*ibid.*, p. 21.

^x**Descartes, Rene**, “Discourses on the Method, PartIV”, in *The Essential Descartes*, edited by Margaret D. Wilson, Meridian, New York, 1983, p.76.

^{xi}**Gartner**, loc. cit.

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^{xii} *Jean-Yves Thibaudet: Conversations with Bill Evans*, The Decca Record Company Ltd., London, 1997.

^{xiii} *Bill Evans: Conversations with Myself*, Verve, Los Angeles, USA, 1963.

^{xiv} **Thibaudet, Jean-Yves**, quoted in **Distler, Jed**, “Jean-Yves Thibaudet plays Bill Evans”, sleeve notes for *Jean-Yves Thibaudet: Conversations with Bill Evans*, The Decca Record Company Ltd., London, 1997.

^{xv} **Attali, Jacques**, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1985, p. 15. According to Attali, this is when “everything changed”, particularly when musicians became professionals performing for the European courts, and music was more widely transcribed.

^{xvi} These arrangements were transcribed by Jed Distler, Richard Rodney Bennett and Art Murphy.

^{xvii} **Thibaudet**, loc. cit.

^{xviii} **Stryker, Mark**, “Jean-Yves Thibaudet: Conversations with Bill Evans”, URL: <http://www.freep.com/fun/sj/qsound0413.4.html>, accessed 9/12/97, 12.30pm.

^{xix} *ibid.*

^{xx} **Thibaudet**, loc. cit.

^{xxi} **Heckman, Don**, “Jean-Yves Thibaudet: Conversations With Bill Evans”, *LA Times*, 4/5/97, n.p.

^{xxii} *ibid.* Of course, it should be noted here that Heckman puts into play an unchallenged notion of genius, which is inherently problematic, not least because it places Evans, ‘the genius’, beyond reproach. To announce genius is effectively to sign a blank check on Evans’ value, which always and inevitably places pretenders to his position, such as Thibaudet, at a critical disadvantage, where the best they can hope to achieve is to come a close second. In these terms, only absolute identity with Evans, actually *to be Evans*, is to achieve Bill Evans’s status. Again, a Platonistic dichotomy of original versus copy, in which the copy is always inferior, is put into operation: “it’s hard to imagine why anyone would want to hear transcriptions when the originals are so superior and so readily available”.

^{xxiii} I mean here the method which is suggested by organisations which govern classical piano examinations, such as the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) in Australia.

^{xxiv} **Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso**, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909”, *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Apollonio, London, UK, 1973.

^{xxv} **Dreyfus, Hubert. L.**, “The Current Relevance of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Embodiment”, URL: <http://www.focusing.org/dreyfus2.html>, accessed 12/11/97, 11.30am.

^{xxvi} *ibid.*

^{xxvii} IBM, “Deep Blue — biographies”, URL: <http://www.chess.ibm.park.org/deep/blue/biolinks.html> accessed 11.39am, 24/11/97.

^{xxviii} *ibid.*

^{xxix} **Gelernter, David**, “How hard is chess?”, *Time*, May 19, 1997, p. 113.

^{xxx} IBM, “Deep Blue — Frequently Asked Questions”, URL: <http://www.chess.ibm.park.org/deep/blue/faqs.html> accessed 11.38am, 24/11/97.

^{xxxi} *ibid.*

^{xxxii} **Dreyfus**, loc. cit.

^{xxxiii} *ibid.*

^{xxxiv} IBM, loc. cit.

^{xxxv} **Kasparov, Garry**, “IBM owes mankind a rematch”, *Time*, May 26th, 1997, p. 54.

^{xxxvi} *ibid.*

^{xxxvii} *ibid.*

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^{xxxviii}IBM, loc. cit.

^{xxxix}ibid.

^{xl}**De Certeau, Michel**, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, USA and London, UK, 1984, p.xix.

^{xli}ibid.

^{xlii}**Foucault**, op. cit., p. 87.

^{xliii}**Machiavelli, Niccoló**, *The Prince*, Orion Books, London, UK, 1995.

^{xliv}**Marx, Karl**, and **Engels, Friedrich**, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore, Orion Books, London, UK, 1996, pp.3-22.

^{xlv}**Foucault**, loc. cit.

^{xlvi}ibid., p. 82.

^{xlvii}ibid., p. 87.

^{xlviii}ibid., p. 83.

^{xlix}ibid., p. 85.

^libid., p. 94.

^{li}ibid.

^{lii}ibid., p. 93.

^{liii}ibid., p. 94.

^{liv}**Deleuze, Gilles**, and **Guattari, Félix**, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1987, p. 6.

^{lv}ibid., p. 7.

^{lvi}**Foucault**, loc. cit.

^{lvii}**Deleuze, Gilles** and **Guattari, Félix**, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1972, translated from French by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, 1983, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, p. 250.

^{lviii}This is similar to the point I have made in Chapter One. This process is similar to the way that, at the point at which incommensurable cultures meet and begin to have meaning for each other, there is instant commensurability, but with the qualification that each culture accommodates its understanding of the other in ways which are entirely of its own.

^{lix}**Jameson, Fredric**, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, New York, USA, 1991, p. 6.

^{lx}**Foucault**, loc. cit.

^{lxi}**Foucault, Michel**, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Penguin Books Australia Ltd., Ringwood, Australia, 1977, pp. 302-4.

^{lxii}ibid., p. 304.

^{lxiii}**Foucault, Michel**, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, Vintage Books, New York, USA, 1990, p. 95.

^{lxiv}**Deleuze, Gilles**, and **Guattari, Félix**, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1987, p. 20.

^{lxv}**Foucault**, op.cit., p. 93.

^{lxvi}ibid., p. 95.

^{lxvii}ibid., pp. 95-96. Indeed, this is a point which I reinforced in Chapter One against Greil Marcus's idea that there is a universal spirit of resistance.

^{lxviii}ibid., p. 96.

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Notes continued

^{lxi}**Foucault, Michel**, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality — Volume 3*, trans. Robert Hurley, Random House Inc., New York, USA, 1986.

^{lxx}I am particularly referring to the work of Foucault published posthumously, in the volume **Foucault, Michel**, *Technologies of the Self*, ed. Martin, Gutman and Hutton, The University of Massachusetts Press, Massachusetts, USA, 1988. In this work Foucault says that there are four major types of ‘technologies’ which enable power and culture, they are;

- (1) Technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform and manipulate things;
- (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification;
- (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject;
- (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p. 18)

Foucault’s own work has been primarily concerned with ‘technologies of power’ and ‘technologies of the self’.

^{lxxi}**Bartky, Sandra Lee**, “Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”, *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, ed. Diamond & Quinby, Northeastern University Press, Boston, USA, 1988. p. 81.

^{lxxii}**Deleuze, and Guattari**, op. cit., p. 213. Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis.

CHAPTER FIVE: TACTICAL BODIES

In Chapter Two I have discussed the ways in which ‘abjection’, in the wake of the NEA debate in 1989, was proposed as a significant method through which contemporary artists could affect wider culture, and as an efficacious strategy for contemporary art practice. I have shown that many artists internationally, adopted ‘abject art’ as a strategy of political efficacy. I have examined the character of this strategy, particular the axioms of the body upon which ‘abject’ strategies are based; that is, I have looked at the specific ‘truths’ and understandings of the body which normalise the body as an encapsulated, finished and individualised subjective unity. ‘Abject art’ takes this particular normalising basis for the understanding of corporeal organisation and, through divergences from this corporeal model, it attempts to affect its audience at a ‘micro’ psycho-political level, and at the same time affect wider culture at a macropolitical level. Basing itself upon Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection, ‘abject art’ claims to possess a definite, reproducible and universal potential to affect wider culture. To artists who deployed ‘abjection’ as a strategy of transgression, it seemed that one could effectively destabilise power by *dysorganising* the normalised notions of the body.

However, it emerged from Chapter Three that this strategy of the political deployment of the body, far from being universal, is contingent upon particular understandings of the topographical organisation of the body, idiosyncratic to our culture and time. This was illustrated by examining the ways in which the Sixteenth-Century notion of the ‘grotesque body’ is not commensurate with the notion of abjection, as it does not conceive of its bodily topography as one governed by the boundary of interior/exterior, subject/object. Within contemporary art discourses of the 1990s, much art has explored the notion of the fragmented body as a political strategy. However, in adopting a fundamentally psychoanalytical approach, such political deployments of the body have tended to be limited by the universalising problems of psychoanalytical discourses, particularly those inherent in Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection. The comparative examination of the grotesque body with the unified subject demonstrates that the body can be understood in

altogether different ways, which undermines the universalising claims made for ‘abjection’.

However, the purpose of Chapter Three was not to seek to invalidate concerns that contemporary artists may have with the body as a political tool. Sure enough, I have questioned the strategic use of Kristeva’s notions of abjection in contemporary art, however this is not to discount the possibility of there being other ways in which the political aspect of bodies may be useful in considering political efficacy in contemporary art. Indeed, this thesis seeks to engage with those discourses concerning ‘the body’ and the politics of its topography have been central to art’s discourses throughout the 1990s. Therefore, in the light of my examination of the tactical character of power in the previous chapter, this thesis now needs to examine the contingent character of the political aspect of bodies which operate and engage in that power, particularly in the corporeal politics of 1990s contemporary art.

In this chapter then, I return to the grotesque body. I will begin to consider the political dimension of the ways in which bodies are thought to be organised, and this will emerge as a key issue in the final chapter of this thesis. As I will argue in this chapter, different understandings of the body are accompanied by very different notions of the ways in which bodies can be affected to political ends. Specifically in terms of contemporary art, in the latter part of this chapter, ‘abject art’ provides a strategic dysorganisation of the body which is at all times framed by the normalised position of subjective unity. It may be possible in contemporary art practice to think of bodies in altogether different ways which are more tactical, contingent and more micropolitically efficacious in wider culture.

The Topography of Grotesque Bodies

As I have discussed at length in Chapter Three, the axioms of selfhood held by the folk of Sixteenth-Century France were paradigmatically different from those of contemporary Western culture. However, in that chapter I did not discuss at any length the engagement of folk culture in an ongoing conflict with the church, and the ways in which the grotesque self was deployed in resistance to church's own notions of self. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the Christian church attempted to install its proto-rationalist unified notions of the self within folk culture, closing off the grotesque body, and creating;

a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness.ⁱ

In response, the resistance of the 'folk' to the church's intentions is clearly manifested in the ways in which their culture sought to travesty the church's official culture. These festive travesties coincided with the church feasts and mocked their serious tone. The Church's feast of Epiphany, for example, coincided with the folks' "Feast of Beans",ⁱⁱ and for the folk culture's "Feast of Fools"ⁱⁱⁱ a mock abbot was erected.^{iv} Indeed, this ongoing antagonistic yet festive relationship between the church and the folk is clearly reflected throughout all five volumes of François Rabelais' novel. Rabelais' tales are scattered with gluttonous friars, festive travesties and irreverent images of the church.

In the first book of Rabelais' novel, Shrove Tuesday is known as the "Feast of Cattle Slaughter",^v the day upon which cattle are killed before Lent. For the folk it was a carnival day accompanied by an abundance of tripe left from the slaughter, lots of drinking, skittle playing and dancing:

The tripes were plentiful, as you will understand, and so appetizing that everyone licked his fingers^ö

After dinner they all rushed headlong to the Willow-grove; and there on the luxuriant grass they danced to the gay sound of the flutes and the sweet music of bagpipes^{vi}

Indeed, Shrove Tuesday (*mardi gras*) was an important date in the folk calendar of merry feasts,^{vii} leading up to the larger festivities of "Easter Laughter",^{viii} at the most solemn time of the Christian year. Similarly, in Rabelais' novel, the most

grandiose of Parisian churches is ridiculed when the character of Gargantua steals the church bells from Notre-Dame “for cow-bells to hang on the collar of his mare”.^{ix} Moreover, much of Rabelais’ oratorical narrative tone mocks the evangelical manner of the clergy, “in a gay and free travesty of the medieval methods of faith and persuasion”.^x For example, in the first book, to validate his tall-tale of the birth of Gargantua, born through his mother’s left ear, Rabelais cites Proverbs 13: 15; “the innocent believeth every word”, and St. Paul 1 Corinthians: 13; “charity believeth all”. Mikhail Bakhtin observes:

The entire passage is a brilliant parody of the medieval doctrine of faith, as well as the methods of defending and teaching it: through quotations from the Scriptures, intimidation, threats and accusations of heresy.^{xi}

The church was an important defining ‘other’ for Rabelaisian folk culture, and the resistance of its seriousness was central to the humour of the carnivalesque folk culture.

As I have examined in Chapter Three, the organisation of the grotesque body was not considered in the same way as the body of the unified subject. Indeed, the topography of the grotesque body was not merely where the folk and the church conflicted; it was vital to its politics of resistance. I have elucidated the characteristics of the grotesque body in the third chapter. However, in what ways was this topography deployed? Which particular aspects of its topography allow it to resist the church?

Bakhtin’s provides a particular suggestion of the ways in which the grotesque body was politically deployed, which is worth elucidating and considering here. He suggests that the grotesque body was essentially and centrally governed by a ‘vertical’ organisation of ‘high’ versus ‘low’:

‘Upward’ and ‘downward’ have here an absolute and strictly topographical meaning. ‘Downward’ is earth, ‘upward’ is heaven. Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts). Such is the meaning of ‘upward’ and ‘downward’ in their cosmic aspect, which in their purely bodily aspect, which is not clearly distinct from the cosmic, the upper part is the face or the head and the lower part is the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks.^{xii}

According to Bakhtin the ‘lower bodily stratum’ was the focus of Rabelaisian folk culture because it was this particular topographical aspect which lay at the heart of

their resistance to the church. Bakhtin and others, such as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White,^{xiii} claim that the lower bodily stratum signified the ‘lowness’ of materiality, through its proximity to the earth. The head is drawn upwards to the heavens, and the anus is drawn downwards to the earth.

As I have shown in Chapter Three, in Bakhtin’s explanation of the topography of the grotesque body, shit does not gain its meaning from the complication of bodily boundaries, as it would in Kristeva’s ‘abjection’ model. Rather, shit is invested with a humorous, regenerative, fertile and earthy character because of the topographical placing of the anus in the ‘lower bodily stratum’, close to the earth on the body, and thus opposite to heaven above.^{xiv}

Importantly then, as Bakhtin understands it, the lower bodily stratum was deployed as a strategy against the things that were ‘high’, namely the metaphysical and lofty pretensions of the church:

The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowing of all that is high, spiritual, ideal and abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body.^{xv}

Thus, for Bakhtin, the verticality of heaven above and earth below is the primary principle which determines the political deployment of the grotesque body against the church.

Indeed, for Bakhtin, the verticality of the digestive tract is central to this vertical political topography of the grotesque body. The digestive tract draws from the ‘upward’, from “the face or the head”^{xvi} and forces it ‘downward’ to “the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks”,^{xvii} in the singular directional movement of ‘motility’,^{xviii} from oral attraction to anal expulsion. Thus, eating is exaggerated because;

it debases the Catholic church and its rituals by bringing them down to the lower bodily stratum symbolised by food^{xix}

Indeed, this is reinforced particularly by the abundance of tripe,^{xx} itself the digestive tract of a cow:

Tripe, stomach, intestines are the bowels, the belly and the very life of man.^{xxi}

However, in locating the digestive tract as central to the political organisation of the grotesque body, Bakhtin employs an understanding to it which is not appropriate in important ways. Sure enough, Bakhtin is apt to draw our attention to the fact that the digestive tract is a major theme of Rabelais' novel. The *orifices* of the digestive tract, particularly the anus, are a strong theme throughout Rabelais' novel and, indeed, played a vital part in the social relations which held together the people's mass body. However, for Bakhtin, *the digestive tract itself* is not merely important, but essential. It presents itself as a rigid teleology, vital to life: "an important primary form of human culture"^{xxii}.

As I will explain here, Bakhtin overestimates the essential centrality of the digestive tract for the grotesque body, and in doing so, he employs an understanding of the organisation of the grotesque body which, for reasons which I shall elucidate, is not appropriate.

In Chapter Three I have discussed the ways in which rationalism colonised and effectively dismantled the grotesque body, and produced a different subjectivised regime of organised bodies. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call this more recent regime of understanding of the body, the "facialization of the entire body"^{xxiii}. Indeed, the Deleuze-Guattarian notion of 'faciality' is useful here in considering the way in which the contemporary subject is organised. For Deleuze and Guattari, faciality is characterised by hierarchical stratification, the white face, marked by its features indented as black holes. To be clear, Deleuze and Guattari's 'faciality' is not simply vertical because the normative aspect of the human face is vertical. Rather, 'faciality' is vertical because it refers to a stratified arrangement, the white face *above* the black holes of its features.^{xxiv} Indeed, the normative aspect of the human face *is* arranged in a stratified organisation of 'faciality', with its features arranged one above the other in a topographical hierarchy which values the 'high' holes above the 'low', but in strictly Deleuze-Guattarian terms, this is coincidental.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, Western culture arranges and organises aspects of itself in terms of vertical faciality. The notion of 'face' as it operates within Western culture is very Euro-specific; "The face is the typical European"^{xxv}. It is a specifically Christian phenomenon,^{xxvi} which has spread throughout the world, through the evangelism of the Christian missionaries. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari

say that people of cultures not strongly associated with the facialised European culture ('primitives', as Deleuze and Guattari refer to them), do not have a 'face' as such, at least not in the sense that the West thinks of its face:

'Primitives' may have the most human of heads, the most beautiful and spiritual, but they have no face and need none.

The reason is simple. The face is not universal.^{xxvii}

The vertical stratified understanding of the body (which founds Bakhtin's understanding of the digestive tract), the process of the "facialization of the entire body"^{xxviii} arises alongside the privatisation of the body, with the emergence of early capitalism. Indeed, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the anus was the first organ to be privatised, coinciding with the abstracted expression of the flows of desire, in the form of money. At that time, the anus underwent "an individual overinvestment", and its "collective disinvestment".^{xxix} As bodies are individualised, and their organs traced and accounted for in terms of interconnecting quasi-economic functions, the body becomes facialised: "Hand, breast, stomach, penis and vagina, thigh, leg and foot, all come to be facialised."^{xxx} With this collective disinvestment there is a loss of the 'horizontal' of the people's mass body. Bodies are individualised, they become determinate, and as labour is divided they become socially functional *only* through a nexus of economically-determined relations. In Deleuzian terms, the people's mass body is never molar, regardless of its collective unity. Rather it is molecular because even as a mass body, it is never closed-off, finished, completed and privatised. It remains mobile. The facialisation of the body rigidifies their local connections into a capitalist economic system of exchange, its molecular mass transforms into molarities, into interchangeable individuals.

The contemporary vertical 'facialised' body is indicative of the organisation of the contemporary body, to the extent that any organisation of topography not familiar to this body is divested of meaning. For the 'facialised' rationalist body, the grotesque body becomes *grotesque* in the common contemporary sense; it becomes threatening and horrific. Those bodies depicted in the *grotesca* of Titus' bath, whose fragments meld together with plant and animal life, defy these verticalised norms, and in our contemporary regime of the unified subject, they become horrific. A literal example

of this 'grotesque' disorganisation of faciality can be found in Maurice

Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*:

If someone is lying on a bed, and I look at him from the head of the bed, the face is for a moment normal. It is true that the features are in a way disarranged, and I have some difficulty in realizing that the smile is a smile, but I feel that I could, if I wanted to, walk around the bed, and I seem to see through the eyes of the spectator standing at the foot of the bed. If the spectacle is protracted, it suddenly changes its appearance: the face takes on an utterly unnatural aspect, its expressions become terrifying, and the eyelashes and eyebrows assume an air of materiality such as I have never seen in them. For the first time I really see the inverted face as if this were its 'natural' position: in front of me I have a pointed, hairless head with a red, teeth-filled orifice in the forehead and, where the mouth ought to be, two moving orbs edged with glistening hairs and underlined with stiff brushes.^{xxx1}

Here, the stratified arrangement of the face is disorganised merely by inversion.

Yet, for the habits of subjectivity which dominate Western rationalist culture, this simple inverted disorganisation of faciality renders the organs of the face as 'monstrous' to the contemporary subject.

In contemporary Western culture, faciality is the normalised organisation given to subjectivity, the 'face' of the unified subject. Thus, to create a face is to create a facade, and the suggestion of unified subjectivity. Moreover, disorganisation of the facialised body, or rather, any differences or divergences from faciality within a body, tend to call into question the unity and subjectivity of a body. Bodies without an organisation along the lines of a normalised template of faciality, the dysorganised bodies, that is, de-faced bodies, freaks, clowns, deformed faces or bodies and defaced public statues, are regarded as disunified and desubjectivised under a regime in which the facial is equated with the subjective. In contemporary Western culture, to take away the face, to cover it with an iron mask, to displace its features, to organise it differently, is to defile the subject in an abhorrent act, to make it objectionable and 'abject'.^{xxxii}

In contemporary terms, the grotesque body is as monster. Within the dominant regime of facialised bodies of our time and culture, the grotesque body, or indeed any body whose boundaries are indeterminate, whose interiors and exteriors are blurred, whose topography is not conceived in terms of physiology, of organs, is highly problematic. Our image of a body organised along different principles is as a part-human, like a Victorian circus show freak; the Elephant-Man or the Wolf-Man. Their compromised unity is horrific to the contemporary rationalist conception of

subjectivity: They are monstrous. Their hyphenated categorisation is analogous to the way in which their status is most often regarded. The logic of identity forbids the Wolf-Man from being all-wolf *and* all-man, so he must then be part-wolf and part-man. Part of his corporeal organisation is that of a wolf, and part is that of a man, that is to say, organs of the wolf are sutured to those of the man. Man and wolf in common occupy molar positions in identity. We are sure we know what organs constitute a man, and which constitute a wolf, just as we can see a B-grade werewolf movie and know exactly which parts of the wolf-man are prosthetic, and which parts are the actor.

In contemporary culture, we find it difficult to conceive of bodies which do not fit the template of unified subjectivity without considering them as molarities sutured together. The grotesca of Titus' bath may well appear like a perverse Frankensteinian creation. We regard its forms as *parts* of bodies, animals and plants stuck together in an order which seems to want to resist such an arrangement. They appear as identifiable molarities which are synthetic, as opposed to natural. However, if we understand this 'unnatural' arrangement in a way which is not primarily in terms of neat *borders of subjectivities*, then they are not simply molarities agonistically forced together. Rather they constitute a molecular body, that is a 'body' made up of mobile and interchangeable parts. If we can understand this, then we are beginning to approach the understanding of the grotesque body in a way appropriate to the Rabelaisian folk.

Bakhtin goes far towards demonstrating the extent to which the grotesque body differed in important ways from the body of the unified subject. However, the 'verticality' in Bakhtin's reading of the grotesque body applies to it a facialised organisation which is peculiar to contemporary Western culture, and alien to the pre-capitalist and pre-rationalist culture of the Sixteenth-Century Rabelaisian folk. He sees the grotesque body as organised vertically, in terms of the upper and lower strata, centred on the digestive tract's relation to a classical topology of 'high' and 'low'.^{xxxiii} In conceiving of this kind of vertical organisation, Bakhtin forgets something which he makes so clear elsewhere; that the grotesque body was principally organised 'horizontally', *across* culture, through indeterminate social relations and indistinct bodily boundaries.

For the grotesque body, ‘organs’ *cut across* ‘individual’ bodies, taking in parts of ‘individual’ physiologically-defined organs and excluding others. The orifices, particularly the anus and the mouth, are central to the culture of the grotesque body, but not, as Bakhtin suggests, because of the flow of the digestive tract from attraction to expulsion. Rather, orifices were the points at which the molecularity of the people’s mass body is held together. They were the points at which the world passed through an individual, and the interface of social relations. Practically, in this sense there was no individualised physiology of a digestive tract as such, only the people’s collective mouth or anus. So, there is certainly an axiomatic quasi-ontological principle governing the grotesque body, however it is not the vertical character of the digestive tract and the relation of its end to heaven or earth. Rather, the governing principle of the grotesque body has a far more fluid organisation in the form of the continuous, singular, corporal, materiality of the people’s mass body.

To be clear, I am not claiming that the grotesque body was without organisation. Sure enough, it was an organised body to the extent that it subscribed to a central axiom of selfhood and organising principle from which the practical understandings of its bodies emanated. However, while being organised, the grotesque folk culture produced bodies in an unindividuated way. It was this principle of collectivity which resisted the imposition of Christian individuality. As such, the bodies which constituted the wider people’s mass body were indeterminate, that is, their boundaries could not be easily traced and mapped. Sure enough, there is still a quasi-ontology at work in locating the people’s mass body as the central organising principle of the grotesque body. However, if one takes the people’s mass body as the central principle around which the grotesque body is organised, then one allows for the degree of fluidity and indeterminacy of social relations, more congruous and relevant to the pre-capitalist and pre-rationalist culture of the Rabelaisian folk than that which Bakhtin provides.

