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# 'Skin-Deep' Impressions :

## Somatic Sense in an Age of Simulated Significance

by

Gitte Braut Rose

Department of English, McGill University

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# Abstract

*'Skin-Deep' Impressions : Somatic Sense in an Age of Simulated Significance* illuminates a variety of bodily modes of expression, ranging from body-art and popular body-fixation, over body-mutilation, body-play, and self-mutilation, to psycho-somatic patterns of behaviour. The question governing the work concerns the extent to which the physical orientation, currently characterizing our society, is to be considered a productive response to the so-called "crisis of representation."

A reading of Kerstin Ekman's novel *Blackwater* (1996) is woven into and through the body of the work, indicating the shortcomings of theoretical understanding, the limitations of literary analysis, and the strength of literary narrative with respect to the issue in question. The distinction traditionally drawn between fashionable, transgressive and pathological ways of turning toward the body no longer holds. The blurring of the boundaries between self-making and self-destruction opens for a rather unexplored field of possibilities.

*' Skin-Deep' Impressions* takes as its point of departure the claim made by some postmodern thinkers, that the cultural climate in the Western part of the world has turned "schizophrenic." The enthusiasm with which the arrival of the "schizo" has been received, ironically and tragically, is out of touch with reality. The suggestion emerging from my work is that the bodily phenomenon serves as a request for the reinstitution of more common frames

of reference. The focus on the texture of the flesh, on physical wounds, and on the experience of physical pain, is viewed not as a manifestation of a general sense of victimization but rather, as the manifestation of a need to reinvent forms of representation allowing for the realization of emotionally intense and often ambiguous experience. The violent turn toward the body, finally, is viewed as a collective means of coping with the social unconscious, that is with the guilt associated with the crimes committed in the name of progress in the Western world. In this manner, physicality comes to substitute for what is lacking, namely a more suitable metaphysics. Paradoxically then, body-fixated subjects, commonly perceived as being self-absorbed and asocial may in fact represent a most serious attempt at introducing respect for other living beings in a culture characterized by an increasingly split between notions of humanity and conditions of living.

# Résumé

*Impressions dans la peau : le sens somatique à une époque de signification simulée* explore divers modes d'expression corporelle, qui vont de l'art corporel aux modèles de comportement psychosomatique, en passant par l'automutilation et le jeu coporel. La question centrale de cette étude est de savoir jusqu'à quel point l'orientation physique, qui caractérise présentement notre société, peut être considérée comme une réponse féconde à ce qu'on nomme la « crise de la représentation ».

Une lecture du roman *Blackwater* (1996) de Kerstin Ekman se mêle à l'analyse, montrant pour le sujet étudié les insuffisances de la compréhension théorique, les limites de l'analyse littéraire et les forces de la narration littéraire. La distinction traditionnelle, crée entre les manières à la mode, transgressive et pathologique de se retourner contre son corps, ne tient plus. Cet estompement des frontières ouvre la voie à tout un ensemble de questions inexplorées.

*Impressions dans la peau* débute avec l'affirmation de certains penseurs postmodernes, selon qui le climat du monde occidental est devenu « schizophrénique ». L'enthousiasme qui entoure le schizo postmoderne apparaît, ironiquement et tragiquement, effroyablement déconnecté de la réalité. La thèse qui émerge de ce travail est que le phénomène corporel exprime le désir d'établir des cadres de référence plus courants. L'accent mis sur la texture de la chair, sur les blessures physiques et sur l'expérience de la douleur physique est vu, non comme la manifestation du sentiment général

d'être une victime, mais plutôt comme la manifestation du besoin de réinventer des formes de représentation qui permettent la réalisation d'expériences émotionnelles intenses et souvent ambiguës. La violence contre le corps est finalement vue comme un moyen collectif de faire face à l'inconscient collectif, c'est-à-dire à la culpabilité associée aux crimes commis au nom du progrès occidental. La dimension corporelle sert ainsi de substitut à ce qui fait présentement défaut : une métaphysique adéquate. Paradoxalement, ceux qui ont une fixation au corps et qui sont habituellement perçus comme centrés sur eux-même et asociaux, peuvent représenter en fait une tentative des plus sérieuses pour introduire le respect pour l'autre dans une culture caractérisée par un écart grandissant entre l'humanité et les conditions de vie.

For Silke

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subject's sense of self and her ability to appropriate a physical and mental outline, on the other hand. My scholarly background, predominated by French structuralism, post-structuralism and Ecriture feminine at the time, quickly began to fade. At the completion of my assignment I felt more than ever that—instead of having isolated and illustrated one or more read threads in the subject's process of learning to receive and give form to experience —I had ended up with my hands full of loose ends. It is from within the resulting state of confusion, frustration, and fascination, that Skin-Deep Impressions was conceived.

Deeply intrigued by what may happen when a subject leaves, looses or enters an unknown language, I chose to do so myself, primarily so as to explore in real life--admittedly on a microscopic scale--the implications we are frequently capable of speculating on theoretically only. Grants and awards from University of Copenhagen, Knud Hoejgaards Fond, Otto Moensted's Fond, McGill University and the Canadian Government facilitated that the project could take root in foreign soil.

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# 'Skin-deep' impressions : Somatic sense in an age of simulated significance

## Introduction

Starting sometime in the late sixties, the subject's ontological and epistemological foundations swiftly crumbled. As if overnight, "he" was pronounced deceased, the "global village " was introduced, and the arrival of the postmodern era announced. The exact timing, along with the precise labeling, of the event is debatable. But what is incontestable, is that the subject woke up one cloudy morning, finding himself in the midst of a so called "crisis of representation." No longer capable of trusting either the word or the world it refers to, he found—and finds—himself in a situation where he must re-create what makes up a sense of self, insight and communal life. Most bridges to the past have already collapsed, or so claim a vast number of prominent postmodern thinkers. And since modern notions of rationality and faith in progress have landed us in nothing but a breeding ground of genocide, violence in general, and severe mental disorders, there is little incentive to look back and see what is to be learned from our past.

Quite a few theorists consider this a turn of events for the better. Finally, they argue, we have been freed from the modern ideals of an integrated and

autonomous subject. Ready to start, as if from scratch, we are free to take pleasure in a multiplicity of games, to experiment with constantly changing identities, as well as to let ourselves grow absorbed by ever increasing intensities and conflicting economies of desire. Our global village, so it seems, has been turned into an international playground where one simulacrum is equally as (in)significant as any other. That the postmodern psychological make up is said to be "schizophrenic" is viewed as a cause of celebration. The "schizo," in possession of a *Body without Organs*, is capable of indulging in the pleasure of going with the grain and incorporating late capitalist dynamics. He never gets bogged down by fidgeting with strategies of illusory, revolutionary resistance.

The fact that the mere notion of starting afresh is inherently modern is conveniently forgotten. Also overlooked in the hurry is the function served by this notion, namely that it releases us from feeling any kind of responsibility for the global meat-chopping misery in which we have ended. Unsurprisingly, therefore, scarce attention is being paid to the fact that the post-modern schizo's attitude and behavior strikingly resemble that of human beings undergoing excruciating states of intense panic. There are, of course, thinkers who cannot but notice the affiliation between the post-modern "hero" and the subject suffering from debilitating mental illness. Most of these view the current situation as catastrophic. We are steering straight towards an apocalyptic elimination of anything human, they worry. Technology is eliminating human nature, simulation replacing emotional authenticity, and virtual reality

substituting real life interaction. We are rapidly and increasingly losing our means to even distinguish between what is socially and individually destructive and (re)productive. How could there be any point in even trying to regain some ground in a world gone awry to such an extent ?

The patterns of reactions to the cultural situation may seem diverse. This, however, is primarily due to the fact that they defy traditional classification. The common denominators characterizing contemporary maladies are oppressive feelings of emptiness, a sense of living in a moral vacuum, and a general experience of bewilderment and total disorientation. Many plod ahead, with a barely definable expectation lurking in the back of their mind, that an up-to-date version of *Hell* is bound to break loose at any moment. Some suspect that it already has. Eluding definition, Hellish dangers are susceptible to come from anyone and everywhere at any time. The impossibility of identifying the enemy in the outer often results in the subject's turning against anything strange and uncontrollable inside of himself. What follows, on a larger cultural scale, is the development of a garden variety of border line disorders and psycho-somatic illnesses.

Psycho-somatic conditions have surged over the last thirty years. If anyone captures, not to say incorporates, the paradoxical situation of our time, it is the psycho-somatic subject: Feeling totally bereft of any boundaries, he is incapable of holding any ground and, even more so, of distinguishing between inner and outer reality. Confused about who is on his side, and who is out to get

him, he often feels persecuted by everyone and everything. Chronically potentially prosecuted, and always on his guards, his psychic and somatic system of defense eventually turns against his self.

In an age of multi-culturality, increasing globalization and growing mobilization, it does indeed seem like we have come to dread anyone and anything that does not resemble ourselves. What is worse, we have come to fear that we ourselves hold unfamiliar secrets. The contemporary "schizo" and psycho-somatic makeup of the subject, thus makes evident that a number of fundamental human needs are not being met within the trouble-free postmodern arena. Even more significantly, it tells us that we are—as a culture—in the process of exterminating our selves. First and foremost, because we have excluded the possibility that boundaries may make a positive difference. Secondly, because we have lost all regard for the probability that culture is no mere lightheaded matter of mind, will power and desire.

If modern pathologies were of a neurotic origin, post-modern maladies are of a psychotic and psycho-somatic nature. People in distress no longer obsessively question their sexual identity. They are basically uncertain of their state of being. " Am I a *real* male or female ? " has been replaced by the much more fundamental question : " *Am* I ? " The neurotic individual's ego repressed unacceptable ideas and impulses. The psychotic's ego *rejects* the disagreeable idea as well as the affect by which it is accompanied. Offensive material is foreclosed, barred from symbolization and thus from emotional processing.

Foreclosure enables the individual to mis- recognize what arises from within, and thus to perceive everything of a negative nature as emerging from without. The neurotic struggled with fear of abnormality and an overwhelming sense of guilt. The psychotic simply strives to avoid total annihilation. His last ditch attempt at holding his own against the flow of dangers arising from " without " is to preclude anyone and anything from "sinking in." Psychically evacuated and affectively deprived, he tends to suffer intolerable loneliness, and that despite the busyness and vibrancy of his environment. Feeling haunted and as if walking on thin ice, his prime support in his possible attempt at breaking free of inner imprisonment is a brittle backbone. The psychotic thus generally finds himself on the verge of what is experienced as an all engulfing big black void. Unable to articulate, that is to symbolize, what his worst fears are about, the latter tend to have to short-cut the system so as to come to expression. Hence, the intimate connection between psychosis, border-line disorders, and psycho-somatic illnesses as well as the psychotic's obsession with reasserting his physical boundaries. Each and every day, he is compelled to marshal and demarcate his bodily contours so as to ensure that his container is intact, even if his self is flawed, liquid, or barely existent.

If the Western world in general is characterized by a general disbelief in the word, it may be due to the fact that it has grown detached from any physical and meta-physical basis in our day and age. While simulating temporary beliefs, desires, and identities, we get carried away by our powers of invention, which

nevertheless constitute poor substitutes for powers of creation. Occasionally we cannot but wake up from the haze of post-modern stimulation and discover that we have lost a multitude of fundamental connections. Most attempts at reclaiming the self focus on bodily means of expression, a fact which may tell us a great deal about how we have got our selves into a "crisis of representation" in the first place, and also a few things about what it may take to wriggle our way out of the current situation. The sense of lack, longing, and physical preoccupation in which modern mentality and postmodern counter-reaction have resulted, may be viewed as a potentially productive response to immanently life destructive views of the world, be they modern or postmodern. Contemporary pathological, artistic, and cultural preoccupations with somatic matters call attention to the particular existential issues in need of a resolution. Thus, having no more truth-claims, only a sense of life to gain, we currently find ourselves in a situation where the best we can do is to rediscover our human and cultural potential for re-creating a more adequate form of authentic living.

Play and creativity figure as key terms in the debate concerning the formation of the currently emerging subject. No matter one's enthusiasm or dooms-day pessimism regarding the subject's prospects for getting his life together, the fact remains that the guidelines ruling the playground are also in the process of redefinition. Play, creativity, and cultural production simply mean and function differently in a time characterized by disbelief in universal truths, lack of stable frames of reference, and the decline of a sense of evolutionary progress.

Modernist conceptions of art entailed that a given work express a developmental stage in a subject's development toward further unification. Symptoms, conflicts, and desire, as painted on the cultural canvas, referred to a point of origin and revealed a story of evolution. Meaning pre-existed the subject's understanding, but could possibly be accessed and elaborated via creative endeavors. The post-modern subject finds himself on an entirely different territory. It is commonly refuted that he makes up an agglomeration of social, cultural and individual experiences. His identity thus no longer is seen as rooted in history. Nor are his creative efforts viewed as breaking the ground for a recovery of general human truth. Contrary to the modern subject, ideally conceptualized as being autonomous, coherent, and independent, the post-modern *functioning* subject must be adept at juggling various degrees of inter-subjective fusion and dispersion, of managing to stay afloat while never having all of his conflicting parts onboard one and the same boat, and of resigning from ever becoming the master in his own house. Creativity, as seen in this light, no longer breaks any path for the emergence of a core self. What it does instead remains under dispute. The primary purpose of creative engagement, at this point in time, this thesis argues, is not so much to expand or eliminate socially instituted boundaries, as it is to institute limits, understood as emerging from, and protecting the fundamental human needs of the subject, as well as serving as contact points and as zones of interaction between subjective experience and social life.

Considering the fact that the subject, the function of play, and the potential of creativity, not to mention the function of culture, must be rethought and adapted to current reality, it hardly comes as a surprise that the notion of limits is up for a reevaluation. Traditionally conceived of as drawing the line between one position and an other, and thus instituting a dualistic subject-object relationship between here and there ("I" and "you"), the ideal of limits or even the mere mention of limits tends to make most postmodern thinkers shudder. If ever we are to lead a more fulfilling life, they argue, we must cease to fear an indiscriminate mixing and merging. We must abstain from operating with, and within, boundaries, as that fosters nothing but hatred towards others as well as our selves. Yet, we must also learn to perceive our selves as made up of different bits and pieces. This thesis, in its totality, presents a counter argument to this stance. It may very well be that modern notions of boundaries and constraints serve the postmodern subject badly. But what has been in the cooking among various parts of the population over the last ten to twenty years, has been a virtual re-creation of the concept. The modern subject was exposed to constraints from the exterior and, at best, he integrated these into the structure of his being and thinking. The postmodern subject, on the other hand, for whom the experience of the exterior is a waste land of opportunities easily perceives his inner as a horizon-less desert. Bereft of a stable point of reference, not to mention any sense of containment, he redraws the lines on the most reliable surface he finds, closest to home : his skin and his body.

Somatic acts of behavior, evoking ideas of self-destruction, rather than self-creation, from a modern point of view, currently seem to serve as the postmodern individual's means of recreating a psycho-somatically interconnected sense of self. Thus, the body and the skin has come to serve as the last frontier, the subject's last resort for self exploration, differentiation, and realization. Starved for more than merely " meaningful " modern encounters, and pushed to the very edge of emotional survival within the postmodern fun-house, the subject has been forced to react, to take action, to seek other means of creating and expressing himself.

The view that the post-modern is our ultimate liberation as well as the attitude that it is a doomsdays predicament are both strongly contested here. The suggestion arising from these pages is that the postmodern offers a long needed challenge and opportunity for the subject's reasserting himself, not in spite of, but rather *because of* the very painfulness and the unbearable " lightness of being" it offers. When embraced wholeheartedly, yet critically, the current confusion provides the very incentive needed to create a more contemporary, less idealized, model of identity formation. The objective here is to break some paths and create some inroads to non-verbal and pre-verbal modes of interaction, somatic means of signification, and inter-relational ways of communicating. More specifically, the aim is to call attention to the layers and degrees of subjective meaning and affective value coming to manifestation in physical or relational—rather than symbolic—manners. Learning to "read " these acts and

gestures, often apparently only bordering on meaning, may be the only way to develop a better picture of what the postmodern subject is currently deprived of. For the world to make sense, and for the individual to find life meaningful and worthwhile, something more and other than mere acquisition of language is clearly required. He must become capable of playing, of dealing with non-sense, and of dwelling in his own skin. Far from representing an inward and asocial turn, the capacity to play and to be physically present lay the foundation for any genuine communal exchange. Thus, it is paramount that the individual appropriate language in a manner that enables him to re-create the story of his own life so as to grow capable of acting and interacting in a socially responsible manner. Thus, this thesis suggests that the cohesiveness of our social fabric can only improve in so far as our ability to grasp extra-ordinary modes of communication are enhanced.

Individuals for whom language falls short, whether for reasons of mental instability or artistic ambition, ordinarily express themselves by means of physical symptoms, gestures, or some other visual form. They *exhibit* an often rather complex impression rather than explaining it. The advantage of this form of communication is that it enables the subject to express rather ambiguous, at times contradictory, frames of mind at one and the same time. Due to the delicate and elusive nature of the subject here under exploration, no attempt has been made in this thesis at developing what may strictly speaking be labeled *a* strategy of interpretation. In so far as possible—which is pretty limited

considered the genre of this work—the structure of this thesis borrows from a visual rather than a verbal logic. Each and every segment makes up a minor piece of the puzzle. The order chosen conveys a certain rationale. Yet the various fragments could have been put together differently, to the effect that the weight of the reading would shifted, not entirely but significantly. It is likely to seem a bit confusing at first that what follows is ordered, and yet, the segments are not fully integrated, as is ordinarily the case in a braided argument. Still, the major objective has been to enable the reader to follow the train of thought put forward, both in terms of content, composition, and *lack* of logical connection. In so far as dialogue between text and reader is valued over and against argumentative water proofing, emphasis remains on exposing the various sources' potentials and pitfalls, rather than closing the case as it is stated in these opening pages. Generally speaking, the thesis moves from a light and illustrative level of information, introducing the subject in question in a relatively simple manner, to a heavier, more theoretical, and less entertaining level, illustrating the complexity and—for sure—the density of the psycho-somatic topic.

Each section of theoretical and empirical material is juxtaposed with an excerpt from and a partial analysis of Kerstin Ekman's novel *Blackwater* (1993).[1] This novel, along with the tetralogy of novels leading up to it, function as a fictional backdrop and a ground of resonance for the factual and philosophical material. The fictional material is intended to let the interplay between one discourse and another indicate the kind of content which does not seem to find more exact articulation.

*Blackwater* thematizes the problems involved in moving from a modern context, and a dualistic conception of the world, into a postmodern age, where past patterns of perception and conceptualization no longer apply. If the post-modern subject feels a bit at seas, Ekman suggests, it is to quite an extent due to the fact that the word has been severed from the world. Links must be recreated, *Blackwater* shows, between past practices of living and traditions of thinking. After all, it is from the latter that we have come. It is from within the latter that our appreciation of the present, and our hopes for the future emerge. Only by accepting the fact that we are the offspring of former ontological, theological, and epistemological models shall we grow capable of taking responsibility for our present situation, says Ekman. The precondition for relearning how to dream and fantasize, freely and productively, is that we awake from our current escapist slumber.

[1] Kerstin Ekman, *Blackwater*, trans. from Swedish by Joan Tate, New York : Doubleday, 1996. Original : *Händelser vid vatten*, Stockholm : Albert Bonniers, 1993.

All further references to *Blackwater* are to the Doubleday edition, not to be confused with the Vintage edition, also published 1996.

*Blackwater* was preceded by a tetralogy published between 1974 and 1983.[2] This series depicts the life of three generations of women as it unfolds within the framework of a rural Swedish town from around 1870 to 1970. *Katrineholm*, originally a minor autonomous society, undergoes a drastic transformation first with the advent of modern capitalism, and later with the arrival of post-industrialism. Evolving into a post-modern world, it becomes the dream—and the nightmare—of a community severed from its resources, and a culture detached from its origins. Ties to the past are broken, respect for nature loses any purpose, and the bonds that previously maintained the community's vitality withers away. The genders gradually lose their sense of identity. Women see their roles as mothers, wives, and caretakers of natural and cultural matters decrease in value. Men are carried away by the enticing prospect of gaining control over nature and taking charge of the course of history. In time, the two are irrefutably estranged. The females suffer intensely from the loss of a living connection. Their partners are driven by the fear that any sense of personal belonging shall create an obstacle for their pursuit of a brighter future. Eventually, the father figure fades out altogether from the nuclear family picture. Looming like a shadow in the background, devoid of any authority, he leaves behind a ghost-like shell of a family organized around nothing but a void, and bound to implode at any minute. In the end, both genders emerge as shallow figures rooted in nothing but light headed imagery, ideas and dreams, none of

[2] *Häxringarna* ( Magic Circles) 1974 ; *Springkällan* ( The Spring) 1976 ; *Änglahuset* (Angel House) 1979 ; *En stad av ljus* (A city of Light ) 1983.

which have any connection with their reality. For the female part of the population, the long term effect of their relative isolation from the social has a dizzying inability to perceive any kind of distinction. Existing as if in a vacuum, out of touch with each other, disconnected from the environment, and disassociated from their selves, these women grow afraid of sexual intimacy, wary of motherhood, and develop a succession of lung diseases, eating disorders, cancers and auto-immune conditions. The Katrineholm community, at the turn of the century a blooming minor world, is a political battleground drained of natural resources as the 1970s come to a close. The groundwater is polluted, alcoholism is on the rise, women have grown infertile or decline to reproduce, and the rising generation is preoccupied, not with the creation of a more advanced world, but rather with genocide and other forms of human self-destruction. Life has turned against it self.

One of the few things that enables some of these women survive, even to regain a sense of self, is the acquisition of the word. In the 1870s it is by some considered a matter of securing a form of access to the social. A hundred years later, it is an issue of establishing a connection between interior and exterior reality. Thus, in *A City of Light* (1983), the female protagonist starts a diary during the opening pages of the novel and, step by irregular step, writes into being a sense of having an embodied self. Starting off her journey as formless and disoriented, living in a self-imposed exile and speaking a foreign tongue, she is initially terrified that the inner emptiness she is to confront may swallow her

up. Eventually she succeeds in returning to her father country and in picking up her mother tongue. From within the framework of her childhood home, she acquires for the first time a tongue of her own. Prior to her re-entry into her native language she was spoken *by* it. At the end of her diary she has started speaking it. The difference is between letting her self be adopted by a preexisting form, on the one hand, and of adapting it to her life history and experience, on the other hand. Words, narratives, and myths, when taken to define meaning and value cause life to come to a halt. Associated with frozen conflict, emotional numbness and affective paralysis, *standstill* constitutes the opposite of *inner peace*. The latter is characterized by the ability to contain ambiguity, to deal with emotional paradox, and to stay tuned in to one's intuitive and " irrational " perception of things. The de-centered female subject of the twentieth century thus faces a highly challenging task. Feeling contour-less and deprived of essence, she must nevertheless try to track down a story line of her own, a story line whose internal connections are as yet to be made, as is its relationship to the larger picture. More at a loss than the earliest generation of women, who believed that if only they tried hard enough to adapt, they too would acquire an equal share of the cake, the postmodern subject is at an advantage in that she has acknowledged that in so far as she perceives herself as a vessel, she will never find any fulfillment.

It is after this line of novels, depicting a course of social development leading to cultural decline, subjective disassociation, and hard won footholds in

the world of words, that *Blackwater* emerges. The red thread running through the tetralogy continues to spin its way, though it is with good reason that the novel also stands on its own. The gender dualism, predominant in the earlier works has dissolved, as has a great deal of other oppositions which previously kept things—and thoughts—in their place. The tension between *good* and *evil*, for instance, has slackened, and the distinction between inner and outer reality dissolved, to the extent that the core of values supposedly sustaining the community has grown fluid.

Form and content are intricately interconnected in Ekman's work. Thus, the early part of the tetralogy stays " true " to historical facts in a semi-documentary manner, and follows the style of traditional twentieth century Swedish epics. It also draws extensively on Biblical allegories, most of which reappear in the novels thinly disguised and only slightly transformed. As the tetralogy progresses, the straightforward narrative structure relating a turn-of-the century mentality is superseded by increasing complexity. Narrative tense, point of view, and chronology can barely be sorted out any more. In *Blackwater*, the narrative takes its beginning in 1973 and reaches a close in the early nineties. Yet, memories from the fictive subjects' –even the landscape's--bygone past, resurface and break into the awareness of the various narrators. In addition, the author has her way of stirring up things. Thus, the surface of the present is repeatedly perforated. Furthermore, an even greater number of Biblical and mythological references contribute to the picture conveyed. But this time around

it appears in an often highly transfigured form. Certain mythological characters appear to come to fruitful use in the more recent context. Others are grossly inadequate. Some linger in a peculiar twilight, making it indeterminable whether they are to be taken seriously or ironically. Thus *Annie*, the female protagonist in *Blackwater*, represents to some extent a revised Mary-the-Virgin figure. Getting pregnant at first with a married man, secondly with a homosexual, both of whom are emotionally unavailable, Annie's children are the fruit of "immaculate" conception. When eventually *Birger*, the local healer, gets to "know" her, Annie is still virgin territory as far as intimacy with the opposite sex is concerned.

Mary, it may be recalled, is often portrayed as sitting with a book in her lap, presumably desiring to absorb the wisdom embedded in *the* word. Birger, however, recalls seeing Annie once late at night, from the outside in the cold and dark at a point in time and space where he has lost any sense of orientation. According to his description Annie does indeed make up a center of warmth and concentration, illuminated from within and without by natural force. Still, there is a twist to the myth of the holy virgin. Annie has created an origin of her own by following in the steps of an elderly independent woman. Furthermore, her sense of protection from evil requires more than mere good faith. In Birger's words :

> He remembered one January storm, the first time he had ever been to Blackwater... He didn't know where he was. Then he suddenly saw a light glowing in a window high up above the road... He wanted to ask where he was. Snow had already drifted up in front of the steps. When he peered through the kitchen window, he saw a woman sitting on a chair, reading in front of a wood stove. She had her feet on the oven door, halfway inside the oven. She was calmly reading and he stood there for so long looking at her that he saw her turning a page of the book....Then he knocked the window, but it was some time before she heard him... (317)

With the arrival of daylight it is revealed that Annie's cottage is in fact nothing but a framework of light, emanating as if from everywhere.

> The entrance hall was lined with pale green paneling and bright blue wall paper ; behind a door, steep stairs led up to the attic...The cottage was flooded with daylight and you could see right though it from the windows. Quite a big kitchen with pine walls and bright blue wallpaper. Windows on three walls. The bedroom had no door, only an opening with old and beautifully shaped molding. It too was light and visible from all the windows. (75)

> ...[He] had been thinking that Annie had taken over Aagot Fagerli's life. It had been there already, a style to step into. Of course she had modified it. But it was a lifestyle she had taken over with the house. Though Aagot hadn't needed to sleep with a shotgun beside her. (317)

A lover of letters from an early age, Annie initially falls into the trap of taking words at face value. From around puberty she has been irritated with her mother, *Henny*, for using words so casually, *as if* they were meant to support Henny's version of things, rather than being submitted to. She sticks to the notion that words are to define and delimit reality for years into her work as a teacher. Later however, she comes to remember this period for its dullness and her own sense of unreality.

Annie does not begin to change her perception of the use of words, till she has suffered a " fall." From here on the similarity between Annie and the truly holy virgin dissolves. Her awakening is further encouraged by the discovery of a pile of old notebooks and diaries. Left behind by the former inhabitants of the alternative commune Annie has come to inhabit, they document life as experienced by a family less than a generation ago. No one, at that time, even contemplated "going native." Their major concern was to survive. With dignity.

Learning from these letters a great deal about the passage of time (and thus of change), and the commonality between her self and the writer of the diary, Annie gradually begins to reflect on another meaning of the word. May it not be, she speculates, that its ultimate function is to move others, that is to touch them and thereby bring about change ? Like another Moses Annie too must climb a mountain, reach towards heaven in search of an answer, before she receives some sort of salvation. However, unlike God's disciple, the word she receives stem from no superior force. Nor does it constitute a command to be taken as truth determining and delimiting. Rather, the letters she discovers serve as guide lines for her further inquiry into the interconnections of dream and reality, desire and necessity.

The post-modern Mary thus learns that no single truth exists, and that what is held as being true at a certain point in time is written in the body, in the landscape, in trash left behind by other individuals, rather than in stone. She recognizes that her *being* is not a matter of free choice, and that the course of her history is far from under her control. She eventually draws the conclusion that even if no meta-explanation is ever water proof and bound to last, human beings need to believe in some sort of stability of and continuity within their frameworks. When serving a fruitful purpose these " stories " are used, not for the purpose of dictating reality, but rather with the intent of enabling human beings to cope with the fact that the complex logic of the larger picture is bound to elude their comprehension.

Danger is involved in clinging to a language, mythology, or ideology, as if it held a sacred truth, Ekman shows. Risks are entailed in employing words and narratives in a utilitarian manner. It is motivated by the fear of not measuring up to norms and conventions. Thus, it stalls the flow of emotion and drains meaning of human relevance. The latter is illustrated in *Blackwater* by the number of realizations undergone by the local doctor. Birger, in the opening of the narrative, represents a modern scientist whose faith consists in believing that emotions are to be subdued and passions held in check. Via the interference of Annie and other super-natural elements however, does he eventually come to the realization that physical illness is likely to be the symptom of a shriveling soul. Curiosity and passionate interest, he acknowledges, provide better healing than any "cure " offered from without. Healing, or redemption, comes to no one from either above or without. Thus, one must breathe life into words, nourish one's narrative traditions, so as to keep one's cultural texture alive.

The impossibility of—and the danger entailed in—trying to define and confine the stream of life into frozen structures is illustrated by the role played by liquids in the novels. Water runs like a river through the tetralogy, and literally speaking overflows in *Blackwater*. Running, seeping, drippling, leaking through the ground, taking shape after the environment and, when necessary, forcing new pathways. Flowing freely and with full force only when in a mutually respectful relationship with its surroundings, water is nevertheless never entirely prevented from seeking an outlet. In Ekman's novels in general, the extent to which the

ground water, amniotic fluid, and bodily liquids enter into a reciprocal relationship with the environment indicates the state of health of the community in question. Crying, vomiting, sweating, bleeding, getting soaked by the rain, and immersing one self in water illustrate various ways in which the subject may try to break free of emotional isolation and spiritual dryness. Water serves as a means of softening up, or breaking down, mental barriers preventing the subject from ever feeling moved, motivated, and taking appropriate action. On a larger scale, the state of the communal rivers, lakes, water supplies, even the climatic conditions, reflect the extent to which the society manages to uphold a balance between past and present, tradition and innovation, biological needs and cultural aspirations. *Use* of the resources sustains a continuing circulation. *Abuse* results in a break down into encapsulated fragments of what used to make up an interconnected whole. In *Blackwater*, the clear cutting of the forest ironically enough progresses with the turning of each page. (No opportunity is wasted by Ekman in commenting on the reader's complicity in the social crimes committed). The logging leaves the pastures barren. In consequence, the stream of water which previously contributed to the maintenance of the natural environment is forced underground and coerced into other less fruitful directions. A cleared surface reflects a dry and lifeless inner depth in which hardly anything moves. A smooth face of the earth reveals a culture out of touch with the forces from which it has emerged. It represents a society in which bodily and affective movements are considered disturbing for what " really" matters. If the

*Blackwater* lakes are dark and apparently bottomless, a few sparkling spots emerging in their middle, it serves to indicate that there is indeed no end to the dilemma of the choice between needing to believe ( in goodness of life) and fearing to be sucked up (by destructive urges). " The spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," as the saying goes. In *Blackwater* this translates into the notion that it may be illuminating to move into and through inner darkness and dissolution, so as to return with greater insight. To aim at getting to the bottom of the issue of human darkness, on the other hand, is an abysmal affair. " Still waters run deep." In *Backwater* this entails that when the social fabric appears intact, too many repressed feelings are kept under the lid. Too many forces of a destructive nature threaten to rip apart the texture.

The origins from which we emerge cannot be directly scrutinized and fully understood, Ekman proposes. Yet, in her work she greatly emphasizes the necessity of paying tribute to those very origins. The role of the fictive character, *Ylja*, is a case in point. A traveling femme fatale from the North who picks up a feebleminded version of a latter day Oedipus, Ylja is affiliated with Nordic goddesses. Her maiden name, Hofstaedter, and her passionate interest in myths about matrilineal societies relates her to Johann Jacob Bachofen. He was the 19th century Swiss historian who launched the theory that Neolithic societies were of a matriarchal nature. Most of Neolithic Europe, he claimed, were for an extended period of time under the sway of a homogeneous religious idea based upon worship of a Mother Goddess, also called the *Daughter of the Mountains*.

The Mother was in possession of generative powers and in control of all sexual forces. One of the most outstanding features of these early societies, Bachofen claimed, was the equal importance attributed to facts and ideas. Whatever a community imagined and believed to be true was considered just as influential for their state of being as was their material standard of living. Consciousness, in effect, was not split up into incompatible oppositions such as heaven versus earth, matter versus spirit. Bachofen's theory, at the time of its conception seen as being of profound scientific value, lost its influence with the development of modern society and philosophy. Hereafter, nature remained associated with maternal powers. But the latter came to be seen as something to exploit and thus subject to control rather than as a source with which one should respectfully interact. Ylja, via her appearance in the context of *Blackwater*, serves as a commentary on the forms of knowledge that has been lost in our hurry towards the future.

Feminist thinkers such as Jane Flax, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Andrea Nye suggest that traditional modern models of knowing, characterized by the separation of knowing from being, are indeed very likely to have developed as a male defense against the anxiety connected with merging and loss of autonomy. Freud suggested a rigid break down between primary and secondary process organization. According to this model reason cannot but exclude unreason. However, the instinctual foundation for his theory has since been questioned by object-relations theory. Psychological birth, object-relations theorists suggest, is

not coincident with physical birth. It occurs through a continuation of object-relations and environmental interactions. The subject, accordingly, is never entirely his "own " person. He remains part self, part other, and always in the process of coming into being as an increasingly complex individual. Reason, these thinkers suggest, depends not upon the existence of patriarchal authority, but rather on the subject's opportunity and ability to oscillate between a state of incomplete separation and a state of insufficient merging with the (m)other. Modern philosophers, following this train of thought, were arrested at a developmental stage where the longing for a symbiotic reunion might become overwhelming and thus seem threatening to their sense of autonomy. In consequence they came to repress, reject and desire to dominate the other. The bottom line assumption is that the models of knowledge to which we subscribe reflect the way in which we have resolved, or avoided to do so, the dilemmas of our childhood. The extent to which we have learned to handle these "primitive" states of emotion is reflected in the way we relate to nature. Ultimately it influences the models of knowledge we construct and the forms of ontology we respect. Traditionally, men have been taught the importance of separation and individuation, women to learn to emphasize and interconnect. Knowledge within Western philosophy, in consequence, has rested on a sharp gender differentiation and been bound up with sexual appropriation.

Communities from which naturally regenerative powers have come to be associated with death and darkness, are bound to be driven by fear, Ekman

shows. Like an undercurrent, the dread of the other permeates the entire foundation, always threatening to either break through or to cause rot and decay. Subjects and societies striving too hard to keep up appearances are unlikely to seek any kind of profound enlightenment. Dreading what they may discover in their inner, they carry on with " business as usual." If we ever are to move beyond a superficial sense of enlightenment which does nothing but scratch the surface, we must first and foremost learn not to fear what we may discover on the dark side, Ekman's narrative tells us.

A reading of *Blackwater* according to postmodern pace, and driven by a desire for excitement, inevitably leads to a superficial understanding. A brutal murder is committed within the first few pages. Anyone hurrying through the text, in pursuit of a resolution to the story's riddle—if not of a detailed revelation of human motivation for killing--reenacts the behavior of the Blackwater community, the very pattern of behavior against which the novel makes up a warning. Closing his eyes to *why* he is attracted to the unraveling of the sordid crime, and permitting no time for reflection, the reader comes to consider the issues brought forth as mere works of the imagination. Choosing to believe, like the community in question, that the murder was a matter of chance, he denies that the impulses acted out in the story resonate with the web of his own life-world. It *is* a matter of mere chance that a young couple is slaughtered at the river *Lobber*, though it was to be anticipated that something of the sort would eventually happen, as it was to be expected that the victims were to be foreigners.

It *is* a matter of chance that Annie comes to be the one who stumbles over the slaughtered couple. It is also a coincidence, or a sorts, that she unravels the riddle. But it is no mere accident that she ends up paying a pretty high price for truth she uncovers.

Likewise, any reading limiting itself to a number of well chosen frames of interpretation is bound to miss the larger issues at stake. Following and sticking to a few well integrated trains of thought and compatible models of logic may indeed result in narrative closure. Yet it misses the fact that the dynamics driving the narrative, that is its life, arise from the conjectures in the text. The points at which a variety of epistemological, theological and ontological models cross paths make up the imaginative point of departure of the emergence of new and slightly revised models. Ancient and eastern philosophy, Christian theology, psychoanalytical mythology and postmodern "signs of our times " inter-weave to the extent that it is often impossible to tell with which level of experience we are dealing. In this sense Ekman's text is truly postmodern : it includes a vast variety of fragments stemming from an array of often incompatible views of life. Yet, it departs from a postmodern life philosophy in that it contests the assumption that it is possible for the subject to freely choose between one life style and an other.

Not a single subject involved in the narrative controls the timing or is capable of predicting the course of events. Yet, all clues to the crime, to its resolution, and to its possible implications for the entire community occur within the first few pages of the novel. Most of these pieces of information, however,

appear to the fictive characters, along with the reader, to make up an abundance of loose ends. Like Annie, at her arrival to the country side, the clues make no sense to the spectator expecting certain *patterns* to occur :

> They were traveling in a foreign country. When a large cold lake was glimpsed between the trees, that was only a break in the monotony that would soon disappear and be replaced by another. She didn't know they were traveling upward along a system of lakes extending right up to the high mountains in Norway, where it ran out of marshlands and mountain streams. In the felled clearings the great network of water had been cut off and the ground had dried to dead flesh in the body of the landscape. Nor did she know that the felled clearings they could see from the road were only the small ones, that larger and larger areas had been cut off from their links with the clouds, making them incapable of giving anything back when the acid rain trickled through them. (9)

The overall narrative structure of *Blackwater* is that of a tapestry with a texture so dense at certain points that it appears impenetrable, and so loose at others that it is almost transparent : a far from consistent piece of fabric. The entire piece is at least doubly, if not multiply warped. No matter the apparent transparency of the texture at certain points, the reader never gets the impression of getting to the bottom of the truth. As in a tapestry, narrative progress and thematic continuity develop in no straight forward manner. Patterns and figures emerge only through an endless number of attentive and tedious crisscrossings of the field. In a work of weaving the tension of the texture is determined by the relationship between the vertically running underlying threads, the warp, and the horizontally inserted pieces of thread, shredded material and scrap, the woof. No matter the weaver's talent and effort, if the warp slackens, neither ground or motive ever come to figure clearly and convincingly. There is thus an intimate interconnection between the state of the invisible trends of time, holding together

the fabric, and the patterns that may emerge. As in a work of weaving, an error once committed has a major impact on the entire piece of fabric. Rarely discovered while in the making, it is as a rule too late to embark on an unraveling whenever it is discovered. No quick means of covering up or restoring the presumed order of the tapestry exists. Only the passage of time, and an addition of a great deal of patient labor may decrease the impact of the mistake. The latter implies that the weaver, like the reader, gets down into the dirt, so to speak, and concentrate on the very particular potential of each and every strand added to the picture. The story does not move ahead on its own. For a world of art to come to life a weaver and a story teller--as much as a compassionate spectator and reader—are required. Hence, no one, undertaking the labor entailed in tying together the loose ends in the story, can wash his hands and feel without responsibility for the course of events.

Weaving, of course, is associated with spinning. The latter suggests an enclosing web, often created so as to capture its victim. Likewise, the *Blackwater* novel spins around a core, a core consisting of the vanishing point constituted by the murder. Neither the murderer, nor the witness (Annie) actually recall anything with certainty. The resolution is a creation of multiple minds. The story is a result of a common need to add some meat—and lay some distance—to the bare fact of human existence : our mortality and limited time on earth.

Ekman needs nobody's help to speak on her behalf. Her fictive characters on the other hand, tend to suffer from a tendency to use words as means of

creating distance to anything "other," so as not to feel disturbed, or, so as not to feel anything at all. Only slowly does their hesitance to allow language to serve as a bridge between inner and outer reality retreat. Their inability to handle a too rapid transformation serves as a commentary on the role served by postmodern frenzy. Their recognition that more adequate means of communication can only slowly be acquired functions as a reference to the workload we have ahead of us. Neither a body, a landscape, nor a cultural body is capable of changing overnight, Ekman suggests. Old wounds requires time to recover, new dreams time to unfold.

***Part One*** of this thesis introduces the basic issues in question : The postmodern stage provides an overload of stimulation and yet something is missing. When the longing for an other, more authentic and grounded, sense of life grows sufficiently intense, we seek refuge in familiar models of meaningful existence. The catch is, however, that even if these may be of great inspiration, whenever they are re-introduced wholesale they come to serve as an escape from reality rather than as a means to learn to cope with the current conditions. Fredric Jameson, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Alphonso Lingis, Brian Massumi, Steven Shapiro, and Michael Taussig attempt to determine the negative to be overcome, or the positive to be enhanced, as result of the post-modern dissolution of conventional notions of boundaries and foundations. They agree that the general personality make-up has turned "schizo" to a greater or lesser extent. Whether this is viewed as for the better or the worse, depends on whether or not the individual thinker subscribes to a psychoanalytically influenced frame of reference. The question that begs to be asked is as follows: Is it actually possible to simply choose to write off the subject's psychic and somatic history as insignificant, as for instance Deleuze and Guattari tend to do? Is it feasible to imagine that this 'schizo' subject makes a joyful player in the postmodern ball game ?

***Part Two*** introduces a counter argument to the postmodern celebration of the "schizo." First and foremost, James M. Glass argues, neither a psychotic, a schizophrenic, nor a multiple personality, makes a social revolutionary or an

individual capable of enjoying himself. Secondly, as indicated by Sensory Anthropology and Human Ethology, for the subject to develop and function, a certain consistency in physical, sensorial, and relational contexts must exist. A recurrent "flux" in the environment merely leads to emotional numbness and intellectual arrest. In the worst case the individual grows catatonic : unable to relate to others, incapable of feeling compassion for his fellow beings. That the developing subject's need for environmental stability is not merely a biological need, but indeed a bio-psycho-social requirement, is supported by Sylvan Tomkins' script theory. The individual is born with the potential to develop various scripts, he argues, only some of which evolve as result of his environmental interactions. Thus, his personality is to some degree determined by his innate potential, to some extent dependent on the culture in which he lives. His image and character are not ever a matter of an entirely free and arbitrary choices. If partly determined by inner potential, partly at the mercy of cultural forces, where if anywhere is play to have any influence on the life of the individual ? What is left for him to self-create, we may then ask ?

***Part Three*** undertakes an exploration of various play and creativity theories, ranging from classical psychoanalysis and object-relations theory to a phenomenologically inspired approach. The early Freud suggested that the individual is biologically wired to seek out interaction with the environment. The quantitative and qualitative nature of this interaction, he suggested, lays down the ground rules for what the subject is later to find enjoyable or offensive. Play,

according to this model, involves an expansion of the already existing neuro-psychologial network associated with pleasure, thus a reinforcement and refinement of the subject's evolving "core" self. With the introduction of the Oedipus complex and the death drive, however, Freud abandoned his early theory. Instead he developed the proposition that play and creativity primarily are about sublimating the energy associated with forbidden libidinal wishes and desires. Creative activity provides a roundabout means for reconnecting with the repressed, while avoiding the guilt that would otherwise follow. Adopting Freud's emphasis on instincts and drives, but paying greater attention to the rôle of object-relations in the evolution of the individual, Melanie Klein suggests that play functions as a mourning device. The subject, she claims, must overcome the loss of his ideal other and the sense of his self as being perfect. Play and creativity enable him to grieve and symbolically repair the flaws of the self acquired during the process of individuation. Whereas Freud and Klein take for granted that the aim is for the subject to integrate and become autonomous, D. W. Winnicott makes the claim that it is of greater significance that the individual learn to oscillate between being one and being (with) an other. The experience of sharing his innermost self, his dreams and fantasies, with an other human being, he says, is the closest a human being can ever get to feeling recognized for his uniqueness. Play and creativity, in consequence, is about the subject's daring to temporarily let down his guards, to be less self sufficient, and to allow for his inner self to interact with that of an other. Marion Milner, heavily inspired by

Winnicott, further elaborates his theory by arguing more concretely for the co-existence of rationality and irrationality in our daily conduct. The former we need so as to get on with our lives, she claims. The latter we need so as to come to terms with the fact that the "evil " forces we tend to project onto others exist in our selves. When these are shut off and repressed, the result is a rigid, overtly rational and suffocating style of living. When permitted to come out in free fantasizing, and to materialize in creative work, the path is broken for a more complex personality to come into being. Susan-Kavaler Adler, also from an object-relations inspired frame of reference, adds to Winnicott and Milner's theories that genuine absorption by creative work holds not only the potential of the self's coming fuller into being. It also presents the danger of the subject's growing compulsively preoccupied and thus caught up in pathological patterns of defense. In the case of women artists, she says, it is not uncommon that their work, instead of enabling the women to pull away from a miserable state of being, actually reinforces it. The reason, Kavaler-Adler suggests, may be that while trying to make up for the lack or loss of a Father figure, what these women really are going after is to receive acknowledgment from an imaginary Mother. Alphonso Lingis, finally, offers an off beat angle to the issue in question. Playing, he shows rather than argues, is about learning to appreciate and make the most out of the fact that one is mortal and thus tends to fear anything serving as a reminder of one's limitations. Play is about letting one's potential as a human being in the present unfold. It is about seeking to realize one's self, no

matter the obstacles presented by norms and conventions. If the post-modern player may seem to undercut his individuality by means of his choice of self-creative activities, it is merely because most of us remain stuck in notions of repression as put forward by psychoanalysis and Marxist inspired culture criticism, both of which are outdated, Lingis states. The post-modern subject appearing to have gone on automatic pilot may in fact be in the process of carving out a vary particular role for him self.

While most of the above theories look at play from a subjective angle, i.e., what it does for the subject's coming together or growing more apt at gaining from involvement with others, Gregory Bateson and Victor Turner adds a contextual twist to the game from an anthropological point of view. For any transgression of boundaries and experimentation with identity to be productive , Bateson claims, certain maps of cultural meaning must be in place and territories for creative innovation generally acknowledged. If not, the creative individual is likely to suffer expulsion. Offering a slightly more flexible model, Turner proposes that temporary creation of liminal zones, that is time and space within which individuals are encouraged to let loose and go overboard reinforces the social fabric. Whereas lunacy may be perceived as threatening, contained "craziness" is likely to serve as a source of social transformation. That there is little agreement what play is about among the theorists above is beyond doubt. Using the anthropological notions of social maps, territories, margins and regulated loop holes as an umbrella for the various views on play is tempting and

indeed moderately useful. The disadvantage of putting all of the diverse views into that grab bag is however, that it tends to cut off the connection to post-modern play as it is currently practiced.

That theory and practice, as far as play and creativity are concerned, tend to be somewhat at odds, may be predictable. That the practice of play and self-destruction have grown increasingly indistinguishable recently, provide more food for thought. Thus, the driving force behind some of the currently most extreme cases of body play, no matter their differences, is an intense urge to walk the thin line between life and death. No one states a desire to get their acts together so that they come to make sense in a socially accepted way. Almost every one expresses a wish to come to fully experience the origin and limit of his being. For some this entails the transcendence of stories of creation. For others it implies the appropriation of the means to string together the story line of their life. In either case, the dialectic put forward by for instance Freud ( between ego and id ) or Bateson and Turner (between the inside and the outside of the social) is brought into question. ***Part Four*** explores the ways in which these play practices comply with or contradict the prepositions put forward above. The fact that the body is often treated as a piece of meat, rather than as an ensouled container, makes one wonder if the postmodern subject has grown so alienated from everything natural that he is capable of perceiving his body as nothing but a piece of furniture. Has hard-core Cartesianism made its return and taken revenge? Not so argues Donna Haraway. The reinvention of our selves include a

reinvention of nature, and thus the development of "cyborg " identities. Another striking feature characterizing these postmodern games is their often sado-masochistic nature. Has the widespread violence in our culture become integrated into our character to such an extent that we now cannot think of anything else to desire but to mutilate and to be ripped apart? The staging and acting out of sado-masochistic scenarios, Robert Stoller claims, need not express a taste for violence and destruction per se. It is more likely to serve as a means for the individual to reconnect with his sexual and ontological origin. That may be what it seems like, counters Jessica Benjamin. But in fact, any kind of involvement in sado-masochistic playing is bound to produce nothing but losers with a horrendously ragged sense of self. Play and creativity has thus taken a deadly seriously turn in the course of the postmodern. It appears obvious that postmodern "play" serves as a form of compensation and outlet for complex emotional conflicts. It is often swiftly assumed that the culprit to blame for the postmodern subject's affective paralysis is modern rationality. Yet, a closer look at the alternative put forward by poststructural theory cannot but trigger the question if the floor has *really* been opened for a less modern subject to speak up.

In ***Part Five*** Michel Foucualt and Jacques Lacan both make the claim that if adopted in a deadpan manner, language acquisition results in the subject's leading a marionette-like life. The opportunity exists, they agree, for the subject to inscribe himself in a more critical fashion, something which allows for the development of some degree of personal and corporeal agency. Neither thinker,

however, is particularly successful in pinpointing the ways in which a more personalized and deeply felt language may be acquired. Their blindness in this respect is explicable primarily by their tendency to write off "pre-subjective" forms of expression. Contrary to what Foucault and Lacan propose, however, cases of physical self-mutilation such as Anorexia, suggest that subjects on the verge of existence may have a great deal to "say " about the meagerness of conventional meaning production. The volume, ambiguity, and intensity of life *experience* at this point in time they seem to indicate, cannot possibly be captured, conceptualized and finally defined. Judith Butler's notion of *performativity* further suggests that the Anorexic's disinclination to fill out any normative figure of speech may be understood as a subtle, through extraordinarily effective, type of resistance. Adding to this picture Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "flesh of the world," and one is led to assume that the physically so-called self-destroying subject might be in the process of carving out a suitable identity for him or her self. He or she might, as a matter of fact, embody the nature of the struggle required for our life world to become more inhabitable. Thus, the subject for whom the word has lost all meaning, and the destruction of the body has come to serve as the point of departure for a sensible life, paradoxically, gets the last word in the post-structural debate.

Contemporary feminist and cultural critical theory add some of the aspects missing from the post-structural picture to our understanding of subject-formation, its relation to language acquisition, and its interconnection with the

development of an embodied sense of self. Trinh T. Minh-ha introduces the notion of speaking nearby, Nancy Miller suggests that we use embarrassment as a guide when exploring our true tongue, and Shoshana Felman proposes that we learn to listen to our own patterns of compulsion. ***Part Six*** thus ties together some of the loose ends from above, partly in a fictional manner. The wish for a form of life that includes a greater degree of psycho-somatic integration, the suspicion that this may require a breaking free of one's cultural context, and the belief that bodily experience cannot *really* come to expression by verbal means, are addressed by two autobiographical writers. Marie Cardinal and Alice Kaplan put to the test the post-structural assumption that meaning and value come about via the sliding of signifiers. In the process they put to rest one of post-structural thinking's most notorious side effects : the abstraction of the body. The appropriation of language *is* about the acquisition of a psycho-somatically integrated self, they demonstrate. Language helps the subject exploring and asserting her bodily self. However it does not *in itself* provide the means for anyone to explore her boundaries or expand her sensory repertoire.

Ultimately the question to pose to these writers and their confidence in language is the extent to which their course of development by any means compares with the postmodern "schizo." Neither of the three women have in fact ever "lost their mind," though Cardinal at some point underwent a major psychotic break down. ***Part Seven*** supports the suspicion that various degrees of emotional instability require different modes of interaction so as to enable the

subject to come to expression. Language does not per se write off psycho-somatic integration. It simply is more or less appropriate, depending on the subject's apperception of form and content, and ultimately of limits, difference, and differentiation. Arnold Modell theorizes that aspects of the subject's experience, ordinarily precluded from awareness, may come to "speak " to him during moments of aesthetic immersion. People seek out objects and environments, he claims, which enable them to connect with the otherwise inaccessible parts of their self. Any interaction with the true self, he speculates, takes place within this type of aesthetic space. Contrary to Freud, who argued that creativity is motivated by the subject's desire to repeat a lost pleasure, Modell makes the argument that repetition is about the creation of coping strategies with unconscious as yet un-processed material. Drawing on Gerald Edelman's neuro-scientific research, he claims that the human organism is simply wired to rewrite its history over time. Christopher Bollas takes the notion of the self's coming to manifestation in terms of taste, form and style even further. We learn the grammar of our being long before we acquire any language, he asserts. Thus the way in which we situate our selves in relation to others, structure our dreams, and organize our fantasies, speaks of our earliest object-relations, as they have been laid down in our being ; speaks of our way of relating to our various part-selves. Joyce McDougall and Didier Anzieu, finally, bring to the fore the emotionally and mentally disturbed subject's way of stating his case. Contesting the classical psychoanalytic claim that the individual comes into being around the time when

he makes the shift from primary processing to secondary processing, McDougall and Anzieu show that where human *hope* exists, language does not necessarily occur. In psycho-somatics, McDougall argues, the body has started speaking on behalf of the individual's mind as if *it*, not the subject, had gone mad. If not some one, then at least some *body*, has to state the individual's discontent. The "language" here spoken is proto-symbolic and archaic. Far from structured like a language, in a Lacanian sense, it nevertheless is deeply meaningful. In cases of psycho-somatics and multiple other conditions caused by boundary confusion, Anzieu adds, not even the body itself serves as a sufficiently distinctive site of exploration and expression. When the end of the rope has been reached, the subject goes to the outer limit of his being and holds on to the very phenomenon which holds him together : his skin. Containing him, protecting him from the world, and yet providing a site of exchange with others, the surface of the body comes to serve as his last ditch attempt at taking a form, coming into being for others, and making himself available for intersubjective dialogue.

***Part Eight*** introduces some of the aspects constituting the larger frame of reference for the physical issues discussed in this thesis. Charles Taylor, for instance, proposes that when bereft of a common ground, exemplified by a shared language, the subject grows disoriented, often to the extent that he feels physically "afloat." Profoundly uncertain concerning what constitutes the life-values within his community, the individual loses his foothold in reality and thus his ability to orient himself. George Steiner supports the thesis that the

contemporary subject finds himself in dire straits and thus is strongly in need of some commonly held values. However, contrary to Taylor, Steiner sees no shortage of words as causing the trouble. In fact, he says, our world is cluttered by a "gray morass" of meaningless critical discourse. In the course of late modern development, he argues, we have learned to talk extensively but lost our ability to make sense. What the "Masters of Emptiness," such as the post-structuralists, fail to understand is that for language to mean anything at all, it must constitute an act of love. It must be underwritten by a "higher" presence, i.e., refer to something "larger than life." The very moment the word is prevented from referring to extra-textual notions of value language dries out and human interaction acquires a mechanical, life defying quality. The contemporary turn towards the body may be understood in this light and even further elaborated on by Elaine Scarry's work. During periods of widespread social uncertainty, she claims, the body often comes to replace and represent the loss of trustworthy (meta)physical frameworks. The self-mutilating subject, thus, cannot be said to have simply turned his back to a world gone awry. Rather, his practice expresses a particular structure of experience. Hence, it represents an attempt at preparing the ground for other and more acceptable social structures to come true.

***Part Nine***, finally, offers a review of some of the key issues brought to the fore in the pages above. Discussing certain aspects, questioning others, and suggesting a number of conclusions, this part is by no means intended to clear the coast. Rather the aim is for it to point to further horizons of exploration.

What is presented in these pages is meant to contribute to a composite model of understanding inarticulate forms of communication. Representing no step-by-step strategy of interpretation, it proposes that numbers of aspects of experience, along with several layers of mental and emotional awareness, must be taken into careful consideration whenever the subject-in-progress is being "read." Regardless of the extensive use of terms, such as "regression," "return to one's origins," or, the reintroduction of "primitive" modes of psycho-somatic processing, infantilization is *not* what is implied. The grown subject, no matter his "primitive" forms of behavior, is conceived of as consisting of an accumulation of developmental stages, *all* of which remain of paramount importance for his adult functioning.

Finally, a formal remark : " He" is used whenever possible, all through the thesis. No complex deliberations lie behind this choice.

# PART ONE

## Drowning by numbers :
## Postmodern ecstasy or distress ?

### 1.0 ENJOINED THROUGH LONGING : WHERE FACT AND FICTION OVERLAP AND OTHERWORLDLY VISIONS EMERGE

" Progress breaks vow of silence " read the title of a full page article in *The Globe and Mail*, September 11, 1997. "With loggers cutting around the clock, a remote hermitage decides to fight back," elaborates the subtitle. *Nova Nada*, populated over the past 25 years by a minor Catholic Carmelite order, is located 60 kilometers north of Yarmouth. *Be still and know that I am God* encourages a Biblical passage engraved in the wooden entrance sign at the gate. *Nova Nada*, meaning "nothing," has taken its name after the wilderness society established on Mount Carmel by the prophet Elijah. The order makes up one out of a number of branches of the *Spiritual Life Institute* (Crestone, Co.), and its members have committed themselves to serving the Lord only. Telephones, other electronic means of communication, along with any other form of distraction are banned from the commune, and running water is available only half the year. Daily life centers around prayer, work in the forest, preparation of simple foods,

and the production of religious information tapes and pamphlets to be distributed. Entire days are reserved for quietude, and most meals are consumed in solitude.

Life went ahead peacefully until one day in June when huge logging machines began to cut timber in the nearby vicinity, twentyfour hours a day, seven days a week. "It was like being tortured," one of the mothers explains. Unable to sleep for weeks on end, distressed and constantly on edge the members were paralyzed. Once silence had once again fallen upon earth, they gathered their senses and requested that the logging be kept at a distance from the holy order. The company resisted, as did the community in general. The *Irvings*, the owner of the logging company, a "plain-spoken family that has built an industrial empire on hard-nosed business deals " claim that the feller-bunchers, worth an estimated $400,000 a piece, are not profitable unless they work around the clock. The community in general, whose living now depends on employment by the Irvings, do not want to see the company's activities restricted. It is, as the article's author, Kevin Cox, concludes, a matter of conflicting values.

In *Blackwater*, a 32 year old female school teacher seeks refuge from civilized society's moral decay, emotional destitution, and lack of human contact, in an alternative commune. Choosing *Starhill* as her destination *Annie* virtually speaking starts all over from on a clean slope. Placed on the top of a mountain, high above the birches and other greenery, Starhill is brushed by a thin and chilly breeze. Sheep graze, where grass still grows and goats inhabit the indoors.

Subsisting on goat milk and meat, cheese, vegetables, grains and seeds, the society consisting of six adults and as many children, lead a life in proximity with nature and in accordance with "original ways " as they put it. Isolated from the artificiality and horrors of present day society the commune exists as if in a bubble of its own. Carried away by her great many dreams and fantasies, Annie has no idea what her departure from Stockholm and her venturing into an entirely *other* world is to lead to. Approaching the community, however, she develops a slight sense that this is not *real*, or, rather that this is not really what she came for. The moment she puts her foot on the commune's property Annie perceives a curios echo from some indeterminate past, at one and the same time strangely foreign and uncannily familiar :

> A dog started barking... She could hear the tinkling of the waterfall in the stream far away, but she first heard the silence when the barking of the dog broke out and sounds came from the mountain. They were dull, regular, and of frightening strength. At first she couldn't connect them with the figure silently but rhythmically raising and lowering an ax at the corner of one of the houses. Then she managed to make out the dry real sound of the ax blade and the echo from the perpendicular mountainside....
>
> She still knew nothing and was accepting everything as if it were reality. The primeval welding of the ax. The security of the rhythmical sounds of a blade striking wood. The eternal barking of a dog.
>
> They came closer and she realized that the long, cloven beard of the ax wielder was not white around his mouth but yellow, his eyes not faded and watery, and he was not as ancient as he had first appeared to be. Petrus. She had the impression that the wood chopping had been staged the moment Dan, she, and [her daughter] Mia had come into sight from the cottage nearest to the path...Then Brita appeared in her long home-woven skirt and an apron raised by her stomach...
>
> Porridge, it was. Brita ladled it out of a saucepan on the iron stove. Porridge with husks and seeds and small hard bits in it... Mia pushed her bowl away so that the milk slopped.
>
> " It smells nasty, " she said. " Like inside shoes."
>
> Blank looks. Everyone looked at her. Brita said it was goat's milk and that was the milk they had. (122-123)

> [Annie and Mia] were to live in the sensible building... But it was hideous and connected with something called the cookhouse...Farther away was a goat shed of corrugated iron and planks...There were two beds made of metal tubing. The room had only one window. Beneath it a piece of hardboard served as a kind of table...

> From the very beginning Annie had said that she couldn't live in a commune. That was really the only thing she had stated with any conviction. Otherwise her life was open. She wanted to change it. But not to live with other people. (124-125)

> Yes—the rug was dirty, like the curtains. Everything was threadbare, dingy, stained with smoke and decades of damp... She had come there to work. To make it beautiful. Not to step into something completed [she reassured her self]. (127)

> Mia had come back and begun to unpack the Greek rucksack, where her Barbie dolls and their clothes were. Ken had nothing on but a pair of white gauze underpants. Barbie had a pink bra and matching panties. ( 126)

Based on the rejection of modern and postmodern society, Starhill is nevertheless permeated to the core by the very evils of civilization. The clear-felling on the slopes of the mountain, for instance, gradually closes in around the commune, making the inhabitants acutely aware of the precarious state of their secluded universe. Other aspects of late modernity seep into the foundation of Starhill, the most significant one being that of fear. None of the members arrived there in a state of innocence. The heavy luggage and dirty conscience which lead them to seek refuge in the commune in the first place have only been left behind to the extent that it is persistently being "written off." When a murder is committed in the neighborhood, the dwellers' deadlocked and repressed sense of impeding danger is spurred. Yet, no one dares to react. It is the group leader's conviction that Starhill represents a clear cut with the world of evil and pollution.

> ...They discussed food supplements. Bert thought the lambs should be given extra. Melodiously, Petrus said the grazing was enough. The grass was lush enough, green and wonderful. Wooooonderfoool, he said. His voice was remarkable. It sang as if he was speaking an old-fashioned dialect. But which ? Everything he said sounded calm and reflective...
>
> " Annie, " said Petrus.
>
> " What ? "
>
> They all looked at her.
>
> " We want to get to know you, " said Petrus. " Tell us why you're so tense"...

" It's what happened, " she said. " The accident by the Lobber. I saw them. "

" Annie, " said Petrus, leaning over towards her, so close she could feel his breath. It smelt odd. Like an animals. Was it goat's milk ?

" You mustn't think about that any more, " he said... " It's in the past now. It has nothing to do with us up here. "

" But I saw...You have to think about how... well, how it happened. That it'll be cleared up I mean. We live so near. "

" No. "

What a fantastic thing to say ! No we don't live near. But she had no time to protest.

" You've left that now, " said Petrus. " The tabloid world. You're here now. " (132)

" He talks like a book, Annie thought. Like a damned Bible...

" The little girl plays with Barbie dolls, " [another member] said...

" Yes, well, " said Petrus. " We're going to forget about that there. There's so much else. There are lambs and kittens, Mia. Alive and a lot of fun... "

" Barbie dolls are dead, " he said, " Aren't they ? " (128-129)

As much as she tries to find Petrus sympathetic, Annie never actually succeeds. Whenever her emotional equilibrium is off balance, she sees Petrus differently, as if more clearly, and in a much less flattering light :

Her old antipathy to Petrus had returned. For a while she had quite liked him. He was an oddball. He thought mostly about cheese, talked like the Bible, and did everything very slowly....Now she was remembering the repellent things.

When Brita had given birth to her child and the journalists had come, Petrus had taken over. It was he who had told them what it was like to have a child at Starhill. At the time, she hadn't wanted to read the article. Now she hunted for it while he was out. She found a whole heap of newspaper cuttings. He had been collecting cuttings on the murders.

In the interview on giving birth, he had said he had buried the afterbirth below the kitchen window. It made good manure.

He wanted to do what they used to do before, in the olden days, as he always said. But he didn't understand that the afterbirth was sacrificed so that the earth would be fertile like a woman. Petrus thought it was about manure. That was not only stupid, but vile. (269)

Social development rapidly catches up with Starhill and the commune dissolves. For its female members, the failed experiment has long lasting implications. It changes their subjective and sexual self perception, enhances their appreciation and awe of being able to reproduce, and leaves them in a

politically less dogmatic frame of mind. The male members, *Dan* and *Petrus*, in contrast remain largely un-impressed by the course of events. For as long as they live, they pursue an agenda already developed prior to the foundation of the commune.

Twenty some odd years later, following the end of the commune and her death, Petrus elevates Annie to modern day sainthood. Deciding to make an exhibit of her life-philosophy, he chooses to promote what is in vogue at the time. And that regardless of the fact that at the time of his and Annie's live interaction, it turned them into arch enemies. Annie's hard won experience, when appropriated by Petrus, is used as a means of self-promotion. Her now grown daughter and her former boyfriend witness Petrus' staging of the event, and more or less understand that this has nothing to do with honoring Annie's life—and premature death, but everything to do with trying to make her fate serve a self-centered purpose of Petrus' own.

> Petrus Eliasson's goatee was quite white nowadays. He was wearing a shirt of cream-colored material that fell beautifully over the cuffs around his wrists. The *Tree of Life* was embroidered on the back of his crocheted west...
>
> " But it was Petrus who took over, " said Mia.
>
> " He has a strong personality. "
>
> " He's an animal. And now he's become trendy as well. A café in a red and white cottage. hand painted signs. And money from the local authorities for courses in ethics. But his breath still smells bad. And he's interested in only one thing : cheese and screwing... "
>
> " He was already a dirty old man at Starhill. We kids thought he was disgusting. He climbed on the ladies. At any time of the day. " (361-362)

The ax-swinging Petrus thus incorporates the messenger of death and the satanic satyr. At the time of his leadership of the Starhill society, he was on top of the world. Having isolated himself, holding a harem of sexually and

financially dependent women, Petrus created a universe exclusively based on his personal need of power and sexual desire. Patronizing his subordinates to the extreme, he temporarily succeeded in upholding an almighty status in the collective. By placing his "chosen people" on the top of a mountain, Petrus reveals lofty, if not heavenly, aspirations. Those who ascend Mont Salvat, are traditionally the lucky few who actually succeeds in discovering the light. Spiritually illuminated, they may be. However, inner " illumination " and notions of social " enlightenment " are not always easily distinguishable. As humanity pulls itself out and up from the dark ages, human suffering and feeblemindedness is replaced by superhuman pleasure and determination. *Starhill* and *standstill.* Time has been brought to a halt in this supra-terrestrial sphere. For the illusion to last everything must remain fixed in time and space. It is a fossil existence.

When fact and fiction merge to an extent as in the case of the Canadian news clipping and the Swedish novel, peculiar things happen. Reality acquires an aura of fiction, fantasy the flavor of brutally explicit factuality. The blending of various reality aspects makes it evident that, "fact " or "fiction," both contribute to the evolution and understanding of one and the same story line. A story-line which, nevertheless, is fragmentary, inconsistent, and full of surprises. Juxtaposing the *Nova Nada* project with Ekman's *Starhill* construct may seem unfair, if not outright derogatory. Yet the purpose is not to evaluate who, if anyone, in this context, is letting themselves being led the farthest astray. As the

further reading of *Blackwater* demonstrates, our history, our personal and collective story-telling, is never made up of merely one explanation, never draws on only one or a few larger frameworks. Reaching one's destination often requires an extraordinary amount of good and better, and sometimes not so successful, attempts. Fact and fiction nourish each other in this respect. They do so, not by means of fusion, but rather by means of an intricate and continuing interaction. Woven fabrics are made up of a limited number of vertical strands. Every single thread contributing to the texture is significant. By itself it makes no larger picture. When contributing to the connective web, however, it may make "all the difference."

*Nova Nada* and Starhill do not in themselves appear to have much of an impact on our culture. Yet, a close reading of projects like these may improve our understanding of why endeavors at building better worlds so often fall short, why they tend to backlash. No future is to be anticipated through an escape from or repression of one's present or past history, Ekman suggests. Likewise, no past can be revived via a withdrawal from one's present. Time *is* continuity. Any attempt at severing one's connections, whether with one's past, present, or future existence corresponds to an extinction of sources of life. We repress our feelings out of fear of our own limitation, exterminate humanity because we are incapable of facing up to death. Taking control of the process of life is one way of trying to avoid the thorny issues. In the end, it is this self-imposed blindness and the emotional numbness it involves, that prevent us from living creatively.

Far from everything goes as planned on Annie's journey to Starhill. Her turn to Blackwater, encouraged by her anarchist lover, Dan, is motivated by a deep desire to return to her roots (193-194). Annie herself was conceived in Blackwater 32 years earlier, and born October 21st 1941. A *Libra*, astrologically speaking, she represents cosmic and psychic equilibrium. As ill fitting as this label may be at the outset of her journey, following the turn of a great many pages in her life, Annie comes to fulfill her destination.

While still in transition from the city to Blackwater, she receives what she is later to understand as a first warning that her Starhill adventure may be a hazardous affair. The moment she initiates a realization of her fantasy of an entirely new life, things begin to fall apart. Connections are broken off, and disorientation takes over the picture. Annie's vision of what the past might bring in terms of a future is close to crushed.

> Midsummer Eve almost eighteen years ago. A hot day. They had traveled to Östersund by train. She knew that. But how did she know ?
>
> Clear and irrefutable memories were actually few. She had stood with the telephone crank in her hand. That was a fact she remembered, but not much more...
>
> ...They had to wait a long time at the bus station. The bus to Blackwater left at half past two, then as now. Over all those years, the timetable never changed.
>
> It was Midsummer Eve, so it was a Friday. The old Midsummer Eve was not until Saturday...There was nothing about her journey in her notebooks, because they hadn't existed then. Her loneliness had not begun, everything was still hectic...her head, her whole body singing. She was to start a new life.
>
> And she had done so. When she tried to wind the crank of the taxi telephone, the handle came off in her hand. She might have thought that a bad start. But she didn't. The song inside her was too powerful. (7-8)

Arriving at the Blackwater village, the last bus stop on the route, Annie is taken aback by the factual state of affairs. Nothing at all corresponds to her imagination. Everything smells of death and decay, or associates hurried

superficiality. Thus, the Blackwater village, a tacky mismatch of new and old, fails terribly in measuring up to her romantic dreams of a rural society:

> A long wooden building, painted green, a parish hall or a community center, had a collapsed timbered barn next to it, its shingle roof fallen in. The house on the other side was clearly occupied, with puckered nylon curtains in all the ground floor windows. But the attic had a big hole with rag stuffed into it, a sheet of hardboard replacing the other pane.
>
> ...Annie found it hard to make it all out, the decay and desolation jarring against the new buildings and improvements. Why couldn't they be bothered to pull down the collapsed and decayed buildings ?...
>
> ...Perhaps the villagers saw only what looked like urban developments. They saw modernity where she saw decay and neglect.. (28)

For most of her life, Annie's actions have been driven by a strong desire for her past and future to come together, that is for her self to be unified and come into fuller presence. The temporal and structural complexity of the novel, along with Annie's wish to find her future identity in a long gone illusory past, are symptomatic of late modern notions of time and identity formation, as is her idea that she may reinvent herself by exchanging one context for another, one version of the story line of her life for another. Yet, her migration is motivated by more than mere restlessness and late modern boredom. As she proceeds into the woods leading up to Starhill, Annie develops a slight sense that her journey may have a sub- as well as a meta-text, the nature of which she is as yet unable to decode. The further *taken in* by the forest she is, the farther away does she move from familiar ways of knowing. Thus, on the bus ride through the mountains she notices that this landscape is stranger than anything she has ever dreamed of. Still, the words she employs to describe this mysterious universe reveals that it

makes her feel like returning home as well as triggering intense fear of getting completely lost.

> They were traveling in a foreign country. When a large cold lake was glimpsed between the trees, that was only a break in the monotony that would soon disappear and be replaced by another. She didn't know they were traveling upward along a system of lakes extending right up to the high mountains in Norway, where it ran out of marshlands and mountain streams. In the felled clearings the great network of water had been cut off and the ground had dried to dead flesh in the body of the landscape. Nor did she know that the felled clearings they could see from the road were only the small ones, that larger and larger areas had been cut off from their links with the clouds, making them incapable of giving anything back when the acid rain trickled through them. ( 9)

> ...a turquoise patch in the great lake that seemed to have no connection with the color of the sky, the water all around a deeper blue...
>
> When the forest opened up she could see a small lake glinting far down below the road, almost black with the reflection of the spruce forest. Only in the middle was there a lighter oval, which again did not reflect the pale blue color of the sky. Instead, it was golden, like old red gold. (43)

> ...Blackwater was the last stop. The lake was bright that evening, the shores below the mountain reflected in the water, blue-black, every detail of the jagged contour of firs as clear as the original. It no longer looked like a reflection in the water, but like another atmosphere, with depths continuing downward in long, wooded slopes toward a bottom they could not see. (10)

The landscape is alien, the lake is large and cold, its surface still. The color scale ranges from deep blue over turquoise to midnight black. And in the middle there is an oval, as if of radiant gold. Heaven and earth has merged, the lake no longer reflects anything. Rather, it absorbs everything, dissolves all difference and eliminates all opportunity to draw a line between reality and fantasy, reality and representation. There is barely a more pertinent metaphor for the current "crisis of representation." The pastures have "dried to dead flesh in the body of the landscape." Earthy sources of water and nutrition have been drained and the cycle of nature been broken. The connection between matter and spirit, between physical existence and emotional vitality has been reduced to nothing but

scattered signs of exhaustion. Annie finds herself not only in a *waste land*, but also on an unexplored path to the underexposed states of her own being. Referring to the primordial water, in which we all come into being, as well as the transitional zone between life and death, the dark surfaced lake, broken by nothing but a surreal golden center, makes it evident that one chapter of Annie's story has come to an end. An other is to take its beginning, but the conditions look forbiddingly drab. Still, from within this no-woman's-land Annie does not have much of a choice but to proceed with the "rebirth" she has embarked on.

The course Annie's life is to take, following her migration, is written in the landscape, many times over as the narrative proceeds. The text is saturated, from beginning to end, with clues as to the plot and its solution. However, the meaning of these "signs" are largely missed by Annie as well as by the reader. She is so eagerly preoccupied with pursuing her goals that she pays no attention to what is written in the ground. Or, she tries too hard to make a sense of things that rings a familiar bell, so as not to loose her foothold in life. Fear of missing the boat makes her overtly alert to the signals around her. It also blinds her to the extent that she cannot see the forest for trees.

Starhill can only be reached by foot. Annie is eager to get her trip over with in a hurry, and ventures into the forest late at night, her 6 year old daughter in tow. Struggling on a short cut through the forest, she is soon at a loss. Having no sense of direction, walking in circles, and feeling haunted by some unnamable fear, she is on edge. Unfamiliar with the workings of this otherworldly reality,

she interprets it as only a child of indeed a highly cultured world can possibly imagine it (64). In resonance with a *Midsummer Night's Dream's* Annie perceives the pasture as scary and utterly hostile :

> ...The map told her nothing about the network of paths across the pasture, nor about the numerous small wooden buildings gleaming in the night light...
>
> They came into a forest consisting almost entirely of twisted birches hung with lichen. Some had fallen and were slowly rotting ; gray fungus grew like tumors out of them. Ferns protruded from the ground beneath the birches, their hairy brown tips still curled up. The forest with its hanging black lichen and fallen trees was full of bird calls, whistles, clicks, and flutings. But they saw no birds...
>
> ...she had had no idea that the landscape was so full of paths branching off and dissolving into long, wet streaks of marshland, diffuse gray buildings, and human installations where there should have been wilderness, heights and hollows she had not expected. Not even the names matched those on the map
>
> ....She was having trouble finding landmarks in the marshland, for in the uncertain light it looked as it both trees and undergrowth had moved. (45)

> Quite unexpectedly, the undergrowth thinned out, leaving a slope running down to the river. Something blue glinted, and once past the last obscuring bushes, they could see two twisted spruces close to each other and beside them a small tent. A circling bird with its wings outspread suddenly dived, its wings pressed close to its body, and they heard a whistling sound that was perhaps a call. It looked like a projectile as it dived through the air...
>
> she saw Mia's eyes fixed on the bright blue little tent, and they were wide with fear. (47)

Terrorized by the murmur from the underworld, and repelled by the overt sexuality with which she associates the place, Annie is excessively relieved to discover a sign of human life and rescue ahead. At the bank of the river Lobber, the little blue tent lights up the gloom of the marsh. But her envisioned redemption is crushed in an instance, brutally and unambiguously. The couple in the tent has been stabbed to death:

> The sunlight flooded a head of long hair. It had been dark and curly, but was now sticky with blood, and there were feathers stuck to it. There were feathers everywhere, stuck in patches of dried blood...
>
> A face. Lips drawn back. The upper lip had dried over the teeth. A young woman. She lay underneath. Perhaps the man, lying half over her had tried to protect her from the knife. He was fair. At the back of his neck was a cake of coagulated blood. (64)

> The tent canvas was lifted off. They were lying side by side on their backs... The girl's back was hunched, her head apparently raised from the plastic sheeting and stiffened like that. She had a wound with brownish-black edges on her cheek. It looked like a mount, another mouth, and it was open. (72-73)
>
> What did she actually see ? Afterward, she didn't know. So many hideous descriptions appeared. She had probably read some of them. She couldn't remember later.
>
> For a long time there was a great empty space there. She saw her on hands under the water, white, even whitish-green...
>
> She wanted to run away. But she must have gone only a few steps more. She felt sick and her legs refused to carry her. Then it struck her with great violence. She fell to her knees, the palms of her hands propped against the swaying ground. When she got up her hands were bloodstained. She rubbed them against each other, tried to wipe them on her skirt, but that wasn't much use. She staggered away, crawling at first, then dipping her hands in the water. It was cold. Strong current. Swift, transparent water. Her hands were clean. She vomited into the water and the current took away the mess she had heaved out of herself. The water was soon clean again, clear and swift-running...
>
> ...She grabbed the girl's arm and hurried away toward the marsh. The sun was coming right through the white wholly tufts now, floating, apparently hovering above the sedge...
>
> Afterward, she was no longer sure of the place. It was not marked, had no boundaries. It wandered like a sunspot between shadows of clouds. It was event, en event by water. As everything is. (55)

The adult woman and her prepubescent daughter respond differently to the traumatic event. Annie automatically preserves the impression in some barely accessible corner of her being. "Great shudderings ran through her body. She seemed to be seeing details sharply, as if she had the vision of a bird of prey. But she could no longer find any order in why she was there. Why had she come to this light? " (104). She remains in a state of shock for the next eighteen years to come. Shutting down to the extent that she cannot let anyone or anything touch her deeply, she comes to fear all forms of penetration. Intimacy with the other sex, on this account, is turned into troubled waters. In the words of her latest lover, Birger :

> He was trying to nudge his way into her, cautiously nosing his way in. They were lying in front of a hot, crackling stove...

> He must have been dreaming about the first time, when there had been fear in her, as if those thin membranes and tensed muscles contained a memory. What happened to her ? He had never been given an answer, and it was all so long ago now. (279)

The young Mia is shocked out of her wits : she weeps, sobs, sucks her thumb and cannot be talked to her senses. Eventually, she stages an elaborate, traditional funeral for her Ken and Barbie dolls, incorporating the most recent ritual she has perceived, the attack from above :

> ...Mia was Burying Ken and Barbie with great enthusiasm She had fashioned s cross with sticks, neatly made and fastened together with tacks...
>
> " Eaaarth to eaaarth, duuuust to duuuust, God is deaaaath, deaaaath, eaaarth to eaaarth, duuust to duust, " Mia was chanting, and Annie wished she would get it over and done with.
>
> " The great bird shall come, the great bird, strike dust in deeeath !" (131)

Twenty four years later, as a grown up, engaged and pregnant woman, Mia's take on the matter is less self assured. At this point Annie has disappeared from the surface of the earth, and a team of people have gone out searching for her. Mia is in the company of her boyfriend Johan, the very boy Annie saw nearby the crime site so many years ago. The party is characterized by the secrets they keep from each other, everyone's pretended innocence, rather than the information they share. Mia, it later turns out, is all too aware that Johan is Annie's murder suspect. Johan, on the other hand, trusts that Mia knows nothing of the bloody slaughtering for which the Lobber became widely known. And Birger, the local doctor, is troubled by the fact that the two others have no idea that he is Annie's life partner. The atmosphere is tense, the ice not broken till the withheld knowledge is released. Forced by a sense of suffocation and unbearable

angst, each individual—in the eleventh hour--reveals their little private secret. In consequence the ties between them grows looser. No pattern and no connection are any more taken for granted. Everything, it seems, is to be made over again.

> When they got down to the ford across the Lobber, [Johan] noticed Mia was now very uneasy... she stopped and didn't want to go any farther.
>
> " I don't like this place, " she said quietly.
>
> " No one does, " said Birger.
>
> A couple of birds of prey were circling above them, making long -drawn-out cries.
>
> " Are they kestrels ? " said Johan.
>
> " Peregrine falcons. "
>
> She sounded dead certain...
>
> " So you know about birds ? " said Birger. " I didn't think you were all that interested otherwise. "
>
> " Nature, " she said with mocking emphasis...
>
> " Aagot Fagerli taught me," said Mia. " She had those big bird books. I really only learnt that one bird. The peregrine falcon. I thought it was called peregrim because it was very grim. "...
>
> ...The marsh was full of pools of water like mirrors...Sky and earth met in those mirrors...
>
> " I almost think I can recognize the place, " said Mia. " And the birds are still here. I suppose they're the great-great-grandchildren of that bird. "
>
> " Surely you can't remember that Midsummer Eve ? "
>
> " I was six. I remember two peculiar spruces. My mother sat me on a fallen birch. There was bracket fungus just like on this one. They frightened me. I thought they were some kind of animals sticking to it. Mom was going to go down to the river to look for the tent because she thought we would be able to get some help there. But I went after her. I was terrified of losing her. There was that bird there all the time. It dived down over the tent when we went there for the first time. Like a spool. You should see what a force there is in them when they dive to kill. Strike, it's called. I got quite close and saw the tent. It was all bloody and ragged and I could see someone was lying there. A foot and all that. Mom was lying beside it, then she scrambled up and made her way down to the river and splashed and splashed in the water with her hands."
>
> " Do you mean you really saw the tent and what happened? "
>
> " Yes. "
>
> " Annie doesn't realize that. "
>
> " No, of course not. She wouldn't be able to cope with that... "
>
> The picture she had drawn for him was a strange one. Her voice was light, almost shrill, scarcely the voice of a grown woman any longer...
>
> ... " I was the only one who knew how it had happened. "
>
> " How did it happen, then ? " Birger whispered.
>
> " The bird dived down and stabbed them to death with its sharp beak....That was what I believed, " she said. " For several years. I don't know when I went over to the general opinion ."...
>
> She had sounded totally adult for a moment, but then suddenly the little-girl voice came back.
>
> " I was frightened but didn't dare say anything. Mom and I were shit-scared that night afterward... She couldn't cope with me. She was too frightened herself. I've thought about that.

" Did you know I'm going to have a baby ? " (308-311)

" Its beak and yellow eyes. It was the most horrible thing I've ever seen, not just grim, but terrifying. [Aagot] read about it to me... Then I read it myself, many many times. I was a wizard at finding that place. Daylight Birds of Prey. Subheading Falcons. Falco peregrinus. " (311)

Peregrim, peregrine, pilgrim. Representing the human soul the bird is ordinarily associated with spiritual elevation and purification. In Plato's *Phaedrus* the soul is described as feathered all over. As humidity increases it grows:

> He receives through the eyes the emanation of beauty, by which the soul's plumage is fostered and grows hot...As the nourishing moisture falls upon it the stump of each feather under the whole surface of the soul swells and strives from its root; for in its original state the soul was feathered all over. So now it is all in a state of ferment and throbbing. ( *Phaedrus* 251c : Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* 27)

Prey and prayer, however are somewhat confused in the context in which Annie currently finds her self. Feathers, far from representing erotic and soulful elevation of the spirit, have come down to earth, and are now stuck in patches of coagulated blood. The peregrine is on watch for a victim. On par with the pilgrim it is a "wanderer," leaving only so as to return home after a higher evolutionary level has been achieved. In *Blackwater* its continuing presence signals the gravest of dangers. Even when no bird whatsoever is in sight Annie, Mia and Birger can hear its shrieking, and always it makes them shiver. Hence the falcon, apart from being the potential killer of the people camping at the Lobber, represents the potentially deadly impact of disembodied spirituality and spiritless sexuality. It brings the message that there is a price to pay for a clean conscience. The sight of the murdered couple, the sacrifice paid by Annie for crossing the

ford comes to cast a shadow over the rest of her life. Unable to shake off the impression of the event she is destined and determined to resolve the crime. It becomes her life-work to learn to acknowledge that human creation and destruction, physicality and spirituality, life and death cannot but coexist and that a balancing act is achieved only by never resigning to the misconception that it is possible to choose sides. In the end, she succeeds, but only by passing on her fate to Birger, her latest lover in life.

Annie offers her sacrifice, but the state of inner illumination she achieves differs from the one appearing in the original script. The evening following the Lobber event Annie listens to the late night radio : "The clergy man gets on air and tells people that they should deliver themselves unto God. And Annie thinks about the two young people who had gone to bed in the tent and delivered themselves unto the bright night and its god." The event does not merely make her indifferent to religion, it makes her utterly hostile to Christianity (103) :

> All concepts of god had begun as beliefs in ghosts, she had said. A power-drunk gangster keeps his tribe in terror and awe. When he dies, they are so terrified and dominated by his will, they hallucinate his voice and his steps and his mad laughter at night. And they claim they can still hear them, or that was her understanding of it, though they've covered it with sugar icing. (346)

Blackwater acquires a certain similarity to Babylon. The marsh in which Annie wanders, and gets lost, assumes a flavor of decomposed spirituality. The forest connecting the Lobber with Starhill, labyrinthine as it is, leads nowhere but into a lost Paradise. She came here to leap ahead in life, but instead she is sinking into a sticky swamp. Regardless of the numerous theological clues scattered on

Annie's path she never turns into a believer, in a conventional sense of the term. For every instance a theological, mythological or psychological "truth " is introduced in Annie's life, it is somehow distorted. No clue ever comes to mean what it was intended to. When confronted with life and human feeling, the story of the "book" inadvertently takes a course of its own. The narrative, whether that of Annie as a fictional character, Annie as representing a revised version of Virgin Mary, Annie as a woman seeking emotional and intellectual illumination, the resolution of the Blackwater crime, or the resolution of the murder of Annie herself, remains in progress.

> Enjoined through water. Why had she said that ? " I am enjoined through water."
>
> Living and talking—including a whole lot of quasi-religious crap—and trying to hold on although all the time you know you are going under—no, being dissolved. Truly enjoined. That's loathsome. That's unendurably loathsome...
>
> " I'm a useless person, " Annie used to say. Her words were as clear in his head as if he had just heard her voice. In this warm air, heavy with scents, in the rustle of aspens. Those sober words: " I'm a useless person. "
>
> " I can't see any particular point in my life. I read a lot and I like being alone. I like being with you, too. And I like the birds and the sound of rain. " (323)

> He had seen the face first. The water pouring over it was so clear, the thought she was lying there watching him approaching. Her eyes were open and the hair streaming out in the direction of the current couldn't hide her gaze. Then he realized she wasn't looking and the white skin couldn't feel the cold of the water. It took on the colors of the riverbed and the stones as ripples in the current and sunspots moved over it... ( 312)

The event at the Lobber, as much as it scares Annie senseless, is profitable for the Blackwater economy. Prior to the crime, Blackwater consists of a number of minor backwater communities in the process of further decline. With the killings it suddenly makes the front page and becomes an exotic site of attraction. The villagers are excited and upset by the fact the event has taken

place in their midst. But tourists arrive in busloads from far and apart, driven by a burning desire to visit the spot where it really happened. Everybody wants to have been there. The tearing of the social texture revives the community. People's interest has nothing to do with either scientific curiosity or social concern, as the local doctor points out. They simple grab the opportunity to feel, to finally feel one thing or another for sure. Horror, as it turns out, cuts right through the morass of muddled sensations and to the core of their being. This is the very reason why no effort is ever made at resolving crimes like the one committed at the Lobber, as Annie later explains. It enables the viewer to identify with either the murderer or the murdered, to take part in and live out human darkness, even if only in fantasy.

> In the early 1970s, Blackwater had been a dying village among many others. Rain fell on the faces around the Walpurgis Night bonfire. The air smelled of diesel oil. They filled coffee cans with oil-soaked sawdust and set them alight. The roads glowed from those lanterns for w few hours on one single evening a year. otherwise nothing.
>
> Since then this village had become a black jewel. Visible. Full of power. (7)

> " There are people around the area [where the crime has been committed], " Aake Vemdal [the police officer] said. " We must get those out " ...
>
> They were called inquisitive. But why had they really come ? When Birger was a boy, it had been wartime and everything had been bad. Even the toilet paper had been thin. Thin and shiny, often tearing. He had never been able to resist smelling his finger when that happened. They were sticky and smelled bad. But you wanted to feel all the same.
>
> It was wrong to say that these people were inquisitive. They wanted to feel... (78-79)

> Then finally the tourists came. They wanted to see the river Lobber. A society that absorbs its life force out of fatal violence has to pay tribute to the village and its mystery--because it is unsolved. There the force is unfettered
> That had been Annie's belief. That was the way she used to talk.
>
> If you solve the mystery, the force runs out and the village becomes a dying village among many others. A place no one sees and no one knows about. The force goes over to the man who did it and you never solve his mystery. Yet it is just as attractive as the smell of well-hung meat. His dark destiny is transferred to you in swift electronic flashes. But the village dies. (325)

Destruction of human life serves as a vital force of social and cultural revivification. Mysteries are not to be resolved. Feelings must be transformed and acted out via others, and in the exterior. The life of the community depends on being left in the dark. This is "enlightenment " in practice. Even if the mentality, as captured by Annie, far from echoes Enlightenment *visions*, it clearly resonates with the less promising course taken when these were realized. Thus, nothing really is what it looks. Everything has been turned upside down, most promises have been broken. A specific mindset is required for these conditions to make sense. But Annie is in no possession of such an ambiguous mindset at the time of her arrival at Blackwater, fresh from Stockholm. If slightly confused at the first sight of the village's strange mixture of innovation and decay, she is rather perplexed by the native villagers' approach to nature:

> Lots of animals, embroidered, carved, or made of glass or pottery...Annie looked into a room alongside the kitchen. It was full of pictures. Above the bed was one made of short-pile plush, brightly died in shades of pink, yellow, and brown. It depicted a naked girl. She had tight, fluffy breasts with budding nipples, like large eyeballs gazing at whoever came in. They must look at the wife every time she went in with the dust cloth, for everything was certainly very clean. (42)

The local healer, Birger, sees it as being a matter of exterior and interior simply rarely matching and of nature having undergone an exchange with culture:

> ...It often surprised him how badly people's external appearances corresponded with what their homes looked and smelled like. They equipped themselves in the chain stores in town and the discount story in Byvången and looked like everyone else. But inside their homes they had a whole lot of peculiarities. Big safes though they were dirt poor. Stacks of cardboard boxes. Tons of old home made furniture...The long narrow bedroom held only one picture ... a picture of a naked girl. The rest, and there were many, were knotted in wool like rugs...They all had motifs from nature : deer by the water, eagles in flight, mountain landscapes in the sun...A great many men worked on such things in front of the television at night. (82)

> A faint twittering was coming from the table. [Birger] went closer and saw it was a small cage with a brown rat inside it. He retched. The rat twirled around once, then sat dead still, looking out with black eyes like glass beads... The rat spun around, its rump sliding on the board that was the floor of the cage.
>
> " You've still got it then ? "
>
> " I can't just let it go... "
>
> They both looked at the rat and it stared back...
>
> The rat was quite still, looking at Birger. The cage was small, so it could turn around in it, but no more, and it had arranged its exercise timetable accordingly. It regularly turned, a swift movement , its long, hairless tail curling outside the cage. There was a rustle, then its hindquarters and the smooth little head with the fuzzy ears had changed places.
>
> " What are you going to do with it ? "
>
> " Vemdal didn't answer...
>
> "[The slaughtered girl] probably let it run loose, " said Vemdal. " They hug them and fondle them. Having them lying around their necks." (80, 52)

Some of those who are in favor of the postmodern turn suggest that we take advantage of the opportunity and start making the world over in our image. The moment has arrived for a celebration of multiple and fragmented subjectivities and sexualities, they assert. However, in spite of having relieved us of guilt, contemporary culture has not necessarily improved the odds for our capacity for playfulness and creativity to develop. In fact, numerous symptoms indicate the very opposite, namely that we have grown increasingly self-imprisoned, isolated, and prone to ritualized life styles ; that we have lost the capacity for being genuinely creative altogether, and that we have come to feel stuck, paralyzed and unable to take any action, in a variety of ways. Unable to represent ourselves to ourselves, we fare no better in our interactions with others. What is left is to act, to react, that is, to *embody* the significance that cannot possibly be *said*. The implications of this "schizo" condition are dire. *If* in fact we are unable to use conventional means of representation in this day and age,

how are we ever to get in touch with others, to make ourselves understood, and to contribute to development of collective visions of a social and cultural community ? Have we gotten lost in an amusement park, does our universe consist of nothing but swirling mirrors, and is any search for a "deeper truth" indeed in vain ? Or, is the fact that we have landed ourselves in a "crisis of representation," made a return to our physical and less articulate selves, an indication that we are currently in the process of reviving a less predetermined point of departure for a more—and differently—meaningful mode of interaction ?

## 2.0 POSTMODERN PLEASURE : WHY SETTLE FOR A SINGULAR 'SELF' WHEN THERE IS AN ABUNDANCE OF OTHERS TO EXPLORE ?

" your personality needs layers, your face doesn't, " says a *Cover Girl* ad. "Touch yourself, " *Intuition* from *Chakra* perfumes (Aveda) encourages. "Be Happy " *Clinique*'s recent break through in odors suggests. The current marketing trend for cosmetics, odors, and clothing, all of which serve the purpose of encapsulating up and selling the individual, is to inspire the potential buyer to " find your true self. " *Clinique* spent years and hundreds of thousands of dollars on researching what the postmodern woman really wants. What the researchers discovered is that the contemporary woman is far from

content with life. Thus the over-enthused label, intended to indicate the possibility of immersing oneself in a bubble of pinkish pleasure and joy. Donna Karan, a guru within the field of soothing odors, launched instead *Chaos*. Women, living under the current chaotic conditions, she claims, are deeply in need of being able to withdraw from and protect themselves against the whirlwind of the world. That may indeed be. Other perfumes are sold under names such as *Envy* and *Obsession*. Business suits for men are promoted under the title of "multiple personalities," underwear for women under the headline "define yourself." And Giorgio's *Ocean Dream* sells under the promise that its customer shall "leave an impression." Clinique's *Happiness-Research* team seems indeed to be on the track of a true scent.

In the moving picture *Synthetic Pleasures : Technology, Control, Passion*,[1] we are introduced to a cutting edge version of the ways in which the postmodern turn, the breeding ground for the "schizo" hero, translates into real life. The key message is that we are now facing close to unlimited opportunities regarding gaining control over and giving shape to our external and internal nature. Leaping from artificial intelligence to intelligence- and personality-enhancing drugs, from excessive plastic surgery to body mutilation and the freezing of pets for the purpose of conservation until future revival, from online dating services to virtual sex, from vegetables crossed with cod genes to human

[1] *Synthetic Pleasures : Technology, Control, Passion* (1996), directed by Iara Lee, Korean by birth, of South American upbringing, currently living in the U.S. Quotations from *Synthetic Pleasures* are according to notes taken during the viewing of the film.

beings transforming themselves into technological wonders, director Iara Lee cuts no corners. Her assemblage is deliberately frame-less, de-contextualized and dislocated in time and space. Proceeding in a rapid and unpredictable pace, the editing encourages neither contemplation nor any kind of emotional involvement. Needless to say, there is no plot. *Synthetic Pleasures* frustrates any attempt at categorization. Neither an informative, critical, nor philosophical film, it is a piece of (pseudo) information and high metabolism in action. Depending on one's personal preferences, the film is evocative, upsetting, enticing.

Representing no stable point of view and defying narrative continuity it is what it thematizes : postmodern multiplicity, complexity and fragmentation, a condition triggering raging optimism as well as paralyzing pessimism and despair, and a general sense of disorientation. Interestingly, *Synthetic Pleasures* leaves the spectator with nothing but a vague impression of the director pulling the strings. Energetic and enthusiastic, indeed. In tune with contemporary culture and cutting-edge science, for sure. Somewhat restless and rootless ? Presumably so. The sound track and the voice over in the movie emerge as if from nowhere, or, from no one in particular. Lee introduces us to a chorus of equally valid voices, none of which enter into a dialogue.

Japan and the U.S. are in the forefront as regards the turning of the world into an even more "human" universe, Lee shows. The unspoken paradox is that human in this context means "controlled by mankind," the net result being extinction of humanity. Humans are equipped with a built in dissatisfaction with

things, we learn, and thus we possess an uncontrollable need to remake the world as if in our own image. Freudian notions of civilization as possible source of psychic discontent find no resonance in this bricolage. If our present does not provide sufficient pleasure, entertainment, and happiness, it is because we have as yet to make some headway in adapting nature to our needs. Currently the parts of nature found useful for the purpose of getting on top of the world are being catalogued, mapped, imitated, reproduced synthetically. As for the rest, " when it is gone, we won't even miss it," as a contributor puts it. Exterior nature, as the story goes, offers little in terms of resistance to our need to transform the universe. We are getting closer and closer to Paradise on earth by the minute. Disney World, the West Edmonton Mall, Epcott , Las Vegas, all of which have been around for a while by now, have as yet to disappoint their visitors. It is so much "nicer than the real world, " a tourist exclaims, "neater, not nearly as messy." And everything is in the place and order it is supposed to be. "You go to a place like this and you get exactly what you expected. " Prepackaged and ready to consume. Impulsive love birds, eager to tie the knot for life, find instant gratification in Las Vegas : " drive up weddings," monitored via TV and video recorded offers a memory for life. The hipper among the newly weds may choose to honeymoon in one of Japan's gigantic indoor leisure domes, micro cosmic capsules containing everything from downhill skiing to vacationing on the water front. "It is really so nice to avoid the hassle of mingling with dirt, jellyfish, and sharks, " an artificial-sun lover sighs. The *Phoenix Ocean Dome* presents beaches

washed over by larger than life waves and an occasional hurricane. All of which is controlled from a computerized back stage office panel. During moments of climatic calm, dancers, representing various cultural traditions perform, a "native" singer goes on stage to deliver a homeland hymn, and so forth. Tourism may appear primarily as a means for the common man to explore more exotic corners of the world. Yet it functions as a hugely efficient means at financing the 'restoration' and further development of particular, natural, cultural, or extraordinarily spectacular sites.

Not only the surface of the earth, but also the human body, is a target of improvement. Lee name drops Orlan, the French performance artist, who recently underwent her 9th plastic surgical operation in New York, in the name of art, and leaves it up to the viewer to pursue this cliff hanging artist on his own. " One never is what one has," Orlan explains. The mirror always disappoints, never returning what we expect from it. " Being a narcissist isn't easy when the question is not of loving your own image, but of re-creating the self through deliberate acts of alienation," she continues (Marais, "Troisième Manifestation Internationale "). The proof, in Orlan's case, is in the numerous, broadcast plastic surgical modifications she has undergone over the last seven years (Rose , "Is It Art ? Orlan and the Transgressive Act"). Beginning in 1990 the then forty three year old French multimedia and performance artist, initiated a major work-in-progress, the *Reincarnation of Saint Orlan.* Involving a gradual but total plastic-surgical transformation of her face and part of her body, the goal was at

the time to transform her face into a composite of the five most beautiful and powerful women in art's history. The women in question may appear submissive and feminine, in a conventional sense of the word, yet in terms of personality they are aggressive, adventurous and transgressive. Hence, Orlan's nose was to be an imitation of the goddess *Diana's* (an adventurer who did not submit to men), her mouth to be drawn from Boucher's *Europa* (who searched another continent and was able to let herself get carried into the future), her forehead to follow the lines of Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (because of her androgynous power and mystique), her chin to be taken from Botticelli's *Venus* (who represents fertility and creativity), and her eyes to resemble those of Gérome's *Psyche* (associated with the need for love and spiritual beauty) (Rose, " Is It Art ? "). As the work evolved, and Orlan's face was transmuted into un-recognizability, so did her story line. Denying that she ever intended to incorporate Diana, Europa, Mona Lisa, Venus and Psyche, Orlan recently had a couple of chubby cheek implants inserted into her forehead.

Regardless of her current resemblance to a goat, rather than to a saint, her change of mind hardly makes much of a difference. Her art is business as usual, each performance lasting from three to five hours, and each of them broadcasting in great detail plastic surgical procedures (liposuction, implanting, removal of tissue from one body part to another). Video taping, music, male African strippers or Indian classical dancers performing in the background, are part of the menu. Colors and music are chosen with extreme care, as is every detail that

goes into the set. Costumes are haute couture, plastic crucifixes, fake fruits and flower arrangements make up the decor. Orlan, who is under local anesthetic, reads aloud from her essays, responds to questions from the audience, and delivers her own comments regarding the experience as it proceeds. The modifications she undergoes are far from superficial. One performance involved the detachment of as much as a third of Orlan's facial skin, leaving her raw meat, bones and eye sockets widely exposed. When the dribbling of blood, pains, soreness, or exhaustion, interfered with Orlan's ability to communicate, the show came to a halt. Drawing heavily on Christian iconicity, Aztec ritual and Hindu goddesses, Orlan recognizes no formal limitations. Comparing her project to the *rites de passage* to which earlier saints subjected themselves, Orlan explains : In contemporary society women undergo equally as violent, intrusive, and painful modifications. In the past it was done in the name of God, today it is done in the name of beauty and for the sake of happiness. In both cases the *rite* serves as a means of pleasing the male other.

Orlan's work is meant to call attention to the contradictions embedded in the ideal female as conceived of by male desire. Woman is on the one hand painted as a martyr and a saint, she points out, and on the other hand she is assigned the role as whore, she says, echoing an old "truth." This double bind is blinding and paralyzing. Any woman attempting to *live* this ambiguity as her reality never comes true. By undergoing the mutilations considered necessary to obtain the image of the ideal woman—and yet—inevitably—failing, Orlan

demonstrates that the ideal is not merely technically impossible, it is brutal and inhuman. "I do this so as to reach people, so as to make it impossible for people to close their eyes and filter out what they see, " Orlan states. " I intend for my viewers to understand that physical pain is no route to redemption." The subtext of the bloody performance is that woman's self-violation, even if represented as saintly, is in vain. She is better off addressing her aggressiveness to the other and exterior. Ultimately Orlan does not pose but *performs* the following question : Does our self representation reflect an inner truth, or, does it function as a disguise ?

That someone for whom the flesh serves as a canvas for the exploration of life is juxtaposed with those who undergo plastic surgery for other reasons, is perfectly in line with *Synthetic Pleasure*'s style. " We'd all like to have replaceable parts," someone less famous adds, or to experience being the opposite sex. The transsexual whose boyfriend paid for her sex-change could not agree more. Where external improvements do not suffice experimentation with the internal chemistry is an answer. Beginning in the 1970s *brain chemistry* has taken off to the extent that we are now offered the opportunity to choose which part of our personality we prefer to chemically modify. *Prozac* improves your self esteem and thus changes your personality if taken in sufficient doses. *Ecstasy* "takes away your ego " and changes your perception of reality. Other drugs improves your intelligence and "gives you an edge." " Medicine should not simply be used to cure disease," a proponent for chemical personality

management states, " it should be used to make you better than normal." While awaiting the day when the subject shall be able to take more firmly charge of his physical constitution Arthur C. Clarke, Sri Lanka, preoccupies himself with the prospects of a soul machine. One day, he explains, we shall be capable of rearranging our molecules, of fixing our physical deficiencies via computers, of downloading our personality on a computer. Computerized, our soul shall become available for feed-back modification of the subject, be made accessible for modification, and find eternal containment. Ultimately we shall no longer be capable of telling the difference between our original self and the computer generated, improved version. Scott Frazer concedes, " nothing is natural anymore. Your original programming can be undone." " Becoming post-human will finally enable us to live indefinitely" he concludes.

For the majority of the population the means available for a general and inexpensive experimentation with one's personality, is to cruise on the Internet. Here, one can make up a virtual identity according to personal preferences, meet others who are similarly, voluntarily dismembered and indulge in whatever kind of activity one could not ever even dream of carrying out in "real" life. The Internet, originally developed by the US military, has grown into a hotbed for the socially inept, single and/or lonely, sexually insecure or extraordinarily experimental. Cyber sex involves few risks of rejection ; it is absolutely safe and there is never an emotional bill to be paid. Fantasies and a great deal of scientific research have already gone into developing the kind of technological-

neurological connections required for even more "live" forms of computer-generated intimacy. The prospect is for us to become capable of plugging into a computer and picking the program of one's choosing. We are almost there, on the way to " pleasuring ourselves to death," a Lee voice states. Eventually, experience will be advertised, bought and sold, like music or similar TV purchasable products.

What in some eyes looks like a loss constitutes in the view of others a tremendous gain. "I live in cyber space. The net is my life !" Steven Roberts claims, while riding his bike onto which a solar powered Macintosh is attached between the handle bars. With physical location having lost all significance, "situatedness " is by most means growing increasingly outdated. Leaving it up to the spectator to draw his own line *Synthetic Pleasures* nevertheless permits an anxious whisper which blows against the grain of the postmodern assemblage : "The day may come when we discover that we do not live in paradise," someone says, "and that is the day when the electricity goes off. "

At a point in time where we are drowning in special effects *Synthetic Pleasures* is easily perceived as yet another virtual kick. In spite of its claim to the contrary, the film illuminates some of the very sorest spots in our culture. All change apparently takes place on the surface or by artificial and emotionally sterile means. Each and every one among Lee's "voices," expresses a desire to explore and expand their sensory and emotional repertoire. They want to live life to the fullest. Yet, they also and desperately so want to avoid the dangers and

discomfort entailed in (intimate) human interaction. A case in point is the dating lines on the Internet. Another one is the recently launched Japanese *RoboShops*, soon to appear on New York's Fifth Avenue. In *RoboShop* services are delivered on the spot, "without having to waste time on chatting with some human sales clerk " A New York cab driver further adds: "People just want to get to their destination alive " ( Higgins ). "If I was overly polite to a passenger, he would think he was dealing with a psychotic." Is this capitalism gone awry ? It is hard to tell. From one of the less developed capitalist systems within the global village rumors talk about an upsurge of human cannibalism. In the course of a five year period Russia has witnessed a steep increase in the appetite for human flesh among its population. It is not that people are starving, it is said. They eat other human beings " as a reaction to Marxism" (Bennett, "Eating People as a Reaction to Marxism"). "In the States," Konstantin A. Bogdanov, a folklore expert at the Academy of Science , thus claims, " people are trying to move on from thinking of Sigmund Freud ... So, an American who wants to express his rage at his society will typically do so through sexually deviant behavior—rape, child abuse, sexual harassment. But here in Russia, what we're all trying to escape from is Marxism ...When people here want to find a way to manifest rage against their surroundings, they express their deviance socially. And what could be a purer form of anti-social behavior than eating people ?...What we're talking about here is different : a sense of social crisis. Not even a real economic crisis, since after all no one is starving in modern Russia, but an internalized idea of

crisis. " People feel that society, as they used to know it, their "familiar ground" so to speak, has been pulled away underneath them. Interpreted differently, people take out their aggressions on the human flesh of Russia's corpus, turning it into a corpse, in response to excruciating difficulties associated with the transition from a Marxist economy to a capitalist culture.

What neither the cosmetics industry, Lee, nor the flesh eating Russians mention with a word is their motivation for buying into the cultural practice and justification to which they subscribe. What is the nature of the urges, hopes and dreams, feeding into this self-reinforcing chain of events ? It is far from an understatement to claim that none of these pursuers of instant gratification stands out as being fulfilled. We are left to wonder about the forces driving the wheel.

## 2.1 A 'HOUSE OF BEING' BEREFT OF BOUNDARIES

### Jameson and Kristeva

Language can no longer be true, but it can certainly still be false says Fredric Jameson in his commentary on contemporary society (*Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 392). The postmodern has occurred at the very exact point in time, he argues, when words have lost their weight *and* the need for historical thinking has grown increasingly urgent. The latter is closely related to the fact that postmodernism is "what you get when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good" ("Fear and Loathing " 179). Culture has been transformed into our second nature, Jameson says, and everything is now excessively humanly controlled. The *post* refers not to an *after* the modern but rather to a move *into* late capitalism, that is, into a still more all-encompassing capitalist consumption of our natural resources. What has happened is that the green revolution, neo-colonialism and a general urbanization has laid "superhighways " down through " Heidegger's field path " and turned his " house of being " into "condominiums, if not the most miserable unheated, rat-infested tenement buildings," Jameson states. The *other* of our society is therefore no longer Nature at all, he concludes, " but something else which we must now identify" (*PCLLC* 35).

More specifically, late capitalist society dates back to the early 1960s. Following this turning point, cultural production came to consist of nothing but pastiche and schizophrenic disassociation. Offering neither a sense of figure-

ground, nor of continuity, postmodernity allows for extraordinarily limited modes of cognition. Culture, as emerging from within this blur, is thus described as "what cleaves almost too close to the skin of the economic to be stripped off and inspected in its own right." It allows for neither emotional distance nor critical reflection ( *PCLLC*, foreword ).

The long term consequence of this leap into depthlessness is a loss of our most fundamental models serving as means of cultural interpretation, states Jameson. Thus, the dialectical model of essence and appearance, the Freudian model of latent and manifest, the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity, and the semiotic opposition between signifier and signified, are no longer of much use. "Critical distance" and "false consciousness" are no longer valid notions, "otherness" totally inconceivable. In effect of the new cultural and epistemological flatness the subject easily feels overwhelmed by his environment and lost in time and space. No longer capable of situating himself in relation to any external order and system of representation, his body has grown "bereft of spatial coordinates " and his sense of subjectivity is left adrift.

Introducing schizophrenia as the emotional ground tone in late capitalism Jameson explains : When the relationship between signifier and signified, between the materiality of language and the world to which it refers, breaks down, then we have a schizophrenic experience of a "rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers." Personal identity ordinarily develops along with a temporal unification of past, present, and future, he argues. And this unification can only

come about by means of language, narrative, and interpretation. " Expression " presupposes a separation within the subject, a metaphysics of the inside and the outside, of senseless inner pain and meaningful expression (*PCLLC* 26, 12). When failing to enter the symbolic, the subject is condemned to live in an everlasting, oppressive, present. Thus, if the good news is that the troubled and guilt- ridden subject has died, the bad news is that he has departed due to his inability to become emotionally involved. The liberation from older agonies has brought with it the liberation from every other kind of feeling as well. In effect, there no longer is any self to contain or process any feeling (*PCLLC* 15). Conceiving of himself as being self-sufficient, and afraid of human contact, the subject shuts himself off in an artificially sustained sur-reality vacuum. Thus, condemned to the "mindless solitude of the monad, buried alive and condemned to a prison cell without egress," he cannot but create utterly miserable conditions for himself (*PCLLC* 15). No longer developing on the basis of experience, the subject is therefore now compelled to seek out and devote himself to a succession of "intensities," a kind of free floating, euphoric and ephemeral sensations, Jameson argues. Hence the shift in cultural pathology : Whereas the modern, alienated subject suffered a great deal of anxiety, the postmodern individual has fallen apart, or become fragmented (*PCLLC* 14).

During the modern, the experience of the "sublime" could be unsettling in that it changed one's perspective on the world. For the post-modern individual, on the other hand, it is not the mind but the body that is taken to its limits. No

lesson is ever learned, no deeper logic discerned. The way out of this misery is a restoration of our ability to represent, Jameson maintains. This entails an increased awareness of the contradictions inherent in our post-modern condition, as these are experienced in the *abstract* as well as in the *concrete.* Recognizing the impossibility of making use of modern concepts for the purpose of finding one self at home in the post-modern his proposal is a *mapping* strategy. This takes into consideration our tendency to think in terms of images, and yet it also implies a reestablishment of connections and power structures.

Adding some volume to this theoretical outline, John Berger says, in "Manhattan, " that in the case of the late modern individual, "what one might expect to happen on the inside, happens here on the outside " (64). Continuing his description of the urbanite, he elaborates : "There is no interiority. There may be introspection, guilt, happiness, personal loss ; but all of it surfaces and comes out in words, actions, habits, tics, which become events taking place on every floor in every block.... [E]ach soul is turned inside out and remains alone." The multiple facades of glass, the flashing neon lights, the "live" illuminated ads, constitute the islanders' spiritual principle, Berger claims. Artificially over-exposing everything it is a principle that denies interiority all together. Spirituality has been transformed into a matter of light shining through or bouncing off surfaces. "And this is to be seen in the faces," Berger observes. It is not that the Manhattan islanders do not pursue an active life style. They do,

extensively so. " *Will* here invariably finds its object," he points out. " Aims cease to be guidelines and become magnets. The aim—seldom another human being—becomes beloved ; promises the fulfillment of a passion. Yet to create the beloved aim, its lover has emptied himself. All obstacles met on the way are then received as blows. The blows are what I see on the faces, " Berger concludes. Manhattan houses no one but those victims of the capitalist system who have lost themselves to hope. Hope for more of everything, a better time, a more glamorous life (67).

In Kristeva's account of the postmodern picture, modern man has come to live in a piecemeal and accelerated space and time, with the effect that he inevitably falls short of acknowledging his own physiognomy. The question she asks is, if " in the wake of psychiatric machines, aerobics, and media zapping, does the soul still exist ? " (*New Maladies* 7). Commuting between psychiatric institutions and televised day dreaming, the contemporary subject barely notices that he has lost his soul. Actions and their immediate abandonment have come to replace meanings. In effect, we never have either time nor space any more to create a soul for our selves. Bereft of moral, subjective and sexual identity, and in possession of a "false " and vulnerable self, the subject strives by all means to create and maintain an enclosed, self-oriented and self-containing totality. His pleasures, if any, never take him beyond himself. His speech, on the other hand, is by definition peculiarly disaffected, impersonal and meaningless. Remarkably, there is one thing which seems to bring about a state of jouissance, a close to

sublime pleasurable sensation, says Kristeva : *the sight of fragmented and dismembered bodies* (*NM* 21, emphasis added). The inspection of these slit open and chopped up others, she notes, somehow appeals to the general audience whose personal drives, desire, and speech are as if in a deep freeze.

The malady of our age, manifesting itself so vividly in this existential collage of evaporated vitality and a thirst for blood, eludes traditional diagnosis. Exhibiting traits of "remorseless narcissism " it is affiliated with psychosis caused by the subject's trouble with symbolization. Seriously doubting the extent to which his interior is distinguishable from his exterior he tends to be utterly confused. In effect, he clings to the superficial offerings of life in the hope that this will bring him some sense of substance. In most cases, however, the result is lack of inter-subjective contact and thus the tendency to somatize.

The individual for whom the word no longer refers to an inner meaning, a higher value, a common notion, is bound to let his emotions come to expression in an unmediated form, that is via bodily "language." This inarticulate, disoriented subject, bereft of any center in his life, is no happy go lucky fellow. He restlessly and listlessly keeps pursuing other, better, more intensive sensations, experiences that will shake him up and make him regain his sense of self. Currently, one of the common ways of trying to wrest some authenticity out of life is to seek for and return to one's origins. But "people who turn back to origins are people who don't know how to metabolise or sublimate their hate, "

Kristeva claims, " they are wounded people, depressed people; and because they no longer have ideals... they turn towards the archaism of the origin " (*Strangers* 7) .

If today we witness nothing short of a mass movement oriented toward a reunification with a long gone past, it is, Kristeva argues, because we have in the West reached a point of no return. Following the disastrous, violent, and humiliating events during World War II, there is no longer any deceiving our selves into believing in modern notions of progress. Genocides, ever expanding racism, and a general increase in violence against self and others have forced us to face up to some unflattering facts about human nature. The horror we are confronted with in the outer world is so incomprehensible, intellectually and emotionally, that most individuals react by turning inward. The pain, and the anger it triggers, that cannot be processed in the exterior, makes horror bloom in the interior. This inner, unresolved fear makes us vulnerable to the foreign(er) in the outer. The dread of anything or anyone different, who may or may not stir our repulsion, leaves us speechless. And our inability to express ourselves re-enforces our sense of isolation and fragility. Having lost our ability to speak meaningfully, we thus find ourselves cornered. Hell is therefore no longer merely a product of theology or imagination, it has become daily life, says Kristeva. Just as our "truths " have become visualised, televised, in other words, superficialized.

Our means of resurrection, according to Kristeva, lies in the re-creation of a *logos* for the soul, and this takes us through a re-entry into the symbolic. The *symbolic*, in her terms, refers to the "discursive practice that adheres to the logical and grammatical rules of speaking, " within a given culture. The imaginary, in contrast, makes use of primary processes, for instance condensation and displacement. It contains a number of strategies of representation and identification, such as projection and introjection. Whenever the imaginary is involved, so is the subject's body, his ego, and his notion of "other " (*NM* 103). The act of representation serves both as an acknowledgment of one's situatedness within the larger whole of socially constituted rules and as a means of giving implicit expression to one's imaginary motions. Any use of language, inasmuch as it involves writing, is a language of fear, claims Kristeva, fear of being absorbed by nonsense, of being annihilated, as in a state of psychosis (*Powers of Horror* 38). By entering into the symbolic, one accepts one's fate as a biologically and socially determined being. The price paid for this rescue from schizophrenic bewilderment or depressive darkness, is splitting. A "self "comes only in form of internal division. There is no symbolic gift without splitting, as Kristeva repeatedly emphasizes.

Maddening as this may sound, this is nevertheless the very promise of the symbolic (*Black Sun* 46). Splitting provides the opportunity for an undifferentiated no-body to become a (more or less) disintegrated some-one. "A narrative is, all in all, the most elaborate attempt, next to syntactic competence, to

situate a speaking being between his desires and their prohibitions, in short, within the Oedipal triangle," Kristeva says. It places him in relation to his Other, provides him with objects of desire, in other words, enables him to master his fears and become a subject of desire and signification (*PoH* 140). Those for whom the entry into the symbolic fails find themselves in a confusing world of similarities. Nothing makes a difference, thus everything is experienced as potentially threatening to the self. Those for whom the symbolic makes no sense tend to react in one of two ways : they speak excessively. Hiding underneath language, wearing it like a second and alien skin, they create a great deal of echoing effect, but make very little sense. Or, they go mute. Like the melancholic, says Kristeva, they lose their ability to "cut through " to reality and thus carries on in life as "living dead."

The subject's entry into the symbolic is preconditioned by the interference into the mother-infant symbiosis by the " father of individual prehistory. " With respect to the mother's interest in something outside of the infant's range of needs and desires, this "father" constitutes the basis for the further development of the individual, such as the ability to idealize, identify and to love an other. The female infant deprived of the paternal interference with the mother-child dyad remains part of her mother's economy of desire. Thus, lack of any sense of paternal authority makes inevitable the development of post-modern pathologies, such as borderline conditions, schizophrenia and melancholia. Kristeva is set on the necessity of the inscription into the symbolic. Yet, she acknowledges that the

symbolic in itself makes life far from a meaningful *experience*. Referring to the state of the abject--the subject who is not yet--and drawing on the notion of the semiotic, Kristeva suggests that it is the *rupturing* of the symbolic, the breaking with convention, and, in fact the residual return to/of the earliest mother-infant interaction that adds affective volume to the text. The entry into the symbolic can never be complete, in particular not for the female. She is destined to remain tied to her maternal (non signifying and semiotic potential) as a woman while also and simultaneously having to cross the phallic divide.

## Life at the end of the rope.

## *BLACKWATER.*

Barbro, the local doctor's wife in *Blackwater*, is an articulate woman of great many words who is constantly in the process of organizing information (33, 155). Barbro has mastered the politically correct jargon of the day to the fullest. Eloquent and of determined, she nevertheless suffers of a serious flaw : her words have a shallow ring, her exclamations lack affective investment. Barbro is as uncertain as is her interlocutor of the truth of her statements. Does she *feel* the pain she gives expression for, or does she choose her terms so as to sound right ?

A skilled artist and tasteful interior decorator, Barbro is the producer of great many tapestries. Her motif and motivation are unspoiled nature, and she always signs her work with her maiden name. *Aesthetics*, in Barbro's view, is a matter of coordination. "Those pale blue, mid-blue, and gray shades of our living room, " her now estranged husband recollects, " the light-colored wood of the furniture. Bentwood. Metal rods. I think they are beautiful too. The collection of glass in the window. The great tapestry you gave me for my fortieth birthday, showing a mountainside " (158). White flowers only in the living room, grasses in transparent vases, and glasses twisted like flowers, out of which no one could possibly drink, as the cleaning lady later remarks. Insisting on repeatedly "talking things over," and finding that her husband is an inadequate listener, Barbro tries to secure his undivided attention by disconnecting their phone line (174). Yet, she fails in reaching him by means of words. In control of her sources of communication, Barbro is powerless as regards moving other human beings. Her use of words, often bordering on an abuse of terms, over and over again results in her husband's drowning out her voice and dozing off.

Babro's monologues leave Birger with a strong sense of being targeted while being overlooked, of receiving an appeal for human contact, while being reproached for being nothing but a nerd with "double chin and sandals. That's all. Stomach, belly. That's it " (112).

> " Grief grows like a fetus, " she said. " What will come of it all ? "
> He thought her words were too grandiose. Especially for a parcel of forest. Perhaps also for a miscarriage in the ninth week. She should make pictures of it instead. But the threads were just hanging from the cloth. It used to look industrious with all those multicolored threads of wool hanging from the tapestry. But now it looked dead. Day after day the same threads hanging in the same way.

At the end of February he had prescribed an antidepressant for her, but it made her feel bad and she soon stopped taking it. She also stopped going out in the kick-sled.

" They're going to clear-fell the whole lot, " she said. " They're taking down our forest. "

" It isn't ours and you know it "...

" A concrete manure pit. That's what it's about. He wants a system for liquid manure. And the patch up here is actually ready for felling. "

" They used to coppice it. They just took what was mature. "

" That's not allowed anymore. Now you get a felling plan from the Forestry Department and you have to follow it "...

" Grief is growing, " she said. " I don't know what to do with it. I feel bitterness and hatred. Maybe that's good. Maybe not. Hatred can be a strength. "

" Psychobabble, " he said, smiling...

" You should weave it, " he said. " You should weave mouse holes and fox lairs and Arctic raspberry plants. That'd be great. "

" It doesn't help. Tapestries can't stop other forests being felled...The aspens will die too. They'll take them down and let them rot...Later on, all that had taken place, and the aspens had died . " ( 92-93)

"You always say that you know what you're party to merely by living in a Western country, " he said.

" Maybe I don't want to be party to it any longer. "

That was the worst ; he never knew whether she was declaiming or whether it was real pain. He could never decide. Previously he had believed her when she said things hurt. And were hurting now. But was she hurting the way she said ?...

" Do your remember what it was like when we came here ? " he said. " Remember the first red-currants we had among the garbage ? Do you remember how churned up the ground was ? Ripped to pieces. "...

" Those wounds are healed now, " he said. " The cat's foot and the melancholy thistle have come back...It's healing. The clearing will too. It takes a few years. Then it grows green again. "

" I remember what it was like when we came here, " she replied... " No one has ever said a word about healing the wounds in this ground. Presumably they don't see it. But if I had gaudy petunias or evil smelling marigolds in plastic pots or cartwheels painted pink and cream for nasturtiums to wind their way around—then they would see it and I would be praised. "

There was hatred and contempt in her voice. Not only pain...

" It makes me sick to walk along the road in case I meet that animal tormentor or that cat killer. And since the miscarriage, I've been afraid to meet anyone at all. Before, I thought I had life in me. Then they took it off me. Like the red-currant bushes. "

" They ? "

" I had a miscarriage after picking cranberries under the power lines... "

" The midsummer flower. It has its image imprinted in its cell. But human beings don't carry their image within them ... "

" A human being can become anything, can grow askew... "

...There was something wrong with talking in that way, apart from what she said. Long periods of silence alternating with moments of chat. Talk. No healthy person talks like this, he thought...She doesn't weave. Doesn't design any pictures, no patterns. Talks. It's great sometimes, but not really healthy.

" No ! I can't weave. You want me to replace the forest with images...But I want the forest... " ( 94-96)

Resigning from rescuing a vanishing world by means of her art, Barbro throws herself into political work. Arriving at a meeting arranged by a group of environmentalists, Birger finds his wife enthralled by one of the saviors :

> Barbro was sitting with the river saver...Barbro and he had their heads close together, a yellow light from the rostrum casting a halo around them. The environmentalist had dark blond hair falling below his shoulders, parted in the middle. He was wearing a striped carpenter's shirt and Lapp boots. All those who had stayed to wash dishes were standing in the doorway watching, when Birger caught sight of them. (96)

Dan, the river-saver, speaks to Barbro's longing for love and her sexuality rather than to her mind. A self assured Jesus figure, he reverses the tables as once put forward by his namesake Dante. Equally as devoted to his cause, and as convinced of the existence of higher powers, Dan constitutes the negative of what in the original blue print were to serve as a life enhancing quest. Barbro is helplessly attracted to this present day demagogue who promises her a rose garden. Their intercourse, however, results in nothing but her loss of everything on earth. Abandoning her teenage son and husband, in pursuit of a hard core dogmatic line of politics, she fades out of *Blackwater*. No longer attributing any significance to the presence of others in her community, Barbro ceases to exist all together...in the eyes of her family, in the view of the Blackwater people, from the aura of her savior, and, finally, from the reader's pages.

Barbro is of noble intent all the way through. A sensitive and delicate soul, she desperately wants to bring about change in the world, that is, to return to a pre-capitalist stage of development. Her honorable intentions however, lead to nothing but death, disillusion, and bitterness. Where does she go wrong and why?

When suffering a late miscarriage Babrbo finds herself incapable of containing the pain. Her reaction is to seek out a responsible agent. And her choice falls upon social progress, more specifically the logging industry in the area. Unable to distinguish between *Mother Nature* and herself, nature as a higher order and source of life and her own ability to contain a fetus, Barbro experiences the injuries inflicted upon the earth as being inflicted upon her own body. Nature, recreation, Babro's sense of self are inextricably interconnected. Her wish to arrest social development so as to return to " virgin soil " comes true, though in a most undesirable form : the growth of her unborn baby, a product of Barbro's time, ceases and the fetus is returned to earth.

Barbro's will power combined with her confusion of Mother Nature and her own physical and mental resources has a serious impact on her work of art. Her tapestries are of a mimetic nature, to the extent they are intended to copy, preserve and improve the original. A latter day partial Aristotelean at heart, form, in Barbro's mind, is content. The shape of her surroundings resonates within her being. Her disinclination to let her married name infiltrate her creative activity is yet another indication that Barbro herself refuses to undergo change and take responsibility for her life. Her creativity serves no broader symbolic purpose. It is meant to retain or recover Barbro's and late modernity's lost innocence. Her tapestries are to make her innermost desire come true and, in result, the real " thread of life" is neglected and left to wither away. Barbro never understands why her efforts to foster change do not pay off. Neither does she ever

recover from her sense of living with nerve ends that have been severed and left raw and exposed on the surface of earth.

## 2.2 THE QUESTION IS PRECISELY WHETHER IT IS NECESSARY TO FIND ONE SELF

**Deleuze and Guattari**

If Barbro in *Blackwater* leaves us with the impression that deep unresolved grief never stops devouring the individual, the overall impression given by *Synthetic Pleasures* is that pain and human suffering is in the process of being put behind us. No longer limited to have to make the best of our genetic make up, intelligence or biologically determined life span, we can now think in broader perspectives. Contesting this stance Jameson suggests that in so far as our cultural means of signification have been reduced to mere surface and superficiality, we have lost the opportunity to reflect on our emotional and intellectual being. The fact that we have been deprived of our means of experiencing and exploring the difference between inner and outer does not eliminate suffering. Rather, it makes it more diffuse. Unable to pinpoint what our chronic low key unease is about, and bereft of the words to make ourselves understood, we are left to drift along. Chronically unhappy, he says, we observe the world and its abundance of opportunities with indifference. Kristeva, by angling the Lacanian psychoanalytical frame of reference differently, sees more than a general mishap as the implication of our current conditions. Shocked by the discovery of the evil in which mankind is willing to take part, she says, we have grown terrified of facing up to the complexities of our own nuature. The

current cultural tendency toward elimination of difference and increased globalization, have left us on shaky ground concerning our subjective, sexual and national identity. With the dissolution of various boundaries, evil has moved inside our own territory. The fear that it may be in our midst, that it may be in us, and that it may consume us, is a psychotic fear. It leaves no exits, no means of relief, and allows for no sense of security anywhere. In spite of their differences each of the above sources expresses a need for the individual to find his own feet.

"But the question is precisely whether it is necessary to find oneself," Deleuze and Guattari respond (*Thousand Plateaus* 156). Viewing the issue of meta-narrative decomposition in an entirely different light, they make the claim that what has happened recently is that the subject has been set free to make and remake himself. Modern ideals of subjectivity, created and sustained by an oedipal economy of desire, were determined not by human but by capitalist needs. They serve no other purpose but to pre-program and distort desire, argue Deleuze and Guattari. Hence,

> ...as long as we are content to establish a perfect parallel between money, gold, capital, and the capitalist triangle on the one hand, and the libido, the anus, the phallus, and the family triangle on the other, we are engaging in an enjoyable pastime, but the mechanisms of money remain totally unaffected by the anal projections of those who manipulate money. (*Anti-Oedipus* 28).

It may be an economically profitable package solution, but its key effect is to shape, put constraints on, and restrain what could otherwise develop into *Bodies without Organs.*

Arguing against the very masters of suspicion Jameson holds up as providing some sort of model of reflection, Deleuze and Guattari put forward the view that human interaction takes place on a variety of—not levels, but—surfaces. Introducing the notion of the *rhizome*, a kind of anti-genealogy and anti-memory, they elaborate: any point in the rhizome is connected with any other point. Contrary to the more conventional *tree-model* which plots a point and fixes an order, the rhizome offers no structures, no positions, no sense of orientation. It is made up of interconnecting lines, a subterranean stem of forces and connections into which there are multiple entry ways. The rhizome, they say, is an:

> a-centered, nonhierarchical, non-signifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states. What is at question in the rhizome is a relation to sexuality—but also the animal, the vegetal, the world, politics, the book, things natural and artificial—that is totally different from the arborescent relation : all manner of 'becoming.' ( *TP* 21).

Slighting orgasmic logic, rhizomatic thinking and living involve no beginning, build up of tension, climax, or any sort of tension relief, catharsis, or ultimate reintegration. It is always made up of tension, that is, it consists of nothing but at middle, a self-vibrating region of intensities. The *middle* by no means refers to a mediocre or average experience. It designates the very zone, or maybe phase, where things pick up speed : a pulsating stream with neither origin nor destination, thus no sense of orientation.

In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari propose that their *nomad thought* serve as an alternative to conventional state philosophy. The latter, as practiced

by Western philosophy in general, operates with "gridded" space, they point out, representational thinking, and a separation of subject (subjectivity) and object (objectivity). Nomad thought, on the other hand, is based on a sense of *flows* passing through *open spaces*. Moving freely in the exterior, thriving on difference, disregarding traditional divisions between representation, subject, concept, and being, nomad thought dissolves dualistic thinking. Nomad thought emerges from the fact that our age is one of partiality and partial objects. The myth that fragments exist only so as to ultimately find their place in a larger picture is obtuse. We can no longer believe in " the dull gray outlines of a dreary, colorless dialectic of evolution, aimed at forming a harmonious whole out of heterogeneous bits by rounding off their rough edges," Deleuze and Guattari proclaims. " We believe only in totalities that are peripheral " (*AO* 42).

Thus holistic notions of the universe, along with visions of the world as consisting and moving ahead by means of opposing forces have grown obsolete. Nature and culture, man and machine, no longer stand in opposition. Everything now belongs under the same heading, namely *production*. Hence, postmodern industry no longer constitutes an *other* in relation to man. And man himself must be conceived of as a being in contact with all types and forms of life. He interacts with " even the stars and animal life, and (he) ceaselessly plugs an organ-machine into an energy-machine, a tree into his body, a breast into his mouth, the sun into his ass hole...[M]an and nature are ... one and the same essential reality, the producer-product " (*AO* 5). If any line is to be drawn and a distinction is to

be made, it is not at all between exterior and interior. These are already always relative, changing, and reversible, the saying goes. The only discrimination possible is between different and coexisting multiplicities that repeatedly interact, exchange places, rub off on each other or merge : machines, cogs, motors, and elements that are set in motion at a given moment, forming an assemblage productive of statements. We can no longer even speak of distinct machines, Deleuze and Guattari argue, only of types of interpenetrating multiplicities that at any given moment form an assembled faceless figure of libido (*TP* 36).

Evidently, this model does not allow for a separation of thinking and being. To conceive of a concept is to act it, to act on it, or to cause it to create stirrings in the social. There is not reason to ask what a concept really *means*, Deleuze and Guattari maintains (*TP* 4). What matters is whether and how it *works*. What kind of waves does it create, what sort of sensation does it evoke.

If thinking is acting, it goes without saying that a realization of "long live the multiple !" requires more than intellectual reflection. It must be lived, and the means to living it goes down intricate pathways and conjectures of the rhizome. Possessing neither a beginning nor an end, the ontological texture of rhizome is made up of an " and... and... and..." Where are you going ? Where are you coming from? Where are you heading? What do you want to obtain? These are totally useless questions. One pursues no transcendental or far off point of

gratification in the rhizome. One is. The greater the flux around and inside of one, the more intensively does one live (*TP* 15, 23).

Existance, according to rhizomatic lines is about living to the fullest. Yet this intensity is not to be mistaken for the modern " fully developed subject. " The individual as such simply does not exist within this zone. The subject has neither a mind, a body, or a desire of his own. His inner is always also exterior, thus his dreams and phantasies are inevitably of a collective nature. Hence, what the contemporary dicontented subject needs to do, more than anything, is *not* to gather himself and to find his own foothold in the world. It is to be truly and thoroughly de-individualized (*AO* xiv, 32).

Deleuze and Guattari criticize psychoanalysis harshly for having used Oedipal drama to make patients believe in the possibility of finding their selves and speak from the heart. The very moment psychoanalysis persuades the subject that he shall utter the most individual of statements, he is deprived of all basis for enunciation, they state. "That is why the Wolf-Man feels so fatigued," they snort. (*AO* 38). Language must not be conceived of as referring to something subjectively seen or felt, they argue. "Narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else said to you. Hearsay...There is no individual enunciation. There is not even a subject of enunciation." (*AO* 76, 79). In effect, no one cannot ever make a personal statement. There never is an individual at the center of any thing. He is constantly

lurking at the periphery, drifting, straying, bumping up against or passing through stages of intensity. This, then, is what makes a postmodern *Body without Organs*.

Psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari claim, committs the error of subjecting the subject's unconscious to primitive structures, hierarchical systems, a reproductive memory system, and an organism centered around the phallus. In Freud's eyes everything is always inevitably reduced to the one : any scar, hole, tearing is seen as representing *the* fundamental *cut*, the castration. What a "scare crow ," Deleuze and Guattari exclaim. "Castration, lack, substitution : a tale told by an over conscious idiot who has no understanding of multiplicities as formations of the unconscious... Freud sees nothing and understands nothing. He has no idea what a libidinal assemblage is, with all the machineries it brings into play, all the multiple loves, " they conclude.

Thus, psychoanalysis serves as no means of liberation. Functioning as contemporary society's figure of the priest, the psychoanalyst, with his three principles of Pleasure, Death, and Reality, manages to immobilize and de-sensualize all. Why such a parade of sucked-dry, catatonicized, vitrified, sewn-up bodies, when the *Body without Organs* is full of gaiety, exstacy, and dance? Deleuze and Guattari ask. Where psychoanalysis says, " Stop, find yourself again ! " as in cases of Anorexia, mystic Vision, Yoga, Krishna, Love, Experimentation, Deleuze and Guattari encourage that we say, "Let's go further still, we haven't found our *Body without Organs* yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self ! " For the *Body without Organs* is what remains when you

take everything away. What you take away is the phantasy of signification and subjectification (*AO* 17, 151, 154).

Erotization, according to nomadic thought, has nothing to do with representation. This is why it comes more naturally for the psychotic who must not be confused with the artificially created institutional "limb rag." The institutionalized psychotic traditionally is forced into autism and gains no credits for his actual being and contribution to the social, claims Deleuze and Guattari. However, he is as a matter of fact hugely productive. His productivity lies in his incorporation of the desiring machine. This machine neither represents nor signifies anything for anyone else. It is what one makes it. Neither more nor less. The schizo is therefore not regressing, as Freud would have it. He is ahead of the game compared to the rest of us. Having long since abandoned playing the game of mummy-daddy-me, the schizo has gone far beyond the constraints of the family romance. Deleuze and Guattari's declaration that schizophrenia is the characteristic malady of our time, is not done with the intent of saying merely that modern life drives people mad. At this point in history the neurotic, the pervert, and the psychotic cannot be adequately defined in terms of drives, they argue, for drives are simply the desiring-machines themselves.They must be defined in terms of territorialities. The schizo, continually wandering about, migrating here, there, and everywhere as best he can, plunges further and further into the realm of de-territorialization, reaching the furthest limits of the decomposition of the social. He deliberately seeks out the very limits of

capitalism. Thus, the schizo is its inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel.

Deleuze and Guattari are well aware that not everybody finds their heroization of the mentally disturbed credible. "After all, schizophrenics have a mother and a father, don't they? " people ask. "Sorry, none as such. They only have a desert with tribes inhabiting it, a full body clinging with multiplicities," they reply. The schizophrenic constantly passes from one code to another, deliberately scrambling all the existing codes. He never gives similar answers to identical questions. He repeatedly moves from one epistemological paradigm to another. Nothing ever means the same from one day to the next. In other words, he plays around with signifiers, meanings, forces. He is far from enacting an Oedipal drama (*AO* 5, 12, 23, 30-35, 288).

Suffering and self-infliction of pain, as seen in the light of rhizomatic thinking and nomadology, have nothing to do with what psychoanalysts claim, namely a price to pay for the achievement of forbidden erotic pleasure. "You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body—otherwise you're just depraved. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted—otherwise you're just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement—otherwise you're just a tramp " (*TP* 106). The aim is to "unhook ourselves from the points of subjectification that secure us, nail us down to dominant reality," Deleuze and Guattari state. It is to dismantle the body, not by killing it off, but

rather by tearing it open so that it will become receptive for the flow of "circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of the survivor " (*TP* 159). Pleasure, in the Freudian sense, must be delayed for as long as possible, primarily because it interrupts the continuous process of positive desire. So as to give the *Body without Organs* an opportunity to come true, we must stop denouncing certain types of desire as true and others as false and derived, in a fascist manner, Deleuze and Guattari argue (*TP* 155-165). Fascicm is what forces us to love power and to desire the very thing that manipulates and exploits us (*AO* xiii). A *Body without Organs* lets itself be occupied only by intensities. It has nothing to do with phantasy and thus it can be subjected to no interpretation, to no claims to meaning. It has no organs as such and yet it is not in opposition to these. Its enemy is the organism, the notion that it makes up a system and makes up art of a larger whole.

The *Body without Organs* makes up a particular kind of presence. It is neither a means nor an end. Hence it cannot ever be achieved once and for all. It is a limit that one may forever attempt to attain. Still, it is under way the moment the body has had enough of organs and wants to slouch them off, or loses them The latter adds up to a long procession say Deleuze and Guattari :

> The *hypocondriac body* : the organs are destroyed, the damage has already been done, nothing happens anymore." Miss X claims that she no longer has a brain or nerves or chest or stomach or guts. All she has left is the skin and bones of a disorganized body "... The *paranoid body* : the organs are continually under attack by outside forces, but are also restored by outside energies... The *schizo body*... the *schizo body*, waging its own active internal struggle against the organs, at the price of catatonia... The *drugged body*... The *Masochist body* : it is poorly understood in terms of pain ; it is fundamentally a question of the *Body without Organs* . It has its sadist or whore sew it up ; the eyes, anus, urethra, breasts, and nose are sewn shut. It has itself

> strung up to stop the organs from working ; flayed, as if the organs clung to the skin ; sodomized, smothered, to make sure everything is sealed tight " ( *TP* 150).

In as much as the postmodern schizo in Deleuze and Guattari's eyes is in no need of finding and founding a more delimited self, he nevertheless—in their own words—is attracted to an erotic practice based on the existence of relatively stable bodily surfaces. He thrives on the fact that the body "holds together" the subject's bodily and emotional fluids, and that it can be broken up and broken down only to a certain extent. What is the pleasure gained from rupturing the skin, suturing the flesh, and sealing the orifices, if not to—at least in part—to play with power and domination, self assertion and annihilation, the fear of leaking out and the desire to dissolve ?

Schizo sensuality is delirious, and deliciously so, Deleuze and Guattari say, simply because the schizo has no notion of origin, authenticity, or representation. His sense of ecstasy is not a means to an end, to return to himself. It is a mode of being. If that is so, then what are we to make of the schizo's focusing on his bodily boundaries, his closing in around his physical body in his sexual acts, or, his fear and refusal of letting in an other ? The schizo's intense fear of invasion and violation, at times to the extent of annihilation, excels by its absence from Deleuze and Guattari's corpse de texte. Schizophrenic mentality in general, when genuine and more than a matter of style, implies a non negotiable need to stay put, that is to remain wrapped in the same old piece of clothing, stick to a ritualized daily routine, inhabit familiar living quarters, and interact along stereotyped lines. Exceptional is the schizophrenic who encounters change

with excitement, and indulges in difference with joy. Deleuze and Guattari write off this *limb rag* as an institutionalized product. Nevertheless, the ideal schizo emerges from the ashes of late capitalist society, according to Deleuze and Guattari, burning with desire and driven by an urgent need to swim with the tide.

## 2.3 A *BODY WITHOUT ORGANS*

## BUT A HEART THAT POUNDS ON IT OWN

### Lingis

Regardless of the focus on an expansion of its erotic capacity and its sensual repertoire, Guattari's and Deleuze's *Body without Organs* is of a rather dis-membered nature. Paradoxically, it is due to its picking up speed, its flow and flux, within the rhizomatic midst, that it comes across as if strangely bereft of desire. What does this "schizo" want? Is there not something he does not want ? How does he differentiate between tormenting pain, minor inconveniences, niceties, and intense pleasure ? How does he—does he—distinguish between bodily injuries and affective wounds ? The list continues, and one may wonder what makes life seem worthwhile for this individual, and what makes it seem utterly depressing. Is not ever the "schizo " disillusioned and disheartened. If he has a human heart, what shape does it take? Is it, maybe, not by choice but by necessity that he is inclined to prefer a machine park to human company? Most of these questions fall flat when addressed to nomadologic philosophy. They can not

really be asked—barely thought. Are they not merely reminiscences of conservative Oedipality or State philosophy ?

In a manner similar to that of Deleuze and Guattari, Alphonso Lingis makes a plea for the *Body without Organs*. However, according to his version, this Body serves as a prerequisite to become more *intimately*—rather than more superficially—involved with others, one's self, and the world. Heavily inspired by phenomenological thinking, in particular as developed by Husserl and Merleau Ponty, Lingis suggests that the *Body without Organs* is a means to open up for, to sense, and to allow one self to be touched by, the multiple configurations of meaning, of which life is ultimately made up. Like Deleuze and Guattari, Lingis conceives of the *Body without Organs* as organized according to unpredictable and forever changing chains of sensation. Having no center, exhibiting no consistency, it houses no core personality. It is a-causal, knows no limits, and it is constantly in pursuit of one pleasure or another. It differs in all respects from the traditional Western concept of coherent, continuous and centered subjectivity. As differing from Deleuze's and Guattari's nomad, however, Lingis' *Body without Organs* thrives *not* on homelessness and eternal drifting. It prospers from playing in the margins and from toying seriously with whether or not to transgress or dissolve a given boundary. The *Body without Organs* is willing to and capable of moving mountains so as to obtain the peak experience of grasping the other in his essence. Seeking to embrace the other in this way is as far as the subject can get from "spreading himself thin " It is the

means to getting to know him in depth, and thus to know oneself. We *play* each other, we learn about our own potential, the way we play an instrument, that is, insofar as we manage to hit a perfect tune.

The challenge today, Lingis argues, again in line with Deleuze and Guattari, is for us to move beyond notions of repression as conceived of by the masters of suspicion. The task is to learn to conceive of our alienated states in a more complex manner. The temptation is obviously there, Lingis says in *Foreign Bodies*, to conceive of Capitalism as a universal devaluation of the human body, reducing it to hands and brains of merely productive value. The capitalist subject, representing nothing but depersonalized exchange value, does in many ways seem to have meager opportunities for leading a life which is not predetermined by economics. There is hardly any shortage of evidence that the individual has been swamped by a larger, inhuman mechanism: the nuclear family is on decline, the individual is uprooted and is increasingly so becoming "self made." Fitnessing, body-toning and building, and plastic surgery are the means to the making of a so called self. Adding to this, we have the celebration of super-models, movie stars, and other celebrities, all providing the unattainable ideals needed to spur our imagination and trigger our motivation. It is a universe of simulacra. The ephemeral flickering and transparent video image has replaced all notions of originality and—as if that was not enough—of transcendence. Life in a world like this, obsessed with virtual communication and global mobility, is an existence deprived of any foundation, of human contact, from feeling moved. In

consequence we suffer : suffocating from fear, loneliness, and a sense of disconnectedness from the larger whole, we are left with fossil identities. So the story goes (*FB* 155, 225). Is it not all useless ? Is it not all a matter of exploiting the individual to the fullest, of encouraging him to indulge in self-imposed exhaustion, of making him desire his own destruction ? It is one of the paradoxes of late capitalism that it still requires the phallic personality bred in an Oedipal setting, while simultaneously it undermines the very reality of this institution, Lingis points out. Late capitalist development has for sure permeated the social and individual body to the fullest. Yet, the other side of the coin of late capitalist evolution is a rendering superfluous of human resources. This is its very promise, and where our hope lies.

Living in the epoch of the end of ideology and the third information revolution, we have grown used to the habitual conversion of insightful and significant utterances into excitations of needs and made up desires. Still, in the midst of this "information revolution" we find ourselves making noises, for the mere pleasure of hearing ourselves talk, for the rhythms and the rumble, for the warmth and moistness of the breath. "A voice in which the forms of things dissolve as it drifts into the elemental. And babble resounds with another truth" (*Sensation : Intelligibility in Sensibility* 96). Thus, time, energy, money, have been set free, and the opportunity provided for our using and exploring our sensory repertoire with no particular end in mind. A green house for the *Body*

*without Organs* have emerged, and with that former epochs in the West and other cultures have come to serve as partial models of exoticism and eroticism.

According to classical phenomenological theories, the most painful experience, that of nothingness itself, is also the most reassuring experience one can have. It proves that one exists. However, this view simplifies the matter excessively, Lingis claims. Building on an ontology that allows for no graduation of experience, it reduces our states of experience to *being* or *nothingness*. But what about less clear-cut, more ambiguous and differentiated types of experience? Is it really always only a matter of "everything" or "nothing" ? ( *SIS* xii). The question boils down to the nature of "otherness." What does it mean to be more or less one self ? In what does the otherness of the other consist? How do we recognize it, and what does this recognition mean to us? How does one's interactions with others affect one's own being? The individual who sees only one alternative to *being* ( fully a person), namely *nothingness*, is bound be consumed by fear. Only in this sense does the classical dictum of "being and nothingness" come true: The other, when exploring and exposing his limits, informs me about my own existential limits and constraints. How do we come to gain significance among these others, that is within this increasingly complex web of moving bodies? How does the other come to matter to us ? How do we come to matter to him, Lingis asks ?

According to classical psychoanalysis, the phallus makes up the turning point in the life of the individual. In Freud it encourages the institution of a super-

ego. Lacan suggests that the mirror stage throws the child into an ever lasting self-alienation, an irreversible discrepancy between ideal and experience, self-representation and being. The child comes to desire to be what the Other desires, namely his or her own lack. In either case the acceptance of the phallus, leading to the entry into the symbolic, results in a split subject condemned to search for in the other what is missing in him self. But how does the Freudian family romance and the Lacanian desire to be what the Other wants apply to late capitalist society ? What happens, for instance, to the son's desire under circumstances where the father serves no higher, authoritative or ideal purpose. Or, when the child grows up in a "fatherless" society, or in a society based on notions of masculinity and fatherhood differing considerably from those of the western world? What happens is that we are given to understand that no sign makes sense in itself, no system of signs determines a definitive meaning, in other words, that the phallus does not per se assign us a particular role and significance.

Knowledge of our selves and our environment is acquired, not by passively applying an order to our selves, but only by moving into the latter, Lingis emphasizes. A sign must be conceived of as a sensorial pattern, its meaning to lie in the style, structure, and dynamics of its relating to its referent (*FB* 108). It comes to mean for us by our inscription of the particular structure-of-relating into our own being. Signs are phenomenological modes of being. Thus, some anticipate our being and thereby provides a point of departure for our coming into our own. Others stand in the way for our self realization. Both are

required, though to a different extent at different developmental levels. The newborn infant, for instance, enters this world with a not yet fully developed self. An *imaginary* role has been carved out for him long before his departure from intra-uterine existence. Newborn needs this kind of constrictive containment, Lingis relates. The baby whose parents have never *dreamt* of their prospective off spring, whose parental origins have focused solely on the practicalities associated with the new arrival, tends to suffer from a sense of lack of containment. Mothers of psychotics are a case in point Lingis argues, here referring to Pierra Aulangier's research. Scared of losing their already shaky sense of reality, these mothers are for the most part unable to fantasize about their babies. The newborn is anticipated and received as if making up yet another physical extension of their own self. Hence the outspoken tendency among psychotics to suffer from lack of inner psychic representations of external or sensed reality as well, as a disposition to suffer from experiences of bodily fragmentation and dismemberment. Feeling he is falling or spilling out, and having no idea into where, or whether it shall ever stop, the psychotic is terrified. Disoriented and as if suspended he remains afloat in a twilight zone of sur-reality : not yet really alive, not yet entirely dead ( *FB* 111).

We sense the world in an intentional, interactive, and goal oriented manner, emerging from our bodily presence, explains Lingis. The realities and dreams of others constantly intersect with, give shape to, provide a ground of resistance for our own coming into being. Our environment thus provides a

ground and a frame of reference within which sensuous elements "apprehend" our attention. We perceive anyone and anything as a figure on a ground, and yet, perception and reflection are intricately related with our living within a web of coherency. The world, our world, is made of one *flesh*, that is of an interweaving of concepts, percepts and sensations. Stirrings in this flesh resonate in our inner universe, have an impact on our actions, and thus reverberate in the world around us. Hence, apprehension is related to our abilities to take hold of and grasp something, by handling, holding, sensing, tasting, and smelling it. We apprehend a thing's sensuous essence, says Merleau-Ponty the way we are struck by "a musical theme in all its variations, or, in the way that one style is found in all the novels of an author who speaks with his or her own voice, or in the way that one's gait is visible in the varying steps made over uneven ground " (*FB* 11). Nothing leaves a lasting impression unless it affects all of our levels of perception. The mind grasps nothing on its own, neither does the sensory apparatus understand anything in isolation from the other psychic and physical faculties.

Merleau-Ponty's dictum that we live only insofar as we accept the responsibility of being embedded in the flesh of the world, that is that the world is ingrained in our being, is often considered tricky. Does not that entail that our destiny is predetermined and that our sole option is to accept as our own responsibility a fate that has been carved out in advance ? Not so, says Lingis. To say that the individual resonates with the movements taking place in his

environment in no way corresponds to claiming that the two are as if of one piece. Each and every individual possesses a unique potential, which he may or may not choose to realize. And self-realization requires a goal oriented and active engagement with the environment. Depending on our social and cultural context, self realization requires the development of one (or more) modes of interaction over and against others.

Lingis' inquiry takes him into foreign territories, in this case into Melanesian field work. Drawing on the work of Gilbert Herdt he makes the claim that there are other ways—than those prescribed by the Oedipal model--of achieving identity for one self as well as for others, ways that it may even make sense to introduce into the Western world. In a number of Melanesian cultures, such as the Sambia of Papua-New Guinea, identity is based on bodily relationships to fluids and fluidity. Social and sexual genders are strictly divided and women as well as men base their gender identity on their ability to produce, transmit, circulate fluids. No such concept as a sexual core identity exists among the Sambia. Femaleness is the flow of blood and the production of milk, maleness the ability to donate semen. Both exchanges are considered social transactions: a man enables other males to mature into manhood by letting the younger perform fellatio. A husband fertilizes his wife and provides the fetus with nutritious liquids until the date of delivery. Afterwards, the mother provides milk for the newborn. The Sambia identities are thus fluid and ever changing, Lingis claims, "forming and dissolving in the force of the flow of time " (*FB*

145, 155). The background for this Melanesian flow of desire is an economy of a cyclical nature : resources poured out into the system returns in the shape of an other male or another human being. Thus transactions of portions of self—as opposed to Western representation and evaluation--are encouraged (*FB* 158).

What makes the Melanesian study pertinent for reflections on late capitalist identity formation then ? The fact that a number of its cultural elements appear transportable, says Lingis. Having undergone a migration at some point in time, and having imported their rituals and patterns of sexual behavior so as to get rooted in their new world, the Sambia prove that cultural habits originating in one time and place may be relocated to an other. Those that survive contextual changes in all likelihood provide a means to play with and preserve pervasive human urges. One of these, Lingis claims, appears to be the need to intimately interact with the other in a non-reproductive erotic manner. It is a kind of interaction comparable to the infant's earliest interactions with the mother. No one is superior to any other, it is indeterminable who is taking an initiative to interact, and bodily and psychical communication cannot be clearly distinguished. If the fluid economy of the Sambia is detachable from its culture and history of origin, if it is possible to inscribe into other places and other times, it may be possible to introduce it into our culture as well. We may benefit from looking at it this way, Lingis suggests : Considering the fact that it is far from clear cut whether our present bodily practical competence is intrinsic to natural evolution or a result of the technological evolution or both. Late

capitalism has introduced us to a plethora of frameworks and logics of desire. Is it not possible that we are now in a position where we can pick and choose for ourselves ?

## 2.4 " I FEAR, THEREFORE I AM ? "

### Massumi, Shapiro and Taussig

Deleuze and Guattari see no reason why we should not cast off our moorings. Lingis agrees that, for as long as we remain stuck in outdated modes of perception and interpretation, we are bound to miss the horizon of opportunities which are opening up around us with the evolution of postmodern capitalism. Still, cutting all ties to past models of perception is bound to leave us at seas, he claims. We simply cannot thrive on the illusion that we have arisen as if from nowhere and independently of everybody else. The subject who does not to some extent feel embraced by a "flesh " of anticipation, intentionality, and desire, is at a loss. Truly disconnected from the world of living meaning he is left to his own devices, without any means whatsoever of situating himself in relation to his own mortality. In consequence he is prone to experience that he is being swallowed up, that is, that he is already more or less dead.

Fear, not to mention nameless dread, as Bion calls it, has received surprisingly scarce attention in the dispute concerning the reasons to celebrate or mourn the death of the subject. We hear a great deal about the most alarming

occurrences, read about them, watch them taking place in remote corners of the earth via tabloids and satellite TV, witness bodies being eaten up from within by means of surgical transmissions from the body's interior, and more. What is worse—in as much as it is closer to home--on a daily basis we overhear reports claiming that children are now being starved to death, that marital bliss is likely to end in a corpse serving as fertilizer in the suburban back yard, and that the serial killers among us tend to suffer from lack of discrimination when they strike. The picture gets gloomier the madder our society grows. Watch out, the message seems to be, your next door neighbor might be a raging pervert or human flesh eater in disguise. Not even self isolation suffices to save anybody's life for sure. We still have to eat. And, what kept us healthy and on the go a few years ago is now a potential threat to our survival. Daily life is no longer gray. It is a meat grinder creating a colorful mess, and giving few guarantees that anyone is going to make it through the ordeal in one piece. As it seems, *everything*, from eating, to engaging in sexual activity, to having or abstaining from having children, to leading a too stressful or too leisurely life, to communicating with another human being, has come to be associated with some sort of concealed danger.