Bakhtin identifies all of these important aspects of that culture, yet adds structure to it by imposing a verticality which understands bodies as structured, distinct and finished individuals. The political bodily topography deployed in the grotesque body was not structured and strategic, to counter the structure of the church.

Rather, the grotesque body was a soup of indeterminate bodies. Accordingly, the vertical stratified hierarchy of the church was resisted with this horizontality of the people's mass body. The people's mass body, the folk, were tactically slippery. When the church most demanded solemnity of its flock, when it demanded that the hierarchy of the church be observed, it was at these times that the folk congealed most coherently into carnival culture. Thus, the strategic hierarchical structure of the church was resisted by the tactical fluidity of the people's mass body: Vertical versus horizontal, strategy versus tactics.

In the second chapter of this thesis, it was indicated that the discourses of Western contemporary art in the 1990s have frequently sought to address the materiality of the body, particularly as a method of political efficacy. Indeed, in that chapter I have particularly focussed on the wave of 'abject art' which attempted to do this following the NEA debate. However, as I have argued, to base discourses relating to corporeality upon psychoanalytic foundations is problematic and tends towards essentialising the materiality of the body. If art and theoretical discourses are to refigure the body as a non-essentialised materiality, which can be deployed in a culturally efficacious way, then we must rethink certain aspects of 'the body'. One such aspect is the way in which we regard the body away from a 'strategic' body, as operated in notions of abjection, and rather begin to consider a 'tactical' use of bodies.

The grotesque people's mass body seems to provide an outline of the tactical deployment of indeterminate bodies. However, it owes a great deal of its notions of corporeality to the absence of the privatised capitalist economy, which transformed the people's mass body into the mass of people's bodies, and contemporary physiology, which also individualised the body and mapped its organs in terms of economy and exchange. However, it is impossible to recuperate the people's mass body. One cannot simply yearn for an earlier age, an earlier notion of corporeality and economy. To deploy the topography of bodies in efficacious ways, we do not need to establish another organisation, another structure. At the same time, neither should we look for a 'natural' organisation, in a raw domain beneath the acculturation of the West in the Twentieth Century. Rather, we need to think about political efficacy in art in much more tactical ways. We need to look toward

creating art practices which seek to rethink, rather than simply *dysorganise*, the organisation of the body. Indeed, the notion of ‘the body’ as it has been thought in recent art needs to be addressed and reconsidered.

Tactical Bodies

The significance and meaning of fragmented bodies, and their potential political dimension, is a conditional matter. This I have made clear in Chapter Three, in comparing the ‘fragmentation’ in the horror of abjection and that in the humour of the grotesque. I have also shown in that chapter that much Western contemporary art in the 1990s has focussed on a strategic deployment of the materiality of the body. Particularly, much of this art has explored the fragmentation of bodies, as attempts at micropolitical interventions in the way in which bodies are discursively produced within contemporary culture. However, in the course of this, in adopting a primarily Kristevan psychoanalytical paradigm of selfhood, there has been the return of more thoroughgoing essentialised understandings of corporeal materiality, and the more rigid normalisation of facialised understandings of the body. For much of this art, the unified subject remains the default understanding of the body, understood as a political edifice, and the fragmentation of its unity is considered as politically effective, without qualification. However, rather than adhering to such determinate notions of the body and to strategies determined by default understandings of its organisation, it is useful to look for a certain instance at which possibilities open up. In concluding this chapter, I will briefly recapitulate the way in which non-facialised bodies have been conceived in terms of both abjection and the grotesque, and also consider a different, potentially more productive, notion of bodily fragmentation.

Returning again to the ‘abject’ work of Jake and Dinos Chapman, their mannequins are, to a significant extent, typical of the kind of ‘transgressive’ abject art strategy which has dominated contemporary art discourse since the early 1990s. Like similar work by artists such as Robert Gober, Tony Oursler, Paul McCarthy, Patricia Piccinini and Kiki Smith, the work of the Chapman brothers depicts human bodies which are ‘problematised’. They are disunified, their boundaries are indistinct and often depicted as agonised in their organisation. Indeed, as an article in *Flash Art* in 1996 notes, there has been a “proliferation” of artworks similar to the Chapman Brothers’ mannequins in the 1990s.^{xxxiv} With the Chapman Brothers’ works, the orifices of the bodies of these mannequins are prolific and displaced. In *Zygotic acceleration, biogenetic desublimated libidinal model*, 1995 (Plate 37), numerous

prepubescent bodies are joined together like serial conjoined twins. It is not clear which limbs 'belong' to which torso, their genders are indeterminate, and on a number of the faces, noses have become penises and mouths have become anuses. Between the cheeks of individual faces there are vaginas. One head's penis-nose penetrates the anus-mouth of one of its conjoined siblings. These are bodies are not organised as unified subjects. The rearrangement of faciality lies at the epicentre of the Chapman Brothers' fragmentation of the default rationalist body. For example, an Italian art dealer refused to show their work in his gallery so, as revenge, Dinos and Jake Chapman made a life-size model of his head, severed from its body, and replaced his nose with a penis.^{xxxv} They then produced a porn video, *Bring me the Head of Ö*, 1995 (*Plate 38*), with the dick-headed mannequin.

Plate 37

Plate 38

However, importantly, these bodies are not simply disorganised, but *dysorganised*. That is, is it not simply the case that the organisation of these bodies is merely different from a particular corporeal model, but rather its organisation is *unfavourably* compared with a particular corporeal model, as dysfunctional. Their particular topographical organisation directly plays on the unified subject as the *natural* organisation of the body. The organisational topographies of the Chapman mannequins' bodies are pathological, because the rationalist unified subject is taken as the baseline, as the ground-zero of normality. Indeed, the fake forests in which many of these mannequins are placed further reinforce the implied unnaturalness of the organisation of these bodies. They are bodies which are wholly contextualised by a facialised normalisation of the body. They are post-facialised, that is, they are facialised bodies which have been rearranged.

Both the Chapman Brothers' mannequins and the grotesca of Titus' Baths (*Plates 39 & 40*) depict bodies which are indistinct and not clearly unified, organised and subjectivised. Ostensibly, they are dysorganised in a similar way. However, the vital difference between them lies in their cultural contexts. Unlike the Chapman mannequins, the fragmented indeterminate bodies of the grotesca, particularly around the time that they were rediscovered and excavated, were not contextualised in relation to a normalised unified subject. There *are* certain arguments, most notably those put forward by Wolfgang Kayser,^{xxxvi} and backed by Philip Thomson,^{xxxvii} that the Twentieth-Century notion of the grotesque, as an 'abject' horrific phenomenon, is its immutable and universal meaning. Indeed, Kayser argues that

Plate 39 & 40

right the way through the works of Fabullus,^{xxxviii} FranÁois Rabelais,^{xxxix} Raphael,^{xl} Hieronymus Bosch,^{xli} Pieter Breugel,^{xlii} Henri Fuseli,^{xliii} Georgio De Chirico,^{xliv} Yves Tanguy^{xlv} and Savador Dali,^{xlvi} the spirit of the grotesque remains the same.^{xlvii} Likewise, Thomson takes this almost proto-Kristevan argument and agrees that the irresolvability of the grotesque is inevitably horrifying.^{xlviii} Thomson argues that this is because “the grotesque mode in art and literature tends to be prevalent in societies and eras marked by strife, radical change or disorientation”.^{xlix}

However, although indeterminate bodies figure in all the works which Kayser cites across the two millennia span he covers, the meaning of indeterminate bodies has mutated. To be clear, the positive Rabelaisian notion of the grotesque, of the generative and productive indeterminate body, belongs to a particular time and place, in Europe, in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century. Indeed, at the time that the grotesca were produced, in Roman culture in 81 A.D., the melding of bodies in the frescoes did not have any particular resonance with the classical self, indeed they were regarded as a “new barbarian manner”.¹ As Vitruvius, writing during the reign of Augustus, notes:

For our contemporary artists decorate the walls with monstrous forms rather than reproducing clear images of the familiar world. Instead of columns they paint fluted stems with oddly shaped leaves and volutes. The little stems, finally support half-figures crowned by human or animal heads.ⁱⁱ

However, during the excavations of Rome in the Fifteenth Century, the forms of the grotesca struck a more resonant chord. Raphael, who was the Chief Architect and Prefect of Antiquities at the Vatican, immediately appropriated the form of the grotesca for the decoration of the Vatican Loggias,^{lii} in 1515,^{liii} and;

although it [the grotesca] had seemed to Vitruvius to embody the spirit of decadence and absurdity, it now seemed the pure sign of vitality, confidence, mastery and inspiration.^{liv}

Fifteenth-Century Europe was both post-Classical, and pre-facialised. Thus, the indeterminate boundaries of the bodies in the grotesca were not regarded as horrific, as the Twentieth Century finds them, as much as they were no longer considered ‘barbaric’, as Vitruvius understood them. In Raphael’s adoption of grotesque ornamentation, we see the same generative and positive aspects of such bodies as

those in Rabelais' novel. Indeed, other Renaissance artists, Agostino Veneziano, Pinturicchio, Filippino Lippi, and Signorelli, also appropriated the grotesca.^{lv}

The important point here is that there is nothing *essentially* different between the art of the grotesque and the mannequins of Dinos and Jake Chapman. That is to say, that despite their obvious differences in materials and aesthetics, they are similar in their depiction of bodies as fragmented and indeterminate. However, it is their historical relation to the facialised unified subject, which make them very different. The grotesque is pre-facialised, while 1990s 'abject art' is dysfacialised.

However, now I wish to turn to a third artwork here to begin to consider a different kind of conception of bodies in contemporary works of art, which is neither pre-facialised nor dysfacialised, but rather imagines the fragmented organisation of the body in far more molecularised and micropolitical terms. In 1997, Oleg Kulik, a Russian performance artist exhibited his work *I Bite America, and America Bites Me (Plate 41)*. Kulik's performance is obviously a travesty of the spiritualism and shamanism of Joseph Beuys's performance, *I love America and America Loves Me*, at Rene Block Gallery in Soho, New York, in 1974. Beuys had arrived in the USA at Kennedy Airport, and was transported directly to the gallery by ambulance.

Similarly Kulik;

passed through customs at Kennedy Airport. Entered a waiting van, stripped off his clothing, put on a dog coat, collar, leash and muzzle and began communicating only in canine-speak.^{lvi}

Instead of Beuys's negotiation of some 'essence' of humanity with that of an animal, Kulik attempts to occupy both positions and render such essentialistic negotiations redundant. He walks around on all fours, wearing nothing but a dog collar and pads on his hands and knees, his new 'dog' feet. Kulik is restrained by a chain attached to his collar, and is lead through the audience of the exhibition. He acts out a dog. Or rather, to look at it another way, he does not simply imitate a dog, but takes on the organisation of a dog. His bearded face becomes the hairy face of a dog, his knees and hands become the feet. He is covered with faeces, growls at the audience, and occasionally bites people.

Of course, Kulik is never convincingly a whole dog. At the same time, this man on all fours is not quite a human, in a normative sense. He has taken on some of the

'organs' of a dog. He has converted his hands and knees into paws and his mouth into a muzzle. To some extent, the Kulik-dog is similar to the bodies of the grotesca. He has some of the organisation of a human, and some of a dog, but fails in being either of these molarities convincingly. We might easily say, in terms of what Kulik *is*;

Plate 41

‘Kulik is trying to be a dog’. At the same time, in terms of what Kulik *is not*; ‘Kulik is not a dog’. To a Kristevan, Kulik’s performance would probably be considered as an attempt at abject being, with confused boundaries, fragmented and disunified. To a Rabelaisian, Kulik may be grotesque, full of the endless generative potentialities of an indistinct body. However, in Deleuzian terms, Kulik is *becoming-dog*. He is like Brian Massumi’s example of a man who decides to become a dog: “dogs, it seems, are never hungry. So the man decides to become a dog.”^{lvii} In Massumi’s illustration, the man begins to walk on all fours, puts shoes on his hands, as well as his feet, in order to make his feet and hands into paws:

He is not imitating a dog; he is ‘diagramming.’ He analyses step-by-step the qualities of two molar species. In other words, he gradually extracts from each body a set of affects: ways in which the body can connect with itself and with the world.^{lviii}

In this way, the man attempts to re-organise himself, organ by organ, into a dog. However, in Massumi’s example the man’s becoming-dog fails: “The tail defies transformation”.^{lix} In this example, the man-becoming-dog turns back and becomes man again.

As much as one may argue that Kulik is obviously *not* a dog, he is not simply ‘playing’ a dog, as a *New York Times* review notes:

[Kulik’s] efficiency is striking. There is nothing extra, superfluous or obscure about Kulik’s performance. For all intents and purposes, he IS a dog: he can be scary and unpredictable and territorial.^{lx}

During a similar dog performance in Sweden in 1997, he bit a critic, and in one of his performance in America in 1997 he bit a child, and caused considerable controversy as a result.^{lxi} His attacks made his performances all the more ‘dangerous’. If the audience had once assumed an element of theatricality in Kulik’s performance, that was broken with the biting incidents, which seemed to be more animalistic than people were prepared to accept. After that point, the organisation of the Kulik-dog was not quite so determinate. Kulik is no longer a man-pretending-to-be-a-dog, but rather these molarities molecularise. This is not simply a theoretical conceit that I am attempting here. This work playfully mocks and actually destabilises the essentialised molar categories of both ‘man’ and ‘dog’. Where does one posit man-ness, or dog-ness? Is it the material organisation of

Kulik that makes him a man? Or, on the other hand, is it the organisation of his behaviour that makes him a man? Indeed, to what extent are material organisation of bodies and behaviours organisations indistinguishable? What is to say that a human knee is not a paw when Kulik is on all fours?

Unlike the 'abject' dysorganised body in the work of the Chapman Brothers, or the prefacialised grotesque body, the Kulik-dog's organisation is unstable. In a culture in which subjective molarities are axiomatic, it is never convincingly supported by its context. Its 'organs' are indeterminate. From one moment to the next, the organs of his body oscillate tactically somewhere between the molarities of man and dog. The organisation of the Kulik-dog's body is not facialised, but neither is it simply dysorganised and dysfacialised. That is to say, whereas the Chapman Brothers' mannequins ultimately reinforce a normalised and naturalised default body by deliberate deviations from it, conversely, Kulik's performance questions this very 'nature'. Kulik's dog differs significantly from the Chapman Brothers' mannequins because it is not entirely framed and enabled by subjective unity. The affect of the Chapman mannequins is entirely contextualised by the normalised facialised rationalist body. Sure enough, Kulik's dog takes this as a point of departure, as a molarity to be molecularised, *but not as a baseline*.

To be clear, I am not holding up Kulik's *I Bite America, and America Bites Me* as some kind of ideal method for efficacious art practice. Rather, the point here is that this work begins to approach the use of bodies in contemporary art which rethink aspects of its materiality and micropolitics. In this respect, Kulik is certainly, in a fairly rudimentary way, heading in the direction of rethinking the understandings of the body in contemporary art in a more Deleuzean way, which engages in the tactical field of power without reinforcing molarities and notions of what is 'natural'.

Kulik's *I Bite America, and America Bites Me* avoids molarities, and achieves a kind of molecularity by 'failure'. Sure enough, Kulik fails in becoming a dog. He can get to the point where he has not achieved the molarity of 'dog', however, he is still becoming-dog even though the process is incomplete. His failure in actually becoming a dog is successful in its lack of completion. He never achieves the molarity of being 'dog', but he succeeds in achieving the molecularity of becoming-dog. Indeed, the constant molarising tendencies of our culture's plane of

organisation become very useful in that they ensure this failure. Rationality dictates that Kulik cannot become a dog, so, his attempt to become a dog is always between molarities. As Massumi suggests, the most effective way of becoming-other, and thus escaping molarising forces of our culture, is to achieve a constant becoming-other, by *becoming what you cannot be*, to be in a state of interminable becoming-other.^{lxii}

For Deleuze and Guattari, the most disorganised *and* most organised abstract body is the Body without Organs. It is the *nth* degree of both organisation and disorganisation. In a way, the Body without Organs is the point at which both organisation and disorganisation meet at their extremes. All ‘bodies’ (in the very broadest sense of the word) are organised. Take, for example, the bodies upon which I have concentrated; the grotesque, organised upon a horizontal fluid movement across the people’s mass body; the unified subject’s body, organised vertically, facially, and contained by skin, along the lines of interior and exterior. The Body without Organs contains all multiplicities of organisation: As Elizabeth Grosz notes:

The BwO [Body without Organs] is a tendency to which all bodies, whatever their organisation, aspire.^{lxiii}

To take Deleuze and Guattari’s analogy of an egg, the surface of the Body without Organs is inscribed with every possible organisation, every point of its surface is lined, so that every possible organisation of the body is present in potential, yet no organisation is actualised or dominant. It exists only on the plane of immanence, as an ideal if you will. Thus the Body without Organs can never be actualised. The closest point that a ‘body’ can get to the *nth* degree (dis)organisation of the Body without Organs is ‘becoming’. Of course, any attempt of a human body to become a Body without Organs, is inevitably restrained by the very insistent default model of the body. Human bodies inevitably gravitate towards the current dominant axioms of selfhood. Sure, the Body without Organs is an impossible actual state, but a body-becoming-Body-without-Organs achieves a state which, while failing at being an absolutely molecularised Body without Organs, also fails to be a unified molarised body. It becomes indeterminate.

While one is in a state of becoming, one cannot adopt a molar strategic position, or have one imposed. Practically, if one resists unified subject positions by always travelling between positions, one resists identification, indeed, one becomes slippery in the extreme. In terms of macropolitics, for instance, if one identifies oneself with the Left, then one is connected to a political molarity, with a structure of predetermined relations to particular axioms, principles and strategies. If, on the other hand, one's relation to all political molarities is expedient, then one is not tied to any structure. Macropolitically, one enters a state of becoming. By common understandings of politics, one would become the *worse* kind of politician: unprincipled, unpredictable, disloyal and politically expedient. However, such expedient politics is contingent and tactical. In terms of the political organisation of bodies, The Kulik-dog does not go as far as becoming a Body without Organs, but it does become, at least for a limited time, a tactical body, a body with indeterminate organs, a molecularity of bodies, with an indeterminate capacity to affect and be affected, unpredictable, unstable and affective.

The Capacity to Affect and to be Affected

Within the Deleuzian theoretical milieu, a body is not simply a predetermined default body. That is, a ‘body’ is not necessarily the human body in its default, normative, individualised, physiological sense. Whereas other theoretical discourses, such as psychoanalysis, may talk of ‘*the* body’, Deleuzian discourses tend towards speaking of ‘bodies’ in the multiple. The term ‘the body’ implies an essentiality of all human bodies, which can be reduced to a singular and universal corporeal model of *the* body. It assumes a commonality of all bodies, and glosses over all actual differences to present a supposedly universal undifferentiated body. As Moira Gatens notes:

Discourses which employ the image of the unified political body assume that the metaphor of the human body is a coherent one, and of course it’s not.^{lxiv}

As Gatens argues, such supposedly undifferentiated images of ‘the body’ actually normalise the male body as ‘*the* body’, with the “female-bits” inset:

Representations of the human body are most often of the male body and, perhaps, around the borders, one will find insets of representations of the female reproductive system.^{lxv}

‘The body’, this quasi-empirical ‘neutral’ body, supposedly undifferentiated by sex, gender, race, class and physical ability, is inevitably an embodiment, literally, of particular Twentieth-Century, Western, bourgeois, patriarchal normalised values. On the other hand, the Deleuzian use of the term ‘bodies’ is a far less insistent nomenclature. It allows for difference, and does not prescribe a particular type of body.

Moreover, and significantly here, the term ‘bodies’ allows us to talk of corporation in an abstract sense, without necessarily invoking any particular organic corporeality of human bodies and any attendant assumptions. Indeed, at a simple level in everyday usage, ‘body’ does not necessarily mean *human* body, such as a body of water, a body of work, a body of a motor vehicle or an astronomical body:

A body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity.^{lxvi}

Indeed, in Deleuzian terms, ‘bodies’ can be considered on an entirely *virtual* plane. This is apparent with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the Body without Organs.

Earlier, I referred to the Body without Organs in relation to human bodies, however, it can be applied in relation to any ‘body’. Indeed, the Body without Organs accommodates *all* ‘bodies’ as well as all ‘organisation’. Unlike ‘the body’ as an essentialised universal model, which inevitably excludes other bodies in its claims to commonality, the Body without Organs is inclusive of all kinds of ‘bodies’, to the nth degree.

Deleuze extrapolates much of this non-default notion of bodies from his reading of the work of Benedict de Spinoza. Spinoza belongs to the same early-rationalist age as Rene Descartes, in the Seventeenth Century. However, Spinoza’s understanding of the world, and the relation of human bodies to it, differs fundamentally from Descartes’ dualism. Spinoza does *not* conceive of the human body as the motor force of the brain, like a machine with homogeneous boundaries.^{lxvii} As Gatens notes:

Human being is conceived as part of a dynamic and interconnected whole, distinguishable from other bodies only by means of speed and slowness, motion and rest, of the parts which compose it. The human body is understood by Spinoza to be a complex individual, made up on a number of other bodies. It’s identity can never be viewed as a final or finished product as in the case of the Cartesian automaton, since it is a body that is in constant interchange with its environment. Spinoza understands the body as a nexus of variable interconnections, a multiplicity.^{lxviii}

Indeed, the notion of the people’s mass body has some resonance with the Spinozist world view. For the Rabelaisian folk culture, an individual human body is only one kind of body among others; the people’s mass body is a valid ‘body’, just as the individual human bodies within it, and the ‘bodies’ which make up the human body. Similarly, Spinoza’s conception of the human body is open, capable of understanding itself beyond the boundaries defined by contemporary physiology:

The human body is radically open to its surroundings and can be composed, recomposed and decomposed by other bodies.^{lxix}

Like the people’s mass body, Spinoza’s conception of bodies is inevitably indeterminate, tied to the interchangeable relations between the individual bodies within the larger social body. So, with Spinoza, the term ‘body’ is loosened to the extent that the definitional criteria become broad. As Deleuze summarises:

How does Spinoza define a body? A body, of whatever kind is defined by Spinoza in two simultaneous ways. In the first place, a body, however small it might be, is

composed of an infinite number of particles, that define the body, the individual body. Secondly, a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies' it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality.^{lxx}

Taking his cues from Spinoza's *Ethics*,^{lxxi} Deleuze calls this consideration of the ways in which a body affects, or is affected by other bodies, 'ethology'.^{lxxii}

This Deleuzo-Spinozist ethology takes into consideration the dynamic and mobile relations between bodies:

Ethology is first of all the study of relations of speed and slowness^{lxxiii}

Bodies relate to one another at different times, in ways which are entirely contingent upon the idiosyncrasies of that particular relation at that particular time, therefore the result of their encounter, their affect upon each other, is not simply predictable.

Gatens summarises Deleuze's 'ethology' clearly:

Bodies of all sorts are in constant relation with other bodies; some of these relations are compatible and give rise to joyful affects which may in turn increase the intensive capacity of a body; others are incompatible relations which give rise to sad and debilitating affects which at their worst may entirely destroy a body's integrity. A third sort of relation occurs when two bodies encounter one another in a non-reciprocal manner such that the more powerful body captures the less powerful.

Thus:

A paradigm case of a relation which enhances one body whilst destroying the other is eating.^{lxxiv}

However, while Gatens talks of one body being 'more powerful' than another, this 'powerfulness' (or, more accurately, this capacity to affect) is not fixed, it does not necessarily determine the outcome. A perfect (and poetically ironic) example of the contingent power relations of bodies is Julia Kristeva's encounter with the skin on milk in the introduction of *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*:

When my eyes see or lips touch that skin on the surface of milk—Harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring—I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoking tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire.^{lxxv}

Kristeva offers this anecdote as an experiential example of the universality of abjection. However, her example is personal, contingent on her own particular organisation, her own 'speeds and slownesses'. For another person encountering

this milk skin or, ethologically speaking, for a different human-body encountering this milk-body, the milk may well be digested, engulfed and disintegrated. In a structural and predetermined world Kristeva's capacity to affect the creamy skin of milk should be far greater than of the milk to affect her. Nevertheless, her *capacity to be affected* by the milk momentarily allows the milk to 'disintegrate' her.

Deleuze's ethology is not simply a matter of mathematical equations. It is not simply the case that the body with greater capacity to affect will overcome a body with a lesser capacity to affect. Ethology is not about structured body versus structured body, such as the quantifiable force of Deep Blue versus the quantifiable force of Deep Thought in a game of chess in which there are preset rules and a preset value of each piece. This ethology does not regard bodies simply as organisms with known quantities and qualities. Unlike Kristeva's theory of abjection, based on an essential psycho-biological drive, which presumes to know exactly what a human body is capable of, exactly its capacity to affect and to be affected, an ethological view makes no claims in advance of any bodies meeting:

biology lays down rules and norms of behaviour and action, whereas ethology does not claim to know, in advance, what a body is capable of doing or becoming.^{lxxvi}

Thus, despite what may be implied by Deleuze's use of the term 'ethology', which derives directly from Spinoza's work, *Ethics*, it is not a system of *morality*, because morality, like strategy, is framed by predetermined principles, policy and rules. As Gatens notes:

If we understand a rule-based morality as one which addresses itself to molar subjects, then ethology may be understood as offering an ethics of the molecular — a micropolitics concerned with the 'in-between' of subjects, with that which passes between them.^{lxxvii}

Ethology, then, is not concerned with rules of conduct between default bodies, but rather the power relations between 'bodies', whatever they may be.

Indeed, the 'in-between' of bodies, to which Gatens refers, is what Foucault would call power relations. Power relations are the affective relations between bodies — the ways in which bodies affect one another. This ethological concern with power relations between bodies highlights a vital point in understanding the operations of power:

Every individual is a 'degree of power', in the midst of other bodies, which both affect and are affected by, that individual.^{lxxviii}

To be clear, *there are always two components to any power relation: the capacity to affect, and the capacity to be affected.* Indeed, the capacity for a body to affect means little without knowing the capacity of its corresponding body to be affected. It is only at the point when connection between bodies is actualised that the affect is known for certain. (Of course, it is not then simply the case that no power relation can be guessed at. While bodies are not fixed, they are often habituated. This inevitably has some bearing on power relations. I will return to the question of habit and bodies in Chapter Seven.)

The difference between power at a virtual level and then at an actualised level is illustrated well by the fact that in the French language there are two words for 'power': 'puissance' and 'pouvoir'. Throughout their collaboration, Deleuze and Guattari remain sensitive to the important difference between virtual and actual power. Since there is only one word in English, in translating *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi finds it necessary to provide an explanation of this distinction in the translator's foreword:

POWER: Two words for 'power' exist in French, *puissance* and *pouvoir*. In Deleuze and Guattari, they are associated with very different concepts (although the terminological distinction is not consistently observed). *Puissance* refers to a range of potential. It has been defined by Deleuze as a 'capacity for existence,' 'a capacity to affect or be affected,' a capacity to multiply connections that may be realised by a given 'body' to varying degrees in different situations. It may be thought of as a scale of intensity or fullness of existence (or a degree on such a scale), analogous to the capacity of a number to be raised to a higher 'power'. It is used in the French translation of Nietzsche's 'will to power'. Like its English counterpart, it has an additional mathematical usage, designating the number of elements in a finite or infinite set. Here, *puissance* pertains to the virtual (the plane of consistency), *pouvoir* to the actual (the plane of organisation). The authors use *pouvoir* in the sense very close to Foucault's, as an instituted and reproducible relation of force, a selective concretization of potential.^{lxxix}

So, *puissance* is power as potential and capacity, the potential for intensities, while *pouvoir* is in a sense the actualisation of *puissance* in terms of force, on the plane of organisation.

Up until the point that it is actualised, the relation between bodies remains virtual, as 'puissance', indeterminate. A practical example of this could be an unidentified package left unattended at a city train station. This happens from time to time.

The package is noticed and reported to the station manager, who quickly closes down the station and calls the Police, who in turn call the bomb-squad. The area is cleared and the train line stopped. After hours of careful planning, the package is approached and eventually discovered to be a bag containing welding equipment which has been mislaid by a plumber catching a train.^{lxxx} Before the package was opened, its potential for terror was incalculable. Was the package a bomb? What kind of bomb? A fairly small bag could hold a block of plastique explosive wired to a timer, or a vial of a biological or chemical agent. Sure, it is unlikely, but the indeterminacy of the bag's contents open possibilities for all kinds of fantastic speculation. In actuality, once the contents of the bag were discovered they only had the actual power, the 'pouvoir', to weld water pipes. However, importantly, while the bag was potentially a bomb, its virtual power, its indeterminate 'puissance' gave it power as effective as power at an actualised level.

While the capacity to affect is indeterminate, the actual affect within the field of power relations is unpredictable. Returning to the chess computer for a moment, regardless of Deep Blue's capacity to calculate, it could never be programmed to play Roulette, and be guaranteed to win. The spinning Roulette wheel is overflowing with potential, its outcome is unpredictable, and so its capacity to defeat Deep Blue is indeterminate. The spinning Roulette wheel is a Body without Organs, it is nth degree of organisation in that it can accommodate any possibility, and the nth degree of disorganisation, in that it accommodates nothing while it continues to spin. Any 'body' with an indeterminate organisation has an indeterminate capacity to affect. Indeed, this is part of the 'power' of terrorists and guerillas. The knowledge that terrorists could detonate a bomb in any place at any time, increases the capacity of a society to be affected and, by instilling fear and uncertainty, the power of terrorism is increased in a very actual sense. Anonymity allows terrorists to become Bodies without Organs, an identity which is no-one in particular, so therefore *could be anyone*. Their methods are unpredictable — at any moment a bomb *could* go off. In a city subject to terrorism, even if there is no bombing in a day, every moment is permeated with its potential. Then every unattended bag becomes a potential bomb.

Of course, I am not suggesting that artists plant bombs in train stations, but there are useful lessons to be learned here. By producing work which are in some sense bodies-in-becoming, which continuously fail to be identifiable molarities, by deploying a tactics of indeterminacy, artists may produce work which possesses unknowable capacity to affect. In order to produce art, which more widely engages culture effectively at a micropolitical level, artists could affect the actual and vertical planes of power by producing work which are in some way indeterminate bodies; that is, their affects are indeterminate. This is where Kulik's dog has greater success than the Chapman mannequins. The work of the Chapman Brothers plots and quantifies divergences and deviations from the normalised facialised body of the unified subject. It is immediately apparent how far these fragmented bodies have deviated from their normalised base, and that base is merely reinforced by this operation. On the other hand, Kulik's dog, the failed *dog-in-becoming*, also deviates from a normalised base. However, by constantly moving at varying degrees between man and dog, by remaining tactical, dynamic and resisting identity, his capacity to affect an audience becomes indeterminate. When he is lead around the gallery on a chain, each moment is permeated with potential and uncertainty: Is he a madman? Does he really think he's a dog? Will he bite someone *again*?!

Kristeva's theory of abjection has been the dominant theory of affect applied in the contemporary art discourses of the 1990s. Abjection, based on a determinate understanding of the body, its capacities, and its political organisation, claims to account for the affect and effectiveness of artworks by providing a set of more or less immutable rules and habits of the body. Consequently, abjection does not allow for contingencies. As a strategy in art, it provides an affective methodology based on a very particular model of subjectivity.

The remainder of the thesis continues to address the 'abjection' notion of affect in art. However, after examining the relevant foundational models in this and the previous chapter, the remaining chapters will focus on rethinking the affect of artworks in a way which takes account of the contingencies which this chapter has highlighted; that is to say they will deploy an ethological approach. The ways in which bodies are understood to be organised has an important bearing upon the ways in which they engage in power. For the politics of abjection, the vertical facialised

body of the unified subject is regarded as the corporeal ‘base-line’, or central point of reference. For the Medieval grotesque body, a different and more fluid kind of corporeality forms its central organising principle. In introducing the notion of molecularised bodies, of the Body without Organs as a tactical ‘ideal’, I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which one may begin to think of bodies in a way which is not simply complicit or reactive to any default notion of ‘the body’. This kind of molecularisation attempts to debunk the singularity of any ‘default’, and widen the possibilities for the term ‘body’. Indeed, this chapter has only begun discussing the ways in which we may be able to tackle this aim.

The remainder of this thesis is concerned with the ways in which contemporary artists may engage in the field of power that I have characterised. A reconsideration of ‘affect’, different from a fixed abjection model, is important in negotiating the tactical field of power as I have characterised it. As Brian Massumi claims:

Affect holds a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology. For although ideology is still very much with us, often in the most virulent forms, it is no longer encompassing. It no longer defines the global mode of functioning of power.^{lxxxii}

The next chapter will begin to reconsider the affect of art in the 1990s, with the notions I have discussed in mind, in ways different from the determined constraints of abjection. The final chapters will take those things which has become abstracted in this and the previous chapter, and refigure terms of a tactics of affect which is not determinate or ossified.

Notes

ⁱ**Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich**, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. HÈlene Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, USA, 1984, p. 101.

ⁱⁱ*ibid.*, p. 219.

ⁱⁱⁱ*ibid.*, p. 5.

^{iv}*ibid.*, p. 220.

^v**Rabelais, FranÁois**, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen, Penguin Books, London, UK, 1955, p. 47.

^{vi}*ibid.*, p. 48.

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Notes continued

^{vii} **Bakhtin**, loc. cit.

^{viii} *ibid.*, p. 5.

^{ix} **Rabelais**, op. cit., p. 75.

^x **Bakhtin**, op. cit., p. 227.

^{xi} *ibid.*

^{xii} *ibid.*, p. 21.

^{xiii} **Stallybrass, Peter**, and **White, Allon**, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Cornell University Press, New York, USA, 1993.

^{xiv} **Bakhtin**, loc. cit.

^{xv} *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

^{xvi} *ibid.*, p. 21.

^{xvii} *ibid.*

^{xviii} **Patrick, et al.**, *Medical-Surgical Concepts: Pathophysiological Concepts*, J.B. Lippincott Company, 1991, p. 1467.

^{xix} **Bakhtin**, op. cit., p. 184.

^{xx} *ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

^{xxi} *ibid.*, p. 162.

^{xxii} *ibid.*, p. 8.

^{xxiii} **Deleuze, Gilles**, and **Guattari, Félix**, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1987, p. 176.

^{xxiv} *ibid.*, p. 167

^{xxv} *ibid.*, p. 176.

^{xxvi} *ibid.*

^{xxvii} *ibid.*

^{xxviii} *ibid.*

^{xxix} **Deleuze, Gilles**, and **Guattari, Félix**, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1972, translated from French by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, 1983, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, p. 143.

^{xxx} **Deleuze, Gilles**, and **Guattari, Félix**, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1987 p. 170.

^{xxxi} **Merleau-Ponty, Maurice**, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Collin Smith, Routledge, London, UK, 1962, p. 252.

^{xxxii} For example, in Twentieth-Century art the dysorganisation of the face has been central to the work of artists such as Francis Bacon.

^{xxxiii} Indeed, the topology of ‘high’ and ‘low’ is given ontologically in Bakhtin’s reading of the grotesque body. Sure enough, the notion of heaven as ‘high’ and earth as ‘low’ can be found in the mythology of Icarus, used to demonstrate the danger of too much enlightenment and illumination, as well as in Plato’s “Gorgias” and “Phaedrus”. However, strictly speaking, the grotesque body did not belong to the lineage of classical culture.

^{xxxiv} **Maloney, Martin**, “The Chapman Bros.”, *Flash Art*, Vol. XXIX 186, January — February 1996, p.64.

^{xxxv} *ibid.*, p. 66.

^{xxxvi} **Kayser, Wolfgang**, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein, Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 1963.

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^{xxxvii}**Thomson, Philip**, *The Grotesque*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, UK, 1972.

^{xxxviii}**Kayser**, op. cit., p. 20.

^{xxxix}**ibid.**, p. 17.

^{xl}**ibid.**, pp. 20-21.

^{xli}**ibid.**, pp. 32-34.

^{xlii}**ibid.**, pp. 34-37.

^{xliii}**ibid.**, p. 88.

^{xliv}**ibid.**, p. 174.

^{xlv}**ibid.**, p. 169.

^{xlvi}**ibid.**, pp. 171-172.

^{xlvii}**ibid.**, pp. 9-18.

^{xlviii}**Thomson**, op. cit., pp. 58-60.

^{xlix}**ibid.**, p. 11.

^l**Kayser**, op. cit., p. 20.

^{li}**Vitruvius**, quoted in **Kayser**, *ibid.*

^{lii}**Harpham, Graham Galt**, *On The Grotesque: Strategies of Contradictions in Art and Literature*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA, 1982, p. 28.

^{liii}**Kayser**, loc. cit.

^{liv}**Harpham**, loc. cit.

^{lv}**ibid.**

^{lvi}**Smith, Roberta**, "I Bite America And America Bites Me", *The New York Times*, 19/4/97, np. URL: <http://www.nd.edu/~astrouni/zhiwriter/97/97041904.htm>, accessed 6/8/98, 12.48am.

^{lvii}**Massumi, Brian**, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, MIT Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1992, p. 93.

^{lviii}**ibid.**

^{lix}**ibid.**

^{lx}**Smith**, loc. cit.

^{lxi}**ibid.**

^{lxii}**Massumi**, op. cit., p. 106.

^{lxiii}**Grosz, Elizabeth**, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, Australia, 1994, p. 169.

^{lxiv}**Gatens, Moira**, "Corporeal representation in/and the body politic", in *Cartographies: Poststructuralism and the Mapping of Bodies and Spaces*, ed. Rosalyn Diprose and Robyn Ferrell, Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, Sydney, Australia, 1991, p. 82.

^{lxv}**ibid.**

^{lxvi}**Deleuze, Gilles**, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley, City Lights Books, San Francisco, USA, 1988, p. 127.

^{lxvii}**Descartes, Rene**, "Discourses on the Method, PartIV", in *The Essential Descartes*, ed. Margaret D. Wilson, Meridian, New York, 1983, p. 76.

^{lxviii}**Gatens, Moira**, "Through a Spinozist Lens: Ethology, Difference, Power", in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, UK, 1996, p. 165.

^{lxix}**ibid.**

^{lxx}**Deleuze**, op. cit., p. 123.

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^{lxxi}**Spinoza, Benedict de**, *The Ethics*, trans. Bell and Son, 1883, Dover Publications Inc., New York, USA, 1955.

^{lxxii}**Deleuze**, op. cit., p. 125.

^{lxxiii}ibid.

^{lxxiv}**Gatens**, op. cit., p. 169

^{lxxv}**Kristeva, Julia**, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Colombia University Press, New York, USA, 1982., p. 2.

^{lxxvi}**Gatens**, loc. cit.

^{lxxvii}ibid., p. 167.

^{lxxviii}ibid.

^{lxxix}**Massumi, Brian**, “Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgments”, in **Deleuze and Guattari**, ibid., p. xvii.

^{lxxx}This ‘hypothetical’ example actually occurred in Redfern Railway Station, Sydney, Australia in 1997.

^{lxxxi}**Massumi, Brian**, “The Autonomy of Affect”, *Deleuze: A Critical Reader* ed. Paul Patton, 1996 Blackwell Publications, Cambridge Massachusetts, p. 235.

CHAPTER SIX: THE RETURN OF AFFECT.

In earlier chapters of this thesis, I have examined the return to a politics of materiality in contemporary art in the 1990s, particularly in the form of ‘abject art’, which has arguably been the dominant transgressive strategy in the art of the 1990s. In Chapters Four and Five, I have elucidated some important notions which underlie these examinations. Simultaneously, those chapters established and clarified some notions which become important to the ideas which are explored in this and the final chapter. In the larger scheme of this thesis, Chapters Four and Five have passed some familiar aspects of ‘strategies of transgression’ over to a more virtual plane, in a Deleuzian sense. These final chapters re-*actualise* that *virtuality* to a certain extent, but in a different form. At this point this thesis begins to consider a tactics of affect which does not attempt, of course, to provide a fixed and strategic manifesto. Indeed, while this thesis provides a definite indication of certain ‘rules of engagement’ in the tactical field of power, this is only the case to the extent that these final chapters provide *beginnings*, outlines and ‘lines of flight’. As Chapter Four argued, it would be contra to the ‘thesis’ of this thesis to seek to produce a strategic, structured, programmatical manifesto of affect as politically efficacious contemporary art practice.

Throughout this thesis so far, I have questioned the potential of abjection as a contemporary art strategy to effectively engage in the politics of wider culture. I have argued that, as a theory of affect, abjection is fraught with problems which stem from its essentialising of the human body, and its universalising claims. However, I am in no doubt that, within the cultural conditions of the end of 1990s, contemporary art discourse needs ways with which to understand the capacity of images to affect wider culture which do not simply revert to universality and corporeal essentialism.

As I have discussed in Chapter Two, for postmodern theorists in the 1980s, the materiality of the world had dissolved into the world of endless signs. Subjectivity had been reduced to a *simulation* of subjectivity. The cultural construct of the body, with its ‘reproduced’ simulatable and simulated symptoms, was regarded as a tissue of signs without any corporeal ‘authenticity’.¹ However, in the changed cultural conditions of the 1990s, the endgamism of the 1980s was no longer adequate for

explaining the new currency which Western culture had reinvested into the affect of images. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, *Piss Christ* was a catalyst for the realisation of the new economy of images in the United States. Following the ‘endgamism’ which had dominated the discourse during the 1980s, it heralded the return of affect for art’s discourse.

In Australia, the implications of the NEA debate itself had a limited bearing upon art discourse. Obviously the NEA debate was confined to the jurisdiction of the American government. However, as I have shown in Chapter Two, the discourse which was generated around *Piss Christ* and the rise in the early 1990s of ‘abject art’ translated into the Australian context in the works of artists such as Hany Armanious, Adam Cullen and Mikala Dwyer. These artists began to deal with a general return of the politics of materiality with their ‘grunge’ work. Following the Whitney Museum of American Art’s *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*,ⁱⁱ they reorientated their practice more in line with the theoretical premises of ‘abject art’, seeking to feed off its supposed universal political strategy.ⁱⁱⁱ However, the affect of Australia ‘abject art’ upon its audience, and its wider impact upon Australian culture was negligible.

Moreover, in 1997 Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ* became the centre of a controversy surrounding the National Gallery of Victoria, in Melbourne, Australia. The impact of *Piss Christ* upon its Australian audience is similar to that of its role in the NEA debate in America, yet Australian ‘abject art’ in general did not create anything approaching the same affect. Does this mean that there is something fundamentally transgressive about *Piss Christ*, or that its affect is more a matter of particular common characteristics which exist between Australian and American cultural habits and contextual protocols? This chapter takes the opportunity to ask; if *Piss Christ* does not draw its force from a universal drive to abject, then what *is* it about *Piss Christ* which gives it a wider capacity to affect (rather than simply being ‘abject art’)? I will consider the important ways in which certain images, such as *Piss Christ* operate. Given a Deleuzean ethological understanding of bodies, and a rhizomatic micropolitical understanding of the power between them, I will examine the way in which certain characteristics of this image not only allow it a capacity to

affect, but allow both American and Australian audiences to be similarly affected by it.

Piss Christ and Abject Art in Australian

As with Senators Helms and D'Amato in America, there are definite conservative elements within Australian politics, and certainly the Australian parliament is not without its own conservative pro-censorship politicians. Indeed, in her recent study, *Bad Girls*, Catharine Lumby cites numerous incidents in Australia in the 1990s where conservative politicians have argued for censorship. Australian Senators Reynolds, Harradine and Tierney have consistently campaigned for the strict censorship of pornography. Consequently there has been a certain amount of parliamentary intervention, for example, the Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, which was set up in 1991 to investigate phone-sex services:

[o]ver the next five years [the committee] sought and was granted numerous extensions to its life so it could inquire into sexually explicit and violent material in a range of media, including film, pay TV and the internet.^{iv}

Indeed, under such conservative pressure in 1992, even Paul Keating, the Prime Minister and Leader of the Australian Labor Party at that time, claimed that Hollywood film violence was infiltrating society and causing 'terrible child murders'.^v In the New South Wales State Parliament, The Reverend Fred Nile has been a significant figure in Australian conservative politics since 1981 through to the end of the 1990s. He founded and leads the Christian Democratic Party (CDP), and is the NSW Director of the Festival of Light. Both are conservative Christian organisations, which have a proclaimed interest in "family life and Christian values",^{vi} in the very narrowest sense.

Hence, gay art and culture has been the main target of the CDP. Nile claims that God sees the annual *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras* as a "dreadful, sinful spectacle".^{vii} The Mardi Gras Festival, consists of a month of cultural activities including Mardi Gras art exhibitions, performances and dance, culminating in the parade. As Reverend A. Stephen Pieters notes in a seminary paper;

Rev. Fred Nile - a Christian and politician to boot - comes out in public every year at the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and prays for rain (to ruin it) and goes on about how homosexuality is immoral and indecent and how AIDS is God's punishment to them.^{viii}

However, despite the zeal of conservative politicians, to date there have been no significant parliamentary political interventions into public funding of contemporary

art of the kind of the US senate and the NEA. This is largely because the pro-censorship conservatives are in a minority in both State and Federal Parliaments. Nile's Christian Democratic Party, for instance, has never held enough seats in the New South Wales State Parliament to be able to influence it significantly. The only other CDP Member of Parliament is Elaine Nile, Fred's wife, and they do not hold the balance of power. Without the kinds of numbers commanded by American congressional conservatives, Australian conservatives simply do not have enough sway to intervene in culture through the legislature. Therefore, most intervention is sought through existing law; through civil litigation or complaints made to the police.

For example, when the 1989 *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade* presenting a giant caricature of Nile's head on a platter, with an apple in his mouth, he brought a defamation suit against the Mardi Gras organisation and the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), which had broadcast the Parade on television.^{ix} Also, in 1982, Juan Davila's *Stupid as a Painter (Plate 42)*, exhibited at the 1982 *Sydney Biennale*, came to the attention Nile, which led to "[t]he most bizarre event of this year [1982], if not the decade".^x Acting on a complaint from Nile, Davila's work was seized by the NSW vice squad. Nile's main objection to the work was Davila's use of gay iconography, such as references to the work of Tom of Finland. The subsequent public "outcry" caused the painting to be "undoubtedly the most controversial Australian painting of the '80s".^{xi} The debate culminated with the intervention of the NSW State Premier, Neville Wran, who ordered the police to return the work to Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery. It was then allowed to be shown under 'R' certificate restrictions, restricting its audience to 18 years old and older. Again, in 1985, three paintings by Davila, exhibited at the Lake Macquarie Gallery, were ordered to be destroyed by a local magistrate, but were saved again by the intervention of the State Premier.^{xii} In 1991, once again Davila was threatened with litigation by Paul Keating (the Australian Federal Treasurer at the time) who was caricatured unfavourably in one of Davila's paintings.^{xiii}

In 1997, The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), in Melbourne, Australia, was drawn into a controversy centred on *the very same work* which had sparked the NEA debate and the rise of the 'object art' strategy: Serrano's *Piss Christ*. On October

11th 1997, the NGV, which is the State of Victoria's main government-funded public gallery, was scheduled to open a retrospective exhibition

Plate 42

of the work of Serrano, titled *A History of Andres Serrano*, which included *Piss Christ*.^{xiv} The NGV's Public Relations Department distributed a media release on October 2nd 1997, hoping to gain publicity for the exhibition on the heat generated by the NEA debate in 1989:

Confronting, shocking and compelling are just some of the words to describe the photographs of Andres Serrano on display at the National Gallery of Victoria from October 11.

'Anti-Christian' and 'a deplorable, despicable display of vulgarity' is another way one of his photographs has been described in recent weeks [sic]. These comments have been in reference to the 1989 [sic] image *Piss Christ*, which triggered the so-called 'Culture Wars'.^{xv}

Despite its factual and citational inaccuracies, the NGV's media release managed to attract more attention than they could possibly have wished for.

Less than a week before the exhibition was due to open, the prospect that *Piss Christ* was about to be exhibited in Melbourne came to the attention of the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr. George Pell. Echoing Helms and D'Amato, Pell accused *Piss Christ* of being "blasphemous and grossly sacrilegious".^{xvi} Similarly, Pell questioned the spending of public money on exhibiting *Piss Christ*, virtually repeating the words of Helms, and the NRCC:

Why should Christians be insulted at government expense in our most prestigious art gallery?^{xvii}

As with the action taken by the Reverend Nile against Juan Davila's work in the 1980s, the attempt to censor *Piss Christ* was not sought through parliamentary politics. Indeed, with *Piss Christ* at the NGV, the only intervention by any Australian parliamentarian was an indifferent comment to the press by Jeff Kennett, the Premier of Victoria, in which he said he respected the church's right to take legal action, but said it was merely generating more publicity for Serrano:

The Premier advised those who thought they would be offended by the exhibition to 'stay at home, see Rembrandt [also showing at the NGV at that time] or have a game of tennis'.^{xviii}

Nevertheless, at the insistence of members of the public, Police were called-out to inspect the work,^{xix} and Pell sought a court injunction to prevent the NGV from showing *Piss Christ* on the grounds of 'religious blasphemy'.