Remarkably, in as much as we are being introduced to fear inducing possibilities, ad nauseam, fear has grown more diffuse and in many ways less perceptual. We are not necessarily tormented by fear. We just tend to feel uneasy overall and a bit on edge. What used to constitute an extra-ordinary

psychologically and socially unsettling event has, according to popular culture and politics, somehow become the ordinary. The enemy, no longer easily to be identified in the exterior has grown all pervasive. We have moved from the welfare state to the warfare state, as Brian Massumi puts it (*Everyday Fear* 3-39).

Finding ourselves on such uncertain ground, Massumi suggests that an ever present *low-level fear* has come to make up our common point of departure. One may easily be led to assume that the recent preoccupation with the oftentimes inexplicable, and certainly unavoidable, horrors that life may bring is a postmodern phenomenon. Never before did we witness as many indications and outcries that our own dismemberment may be next on the list of chaotic and coincidental blood shedding. No longer capable of capturing these occurrences within a theological framework, they have somehow gotten out of control. Or have they? The fact is, Massumi argues, the modern self too was constituted by real or postulated fear. Still, following World War II, however, something did change. The question is how, to what extent, and to what effect fear has been "fundamentally reconfigured." In other words, what if any rethinking of the fear-functioning is made necessary by the occurrence of such a break? Is fear still experienced as emotionally and personally disturbing, something that cuts to the core of the individual's being and arrests his development ? Or, has it rather become part of our collective image, a means to remaining on our toes, a way of constituting a vibrant social subjectivity? In either case, considering the overflow

of fear in our society, how does one (if at all) resist being swamped by the ever escalating flow of imitated, real, and surreal fear?

Capitalist dynamics have colonized all of our geographical, cultural, and social space, Massumi claims. The latter has evolved into an unbounded space, a strangely shapeless and unlimited field consisting of an endless amount of mutually exclusive forms of existence. In result, we no longer have a sense of an *inside* into which things, events, experience can be integrated. Capitalist power actualizes itself in a basically uninhabitable space of fear. And it profits from the fact that, as much as we find our selves ill at ease within this space, we have nowhere else to go. Fear, in the postmodern, is therefore not fundamentally an emotion, Massumi concludes. It is a late capitalist condition of being. In place of ontological foundations we now have a succession of ephemeral images, commodities produced to break down, and the sense of detached self-effects generated by the constant circulation of these fugitive impressions. Fear, in Massumi's words, is therefore the direct perception of the contemporary condition of the possibility of being-human (*EF* 12).

It is true, Steven Shapiro agrees, that notions of autonomy and disalienation have grown absolutely obsolete in the postmodern. Also that the postmodern condition *is* one of fear, anxiety, and mourning. However, *not* in a tragic or Freudian sense. Fear reactions are no longer in response to anything *else* or as an expression of a deeper meaning. They constitute a physical and affective form of a volatile being, typical of our age. Postmodern subjectivity, he says, is

"entirely embodied, has no sense of privacy, and ... can no longer be defined in terms of fantasy. " It is a series of *happenings*, taking place on the surface and in the confrontations and interactions with other bodies. In consequence we are forced once and for all to give up Cartesian notions of our physical being as secondary to our "selves" and of our identity as in the process of stabilizing. The subject has become " dispossessed of itself. " He has been taken in, taken over, invaded by forces that he is unable to control and continually threaten to destroy it, such as social technologies of power. As unfortunate as this may sound, it is by no means a negative turn of events. The very dynamics that threaten us also serve as sources of great passion, obsession, sensation, and pleasure (" Bodies of Fear" 129). There *is* something excruciating and irredeemable in this materiality. Yet, it is precisely because of its *untenability* that it is so very important and extraordinarily affirmative. Unbearably physical sensation is of an intensity that cannot be "brought to order. " It eludes recovery, defies the law (" BoF " 128). Thus, the very images that strike us as being the most repulsive and monstrous in their *sub*-humanity may hit us the hardest, that is trigger the most intense sense of happiness. The conventional terms of castration, lack, and desire for mastery over one self and possession of the other are evidently passé. Contemporary subjectivity thrives on a diet consisting of the horror, the turning-the-self-inside-out, and the ambivalence associated with abjection. Alterity is encountered in connection with the closest intimacy, it is at the very heart of the self's relation to

itself, Shapiro concludes. The postmodern subject is thus close to him self, regardless of the fact that he is also always on edge.

How is this celebration of uprootedness and restlessness to be understood, we may ask Shapiro. How can it possibly be better to linger as if permanently on the verge of a break down? How can anyone sustain an existence on those terms, not to mention derive pleasure from it? How does one survive? The key is, Shapiro argues, for us to learn *not* to confuse bodily concern with bodily sensation. Late Western culture's obsession with the body does not change the fact that it tends for the most part to exclude tactile contact and affective involvement. Frantically concerned with denying any materiality, it still keeps apart thought from the motions of the flesh. Modern thinkers did so very explicitly and deliberately. What many postmodern thinkers have done is simply to transfer the old fantasy of freedom from bodily constraints onto virtual bottles (" BoF " 113-114). McLuhan and Baudrillard, for instance, see the merging of the medium and the message as having created a "hyper reality" in which nothing can be said to refer to something else. The medium *is* the message. We live in a flow of ever changing images and impressions, something which according to Baudrillard is "cool." But hyper reality does not necessarily leave us untouched. Contrary to many claims to the opposite, Shapiro insists, the "hyper real" has neither evacuated or erased the body. Permanently over stimulated it is constantly being pushed into new forms, new thresholds, and intensities ("BoF" 121). The fact that our images have become increasingly flattened out and

distanced from any representational source, in no way implies that they have less of a stronghold over us. "We have entered a new regime of the image : one in which vision is visceral and intensive instead of representational and extensive. In this new regime the body is the common locus of subjectivity and subjection, of inner perception and outer manifestation. " In consequence images now leave a direct imprint on our organism. "The more images are flattened out and distanced from their representational sources, the more they are inscribed in our nerves and flash across our synapses...We have entered a new regime of the image : one in which vision is visceral and intensive instead of representational and extensive." Vision leaves its mark in terms of pain and the body remains constantly alert and ready to absorb yet another shock to the system. Visions become flesh, "uncontrollable flesh," and the distinction between fantasy and reality collapses. Power no longer works primarily on the level of words, images, or ideologies. It impresses the flesh directly. The fear brought into the picture by Massumi is therefore, as far as Shapiro is concerned, not *felt* in any traditional sense of the term. It is acted on and acted out. What may sound like a nightmarish version of paralysis in the face of a spinning world is not necessarily so.

Shapiro's theory finds support in several camps, one of the persistent ones being that of Michael Taussig. Heavily inspired by Walter Benjamin, Taussig proposes that representation is currently of greater significance than what is being represented.[2] The structure of a pattern, a design, a piece of architecture, or a social ritual says everything worthwhile understanding about the workings of the

[2] See for instance Benjamin, *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*, and *Das Passagen-Werk*.

society in question, he says. Significance arises from the incorporation of the dynamics of representation as working on a larger scale into minor details. " Whoever grasps the particular in all its vitality also grasps the general, " Walter Benjamin says, " without being aware of it, or only becoming aware of it at a later stage " (after Taussig, *Nervous System* 152). Habit formation is a key word in this context ; habit and absentminded, tactile absorption of one's environment. Deep understanding of the broader issues at play in a given society at a certain point in time is never to be grasped by optics and contemplation alone. It is realized and recognized as these issues impose themselves on one's life rhythm and encourage of enforces change of routine ( *Mimesis and Alterity* 35).

Benjamin's notion of tactile apperception relies heavily on his understanding of the functioning of mimesis. Mimesis is about immersing oneself in the object and about allowing oneself to get lost in one's environment. It entails a physical copying, a trying out the very shape of a perception in one's own body. The wonder of the process, Taussig claims, lies in the fact that the copy draws on the character and power of the original. Thus bodily musculature, neurological maturity and sensory alertness are all intricately interconnected with our perception of things, with our percepts (*MA* xiii-xix, 46).

Representation acquires not just the power *of* the represented, but power *over* it, as well. This is how *Nervous System writing* works : what is written on the wall is also and at the same time imprinted into the flesh (*NS* 125-128). As a notion and practice, this view clearly contests modern Enlightenment ideas of

distanced and uninvolved observation. Knowing is giving oneself over to a phenomenon rather than thinking about it from above. It re-invokes early childhood forms of interaction as during the symbiotic coexistence with the caretaker the infant tends to materialize the mother's ideas and known as well as unknown habits. Interestingly though, but once again in line with Benjamin's thinking, Taussig maintains that mimesis involves a *distancing* from the imitated. The distance provides the space required for reflexive thought. Mimesis is not a matter of believing that one has become other, he points out. It is a matter of acquiring a sense of how it is to inhabit his powers, simply in terms of putting oneself in his shoes ( *MA* 35). What, then, makes mimesis particularly pertinent for late modern society ? In our day and age of commodity culture, Taussig argues, collective symbolic meaning is transferred to new generations not through stories, myths, or fairy tales, but through things, namely the commodities we buy (*NS* 55). The practice of mimesis in our day, inseparable from our procedures of imagining and thinking itself, involves the rehearsal of the practices of the body associated with primitivism. Thus, mimetic patterns of behavior, interaction and identity formation take odds with social constructivism as well as essentialism (*MA* 70).

However, what Benjamin emphasized in his theory of the importance of distance to the object studied, and Taussig chooses not to bring into the picture, is the significance of having a stable point of departure. Foreign cultures, Benjamin argues, are appropriated from a distance. Tactile immersion is the key to an

immediate experience, but distance in time and place is a precondition for the "other" to be understood. What we cannot do without, Benjamin maintains, is a vantage point and a frame of reference. Distinguishing between "getting lost" in a foreign place and "loosing oneself" to it, Benjamin makes it evident that he is no proponent of continuous migration and transformation of the self. One "looses oneself" only to return to one's site of origin, one's horizon expanded and one's understanding of one's background increased (Benjamin, *Berliner Kindheit*). When Benjamin was exiled in 1933 he stopped working on his otherwise elaborate series of city portraits, in many ways his life-work. When asked why, he responded, simply, by saying " far from what ? " Distance to the foreign and unknown was as necessary as a temporary distance from home. Bereft of the latter Benjamin lost his curiosity (Szondi 31).

Needless to say, we have made it a long way from the light hearted simplicity with which the synthetic pleasure garden in the beginning of this chapter was conceived. The stakes are high. Does our current practice of immersing our selves in intensity and exciting adventures break down our layers of defense and bring about a sense of catharsis, or, does it rather prevent our own feelings from materializing ? Does it help to return the head severed from its shoulders by Descartes to its shoulders, or, does it encourage all minds to be thrown out with the bath water ? Does it enable us to come to terms with our sense of lacking a sufficiently formed subjectivity, or does it rather make us lose all hope ? The answers are still simmering.

For now, an Ekmanian commentary on the art of skillfully applying models of living and interpretation, shall suffice.

## A scent of originality. *BLACKWATER.*

Enthralled by books, convinced that they are meant to define reality, but weary of associating the letters she reads with her of life experience, the adolescent Annie's entry into the world of convention is striking by its lack of conviction. Endowed with an ear for music and a voice worthwhile listening to, her mother, *Henny*, encourages her to turn singing into a way of living. Annie, however, suffers stage fright, is painfully self-conscious of her lack of female attributes, and breaks into sweat whenever she is forced to stand up in front of an audience. Evidently, she assumes the audience to be of male orientation, that is,

to judge her competence as a singer on the basis of her ability to perform a full fledged female role. She resigns from the challenge and chooses to join the church choir instead :

> Church music had gone better for Annie. She didn't have to be seen ...
> [Annie] herself was troubled by the words. She found that the most beautiful music in the world had been created to put across words that were at best stupid but more often senselessly cruel. She hunted out their origins in the bible and found something she had never known before because she had never been interested in religion: a compost of superstition, war frenzy, and mysticism, about rotting corpses. She sang nonetheless " *Bist Du bei mir,* " she sang, seeing a man with dark curly hair above a warm, swelling penis and a wrinkled blue-brown scrotum. To produce the notes, she had to put everything she found warm and sensually appealing against that repugnant shattered head, dripping saliva and blood, the stinking bandages and the gust from the opened grave...
> It didn't work in the long run. (254)

Few things work out in Annie's life. It is not necessarily a matter of her lacking hips or other female attributes. The problem boils down to her never having grasped the fact that life is about a dynamic interplay between movement and form. Moving ahead, as if with a split consciousness, Annie constantly runs into trouble, without ever really recognizing it. She starts an education at the Academy of Music, so as to materialize Henny's dreams. In due time, she cannot but acknowledge that this is not her true element. Unable to continue, and unable to figure out why she has failed, Annie carries on, like a somnambulist. She remains paralyzed and perplexed until Sverker Gemlin comes by, her teacher in harmony and counterpoint. Sverker sets her sexual passions on fire, and seduces Annie into believing that his desire is hers. Annie's firm belief that words match reality forces her to choose sides in her affair with Sverker. Thus his version of things come to represent the truth. At least for a while :

> He spoke of his marriage in graceful circumlocutions such as, we must cherish what we have. What he had, of course, was My, the children Jesper and Jannika, the house in North Ängby, and a summer place in Kullen together with My's parents. Annie had her small apartment in Karlbergsgatan and her precious freedom. He talked about that a lot . (256)

Sverker eventually tires of the romance, or fears the impact it may have on his real life, and quietly decides that the story has come to an end. So as to avoid any upheavals he lies to Annie so as to get him self off the hook. Finally, when discovering the deception to which she has been subjected, Annie wakes up. Beside herself with anger—the two of them had after all been in the process of creating a new life—she lets Sverker hear everything she previously had not been able to learn from her readings :

> A raging woman took over the stage. It was not Annie ; it was Brangane or Medea. Her performance lasted scarcely an hour, but long enough for him to retreat forever. Temporarily he calmed her down on the blue couch...
> ..she was afraid he would question his paternity. It was like fear of reviews. Someone would write that she had a thin, sharp, hopeless little voice and an affected manner...
> " What are you going to do ?"
> For the first time in her life, Annie had known what she wanted to do. As she was to have a child, she had to have a job...Not dither around. Not sing at funerals. Not have an affair with a married teacher. Nothing of what had gone before. Just herself and the child.
> She explained she wasn't going to do anything except get herself training as a teacher, and he dropped a piece of his almond cake into his cup of coffee. (275)

Deception is the trigger of intense feelings leading to action at several points in the novel. Curiously, deception by a lover is as a rule associated with conception of a child, an *other life*. Annie repeatedly and automatically sinks into a sleep walker existence in which nothing matters much. Each time she is jolted out of her numbness by a piercing betrayal, and the sense of life moving inside of her, the latter taking the form of a fetus or the very beginning of a story line of her own.

She couldn't decide anything. That had happened time and again in her life. Standstill.

" As if it had nothing to do with you, " Henny had said at the time Annie was messing around at the Academy. And later in Malearvaag. All had gone well at first. She had liked it in a dull way. Gradually it had come to a standstill, though she had never noticed until Dan came and started asking about her life. (259)

Dan, the dubious river saver who is also to sour-sweeten Barbro's life, arrives at Annie's college during the so called revolt. For Annie revolutionary avant garde activity had never been an issue. She felt repressed and deadened in the same dull way as she felt capable and functioning.Yet, at the time of Dan's emergence, Annie's life was a breeding ground waiting for change. Dan provides the fertilizer, though in no way in a manner that Annie could have envisioned.

She had been ensnared. A fish in a net. A thousand stupid things, people, regulations, papers, and things, things, things. Like the car battery...

The baby-sitter took tranquilizers because she needed to lose weight, but the truth was she couldn't even vacuum-clean without them. So on some days her face was like a pale moon with spots, and she had to be sent home. For Annie it was back to the car, the road, the black ice, lamplight. And at college. " Sit down and draw now, Mia. I'll get you some cookies."

Eight lessons with cookie crumbs and chalk dust and the smell of sweaters and exhalations, Mia wanting to pee and being bored, her chatter disposing whatever concentration there had been in the classroom, if any. (114)

Sverker could have been Annie' father, Dan could have been her son. Nine years younger than Annie, Dan is a self defined natural, non conventional, anarchist. He vaguely alludes to a past in poverty, emerges as if from nowhere, but nevertheless manages to turn himself into the center of others' attention. Dan has two ways of being, Annie observes :

He was mostly turned on an energetic, a field force surrounded him, and he inspired others. When he moved around a room and spoke, everyone looked at him. She had thought of intellectual and sexual energy when she had seen him for the first time, thinking it was a zest for life.

But it was more a gathering of strength, willpower, defying boredom, and loss of energy. Dancing. Keeping himself visible.

His other way of being always started with pallor, his lips turning thin, his voice slightly irritable as he retreated into himself, and he seemed to turn gray. (119)

No one is capable of pinning down Dan and holding him responsible for anything. With great agility he avoids any kind of framing, he even refuses to let his photo be taken (68). Sexuality ought to be a natural matter, according to Dan who, subsequently exposes Annie's three year old daughter to their having intercourse and masturbates in front of Annie (206). Being rebellious on Dan's terms involved a rolling around, which ultimately leads to a sliding down the slope of convention and ordinary security. Annie is deemed incompetent as a teacher and expelled from her work.

> To revolt ! With a pupil...
>
> Out there, though, the atmosphere had turned gray around them. The revolt was sluggish in a country college of great brutes who wanted to be police men and put rebels up against the wall. And little girls wanting to be nurses and dental receptionists and put on bandages and mended people as well as rebels....
>
> Dan was a storm petrel but the storm was a long time coming...
>
> She would never have broken free...
>
> She would never have broken free if Mia hadn't woken, seen them, and run out, still quite silent but crying, and met Arlén, who taught social studies.
>
> " Dan's hurting Mommy !"
>
> Then it was the principal, his light office with its tapestry pictures and woodwork bowls.
>
> " Your presence here is no longer a matter of course. "
>
> Trembling chin. The ball point to hold on to. He was more terrified than she was. God, how she had longed for a reprimand, a few gobs of words, real language ! These academics on the staff, councilors and female volunteers. (115-116)

Annie's standstill is broken up by Dan's interference, but only to land her at Starhill, a negative of the very ordinary life from which she is eloping. As it turns out, she suspects from the very beginning that there is something slightly surrealistic about Dan's promises. When he tells her that the Starhill commune lies above Blackwater, she is struck by an intense feeling of "significance and destiny." She would be returning to her origins by moving there. Yet she keeps it

a secret that her decision to join the commune is driven by her desire to conserve her past. Other discordances stir her suspicions. Her initial impression of Dan is that he is "slightly ridiculous." The fragility and agility of his physical frame comically contrasts with his weighty speech (115). And no sooner has their relationship acquired sexual overtones, before Annie loses her ability to think. What is left is an obscure sense of disharmony. The intimacy between the two of them is awkward. There is no real connecting, but a great deal of inter-*acting*. "Occasionally he had said that she didn't take him seriously. He seemed to sense sometimes she had that feeling, the feeling that he was weird. Totally unknown. Like living tissue that is rejected. Alien, incompatible tissue of the soul " (208). As it turns out, Annie's intuition is to the point. Yet, she fails to take it seriously, until the loudness of her convictions have been forced into silence. Dan, as she discovers, is the offspring of a lieutenant-colonel and has been expelled from his anarchist party due to his inherent bourgeois tendencies. He is gay. He is keenly interested in Science Fiction, and he is to later open a bookstore trading in Asimov, Clarke and Lem, and promoting music such as the score from Stanley Kubrick's *2001*. In Dan's mind there is nothing peculiar about juggling one's stories according to one's immediate needs. There is nothing strange about lying, he claims. Everybody does it. Swiftly and gracefully, he moves through time, like a dancer barely touching the ground. Decades go by, never leaving any mark on Dan, emotionally or physically (223, 338). For quite a period of time, during their relationship, Annie assumes that even if their verbal communication is

somewhat awkward, what really matters presumably takes place in between the sheets:

> At first, when they had not yet exchanged a single personal word, he had often said things that made her feel uncertain. She had been unable to answer, but afterward had thought up a continuation. She found ingenious replies and it became a conversation. A kind of conversation.
>
> That didn't stop when they really started talking to each other. Not even when they became lovers. On the contrary. Nor when he distrusted her. He occasionally said she was playing with him, like a mother playing forbidden games with a son. But she never showed him it was serious ...
>
> Sometimes she thought she had some kind of fever. She was hot and heavy from going around carrying him inside her. Whenever they met, the fierce tensions in her slackened. That was happiness. Or, anyhow, freedom from torment. (103-104)

Eventually, Annie cannot but notice that Dan's stories ring false. She gradually detaches herself and slowly grows capable of engaging in self-reflection. The discovery that he has lied to her, and that she merely served as a means for him to realize a number of political ends brutally crushes her illusions. Planting the seeds of suspicion in her mind, Dan nevertheless also impregnates her. Thus, his killing off of Annie's illusions breaks the ground for a new life, that is, a new sense of reality to evolve.

# PART TWO

## When the juice of life seeps through the fractures in the self

### 1.0 SHATTERED SELVES AS PROVIDING THE MISSING PIECES ?

**Glass**

Contesting the celebration of the "artificial schizophrenic" found in mental institutions, James M. Glass points out that what Deleuze and Guattari, and other postmodern thinkers, overlook is the immense pain suffered by the individuals *living* this "ever shifting bricolage and blur " (*Shattered Selves* 13). It is one thing to philosophize about the deconstruction of identity, an entirely different matter to actually fall apart, he states. To listen to schizophrenics speak, is to hear stories of "hearts broken at very early stages in the psycho-developmental process" (*SS* xvi). If the sign-and-signifier relationship must remain open for playful deconstruction, human pain simply cannot really matter. One is lead to suspect, Glass says, that these thinkers have lost the ability to distinguish between textuality and real life experience. The self, accordingly, is transformed into a caricature, "a copy of a copy of what

exists around it " (*SS* 25-26). Far from refuting that the individual in general draws on his environment in his making of a self-image, Glass emphasizes that this is even more so in the case of mentally disturbed individuals. The psychotic, he specifies, simply cannot draw the line between his own desire and the unconscious needs and desires of others. 'Ruth' makes a case in point. Lucid enough in her perception of the nature of the demands made on her, 'Ruth' nevertheless is unable to detach herself from the other's intent :

> Papa threatened me if I misbehaved. "Ruthie, if you don't come here at once, I'll throw you in the pot and we'll cook you for dinner."
>
> A weird thing to say. Actually grotesque, since both my parents had been in concentration camps during the war.
>
> Being alive is such a burden. ( *Private Terror/Public Life* 65-70 )

Real selves that *live* out the imperatives of multiplicity have hardly anything in common with selves deconstructed in texts, Glass claims. It is therefore imperative that we learn to distinguish between the aims and methods of literary and philosophic criticism on the one hand, psychological needs and realities on the other hand. Somehow, the postmodernists in question, expect to have their cake and eat it too : a-historical selves and bricolage identities, still capable of carrying out complex tasks of organization, of sophisticated reflection, and of gaining control over their lives. But, to toy with a variety of roles differs considerably from being in possession of—or being possessed by--a de-centered identity. A *role*, Glass points out, differs from *identity* in that the former functions as a commentary on the latter. To be a multiple identity, on the other hand, is to live with a self that has no center, no sense of history and

to be unable to situate one's self in relation to the larger community. It is a an appalling mistake, he insists, to confuse multiple roles, interests, or tastes, with a multiple self. Far from inhabiting a broader slice of life, the multiple's scope is especially narrowed (*SS* 89).

> It's funny, [another of Glass' female multiple personalities muses]. The only thing Molly took from Russell when he died, the only possession, was his penknife...Elizabeth made small horizontal cuts over the inside of the wrist and on the inside of her arms and thighs...Isn't it strange ? For years, Molly had been terrified of that penknife ; all of us [alters] were, because we knew what Russell had done with it, how many animals he had cut, how many times during the rapes he flashed that knife in front of Molly's eyes.
>
> Isn't it odd—that what Molly chose to take from Russell after he died was his penknife, his instrument of torture ? ( *SS* 89)

It is not exactly obvious that the multiple subject is on to a particularly joyful track. Deleuze and Guattari's schizo-analysis is said to show us the way out of inherited value judgments, oppressive family structures, to affirm atheism and to encourage general displacement. However, their theory suffer the weakness of neglecting the fact that to be physically and emotionally nomadic, without going crazy, the subject must necessarily be in the position of a pretty strong ego structure (*SS* 134).

Simply to *function*, forget about revolting, within contemporary society, requires a high degree of subjective development. Capitalist organization requires efficiency on behalf of the subject, an ability to remain tuned in to externally imposed demands, an extraordinary ability to keep up appearances, as well as some rather well developed interpersonal skills. The schizophrenic, however, who frequently is terrorized by fear, paralyzed by ambivalence, or overwhelmed

by stimuli emerging from the inner, is prone to develop numerous compulsive rituals and private rules of interaction. Thus, the reality of psychological fragmentation is that the real world remains somewhere *else* and subjectivity always belong to some body else. The decentered individual therefore, has little opportunity to benefit from the possible advantages of what is experienced as a centrifugal existence (*SS* 19). The one thing he does *not* embody is a Deleuzian flow of desire. Thus, in response to the celebration of an anti-oedipal being, Glass points out, we are forced to pose the following questions : On what sources do these heroes draw in their fighting the revolutionary battle? On what are their visionary practice based? What are their ideas about how to realize their utopian conditions? And what about the rest of us, how are we going to join them. If we are not, what are we to make of the closed ranks of these societies of fluid Bodies without Organs? In other words, "How can persons who hallucinate, who live in fear, who refuse to speak, who are desperately afraid of other persons, who lack a sense of historical self, be in any way considered 'revolutionary'?!" Opening the floor for a subject for whom psychosis is reality, Glass leaves the postmodern thinker with food for thought : "That's what begins my psychotic episodes, little things, nothing more dramatic than trying to find a shirt," 'David' explains :

> It's like this huge problem overtakes you : moving toward the closet, opening the door, searching through the rack. Each step of the process is like climbing Mount Everest, so you say to yourself, " Why bother, let it be, stay with the one on your back." Little things are magnified a thousand times, and what happens inside your mind takes on much greater importance...You find yourself everywhere, and all your energy is spent trying to keep from dying....You lose all sense of yourself as a person among other persons...
>
> It's like all my cells are exploded over the universe, and I live in each of those millions and millions of nuclei shooting in every direction. In the midst of all this, how

> could I possibly deal with the concrete, even tie my shoelaces, much less find my shoes ? ( *SS* 36-37 )

Indeed, it is hard to imagine that a haunted individual like David would ever come to take part in a close ranked revolutionary movement. It is not that the schizophrenic and his fellow beings do not desire to participate in communal life, Glass emphasizes. Most tend to feel terribly downhearted by the fact that they are unable to do so. But any engagement with a consensual world involves the establishment of trusting relationships with other human beings. It implies the ability to see things from others' point of view, to be able to face up to disagreement, to be able to negotiate terms as well as to come to terms with acceptable compromises. "Even to begin to practice citizenship," Glass writes, "the self requires a sense of its humanness, its existence in a social world." The precondition for any kind of productive participation in social life is a sense of what it feels like to be alive, free, equal, in charge, to have rights as well as to participate in a shared world which is larger and different from one's inner reality. This is exactly where the schizophrenic falls short. Preoccupied with concealing for the rest of the world that he is in fact a monstrous animal, or maybe already dead, he has few resources left for intersubjective negotiation (*PT/PL* 3). To be delusional is to question one's existence. It is to perceive oneself as an object about to be destroyed. And it is about being internally dominated, seriously and fatally, as if by an external regime. Whether under torture from external secret forces or internal hidden powers, the self suffers a

loss of place and context ( *PT/PL* 5 ). No relief is to be had from acts of symbolization, in these cases. Words spoken and images described are experienced, not as linking the subject to reality, but rather as making up *acts* that threaten to destroy his world. Words cut into and through the flesh of the delusional individual, and make him acutely aware that he has no core.

Drawing a line between *illusion* and *delusion*, Glass argues that the former provides a cultural and social frame of reference. It is frequently collectively created and in consequence widely shared. "We can share a respect for illusory experience," he says, quoting Winnicott, "and if we wish we may collect together and form a group on the basis of the similarity of our illusory experience. This is a natural root of grouping among human beings " (*PT/PL* 117; Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*). Delusion, on the contrary, represents an "attack " on shared meanings and thus isolates the individual from the social. It is frantic and a-historical, the result of an escape from any sense of continuity. Delusional knowledge is characterized by refusal to acknowledge any kind of ambivalence, politically speaking mirroring authoritarianism. Hence, delusional concepts of power, Glass emphasizes, are not " those of sharing and cooperation ; what appears are images of domination, absolute sovereignty and command, force and control " ( *SS* xii-xviii ). Whereas illusion may serve transitional purposes, delusion entirely undermines trust and playfulness and arrests acts of invention . The very fact that Western philosophy has persistently refused to listen to these disruptive thoughts proves the point that 'we' fear the

potential power they may hold over us. So does the current tendency to package and promote mad living as a form of postmodern liberation. *Thinking* involves feeling in addition to cognition and analysis, Glass points out. And it cannot be categorically denied that these pre-categorical or pre-linguistic emotional factors, the unconscious or split-off self, have the greatest influence on how the adult self reasons (*PT/PL* 16-24, 122 ).

One of the more recent discoveries in research dealing with schizophrenia has revealed that against all prior presumptions, there is no such thing as a genuine pathological course of schizophrenia. The extent to which the individual recovers, greatly depends on whether or not he is capable of experiencing his life story as being meaningful. This, research shows, is intimately related to the individual's opportunity to relate normally to the extra-institutional environment. Schizophrenic subjects are thus no happy fools for whom disconnected action equals satisfaction. They deeply desire to see their life as making sense within a larger context. And they urgently wish to lead what may go under the label of an ordinary life. One of the few things the schizophrenic knows with certainty is that he neither needs nor wants to be turned into a model representing an alternative and exotic life style. The wish to be taken seriously by the main stream, and to gain recognition for what he is, is often so out of touch with reality that the subject indeed goes off the wall to get it. Quoting 'Ruth' :

> I would be God's favorite ; then everyone would love me, [she says]. But it didn't turn out that way, I worked hard, but the numbness kept increasing...I even had the thought of offering myself to a local hospital as a subject for special surgical

> experiments designed to improve on the human body, anything, surgery, whatever, to make me more perfect...Would a human being do what I was doing...
>
> When I was a kid, I lay awake at night thinking about physically disfiguring things. Somebody broke my body into bits and fragments. Or they tied weights onto my severed limbs and threw them into the Ohio River. (Glass, *PT/PL* 77-78)

At other times the almost violent urge to belong somewhere in particular is expressed in more subdued, but no less desperate terms.

> Whose body do I live in ? [ a psychotic subject asks].
> ( McDougall, *Many Faces of Eros* 88)

> We all want to get out of this place and go home...
> But we haven't all got homes to go to...
> ( Barham, *Schizophrenia and Human Value* 128)

Clinically speaking, the picture of the disordered subject's prospects is stark and forbidding. To live as a borderline personality, to undergo psychotic breakdowns, to lose one self to psychotic terror, or, to have to deal with multiple personalities, is excruciating. No one voluntarily chooses to "lose their mind." As an experience it could not be farther from the hallucinogenic or mystical experience of reaching a *higher* or more *transcendent* reality, of taking the self out of time and space (temporarily) as is often mis-associated with schizophrenia (*SS* 151). If, in diagnostic terms, it may give a far from accurate picture to classify the various disorders, as is done below, it may nevertheless serve to clarify what some of the misconceptions aired in postmodern circles are about. A great number, it turns out, are explicable by the fact that mental disorders of all sorts are conceived of as belonging to more or less the same stock.

The *borderliner* is as a rule tormented by feelings of inferiority, shame, inner emptiness and social isolation. Unable to tolerate ambiguity, and incapable

of considering a partial success as anything but a humiliating failure, he walks a thin line : Unless he is perfectly right and superior in comparison with others, he must be absolutely wrong and unworthy of life. His all-or-nothing attitude reflects a fragile inner structure and a self for whom flexibility is inconceivable. Compassion, it may go without saying, does not come easily for this subject, neither as far as his own weaknesses, nor the shortcomings of others are concerned (*SS* 120). The world, as perceived from the point of view of this subject, is incoherent and inconsistent. It is at best a risky place to fare, at worst a death trap just waiting to snap.

*Psychotic* consciousness is characterized by a depleted, crippled core, an a-historicity dominated by delusional projections and fears of imminent annihilation. The inner worlds lacks coherence and credibility to the effect that *being* often has been renounced. Struggling to preserve the few frail remainders of his cut off inner self, the psychotic dreads any kind of contact with the exterior world. Most interaction is experienced as being potentially invasive, destructive and annihilating (*SS* 40). Operating as if in a vacuum, excluding reality, the psychotic is somewhat at a loss as regards distinguishing between a reality experience, a symbolic representation, and the work of the imagination. Mind and emotions, words and physical perception tend to merge. " In psychosis truth moves from the space of the word to the body itself, " Glass explains. "The body becomes text " ( *SS* 21). *Written on the body*, a contemporary culture

critical catch phrase, literally speaking means itched, ripped, torn apart and cut open, when experienced by a psychotic subject.

> Staff cut you up into pieces or they take dead pieces from the people and stuff a brain into it, [says 'Chuck,' diagnosed as psychotic]. You can do all kinds of things with body parts; I live for pain. Last night in my sleep, staff cut off my head with a chain saw, a small one because my neck is not so big. It went zip and my head fell off, just like that. It didn't bleed too much but dropped right off and then grew back. (Glass, *PT/PL* 129)

To be *schizophrenic* is to live with a self that has imploded. Series of disconnected fragments of experience, none of which adds up to any one persona or personality, occupies the subject's inner. Embedded in delusional projections, barring any kind of 'reality check,' the schizophrenic is prevented from participating in consensual interaction. Hallucinating, living with a chronic fear, desperately afraid of human contact, confused by the constant emergence and dissolution of boundaries, and unable to communicate by ordinary symbolic means, he is a miserable loner (*SS* 135). Inclined to cling (as if) for his life, to rigid rules, rituals, and systems of signification that are inaccessible to others, his battle is condemned to being a solitary 'private language' affair. There is not much of a revolutionary hero in this subject. His wildest dream is simply... to get a life.

> How do I become a person ? Maybe I should change my eyes, [a schizophrenic subject reflects], or move them differently or get new arms and toes. Do you know where I can buy them ?...Why don't you let me live inside your skin ; I can make myself real small in crawl right on in. (Glass, *SS* 148)
>
> They're using gas on us in here you know...I don't know, you get to the point where you think 'oh, have I hurt his feelings or has he hurt my feelings ?' (Barham, *SHV* 112-114 )

The individual sitting around for hours, unable to utter a word—out of fear it might be the pass-word to Hell—or, pacing the same old circles over and over--so as not to "cross the line" and trigger murderous forces, the individual who dare not drink the tap water because of its content of acid, or receive commands from outer space, makes up a pathetic model of " resistance." Struggling to cope with a disintegrated emotional structure, his consciousness is lost to the world. Hooked up to machines, his awareness journeys into outer space. It is experienced as being interconnected with cosmic forces, as being part of the animal world, of having been appropriated by some hostile other. Lost in time and space, the subject may feel either peculiarly unborn, or, "three thousand years old" and ancient like a "mummy without flesh, just rotten stuff over my bones" (*PT/PL* 57 ; *SS* 137, 147). Others are so beside themselves that they worry their body has been displaced outside the soul and must be returned by some body else, the catch being that this helper might be a serial killer in disguise. Everybody expresses concern that their soulful substance may evaporate, leak out, seep away.

> No one understood why I refused to shower, [says 'David']. It was like having my skin washed of. Clothes became my skin and when staff took them off, I felt my skin begin pulled apart. Taking a shower terrified me ; it stripped me of my dignity or what remained of it. The dirt showed me I was alive ; it extended my flesh, my skin. Being in the shower, then, was like finding myself in an acid bath, my skin burning off, taking bits and pieces of me down the drain...[T]he longer I stayed in the stall, the more of my identity would dissolve down the drain. ( *PT/PL* 132).

To be a *multiple personality* is to live in utter confusion. The multiple subject contain a series of personas but none of them define the individual's

being, and most of them are mutually exclusive. "How can I ever know who I am, if whoever I am is one of the many inside of me?...I have no memory of any alter ever being out," a female multiple personality states (*SS* 49 ). Each "alter" is born during specifically trying circumstances and remains in a fixed and frozen association with that particular frame of mind. To be multiple is thus to harbor a chaotic series of separate personas that can neither learn from experience nor connect with each other. History never adds up to anything and one's moves make very little sense. Inhabiting an over crowded world, the multiple inevitably suffers excessive isolation. Most forms of intercourse is associated with disappointment and pain. "Why even relate to people since all they want to do anyway is steal part of yourself," a 'multiple' exclaims with despair. "Why subject yourself to that kind of pain ?" ( *SS* 32 ). In as much as he suffers from having too many "selves," the multiple worries that the one his *real* self (at the moment) is going to meet rejection. To suggest that the subject may derive certain pleasure from such a genuine de-centering, as some thinkers do, is utterly naive, if not simply cruel. The multiplicity of identity or personality, Glass concludes, cannot ever be viewed as an expression of a playful and fun-loving personality. " It is a commentary on some of the most pathological aspects of a deranged modernity that idealizes paternal authority and the violent imposition of power"(*SS* 60).

> I didn't want to be a symbol for anything, [as 'Ruth' puts it]. I just wanted to live...How could anyone who saw themselves as worthless, as a stinking evil thing, a creature from another world, ever experience anything like innocence ? ( *PT/PL* 80)

What is worthwhile keeping in mind about psychosis and multiple personality, is the extent to which "otherness" has come to be defined through an extensive abuse of power. For the psychotic, "otherness" is experienced in form of delusional persecution. In cases of severe dissociative disorders, the etiologically motivating factor is often paternal abuse, rape, and thus nameless terror. The fact that these conditions originate in soul violence, if not murder, of various sorts, ought to encourage us to reconsider what revolutionary purpose the mentally ill is supposed to serve (*SS* 54). Postmodernist notions of the *Body without Organs* reject boundary stability, historicity, and any kind of coherence of self. This very de-centering of the self exemplified most strikingly by the very human beings who suffer the most : women, in particular, who have been subjected to and brutalized by patriarchal domination. Unable to figure out where their selves end and others' begin, without any sense of historical continuity, no ability to rest in their own skin, these subjects are genuinely lost and dispossessed. Wandering aimlessly in the margins of a world in which the find no self-reflection, they are placeless, displaced, always out of place ( *SS* 54).

Values, norms and practices created by human beings inevitably produce systems and dynamics of power. Power is not a disembodied force which appears independently of the social. It is an extension, if not a projection of what is collectively human, for better and for worse (*SS* 128). When the abuse of power is knowingly accepted we have the clearest indication that the collective is at fault. That the collective, in other words suffer from feelings of powerlessness. If

multiplicity of self in many cases derives from a paternal domination, if it is the result of abuse of authority and power, then it must be said to originate in the most debilitating endgames of a corrupt culture. Name it modernity or postmodernity. That is the very paradox of postmodern philosophical celebrations of mental fragmentation : Postmodernism as a philosophy worships a form of human experience which, in its most vivid representations, derives from the most sinister aspects of what has gone wrong in our society (*SS* 98). The real sickness, Glass argues, lies in paternalistic and derogatory assumptions about women, their bodies, and humanity in general. "What sense can it possibly make to idealize a form of human experience whose most dramatic etiology lies in some of the most perverse representations of human desire?" (*SS* 99).

Power has habitually been considered a repressive and thus a negative force. Even if Foucault paints a slightly more ambiguous picture, by showing that the most efficient power works not by repression and force but rather by means of coercion and encouragement, the bottom line remains that power is an evil to be overcome. But must we not distinguish between *use* and *abuse* of power, asks Glass ? The question remains, if the 'madmen' in our midst are neither to be transformed into involuntary heroes not to be dismissed from the social, how is the 'disorder' they present to be integrated into our models of subjectivity ?

Foucault tends to view all kinds of confinement in a repressive light. But that is not necessarily so, Glass argues. The subject who feels compelled to

repeatedly cut himself, is obsessed with suicide, torture, razor blades, and who experience himself as sub-human and as possessing animal-like features, is unlikely to be a good citizen. For the mentally ill individual, whose strongest wish is to come to lead an ordinary family life, temporary confinement, may function as temporary containment, as a space within which the subject can acquire the skills to climb out of his despair. To undergo treatment in an asylum may be what is required for an individual to become able to take part in public life. Thus, the minor, artificial community created within an institution, often serves as the kind of adult holding environment the disturbed and insecure subject needs. Functioning as a circle within a circle, it enables him to gradually become involved with transitional objects, to move into the transitory zone between inner fantasy outer reality, and thus to learn to distinguish between interior and exterior reality (*PT/PL* 94). For some subjects what is needed the most, is to practice having a sense of control over their life. A project which admittedly may cause trouble in cases of a seriously compulsive character. For some, Glass explains, a razor may function as transitional object in Winnicott' sense, as a means to bridge the gap between psychotic imprisonment and social engagement. Possessing the means to self-annihilation provides some sort of relief for individuals for whom social interaction is a dreaded trial. A stable and yet flexible sense of self emerges from a recognition of and ability to accept similarity and difference. Thus, for these individuals, an intermediate station and step is paramount. Which is not at all to say that the

goal is to produce an assembly line of equally conventional level headed individuals. The aim, must be, to summarize Glass's stance, to provide the conditions for human beings, of all dispositions, to (re)gain their voice and to become capable of contributing to the creation of the social, on individually agreeable terms.

> We used to have values once that were worth working for,['Arthur' says] But nowadays they're open to doubt. If you don't have something to believe in you just don't feel like going out and working...It all depends on how much people value their selves...I think that people should be livelier than they are. They should be stronger, fitter, brighter, have more inspiration you know. ( Barham, *SHV* 123-125).

Following Jameson's theory, the schizophrenic ground tone coloring our age is a reason for worry simply because it undermines all alliance formation, and ultimately sabotages the struggle for a healthier and happier society. The loner, predictably enough, is unlikely to take much interest in getting to know him self, grow capable of feeling compassion with others, and to desire to contribute to collective improvements. Recently, Kristeva suggests, our sense of vulnerability as human beings, and the aggressiveness it produces, has met a dangerous match in our social conditions. When toying with murderous feelings inside, and meeting a similarly bloody picture in the outside, no opportunity for sanity seems left. It is a psychotic condition in that inner darkness and outer evil merge. One way or another, she says, if we are to recover our humanity and survive as civilized beings, we must learn to distinguish between inner reality and outer fantasy. In her view, the solution lies in contemporary subjects' re-learning to represent meaningfully. Late Capitalism, as seen in the light of

Jameson and Kristeva's theory, has stretched the envelope to the breaking point. If there is any hope for improved awareness and redemption it consists in the following possibility : It may have grown sufficiently impossible to perceive one self as a human being under the given circumstances. Being driven up the collapsing walls of postmodern society, by the flow and groundlessness of contemporary culture, we may finally come to our senses, and recognize that we must relearn to operate with distance, difference, and similarity, that we must acquire the ability to speak compatible and yet flexible tongues. Whereas the world seems to be in the process of closing in on and suffocating humanity, in Jameson's and Kristeva's view, Deleuze and Guattari see an entirely new vista of unexplored sensation and meaning formation opening up. What is "schizo" about recent society is the fact that nothing means anything in particular any more, that everything is up for grabs, that our selves can be reinvented from one moment to another. Time and spacelessness, regardless of the dizziness they produce, serve as an invitation to take the plunge. To even dream of re-entering the symbolic, as Jameson and Kristeva advocates, is—paradoxically—an expression of pure institutionalized insanity, in Deleuze and Guattari's eyes. Jameson and Kristeva have as yet to make the larger connection : to make the leap into life *lived*, rather than life as categorized, analyzed and desensitized. It may seem seductive. Making the leap into virgin territories is after all more exciting than trying to make do with already exhausted fields. Still, Deleuze and Guattari's "schizo" concept is derailed. Paradoxically, while aiming at

elevating "schizo" mentality to a heroic quest, in the name of a fuller life practice, Deleuze and Guattari altogether overlook the lessons to be learned from the clinically diagnosed schizophrenic. As Glass points out, trying to make the schizophrenic serve purposes of liberation as conceived of from a non-pathological—slightly bored—frame of mind, is not fair game. It is to do a disservice to the clinically ill as well as the part of main stream population in search of a viable alternative. Distorting and importing schizophrenic delusion into this field, and introducing it as an optional alternative, results in little more than a reproduction of the mentally ill's slippery grip on reality. Moving onto shakier grounds is not necessarily a means to expanding one's horizon. Lingis, finally, regardless of the fact that he too tends to paint a somewhat rosy picture of the "schizo," is on to something by providing the useful notion of the expansion of one's self and the incorporation of otherness via a greater physical, psychical, and phenomenological acknowledgment of one's embeddedness in commonality on the one hand, distinctiveness on the other hand. Contrary to Deleuze and Guattari, he puts emphasis on an experience of "the end." No matter how hooked on to machinery and virtual reality we grow, in the end, we are still mortal. Kristeva suggests that we must learn to come to terms with the evil in our selves. Lingis' proposal my be rephrased in this way : so as to overcome our sense of never living sufficiently fully, of being prevented by others from coming into our own unique being, of resenting the world for producing such a vast amount of pain, we must dare to get in touch

with the aspects of the " monster " that are soft, vulnerable, open for fatal blows. Touching " him " is the means to get moved our selves. Is the means to move on. Is the means to derive the most from the fact that life has limitations of its own.

## Fishy Fantasying. *BLACKWATER*

Birger, the provincial Blackwater doctor, is middle aged, overweight, wears sandals and is estranged from his wife, Barbro, the newborn environmentalist. Powerless and impotent in his attempts at relieving the suffering of his fellow beings, Birger has resigned to over-prescribing sleep medication and anti-depressants. Still, over and over he asks his patients how they sleep. Those for whom true rest remains impossible, he somehow suspects, lead a dimly lit existence. Their inner darkness and ultimate death remain overshadowed and unreal, as do their own sources of vitality and the gift of life. Never fully convinced that they are actually alive, Birger's patients grow exceedingly preoccupied with warding off disease, unease, and death. A lot are hypochondriacs. Eventually, he cannot but notice that no medication works better than the sharing of supposedly secret gossip. Spurred curiosity, he senses, revitalizes the patient's desire to expand his horizon and thus to embrace human life.

At the time of the Lobber killings, Birger is of the impression that the increasing violence in the community is due to people's inability to listen, to their own needs as well as the needs of others. Fear, guilt, and conscience, believes, prevent these villagers from getting in touch with their wildest dreams and worst fears. When in the aftermath of the event, tourists stream to the site, as if attracted by magnetism, Birger understands that curiosity and the desire to feel make up two sides of the same coin. Having no particular interest in finding out about the morbid details related to the crime, these people are driven by the wish, for once, to feel. Birger too, no matter the implications, "wanted to feel all the same." Yet, the insight into the dynamics keeping in order the community precedes Birger's understanding of the decline of his own marriage. His entire life Birger has been terrified of "true, profound humiliation." When it finally happens, he responds automatically by (almost) raping his wife. Shocked beyond his wits, Birger is compelled to face up to the feelings that have kept him and Barbro together--and driven them apart--for so long. Both of them have lived a lie, he recognizes, a lie of the sort that distorts self-awareness. Not all lies do, as the trick he pulls on the ailing teacher serves to indicate. The challenge lying ahead of Birger is to learn to tell the difference between the two. Words in themselves, it turns out, serve as unreliable guidelines :

> [Birger] slowly drained the last of his drink. The liquor was very diluted, the ice melted. Then he went up to the bedroom and stood outside the door, actually fearful...
>
> Then he opened the door and she sat up suddenly as if she, too, were frightened. Her face was pale in the night light...

Did she think he should have knocked ? Had yet another displacement taken place without his noticing ?

" This is my fault, too, Barbro," he said.

And realized at once what a stupid thing it had been to say.

" I mean, I know it's my fault."

She stared at him, her eyes quite black ; the pupils must have been enormously enlarged. Her mouth was tightly shut and colorless. He realized he couldn't tell her. What should he say ?...

He had really thought he was going to do it. Then the moment when it was at least possible had gone. She twisted round, lay down with her back to him, her body still under the covers, her face invisible.

Then he did the hell of a stupid thing... He ran his lips over her hair and forehead, felt the knitted eyebrows, sought her mouth, and at that moment her arms shot out and she pushed him away, making a sound like a groan or a grunt... Then came the true, profound humiliation. He knew he had been frightened of this all his life. In one way or another... She didn't move.

Talking crap about the forest and the river and the guilt of the West. I have double chin and sandals. That's all. Stomach, belly. That's it. (112)

He lied to the teacher in Tuviken and said he wanted to be passing on his way to a nearby call. She wanted to know where and her curiosity stabilized her heart better than the quinine...

He would be home again in less than an hour, and Barbro would be lying in the bed he was to lie in. That was why he was driving through forests and marshlands, driving without noticing the scents of the harsh damp.

Everyday his conscience tormented him over what had happened, though she still didn't believe him. It had been happening for a long time and still nothing had been said about it. But her was certain of inevitable misfortune. Necrosis.

He was driving too fast along a narrow dirt road that often ran alongside lakes sliced through by the wash behind divers and goldeneyes. The dark waters by the shores were as glossy as metal and there were the reflections above the depths in the middle of the lakes, some *pinkish like skin with blood running through it*, others shimmering blue like the whites of children's eyes. Under the anesthetic of speed, he had emotions. But they were not *pure*...

" I'll be away for a while,"she said. "I must think this over. You can understand that."

Think this over, but she didn't say what. He was angry though he had no right to be. That morning he had been awoken by the alarm clock after a couple of hours' sleep. Then he had been furious and felt at the same time a deep, pure longing for her. But once he was properly awake and had got up, he no longer had any pure feelings. He felt shame more than anything else...

" You never say anything."No. What should he have said ?

We've always been like this. You've said what had to be said, Barbro. You've been articulate. Not in a facile way either. You've really thought things through. Emotionally. Politically. Or near enough. (150-155, emphasis added)

Once rejected and abandoned by his wife, Birger's initial reaction is to try to preserve the picture of the past, as designed by Barbro. His efforts soon prove to be half-hearted, however, and thus they are ultimately in vain :

> Barbro had said she didn't want to take anything from the house as long as Tomas, [their son], was living there. He had a right to live in his environment. She didn't say his home...
>
> Only white flowers were supposed to be in the living room, or green leaves and grasses in glass vases. He bought a white cyclamen, but it died. Overwatering, said the cleaning lady who came in nowadays...
>
> ... he had to accept the cleaner, though the result was not what he had hoped for... [S]ome materials didn't like water, even he realized that. He looked at the delicate silky surfaces of birchwood and wondered whether they had dulled. He wanted to keep the beauty of the living room. The glass birds in the window, their slight hovering movements when he walked across the floorboards, now a hundred and fifty years old but fresh and polished to dull sheen.
>
> He found our that glass was difficult to keep clean. Water-spotted Finnish Littala vases with yellowish chalky rings on them appeared. The cleaner broke one of the glasses with spiral stems... She must have realized they were expensive, because the next time they met she said, "No one could drink out of them anyhow »...
>
> The seven glasses were twisted like flowers reaching out for the light.
>
> " No, you can't drink out of them," was all he said, and he found he was afraid of her. (169-170)

Relinguishing the aim to keep intact the interior of his home, Birger grows frantically preoccupied with restoring the facade of the house. While focusing on the "elaborate lattice work he thought gave the big house its character," he manages to avoid human company. No matter his efforts at restoring the decor, however, his own appearance begins to crack. Long gone and repressed feelings resurface. Images and imagery interfere with his attempt at " thinking things through."

> It was really so simple. He wanted to be left in peace. He wanted a place where he could be absolutely on his own. Not have any comments. No one looking in. No talk about what it looked like at the doctor's...
>
> But in the long run he couldn't avoid noticing that his life was falling apart. He thought about flesh putrefying. Something grayish-white. Salt ling fish soaking. An absurd image he had long had. (170)

Following the departure of his wife, Birger is alone, isolated and under the sway of unprocessed loss. He proceeds by maintaining a mechanical and ritualistic daily rhythm. "I keep [my home] in order," he tells a police officer,

" and I cook dinner every day. I'm living kind of... under a glass dome. Palpating people's bellies and groins but not talking to them"(201).

The break up of his own marriage brings to the fore memories of his parents' relationship. His mother had been of a wealthy background, his father of less affluent origins. He spent his entire married life punishing his wife for her social superiority. Knowing no limits and finding no reasonable outlet for his resentment, Birger's father's hatred came to expression in terms of political extremism and wife battering. "Your father has a strong character," Birger's mother would say. " He had been dead for fifteen years then. But she remembered the rapes, of course... Still, she bothered with the euphemism so as not to humiliate herself "(213).

Unable to concentrate on his lattice work or duties as a professional healer, Birger keeps returning to the Lobber case. His curiosity has been spurred. Regardless of his telling himself that it is "to no purpose," there is nothing he can do to avoid getting all-absorbed by the investigation (205). When cast under suspicion by the police, Birger's bubble finally bursts :

> It was one of those absurd, far-fetched reasons that lay behind every village hostility, manufactured according to the pattern as complicated as crochhet work. Yes, absurd to the point of childishness, almost imaginary. But the hatred was real. (214)

## 2.0 THE SPICE OF LIFE, THE PRICE OF SENSIBILITY ?

It is far from coincidental that an *Anthropology of the Senses* saw the light of the day at approximately the same time as the interest around emotional

and bodily disassociation surged, that is in the course of the 1980s. While postmodern thinkers pondered the implications of meta-explanatory dissolution and culture critics wondered about whether to locate the body in the text or the other way around, anthropologists began to question the nature of the exchange when trying to get under the skin of an *other* human being. "'Tasteful ethnography' revives the concept of 'ingestion,'" explains Stoller. "It extends physical tasting to mental tasting, and that is to the savoring of the world of the other"(*Taste of Wthnographic Things* 32). The new ground being broken here, reveald to the field worker that, in so far as the object is considered "foreign," the tendency is for the interpreter to stay affectively un-unvolved. Real "reading" it was proposed, requires that the interpreter strive to put himself—physically, emotionally and sensorially—in the place oft he other, without pretending that his background coincides with that of the other. This was certainly no pastime entertainment motivated by academic ennui. " Indeed," Howes puts it bluntly, "If we do not 'come to our senses' soon, we will have permanently forfeited the chance of constructing meaningful alternatives to the pseudo-existence which passes for life in our current 'Civilization of the Image'"(*Varieties of Sensory Experience* 4).

Neither a first attempt at moving beyond reductive structuralist anthropology, nor the only endeavor at developing a model of interpretation taking into account the field worker's presence, not to mention preconceptions, Sensory Anthropology came to function as the forerunner for

the innovation of a less intellectualizing approach. Clifford Geertz a long time ago proposed that we read cultures as texts. Still, his theory reproduced the lack of interaction, dialogue and negotiation so typical of earlier anthropology. Out of the shortcomings of his model arose *Dialogical Anthropology.* However, as demonstrated by George Devereux , dialectical encounters, more often than not, reinforce rather than reveal private transferential truths. Clearly, more than the spoken word, the acknowledged gesture, and the conscious exchange of information, enter into the picture whenever a venture into the field of an other takes place (Howes, *VSE* 3-25). Ultimately, the *mapping* of other cultures, for which structuralist anthropology is so well known, began to be replaced by an entirely different attitude : The desire to learn to make sense of cultures, not as much by understanding and explaining them as by allowing these to appeal, disrupt, unsettle our sensory repertoire. A move like this required courage and an open-mindedness previously unheard of. It was encouraged by a particular discovery : The savage, traditionally assumed to function differently from literate man, turned out to function similarly in the most fundamental ways. Thus, if, as it seems, the cross cultural spectra is characterized by human resemblance rather than incompatibility, then there is no longer any reason not to cross borders and immerse oneself in the wilderness. The recognition that civilized and savage man are more or less in the same boat triggered a plethora of questions. If others can think in sound (as the Songhay do) Howes asks, cannot we too

develop a finer tuned car ? If some can think in terms of touch, is it not feasible to think in terms of taste ? *(VSE 10 )*. If some communities can function on the basis of individual and collective fluids, why then should not we be able to soften up our inter-actional patterns ?

Diane Ackerman, Constance Classen, David Howes, and Paul Stoller dove in, and as a result came up with a large number of contributions to a sensory approach to cultural interpretation. Classen and Ackerman thoroughly demonstrate that we never plunge innocently, and as if born anew, into a foreign sensory order. Depending on the context within which we have been brought up, our sensory faculties are organized according to the *paradigms* accepted within our culture. These, in turn, determine the extent to which we can allow our senses to be pervaded and persuaded by other frames of mind. Each culture thus offers modes of existence and models of knowledge, particular to its time, space, and climactical framework (*Aroma* 10). Adding a twist to this model, Howes emphasizes the role of the *dynamics* of a given paradigm. Supposing that different forms of reasoning, memory and attention may exist for *each* of the modalities or faculties of consciousness, he reflects, then we may have to conceive of cultural contexts in terms of the distinctive patterns to the *interplay* of the senses they represent. More specifically, we may have to ask " What is the impact of other 'sensory ratios' on the life of the mind and the emotions ? What is the relation of the hierarchy of the senses to the social hierarchy, or relation between the sexes'? How does the sensory

order relate to the social and symbolic order ?"(*VSE* 3-25). Further complicating the matter, Howes suggests, with reference to the work of Mallory Wober, that there is no reason to assume that individuals exhibit a similar degree of psychological differentiation in all domains (*VSE* 167-192 ; 257-289). Under any circumstance, Howes maintains, there need not at all be any straightforward relationship between one sensory patterning or another, epistemologies and ontologies. Even if any such relationship were to be consistent within one gender group, it is by no means certain that it would be equally as consistent for the other gender, and so forth. Thus, we must avoid the temptation to reduce or translate sensory paradigms into epistemological models.

Regardless of the unlimited possible differences within a given cultural setting, Classen's position leads her to assume that we are tied quietly, imperceptible, but ever so strongly, to our fellow beings by the ways in which our gustatory, olfactory, tactile, and other sensations are patterned ("Sensory Orders" 47-61 ). Using in *Aroma* as an example the perception of smell, Classen argues that its major impact lies not in the sensation triggered by the odor itself, as much as in the emotional experience and the social space it evokes. Anchoring our being socially, culturally and ontologically, it creates a profound sense of belonging. Fooling around with our senses is simply no subjectively beneficial adventure. The reaction exhibited by individuals who are unexpectedly transferred from their habitual environment supports her

point: Finding it difficult to adapt to the new and foreign context these subjects quickly develop an obsessive need for order, a need they cannot resist imposing on their immediate environment. Habits, involving our sensory repertoire, thus make us feel at ease in our own skin. They give us a sense of having arrived home.

Significantly, Classen's research shows that whereas sensory isolation and deprivation lead to irreversible intellectual and emotional retardation, it results in no slackening of the senses. Lack of sensory stimulation, somewhat unexpectedly, appear to produce hyper-sensitivity. Thus, for individuals who have suffered sensory deprivation over a longer period of time--even more so if during the formative years—" getting back to their senses" is bound to be a painful awakening. Painful, at times, to the extent that supposedly pleasurable excitements are experienced as hurtful and repulsive. Ackerman's slightly different take on the matter expands Classen's view in various ways. Our senses, Ackerman claims, "define the edge of consciousness." Even if they do break with and go beyond, they also delimit and give shape to what is perceptible and conceivable (*A Natural History of the Senses* xv). Making up the texture of our being, they make life come sensibly together, not by making us respond knee-jerk mechanically to real life stimuli, but rather by tearing apart reality as we know and anticipate it, and thus initiating a reassembling of it into a personally, sensory meaningful pattern *(NHS* xvii ). Specific odors thus evolve over time and come to be

identified with specific moods, stages of development, life expectations and opportunities. Even something as impossible to boil down and pinpoint as flavor and degree of self esteem has its own smell *(NHS* 37). Evidently, Ackerman acknowledges, this is one of the red flags we have been socialized not to receive, and thus we tend to miss the signals no matter how loudly they speak. After all, hardly anyone in this world, would want to wear his sense of self (or lack of the same) on his sleeve at all times. To be "out of one's senses" is to be " beside one self," that is, detached from one's body and out of touch with one's core of experience (*NHS* xviii ).

Our survival may not depend on, for instance, our ability to smell. But when deprived of it we feel lost and out of touch. Due to the intricate connection between smell and memory, when significant odors fade right under our nose, so do our memories of the past *(NHS* 40-43). As a side effect of the loss of this living connections smell-disordered individual as a rule also suffers a weakened sex drive. " What is a sense of one's self ?"Ackerman asks. " To a large extent, it has to do with touch, with how we feel. Our proprieceptors... keep us informed about where we are in space... what we feel like from moment to moment"(*NHS* 95). Still, as opposed to the scholarly emphasis on the subtler and more sensitive sides of our self, what we repeatedly hear from within the public arena is an entirely different tone : " Do not touch the exhibit !" Touch, in North-American society intimately associated with infantilism as it is, is associated with lack of sophistication

(Howes and Classen, *VSE* 265-70). Touching is primitive, motherly, immature. Smelling even more so.

Odors, Ackerman shows, having suffered a fate similar to that of touch, in our part of the world, has been neglected to the advantage of a *management* of smell. Contrary to visual appearance, odors leak an individual's inner truth, something we would rather keep to our selves. In natural form, smell is uncontrollable, respects no boundaries, accepts no hierarchies, and knows no mercy. Impossible to contain smells mix and merge in a disorderly fashion, entirely at odds with a modern world view based on causality, linearity, and segregation of various elements (*Aroma* 89). The urge to distance one self from naturally emerging odors, Classen argues, was in modern society based on the assumption that the lower classes smell. "No feeling of like or dislike is quite so fundamental as a physical feeling," she states. Any kind of moral distaste can be overcome, with the exception of one : physical repulsion. Class distinction was upheld by the frail stomach and sensitized noses of upper class individuals. Modern management of smell broke with the ancient world's view of perfume, food, and medicine as indispensable for the maintenance of a balanced life. Until the 19th century it made up a key ingredient on the list of health restoring means. Following this point in time, it came to serve as a class and sex -distinguishing means (*Aroma* 84). Natural smells were associated with social inferiority, lack of civility and sexual immaturity. Granted, perfume were to make women more attractive

and alluring. It goes without saying, however, that "*no sensible* person would wear such nonsense"*(Aroma* 163). Turning increasingly illiterate, as olfactory perception regards, the Western world arrived at the mid-20th century at a point of all round ignorance. Not even to anthropologists working in the field, did it occur that olfactory cultural differences may play a part in the development of cultural meaning *(Aroma* 92). With the evolution of modern society into postmodernity, finally, smell became a matter of engineering : simulated fragrances were developed according to our dreams of reality, to the extent that they came to outshine it. The replica, selling better, due to its greater exuberance and fuller taste, is ironically perceived as being closer to the original flavor. If in the past smells were indicative of the essential worth of their origin, however, today synthetic scents are evocative of things no longer there, of presence characterized by its absence. " Smoke without a fire," these olfactory traces refer to nothing other than a fantasy of a more substantial reality. Smell, in a postmodern sense of the term therefore, is about recovering or recreating a history and an identity, a world, from which one has already been irrevocably estranged. "Our contemporary craving for larger-than-life flavor is reminiscent of the medieval appetite for spices," concludes Classen :

> While spices brought medievals a taste of Eden, however, artificial flavors are reminiscent rather of *Disneyland*, a synthetic paradise of consumer *delights... Coca-Cola* with its undeniably artificial flavor, is paraded as 'the real thing.' *Coke* is not a real thing in that it is not natural. *Coke* is an artificial thing. None the less, in that the reality of our world is increasingly defined and created for us by artifice.... *Coca-Cola* is real ... *Coca-Cola* is able to represent the new, infinitely desirable, imagineered reality, with no tattered shreds of the shabby old reality clinging to it. (*Aroma* 204-5)

Paradoxically, in as much as we struggle to distinguish our selves from nature, we concurrently strive to get closer to our origins. One urge takes us deeper into the managed technology of civilization, the other brings us right back onto the track of primitivism. *Musk by English Leather* is one out of many products making its profit from postulating a bridge where only a gap exists. *Musk*, it is advertised, provides " the missing link between animal and man"*(Aroma* 187). Man, it seems, oozes English superiority and imperialism, all the while remaining fitted for a battle in the jungle. Herbal scents, fifteen years ago associated with "weirdoes" believing in folk medicine and midwifery tricks, today exude contemporary sensibility and effortless harmony with nature (Jellinek, ref. to by Classen, *Aroma* 195).

Sensory Anthropology's hypothesis, that culture patterns our sensory repertoire--and that bereft of any such patterning we loose ourselves--is supported by recent research in the field of *Human and Animal Ethology.* Here the conclusion has recently been reached that the commonly held antithesis Nature/Culture ; Innate/Acquired skills, no longer stands. "Every biological character, whether it be morphological, physiological, or behavioral," John Bowlby says, "is a product of the interaction of genetic endowment with environment. Terms like innate and acquired must therefore be cast into limbo and a new terminology employed" (*Attachment and Loss* 1:

38). Flexible psychic and somatic systems are required for our survival in a constantly evolving world, he maintains. Yet, no system can possibly be so flexible that it suits all and every environment. A certain degree of environmental stability along with individual continuity is a prerequisite for our survival (*AL* 1: 54).

Distinguishing between innate and learned behavior, Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt explains that in the case of the former, it refers to properties present, though not necessarily developed, at birth. The nervous system is predisposed to be wired in a great number of ways, he says, only some of which are actually realized, depending on the makeup of the environment and the character of the interaction between subject and environment (*Human Ethology* 19). This pre-wiring, made up of *templates,* permits incoming signals to be compared with some built-in reference patterns, an a priori knowledge about expected behavior, and thus to influence one's adaptive behavior. The tabula rasa infant, viewed from within this model, is nothing but a product of the fantasy (*HE* 66, 85). Our perception generally organizes incoming sensory data so that we perceive wholes rather than isolated parts, and our perception tends toward the simplest form, also called *Pragnanz.* Out of a mass of unordered, irregular formations we recognize regularities simply because of their regularity and order. Thus, children automatically arrange blocks of color, or figures of various shapes in some sort of order. Regardless of the disorder of the environment into which we arrive, Eibl-Eibesfeldt

maintains, man automatically tries to create order, even where none exists, an order more or less congruent with his physiological and psychological expectations. Gestalt psychology further demonstrates that we automatically assume a depth perspective on the world as well as we take for granted the light comes from above, darkness signaling the below and grounded. Still, these expectations do to a limited extent depend on the nature of our environment. Inhabitants of open terrain are less responsive to the Müller-Lyer illusion than those of an urbanized environment where vertical and horizontal lines are more prevalent. This process only breaks down in cases of insufficient balance between individual flexibility and environmental stability. We also seem to enter the world with an innate expectation that sounds have a visual source, and things appearing in our visual field can be touched. Newborns, even blind infants, introduced to a sound thus turn their head toward its source. And three week old infants, Eibl-Elbesfeldt tells us, will practice pre-reaching, the forerunner of actually grabbing something. The fact that, for instance, children born deaf and blind at birth develop along similar lines as normally healthy children as well as the occurrence of similar patterns of perception and behavior across cultures, firmly supports the thesis that human beings are born with phylogenetically developed pre-wired fixed-action patterns (*HE* 42, 53, 85). Even *moods* seem to serve a purpose from the earliest beginning. They motivate an active search for means that will satisfy our appetite, whether for nutrition, touch, or intellectual stimulation. Thus

*appetitive behavior* prevents us from waiting around passively, withering away if our needs are not automatically met. As soon as a need has been fulfilled, and our system has recuperated from the energy exertion involved in the process, appetites move in another direction.

The innate ability to self-regulate the level of stimulation received, is demonstrated in young infants' oscillation between reaching out (paying intense attention) and withdrawing. Young children regulate the level of excitation themselves by seeking and avoiding eye contact. Their need for a balance between closeness and distance is likewise regulated by a looking to and for, an activity which involves a coordinated increase and decrease in their pulse rate. When looking away from strangers the pulse rate automatically slows down, Eibl-Eibesfeldt claims (*HE* 173, 335). In case of the elimination of either option (isolation or deprivation of privacy respectively) the individual is likely to stop functioning, that is, to stop being able to process and appropriate the input received. *Any* introduction of an exclusive *either-or alternative* is bound to create intense fear and thorough disassociation in the individual. For the already mentally unstable individual the interruption of the pattern of oscillation between intimacy/distance is unbearably distressing. A fact of life which makes it serve purposes of torture more efficiently than anything else. Inner balance, a sense of rooted-ness, and the ability to recuperate and adapt to one's environment come from being able to vacillate between one mode of being and another.

If the ability to perceive and adapt to the environment along with a great number of physical and psychic modes of interacting with the world are pre-wired, it is likely, Eibesfeldt suggests that emotions too be pre-programmed in the neuronal connections within the visceral-limbic system. When someone looks at us with tenderness or simply gives us a smile, cerebrochemical processes are activated and we ourselves grow into a better mood. Thus the mood conveyed by visuals, sounds, and tactile qualities in our social environment greatly influences the process activated in our inner environment. Emotive involvement and relationships, viewed from within this perspective, are chemical events taking place in the brains and the entire body chemistry. Hence, we are to take it very literally when someone " leaves an impression " on us, even if it appears to be no more than "skin deep." It may indeed involve an experience of the most profound nature (Ackerman, *NHS* ). Subjective experience, thus, consists of an interplay between the individual's biological predisposition, the way in which his system has developed in the course of time, and external factors. *History* comes to serve as a key factor in the nature of this interplay, as only history brings about the development of individual difference.

## 3.0 LIFE-LINES AS BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN BODY AND MIND

### Tomkins

"We are in the process of redefining what it means to be human in an increasingly technologically sophisticated world," says Sherry Turckle (*Life on Screen* ). The one thing that still sets us apart from intelligent machines is our ability to feel affection, to care, as well as our capacity for spirituality. These faculties make up one of the major *motivating forces* in human life in so far as it is not driven merely by instincts of by rationality. The experience that something is of significance to us compels us to take action. Or, to put it differently and in the words of Sylvan Tomkins :

> A world experienced without any affect would be a pallid, meaningless world. We would *know* that things happened, but we could not care whether they did or not... affect either makes good things better or bad things worse... without its amplification, nothing else matters—and with its amplification, anything else *can* matter. (*Exploring Affect* 86-88)

In *Exploring Affect* Tomkins inquires into why affective investment matters so much to us and of what it actually consists. Tomkins' focus is on *how*—rather than *by what*—we get motivated. His starting point is to ask *if* man can actually live with the kind of efficiency-society he has created and, if not, in what does his unhappiness actually consists. His answer, briefly, is that if man is in agony in this day and age, it is primarily because he is bereft of opportunities to create *affective story* lines in and of his life. Distinguishing *excitement* cultures from *enjoyment* cultures he explains: The former

emphasizes change and therefore allows for exploration and expression of affect. Enjoyment cultures, in contrast, prioritizes similarity, sameness, harmony. Permitting little leeway for a loosening up and living out our emotions enjoyment cultures create affective deficiencies. It may enable us to enjoy ourselves endlessly, but it nevertheless leaves us in a strangely disconnected and dissatisfied state. "Let us suppose that all over the world human beings were forbidden to exhale air but were permitted and even encouraged to inhale air," Tomkins says, "so that everyone held their breaths to the point of cyanosis and death. Something similar to this has, in fact, happened to the affect mechanism " (*EA* 93). Free expression of innate affect is always an extremely contagious and high-powered phenomena, bound to be subjected to some degree of control in all societies. Nevertheless, in the Western world, we may have taken the management of natural affect, to the advantage of the expression of staged emotions, too far.

The first theorist to argue that affects are our primary motivating forces, Tomkins takes a stance in opposition to Freudian drive theory and its emphasis on "civilization and its discontents." The originality in his approach lies in the way in which he attempts to create a third position, by drawing on both social constructivism, psychoanalysis, and essentialism. Man is from the outset embedded in a *biopsychological matrix*, he argues, echoing and elaborating on Bowlby and Eibesfeldt. He enters the world equipped with a number of affect dispositions soon to be complemented with, modified by, and to some extent

overshadowed by socially acquired patterns of feeling and behavior. Affect evolves through an intricate interplay between biology, social conditioning, inner reality and environmental stimulation and thus stands apart from both nature and culture, being neither biology nor intellectual activity. There is no profound insight, no *hot* cognition, that is not based on affective investment. This is another way of saying that cognition affects us emotionally. Thus "Cognition without affect is weak ; affect without cognition is blind" (*EA* 309).

Tomkins' main criticism of Freud is that, regardless of his preoccupation with affect, Freud could conceive of it as nothing but a libido derivative. It was as a consequence of this drive economics that Freud's attempt at explaining the connection between quantities of stimulation and qualities of experience fell short. But affects are not necessarily associated with sexuality, Tomkins maintains. It is closer to the point to consider affect the "primary innate biological motivating mechanism, more urgent than drive deprivation and pleasure and more urgent even than physical pain." Sexual excitement, Tomkins argues, constitutes merely one out of several modes of affective investment. The arousal one experiences during sex does not differ in essence from the excitement triggered during any other act in which one is passionately involved. A radical approach indeed :

> The excitement of sexuality is the same excitement as to poetry or mathematics' beauty bare, or the possibility of good food. Although mathematics and sexuality are different, the excitement that amplifies either cognitive activity or drive is identical... (*EA* 53)
>
> ... no one has ever observed an excited penis. It is a man who is excited and who breathes hard, not in the penis, but in the chest... Such excitement is in no way peculiarly sexual. The same excitement can be experienced, without the benefit of an erection, to mathematics...to a rise in the stock market. Instead of these representing

> sublimation of sexuality, it is rather that sexuality, in order to become possible, must borrow its potency from the affect of excitement. The drive must be assisted by affect as an *amplifier* if it is to work at all. Freud, better than anyone else, knew that the blind, pushy, imperious Id was the most fragile of impulses, readily disrupted by fear, by shame, by rage, by boredom. At the first sign of affect *other* than excitement, there is impotence and frigidity. The penis proves to be a paper tiger in the absence of appropriate affective amplification. (*EA* 87)

Curiosity, a desire to know, an urge to touch, a wish to master something new, none of it, according to Tomkins, is necessarily driven by or derived from libidinal energies. Affect, on the contrary, constitutes one of *the* basic systems of human functioning, which may occur independently, interdependently, and dependently with every other system. It is an analog relationship and multiply determined, he argues, meaning that there is always only a " loose fit in between one mechanism and every other mechanism, between the system as a whole and its varying environments, and reproductive success." An analog relationship is that of the letter in the alphabet in a given language which changes in significance as it is assembled with other letters, sentences, contexts. Thus, the individual can invest any and every aspect of existence with the excitement and joy, or with dread of fear, shame, or distress (*EA* 50-51). Affect functions as an analog amplifier creating within the organism experiences of urgency. It causes the organism to care deeply about what is happening.

> Affect either makes good things better or bad things worse, by conjointly stimulating its activator in its profile of neural firing and by adding a special analogue quality which is intensely rewarding or punishing. ( *EA* 50-52 )

The very generality of the system constitutes its particular flexibility and thereby the individual's freedom. *What* and *where* is an affect then ? Tomkins contests the commonly held theory that inner bodily responses are the chief site of emotions. These are in fact secondary in importance to the expression of emotion through the *skin*, he claims. Affect comes to expression in the muscular response, in the flow of blood, in the tone of voice, and in the breathing, that is on the surface of the body. The somatic response to the felt urgency *is* the affect in itself and refers to nothing else. Thus facial expressions, for instance, do not reveal any "deeper" or "hidden " emotions. They *are* what they show. "The surface of the skin is where it is at, not deep within us," it expresses and thus gives shape to innate as well as acquired affects, Tomkins states (*EA* 263-64). Human beings are thus most vulnerable on the surface of the skin. In consequence, any kind of intrusive skin stimulation may force the individual to act against his "innermost " conviction (*EA* 91).

Tomkins operates with three distinct classes of affect about which he assumes a general cross-cultural consensus. There is affect for the preservation of life ; affect for people ; and affect for novelty. Nine response varieties make up a sub category to these classes : interest, enjoyment, surprise, fear, anger, distress, shame, contempt, and disgust, all of which comes to expression in distinctive somatic reactions (*EA* 21). There is no one-to-one rationale at play, meaning there is no necessary correlation between bodily symptoms and

particular affective states. The phenomenon of connecting one affect-laden scene with another affect-laden scene is called *psychological magnification*. The entire process, as it continues, evolves into the development of certain affective *scripts*. It is the evolution of scripts that enable us to interpret affective stimulation as it occurs in the present, to re-interpret affective events of the past, and to anticipate the flavor of affective outcomes in the future. Scripts are defined as : sets of incomplete ordering rules for the interpretation, evaluation, prediction, production, or control of scenes. They are considered selective in the number and types of scenes they organize. They are more or less accurate (or inaccurate) in their interpretation, evaluation, prediction and control. In consequence of this incompleteness they are continually being revised, all depending on the degree of confirming or affirming magnification they are exposed to. Different scripts co-exist simultaneously, and thus there is basis for inter-scripting. Most scripts are more self-validating than self-fulfilling, i.e., they legitimate already existing affects rather than provoke unanticipated ones (*EA* 21). The more affluent we are, the more scripts we have available for coping with unexpected events and change in our environment. The less affluent, the more we tend to reinforce stereotyped scripts and thus to dig a deeper hole for our selves.

If life were made up merely of transient scenes, i.e., if there was neither a plot nor a course of events to be derived from its course, the individual would suffer greatly from insufficient psychological magnification, Tomkins asserts.

The subject would remain unable to distinguish between what matters to him and what does not. A scene is a happening which has a perceived beginning and end. It involves a division of the scene into figure and ground. Any scene sufficiently similar to evoke the same kind of affect as another scene is made even more similar through the affective response. The connected set of scenes lived in sequence adds up to a life *plot*. And the script is made up of the individual's rules for interpreting, responding to, controlling, and predicting a magnified set of scenes (*EA* 320). The major difference between how an individual governs himself in an isolated scene without and with a script, is thus : in the case of the former he starts from scratch and is likely to experiment with alternative responses to the scene until he is either more satisfied or less satisfied than with the scene at its beginning. In the case of the pre-existence of a script, the individual is prone to comparing the scene in question with former events, to think about their similarity and difference, to ponder his role in relation to these scenes, to wonder about the direction his story is taking, and so on. The individual's reconstruction of the major scripts in his life is thus rooted in an individual hermeneutics.