Pell claimed that the Christian church and community was offended by the content and meaning of *Piss Christ* as they were “commonly understood”. He said; “[t]he conjunction of the sacred symbol and excrement is recognised *universally* as deeply insulting.”^{xx} Indeed, he urged leaders of other denominations to join in the legal action against *Piss Christ*:

We have obligations as religious leaders to attempt to maintain public standards and protect the reverence due to sacred objects.^{xxi}

Although only Pell actually brought litigation against *Piss Christ*, The Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Keith Rayner, and The Uniting Church moderator, the Reverend Pam Kerr, released a statement supporting Pell’s action, and appealing for *Piss Christ* to be removed from the exhibition as a sign of respect for religious beliefs.^{xxii} Rayner said:

there comes a point where there is less and less respect being shown for the sacred in whatever form the sacred comes, and you have to draw a line.^{xxiii}

Pell’s litigation was heard by Supreme Court Justice David Harper on October 9th, 1997.^{xxiv} As a Melbourne daily newspaper, *The Age*, records the hearing:

During the three-hour debate, the church’s barrister, Dr. Cliff Pannam, said that the photograph constituted a common law misdemeanor of blasphemous [sic] libel.

The Archbishop, Dr. George Pell, was more impassioned. In an affidavit before the court, he said: ‘Both the name and image of Piss Christ not only demean Christianity but also represent a grossly offensive, scurrilous and insulting treatment of Christianity’s [sic] most sacred and holy symbol.

Outside the court, more religious and community groups were adding their voices to the outrage. The Religious Alliance Against Pornography said images created by Serrano were morally repugnant and degrading to all people.^{xxv}

However, Pell’s disgust did not translate into valid litigation, and Justice Harper rejected the application for an injunction:

Justice Harper said it was clear English Law recognised blasphemous libel, which originated from the unity of church and state, but the unity did not survive the journey to the Australian colonies.^{xxvi}

Thus, the exhibition opened as scheduled on October 11th.

On the first day of the exhibition, *Piss Christ* was attacked by a man from Sydney who removed the work from the gallery wall. The damage to the work was negligible, and it was returned to the exhibition the following day, on October 12th.

However, on the second day of the exhibition the work was effectively destroyed by two youths who attacked it with a hammer:

Yesterday's attack [October 12th, 1997], the second in as many days, took only a few seconds. One youth distracted security guards by kicking another exhibit, and the second smashed the perspex covering of *Piss Christ* with the hammer about eight times, ruining the photograph, valued at \$25,000.^{xxvii}

Consequently, the NGV's Director, Timothy Potts, took a decision to cancel Serrano's exhibition. As Potts told *The Age*:

There have been two incidents in the Serrano exhibition on the weekend involving damage to a work of art and injury to two members of security staff.

After consultation with relevant authorities, the trustees and director have with great reluctance taken the decision to close the exhibition immediately.^{xxviii}

So, having won the court case against Pell's injunction, the gallery capitulated after the second attack.

For Serrano, the NGV's decision to cancel his exhibition was a parallel to the Corcoran Gallery's cancellation of the Mapplethorpe exhibition in 1989, in the midst of the NEA debate:

I think the exact same thing happened with Mapplethorpe's show, and actually, indirectly, I was the cause of that cancellation, because I was getting so much heat in congress in May of 1989 as a result of 'Piss Christ'.^{xxix}

Indeed, although *Piss Christ* did not provoke much in the way of parliamentary action, Pell's court action and the hammer-attack on the work at the NGV created a controversy similar in pitch to the NEA debate in the USA.

For a number of weeks in October 1997, the ongoing controversy made the national television news and front page headlines, as well as being the subject of some amusing press cartoons (*Plate 43*). Public discussion centred around questions of freedom of speech, the respect of sacred symbols and the status of the work as 'art'.

Plate 43

One letter to The Sydney Morning Herald says:

I am so sick of listening to people whinge about the Andres Serrano exhibition. I find Billboard ads and television far more offence than this work of art by Andres Serrano. The arrogance of the Catholic Church and its followers never ceases to amaze me. Stop telling us what to think. I was brought up in a Catholic school, but by the age of 15 - when I could think coherently for myself - I realised that there was something seriously wrong with this stifling education.^{xxx}

Conversely, another letter echoes Helms, D'Amato and Pat Buchanan's questioning of the work as 'art' (which I have examined in Chapter Two):

I wish to applaud the director of the NGV for having the courage to cancel a display of non-talent pseudo art which disgusts most reasonable people. As an American artist myself I am very troubled with the move to non-art for art's sake. Just because a cow drops something on a road doesn't mean it needs to be framed and put on display. Andres Serrano is a gifted hustler, plying his snake-oil brand of art much in the manner of the tailor in the Emperors New Clothes.

The art world (Emperor) needs to wake up and realize that it's been had. Christ in such a setting is in the same category as one's mother in such a setting. If he feels the need to disgust, annoy, or offend people, he should do it in New York where nothing offends people. Perhaps that is his problem.^{xxxi}

Similarly, another letter-writer asks;

Who is this revolting little man? Has he not got the message yet? Is he thick as well as insensitive to others religious [sic] beliefs? Doesn't he realise that this garbage is not art!!

Maybe he should attempt to display this garbage in [sic] a more liberal country such as Iran or Saudi Arabia and see how he gets on.

I for one would be willing to contribute to the legal costs incurred by those who took this matter into their own hands.

A special WELL DONE to the two young boys who attacked this garbage with a hammer. Its good to see young lads like this with the conviction of their beliefs.

I truly hope that Andres Serrano would just PISS-OFF!^{xxxii}

The NGV's own controversy surrounding *Piss Christ* certainly sensitised the Australian public towards the use of 'sacred symbols' in contemporary art. On October 17th, 1997, less than a week after the hammer-attack on *Piss Christ*, Tania Kovats' *Virgin In A Condom*, 1996 (Plate 44), was stolen from the *Pictura Brittanica* exhibition, at that time showing at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney. The work is a small figurine of the Virgin Mary, inside a rolled-out condom, fitting over the length of the figure. The MCA had received "no threats of action against the piece"^{xxxiii} indeed, the work had been on exhibition

since August 22 of that year, months before it was stolen. For Serrano, the theft of *Virgin In A Condom* seemed to be a consequence of the NGV's cancellation of his exhibition, which only encouraged attacks on art:

I think this is a direct result, that these nuts now feel they have a license to do anything they want to. But more importantly, it's not really the nuts who feel empowered, it's the church and other people like the Archbishop of Melbourne. Perhaps he [Archbishop Pell] directly did not go in there [the NGV] with a hammer, but those kids, those goons, they've done the work for him.^{xxxiv}

Indeed, following the theft of Kovats' *Virgin In A Condom*, the MCA felt the need to increase their security to protect Sam Taylor-Wood's *Wrecked*, 1996 (*Plate 45*), which was on display at the gallery at that time.^{xxxv} *Wrecked* is a revision of Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, c.1497. It is certainly a Serranoesque photograph, depicting a table of revelling disciples surrounding a naked woman standing arms stretched-out as through crucified.

Plate 44 & 45

Ostensibly, to engage in abject art in a conservative political environment is to court controversy. As Hal Foster notes;

Just as the old transgressive surrealist once called out for the priestly police, so an abject artist (like Andres Serrano) may call out for an evangelical senator (like Jesse Helms), who is allowed, in effect, to complete the work negatively.^{xxxvi}

Indeed, as I have shown in my discussion of *The Reverend Nile*, and the *Piss Christ/NGV* controversy, there are certainly conservative elements in Australia who are eager to ‘complete the work’ by their objections. However, although there are conservative elements in Australian politics comparable to those we have seen in the United States, for the Australian artists the strategy of abject art met with virtually no friction.

Indeed, no other work of ‘abject art’ caused any degree of political effect in Australia. Throughout the 1990s, the effects of the abject art strategies of Hany Armanious, Adam Cullen and Mikala Dwyer, has been negligible. The very greatest degree of popular controversy that this art produced was a derisory and dismissive story on the Australian current affairs television program *Inside Edition*. The report took the ‘YesÖ But Is It Art?’ position similar to Morley Safer’s infamous “grumpy, but bemused attack on contemporary collectors, artists and critics” on *60 Minutes* in America.^{xxxvii} Like the American *60 Minutes* story, *Inside Edition* asked if it was the case that the Australian contemporary art world was suffering from a serious case of *emperor’s-new-clothes* syndrome. Indeed, for the large part, although abject art in Australia has deployed this tried-and-tested political strategy, its reception has been considered more in terms of humour, rather than horror.^{xxxviii} For example, the work of Armanious has often been critically discussed in terms of its humour. Armanious’ *The Witness* (his lumpy ‘turd’ in the shape of a human figure, referred to in Chapter Two of this thesis), was included in the 1993 *Wits End* exhibition at the MCA, Sydney, which was intended to survey humour contemporary Australian art. Indeed, the curator of *Wits End* described his work as “funny, poetic and sinister”.^{xxxix} This is similarly the conclusion reached by Felicity Fenner, in a review of Armanious’ *Snake Oil* works.^{xl}

The tendency in Australia to censor through litigation is merely a different expression of the same political objectives held by Senators Helms and D’Amato in

the United States. So, given Pell's legal attempt to censor *Piss Christ* at the NGV in October 1997, and the wider impact of this work on the Australian community, a conundrum arises for this thesis: if, as I have argued in Chapter Three, Kristeva's theory of abjection is not adequate to explain the affect of artworks such as *Piss Christ*, then *what is* the cause of the controversy *common* to both America and Australia? If the reactions to *Piss Christ* are *not* founded upon a universal drive in the nature of a singular human condition, then what is it founded upon?

As I have indicated in Chapter Three, the common reaction to artworks such as *Piss Christ*, is not the result of any universal affect based in any culturally transcendent drive, but rather is due to far more localised contingencies and conditions. So then, what are the conditions of both *Piss Christ* and the Australian and American audience which grant the work its capacity to affect? If there is nothing transcendentally inherent in this work which grants it a capacity to affect, and nothing inherent in the audience, in the form of some 'human condition', then what does direct these capacities? I shall explore this question in the remainder of this chapter.

Hierograms

In both America and Australia at different times, *Piss Christ* brought into question the use, or perceived misuse, of sacred symbols. In America in the early 1990s, the discussion surrounding *Piss Christ* combined with a debate concerning the burning of the American flag. In the last days of the cold war in the 1980s, conservative American fear was still fundamentally McCarthyist and xenophobic. Any perceived threat was still regarded as coming from the outside. The controversy surrounding *Piss Christ* hit American consciousness in the short intervening time between the October 1987 crash, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. For conservative America, it formed part of a growing notion that the threat to ‘the American way of life’ no longer came from outside its borders, but from within. For conservatives like Patrick Buchanan, or US Senators Jesse Helms and Alphonse D’Amato, where once the atheism of Communism threatened the freedom of worship for Godfearing Americans, now this task had been inherited by American art and culture:

While the right has been busy wining primaries and elections, cutting taxes, funding anti-communist guerillas abroad, the left has been quietly seizing all the commanding heights of American art and culture.^{xli}

The controversy of Serrano’s *Piss Christ*, and the ensuing debate surrounding the American government’s funding of the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), followed only a year after the controversial release of Martin Scorsese’s *The Last Temptation of Christ*.^{xlii} To right-wing conservative America, this was part of “an explosion of anti-American, anti-Christian, and nihilist ‘art’.”^{xliii}

As the *Piss Christ* controversy surrounding both the NEA in American and the NGV in Australian demonstrates, the significance of Serrano’s use of the crucifix in predominantly Christian cultures should not be underestimated. As I will explain here, in both cultures the crucifix becomes a value in itself which seems to condense certain values into a reified body. For a community of Christian believers, the crucifix operates in a complex way. An examination of this operation provides us with a useful understanding of the contingencies in place in the *Piss Christ* incidents.

The very least and first thing one can say about the crucifix is that it is the central physical manifestation of the more or less homogeneous set of ideas and values

which constitute Christianity. In a sense, it is the physical body given to a body of ideas, as the result of a process of recorporealising the identity of Christianity. It is the process of taking the sovereignty of Christian belief away from the multiple bodies of the flock, and reconstituting it as a unified body, in thought and in actuality.^{xliv} In a Deleuzian sense, the crucifix can be thought of as an ‘image of transcendent agency’^{xlv}

With images of transcendent agency, values are lifted at a micropolitical level, interrelated at a macropolitical molar level and this unified body is crystallised and given unified form. Brian Massumi succinctly elucidates this process:

The plane of transcendence lifts bodies out of the uniqueness of the spatiotemporal coordinates through which they move. It abstracts them, extracts from them a system of identity. The identity grid is actualized in images, in an instantaneous redescent of the plane of transcendence toward the flesh, via a technical and social apparatus or medium. In descent mode, the plane of transcendence reconnects to the bodies from which it rose, but in a way that composes upon them conformity to its system, demands that they live up to its abstraction, embody its glory.^{xlvi}

In effect, this is the process which, from a range of beliefs and values, creates a formidable reified embodiment of certain values in an image or symbol, which operates as more than a simple icon. From a mass of bodies, across which multiple values and points of power flow and collide, certain values are produced as irrelevant and other as conjunctive in relation to certain other values.

An image of transcendent agency is the face of molarised values, or rather, the facialised body of values, since it is the reification of a range of stratified values on the plane of organisation. In *A user’s guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Massumi illustrates an image of transcendent agency by referring to the film *Vendémiaire*, made in 1917, in the aftermath of World War I.^{xlvii} In a nutshell, the film is set in the vineyards of the south of France, in the final days of the war. In the vineyard, two German prisoners of war are attempting to pass as Allied soldiers. They plan to rob the vineyard owners, frame a gipsy co-worker for the theft, and use the money to flee to Spain. However, their scheme is foiled. One soldier attempts to hide in a storage tank, but dies from the fumes of fermenting grapes, and the other, drunk on wine, betrays himself by accidentally speaking in German.^{xlviii} In *Vendémiaire*, wine becomes the image of transcendent agency. It is the reification of the French national identity; “The image of wine contracts into itself the

sensations attached to everything valued in the film”^{.xlix} It not only symbolised France, but effectively embodies the values of France. It defends it from German invaders, from theft and deception, and unites those who identify with France: “The potion works its magic before our eyes. Thanks to it, a new France with rise. Praise the wine!”¹ Thus, in *Vendemiaire*, the wine is the physical manifestation of the molar identity of France. Once discordant foreign values have been eliminated, and the essence and identity of France extracted into abstraction, it is reified in wine. Wine thus presents such a powerful image of the transcendent agency of France, that it is not only omnipresent, but omnipotent; it *actually* flushes-out the enemy, or even kills them.

Massumi says that;

Wine is the soul of the Film. Every molar organization produces an image of transcendent agency. For the state it is often the blood of the race or the flag; for Christianity, the blood of Christ; for the Family, the phallus and semen.ⁱⁱ

In the blood of the nation or of Christ, a transcendent agency is imaged. With Christianity, an individual connects to and identifies with a Christian community through its conjunctive values. Christianity becomes an abstract body of homogeneous values and ideas, extracted the conjunctive values from its community into an abstract molarity (against which any one Christian may actually find it impossible to absolutely reconcile). This molarity is Christianity at the ‘plane of transcendence’. Of course, this molarised identity is not all that holds Christianity together. That is, once values have been extracted from a molecularised mass of values, and funnelled into a metaphysical molarity, they ‘descend’ into the ‘plane of organisation’ and become reified, as Massumi says, in ‘images of transcendent agency’. Thus, micropolitical values are extracted from a multiplicity of points, unified and molarised, and then embodied in determinate unified identities.

However, while the blood of the race (for a state) or the blood of Christ (for Christianity) are certainly images of transcendent agency, the object of the crucifix or the flag are also much more. In their ostensibly decorporealised ‘symbols’ (the flag or the crucifix) there is not only a reification of molar values, but also there occurs a kind consecration of the object itself, so that the ‘symbol’ not only becomes an image of transcendent agency, but a transcendent agency in itself which both *is* and *is not* the sacred thing in itself. It is a process in which values become

condensed into a body, and that body becomes a value in itself, thus short-circuiting any reference to the initial reified values which descended from abstraction.

Practically, the difference between an image of transcendent agency and a sacred symbol is the difference between wine as symbolic supplement of Christ's blood and the crucifix as 'complementary' embodiment of Christ himself. For the French, the wine in the film *Vendémiaire* is a trace of France, while the crucifix for a Christian is Christ.

It is useful here to pause for a moment and elucidate what I mean by 'complementarity'. Complementarity activates a logic which is at odds with the 'logic of identity'. I have mentioned the 'logic of identity' in Chapter Three. To reiterate :

- (1) The law of identity: 'whatever is, is.'
- (2) The law of contradiction: 'nothing can be and not be.'
- (3) The law of the excluded middle: 'everything must either be or not be.'^{lii}

The logic of identity is the foundational logic of oppositional categories (such as subject/object discussed in Chapter Three and man/dog discussed in Chapter Five).

Its axiomatic status naturalises molarities and normalises subjective unity.

However, the laws of the logic of identity are no less conditional than the axiom of subjective unity which is built upon them. Indeed, as Jacques Derrida demonstrates, the logic of identity does not bear-out consistently even within Western modernity.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida attempts to deconstruct the foundational and axiomatic status of the logic of identity.^{liii} He focuses on the debate surrounding work of

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, particularly *Essays* and *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men*. For scholars of Rousseau, there has been much debate surrounding the dates that these works were written because, between these two works, Rousseau contradicts himself. The debate has largely attempted to place the works in a temporal relation to one another, which would justify a contradiction as a mere progressive development, and thus, not threaten the internal consistency of Rousseau's oeuvre: To "save Rousseau from contradicting himself: saying A and not-A at the same time."^{liv} Derrida, on the other hand, concentrates on the contradictions.

As Robert Bernasconi explains:

Derrida will say that the contradictions are only apparent and that what appears contradictory can be reconciled at a deeper level: ‘the concept of the supplement should allow us to say the contrary at the same time without contradiction’.^{lv}

The logic of supplementarity allows both positions in a binary opposition to be occupied by the supplement: the supplement can be *both A and not-A at the same time*. There is a temporal element which is important to Derrida’s supplementarity. The supplement comes *in place* of something. For example, with the King and his son, as his heir, the son becomes King himself in time, but only through this process of supplementarity. Derrida uses the notion of supplementarity almost as something taking over from another thing, the supplement comes to take the place of the first thing.

So for Derrida, Rousseau’s occupation of two contradictory positions is problematic *only* so long as our understandings are grounded by the foundational ‘logic of identity’. As Derrida demonstrates, within Western thought the logic of identity is established as a quasi-naturally-occurring set of ‘laws’, which presupposes a single metaphysical originary point of logic; a central *logos*. Derrida’s notion of supplementarity is enabled by his refusal of the universality of these foundational ‘laws’, and of a central *logos*. Thus Derrida shows that the logic of identity’s ‘laws’ are *specific* to Western thought, and not anterior to it. If one recognises this and rejects the universal authority of these foundational ‘laws’, then Rousseau is allowed to occupy two contradictory positions. Derrida’s notion of supplementarity succeeds in problematising the logic of identity. Supplementarity allows something to be *both A and not-A* in a process of becoming.

Interestingly, Bernasconi uses the logic of the supplement to operate in a slightly different way from Derrida’s use of it. While Derrida’s use of supplementarity is a process of ‘A’ becoming ‘not-A’, and thus ending as being both ‘A’ and ‘not-A’ at the same time, Bernasconi’s use of supplementarity seems to be more a process of ‘A’ and ‘not-A’ becoming the other *simultaneously*. In Bernasconi’s use, as subtly different as it is, supplementarity is meant as more of a mutual *augmentation* of one *both* ‘A’ and ‘not-A’ with the inclusion of the other.

Perhaps then, a more accurate term for Bernasconi’s use of supplementarity would be ‘complementarity’. Complementarity is similar to Derrida’s use of

supplementarity in that it complicates the logic of identity, and the distinction between one thing and another, between 'A' and 'not-A'. However, although a complement becomes so through a process similar to that of supplementarity, 'A' does not come *to take the place* of 'not-A', rather 'A' and 'not-A' come together concurrently, complicating their identity logic. The term 'complementarity' has been previously most often used in the field of quantum physics. Particularly, an electron can be understood as either a 'wave' or a 'particle'. Both the wave and particle models are generally accepted by atomic physicists, even though this means that there are two different ways of understanding atomic systems, producing different kinds of data, with different methods. The two systems offer entirely different ways of understanding exactly the same thing. Ostensibly, this would seem to be a contradiction, but the principal of complementarity in physics allows the two models to occupy the same place in theoretical physics.

Therefore, with complementarity one thing is augmented by the presence of a second thing which is, at the same time, *both* 'A' *and* 'not-A'. With both Derrida's notion of supplementarity and the notion of complementarity, the presence of one thing is *within* another, and vice versa. It may seem that, in their process of *adding-to*, both supplementarity and complementarity are about filling a lack, of augmenting one thing with another in order to make it achieve some idea of completeness. This is not the case with either of these terms. As Derrida says of the supplement; "The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence."^{vi}

The same can be said of the complement. It is not 'either/or', but 'both/and'. This is not simply to say that the complement has 'a foot on each side of the fence'. Rather, as with the Derridean notion of 'undecidables', the oppositional relation of the categories are themselves affected. A practical example of complementarity is the sides of a Möbius strip. Any point on the strip is *both* inside *and* outside, *both* back *and* front. In the Möbius strip, inside/outside, back/front become complicated categories, existing in a relation of complementarity. The 'logic' of the complement enables us to understand the way in which two things can be *both* one *and* two.

While Derrida's logic of *supplementarity* may be said to be at work in the Eucharist, at the point of transubstantiation of bread into Christ's flesh, and wine into Christ's

blood, the logic of *complementarity*, on the other hand, operates in the Christian Holy Trinity: The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. Unlike the logic of the supplement, with which the King and the son have a supplementary relation which means that the father will never live to see his son become King, the ‘logic of complementarity’ allows The Father and The Son to be the same thing. For a community of Christian believers the logic of complementarity presents no problem in certain circumstances.

Indeed, the logic of complementarity is a logic of multiplicities, because many can be one and vice versa. For Christian believers, Christ is not only a complement of The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit, but is also in a complementary relation with the crucifix. Thus, when a Christian believer looks at a crucifix, this object is not simply a referent which operates as the signifier of Christ. Rather, it signifies a multiplicity of co-complements. For a Christian, to see a crucifix is invariably to see The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. In this case, a crucifix is never just a crucifix, without embodying the incarnation of the Holy Trinity in Christ. Although a crucifix does not *wholly* embody Christ, neither does it merely *represent* Christ. While the crucifix is the physical referent, and we may utter the word ‘crucifix’ to signify that particular object, Christ is always a complementary presence within its sign.

Practically, a crucifix is ‘sacred’ not simply because within Christian conventionality it is an *image* of Christ, but rather because of the way in which its meaning operates for a Christian believer, as a material projection of Christ himself, as a complement of Christ. At the level of a believer’s regard for the crucifix, there exists a complementary relation between the ‘symbol’ and what is ‘symbolised’, so that in effect, a sacred symbol is not a ‘symbol’ at all, insofar as it does not ‘symbolise’. It is neither an iconic nor indexical sign of Christ (in a Peircean sense), but rather ‘is’ Christ.

Since sacred ‘symbols’, such as the crucifix or flag, do not symbolise properly speaking, a far better term for them would be ‘hierograms’. The referent of a hierogram is regarded by its community of users as embodying the thing to which it refers, thus there is no distance between sign and referent. In Egyptology, a ‘hierogram’ is not an element of writing which simply refers to the sacred, but is the

sacred itself, again, in much the way that the words in the Christian bible are, for Christian believers, sacred in themselves.

Indeed, in contemporary culture hierogams can be found beyond those things which are sacred in religion. A nation's flag is not just an image of transcendent agency for a nation, but also operates as a hierogam for a certain culture of users. For example, in the United States, the Stars and Stripes flag is 'sacred' in a secular sense. Any Stars and Stripes flag does not simply 'symbolise' the United States of America. Rather, for a certain community of patriotic Americans, the Stars and Stripes exists in complementarity with America as a land, a people and body values. The flag and the nation are inextricable. The subjectivity of the nation is 'embodied' in the flag in much the way that the subjectivity of Christ is embodied in the crucifix for a Christian.

It is virtually impossible for a hierogam to be represented. A hierogam is not simply an inscription. Rather, a hierogam is held in a constant, active and ongoing inscription. To illustrate, if a crucifix were drawn with a pencil on paper, this would not simply be an icon of a crucifix, in the same way that a crucifix is not simply an icon of Christ. Rather, it is an actual crucifix. Practically, with *Piss Christ* the vague outline of a crucifix is an actual crucifix nevertheless, only one on photographic paper (or even one on magazine paper, or photocopy paper, if it is reproduced so). Thus, a crucifix can never represent a crucifix because it is always a crucifix. Jasper Johns was acutely aware of this characteristic of hierogams when he produced his *Flag* series, paintings of the Stars and Stripes (*Plate 46*): "Somebody said, 'It's not a flag, it's a painting.' But that's not what I meant. It's not a painting, it's a flag."^{vii} Its presence is always direct and ongoing and, as I have said, a hierogam such as a crucifix or a flag, cannot be represented in the sense that a 'representation' of a crucifix *actually is a crucifix*, and a 'representation' of a flag *actually is a flag* which in turn is actually the sacred thing.

Since a hierogam only remains so because it condenses the molarised values and ideas which are conjunctive with a certain community, its integrity is automatically safeguarded. It is not so much that the 'correct' use of hierogams are safeguarded by external protocols (for example, the American laws enshrining the Stars and Stripes). Rather, those bodies which do not correspond with the values which are

condensed into a hierogram are self-excluding by their disjuncture. Indeed, what we may call ‘protocols’ are actually embedded in the systems of values condensed in a hierogram, rather than enshrined in laws external to it.

The problem with *Piss Christ* for Helms, D’Amato *et al.* is that the crucifix, operating in complementarity with Christ, and in turn as complementary with certain values, is quasi-artificially conjoined with a body which is not in conjunction with the values condensed into their Christian hierogram. The vital thing here is

Plate 46

the relativity of molarities of values, and not the inherent value of either the crucifix or the piss. While a Kristevan approach may place the emphasis on the ‘sacred’ sullied by the desecrating matter of the ‘profane’, a less determining ethological approach, which accounts for cultural contingencies, may focus on the character of the bodies involved and the values which may be seen to constitute them. In the specific case of *Piss Christ*, what is important is not the piss as the supposed ‘hieroglyph of fear’,^{lviii} and any inherent “weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me”.^{lix} Rather, the hierogrammic character of the crucifix is more significant here. If conservative Christians in America and Australia are equally incensed by *Piss Christ*, it is not because the crucifix is seen in the presence of something which is unspeakably horrible, in which there is a dysfunction of symbolic relations. Rather, the crucifix condenses a plenitude of conjunctive values and meanings, and piss, to a greater degree, does not conform.

Indeed, ‘abject art’ in itself is rarely quasi-artificially conjoined with such embodied disjunctive values as a crucifix. With the works of ‘abject art’ in general, visceral matter is conjoined, more often than not, with the gallery space as a body of values. The gallery space is a hyperconnective space whose primary purpose is to conjoin with just about any body of values placed within it. For example, with Hany Armanious’ *Witness*, exhibited at the MCA, Sydney, in 1993, the gallery space affords the work connectivity through whatever ways possible. It is more than the gallery simply framing the work, and disconnecting it from the outside world. Rather, contemporary gallery spaces act to interface with multiplicities of values in both an audience and an artwork. On the other hand, *Piss Christ* (since its disjunction exists in a single body of work) in the gallery space, in the enraged hands of D’Amato on the floor of the Senate, or on the cover of *The Age*, remains a disjuncture of values for Christians.

Importantly for the wider concerns of this thesis, if we look at the affect of works such as *Piss Christ* outside of the dominant determining abject model, to take into account the contingencies of culture and context, it is clear that there is still a degree of determinacy at work; the capacity of *Piss Christ* to affect a contemporary Christian audience remains fairly predictable. While Kristeva’s theory of abjection

provides us with particular protocols for the ‘profane’ (alongside those of the ‘sacred’), she regards these as embedded in a universal human condition, in instinct, as though programmed into our being from the start. Here, I have discussed bodies which are also governed by protocols, and which are likewise embedded in the organisation of the bodies themselves. However, the important difference lies in where and in which ways one regards the such protocols to be ‘stored’. The common reactions to *Piss Christ* in America and Australia is not the result of a fundamentally human condition, but one which is supported by the normalised characterisation of bodies, as predominantly white, rationalistic, Eurocultural and their habitualised function within capitalist economics. This much is clear. However, if they are not in some sense constitutive of a fundamental human makeup, where are such protocols constituted? This question is addressed in the final chapter.

Notes

ⁱ**Baudrillard, Jean**, “Precession of the Simulacrum”, trans. Paul Foss and Paul Patton, *Art & Text*, #11, Spring 1983, p. 4.

ⁱⁱ “Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art”, Whitney Museum of American Art, June 23-August 29, 1993.

ⁱⁱⁱ**Foster, Hal**, *Return of the Real*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Minneapolis, USA, 1996, p. 157.

^{iv}**Lumby, Catharine**, *Bad Girls: The Media, Sex and Feminism in the 90s*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, Australia, 1997, p. 66.

^vibid.

^{vi}**Nile, The Reverend Fred**, “The Reverend the Hon. Frederick John Nile, E.D., L.Th., M.L.C.”, URL: <http://www.nsw.gov.au/lc/cmembers/nilef.html>, accessed 10/7/97, 4.00pm.

^{vii}**Harvey, Adam**, “Medics busy, but it’s a fair cop now”, URL: <http://www.smh.com.au/daily/content/970303/national/national2.html>, accessed 3/3/97, 10.47am.

^{viii}**Pieters, The Reverend A Stephen**, “Religion and Condemnation of Homosexuality”, URL: <http://www.thebody.com/pieters/answers/quest10.html> accessed 10/7/97, 4.15pm.

^{ix}**The Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Ltd**, “Passing Parade!”, URL: <http://www.geko.com.au/~mardigras/parade.html>, accessed 10/7/97, 4.21pm.

^xTension Editorial, “The 1980s”, *Tension*, No.19, Summer 1989, p.25.

^{xi}ibid., p.15.

^{xii}ibid., p.27.

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^{xiii}I make note of this in an art review in 1993. **Messham-Muir, Kit**, “Davila at 9”, *Honi Soit*, #5, March 23rd, 1993, p.26.

^{xiv}*A History of Andres Serrano*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, October 11th — December 3rd, 1997. It must be noted that due to its premature closure, this exhibition did not run its fully-scheduled course.

^{xv}*A History of Andres Serrano*, Media Release, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, October 2, 1997. I have discussed the quotes that have been used in this media release in Chapter Two. The NGV’s media release is inaccurate in claiming that these comments were made in recent weeks, since they were in fact made by US Senator Alphonse D’Amato in the US Senate, May 18th, 1989, as cited in **Vance**, “Issues and Commentary: The War on Culture”, *Art in America*, Volume 77, September 1989, p.39.

^{xvi}Pell, George, quoted in **Rochford, Denis**, “The line between religion and art”, *The Age*, Melbourne, Australia, 9 October 1997. URL: <http://www.theage.com.au/daily/971009/news/news7.html>, accessed 9/10/97, 11.04pm.

^{xvii}Pell, quoted in **Pegler, Tim**, and **Usher, Robin**, “Crucifix picture fight to court”, *The Age*, Melbourne, Australia, 8 October 1997. URL: <http://www.theage.com.au/daily/971008/news/news21.html>, accessed, 8/10/97, 9.11am.

^{xviii}“Art or blasphemy: Serrano flies into a burning question”, *The Age*, Melbourne, Australia, 9 October 1997. No author name given. URL: <http://www.theage.com.au/daily/971009/news/news1.html>, accessed 9/10/97, 11.04pm.

^{xix}**Butler, Mark, Ross, Norrie** and **Wilson, Kim**, “Police inspect urine photo”, *The Australian*, October 9, 1997. URL: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/state/4278974.htm>, accessed 9/10/97, 11.20pm

^{xx}Pell, quoted in **Pegler, Tim**, and **Usher, Robin**, loc. cit. Emphasis added.

^{xxi}Pell, quoted in *ibid*.

^{xxii}*ibid*.

^{xxiii}Rayner, Keith, quoted in *ibid*.

^{xxiv}**Butler, Ross** and **Wilson**, loc. cit.

^{xxv}“Art or blasphemy: Serrano flies into a burning question”, *The Age*, loc. cit.

^{xxvi}**Pegler, Tim**, and **Gregory, Peter**, “Serrano wins TKO, Pell claims moral victory”, *The Age*, October 10th, 1997. URL: <http://www.theage.com.au/daily/971010/news/news5.html>, accessed 10/10/97, 9.49am.

^{xxvii}**Faulkner, Jane**, “Serrano show axed”, *The Age*, 13 October 1997. URL: <http://www.theage.com.au/daily/971013/news/news2.html>, accessed 13/10/97, 8.04am. Incidentally, the same two youths that attacked *Piss Christ* with a hammer were also responsible for stealing a monkey from Melbourne Zoo six months later.

^{xxviii}Potts, Timothy, quoted in *ibid*.

^{xxix}**Serrano, Andres**, unpublished recorded telephone interview with Kit Messham-Muir, Melbourne, Australia, 19/10/97.

^{xxx}**Moran, Deirdre**, (d.moran@library.usyd.edu.au), email published in *The Sydney Morning Herald On Line*, URL: <http://www.smh.com.au/eletters/eletters/191017>, accessed 17/10/97, 2.15pm.

^{xxxi}No author given, (ufcc@otbd.com), email published in *The Sydney Morning Herald On Line*, URL: <http://www.smh.com.au/eletters/eletters/191017>, accessed 17/10/97, 2.15pm.

^{xxxii}**Nipperus, Frank**, (BAFC@wantree.com.au), email published in *The Sydney Morning Herald On Line*, URL: <http://www.smh.com.au/eletters/eletters/191017>, accessed 17/10/97, 2.15pm. Author’s emphasis.

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^{xxxiii}**Thomas, Brett**, and **McArthur, Jacqueline**, “Pranksters may have taken statue”, *The Sun-Herald*, October 18 1997, p. 24.

^{xxxiv}**Serrano**, loc. cit.

^{xxxv}**Thomas** and **McArthur**, loc. cit.

^{xxxvi}**Foster**, op. cit., p. 157.

^{xxxvii}**Amerliar, Sarah** and **Riley, Charles**, “Aftershock from the Artquake”, *World Art*, Vol. 1, #2, 1994. p. 22. Amusingly, this issue of World Art makes an inversion of the title of Morley Safer’s story “YesÖ But Is It Art?” on their contents page, referring to their reply story as “YesÖ But Is It Philistinism?”.

^{xxxviii}Indeed, even within contemporary Western culture, under the regime of the rationalist notion of subjective unity which has predominated for four centuries, it cannot be absolutely claimed that bodily matter is necessarily and consistently ‘abject’. In these instances, the matter which breaches the boundaries of the body is not necessarily seen as abject and horrific, but contrarily, as abundantly funny, as a kind of playful and juvenile toilet humour.

^{xxxix}**Campbell, Kay**, “Out of Humour”, *Wit’s End*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia, 1993, p. 24.

^{xl}**Fenner, Felicity**, “Nostalgia and Jelly Delights”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11/3/94, p. 19.

^{xli}Buchanan, Patrick, quoted in **Fox, Nichols**, “NEA under siege: Artwork sparks congressional challenge to agency’s reauthorization”, *New Art Examiner*, Summer ‘89, p.18.

^{xlii}“The Last Temptation of Christ”, directed by Martin Scorsese, MCA/Universal Pictures, USA/Canada, 1988.

^{xliii}Buchanan, Patrick, quoted in **Vance, Carole S.**, “Issues and Commentary: The War on Culture”, *Art in America*, Volume 77, September 1989, p. 41.

^{xliv}Indeed, as a body of values it is certainly facialised in its vertical and hierarchical organisation.

^{xlv}**Massumi, Brian**, *A user’s guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1992, p. 112. As I shall argue, the crucifix is also *more* than an image of transcendent agency.

^{xlvi}*ibid.*

^{xlvii}*ibid.*, pp. 109-112.

^{xlviii}*ibid.*, p. 108.

^{xlix}*ibid.*, p. 109.

^l*ibid.*

^{li}*ibid.*, p. 112.

^{lii}**Russell, Bertrand**, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, London, UK, 1973 p. 40.

^{liii}**Derrida, Jacques**, *Of Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, USA, 1974.

^{liv}**Bernasconi, Robert**, “No More Stories, Good or Bad”, ed. Wood, David, *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, UK, 1992, p. 143. Author’s italics.

^{lv}*ibid.*, p. 144. Including quote from Derrida referenced by Bernasconi as (G 254/179).

^{lvi}**Derrida**, op. cit., p. 144. Derrida’s emphasis.

^{lvii}Johns, Jasper, quoted in **Alloway, Lawrence**, *American Pop Art*, Whitney Museum of American Art/Macmillan Publishing, New York, USA, 1974. p. 69.

^{lviii}**Kristeva, Julia**, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 1984, p. 34. Kristeva’s italics.

^{lix}**Kristeva, Julia**, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 1982, p.1, p.2.

CHAPTER SEVEN: TACTICS OF AFFECT

There seems to be a growing feeling within media, literary and art theory that affect is central to an understanding of our information and image based late capitalist culture, in which so-called master narratives are perceived to have foundered. Fredric Jameson notwithstanding, belief has waned for many, but not affect. If anything, our condition is characterised by a surfeit of it. The problem is that there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect. Our entire vocabulary has derived from theories of signification that are still wedded to structure even across irreconcilable differences (the divorce proceedings of poststructuralism: terminable or interminable?). In the absence of an asignifying philosophy of affect, it is all too easy for received psychological categories to slip back in, undoing the deconstructive work that has been effectively carried out by poststructuralism.¹

Here, Brian Massumi characterises the cultural conditions under which this thesis is written. He registers that understanding the affect of images in our culture has become increasingly important at the end of the Twentieth Century. Indeed, as this thesis has shown, the discourses of art theory in the 1990s have been primarily concerned with the affect of images, but these concerns have certainly been dominated by ‘received psychological categories’. As I have shown, in art theoretical discourses, this has largely taken the form of a strategic deployment of Julia Kristeva’s psychopolitical notions of abjection, a strategy which is certainly ‘wedded to structure’ and thus shackled to the problems of structure, strategy and determinacy. The deployment of notions of abjection following the American NEA debate is counter to the generation of the kind of vocabulary specific to affect which Massumi urges us to seek. I have shown the extent to which such theory is limiting in terms of efficacious macropolitical strategies.

For art theory at the end of the 1990s, the options available for considering ‘affect’ are few. Current discourse tends to provide two opposed alternatives: either fall back onto biologism and psychoanalysis (such as Kristeva’s theory of abjection), or employ a linguistic structuralism which reduces all meaning and affect to conventional signification. As Massumi indicates, poststructuralism remains uncomfortably connected to structure, still tied, to a significant extent, to structural linguistic theories of signification in order to talk about ‘affect’. Structuralists, such

as Ferdinand de Saussure or C. S. Peirce would conflate ‘affect’ with conventional signification, since;

[t]he only thought...which can possibly be cognized is thought in signs. But thought which cannot be cognized does not exist. All thought, therefore, must necessarily be in signs.ⁱⁱ

Such a structuralist paradigm would see ‘affect’ as operating through a process of a fairly fixed body ‘reading’ an image. Although this is explicitly a structuralist position, Massumi rightly claims that such premises continue to bear on poststructuralism, to the extent that *all* intelligibility is considered in terms of cultural textuality:

Theoretical moves aimed at ending Man end up making human culture the measure of all things.ⁱⁱⁱ

If this were the case, ‘affect’ could be adequately understood as a standard process of reading, as though ‘affect’ can be comprehensively unpacked into words.

However, it would seem that affect is a dynamic in which there is very little ‘process’. Affect is not absorbed and then negotiated at a linguistic level, rather, at the point of ‘impact’, so to speak, a body responds in a way which is seemingly autonomic or habitual. Catherine Malabou notes:

What takes place in terms of habit is a reduction in receptivity and an increase in spontaneity.^{iv}

As Jill Bennett also says, in regard to contemporary art which affects its audience:

there is no space between stimulus and response in which to reflect. The violent and the pornographic act upon the sensory body before it has a chance to process information, to ‘read’ the image.^v

The seemingly unmediated impact of affect has been discussed in recent art theory as a ‘language of the body’.

This final chapter looks at affect as ‘a language of the body’, and the dangers in employing such a notion. In discussing the notion of a ‘language of body’ in regards to affect, I will consider, through the Deleuzo-Spinozist ethological approach (explained in Chapter Five), the ways in which bodies ‘receive’ affect, or rather, the way in which the organisation of bodies influences the way in which affect is

received. Importantly, certain ideas of the embodiment of habit will become significant in considering affect in this chapter. I will argue that if we are to produce understandings of affect more pertinent to the contingencies of culture, to create a “cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect”,^{vi} then it is necessary to consider the ways in which the organisation of bodies has an important bearing on their perception and their capacity to be affected.

Furthermore, thinking about bodies and their capacities in terms of ‘habit’ is useful for understanding the ‘process’ of affect, and the ways in which capacities are enabled. Notions of habit provide us with ways of thinking about capacities. It can lead us to consider ways in which the supposed ‘natural’ capacities of bodies can be changed. Reorganising habits can extend ‘bodies’ and their capacities, or indeed, a molecularisation of habits can create indeterminate bodies, whose capacities are unknowable. Therefore, this chapter attempts to address the important question raised in the previous chapter: if the capacities of bodies to be affected is not constituted in a fundamental human makeup and inherent in instinctual organisation, yet certain ‘protocols’ *do* somehow determine to a certain degree a body’s capacity to be affected, then in what ways may such capacity be aggregated in bodies? Moreover, if we can establish a non-instinctively based understand of affect, what does this mean for our understanding of affect and the deployment of affective strategies in art?

A Language of the Body?

For those who were affected by *Piss Christ* during the NEA debate and the NGV controversy, the impact was effectively *on their body*.^{vii} This affect upon bodies seems to occur through a language which may be thought to operate somewhere between signification and a literal and actual attack on one's body. Interestingly, the reactions to *Piss Christ* manifested in both verbal *and* physical counterattacks. On the floor of the American Senate, on May 18th 1989, not only did Senator Alphonse D'Amato verbally condemn Serrano and *Piss Christ*, calling it "a deplorable, despicable, display of vulgarity"^{viii} but he also ripped-up a copy of the work. Likewise, the attack on *Piss Christ* in Melbourne was not only through Archbishop George Pell's litigation, but also by two youths with a hammer, as though to literally hit-back at the image.

Walter Benjamin refers to the kind of affect provoked by works such as *Piss Christ* as 'ballistic'; "it hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality"^{ix} That is, bodies are affected through the impact of an image, in ways which are almost as brutal as a physical assault.^x Jill Bennett describes this 'ballistic' affect in contemporary art as "not so much semiotic", rather "the image [is], in a very palpable sense, 'felt' rather than merely observed".^{xi} Similarly, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari also talk of this kind of 'ballistic' affect in regards to authors who "wrote with affects, using them like stones and weapons".^{xii} The audience is not engaged in a passive spectatorial observance, yet neither does such 'ballistic' affect brutally impacting upon bodies in the most literal sense. Rather, according to Bennett, one may conditionally consider this 'ballistic' affect as a "'language of the body' — an untranslatable idiolect".^{xiii} The body is acted-upon by a language which is *in some way* corporeal.

Bennett argues that to enter into a dialogue with such 'ballistic' affective artwork, and be affected, one must interpret the work through the body. This requires of the viewer a capacity to 'feel' an image on the body. She claims that it implies a kind of 'openness' that appears to have characterised the medieval body.^{xiv} This

medieval body, as Bennett footnotes, is one familiar to this thesis: It is the ‘grotesque body’ as discussed in Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*.^{xv} To briefly recapitulate, the medieval grotesque body was not the body of unified subjectivity. As I have argued in Chapter Three, the grotesque body was not understood as distinct from the world outside it, in the sense in which contemporary Western culture knows it. Bennett suggests that the grotesque body could not be made sense of, and rather ‘can only be sense’.^{xvi}

However, to speak of a ‘language of the body’ without further qualification is potentially problematic. In a culture in which rationalist notions of subjectivity dominate, in which the body is posited on one side of a binary, in opposition to language, to talk of a ‘language of the body’ invokes a number of assumptions, by default. In the first instance, if one is to talk of a ‘language of the body’, there is the attendant implication that it stands in distinction from, and in opposition to, a ‘language of the mind’. In turn, one risks the implication that there is ‘corporeal communication’, distinct from ‘linguistic communication’. Moreover, to talk of a ‘language of the body’ risks an implied assumption of ‘the body’ as a transcendental pan- or pre-cultural materiality, a ‘truth’ behind ‘culture’. Of course, art theorists such as Bennett, are writing from a milieu of contemporary critical theory, in which such dualistic assumptions have been comprehensively critiqued. Therefore, we need to qualify and clarify Bennett’s use of the term ‘language of the body’ to avoid unproductive misconceptions.

The risk of falling into rationalist dualism when discussing a ‘language of the body’ is perpetuated in some of the ways in which language has been understood, as though in opposition to materiality. Structural linguistics, while it recognises that signification is arbitrary and not ontologically given, in its rationalist paradigm tends to figure signification in dichotomous terms of convention and matter. For example, C.S. Peirce claims that there are three main sign types: icon, index and symbol. A symbol is a sign which refers to a referent through a general law of ideas. As David McNeill elucidates; “the word ‘word’, a traffic light and a Masonic handshake are all symbols.”^{xvii} Speech and writing are Peircean ‘symbols’ because

“[n]o symbol...could be a symbol without being interpreted.”^{xviii} However, with Peirce’s classifications of ‘icon’ and ‘index’, he posits materiality as at least partially transcendent of culture. An ‘icon’ sign denotes through a characteristic of its own. As John Lechte says:

a portrait then is iconic to the extent that the qualities of the representation are similar to the qualities of the subject represented.^{xix}

Likewise, an ‘index’ sign refers through a material causal link. Peirce cites a weathercock, a barometer and a sundial.

Peirce argues that the classifications of ‘icon’ and ‘index’ do not operate in a conventional symbolic way, because their meaning operates via the physicality of signs, rather than contractual rules. They are founded and reassured by the related qualities of their material referents, and thus there is a ‘natural’ determined fixity. However, as Umberto Eco argues, ‘iconic’ and ‘indexical’ signs are no less culturally encoded than conventional signs in Peirce’s ‘symbolic’ category. The physical properties that exist for an icon are nevertheless embedded in a coded perception.^{xx}

Similarly, the ways in which corporeal materiality is understood in *any* circumstance is contingent upon and subject to the cultural axioms of selfhood that dominate for the time and place in which those selves live. As Judith Butler states in relation to the materiality of the body, even;

[t]he body posited as prior to the sign, is always *posited* or *signified* as *prior*.^{xxi}

What one may consider to be the materiality of the body is always culturally constituted. Any claim that materiality too has its own signification running either in conjunction or disjunction with conventional signification is problematic because it reinforces a dualism which is culturally specific.

Thus, Bennett is apt to invoke the grotesque body in discussing a ‘language of the body’ in as far as this model of ‘body’ does not operate as a dualised body, but rather a monistic body. Therefore, a ‘language of the body’ in the culture of the grotesque body is rather a ‘language of bodies’ as a whole. As I have shown in Chapter

Three, the grotesque body existed within the context of selfhood which is not one of contemporary subjectivity, individuality and a functionality configured by capitalism. Under the pre-rationalist grotesque notion of the body, the materiality of a body is not considered as the corporeality at the foundation of subjectivity, there is no cleavage of the self from the body. To reiterate, rationalism's understanding of corporeality is the body as the "motor force" which derives its commands from the operating brain.^{xxii} For the grotesque body, there is *no* distinction of the matter of the body and a metaphysical self. The grotesque body did not *contain* the mind of the 'self', rather the 'body' *was* the 'self', and the 'self' *was* the 'body'.

Thus, for the grotesque body, a 'language of the body' is not distinct from a 'language of the mind', that is, it is not a corporeal and somehow a non-significatory language. Rather, given that the grotesque body (to contemporary Western thought) is in complementarity with the self, its 'language of the body' is rather an understanding of language which is not regarded as being either of mind or body. Thus, while Bennett may talk of affect as a 'language of the body' it is not meant in the sense of 'the body' as a precultural materiality, but rather a language of 'bodies' in a more Deleuzo-Spinozist ethological sense.^{xxiii} Indeed, from the instance at which we regard bodies as not simply a duality of the *materiality* upon which *subjectivity* is based, then this problem disintegrates into irrelevance. Similar to the grotesque body, ethological bodies are not dualised, that is, this understanding of bodies does not differentiate between those bodies which one may regard as having only materiality and those which additionally have cognition. Neither, with those 'cognisant' human bodies does it differentiate between their materiality and cognition. Against the dualistic rationalist understanding of subjectivity and bodies, an ethological understanding is monistic in the sense that 'a body' is an organisational cluster, and not a combination of mind and body.^{xxiv}

In the previous chapter, I discussed the way in which certain values and meanings may be condensed into a hierogram for a particular community, such as the crucifix for Christians. However, this is only half of the relationship. This kind of condensation of meaning is not simply inherent within an object or image. Rather

the object or image operates as a “mnemonic”,^{xxv} because it is meaningful in itself, without fully referring to the meanings it condenses. For Bennett, the wounds depicted in late medieval Italian painting;

convey the horror of Christ’s Passion through a mnemonic which imprinted itself upon the spectator.^{xxvi}

Here, Bennett touches upon what seems to be an important feature of affect. Of course, the capacity for artworks to affect is not inherent in the work itself, but at the same time it is not so much constituted in language. Rather, it is constituted in perception, within the habituated organisation of bodies; “imprinted...upon the spectator”,^{xxvii} or rather, *within* the spectator.