Scripts link affect and cognition in story lines and they make up mini theories, generated by each of us, in order to deal with the regularities and changes of the world in which we live, and as we live in it. Some scripts are innate but most are innate *and* learned (*EA* 189-312). With some kind of script in place from birth future scenes are subjected to an affective

interpretation as they are related to the already existing larger picture. This is a reciprocal affair : the script-background sets the tone of the interpretation. The particular event reinforces or contributes to a change of the script in question (*EA* 329 ). As an example, Tomkins mentions that the *phantom limb* only becomes conscious following a "massive discontinuous change in the contours of the body," that is after the sudden loss of a limb. It does not occur if such change has been gradual and continuous and neither does it appear before the age of five when the self and body image are still in the making. The evolution of a body *scheme* thus appears to require a substantial amount of interaction with the environment, a gradual and continual learning of and about boundaries, textures, and affective connections (*EA* 370).

The script, in summary, is subject to pluri-determinate experimentation and confirmation, or, disconfirmation and change, but it is the script itself that is increasingly at issue rather than the individual scene (*EA* 322). This explains why a subject may be guided through life, and yet his fate—or his script--may remain open for re-evaluation.

## Revitalized by deadened matter.
## *BLACKWATER*

As Birger's attempt at maintaining his self-imposed isolation proves unsuccessful, and his effort to restore the facade of his house and to keep in order the interior results in nothing but boredom, he grows increasingly

suspicious of various forms of convention. Feeling vulnerable and exposed, he discovers that words are frequently employed by others as a means of protecting the speaker, distorting his true intent, and watering down the implications of his message. Narrative, Birger senses, has come to serve the purpose of stirring up peoples' emotions and thus of talking them into forgetting the real-life issues under debate. Used as a means of supporting the illusion that life is a fantasy, rather than encouraging the listener to seek further clarification, it spreads smoke screens over the experience of life in its many aspects. The sensible subject, Birger realizes, is a numbed individual for whom form and structure have come to substitute for inner disturbance and movement :

> At first he listened to the councilor, who was a Social Democrat but wearing Levis Jeans and a white Lacoste polo shirt. As usual, he was promising to sell the community. But he didn't mean for good. He wasn't thinking of disposing of it to Germany or the Cellulose Company. He was going to sell it the way you sell a beautiful girl.
>
> He went on to talk about health and life style. He didn't say " the EC " or "Europe."
>
> quite so often as he had done a year ago, nor did he use the expression: "Quality of life." He implied that the lifestyle in their district was health promoting. He talked about water and snow and air, about forests and mountains and streams. He didn't mention diabetes, back trouble, or coronaries, nor had he brought any suicide statistics.
>
> ...After [ the lecture ] they were given coffee, tea or herbal tea.
>
> Life Core was no longer as orthodox as it had been when it was called Byvaangen Health Home. It was a modern conference hotel and had gone bankrupt in April, but they continued their activities. Birger had cheese cake and coffee.
>
> He spoke after coffee, looking over the audience's already tired faces and ice-cream colored clothes... Many of them were wearing Life Core T-shirts with the halved red apple on the chest. He could feel expectation in the air. Ah, here's the doctor who's usually so amusing.
>
> But he wasn't. As soon as he got up on the rostrum, he felt he was falling. His ears closed and for a moment he thought he had gone deaf. But they must have heard him through the microphone, because no one complained, the faces gleaming like empty bulletin board at him. He had no idea what he said.
>
> At first he only slowly recognized the feeling—faintness, nausea, paralysis, and mechanical behavior. He talked and talked, unable to remember when he had felt like this before or how he could know what it was. It was fear, great fear.
>
> Again and again he had to sip mineral water. His mouth was dry and he thought his voice was disappearing. ( 289-91)

Frances introduces Birger to the fact that life is a messy business, and reconfirms his budding suspicion that an ordered life is an illusion. A forbiddingly cold January night, following the Council meeting concerning the distribution of financial resources, Birger's car is frozen. Too exhausted to hunt down a heater, Birger seeks lodging in a nearby hotel. Hotel Sulky is primarily used by jockeys from the trotting races. It is run by a widowed woman who is "healthy, sleeps well and needs only a little antihistamine in the spring when everything is in flower." Birger's encounter with Frances comes to make up one of the most significant turning points in his life. Still, it is anticipated by nothing but a rather trivial, popular song : "A fleeting moment stole my life away," as Birger hums (111). The fateful meeting takes place in the tidy but tacky little hotel :

> It's a warm little hotel...
>
> Barbro, my dear. You should have seen them. Red and green paper garlands. Turquoise, orange, red, silver, and gold glass balls. Gnomes, nasty malformed little monsters in red stocking caps all flopping in the same direction.
>
> German...Her name is Frances. I didn't think much about her to start with. Handsome woman anyhow. Dark, with an American Indian profile. She had been married to a gambler. Sometimes he owned horses...He died while he was on his way up...
>
> She bought the hotel—it was called the Three Lilies then. It was dreadfully shabby, but she restored it.
>
> That was where I got a room. Sheer chance. Do you believe in chance ?...
>
> I go to bed in this nice warm little hotel. I am tired but not drunk or anything.
>
> Perhaps it can be said like this. One thing at a time. When I'm about to fall asleep, I see I've forgotten to pull down the blind...I let it be...I can hear cars going by all the time...
>
> So no peace, nothing like that. No special atmosphere or premonition. Nothing.
>
> I'm just lying there. I'm tired and can feel my blood pressure on a down...
>
> I'm lying there with my eyes closed, I think. Then it comes. Like a light from the inside. Like, like...anyhow, like a feeling of light. Not in my eyes. In my body. As if it's expanding with light. It's all around me. There's nothing else but light. I am in the middle. I know everything. Not in words. Blissful.

> Well, that's a word. I don't know what words to use. Perhaps that's why I have said nothing. I'm lying in the middle of everything that exists and there is nothing to explain and nothing to achieve. Only this prolonged feeling of bliss. It lasted quite a long time. An orgasm, but more powerful. Like continuous waves, one after another in the light within me and around me
>
> ... I hadn't really seen anything. Not with my eyes. (156-57)

Frances presents Birger to a world consisting of peace of mind, practicality, and a sense of belonging. She shows him that things come to acquire meaning, not when we want them to, but when we cannot but invest our selves affectively. And she opens his eyes to the fact that inner healing and enlightenment cannot be willed into happening. The best we can do, she suggests, is to remain receptive to their coming. Frances' close connection with the world of horses, and the fact that she has succeeded in making horse-racing her living, put her in the saddle of the Platonic charioteer. The latter, it may be recalled, goes to great lengths to properly guide his two winged horses, the one representing the uncontrollable passions, the other being a more subdued and sensible creature. When things go astray, within the Platonic sphere of idealized reality, the horses loose their wings and the soul suffers the unfortunate fate of falling to the ground. Redemption, according to this model, lies in the soul's discovery that things and other forms of embodiment merely serve to remind us of the real world, the world of pure ideas. Frances, however, is well aware of the horse-power driving her business, her sexuality and her spirituality. If anything within her reach has lost its heavenly connection, it is the tasteless decor, cluttering her shelves. Yet, in her view, these concrete souvenirs of

past experience, reinforce her connection to home. *Home* is associated with her connection to the material and spiritual life of her ancestors. In Plato's *Phaedrus* the soul is defined as a source of motion. It is this self-initiating source that makes the world go around according to his theory. The extent to which its force arises out of nothing may indeed be questionable, at least according to Birger's experience at Frances' hotel. The former *Three Lilies*, associating purity and virginity under the eye of God, now going under the name of Sulky, does in many ways seem to hold the key to the extraordinary illumination he undergoes, as if the parts of which it consists, not only made up a suitable receptacle for that kind of happening, but evoke and invite it.

The impossibility of conceptualizing what turned around his life, leaves Birger even more wary of traditional use of words. No longer fearful of recognizing the feelings on which conventional narrative plays, Birger simply looses interest :

> I get tired of reading. Haven't the time either. It's so self-referential. Like the jargon of politics or economics. Or medicine for that matter. It's the first time I notice the way writing is built up round feelings. Words are used as a kind of climbing frame to reach an emotional climax. At a pinch, writers fabricate feelings and force them to climax....I get sick of it. (159)

Frances, seemingly, enters Birger's life as if by coincidence. Yet, she does not depart from his sphere till she has also left an aesthetic, a practical and a sexual mark on his path. Unable to forget about the cold winter night, Birger cannot resist returning to the hotel. He tries to convince himself that it is unrealistic to assume that the old hotel may hold any more promise.

And yet, he still expects that something more shall happen. Something does take place. Though not exactly in the form he had expected :

> Some time in march, I stay there the night again and ask to have the same room...
>
> I like it there [ he imagines to be telling Barbro]. You would probably say it's tasteless because for you aesthetics are a matter of coordination...
>
> Frances never seems to have discovered any central perspective. She sees one thing at a time. Things lie about like islands. And when you see them, they are fun or great or whatever. Never actually indifferent. Not to her, anyway. She's been given lots of horses as presents, in china and wood, even stuffed ones with woolly manes. She puts bright orange winter cherry into a pottery vase flaring in every possible color and says that her grandmother always had it in that vase and on that very shelf below the mirror.
>
> Everything means something to her...
>
> I stay there overnight and occasionally I still think a lot about what happened. But I no longer think I'll ever understand what it was...Perhaps I'm waiting after all, but nothing further happens... (158)

On Christmas Day, a guest commits suicide at Frances' hotel. Approaching the incident in a matter-of-fact practical manner Frances calls Birger and requests that he helps her resolve the problem. So as to avoid scaring off her customers Frances pretends to fall ill, whisks off the remaining guests, and finally calls in the police. At the end of the ordeal Birger "didn't think Frances could have coped with being alone in the empty hotel." Whether or not the sturdy woman was in proper shape to make it through the night on her own is beside the point. The handling of the dead body has whet their appetite and spurred their taste for a garden variety of meaty delicacies :

> We were overcome by hunger, quite literally. She got out marinated herring and carved some ham. We had a schnapps each. We ate thick slices of dark bread and I remember there was a crisp, sweet crust on it....Everything was good. The pilsner. The jellied veal. The liver sausage one of the guests had brought her.
>
> She smelt strong. Not bad but strong. That long, curly, dark-auburn hair hung down over her shoulders. She dyes it with henna...The bush down there is dark brown, a real bush. She was still in her dressing gown. This is not the kind of thing I can tell you, nor am I doing so. I'm only trying out words.
>
> For our exhilaration. Our hunger...

> She has a long pear-shaped ass. Long legs with clearly defined muscles and sinews. Her stomach arches. The furrow in her spine goes down to the dark slit between her buttocks. I wanted to be there and everywhere. Always really. (160-63)

The dispute between the postmodern enthusiast and the cautious culture critics started out so relatively simply. The crazier the non-subject, the more embodied, said one position. The less of a subject the more miserable and dismembered, said another. However, the closer we look at the various aspects implied in the dispute, often in hidden or neglected form, the murkier the waters grow. The mentally disturbed individual is no cherful revolutionary, Glass shows. He is tied down by annihilation angst. How could he possibly be a happy gambler, ask the Sensory Anthroplogists, considering the fact that for him to feel fundamentally human, he needs to exist within an environment which resonates with his sensory profile, as it has developed over the years. Currently, our tactile, emotive, and sensory rug is constantly shifting colors, providing no firm grounding. If the former argument may be swallowed with a grain of salt, for those who remain enthused by postmodern heroization of the "schizo," Human Ethology introduces something of a thorn in the eye. The human organism is pre-disposed to seek out a certain stability in physical and sensorial figure-ground patterns in the environment, it is shown, hence the claim that we are predominantly socially constructed is undeniably farfetched. What then, is this persistence that we remain capable of starting anew and defining our own terms about ? If there is a grain of truth in Glass' thesis that

the "schizo" is the product of barbarian conditions of living, must not the refusal to take this into consideration be understood as a form of denial ? Thus, must not the frantic flavor, emanating from the postmodern grounds of delusion, be understood as an inability to face up to the decaying state of the flesh (of the world) from which we emerge ?

Play and creativity, it may be pointed out, remain surprisingly vaguely defined within the postmodern sandbox. An overview of some of the most predominant theories of the kind of experience play may bring about reveals two things : First of all, that the mentally disturbed subject is no great candidate for playing heartily. Secondly, that most notions of play and creativity imply that the subject's motivation arise from his urge to resolve the conflicts that slow him down in his tracks. He desires to move on into life, and yet, for as long as he remains in the shape of too many parts, he is bound to get arrested during his climb through the needle's eye.

# PART THREE

## Playing with "matches"

The emblematic playmate of the year is by Deleuze and Guattari, and to a different degree Lingis, seen as produced by postmodern conditions. It is the typical neurotic, they say, the subject still under the influence of modern modes of thinking and being, who cannot figure out how to let down his hair and "let go." His major problem is that he cannot relinquish his faith in—and thus his fear of—a higher authority. Somebody, or something, out there, usually one meta-explanation or an other, is presumed to hold the answers to his problems. Convinced that he might suffer from false consciousness, exhibit signs of alienation, demonstrate sexual immaturity, or reveal perverse personality traits, he anxiously sticks to the well trodden path. Shame, fear of embarrassment, inferiority complexes, all ensure that, no matter how hard this subject works on improving himself, the fruits of his labor are never truly unique. God has been out of business for quite a while by now, but the blindfolded subject here in question acts as if he may make a return-in-disguise at any minute. Busying himself with measuring up to whatever norm he is aware of, this subject never notices that all he ever does is to feed into an illusion. Overarching norms and ideals, supposedly holding our collective world together, *no longer exist* Deleuze, Guattari and Lingis state. It is time

to wake up and get on with the business of reality. Contemporary reality *is* chaotic, unpredictable and makes up neither a coherent whole nor a continuous (hi)story. The "schizo" is aware of this and exploits the opportunities it offers to the fullest. Waiting for neither condemnation nor redemption, he is neither bogged down by the dirt in his past, nor distracted by purification promised in the future. *He lives* !

Ironically, according to Glass's psychoanalytically inspired theory, things work exactly the other way around. In agreement with the postmodern thinkers he sees a great deal of the vices with which we struggle today as emerging from modern society. However, unlike these philosophers, he conceives of the vices *not* as consisting in the subject's internalized fear of persecution, but rather in the externalized abuse of power. Modern society fostered the philosophy that nature, irrationality, femaleness, and physicality could and should be submitted to domination and exploitation. Hatred of otherness was legitimized. The outcome was a surge in splitting pathologies such as psychosis, schizophrenia, multiple personality, and so forth. Adding insult to injury the postmodern philosophers above suggest that we eliminate the meager opportunities these subjects have of recovery. Recovery of a self, as Glass emphasizes, does not necessarily correspond to the reproduction of assembly line identities. It primarily entails providing the conditions for the individual in question to evolve to the point where he is capable of living creatively. And living creatively covers a wide range of activities, such as

exploring one's potential as a human and cultural being, experimenting with one's limitations, and contributing to the writing of the story of one's own life. No one is capable of playing or making up new worlds unless he feels at ease in his own skin. The latter is based on a certain integration of psychic and somatic reality, an integration which cannot possibly come about unless the subject experiences that his attempts at coming together are reflected and respected by his environment. Thus, the enthusiasm exhibited by Deleuze & Co. in response to the magnitude of opportunities during the postmodern is of limited use value. The contemporary playground makes sense only in so far as the subject is allowed some time out, a position to choose between playing, being played, or withdraw from the party.

Both camps see contemporary trouble as arising from modern narrow-mindedness. Glass and thinkers of a more cautious nature point to numerous reasons for why the subject may collapse at the threshold to the world of joy. The postmodern side, on the other hand, has made little effort to define its terms. *Play* and *creativity* are frequently pulled in and used as flashy red flags in the dispute. But what exactly it is that drives the subject to desire to participate in a continuing succession of dress-up parties remains an open ended question. Assuming that the development of a more playful life style is a matter of choice, the postmodern thinkers repeat the modern faith in the power of the will, in a most unfortunate manner. What is so very perplexing about this gesture is that, on the one hand these thinkers propagate that we cut

all ties to modern modes of making sense of our life, but on the other hand they reinforce one of the very features for which modern philosophy is criticized so harshly : the splitting of body and mind. If it were merely a matter of making up one's mind, would not more people go for a less strained and deprived style of living ?

The motivation behind the postmodern confusion is not to be unraveled here. What is to be explored is a number of classical theories of play, creativity and cultural production. Most bear a strong affiliation with modern philosophy, without necessarily subscribing to *a* particular modern view of the world. Considering the fact that the contemporary subject has been breastfed on philosophies, epistemologies, and ontologies as emanating from the modern era, is it not about time that we take a closer look at the forms (and foundations) of play arising from this background?

In classical psychoanalysis creativity is associated with the individual's struggle to keep his instinctive drives and impulses in check. Freud sees it as a sublimation of infantile incestuous wishes and desires. Channeling his instinctual energy into works of art, the individual not only avoids getting trapped in the lures of neurosis, he also contributes to the cohesiveness of the cultural fabric. Melanie Klein, a classic object-relations theorist, focuses on the pre-oedipal interaction between mother and child. According to her theory, the infant enters the world in possession of a vast amount of innate, aggressive

impulses. The mother-object, serving as an external and an internal object, is exposed to intense love as well as overwhelming hatred and desire to destroy. Symbolization, as understood in this context, plays the role of making up for damage done to the ambivalently loved-hated object. It serves as a means of mourning the loss of the ideal and ever lasting object. Elaborating on Klein's model, Segal goes as far as to say that the complexity and the beauty of a work of art reveal the degree of mourning that has gone into producing it. The models above—focusing on the nature-culture conflict as they do--conceive of creativity as a means of survival for man as a social animal. But other, object-relational contributions—emphasizing the body-mind dilemma--suggest that creativity is the key to psycho-somatic integration. Bereft of the capacity to create, they say, nothing matters much and life seems pallid. Thus, according to D. W. Winnicott, the infant arrives in this world in a state of total vulnerability. Developing the ability to play, he claims, lays the foundation for what is later to turn into a psycho-somatically centered and integrated self. Marion Milner, in her fine- tuning of some of Winnicott's points, proposes that play is about learning to oscillate between psycho-somatic integration and disintegration. The ability to hang together and to temporarily fall apart, she claims, preconditions the subject's opening up towards the world, his processing and integrating input, and for recovering his interest in others. Susan Kavaler-Adler, finally, reminds us that creative work, in that it is intimately connected with the subject's striving to gain significance within the

world of meaning (for and of) others, must work differently for men and women respectively. The creative woman, she points out, is up against two obstacles : her (love) object may be inaccessibly by symbolic means, and, the language at her disposal tends to exclude her from the realm from which she also requires recognition. Thus, if she wins in one respect, she is more than likely to lose in another.

## 1.0 AFFECT, INTEREST, AND IMAGINATION : A RESIDUE OF TENSION ACCUMULATION AND DISCHARGE ? FROM FREUD'S "PROJECT" TO *CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS*

Spending most of his life exploring the working of the mind, in particular that of the imagination, Freud's theoretical contribution to the role of affect, creativity and art in the life of modern man was in many respects limited. Beginning with the *Interpretation of Dreams* he suggested a unity of dream distortion, neurotic symptomalogy, literary creation and mythology. Later, in "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," he extended this umbrella categorization to cover as well fantasy, humor, play, daydream, folklore, and genuine works of art. What tied all of these categories together, Freud argued, was their being the result of a transformation of sexual energy. Individual sublimation, collective cultural production, in fact civilization itself, came to be conceived of as a *balancing-sheet.* However, the question no

predominantly economic model could possibly answer was : Why would the individual prefer such a meager substitute as sublimation, and sacrifice a full blown sexual satisfaction?

When Freud introduced the Oedipus complex, the open ended question found its resolution : due to guilt and fear of retaliation. The launching of the Oedipus complex resulted in a merging of the economic view with a structural model of the mind (id-ego-superego). Physics and affect were hereafter intimately and intricately interconnected, and the seduction theory was dissolved. Fantasy came to be understood as originating in individual psychology, mythology or phylogenesis; creativity as a safety valve. Providing an outlet for energy in need of discharge, it simultaneously relieves the subject of the burden of suffering the guilt otherwise triggered by the event. Hence, it enables the individual to take control over those instincts, "so hard to educate," as Freud puts it. The bottom line assumption was that all fantasy was, one way or another, rooted in reality. This was a controversial stance at the time and has indeed remained so, as contemporary discussions concerning *false memory syndrome* and incest-persecutions serve to prove.

It may be that Freud was somewhat hardheaded in his insistence on fantasy formation as necessarily emerging from real life events. It my also be that he repeatedly failed in developing a model which successfully united the economic and the structural view of the mind. Still, his persistence eventually paid off. It took about a century before the coin dropped in affiliated

disciplines, but eventually it did. However, it also proved the point Freud himself made with his introduction of the notion of repetition compulsion. What cannot be comprehended by the organism, he suggested, due to patterns of defense and repression, must be re-enacted until it can finally be assimilated. The discoveries uncovered during his earliest groping in the dark have resurfaced. Even if Freud still receives little recognition for being the originator of the latest breakthroughs in scientific thought and cultural criticism, the spirit of his early work currently rekindles a great many disciplines.

**The "Project"**

The essay that laid the ground for Freud's physics of the mind was the " Project for a Scientific Psychology " written in 1895. It was published immediately after his essays on hysteria and during his neuro-scientific period. that is prior to the naming of psychoanalysis as such. At this time Freud relied on a hands on approach. His "analysis" revolved around hypnotism and had the aim of bringing about emotional catharsis. Hence, the key issue in the "Project " was–and were to remain so--the transformation of *quantitative* physical energy into *qualitative* experience and affective investment (283-88). Freud here suggests that affect, imagination, and the ability to think are based on a psychic processing of quantitative stimulation. Introducing the concept of drives, the argument goes that these originate in the somatic, act on the

psychic, and yet are only indirectly related to the latter. The model implies that stimuli, whether emerging from the outside or the inside, advance through the psyche from perception to motor reaction. In order to become part of the psyche the drives must find some sort of representation. They must become linked with an *idea* (an image, an imagination). Thus an impulse, arising in response to a stimuli, hooks up with an image or idea and triggers physical, affective reaction. The driving force and dynamics of the system is undeniably of a rather mechanical nature, leaning in the direction of behaviorism and similar stimulus-response based models. Focusing on the mechanics of the psyche as it does, it allows for no distinction between when (and of what) an individual is conscious or not. This, then, was the main reason for Freud's decision not to develop further the theory.

The mind, according to the " Project," is an energetic system. It consists of a *network* of inter-related sensory systems, systems for which human beings are developmentally pre-wired at birth. Immediately following delivery, the individual's system enters into a *reciprocal interaction with the environment*. It actively reaches out for stimulation and interaction, and eagerly perceives and processes feedback received from others. Importantly, *any* kind of interaction leaves behind a trace in the psyche, thus laying down pathways for certain neurological connections to the exclusion or reduction of others. It thereby contributes to the continuing structuring of the psyche, and thus to its growing capacity for distinguishing negative from pleasurable input.

The system's ability to distinguish pleasing from displeasing stimuli, as it goes, is based on the perception of quantity, along with an inbom tendency to strive for an equilibrium between tension accumulation and release. If the young infant suffers from an inability to discriminate in the very beginning, he does not remain without means for long. Quickly, though gradually, his psychic system develops a *shield*, that is a screening facility, and an intricate network of inner pathways and interconnections. The network serves the purpose of facilitating the passage of some stimuli, of slowing down the passage of others, and making the organism inaccessible to yet others. However, the shield offers protection against *externally* arising stimuli only. Against internally emerging excitement it is defenseless. Hence the purpose of psychological projection : So as not to perceive unpleasurable stimuli as emerging from the interior, these are experienced as belonging to the environment.

The neurological network makes up a structure of a kind. Yet, it is based on a number of interconnections so vast, that no one-to-one correspondence between stimuli and impression can ever be drawn. The notion of the *interconnected* nature of the system has a major impact on Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. Here he says, a dream can never be fully interpreted. One always, inevitably, runs up against a certain blindness at some point. This is the *navel* of the dream, the " point at which [the dream] ascends into the unknown. For the dream-thoughts which we encounter during the

interpretation commonly have no termination, but run in all directions into the netlike entanglement of our intellectual world " (382 ).

If, as Freud claims, qualitative preferences enter the picture along with the structuring of the psyche, one could be led to assume a certain determination of the subject's *taste* by the environmental encounters he undergoes. But this is not so, claims Freud : "We have no reason to dispute the existence and importance of original innate distinguishing characteristics of the ego," he argues. Later he reiterates, "This is made certain by the single fact that each person makes a selection from the possible mechanisms of defense, that he always uses a few only of them and always the same " (*Analysis Terminable and Interminable* 240). A pleasurable experience, at this stage in Freud's thinking, corresponds to a shift in tension, that is in the move from tension accumulation to release. Three decades later Freud returns to and elaborates on the workings of this dynamics : " [W]e are so consituted, " he states, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, "that we can only intensely enjoy contrasts, much less intensely states in themselves " ( 11 ).

In 1895 the *pleasure principle* has as yet to see the light of the day. The guiding principle is at this point plainly to avoid unpleasure, in *Interpretation of Dreams* coined as an *unpleasure principle*. A negative experience consists in suffering from insufficient opportunities of discharge, or the feeling that one is unexpectedly overwhelmed by an impression for which the psyche is unprepared. The latter is said to break through the psychic shield. It jolts the

intricate and delicate network of pathways out of place, and thus produces in the individual a disjointed frame of mind, preventing any kind of processing and recovery from taking place. Where there is a breach in the shield, there is trauma. Ultimately, following Freud's model, unprocessed trauma results in neurosis : a situation characterized by ever present and self-reinforcing anxiety, that is, a state of distress whose source is non-recognizable and whose solution is therefore always sought *else-where* and in futile patterns of behavior.

Thanks to the mechanics of the psychic system however, there is *one* means of escaping the lasting impact of trauma, and that is motor activity. Why this is so is vaguely indicated in the "Project," more clearly formulated still in ***Beyond the Pleasure Principle***, published twenty five years later. Elaborating on the economics launched in his earliest work, Freud here goes as far as claiming that the model enables us to understand *any* kind of energy-expenditure, including the pleasure taken in aesthetics. Cultural production, he states, is a matter of capturing and containing one's otherwise unruly instincts. Externalization and fixation in *matter* works as an outlet for otherwise destructive energies. *Motor reaction* serves a similar purpose in relation to traumatic events. Trauma ordinarily immobilizes the psychic organism. In case of a *simultaneous physical injury*, however, the impact is halted. " A wound or injury inflicted simultaneously (with the traumatic event) works as a rule *against* the development of a neurosis." How come?

Because the excess of excitation, tension and anxiety, triggered by the violation is bound, or swallowed up, by the wound. Thus, Freud claims, melancholia, and related maladies of the mind, are often brought temporarily and abruptly to and end by intermittent organic illness (*BPP* 281-305). Sudden and intense physical pain brings an end to lingering and oppressive ruminations of the mind. Physical agony heals a bleeding heart, at least when the timing is absolutely right.

In the " Project," Freud never dismisses the fact that cognition, recognition, and evaluation of things happening can and *do* take place at times without any form of bodily involvement. But it remains inexplicable why this is actually so. " Obviously," he says, " the presence of bodily experiences, sensations and motor images of one's own [ has an evident effect ]. So long as these are absent, the variable portion of the perceptual complex remains un-understood " ( "Project" 333). What *is* understood, on the other hand, is that the individual develops and refines his sense of self, his system of defenses, and his repertoire of preferences, only via *interaction* with others. The child's move from a primitive and primarily somatic processing to a more complex psycho-somatic mode of operation is preconditioned by social interaction. " It takes place by ***extraneous help***, " Freud stipulates. Interaction is initiated "when the attention of an experienced person is drawn to the child's state by discharge along the path of internal change. In this way this path of discharge acquires a secondary function of the highest importance, that of

*communication*, and the initial helplessness of human beings is the *primal source* of all *moral motives*" (318, emphasis in original). The individual is aided in his development of a personality profile of his own, a profile for which a certain predisposition was in place prior to birth.

The ego emerging from this process is defined as the "totality of the [accumulated memory traces], at the given time, in which a permanent component is distinguished from a changing one." It consists of the network of loaded neurones, that is of the structure of the mind and the dynamics between its various parts. By emphasizing the interaction between organism and environment, Freud noticeably anticipates what object-relations oriented theorists were later to re-discover, namely that the subject starts out as a somatic entity, that he comes into being via interaction with others, and that psyche and soma are gradually developed and differentiated. Finally, the subject's *true self* is only realized under the best of circumstances. He is neither born with a biologically predetermined personality, bound to unfold no matter what the conditions are, nor as a clean slate waiting to receive social inscriptions. Nature interacts with culture, in this version of the making of a subject.

The overall aim of the nervous system is to maintain an energy equilibrium. Balance comes into being via interaction between the nervous system's three key systems, *perception*, *consciousness* and *memory* all of which consist of different classes of neurons. The *perceptual system* receives

and perceives stimuli but does not get "impressed" by these. Allowing input to seep right through, it remains unaltered and in consequence forever receptive. *Consciousness* makes up the site of energy's transformation into quality, to the exclusion (or release) of excessive quantities. Any stimuli becoming conscious automatically trigger an urge for energy discharge. Consciousness falls between being a " mere appendage to physiologico-psychical processes " and being the "subjective side of all psychical events... It is inseparable from the physiological process " ( 318 ).

The ability to make sense of one's environment rests on recognition, or, more precisely, on the subject's psychic-somatic experience of dissonance and resonance respectively. *Thought interest*, Freud says, may be proportionate to *affective interest*, where the latter has developed. It is triggered by the emergence of a discordance in the system, something which leads to *affective interest*. A smoothly working machinery, a system in which the quota between bound and released energy is balanced, interestingly enough provokes no deeper thought (331 ). In consequence, no real thinking can take place in disassociation from one's somatic state and sensations. The aim of all thought-processes is to bring about a *state of identity*. The end is the achievement of an equilibrium between the energy associated with the ideas of the mind and the energy related to the somatic sensations processes that triggered these ideas in the first place.

*Speech*, through an association of the sound-image with the word-image, serves a similar function of discharge. Operating like an "outlet," regulating oscillations in energy intensities, it contributes to the process of internal change by providing a certain degree of stability. Serving as a substitute for action, it keeps us in balance, Freud says, until we have figured out how to react to an impression (*Studies on Hysteria* 59 ; "Project" 336 ). Hence the tendency for people to talk excessively when facing up to an anxiety provoking challenge.

Mindful work requires emotional investment, and yet, affective interest and over-emotional involvement present an obstacle for the operation. Reflection is a time consuming ego activity, Freud points out, which is why it is obstructed when excessive amounts of psychic energy are affectively fixated. In effect, any affective experience is troubling for the mindful ego. It is therefore the "ego's business not to permit any release of affect, because this at the same time permits a primary process. Its best instrument for this purpose is the mechanism of attention." In other words, thinking is not by necessity followed up by action. Starting out from an idea it eventually produces a piece of "practical knowledge," a preparedness for whatever may occur in real life in the future ("Project " 358-83 ).

*Memory*, as differing from both perception and the conscious, processes information more selectively and secretly, but with long lasting effect. What is loaded in memory is *not* what is traditionally understood by the term.

"[B]ecoming conscious and leaving behind a memory-trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system, " Freud argues, "*consciousness arises instead of a memory-trace*" ("Project" 358-83 ). Memory consists of imprinted memory tissue. Forever altered by any imprinting that takes place, memory (tissue) is structured by traces of significance that has been—and will remain--excluded from awareness ("Project" 299-300 ). No matter how deeply ingrained a memory, it forms no exception to the rule that memory per se eludes recollection. Due to its unconscious character memory gives shape, not to reflections, but rather to the structure of the subject's being. "What we term our character is based, indeed, on the memory-traces of our impressions," Freud explains, "and it is precisely those impressions that have affected us most strongly, those of our early youth, which hardly ever become conscious " ("Project" 395). Paradoxically, whereas qualitative experience leaves no lasting mark, quantitative experience enters into the subject's deep-freeze memory—and thereby has a hard-core impact on our psychological make up ("Project " 310 ).

In 1895 Freud was somewhat distraught by the implications of the *double-layered* nature of the perceptive shield. Hard as he tried, he could not quite account for the way in which the two "faces" are interconnected. Twenty eight odd years later the notion of the shield reoccurs, along with a solution to the problem. In *The Ego and the Id* consciousness is described as the *surface* of the mental apparatus. "A person's own body, and above all its surface, is a place

from which both external and internal perceptions may spring, " Freud says. " The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego ; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface...The conscious ego ... is first and foremost a body-ego " ( *EI* 364 ). In "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad' " the problem of interconnection is re-phrased. Freud here focuses on the way in which the two faces are divided between two separate but interrelated component parts or systems. Consciousness is now conceived of as consisting of a pad with a receptive surface " that can be used over and over again, and permanent traces of what has been written." The pad itself, a "slab of brown resin or wax with a paper edging" mostly serves as a receptor of inscriptions. The intriguing part is the transparent sheet, consisting of two inseparable layers : an exterior transparent piece of celluloid and a lower and internal layer of translucent waxed paper. The pad is never directly imprinted. Any scratch is perceived via the covering sheet. Thus, Freud explains, "The celluloid is a 'protective shield against stimuli,' the layer which actually receives the stimuli is the paper...The layer which receives the stimuli ... forms no permanent traces ; the foundations of memory come about in other, adjoining systems " (" 'Mystic Writing Pad' " 430-33 ).

The one exception to the deep-freeze effect of memory is *pain*. Characterized by an excessive and rapid increase in physical tension, intense pain short-cuts the entire system, destroys all barriers and screening systems, and leaves a lasting mark, "as though there had been a stroke of lightning " ("Project" 307 ). Contrary to the experience of pleasure, which increases in strength for each

time a series of stimuli has gone down its pathways, the experience of pain decreases with repetition. If the first experience of pain is traumatic, the second time is bound to cause less of a sensation. In the end the system reacts as if numbed (359). And so, seemingly, human beings grow increasingly sensitive to a gentle touch, increasingly desensitized to violent intrusions. This dynamics, evidently, encourages sadomasochistic search for pleasure. No wounding shall ever upset the system as profoundly as the original one. The particular pleasure remains of a kind that could not—and still cannot—be *felt* as such. The memory (as conceptualized in the "Project" ) never fades.

*Repression* comes about when an image evoking the memory of pain attracts an overload of energy. Based on the biological principle of inertia, discharge is automatically initiated, says Freud. Re-*acting* by reflex is one way of avoiding the impression to settle in the system, as is demonstrated by compulsive-obsessive patterns of behavior. Compulsions are motivated by excessively intense ideas, that is of "non-uniform distribution of increased excitation," explains Freud. And he continues, "Hysterical phenomena ... emerge as purely somatic phenomenon apparently without psychic roots " ( "SH " 276-302 ). These ideas are not necessarily excluded from consciousness, but they are definitely excluded from the process of thought. Hysterical symbol formation therefore does not evolve along ordinary lines. In obsessional neurosis, repression occurs *without* symbol formation. The act of repressing and the creation of a substitute "symbol " are kept separate to the extent that their

association becomes barely detectable ("Project" 349, 351-2 ). "A soldier will sacrifice himself for a many-colored scrap of stuff on a pole, because it has become the symbol of his fatherland, and no one thinks that neurotic," as Freud observes. The hysteric, on the other hand, weeping over a particular "symbol " is totally unaware that he engages in a displacement and that, in fact, he is weeping over something entirely different. What in ordinary cases is recognized representing something else is, in the case of the hysteric, misconceived as the "real thing." Thus pathological behavior is a result of the blocking of the "wearing away process" of the intensity of the violation ("SH" 63 ). The hysteric, says Freud, "only gets free from the hysterical symptom by reproducing the pathogenic expressions that caused it and by giving utterance to them with an experience of affect." In consequence, the aim of analysis, at this point in Freud's work, is to cause resistance to melt, that is to "enable circulation to make its way into regions hitherto cut off." What all of this adds up to is the very significant implication that : theoretically speaking, *no interpretation can ever be stuffed down the throat of the patient.* Unless an interpretation resonates with the subject's somatic experience, it simply leaves him "cold " ("SH " 368-82 ).

Where, if anywhere, does sexuality appear in this picture ? The pan-sexualism for which Freud is often accused does not immediately seem to have much of an impact on the evolution of the psyche according to the "Project." Nevertheless, sexuality, Freud claims *is* the key source of "distressing perceptions and unruly memories. " How come ? The simplest

answer is that the belatedness of the development of human psychic sexuality is at the root of later misery. The younger individual frequently undergoes sexually loaded experiences for which his or her organism is insufficiently prepared. When the reality of his sexual desire dawns on the subject, the anxiety associated with premature sexual release is experienced as if in retrospect. The memory arouses, says Freud

> what it was certainly not able to at the time, a *sexual release*, which [is] transformed into anxiety... Here we have the case of a memory arousing an affect which it did not arouse as an experience, because in the meantime the change in puberty had made possible a different understanding of what was remembered.

The fact that this delayed sexual experience is caused by memory (as opposed to physical stimulation) makes it impossible for the individual to defend himself against it, to ward it off, and to ab-react the tension it produces ("Project " 354-7). Thus the workings of sexual neurosis and its "negative," namely perversion.

### Creativity

According to Freud's early thinking, the organism is at birth oriented towards instinctual gratification and is governed by primary processes. With the introduction of the structural model of the mind, along with the *pleasure principle*, less straightforward ways of obtaining pleasure emerge. Whereas the child fantasizes, the adult secretly day dreams, says Freud. "The opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real," he continues. The grown up who covertly indulges in an other-worldly dream manages to live with the

harshness of reality without necessarily facing up to it. "The child distinguishes [ play ] quite well from reality, " he continues, as does the creative writer. The adult whose deepest and most hidden desires by necessity are of an infantile character cannot but be *ashamed* of his fantasies. The source of imaginative work , therefore, is frustration : " We may lay it down *that a happy person never phantasies*, only an unsatisfied one," Freud states. " Every single phantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality " ( "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming " 132-34 ).

Day-dreaming, serving as compensation for continuing instinctual deprivation and lack of narcissistic gratification, falls into two main categories : erotic compensation and fulfillment of narcissistic ambition. In both cases an experience from the subject's infantile past is transported into the present as a wish, and projected into the future as something "new" coming true :

> An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it at first demands, and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full play in the life of fantasy. He finds the way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mold his phantasies into truths of a new kind....But he can only achieve this because other men feel the same satisfaction as he does with the renunciation demanded by reality, and because that dissatisfaction ... is itself part of reality. ( " Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" 42 )

What grips the spectator is the artist's intention. The appeal has little to do with the extent to which the viewer grasps what the artist is trying to express, states Freud. The effect of a work of art is to awake in us an emotional attitude similar to that of the artist's (" Moses of Michelangelo ").

The attraction of a work of art thus lies in its capacity for evoking feelings associated with forbidden fruit, at the same time that it absolves the viewer from the guilt triggered by the indulgence in the wish. Thus, Michelangelo's Moses, for instance, represents an intense inner rage burning right underneath a calm and composed surface (" Future of an Illusion "). The spectator, Freud theorizes, picks up both messages. He perceives an ego in control of the subject's passions, and yet, he identifies with the uncontrollable urge to kill.

> [T]he essential *ars poetica* lies in the technique of overcoming the feeling of repulsion in us, which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that rise between each single ego and the other...The writer softens the character of his egoistic day-dreams by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by purely formal—that is, aesthetic—yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies. We give the name incentive bonus or fore-pleasure to a yield of pleasure such as this, which is offered to us so as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources. ( "Creative Writers " 140-41).

**How to juggle the rules of the social game,**

**without getting caught with one's pants down**

In 1924 Freud deduces—and introduces--the death instinct on the basis of the observed occurrence of *repetition compulsion*. The peculiarity about this compulsion is that it not only repeats pleasures from the past. It also repeats painful experiences associated with the past. Why would anyone voluntarily submit to yet another rehearsal of an unresolved excruciating experience? Repetition, Freud claims, the re-experiencing of something *identical*, is in itself an undeniable source of fundamental pleasure. However, as far as the psychoanalytical procedure is concerned, this matter acquires an other significance. Here, on the contrary,

> the compulsion to repeat the event of his childhood in the transference evidently disregards the pleasure principle in *every* way...*[I]t seems, then that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces. [The death instinct is a kind of] organic elasticity, [also named the] expression of the inertia inherent in organic life.

All instincts tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things. "Everything living dies for internal reasons" and "the aim of all life is death," Freud concludes. The organism wishes to determine the fashion in which it is to die, he points out. Life is thus a detour towards death, each and everybody's roundabouts making up his individual history (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 308-12). The life-savior brightening up this somewhat stark picture is *Eros*. Equally as conservative and as intent on reaching its goal as the death instinct, Eros strives toward a reinstatement of earlier states of *life*. For the better, rather than for the worse, all things considered, these instincts are, as Freud points out, particularly resistant to external influences (*BPP* 278).

Freud interprets his grandson's "fort-da " game in the light of the discovery of the role of repetition compulsion. Following his mother's departure, the little boy repeatedly throws away and retrieves a cotton reel. Over and over again he replays the scene of rejection and reconciliation, accompanied by his infamous "fort...da !" exclamation. This is a play with the disappearance and return of a loved and desired object, deprivation and gratification, says Freud. It marks a great "cultural achievement " in the child's development. The instinctual renunciation made by the boy, in

allowing his mother to go away without protesting corresponds to a sacrifice of instant gratification, a sacrifice we all must learn to endure. Ingeniously, the body emerges as a victor from what in reality, and by necessity, is an instinctual defeat. The keyword is symbolization. "He compensated himself for this ( loss of his mother ), as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach " (*BPP* 285). The turning point consists in the boy's active investment of his energies in the creation of a symbolic substitute for the uncontrollable and desired other. He takes charge of the situation and makes sure that his own needs are met (even if by substitution). "At the outset he was in a *passive* situation—he was overpowered by the experience," explains Freud. " But, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part...As the child passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game, he hands on the disagreeable experience to one of his playmates and in this way revenges himself on a substitute " ( *BPP* 285-86 ). Anticipating what Winnicott is later to conceive of as a key element in his theory of creativity, Freud resolves : " It is of course a matter of indifference from the point of view of judging the effective nature of the game whether the child invented it himself or took it over on some outside suggestion." What remains crucial is that the ability to symbolize replaces the necessity for physical abreaction.

With the discovery of masochism Freud once again revises his economic model of pleasure and creativity. In "The Economic Problem of Masochism" he questions his earlier assumption that every un-pleasure coincides with an increase, every pleasure with a decrease, in psychic stimulus as derived from physical tension. It no longer appears that straightforward, he says, now acknowledging that in some individuals pleasurable tension and un-pleasurable relaxation of tension occur. Guilt, once again, is pulled in as a key player. Pain, violation, humiliation, and what would be conceived of as un-pleasurable, according to the earlier theory, is perceived of as holding gratifying potential when viewed in light of guilt and the quest for punishment. Freud here somehow manages to get it both ways : Masochism is explicable by an economic as well as a structural model. Still, he is as yet far from comprehending pleasure associated with physical pain, and yet not triggered by guilt.

Having uncovered the psycho-somatic mechanisms governing our state of joy or suffering, Freud notices with some amazement that civilization, that is cultural, technological and scientific progress has not made us any happier. If anything, he observes in *Civilization and Its Discontents* progress seems to only further our misery. We have succeeded in achieving a god-like control over nature, we have realized a vast number of other of our ideals, and yet we are profoundly unhappy. What is at the root of this misery and how is it to be

resolved? Ultimately, Freud reaches the conclusion that cultural advancement and emotional agony go hand in hand. He can offer no consolation, as he puts it (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 70 ). To live on the edge of emotional and sexual deprivation is the human lot in so far as we are to lead a civilized life. *Culture*, in Freud equaling "civilization," thus consists of :

> the sum of the achievements and institutions which differentiate our lives from those of our animal forebears and serve two purposes, namely, that of protecting humanity against nature and of regulating the relations of human beings among themselves. (*CID* 22)
>
> [It] obeys the laws of psychological economic necessity in making ...restrictions, for it obtains a great part of the mental energy it needs by subtracting it from sexuality. ( *CID* 40)

The implication is that most erotic strivings must undergo a transformation with the effect of becoming beneficial for the larger whole. What is it then that man seeks from life and why is it fundamentally in disagreement with communal existence ? Man wants happiness, says Freud, he wants to avoid pain and to indulge in pleasure. And pleasure is per se associated with erotic gratification. However, neither happiness nor pleasure exclude aggressiveness. Loving one's neighbor as one loves oneself comes naturally to no one. Neither does an altruistic sacrificing of one's needs and desires for the larger good. In other words, " *Men* are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked...Their neighbor is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness on him " (*CID* 40 ). The one feature that is evidently not pre-wired from birth is social conscience.

That man is at heart a self-centered animal is hardly surprising. However, the assumption calls for some unpacking. If Freud is basically correct in the theory put forward in the "Project," then man is from the earliest stage in life deeply dependent on social interaction. Freud later upholds that man is incapable of giving up a pleasure once experienced. One of the most gratifying experiences he has ever had, Freud says in various places, was in neo-natal symbiotic union with the mother. Belonging to a time period prior to the introduction of the reality principle in the life of the individual, oceanic bliss is associated with a pre-subjective phase in life. Thus, the deepest and most archaic desire of man's is of a self-dissolving nature that brings back the experience of being (as) an other. What happens to this fundamental urge to fuse with another, to be held by and gain recognition from, as well as to gain power over, an "extended existence " ? As far as the later Freud is concerned, the individual is forced to constrain him self and to keep in check his most urgent desires. It is his sole option, he says, to juggle the pull of Eros, the temptation arising from Thanatos, in other words, to submit to Ananke ( the reality principle). With that stated in unambiguous terms, the evolution of civilization is no longer obscure to us. Freud summarizes it in these words :

> It must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of, and the evolution of civilization may therefore be simply described as the struggle for the life of the human species.

The means that makes possible this transformation of raw life force into cultural productivity is the institution of a severe super-ego.

> Civilization [Freud elaborates], obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city. (*CID* 134-24)

Guilt, anxiety, and fear of revenge explain why culture makes us so discontent, and yet why we cannot do without. As human creatures, wanting to survive as social animals, we have no choice but to settle for approximations (*BPP* 278). Life never was and never will be a piece of cake. " It is too hard for us ; it entails too much pain, too many disappointments, impossible tasks," Freud acknowledges. Thus we desperately need our palliative remedies, of which there are three categories : a powerful *diversion of interest*, which leads us to care little about misery ; a *substitutive gratification*, which lessens it ; and an *intoxicating substance*, which make us insensitive to suffering but also to anything else as well. Neither option provides a real solution. The task remains, therefore, ultimately one of transferring the instinctual aims into such directions that they cannot be frustrated by the outer world. Mental and intellectual work make the safest bet, illusions another efficient means. Art serves as a mild narcotic and offers only a temporary refuge from the hardships of life. Its impact is never—can never be—sufficiently far reaching to make us forget our misery (*CID* 10-15). Artists and creative writers are moved to create by urges similar to those

of the neurotic. What they do is to give shape to the dreams that have never been dreamt ("Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva " 33).

Yet, the artist and the mentally disturbed person differ significantly in that the artist is capable of obtaining gratification through symbolization, whereas the neurotic is not. All neurotic pleasure is thus of the kind that cannot be felt as such (*BPP* 279). The neurotic's search for fulfillment, in so far as he recognizes neither his real need nor how to approach it, is therefore bound to be frustrated. The artist's on the other hand, is likely to provide a shade of satisfaction. The most we can dream of is a foretaste of genuine gratification. Anything else leads to savagery, Freud concludes.

## An environment furnished by inner meaning. *BLACKWATER*

> ... Memory Lane, it said on the first [sheet of paper] and underneath was a childlike drawing of a house, diagrammical and at the same time very complicated. In each room one object had been drawn in detail. In the first basement room was an ax on a chopping block beside an amputated foot; in the other two, broken jars out of which something red was pouring. The rooms were numbered and their contents macabre, possible a little more gruesome with each floor. (347)

Following her departure from *Starhill*, Annie continues working as a teacher in Byvaangen, a minor village in the Blackwater neighborhood. Slightly embarrassed by the fact, she eventually confesses to Birger that her occupation at the time had actually fulfilled her:

> Corny or not, she had said, but I loved my work and was fulfilled by it all those years in Byvaangen. Otherwise I would have probably lived like most people and kept looking at my watch in working hours.

In the beginning of her contract, Annie carried on in her usual somnambulist manner :

> At first, of course, it was the usual mild boredom. I had little encounters that brightened the day. I read a lot and longed for bed and my book....I was sleeping spasmodically and eating too much.
>
> The tedium of school has a particular flavor. Knobbly sweaters and unwashed bodies. And that lethargy. They did as I told them...But never a protest.
>
> They were prepared to spend six years in this half-light. And they obeyed me. They never asked why they had to learn this or that. They just tried, most of them absently...Toward the end of the autumn term they were like fish in a lake that had almost frozen solid. (349)

The process of "conservation " to which the children have been subjected, has as this stage progressed to the point where they no longer react to anything whatsoever. They are bored stiff, but it never crosses their mind to break the inertia or to rebel against their guides. The incentive to break with the deadening routine is brought to them from an exterior source, and by mere coincidence.

*Police Day* arrives. A couple of officers show up, supposedly to inform the children of the consequences of any wrong doing they may be tempted to undertake. However, due to the officers' exhaustion and the ennui triggered by the task awaiting them, they allow the children to influence the course of events. The outcome is explosive. For the first time ever do the kids perceive a purpose in learning. The stalemate has come to an end:

> In my classroom [Annie recollects] there were only future drunk drivers and workers in the black economy who might occasionally bash the wife or neighbor. They would add an amplifier or an electric typewriter when reporting a burglary, but they would never think of protesting against anything. In what the police chief called the present scenario, the children were not interested in hearing how he and his assistant served the community and made life safe for people. They wanted to hear how they chased robbers... [The police had found an eloped bank

> robber and his girlfriend] dead, frozen to dead. The wood stove was stuffed with logs and newspaper. They had used up several boxes of matches. But they had never opened the damper. It had smoked in, but they hadn't died from inhaling smoke. They had died of the cold...
>
> " They went out like a light "
>
> All eyes were on the police chief. Behind him, the green blackboard was blank.
>
> " They died because they didn't know how to light a wood stove, " he said. There were questions and cries, objections and assertions, but he stuck to it : They had died because they couldn't get the stove going. (350)

The story about the young couple submitting to the darkness of the eternal night, due to lack of practical knowledge heats up the children's interest, more than any special-effects loaded action movie could ever have done it. Taken aback by the fact that life-and-death dramas are played out close to home, the children discover, much to their surprise, the forces of potential recreation and destruction embedded in their environment. They learn that the insight required to survive does not necessarily come from a syllabus. A lecture whose purpose was to instruct the children in how to avoid being caught by the Law when breaking the rules, has resulted in an active inquiry into what they--and their community--may need to know in order to keep the wheels spinning. Suddenly understanding that their mastery of practical and technical skills is likely to have a concrete impact on the course of their life, the children burst from excitement :

> When the bell went...In the deepening dusk [the children] were gesticulating. I had never seen that before. They usually stood there with their hands thrust into their jacket pockets, their shoulders hunched in the cold...
>
> Why should I learn this ? The police chief had managed to arouse this question in them. Not me. To survive, was the harsh answer his story gave. That was how we got on to what you need to survive...
>
> " But what if everything runs out ? "
>
> " What do you mean, everything ? "
>
> " The electricity. If the cables fall down. If there's a war and a nuclear bomb. "

> In that way, I had access one winter afternoon to their fears. That was a room they seldom opened up to adults. They had all seen a girl running along the road with her burning skin crackling into a white map pattern. They had seen her several times. She was running underneath the thick curved glass of the television screen. She was naked and the same age as they were, so she was real. They had learnt how to read the map of cracked skin. ( 351)

If the children's immediate response is colored by romantic notions of returning to the infancy of civilization, they quickly resolve that such a resolution is pure fantasy. In as much as the popular media gives a distorted picture of reality, they nevertheless make the children aware of the dangers present in their time. The televised reportage, in spite of its "playing on people's emotions," serves as a source of information, primarily by providing models of identification. It makes war concrete and relevant.

As soon as the children recover from the immediate excitement, they get down to the serious business of thinking out what means of survival they would need in case of a catastrophe. " Survival " rapidly shifts, from being a simply issue of finding food and shelter, to the more complicated task of surviving physically, emotionally, and spiritually :

> One of them who had mostly said nothing asked who decided what they should learn...I was in a state of great tension, my skin was pickling. I was full of laughter and I had tears in my eyes. They had started asking questions : Why should I learn this ? Isn't it unnecessary ? They balanced this against that in case.
>
> I was feverish with eagerness that evening and simply couldn't sleep. I kept having one idea after another, my mind exploding and brilliant.
>
> A red file. A green file. Two workbooks. One for continuity. One for in case. I had found my teaching method...Computer knowledge against mental arithmetic. Social studies ? What if no society existed any longer ? Political parties ? The capitals of Europe ?...
>
> They figured out that things that weren't directly necessary for a settler life could be forgotten and that was a pity. One girl wanted to transfer a crochet pattern of stars to the green book. That gave rise to several questions. Songs ? Tunes ? Notes even ? The names of the stars and planets ?...
>
> [T]hey had found out that they lived in a civilization. Now they were finding out that there were the remains of a culture in it and that both were fundamentally based on knowledge...

> I decided that everything they wanted to have with them in case should be written down in detail. No abstract generalizations, but recipes. Formulas. Construction drawings. Words and notes of songs. Thus the recorder, the loom, the sourdough loaf and the composition of mortar all went into the green workbook. (352)

" We got twice as much done and we felt no fatigue," says Annie. "We were *playing*, I suppose."

Using as a point of departure for her teaching strategy the "in case" of an elimination of civilized society as we know it, Annie includes in the project the creation of a personal memory structure : *Memory Lane*. Inspired by the principles put forward by Cicero, she suggests that the children learn to make use of the landmarks at hand for their memorization. Having no other remarkable or monumental buildings in the area, than the local IKEA storage house, the class trot through the halls, creating a personal inner memory structure on the basis of the furniture in their way. The kids have none of the adult demand for a meaningful connection between what they want to remember and the symbol that would remind them of it, Annie notices : " The girls put five cute kittens in a memory room. The boys found it more effective to put five drowned kittens " (354). The parents react with hostility to the project, in particular to the children's construction of an inner space, organized according to their own needs and desire. The mere thought that their children may grow capable of determining the extent to which they want to be accessible to their environment, drives the parents into panic. The media

representative among them, significantly enough, insists that Annie leave out of the children's picture of the world, two thirds of what is known to be true :

> " D'you think everything's come to an end ? " cried a fat little woman whose whole figure I had rarely seen because she worked at the newsstand.
> " Are you frightening the kids with that ! "
> " There's no need, " I replied. " They're frightened enough already "...
> " Yes, yes, " said the principal. " You're full of ideas and there's nothing wrong with that. But one mustn't frighten the children. "
> " I haven't, " I said. " I've frightened the parents. " (358)

Annie pretends to abandon her teaching method, and matters settle into a more peaceful pace for a while. However, seeds of suspicion have been planted in her colleagues and she is soon found wanting in various respects. Eventually she is given the "cold shoulder" by the other teachers, and a final handshake by the director, all of whom consider her mentally unstable. What leads to Annie's expulsion is nothing but an incident in the teachers's room:

> The fifth event took place in the staff room. One of the teachers had a share in a racehorse. He used to arrange the bets...This time he had thought up something more piquant. The woman he was living with, a gym teacher at the school was going to have a baby and she was quite far gone. Now we could sign a list and leave ten kronor, then bet on when the baby would arrive...
> I was furious. I knew that five of the younger male teachers got together to watch porn films on Tuesday evenings when their wives were attending a batik course...this was indecent.
> " Who wins if the baby's dead ? " I said.

Teaching the children how to think results in Annie's running up against a brick wall of frightened parents and conservative authorities. She decides to give up her attempt at making a living in the province and to return to the city. Surprisingly, though, Stockholm has changed during her absence, and taken on a life of its own. At the time of her departure from the city, Annie had been in search of (her own) true nature. Upon her return she

discovers that *truth* as well as *nature* have acquired different meanings, while water was passing under the bridge :

> Going back was more difficult. I decided to leave. After all, I had never meant to end up in Byvången. I went to Stockholm, thinking of supply teaching until the autumn and seeing what cropped up.
>
> But it didn't work. The city had changed. I remembered it as composed of artifacts, but it was becoming organic, with a substratum of sustenance. A green clump I had never seen before protruded out of the cliff above Slussen. Bad smells were coming from the basement windows. The ventilation systems were crawling. The city hadn't stayed in place. It was growing and smelt of procreation.
>
> In August, the air became difficult to breathe, heavy with humidity and invisible gases. Rats scuttled through the creeper and the house in Strindbergsgatan where I was staying with Henny.
>
> I went back to Blackwater and moved into Aagot's little red cottage by the road. (359)

Aagot is the elderly toothless woman who gives Annie shelter following the Lobber event. Aagot has traveled the world when younger, and thus, she speaks Swedish with an accent, and swears in American, something which greatly impresses Mia. During Annie's most intense state of disassociative panic, Aagot entertains Mia by reading from books on birds. From the beginning of Annie's Blackwater years, Aagot serves as Annie's center of orientation. Following her departure from Starhill she returns to the cottage rented out by the woman. Following her failed escape to the city she moves back into the same cottage. When eventually the elderly woman dies Annie purchases the main house. And this is where she stays for her remaining days.

## 1.1 TORN BETWEEN CANNIBALISM AND PARANOIA, AND LICKING ONE'S WOUNDS THROUGH SYMBOLIC SUBSTITUTION

### Klein

The emotional ground tone of the late modern subject, described by Jameson as being flattened, characterized by Kristeva as being dangerously asocial, and celebrated by Deleuze and Guattari for its vast potential, bears great resemblance to the *paranoid-schizoid* position as conceived of by Melanie Klein ("The Importance of Symbol-Formation"). The paranoid-schizoid position, according to her theory, is an instinct-dominated fantasy world occurring around the time of the individual's first attempts at relating to his environment. The ego—presumed to be present from birth in Klein's theory—relates to its environment in terms of *part* objects during the earliest stages of life. Distinguishing only between an all good breast, which is preserved and introjected, and an all bad breast, which is destroyed and projected onto the object, the individual finds himself in a dualistic universe consisting of love and hatred, good and evil. Evil, in Klein, corresponds to an elaboration of Freud's *death drive*. But the *super-ego* is in her theory introduced prior to the occurrence of the Freudian Oedipus complex, that is, at the age of orality. A young child, she argues, is in no position to cope with an overwhelming urge to destroy on the one hand, and an overtly severe super ego on the other hand. To cope with

ambiguous feelings is unimaginable at this point. The problem arising from this clear cut and otherwise comforting distinction between good and bad, is that the pleasing breast occasionally turns sour. In so far as the external object also makes up an internal object, any attempt at taking revenge at the good-turned-disappointing breast equals self destruction.

The ego's means of defending itself are limited. They consist in splitting, introjection, projective identification and idealization, all of which are characterized by a displacement of the subject's own feelings on to others. *Splitting* is a sure winner among the primitive defense mechanisms. During *repression* the links between various affective states are preserved (even if transformed), but during splitting they are destroyed. Being of a fragile and undifferentiated constitution, the ego not merely fears the annoyance of being the object of persecution. It is convinced that any kind of ambivalence entails total annihilation. Struggling desperately to rid itself of-- and protect itself from-- aggression, the splitting ego cannot but sever its contact with other human beings. Isolated, affectively disconnected and always on guard, the subject is then left to face up to an even more excruciating fear : The fear of inner vacuous emptiness. In the worst case, the individual grows paranoid and chronically feels like he is lingering on the edge of some existential abyss. Devoid of an inner psychic space, the best, and the most, he can do in his interactions with others is to identify "adhesively." Sticking and clinging cannibalistically to objects

considered relatively safe, he allows no room for interaction. Hence, the urgency of preserving a good object.

The paranoid-schizoid position belongs to the earliest instinctual, oral, corporeal and *non-verbal* interactions with the mother. Characterized by concrete thinking and an inability to feel concern and compassion for the other, things *mean* nothing, rather they threaten or ensure the survival of the infant. With some luck and a "good enough" mothering, the infant may succeed in moving into the *depressive* position. Occurring during the second quarter of the first year of life, the depressive position opens up for the opportunity to leap out of the earliest dichotomy and into the field of symbolization. The loved one (and the model of identification) and the hated one (and the representation of inner destructive urges) are gradually perceived as inhabiting one and the same body. Paradox and ambiguity enter the picture. And the infant begins to feel *concern* for the other, *guilt* over his murderous impulses, and *responsibility* for the damage already done. Spurred by intense feelings of remorse he now aims at repairing and restoring the injured object. *Symbolization* provides the means to make up for damage done and to process the mourning of the no longer ideal object/self. Not until the intensity of the loss is felt as a whole, that is, not until the infant has taken full responsibility for his own " badness," does he recover the capacity to create an inhabitable inner psychic space.

The advantage of playful creativity lies hereafter in its continuing easing of guilt and sorrow, and in its institution of new objects, towards which some of

the instinctual impulses can be turned. Creativity, Klein says, corresponds to an internal institution of the reproductive couple (mother/father, and love/hatred). It leads to a decrease in internal tension and conflict as well as in the subject's fear of retaliation. Ultimately, the subject may grow sufficiently well rounded in his core identity to become adept at coping with the grab-bag of mixed messages arising from within as well as without. Still, this kind of integration does not come about automatically. It requires an extensive amount of creative, restorative labor.

Hanna Segal, elaborating on Klein's understanding of symbolization, suggests that the beauty in a work of art is a result of the struggle that has gone into restoring the broken object in its bits and pieces. A *symbolic representation* of an object or an event entails that a *true* symbol be substituted in place of the original and that the individual recognize the substitute's lack of coincidence with the represented object. *Symbolic equation* on the other hand entails an unrealistic projection of the symbol into the object so that they become "one and the same." In symbolic equation the symbol attracts similar conflicts and inhibitions as the original and therefore provide no opportunity to work through a familiar conflict with a different outcome. Thus severely neurotic individuals, to some extent, and even more so psychotics and schizophrenics, are prone to take the symbol too seriously, *as if* it were the flesh and blood it is meant to represent. Mentally arrested individuals thus remain incapable of mourning their losses, of making up for damage (imagined to be) done, and of accepting inner conflicts.

Hence, *real* creativity can only be undertaken by a subject whose subject formation is under way and on a healthy track. Subjects suffering mental illness, following this model, fear for their life to the extent that they never acquire the capacity to show any genuine interest for others.

Contrary to what is suggested by Freud, the individual, according to Klein makes no move from a so called pre-Oedipal situation to an Oedipal position. Symbolization does not represent someone desired for some one else. The passage of *time* has thus little import in Klein, as has the individual's real life history. Thus Fairbairn and others have pointed out, that Klein's theory could lead one to assume that it makes little difference whether the individual is born into one family and social group or another. Due to the infant's predisposition for destructive urges and unconscious fantasying, the outcome seems more or less given in advance. What about the real life mothering object : do all breasts really turn equally acid? If the cards dealt are of an almost universal nature, why explore so extensively the dynamics of the interaction between baby and breast ?

The role of representation, along with the function of creativity, seen in this context appear to be of an even more limited scope than in Freud. It is our only means to get beyond intolerable entrapment, Klein says. In fact, creativity translates into the sole means of *surviving* the inevitable wounds and losses life brings. Driven by fear, the individual plods ahead and makes up his own self. It is not evident why he should not choose a less strenuous solution, give in to nameless dread, and settle for a life in the big black hole.

## 1.2 Creating a passage between oceanic bliss and solitude

### Winnicott

Approaching the issue of creativity from an angle quite different from Freud's and Klein's Winnicott starts out saying that "cultural experiences are in direct continuity with play, the play of those who have not yet heard of games" ("Location of Cultural Experience " 370). Contrary to Freud who conceives of symbolization as a means of containing irresolvable conflict, and to Klein who sees it as a means to recuperate subjective "wholeness " and integration, Winnicott proposes that we conceive of creativity as a means for "paradox to be accepted and tolerated and respected, and for it not to be resolved" (*Playing and Reality* xiv).

Freud provides us with valuable insights into the workings of inner psychic reality, but none of his models of the mind incorporate a space for cultural experience, Winnicott notes. Freud explains that cultural experience becomes meaningful via sublimation. But he tells us little about *where* in the body and mind cultural experience is located. Neither does he elaborate on cultural experience which is not motivated by the need to transform sexual energy. Playing is *not* merely a matter of sublimating instinct. In fact, Winnicott points out, instinctual excitement often gets in the way. When a child is playing, he says, "the masturbatory element is essentially lacking." Or, to put it differently, "when a child is playing the psychical excitement of

instinctual involvement becomes evident, then the playing stops, or is at any rate spoiled " (*PR* 39).

The focus, in classical psychoanalysis, on drive dynamics and economies results in an overlooking of what matters more than instinctual release, namely *what life is about.* Sexual sublimation does not necessarily make life seem worthwhile. So called psychic health, in Freudian terms, may make it easier to function in daily life, but it certainly does not provide the *juice of life* ("LCE" 370). Says Winnicott :

> People may be leading satisfactory lives, and may do work that is even of exceptional value and yet may be schizoid or schizophrenic. They may be ill in a psychiatric sense because of a weak reality sense. To balance this one would have to state that there are others who are so firmly anchored in objectively perceived reality that they are ill in the opposite direction of being out of touch with the subjective world and with the creative approach to fact. (*PR* 66-67 )

If some individuals feel miserable because they are out of touch with the environment (such as the schizoid types), others suffer from a sense of being disconnected from their selves. No one is motivated to *become*, to *be*, or to *engage with reality* merely by means of instinctual balance or imbalance. Prior to any interest in instinctual gratification and other exciting and unsettling events, a well grounded ego must be in place ("LCE " 370 ). "After being—doing and being done to. But first, being," Winnicott stipulates (*PR* 85 ).

In addition to criticizing classical psycho-analysis for focusing too narrowly on instinctual matters, Winnicott points to what he sees as an inconsistency within this framework. On the one hand, he says, psycho-analysis emphasizes the importance of the social environment. On the other

hand it overlooks the role of the environment in the development of creativity. The history of a baby's development, including his creative capacities, can never be written solely in terms of the baby's trajectory through life. But there is no such thing as an infant, understood in terms of an independent bundle of struggling drives, he insists. The baby's primary world consists in his mother's way of holding and handling him. "There is no value whatsoever in describing babies in the earliest stages except in relation to the mother's functioning, " Winnicott points out. "When there is not-good-enough mothering the infant is not able to get started with ego-maturation, or else ego-development is necessarily distorted in certain vitally important respects " (*Psycho-analytic Explorations* 54 ). Thus, contrary to Klein, Winnicott draws the conclusion that the role of symbolism can only really be understood through a study of an individual's *interaction* with his environment, that is through a close observation of his *growth*. It has, he says, at best a *variable meaning* (*PR* 6).

Drawing on his notion of *transitional objects* and *transitional phenomena* Winnicott reformulates the question of creativity along the following lines : "*Play is in fact neither a matter of inner psychic reality*," he says, nor is it "*a matter of external reality...if play is neither inside not outside, where is it* ? " ("LCE " 368 ). It takes place in a *third area*, in a potential space similar to the one that evolves in between mother and infant during the transitional phase. The latter, also called the third zone, makes up

the *potential space* and *playground* between one (emerging ) subject an another ( *PR* 40). Thus, cultural production in general serves as an extension of the activity taking place within this space. It follows that "deeper " in psychological terms, by no means implies "earlier" developmentally speaking ("The Capacity to Be Alone" 177). Enlarged to the grander cultural scale the transitional object involves "the common pool of humanity ... into which individuals and groups of people may contribute ... a source from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we find.* " Cultural participation enables us to create continuity in life and thus to transcend individual fears. The extent to which the individual is capable of making use of this space, Winnicott emphasizes, clearly depends on his earliest *life experience*. The subject who remains haunted by infantile anxieties remains unable to build any castles what so ever ("LCE" 371 ).

The path for symbolization is broken by the infant's use of transitional objects and phenomena. The transitional *object*—a teddy bear, a piece of clothing, a body part, representing the union of the infant and the mother, emerges in the potential space between " the subjective object and the object objectively perceived, between me-extensions and not-me " ("LCE " 371). Transitional *phenomena* consists in *acts* serving purposes similar to those associated with the object. The four to twelve months old infant grabs a blanket, sucks his thumb, chews on a piece of cloth, pucks wool or babbles and thereby bridging the anxiety producing gap between itself and

the (m)other. Significantly, the transitional object is subjected to not merely tender and loving gestures. It is also thrown overboard, torn apart, and brutally destroyed. For the infant the purpose is to test the trustworthiness of the subject. "*There is no anger* in the destruction of the object to which I am referring, " Winnicott emphasizes, " though there could be said to be joy at the object's survival...The object can now be used." And used means loved, related to, played with (*PR* 91). What the child receives in return for his attachment to his object is thus warmth, reassurance, a promise of continuity and an opportunity to develop his self . The magic that drives the wheel is— not an urge for drive release but rather-- the potentially electrifying experience of relating, intimately and meaningfully, to an object and an other (" LCE " 369-371).

If most things go well in the course of the transitional phase, the infant comes out of it in possession of an inner psychic space, an ability to relate to others, and with a sense of psycho-somatic integrity. He is, in other words, adept at playing creatively. The *skin*, Winnicott explains, has in this case come to constitute the boundary between the me and the not-me. However, the deal is never dealt with and done for good : "Of every individual who has reached the stage of being a unit with a limiting membrane and an outside and an inside," Winnicott elaborates, " it can be said that there is an inner reality to that individual, an inner world that can be rich or poor and can be at peace or

in a state of war " (*PR* 2 ). The reassertion of one's boundaries, and that is the recovery of one's inner space, remains a work in progress.

Transitional objects and phenomena serve no symbolic function per se. Symbolization occurs only after the infant has acquired the capacity for distinguishing between fantasy and fact, between inner reality and external reality, as well as between primary creativity and perception (*PR* 6). It is one thing to *relate* to the object, a different and considerably more complicated matter to make use of it. The two skills are distinguished by what Winnicott calls "the most difficult thing, perhaps, in human development" namely the recognition of (the object) as an entity in its own right " (*PR* 89). Rewriting the classical psycho-analytical theory of *aggression*, he argues that destructive drive in fact "creates the quality of externality." The fact that the torn apart transitional object bounces back following an intensive attack proves to the child that external fact and inner reality do differ.

The transition from being at one with the mother, to becoming one self, evidently does not happen with equal ease for all infants. The key to smooth sailing is a stable and yet flexible environment, meaning a caretaker. The infant's capacity for tolerating "abandonment " is initially extremely limited. And the mother may be inept at tuning in to her still evolving infant. It is the mother's role to hold the baby, to handle him and to introduce him to new objects with which he can experiment. The baby repeatedly looks to the mother to receive himself as a realized person. Thus one of the mother's most

essential tasks is to continually return to the infant an acknowledged and recognizable part of him self. "Wouldn't it be awful if the child looked into the mirror and saw nothing !" as one of Winnicott's patients put it. (*PR* 113-16 ).

Indeed, if the mother's face remains blank, the mirror becomes something the infant avoids looking at ; something he strives to look right through. Finding himself in a void—not knowing if he is about to dissipate--the infant is consumed by unbearable anxiety. His last resort defense is, ironically and tragically, to fall apart, that is, to regress to ego-disintegration and slide into madness ("LCE " 369). The older child whose environment is non-reliable is at a loss. Being insufficiently equipped to make use of the world's objects for his own creative purpose, he grows restless, incapable of imagining, and shows an extremely limited interest in cultural life in general. Suffering from un-integration, terror of disintegration, and a sense of unreality symbolization serves as meager consolation ("LCE " 371). As a result, the subject might ultimately resort to primitive means of self-comforting, such as holding himself, rocking, humming monotonously, undergoing depersonalization, or autistic withdrawal (*PE* 89). In the end, he might simply resign, let others "fill him up," and thereby grow even more disconnected and genuinely " false." In the words of another of Winnicott's patients :

> At the beginning the individual is like a bubble. If the pressure from the outside actively adapts to the pressure within, then the bubble is the significant thing, that is to say the infant's self. If, however, the environmental pressure is greater or less than the pressure within the bubble, then it is not the bubble that is

> important but the environment. The bubble adapts to the outside pressure. ("Birth Memories" 185 )

In more mature individuals, inability to play manifests itself in an outspoken suspicion of the environment, a general insecurity, bodily disassociation, and a severely restricted capacity for play. Tendencies to take flight into obsessive exercising, or to over-sensualizing his activities also characterize the play disabled. The result is never exhilaration, always fatigue, a sense of futility, paralysis, suicidal impulses and perverted fantasying (*PE* 59-63 ).

Distinguishing between *games* and *play*, Winnicott suggests that the former is about playing according to the preestablished rules of some game. The latter, in contrast, involves the creation of something new. The individual for whom real playing is impossible is walled in behind grids of defenses. No matter how many roles he assumes, or how many games he takes part in, he remains isolated, hopelessly bored and frustrated. Nothing penetrates his defenses. No one ever moves him. Nothing ever touches him. He has shut down emotionally. His last desperate attempt at rescuing his withering soul as a rule centers on the boundary of his body and skin. "I have known helmets and hoods to be important as providing reassurance that the self will not escape through the top of the head," Winnicott says. The severely disturbed individual will go to extreme lengths to wrap up or demarcate his self ("BM" 187 ).

*Psychosis* and related pathologies, according to this theory, represent not a personal break down. It represents *a defense against breaking down or against*

*total annihilation of the self.* Fear of breaking down is what triggers this kind of defense, Winnicott emphasizes. But *the fear relates to a breakdown already suffered,* even if *not yet experienced,* by the subject in question. The only good news is in this regard that "only out of non-existence can existence start " (PE 95).

The individual on the verge of coming into being faces up to the obstacle of learning to differ between fantasying and dreaming, something which does not come easily to mentally disturbed subjects. In fantasying everything "happens immediately " without ever happening, Winnicott explains. The main part of the person may very well remain passive and dissociated from the part of one self which is living an organized series of fantasies. Fantasying interferes with action and with life in the real or external world, as it interferes with individual's ability to dream and to develop a personal, psychic reality, a living core. Fantasying is about a certain subject and is a dead end, form is fixed and content remains inflexibly familiar. Serving merely as an escape from experiencing and dealing with one's reality, it is of no poetic value. " A dog is a dog is a dog," that is it, and the road is paved to paralysis. Dreaming and Creative playing, on the other hand have little relation to fantasying. They involve an experience of "contained formlessness " within which the unknown is likely to emerge. In a dream a dog is likely to mean something more and other than a four legged furry creature. Dreams are poetic, are made up of multiple layers of meaning related, they tie

together past, present, future, inner, outer. Significantly, dreams are about an exploration and evolution of the self (*PR* 33-35 ).

Yet not all dreams are equally substantial. Dreams fostering individual growth are made of delicate and yet strongly experienced stuff of life. Mass produced images, and sometimes works of art, on the contrary, make up nothing but waste products, claims Winnicott. In a search for the self the person concerned may have produced something valuable in terms of art. but a successful artist may be universally acclaimed and yet have failed to find the self that he or she is looking for, he says.

> The self is not really to be found in what is made out of products of body or mind, however valuable these constructs may be in terms of beauty, skill, and impact. If the artist is searching for the self, then it can be said that in all probability there is already some failure for that artist in the field of general creative living. The finished creation never heals the underlying lack of sense of self. ( *PR* 54 )

## 1.3 LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR, FALLLING THROUGH ITS CRACKS, AND RESURFACING AS A MORE WELL-ROUNDED BEING

### Milner

Marion Milner, in agreement with Winnicott, warns against a simplistic theory of the rôle of symbolization and the act of creativity in the formation of the subject. The use of symbols fundamentally enables the subject to accept and to benefit from paradoxical emotional states of being, she argues. Rather than dulling his awareness of the deeply conflictual character of the human

predicament, or diverting his attention, as in Freud, symbolization provides him with the opportunity to grasp his inter- and intra- subjective inconsistencies with greater clarity ("Aspects of Symbolism" 181-195). Klein suggests that the subject's creative work is paramount for his inner healing and integration of conflicting parts. What cannot be bridged or leveled out can, at the least, be made to coexist. Milner, in contrast, emphasizes the subject's continuing need to temporarily dissolve and come together. The more attuned he is to his inner incompatibilites, the better off he is, she argues. Hence, when used imaginatively, symbolization helps the subject coping productively with the fact that, he is a complex personality and yet of one mind ; that he is partly made up of his relations to others and yet remains a unified being; and that he is of a fluid and yet a structured nature. Milner's emphasis, thus, is not on the ways in which the budding subject may come to emerge in one piece from the trial of coming into being. Rather, she focuses on the opportunities available for the relatively well developed, at times over developed, individual to soften up and develop a more flexible attitude to life.

Generally speaking, Milner claims, we all engage in two different ways of thinking, each of which employs symbolization in a particular manner. In science a symbol is used to pin down facts. In the arts it is a means to giving shape to formlessness, that is to feelings in general, ambiguity in particular. The scientific way of knowing is in itself sterile and impersonal. It assigns people and things an orderly place in the world, but does not necessarily further human

development and change. The artistic way usually deals with the psychically unknowable and the socially unacceptable. To some the latter is seen as corresponding to pure chaos. When keeping apart these two ways of knowing, says Milner, the outcome is a crippled insight and a frustrated subject. Granted, the model perfectly prescribes a life in which work is deprived of personal involvement, and love and affect is assigned a marginal existence. It is not that *any* kind of order and categorization disagree with a fuller and more balanced living, Milner emphasizes. But there is a difference between the structure and dynamics imposed on us from the outside, and the rhythm emerging from our inner. The former, when left to its own devices, fosters mechanical repetition, deadness, and—deep down--a simmering desire to destroy. The latter, in so far as it is contained by the former, cultivates dynamic reproduction and vitality (*On Not Being Able to Paint* 99).