If the organisation of any body has a vital bearing upon the way in which that body is affected by an encounter with other bodies, then certain notions of embodiment are important here. In turn, if we are to talk of meaning in some way being ‘embodied’ it is important not to fall into the trap of necessarily regarding embodiment as material determined or constituted in instinct. Therefore, it is also important to discuss some ideas about habituation which are appropriate to the Deleuzean ethological approach which this thesis follows. Indeed, if we can think of other ways of understanding the organisation of bodies, through habit, it leads us to reconsider the ways in which one may deploy a tactics of affect to change the ways in which bodies affect, and are affected.

De-essentialising Habit

In Chapter Five I discussed the way in which Deleuze's Spinozist ethology enables us to consider 'bodies' in a much less fixed and default sense. A Deleuzo-Spinozist ethological approach to bodies allows us to think of power relations away from any restrictions or assurances of predictability in the ways in which 'bodies' of any kind will interact. At that point in the thesis I briefly made mention that it is not simply the case that *no* power relation can be guessed at. Indeed, my consideration of the way in which a work such as *Piss Christ* affects a certain audience in a very particular way illustrated that bodies *do* become organised in such a way which increases the determinacy of their capacity to be affected by certain other bodies.

Sure, while an ethological approach regards the forms and capacities of bodies as not fixed, it is certainly a common experience in our culture that bodies are not entirely unpredictable. Indeed, while no body is absolutely fixed, most often bodies are habituated. With human bodies in our culture, a number of paradigmatic axioms operate as molarising forces upon bodies, to produce bodies as fixed, and indexed to certain material characteristics. A four-century-long regime of privatisation based on economic function has founded the habituation of bodies in functional classifications. As Moira Gatens notes:

This classification decides what may be 'legitimately' extracted from any given body (reproductive services, military services, types of labouring services, types of utterance, and so on.)^{xxviii}

As I have argued in Chapter Three, with the loss of the people's mass body into the fragmented masses, each subject's function is only exchangeable in terms of the force of its labour. Rationalism individualised the subject and the body, and fragmented the people's mass body. Its fluidity becomes fixed, labour is divided, and the subject's 'role' becomes its 'function'. As I argued in that chapter, the rise of physiology dissected the body, organised its parts and announced the function of its individual organs. The Christian tradition within the otherwise secular culture of the Enlightenment made sacred the materiality of the interior of the subject. In turn, the rise of capitalism reinforced the individuality of subjectivity, regarded those

subjectivities in terms of their definite and determinable role within capitalist production, and privatised the body. The result, according to Gatens, is thus;

Such a strict bifurcation functions to structure the materiality of individual bodies, their speeds and slowness, their relative motion and rest, into stable and reasonably predictable patterns. This structuration, in turn, is paralleled by the organisation of the intensive capacities of such bodies.^{xxix}

In other words, the functional classification within our culture organises bodies in ways which are primarily teleological, largely in terms of their function for the greater good of capitalist culture. So, our culture, which divides labour, in turn divides labour functions largely according to the classification of bodies. To use Gatens' clear examples, a female body of child-bearing age is considered in her capacity to reproduce, or an adult male body is considered in terms of his capacity for military labour. Classification based on the materiality of bodies lays down particular expectations of the capacities of those bodies. However, it is important to note that, despite the teleological axiomatic status granted to capitalism, such classifications are ultimately arbitrary, or rather, contingent. Thus, if a woman is expected to bear children, it is the result of an economic and social imperative for reproduction, and not because her body is transcendently predetermined to perform this 'natural' function, subject to some biological clock which keeps on ticking. Capitalist culture requires the ossified habituation of bodies; in the terms used in Chapter Three, it requires *minstrels* not *jongleurs*.

So, the capacities for bodies to affect, and to be affected, whatever form those bodies may take, is not entirely unpredictable in a culture such as ours, which calls for the clear habituation of bodies. However, the 'nature' of such habituation then becomes an important issue here. As Gatens says, the habituation of bodies in our culture is determined to a significant degree by the contingencies of economic imperatives. Moreover, capitalist culture has very much adopted a Darwinian paradigm, establishing *the market* as the natural element which decides who shall 'survive'. Thus, our culture has been inclined to posit the economically determined habituation of bodies as a natural tendency. The division of labour and the understanding of bodies in their economic functional capacities presents itself as an axiom of the 'nature' of our culture.

An often used exposition of this idea of ‘capitalism as nature’ can be found in Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe*.^{xxx} As Gatens says:

The use to which economists put Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is well known: his story functions as a model of *homo economicus* as well as a fast-forward history of human rationality and industriousness.^{xxxii}

Indeed, Karl Marx also notes that; “Robinson Crusoe’s experiences are a favourite theme with political economists.”^{xxxii} Marx himself even uses the relation of Robinson and Friday in *Das Kapital* to reinforce certain axioms of economic relations, such as;

the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour, appear at all events as their own mutual relation, and are not disguised under the shape of social relations between the products of labour.^{xxxiii}

Defoe’s fictitious Robinson Crusoe lives in a world nearly two centuries after François Rabelais’ pre-capitalist world of the grotesque body and its interchangeable functions, and a century after Rene Descartes’ founding notions of rationalism. It is a world seen through the lens of Eighteenth Century Europe, in which capitalism and the beginnings of global trade and European colonialism are emerging.^{xxxiv} In Defoe’s novel, Robinson Crusoe is shipwrecked on an uninhabited island with the few remnants which he managed to salvage, and he attempts to survive in a space which is effectively outside of culture and time. In this apparently neutralised and naturalised space, he employs a kind of ‘caveman’ technology to eventually re-establish for himself his apparently irrepressible humanity, in the form of a microcosmic capitalist system. When ‘Friday’ joins Robinson, he soon establishes his own ‘natural’ place, being lead by Robinson in social, economic and religious terms.^{xxxv} Together, they fine tune their economic system, dividing the labour and establishing systems of exchange. Their relationship is a microcosm of the European colonial relationship: Friday provides labour and raw materials, while Robinson ‘advances’ Friday into civilisation and monotheism, making him less beast and more man.

Indeed, it is quite likely that Defoe intended to present *Robinson Crusoe* as a model of the ontology of capitalism. As the economist Maximillian E. Novak notes;

In his *General History of Trade* [written six years before *Robinson Crusoe*], Defoe argued that although God had created the world in such a way as to make commerce essential, he might have done it so that ‘every Man should have been his own Labourer, or his own Manufacturer.’ But whereas God assured each country its share of the necessities of life, he spread the articles of comfort and convenience all over the earth.^{xxxvi}

Thus, according to Defoe, God has made capitalism and European colonial economic relations necessary. Indeed, Defoe’s novel argues, at a paradigmatic and axiomatic level, that humanity is naturally constituted by its tendency towards capitalist economics: capitalism is instinctual, and just as water always finds its level, humanity eventually finds capitalism, even if it has been disturbed. Since capitalism operates as a central ontology, all else follows. Bodies are naturally organised in terms of their function in the system. The classification of bodies in terms of predetermined habits and capacities is not simply demanded by capitalism, but is naturally there, always and already. Thus, the organisation of bodies in Defoe’s world is economically teleological. In effect, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is a paradigmatic hypothesis, a fictitious experiment the purpose of which is to reinforce the teleology of capitalism and, importantly, the ontological organisation of the bodies within it.

However, against Defoe’s understanding of capitalism as nature, and bodily organisation as instinct, recent contemporary Deleuzean theory has focused on Michel Tournier’s novel, *Friday*,^{xxxvii} a revision of *Robinson Crusoe* which questions Defoe’s economic ontologism. Tournier’s *Friday* was first published in 1967, in a world divested of the European blissful naivety of ‘benevolent’ colonialism which underlies Defoe’s novel. It effectively strips Defoe’s novel of its economic certainty. Instead of placing Robinson at the centre of an uninhabited world which he changes to suit his ‘nature’, Tournier’s Robinson is cast away into a world in which capitalism and the functions it attaches to bodies is dissipated and sundered. The bodies in Tournier’s *Friday* are not determined by the quasi-axiomatic ‘truths’ of capitalism. Rather, dislocated and disconnected from the molarising forces of Western culture, ‘instinct’ and function disintegrate.

Following on from his discussion of Tournier’s *Friday*,^{xxxviii} Gatens has recently

taken Deleuze's analysis further. In *Friday*, not only does the ontologism of capitalism collapse, but numerous aspects of the 'natural' organisation of bodies come into question. As Gatens notes, *Friday* provides "a clear illustration of the thesis that individuals are never separable from their relations with the world."^{xxxix} Tournier's *Friday* provides us with a way of understanding the immutability of instinct as mutable habit.

Indeed, in Tournier's *Friday*, the organisations of Robinson's body, over the course of the 28 years in which he is cast away, are refigured away from molarity, in an ongoing process of becoming-elemental.^{xi} The ostensibly transcendental functions of his body undergo an "astonishing metamorphosis",^{xii} and become molecularised. Robinson's body is no longer in relation to any functional ontology, with determinate functions forming determinate habits:

He had visions of his body transformed into one large hand, his head, arms, and legs its five fingers—legs capable of pointing like a forefinger, arms capable of serving as legs, the body capable of resting on any of its limbs like a hand pointed on one finger or another.^{xiii}

One could possibly argue that this is simply a matter of Robinson returning to nature in his dereliction. However, Robinson does not become more 'instinctual', or less acculturated. Rather, Robinson's 'culture' becomes molecularised. It is a culture-in-becoming, but unlike Oleg Kulik's *becoming-dog*,^{xiiii} Tournier's Robinson is not in a process of becoming between one molarity and another, but rather is in a process of becoming from his Eurocultural molarity towards an unseen molecularisation.

After 28 years of this molecularisation, Robinson is no longer the same Robinson who was washed-up on the island's shore. All his habituated molarities which, in his original English culture, organised his body towards certain functions, become fluid, expedient and contingent. The molarities of biology, humanity, masculinity, sexuality, capitalist economics, law and order, linear time, age, and so forth, have disintegrated. As Gatens notes:

The process through which [Tournier's] Robinson becomes 'elemental' may be seen as the gradual unfolding and undoing of all his habituated affects. His

dis-engagement from his culture and its norms may be seen as a literal decomposition of his past 'self'.^{xliv}

When Tournier's Robinson and Friday's are eventually visited by English ship the extent of Robinson's molecularisation becomes clear:

December 22, 1787. Twenty-eight years, two months, and some twenty days. The figure still amazed him. If he had not been cast ashore on Speranza he would now be in his fifties, a graybeard with cracking bones. His children would be older than he had been when he left them, and perhaps he would be a grandfather. But none of these things had happened to him.^{xlv}

Of course, none of these things *had* happened to him because the habits, the organisation of his body, the ways in which he organised the 'bodies' around him no longer supported the multitude of quasi-ontological axiomatic European notions which enabled these habits. Western culture attaches incorporeal transformation to bodies which determine their functions and capacities:

Bodies have an age, they mature and grow formations that are immediately attributed to bodies in particular societies.^{xlvi}

Disconnected from these particular incorporeal transformations, Robinson does not age, as Gatens notes:

There is no form, substance, essence or subject 'underlying' Robinson which 'causes' his humanity. Rather a specifically *human* body persists only whilst it exists in extensive and intensive interrelations with those bodies which together constitute a human society.^{xlvii}

Thus, Robinson's own 'truth', of his own becoming is quite different:

The truth was that he was younger today than the pious and self-seeking young man who had set sail in the *Virginia* [the ship that was wrecked on the island], not young with a biological youth, corruptible and harboring the seeds of its decrepitude, but with a mineral youth.^{xlviii}

Youth, for the biological molarities of Western culture, dictates the organisation and habituation of function of bodies.

Of course, Tournier's revision of *Robinson Crusoe* is no less a work of fiction as Defoe's original novel. However, conversely, Defoe's novel, which has long been regarded as reinforcing the axioms of capitalist economics, is no more likely.

Tournier's *Friday* is useful in that it offers us a re-reading which de-essentialises a

range of Western axioms, particularly of the organisation of bodies, their capacities and habits.

Indeed, of the gamut of instincts which become dismantled for Tournier's Robinson, Gatens particularly focuses on the disintegration of his sexuality.

On arriving upon the island, Tournier's Robinson establishes it as his sexual other. The island becomes a body organised in alignment with Robinson's own quasi-natural heterosexuality. He names the island 'Speranza' in "the wholly profane memory of a hot-blooded Italian girl whom he had known when he was a student at York University."^{xix} Even the geographical form of the island is regarded as female, and eroticised.¹ The island's rock formations, flora and fauna become female sexual organs, and his sexual desire for the island is eventually consummated when he finds a fallen quillai tree resembling parted female thighs, with a mossy aperture at the point of the fork.ⁱⁱ His sexual liaison with the island, via the tree, lasts for several months until, during one encounter, he is bitten on his penis by a spider nesting in the tree's crevice.ⁱⁱⁱ This event begins a rupture in Robinson's molar sexualisation of the island, and indeed, it begins a rupture in his own molar sexuality.

The organisation of his ostensibly natural sexuality disintegrates, as well as the sexuality he has imposed on the island. Even the presence of another human with the arrival of Friday does not hinder the becoming-elemental of Robinson's sexuality:

As to my sexuality, I may note that at no time has Friday inspired me to any sodomite desire. For one thing, he came too late, when my sexuality had already become elemental and was directed towards Speranza.ⁱⁱⁱ

Over the course of the story, spanning 28 years, the sexual organisation and habits of Robinson, Friday and the initially sexualised island eventually molecularise into something *other than sexual*.

Beyond the fiction of Tournier's *Friday*, this kind of reorganisation of the ostensibly instinctual sexual organisation of bodies is not unheard of. As Elizabeth Grosz notes, in certain instances:

The erotic dimensions attributed by us to genitality are spread in varying intensities over the surface of the body^{liv}

Indeed, a documentary film, titled *Untold Desires*,^{lv} clearly suggests that sexual organisation, while constituted in the body, is not so predestined and immutable. The documentary focuses on the sexuality of disabled people in Australia. It examines the sex-life of people whose sexuality has been marginalised by the normalisation of both sexual practices and the ways in which bodies are organised. One man in the documentary broke his spine in an accident, and lost all feeling and voluntary movement from his waist down. In our culture, in which the capacities of bodies and their functions are primarily understood in relation to a normalised 'body', his ability to perform certain functions is often regarded as limited. For example, before the accident the interviewee enjoyed skiing. After the accident, he successfully reorganised his corporeal habits to accommodate the changed capacities of his body. He continued to ski on a ski-board adapted to carry him. He re-habituated his body to ski with the adapted equipment. However, sexual pleasure tends to be regarded as more corporally inscribed, and ostensibly the capacities of a body to affect and to be affected sexually would not simply be reaccommodated by prosthetic adaptations. Thus, given the Freudian understanding that there are limited and neurologically determined erotogenic zones, one may imagine that corporeal options are narrowed down. However, as the interviewee claims:

I've got quite a few options actually. It's a funny thing, the human body, the back of my neck now, and the back of my arms... I've got spots which are just unbelievable... really out of this world!^{lvi}

As another interviewee in *Untold Desires* explains, erotogenic zones can undergo a 'dominance transfer'.^{lvii}

When you lose sensation [in one part of your body] you find that the bits that are left are actually a bit more sensitive than what they used to be. Sensation... is generally heightened in some areas, so, the actual genital sensation can be amplified into another... sensitive area of the body.^{lviii}

For these two interviewees, the 'natural' organisation of erotogenic zones is rather more contingent, habitual, and reorganisable.

Practically, this suggests that supposedly ontologically given elements of sexuality,

such as the erotogenic zones, are not as immutable as psychoanalysis would lead us to believe.^{lix} These interviewees enjoy sex to a similar degree as before their accidents, when both men considered the penis to be the primary erotogenic zone, even though their sexual organisation has changed radically to exclude what Freud would call the phallic zone.^{lx} Psychoanalysis takes a normalised neurological homunculus as the determinant ‘fact’ of the body in its sexual organisation, choosing nerve-concentrated orifices as the primary erotogenic zones. However, ‘dominance transfer’ suggests that sexual organisation at the level of bodies and their functions is far more adaptable.

For Tournier’s Robinson, the reorganisation of his sexuality also changes radically, but not just in terms of his own erotogenic zones (as with the interviewees in *Untold Desires*). For Robinson, the axioms of psychoanalytical notions of sexual organisation, of ‘libido’, ‘erotogenic zones’ and ‘objects of desire’, disintegrate in a synergistic spiral, eventuating in a molecularisation of sexuality, until “sex is left behind.”^{lxi} The quasi-natural notion of ‘sexuality’ dismantles itself in a world in which its meaning is no longer sustained.

I have looked at the dismantling of instinct to argue that although the ‘protocols’ which influence a body’s capacity to affect are constituted within the organisation that body, that organisation is mobile, reactive and changeable. This is where Tournier’s *Friday* is useful and important in thinking about the ways in which bodies affect and are affected in ways which are not determined by quasi-axiomatic biological ‘truths’ or functions corresponding to the capitalist imperative. The ‘bodies’ in Tournier’s *Friday* have entirely mobile definitions and relations. There is no ‘natural’ order of the human body, no natural organisation of the world and no set functions or scheme into which any functions fit. At Robinson’s most molar state, at the beginning of the novel, his behaviour is not set in instinct, but habituated and subject to contingencies which happen to hold his organisation in relative stasis.

So, while the psychoanalytic paradigm to which Kristeva’s theory of abjection belongs, talks of ‘instincts of the body’, a Deleuzian understanding of these notions may rather talk of ‘habits of bodies’. Kristeva’s notions of abjection are acceptable

up to a point, in that the capacity for bodies to be affected is constituted within those bodies. However, as Gatens, Tournier's *Friday*, and *Untold Desires* suggest, this constitution is always habitual. Habit is neither immutable nor unpredictable, rather, it lies at a point in between. It is neither law nor chance. It defines the dispositions of a body. Importantly by 'habit', I do not mean a set of responses inscribed upon a blank subjectivity from birth, and neither do I mean a responsory repertory of an instinctual set of unconscious drives. Rather, habit is the responsory repertory of 'bodies' *whose capacities are constituted within culture as determinate*. Habit is a fold in culture at which culture tends to define itself as nature.

Contemporary Western culture tends to constitute bodies in terms of their social and economic functionality. Thus certain bodies are aligned with certain functions — labouring, reproductive, military, and so forth. Along with the axiomatic status which this economic system enjoys, the organisation of bodies in this system is also privileged as axiomatic and natural. While this constitution of bodies is merely habituated, and thus changeable, it is most often given as instinctual and natural. I have shown here, when habit is taken as instinct, bodies are understood as determinate. When habit is taken as instinct and drive the capacities of bodies become closed-off.

If affect occurs with little distance between stimulus and response, it is a 'language of bodies' because the capacities of those bodies to be affected is itself within their habitual organisation. I began this chapter by claiming that an affective 'language of bodies' does not put into operation a process of 'reading', but rather is something which is more direct. Having discussed the contingent character of habituation, I shall now look at a way in which the capacity for a body to be affected may become habituated in a way in which affect may operate. I shall look at a way in which the habits of bodies may take the place of a strictly linguistic process when a body is affected.

Bodies and Habit

Hubert L. Dreyfus provides us with a contemporary explanation of the ways in which bodies are habituated, which is particularly pertinent to the Deleuzo-Spinozist ethological understanding of bodies. Dreyfus predicates his understanding upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notions of 'habit' in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Firstly, this is useful because Merleau-Ponty does not think of habit and bodies as established in a rationalist scheme of either of mind or body. As Elizabeth Grosz notes:

Merleau Ponty begins with a fundamental presumption, not of a Cartesian dualism of mind and body but of their interrelatedness.^{lxii}

This blurring of the mind/body dualism is apparent where Merleau-Ponty says;

I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once.^{lxiii}

Indeed, embodiment itself is vital to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of habit. As Paul Crowther explains:

[o]ur knowledge of the world is thus founded upon the body's relating and habituating itself to things. Such encounters will leave behind then not so much mental 'pictures' or memory-images, as 'carnal formulae'.^{lxiv}

Crowther says that the "acquisition of language, of course, facilitates this", however, 'carnal formulae' are not 'lingual' in the sense that it is not simply a catalogue of signifieds linked to certain signifiers. Rather, Merleau-Ponty's 'carnal formulae' actively alters one's perception of the world. They are not so much stored memories, but rather, according to Crowther, are "ingrained upon our body".^{lxv} 'Carnal formulae' persists after the original 'encounters' that form them are ended. When such times come that the world we perceive differs from that inscribed in our 'carnal formulae', those formulae are "enriched".^{lxvi}

Further, although Merleau-Ponty's existentialist foundations may share little with the Deleuzean oeuvre, some elements lend themselves to an ethological understanding of bodies and affect. As Monika M. Langer notes;

[Merleau-Ponty's existentialism] rejects the Platonic-Cartesian-Hegelian ideal of eternal truth or absolute knowledge on the one hand and, on the other, the positivistic levelling which insists on objectivity and calculation.^{lxvii}

Similarly, an ethological position does not assume to know the character of a body, it does not assume bodies are organised universally, along the scheme of any eternal truth. Indeed, the non-operationalist imperative which underlies existentialism also resonates with Deleuzo-Spinozist ethology because it works against the kind of rigid functionalisation which seeks to determine the capacities of bodies in terms of their exchangeable and economically productive function. Of course, existentialism's faith in humanism, and its ultimate fear of dehumanisation, is not something shared by an Deleuzo-Spinozist ethological understanding of bodies. Rather, the ethological approach seeks to dismantle the 'default' understanding of the human body, so that universalistic assumptions of 'the human condition', of humanism, do not bear upon our considerations of the ways in which bodies affect one another.

From Merleau-Ponty's premises, Dreyfus considers a way in which habituation may occur. He regards habituation as a process which takes the body from one state to another. Dreyfus defines this process as having five definable stages: beginning with 'novice', then 'advanced beginner', to 'competence', 'proficient, and finishing at 'expertise'.^{lxviii} In elucidating this process, Dreyfus specifically uses the examples of a novice chess player or a learner driver, but notes that these are not special examples. The 'novice' learner is told to read certain signs, and how to respond in certain ways:

The student automobile driver learns to recognize such interpretation-free features as speed (indicated by his [sic] speedometer) and he is given rules such as shift to second [gear] when the speedometer needle points to ten miles an hour.^{lxix}

Indeed, in Chapter Four I discussed Dreyfus's definition of a 'novice' in relation to rule-based artificial intelligence. I will return to this shortly.

The next stage is the 'advanced beginner'. At this stage, "after seeing a sufficient number of examples, the student learns to recognise them."^{lxx} The learner driver will know to change gear when the motor revs up to a certain pitch:

No number of words can take the place of the few choice examples in learning these distinctions. Engine sounds cannot be adequately captured by words, and no list of objective facts enables one to predict the behavior of a pedestrian in a crosswalk as well as can the driver who has observed many pedestrians crossing streets under a variety of conditions.^{lxxi}

Likewise, the chess player begins to learn the signs of a dangerous situation in a game. This is the point at which the linguistic begins to be compressed, and no number of words can unpack it. In the process of habituation, one could say that this is the point at which the infant Jesse Helms or George Pell began to compress certain values into the crucifix.

‘Competence’ is the next stage for Dreyfus. For the learner, the number of facts is overwhelming, yet they don’t yet have the ability to hierarchise what is important, and what can be omitted:

The competent performer thus seeks new rules and reasoning procedures to decide upon a plan or perspective.^{lxxii}

So, the new rules are more about organising what has been learned in order of significance. Competent performers;

have to decide for themselves what plan to choose without being sure that it will be appropriate in the particular situation.^{lxxiii}

The competent learner driver must assess a situation consciously and choose a response in a kind of calculated trial and error. The competent chess player, a class A chess player, will feel less detached from the game than the rule-based player.

Next for Dreyfus is ‘proficiency’:

the performer’s theory of the skill, as represented by rules and principles will gradually be replaced by situational discriminations accompanied by associated responses. Proficiency seems to develop if, and only if, experience is assimilated in this atheoretical way and intuitive behavior replaces reasoned responses.^{lxxiv}

It seems at first to be saying that an expressionistic atheoreticality takes over. However, Dreyfus is saying that those things we may call ‘intuitive’, have been habituated through embodiment to the extent that they no longer are present as rules:

Action becomes easier and less stressful as the learner simply sees what needs to be achieved rather than deciding, by a calculative procedure, which of several possible alternatives should be selected.^{lxxv}

So, for the ‘proficient’ driver;

approaching a curve on a rainy day, may realise intuitively that he is going dangerously fast. He then consciously decides whether to apply the brakes or merely to reduce pressure by some selected amount on the accelerator.^{lxxvi}

For the ‘proficient’ chess player;

who is classed a master, can recognise a large repertoire of types of positions. Recognizing almost immediately and without conscious effort the sense of position, he sets about calculating the move that best achieves his goal. He may, for example, know that he should attack, but he must deliberate about how best to do so.^{lxxvii}

‘Proficiency’ then, for Dreyfus, is when the learner has reached a point where they can ‘intuitively’ feel-out a situation, but must still apply a deliberate effort of thought in order to respond to the situation.

Unlike the proficient performer, at the point of ‘expertise’;

[t]he expert not only knows what needs to be achieved, based on mature and practiced situational discrimination, but also knows how to achieve the goal.^{lxxviii}

A chess grandmaster can therefore play successful games, even while being engaged in analytical thinking on something else:

Such a play, based as it is on previous attention to thousands of actual and book games, incorporates a tradition which determines the appropriate response to a situation, and then to the next etc., and therefore makes possible long range, strategic, purposive play without the player needing to have in mind any plan or purpose at all.^{lxxix}

The expert driver is not aware of any decision he or she has just made: “what must be done, simply is done.”^{lxxx} Thus, expert habituation is not a matter of processing data, as Crowther notes:

[a]n object given in perception is encountered firstly as a meaning-for-us, an intersensory style of being, rather than a ‘mental’ construction from sense-data. It is grasped in the context of complex relationships in the immediate perceptual field, and in terms of its significance in our past, and for our future life.^{lxxxi}

While a novice calculates using rules and facts, an expert “does what normally works and, of course, it normally works.”^{lxxxii} At the point of ‘expertise’, habit becomes ostensibly normalised and naturalised.

Further, Dreyfus argues that the body is organised by the ‘expert’ habit to the extent that it becomes part of the constitution of the body, ingrained in its carnal formulae:

One does not need a goal or intention to act. One’s body is simply solicited by the situation to get into equilibrium with it.^{lxxxiii}

Thus, the particular response is not solicited by a desire of a body to externally affect, but by a more general desire to maintain its own sense of integrity. As Merleau-Ponty claims:

Whether a system of motor or perceptual power, our body is not an object for an ‘I think’, it is a grouping of live-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium.^{lxxxiv}

A body is experienced as moving in accordance with maintaining its ‘equilibrium’. In terms of motor skills, an example Merleau-Ponty uses is that of typing:

When I sit at my typewriter, a motor space opens up beneath my hands, in which I am about to ‘play’ what I have read... this power of habit is no different from the general one which we exercise over our body.^{lxxxv}

Indeed, while I type this line, I find the location of the appropriate letters on the keyboard without being aware of where exactly my fingers are going, or where they have just been.

If I make a typing error, I know not only by the wrong spelling appearing on the screen, but by an uneasiness in my fingers. The bodily relations which habits maintain are also the foundations of our axioms of the world. As Langer says:

As long as that dialogue proceeds smoothly, we take its results for granted and consider them a ‘natural’ world. It is when the dialogue is disturbed that its character as dialogue begins to emerge and we see that the subject’s way of living its body is decisive for the manner in which it apprehends the world.^{lxxxvi}

Of course, here I have discussed Dreyfus’s examples of the habituation of motor skills. However, the habituations of subjectivity could just as easily be understood in the same way. Indeed, since habituation is necessarily concerned with formulating certain configurations of the self, motor habits are in themselves habits of subjectivity. Not only do bodies become ‘experts’ at possessing certain subjective characteristics, but a body’s expanse of habituations themselves constitute it, its “general medium of having a world”.^{lxxxvii} As Grosz says:

we acquire motor skills and a system of possible actions or corporeal projects spanning the gulf and spectrum of possibilities, which range from our subjectivity to the external environment.^{lxxxviii}

If a body's habits are contradicted, then a body may experience a sense of disequilibrium, but such a contradiction will be absorbed, re-writing the 'carnal formulae', reconfiguring habit.

The underlying maintenance of equilibrium becomes the primary motivation of an habituated action, rather than the more obvious goal. For example, for a concert pianist, the main motivation is to keep things going smoothly, to maintain the equilibrium of the player and piano, rather than the more direct goal of playing a certain combination of notes in a particular way. Dreyfus says that this is the way in which one can feel a sense of being 'absorbed' in highly skilled action.^{lxxxix} According to Dreyfus, the equilibrium of a body is maintained by the subject recognising an 'input' and responding with an 'output'. The process seems automatic, or even physiologically autonomic.

In what ways may these formulated habits be 'stored' in bodies? Again, looking at different kinds of artificial intelligence, Dreyfus suggests that habituation is best understood in terms of a changeable 'connective' model. In Chapter Four, I looked at Dreyfus's example of the rule-based 'novice' in relation to strategy and tactics, as a rule-based system similar in operation to rule-based computer, such as Deep Blue. However, Dreyfus discusses another model for artificial intelligence which is entirely different from rule-based artificial intelligence, which he claims operates similarly to the habituation of an 'expert'. This is the 'neural networks' model of artificial intelligence. Neural networks operate in an entirely different way from rule-based artificial intelligence (at the time of writing, this theoretical model of artificial intelligence has not been developed much further than a rudimentary experimental stage). Whereas rule based computers follow their program like a preset flow diagram, neural networks continuously rewrite their own programs, making newer connections for dealing with problems, to accommodate contingencies:

According to these models, memories of specific situations are not stored. Rather, the connections between ‘neurons’ are modified by successful behavior in such a way that the same or similar input will produce the same or similar output.^{xc}

Thus, the data is not stored as an inert bank, but rather actively in the actual operation of the computer. Computer developers hope that this active connectionism more closely mimics the neural operation of the human brain.

According to Dreyfus, the way in which neural networks store information, or experience, is what allows it to be habituated. While rule-based AIs, like Deep Blue, rely on masses of data stored in inert memory banks, neural networks reorganise the very ways in which they process data according to past data input. Thus, they do not store memory like books on a library shelf:

Neural networks provide a model of how the past can affect present perception and action without needing to store specific memories at all. It is precisely the advantage of simulated neural networks that past experience, rather than being stored as a memory, modifies the connection strengths between the simulated neurons.^{xci}

Therefore;

New input can then produce output based on past experience without the net having to, or even being able to, retrieve any specific memories. The point is not that neural networks provide an explanation of association. Rather they allow us to give up seeking an associationist explanation of the way past experience affects present perception and action.

A neural network will have tendencies, formulated from events which it has henceforth encountered. These habituated tendencies not only determine, to a certain extent, the way in which the network responds, but also they change to accommodate the new data. Thus, a neural network computer does not read data input against stored data, but rather channels the data input in particular ways.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection understands bodies as predetermined programs, as though data is merely input into the subject, and is responded to by a pre-determined output. However, any particular input is not merely ‘read’ as raw data, and then responded to. Rather, affect upon the bodies of an audience may operate in ways similar to neural networks. As with Dreyfus’s ‘expert’, the response of a body to any affect is habituated according to a continuous and active negotiation of past and present

corporeal relations to other bodies. When Kristeva recoils and gags at the moment that her lips touch the skin on milk, the sensation of the milk skin on her lips has no inherent meaning, and invokes no innate response, but through habituation, over a lifetime, Kristeva, has become an 'expert' (in Dreyfus's scheme) at gagging at milk skin. She does not have to think about the milk skin, to register her reaction. She does not have to evaluate the meaning of the milk skin, then select a response, neither does she 'read' the milk as such. This process has been compressed, and the signifying process has become elided in the sense that it has become an habituated part of Kristeva's very self, at that particular time.

If we regard *all* meaning as operating as a kind of textuality, then this is to say that all meaning occurs through a process of 'reading'. The process of reading in a structured programmatic process of signification is similar to the process which Dreyfus identifies in ruled-based artificial intelligence. Raw data is fed into the computer, it is processed according to the structure of its program, and the computer responds accordingly. However, with those images whose meanings seem to be 'felt' upon the body, which seem to operate through a kind of 'language of the body', one's body does not 'read' the image in this way. Rather, the process of responding to a given input is momentarily determined by the habituation of a body. If a given input is similar in configuration to something already experienced, then the output is not read but automatically 'throughput' via channels which are constituted in the very make up of that body. This may seem to be a return to something similar to an 'abjection' understanding of affect, which places the response entirely with the instinct of the body. However, importantly, the habitual constitution of a body is not embedded in some immutable organisation. Rather, the body is organised and reorganised in relation to the habits at that moment. With each response, the configuration of habits changes to fit with both the immediate conditions and in anticipation of immanent conditions.

Langer says:

Acquiring such habits is neither a matter of intellectual analysis and reconstruction nor a mechanical recording of impressions, as the adjustment to an unfamiliar car or keyboard makes evident. It is a question, rather, of the bodily comprehension of a

motor significance which enables me to lend myself completely to expressing music without thinking about the position of my fingers, or to manoeuvre my car successfully through a narrow street without having to compare the width of my vehicle with that of the driving lane.^{xcii}

Similarly, Bennett is accurate in a sense when she says that an affective ‘language of bodies’ is ‘felt’ rather than observed.^{xciii} Words fail, but not because their meaning is no longer present, nor because ‘the body’ takes over. Rather, the significance becomes embodied as the words become elided. Their meaning is still present, but not through a strictly symbolic relation, but in a perceived complementarity with the affective object. Merleau-Ponty claims that;

We say that the body has understood and habit has been cultivated when it has absorbed a new meaning, and assimilated a fresh core of significance.^{xciv}

Put simply and practically, this kind of habitual ‘incorporation’ of meaning is similar to the use of Personal Identification Numbers. When someone is first given a PIN code, to access a bank autoteller machine for instance, they will read the code as numbers, for example, ‘3638’. For the first number of times a PIN code is used, the number itself is remembered, and “3-6-3-8” is recalled when the number is entered. However, after entering the code on a greater number of occasions, one may become familiar with the pattern and sequence of the numbers on the keypad. Eventually, the PIN code becomes ‘remembered’ as a certain action of the fingers, so that it is sometimes the case that the number itself, ‘3638’, might be forgotten, to the extent that only an embodied engagement with the keypad of the teller machine can recall the code through a kind of carnal formulae.

This ‘carnal formulae’, which may be forgotten at a linguistic level, is certainly something which is familiar in our culture. For example, take a scene in the film *Blade Runner*. The film is set in Los Angeles in the future, in 2019, in a world which is populated by humans and ‘replicants’, which are the kind of embodied artificial intelligence which Dreyfus discusses. The character of Rachel, sits at the piano and plays. She comments that she did not actually know if she could play. She remembers having lessons, but she thinks that they were probably implanted memories which were given to her at her inception. So, she does not know if she can play the piano until she sits down at the keyboard, and attempts to play. The

‘memory’ of the pieces she can play is there, but it is not until her body engages with the piano that she can actually be sure of it.

So, to talk of an affective ‘language of bodies’ is not to say signification is entirely diminished, and replaced with a pure material language of the body. Rather, the process of signification is compressed into a space in the organisation of bodies themselves. If artworks with ‘ballistic’ affect seem to be ‘felt’ on one’s body, it is because one’s engagement with certain elements of those works invokes one’s very organisation. Importantly, the affective elements of any work are not ontologically predetermined, but are determined to some extent in correspondence with the habits of certain bodies.

For Senator Jesse Helms or Archbishop George Pell, their capacity to be affected by *Piss Christ* was determined by their particular habituations, at least at the moment of impact. They are affected because of their particular range of habits. As I argued in Chapter Six, the identification of their *own* bodies as bodies of values and the crucifix (as a hierogram) as the embodied values, organises their habits (or one may say, habituates their organs) to be affected by the of quasi-artificial conjunction of the crucifix with any disjunctive body (which in the case of *Piss Christ*, happens to be piss). This disjunction, for a ‘naturalised’ Christian, discharges a certain compressed ‘motor significance’, and their meanings resonate and interfere into disgust. This reaction is not ‘thought’, but derives from their habituation of their axioms of their world which embeds their very perception of their world in the organisation of their bodies.

The habitual organisation of contemporary bodies is in turn organised to some extent by the prescribed scheme of functions of particular bodies in capitalist culture. This is not to say then, that by some biological ‘fact’ the Archbishop of Melbourne would be a Christian, would identify with the values embodied in the crucifix, and thus be offended by *Piss Christ*. Rather, it is certain that being white, male and raised within a predominantly Christian rationalist and capitalist culture, his body more readily affords such an organisation. The habits of each ‘body’ involved in the reaction to *Piss Christ* are organised as the result of deeply habituated

understandings embedded in the organisation of the Christian subject. The church services, the words of the hymns, the priest's sermon, and taking communion, all act to embed particular meanings into the crucifix, which is ever-present throughout all of these acts. The 'sacred' meaning it takes on occurs through a compacting of layer upon layer of discourse of which the crucifix is central, yet silent. The crucifix becomes a hierogram as it becomes Christ, and it also becomes a mnemonic of Christian values which is understood by Christians without being 'unpacked'.

For Helms, D'Amato, or Pell, it is not a matter of 'unpacking' the meanings of *Piss Christ*. Rather, their offence is taken more immediately. As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, Helms does not explain his disgust at *Piss Christ* because to him it is self-evident. The affect is such that it is not simply decipherable into words. If they were to attempt to explain their reactions, no amount of words would be adequate. However, this ineffability is not because the affect upon them is in some sense singularly corporeal, and thus excludes the linguistic. Rather, this ineffability, this inability to commensurate the affect with words, happens because the very axioms upon which their world is perceived have been habituated in their bodies. Thus, all Helms knows is that, for his particular habituation (which he seemingly understands as universal), *Piss Christ* does not *fit-in*.

As I have explored in this chapter, these habituated axioms do not simply sit on some internal metaphysical shelf, stored away as a reference which one consults, neither are they simply constituted in law. Rather, they are embodied. A body does not *have* habits, rather, a body *is* habits, in the sense that the organisation of a body is configured by what it encounters and, in turn, what it encounters is perceived through the resulting organisation. In a sense, through innumerable incidents and incalculable modifications and magnifications of one incident by others, Christians have become, more or less, highly-skilled 'experts' at the molarity of *being Christian*.

In this chapter I have focused on opening up restrictive understandings of the capacities of bodies. Indeed, a more productive understanding of habit and bodies could potentially provide contemporary artists with conceptual tools with which to

expand the capacities of their works to affect. As this thesis has shown, the rigid and highly policed boundaries of the kind of ‘body’, which underlies abjection, is held in place by habit. Yet it is also through habit, or rehabilitation rather, that the boundaries of bodies may be expanded, and the capacities of bodies altered and increased. Merleau-Ponty says:

Habit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments.^{xcv}

So, while the boundaries of our bodies and their capacities can be restricted by common habits which lie at the foundations of our culture, they can also be changed. Indeed, we can expand our understanding of the ways in which artworks can affect the bodies of audiences. Rethinking habit in this way can provide the kinds of points of departure, beginnings or ‘lines of flight’ which allow contemporary art discourse to conceive of new ways of considering the affect of art upon audiences.

Notes

ⁱ**Massumi, Brian**, “The Autonomy of Affect”, in ed. Patton *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell Publications, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1996, p. 221.

ⁱⁱ**Peirce, Charles Sanders**, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Hartshorne and Weiss, The Belknap Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1931, Vol. 5, paragraph 251.

ⁱⁱⁱ**Massumi**, op. cit., p. 231.

^{iv}**Malabou, Catherine**, “Whose afraid of Hegelian wolves?”, in ed. Paul Patton *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell Publications, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1996, p. 132.

^v**Bennett, Jill**, “Kama and Eroticism: The Five Senses in the Work of Francesco Clemente and Pierre Klossowski”, in *Body*, Bookman Schwartz, Melbourne, Australia, p. 131.

^{vi}**Massumi**, op. cit., p. 221.

^{vii}The NEA debate is discussed at length in Chapter Two of this thesis, and the NGV is discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

^{viii}US Senator Alphonse D’Amato, quoted in **Vance, Carole S.**, “Issues and Commentary: The War on Culture”, *Art in America*, Volume 77, September 1989, p.39.

^{ix}**Benjamin, Walter**, *Illuminations*, (1955), trans. H. Zohn, Fontana, London, UK, 1973, p. 231.

^xIt is useful here to note that such ‘ballistic’ affect is quite different from the kind of physical affect which has occurred with some recent artworks such as Lauren Berkowitz’s “Follies”, or Dale Frank’s “Satellite of Love”. For the 1997 biennial survey exhibition, *Australian Perspecta*, Lauren Berkowitz contracted “Follies” which consisted of three heavy folded ‘curtains’ of vegetable matter. Each curtain was made of a different plant, one was lavender, another was banksia flowers and the third was made of red chillies. The curtains were large and hung from the ceiling of the gallery in a way

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which allowed the audience to walk between their folds, becoming immersed in the strong smells which came from the materials. The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, where the work was installed, placed a sign next to the work warning that the materials could cause irritation to viewers' eyes, and should not be touched. As John McDonald, an art critic for the "Sydney Morning Herald", complained, the smell of the chilli work in particular "can sting one's eyes" (**McDonald, John**, "Back to Nature", *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, Australia, August 16th, 1997, p. 14s). Indeed, the making of the work caused such irritation to the artist's eyes that, according to another review, she had to be rushed to hospital (**Chenery, Susan**, "Perspecta Perspectives", *Metro, Sydney Morning Herald*, August 8th-14th, 1997, pp. 4-5). Similarly, a few years earlier a work by Dale Frank was the centre of a little-known controversy. In 1994, Frank produced a series of resin paintings were included in the "Virtual Reality" exhibition, 1994, at the Australian National Gallery, Canberra. Concurrent with "Virtual Reality", the Canberra Contemporary Art Space (CCAS) held a satellite exhibition by Frank called "Satellite of Love". For his works in his "Satellite of Love" exhibition Frank intended to create a formal resonance with his resinous paintings in the main exhibition "Virtual Reality". So, he created a work from a small backgarden swimming pool, which was filled with water, upon which 30 litres of resin was floated. However, because of the sheer volume of the resin, and the fact that it was floating on water, the resin did not set with a containing skin as the artist had expected. Hence, the pool of resin did not dry at all, and consequently continued to give-off a powerful vapour which filled the gallery. The vapour from the plastic resin used is carcinogenic. According to Trevor Smith, the director of the CCAS gallery at the time, many visitors to the exhibition commented on the smell of the resin, but the most forceful complaints came from the gallery staff. The staff filed an official occupational health and safety complaint. The pool also began to leak, and its contents began to damage the gallery floor. This work was noxious, uncontrollable and attacked everything it came into contact with. This work was literally dangerous. Eventually, only one week into the exhibition, the resin pool was prematurely removed from the gallery. In the case of both Berkowitz's "Follies", and Dale Frank's resin pool, there is a particular kind of affect, in which bodies are *brutally* affected, in a directly physical, physiological manner.

^{xi}**Bennett**, loc. cit.

^{xii}**Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari**, *What is Philosophy?*, Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill Verso, London, UK and New York, USA, 1994, p.169

^{xiii}**Bennett**, op. cit., p. 132.

^{xiv}ibid.

^{xv}**Bahhtin, Mikhail**, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1968.

^{xvi}**Bennett**, loc. cit.

^{xvii}**McNeill, David**, "Pictures and Parables", *Block*, November 10th, 1985, p. 12.

^{xviii}**Lechte, John**, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From structuralism to postmodernity*, Routledge, London, UK, 1994, p. 146.

^{xix}ibid.

^{xx}**Umberto Eco**, *The Theory of Semiotics*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, USA, 1979, p. 193.

^{xxi}**Butler, Judith**, *Bodies that Matter*, Routledge, New York, USA, 1993, p. 30. Butler's emphasis.

^{xxii}**Descartes, Rene**, "Discourses on the Method, Part IV", in *The Essential Descartes*, edited by Margaret D. Wilson, Meridian, New York, 1983, p.76

^{xxiii}This distinction is discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis.

^{xxiv}This Deleuzean ethological notion of the body is discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis.

^{xxv}**Bennett**, op. cit., p. 131

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^{xxvi} *ibid.*

^{xxvii} *ibid.*

^{xxviii} **Gatens, Moira**, “Through a Spinozist Lens: Ethology, Difference, Power”, in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, UK, 1996, p. 180.

^{xxix} *ibid.*

^{xxx} **Defoe, Daniel**, *Robinson Crusoe*, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London, UK, 1906. The story is well-known. In 1761, Robinson joins the crew of a ship seeking adventure, and is not disappointed as his ship is wrecked in a storm. Robinson is washed-up on the shore of a tropical island apparently uninhabited by humans.

^{xxxi} **Gatens**, op. cit., p. 171.

^{xxxii} **Marx, Karl**, *Das Kapital*, trans. Samuel Moore & Edward Aveling, Charles H. Kerr, Chicago, USA, 1909, vol. 1, p. 88.

^{xxxiii} **Defoe**, op. cit., p. 91.

^{xxxiv} It is also a world of exotic wonder, as the full title suggest: “The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner”. **Defoe**, op. cit., p. 5.

^{xxxv} *ibid.*, p. 165.

^{xxxvi} **Novak, Maximilian E.**, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe*, Univeristy of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, USA, 1962, p. 49.

^{xxxvii} **Tournier, Michel**, *Friday*, John Hopkins Univeristy Press, Baltimore, USA, 1997.

^{xxxviii} **Deleuze, Gilles**, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Lester and Stivale, Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 1969, pp. 301-321.

^{xxxix} **Gatens**, op. cit., p. 171.

^{xl} **Tournier**, op. cit., p. 211.

^{xli} *ibid.*, p. 182.

^{xlii} *ibid* p. 183-184.

^{xliii} See Chapter Five of this thesis.

^{xliv} **Gatens**, op. cit., p. 172.

^{xlv} **Tournier**, op. cit., p. 226.

^{xlvi} **Deleuze, Gilles** and **Guattari, Félix**, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (1997), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1980, p. 81.

^{xlvii} **Gatens**, loc. cit.

^{xlviii} **Tournier**, loc. cit.

^{xlix} **Tournier**, *ibid.*, p. 47.

^l *ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

^{li} *ibid.*, p. 115.

^{lii} *ibid.*, p. 116.

^{liii} *ibid.*, p. 211.

^{liv} **Grosz, Elizabeth**, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, Australia, 1994, p. 140.

^{lv} *Untold Desires*, directed by Sarah Steven, produced by Eva Orner, Fertile Films & Australian Film Finance Corporation, Australia, 1994.

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Notes continued

^{lvi} *ibid.*

^{lvii} *ibid.*

^{lviii} *ibid.*

^{lix} For Freud, the sexual organisation of the infant is not entirely given at birth, except for the ‘polymorphously perverse’ unstructured libido. Beyond the libido, the other two elements of sexuality, the ‘erotogenic zones’ (the places upon the body which are the receptors of sexual stimulation) and ‘object of desire’ (an external person or thing towards which the libido is directed) are transitory and entirely unorganised. However, for Freud, the organisation of the ‘erotogenic zones’ and the ‘object of desire’ occur through a quasi-ontological process. The erotogenic zones begin with the mouth, then the anus, and then the final with the phallic zones. Likewise for Freud, the object of desire transforms and settles through the ‘natural’ Oedipal drama. Thus, in the ‘normal’ course of events in sexual organisation, the libido becomes directed towards the ‘correct’ phallic erotogenic zones, and the ‘object of desire’ becomes a non-familial member of the opposite sex. Importantly, even though this process of sexual organisation happens after the child is born, it is still regarded as ontologically given and driven by the instincts of the libido.

^{lx} Even though Freud separates the genital teleology of procreation from the sexual urge, he still regards them as inherent human imperatives. They are *coincidentally* the same zones, and thus Freudian notions of sexuality still fall back into the tendencies of Christian Western culture. Freud still tends to ontologise this ‘coincidence’ by implying that there is something morally suspect with sexual pleasure which is directed through absolutely non-procreative erotogenic zones to absolutely non-procreative objects of desire. Thus, sexual pleasure derived through the feet, hands, or through sight, in the normalising axioms of psychoanalysis, is regarded as perverted.

^{lxi} **Tournier**, *op. cit.*, p. 212. Original passage in italics.

^{lxii} **Grosz**, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

^{lxiii} **Merleau-Ponty, Maurice**, “The Film and the New Psychology”, in *Sense and Non-Sense*, Northwest University Press, 1964, p. 50.