Heavily inspired by Winnicott, Milner assumes human interaction with others to be driven by more than mere instincts, whether of a sexual or a self-preserving nature. Both the infant and the adult, she suggests, are driven by the desire to gain recognition as a person in his own right, that is, to be seen as *some one*. A desire of this nature, she argues, involves the ability to oscillate between fusion and separation, between immersing one self in fantasy and situating one self in relation to reality. This is exactly what takes place during the transitional phase. The subject, whose endeavors at sharing his "inner world" with others are thwarted, loses his zest for life. As opposed to Freud, for whom gaining control

over the forces of nature is imperative, Milner focuses on the tendency for conformity to eliminate the spark from life. The well adapted individual, whose well greased wheels are spinning according to the drum of convention, has missed the boat she states. Being in the habit of always rushing off so as to mind yet another obligation, whenever a free moment occurs, he is bound to collapse whenever forced to mind his own business. This is a form of life which is driven neither by curiosity nor desire, Milner concludes. It is motivated by fear (*Experiment in Leisure* 35). As stressful and isolating as this may be, what the superbly adapted individual dreads more than anything, is to get lost. Having no sense of his self, his regime is a prerequisite to keep in place a superficially acquired self-image (*ONBAP* 17, 82).

What the subject must do, in so far as he desires to be less discontent than prescribed by Freud, is to work persistently on establishing links between his inner and his exterior landscape. The acknowledgment of his own projections and introjections is *the* means to learn eventually to accept any kind of otherness. *Self-absorption,* consequently, is essentially about *getting real*, says Milner. The long and painful struggle towards the development of an inner life is by no means a matter of escapism. It is the sole road leading to ever facing up to reality.

Using as a point of departure for her theory her past tendency to try to keep differences apart, Milner recollects : She would, as a rule, seek out intimate others, whose role were to complete her own picture :

> On looking back, it occurred to me that I had chosen to fall in love with those people who, I thought, combined the two aspects... people that I thought, though often mistakenly, could be both fierce and gentle. Only later had I discovered the futility of hoping to find the solution to one's own problems all ready-made in

> another person, on whose wonderful qualities one could live parasitically for ever. (*EL* 216 )

This, however, was prior to her realization of the two ways of knowing.

In order to experience real tenderness for others one must find a way of coming to terms with one's own inner nature. To open one's eyes to the stern facts of life means to recognize that "the inner dream and the objective fact can never permanently coincide, they can only interact." One must reckon with one's hate of the world when it disappoints, and resign from a too intense resentment towards oneself when similarly falling short. The gap between the ideal and the actual must be dealt with similarly to the way one copes with the discrepancy between what one is and what one would have liked to be (*ONBAP* 90).

Is it not ironic, Milner says, that as a society we put such an effort into teaching people how to reason better when what they need to learn is how to make use of *unreason*. In fact, the attempt to nail down an experience often kills it. The endeavor to *think through* the problems of life generally fails. Merely thinking is never going to make people come to terms with their feelings and discover what they really *want* in life. And confusion concerning one's personal desires may have as negative an impact on the psyche as externally imposed restrictions. "Having difficulties figuring out where one stands, and feeling deprived without being able to figure out why, produce as much, if not more, hatred towards others as repression does " (*EL* 221). What we have all the reason in the world to fear, rather than worrying about not measuring up to externally imposed standards, is the very inability to "loose

ourselves." Thus the greatest hazard lies not in cutting a few corners of any syllabus, Milner states. It lies in losing the capacity for total concentration, the kind of concentration " which both envelops the whole body, and at the same time can spread out in spiritual envelopment of the object. " When unable to fully immerse oneself in a subject, one's life experience is reduced to that of a parrot's (*ONBAP* 111).

What each of us need to understand, Milner states, is that the imagination serves a major role in our "getting on" with a life worthwhile living. We must come to realize that,

> the act of welding, by means of words or shape or musical sound or color—into some sort of tangible form—a single moment of raw lived experience, is action as real and effective, though not as obviously so, as being able to order people about. ( *EL* 199)

Imagine how differently things would look if we could accept self-knowledge with all its implications, Milner ponders, if we could take seriously and believe in our own experience in all of its aspects. An entirely new way of living, an entirely different kind of society would unfold (*ONBAP* 91).

To *be-come* our selves, we must commit ourselves to a life of *faith*, she states. Because there is no way in which one can ever totally submit to anything, unless one fully trusts it (*ONBAP* 207). To *express* ourselves we must let " impulse and mood crystallize into outer form : not into purposive action determined by some outer goal, but expressive action determined by an inner vision." True expression comes out of plunging into the abyss.

Authentic being out of acting on one's own inner images, and thus turning them into tangible and comprehensible aspects of life ( *EL* 205 ).

Everyone making the move from childhood to adulthood must find a particular niche in the social world into which he can pour his energies, leave his mark, feel known and needed. Many are left to creating this gap on their own. For this space to be habitable it is essential that it be based on genuine inner wishes (*ONBAP* 133). The unconscious nature of these wishes makes necessary that they be allowed to emerge in non verbal form, Milner points out. Making available space for these to take shape in the exterior is the first step towards learning to love the sensations they are about :

> Through the process of giving life to the portrayal of one's subject, of coming to see it as a whole through the discovery of pattern and rhythm and so coming imaginatively to appreciate its nature, one is actually creating something, creating the spiritual reality of one's power to love it—if it is lovable ; or laugh at it or hate it—if it is laughable of hateful. Ultimately, the artist [in all of us] is trying to create a self. And if ourselves, then also the world, because one's view of the one interpenetrates with one's view of the other. (*ONBAP* 136)

Any kind of innovative thinking takes a vague, often a visual, frequently a poetic beginning. It draws, Milner argues, on the early experience of discovering and experimenting with the boundaries between self and other. This dynamics, affiliated with Winnicott's transitional zone, involves the drifting back and forth between fusion and separation. At its most primitive, it is dominated by pre-logical bodily, or concrete, thinking. This earliest, or most fundamental, experience is one of oscillating between total containment by the world and of containing it entirely. It is an incorporative mode of loving that is associated with fantasies of eating the

other and being engulfed. Ultimately it may result in the evolution of an *imaginative body.*

The imaginative body, Milner explains, is experienced as an extension in space, as the ability to spiritually envelop the other and to project one's inner imagination into him. Pre-logical thinking, thus, is an essential recurrent phase in the development of a creative relation to the world ("AS" 184-95). We get to explore our own inner unknown by spreading our imaginative body around objects in the outer (*ONBAP* 63). Pre-logical thinking frequently reappears in relation with production and contemplation of works of art, Milner points out, often to the extent that the subject falls in love. Hence, the experience of outer and inner coinciding, as when falling in love, seems to be consciously brought about in the arts. In the case of the latter through an aware acceptance of as-if-ness of the experience and the conscious manipulation of a malleable material. Thus, when dead matter is endowed with the life of the imagination, it comes to serve as a source of inner motion (*ONBAP* 131). Moments like these change the view of the world from consisting of an accumulation of inanimate matter into being made up of a web of living essence. Objects come to exist in their own right and to lead lives of their own. Hence the merging of illusion and reality, that is, illusion's so called distortion of factuality, is what lies at the root of enthusiasm for life, of the ability to feel affection for others and for developing respect for the environment (*ONBAP* 21).

To approach the world creatively is to allow for a revival of the primary phase of experience. It involves an opening up for the primary madness which everyone has lived though. Creativity, thus, is world making no matter the subject's developmental stage. Ultimately, Milner says, creative activity functions in a way similar to psychoanalytic interaction. The two settings have in common the provision of an open space within a containing environment. In both cases the setting serves as a framework, a world within which illusion can be explored and self-disintegration allowed for. In neither case is the procedure to be goal oriented. Also, both involve the ability to immerse oneself "against better sense, " and thus to "fall in love."

The way to a sensible and wholesome life goes through imagery, but only in so far as one does not limit one self to pictures of a beautiful and life reassuring nature. It is the expression of the most despised of our inner images that shifts the heaviest weight, Milner insists. If *images* hold great emotional power, it is because they make up outward and visible signs of an inner, often hardly accessible experience (*EL* 190-94). Unacknowledged and unexpressed the power associated with these pictures remain obscure. As soon as they have been given external shape the opportunity arises for the subject to become aware of their force.

Drawing on her own experimentation with drawing and painting, also called "awake dreaming," Milner recalls:

> I remembered a kind of half-waking spatial nightmare of being surrounded by an infinitude of space rushing away in every direction for ever and ever. In a similar way the term "vanishing point" aroused vistas of desolation. (*ONBAP* 12)

Contrary to what most would be tempted to do, namely trying to regain a foothold in familiar foundation, Milner lets go and immerses her self in the effects and affects triggered by the color scheme. Clearly demarcated colors leave her cold, she discovers. Colors in transition, on the other hand, colors fading into each other, blending, merging and appearing to "move and live against each other" evoke her curiosity. The fact that color classifications appear deadening and color combinations lively to her reflects, in Milner's mind, her way of dealing with the two ways of knowing :

> One way had to do with a common sense world of objects separated by outline, keeping to themselves and staying the same, the other had to do with a world of change, of continual development and process, one in which there was no sharp line between one state and the next ... only a gradual merging of the one into the other.This idea of there being no fixed outline, no boundary between one state and another, also introduced the idea of no boundary between one self and another self, it brought the idea of one personality merging with another. (*ONBAP* 24)

Does the vertigo triggered by loss of perspective and the sense of plunging evoked by graduated color schemes have anything to do with fears of drowning, Milner asks? It seems evident, she says, that if painting is concerned with feelings of space, then it must also associate feelings related to the problems involved in separating one self from the world of other bodies. In fact, she reflects, it must be deeply concerned with ideas of distance and separation and having and losing, a fear of losing all sense of separating boundaries; particularly the boundaries between the tangible realities of the external world and the imaginative realities of the inner world of feeling and idea; in essence, the fear of being mad (*ONBAP* 12). "This idea of there

being no fixed outline, no boundary between one state and another," she relates, "also introduces the idea of no boundary between one self and another self, brings to the fore the notion of one personality merging with another" (*ONBAP* 24). What if it's not a picture, but a person who is loved like this , she asks. "Image-finding," ultimately, is the means to getting closer in touch with the movement of life. Milner elaborates :

> By taking notice of those feelings and images that seemed to be in my blood and bones rather than in my head, I had found myself able to behave, not less reasonably, but more so...I was sure that the way to pass between this Scylla and Charybdis was to listen to the voice of the blood and the bones, but not to make the mistake of taking it at its face value, not to take its images literally and assume that it was talking about inner truth, about the problem of the inner organization of desire and experience. For if you lived recognizing only the outer half of the facts, taking images literally, as many people did, then the ignored inner facts, the demands of the inner organization of desire, took their revenge by distorting your external vision, and you would read with gusto the lies of atrocity-mongers and pass them on to your friends as if they were external truth. ( *EL* 227)

## 1.4 SEARCHING FOR ONE'S SELF, AND STUMBLING OVER AN OTHER

### Kavaler-Adler

Winnicott sees creativity as breaking the path for the subject's establishing an inner space of his own, and thus facilitating a flexible interaction with the environment. Milner views creative endeavors as making up the means for the subject to learn to live more fully, not in spite of the irresolvable conflicts with which he struggles, but rather *because* of these. Both theories contest the Freudian thesis that artistic engagement primarily serves the purpose of permitting the subject to displace instinctual, sexual

energies. Likewise, both also emphasize the significance of inter-subjective interaction for the subject's coming into *being*.

As far as subjectivity is concerned, the field of imagination is not at all clearly distinguishable from the domain of so called reality. Based on Winnicott and Milner, to a lesser extent on Klein, one could easily assume that any object-relations inspired account of creativity is bound to conceive of the playful individual as a subject-in-the-process-of-coming-more-*completely*-into-being. That this is not necessarily so is demonstrated by Susan Kaveler-Adler's *Compulsion to Create*. Drawing extensively on Fairbairn and Klein, and focusing on the differences made by gender, Kavaler-Adler presents a more skeptical view of the potential and pitfalls represented by creative labor.

Contrary to Winnicott and Milner, Kavaler-Adler pays little attention to the *process* of relating. Instead she strongly emphasizes the nature of the *object* of the relation. According to Klein, Kavaler-Adler reiterates, there is a tendency for the infant to split off various parts of the object in an attempt at recovering the ideal object, and thus of overcoming anxiety. However, a whole object internalization must take place before an internal dialogue between self and other can come about. Kavaler-Adler, in disagreement with Klein, hypothesizes that only under the best of circumstances *might* symbolization result in a healing, i.e., an increasing integration of the self. It is in practice much more likely, she says, that acts of symbolization reproduce and reinforce pathological states of psychic disintegration.

Generally speaking, creativity may serve one of two purposes, Kavaler-Adler suggests. It either makes a free use of the imagination, something which entails a self-involved production of aesthetic pleasure. Or, it constitutes a desperate and doomed attempt at creating some sort of containment for a hopelessly scattered self. The former furthers individuation and self-integration, the latter enhances the pathological condition that drove the subject to symbolize in the first place. It may well be that the creative process function as a potential space, as proposed by Winnicott. Still, this can only happen in so far as circumstances are favorable. It is a myth, Kavaler-Adler states, that creative immersion in itself may substitute either the transitional space of early infancy or the transferential space of a psycho-analytical process :

> The creative process is an experience of interacting with one's internal world. Such interaction can allow the creative work to provide containing and mirroring functions when these functions *have already been internalized* in infancy so that they can be recreated within the context of the creating process... Involvement with creative work can activate a good early holding environment during engagement in the creative process but only if such a holding environment has been internalized early in life. (35, 83)

Creative work cannot possibly ever make up for human affective interaction missed out on early in life, Kavaler-Adler insists. Those for whom creativity becomes a matter of survival, simply have no idea how to create or make use of a holding environment. Their developmental mourning has been disrupted by a pre-Oedipal trauma. The self has split off experience to the effect that the latter is not even registered as such. "The inner life is imprisoned behind a 'schizoid barrier,' " Kavaler-Adler states, which is " far

less penetrable than a repressive barrier, because affective life is not simply dissociated but is constricted and deadened " ( 14 ).

The sealing off of the affective self results in a closed psychic system, by Kavaler-Adler labeled *bulimic*. The longer this developmentally deprived and primitive position lasts, the more intense the subject's sense of suffocation and despair. Starved for human contact, and yet unable to engage in any kind of affective exchange, he is consumed by a craving to incorporate others. These others are expected to extend the self, to repair it and to restore the long lost symbiotic unity. Idealized and swallowed wholesale, however, they are soon experienced as being both disappointing and poisonous. The moment they "click in" and resonate with the unexpressed pain of pre-Oedipal trauma, it is experienced as imperative that they be thrown out (19). Thus, no losses are ever processed, no part-objects ever incorporated into a larger whole. Creativity, under circumstances like these may bring temporary relief but never any healing. A dynamics like the one described above manifests itself most explicitly in borderline pathologies, Kavaler-Adler points out. The individual may produce with feverish passion and produce at a dizzying pace. In other words, his work may give the impression that he is blooming, when in fact his inner space is shriveling (5).

When shifting her focus from the subject's development in general, to that of the girl, things grow increasingly complicated. The mother's holding and handling of the infant-girl, Kavaler-Adler argues, even more vehemently

than Winnicott and Milner, essentially lays the ground for the girl's later development of creative skills. The father's entry into the picture at a later stage, on the other hand, critically determines whether or not the girl's ego can *sustain* pleasure in creative work (64). However, unless the girl has already experienced a fulfilling sharing of her self with her (m)other, the issue of sustaining her creative efforts remain irrelevant. The pre-Oedipally arrested girl, still waiting for her first transitional space to become available, so to speak, has never learned to distinguish between inner and outer, or self and other. Regardless of the fact that she seemingly moves on in life, her prime goal remains to encounter her self (via the mother's reflection) in the transitional zone.

What the deprived, creative girl is *really* after, Kavaler-Adler claims, is, unbeknownst to her self, an alternative mother. No matter the character of her real-life father, partner, or creative product, he—or it-- triggers nothing but devastating disappointment. The greater the subject's sense of internal dissolution, the more unwavering her obsessive determination to find a good-enough father-figure. The girl thus develops a *demon lover complex*, says Kavaler-Adler, which cannot but continuously put her in a profoundly frustrating situation. Basically, it leaves her with the unattractive alternative of having to choose between a cold and inaccessible, and yet suffocating, mother, on the one hand, and an ideal and loving, and yet irretrievable father, on the other hand. No matter her efforts, the girl is likely to be down on her luck. *Any*

man, lover, the work of art, no matter their qualities, simply make a pretty bad retrospective preodipal mother, states Kavaler-Adler. Thus :

> Creative women who become entrapped in this realm are those who have no leverage to come and go from it, because they have no containment within their bodies and its physical relations with others owing to an absence of early maternal internalization. (And she continues). The creative woman who is imprisoned within this complex becomes sealed off in an isolated psychic domain. in which the only nourishment is increasing psychic intimacy with the idealized father-muse, thus perpetuating an untimely and addictive symbiosis. (81)

## Life on Stage. *BLACKWATER*

When Annie's sixty-something year old mother suggests that she pay her daughter a visit at Starhill, her proposal is not received with enthusiasm. It is unlikely to work out, Annie mumbles, a response which does not discourage Henny the least bit. The undeveloped infrastructure in the area, along with the long climb from the village to the mountain top, could have turned the journey into a strenuous ordeal for the aging woman. However, equipped with a backpack and of high spirits, Henny conceives of the trip as yet an other adventure on her journey through life. The village cab-driver, known for his unhelpful attitude towards his clients, is so enchanted by Henny that he extends his services for free. Her uninhibited explicitness leaves even Petrus short of words. Henny has a particular talent for placing herself at center stage in life. She is taken in by all kinds of imaginative *forms* as encountered in the external, no matter their imperfection as regards their resemblance to reality. In return, she

takes over her environment simply by means of being so very well—and yet vibrantly-- defined.

> "Just imagine ! There he sits, watching me as some gangster's moll starring with Aake Söederblom, then a fortnight later I'm outside his door right up in the mountains saying, " Help ! Where is my daugher ? " [ Henny explains about her taxi trip].
>
> Not starring with Aake Söderblom. Sickan Carlsson or Anna-Lisa starred with him. In the same film as. In a scene with [Annie corrects her silently]....
>
> Since Henny had appeared in the hollow by the stream, they had all been staring at her and listening to what she had to say. Even Petrus. He was the one most affected. His mouth fell open
>
> She made her way through the grass without showing any signs of fatigue. her voluminous hips swinging. She had always had the most feminine figure, narrow-waisted, big-busted and curved behind....
>
> Nowadays the kilos were visible...She was sixty-eight, her profile still clean but flowing below her chin. She raised it against the wind...
>
> "What exquisite stonework ! "
>
> Not for a moment had Annie expected her to be anything but excuberant. Henny had seen every grotty boarding house in the country, had acted on wooden stages in public parks for the evening, and tussled with the drunks. She had never complained and always got her way. (249)

The capacity for juggling facts according to her needs is one of Henny's most outstanding talents. Factual states of affairs are gently, though firmly, dealt with so as not to smother her dreams. When Henny sets her mind to something she projects herself into the assignment with such force and conviction that others cannot but get enthralled. As an adolescent Annie perceived Henny's force as paralyzing. Now she discovers that people are not immobilized by her. They are *captured* (249). The one thing Henny is definitely not burdened by is shame. Unabashed by her need to make up for the flaws and failures in her past, she openly rewrites reality. Dull facts are spiced up by a colorful, though often artificial and slightly awkward, touch. Thus, Henny brings "rabbit slippers with ears of fluffy material and large shiny eyes " to her grand daughter living in a shed among goats. For her

middleaged virginal daughter she brings a blouse with a transparent front that shows her breasts. Everything is "extraordinary!" in Henny's eyes, and whatever does not automatically comply with her view, receives a generously helping hand .

Henny's real life is no Harlequin Romance. Her prince did not either ever dress in shining armor. Aake is so nearsighted that he looks like a goldfish in a bowl. Imperturbably dignified and courteous, he nevertheless has horrendous taste and exhibits no sign of ambition. While Henny vacuums and practices incessantly in their one room apartment, all through Annie's childhood, Aake buries himself in piles of travelogues. Aake took Henny's last name when they married, and shortly after his major role in life became that of supporting Henny's career. Thanks to her vivid imagination and her willingness to merge fact and fiction, Aake acquires in Henny's eyes the radiance of a star. With a deep and sensual voice she sings :

*Maybe he's lazy*
*maybe he's slow*
*maybe I'm crazy*
*maybe I know...*
*Can't help loving that man of mine...* ( 253)

Henny's visit to the secluded Starhill is by her daughter perceived as intrusive. And yet, the mere sight of her mother evokes in Annie's mind a curiosity concerning her own story line. Her budding desire to see herself as emerging from an interconnected chain of events, cause her to think about the fact that her own daughter shall never be able to trace down her own origins.

Thus, connections which may exist, between past and present, must be looked after and nourished, so as to remain alive. No ties are ever automatically made up. They cannot be mechanically retrieved. Neither is it possible ever to calculate their continuity by any means of certainty.

> [I]t had been fifty-two below zero when she was conceived...How and where could people make love when it was so cold ? Perhaps they had to ?...
>
> Mia ? Did she know what her grandmother's name was. She had been an operetta singer, and Henny Raft was her stage name. Her real name was Helga, née Gustafsson, and Annie was sure Mia didn't know that...
>
> [Aake] had married Henny Raft in 1939, when he was thirty-one and Henny thirty-four. Annie knew this by heart, because it formed part of the story of her birth, which Henny loved to tell. There had never been any talks of children. Henny's career as an operetta singer was at a sensitive stage...
>
> Henny and Aake married at Whitsun. That September, the war came and Aake was called up...into the infantry... Henny went to see him there and became pregnant...According to the family legend, because of her pregnancy Henny lost the chance of playing the lead in Annie Get your Gun, so instead she christened her baby girl Annie.
>
> Annie was still quite young when she realized Henny would never have been given the lead. Dolly Tate was the best she could have hoped for. (195-96)

Stirring up things, and bringing a breath of fresh air into the stale atmosphere at Starhill, is exactly what Henny does. Her vivacity and flexible grasp of reality are contagious, as is her blurring of the boundaries between sheer facts and reconstructed reality. As soon as Annie *sees* her she becomes aware of the new life stirring inside of her. And a tight lipped Starhill woman, impressed by Henny's authenticity and lack of embarrassment, suddenly admits to otherwise deeply repressed and rejected feelings :

> I'm pregnant.
>
> The moment that white pompom, that beret, that quilted jacket, had emerged from the hollow, realizing that it was her, Annie had had the thought. At that very moment, not a minute earlier. (250)

> ...without a moment's hesitation, Henny asked them whether they weren't frightened ?
>
> " Yes, " said Brita. " Sometimes I think it is all so horrible. "
>
> She had never said that before. None of them had ever admitted that it had concerned them...Henny had got Brita so say what it was like—that she was

> sometimes frightened. She had said it in a quiet, sorrowful voice, and Henny clearly felt this was something you only touched on lightly, for she hugged Mia and suggested they sing " The Maiden to the Well Did Go. " (251)

Nothing eludes Henny's attention. Everything is seen as representing a challenge and as offering a particular opportunity to rewrite life's significance. When hit by the tragic loss of her daughter, she keeps up appearances. Performing with dignity she does *not* repress her feelings. Rather, her emotional havoc is canalized into the shape of the role, she has assigned herself. The dramatization of her own experience helps Henny to stay contained. It keeps her together, keeps her inner resources in circulation, an even enable her to bring comfort to those for whom streams of tears—and a loss of life force--is the only feasible mode of reacting :

> When her one and only daughter dies, Henny responds with studied dignity:
>
> Not once had she given in to tears or any outburst over the senseless and cruel thing that had happened to her only child. She had acted a part. There had been no falseness or dissembling at all in the way she had played her role. She coped with what had happened to her in the same way as she had coped with what had happened to her in her long life; she took it on herself as if it had been a part written for her and no one else.
>
> She had given [ Birger] strength...When he saw the tiny, compact little lady in black with swollen ankles coming down the airport stairs, he had felt compassion and tenderness. That was the first time since the event that he had felt anything but a confusion that sometimes seemed like drunkenness or numbness...
>
> What he had felt for Henny Raft had been fierce and unexpected, and it had helped him through the funeral...Henny put her hand with all those rings, the most prominent a huge bloodstone set in marcasites, over his hand and kept it here until he could breathe normally again. (319)

A contemporary Aristotelean, Henny aspires not to develop a well rounded character, as much as she intends to *move* through life. Whether exposed to good fortune or catastrophe, she transforms it into a story line requiring her

acting and taking action. Nothing ever entirely destroys Henny's role in life, for the simple reason that her repertoire is extensive. Contrary to her ancestor, however, Henny strays from the artistic road of universal values. In her case, art and history telling influence each other to the extent that they cannot be told apart. In as much as human beings contribute to a larger, interconnected, history, each and every individual makes up a particular part of the puzzle.

## 1.5 FROM PLAYING ACCORDING TO THE RULES, TO PURSUING ONE'S DESTINATION

### Lingis

In Freud, sublimation, the successor to childhood play, makes up the cornerstone of culture. It establishes cohesiveness, continuity, and lays the ground for community. Basing his theory primarily on a drive *economy*, heavily inspired by positivist thinking and capitalist dynamics, it is inconceivable to Freud that superfluous and free floating energy may exist and serve man for the better. Motion ( physical discharge ) and imagination (psychic representation and transformation of content) are the organism's way of ridding itself of accumulated excitement. Whenever the equilibrium is jolted out of balance, the individual goes overboard in compulsive obsessive, fruitless patterns of repetition. A similar logic applies to society at large. Erotic or aggressive energies straying from their channeling into a productive outlet result in perverse and crime-ridden cultures.

Alphonso Lingis strays far from the Freudian path. Similarly to Milner, he examines various ways in which we may expand our experiential horizon. However, the theory he comes up with is a far cry from Milner's rather moderate proposal. Toying with one's outer limits involves an intensive cutting-core engagement, states Lingis. No nervous and ambivalent lingering in between two modes of experience occurs within his framework. Inspired by Husserl and Heidegger, but even more so by Merleau-Ponty, Lingis suggests that play is an *expenditure of excessive energy*. Being neither goal oriented nor structure dependent, its aim is but to engage the subject in erotic interactions with similar minded bodies. The subject's true aspiration in life is to realize his unique potential, says Lingis. And this comes about through an increased awareness of his ultimate limitation, i.e., his mortality. The process of coming to terms with his mortality often *appears* useless, meaningless, incomprehensible. " A waste of time and energy, " in other words. And this is the very point. For how could the subject's *unique being* possibly unfold according to guide-lines for what is already pre-determined as being meaningful ?

The subject's uniqueness is inaugurated first and foremost by his realization of the experience of the *void*. It is here, from on the verge of nothingness, that he is greeted by the multitude of pre-given forms. It is also at this point that it may dawn on him that no pre-existing form is ever to facilitate his self-expansion. He must make one of two choices : He can

withdraw from accepting the challenge of creating a role for him self, or, he can make a leap right into nothingness. In so far as he chooses the former, he is destined to end up leading a de-vitalized existence in a cookie-cutter. In either case, there is no avoiding the reality of death.

Merely acknowledging the existence of the void, and making the *decision* to plunge in, is far from enough to bring the subject on to a self-realizing track. No one develops the least bit of a personality without practice, as Lingis puts it. Physical and psychical self immersion in the unknown, is requirement number one. The further into the thicket of unfamiliarity the subject moves, the greater the anxiety. *Anxiety,* says Lingis, is to find oneself adrift. But *anxiety is also a life force* striving to be realized. "Out of anxiety, in anxiety, singled out within the unerring arms of death closing in, one finds one's own forces existing, one finds a compass of elemental possibilities responding to oneself alone, awaiting immemorially for oneself alone," he explains (*Sensation : Intelligibility in Sensibility* 5 ). Anxiety makes the subject acutely aware of his opportunities, limitations, and responsibilities in this world, that is of his *conscience*, in Heideggerian terms. And the conscientious individual cannot but strive to realize his personal potential. If not for any other reason, at least so as to die his very own death.

What the individual searches for in his play with the other, is that his *efforts* to realize himself be recognized (*Foreign Bodies* 184). What he seeks in the eyes of the other, Lingis elaborates, is an *opening*, an emotional and

physical reassurance that makes possible the pursuit of an angst provoking, risky and visionary course (*FB* 219 ). The interplay between one individual and another is thus all about giving and gaining reassurance, about feeling that one has an impact on the world, that one exist for others, that one's is real (*SIS* xiii ).

Merleau-Ponty defines perception as the distinguishing between figure and ground. The subject perceives things as more or less real, depending on their "intersensorial coherence and consistency." Things *grab* him and, reversely, cause him to *grasp* their essence by introducing him to a task at hand, a force, a possibility in the context of the larger whole. Some configurations never settle in to the perceptual map of reality: Breaking with the coherency and consistency of the world, they merely "float like phantoms " before our perception ( *SIS* 32 ). For the subject to *really* perceive some thing, however, it is paramount that he place himself in relation to it : " to see a visible thing in real space is to feel how to get to it and how to handle it," says Lingis, echoing Merleau-Ponty ( *SIS* 37 ). Perceptual competence equals motor competence. Reality, in effect, is constituted neither by the imaginary nor by the sensory in itself, but by practice (*FB* 21).

But does not Merleau Ponty overlook something, Lingis asks. What about the imperative to *not* hold onto things, the releasing and the letting go of the world, associated with the experience of dying? Is it not possible, he suggests, that the unpracticable spaces (such as the world of music, painting,

dreaming, and obsession) make up *more* than mere fragments of the practicable world of perception, that is, that they enlarge it ? May it not be that the world, as we understand and experience it, depends on these *voids* in which its consistency and patterns of coherency break up, i.e., that it is held together by the visionary, hallucinatory, lascivious? The body orienting itself in relation to no single goal, but letting itself get caught up in the flow of things, is an infantile, sensitive, and perceptive, but not a comprehending, body.

Lingis is inspired by a garden variety of psychoanalytical critique, phenomenological reflections, and experience from the field. With the aim of spreading wide open the fan of otherness, he indicates, rather than demonstrates, a great number of the many shades it may take. He rarely attempts to *explain* the deeper meaning of one event or another. Instead, he makes accessible a very particular part of the world. A great deal of readerly footwork is actually required for the experience Lingis he opens up for, to become intimately felt. Thus, the reader is confronted with a task comparable to that of the individual who is facing up to the void.

In *Excesses: Eros and Culture* Lingis provides a readerly fore taste of the nature of the games awaiting him. Quoting extensively : "I paid them to torture you, Prasadchandra," he opens with a chapter on eroticized play. Prasadchandra, an adolescent Shilanese, five feet, six inches tall, weighing 112 pounds, is "seventeen, still a boy, already a man, ready to die." Slowly

and gradually approaching, and as if encircling, the essence of the young man's self-expansion, Lingis continues :

> You, Prasadchandra, rise and walk to the center of the flames, the tablas are thundering like avalanches and men in lungis are chanting mantras. You clasp your fingers about the Shiva lingam hanging from your neck, and hold it to your lips and kiss.

Scared to death, but nonetheless determined to proceed, the boy step by step prepares to subject himself to a series of torturous acts.

> In the mountains covered above, a rock covered with nines shifts position, and the eagles awaken. In one continuous movement you lay your body on the mat on the ground. Men whose faces are marked with the red and white lines of Shiva the destroyer tie your legs at the ankles with apiece of cotton cloth, and then tie your legs at the ankles with apiece of cotton cloth, and then tie your thighs together with a second piece of cloth.
>
> The guru rises beside you, you look upon him with eyes of insatiable passion...He takes out the bundle of five-inch steel hooks, wrapped in twine, and unravels the twine. He takes one of the hooks, rubs your back with the diagram of yantra, then with a strong trust he drives the steel hook into your back.

Gone is the sensitive touch of the story opening, gone is any childhood innocence previously associated with the boy. Gone is the illusion that change requires nothing but superficial fooling around.

> The pain cuts into you like the hooks of laughter. The Gury Krishnananda drives a second hook into your back, on the opposite side of the first one...The guru has forced in four hooks, he runs the twine through the eyes of the hooks and binds them together. The men take hold of your thin arms and your bound legs and lift you high over yourselves... The guru stands on a stump and twists the twine around the warm limb of the bodhi tree. When he comes down the men lower slowly below you. The flesh of your back curdles as your body mass descends, then the hooks hold...You open your mouth and extend your tongue. The guru Krishnananda takes one of the steel skewers with the metal pennant...and he pushes it against your cheek, holding with his other hand the inner wall as he pushes the steel point through, then through your tongue, then through the wall of the other cheek...
>
> You are backed up to yourself, afflicted with yourself, unable to flee and unable to retreat, mired in pain, mired with yourself...The volume of the pain holds you in the opacity and gravity of your being...Your eyes are blazing, a terrifying insanity of searing yellow, raging and seething over an inner secret. *Mahakaruna, anicca, anatta*. The compassion. The impermanence. The no-self. (113-31)

Freud's notion of masochism allows for self-destructive practices, but nothing in his theory comes close to this boy's submission to inexpressible pain. A pain which, according to most accounts, has little to do with play. By drawing extensively on both Western phenomenology and Eastern philosophy, however, Lingis succeeds in conceiving of this boy's activity as an act of active *self-making*. The boy's transgression of previous bodily limitations and lack of courage opens up for a merging with forces different from and larger than his own. It enables him to move up against, go beyond, and unsettle the very constraints that used to restrict him. By submitting himself to the torturous act, the boy has forged a space for him self in the flesh of the world.

To inscribe one self into the web of the world by such bloody means corresponds to love making, claims Lingis. Devoted play, love-making, and self-exploration all equals world-making. The aroused body undergoes a material change, or, a change of state. The sensual experience of lust is a communication with what is most remote from the integrating, interpreting, decoding nature of the conscious ego, he continues. " It is a communication with materiality in transubstantiation. It is provoked by the body of another divested of its socially coded uniforms...It is provoked by the hard edges of reality radiating in twilight halos and perfumes" ( *SIS* 64 ). No single individual is in the position of running this game on his own. The course of events is driven by ephemeral connections, conjectures, and confrontations, as they emerge, as if out of the living texture of the world.

Heidegger says we are born into an already formed environment. Unless we accept the challenge of creating an existential contour of our own, this pre-ordered environment shall confine, possibly suffocate, our being. All philosophy aside, the temptation is undeniably there, Lingis admits, to simply embrace the preexisting models of existence. Still, the downside of fitting ourselves into this mold, he points out, is that it leaves us interchangeable. The greatest failure one can commit, Lingis claims, is to assume that the official labeling of one's reality necessarily corresponds to one's sensations, as if words were in possession of the capacity to define and delimit what one may possibly ever feel. To learn, to dream, feel, and think, Lingis says, traditionally entails to learn by heart what others have dreamt about, how they have felt, what they have thought about. But *words*, as opposed to *gestures*, fix objectives and ceaselessly chop up life's sense of continuity. Acting *as if* they translate the void into a substance of a kind, they engrave their meaning. By doing so they gradually loose their evocative powers. In summary, language by no means captures the range of bodily sensations that the subject may undergo. The "otherness of the other " can be perceived only by the naked eye. And naked intercourse is precisely what a sea of words, explanations, and reflections exclude (*FB* 218).

Sliding into the cookie cutter entails the subject's making him self *some one* in accordance with other's expectations to the form he should take. As part of the package solution he must be sure to avoid any once-in-a-lifetime-situations, as these might disrupt his otherwise ordered universe. Or, it may make

him painfully aware that his passion is wanting. Cookie-cutter life precludes confrontations with the utterly unknown and unsettling, some of which may hold the key to the experience of all encompassing joy, says Lingis. Falling helplessly in love, it may go without saying, is out of the question (*SIS* 3). In the end, the self-restricted life of convention is practiced with one particular agenda in mind : never to risk spending all of one's energies on one single adventure.

When occasionally the lid on this coffin like existence is tipped, and the subject regains a glimpse of what real life may be about, he is in for a shock. The course he has so far meticulously followed has been in vain. What he used to find important, valuable, significant, all of a sudden means nothing. During lucid moments like these, Lingis claims, the subject is caught up in dread. Having no unique and self-made identity to loose, he is bound to fear that the life style which served as his shelter may easily be appropriated by somebody else. The subject for whom the question of his existential aim in life has never even been posed, the individual who felt safely grounded in foundations of convention, may thus come to the realization that his lot in life is vacant (*SIS* 4).

Considering the risks involved in not realizing our potential, how come we generally tend to gravitate toward fixed patterns and fossil identities ? Why does it not come naturally to enthusiastically explore flexibility, uncertainty, and sexual vitality? Partly, Lingis responds, because we have been raised on a diet of ancient Greek philosophy and turn of the century German psychoanalysis. In both

instances eroticism is viewed as a deadly serious matter. In neither case is it conceivable that erotic play may constitute a mode of being whose greatest potential is its relaxing our bodily and intellectual rigidity.

In Plato's *Symposium* love essentially is understood as a striving for universal, general and pure form. Eros is purposive, its goal being to reach an extraordinary understanding of the order of things. Striving forever onward and upward is seen as inherently natural. " When eros reaches this final normative order, " says Lingis, "it has left behind all its sensuality and become metaphysical." Ultimately, the "love of the general " results in a passion for higher forms of knowledge, that is for refined cultural living. In effect, it is a "transitory love of transience," at most leading to a "contemplative bliss beyond the mortal saturation of every orgasm " (*Excesses : Eros and Culture* 56-58 ).

Freud too conceived of erotic drives as being of an ultimately scopophilic nature. The intellectual, the scientist, the man who strives to *know* desires to penetrate into the deeper truth, to reveal and expose the secret knowledge, to resolve the riddle of life (*EEC* 52). Divested of any teleology whatsoever, libido, as conceived of by Freud, tends to work towards its own neutralization and dissolution. The libido does not naturally orient itself towards one sex or another, it does not automatically follow a certain path of release. Neither does it move from basic and primitive love (instinctual gratification) to a love of sublime objects (leading to greater comprehension) as in Plato. Libidinous impulses are simply bound to be forever frustrated. Cultural production is therefore never an

end in itself, according to Freud. It is an ever extended detour towards an always derailed type of gratification.

**From a body tied hands and feet, to an all embracing eroticism**

It is a little discouraging, after all these years, says Lingis, to realize that the problem still boils down to "that of the one and the many, more exactly, of the nature of the identity involved in subjectivity." The arithmetical solution seemed the simplest to the western mind, he continues. "Ascribe everything to a transcendental ego. What one has, in the air-conditioned bedroom, is an entity : a man, a woman." And is not that what sex is about ? " filling that hole with a man ? " (*EEC* 35). Is it really impossible to imagine an alternative, asks Lingis? Is it implausible to conceive of play in terms of an erotic response, driven by no other urge than an inner human urge to interconnect universally ? Is not real play in essence about moving out from under the system of causality, productivity, image-continuity? Considering the fact that our philosophical and our psychoanalytical classics can think of nothing but an Eros forever doomed to deprivation, Lingis states, is it not about time that we try to imagine other options? His proposal amounts to a global eroticism, an eroticism that spreads everywhere, invades all the domains of high culture, and does not make up any form of misery driven by frustration. This new eroticism sensualizes the mind in its quest for the truth of the real, it infects the political order, it intensifies through

artifices and in art, and it discover its climactic intensity in the most sublime forms (*EEC* 58).

Granted, an eroticism of such a subversive nature may be easier to theorize than to practice. Where, for instance, does the subject meet playmates who are up to similar endeavors, in a late capitalist setting where the tendency is for people to strive for stereotyped fitness ? Alternative opportunities exist, Lingis says, and they exist among the savage people and among those of us who do not fear going overboard. Neither determined by imperatives of instinctual renunciation, threats of castration, utilitarian notions of sexuality or capitalist ideas of love, the savage is free to express himself and his sexuality (*EEC* xi ). Postmodern conditions, such as the dissolution of national boundaries and the increase in mobility, have opened the flood gates for those subjects who dream of "going primitive."

What primitive individuals and cultures have to offer in terms of existential orientation and creativity is as follows : a lack of object and goal orientation, a desire to perfect form and to reach equilibrium in each mode of existence or intensity, non-procreative and non-orgasmic love, and states of erotic charge that are maintained in a feverish but blissful state. Dissymetries in these cultures are based neither on gender differences nor according to a master-slave logic. Men and women dare to transcend their human limitations and to strive for cosmic interaction. Their bodies are volatile. Their being is forever changing ( *EEC* 60 ). Thus, in Hindu temples, Lingis says,

"sensuality itself reaches a supreme degree of intelligence, thoughtfulness, beauty, capable of entering into or assembling the cosmos... Here is nothing guilty or crafty, nothing disfigured with leering and duplicity, nothing self-indulgent or self-ashamed. There is nothing servile." The male, female, and partly human creatures are "blissful with the freedom of gods who have understood everything." No one descends or is degraded by making love with animals or trees. No one is praised and honored for making love with the moon, the rivers, the stars. Any combination of bodily parts and emotional interest is legitimate. Immediate instinctual gratification is not even an issue in this context. Here, Lingis says, " the beauty of the partner is dismembered into an unending sequence of animal and vegetative and crystalline forms, each closed in its own perfection." The subject travels aimlessly and endlessly in a universe of total eroticism.

Contrary to Hellenistic art which, in Lingis' words, brings "the petrified into life by carving out tensions and counter-tensions in musculature, in the mechanism of bones and sinews, as though life is force or will-power, " Hindu sculpture brings into presence *aspiration*. From their curves breathes the passion and intensity of the sculpturing genius' wish. "To be looked at, with eyes. With eyes of fish, of happiness," this is the kind of desire one may encounter in Hindu works of art (*EEC* 61-67 ).

**Expressive bodies coinciding with impressive subjects**

The kind of expansive existential quest Lingis is after necessarily demands that we break with all boundaries and go beyond our (de)limited selves. This, as is well known, can only take place in so far as temporary personal disintegration is judged acceptable by the environment. To most Westerners any loss of personality is a scary thought, something to avoid at all costs. Yet, in cultures where excess energies and transient loss of self are considered part of the larger picture, the individual, along with the social fabric appear stronger, more flexible, more content.

In Bali Lingis relates, the requirement is that the Balinese speak four languages. Exuberant funeral celebrations are the order of the day, white and black magic are frequently confronted with each other, and rituals are regularly organized during which the Balinese engage in trance induced dancing, gorge daggers, chew up live cocks. Young men as a rule are taken over by mania during these occassions, and go amok. These festivities serve as no carnivalesque exceptions to the social order. In fact, they frequently provide the setting for significant social decisions to be made. To the main stream eye of the Westerner this is nothing if not bizarre. Is it not a waste of immoderate resources, and do not the Balinese inadvertently jeopardize social stability and thus progress ? Not so, claims Lingis. The opportunities offered to sporadically break into raging madness actually seems to strengthen the social order. Thus scheduled seizures, experienced as an integrated part of religious life, and accepted as playing a

socially significant role of their own, serve as therapy. In fact, it is more than likely that social elaboration and celebration of specified deranged states "makes possible an exceptionally consistent constitution of other, orderly and ordering, states in an economy of the ethnic personality whose precise laws are yet to be formulated " (*EEC* 83). Our culture, any culture, has built into it the breakdown it produces, Lingis argues. Ironically though, our "productivity society " precluding that any individual and social benefits be gained from insane and non-profitable acts of behavior, loses substantial amounts of energy and life force on that very account. Savage societies, on the other hand, appreciating the occurrence of temporary "waste of energy" absorb the forces involved in deranged states of mind. They thrive on the managed presence of the very powers that threaten to undermine Western culture (*EEC* 80).

There are a few odd balls among us, Lingis states, "the nuts of capitalism " who dare venturing into the field of experience practiced and offered by the savage. The "schizo" individual, similar to the primitive subject, has a sense of how to explore and make use of the *excesses* of erotic energy. Depending on no particular object and targeting no specific goal, his aim is neither climax nor release. His energy is of a general erotic that urges him to strive towards expansion. Thus the *Body without Organs* invites, initiates and encourages sensory interconnectedness across all bodily and inter-social surfaces. It puts together its own pleasure chain, "out of the debris of civilization," not according to its codes, but rather by bricolage. The

"schizo," once again, emerges from the dust of dulling civilized desensitization as a radiant being (*EEC* 46 ).

For the civilized individual, itching to go primitive, the savage represents and provide access to the powers of *nature*. We desire to share his resplendence, his strength of faith, and his physical courage, says Lingis (*EEC* 220 ). This particular urge cannot ever be met by a common-stance tourist curiosity-driven adventure. "To walk down the way with someone whose sensitivity illuminates secret splendors and desolations, " recounts Lingis, "demands that one open one's heart to him." Opening one self to an other is an event entirely different from observing, exploring or trying to imitate him (*EEC* 220 ).

Distinguishing between the *expressive body* of civilized man and *the inscribed surface* of the savage's skin, Lingis explains : An urban Italian cannot make a single move without turning his body into a sign. His body is a filter of transparency indicating his place on the social scale. The Italian is a constantly signifying agglomeration of

> surface figures, articulations, moves [that] are made into a zone of systematic mediation between inward, depth intentions and transcendent objects, goals, landscapes of the world beyond... The surface is not laid out for itself ; it is completely occupied by signs which simultaneously refract your gaze into the street, into the horizon, into history where the signified referents are, and open in upon the psychic depth where the intentions are being formed. (*EEC* 33)

No matter the way in which an Italian transform his body ; whether he cuts or grows his hair, wears tight or lose fitting pants; it is always *significant*. His

identity is inwards, that is all exterior features are taken to refer to the nature of his inner core (*EEC* 33).

The savage, in contrast, fixes his identity on his skin. His scarification makes no appeal to interpretation. If anything it causes the spectator's train of thought to cease. It exudes pain, it makes others wince (*EEC* 34). The primitive's bodily modifications are all-over surface inscriptions. Constituting points of intensity this inscription relays no deeper meaning. Instead it creates an extended erotogenic surface. Barely bordering on a semiotic system, it constitutes an appeal for attention, and a quest for touch. Its intensity lies in its exhibiting the subject's lack, cravings, demands. "The tattooed breast is no longer exposed with the contours of a mammary gland ; it is but the surface for an inscription that extends up the throat, down the stomach, and draws its own borders around itself. There is inscription, and there is codification ... Inscription and codification of what ? Of, we shall say, excitations " (EEC 25). Hence, the savage invites particular sense of touch, the sense of touch only the encounter between his and our own body can bring about. When we *touch* the other, Lingis says, we grasp his very particular vulnerability, his pains and his possible pleasures. "The hands that caress do not move with their own goals in view," Lingis says. "They are moved, troubled by the touch of the other with which they make contact, afflicted with the pleasure and the torment of the other" (*FB* 170-71). Touching, being touched, making a move and being moved are inextricably interconnected. The writing in flesh and blood, fixed forever and yet changing over time, hurts rather

than signifies. And this it its very meaning. The savage and the individual gone primitive live in the present. Sensation, significance and meaning of life emerge from the experience of an all absorbing now. It is a style of life which evidently does not encourage the individual to *build* connections, relationships, experience. It does not call for irrefutable fruits of his labor. His life is in progress but does not evolve as a work. Savage eroticism leave behind no monuments, create no collective memory. What it does leave behind is *traces. Traces* are made up of deeds that no one ever intended to document, as in the case of acts of crimes for instance. Inevitably leaving behind pieces of evidence, these traces tell no story. However, they reveal a great deal about the deed as well as the agent. A trace is an element that is found only within the human economy. Never made in order to be read, never intended to be deciphered, it simply it indicates a presence that *has* been ( *EEC* 145-46).

In conclusion, acts of excessive generosity, of apparently incomprehensible passion or exorbitant craftsmanship may be done for the sake of the pain and the pleasure that goes into it. For the sake of expressing and having—not any one but—the *other* one seeing one, not as someone particular, but in all of one's *excessive* eroticism, in one's forever changing potential.

**Orchids of our age. Body-building as a form of self-mutation.**

The *Body without Organs* is made up of pure libidinous energy. It exhibits no need to keep up appearances, impress an other, or achieve any goal. "It is

superficial, all surface," says Lingis. "It is the slippery effervescence at the conjuncture of mouth with breast, anus and exterior, urethra at the point where the urine surfaces, thumb with lips, finger with nostril. " And he elaborates :

> Couplings for the sake of the surface effect—that is the machinery of the libido. The libidinal zone in the body is the skin—skin and the mucous orifices that prolong it inward, but where the finger, tongue or penis will make contact with more skin...The movement of the primary process, of the libidinal excitations, is horizontal, from one contact-point on the skin to another. Even when one inters into the orifices that open on the body surface, the finger, tongue or penis that penetrates does not make contact with a sphere of immanence, a control-room or broadcasting studio ; it only slides into more surface effects...Life reduced to the coupling of mouth with breast, and the slobber, and the gurgling, the surface effects. Finally the tubes are all full, the body a sack of milk, blood, and urine...Not anxious about death. Just wants to curl up, to shut the eyes, plug the ears, seal the orifices ... Nothing but a closed, full corpuscle, cell filled with milk and blood and soft ooze shit. Sleep. Unconscious. Id. ( *EEC* 27-28 ).

The *Body without Organs* has neither a personal identity nor an irreducible individuality. One plus one never adds up to two, according to this Body's logic. Incorporating neither an "intentional arch " nor a "postural schema" (Merleau-Ponty) no phenomenological integration of its various parts drives its functioning. Its impulses, movements and effects emerge not from the bodily depths but rather at the conjectures of various couplings.

Contemporary Western society offers exceptional potential for a realization of the libidinal body, claims Lingis. The age of information processing has turned us into pure spectators,

> with huge eyes feeding into massive brains, floating in the air, with minuscule strophied limbs dangling...*orchids*...parasitically clinging to the rising trunks that shut out the sun, flowering their huge showy sex organs...With our sight disconnected from any decision of motor functions, its content determined by the image-industry programming, our bulbous and succulent organisms, hoisted into the space of visibility on the massive trunks of cybernetic forests, are biologically evolving into mammalian orchids. ( ***FB*** 43 )

The body-builder, Lingis argues, is emblematic for a libidinally invested, aimless and "useless " organism. One captures the essence of a thing by tuning in to the lines of tension as expressed in its surface. One grasps the meaning of their being by absorbing their tension in one's own posture. To listen to another is already to know how to pronounce the words he chooses next. The body builder's musculature knows the inner essence of the steel (*SIS* 59). Body building functions as a cult in contemporary society. Its members operate according to a set number of codes, codes characterized first and foremost by being uneconomic and consequently undecipherable. As differing from the body subjected to the surveillance of industrial capitalism, the *disciplined body* (Foucault), the contemporary body of corporate late capitalism has been made available for another state of socio-biological evolution. Body building, Lingis notes, only became popular in Japan after the end of the Second World War, that is at a point where the fantasy of conquest was ruled out and society was rapidly evolving into high-technology. Having lost is purposefulness in industrial society the virile body has acquired an imaginary function. It works, even if not taken to the extreme as in the case of body building, as a " displacement " or " expansion " of one's sense of self. "As the ego surfaces, distends, and exposes itself, it depersonalizes, " Lingis says, " On his-her contours the body builder watches emerging not the eccentricities his or her own tastes and vices leave in his or her carnal substance, but the lines of force of the generic *human animal* " (*FB* 43).

Regardless of the fact that these bodies and economies of desire can be understood to be the natural implication of the socio-economic development, most of us still look away in resentment, repulsed and disturbed, when encountering them. We are attracted and frightened by the fact that they do not make sense, that they serve no productive purpose, that, in fact, they explicitly question the role of reproductive sexuality. The virile body is linked to a story line, says Lingis, the *Body without Organs* to an unpredictable interplay of pain and pleasure in the present. It holds no promise, hands out no guide lines for where to go next. It is grotesque, and it undermines our sense of life as a movement towards the future. Infantile sensibility is sensuality.

**Playing for life?**

Freud's later and most elaborate theory concerning the issue of creativity suggests that it serves the dual purpose of enabling the subject to play with his infantile, forbidden sexual desires on the one hand, to gain social recognition for doing so on the other hand. Play and creativity bring the subject "back" in touch with pre-Oedipal modes of perception. According to Freud's earlier theory as developed in the "Project," this stage of development is characterized by the subject's intimate psycho-somatic interconnection. A reading of Freud's later theory in light of the Project" makes it possible to understand play as serving the purpose of reviving of not-yet-structured forms of physical, psychical and relational experience. Play involving pain may likewise be understood in this

light : It revitalizes the receptive psycho-somatic system to a degree that returns it to a level of intensity otherwise only experienced during childhood. Hence the two divergent trends in Freud, as regards the subject of creativity, are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

In Klein creativity is about trying to restore a sense of integrity following the psychic wounding suffered from an already realized castration. Symbols are employed by the subject so as to recover from his sense of imperfection. The meaning of the symbol, and the emotional intensity with which it is invested depend on where in the grieving process the subject finds himself. Thus, social acknowledgment, as in Freud, plays an insignificant role in Klein. What matters is that the subject become capable of investing himself affectively in dead matter, and that the symbol he chooses is sufficiently malleable to suit his needs. Given the continuing progress made by the individual, any symbolic investment is a rather personal affair, and no symbol ever retain exactly the same meaning for long.

Winnicott departs strongly from Freud in that he emphasizes attachment behavior over sexual instincts, the subject's need for social recognition over his dependence on narcissistic gratification. Whereas the Freudian subject strives to be taken seriously, and install respect in the other, Winnicott's subject desires to find a playmate with whom he can go naked. Creativity, in Winnicott, serves not to hold in check the subject's raging instinct. It is his means to overcome the gap between self and other, to negotiate the terms of interaction, and to explore and

expose what is the most secret and sacred to him self. Cultural production, seen in this light, is a result of his urge to find fulfillment as a subjective being through inter-subjective exchange.

In Milner play and creativity are conceived of as providing the subject with the means of staging in the outer dramas fought in the inner. The symbol to which the subject is automatically and as if magneticallly attracted, Milner states, may tell a great deal about what it is the subject cannot consciously permit himself to see, sense, or conceive of.

Kavaler-Adler, on the other hand, points out that when the stakes are as high as they are in the case of the budding subject, no such thing as a unisex theory captures the entire picture. Regardless of whether one understands creative activity as reaching down into a layer of experience which precede or succeed the Oedipal crisis, creative activity is unlikely to function similarly for the adult male and female. Kavaler-Adler furthermore calls attention to the fact that the conflict attempted resolved may be of such a nature that it simply is not merely a matter of the subject to learn to accept ambiguity. She makes one wonder if play and creativity are particularly attractive for subjects for whom there simply is no sensible way out.

Lingis in many ways supports the suspicion that creativity embraces mutually exclusive ends. Focusing on the functioning individual, unlike Kavaler-Adler, he proposes that any form of play and creativity that claim to bring about integration, healing, and unification of the subject is profoundly deflated.

Creative living, according to Lingis, is about unfolding, exploring, stretching, and revitalizing the flesh of the world. Contrary to Freud, Lingis conceives of genuine cultural production as a result of a realization of the subject's most profound inner urges, wishes, and aspirations. In agreement with Freud, he speculates that these are of a predominantly erotic nature. Yet, no body sexed on Lingis terms enters the Freudian/capitalist exchange economy. Lingis' eroticism, i.e., the creative recovery of the subject's true potential at one and the same time makes up an orientation towards one's own needs and a turn towards the needs and demands of others.

## Re-evaluating the script. *BLACKWATER*

Annie has been found dead. She has been shot and has subsequently drowned. In the river Lobber. Johan, is the one to discover her. Lying flat on her back in the riverbed, water pouring over her, her skin is greenish-white, exuding coldness.

Following the funeral Mia, Johan, and Birger start cleaning up Annie's cottage. The air in there is saturated with the smell emanating from the Lily of the Valley bouquets Annie has received as an end-of-the-term gift from her students. Birger finds the smell oppressive. Mia trashes the bouquets without a word. Proceeding with a heavy heart, Birger repeatedly drifts off into thinking about Annie. Figures of speech, fragments of lines often employed by Annie, begin to

speak to him again. Detached from their speaker, Annie's words seem to make little, or, at any rate, different sense :

> He went out into the heavy air. The roses in the hedge were flowering in abundance. Their scent was strong and sweet, scarcely fresh. Annie had said they smelt of incense and myrrh, another time that they smelt like the armpits of the goddess of love, and during the heat wave she had complained that they smelt like a north African brothel. The way she talked ! Presumably just to breathe life into words that would otherwise not be used... (313)

Agitated and exhausted Mia absentmindedly reveals to Birger what she has deliberately kept from the police investigating the Lobber event: Johan is the boy Annie saw rushing off from nearby the crime site so many years ago. The very morning prior to her death, she had called Birger to tell him that the Lobber killer had made his return. He was right in her own front yard, intimately intertwined with her own daughter. Birger is struck by Mia's revelation. The fact that she deliberately lied may have derailed the entire investigation. He encourages the couple to immediately contact the police. Mia refuses. Johan feels under quiet suspicion and trapped.

> After saying goodbye to Birger, Johan Brandberg walked back up the steep slope to the house and found he was out of breath... the air was very heavy and humid, a spicy, cloyingly sweet scent coming from the roses. They were an old-fashioned kind which could be found in several places in the village, a multi-petalled, deep-purple rose. It flowered in abundance and the heavy heads hung over the stone wall terracing the slope in front of the shed. Many of the blooms had faded now, displaying interiors of decay and dissolution. They looked shameless at this stage and those still flowering were full of hover flies and bumblebees. Such an abundant species should be checked before it got to the obscene stage. He wondered whether Annie used to deadhead them. He didn't know much about her. Anyhow, Mia hadn't done it.
>
> He was annoyed with Mia. And worse. But he had said nothing until his thoughts had been turned to the odd demand that she ought to have thought about deadheading the roses...
>
> He had realized she was protecting him and had expected her to talk to him about it. But she hadn't. He had never imagined living with Mia in an atmosphere in which it was so difficult to breathe... (326)

> He had told her he had grown up in an atmosphere of silences and concealment, but had managed to get out of it.

> " I ran away from it. I know quite a lot about the hatred generated in that kind of sludge of silences and suspicions...I don't think anything has ever been said (about Johan's biological origin). I'm convinced they just went on and said nothing. But I grew up in that mess of suspicion and humiliation and minor racist outbursts, protected by a powerful force. Mother-love, Mia ! Watch out for that...
>
> Yes ! Mother love has thick, thick blood. It has substances you find in mares and female rats. It's good for eighteen months. Fitting and necessary. After twenty-four months it has to become human. Humanistic. Even dry and matter-of-fact. It has to acquire an element of indifference...I don't want my child to grow up in that thick murky soup..." (327)

The Lilies of the Valley, their scent and sweetness a symbol of Mary the virgin and thus of Jesus Christ, bother everybody in the party. Mia finds them the most repugnant. Pregnant with Johan's child, she is beyond immaculate truth-telling. Also representing spring and everything's regeneration, Birger cannot but feel more ambivalent about the flowers' odor. Contrary to Mia he senses that Annie's garden variety of flowers, the impact they have on him, may be of significance.

The deep-purple, multi-petalled roses, reminding Annie of sexual consumption, her son-in-law of vulgarity, dissolution and decay, even evoking in him an urge to sever their obscene heads from their stem, are more complex as a symbol. Referring to God the Father, they inevitably trigger Johan's resentment. Secretly assuming that he is the offspring of a native Same, and not of the authoritarian brute hovering over him at home, he resents his official father and is repulsed by his mother. Her attempt to protect him, as he puts it many times over, is sickening. The rose also symbolizes balance between body and soul. It stands as an encouragement that we open ourselves to inner enlightenment. And it represents martyrdom. Prior to the fall, it may be recalled,

the rose is said to have grown in Paradise without thorns. Following the fall, however, the thorns of the rose came to serve as painful reminders of the crimes committed by man, his loss from grace. Mary the Virgin often also goes under the name of "a rose without thorns." Johan's walk up the path towards Annie's cottage, symbolically speaking represents his entering an overwhelming impressive female container, body, and tradition. If Annie smirkingly perceived her blooming sexuality as being sweet and moist, Johan clearly feels swamped by it. The middle-aging man and father to be has no interest what so ever in getting a taste of—or for—the maternal matter. This fact is later well illustrated by the course chosen by Johan in respect of career. He becomes an expert in climactic conditions : the elements of the mind. As for the rift created between Johan and Mia, due to *her* attempt at protecting him, it never actually heals. What each of them discover is that faith, when brought down to earth, requires that one cuts a few corners :

> ...It was all fairly simple, he realized that afterwards. She wanted to be left in peace for a while. But he couldn't leave her in peace. He wanted every thing to be all right...
>
> She said it wasn't certain there would be any baby...
>
> ...her tone of voice was cold and conclusive when she told him that she had no intention of making the same mistake her mother had made.
>
> " I know what I'm doing. I wanted to be pregnant and I became pregnant. But I've no intention of raising a child on my own. That's a wretched existence. " (330)

> He had been given no assurances, and yet she believed him. She did so because she needed him. He felt no bitterness about this. She was tired and pale. She believed what was necessary for her to believe. She had not strength left for anything else.
>
> Unemployed now. The project over. She had sold the car. He would look after her, but how could things be like this ? Or rather, how could what she had longed for and wanted so much be like this. ? Mia had rejected Annie's dry, frozen life, her flexible solitude. But what did she want now ?
>
> Pregnant, unemployed. No alternative. (399)

## 2.0 HOME IS WHERE WE DEPART FROM WHEN IN SEARCH OF A LIMIT, RETURN TO WHEN IN NEED OF A CENTER

### Bateson and Turner

The above theories concerning the function of playful activity, creative work and, to a lesser extent, aesthetic enjoyment, predominantly focus on the *subject's* possible motivation and result. Whether or not he is capable of involving himself in world-making endeavors, the suggestion goes, greatly depends on the structure of his interior landscape. Thus Freud conceives of creative work as opening up into the social subject's universally valid secrets. Klein talks about the individual's need to go into a trough a protected stage of mourning. Winnicott quite explicitly talks about cultural production as making up an enlarged communal playground. Milner mentions the difficulties entailed in finding sufficiently flexibly minded playmates "out there." And Lingis insists that if we ever are to break the path for any real life-change, then the challenge is to cross all boundaries and go public. He does, of course, pay some attention to the apparent fact that societies allowing for temporary, contained madness are of a stronger knit. In as much as these writers emphasize the need for the playful individual to bridge the gap between interior and exterior reality, few have a whole lot to say specifically about the role played by the external.

Whether we claim to operate within a modern view of the world, or a postmodern dissolution of limits, play and creativity are inconceivable unless we

operate with *some* sort of a framework. Play and creativity are about breaking the rules, exploring virgin territory, inventing extra-ordinary modes of existence. None of which can happen unless the subject—and the community within which he lives—orient himself in relation to socially accepted figures and grounds. Two thinkers, neither of whom goes into a highly detailed analysis--throw some light on the issue in question. Launching the notion of *frames*, *maps* and *territories*, Gregory Bateson introduces us to the necessity of being able to navigate on the social map of serious, ironic, romantic, sarcastic, and so forth intent. Victor Turner, with his concept of *liminality*, on the other hand, points to the significance, individually and socially, of the subject's being able to occasionally go overboard.

Using as his point of departure modern society, and drawing on British Empiricism, Bateson explores the nature of the need of having frameworks of various sorts, the fact that these come in different shapes, and the consequences of not having any. Bateson originally launched the notion of *frames* in " A Theory of Play and Fantasy " to account for the importance of *paradox* in human communication (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*). Paradoxes of abstraction, he argues, are essential for any personally meaningful communication to take place. If everybody were to follow the "Theory of Logical Types" in their communication, life would amount to nothing but an endless string of stylized messages. Change, irony and a sense of humor simply could not occur (*SEM*

193). The acceptance of paradox, the predecessor to play, is the steppingstone toward individual and social change. The role of frame and paradox is closely connected to Bateson's notion of *map* and *territory*. Frames, psychologically speaking, delimits a class or set of messages as meaningful actions. It includes and puts into focus some messages while excluding and deeming others irrelevant. It meta-communicates to the viewer, listener, participant, that he is to use a particular sort of thinking and interpretation for the content in question. Hence, in some cases the frame is *recognized* as being that of *play*, *fiction*, or *work*. In other cases it remains *unconscious*. Frames are employed by humans, Bateson argues, because :

> [H]uman beings operate more easily in a universe in which some of their psychological characteristics are externalized....Perception of the ground must be positively inhibited and perception of the figure... must be positively enhanced... Mental processes resemble logic in needing an outer frame to delimit the ground against which the figures are to be perceived. This need is often unsatisfied. as when we see a piece of sculpture in a junk shop, but this is uncomfortable. ( *SEM* 187-89)

According to the theory frames are needed so as to prevent the confusion caused by the often paradoxical relation between figure and ground, also called map and territory. The map-territory relation, Bateson explains, consists in the fact that a message never consists of the objects it denotes ("cat " does not scratch). Rather, language bears to the object which it denotes a relationship comparable to that which a map bears to a territory. For any dialogue to come about both partners must be able to steer in on and navigate within the same

meta-communicative level, a level which is initially indicated by means of unspoken acts and gestures.

Frames, due to their non-verbal nature, appeal to primary process organization Bateson argues. They are characterized by indifference toward inconsistency and acceptance of paradox. The framing of the playful event enables the healthy individual to throw himself wholeheartedly into the game while remaining capable of returning to reality. Play therefore, enables us to better understand and to modify the relationship between map and territory in our culture. " In primary process, map and territory are equated ; in secondary process, they can be discriminated," Bateson states. "In play, they are both equated and discriminated " (*SEM* 185). The psychotic and the schizophrenic, lack the very ego function, he says, which enable them to discriminate "*communicational modes either within the self or between self and others.* " Verbal messages sent and received are misinterpreted, unconscious intent on behalf of the other is perceived as physically intrusive. The neurotic on the other hand, suffers the ill fate of being unable to cope with the fact that frames are not always water proof, i.e., that fantasy contains truth and that it should at times be permitted to seep into and through the frame to factuality (*SEM* 192 ).

Bateson's model explains the individual and social advantage of operating within a field of familiar markers. The sense that one is adept at orienting and situating one self in relation to others, and at playing with various levels of reality enables one to move ahead and thus to develop. Yet, his model also inadvertently

demonstrates the pitfalls of operating within a too rigid conception of frames, and a rather narrow conception of meaning. Allowing for neither blurred boundaries nor fuzzy zones of transition Bateson's model permits us not to grasp marginal and partial meanings. There is a limit to how far we can stretch the envelope, Bateson argues. The breaking point quickly arrives, and on the other side there is psychosis. Minimal use of private languages easily land the individual in a no-man's land. Thus, Bateson's model rests on a high degree of inter-subjective consensuality, the existence of a mutual understanding and a shared discourse affiliated with the kind occupying Habermass' "public sphere." What he tends to overlook , is that the subject, scientist, or interpreter import an epistemological model of his own, depending on the pattern and degree of his repressed. Whether or not one " speaks the same language " does not matter all that much unless one also exhibits similar patterns of blindness and insight. Still, Bateson convincingly argues that the issue of boundaries is not to be *willed* into appearance or disappearance. The issue of orientation is not so much a matter of being able to detect where one territory ends and another man's land begins. It is about feeling and believing that one operates within a larger whole, name it a framework, a bounded zone, or a context.

Bateson devotes little attention to the fact that most limit- re-evaluations, transgressions and modifications of cultural norms take place on the fringe. Victor Turner's work on liminality illuminates the individual and social

advantages of occasionally playing in the margins. Contrary to Bateson, Turner sees in this no psychotic withdrawal from the center, no self-imposed exclusion from the core. Similarly to Lingis, he conceives of temporary border-line behavior as ultimately reinforcing individual and communal cohesion. Contained evacuation from the social, Turner argues, may serve as a *rite of passage*. It helps the individual to make the transition from one phase of life to another. Likewise, it enables the community to count on its members' desiring to meet the requirements of their socially assigned role.

About the *communitas* of tribesmen and other marginal groups in general Turner explains : They provide a transformative experience, an experience "that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared." In Lingis, ecstasy is said to bring the subject in touch with his higher as well as his more profound powers. It enables him to connect with the vaguely defined web of the world. In Turner this takes a differently concrete turn. Existence and ecstasy are pertinent to any notion of transformation, he says. Any transformation takes place in relation to a set of socially defined roles and expectations. To exist is to "stand outside," that is to temporarily step beyond the totality of structural positions one normally occupies in a social system. " *To exist is to be in ecstasy.*" To be in ecstasy is exhilarating, though safe, as long as one remain convinced that one is eventually to return to one's point of departure.

Van Gennep defined a *rite de passage* as a ritual accompanying every fundamental change of place, state, social position and age. In *The Rites of Passage* he conceives of all transitions of this nature as encompassing three stages : *separation*, during which the initiate is separated and excluded from his family and social network, *marginality* (or liminality) during which the subject is stripped to the bone of physical and emotional support and has to prove to the world that he can survive on his own in a no where land and, finally, *re-aggregation*, the point at which the subject is recognized as the *other* person he has become and is reintegrated into the social. "The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness," Turner rephrases it. The initiate must endure a tabula rasa experience before he can become re-inscribed into the social. He must confront his worst fears and conquer them. He must demonstrate that he is now no longer dependent on the care taking by others, i.e., that he has become his own man. The test in the bush provides the subject with an opportunity to prove himself. Hence, it teaches him gratitude towards those who enabled him to break free from the strains of indignity (Turner, *Ritual Process* 97-103 ).

The identity of individuals inhabiting the fringes of the social, Turner points out, is necessarily ambiguous. Neither of one status or an other, they belong neither to this nor to an other worldly realm, neither to the sphere of infancy nor to adulthood, neither to one gender nor to another. They are frequently seen as representing death and darkness, savagery and bisexuality (*RP* 95). More importantly, however, they are also often perceived as representing

the process--and possibility--of *rebirth* and profound transformation. A new life thus emerges as if from chaos. *Communitas* differ from community in that the former emerge only where social structure does not rule, and is richly charged with the deepest of emotions (*RP* 126). Communitas "breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority," Turner explains. "It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or holy, possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency." Community, however, is the requirement for any communitas ever to occur. Within the community human interrelatedness takes on an existential quality, says Turner, develops a flavor of "the whole man in his relation to other whole men."

Where structured society tends to be pragmatic and down to earth, communitas tends to be speculative and to generate imagery and new ideas (*RP* 127-32). Thus, no human being or society can function properly without the existence of communitas. In more general terms, liminal situations constitute breathing space, time to fantasize, reflect and come to terms with one's psychological or social unknown. Moments in and out of time, like these, are paramount for the revitalization of society Turner claims, providing as they do an opportunity for open minded playfulness and risky experimentation. Film, dramas, and dreams break the path for new modes of being, for other trains of thought, for redefinition of will and power. Thus aesthetic and ritualistic

expressions evolving within the liminal zone make up "the reflexivity of the social process, wherein society becomes at once subject and direct object ; it represents also its subjunctive mood, where suppositions, desires, hypotheses, possibilities, and so forth, all become legitimate." Thus, as dependent as the individual is for his re-invention of him self on the presence of the home base, social structure, Turner claims, is reinforced by the presence of communitas (*RP* vii ).

Anti social patterns of behavior clearly exist in all societies, but these are not to be confused with liminal ritual. While the former may reinforce social structure negatively, the latter, regardless of its temporary absolution of all rules and conventions reintroduces a renewed force of life and determination into the community. Ignoring for a moment that Turner applies a model based on primitive societies to late modern cultures, his theory leads to the conclusion that, for the individual to grow capable of contributing fruitfully to the restructuring and maintenance of the social fabric, he must first and foremost be given the opportunity to face up to his own inner mixed blessings. He must recognize his "sickest" fears, and most primitive urges, acknowledge his ability to survive, and understand that the immense power of which he is in possession is not his alone.

The dust settle in between Mia and Johan, they pick up where they left, and continue on their path toward the creation of a life together. Mia's baby is soon due. Johan has grown careful not to upset her. Their daily life is spiced up and their interpersonal drama put into perspective when, once in a while, an artist from the outside world makes an appearance. One evening, during a reading at the local library, Salman Rushdie enters their life, reminding both of them, that fanaticism and extremism does not work in the long run. Well known for his creation of dense and interlocking narratives, Rushdie calls to their attention the fact that no life-story is a simple-minded matter. In the *Satanic Verses*, for instance, dream, hallucination, imagination, and reality, are layered and interwoven to the extent that it is impossible to extract *a* single argument from the texture. The excerpt below serves not only as a commentary on the pitfalls toward which the couple could be steering in their determination to create a *spotless* point of departure for their child, it also works as a very direct plea made through Kerstin Ekman's authorial voce to the reader of her novel. Ekman, it is worthwhile keeping in mind, resigned from the Swedish Academy of Arts and Letters in 1989 when the Academy declined to issue a sufficiently powerful and supportive statement in relation to the then hotly debated Rushdie case.

> He remembered a night of wine drinking and talk. First, Mia had taken him to the library, where a famous old poet gave a reading of poems he'd written over five decades...There had been much talk, and quantities of cheap wine were consumed.
>
> They had talked about the event by the Lobber. And about that mass

# PART FOUR

## From within the garden of incorporated delights

The assemblage below is intended to serve the following purposes: It is partly to give an impression of the practices of play and creativity characterizing our time, partly to illustrate the many forms the orientation toward the somatic has taken. It is also to open the floor for questions such as the following: By what means is it possible for us, today, to conceive of a particular play-form as either productive or destructive? Who or what are we talking about when we use these terms, the subject or the social, or the interaction between the two? Thus, to what extent are we capable of making use of the theoretical body of work as outlined above? To what extent do we find ourselves in a position to make use of the discrepancies we discover between theory and practice? Finally, has the postmodern made it any easier to juggle the traditional misfit of theory and practice, or, has it undercut the very means for doing so? What follows by no means provides an ultimate answer to all of these questions, but serve to sharpen our awareness for the ways in which the issue at stake crystallizes when put under scrutiny.

## 1.0 TENDER LOVE

### Sterbak

Jena Sterbak was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1955, and left for Canada in 1968 where she took an education in the arts.[1] Strongly influenced by the Russian invasion in 1968 most of her work incorporates reflections on the workings of value reversals, that is, the possibility of developing human values independently from external pressure. How do we distinguish, she asks, between what we are, what we need, what we have learned to be and what we are told to desire ? What is the connection between materiality, ideas, and feelings ? Focusing on the interrelationship between materiality of being and "states of being," Sterbak subtitles her work poetically, in a low key style and voice, but with a heavy handed impact. The focus is on *texture*, *weight*, and *tactility* of material, never on wordy explanations. Thus her *Heart Series* (1979), consisting of a bunch of small, severely constrained scattered hearts—cast in lead and thrown on to the ground, like fallen angles—juxtapose the lightness of being with the burden of a grounded existence. Destruction, as a means to re-construction ; pain as a pathway to pleasure, recurrently emerge in Sterbak's work, as does the dissolution of boundaries and difference as a means to reestablishing other, more flexible and differentiated areas of experience. Animalistic, technological and purely natural human aspects often mix and

[1] Jena Sterbak, at age 41, was awarded the *Prix Ozias-Leduc* in 1996, a prize ordinarily granted for a the body of work accumulated over a life time. Her work has been exhibited in high-scale galleries in New-York, Paris, Venice, Copenhagen, and other international centers.

merge in a single, many-faceted statement. The self, as an effect of this interplay of "matters," comes to expression via various forms of bodily disguise and revelation.

One of Sterbak's installations consists of a wire-dress, subtitled : *I Want You to Feel the Way I do*. Poignantly, in the text accompanying the dress, "I" and " you" and "whose feelings we are actually talking about "are totally confused. Intimacy is deeply desired. Yet, as soon as it is about to materialize the subject experiences it as being suffocating, alienating. Quoting Sterbak :

> I want you to feel the way I do There's barbed wire wrapped all around my head and my skin grates on my flesh from the inside. How can you be so comfortable only 5 inches to the left of me ? I don't want to hear myself think, feel myself move It's not that I want to be numb, I want to slip under your skin I will listen for the sound you hear, feed on your thought, wear your clothes Now I have your attitude and you're not comfortable anymore. Making them yours relieved me of my opinions, habits, impulses I should be grateful but instead you're beginning to irritate me I am not going to live with myself inside your body, and I would rather practice being new on someone else ( *States of Being* )

The wire-dress expresses an excruciating sense of always being on edge, and yet, of reacting with shock—as if electrified-- and repulsion to what is desired the most. Serving as rigid support and as an armed form of defense, the dress indicates that the subject behind the facade is of a frail constitution. In fact the subject is so frail that he or she remains immaterial. Thus, no body inhabits the dress. Its voice emerges as if from within an empty space, whispering and whimpering.

Sterbak's *Vanitas : Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987) sparked a stronger reaction and quite a controversy at the time of its reception. Made out of

slowly desiccating, raw flank steak, kept at room temperature, the dress not merely challenges the eye but also embraces the spectator by olfactory means. Juices seeping from the dress and odors evaporating from the lump of rotting meat prevents any one from keeping the impression at an arm's length distance. The chunk of disintegrating protein provides an ambiguous nutrition for, and poisoning of, the Anorexic alluded to in the title. It is alive and yet also already in the process of disintegrating. It is permeable and thus offers dubious protection. Raw nerves are worn on the sleeve, exposed to scrutiny, wear and tear and externally imposed repulsion. Its title associate late modern welfare society, with (female) self-image problems and epidemics of self-starvation.

The inspiration for the dress, however, was found in secular Medieval society's obsession with decay. At the time decay, similarly to the intermittent occurrences of "holy anorexia," represented the possible liberation of the soul and transition to eternal life (Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice"). Within Medieval hierarchical thinking the body was associated with cosmos and higher spirituality. With the break away from this world view, however, physicality acquired very different connotations. Eventually it came, in the postmodern, to be perceived as the last bastion of individual power and control. Serving as an anchoring point in place and time, the subject now clings to it, so as to avoid getting carried away, in various senses of the word. Hence, the Anorexic, in Sterbak's view, perfectly incorporates the shift in emphasis from Medieval to modern, and later postmodern, culture : Swallowed up by

delusional omnipotence and an urge to remote-control her life, and convinced that the less of her flesh the more of her soul, the anorectic deprives herself of the (re)sources of earthy existence. Without any foundation for her being, and bereft of notions of higher meaning, she turns her transitory physicality into an intellectual point of fixation.

Sterbak's work classifies as art, though this was hotly contested during the debate ensuing her introduction of the meat dress. Indeed the line between Art,Therapy, Sexual Experimentation and Self-Transcendence has grown rather mushy over the last few decades. As an independent artist Sterbak processes and re-presents the conflicts embedded in contemporary culture. The subject-formation she presents as emblematic for our time appears painful, and far from always fruitful. Suffering on this earth leads simply to more suffering on earth, not to any kind of soulful purification and spiritual elevation. It remains obscure how—if at all possible—this vicious circle is to be broken. Others, however, working with similar material, though in a less purely artistic mode, bring forth the suggestion that work *on* and *in* the flesh represents our last ditch solution to existential agony. For some it is seen as the road to transcendence and freedom from bodily torment. For others, it is perceived as the means to genuine immanence, a grounded state of psycho-somatic integration. In either case, the subject claims to have found himself. When surveying the scale of meaty preoccupation, we may have to ask our selves : Is it possible that the flesh focused artist, the body-modifying activist, the self mutilator, and possibly also

the anorexic, through such different modes of investment, nevertheless reach the same end ? The following is intended to give a foretaste, so to speak, of the flavor of the games being played out within our very own yard. No matter their disparity, the point of convergence of these re-creations of the self is the limit of existence as subjectively experienced. Bateson and Turner suggested that no act can be perceived as socially transgressive unless it takes place in relation to a larger whole. The scope of this very issue is considerably narrowed down by a look at the play forms enacted by the subjects below. Any remaking of the self, these practices indicate, involves the subject's situating himself in relation to an intimate environment. Without necessarily paying much attention to the larger picture, an *other* may be chosen to serve as the frame of reference. Due to the intensely sensual and existential nature of these play forms, the outcome is often of a Sado-Masochistic nature. Ultimately, the question arises : Is this to be considered a particular postmodern form of pleasure or self-destruction? Donna Haraway's theory of cyborg-identity supports the former. Robert Stoller's understanding of Sado-Masochism leads one to assume that there is nothing particularly postmodern about the urge to play it hard; if anything, contemporary culture may simply have provided the opportunity for these otherwise closeted activities to unfold. Jessica Benjamin, finally, puts a spin on the Sado-Masochistic overtones of a number of contemporary games by exploring these through a Hegelian tainted lens of a psychoanalytical bent.

## 1.1 RECUPERATION OF ROOTS : A POSTMODERN EXPENDITURE

### Modern Primitives

*Dear Alice,*

*My boyfriend went down to the Village last night and came back with a pierced cock and I am completely grossed out by this. Moreover, he wants to have sex with it on, but it is of the type that would definitely scratch my insides up. What should I do ? Also, he's thinking about getting his cock sliced into two parts. Alice, he's freaking out on me...*

*Weirded Out.*
(*Body Modification* web site)

*My decision to surgically remodel my genitals was deliberate, of deep satisfaction to me, highly exciting, sexually adventurous, and erotically exhilarating...Full erections are still maintained...but now in two complete, separate halves...*
*Carl Carrol.*
(Juno and Vale, *Modern Primitives* 27)

*My pain forced me to look inside and see what was really bothering me...I also learned to ignore all the psychiatrists and their non-sense. Some said I had obsessive compulsive disorder with schizophrenic-type tendencies, others would say I was just schizophrenic. A couple of other doctors said I had 'schizo' type personality disorder which is sort of like a person who doesn't want to feel anything.....I decided to stop using all medication and deal with the real McCoy...I started stretching my ears about two years ago because I feel like there's a pretty big part of me that is directly attached to god, like I live through god and god through me...it is really important to participate in your own healing*
("Voices—Blair," *Urban Primitives*)

The *Modern Primitives* loosely refer to a great number of North-American groups and individuals practicing various forms of body manipulation. What drives the movement is explained in the following words :

> In an era where overpopulation and the breakdown of representative provide an overall feeling of despair in regards to one person's ability to have an affect [sic !] on the destiny of the world, [*ModPrim*] explains. Many people are taking control of what little they can. In the case of the modern primitives, this means their bodies. (*ModPrim* 1)

The *Modern Primitive* movement was coined in the 1980s by Fakir Musafar, the *ModPrim's* foremost spokesperson. Fakir and Stellarc, both of whom gained fame by suspending their bodies from large butcher hooks, are the two most infamous *ModPrims*, though Stelarc persistently distances himself from Fakir's work.

What makes the modern primitive movement unusual is its pursuit of sensation, a *ModPrim* explains. Modernization led to psychic numbing and the ability to get high on biochemical and neurological interactions for the most part belongs to the past. Piercing of the genitals, a practicing piercer conveys, means pain, especially during intercourse. But it is a sure route to ecstasy. The *ModPrims* are returning to this idea of a knowing through pain which modernity has forgotten, it is said (Mizrach). *ModPrim* mentality and practice first became popular in the gay communities as well as in various subcultures in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Toronto. In 1989, with the publication of Juno and Vale's *Modern Primitives* book, a comprehensive introduction to the self-modification phenomenon in contemporary North-American and urban culture, the term gained in popularity. Since then, a vast number of affiliated info-media, centered around the creation of a *ModPrim* meeting ground, have seen the light of the day. Journals such as *Piercing Fans International Quarterly* and *Body Play and Modern Primitives Quarterly*, are closely affiliated with the movement, as are the live or video-taped performances of numerous body-oriented artists. The range of sub groups influenced by *ModPrim* mentality is wide. Many operate via

the Internet, others via privately funded publishing companies. Among the groups of affiliation with the ModPrims are the *cyber anthropologists*, *net occultists*, *net religions*, *net subcultures*, *speed tribes*, the *net underground*, some *fourth world activists*, *neo fetishists*, *technological guerilla-artist groups*, and more.

The *Temple Ov Psychick Youth* is organized around the idea of electronically enhanced spirituality. Founded in the early 1980s, and inspired by W. S. Burroughs and J. G. Ballard, the Church of Satan, Surrealism, Chaos Theory, Deconstruction, Paganism, Nietzsche, and Native American Culture, *TOPY* makes extensive use of *psychic TV*, electronically designed music and related means of cyber space communication. The objective is to enable its members to focus their Will. This is brought about via *Sex*, *Ritual*, and *Television*. People must be "seduced into awareness of their potential freedom," as *TOPY* proponents put it. Inspired by McLuhan the group subscribes to the view that :

> When properly utilized in carefully crafted ritual, [electronic media] actually help facilitate states of consciousness which are more tribal and aware. As it is, most mass media are used in ways that put people in media trance. It imprisons and paralyzes, rather than liberates the spectator's *essential* being.

The current flatness of the media, they continue evokes "continuity, restriction, guilt, and 'Because.'" It is the living death according to the group, a dreamless sleep from which one never awakens. Hence, "Dogmas, Religions, and Political Systems, designed to limit the potential of the individual" must be swept away. Recognizing the function of magic and modern pagan philosophy, *TOPY* nevertheless abstains from actively seeking recourse in mysticism, theology or

demonology. The higher powers belong to the human subject, they insist. Man's potential is located in his brains, that is, as the latter is invigorated by an uninhibited sexual practice and an insurmountable will.

In another part of the *ModPrim* field, a home page called *Body Modification* shot up in 1994. Launched by Shannon Larratt, on the world-wide-web, and starting out as a minor site for exchange of personal modification experiences, it rapidly evolved into a large scale affair. Around the end of 1996, the site reportedly received about 500.000 net-cruisers a week. Thus, in the span of less than ten years, practices involving bodily marking, cutting and carving, and a vast number of other modes of physical inscriptions have surged. The trend, during the mid nineties, for fashion models and similarly hip parts of the population, to emphasize their "uniqueness" by wearing decorative tattoos and piercings, makes only one out of several cases in point.

Introducing the movement, Juno and Vale writes:

> The *Modern Primitives* react to the fact that the civilized world, with its excessive emphasis on rationality, is stifling and life-thwarting. As a consequence of the mass media development we have all come to share a global and impersonal memory bank. TV, for instance, has provided us with a common set of images, ideals, role models, to the extent that our minds have been 'colonized by images.'... In the absence of truly unique, first-person experience in one's own RNA-coded memory cells, how can one feel confident about one's basic 'identity' ? And by extension, how can one, lacking unique experiences, create something truly eccentric ? (5)

*ModPrims* aspire to live in the present, to leave their mark on the social, and to *make a difference*. The precondition is a re-awakening of our senses, says Juno and Vale. And for this purpose pain serves exceptionally well. Pain is a particular personal experience, the editors agree, which takes back the subject into--and

beyond—his physically limited existence. The latter is elaborated on by an enthusiastic *ModPrim* spokesperson, who puts it this way :

> Piercing, tattooing, branding, and scarification rituals ignite the nervous system, and shock individuals into a highly charged emotional state where they can reprogram the painful, paralyzing, shame-based and life- thwarting messages of their past. Conferring a tangible, physical reality to an intangible emotional wound brings catharsis, reclamation, liberation, and a sense of closure.

Pain facilitates an acting out of inner conflict. It provides a release mechanism from the tensions of everyday reality, an increased awareness of personal strength, and a sense of well being that persists long after the experience is over (Rowanchilde ).

The *ModPrims* strive higher than for mere survival in a hopelessly alienating world. Their ultimate intent, they explain, is to achieve a new integration of poetic and scientific imagination in daily life. This explains to some extent the somewhat confusing umbrella term, *Modern Primitives*. There is nothing particularly modern nor primitive about their practice, apart from the fact that they see them selves as belonging to tribes or clans. Even primitive societies have been contaminated by civilization, as the *ModPrims* themselves point out. And those who have maintained a certain level of authenticity would not be worth while appropriating whole sale anyway. Clitoridectomy, as practiced by some African societies, or head bashing, as encountered among the Yanoamo, for example, are by no means among the preferred body-modifying practices. Drawing on a wide range of symbols of cross cultural origin or rooted in pre-Christian paganism, the *ModPrims* pick and choose in accordance with the flavor

of the meaning to be expressed. It is thus not unheard of for a subject to carry an ancient Arab tattoo sign on one part of the body, a Maori inspired symbol on another part, and a pagan sign elsewhere. Each and every mark may thus refer to a particular phase in the life history of the individual. It concentrates the energy associated with particular stages of life, it is claimed, serving as a reminder of hardships suffered as well as of courage and strength exhibited. Hence, the *ModPrims* contribution to a poetic and scientific renovation lies in their mixing and merging of a variety of ancient, eastern, pre-Christian, and high-tech late modern modes of signification. Quoting a fervent *ModPrim* advocate :

> You may not believe the Archaic Revival is here, but give it a chance...I see all these groups/events as presenting one basic principle : that the advance of technology need not be accompanied by the inexorable advance of instrumental reason ...technology can in fact lead to new forms of creativity, spirituality, social and cultural challenge, identification and affiliation, and norms of conduct. (*ModPrim* 2)

Body modification is what ties the *ModPrims* together, regardless of their oftentimes divergent ideological or emotional explanations for subscribing to the movements's philosophy. The practice covers a scale of ritualized "mutilations," ranging from tattooing over piercing, implanting, surgical and non surgical modifications, branding and scarification, as well as nullification, to branding. Piercing of ear, lips, frenum, navel, eye brow, labia, clitoris or penis glans, and tattooing belong to the repertoire. So does lip-sewing and genital modification. From an outside point of view the *ModPrims* physical modifications may seem sick. Yet, no immediate connection can be drawn between acts of bodily modification and pathological self mutilation. *Pathological* self-mutilation, it

may be noted, is classified into three categories : *major* (frequently associated with psychosis), *stereotypic* (often associated with mental retardation), and *moderate* (associated with borderline and antisocial personality disorders) self-mutilation. Individuals who engage in self-mutilation for aesthetic purposes do no necessarily fall into either of the above categories ( Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*).

Putting aside the motivating factors behind mentally ill individuals' selfmutilation, the *ModPrim's* state the following reasons for their choosing to go under the knife: a desire to sever the connection to one's contaminated past, a search for greater authenticity, a craving for more intense sensations, an urge to overcome one's worst fears, or, an urge to gain control over one's life. Major turning points in life, such as "coming out," or resigning from an ultra conventional social or sexual role are demarcated through the ritual. Most females who decide to reclaim their life along these lines are around thirty years of age, males approximately ten years older. Half are college educated, and a similar percentage homosexual. As a result of the event most report increased erotic sensation. Many women, formerly sexual abuse victims, have their labia, inner labia, or clit-hood pierced, the stated reason being that they want to break free of sexual paralysis and emotional numbness. The male counterpart to this measure is constituted by the ampallang, a glans-piercing going through the urethra, its barbell transcending to the tip of the penis. More invasive procedures involve a splitting of the penis which turns it into a fan shaped genital. At the

opposite end of the scale, where no sexual abuse is reported, sexual enhancement-, inter or intra personal commitment-, and bonding- desires motivate the act. Some couples get tongue piercings as wedding rings, close friends or lovers get matching tattoos so as to forever remain each other's other missing half. Thus, paradoxically—and significantly--most subjects reveal an intense wish that their subversive practice shall facilitate an access to the "naked truth." This truth, they indicate must not be contaminated by norms and conventions currently held by mainstream culture. Still, the very values and meanings the *ModPrims* aim to incorporate and express are as a matter of fact of a highly conventional nature. Independence, unconditional love, lasting friendship, impassioned sexuality... None of these ideas have been invented overnight. Thus, a curious interplay is taking place between reinvention and repetition of traditional notions of human worth and dignity.

To the question what these urges are generally about and why they come through so strongly at this moment in time, the *ModPrims* respond that their practice is of a universal nature :

> We'll always have the urge to change the body because it's such a personal expression.The world is changing so fast. It's a more dangerous world and you really have to keep up with the changes. You go to school, graduate...It's go, go, go, and it's all external and kind of unreal, like a movie. People go by, nobody stops to talk to each other, and you can feel very alone, isolated. But if you take the time to care for your body, have nice hot baths, massages, do good things to yourself and for yourself, it builds confidence in a world that's crazy. If you can take control over yourself—physically, emotionally, spiritually—however, or in whatever manner you can, it puts you in control of your life and all it's important aspects....If you can be in control of your own inner world, you will never be afraid in this crazy world. (" Voices—Tee " *Urban primitives*)

If the *ModPrims* generally agree that they react against conventional society, there is little consensus concerning what mainstream culture actually entails. The confusion concerning what the movement is up against and what it works towards has only increased with the *ModPrim's* popularization. Professional development courses have recently emerged on the virtual waves of Internet advertising. Karen Hurt (sic !) writes :

> Certified Master Piercer and Former Gauntlet San Francisco Manager...working in one of the world's premier professional piercing studios now offers On-Site Training Available from Future Primitives.
>
> ...fully customized and personal training programs to professionals and their staffs around the world. Future Primitives' training programs are conducted in your place of business, you will practice the latest techniques on more people than in group seminars... ( Hurt )

Karen who is located in San Francisco obtained her "Master Piercer Certificate" in April 1994, and she is "vastly experienced in the training of apprentices." Curious or cautious clients may find further evidence of Karen's skills in some of her publications or videos, such as, *Piercer for Tongue and Vertical Clit Hood piercings* (*Piercing Fans International Quarterly*). A seminar registration packet can be ordered via the net.

There is a certain irony in the fact that primitive cultures, previously considered less sophisticated than the Western world, are now being introduced as providing the means to survival in the urban, highly technological, jungle, and this at the very point when they are closer than ever to being extinguished (Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive*). Some *ModPrims* reflect on the implementation of the variety of primitive rituals into postmodern, urbanized life and find it slightly troublesome. Says one critical *ModPrimer* :

> There's a lot of ritual appropriation going on which I think is even more deeply insulting to a lot of those groups. They don't really know much more about the ritual than what they have seen or read in *National Geographic*. And they have all these ideas about the cultural meanings behind these rituals which are very wrong. I'm not opposed to people borrowing the physical methods of a ritual but I am opposed to their borrowing the meaning. It doesn't make sense, for example, to call on a set of deities that aren't yours to call upon, or use a chant that is indigenous to another culture because they have no meaning to you. (Rowanchilde)

## 1.2 THE BODY AS A STEPPING STONE TO AN OTHER-WORLDLY EXISTENCE

### Fakir Musafar

If some *ModPrims* regret the growing institutionalization of the movement, others embrace it with gusto.

Fakir Musafar who was born in 1930 and raised in South Dakota. started playing with his body early on. "At a very early age I was aware that I was an alien. I didn't belong where I was...I just didn't seem to fit," he explains (Juno and Vale, *Modern Primitives* 6). One of his earliest acts of a body-modification was to pierce his foreskin. He did so at the tender age of thirteen. "I think modern primitives are born, not made," he says, "early childhood experiences only open the door to what's already inside " (*MP* 9). He is of the conviction that he has lived before and that his former identity speaks through his present body. At the time when the Indians were being wiped out, he claims, he was an Indian, about twenty two years of age, and involved in an intertribal war (*MP* 8).

Fakir engages in the most extreme types of bodily modification. His so called play covers a wide range of forms : contortion (bending bones, enlarging

piercings, stretching parts of the body) ; constriction (corseting and covering large parts of the body by tight bands or ligaments) ; encasement (wearing heavy bracelets, anklets, neck ornamentation, chains) ; fire (electric chock or constant stimulation) ; steam and heat baths and boxes ; "packing" of the body ; branding and burning the flesh ; guilding (sealing body openings for 3-4 hours) ; penetration (flagellation, being pierced, punctured, spiked, tattooed, lying on a bed of nails, using chemical irritants) ; and suspension (hanging on a cross, suspension by the wrists, thighs, waist, ankles of flesh hooks) (*MP* 15). The ultimate aim is to achieve a separation of consciousness and body, that is, to transcend ordinary states of consciousness. "The most important thing you can learn is that you are not your body, you just live in it. People in this culture practically never have learned that, " Fakir proclaims, implicitly referring to the fate of his ancestor and namesake, Fakir Musafar (*MP* 29). The latter, a 19th century Sufi, spent eighteen years of his life wandering around with daggers and spears, as well as other things, stuck in his body. He was trying to educate people, the contemporary Fakir explains, but they more or less ignored what he had to teach them. Eventually he died from a broken heart. Bodily modification, pertinently, is said to enable the subject to transcend most forms of earthly pain.

> *You* don't feel the pain. The *body* feels the pain, and you observe the body recording or feeling sensation...If you can learn to separate your consciousness and your attention from your body, you can do almost anything to it and you don't feel pain ! (*MP* 9)

"Out of body " and " near death " events are the closest one ever gets to feeling spiritually fulfilled, Fakir concludes.

Attending a Lutheran Catechism School during his upbringing, the young Fakir assumed an attitude of compliant non-resistance. He went to great lengths, he informs, so as to avoid that any authority figure would notice his difference. For most of his adult life he maintained a double identity: as the founder and president of his own Silicon Valley advertising marketing company, he has always appeared impeccable when dressed up for work. In 1978, at age 48, Fakir exited his closet. The occasion was a Tattoo Convention in Reno. Here, he called attention to him self by hooking daggers into his chest, resting on racks of machetes, having bricks broken across his back while lying an a bed of nails, and similar innovative acts. Reno turned around Fakir's entire career and rapidly turned him into a cult figure. Following this event, Fakir began to deliberately downplay his involvement with the advertising industry. Magical events he says, swiftly changing the topic from commercial advertising to spiritual enlightenment, have to be part of our existence so as to promote real progress. " Being comfortable isn't necessarily living a *good life* --that's the myth, but it's not true. Living an *uncomfortable* life is sometimes far more satisfactory than a placid bovine existence " (*MP* 15). Persistently refuting that body play may involve a certain aspect of self destruction, Fakir states:

> The only time you're aware of time, is when you're in a body ! Because time belongs to nature ; it's part of trees getting greener, having leaves, and leaves falling off. And your body belongs to nature... it's like a house we live in... Body play is all just a joyous loving expression of decorating your house—an expression of the life force that lives in the house. To not do these things is *not to live*—it's to deny the purpose of why we're here... that's what I discovered (or re-discovered) at seventeen.
>
> For me there is no real pain, only one thing—sensation. It's nice to have sensation through a body, because then you know you're alive. (*MP* 10-11, 29)

Body-modification is a means of getting beyond one's self *and* to get grounded in real time. Bodily modifications of the permanent kind bring the subject back into touch with his basic conditions. It teaches him patience and cooperation with nature. The negativity associated with pain only exists for people who are relatively undeveloped, Fakir asserts. The key is to *take control* over the process, and to *consent* to the experience. Emphasizing the difference between consenting and submitting to an other individual's will, he explains : The "undeveloped " individual, or the victim undergoing torture, does not consent. He is scared by the experience. Thus it becomes a living hell. Consensual SM is one of the few places in this culture where people can get started on the road back to their gods, he claims. Still, many misunderstand the purpose of that kind of play. Instead of developing the ability to sustain ultra-sexual sensation, these SMs in pursuit of instant gratification go after the orgasm as the end in itself. SM and other body modifications should be about opening the gates for a freer flow of primal energy, Fakir states, about getting to the point where one can freely express one's primal urge, without any inhibitions, without focusing on any climax (*MP* 21).

One of the sources of the widespread misery in this culture is the lack of *rites de passages,* Fakir points out. Initiations like these are imperative for young people moving from childhood and into adulthood. When deprived of the opportunity to markedly make a transition from one stage in life to an other, the

subject never matures. The experience of the altered states of conscience is what matures people—intellectually, emotionally or spiritually, Fakir concedes.

Fakir's conception of what the movement is about is worthwhile quoting extensively. The purpose of a tattoo, a piercing, or some other modification, is to help people realize the *individual* magic latent within them. The latter, Fakir emphasizes it the very opposite of the contemporary cultural tendency to wipe out difference. "We've got this great oppressive force that is trying to homogenize and make everything the same ! " he says ( *MP* 11-12). And he continues :

> We, the Modern Primitives find ourselves coping with dual and sometimes triple identities, living several lives at the same time, very seldom letting all the identities merge into one and the same. We instinctively know the confusion that would cause—both to ourselves and to others. Sometimes, however, the 'primitive self, gets the upper hand and becomes so strong. It emerges as the primary self...atavistic people... are outcasts in a sea of sameness : society will stare, but will not accept them...No conventional psychological explanations seem to apply to our seemingly eccentric behavior. The 'urge' to go primitive seems to be innate from birth, fully developed and just waiting for expression—without preconditioning experiences in youth...Where I grew up, there was no possibility of external influence...Most Modern Primitives ... simply must have a nose plug, a large bizarre tattoo, huge holes in the ears and lips and so on. That is beauty to them—the only acceptable self-image. ("Fakir Quotes")

## 1.3 THE BODY AS A MASOCHISTIC MEANS OF REMOLDING ONE'S HISTORY.

> In a bizarre, alternative universal kind of way, I sort of resemble *Superman*. Look, up in the sky, suspended by his wrists and sporting a huge erection—it's me...most of the time I feel as though I come from another solar system. ( *Bob Flanagan : Super Masochist* )

Flanagan, born in New York City in 1952, began to make his sado-masochistic fantasies come true as an adolescent, while living in Los Angeles.

Part of the thrill, he emphasizes, was related to the fear of getting caught and thus of shocking the establishment (*BFSM* 23). Flanagan would at the time tie himself up, pierce his penis, undergo periods of fasting, or force feed himself. Similarly to Fakir, he was a model child at home and an impeccable student at school. His primary sources of inspiration consisted in the popular media and Catholicism, he claims :

> When I started tying myself up with belts, I'd read about a father who was arrested for abusing his kids—articles like that always turned me on... I read one article where the father took the kids and hung them up by their wrists in the garage for four hours at a time as punishment. I started doing the same thing.
>
> Catholicism is great for cultivating young masochists. Most of the people I meet in SM clubs are either Catholic or Jewish... Both religions have a lot of rituals, and there's so much ritualism in SM.
>
> What do Protestants do—they become swingers. Baptists are hopeless ; they're child-molesters and burn records. (*BFSM* 15, 71, 90)

Between the late seventies and the mid nineties Flanagan performed about 20 times in primarily Los Angeles, San Fransisco and New York. During the same span of time he produced about 7 installations, became involved in acting, video production and publication of poetry. Inspired by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Flanagan's repertoire covers acts such as the nailing of his scrotum to a board, piercing behind the balls, penis and nipple piercing and the insertion of a *prince Albert*. In the private domain he formed an intensely sado-masochistic relationship with a genuine *top*. For more than fifteen years did he serve his Mistress. "Exactly what I always wanted in a relationship," Flanagan declares about the woman in his life who would starve him for days on end, lock him up in a dark closet for hours at a time, whip and oblige him to scrub floors in the nude, and humiliate him in front of others. When particularly inspired Shere Rose

would go as far as to padlock his genitals and drop the keys in the mail (*BFSM* 43). "What really gets me going," Flanagan says, is lots of restrictions, "having to operate in a confined space, either psychologically or physically, and enduring that. There's... an almost spiritual high, a spiritual feeling you get from surviving confinement... I really liked being a house boy " (*BFSM* 32-33). If his and Shere's relationship has proven so strong, Flanagan reflects, it must be due to the fact that they have shared so many painful moments. SM works, in other words, because it offers ultimate closeness with somebody else.

Contrary to Fakir' body play, Flanagan's practice draws extensively on themes such as *guilt, shame*, distorted bodily relationships and *sexual inhibition*. Also contrary to Fakir, Flanagan sees a clear connection between his psycho-sexual history and his preference for pain-related intimacy. Born with Cystic Fibrosis, he underwent great many hospitalizations and several near-death encounters as a child. "I was supposed to succumb to [my genetic illness] at two, then at ten...but I didn't," he recounts. "And, in a never-ending battle not just to survive but to subdue my stubborn disease, I've learned to fight sickness with sickness." The medical world was something he was forced into, SM something he chose. "One way of taking control of the stomach-ache was to turn it into an orgasm " he explains (*BFSM* 3). Says Flanagan:

> When I was a baby and really sick...they had to stick needles in my chest to draw fluid out...the doctors tied my hands and feet to the bed so I wouldn't hurt myself. And that's still one of my favorite positions to be in : flat on the bed, tied up. (*BFSM* 3)

When horrible things were being done to him as a child, he further relates, the gain was additional parental attention. Intense pain thus came to be associated with the sweetest of affections. The *imprinting* effected by his many bouts of illness and ensuing treatment was therefore never experienced as exclusively negative.

The early in life encounters with unendurable pain and unsettling unpredictability, resulted in a bizarre fascination with power in Flanagan's case. On the one hand he enjoyed taking total control over a situation. On the other hand he never could overcome the desire to be a slave. Fate dealt him a strange blow which he simply had to cope with, as he puts it. He did so by developing an artificial checkmate system. A system which—ultimately—left him in full control. Still, he never stopped short of pondering on the nature of his play. "I think it's ironic," he says, " that I get turned on by being deprived of air, because I have so much trouble breathing anyway. "

The ever present issue in his work is, unsurprisingly, the nearness of death. If you really know you're going to die, perhaps you can feel free to follow your heart, and live your life to the fullest, Flanagan suggests. Elaborating on his own source of motivation, he says :

> These feelings would build and build until I'd have to do it, but once I'd had enough sensation and gone far enough, there was an immediate release afterwards, and I felt peaceful, calm and sharp—like I could do anything. (*BFSM* 3)

The series of minor deaths he undertakes makes up a preparation for the ultimate ending. However, out-of-body experiences and similar instances of transcendence

do *not* belong to Flanagan's repertoire. Neither does he subscribe to the view that his practice may be a metaphysical or neo-religious affair.

> This intense belief in some 'after-life.' To me that's really frightening. My mother came from a family of ten kids who suffered lots of abuse—I wonder if abuse is passed on through the genes ? She used to tell us stories about being beaten with sticks and belts by her older brothers. (*BFSM* 82)

Flanagan views contemporary movements (like the *ModPrims*) as curiously self-contradictory. Is it not ironic, he asks, that while we are genociding indigenous peoples all over the planet, a number of mostly white Americans are romanticizing and aping certain rituals torn out of other cultural contexts, thus replicating the imperialism and colonization of white western cultures ? It is pretentious and arrogant, he asserts, to think that if a Westener does a Kavandi dance (a Hindu ritual with thin spears pierced into one's body), he is participating in an authentic ritual. "It's weird—it's gone backwards and is more ancient for a lot of people and sexuality has been removed from it," he concludes. In consequence of its trivialization, Flanagan claims, the *Modern Primitive* movement lost sight of what was its original goal and justification. Fakir has assumed the role of a guru and its members have grown more concerned about getting things right than about what used to be the spiritual dimension behind the movement (*BFSM* 3). The movement's current assumption, that only intense pain leads to real enlightenment, has resulted in a peculiarly dogmatic approach to the entire experience. If one *must* endure the *right* kind of pain, Flanagan says, what happens to the sense of self-assertion that otherwise joins the experience ?

By most accounts Flanagan's practice should have reduced his odds for survival. Even if his life style had been less strenuous, it would have been a medical miracle story that he has lasted into his forties. Flanagan himself always suspected that he had become one of the oldest Cystic Fibrosis survivors *because* of his SM practices. His illness made him feel helpless, his SM practice has made him feel empowered. Dying in 1997, at age forty two, he did indeed outgrow most people's expectations.

## 1.4 BODILY BOUNDARIES AS MAKING UP THE LAST OBSTACLE FOR AN ALL EMBRACING LIFE

### Stelarc

"Why should I continue with just two eyes, why should I continue to experience the world as a local space. Why should I operate and function with only two limbs and hands? " asks the Greek born performance artist Stelarc ("Interview with Stelarc"). Could one not as well argue, he continues," that skin is no longer an adequate interface to the world, and that technology becomes this new membrane of our existence." If your heart wears out after 70 years, he adds, then it is nothing but an engineering problem. We must start re-engineering the body he suggests, always keeping in mind that the most significant things are no longer freedom of information, but "freedom of form, freedom to mutate and modify your body " ("Cyberhuman "). The challenge we currently face is thus to learn to make use of the fact that "technology is what defines the meaning of

being human, it's part of being human." We must learn to perceive of the body in a different way, to see it as intricately interconnected with other bodies in multiple places, and thus as embodying a range of sensory antennae, greatly enhanced by technology. "By continuously pushing the body, by continuously interfacing the body with new technologies and robotic systems and even other bodies remotely," Stelarc says, " you generate experiences that you wouldn't ordinarily have and so consequently you are always thinking and even redefining what it means to function in this way" ("Interview").

Stelarc has worked in Australia as a performance artist since the late sixties. His background is in the Arts and Technology from Melbourne University and he has taught courses in Art and Sociology, Sculpture and Drawing at Yokohama International School and Ballarat University College respectively ("Extended Body"). His overall intent, he declares, is to "plug the body into a direct experience" so as to improve our comprehension of the world :

> Having spent two thousand years prodding and poking the human psyche without any real discernible changes in our historical and human outlook, we perhaps need to take a more fundamental physiological and structural approach, and consider the fact that it's only through redesigning the body that we will end up having significantly different thoughts and philosophies. ("EB")

His performances include the introduction of laser eyes; bodily suspension from meat hooks over metropolitan cities around the world; the construction and attachment of a third hand or multiple artificial arms; skin-stretching; the swallowing of a minor mechanical sculpture built of implant quality metals (the

size of a fist, self-illuminating, and sound-emitting). Some of these events take place in remote grass root corners of the universe; others at fine Arts exhibitions.

Most of Stelarc's work involves excruciating physical pain, which is why he is often assumed to be affiliated with the *ModPrims.* Yet, Stelarc pays little respect to Fakir and the *ModPrim* movement. Refuting that any transcendental benefits be gained from the pains involved in the trials, he explains that his own work is about substantially more grounded efforts :

> I don't take any anesthetics, I don't chant or get into altered states... It's not about pain. If you were to get pregnant, you wouldn't do it to experience physical pain, but giving birth is a painful experience.

The skin, traditionally conceived of as a boundary for the soul and for the self, and simultaneously as the beginning to the world, is undergoing a change, as a result of technological innovation, argues Stelarc. "Once technology stretches and pierces the skin, the skin as barrier is erased " (" CH "). This, he states, equips our organism to explore how to successfully inhabit extra terrestrial space. It is thus more up to date to consider the body a mere resource : an "impersonal, evolutionary, objective structure," as Stelarc puts it, which may be improved considerably by technological appendages.

Romantic conceptions of the body are clearly considered obsolete. We ourselves have created an information and technological environment with which our physical systems no longer can keep up, states Stelarc. We have created the potential of life without humanity. The only feasible evolutionary strategy left, is to trigger an evolutionary dialectic, in Stelarc's words, so as to incorporate

technology into the body. Thus, what is on the agenda is the creation of a human hybrid in which the organic and the synthetic come together in the creation of a new sort of energy ("Work by Stelarc"). The latter, it is worthwhile emphasizing, excludes a return to the biological body :

> As we develop more complex force-feedback, tactile feed-back loops of connectivity, then we might be in a position where we can generate experiences of phantom bodies on the Internet, but a phantom not as in phantasmagorical, but as in phantom limb sensation. It's not there, but you can feel it. ("Interview ")

This type of inter-connection may not only expand our already familiar range of experience. It is likely to introduce experiences of a sort, that are neither motivated by desire not based on memory. Perhaps the *meaning* of being human in this day and age, Stelarc suggests, is *not to remain human at all*. Maybe it is to be all over the place, or, under the skin of several different people, at one and the same time. Hence, one of his projects-in progress involves a world-wide-web linking of different bodies in various parts of the world. The aim is to enhance the body's sensory repertoire by taking into account both our primal desire to defeat physicality, as expressed in primitive rituals, as well as in our contemporary situation as being inter-connected via the www.

> A body is not just this entity. It is this entity connected to another body, where awareness is sliding and shifting, coagulating, ebbing and flowing, intensifying and dimming, depending of the connectivity of the body. [What is crucial is] the subject's connectivity and multiplicity of operational possibilities.

Yet, a question remains: Where, if anywhere, does subjectivity fit into this picture? The body/machine may be made of mechanical, silicon, or chip parts, Stelarc responds, but that does not prevent anyone from behaving in a socially acceptable manner and a human fashion. As long as one's behavior is

humane one makes a pretty decent subject ("Interview"). It is simply the case, Stelarc states, that the time has arrived for the body to get redesigned so as to match its machines.

## 2.0 WHEN MAN-MADE-IN-GOD'S IMAGE GETS DOWN TO EARTH, SHE IS PARTICULARLY POSTHUMAN

### (Grosz and) Haraway

Reflecting on the recent shift in the ways in which we transfer meaning, Elizabeth Grosz zooms in on the bodily preoccupation in our midst. The 1980s and 1990s cultural celebration of the body, she says, is neither to be understood as an expression of an improvement of our physical and psychical states of being, nor is it to be taken as an indication that we now desire to interact more fundamentally. "While representing itself as a celebration of the body and its pleasures," she states, "this fascination bears witness to a profound, if unacknowledged and un-discussed, hatred and resentment of the body "(*Space, Time, and Perversion* 1). Our bodies are no longer "docile" to power, as Foucault would have it. They have grown docile in another respect, namely in regards to our will, mind, and desire. We have, in other words, been led terribly astray. The question is, how did we get onto this course while in the midst "liberating" our selves?

The rapid change of our human and material environment, Grosz argues, has made it almost impossible for most people to *place* themselves. For the individual to assume a subjective position, it is imperative that he be able to situate himself within his body as well as in relation to the space within which he lives. This anchoring of subjectivity in the individual's body, Grosz argues, is the precondition for the individual's gaining a perspective on the world. It makes up the point of orientation from which any vision may emanate. The problem with the psychotic, as she points out, is that he fails to place himself, and thus cannot locate his own being. Hence he feels dis-eased in his own skin, and incapable of assuming a stance in relation to the world. To the dispossessed soul, the environment is experienced as a devouring force. It pursues him, encircles him, digests him, ends up replacing him. The body separates itself from thought, and the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and gradually begins to occupy the other side of his senses. He may resign from ever developing a sense of self, and simply try to get an impression of himself from whatever external point of view is available. The result is inevitably disappointing. In all likelihood, Grosz claims, the subject begin to feel like he has dissolved, that he has turned into a badly defined space, a "*dark space where things cannot be put*. He is similar, not similar to something, *but just similar*" (90).

If Bateson and Turner presume that no content comes without a container, no center without one or more peripheries, Grosz points to some of the effects of life on the other side of their theoretical elaboration. One may *try* to determine

whether or not the play forms described above break, expand, or establish boundaries. However, it is imperative that one keeps in mind that many avenues lead to an answer, and no matter the route chosen, it is bound to be paved with a bewildering mixture of potentials and pitfalls. The theoretical contributions that follow do not as much resolve the issue, as they point to a number of inroads to the play-phenomenon. Depending on the individual writer's orientation, focus of attention is on either the players' attempt to unite biology and technology, on the much acclaimed intensity gained from sado-masochistic playing, or, on the necessity of having a respectable play-partner and the slim possibility of coming out "even."

"The body is an agent, not a resource," says Haraway in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women : The Reinvention of Nature* (200). There is no reason to assume that it should end at the skin, or, at most include other beings encapsulated by the skin. Why should our identities not be conceived of in hybrid terms, that is, as a merging of man and machine, man and animal, man and fellow being? Stelarc could barely have found a more convincingly eloquent mouthpiece. Following the cultural move into postmodernity, Haraway states, we are more than due for a reconfiguration of our identities, particularly as women. What we have got to realize, she says, is that "self-identity " is a profoundly destructive notion, and that fusion is an unfortunate strategy of trying to position one self. Says Haraway:

> The boys in the human sciences have called this doubt about self-presence the "death of the subject." That judgment seems bizarre to me. I prefer to call this generative

> doubt the opening of non-isomorphic subjects, agents, and territories of stories unimaginable from the vantage point of the cyclopian, self-satiated eye of the master subject. (192)

In other words, the coast has been cleared for the subjects previously left in the dark, to come out—and get together. It is imperative, Haraway maintains, that our inquiry into what kind of other persons we may be, avoid such paralyzing notions as master-subjects and alienation. We would be better off trying to track down "multiply heterogeneous, inhomogeneous, accountable, and connected human agents." Most importantly, she asserts, we must never again subscribe to notions of subjectivity based on monotheism and the secular heresies this implies (3).

Haraway's counter proposal is of a post modernist as well as a non-naturalist nature. Referring to the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries in the field of sciences and humanities in the 20th century, she makes the point that other distinctions went down the very same drain. Thus human/animal, man/machine, body/mind dualistic thinking no longer stands. What, then, are we to make of the fact that we currently find ourselves in a situation during which not much can possibly "make a difference"? (152-161). A return to *nature* is out of question. Equally so is it to subscribe to the claim that our identities are entirely socially constructed. High technology is here to stay, and not as a tool, but as a way of being. The bottom line message is: We might as well embrace the fact and make the best of it. Our bodies are now to be conceived of as maps of power, pleasure, subjectivity. Passion and technological enthusiasm, no longer

mutually exclusive, now contribute to a full fledged, embodied identity. Hence, the machine cannot any longer be feared or worshipped. It *is* us, it is our embodiment, it is our souls and selves (180). "We are living through a movement from an organic, industrial society," Haraway puts it, "to a polymorphous, information system—from all work to all play, a deadly game."

Ultimately, the solution is, in Haraway's eyes, that we seek to re-configure ourselves through cyborg identities. In "A Cyborg manifesto" she explains that the cyborg imagery offers us a long overdue way out of the maze of dualisms traditionally used to explain and constrain our bodies and minds (180). Providing some guidelines for how to move on in the world, the cyborg enables us to get grounded, without getting stuck in normativity and convention. A cyborg consists, in Haraway's words, of the following:

> cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction... an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings....The cyborg is our ontology...
>
> The cyborg incarnation is outside salvation history. Nor does it mark time on an oedipal calendar, attempting to heal the terrible cleavages of gender in an oral symbiotic utopia or post-oedipal apocalypse...The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world...
>
> The cyborg skips the step of original unity, identification with nature in the Western sense... The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private...Nature and culture are reworked...
>
> The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family...The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden ; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust...[Cyborgs] are wary of holism, but needy for connection...
>
> The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism...Their fathers are, after all, inessential... (149-153)

Haraway herself is aware that her suggestion could be interpreted as a last ditch attempt at saving (feminist) face in a game where the cards handed out do not

differ substantially from those of the past. Does her cyborg-proposal not merely prove the means for the final "appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war"? Not necessarily so. Haraway maintains that it must be possible to conceive of the cyborg as *maybe* being about living the social and biological reality we have, of maybe enabling us to move beyond the fear commonly produced by the association with animals, machines, and other human beings. And it *may* be about taking pleasure in, instead of fearing, permanently partial identities and irreconcilable viewpoints.

*Experience* has always been a touchy issue within feminist ranks. Never prior to particular social occasions, discourses and other practices through which experience becomes articulated, it is highly dependent on the social mechanisms and rules for story telling (89).But meanings cannot be abstracted and generalized. Meanings are made—and grasped--by people in particular situations only. Static structures, independently of subjective investment, never made much sense in themselves. Ways of life, as they are shaped by and give shape to structural conditions, do. Thus knowledges are *situated*, stipulates Haraway. And situated knowledges are always marked knowledges. They are marked and they make up re-markings, and are thus influenced by and have an impact on the map of "the heterogeneous body of the world in the history of masculinist capitalism and colonialism" (111). Situated knowledges, in essence, are gendered, embodied, concrete and partial. They also, surprisingly to some, make up the only kind of objective knowledge of which we can possibly conceive.

We must insist on this embodiment of all vision, Haraway reiterates. Which is not to say that we are to support the myth that vision equals disembodiment. Rather, it allows us to construct useful, though not innocent, doctrine of objectivity. Haraway puts it in these terms:

> I want a feminist writing of the body that metaphorically emphasizes vision again, because we need to reclaim that sense to find our way through all the visualizing tricks and powers of modern sciences and technologies that have transformed the objectivity debates...
>
> All these pictures of the world should not be allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability, but of elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another's point of view, even when the other is our own machine. That's not alienating distance , that's a possible allegory for feminist versions of objectivity...
>
> Objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple : only partial perspective promises objective vision. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. (189-90)

Thus, we must learn to "see for ourselves" *and* to put ourselves in somebody else's shoes. And we must keep in mind, that no matter what, a view from the body always inevitably exclude the view from above, that is, the simplifying, distancing, *god-trick* (195). The only position from which objectivity could possibly be practiced and honored, according to traditional Western philosophy, is from the standpoint of the master, the Man, the One God, whose Eye produces, appropriates, and orders all difference. The god-trick is self-identical, and we have mistaken that for creativity and knowledge, omniscience even, says Haraway. The larger vision must be found in the particular. Hence, the problem with which we are left is how to *simultaneously* give an account of historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, *and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a *real* world. We clearly do

need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different—and power-differentiate—communities (187). We must grow capable of emphasizing with the views of others' from a "passionately detached " stance, that is, we must learn to open our selves for unexpected and unfamiliar points of view. We have to grow grounded and yet to remain mobile (192).

## 3.0 STIRRING UP OLD WOUNDS SO AS TO RECOVER AN UNSCARED SELF

### Stoller

Freud made the claim that neurosis constitutes the negative of perversion. Neurotics, Freud said, disguise their perverse fantasies in symptoms. Perverts, on the other hand, express desires of a similar nature openly. These desires, he speculated, may originate in untamed human urges associated with the death instinct. Freud suggested that perversion is the result of an inherent sado-masochistic tendency in the human subject. He also proposed that it might be an outcome of the subject's attempt to either prevent castration, or, to make up for the fact that it had already happened--thus the double awareness represented by knowing and yet not knowing at one and the same time. Full blown *sado-masochism*, according to Freud's theory, expresses the subject's genuine request for punishment of earlier unconscious sins (*Perversion*).

Neurosis and perversion *do not make up negatives of each other*, Robert Stoller argues. Perversion *is* an erotic neurosis (*Perversion* 101). Besides, sado-

masochism does not represent a quest for real punishment. The games played out between the one and the other merely make up pretense situations. Stoller hypothesizes that many, though not all, perverse scenarios constitute a reliving of an actual historical sexual trauma to one's sexual identity. By "reliving" the traumatizing scenario, the past is "rubbed out" and pain is turned into pleasure, powerlesness into control, subjection into victory. The subject thus repeats because repeating entails an escape from the old trauma. Seen in this light, self-destructiveness constitutes "a technique one feels one *chooses* as a way to take the power from others—to destroy oneself—guaranteeing that the choice resides only in oneself." It is the bottom-line mastery of trauma (*Perversion* 7, 119; *Pain and Passion* 293).

It is not like trauma instantly transplants into perverse patterns of behavior, Stoller points out. A latency period is required before the hostility triggered by the experience may emerge. The latency period, he speculates, goes into the re-stabilisation of the psychic-somatic system in the wake of the shock. Thus, at a later point in time, *seemingly* without any connection to the traumatic intrusion, the pervert creates his own success story, the point of which is that *this* time around he comes out as the conqueror (*Perversion* 77).

Stoller's thesis contests mechanic explanations as well as classical psychoanalytical theories. The former tends to overlook the existence of any psychic sources of motivation for the repetitive behavior, he says. It disregards the fact that "*what is labeled one's behavior is actually also one's explanations.*"

Traditional psychoanalytical explanations, on the other hand, tend to emphasize psychic structures to the exclusion of physiological impressions, embodied memory traces and thus, the physical structuring of desire. Stoller's hypothesis falls within the Freudian paradigm, but further emphasizes the role of early psychic-somatic imprinting. Fantasy is conceived of as playing the predominant role in subjectivity formation, though it remains firmly supported or undercut by physiological reality (*PP* 43).

Imprinting as a phenomenon draws extensively on biological explanations. But is it not possible Stoller asks, that man, like animals, undergoes an imprinting during certain circumstances, and that this fixing greatly influences further structuring of identity and development of the subject's sense of self ? This kind of hard-wiring is different from genetic inheritance as well as from social constructivism. Imprinting takes place during the subject's earliest interactions with the environment. Says Stoller :

> Stimuli from the environment... set up changes in the nervous system that function more or less permanently as neurophysiological sources of motivation, the change now serving as non-mental 'memory.' ( *Perversion* 147)

It is actually very plausible, Stoller says, that the etiology of sado-masochistic behavior lies in a premature exposure to overwhelming physical pain, ordinarily involving a component of inordinate psychic fear.

Perverse patterns of behavior are in all likelihood the result of a family dynamics in which the child has been *precluded* from immersing himself psychically in the oedipal situation. His heterosexual identity has been blighted.

Following this arrest, it is relatively easy to imagine that the individual may be susceptible to the experience of trauma, that is, that his system is prone to perceive almost any kind of stimulation as overwhelming. The sense of constantly being *played* by an other is the very experience which later results in the subject's inability to conceive of his partner as a human being. He cannot but perceive the interacting partner as playing a game, the other serving in the role of the prop needed for the revival of the age old drama (*Perversion* 8). Foreplay, in an ordinary sexual encounter, creates excitement, builds up tension, and increases the involvement with the other. In perverse scenarios, in contrast, the pervert aims at releasing his own tension, a process which more often than not requires that he be oblivious of his partner's needs and desire (*Perversion* 111). What is crucial is that the body, in this inauspicious interaction with the other, comes to be perceived as a tool. The power struggle between the one and the other takes place, almost literally speaking, over a dead body.

Children who have suffered massive disease resulting in invasive medical treatment, usually involving physical confinement, often turn into extreme sado-masochists as adults. What at the childhood stage constituted an incontrollable physical agony and terror is gradually reworked and turned into fantasies and practices of physical pain. This subject, desperately and successfully, has taught himself to eroticize suffering, Stoller says. The perversion is *his* triumph (*PP* 25). Rather than facing up to the guilt, anxiety, and humiliation experienced in association with the childhood event, the grown sado-masochist

fends off these feelings. His arousal arises from the fact that *he* is now in the process of hurting another, that *he* is now about to commit a sin equaling the one commited against himself, and that *he* is now on the very verge of setting the record straight.The real victim in this scenario, Stoller points out, is a person from another time and place (*PP* 47). Nothing is to be taken at surface value in these games. Right underneath the play there is a deep fear of loss of control. Even further down, there is a tremendous dread of freedom, of loss of identity, of annihilation (*PP* 287).

What we must not forget to ask ourselves is what sado-masochism *means* to the subject who undertakes this anxiety-loaded form of playing. Furthermore, why do perverse patterns of behavior occur in men more frequently than in women ? Responding to the latter, Stoller proposes that maybe Freud was wrong in assuming that the baby starts out being heterosexual. Possibly he was also off target in believing that male homosexuality is caused by an oedipal conflict with the *father*. Is it not possible, says Stoller, that masculinity as well as femininity, prior to the separation from the mother's body, are actually *proto-feminine* ? In other words, is it not likely that the basis for our gender and identity is laid in the primary interactions with the mother, the mother understood in terms of her ambience, her attitudes, her touch? (*Perversion* 147, 184). In the case of psychotics, Stoller points out, fear of changing sex seems universal in males but not so in females. In addition, the preoccupation with the preservation and protection of one's sexual identity appears to be a cross cultural common

denominator among men, but –again—not among women. Could not this vigilance be understood as a result of male symbiosis anxiety, asks Stoller. It seems, at any rate, to reflect the male subject's fear that his gender identity is shaky. Stoller elaborates on the nature of the latter. It is, he says a

> ubiquitous fear that one's sense of maleness and masculinity are in danger and that one must build into character structure ever-vigilant defenses against succumbing to the pull of merging again with mother. . .set up to protect us from outer threats and insults, it must ultimately be established against our own inner, primitive yearning for oneness with mother.

His thesis finds support in the field of biology and ethology. Male features (in man and animal), it is said, develop on the basis of, and through the differentiation of, the self from a female anlage. Thus, masculinity seems to rest on a pushing away from mother. And it is of course a matter of fact, Stoller points out, that our culture defines masculinity by how completely the subject has succeeded in ridding himself of his need for symbiosis with the mother (*Perversion* 138, 147). Sado-masochistic behavior may thus function as a means to keep in check the angst triggered by intimacy with the female aspect of an other.

Identity, according to Stoller, is made up of an accumulative integration of various isolated self-representations (*Perversion* 151). When these parts cannot be integrated the individual's identity remains flawed, or, more precisely it constitutes an assemblage of incompatible and mutually unsympathetic bed mates. Sado-masochists do not differ that much from others, personality wise. What unites those with a flair for sado-masochistic joy is their preference for

painfully serious role playing. Among the common denominators is the fact that *humiliation* plays a major role as does *risk* taking. The objective is to increase excitement to the point where it becomes (almost) unbearable and—at the same time—to ward off boredom and the dangers this includes (*PP* 8, 19). Stoller lists among sado-masochist techniques the following : whipping, piercing, tattooing, scarification, cutting, hanging, electric shocking, stretching on racks, mouth gagging, imprisonment, alteration of consciousness, mummification, cocooning, iron-maidening, tickling, bondage, playing with excrement, pulling hair, shaving, burning, wrestling, stomping, non-suicidal wrist and ankle slashing. He also includes the particular desire of amputees, infantilism, air-deprivation, clamping, fisting, and boot licking into the category of perverse actions (*PP* 10-15). The roles are as a rule divided between a top and a bottom, a master and a slave. It is in vain to conceive of these roles in terms of *activity* versus *passivity*, Stoller emphasizes, for the very reason that the bottom is likely to be the one who pulls the strings. It does not work either, to consider all sado-masochistic acts as being brutal on par with other forms of physical violation. We need to learn to distinguish those who injure others from those who, in trying to undo the effects of harm undergone early in life, *play* at injury, insists Stoller. For many Sado-Masochists "life is so much more painful than the wounds of the flesh." They feel that they "are saving their souls--staying alive in an alien universe—by risking their skins" (*PP* 21-23).

Inner life, as Stoller points out, is not only a result but also a cause of culture. Thus his theory contests the Freudian theory that, if left out of control, human sexuality dehumanizes erotic life and thus undermines any foundation for love (*PP* 208). Have we ever seen a healthy and thriving civilization based on suppressed sexuality, Stoller asks ? Utopias are calm but boring, in addition to being unrealistic, he claims. Perversion simply cannot be ruled out. Besides, he argues, perverted individuals, those for whom intimacy is complicated and unsustainable, provide us with the most ground breaking artistic, scientific, philosophical, and political work (*PP* 213). Having withdrawn or resigned from primordial disappointments the individual has kept intact and untarnished by reality his most imaginative and creative faculties (*PP* 157).

## 3.1 TOYING WITH DOMINATION, SUCCEEDING IN HUMILIATION

### Benjamin

Based on object-relations theory, phenomenology, and human ethology, Jessica Benjamin argues in *Bonds of Love* that sociability is a primary phenomenon, something we cannot *choose* to engage in. It is within the dynamic of a relationship that the subject develops as an individual, she states. In *Civilization and It's Discontent* Freud makes the claim that power is repressive. If this was the case, says Benjamin, culture could not be sustained. People would simply rebel. *Domination*, she suggests is a two way process which is tragically

anchored in the heart of the dominated. Individuals participate in their own submission. Any theorist unable to cope with a contradiction of this sort, or, vehemently denying the irrational, and trying to sanitize the erotic, fantastic components of human life, Benjamin states, simply cannot come up with an authentic end to domination. All this theorist is capable of doing is to vacate the field of erotic and aggressive experience (*Bonds of Love* 10).

Many forms of cultural activity, such as sado-masochist play, can only be comprehended in view of what makes an individual feel authentically alive, Benjamin asserts. Human beings are deeply dependent on recognition from others. Intersubjectivity is introduced around 7-9 months of age and from hereon the tension between individuals acquires extraordinary importance, as does the extent to which they reflect each other's reality and imagination (29). The interplay between self and other, as it took place externally in infanthood, is replayed *inter* and *intra*-subjectively. Thus the subject's internal structure organizes his desire to the extent that he later in life seeks to reproduce once missed encounters. Fundamentally, the infant's *and* the adult's greatest problem is to recognize that the other exists for himself. Individuals of fragile constitution in particular, insists that the other be separate, autonomous and capable of granting recognition. Yet, they also need to feel totally in control. When the conflict between dependence and independence becomes too intense, Benjamin says, the psyche simply gives up in favor of an opposition (50). The result is psychic-somatic splitting. In consequence, the basic tension of forces within the

individual is externalized, transformed into an impossible dynamics between two or more subjects. A domineering attitude to the other, therefore, is rooted in an excruciating sense of insecurity, that is, in an intense desire to be independent and self-sufficient.

The implication of the subject's doubt that he himself is truly human is that he frequently fails to perceive the other as being alive. Hence the anti-playful nature of his games. Often they make up nothing but a frustrated search for recognition during which assertion becomes aggression, and union as well as separation are made impossible. "The painful result in the battle for omnipotence is that to win is to win nothing," Benjamin says. "The result is negation, emptiness, isolation" (35). Sado-masochism, in essence, is a struggle to death for recognition. Freud suggested that pain be converted into perverse erotic pleasure. Benjamin could not disagree more. Regardless of the fact that the "bottom" might be pulling the strings, the pleasure, she insists, is only for the master. Sado-Masochistic relationships introduced to reinstall tension between self and other in the individual ironically results in tension reduction, that is in numbness.

## Mother Earth, and similar mythological shelters from which you have come.

## ***BLACKWATER***

The following excerpt makes up a story, *not* about body modification and mutilation per se, but rather about the impossibility of ripping out an individual body from the web of the world of mythological explanations. The subject's physical existence, the earth, and sexuality, are interconnected to the extent that any attempt at separating out the one from the others results in a grave imbalance. When any one aspect of experience is isolated, and thus confined, from the others, the outcome is a distortion of individual as well as collective sensuality, spirituality, and comprehension. Nobody, no matter the particularity of his course through life, can perceive his physical, sexual, and intellectual being as being an entirely personal possession.

Our mythological framework, Ekman suggests, enables us to come into psycho-somatic being, socially and sexually. For this framework not to come to function as life defining, meaning life depriving, it must be constantly kept alive. The texture within which we live is thus like a living tissue. When nourished, it comes to contain the flow of life (eroticism and intellectual reflection). When framed and submitted to control, it cannot but cast a shadow of decay and incomprehension over reality.

Time and place of the opening part is Blackwater, eighteen years after the Lobber event. Annie is to be murdered later in the day:

> A sound woke her. Four o' clock in the morning. 4: 02 in the red digits of the clock radio. There was a gray light in the room. The windowpanes were streaked with rain and outside damp was rising from the grass.
>
> A car door slammed. Another. So at least two people. Then this silence. No voices.
>
> She slept with a shotgun beside her. There was a gap between the bed and the wall, and the gun lay in this space. A very neat weapon, Spanish. A Sabela. She kept the cartridges behind the clock radio. It took her twenty-two seconds to broach the gun and put in the cartridges. She had practiced and timed it. But she had never had any serious need to load it.
>
> The house was locked. She had never forgotten to lock the front door, not even by accident. Not in eighteen years.
>
> She lay with her hand on the finely carved butt of the Sabela, feeling its dull, greasy surface. Rigid and a little cold.
>
> She didn't want to go out into the kitchen to look because she would be visible through the window...
>
> In the end she went out into the kitchen after all. Without the shot-gun. *That is probably what you do. You think it will be all right.*
>
> The rain was now pouring soundlessly down the window panes. Beyond the veil of glass and water, Mia was standing in front of the car, her body welded to another...
>
> ...They were so close, it looked as if he had penetrated her out there in the rain. But that was not it. What she saw was something equally primeval, as if a wound were opening itself in time. And then closed, was gone. As the faces detached themselves from each other, she recognized him.
>
> ...Her heart was moving inside her like an animal. After a while her mouth had filled with saliva and a violent nausea forced her to swallow.
>
> The same face. Firmer and coarser after eighteen years, but it was him.
>
> ...With budding leaves in his wet hair, he also looked like something else. Something she had seen, an image perhaps. In spite of herself, she pictured a knife. She could see the knife in those strong young bodies. (3–4)

Johan Brandberg, born February 21st , 1957, a fish astrologically speaking, the boy Annie saw eighteen years earlier escaping the crime site. That Johan's relationship with Annie's daughter is to grow rather strained, following Annie's death, we already know. What remains obscure is Johan's reason for developing a characteristically forbidding attitude to mother love, in his mind associated with rats and other creeps on earth. His ambivalence in relation to female sexuality is evident. Still, what is not at all clear is the extent to which his

difficulties with the opposite sex suffice to trigger murderous rage. According to Christian mythology the fish is associated with Christ, the significance of baptism, and thus a pure mind. Confusingly and significantly, the fish also symbolizes maternal waters, unconscious existence, and hence the subject's dependence on mater(ial) matters. An ambiguous and slippery symbol, few in the Western world of theology and philosophy have ever managed to get a firm grip on all of its meanings. In a similar vein, Johan's attempt at coming to terms with the sign under which he was born is no smooth sailing.

At the time of Annie's arrival to Blackwater Johan is sixteen years old. While Annie is loosing her way in the forest late at night, Johan is reading up on an expedition to Antarctica in the 1950s. A Social Studies *student*, he prefers to huddle up in the attic in his parental home. Around the beginning of puberty Johan began to fantasize that the brutish, industrial logger Torsten, known to be his father, had been deceived. Manhood, according to Torsten, consists in physical violence, sexual savagery, abuse of after shave and liquor (24, 29-30). His true origin, Johan imagines, is a native Sami and hunter, a male who relies on no artificial intervention in his dealings with the forces of nature. Enraged that his true origin remains a dirty secret within the family, Johan nevertheless keeps quiet. His animosity eventually creates a cleavage between Johan and the other male members of the family. His four brothers he cannot but regard as the distasteful Torsten's alien offspring.

Midsummer Eve Torsten beats up a neighboring farmer, right under the nose of the studious Johan. Repulsed and frightened, Johan takes flight into the forest. This gesture, merely intended to make an impression on his family, comes to constitute Johan's first break with his incubated existence. Unexpectedly, his brothers catch up with him and, so as to humiliate their younger, overintellectual brother, lower him into a deserted well. From the bottom of the darkness, in a pit of mud, and in the company of lone surviving eel, Johan's life begins to take a new turn : " He realized something quite new was beginning now. " Still he has no clue as to what his involuntary breaking free is to lead to (24). Following an extended period of resignation, immobility, and waiting for his mother to come to his rescue, Johan shockingly realizes that maybe this is exactly what is not going to happen. Flung into a state of horror he begins to loathe the mother on whom he has been so dependent :

> Finally he was just screaming, no words. But the hole up there stayed light, like a blue disc. Nothing moved against it.
>
> His voice cracked...
>
> He had lost all sense of time...
>
> Did Gudrun know that when he was young, Torsten had knocked down men he didn't even know ?...
>
> Had she known that when she married him ? Was there something deep down in sweet little Gudrun, with her courses in English and natural dyes, that liked that ? In the dark of the night ? He felt sick...But all the same, it was her fault he was down a well. (36)

> ..As soon as he'd heard it was a woman's voice, he had calmed down. Gudrun was looking for him...he wasn't particularly tired now, and he needed to think.
>
> But he couldn't. He was too hungry...He would have to go back home without having done any thinking.
>
> Well that wasn't the end of the world. He had lain in his room before, hunched over his desk....
>
> He had to climb out the window to take a leak. It was all so silly, so much trouble. He had never liked things that wasted time and were tiresome. Like camping. (57)

It is from the bottom of this tunnel that Johan eventually catches a glimpse of light: No matter the intensity of his self-righteous resentment, hatred is not going to change anything :

> Gudrun had probably been really worried...
> They would grin a bit when he got back, then say nothing. Nor would he dare say anything. He would have to go on living there, curled up, one year at a time. Then military service.
> It struck him it would be the same then.
> Torsten and his real sons fitted in. They belonged, only sometimes they went a bit too far. (57)

The well, as far as Christian mythology is concerned, represents life as a pilgrimage, the road to salvation. Still, it also stands for the birth channel through which new life must *move* so as to acquire a being of its own. Johan is not particularly enthusiastic about the prospects of having to work his own way out. In the end, however, he sees no other option but to wriggle out of the well. When finally above water level he is amazed. How come, he wonders, it never before had crossed his mind that he could make a move of his own ? (39). Refusing to return to the regime at home, Johan continues his flight. He leaps into a boat waiting at the river side. Tugging along the eel from the well, and curling up inside of the little shell, he embarks on his journey. A contemporary Oedipus, his destination is unknown, his origin uncertain, his fate is to return home.

> The lake looked peculiar, oily in the stillness, as if the water were sticky...
> Then he noticed the canoe, a light metal one glinting in a willow thicket.
> What actually happens when you decide ?
> Afterward Johan realized that he never had decided...
> The water enveloped the slim body of the canoe. As he dipped the paddle... Christ, how fast it goes. ..Suppose people were forced to travel like the eel to mate...

> He was sitting like innards inside the shiny shell. He had always felt at one with the canoe...
> He had to think. (58-59)

During the initial stages of the trip, Johan grows obsessed with how to explain, or rather, justify things. Over and over he decides to *think* things through, and over and over he breaks his own word. Other urges, as it happens, keep interfering with his desire to resolve things rationally.

Hiding out in a deserted cottage at the river bank, he finds that he is, as a matter of fact, in the shit. Up until this point in time, Johan's understanding of the workings of his world has been based on a limited number of myths. Most of these, in addition to being produced by the popular media, represent a dualistic view of the world. Thus, they have promoted Johan's perception of Torsten as being a primitive Law setter without any respect whatsoever for life. Gudrun, in contrast, has been painted as the suffocating mother, and love and sexuality as deeply romantic and definitely eluding conscious awareness. Paradoxically, on most accounts Johan's perception is both right and wrong. Or, more accurately, the type of *framing* he employs for the purpose of being able to capture his conditions of living, merely put into focus a fragment of the larger picture. Significantly though, while in the process of realizing the Oedipal myth, Johan begins to reflect on the ways in which other narratives give shape to our world.

> He began to read an old magazine, the paper yellow around the edges.
> There was a serial he hadn't read before, thinking it was about love, but now he found it was a political story—though with love in it. A weeping wife who was an alcoholic. The husband had gotten drunk and the pretty girl he was out with in his car had been killed...
> ...Edward Kennedy...

> Yes, it was the story of the president's brother, though they had changed all names...
>
> Outrageous really.
>
> Edward Kennedy was still around and active. He had only gone a little too far. But it had worked out.
>
> Things always worked out for them.
>
> His revulsion rose like the smell of shit from the torn paper... (58)

Hitchhiking out of town Johan is picked up by a Finnish-Norwegian femme fatale. "Old," he thinks. She is forty one and her hair is fair and coarse. The woman smokes cigarettes, drinks vodka, feeds Johan fish and wine, and she is determined to take the sixteen year old boy on a ride. All she reveals about herself is that she is a Scorpio. *Ylja* is, in other words, in so far as Johan sees her, a witch of evil intent, in league with the greedy mother goddesses of the North.

Ylja remains in the driver's seat all the way through. Their destination thus remains unknown to Johan. Eventually, they arrive at an old mansion located in the woods surrounding the mountains. Johan is stored away in a minor annex, resembling the housing used for the servants around the turn of the century. In due time, Ylja seduces the boy. Johan, for his part, is taken aback by her lack of pretense, her determination, and directness. His sexual initiation, he had always imagined, were to come about on its own, without anyone *willing* it.

> "You and I have something to do, " she said. " Then you can sleep. "
>
> She came over and pulled the quilt off him. Leaning over, she put her hand on the front of his jeans. She gave a little laugh, like a snort. She must have felt his dick throbbing...
>
> He had given quite a lot of thought to an occasion like this. That it would come. But he had though about a girl, a faceless girl, yes, but soft...
>
> She parted her legs and threaded herself onto him...She twisted his dick back as she leaned away from him, and he came with a pain that made his upper lip curl back from his teeth...

> After a while she began to finger him again, and when there was a response, she pulled. This was not as he had imagined. He had thought all this kind of thing went like a dream, almost imperceptibly. Not purposefully like this. (108-109)

Ylja informs Johan that the purpose of her trip is to meet with a larger group of women who regularly gather around the *Traveler*. The role of the Traveler, also called the *Silver Fox*, is to constitute a moving center of orientation for women all over the world. Originating in matrilineal tribes, the ritual is based on a number of secrets to which only women acquire access. The women pass on their knowledge to their daughters and thus ensure that the bond stretches through history. The identity of the Traveler is coincidental. When aging to the point of being unable to make up a sufficiently vital center of orientation, he is replaced by a younger successor. However, for the newcomer to earn his right to the position, Ylja adds, he must kill his forefather. A sign has been given, she relates—in terms of the eel Johan stubbornly clings to--that Johan is to be the new Traveler. Johan is awestruck by Ylja's talk about mythology and spirituality. Pretending to understand what she is getting at, he is caught off guard when Ylja addresses him more directly:

> "What is your god called ? "
> He didn't understand the question, and echoed," God ? "
> He wasn't even sure he had heard right.
> He remembered a preacher with a voice that had sunk from the first syllable so that it sounded like singing : " Jeesus is waiting for you ! Jeesus ! " And his grandmother beginning to tremble. He had felt her body shaking inside her coat, and he had withdrawn from her, ashamed and wanting to pee
> "The god of your forefathers, " she said, helping him, and at last he understood.
> "Peive, one of the Lapp gods, " he said uncertainly. That was school knowledge.
> "I thought Tjas Olmai was your man otherwise. " She could see from his face

that he knew nothing and she laughed.

"The water man," she said. " The god of the fish. " ( 110)

If Johan is a fish, he has grasped only half its importance. Like the dusty frames and cracked pieces of glass holding in place the history of mankind, Johan's explanations have lost touch with reality and grown stale. Similar to the males in the fading pictures in the women's house, his conception of meaning, spirituality, and purpose, associate mastery, violation, and suppression of the unruly forces of nature. No one, apart from Johan himself, can take them fully seriously any more. Entering the mansion in which Ylja and her company lodge :

> Well, so what ? It couldn't be forbidden to go inside. He went into the dark hallway...The framed photographs on the walls looked as if they were taken at the beginning of the century, all men. Men in tweed caps and lace-up leather boots. One posed with his foot on a bear's head, a thick stick jammed into its mouth to hold it open.... In one photograph, two men were carrying a salmon on a stake between them. Another showed a whole company with dogs in front of heaps of dead birds.
>
> The glass in the frames was dusty and two were broken...It all looked as if no one bothered about the pictures any longer ; they simply hung there, the men's faces staring rigidly down at the mess in the hall. (145)

Johan learns that the women are to make a trip to the *Stone God Cave.* Doubting its existence, and yet unable to put to rest the suspicion that it may be exist, Johan decides to test the waters himself :

> He wondered where the cave was, if it actually existed. She had said it wasn't far. The path ... crossed the river over a footbridge of two logs, and went on across a marshland sloping upward...one or two small spruces. He took that way and enjoyed moving quickly without having to think....Hundreds of birds were calling and whistling all around him, he thought, thousands of birds calling and I just keep on walking.
>
> The path appeared to lead up to the high mountain...In the end he was balancing on a very narrow ridge and approaching the hillside...
>
> He turned around when the going got slower on the cliff face and what he saw was incredible. The sea. The whole sea, misty blue in the morning sun, the midst on the horizon reddish and glowing. Out there was the sun, and above the

> mountain ridges the clouds had begun building up...for a few moments he could see clouds below him, floating in the ravine, ragged and steaming...
>
> There was no sign of any cave. That was all just bloody nonsense. He had gone on walking as if drunk and was now stuck on the mountainside, clouds drifting below and above him, soaking with their moisture.
>
> As soon as he got to the top and found firm, lichen-covered rock beneath his feet, squalls of rain came racing in and he could no longer see the sea...he found himself sitting in the cloud, dripping wet...
>
> When he had gone so far that you were supposed to let yourself down. The path led into the perpendicular mountainside, and opened up into a large, almost oval entrance.
>
> The cave. So it did exist after all. As he slithered down the rope, he realized that he'd done the worst part quite unnecessarily. The cave wasn't all that high up and the path to it was easy. There were ferns in the entrance, hanging from the roof of the cave inside, the dark rock covered with lichen, but not far inside. Then it became sterile...
>
> Only the first part was smooth, the ground beginning to slope steeply down into the darkness. Must be damned big cave. He would tell her he had been there now—she wasn't expecting that of him. But he had to go a little farther in. There must be something there he could say he had seen so that she would believe him...
>
> Finally he came down to more level ground. To test out the size of the space around him he tried with his voice, but his throat locked and it hurt to call out...He was alone in the harsh odor, with the darkness and cold that was the mountain's...
>
> So there was a path there—the cave went on, but how far ? He didn't want to know...When he opened (his eyes), he could see a bit farther in front of him.
>
> It was a rock. High and rough, upright, narrowing toward the top, taller than a human being.
>
> Quite suddenly he was frightened out of his wits, fear coming without warning. Before he had been uneasy, but now it was terror, so great that he didn't think of being careful. He rushed back up, gravel and stones falling below him, then slid down again...When he finally reached the cave entrance, he pressed his face into the harsh crowberry scrub and moss, and after a while was aware of the taste and smell of earth that was alive.
>
> He didn't know what had frightened him, nor did he want to think about it. That served no purpose. (142-44)

The passage above perfectly describes a journey across the "river of life," into another dimension of human reality, down through the slopes of doubt, fear of immersion, and sticky pubic hair, and into the mysterious midst of mater(nal) interiority. Johan is in the process of undergoing an initiation of substantially greater implications than the kick in between the sheets, to which he has recently been introduced. Impressed by the course of events, but

also profoundly shattered, Johan decides upon his return to the house to lay his hands on an appropriate pay for the upheaval he has undergone. He is, after all, a child of late capitalist society. The price he claims is freedom, the means is money. As it is, his only access to monetary power goes through Ylja's pockets.

> He felt different as he picked up [Ylja's] hand bag. Half anxious again...On another chair lay a number of packs of those pale-blue panties. The bed was unmade and smelt of her...
>
> She had got almost eighteen hundred. Norwegian kroner. She wouldn't notice if he took two hundred...In the end he took five hundred. It happened so quickly he had no time to think it through...
>
> He had just closed the bag when he heard voices...He was caught like a rat in a trap...
>
> Without thinking, he had backed over towards the window...The grass had looked soft and wasn't too far down. He opened the window and wriggled out...But he hadn't the time [to be careful]...
>
> He immediately realized it had gone badly wrong. The ground wasn't soft ; the tall grass had deceived him. He felt a sharp pain in his hip, but soon found it was his left foot that had landed really badly...His fall was still shuddering within him, from fear as much as shock and pain...
>
> He was her prisoner. But perhaps she didn't know that ?

Ignoring the swollen and aching state of Johan's injured member, Ylja proceeds with her sexual advances. She also encourages him to talk about his parents. After having listened to his stories about Torsten and Gudrun she exclaims that Johan has got an Oedipus complex. In return he hits her. Subsequently, "he knew that at all costs he had to get away " (164-65). The standoff between the two leads *not* to Johan's leaving, but rather to Ylja's ridding herself of him. She abandons him on the mainroad, from where Johan starts his return trip to Blackwater.

When Gudrun picks up her son, she is scared and angry, not at all as worried and compassionate as Johan had anticipated. Paying scarce attention

to his swollen foot, she hurriedly deports him to her sister's, located in a Sami community. Johan is convinced that Gudrun is finally about to confess to their little shared secret. However, no such thing is on Gudrun's agenda. Johan ends up playing *Monopoly*, eating American potato chips, and drinking Pepsi-Cola with his cousin in his aunt's living room. The drama of his life draws to a close when he doses off on a cross-stitch cushion , "Ullevaal Hageby, Princes Street, Parliament Square, and Trondheim Road spread out on his chest" (230).

# PART FIVE

## Opening the floor, and leaving it to a stupefied subject

### Bodily being as emerging from discoursive discordance

We have arrived at a crossroads at this point in the stringing together of an argument. On the one hand, it appears that words have grown increasingly insufficient as a means of expressing the contemporary subject's affective states of being. On the other hand, it has been indicated that bodily modes of expression do not necessarily—certainly not immediately—help the subject getting clear on his needs and desires. The temptation and tendency are there, to quietly leap to the assumption that words presumably *do* stand in contradiction to bodily sensation, and that physical experience under any circumstance eludes verbal comprehension. Still, it has also been made clear that words may be made to signify differently, depending on the position assumed by the subject involved in the exchange. As it turns out, it is the very mutability of the subject-object positioning that keeps fueling the dispute over whether or not fear is something to be scared of (Kristeva versus Massumi, Shaviro and Taussig), inner chaos is worthwhile loosing sleep over (Deleuze and Guattari versus Glass and Tomkins), temporary self-dissolution should be prevented by any or all

means (Freud over and against Winnicott, Milner and Lingis), and physical pain ought to be avoided for the sake of the subject's peace of mind. Even the most extreme cases of physical subjection, it seems, may be reversed by the players in question into manifestations of love. Conditional love, admittedly, but nevertheless love. The degree to which a subject perceives a physically injurious event to be psychically damaging thus greatly depends on whether or not he is given the opportunity to *choose* his submission and possible "victimization." It is neither degrading nor humiliating to be treated as some*thing* rather than some*one*, Haraway suggests, as long as the subject herself has chosen to undergo the reconfiguration in question. Neither is it profoundly harmful to the individual's self esteem to be physically mutilated or treated as a subhuman, Fakir, Flanagan and Stoller argue, as long as he himself remains in charge of the scenario. Determining one's own terms, and gaining control over the narrative in which one participates, overshadows any question of pain to a surprising extent.

We are not talking about such things as a widespread desire to indulge in "private languages." Each of the arguments above relies on the possibility of subverting the rules governing the social or, rather, the symbolic game. The subject's excitement and sense of triumph arise from the experience of having succeeded in talking an other human being into sharing a deeply personal reinvention of conventional terms. The sado-masochist scenarios, as described by Stoller, for instance, prosper on the basis of a twisting of traditional norms,

themes, and ideals, a twisting which transforms a conventional power dynamics, with clearly assigned power and role -distribution, into a mouthpiece for personal story telling. Hence, outdated forms of interaction serve as the ground for a re-exposure of wounds still fresh.

What are we to make of this? Does it reinforce the body-mind dualism hinted at previously, or does it suggest that particularly vulnerable bodies are prone to discriminate carefully between one term and an other, precisely because their choice of terms *does* matter. *Matters* in the sense that the subject's psychic and somatic being is being shaped by the extent to which he feels called upon, named and addressed in a personally sensible manner? It does not come easily even to conceive of the possibility that some bodies may be more receptive and are bound to be more heavily imprinted than others, by the language surrounding them. To even breach the possibility opens up for a vast horizon of theoretical and analytical uncertainty. *If* it turns out to be a matter of fact that (some)bodies are differently impressed by symbolic use, how are we ever to distinguish one bodily mode of speech from an other? *If* we can no longer detect any clear and relatively straight forward connection between physical symptoms, difficulties with representation, and personality (not to say pathology), might we not as well give up all together on the entire endeavor and declare bodily sense of non-sense?

Cases like those introduced in this work which offer meager opportunity for systematic analysis, and even worse, for comprehensive theoretical explanation, often trigger an overwhelmingly strong academic desire for

certainty. Nevertheless, any attempt at drowning out the voices we would rather not witness cannot but take us even further into the woods.

The fact that *some* bodies employ words in a more intensely corporeal sense than others by no means rules out the possibility that particular categories of bodily "languages" exist. The extent to which we may ever learn to gracefully decipher these—rather then dissecting them as is frequently the tendency—depends on our ability to explore the phenomenon from a variety of angles, preferably at one and the same time.

The intent of this chapter therefore, is to introduce a range of theoretical and practical attitudes to the issue of bodily speech. The thread running through the following sections is made up of a single, yet many-faceted, question : Of what are the links between body and mind, sexuality and subjectivity on the one hand, and the mastery of language on the other hand, made up ?

*Part Five* opens with Michel Foucault's post-structural view of the role of language in late modern society. "Representation no longer exists," he states in 1977. "There's only action—theoretical action and practical action which serve as delays and forms networks" ("Intellectuals and Power" 207). Neither reading nor writing, he says, any longer mean anything much unless it results in action, or more precisely in re-action. Drawing the consequences of this view, he states as his ultimate goal to write in such a way that he may trigger physical pleasure in his reader ("Talk Show" 137). Nothing would be peculiar about this desire to *move* the reader, if it were not for the fact that

Foucault has already written off both the subject and the author, as traditionally conceptualized. One is left to wonder : *Who* is to move *whom*, by what means and to what effect, and how can words possibly provide physical pleasure in such an intangible subject? Extraordinarily persistent in his scrutiny of the ways in which late modern society has created a further cleavage between words and sensuality, man and sexuality, Foucault, ironically enough, ends up reproducing this very split. Regardless of the strength of his conviction that the moment has arrived for the subject's recovery of genuine, non-distorted physical pleasure, Foucault never succeeds in finding a way beyond conceptualized, thus pre-determined, emotional and sexual being. His work illuminates the many ways in which the modern and late modern subject has served as a vessel for an objectifying speech, something which has nothing to do with the exercise of a personal voice. It constitutes a persuasive argument for the fact that the late modern "crisis of representation" may be considered an inevitable outcome of modern and late modern cultural development in the Western world. Foucault's inability to devise any way out of this stupefying situation reflects back, not only on the limitations of his theory, but in particular on the impossibility of actually *living* and thriving under the outlined conditions. As far as Foucault is concerned, the subject is coerced into speaking a "common language." What we witness today, however, is that some subjects refuse to do so. Foucault's depiction of the power dynamics helps us understand why. He describes our

cultural universe as being more than merely claustrophobic: it drains any kind of experience of whatever sense of authenticity it may have (had) for the subject in question.