^{lxiv} **Crowther, Paul**, “Merleau-Ponty: Perception into art”, p.139.

^{lxv} *ibid.*, p. 140.

^{lxvi} *ibid.*

^{lxvii} **Langer, Moniker M.**, *Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary*, Macmillan Press, London, UK, 1989, p. ix. Including quote from Merleau-Ponty.

^{lxviii} **Dreyfus, Hubert L.**, “The Current Relevance of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Embodiment”, URL: <http://www.focusing.org/dreyfus2.html>, accessed 12/11/97, 11.30am. At the time of writing, this essay has only been published on the internet, but is due to be published in book form in 1999. The pre-published copy I have used in this chapter was received from Dreyfus himself, therefore there is no pagination in the copy of the work used.

^{lxix} *ibid.*

^{lxx} *ibid.*

^{lxxi} *ibid.*

^{lxxii} *ibid.*

^{lxxiii} *ibid.*

^{lxxiv} *ibid.*

^{lxxv} *ibid.*

^{lxxvi} *ibid.*

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Notes continued

^{lxxvii} *ibid.*

^{lxxviii} *ibid.*

^{lxxix} *ibid.*

^{lxxx} *ibid.*

^{lxxxi} **Crowther**, *ibid.*

^{lxxxii} **Dreyfus**, *op. cit.*

^{lxxxiii} *ibid.*

^{lxxxiv} **Merleau-Ponty, Maurice**, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge, London, UK, 1989, p. 153.

^{lxxxv} *ibid.*, p. 144.

^{lxxxvi} **Langer**, *op. cit.*, p. xvi

^{lxxxvii} **Merleau-Ponty**, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

^{lxxxviii} **Grosz, Elizabeth**, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

^{lxxxix} **Dreyfus**, *loc. cit.*

^{xc} *ibid.*

^{xc1} *ibid.*

^{xcii} **Langer**, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

^{xciii} **Bennett**, *op. cit.*, p. 131

^{xciv} **Merleau-Ponty**, *op. cit.*

^{xcv} **Merleau-Ponty**, *ibid.*, p. 153.

CONCLUSION

In the contemporary art discourses of the 1990s, there has been a resurgence of the idea that contemporary art can make effective interventions in wider culture. We have seen this most significantly in the NEA debate in the USA in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the manifestation of the strategy of ‘abject art’ which followed directly from the central role of artists such as Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe in that debate. With the adoption and deployment of ‘abject art’ as a political strategy, many artists have attempted to produce political *effect* through bodily *affect*. That is, the political effects of works such as Serrano’s *Piss Christ* were considered, by theorists and curators such as Jack Ben-Leviⁱ and Simon Taylor,ⁱⁱ to be the consequence of the impacting affect of ‘abject’ matter upon audiences. Thus, to produce affective artworks has been considered a viable political strategy.

Indeed, this thesis agrees that art practice may effectively intervene in wider culture through a micropolitics of affect. As Brian Massumi notes, notions of affect have become central to understanding and negotiating our present culture.ⁱⁱⁱ However, art discourse of the 1990s has not been characterised by an open-ended, productive and generative debate upon the possibilities of affect. Rather, discussion of affect and artists’ capacity to intervene in wider culture has focussed almost exclusively upon the strategy of ‘abject art’. Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*^{iv} has been the seminal text for the ‘abject art’ of the 1990s, providing both a rationale and a strategy for artists and art theorists. This thesis has sought to identify the resonance between Kristeva’s text and the art which accepts its premises as strategic rules of engagement. Particularly, following the Whitney Museum of American Art’s exhibition *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*^v in mid-1993, Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* became institutionally canonised as a textbook of politically transgressive affect in contemporary art. Throughout the 1990s, artists and theorists concerned with the efficacy of contemporary art, or wanting to explore understandings of the body and its boundaries, have been primarily preoccupied with this psychoanalytical model. Indeed, for the curators of the Whitney Museum’s exhibition, ‘abjection’ could

explain the universal transgressive affect of artworks across the Twentieth Century, from Marcel Duchamp, to Andy Warhol, to Andres Serrano. Therefore, while there has been a renewed faith in the idea that art can effectively intervene in wider culture, the affect of artworks has been predominantly understood within the single theoretical model of 'abjection' and this has, in effect, enforced a closure.

This thesis has attempted to address this discursive monopoly. It has endeavoured to reconsider dominant understandings of the affect of artworks, and provide the foundations of a different and more useful understanding of the efficacy of art which, unlike Kristeva's theory, which is restricted by structural notions of power, the body and the body's natural capacities.

Accordingly, this thesis has ventured to subject the rigidity of the Kristevan understanding of affect to a process of liquefaction. It has also attempted to divert this determining discourse to more fruitful alternatives, by problematising the dominance of the default understandings of bodies and their capacities to affect and to be affected. In relation to the discourses of 'abject art', this thesis has attempted to supplant 'the body' with 'bodies'. That is, it has examined the economically functional, contained, unified and immutable model of 'the body', in its determinate, facialised organisation, and its place, it has drawn on different conceptions of 'bodies', such as those found in Rabelaisian culture or in Deleuzo-Spinozist ethology, and attempted to formulate a less determinate and more contingent understanding of bodies and, most importantly, their affective capacities. This thesis has attempted to define a clear contrast between 'strategy' and 'tactics', and demonstrate the limits of the former. Similarly, It has taken the 'instinct' of default bodies, the 'nature' in Kristeva's abjection, and attempted to refigure it in terms of habit.

However, if this thesis has expanded the vocabulary for dealing with affect in contemporary art and culture it has hopefully not been simply through providing a set of neologisms. Rather, this thesis has attempted to take the current dominant discourse from 'order' to 'passage'. I mean this in a specifically Deleuzean sense. Abjection, as a transgressive strategy for contemporary art, with its discursive monopoly in the 1990s, presents artists with a very specific vocabulary for dealing with affect. It is an imperative vocabulary, founded on limiting and determinate

understandings of what bodies are, and of what they are capable. Effectively, Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* has stood as a textbook of ordering ideas for much contemporary art. It seeks to reinforce dominant notions of the unified self, to quantify affect and to order bodies.

Kristeva says:

refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty on the part of death.^{vi}

For art discourse, these words have become more formative than explanatory, producing artworks as very particular kinds of objects hoping to affect very particular kinds of human bodies. The discursive monopoly which notions of abjection have held over ideas of affect has installed abjection as the *de rigueur* strategy of transgression. This has in turn created agendas in art discourse which, by their very focus, reinforce these very particular deterministic ideas of bodies and affect.

Such determining discourse is, what Deleuze and Guattari might call, a litany of 'order-words'. An 'order-word' is an affective statement which organises bodies. 'Order-words' are words which produce order. They are statements which operate in more subtle or insidious ways than simple imperative commands or pronouncements, such as ordering a dog to 'sit' or 'fetch'. Deleuze and Guattari define order-words thus:

We call *order-words*, not a particular category of explicit statements (for example, in the imperative), but the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions, in other words, to speech acts that are, and can only be, accomplished in the statement. Order-words do not concern commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a 'social obligation'.^{vii}

According to Gatens;

The order-word expresses a possible world as if it were the only and inevitable world but it is an utterance that should be seen as an attempt to pass off the virtual as the actual.^{viii}

'Order-words', like biological 'facts', organise bodies to function in particular ways, and they do this by presupposing what a body is capable of before any event. As Gatens argues:

By positing the merely possible as the ‘obstinate real’ order-words aim to materialize bodies as *organizations* of affects and powers, and always with a prohibition on the transformation of that organization — a prohibition against decomposing these relations and recomposing others.^{ix}

Order-words sustain our picture of the material world, by determining the kinds of materiality that are thought possible. Indeed, they operate to *sustain* in particular, to make that materiality constant.

In this respect, Kristeva’s theory of abjection reinforces the materialisation of ‘the body’ as a set of order-words in language, which in turn forms the ways in which we understand bodies and their capacities. Art strategies which employ abjection, ‘obey’ predominant contemporary incorporeal order-words. However;

A micropolitical strategy will concern itself not only with the *limitative* mode of the order-word — that captures — but also its *expansive* dimension.^x

Robinson of Tournier’s *Friday* (discussed in Chapter Seven) through his becoming-elemental, resists these kinds of quasi-corporealising order-words. He resists the order-words which would otherwise tell him what his sexual relations can be, what his bodily capacities are and how old his body should be. In a similar way, taking the discursive dominance of abjection in contemporary art in the 1990s as a point of departure, artists can resist the restrictive formulations of ‘the body’, by rethinking its capacities, their ‘body’ of work, its capacities to affect, and the capacities of the bodies of the audience to be affected.

For Deleuze and Guattari, this resistance to the imperatives of order-words seeks to take the stasis of ‘order’ and reorganise it into the dynamism of ‘passage’. They call such a tactical and disordering reorganisation ‘pass-words’:

There are pass-words beneath order-words. Words that pass, words that are components of passage, whereas order-words mark stoppages or organized, stratified compositions. A single thing or word undoubtedly has this twofold nature: it is necessary to extract one from the other—to transform the compositions of passage.^{xi}

Gatens develops the notion of the pass-word further:

Pass-words unlock the order-word and in doing open the plane of immanence to experimentation. Pass-words rupture the habitual organisation of a body’s powers and capacities and express new powers of affecting and being affected.^{xii}

Indeed, Gatens argues that this Deleuzean tactic is entirely appropriate for an ethological approach:

Just as ethology refuses to consider biology and production in terms which split the social field into transcendent norms and that which they norm [sic], so too will it evaluate language in immanent terms.

Thus;

An ethological approach will map language not according to the linguists' apolitical principle which states that language is primarily about communication. Rather, specific statements and specific utterances will be analysed for the manner in which they capture, transmit and engender affects.^{xiii}

Thus, the ways in which language materialises bodies as predetermined can be resisted through the reorganisation of the existing assumptions of order-words. This thesis has sought to provide a 'vocabulary' for dealing with affect by taking the restrictive axioms of abjection, and refigured them away from strict and ossified determinacy, and thus attempted to supplant the order-words of the strategies of transgression and abjection with alternative terms with a set of tactical pass-words.

The first chapter of this thesis took the opportunity to discuss certain contemporary notions of transgression before getting into the specifics of abjection as a strategy of transgression in the 1990s. Particularly, it looked at the discursive imperative in contemporary art to be transgressive, and how this impetus is not necessarily concerned with providing ways for artworks to be effective in wider culture. It looked at a number of strategies which seek to transgress an interior realm of power to breakthrough to a 'raw' domain, outside of the jurisdiction of power. It was argued that in 1990s art, the 'quotation' of outsider strategies tends to be rhetorical, rather than evidence of renewed romantic faith in a cultural 'outside'. Thus 'transgression' itself has become a value which is strategically deployed for cultural and economic reasons, rather than a political aim in itself.

In the first chapter, the general return to a kind of strategic material in art of the 1990s was considered. In particular, that chapter examined the work of the Australian 'grunge' artists within a short time-frame, in the first half of 1993, before the Whitney Museum's *Abject Art* exhibition in mid-1993 would crystallise the effects of the NEA debate, and effectively transmit the packaged strategy of 'abject art' more thoroughly throughout international contemporary art discourse. In examining the Australian 'grunge' artists, it was shown that they appeared to deploy the same transgressive strategies as previous 'outsider' movements, particularly the

ragged ‘lumpenmateriality’ of the 1970s punk movement. The punk movement wanted to reject culture as it was given to them, through a strategic downward mobility, by association with the lumpenproletariat. However, it was determined that, despite grunge art’s reinvestment of punk’s aesthetics, these artists were not concerned with a wholesale rejection of art discourse and its historical imperatives. Rather, grunge art was merely concerned with debunking the incumbent authority of 1980s postmodernist art discourses. Indeed, in the examination of the Australian ‘grunge’ artists, it was argued that these artists ‘performed’ certain aspects of historically validated strategies of transgression, without investing any significant degree of faith in them.

Further, Chapter One argued that this kind of operation of transgression, as a value in contemporary culture, is actually counterproductive in terms of its political effectiveness. Popular ideas of transgression act as discursive diversions which actually operate counter to the efficacy of contemporary art. The circulation of notions of transgression in our culture reproduces and reinforces the axiomatic status of the ‘juridico-discursive’ notion of power in our culture, effectively closing-off opportunities for contemporary artists to rethink power in a more useful and productive way. In addition, it was argued that by providing prescriptive deviations, through ‘youth movements’, models of rebellion and group identities, popular strategies of transgression effectively channel resistance into prescribed subject positions which are far more disciplinary and steeped in self-surveillance than any of the obvious and visible agencies of the state.

While the first chapter looked at a return to materiality, and the notion of transgression in the 1990s, Chapter Two began to focus this thesis more on ‘abject art’, as the materialist strategy of transgression which has particularly dominated art discourse in the 1990s. It began by examining the argument put by particular art theorists in the 1980s that the capacity for art to affect, and in particular for its audience *to be affected*, has waned over the course of the Twentieth Century. However, it then registered the way in which the economy of images dramatically shifted since the 1980s, and the ways in which this has been manifested in both art and wider culture in the 1990s. That chapter introduced abjection in the context of the ‘culture wars’ of the USA in 1989, which centred on the government funding of

‘obscene’ art through the NEA. It was established that this debate was something of a flashpoint for ‘object art’, particularly because of the central role which Serrano’s *Piss Christ* played in it.

Chapter Three examined the Kristevan understanding that ‘object’ matter is invariably affective; that it will particularly and inevitably cause revulsion. Referring to the seminal text of *Powers of Horror*, it was shown that Kristeva understands that this revulsion derives from the instinctual drive to ‘object’ the mother in the process of infant subject formation, so that the infant can establish itself as a subject in a world of objects, in order for it to establish the subjective differentiation which allows language to occur. It was found that an important underlying axiom for abjection was the assumption of the human body as naturally subjectivised and unified. Chapter Three began to question these assumptions by examining the way in which selves were imagined in a different time. To this end, it looked at the folk culture of medieval France, as depicted in the novels of the Sixteenth Century author Francois Rabelais, and the reading of Rabelais provided by Bakhtin. Indeed, that chapter contrasted Kristeva’s universalising ideas of abjection with ideas from the Rabelaisian world, because the effects of ‘breaches’ of the body are perceived entirely differently within this medieval culture; that is in terms of humour not horror.

Further, Rabelais was depicting a world *before* rationalism’s unified and subjectivised selves, *before* capitalism had privatised their organs and functionalised their capacities, and *before* physiology had decreed the boundaries of individual bodies. The pre-rationalist notion of the body which prevails in Rabelais work, that of grotesque body was examined. It became clear that the way in which the grotesque body was understood by Medieval French culture differed from the privatised, unified subject, which founds Kristeva’s notions of abjection. For the grotesque body, the boundaries of subjectivity and objectivity were not so clearly and immutably marked. It was not a body problematised by indistinct boundaries, but rather, it was a body connected to other bodies through the fluid social relations which such indeterminate boundaries allow. The grotesque body was a body whose boundaries were not policed. Excrement, the orifices and visceral matter in general were not regarded as horrific, as rupturing the unity of subjectivity, but rather were

regarded as generative, rejuvenative, fertile and as the source of humour. Indeed, the grotesque understanding of the body holds in question the universality of the model of unified subjectivity, upon which Kristeva's theory of abjection depends, in order for it to claim that the affect of abjection is universal and instinctual.

The critique of the Kristevan premises of 'abject art' begins in Chapter Three, and is sustained throughout this thesis, because it is against abjection that this thesis proposed other, more useful, ways of thinking about affect in art. From Chapter Three, each chapter of this thesis has sought to address the particular aspects of Kristeva's theory of abjection which are relevant to its use as a strategy in contemporary art. This thesis has attempted to identify and critically examine some of the important axioms which support it and, in the process of rethinking these axioms, provide alternatives. This thesis has not questioned the use of Kristeva's theory of abjection in art by attempted to undermine the entire edifice of psychoanalysis. Rather, the aim of this thesis has been to draw upon ideas of bodies, power and habit which differ from those which found Kristeva's theory. It has sought to question some of the axioms, the basic commonsenseness, upon which Kristeva's must rely in order for her theory of abjection to operate.

With the strategic deployment of 'abject art' in mind, Chapter Four looked closely at the inherent problems within systems which are based on structure, and particular when one attempts to deploy such systems politically, as strategy. Strategy, as opposed to tactics, attempts to account for all the variables of a situation, in order to establish rules of engagement, manifestos, and political deployments which are predetermined. By claiming to predict an invariable affect of 'abject' matter, abjection establishes itself as a structured and strategic system. It was argued that any attempt by contemporary artists to affect audiences and intervene in wider culture is restricted if it takes a strategic approach. It was suggested that artists should adopt a more tactical approach if they are to engage in the tactical field of power, and with the contingencies of bodies which are encountered within it. Indeed, Chapter Five sought to further de-essentialise understandings of 'the body'. In establishing 'the body' as an instinctually organised structure, abjection does not allow for the ways in which bodies vary, interculturally and intraculturally. By closing-off such possibilities, the 'default' determined understanding of 'the body'

and its affective capacities stifles other potentially useful ways of employing bodies in an affective micropolitics. Thus, Chapter Five looked at understandings of bodies which allow for more tactical and contingent methods of using corporeality in contemporary art, such as Deleuze and Guattari's *Body without Organs*, or the Deleuzo-Spinozist notion of an 'ethology' of bodies.

While Chapters Four and Five discussed more abstract ideas regarding power and bodies, the final chapters sought to bring the thesis back contemporary art discourse, to begin to consider the ways in which affect may operate within works of art. Chapter Six returned again to the Australian artists discussed in Chapter One, and looked at 'abject art' in the specific conditions in which this thesis is written, in Australia in the 1990s. It was found that, despite similarities between conservative political elements in Australia and the US, that Australian 'abject art' had a negligible affect.

However, in 1997 Serrano's *Piss Christ* was the centre of another controversy, this time in an exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia. *Piss Christ* had a capacity to affect where Australian 'abject art' had not and, on the face of it, this seemed contradictory. However, it was argued that with *Piss Christ*, its affect was not so much a matter of any inherent 'abject' character, than its affect upon particular bodies constituted by certain contingencies of belief. After examining the way in which the meaning of *Piss Christ* operated in a certain way for a particular community of users, it was suggested that the ostensibly instinctual reaction to that work could be better explained in terms of the habituation of the bodies which it affected.

The final chapter then proposed to consider the central question of this thesis: In what ways can we think of the affect of artworks upon the bodies of audiences? In response to a return to the materiality of the body in recent art, some art theorists have begun to consider the idea of a 'language of the body', an untranslatable idiolect through which affect operates. The final chapter began by examining the ways in which such a notion is problematic, unless there is some qualification of what is meant by 'the body' and, indeed, the way in which such a 'language' is thought to operate through it. It was suggested that an ethological notion of bodies, which does not simply take 'the body' as a material foundation to subjectivity, is

more useful in thinking about the way in which the organisation of bodies may play an important part in the capacity of bodies to be affected in certain ways.

The final chapter suggested that the organisation of bodies, which determines their capacity to be affected, is constituted by their habits. It was argued that the habituated capacities of bodies are naturalised in the form of instinct in our culture, and that such habituation is governed by a principle of function, itself based in the naturalisation of capitalist economics. Looking at recent work by Moira Gatens, herself expanding from Deleuze, the de-essentialising of economics and bodily functions and habits was considered in relation to Michel Tournier's novel *Friday*. Tournier provides useful speculations on the contingent character of capitalism, function and human instinct. These speculations were compared with the biological determinism of psychoanalytic foundations of Kristeva's theory. It was the hope of Chapter Seven to bring into question the assumption that bodies are constituted by 'instinct' to be affected in particular ways.

The last section of the seventh chapter considered the ways in which habit operates to constitute the organisation of bodies as though natural. Here, that section drew on recent work by Hubert L. Dreyfus, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, and discussed Dreyfus's suggestion that 'instinct' and 'intuition' are established as though natural through embodied experience which layers meaning into the very organisation of bodies. The ways in which bodies are organised, through habit, bears upon the various capacities of those bodies to be affected. Thus, a 'language of bodies' actually invokes the organisation of bodies in their perception and reaction to other 'bodies', such as 'abject' visceral matter.

As this thesis has shown with Kristeva's theory of abjection, when habit is understood as instinct, the affective capacities of bodies are understood as determinate. However, if instinct is de-essentialised, and instead considered as mutable habit, possibilities are thrown open for thinking of the ways in which bodies can alter their affective capacities. If 'instinct' is an order-word, then 'habit' is its corresponding pass-word. Importantly, through an understanding of habit we are equipped with a more open array of discursive tools with which to understand the affect of artworks, and with a less determined conceptual palette with which to formulate contingent tactics for deploying affect.

The application of Kristeva's theory of abjection in art discounts such generative practices. By attempting to achieve a universal strategy, abjection as a strategic intervention in wider culture, is restricted by its assumptions of universality, teleology, inflexibility, its determinacy and its structurality. It is founded on essentialist ideas of the body, its materiality and its organisation. It presumes to account for the affect of an image on its audience before the event. It presumes to know where the boundaries of a body lie, what its capacities are, and it solidifies these presumptions in nature, drive and instinct. I have attempted to analyse these central aspects of abjection and, importantly, to provide de-essentialised understandings of bodies, power and the affect of images. I have sought to provide beginnings, lines of flight, points which are not too determinate and resolved, which are focussed enough to break the discursive monopoly of abjection, but open enough to generate a multiplicity of points from which to continue.

However, there are limits deliberately built into this thesis. This thesis has never sought to provide a comprehensive, definitive theory of affect that will persist through time, because any attempt to do so ignores the importance of the contingent character of bodies, their habits and capacities, and the tactical field in which they engage. Rather, the intention has been to provide a pragmatic, effective, yet tactically inconclusive and ongoing theory of affect that will continue to change. My intention has been to actively produce theoretical conditions that do not to merely reproduce existing conditions, but rather create fertile ground within art theoretical discourse.

Of course, one could argue that this potentially leaves the thesis with a paradox: how can a thesis propose a kind of fluidity, when a thesis is, by its very character, rigid? How can a text deny structure and strategy when it is chronologically and materially structured? It is a particularly Deleuzean paradox, one which Deleuze was well aware of in his work, and which he and Guattari specifically address in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

Even the book as a natural reality is a taproot, with its pivotal spine and surrounding leaves. But the book as a spiritual reality, the Tree or Root as an image, endlessly develops the law of the One that becomes two then the two that become four. Binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree.^{xiv}

In Deleuzian terms, a book, or writing in general, is the point at which thought moves from the plane of immanence to the plane of organisation, the point at which the rhizomatic risks becoming the arboreal. It is the point at which an indeterminate number of words, and ideas which may not even be formed enough even to be articulated, are given determinate shape, number and form. In its materiality, it is constituted by written words, inscribed in ink on paper, set, in a state which cannot change. Sure, its paper may change colour, decay, and culturally, the meaning of the words within it may vary between reader or between the moments in which it is read, but ultimately, at its point of inscription, its ideas becomes ‘set’. However, in attempting to provide beginnings, through rethinking abjection and formulating less restrictive parameters I have attempted what Michel Foucault calls “ars theoretica”; “Questions that are less concerned with *why* this or that than *how* to proceed.”^{xv}

Notes

ⁱ**Ben-Levi, Jack, et al.**, “Introduction”, in *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, ed. Philbrick, Jane, Whitney Independent Study Program, ISP Papers, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1993.

ⁱⁱ**Taylor, Simon**, “The Phobic Object: Abjection in contemporary art”, in *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, ed. Philbrick, Jane, Whitney Independent Study Program, ISP Papers, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA, 1993.

ⁱⁱⁱ**Massumi, Brian**, “The Autonomy of Affect”, in ed. Patton *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell Publications, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1996, p. 221.

^{iv}**Kristeva, Julia**, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 1982.

^v“Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art”, Whitney Museum of American Art, June 23-August 29, 1993.

^{vi}**Kristeva**, op. cit., p.3.

^{vii}**Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Félix**, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1987, p. 79. Deleuze and Guattari’s italics.

^{viii}**Gatens, Moira**, “Through a Spinozist Lens: Ethology, Difference, Power”, in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, UK, 1996, p. 181.

^{ix}ibid., p. 182. Gatens’ italics.

^x**Gatens**, op. cit., p. 182. Gatens’ italics.

^{xi}**Deleuze, and Guattari**, op. cit., p. 110.

^{xii}**Gatens**, op. cit., p. 183.

^{xiii}ibid., p. 180.

^{xiv}**Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Félix**, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1987, p. 5.

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Notes continued

^{xv}**Foucault, Michel**, “Forword” in **Deleuze, Gilles** and **Guattari, Félix**, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1972, translated from French by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, 1983, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, p.xii. Foucault’s emphasis.

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