Many a thinker has let themselves get caught up in the debate over the deadened bodies accumulating in the train of post-structuralist theory. There seems to be a certain comfort in maintaining the discussion at an abstract level, and thus to repeat the crimes of those accused of misconduct. The act of *listening* to an other for whom the spoken word either does not come naturally, or, seems to repress rather than express her sense of reality, makes for a very particular experience. One easily gets the sense that this individual does not want to share her story, or, that she insists that the listener gets subsumed by it. This in itself may be more or less manageable. The dynamics grows more troublesome, however, the moment the exchange leaves the listener with a feeling of being totally ignored, violated, or strangely transformed. Unable to feel at ease in the company of an other the muted subject often—unconsciously—transfers her discomfort to her interlocutor. In consequence, and this is an enigmatic experience, the listener comes to feel as if she has literally speaking been transferred into the shoes of an other. No psychoanalytic encyclopedia or phenomenological tomb stone can accurately describe this experience of being pulled in under the tormented skin of an other human being. The second section of this chapter therefore introduces a taste of reality, as experienced from behind what often amounts to a wall of silence and a muffled body.

The attempts at explaining physically self-destructive practices are many, but few make it as far as detecting some cogent connections between the subject's physical self-image and his or her particular use of language. Lacan gives a post-structural and psychoanalytical interpretation of this case. In essence, he says, physically self-destructive gestures are insignificant and reveal nothing but profound meaninglessness. Arguing that the subject's entry into the symbolic constitutes her ontological threshold, Lacan implicitly makes the claim that verbal symbolization serves as her second, psychic skin. Words, in effect, function as a "symbolic body," a body which is prone to undergo lesions and cause psycho-somatic havoc, the way a flesh-and-blood body may do it. The point remains relatively undeveloped in Lacan's thinking. Yet, the implication remains that the subject under certain circumstances may perceive the entry into the symbolic on par with being dragged into a killing field. The refusal to acquire a tongue of one's own is deadly, says Lacan. However, what is to be derived from in between the lines of his work is the crucial fact that, for some, *words are lethal.*

Foucault and Lacan both theorize that the body and the word interact in the most intricate ways. Foucault is at a loss at explaining why, if discourse thoroughly permeates the subject's body and soul, the individual remains capable of resisting total submission. No matter how he turns the matter, the result is inevitably—and inexplicably so--that the body constitutes some inexplicable last-resort-resource of psycho-somatic health. Lacan, on the other hand, gets into

trouble whenever he endeavors to give an account of the non-anatomical nature of the phallus, that is of the institution of the word as spoken by the Other. Granted, he says, it has nothing to do per se with the male penis. Evidently, he continues, it has everything to do with the recognition of the Name of the Father. The latter, we must not forget, is the very reason why mothering subjects must keep in mind that she should orient herself toward the Other. Severing the connection between sex and anatomy to an extreme and highly implausible degree, Lacan rules out the possibility that a subject's preference for non-verbal means of interaction may be understood as a disapproval, not of power and difference per se, but rather of monolithic phallic and patriarchal power.

Judith Butler's notion of *performativity* ingeniously adds a missing piece to Foucault's as well as Lacan's theory. Taking to task those thinkers who consider Poststructural and Psychoanalytic thinking worlds apart Butler shows that Foucault and Lacan, when productively deconstructed, offer a solution as to where the subject's sense of authenticity and source of resistance may be found. The individual body is "written" indeed, as Foucault would have it, says Butler, but never entirely so. Likewise, meaning emerges from the subject's recognition of difference, as Lacan argues, but differences come in multiple forms and shapes. The phallus, no longer the sole tower of power has lost its monopoly over contemporary minds and hearts. What has arisen instead, from the darkness of the Foucauldian and Lacanian theoretical unconscious, is the lesbian phallus. Drawing on speech-act theory Butler

suggests that all utterances are *constative*, and that constative claims are inevitably to some degree *performative*. Thus the power of the phallus, the word and the Other, she states, is derived from the extent to which they are repeated in a proper or an abortive manner. Foucault and Lacan correctly assume that no fixed sign-signified relationship exists, she points out. What they seem to overlook is the implication that "fallacious" identifications of the phallus are likely to undermine its very authority.

The *opening pages* of this chapter deal with the question concerning the nature of the relationship between bodily experience, bodily expression and language. Whether of a post-structural, psycho-analytical, or a deconstructive orientation, all of the theories in question presume that at the crux of the matter is the subject's inscription of sexual identity. Neither sex nor identity are given by nature, we are made to understand. They are made up (in particular) by cultural constraints, the outline of which the subject has no other choice but to adopt at his "core" being. The debate centers around the status of the phallus. Regardless of Butler's deconstruction of its anatomical sex, for instance, it attracts undivided attention. Any kind of insight comes with its own kind of blindness. The fixated conception of the phallus as a sexual trend setter constitutes one of these blindnesses. As the chapter comes to a close, therefore, an attempt is made at pointing toward a wider horizon.

No phallic fixation, regardless of its sophistication, can grasp the larger picture in all of its dimensions.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty thus gets the last word in this connection. Introducing a phenomenological perspective on the matter, Merleau-Ponty proposes that sexuality does not concern genitality and gender identity as much as it concerns the subject's ability to open herself toward the world. The mute individual, he says, the individual for whom bodily symptoms come more easily than words, *is* likely to exhibit signs of sexual repression. However, the key problem is not that this individual doubts her sexual identity. The real issue boils down to her inability to handle the flow of emotion and the change of perception that follows from intimate human interaction. Psyche and soma, meaning and action must be conceived of as operating interactively. Thus, the subject for whom words never suffice and physical existence is experienced as hopelessly inadequate, poses a question or a larger, metaphysical order. Her appeal is addressed to a society perceived to have gone awry. Representing a quest for a life-world more clearly perceptible, and yet less rigidly defined, the body-oriented and silenced individual 'asks' that she be able to loosen up without having to suffer the risk of falling through the cracks.

Following this rather circumstantial exploration of contributions to the core *and* the extreme margin of the issue concerning somatic significance, a return to the surface is made in *Part Six*.

Here a selection of more light-hearted contemporary feminist attempts at recreating a connection between body and mind is introduced. Strikingly, the writers in question succeed in developing a more intimate relationship between the symbolic, the personal and the emotional by transforming the very vices of post-structualism into a virtue. Choosing as their point of departure the attitude that words, narratives, and explanations are *not* supposed to fit anyone perfectly, these writers produce outlines for a deeply personal, yet by no means merely individual type of subjectivity. It is a form of subjectivity which grows increasingly integrated, differentiated, and complex—not to confuse with fragmented—via the use of the word. A few samples illustrate the ways in which speech which is both socially alert and personally tuned in, may help the subject bridge the gap between psyche and soma.

*Part seven* serves as a reminder of the inevitable, that is, of the kinds of meaning which persistently elude representation, no matter how far we bend the word or how supple we make the entry-rules to the symbolic. This section inquires into the domain of "significance" as it occurs in the domain of life-on-the-verge of reality. The "meanings" emerging from this strata of experience are written *on*, *in*, and *through* the body. To name them primitive or regressive would be off target. Whenever, and for whatever reason, core aspects of a subject's

being are experienced as "lacking" or "lost," the issue is of urgent significance in and for the present. "Regression," conceptualized as a mature being's return to more primitive states of being, is simply in opposition to the model of the human subject here being pieced together. The model of the subject, as emerging from the pages of this thesis, *includes* the necessity of retrieving, sometimes re-experiencing, past experience. However, it excludes any such notion as "going back" in time and development. The stories currently "written by the body" may serve transitional purposes, but only in the sense of preparing the subject for a readjustment to and a re-appropriation of a rapidly changing world by means of the word.

*Part Eight*, finally, provides some more general reflections on the nature of the relationship between physical preoccupation and metaphysical confusion in contemporary society. In cases of social and cultural uncertainty, it is suggested, the distinction between those supposedly in power and those bereft of any authority grows blurred. As a result, the human body, the subject's own as well as that of any other, may come to function as the last frontier. Having lost all faith in liberty and equality, the subject is left to struggle for neither more not less than his right to exist.

## 1.0 THE LIMITATION OF DISCOURSE AND EXISTENCE AS A THEORETICALWORK OF ART

### Michel Foucault

Foucault made a name for himself by declaring that the modern subject had expired. Along with the emission of the authorial bath water followed a stream of traditionally highly regarded notions, such as: consistency in quality, conceptual and theoretical coherence, stylistic uniformity, and definite historical associations within a given author's work. Traditionally, the function of the author was governed by the belief that there had to be—at a particular level of his thought, of his conscious or unconscious desire—a point where contradictions could be resolved. But no such center of unification exists. It is an illusion, says Foucault. The text refers to nothing but it self. The subject, whether reading or writing, is made up of discontinuous fragments of discourse. He contains no core identity and consequently has no original self to develop or discover. "[I]t's my hypothesis," Foucault says, that "the individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces" ("Questions on Geography" 74). Finding himself in a swirl of power flows, the individual is faced with the necessity of reinventing and producing himself, and that without any framework in terms of higher meanings or universal human values to draw on.

There is *nothing* in man, *not even his physical being*, argues Foucault, that is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self recognition or for understanding

other human beings. The subject's body, he argues, is an "inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration." The expiration of the author and the decline of the modern subject have as a matter of fact liberated man. He has been set free, but free to what? Certainly not to discover the origin of his being, and thus potentially the truth of his present.

One of the few things man may hold on to in his attempt at re-constituting his self says Foucault, is discourse. At seas in what seems like an ocean of increasingly weightless verbiage, the late modern subject has no other option but to try to find himself at ease within this world of words ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 139-165). The going is hard, Foucault points out, in so far as the subject enters the arena naively, intending to reconstruct a new identity according to outdated prescriptions. This, unfortunately, is something by which most are still tempted. Discourse *is* of paramount importance for the formation of the subject. But the nature of its significance has been grossly misunderstood by the general population. As if guided by the conviction that *articulation* is the means to achieve a sense of inner structure, the stereotypical contemporary subject swallows all pride and babbles incessantly—not to say obsessively—about his innermost secrets. However, no matter the heart-wrenching character of these self-revelations, explains Foucault, uncensored self-exposure never results in the much wished for inner certainty. Self doubt, lack of

faith in the values according to which one organizes one's life, and feelings of futility are not to be eliminated from the subject's mind by a wordy and exhibitionist process of elimination.

Where this individual goes wrong is in his quest for a higher meaning in life, a stable foundation and a sense of continuity, under circumstances evidently offering nothing but the very opposite. How, asks Foucault, could the word, no longer referring to anything "beyond" possibly convey any "higher" truth? The best we can do, at this moment in time, he says, is to resign from whatever faith we may still have in obsolete concepts such as *personality*, *authenticity*, and *representation*. It *is* regrettable that the transition from one era to another is a slow and lagging affair. But there is by no means any reason to lament the loss of presumed self-certainty. Less settled—and therefore less repressed—forms of subjectivity may not come about over night. But when eventually they do, tremendous relief is ahead.

Eagerly anticipating the moment in time when, finally, most subjects are ready to embrace the true function of *discourse*, Foucault says, what a thrill it shall be to no longer have to listen to tiresome repetitions such as :

" Who is the real author ?"
" Have we proof of his authenticity and originality ?"
" What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language ?"

New questions shall be heard :

" What are the modes of existence of this discourse ? "
" Where does it come from ; how is it circulated ; who controls it ? "
" What placements are determined for possible subjects ? "
" Who can fulfill these diverse functions of the subject ? "
Behind all of these questions we would hear little more than the murmur of indifference :
" What does it matter who is speaking ? "

("What is an Author?" 117-138)

If it matters little who is speaking, how then are we to understand Foucault's desire to write movingly and to stimulate sensual delight in his reader? The subject he wishes to touch by means of words is also discursively produced, that is, he is made up of a "series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable." Thus, he never resides in one and the same shape for long. One must not imagine, Foucault painstakingly points out, that any body is under the influence of merely a single or a few well acknowledged forms of discourse. The world of discourse simply is not divided neatly into categories and down the middle. Any one subject is continuously under influence of a multiplicity of discursive elements which may come into play in a number of unpredictable ways (*The History of Sexuality* 1: 100-101). Discourse makes and unmakes us, says Foucault. It gives shape to our feelings and guides our desire. Yet, no straightforward correspondence between a discourse and its impact is ever detectable. Meaning is continually made and remade. In effect, the subject's sensory repertoire is constantly in the process of being reinvented or repressed. As a result, any attempt at "touching" an other human subject must address a moving target. Hard as he tries, however, Foucault himself never resolves the problem that writing and erotic pleasure seem a contradiction in terms. The theoretical construct he puts forward never permitts for the discourse on the body and the discourse of the body to coincide.

One of the pieces which is repeatedly being squeezed out of the picture, during the major part of Foucault's work, is interior experience. That the scattered subject-in-the-making is far from centered must be evident. But does he not have a heart? If he does, what makes it throb? What triggers its excitement, its curiosity, its compassion? Never suspect for a moment that the late modern subject has lost his soul. Foucault hurries to say. On the contrary, it exists, it is real, even if non-corporeal. It is produced permanently around, on, and within the body, he says. It is produced by the very power exercised by means of punishment, supervision, and encouragement (*Discipline and Punish* 29). The subject's soul thus manifests itself in his attempts at succeeding socially. Few subjects can abstain from measuring themselves against the governing notion of normalcy. Thus, the sacrifices an individual is willing to make in order to achieve social status say everything about the ways in which his soul has been patterned. However, it says nothing about the form it would have taken, had the individual been in possession of a freer spirit. The fact is, Foucault emphasizes, prior to any patterning the subject is in possession of no soul. *Soulful-ness* automatically implies imprisonment by social expectations and ideals. Bizarre as this may sound, it remains Foucault's stance to the end.

The subject is commonly perceived of as having grown increasingly liberated over the last decades, if not centuries. The sexual revolution figures as one of the key markers in this respect. What then, is one to make of Foucault's claim that we have, as a matter of fact, grown only more genuinely repressed?

Over the last three or four centuries, Foucault argues, the drive to succeed in the social sphere has taken a sexual and discoursive turn. Contesting the Freudian view that sexual repression is as age old as the civilized world he says that, contrary to general impressions, Christianity never repressed sexuality. It subjected it to intense scrutiny. Christianity introduced a break with the traditions of the ars erotica of the Classical age, and turned sex into a scientia sexualis, Foucault explains. It launched a surveillance attitude to sexuality and codified decent and indecent behaviors. In the 17th century, he notes, the desiring body--no longer the forbidden relationship--became the object of an emerging sexual technology. Confession as a means of producing truth and protecting normalcy followed suit (*HS* 1: 59; "Schizo-Culture" 165). For three centuries, Foucault reiterates, Western man has been drawn to the task of telling everything concerning his sex. And he continues: "This carefully analytical discourse was meant to yield multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself." Our culture has moved from an exploration of the art of living into sexuality as a measure of normality. Sexuality has acquired the role of an imperative, a standard of "liberation" that must be achieved in so far as one aims at being considered normal. No longer hearing that we ought to abstain from overindulgence in the pleasures of the flesh, what we hear today is that we should "Get undressed—but be slim, good-looking, tanned!" ("Body Power" 57). A heavy imperative now weighs on our shoulders: the imperative of being correctly and prettily "experimental" and "self-

assertive" in the field of sexuality. The obligation to confess is in contemporary society is now relayed through so many different points, Foucault points out, that we have lost all ability to conceive of it as a constraining power. Contrary to growing more alert to the fact that our obsessive turning our selves inside out provides for more pervasive administration, we appear to have lost all critical distance all together. It has come to the point, Foucault says, where most of us actually believe that "a truth, lodged in our most secret nature, *demands* only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation" (*HS* 1: 23-24, 59-60).

An entirely new kind of pleasure has come to replace erotic sensuality and intimacy, a pleasure Foucault labels "the pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth" (*HS* 71). Currently a measurement of normalcy, sexuality is not something one practices. Intimacy has been replaced with empty talk. No longer pointing to anything beyond itself, in "this night of God's absence," as Foucault puts it, sexuality has grown profane. "On the day that sexuality began to speak and be spoken," he reiterates, " language no longer served as a veil for the infinite ; and in the thickness it acquired on that day, we now experience finitude and being" ("A Preface to Transgression" 50-51).

Further elaborating on the implications of the de-sensualization of sexuality, Foucault explains : The obligation to sexually "liberate " oneself leaves sparse room for individual self-creation. In the end, it is likely to cause as

much—if not more--frustration than did traditional modes of repression. Sex has as a matter of fact grown into such a stale matter, Foucault continues, that new and wilder games must continually be invented so as to ward off the ennui that inevitably follows ("Sexual Choice, Sexual Act" 330). Considering how dull and it has grown, is it not peculiar then, that sex maintains center stage for our attention? Not necessarily so, argues Foucault. It may simply be that the subject's crisis, or his crisis of subjectivization, makes him prone to seek out an other ethical subject worthwhile his devotion. To focus excessively on a hierarchy of sexual practice and liberation is a way of trying to make life seem meaningful (*HS* 3: 95 ).

If conventional sex is repressive, and liberated sex is even more so, what are the prospects for a more genuinely fulfilling living, as far as Foucault is concerned ? What we should ultimately strive for, so as to work our way out of this self-reinforcing deprivation, he proposes, is something truly liberating, namely a de-sexualization of our culture. The aim must be, he says, to develop an economy of pleasure that is not sexually normed, an economy that enables people to actually take pleasure in themselves ("Power Affects the Body" 204-14).

The herd-like focus on sexual practice does not make for much of an imaginative life style. We have ended up with a society as poor in creative imagination and artistic sensibility as it is affluent in artifice, argues Foucault. Art has come to be perceived as something related to objects, but never to individuals or to life. As far removed from real life as possible, it has been turned into a

specialization. But why could not, or should not, everyone's life become a work of art, asks Foucault? If the self is neither given at birth nor totally determined from without, the subject does indeed have the opportunity to create himself as a work of art. This, he points out, would serve as a most efficient means of restoring our relation to our selves. To be modern, even more so, to be postmodern, offers the opportunity to take one's self as an object of elaboration, like a work of art in progress, he says. It is about time we discover that that is what late modern freedom is essentially about. As a project it involves a great potential for the subject's self awareness, a potential for recognizing and possibly overcoming the norms and structures to which he otherwise habitually subscribes ("On the Genealogy of Ethics" 350-51).

Foucault's proposal, that we return to our physical being in our search for a less sexed, more sensual grounding for our being comes at a late point in his work. In his early writings the body merely makes up a "docile" site of inscription. Subjected to disciplinary regimes, power plays (and relays) and discoursive inscriptions, this body harbors few—if any at all—remnants of subjective perception and genuine physical delight. In the later volumes *of The History of Sexuality* however, it emerges as a much richer source of ethical and sensual self-exploration. Here emphasis is on the ways in which the individual may create his own "aesthetics of being." No longer focusing exclusively on the parts of the subject that are analyzable in terms of observable techniques of domination, Foucault now seeks to integrate the subject's self-understanding,

and thus his motivation for subjecting himself to specific "self-improving" techniques. Drawing on ancient Greek and Roman practice and philosophy, he shows that the "desiring subject " is an age old invention (*HS* v.2; v.3).

Classical morality prescribed a mastery of one's drives and desires with the aim of creating a balance between activity and passivity in life. Body and soul were to be carefully coordinated and thus any kind of indulgence in excess had to be discouraged. Whether it came to dietetics, economics, marital relations, erotic life, or knowledge, moderation was recommended. The ability to control oneself was considered a sign of ethical worth and maturity. The soul was to be independent of emotional needs and demands so as to be capable of guiding the body reasonably and in accordance with its own laws. The cultivation of the self, characterized by the principle that one must take care of all of one's needs, was based on the assumption that man is a free and natural being (*HS* 3: 42-55). Among the Greeks, men, by means of intentional and voluntary actions, set themselves rules of conduct, searched to transform themselves, and to make their life into an oeuvre carrying certain aesthetic values (*HS* 2: 10-11). Practicing one's aesthetics of existence turned one's life into a work of art in progress. The notion that it is of importance that one attributes style to one's life and attempts to give it a particular shape in which pleasure, ethics and morality coincide has vanished in our society, says Foucault. From Antiquity to Christianity, he elaborates, we passed from a morality that was essentially the search for a personal ethics to a morality as obedience to a system of rules (*HS* 1: 49).

Balance was translated into austerity. The ability to choose became an imperative. Self-discipline as an aesthetics of life became self subjugation in relation to a higher order and Other.

Without going so far as to suggest that we use the Greek model as a blue print for contemporary self-making, Foucault proposes that we draw on its ethics as a source of inspiration. What may sound like a facile matter of choice, is obviously not so in reality. Making oneself over in a more creative manner requires a great deal of hard work and, for sure, ability to resist. Opportunities and obstacles for increased insight are created and barred from coming into being by means of power. It is power one must watch out for. And power is one of the most notoriously difficult concepts to define in Foucault's theory.

Operating with no such notion as a basis-superstructure-dialectic, Foucault professes that the micro level of reality does not reflect the macro level. Thus power by no means manifests itself similarly on various levels. He illustrates this point well by drawing a comparison of American and European penal systems :

> You cannot... simply be satisfied to say, "Oh yes, American prisons are the image of American society, just as European prisons are the image of Europe." For, if you say that too much, you finally are saying this, that ultimately we are all in prison, that, after all, in the street, in a factory, in a dormitory, one is similarly in prison. It is true that we are caught in a system of continuous surveillance and punishment. But prison is not only punitive; it is also part of an eliminative process. (" On Attica " 117)

Elimination, regardless of its unity in purpose, takes place differently, depending on social and cultural context. Power is thus never to be located anywhere in particular ; it is everywhere in general. It is based on neither will-power nor on

particular interests. Neither an institution nor a structure, it is the complex strategic situation in a particular society, says Foucault (*HS* 1: 99). It is a construction and it functions "out of powers, multitudes of questions and effects of power," which is not to say that it is independent of the economic process and relations of production ("Power Affects the Body" 210). There is no "outside" of power, no critical stance that is not tainted by it. In fact, our ability to criticize the systems in question only emerge from our being embedded in the web of powers. Embedded to the extent that we find it suffocating. Power would be fragile if its only function were to repress, states Foucault. If, on the contrary, it is immensely strong it is because, "it produces effects at the level of desire—and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, it produces it " ("Body/Power" 59). Thus, says Foucault, the common notion that knowledge exists only where power relations are suspended must be abolished for good. We may even abandon the belief that it is power that drives people crazy. We should rather admit, he suggests, "that power produces knowledge...that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (*DP* 27). Power is repressive, but also productive. "We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms," Foucault emphasizes. Power "'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals." Yet, power also "produces ; it produces reality ; it produces domains of objects and rituals of

truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production " (*DP* 194).

Power affects the body directly because it constitutes a *bio-power*, a "somatic power that is itself a network from which sexuality is born as a historical and cultural phenomenon within which we both recognize and lose ourselves." Power relations, in other words, get through to the very depths of bodies, materially, without having any transmission in terms of representation of subjects ("Power Affects the Body" 209). This, however, is not to say that any body is entirely determined by the external forces of power. Once power produces the effect of what appears to be total subjection, responding claims and affirmations supposedly—inevitably--emerge. The subject's body reacts against hegemonic pressures, and thus it cannot but counteract any power dynamic working too smoothly. More specifically, its resistance manifests itself in terms of the development of forms of pleasure undercutting the predominant norms of sexuality, marriage, decency ("B/P " 56). Opposing the common and romantically influenced distinction between naturally developed and socially acquired sexual patterns of behavior Foucault says: The notion of a "natural" savage and barely controllable sex is simply yet another construct permitting us to regulate people and create hierarchies among people, based on their degree of perversity or normality. An original, natural and not yet culturally inscribed body simply never did and never will exist within civilized society :

> One should not think that desire is repressed, for the simple reason that the law is what constitutes both desire and the lack on which is predicated. Where there is desire, the power relation is already present : an illusion, then, to denounce this

> relation for a repression exerted after the event ; but vanity as well, to go questing after a desire that is beyond the reach of power. ("B/P" 81-82).

Praised by feminist thinkers for his emphasis on the body as site of power-inscription and resistance, and blamed by similar minded for neglecting the fact that bodies are gendered, Foucault's emphasis on the discursive inscription remains a contested issue. Freud tried to raise and address the issue of gender with his infamous inquiry into what a woman wants. He found that her true desire emerged only during the transferential and counter-transferential relationship. Disregarding any such notion as the unconscious, Foucault refutes that any "deeper truth" may arise from analytical interaction. The psycho-analyzed individual, obsessively in search of his inner and original self, he says, merely adapts a psychoanalytic strategy of interpretation that focuses on the course and the cure of his so called pathology. The idea that there is a hidden and original truth to recover, simply serves as yet another means of modern subjection :

> There is a will to essentiality which one should mistrust, which consists in saying, "If you don't talk about something it must be because you are impeded by some major obstacle which we shall proceed to uncover." One can perfectly well not talk about something because one doesn't know about it. ("Questions of Geography " 66)

Psychoanalysis provides little help as regards our having to re-define our pleasures within a framework differing from the Oedipal family romance, argues Foucault. It actually produces an even more thorough self-imposed regulation of the subject's sexuality, thus of his subjectivity. Viewed from a psychoanalytic perspective, he says, there was never a risk that sexuality would appear to be, by nature, alien to the law, Foucault points out. Regardless of Freud's notion that civilization and discontent come hand in hand, sexuality is constituted only

through the law." Whence the enormous consumption of analysis," comments Foucault, "in societies where the deployment of alliance and the family system needed strenghtening." (*HS* 1: 60, 130).

In essence, the more talking goes on, the heavier the load of circulating power. And it is not power that reduces speech to silence ("Schizo-Culture" 157). Silence itself, Foucault stipulates, is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say. Thus we must strive to learn to define the different ways of not saying something, how those who can and those who cannot speak of these things are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, and or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses, Foucault concludes (*HS* 27).

Charles Taylor and others have pointed out that the sources of resistance in Foucault's subject surely do remain obscure ("Foucault on Freedom and Truth"). Being in possession of neither a physically rooted nor an emotionally cohesive sense of self, the subject is essentially without any means to help him orient himself in relation to social power structures. The individual is imprisoned by his soul, as Foucault himself puts it, because even his soul is permeated by discursive force and structure. But how, Taylor asks, can a notion of constraint

have any impact if it does not contrast a vision of what lack-of-constraints may entail? Re-introducing romantic notions of a genuine self, Taylor proposes a resolution to the problem in Foucault's theory. In so far as we operate with a romantic notion of the self, language and discourse no longer automatically exert power over the individual, Taylor points out. The subject only gets influenced in so far as he feels addressed by the issue in question. Certain parts of his personality functions as a selecting agency, giving priority to some languages over and against others. Hence, the subject is capable of distinguishing between being labeled and being addressed.

Nevertheless, as pertinent as Taylor's suggestion may be, it does not in itself bring us much closer to an understanding of how the particular subject experiences the difference between being spoken on the one hand, and giving expression to his self, on the other hand. Lacan's and Butler's contributions shed some light on this matter, though--admittedly—they are not of the kind Foucault or Taylor would have wished for. Still, prior to pursuing the issue of individual resistance further along theoretical lines, a brief intermission. From the edge of existence speaks and acts an extreme group of body-modifiers which, for reasons not all that obvious, hardly classify as either artists or self-conscious resisters.

## 2.0 CUTTING TO THE CORE : MISSING OR MARKING A POINT ?

### In the shade of Anorexia

> " I always wanted you to admire my fasting, " said the hunger artist.
>
> " We do admire it, " said the overseer, affably.
>
> " But you shouldn't admire it, " said the hunger artist.
>
> " Well then we don't admire it, " said the overseer, " but why shouldn't we admire it ? "
>
> " Because I have to fast, I can't help it, " said the hunger artist...
>
> " Because, " said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and speaking, with his lips pursed, as if for a kiss, right into the overseer's ear, so that no syllable might be lost, " because I couldn't find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else. " These were his last words, but in his dimming eyes remained the firm though no longer proud persuasion that he was still continuing to fast.

Published in 1924, Kafka's " Hunger Artist " uncannily foreshadows what was in late modern society to turn into a virtual cultural preoccupation : Bodily perfection, celebration, and subjection. Starved for genuine affective and spiritual fulfillment, and doubting that he exists in the eyes of others, the Hunger Artist turns the art of sustaining emptiness and lack of inter-subjective recognition into a virtue. Busying himself with the transformation of his material being into a vacuous vanishing point of attention, he has got his hands full, in the sense that he never notices his inability to be present, that is, his totally inadequate means of re-presenting him self for others. The stakes on his self-invented stage are high : His sole means of acquiring human dimensions in the eyes of others—so he imagines—is to overcome human needs and desire altogether. The road to becoming super-human—nothing less shall do—goes through a persistent annihilation of his own humane features. No matter how

steadfastly he fasts, however, the Artist remains frustrated. Putting himself on display backstage of the theater of this world, he introduces himself as a freaky piece of artifact, hardly worth a life savior's selective attention. Locking himself behind bars, he categorizes his needs and desires as sub-human and savage. A single, continuous and intensely refined act, carried out with the intent of attracting fascination, respect and concern, tragically but inevitably results in the very opposite outcome. Regardless of his persistence, the Hunger Artist manages to do neither more nor less than convincing others that he is no-thing and no-one in particular. Perhaps, as Kafka writes, it was not mere fasting that eventually brought him down to looking like a shadow of himself. " Perhaps it was dissatisfaction with himself that had worn him down. For he alone knew, what no other initiate knew, how easy it was to fast " ("HA" 270).

The profile of the hunger artist, for whom the means of psychic survival is to eliminate any physical trace of his being, uncannily resembles a major part of contemporary female role models as they are presented in the popular media. The mere word "role model "does indeed have a hollow sound to it, considering the point of reference. For how is it possible for such elusive characters to give shape to any norm, or, to provide support for an ethical backbone ? Is it possible that their primary function is to bring to the surface aspects of human mortality, rather than to reconfirm conventional pictures of female health and happiness ?

Let it be said, no *single* image dominates the contemporary market. Still, a vast majority of popular pictures tend to converge in the production of an image

of womanhood as strangely substance less and surreal. In addition to the previously mentioned fitted, trimmed, surgically re-formed, and powerfully independent woman in line at the plastic surgeon's, we currently encounter an entirely different stereotype. It is the grossly underweight, spaced-out teen-age model, at times in the shape of a social outcast, at other times appearing as a waif like fairy-tale character. When taking the shape of the high-school drop out, the resemblance to a drug addict or a street girl in trouble is appalling. Her facial expression expresses intense hostility, her gaze drifts off into some indeterminate inner space. She is drugged, fazed out and totally indifferent. Frequently caught off guard, her mascara is running and her clothing is ripped. Cornered and huddling up or in the midst of taking flight, she gives the impression of trying to escape a crime site where, presumably, a rape or a similarly violent event has taken place. Sullen and gawky, exuding the air of a haunted animal, this awkwardly vulnerable girl-woman evidently has no clue as to what direction she is heading in. The less ghastly, waif-like version of the stripped-to-the-core kind of woman appears to have landed more of a lucrative lot in life. As if freshly picked from a turn of the century British novel, radiating moral and sexual virginity—not excluding a certain playful homo-eroticism--her presence gracefully erases all traces of the Fall of human mankind. Still, gauzy clothing, out of focus photography, airbrushing, and so forth wraps her up in veils of some bizarre imagination.

From the metropolitan back street, where physical and emotional abuse is on the daily agenda, to the turn of the century faded-focus revision of the Garden of Eden, what these female figures have in common is a conspicuous lack of context. Whether their life is depicted as a nightmare or a fairy tale come true, neither knows any boundaries ; neither reveals any sense of belonging. No one is truly alive in these shots. These girls, whatever they may have been through, are surreal, explicitly beside them selves, out of this world. Whether for better or for worse, they leave the spectator with the impression that they have gone beyond ordinary life constraints. Or differently, they leave the spectator with an impression of not yet having discovered the reality of any such limitations. The onlooker does not exist for them. By implication, they refuse to give any gratification to the eye of the beholder. As in the case of the Hunger Artist, the effect of the manner in which these figures are objectified, laid out, presented—without ever presenting themselves--is that all ties to the human world are severed.

The lack of concern for anyone and anything else, as expressed in these pictures, ceases to be merely an eccentric media phenomenon as soon as one begins to ponder the implication of this lack of framing. Whether it is a matter of art imitating life, or rather of life drawing inspiration from art, these pictures spill over into real life in a highly unsettling manner. Anorexics, as is widely known, conceive of self-starvation—self-transparency as it is--as their primary means of psychic survival. What they may have in common with the Hunger Artist and the

dangerously skinny model is a singular inability to fill out an outline of their own.

The women for whom the only way of making their presence felt is to create an open wound in the social texture have yet another thing in common with the hunger artist. Triggering curiosity, alarm and fascination at first, they are soon considered commonplace, if not outright offensive. The surly model is labeled an artifice. The anorexic is rumored to suffer from some incomprehensible pathology hitting those with a not too "amenable "personality, a term Freud used to apply to those of his female patients who had a hard time swallowing his solutions. The presence of these emaciated shadows of life is generally experienced as oppressive. Neither dead nor alive they indicate boundary confusion if not dissolution. Reminding us of aspects of reality which we have as yet not developed the means to cope with, they confront us with human mortality. They question our claim to have made some headway concerning social progress and gender equality. And—looking like they have walked straight out of a concentration camp—they bring to mind what the collective body ordinarily prefers to repress. *Guilt* is incorporated in these strange configurations. How could anyone witnessing a female vanishing act of this magnitude not begin to think of possible maternal insufficiency, paternal neglect, incest, gender injustice and barbarianism? How could anyone not be reminded that civil society has a downside? Could anyone walk away from a sight like this, not feeling fundamentally shaken and asking himself what has happened to

human value in the course of progress in the Western world? Is it not possible to read these girls as saying : "Do not focus on my story. Please, read over my shoulder (or right though my transparent body). Read beyond this core of violation. Read the context for which I have ceased to exist : a world which no longer is capable of sustaining life"?

The crux of the matter, as far as anorexia is concerned, may seem to boil down to the individual's inability to "tell" the difference between her self and others. This apparently straightforward issue is complicated, however, by the fact that whereas some theorists, like Lacan, conceive of self-alienation as the precondition for any genuine sense of real difference to occur, thinkers of a different orientation, Merleau Ponty for instance, make the opposite claim. It is not the ability to set herself apart from the other that makes the subject come true, he says. Rather it is his capacity for being with and as the other, that is, for enduring and perceiving the dissolution of any kind of self-other distinction.

**Transparent guilt ?**

The anorexic consisting of nothing but skin and bone without a doubt represents a truly paradoxical sexual identity. On the one hand she materializes to an extreme the prescription for female perfection, as put forward in popular media. On the other hand, her child-like or androgynous appearance, along with her tendency to treat her body as a piece of furniture, bestows her with an air of gender neutrality and sexual innocence. Hence, her excessive skinniness works as

a simultaneous reaffirmation and denial of more conventional forms of female identity. Striving to become the woman of everybody's dreams—or so its seems--she also and at the same time refuses the male pursuer any voyeuristic indulgence. When taking into consideration the recent rise in child pornography, reported cases of incest, and other forms of child abuse, the girl's refusal to embody a female figure acquires yet other dimensions. Is the anorexic struggling to fend off male attention by reclining from the voluptuous ideal, only to end up inadvertently meeting that very same sex's acclaimed thirst for under-age sex ? Is the self-starving woman submitting herself to selflessness and domination? Or, is she rather trying to subvert predominant modes of subjection? The picture is far from clear. The most we can say with certainty is that "self-denying "women, as anorexics are often labeled, call a great deal of attention to the difficulties women have in contemporary society with asserting their selves.

The etiology of anorexia, and related eating disorders, is complex. No one knows for sure how to isolate the causes that trigger the outbreak of the disorder, on either an individual or a collective level. The most sophisticated accounts emerging from within the medical world suggest that it is a multiply determined phenomenon triggered by factors primarily existing within highly developed Western societies. Literature of cultural criticism and with a feminist orientation focuses on the fact that anorexia has been used for ages, though less extensively, by women who wished to escape the confinements of the female destiny. Hardly anyone dares to zoom in on any particular cause of Anorexia. However, this

has not prevented patterns in the anorexic's socio-psychological background from emerging over the last few decades.

> I battled with anorexia and bulimia in my early teens up until the age of twenty-six. I got these tattoos so as to remind myself that I don't have to fit in. ("Voices—Dar-Anne")
>
> All I know is I live in fear of destroying everything, and therefore hold things together compulsively, trying to make good the destruction that I feel I must have already carried out, or, maybe that I am continually carrying out (Dick, "On Splitting").
>
> I am so relieved to have finally fully recovered. All I have to do now, so as to stay calm, is to stick to my daily routine. I eat once a day. ("Victoria")[1]

"Victoria" is 30 years old and introduces herself as a relatively recovered Anorexic. She has been in and out of treatment for years, most of which involved hospitalization, force feeding and psychiatric treatment. An acknowledged pianist, with a preference for ballet as work out routine, and always impeccably dressed, her appearance is pure and refined. Of average height and fitting a size four, she somehow seems shockingly frail. Regardless of her looks however, Victoria keeps up a daily regime resembling that of a military camp. She makes sure that her agenda leaves neither time nor energy for relaxation or self-reflection. Emotionally, her day is centered around her once-in-24-hours-meal. It is paramount that she be able to consume the exact same amount and quantity of food, at the same time and place, and preferably in solitude, every single day.

When the question is raised what the consequences

[1] "Victoria" is a cover name for a composite of a series of women interviewed from September 1994 through September 1996 in Montreal. All interviews remain confidential.

may be if she is ever obliged to stray from her well beaten path, she grows flustered and agitated. "It does not happen. It cannot happen...it really must not," she responds, greatly distressed, embracing her self tightly, unable to concentrate about the ensuing conversation. The mere mention of the possibility that it could happen, she tells at a later occasion, made her worst nightmare come true. "It happened. I went overboard. It made me so scared that I lost it." Losing control over herself, says "Victoria" is one of the most frightening things imaginable. Every loss is tremendously costly in terms of time, energy, and self-esteem. It causes her rigid agenda to collapse. And the physical and emotional climb back up the depressive ladder to reality is steep and strenuous. If anyone were to suspect that "Victoria's" fear of loss of control should ultimately lead to a more flexible agenda, they are wrong. The irony and the very tragedy of her fear of failure is that it only reinforces her tendency to turn each and every day into a trial. No human being could possibly stick to the agenda she imposes on her self for long. Still, for each time "Victoria" fails, her sense of having yet an other flaw to cover up is reinforced. Minor daily life incidents, by most people accredited little if any significance at all, sends Victoria into a frenzy. She cannot bear to make mistakes, she says. Whenever it happens it is as if her entire being is being jeopardized. Her mistakes keep adding up, so it seems, to the extent that she should soon be deserving of the guillotine. Humiliation, it appears, lurks right around the corner of any move she might make.

Mistakes, thus, bring her into a state of all consuming anxiety, lasting from a couple of days to an entire week, a period during which she cannot tolerate to interact with anyone, least of all to talk. The latter she stresses, is of wide ranging implications :

> The loss of the living connection makes me feel like I am in the process of drowning. Like I am in the dark... being buried alive. I panic and desperately want to get "out." But there is nowhere to go, you see. There is no outside, and it's like... it's like everything is closing in on me... I sometimes get so short of breath that I think I am going to suffocate. I cannot swallow, and yet, I absolute have to. It's like... it's like I am split in two and "they" are fighting over my right to live or my duty to die.
>
> Eventually I start thinking about how to kill myself...to not have to struggle any more...against drowning or going crazy, or...I really do not know what. All I know is that when I am out of control I consist of nothing but fear. It is eating me up from the inside.

Like Kafka's Hunger Artist, Victoria's struggle to enable her soul to survive, the only way she knows how to make it survive, exhausts her energy to the extent that others cease to exist around her. It may well be, that her sense that the entire world is judging her harshly and contemptuously, leaves her no other option but to make it disappear. However, the major problem associated with this procedure is the fact that the other (world) cannot be made to disappear without the woman herself falling apart.

**Self-starvation as a means of communicating uncommon sense.**

**Etiology**

Primarily a Western European and North American phenomenon, anorexia and bulimia, along with self-mutilation in general, all of which are associated with depression, are more common among woman than men (Cross,

"Body and self in feminine development"). One out of every 100 North-American girls between 12 and eighteen is likely to develop the disorder, 20 % of whom are likely to die from it ("Anorexia in Males"). Anorexia usually develops around puberty, in connection with leaving home, during parental distress and break up, or in connection with other critical transitional life phases. Studies also suggest that there is a close correlation between emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and eating disorders. Hence, the eating disordered subject's difficulty with handling change may be explained by the fact that her point of departure is already chaotic, her sense of self at most tentative and insecure. The girl's tendency to develop and cling to a range of stereotyped patterns of behavior supports the theory that she may be desperately seeking to achieve a sense of inner structure through laying down rules and regulations in the external world. She may fast religiously, or she may oscillate between self-starvation, over-eating and enforced vomiting. Her food rituals are elaborate and, in many cases, she panics the moment the slightest change is introduced. Her energy is poured into keeping her head above water, that is, to keep what she perceives as her physical and emotional boundaries firmly in place. Emotionally impoverished and prone to operate within a dualistic field of values and emotions, she often compensates for lack of real life experience by intellectualizing or devoting herself to some of the finer arts, thus inadvertently feeding into the myth that great intellectual and artistic creativity thrives on emotional turmoil.

The question is, what makes the breeding ground for this type of both self-centered and painfully self-less pattern of behavior? In what ways does it tie up with the cultural development at large? To what extent can it be said to be associated with the contemporary "crisis of representation"? What, if anything, does it have to do with the fact that gender and sex definitions have grown more flexible? The bottom line issue after all concerns values. What are the values the anorexic girls are willing to die for, and how come such extreme measures are currently required for the subject to try to live up to these?

No such thing as a "typical" anorexia-nervosa family exists. Nevertheless, the families making up the breeding ground for the anorexic females tend to share a number of features. The family of origin is mostly deeply troubled, plagued by conflicts that are never resolved, and unable to handle the expression of emotions. It is more often than not characterized by holding rigid, traditional gender-role stereotypes assigning the woman lower status, and imposing on her the expectation that she be sensitive to the needs of others and willing to sacrifice herself. In other words, the prescription for womanhood is a devalued, devoted wife, mother, daughter, who keeps her complaints to her self (Palazolli, *Self-starvation*). Competition with men is usually strongly discouraged and vitality and inventiveness considered non-feminine and despicable. Yet high achievements on behalf of the daughters in the public sphere are required. Pressured to achieve and succeed, on behalf of her family, the girl

turns herself into a showpiece of admiration, usually with the hope that she will receive compensation in terms of paternal appreciation. Instead of the intensely wished for reward, what the girl ends up receiving is a carefully measured, sometimes erotically loaded, substitute for love.

The nature of the double bind in which this girl finds herself leads some feminist thinkers to interpret the anorectic reaction as an intense response to a general social situation. Nancy Sondon-Hagopian writes:

> Anorexic girls, perhaps to a greater degree than most girls in our society, are caught in an untenable double bind...the families of these girls are asking them to reconcile the un-reconcilable. They should be feminine, people-pleasing, compliant and perfect home makers. At the same time, they should succeed in the professional arena in a way that will bring pride and satisfaction to their parents. ("The Connection between Anorexia Nervosa and Achievement in Modern Society")

The mother in this family is frequently intensely frustrated with her marginal role and prone to depression (Gillberg, "The Family Background in Anorexia Nervosa"). Having renounced from the development and assertion of her own identity, as well as from the exploration of her own sexuality, she has a hard time supporting her child in her struggle for independence. In fact, the daughter often serves as the mother's last straw: she is the child who is to prove that the sacrifices the mother herself has made as a woman have been worthwhile.

There is nothing to indicate that the parents in question do not--as a rule--have the best of intentions. However, things frequently go wrong almost as soon as their female offspring arrives. The father often cannot cope with being

marginalized by his daughter. Jealousy and resentments develop but are kept carefully under lid. As a result the already overtly anxious mother is subjected to further, often unreasonable and irrelevant, criticism. The mother's insecurity as a wife and a woman seems to reinforce her determination to succeed as a mother to the point of obsession. So as to ensure victory she is prone to rely on primarily exterior sources for the upbringing of her child (Steiner, "The Early Care and Feeding of Anorexics"). Feeding her daughter according to schedule, offering mainly the kind of stimulation proscribed by some "expert," and denying her child any indulgence that goes against the rules, she never learns to tune in to her baby's needs and adapt to her changing abilities. She thus offers her daughter sparse opportunities for seeing herself reflected and feeling respected through the way she is being held and handled. Play, obviously, is one of the profound factors missing from this picture. A great deal of role playing takes place, but it is of the kind that further alienates the subjects from themselves, rather than providing an opportunity for developing different skills and personality traits.

In the light of the above, it is no wonder that anorexic girls generally speaking are willing to go to extreme lengths so as not to come to resemble their primary model of identification, the mother who tried so hard. Feeling both swamped and overlooked by her mother, the girl seeks her father's attention by all means. Regardless of the degree of his indifference, ranging from simple lack of involvement to outright contempt of his female offspring, the girl tends to bend over backwards so as gain his recognition. In effect, most of her childhood

is often spent as a people-pleasing model-child, forever awaiting a reward which is destined never to arrive (Boskind-Lodahl, "Cinderella's Step Sisters").

Constantly controlling her emotions so as to comply with often obscure wishes of her emotionally conflicted father, she eventually loses what may be left of a once budding sense of self. It is no wonder, therefore, that many an anorexic woman complains of having experienced childhood, and later adult life, as excruciatingly lonesome. Most of the girl's psychic resources have gone into warding off a sense of psychical—and often physical—abuse and abandonment. Thus the resources left for approaching the world with curiosity have been sparse.

Unable to assert her self, uncertain of her wishes, and doubting her ability to act, this girl is hardly up for boundary-transgressive and experimental pursuits of pleasure. It is enough of a challenge for her to figure out how to put her foot down and take a stance in the face of ordinarily life's inevitable complications (Boskind-Lodahl, "CSS"). Finding a point of departure for her own being, therefore, is the first step on the route into reality. Personal relationships, not to mention intimacy, are infinitely confusing. Having tremendous difficulties feeling, and identifying her own feelings, she is regularly bewildered by the emotional expressions of others. Furthermore, having never had the opportunity to develop a graduated scale of emotions, she often reacts strongly and impulsively, in a manner incomprehensible to others.

Emotionally (in)tense, and incapable of comprehending what her own tension means, the girl is often torn between either having to ignore her feelings

altogether or acting on them instantly. Containment and processing are foreign words in her emotional vocabulary. She simply does not possess the inner storage space for phenomena such as these. The latter, in so far as the hypothesis holds water, sheds light on her general difficulty with concentrating, reflecting, and of course, with eating according to her varying needs. The anorexic's living conditions are paradoxical and likely to end her in a stalemate situation : overwhelmed by emotional pain on the one hand, and almost entirely unequipped to process her feelings, on the other hand, there really is no easy way out. The frailty of her sense of self for the most part leads to psychic numbing.

The net result of the anorexic's survival strategy is a profound uncertainty concerning her sense of self, her dreams, and her desire. Emotionally at seas, she is physiologically and psychically open for intrusion of various sorts. The price to pay for her self-anesthetization is that her entire sensory and affective repertoire often turns analgesic. Physiologically speaking her "steeling her self " against emotional pain frequently results in noteworthy elevations of her pain threshold , neurological abnormalities causing intense tension, and a significantly reduced immune systems function (Lautenbacker, "Pain Sensitivity and Anorexia Nervosa").

Some studies suggest that the anorexic's problem with tension build up and relief, along with her neurologial and immunological abnormalities, along with her tendency to suffer from a grossly distorted body-image are due to real life events. Having experienced a shockingly abrupt destruction of her body-

image at an early point in life, it is said, the girl has remained in a state of post traumatic alertness. Finding support in studies of the phantom limb syndrome, the theory further suggests that the memory of pain in a body part may persist even though the original lesion is no longer "really" painful, especially, the report says, if the particular body part is heavily associated with symbolic meanings. Under any circumstance, the earlier the disruption the more confused the body/self experience (Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege* 73).

It may indeed be that the psyche and soma in anorexia cross paths in ways resembling those of holocaust survivors, war victims, and others, who have once been exposed to intolerable starvation (Szekely, *Never too Thin* 65). If that is so, the anorexic may not only be driven by her unconscious, that is by the traumas suffered at the hands of her most intimate others, supposed to take care of her. She also brings to the fore aspects of the social unconscious. Her minimal appearance, combined with her insurmountable will power, illustrate the stories of inhuman violence never told, because no one can bear to hold themselves or their culture responsible for the crimes committed in the name of progress and civilization. To quote Podvoll, here talking about multiple forms of self-mutilating patterns of behavior, of which anorexia is only one :

> The self-mutilator can incorporate into his actions patterns which, to a greater or lesser degree, remain unarticulated in most of us. That is, such patterns already exist in muted intensities within the patient's social field. As such, he may even *perform a service to his culture in his dramatic expression of those patterns which are felt to be intolerable within the self.* Still other patterns invoked are those which elicit silent levels of admiration and envy. The history of these images reaches at least as far back as the Passion of the Cross and has prevailed among some of the most respected members of our culture. ("Self-mutilation within a hospital setting")

Favazza adds:

> Self-mutilative behaviors, as culturally sanctioned, serve the purpose of correcting a pathological situation that threaten the individual, the community or both. Thus at the deepest irreducible level self-mutilative behavior is prophylactic and salubrious for groups and individuals threatened by death, disorganization, disease, and discomfort. (281-82)

The modern world, considered both safer and more restrictive than the late-modern world, made us miserable and neurotic, it is sometimes said. The postmodern chaos, on the other hand, has made us prone to psychosis and schizophrenia. What are we to make of the fact that greater "liberty" has made us less free, more opportunities has made us less adventurous, greater mobility has left us paralyzed ?

## 2.1 DISSYING DESTINATION

### Explaining self-mutilation

There is no shortage of attempts to explain anorexia theoretically. As it goes, the route to a better understanding of the phenomena, in particular its place in our culture, is paved with minor inconsistencies as well as groundbreaking contradictions. It has traditionally been conceived of as a *holy* disorder, indicating that the woman in question was of a saintly mindset and had chosen to forego the needs of the flesh for the advantage of spiritual communion with the Father. Early psychoanalytic literature focused on the fear of sexuality, in particular penetration and "invasion." Self-starvation came to be understood as a refusal, on the girl's behalf, to assume her female sex, and self-mutilation as a

symbolic act of castration carried out in order to avoid the real castration. In either case, the girl's behavior was understood to make up an attempt for her part to retain her (imagined) childhood innocence and omnipotence. What few of the early psychoanalytic theorists paid attention to is the fact that these girls not merely resign from developing their own repertoire of sexual sensitivity. Even more so, they deprive the male sex of what is traditionally conceived of as his preferred object of sexual power and pleasure. By refusing to play along the rules of the phallo-centric game, these girls create an intellectual space of their own, something feminist thinkers have picked up on more recently. It is from these ranks that rumors have emerged that "holy anorexia" was merely a disguise for women who wished to lead an intellectual life, at a time when the duties of housewifery and maternity were hard to avoid.

Winnicott was one of the first psychoanalytic thinkers to ignore the sexual aspect all together, to the advantage of the subject's need of experiencing that she *is*. An individual reaching the point of being unified with a limiting membrane, he argues, senses that there is an inside and an outside. For the subject, her inner reality and the exterior are separate and yet interrelated. Thus, for some subjects, their bony outline, or the razor with which they cut themselves, serves as a transitional object. While emerging from the body it creates a sensation of warmth, of being wrapped up and thus of being held and comforted, safely (Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transactional Phenomena").

As the debate continues, it seems increasingly evident that the self-harming individual's orientation toward the Father and the phallus, in so far as it figures strongly in the picture, has less to do with respect of the male sex and fear of castration, than it has to do with the subject's urgent need to develop and maintain a space of her own. The fact that we live in a so-called post-colonial era has far from eliminated the threat and dread of invasion and occupation by the Other. What has changed, however, is the nature of this—no longer necessarily his—power.

**Favazza**

> I'd rather die than face up to being unreal. You go through life doing things automatically, like a machine. And then at the end of the day you try to match events with an emotion and try to experience them as a whole being. It's all right to hurt yourself because it proves you are real.
>
> -a female self-mutilator.
> (Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege* 27).

Drawing on studies implying a strong connection between eating-disorders and other forms of self-mutilation, Armando R. Favazza proposes that anorexia and self-mutilation are triggered by similar fears of self-loss, both representing attempts at restoring some degree of mental stability. These forms of self-harm, he argues, express the subject's deep and desperate need to inhabit a body of her own, that is, to feel contained and comforted within her own skin. The violent attack to which she subjects her body serves to demarcate some limits where presumably none ever existed. Ultimately, acts of self-harm are carried

out with the intent of getting to the core of what has gone wrong in the life of the individual. For most people the preferred recourse, during moments of intense stress, is to try to create a distance to the source of the pain by means of reflection or physical action. In the case of self-mutilators, however, this is no feasible solution.

> Everyday life is primarily a surface phenomenon, but the examined life—*getting to the heart of things*—involves the painful process of dissection... For most of us, dissection is a metaphor for intellectual examination, but for others it is a physical act....The scars of the process are more than the artless artifacts of a twisted mind. They signify an ongoing battle and that all is not lost. (322, emphasis added)

The notion of self-mutilation is relatively recent. It gained recognition only in 1964, in connection with efforts made at distinguishing intended from accidental suicide (Stengel, *Suicide and Attempted Suicide*). Shortly the delicate self-cutting syndrome was coined, designating a phenomenon with apparently no suicidal intent (Pao, "The syndrome of delicate self-cutting"). Ross and McKay came along in 1976, suggesting that self-mutilation in fact was counter-intentional to suicide and should be understood as a desperate means of trying to make it back to life (Self-*Mutilation*). Favazza elaborates on this interpretation by adding that "Suicide is an exit into death, self-mutilation is a reentrance into a state of normality." Suicide, he continues, makes up an attempt at escaping from life. Self-mutilation in contrast functions as a "morbid act of regeneration" (271). Hence, local self-destruction is done so as to avert total suicide. It is done with the aim of cutting out—or starving away--the part of the self experienced to be deadly (232). The act itself, importantly, does provide temporary tension relief.

The fact that it is short lived, though, reveals a great deal about the nature of psychic structuring. Presumably never of a clear cut and straightforwardly consequential nature, psychological and biological structuring is a slow evolutionary process. The shortcuts, carried out by those in dire straits, make for no water proofing of a fluid sense of self (xix).

The majority of female habitual self-cutters are as a rule from broken homes and share the following features: They have a history of surgery, hospitalization, or serious illness, before the age of five; a conflicted relationship to femininity; are confused about their sexual identity; suffer chronic feelings of depression; feel empty and struggle with more or less severe eating disorders. Feelings of rejection and confrontation with painful separation are the key triggers of cutting (Rosenthal, "Wrist-cutting syndrome"). Described as "an attractive, intelligent, unmarried young woman," the typical female wrist slasher is hardly ever immediately recognized as being out of the ordinary. Her appearance is deceptive however. She is often either promiscuous or overtly afraid of sex, has a problem with addiction, and leaves behind a trail of unresolved relationships. She reportedly "slashes her wrists indiscriminately and repeatedly at the slightest provocation," but she always stops short of committing suicide (Graff, "The syndrome of the wrist-cutter").

The overall purpose of self-harm may be summarized as a form of self-stimulation that enables the individual to feel alive as opposed to isolated and non-existent, as a means to satisfy physical and sexual needs, as an outlet for

anger, and as a frantic attempt at handling the impact of severe emotional trauma (Favazza, *BuS* 166). Self-mutilating subjects themselves give a variety of reasons for their practice. The moderately disturbed individual and episodic cutter reports that she harms herself so as to achieve tension release, to return to reality, to gain control over something in her life, to obtain security and a sense of uniqueness, and to enhance or decrease sexual feelings (Favazza, *BuS* 245). Frequently suffering from episodes of depersonalization, the subject leads a patched up life, consisting of ruptured story lines and filled with perplexing memory blanks. The multiple missing pieces in her story are likely to leave her with a sense of always being at the risk of slipping through some vaguely defined cracks. Not necessarily losing her grip on external reality, when undergoing a period of depersonalization, the subject loses any certainty that she herself actually exists. Hence, when on the verge of being swallowed up by nameless dread, her last ditch attempt at surviving is to "draw the line "in the most literal manner possible. The psychic sense of being without substance, of being fluid, shapeless and leaking, is thereby transferred to something more substantial, the materiality of the body. "Things" and "signs " come to function as the last bastion holding her self in place.

It may seem paradoxical, that the measure taken by this subject, when confronted with fear of dissolution, is to reduce her volume and create even more and deeper cracks in the surface of her body, thereby facilitating the intensely feared disintegration. However, one often fails to understand what is

happening "underneath the surface" in these cases, says Favazza. The physical self-mutilation verifies to the subject that she is alive. It gives her reassurance that she does have boundaries. It serves as protection against further deterioration (148-49).

Mental hospitals and correctional institutions are hotbeds of self-mutilation. This may be due not so much to the mental state of the inhabitants living there, as to the fact that physical confinement and psychological deprivation, along with lack of any kind of mirroring of the subject's self-image, trigger unbearable anxiety in almost everyone. Forced to live under close behavioral scrutiny and imposed rigid regularity, the woman often finds herself, at one and the same time, too crammed in and too isolated. Feeling lost in a world of indifference, she may feel that self-stimulation is her sole means of re-connecting to reality. Thus a female, institutionalized cutter says:

> There was too much white. White nurses, white doctors, white sheets, white walls. It was such a relief to cut and see the red blood flow. (Asch, " Wrist scratchinng as a symptom of anhediona ")

Outside of institutions, similar feelings of being captured or of having the world closing in on one, cause comparable accumulation of tension and anxiety, often resulting in an intense urge to self-mutilate (Virkkunen, "Self-mutilation in antisocial personality (disorder)"). Subjection to excessive control and social isolation are key predisposing factors for auto-mutilation in animals as well as human beings. Animal ethological research for instance, shows that in monkeys auto-mutilation is associated with features such as social withdrawal, rocking,

huddling, excessive fearfulness, stereotyped patterns of behavior, and deviant sexual behavior, all of which is closely related to social deprivation during the first year of life. The earlier and more effective the isolation, the more severe the eating disorder or cutting-behavior later in life. In humans, the greatest number of self-harming individuals is found among subjects with borderline personality, tremendous difficulties with sustaining relationships, and weak impulse control. Ross and McKay speculate that these subjects may simply have been "imprinted" during early infancy. The immaturity of the central nervous system of children, they say, makes them more vulnerable than adults to develop lasting biological changes in response to trauma and neglect. "Dissociation, self-destructiveness, and impulsive behavior," they elaborate, "may all prove to be hormonally mediated responses that are triggered by reminders of earlier trauma and neglect." Whether or not the subject be physiologically wired for self-harming patterns of behavior in infancy is hard to prove. What has been documented, however, is that repeated or extended acts of self-harm cause neurotransmitter abnormalities and hormonal changes, similar to those found in post-trauma syndromes following combat and rape. In effect, repeated acts of self-harm have an addictive impact on the subject. It predisposes her physiologially as well as psychically to crave a repeat event.

Favazza draws in his analysis on Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*. In this paper Freud suggests that the process of mourning and that of depression

both are modeled upon the earliest oral interaction with the environment, that is food. The infant at this stage in life does not relate to the other. She introjects and absorbs him or her. Later in life, in the event of the loss of a beloved object, the subject is prone to regressing to so called primitive forms of identification, comparable to those of early life. Identifying with the deceased other is a way of consuming a part of her, of becoming (like) her, of calling her back to life. Adding a further dimension to the depressive's inability to relate to others, Favazza explains, here by reference to Cameron's work :

> The depressive adult, is a person who has had to meet implacable demands for compliance during infancy by the overuse of introjection. Introjection is a symbolic engulfing, a perceptual taking in ...The infant incorporates [her] mother symbolically, as [she] has previously incorporated her food, and sets her up as a regulating image. Instead of internalizing merely the role, [she] internalizes the whole frightening image, which then controls what she does. (*BuS* 66)

As Melanie Klein has suggested elsewhere, oral introjection is complicated by the fact that the other is swallowed wholesale, so to speak. Prevented from taking a battle with the offensive aspects of the other in the outer, the depressed individual by necessity turns toward her interior, now (pre)occupied by the evil aspects of the exterior. Hence the intricate confusion of an intense desire to survive, and an equally as strong urge to self-destroy. Distinguishing between affectionate and aggressive cannibalism, the former associated with the mourning process following the death of a society member, the latter addressed to an enemy, Favazza points out that, cross-culturally and phylogenetically, there is a close relationship between mourning and "affectionate cannibalism." Affectionate cannibalism, he

argues, is associated with mourning rituals over a deceased individual who is thereby given another and symbolic opportunity to return to life via the social body. Perhaps, he suggests, the latter works as a prototype for both religious self-mortification and anorexia as well as for habitual self-mutilation. Favazza finds support for this theory in Lilian Malcove's work which suggests that the experience of learning to eat constitutes the prototype of fear of dismemberment. In the child's view, Malcove says, eating is a cannibalistic experience. The dilemma is whether to eat (and be taken over by an other) or be eaten (and be overtaken by an other) ("Bodily mutilation and learning to eat "). Quoting Favazza :

> The conquering cannibal literally tastes the fruits of his victory, but victory can also be achieved by exactly the opposite action, namely, self-starvation. Cannibalism and self-starvation appear to be linked poles representing the opposite sides of revenge-victory... [Anorexia nervosa] is a form of indirect self-mutilation in which the patient achieves victory over real and fantastic enemies through fasting. To eat is to accept the status quo...To eat is to open one's self to the possibility of being devoured and to participate in the cycle of life. (65-67)

The subject prone to either starving herself or mutilating her body, the real-life version of the Kafkaeske, glamourized magazine model, is ruled by panic. Feeling cornered, with no where to turn, and deprived of any mirroring in the environment of her 'self,' as she knows it, she despairs. Dying to come to life, terrorized by the blankness surrounding her, she seeks recourse in the one sure thing on earth: the comfort of pain. Physical self-destruction must necessarily be carried out by someone. Whether this is an imaginary or a real

other matters little. The emphasis being on *some one*. Pain and injury serve as last resort company.

**Never take a no for an answer.**
**Claude-Pierre**

Anorexia is a symptom of an underlying mindset called Confirmed Negativity Condition (CNC), says Peggy Claude-Pierre, Director of the eating-disorder program at the Montreux Center, Victoria B.C and author of *The Secret Language of Eating Disorders*. Some people have an inborn predisposition for CNC. By nature excessively concerned about the well being of others, they suffer from a sense of over-responsibility. Convinced that it is their destiny to ensure that the needs and desires of others are always met, they set themselves up for failure. Repeated defeat causes the anorexic mind-set to rapidly evolve into a confirmed state of continuing self-blame and -denial. The girl's determination to starve herself to death must be understood in this light, says Claude-Pierre. Serving the dual purpose of self-punishment and of self-enhancement, self-starvation is the ultimate expression of CNC. Due to the genetic origin of anorexia, not even the most loving and supporting childhood environment is necessarily sufficient to counteract this force of nature, she asserts. At best, parents may contribute to reversing the anorexic's predetermined course of development by disallowing her over-responsible behavior. What needs to be done, argues Claude-Pierre, is to insist that the child be more childish and selfish and that she admit to her need of parenting. The Montreux Center serves as an

exclusive treatment resort for some of the more severe cases. Staffed by professionals, a great number of which are former patients, the center literally speaking embraces the anorexic. Subjected to something akin to a verbal drilling the girl receives an overabundance of expressions of unconditional love. Occupying the center of the round-the-clock staff's personal attention, she is fed according to needs (as estimated by the staff) and is showered with physical affection, held, hugged, stroked excessively, whether she wants it or not.

CNC, Claude-Pierre argues, is a disorder comparable to other illnesses. Emerging as if from without the individual's life, it must be understood as apart from the subject's personality. The aim of any treatment therefore, is to reclaim the girls "actual mind" from the grip of a "negative mind set" which is not really hers. No treatment goes smoothly. For some, to be showered by unconditional love (from strangers) and receive vast amounts of unsolicited physical attention, combined with the deprivation of any kind of personal responsibility, are experienced as intrusive and infantilizing. The fact that their will and explicit desires are categorized as symptoms to overcome, is perceived as a violation of the girl's self. According to the center, this attitude of resistance should merely be interpreted as an expression of the patient's inability to receive tender loving care, an inability, if not a deficiency, which, after all, landed her in the Center in the first place.

In her review of Claude-Pierre's book, Karin Jasper points out that Claude -Pierre's theory fits hand in glove with one of the myths in which our culture is desperate to believe :

> We have an evil demon, a hapless victim of especially fine character, and a tireless heroine who works wonders with love. Anorexics are extraordinarily caring individuals who come from extremely loving families. They are caught in the grip of a condition to which they have fallen victim. Enter Claude-Pierre, who promises deliverance, then wrestles down the vicious condition that is killing her patient. ("Saving girls from the body-image trap ")

The evil condition, according to this myth, emerges as if from nowhere in particular, which is why no one can possibly be held responsible. An externally imposed solution is at hand. Things are under control, that is, as long as the girl does not resist too persistently. Is not this a curiously disembodied take on the matter, Jasper asks. What about the fact that individuals suffering from eating-disorders often emerge from backgrounds of emotional and/or sexual abuse, and that abuse at an early age as a rule leaves deep emotional scars ? Claude-Pierre rejects the suggestion that eating-disorders and bodily obsession originate in an extraordinarily abusive or negligent background. The root to the girl's misery lies in her inability to not respond to any kind of disappointment by excessive self-blame and self-hatred. It is all in her genes and somehow in her head.

**Killed by affection.**

**Lacan**

If we leave Claude-Pierre's light-hearted—though firm fisted—grip on the matter aside for a while, we find that Lacan, somewhat predictably,

a considerably more complex take on the matter. *Soul-murder*, Lacan explains, implies a fundamental break at the very juncture between the subject and her sense of being alive. This break takes place right as the girls is about to enter the symbolic, that is, when she is at her most vulnerable and on the very verge of learning to make sense of the world (*Écrits* 201). The anorexic is soul-dead indeed. However, her having severed all connections to real life should by no means be ascribed to parental neglect, states Lacan. If the girl refuses to receive food and other "gifts of love" it is due to her already having received too many of the kind. Drawing on the Freudian distinction between the goal and the aim of a desire, Lacan makes the claim that no one wants to be satisfied merely at the level of his or her real needs. Goals may be met but aims must remain frustrated (*Écrits* 261). "Desire," he elaborates, "is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting" (*Écrits* 287). The missing object, the object imagined to be possessed by the other, is the source of all desire (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* ix). Belonging to a pre-ontological level, this lack makes up the very point of departure for the development of an individual identity. The girl fidgeting around these initial stages of coming into being clearly suffers developmental arrest. What she continually misses out on, says Lacan, is the experience of profound frustration. In other words, only the child who has been fed over-abundantly with food and love and other goodies, will ever refuse food. Only the child who never had to ask for instinctual

gratification will be prone to developing an urge to play with refusal on par with desire (*Écrits* 264).

Referring to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which Freud interprets his grandchild's play with a cotton reel as a major cultural achievement, Lacan says: "To say that it is simply a question for the subject of instituting himself in a function of mastery is idiotic." The reel represents a minor part of the subject himself and the function of the exercise concerns the subject's alienation. "Man thinks with his object," as he puts it. The reel represents an other, an object of desire. The game introduces a splitting of the subject as well as it structures his desire. It enables him to become a subject who desires (to be) (*FFC* 62, 239). The object, also called "object a," is something from which the subject, in order to delimit and constitute himself, must separate. An object a may take the shape, in the external world, of a breast, feces, a gaze, a voice, an other body part, or the like. Its reality is insignificant, its symbolic value all important. It represents the lack, that is, the phallus, the cause of all desire. It signals the individual's budding desire that he become what the Other desires. Hence it constitutes his ontological birth. It is this very threshold that the anorexic avoids transgressing. The question is, why would a disavowal of this nature necessarily be of disastrous implications. Why would it lead anyone to self destroy? Before splitting has taken place, there is nothing, explains Lacan, no desire, no meaning, no sense of there being any distinction between fantasy and reality. The oral stage, characterized by no sense of difference, no distinction between interior and

exterior reality, no recognition of any lack, simply does not allow for the development of desire. It makes up a nonsensical symbiotic bliss which is affiliated with psychosis. Providing the individual with a sense of omnipotence at times, it nevertheless also holds the danger of total annihilation. "Only a subject can understand a meaning," states Lacan, "conversely, every phenomenon of a meaning implies a subject." The anorexic who refuses to move beyond sameness and non-verbal modes of interaction is doomed to persevere in a world of meaninglessness (*Écrits* 9).

To get to an understanding of the emphasis Lacan puts on frustration, as well as the links he sees between lack of frustration and embodied refusal to speak, some back-tracking is required. For a start, "the truth is always disturbing,"says Lacan. "We cannot even manage to get used to it ...The truth we repress" (*Écrits* 169). Introducing the notion of the unconscious as the primary force in the life of the individual, Lacan explains his inability to experience real gratification as due to the discrepancy between the needs and ideas to which he consciously subscribe, and those to which he has subconsciously submitted him self. Similarly to Foucault, Lacan makes the claim that the subject comes into being via language. Contrary to Foucault however, Lacan operates with a pre-symbolic, psychotic non-subject whose existence is "insignificant" and whose sole means of experience consists of bodily sensation. The pre-symbolic individual is not yet a subject, Lacan emphasizes. Thus, the symbiotic bliss and blur of the earliest stage in life remain inconceivable. One could be led to

suspect, that this pre-significant body makes up the *ground* for the individual's later ability to resist symbolic inscription. But not so, argues Lacan. The subject's body and self-image is instituted only in connection with the mirror-stage.

At around 6 to18 months of age the child enters the mirror stage, Lacan explains, during which he develops an identification with an assumed imago. The gestalt, inevitably more whole and total than the individual's inner experience, establishes a distinction between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*. It lays the ground for a fragmented body-image and for an eternal discrepancy between the subject's real and ideal self-image (*Écrits* 4). His inner fragmented self never comes to measure up to the more coherent self-image he (imagines to) find in the reflection of the other's gaze. The mirror-stage is the first decisive break with the infant's sense of unity and omnipotence, initiating his ever lasting search of his better, missing half. It lays the ground for the subject's chronic sense of feeling flawed and thus, it provides him with a strong incentive to learn to symbolize, the symbol somehow making up for his deficiencies and representing a fuller self. The mirror-stage, claims Lacan, structures the subject's perception of self and environment. "What did I try to get across with the mirror stage?" he asks. That "the image of (man's) body is the principle of every unity he perceives in objects...all the objects of his world are always structured around the wandering shadow of his own ego" (*Seminar II;* after Butler, *BM* 77). Being, hence, is based on the existence of an unbridgeable gap between interior and exterior reality. The degree of coherency and meaningfulness of the subject's world

depends on the extent to which he has succeeded in coming to terms with—and making up for—his basic split.

How are we to comprehend the subject prone to cutting, carving and starving his or her bodily self, then? Do these actions represent an ego haunted by a sense of having been torn apart, having ruptured, and therefore being in the process of leaking? Or, do these gestures reveal that a subject has gotten stuck in the gap between inner and outer reality, that is, in a vacuum in which neither seems real?

It depends, Lacan would say. When hard pressed, he admits that a limited range of bodily gestures may make some sort of sense, but only in so far as these acts are subjected to a linguistic structure. The unconscious, he explains, is that chapter of one's history that is "marked by a blank or by falsehood." It has always been written down "elsewhere" though. He states the terms as follows :

> [It often surfaces as a] *leitmotif : in the body in terms of symptoms revealing a "linguistic structure" of their own* ; in forgotten childhood memories , in one's language (vocabulary, style and structure) , in habits and traditions , in the links one makes between one chapter and another of one's past (*Ecrits* 50 )

As for the occasional body-artist, the irregular body-mutilator, and the anorexic, their symptoms are simply insignificant. Psychosomatic symptoms cannot be considered signs, he states, for signs are always intended for some one else to decipher (*FFC* 157, 227). The body-modifier is merely throwing flesh in the face of anyone who bothers to stare. His gestures serve as an indication that, as a subject, he has as yet to come true. One has to consider these symptoms irrelevant, says Lacan, because *nothing* outside of the symbolic can possibly

mean anything. The fact is, the unconscious is structured like, and by, a language. Hence, The subject's repressed never reaches further back than to his earliest glimpse of difference (*FFC* 203). Prior to this discovery, the individual is no-one and thus experiences nothing in particular. It is not that the unconscious is directly instituted by language. Rather, it is made up of " the sum of effects of the speech on a subject, at the level at which the subject constitutes himself out of the effects of the signifier" (*FFC* 126). In this way, the unconscious is directly linked to the formation of the subject's identity. It delimits his conscious and gives shape to his desire. Whenever it does reveal itself, it is through impediment, failure, splitting, stuttering in a spoken sentence, stumbling in a written text. It creates discontinuity, constitutes a major and yet inexplicable turning point in a story line.

In Freud the unconscious is associated with resistance. It vanishes the very moment is has made its appearance. In Lacan it is not that which resists but rather that which repeats an impulse, or, a pulsation. He describes it as such : "everything that, for a moment, appears in its slit seems to be destined, by a sort of pre-emption, to close up again upon itself " (*FFC* 43 ; *Écrits* 52). Onto what does this shutter open up, and for whom or what is it willing to recede ? Freud and Lacan agree that the unconscious reveals itself most markedly during the transference. However, Lacan goes to great lengths to point out that his notion of transference has nothing whatsoever to do with the Freudian notion of repetition. The unconscious may always try to re-state the subject's never ceasing quest for

love. But no matter how many times this demand is repeated, he argues, it is always with a difference. Time goes on and the world goes around, after all.

Freud suggested that what cannot be remembered is repeated in behavior. By handing over to the Other the work of reconstructing his past, the analysand transfers the power to determine his own Truth to an other. Nevertheless, remembering, in the early Freud, is what ultimately must take place. Nothing can be destroyed *in effigie*, in absentia, as Freud puts it.Thus, repetition and transference-resistance make up the necessary means for the analysand ever to accept his *true* self. Lacan is astonished by Freud's naiveté :

> To appeal to some healthy part of the subject thought to be there in the real, capable of judging with the analyst what is happening in the transference, is to misunderstand that it is precisely this part that is concerned in the transference, that it is this part that closes the door, or the window, or the shutters, or whatever—and that the beauty with whom one wishes to speak is there, behind, only too willing to open the shutters again...[I]t is to the beauty one must speak. (*FFC* 131)

Transference is not about repeating any real life experience, Lacan insists (*FFC* 33). It is an effect of love. And, to love is, essentially, to wish to be loved (*FFC* 253). "As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere ... there is transference," Lacan reminds us (*FFC* 232 ). As it goes, only the subject painfully aware of his imperfection, is capable of loving the idealized Other with devotion.

Rewriting the Cartesian dictum, *cogito ergo sum*, Lacan says, "by virtue of thinking, I am" (*FFC* 35). The individual becomes fully human only with his " birth into language" (*Écrits* 103). We are born into the social web of meaning production." Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that

they join together, before he comes into the world," elaborates Lacan. They are what engender the subject in flesh and blood (*Écrits* 68). The implication of the subject being born through language is that he himself emerges as a sign (*FFC* 199). The fact that being equals becoming-a-signifer logically speaking precludes the subject's ever reaching some sort of ontological certainty. The signifier, as Lacan puts it, "functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as a subject " (*FFC* 207). No matter how smooth the subject's transition into the symbolic, the odds are against his ever acquiring any form of self-certainty (*Écrits* 150). The signified constantly slides under the signifier, as Lacan usually puts it. A stable relationship between the two is simply inconceivable.

> There is in effect no signifying chain that does not have, as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units, a whole articulation of relevant contexts suspended "vertically," as it were, from that point. (*Écrits* 154)
>
> [Thus] It is not a question of knowing whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather of knowing whether I am the same as that of which I speak. (*Écrits* 90, 164)

It may not be all that evident what is to be gained for the subject's part, from the hazardous transition from the maternal realm into a field of ontological agony. Once again the answer lies in the urgency of coming to mean for the Other, of acquiring desirability in his eyes, of—ultimately—coming to find one self lovable. Thus, what the subject asks from the other is his response. It is his taking seriously the subject's past and his granting him a significant future :

> What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question... In order to find [the other], I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me. I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite

> of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming. ( *Écrits* 86)

It may seem that the individual's dependency on the other person, in his search for subjectivity, encourages the adoption of this other's point of view. However, no such short-cutting parroting is possible, declares Lacan. Subjectivity, as must now be evident, requires hard work. It requires more than mere acquisition of literal and formal knowledge. What the subject must learn to do is, not to speak from his heart but rather, to speak in accordance with the structure of his own unconscious. The key to understand what a subjective adaptation of the symbolic may entail lies in Lacan's differentiation between language (langue), and speech (parole). Language consists of the conventional signifying system in its totality. Speech is particularized language, used so as to give expression for a personal, view of things. The subject-to-become born into the vastness of language may only gradually sort out his self and thus slowly develop his own speech. Absence of true speech is as common in our culture as is absence of true subjectivity, Lacan says. It comes to expression in a stereotypical discourse in which the subject is spoken rather than speaking (*Écrits* 69 ). Speech always subjectively includes its own reply. In effect, stereotypical speech extorts nothing by trivial replies. More to the point, it has lost its function entirely (*Écrits* 85).

Speech is in fact a gift of language, and language is not immaterial, states Lacan. It is a subtle and hardly tangible body, but body it is. Words are trapped in

all the corporeal images that captivate the subject, he continues. They cause some hysterical subjects to fall "pregnant," others to undergo intense infantile jouissance. What is more, words themselves can get injured and come up with imaginary acts of which the patient is the subject (*Écrits* 87). For the subject to regain his senses, a tour through the symbolic is inevitable. The means to the development of an "inner" life and to learning to love requires skillful acquisition and modification of the models of "interiority" and "passion" available. Who in their right mind, for instance, would ever have fallen in love, Lacan asks (referring to Rouchefoucault ), had they not first been told of the experience ? (*FFC* 61)

It is evident that, as far as Lacan is concerned, the individual's acquisition of subjectivity preconditions the assumption of one gender or another. The alternatives are given in advance : Choose the limitations that follows with identifying with one sex, or get lost in psychotic lack of differentiation. The psychotic, Lacan claims, has failed entirely to recognize the status of the phallus and the *Name of the Father*. Oblivious of the Law he has developed no screening devices enabling him to separate reality from fantasy. Contrary to the object-relations theorists, thus, Lacan sees the foreclosure of the Name of the Father as the primary cause of psychosis. Whereas the object relations oriented theories suggest that castration anxiety appears prior to the emergence of the phallus (in terms of annihilation anxiety), and that an extension of the illusion of unity is essential for the development of any subjectivity, Lacan insists on the

interference of the phallus as a necessary severing of the subject-to-be's umbilical cord. The neurotic never succeeds in actually grasping the nature of his true desire, he says, and thus he may exhibit a tendency to seek the right pleasure and reassurance in the wrong place. A frustrating fate, for sure. The psychotic, however, is into an entirely different ball game. He feels at home, if not exactly at ease, in a world characterized by lack of differentiation. Thus his conviction that he is a machine, that he is being persecuted by Russians and that he is going through a meat grinder. Having failed to recognize the status of the phallus he never has developed any filtering mechanism, never has learned to distinguish fact and fiction, life and death.

The fantasy of one's death, argues Lacan, serves as a first object in the interplay between the subject-to-become and the Other. Using as an example the practice of tattooing and scarification, he explains: The physical mark serves the function of placing the self in relation to the Other. And, for this very reason, is it frequently intensely erotically charged (*FFC* 206-14). Why the connection between questioning one's existence, and placing one self in relation to the Other, and sexuality? Because, Lacan argues, any play with ontological boundaries necessarily evokes the castration complex. Libido is introduced into the life of the individual simultaneously with the discovery of his "amputated" state of being. Contrary to Freud Lacan thus argues that the libido is formed, not according to some "natural pseudo-maturation," but rather around the fear of castration. The introduction of sexuality is bound to traumatize the child, Lacan claims, and thus

to leave its mark on all further development: "The fear of castration, is like a thread that perforates all the stages of development " (*FFC* 64). Hence, the experience of being about to leap into the symbolic is intensely anxiety provoking. To the question, "shall I survive in one piece ?" the answer is "no." To the worry that it might cost the subject his life, the response is "yes." At least life as has been experienced prior to the big divide. No wonder, therefore, that the subject drags his feet. In so far as he develops a taste for libidinal gratification, fear is the price to pay. It is in vain to even contemplate the possibility of a de-sexualized libido, a neutral life sustaining force, concludes Lacan.

The anorexic refusing to eat returns to, or remains at, the oral level of functioning, says Lacan, thus protecting herself against the experience of separation and fragmentation. Her sense of extreme fragility and her tendency to sink into deep depression equip her badly for the experience of splitting, which inevitably accompany her on her entry into the symbolic (*FFC* 214). Lacking the screen between her "real" (unconscious) and reality, as perceived by others, she lingers in a psychotic border land between life and death. Accessible to no one, she is unavailable for any attempts at personal contact, thus protected against pain and humiliation, but also barred from affective exchange. The one fundamental question out of which she gets some sort of a kick concerns her death: "Can he lose me ? " she repeatedly asks herself. "Can I stop existing for him ? " Degrees of desire do not exist in this universe. The individual in

question suffers from the unshakable conviction that either she "has been had," or, she "has been lost."

Regardless of the circumstantial character of Lacan's theoretical explorations one is left to wonder how on earth the phallus can make all the difference in the world. Whenever he attempts to explain the dual nature of the phallus, that is, its symbolic and yet also psycho-somatic function, he gets into trouble. The phallus is not to be associated with any flesh-and-blood body part, as any such stable, referential link contradicts everything else suggested by his theory. One must not forget, he reasserts, that sexuality is established in the field of the subject by way of lack, not by way of a sense of dismemberment (*FFC* 204). Still, neither is the phallus a fantasy, if by fantasy is meant an imaginary effect. The phallus is a signifier (*Écrits* 285). All very well, but at the same time Lacan also insists that the phallus be of a masculine or paternal nature. The alternative, a "lesbian phallus" for instance, as proposed by Judith Butler, is inconceivable in Lacan. After all, its primary function is to interfere between mother and child. It is to call the child's attention to the fact that something is missing in his mother, thus in himself, to the extent he uses her as a model of identification. However, the confusion gets close to total, when juxtaposing some of Lacan's most explicit statements concerning the state of those phallic affairs :

> The relation of the subject to the phallus is established without regard to the anatomical difference of the sexes, and ... by this very fact, makes any interpretation of this relation especially difficult in the case of women. (*Écrits* 282)

Yet, at other times he says :

> What I do wish to insist on is that we should concern ourselves not only with the way in which the mother accommodates herself to the person of the father, but also with the way she takes his speech, the word let us say, of his authority, in other words, of the place that she reserves for the name-of-the-Father in the promulgation of the Law. ( *Écrits* 218 )

## Shades of desire. *BLACKWATER*

Foucault throws light on why the subject may resign to use of non-verbal means of communication. Anything else, it seems—regardless of his claim to the opposite—is bound to land the subject in a situation which excludes the experience of genuine pleasure. And the latter, he points out, is what makes the individual feel really real. The relationship between the social domain of power and the formation of the subject's "soul" remains complicated. Based on Foucault's earlier work, one is led to believe that any adoption of a prevalent tradition cannot but result in an inauthentic outcome. However, in his later work Foucault opens the door for a less fated recycling of tradition. Former forms of knowledge and models of being, he here suspects, may provide the contemporary subject with the means to create a life style of his own. The discordance between past and present, it now seems, enables the subject to critically choose and adapt the ingredients he finds useful. Thus, whereas the younger Foucault really could not deliver any convincing reasons for the subject's resisting subjection, the more

mature theorist begins to glimpse some light. Granted, it is still of a theoretical nature.

Lacan, similarly to Foucault, sometimes makes one wonder why the symbolic realm has not yet been entirely evacuated. It is not that Lacan presents psychosis as particularly attractive. In fact, he offers the subject a choice between pest and cholera : Either he loses his head, or he severs the connection to all consuming bodily experience. Lacan's suggestion that language structures desire and thus, comes to structure the subject's bodily experience, leaves little to be said about the turn towards the body, as discussed in this thesis. From a Lacanian point of view, this widespread preoccupation can only be understood in terms of a "fatherless" culture, consisting of individuals for whom the gates to subjective existence have remained locked. He may have a point, that the absence of difference and thus distance, tends to give the budding subject a sense of drowning. However, he tends to overlook that meaning does not necessarily emerge from a battlefield of contradictions. If the maternal realm, according to Lacan's theory, suffers from lack of distinction, it is partly due to the fact that his grasp of differentiation is surprisingly vague. What eludes Lacan's comprehension is the possibility that subjectivity may as well be constituted via an intimate experience of being alike and yet different, that is, of already having been given a form, and yet of slightly altering it, of the subject's seeing himself being no different from everybody else, and yet having a slightly different perception of things.

In the Ekman excerpt below, the female protagonist discovers both the very usefulness of tradition and the necessity of re-inventing language, as if from within.

"You cannot live in the world without living off it."

From her seclusion at Starhill Annie reflects on the origin of the word world. Her companions in the alternative society responds with hostility to her inquiry. If she is of the impression that it has anything whatsoever to do with nature, then she is definitely wrong! Annie says she believes nothing yet. She is simply just pondering the nature of things. Her question is the first of many leading to a succession of inquiries into equally as significant issues. Her companions find her attitude uncooperative, and let her understand in no ambiguous terms, that no such questioning belongs within their holy ranks. Annie's sense of having gotten a sense of something essential, combined with the wall of indifference with which she is met, shakes her up. Her blood circulation increases, and she experiences the heat of excitement spreading inside. Her paralysis is about to come to an end. A fact which is illuminated by her ability to meet her environment with curiosity, rather than unspeakable fear, when venturing into the forest and hearing the birds :

> Whatever it meant, the world was full of cuckoo calls. She saw the cuckoo. At first she thought it was a bird of prey landing in a low spruce...She squatted down on her heels in the moss. In the quiet, the bird called and revealed its presence...He was calling like a bell in the forest. She was so close she could see the slate-gray throat feathers trembling at each call. He was perched with his wings folded and black tail feathers outspread, spotted with white...
>
> ...The first time she had walked down from the pasture and followed the stream in among the lichen-festooned trees, she had suddenly been frightened in the middle of a step. Not by any sound, but frightened from within, icily and

> inexorably warned by an instinct she had never before known existed within her. She immediately turned around and started running back. (178)

The alternative society cannot contain Annie's emerging sense that life may be made up of more than seclusion, idealism and misogyny. Things cannot be willed and planned into being, she understands. Sometimes things go awry. At other times chance changes the entire picture. Absorbed by her reflections concerning the interplay between order and disorder, plan and incident, framework and content, and unable to dialogue with anyone in the commune about these matters, Annie starts her notebook:

> ...She took out her *notebook* as soon as they had gotten back to their room because she didn't want to forget it. The wildly and chaotically unpredictable that formed the basis of new creation in nature must also exist in the world. In civilization. Was the world really the predictable progression of cultural and economic order now being described. Was it so unlike nature, which could at any time spew or spit out anomalies, wild ones? Was it not also in a sense nature?... Whatever happened, she was not going to stop thinking in this way, because it was new and gave her some pleasure. It was like swimming or running...
>
> Before her inner eye she could see the burnt skin on a child's back, a girl the same age as Mia. The girl was running along a bombed road, but she was really moving in a pattern, a suffocating order scorching the map of its pattern into her back and arms. Was it like that? Was she part of an order?...
>
> And in Cambodia ? Is that a new order establishing itself there ?...(Bert) replied that peasant war was grim. Their order was grim. But then a new order would emerge. A new world.
> World ? So he meant that there would be peasant wars all over the world and then—a new world ? (179)

"Can you really live in the world without living off it?" Annie cannot get the question off her mind. A woman in the commune tells her that the line originates from the Bible, St. Paul, the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Annie tries to track down a Bible among heaps of trash in the commune's storage loft. Accidentally, she discovers a number of items left behind by the family who inhabited the building less than a generation ago. An Enrollment book, damp and

damaged, informs her that an Arne Jonasson signed up for military service in 1951. At first she thinks she has mistaken the year. The book looks like it is already in the process of disintegrating. She also finds a Liquor ration book, stamped half way through, until rationing was abolished. A notebook containing songs about longing and all kinds of misery. Photographs of grazing cows mixed with pictures of bulging fifties car models cut out of magazines. And a school report for Astrid Jonasson, dating back to 1937. The ten year old girl reportedly was inadequate at formal knowledge but extraordinarily well behaved.

> [T]he feeling she had had all the time she had looked at these moldering papers. Compassion, albeit a feeble compassion mixed with shame, as if she would have preferred not to see or know. Yet she went on looking through the papers and found a 1937 school report, from the third year in the village school in Blackwater. A report with many reservations, the marks all very modest, but the girl, Astrid Jonasson, had the top mark for conduct. She must have been ten years old then. Born 1927. If still alive, she wouldn't be fifty yet.
>
> Why shouldn't she still be alive ? She must have gone to school in Blackwater and spent most of her school years in lodgings. As I did, Annie thought. And not really much farther away from home than I was. Had she also had that feeling and still lived with it, a meager normal life above dark waters ? Solitude. Devotion. Profound loneliness. One more wild attempt. Dry, cold loneliness. Like me. Until now. (191)

> There were several sheets of yellowish-brown tissue paper, apparently used, for they had been folded in quite a different way. Creases had been smoothed out but not entirely eliminated. She had found no trace of the woman who had been the children's mother and the wife of Erik Jonasson. Perhaps the tissue paper was something she had saved. She could have made a pattern out of it by laying it over a dress, but who would have had a dress she wanted to copy ? This wasn't the ghost of a dress but of a desire. (193)

The papers look as if they have been lying around for at least a century. The family sounds as if it had been tucked away in a pocket of time. "But I was at school then, she thought. I lived in Enskede and Gaeredet in Stockholm. With a fridge, telephone, and streetcars" (190). Struck by the fact that her own dream of

an alternative life resembles this family's reality, and recognizing the family's struggle to survive with some sort of dignity, Annie is moved.

> When Dan had told her that the commune lay above Blackwater, she had had a strong feeling of significance and destiny. She would literally be returning to her origins if she moved there. She wondered if the people who had left behind these tattered papers, incomprehensible in their incompleteness, had also suffered from a sense of destiny. Or had they looked at their lives, as the papers seemed to indicate, as something random and soon scattered ?...
>
> [S]he had never told Dan she had been conceived in Blackwater...But why do we keep looking for meaning and connections ? It's the way our mind work, seeking pattern and order. Yet we scatter our lives, helplessly and absently. ( 190-191)

## 3.0 WRINGING THE WORD SO AS TO CREATE A MOUTHPIECE FOR ONE'S AFFINITIES

**Judith Butler**

Butler, in her work, puts forward the suggestion that we introduce a Foucauldian perspective in psychoanalysis. It is her aim to critically rethink the entire problematic of subjection and resistance, something which entails a reformulation of Foucault, Freud and Lacan. Her overall goal is by no means to produce yet an other defense in the name of constructivism. Rather, it is to explore the forms of "erasure" that constitute the limits of the latter. Making a plea for a productive deconstructive approach, Butler explains about the motivation for her endeavor : The debate between constructivism and essentialism usually misses the point of deconstruction all together. It quietly assumes that "construction" entails that everything is discursively constructed (*Bodies that Matter* 8). Feminist theorists, for instance, often take a highly critical stance against the "construction" of the female sex—understood to distort

its otherwise different, often pre-linguistic, nature. Any distortion of a true sex is inconceivable, of course, unless one operates with the notion of an original sex prior to the artificially constructed one. Evacuating sex from the powerful field in this manner, as many feminists still do, may be done in an attempt at rescuing an unspoiled and authentic identity. Yet, it has the negative side effect of making sex rather inaccessible to us (*BM* 5). *Construction*, as mis-conceived of in feminist circles, seems merely to claim that there is no pre-discursive sex. What it falls short at explaining then, is how when, and in what ways, the materiality of our bodies and our sexuality is produced. Butler summarizes her alternative hypothesis as follows: The materiality of sex, she argues, is constructed through a ritualized repetition of norms (*BM* x-xi). The fact that it is constructed however, by no means implies that it is "artificial." What are we to make of constructions, she asks, without which we would not be able to think?

Bodies cannot be fixed and reduced to simple, material objects of thought, Butler says. A body does not merely—as a side effect--always point to a world beyond its own limits. This very pointing beyond its own boundaries is constitutive of the subject's bodily being. In effect, we must return to the notion of matter. Matter she stipulates should be understood "not as a site or a surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (*BM* 9).

> To claim that discourse is formative, is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body... the very meaning of referentiality is altered. In philosophical terms, the constative claim is always to some degree performative. ( *BM* 11-12)

Zooming in on the weaknesses in Lacan's theory, that is on the assumed connection between the mirror-image and the inscription of a phallus affiliated with the Name of the Father, Butler deconstructs the mirror-stage and re-constructs the nature of the phallus. Both of these moves result in a reduction of the forcefulness of discourse and the influence of the Father on the subject-in-formation. Opening up for the inauguration of signifying possibilities exceeding those to which a term, or a turn of phrase, is ordinarily bound, Butler reintroduces physical experience into the picture. Neither Foucault nor Lacan writes off physical sensation or erotic desire, of course. But both have severe difficulties conceiving of sensation as other than discursively prescribed. The originality of Butler's argument lies in the way in which she deconstructs and ingeniously reassembles the theoretical corpus making up her point of departure.

Following Althusser's application of Lacanian theory the subject is in principle called into being. Through naming he comes to recognize himself. However, chances are that in practice the subject who is being interpellated may mis-recognize the address, misunderstand its implications or assume it is addressed to somebody else. Mis-recognition, according to Althusser, is made possible by the function of the imaginary. The imaginary may well be structured by the law. However, it does not automatically or totally subject to it as such ("Subjection, Resistance, Re-signification" 239). How subjection to discourse comes about is thoroughly demonstrated by both Foucault and Lacan. What neither elaborates on is how a sense of individual resistance is effectuated.

Subjectivation is associated with the becoming of an independent subject as well as subjection to--and thus dependency on--a higher power. Following Foucault subjection is what makes a subject. It not only acts on the individual, it also activates forms of subjectivity ("SRR" 230). Power invades the body, permeates the interior. "This transposition of the soul into an exterior and imprisoning frame for the body, " Butler points out, "vacates, as it were, the interiority of the body, leaving that interiority as the malleable surface for the unilateral affects of power." Norms and ideals coerce the subject into wanting to live up to certain standards. In this sense they render coherency to an otherwise fragmented identity. The subject is, as it goes, generally speaking led to embrace the terms that injures him, for the very reason that they constitute him socially. What remains unaccounted for is what—if anything—makes the subject feel mis-named, what motivates and animates the subject to take up the challenge of reverting an "injurious " term ?

Disheartening as this may seem, the fact remains, that it is Foucault's very notion that power as made up of regulative, productive, and destructive aspects that allows for a an efficient resistance ("SRR" 241). The subject, Foucualt says, is always in the process of being "written." This leaves him some leeway, Butler points out. There is always, inevitably, a temporal gap between the invention of a sign and its various uses. It is this very gap which effectuates the possible reversal of signification. Foucault's theory can also be made to suggest that even if there is always the risk of re-normalizing one self discursively, there is still the

opportunity to re-signify one self to a degree. Precisely because the subject is as a rule coerced into adopting main stream terminology, he is free to resist these according to desire.

No resistance, however, arises as if arbitrarily or as a matter of pure choice. The crux of the matter is attachment. Whenever the subject feels violated at heart, when he perceives his esteemed others, objects and values to be degraded, he might experience the kind of passionate investment required for any reversal of terms to take place. "Any mobilization against subjection will take subjection itself as its resource," in Butler's words. "Attachment to an injurious interpellation by way of a necessarily alienated narcissism will become the condition by which a re-signification of that interpellations becomes possible." Thus, each and individually, we do harbor some personal truths, even if these are always in the process of being re-inscribed. Injurious terms that hit home, due to missing their target, make the subject acutely aware of the power associated with words. It also and simultaneously calls his attention to the fact that he himself possesses the power to revert the meaning of things. How does the subject's resistance manifest itself then ? He simply fails to repeat his "name" with accuracy. His failure to fill out the role to which he has been assigned opens up a possibility for re-signification (*BM* 124).

The entire argument rests on the subject's ability to strike a balance between mere repetition of terms of convention, and repetition with a difference. Innovative signification and self-exploration arise not from the subject's

developing a transgressive tongue of his own, but rather in his repeating norms and conventions as if askew. What follows from this theory is the possibility that repetition compulsion may as a matter of fact hold considerably greater potential than ever imagined by Freud and Lacan. Repetition compulsion, Butler acknowledges, is oftentimes a consequence of violation. However, the very forcefulness of the urge to repeat may indicate that repetition compulsion actually constitutes an affirmative response to violation. The compulsion to repeat an injurious event reveals not necessarily a need to repeat the very injury—and the powerlessness it implies—with any form of accuracy. "Repetitions of hegemonic forms of power which fail to repeat loyally and," Butler explains, "in that failure, open possibilities for resignifying the terms of violation against their violating aims" (*BM* 125). In effect, ambivalent forms of repetition and embodiment, or outright failure at embodying a certain meaning, create the distance required for a critical reassertion of hegemonic forms of gender and identity distribution. Anorexia, viewed in this light, represents a deeply personal, yet highly effective, criticism of the socially available terms of sex, gender, and subjectivity. It serves as a suggestion that these notions may be appropriated and lived differently, even if the alternative is still very much in the making.

The key to Butler's reformulation of Foucault and Lacan lies in her understanding of the Lacanian *mirror stage*. The mirror stage introduces a time-gap in the formation of the subject, the importance of which both Foucault and Lacan overlook. According to Lacan's account of bodily boundaries as

constituted in the mirror stage, the body is an imaginary formation that can only be sustained in its phantasmatic integrity through submission to language. To be named is to position oneself within the Symbolic. The mirror does not reflect a preexisting ego. It provides the frame, boundary, spatial delineation for the projection of the ego itself. The image of the body gives the subject the first form which allows him to locate what pertains to the ego and what does not. Hence, identifications are never simply or definitively made or achieved. They are always in the process of being negotiated, contested, revised (*BM* 76). The mirror stage provides the individual with the opportunity to try to measure up, or, to—voluntarily or inadvertently—fail to do so. The claim made by Lacan with reference to the mirror stage is that symbolization comes to make up for bodily and self fragmentation. However, nothing in Lacan's or Foucault's theory actually supports the assumption that the body is simply formed by discourse, Butler argues. Thus, one must learn carefully to distinguish such a forming from causing and determining ("SRR" 229). What Lacan implicitly proposes, she points out, is that we read the mirror stage as offering a theory of mirroring and mimicking as a signifying practice. Miming of course, has the effect of repeating the origin only to displace that origin as an origin. It serves as a displacement of a displacement, thus demonstrating that no *original* ever really exists (*BM* 45). In the mirror, Butler reiterates, "the parts come to stand (in and by the mirror) for the whole; or, put differently, the part substitutes for the whole and thereby becomes a token for the whole" (*BM* 80). Hence, partial identification and

incomplete reproduction of a term, whether of an ideal or a destructive nature, may serve self-explorative and assertive purposes.

The body and its desire are formed in response to the norm and the ideal, ultimately in relation to the phallus, says Lacan. The phallus is not, merely symbolizes, the penis. What must be kept in mind in this connection, Butler emphasizes, is that symbolization as a rule depletes the symbolized object of its ontological association with the symbol itself .

> To claim the phallus the status of a privileged signifier performatively produces and effects his privilege. The announcement of that privileged signifier is its performance. The performative assertion produces and enacts the very process of privileged signification... Indeed, the phallus is *not* a body part [but the whole], is *not* an imaginary effect [but the origin of all imaginary effects]. These negations are constitutive ; they function as disavowals that precipitate—and are then erased by—the idealization of the phallus. (*BM* 83)

Performativity makes up the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names, and should not ever get confused with performance. Performativity refers to no one and nothing else. It is its own referent (*BM* 2, 200, 234). The conclusion to be drawn from the above is thus that the phallus induces respect only to the extent that it is performed in a respect-inducing manner. Its power is not determined once and for all at some moment of origin, as Lacan insists. It is merely part of a reiterable signifying practice and, thus, open to re-signification. "If the phallus is a privileged signifier, it gains that privilege through being reiterated," Butler concludes (*BM* 89).

If the phallus has no existence—certainly no power--separable from the occasions of its symbolization, its authority greatly depends on the maintenance of a certain context. Moreover, Butler points out, contexts are constantly to occur

which do not suit for the traditional paternal phallus. Introducing the lesbian phallus she argues, that the latter offers the occasion for the phallus—for any phallus--to signify differently and yet with a similar power of authority (*BM* 90). No one ever gets the floor by awaiting her turn at the roundtable of conventional conversation. Privileges are assumed, performed, put into words making up citations, with a difference. The lesbian phallus, Butler explains, is realized through parody and practices of a similarly humorous—though deeply disruptive—nature. Expanding the framework of binary thinking, it allows for more flexible, less definite, forms of subjectivity to evolve. Evidently, these newly evolving identities, having no fixed center of power as their source of orientation, are bound to be experienced as less cohesive than anything prescribed by even Lacan. What must be sacrificed so as to pursue the course prescribed by Butler is any stubborn dream of individual centeredness and wholeness. But does it not seem, Butler asks, that the risk of incoherence is worthwhile running for the sake of establishing more genuine connections, connections with one self as well as with others ? (*BM* 113)

The last word is left to Butler herself who ever so concisely not merely articulates an essential part of the argument presented by this thesis, but even more so provides a pertinent framing for the following Ekman quotation :

> It would be a mistake to impose the same criteria on every cultural product, for it may be precisely the partiality of a text which conditions the radical character of its insights...[T]he unanticipated reappropriations of a given work in areas for which it was never consciously intended are some of the most fruitful. (*BM* 19)

> [Annie] hunted out St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians and started reading it.
>
> It was all about a small gathering of people exposed to contempt but in possession of something they called spiritual gifts. They were advised against sexual intercourse and eating meat, but if necessary could do both. They were seriously warned against doubting that people could live after death. As they believed so it would be.
>
> ....So now people could--and ought to—give up worrying about their nearest as well as their own feelings and affairs and the world in general. This was obviously the opposite of her own fumbling but basically sensible thoughts...
>
> As she stood on the ladder fetching the last lot, she stirred up the sawdust and caught sight of a cardboard box in one corner. It had damp patches and must have been there longer than the rest. It had once been a blue chocolate box bearing the name of *Freia*, and the gold lettering was in Norwegian.
>
> When she opened it, small paper clothes welled out. Cut out, beautifully painted and quite undamaged, they rose out of the crush underneath the protective corrugated sheet of gold paper. Every flap to hook them on to the paper doll's body was intact. She couldn't see one that was ragged or had been torn off. They were all in the style of the forties—the yokes, straight shoulders, pleated skirts, belts, and hip draperies. There were clutch coats, topper coats, and blazers... The paper doll lying almost at the bottom resembled Ava Gardner or Joan Crawford and had her arms held away from her body. The muff had to be fixed to the sleeve of her coat. She was to make a gesture with it. As if meeting someone. In town. It was cold, the snow falling and perhaps Christmas Eve with bells ringing—as in an American film from the days of the coat.
>
> The doll of hard cardboard was home-made, as all the clothes were. You could tell the bright lips had been colored with a red crayon, the point of which had been moistened. The clothes were painted in paler watercolors, perhaps from a school paint box. Flowers, squares, stripes and dots. Lace edges to collars. Sequin embroidery. Sewn-down pleats. Stitching and smocking. Everything was reproduced with loving care. Yes—love. She felt it herself as she touched the paper clothes. Carefully she put them all back under the gold paper and put the lid back on the box. (199)

Struck by the feeling of powerlessness and sense of determination expressed in the documents, Annie decides to hide away the pieces of evidence from the commune. The desire they reflect is too fragile, the vulnerability they expose too fresh. It is all too close to the surface. "They should be preserved, not thumbed over, giggled at, or have compassion poured over them. The interval

since they had been written was too short, and they held the secrets of living people "(194). The discovery of the not so old documents leads to Annie's reflections on the role played by her own recently begun diary writing. What is produced in one's present, and phrased in one's own words, she realizes, is often associated with a humiliating sense of taking one self too seriously.

> Only a couple of hours before she had been sitting at the table by the window in their room, writing in her notebook, expounding on living in the world. Now her words seemed embarrassing. But she had found that dangerous ideas could come of thinking like that. In all likelihood she would never have noticed if it hadn't been written down. (149)

Annie's feelings have been stirred, her trancelike state of being is broken, and the rain starts pouring down, settling " like a membrane on the grass and across their faces " (219). For the first time Annie sees her fellow mates clearly. For the first time she recognizes her need for a more suitable, yet more flexible, shape of her own. At Starhill they were living "an existence devoid of irony slowly twisted their joints, stretching their sinews thin and hard," she observes. And she instantly recognizes a "fierce longing for town, for trying on clothes, people, and rooms the way you try out a quotation in your mouth. Starting. Driving fast. Touching on terror of desire. Turning and forgetting " (220).

> Cold is standstill. Her own was over...
>
> It was over. The cold was evaporating, the water moving, at least on the windowpanes. Her breath made the ice melt as she blew on it slowly.
>
> It's over.
>
> I am not the place, immovable, to which you will return. I am not marked and demarcated. I happen. Mobility....
>
> " I'm going down [to the village] today." (269)

> Cold is standstill...Death bear upon us. Petrus thought she was morbid. It was stupid to talk so much....
>
> The cold is death, is life curled down low. Wax-covered with no fluid. No pulse. But inside me blood is throbbing, the waters in the fetal sac shifting with the movements of the ski sticks and skis.

Now she could hear the water. The mountain river. The river Lobber. The same sound that had been heard before the water was given a name...Up at Starhill they could hear the rumble[from the logging processor] for hour after hour throughout the short days and long after darkness fell...[Petrus] said it was a processor and the company was going to clear-fell the forest right up to Starhill.
When suddenly it became lighter, she was unprepared....

She couldn't quite figure out where she was. The space the forest had formed towards the river had gone, and there were inexplicable waves and hollows in the snow...It was all far more violent than she had thought.

She could see the man right up there in the driver's cabin...

She hadn't realized how quickly it all went...

In some places, people were pleased the company was clear-felling below Starhill. But many others thought it a pity that the whole of the mountainside down to the Lobber was to be scraped bare. Would it ever grow after replanting ?

He finally stopped the machine, and the silence was like a collapse...

" I was going to ask you if you would take me and my daughter down to the village, " she said. "And our belongings "...

" You're sure you can come ? " she said.

Yes, he would come. And before he left on Saturday morning, he would go and light the stove in the cottage.
And we thought he was the Enemy, she reflected...The company lackeys, Dan called people like him. I've gone over to the Enemy. She snorted. It wasn't often she laughed at herself...But it was the Day. She realized that ; the standstill was over. (271)

## 4.0 WORLDS APART

### Merleau-Ponty

Supporting neither the camp of extreme subjectivism nor the trend of extreme objectivism, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology proposes that the subject's formation is based primarily on his interactions with the environment in all of its dimensions. Born into a pre-existing worldly web of meaning, the individual acquires a sense of subjectivity, only in so far as he actively endeavors to leave a mark of his own in this world. No such notion as an "inner self" sealed off from external influence and developing according to its own rules, exists according to Merleau-Ponty. "Truth does not 'inhabit' only the 'inner man,'" as

he puts it. Or, more accurately, "there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (*Phenomenology of Perception* xi ).

The nature of the subject's physicality, that is, the way he inhabits and conceives of his own body is of paramount significance. His body image must always be understood as in a figure-ground structure, says Merleau-Ponty, the character of the relationship revealing the way in which the individual situates himself in relation to others. The bodily self image is thus a phenomenal, to a greater extent than a physical, matter. It tells us everything about what kind of challenges the subject perceives to be within his range. A well developed body image is intimately associated with the subject's recognition of his unique potential, and thus an acute awareness of his limitations, as a human and cultural being. A poorly developed body image, in contrast, reflects the subject's inability to acknowledge that freedom comes with the acceptance of individual constraints. As Merleau-Ponty pertinently points out, an unclimbable rock really only has significance for the subject who makes it his destiny to surmount it (*PP* 436). Likewise, any role in life, chosen halfheartedly and in neglect of the subject's actual potential, is bound to make him feel trapped, powerless, and with no influence over his own destiny. Freedom involves the subject's understanding that the world is already 'made,' but never completely so. "Under the first rapport," Merleau-Ponty says, "we are solicited, under the second we are open to an infinity of possibilities... (W)e exist under these two relations at once. There is therefore never determinism and never absolute choice" (*PP* 453 ). The notion

of body image emphasizes how utterly in vain it is to operate any such thing as the subject's original, natural bodily self.

> Neither body nor existence can be regarded as the original of the human being, since they presuppose each other. Saying that I have a body is thus a way of saying that I can be seen as an object and that I try to be seen as a subject, that an other can be my master or my slave, so that shame and shamelessness express the dialectic of the plurality of consciousness, and have a metaphysical significance ( *PP* 167 ).

The subject may very well be endowed with a unique set of potential skills from birth. However his coming "true" depends on his carving out a role for him self on the stage of the world. No one perceives any one else, even less so him self, except through role playing. The effort put into making his image come true gives the clearest indication of the particularity of the subject's personality :

> The perception of other people is that of a freedom which takes place through a situation at the same time that it transforms the situation. One does not love only qualities ; one loves only through qualities.... Other people can only make something appear through themselves (transparaitre). They appear as a living meaning (sens), a meaning which either conserves or debases itself...One cannot help but notice how much the perception of other people becomes increasingly comparable to language. ("The Experience of Others " 57)

Merleau-Ponty's strong emphasis on the influence of the environment on the individual easily leads to the suspicion that the subject's lot in life is more or less automatically secured. It is true, the subject may get by, by avoiding to create any waves and simply letting the course of events determine his fate. But this has nothing to do with living and self-creation. Truly creative acts, Merleu-Ponty maintains, change the preexisting structure of the individual's consciousness. It is hard and daring work. It is genuine world- and self-making (*PP* x).

> If to live is to invent, it is to invent beginning with specific givens...In the life of an individual there are some fruitful moments where the individual is particularly expressive of himself, where he injects unexpected meaning (sens). As to certain episodes from his past, he uncovers a meaning (signification) which favors something that surges in him or around him. Thus one's self-expression is an exchange between what which is given and that which is about to be accomplished. ("EoO" 55)

One may legitimately wonder what, if anything, there is to prevent the subject from wandering off an arbitrary tangent, leading directly to what in psychoanalysis is termed psychosis? Given the choice, would not most subjects in all likelihood choose to give their history a more exotic turn than circumstances call for? Would the individual be tempted by re-writing his own history according to somebody else's story line? This is simply no feasible solution, argues Merleau-Pontly. Because there is a big difference between mere play-acting and the act of assuming a real life role :

> [O]ne's role in life is subjected to specific relationships with one's past and with other people....[W]e cannot restrict our responsibilities as we do in aesthetic activity. We are so intimately engaged with other people that the closer one gets, the less any limit is possible. Whereas in the theater, one can always start again, in life everything one does is absolute. In life one can never begin again. ("EoO" 56)

Hence, in agreement with psychoanalytic thinking Merleau-Ponty conceives of the subject's structure of perception as being laid down in the course of his childhood. Contrary to the determinism often found within the psychoanalytical ranks, however, Merleau-Ponty argues that structures are forever plastic. Patterns of thinking and habitual actions are over time physically incorporated and thus come to make up the structure of our being (*PP* 91). These structures, however, are never imprinted once and for all. They remain as

mutable and susceptible to impressions from the environment as does the human body.

A question which instantly springs to mind at the mention of psychoanalytic notions of psychic structuring is, of course, the role of sexuality. Where if anywhere does sexuality play into the formation of the subject according to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology? Similarly to Freud and Lacan, Merleau-Ponty conceives of sexuality as making up the corner stone of the subject's being. Contrary to these thinkers, however, Merleau-Ponty focuses not on genital sexuality, but rather on what the individual's sexual behavior reveals about his relationship to the world at large. The question is not so much whether human life does or does not rest on sexuality, Merleau-Ponty states, as of knowing what is to be understood by sexuality. In sexuality, he explains, the subject openly and explicitly projects his attitude towards his human and non-human environment. Thus it may indeed be that all neurotic behavior is caused by sexual symptoms, as the psychoanalysts would have it. But what is really significant about neurosis, Merleau-Ponty argues is that, correctly interpreted, sexuality "symbolizes a whole attitude, whether, for example one of conquest or of flight....Sexuality... has internal links with the whole active and cognitive being " (*PP* 157-58). This, then, leads to Merleau-Ponty's claim that sexuality is as much about metaphysics as it is about physicality :

> Metaphysics, is not localized at the level of knowledge: it begins with the opening out upon 'another' and is to be found everywhere, and already, in the specific development of sexuality...Sexuality is at all times present [in human life] like an atmosphere. (*PP* 168)

As in psychoanalytic thinking sexuality and speech are irrefutably interconnected. The individual refusing to assume a sexual identity compares here to the subject who chooses silence over and against speech, or, even more extremely, literally speaking loses his voice. Contrary to psychoanalytic theory, however, Merleau-Ponty sees the link between sex and language as having hardly anything to do with the kind of subject-object dichotomy, as proposed by Lacan's mirror stage. He explicitly puts forward the assumption that speech and sexuality serve as a means for the subject of embracing—rather than objectifying--the other. "In trying to describe the phenomenon of speech and the specific act of meaning," he concludes, "we shall have the opportunity to leave behind us, once and for all, the traditional subject-object dichotomy " (*PP* 174).

Any kind of use of language, on par with any form of sexual expression, constitutes an appeal to an other, says Merleau-Ponty. There simply is no expressing oneself that does not intentionally target an other person. Likewise, physical existence and psychic being is always inevitably involved in reciprocal expression. In effect, not only does any bodily gesture or event always have a psychic meaning. Certain signs, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "not only convey their significance, they are filled with it" (*PP* 161). Bodily behavior may thus speak louder, and about even more urgent matters, than ordinary speech. Loss of the ability to speak and anorexia are cases in point. Both illustrate the subject's inability to open up towards life. Any such opening up requires that the subject be

capable of tolerating the uncertainty and change that follow from any kind of intimate engagement (*PP* 178). Significantly, whereas Lacan views the slippery relationship between sign and signifier as the major reason for the subject's self-uncertainty, Merleau-Ponty zooms in on language's moving effect. The subject who really receives somebody else's speech, or, the individual who truly expresses himself, cannot but undergo a change in result of the exchange. What happens is not that the individual grows further alienated from what he used to perceive as him self (as in Lacan). In fact, verbal expression enables him to assert himself with greater force and authenticity. Quoting Merleau-Ponty extensively :

> [W]hat is 'fixated' on the mouth is not merely sexual existence but, more generally those relations with others having the spoken word as their vehicle. In so far as the emotion elects to find its expression in loss of speech, this is because of all bodily functions speech is the most intimately linked with communal existence, or, as we shall put it, coexistence. Loss of speech then, stands for the *refusal of coexistence*, just as in other subjects, a fit of hysterics is the means of escaping from the situation. [The] inability to swallow food arises from the fact that swallowing symbolizes the movement of existence which carries events and assimilates them, the patient is unable, literally, to 'swallow' the prohibition which has been imposed upon her...
>
> No more can it be said that the loss of voice is voluntary : what collapses is the whole field of possibilities. I cut myself off even from that mode of communication and significance which silence provides : resentment and loss of voice, as they persist, become consistent like things, ... [T]hey resume a structure, and ... any decision that interrupted them would come from a *lower* level than that of 'will.' The patient cuts himself off from his voice as certain insects sever one of their legs. Loss of voice as a situation may be compared to sleep (*PP* 160-64)

Loss of voice, Merleau-Ponty reiterates, not merely represents a disinclination to speak, neither does anorexia merely represent a refusal of life. Both serve as means for the subject to refuse his conditions of existence. Lacan speculates that for the anorexic's withdrawal from social life to be brought to a halt, she must be made to acknowledge and accept her socially instituted limitations. Merleau-Ponty, in contrast, conceives of the solution as lying in the

subject's return to her own body as well as to the flesh of the world, neither of which necessarily constitutes a "meaningful" act.

> Precisely because my body can shut itself off from the world, it is also what opens me out upon the world and places me in a situation there. The momentum of existence towards other, towards the future, towards the world can be restored as a river unfreezes...The memory or the voice is recovered when the body once more opens itself to others or to the past, when it opens the way to co-existence and once more (in the active sense) acquires significance beyond itself...I never become quite a thing in the world... (*PP* 160-61)

Two aspects in this passage carry particular phenomenological weight : Speech and bodily being transfigures each other to the extent that the body becomes the intent of the speaker (*PP* 197). Secondly, the speech of others has the power to break through the subject's barriers and greatly influence his being and self-perception. As differing from what psychoanalytic theory suggests, the adaptation of an other's frame of mind is here seen to make the individual more closely aware of his own being. The ability to "think according to others," argues Merleau-Ponty, the ability to let them under our skin, enriches our own thoughts. The means to really grasp an other, thus the limitations of one's self, goes through gestural meaning.

> [A]s in a foreign country, I begin to understand the meaning of words through their place in a context of action, and by taking part in a communal life - in the same way an as yet imperfectly understood piece of philosophical writing discloses to me at least a certain 'style'...I begin to understand a philosophy by feeling my way into its existential manner, by reproducing the tone and accent of the philosopher. (*PP* 179)

Words and speech, as viewed from within this framework, refers to nothing else, designates no absent object. They constitute the presence of the idea in question in a phenomenal respect. Thus, any kind of expression, whenever it is successful, says Merleau-Ponty, not merely makes up a sort of reminder for the

speaker or interlocutor in question. "It brings the meaning into existence as a thing at the very heart of the text. It brings it to life in an organism of words, establishing it in the writer or reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience" (*PP* 182 ).

> As soon as man uses language to establish a living relations with himself or with his fellows, language is no longer an instrument, *no longer a means; it is a manifestation, a revelation of intimate being and of the psychic link which unites us to the world and our fellow men.* (*PP* 196, emphasis in original)

It follows from Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on reciprocal interaction that emotional and intellectual activity make up a highly complex process. It involves all of the subject's human faculties as well as his way of relating to the world. And again, the environment in Merleau-Ponty differs substantially from the way it is conceptualized in the linguistically oriented theory of Lacan. Here it makes up a "closely woven fabric" consisting of all forms, sounds and movements intermingling in and giving shape to our world. No one can possibly inhabit an environment, states, Merleau-Ponty, without being heavily influenced by its nature "All consciousness is consciousness of something," as Merleu-Ponty puts it, and the environment does not leave the subject any opportunity to ignore it (*PP* xvii). "The world extends into my body," he says, "the body is invaded by signification...We never perceive an object in a pure state. It is always an object along with the living bodies which surround it and perceive it " ("EoO " 47).

Distinguishing between the experience of natural objects and the experience of other people respectively, Merleau-Ponty explains : Ways of perceiving various cultural objects according to the governing codes are

automatically passed down to the subject. Rejecting the existentialist view that the perception of another human being reduces him to an object, Merleau-Ponty argues that, the latter requires genuine cooperation. It is not that we ever perceive the other's true, uncultured being. Each and every one is made up of a combination of nature and culture. The way in which the subject brings the two into interaction makes up his style. The manner in whichh he makes these different dimensions of his being interact—or come together—constitute his unique being. Thus, everything the subject does, the way he places him self in relation to others, the kind of initiatives he takes, the extent to which he pursues them, and so forth, reveals something about the individual's *life world* (Husserl's *Lebenswelt*). Style is inseparable from expression itself.

Habit formation and style evidently overlap, the former laying down the ground for the latter. However, as opposed to what is in psycho-analysis often conceived of as a means of escaping true experience, habit and repetition, according to Merleau-Ponty, serve as the subject's means of coping with chaos while expanding his emotional and perceptual repertoire. Ritualized and compulsive patterns of behavior, originally motivated by the subject's intense fear of being unable to bridge a given conflict between nature and culture, here serve a highly productive function. It creates a means for and a mode of feeling which dissolves the nature-culture opposition, the very source of the anxiety. "A habit is an aptitude for responding to a particular type of situation with a particular form of solution, " Merleau-Ponty explains. It has nothing to do

with going on automatic pilot or reviving one's ghosts from the past. Habits provide a point of departure for one's move into the future. It is, in Merleau-Ponty's words, a bodily and spiritual operation, an existential operation ("EoO" 52). Habits, in other words, bring together the mindful, spiritual, and physical aspects of our being.

Thinking in Merleau-Ponty is unimaginable from acting, that is from approaching the world intentionally, both of which are intricately interconnected with the subject's corporeal being. For the subject to achieve any insight, whether of a psychological or a scientific nature, he must first and foremost learn to undertake the dual operation of experiencing and perceiving his own body image, at one and the same time, says Merleau-Ponty. The perception of one self, as if from the inside and the outside simultaneously, lays the ground for a sense of existential certainty. It makes up the most fundamental point of departure for the subject's approaching the world, as it is, and endeavoring to make it his own.

> ...A baby of fifteen months, opens its mouth if I playfully take one of its fingers between my teeth and pretend to bite it. And yet it has scarcely looked at its face in a glass, and its teeth are not in any case like mine. The fact is that its own mouth and teeth, as it feels them from the inside, are immediately, for it, an apparatus to bite with, and my jaw, as the baby sees it from the outside, is immediately, for it, capable of the same intentions. 'Biting' has immediately, for it, an intersubjective significance. It perceives its intentions in its body, and my body with its own, and thereby my intentions in its own body. (*PP* 352)

# PART SIX

## Words as the key to unheard of territories

Whatever the links between desire, affection, and attachment—the kind of experience from which resistance supposedly arises—the post-structural vagueness in this regard has provided fertile soil for many a feminist thinker. Psychoanalytically inspired feminist culture critics have, more recently, worked hard on deconstructing the words of the masters. The goal has been to develop strategies of analysis capable of taking into consideration *degrees* of affective investment, and divergent *modes* of meaning formation. By drawing on psychoanalysis, object-relations theory, poststructuralism, some of it spiced up with post-colonial theory, pragmatism, and phenomenology, a number of melting-pot models of criticism have thus emerged.

There is nothing new in the fact that the meaning of the Word and the use of the Voice is subjected to criticism by those who never felt appropriately addressed by either in the first place. Much has also been made of the fact, that women were not given an opportunity to speak up, until the "author" had been pronounced dead ( Kosta, *Recasting Autobiography*). True as this may be, what is more essential is the fact that the "crisis of representation," practically and theoretically speaking came in handy for quite a few marginalized groups and

subjects in need of developing a tongue of their own. The mere fact that no one could any longer rest assured, that one view of the world holds precedence over any other, led to greater willingness to try to listen to others, if not by desire at least by necessity. Along with a greater openness toward the "negative" (gender, sex, irrationality) on which meaning has traditionally been based, a less exclusive approach to the unspeakable slowly saw the light of the day. Thus, with the arrival of post-colonialism, post-feminism, and post-Freudianism, the "dark continent" no longer remained in the shadow.

What is currently considered a most urgent issue, among feminist culture critics, is for the female subject to develop suitable, and yet flexible, forms of representation, which allow for her exploring and expressing her own truth. Whether or not this is at all possible, considering the fact that the models available have all been developed within a system based on the exclusion of the other, remains under debate. Thus, to the question, to what extent it is really possible to conceive of a *female* writing, Christa Wolf responds, " to the extent that women stop wearing themselves out attempting to integrate themselves into the prevailing system of insanity. To the extent that through writing and reading they are intent on autonomy " ( *Cassandra* ). Easier said than done. Though Wolf has a point. Wearing themselves out so as to adapt to—and in return get adopted by—the governing system, is exactly what previous generations of women, even feminists, have done. Thus, a train of thought similar to Wolf's has come to serve as the point of departure for larger parts of current feminist thought. No longer

preoccupied with figuring out how women may appropriate an equal share of the cultural cake, more recent research focuses on the way in which the marginalized subject may deceive herself into believing she is speaking her own tongue, when in fact she is merely exercising somebody else's.

Poststructuralist theory suggests that the subject always does, to an extensive degree, serve as the mouthpiece for somebody else's speech. Feminist thinkers, of deconstructive inspiration, have made productive use of this suggestion in their conception of the female subject's voice. Since it is inconceivable, they argue, that the female subject speak with a pure voice, her own speech must be derived partly from what she says, partly from in between the lines, from her saturated silence, discomfort with conventional turns of phrases, and so forth. Thus her voice must be accessed by subtle, and sometimes rather convoluted means. The resolve emerging from this realization, is to develop strategies for a more *sensitive listening*. It is in the subject's attending to others' speech, in her reading other female subjects' texts, it is said, that she gradually learns to pick up on the voices resonating with, or emanating from, her inner. Hence, the role of context has come to be greatly emphasized, as has the presence of fluctuating *presences* and *traces* in a text (Walker, "Feminist Literary Criticism" 568-69). The *texture* is often assumed to make up the *signature* of the author. History, the subject's story-line, thus no longer is to be read as if it exists "out there." It is ingrained in the fabric of the text.

Critics other than feminist thinkers have come upon the idea, that Western capitalist culture serves as a generator of narrow-minded attention, and thus of deafness. Thus, J. B. Pontalis suggests in his *Love of Beginnings* that all of us, whether male or female, would benefit greatly from learning to detect the many voices of which we ourselves consist. Providing a simple introduction to a task which tends to grow rather more complex when in feminist hands, Pontalis says : "Of course, when one is looking for one's own intimate voice, one finds all sorts of alien voices." There is no reason, he argues, to believe that one basically consist of *a* core self, a key relationship (to an Other), or a single voice :

> We are, fortunately never done with appropriating others, never done with becoming *one's self's other*. But, at least as far as I am concerned, the voices are always linked to a place. Memory is less subject to time—that enigma—than to space, which gives it shape and consistency...While we have only one life, we have innumerable ways of recounting that life [to ourselves]. (Preface)

We remember our ontological origins by recalling the psychical and somatic impressions certain human or nun-human environments have made on us over time. We appropriate the course of our life-events by choosing one way of narrating our story over and against others. The acknowledgment that we have chosen one discourse over an other, not because it is more scientifically "correct," but rather because it expresses our affective motivation, Pontalis claims.

The subscription to one "truth model" or another, a gesture which makes Foucault's and Lacanian's subject feel real, has very different implications according to Pontalis' theory. To put forward ideas, to propose and defend a

stance, is something academics are amazingly adept at, he points out. And indeed, it may at times lead to more discussion. But it rarely results in any deeper insight, or to the development of a more well rounded subjectivity. More often than not, the most articulate and opinionated individuals remain silent on the personal trajectories that led to their thesis. Giving the impression that their ideas have come about as if on their own, they act like their personal affective and intellectual investment have had little influence on the outcome. We have been taught to believe that this is the safe way to scientific validity, as Pontalis points out. Yet, how on earth are we ever to grasp the implications of a given theory, use of terminology, or mode of analysis, if kept in the dark concerning the genesis of these models ? ( *LB*, preface). Pontalis' rather general observation that interpersonal relationships, here put in terms of inter-spatial relations, profoundly influence our scientific profile, has been taken up and greatly elaborated on by several feminist thinkers. What is so illuminating about these endeavors is the fact that each proposes a slightly different approach as to how the subject may sort out what kind of investment, attachment, or intellectual objectives drive her work. If it is in vogue among male postmodern thinkers to applause the opportunity to spread our selves thin, feminist thinkers predominantly subscribe to the view that a higher degree of internal and external differentiation, and thus of greater integration, is the path to pursue. The more complex—and yet coherent--a picture we develop of each other, they argue, the less likely we are to reproduce dualistic (sexist and colonialist) attitudes of the

past. Having been caught in a stale mate situation between essentialism and social constructivism for many years, the differentiation-integration strategy offers many a thinker a long overdue opportunity to finally re-cover or discover a voice that speaks with psychic, somatic, and socio-cultural integrity.

Sophisticated approaches to the detection of any such voice have been long in the making. In 1975 Juliet Mitchell exclaimed that "the setting or personality of a scientist, by definition of his work, is largely irrelevant; if it becomes relevant, then we have to question whether it is a science that he is working in " (*Psychoanalysis and Feminism* 323 ). A little later the confessional genre surged. However, it never really succeeded in breaking new ground and quickly resulted in boredom. Most of the more ingenious recent attempts are heavily inspired by deconstruction and psychoanalysis. Both enable us to read in between the lines of the text. The former legitimates a reading against the intention of the text, the latter an interpretation in disagreement with the awareness of the writer. Still, we must remain aware that any reading against the grain of the stated intent of the text, entails the risk of pulling yet another god-trick. The key to a resolution of this touchy issue is by some assumed to lie in an increased awareness of the dynamics of transference and counter-transference. In this way, it is said, we reach some sort of full circle: a voice of one's own is detected in the text of the other, that is in what one desires to hear, the way one wishes to be received by and reflected in the text. Language becomes a meeting

ground, or, let us say a transitional zone, for an exchange of identities in the making.

The predicament following from the Lacanian train of thought concerning the subject's splitting may be reinterpreted along the following lines : It may indeed be that the subject never succeeds in fully merging into a relatively coherent self-image. But that is not to say that she is destined to remain forever alienated from her own truth. As is suggested in the pages below, previously silenced subjects may get closer to them selves, closer than Lacan could ever have imagined, by letting their wounds, silence, and inability to make sense, "speak" on their behalf. They may gain in subjectivity from learning to listen to their own unknown as it manifests itself in their attraction to the story telling of others. A sense of self, as it is pointed out, need not necessarily be based on "measuring up " to any norm. It may as well come about through an acknowledgment that one is as vulnerable and imperfect as anyone else, that is, that one's strength comes out of accepting and coping with one's pain and insecurity, rather than subscribing to a model that eliminates any such destabilizing forces. Subjectivity, according to the models proposed below, emerge from the experience of degrees of similarity, commonality, and compassion, rather than from an acknowledgment of clear-cut difference, a sense of lack and competition.

Thus, the first part of this chapter introduces feminist, culture critical views which strongly contest the Freudian and Lacanian conception of subjectivity. The Ekman excerpt following this section, reminds us that the difference-and-differentiation issue regarding our use, or inability to make use of, social norms and conventions in our personal story-production, is by no means of relevance for only the female sex. Both genders habitually create story-lines which shelter their sense of self. The loop holes we create may be differently located, so to speak. But they still speak on behalf of our repressed. The necessity of learning to listen, with an evenly suspended attention, as Freud put it, applies to any subject desiring to come true.

The second part of this chapter introduces two works of fiction both of which serve to demonstrate that what is relatively easily sorted out in theory, is a rather complex affair in practice. Marie Cardinal's autobiographical novel, it seems, proves both Lacan and more recent feminist speculations right. Alice Kaplan's semi-autobiographical novel, on the other hand, in as much as the author of this novel appears to subscribe to a Lacanian frame of reference, actually supports an object-relations inspired view, as represented by Winnicott. The chapter closes with yet an other excerpt from *Blackwater*, the purpose of which is to indicate the complexity of the range of issues at stake whenever we try to adapt to, or be adopted by, already existing forms of meaning formation.

**Among unfolding ears**

The contributions to the development of a voice ringing more true, here brought to the table, are diverse. Trinh T. Minh-ha suggests that we aim at coming to terms with otherness in general so that the dark aspects of experience no longer be perceived as remotely familiar, i.e., as foreign. Nancy K. Miller proposes that we learn to use as a guideline for greater enlightenment the aspects our female selves we tend to find embarrassing. And Shoshana Felman argues that the means to learn to listen more attentively to our selves is to explore the ways in which we listen to others.

**Speaking nearby**

The point of departure for Trinh T. Minh-ha's proposal is the assumption, that marginalized subjects must strive to tell their stories from the *dual* point of departure. Personal experience, and the course of history, she says, both influence the ways in which the subject makes sense of her life. When inhabiting a universe, which has not exactly been made in the image of the repressed, there is simply no use in the subject's trying to speak "to the point," she says. The best she can do, in so far as she aims at getting closer to her own experience of things, is to speak nearby, to approach her truth sideways and indirectly. If approaching it head on, Minh-ha points out, trying to capture it by the means available, she may all of a sudden find herself stranded in a desert of meaningfulness, drained and over-explained (*Framer Framed* 182 ; "Speaking Nearby " 433-452).

Talk that matter does not put things in order. It is disturbing and disruptive. And this is the very point. There is no need for the subject to waste time on developing final definitions or to struggle to get her narrative to come to a close, Minh-ha emphasizes. The speech worthwhile expressing and listening to expresses urgency. It triggers change and forces the subject, and her interlocutors, to ask new questions. Thus, words of importance always break the ground for other modes of experience. Another way of putting this, is to say that words that make a difference always cause pain, and thus inevitably evoke an urge to return to more familiar truth-statements :

> When armors and defense mechanisms are removed, when new awareness of life is brought into previously deadened areas of the body, women begin to experience writing/the world differently. This is exciting and also very scary For it takes time to be able to tolerate greater aliveness. Hence the recurrence of musts and must-nots...Closure and openness, again, are one ongoing process Who can endure constant openendedness ? (*Woman, Native, Other* 36)

As scary as it may be, we must learn to distinguish, Minh-ha says, between the danger and the opportunity contained by the void, the danger and potential in being similar and yet different, the risks and advantages entailed in being both an object and a subject at one and the same time. Insight does not grow from fulfillment, it arises, as if from the experience of the "other side" of what makes sense in contemporary society (*Framer Framed* 142). Therefore the challenge is, according to Minh-ha, to expand our notion of texture to the point where it does not force us to distinguish sharply between the spoken word and the act of speaking, production of the text and its perception, lived and the imagined reality. The aim must be to acquire the skill to distinguish between an alienating

notion of otherness, and an empowering notion of difference. As long as difference is not given to us, she states, the coast is clear and the floor is ours. Left behind is the notion that fragmentation stands in opposition to the whole. Fragmentation neither stands in opposition to, nor makes up a minor part of, the larger whole. Minh-ha stipulates (*W/F* 185):

> Fragmentation is a way of living with differences without turning them into opposites, not trying to assimilate them out of insecurity. Fragmentation is here a useful term because it always points to one's limits. The self, like the work you produce, is not so much a core as a process. (*W/F* 156)

Minh-ha's suggestion can shortly be summarized as such: The more successful the subject is in abstaining from trying to close in around the truth, the closer she gets. The more adept she grows at abstaining from making all of the pieces of experience fall into place, the more accurate an impression of how things are interconnected is she likely to receive. The less afraid the subject is of not making up a consistent whole, the more likely she is at developing an integrated sense of self. The tables have been turned, as compared with the classical psychoanalytical paradigm. Minh-ha's proposal opens up the possibility that for something to be experienced as fully meaningful for the subject, it must necessarily remain loosely defined. No Master, Other, or social norm, can possible inform her subject of what makes up a suitable sense of significance.

**Utterly embarrassing**

Dealing with the problem of representativity in an age characterized by rhetorical "overloading," Nancy K. Miller encourages a renewed attention to the "unidentified voices of a writing self outside or to the side of labels, or at least at a critical distance from them, and at the same time as part of a wider effort to re-map the theoretical " (*Getting Personal* ). The problem concerning representativity, she argues, is no longer essentially a matter of representing "us" as women over and against the male other. It has become a problem amongst our selves. In spite of having grown so very adept at juggling terminologies of decolonization and emancipation, the tendency remains to evacuate the very subject who produces the theory. Thus we tend to proceed as if our insight into the life conditions of marginalized individuals arose from no one in particular and applies to everyone in general. It is not enough to be able to speak on behalf of the repressed "other," Miller states, we must learn how to distinguish between the other in the exterior, and the other—and unacknowledged--in ourselves.

There is a difference between speaking *for* and speaking *as* women or feminists, and there is between speaking *about* the body *and speaking one's body*. Being outspoken about the degrees and varieties of authoritative knowledge within our selves inevitably makes ludicrous any attempt at "grandiose assertions " on anybody's or any sex's behalf. And this is the very point : We must dare to risk not being taking seriously, even if that goes against

everything we have fought for over the last may years. Why the necessity for taking risks even before we have—as a gender—reached any kind of common ground ? Because, Miller, argues, in spite of our theoretical and political advance, nothing much has changed. Not enough, at any rate. Women still abstain from speaking up, in particular from speaking what is really on their mind. How are we ever going to get a better understanding of each other, not to mention our selves, if we keep appearing in disguise and playing according to rules determined by others, she asks ?

Miller suggests that we improve our theoretical capacities by drawing more extensively on personal faculties of experience. Innovative metaphors emerge from, and original connections are based on, personal life, in particular personal imagination, she points out. Reflections of an autobiographical nature, per definition integrating fiction, fantasy, curiosity and a quest for knowledge, provide insight into where our limits are and of what they consist. The labor that goes into tracking down one's history is not time wasted. For each move we make, Miller says, we learn something more about the kind of sweeping generalizations we must avoid making in so far as we aim to talk as our selves, to and with others, as opposed to above everybody's head. The desire to "personalize" our speech does not equal the wish to develop a uniquely female language, as for instance in écriture feminine. Choosing to camp in the wilderness, as Miller puts it, is reclusive and results in the exclusion of too many aspects of the self. Neither the choice of a disembodied voice nor of purely

natural embodiment heals the wound caused by real or imaginary castration. Unless, that is, one assumes the speaking subject to have emerged from either pure nature or to be the creation of social construction.

The task awaiting us today is to make room for both identification and difference. Miller asserts. Has not anyone thought about that previously? If the going in this respect has been slow, Miller says, it is primarily because there remains a close link for women writers between standing up, standing out, exposing one self, and anger (*GP* 22). Traditionally, woman is expected to appear emotionally subdued. A female expressing her innermost anger is conceived of as "making a spectacle of herself." She is embarrassing. A fact which is in itself sufficient to spur an even more intense rage "inappropriate" bitterness and resentment.

Referring to Elaine Showalter's work, Miller draws a distinction between feminist *critique* and feminist *criticism*. The aim of feminist critique is to uncover the workings of phallocentric discourse in texts by male authors. The goal for feminist criticism, on the other hand, is to explore the ways in which female writers write themselves into culture. The assumption behind the latter is, Miller points out, that "women's lives are different from men's in some irreducible way," and that this difference has a decipherable impact on the imaginative structures of their work (*GP* 36). For the purpose of further elaborating the notion of feminist criticism, Miller proposes that we distinguish between personal and autobiographical criticism. Personal criticism is based on

a "certain intensity in the lending of oneself" to the work of criticism without necessarily involving autobiographical self-representation (*GP* 1). In personal criticism the self-narrative voice is woven into the argument to the extent that it leaves an internal signature in the work. It may tell very little about the subject's history, but it reveals a great deal about her understanding of the relation between the personal and the theoretical. Quoting Mary Ann Caws, Miller summarizes :

> Personal criticism ... has to do with a willing, knowledgeable, outspoken involvement on the part of the critic with the subject matter, and an invitation extended to the potential reader to participate in the interweaving and construction of the ongoing conversation this criticism can be, even as it remains a text. (*GP* 16)

The indication that a text has hit home, Miller claims, is that it makes us feel ashamed on our own and the other's behalf. The writing and reading of autobiographical work thus enable reader and writer to become increasingly aware of their innermost personal resistance. It alerts the subject to the secrets and sensations of her own that she herself has considered unacceptable. It provides her with an opportunity to catch herself reacting (or counteracting) to the emotional and intellectual process represented in the text at another level than the merely theoretical. Working within an autobiographical realm, Miller argues, enables us to develop a more sophisticated, indeed less blindfolded subjective theory.

To Minh-ha's encouragement that we loosen up for our expectations to the accuracy of the fit between the meaning of words and our experience of the world, Miller adds the suggestion that we resign from striving to fit into one and

the same boat. Women, and other marginalized subjects, do not simply make up an other half. The main opposition is no longer between "us" and "the other," between our tongue and his. The dread of rejection, later turned into anger as a result of feeling degraded, by the other, has undergone a significant transformation : It has been turned into the fear of self-recognition. Thus, in so far as we strive to get closer to our true selves, individually and collectively, as Minh-ha suggests, we must learn to face up to what we fear the most: our own embarrassment. The latter, Miller argues, is triggered by viewing ourselves through the eyes of a more politically correct feminist other. But how are we ever to make any kind of headway, if we do not learn to *listen* by means of our *own* ears ?

## Eavesdropping one's way through to the truth

In *Writing and Madness* Shoshana Felman observes that madness has become a commonplace intellectual preoccupation in contemporary society. A few years later, Felman and Dori Laub wonder why testimony has become at once so central and omnipresent in our cultural accounts of our selves (*Testimony : Crises of Witnessing* 6). Ever since World War II, they say, we have found ourselves in an age of testimony. What we have had to witness are "bits and pieces of a memory that ... have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge or assimilated into

full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference" (*TCW* 5). Finally, in *What Does a Woman Want?*, Felman suggests that maybe our preoccupation with the strangeness of others reflects a great need, in a day and age characterized by indifference, to deal with the trauma through which we came into being as subjects. She hypothesizes that writing about madness works as a means to gain access to the parts of one's own existence that can find no direct articulation.

The mainstreaming of madness, Felman argues, indicates a radical ambiguity in contemporary society, concerning the inside and the outside. Ambiguity is exactly what cannot be conceived of in language, and thus, the madness we talk incessantly about is a simplified and trivialized version of the real thing. Thus what is the most crazy about contemporary society, she points out, is the fact that we have lost all sense of "other," of strangeness, and of alienation (*WW* 14).

If genuine madness defies articulation, how then, can we get a better grasp of what it is really about. How do we get to comprehend the truly "other" without inadvertently capturing, confining, explaining it? (*WW* 42). Inspired by Austin's speech act theory and Pierce's pragmatism, Felman proposes that we read the current preoccupation and "figures of speech" in terms of force rather than in terms of form and content. The question is hereafter not so much what a text means as what it *does*. What kind of upheaval does it create. In what frame of mind does it leave us? (*WW* 26-32).

Felman and Laub point to the fact that traditionally, "bearing witness" implies a subject-object distinction, associated with the ability to distinguish between actor-spectator, crime-recovery, repression-remembrance, falsehood-truth, innocence-evil. Witnessing is ordinarily associated with traumatization and with the attempt to recover an existential foundation. What does it mean then, to bear witness in a world in which the distinction between good an evil is dissolving? What happens when there is no longer an Other to listen to and confirm one's truth? (*TCW* 82). Based on the observation that the witnessing of somebody else's *real* almost always sets off an existential crisis in the spectator, Felman and Laub suggest that an answer may be found by viewing the relationship between art and culture as a performative and nonrepresentational relationship. The historical, political, and cultural scene functions as the stage on which we re-enact our own unspeakable and respond to that of others. Art is an expression of "what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times," Felman and Laub claim (*TCW* xx). Testimony, seen in this light, may work as an endeavor at creating an address for a historical experience which annihilated the very possibility of addressing anything to any One. Narrative, accordingly, functions as a means to create an inner, imaginary witness, a substitute for what was, or is, missed in real life (*TCW* 41, 91). Further exploration of the "mad" attraction results in questions such as: For whom do we write, by whom do we wish to be read, by whom do we dread to be read, what kind of reader does our story require to survive, what do we

ourselves need so as to survive our story? No response can be anything but tentative. It may at best lead to continuing search, trial and errors, and the acceptance that we shall never reach an ultimate answer, states Felman (*WDHW?* 130-31).

Trauma is per definition inconceivable. It is what could not possibly ever have happened, what does not fit into any order, what breaks down any order and world view on which the individual may have based his existence. In consequence, if the traumatized subject tends to repeat the event, over and over, to the point of repetition compulsion, Felman and Laub state, it is due to the fact that the event has never really begun. Having had no comprehensible beginning it cannot come to a close. What is "repeated," does not belong to a past. It makes up an all consuming present. As a result, performers of trauma are many, speakers of trauma few. Words simply will not do. Silence signals defeat and adds insult to injury, yet, it also offers protection. Blurring the edge off things, it provides a secret inner sanctuary. To not return from this silence is therefore the rule rather than the exception (*TCH* 58). The fear that fate will deliver yet another blow is experienced as intimately associated with any *naming* of the trauma, as if telling inevitably entailed re-living. And of course, it does, though not in any ordinary sense of the word. Experience shows that oftentimes a long postponed "confession" brings about relief. But only to the extent that the individual who has already suffered some sort of soul-murder grows sufficiently mobile to commit suicide (*TCH* 67). The story nevertheless must be

externalized, transmitted told. It is *imperative* that it be listened to by another. It is imperative that it be received by an other who is in a position to validate it as an experience belonging to another time and place (*TCW* 69). At issue then is how to re-install an other listener, how to re-institute one or more authoritative others.

In her foreword to *Literature and Psychoanalysis* Felman elaborates on the "otherwise" in the title. We need to revise our reading strategies, she says, because traditionally psychoanalysis occupies the place of the knowing subject, literature that of a still-to-be-mastered object. Frequently serving as a diagnostic answering service, that shuts up and captures the unsettling in the text, it reassures the reader's power, calm and sense of control (*LP* 103, 196). And this kind of reading prevents us from recognizing the text's possible "otherness" and thus from interacting with its and our unknown. Referring to Henry James's tale about the turn of the screw, Felman proposes that the triumph of the reader may ultimately destroy what is about-to-come-into-being in the text. In James's story the governess' great victory consists in forcing everybody else to confess to knowing what she has suspected from the outset. However, as a result of her laborious work of interpretation no new life is born. Instead, a child is killed (*LP* 164 ). Felman concludes :

> The manipulator of the screw, who believes [her]self to be in control of its successive turns, in control of an enterprise of fixity and closure, discovers that, in reality, he himself is nothing but a screw, a cog in the wheel of a machine that runs by itself, automatically and repetitively ( *LP* 178 )

Playing on the associations between grasping intellectually, and grasping some one physically—causing them to suffocate-- Felman proposes that a reading process driven by the desire to grasp the knowledge, presumably held by the other, is an act of violence. Reading, under these circumstances, is established not only in relation to knowledge, but also in relation to power. "Meaning itself thus becomes the outcome of an act of violence," as she puts it (*LP* 164). What is missing from this picture is dialogue. The tighter the interpretation gets, the greater the risk of killing the dynamic that drives the narrative.

In many ways text represents the unknown other for the reader the way the analysand represents the unexplored territory of not-yet-realized knowledge for the analyst. In both cases the analyzing part is driven by a desire to know and to take possession of the secret, the source and the cause of the symptoms in the other, Felman claims. To avoid that both get caught up in a power struggle, the traditional master-slave connection must be broken. The means to do so is to refuse to choose side. Thus the literary critic can have his cake and eat it too. And that because of the following particular paradox: The work of the literary analyst resembles the function of the psychoanalyst and yet :

> The text--is, however, not that of a patient, but rather of a master: we say of an author that he is a master; the text has for us authority--the very type of authority by which Jacques Lacan indeed defines the role of the psychoanalyst in the structure of the transference. Like the psychoanalyst viewed by the patient, the text is viewed by us as "a subject presumed to know"--as the very place where meaning and *knowledge* of meaning, reside. (*LP* 7)

The tables keep turning. Reading a text is an encounter on par with a psychoanalytic encounter. Both are called upon to be more than merely cognitive. They are expected to produce change and to facilitate self-transformation. Nothing comes out of insisting on convincing the other of one's own truth, or, of trying to subtract from the other a truth to apply to one self. A reading "lesson," like an analytic session, is not about making a statement. It is a performance, in Felman's words, it is a practice, exemplary only insofar as it is understood "to be a model or a paradigm, not for imitation but for self-transformation." For, as was the case with Freud, it is not in words that the lesson can be learned, it is in one's body and actions (*LP* 20). Defining transference along Lacanian lines, that is, as the repetition of the structural relationship between patient and analyst, and as the continuing displacement of "energy" and significance through chains of signifiers, Felman claims that all narratives are of a transferential structure. What they reveal is essentially a love interest. The more scandalous a text is perceived to be, she points out, the closer it is bound to be to the structure of the reader's unconscious desire (*LP* 133).

In *What Does A Woman Want?* Felman introduces her work on women and writing by announcing that it is a demonstration of the "many varieties of error" that goes into trying to figure out what a woman wants. Freud resigned from resolving the question, and the uncertainty created by this defeat triggered a great deal of anxiety regarding the issue sexual difference. Over time, it resulted in a variety of violent attempts at settling the issue once and for all, in particular

among male writers. The tendency is, Felman notes, for these writers to conceive of the female as being in need of a cure and some common sense. Frequently, the woman's recovery comes about at the very point of the female subject's death. Thus women in these texts resist male recognition, Felman observes. They resist sexual appropriation, and they refuse interpretation (*WDWW?* 1-20). Remarkably, even in fiction authored by men, women resist recovery. If Freud, Balzac, and other ingenious male masterminds, were forced to back off from an ultimate resolution of female desire it is not because they were completely off the mark in their assesment of the dark continent. Their resignation indicates that they were, even if only partially, on the right track. How then, do we in this day and age learn the lesson that these masters offer, without adopting their blindness ? Having not other choice but to work within the given traditions, Felman declares, our goal must be to break their hold over us. Drawing on deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and pragmatism, she suggests that we train ourselves in "tuning into the forms of resistance present in the text." We must "seek to trace within each text its own resistance to itself, its own specific literary, inadvertent textual transgression of its male assumptions and prescriptions" (*WDWW?* 6-8).

In her rereading of Freud Felman thus emphasizes the psychoanalytic dictum that blindness and insight are inseparable. In consequence, she chooses not to scrutinize Freud's theoretical solutions, but rather to explore the ways in which they work on him in practice. Freud's textual contradictions, she says,

tell us less about his insights than his actual reaction to the questions he could not resolve (*WDIIW?* 73). In the case of "Irma" for instance, Freud's dream reveals to him the failure committed during his treatment of Irma in consequence of his sticking too persistently to his principles. The dream calls his attention to the importance of resistance as a crucial psychoanalytic concept. And it suggests a transformation of the master-slave relationship previously ruling the analytical encounter (*WDIIW?* 90, 111). It is no coincidence that Freud came upon the significance of the wish fulfillment of the dream simultaneously with his conception of the navel of the dream. Woman navel resistance became intricately linked. It pointed to the riddle yet to be resolved by psychoanalysis : how to dialogue and interact with an other and different. The solution of Freud's dream turned out to be different from the solution in the dream (*WDIIW?* 91). Thus, as Irma's resistance brought Freud to an impasse, his dream showed a way out of a psychoanalytical stale mate. By means of her "disagreeable nature " and her disinclination to "open her mouth properly," Irma told Freud a fundamental truth : The unconscious nature of a dream wish, or a symptom, entails that it requires--by definition-- interpretation to be understood (*WDIIW?* 98). The event taught Freud to listen *differently* and *differentially* to his own dreams as well as to those of his analysands. It opened his eyes for another praxis of relating and to another way of relating theory and practice. A dialogic conception of truth had seen the light of the day ( *WDIIW?* 112 ).

The trouble associated with reading "as women" according to Felman, is that we too are confused by the issue of sexual difference and differentiation. To read or desire as a woman leaves us with two unknowns. And the means to overcome this sense of double alienation it to create a bond of reading among women. We become feminist writers and readers, and more secure women only, she suggests, when understanding each other as such. The resonance and repercussion created by any such bonding, enable us to situate our selves in relation to our own as well as the other sex :

> *Becoming* a feminist is to undertake an investigation of what it means to *be* a woman and discovering that one *is* not a woman but rather *becomes* (somewhat interminably) a woman. It is to discover, through others' reading and through the way in which other women are *addressed* by one's own writing, that one is not born a woman, one has become (perhaps never quite sufficiently) a woman (*WDWW?* 12)

An increased awareness of one's identity as gender and sex comes about through a reading of literature and theory with one's own life. Felman suggest, the point being that this life is " a life, however, that is not entirely in (one's) conscious possession." Reading and writing autobiographically is an act of getting in touch with and reviving those parts of one self that otherwise elude attention (*WDWW?* 13 ).

In what ways does Miller and Felman's appraisal of the autobiographical gesture differ then ? Miller seems to assume that our cringing from embarrassment indicates that a text has "hit home." Felman disagrees. We may easily "get personal " while in disguise, she says. Nothing prevents us from

speaking with a borrowed voice, from following its logic, and thus from getting embarrassed for reasons that are not really our own.

Once again, the issue is how to locate our own voice, or the voices the express our own desire, as opposed to those that induce normative behavior. So as to elaborate her view Felman draws on Luce Irigaray's work. The role of the female, within the tradition of Western Metaphysics, has always been that of the opposite and negative of the signifier that counts and the sex that is, says Irigaray. Freud too subscribed to this dualism. He understood female identity and sexuality to be developed in relation to the phallus, that is he never understood that the female subject may be fundamentally different from a man. The issue of representation is crucial in this respect : How does one speak on behalf of a woman without silencing her, reducing her to preconceived notions, or imposing on her prescriptions for how she ought to be? How does one speak from the place of the other? Trained to see ourselves as other, our stories can by definition not yet be self-present to us. Until we have "excorcised the male mind " from our way of thinking, Felman says, we shall remain incapable of telling our own story. Our only means to this more authentic version of the course of events goes through a reading a other women's attempts at narrating their lives. Felman sums up the task as such :

> The challenge facing the woman today is nothing less than to 'reinvent' language, to *re-learn how to speak*: to speak not only against, but outside of the secular phallocentric structure, to establish a discourse the status of which would no longer be defined by the fallacy of masculine meaning. today more than ever, changing our minds--changing *the* mind--is a woman's prerogative (*WDWW?* 40)

Why cannot we simply shortcut and gain a more direct access to our own autobiography, one may wonder? Because, Felman says, we can only detect our sense of alienation by seeing it in the other (*WDWTC?* 14). As Marguerite Duras writes :

> I have no recollection whatsoever of having written this [says Marguerite Duras]. I know that I have [written] it, . . but I do not see myself writing this journal [it]is one of the most important things of my life (Duras, *La Douleur*, Felman, *WDWTC?* 15)

May it not be that Duras captures the story of most women's lives, Felman suggests, that is, that woman's life is the story of what eludes signification, that is trauma? Trauma, impossible to remember, talk about and to explain, can only be reenacted. We tell about our own unspeakable trauma by telling other people's stories. We are attracted to those narratives in particular that revive our wounds and appeal to our blindness. Ultimately, the strength of this appeal breaks the path for an increased awareness of the pieces of which our own story is made up. Truth emerges via transferential transactions.

## Stains of truth. ***BLACKWATER***

We are here returning to Johan, the presumably illegitimate child of a native Same, in Annie's mind a murder suspect, her daughter's fiancee, and the father to her not yet born grandchild. In addition to never spilling the beans to his family concerning his whereabouts on the night of the fatal event at the Lobber,

Johan has kept quiet to Mia about the nature of his sexual initiation. Carrying on with life, his past tugged behind him. Johan never—or hardly ever—even thinks of Ylja. One ordinary evening though, eighteen years after the Lobber event, Johan hangs around at the local library, killing time. By coincidence, he stumbles over a scholarly tombstone in which the Myth of the Traveler is recollected in great detail. The middle aged man is as if struck dead in his track. The mere thought that the myth could be true leads to a rapid disintegration of the foundation for Johan's self-assured, and indeed very measured, sense of self

> He could feel a movement in his chest. It was powerful and resembled the swift change of pressure in a bow when the arrow is released. He thought that what he regarded as his ego was forever changing, though the process was slow and with great many retakes. The idea of an arrow that had been in the firing position for almost two decades amazed him. The author was a lecturer in folklore and religious knowledge called Doris Hofstaedter. He wasn't thinking at all, just staring at images. One of them ought to have disappeared in the shedding of shells and emptying of content he had thought was the process that constituted his ego. And the other was one he had never known he had. He was feeling like a very old person. He had heard that old people could haul up fresh memories from the well of the past. (365-66)

If Doris Hofstaedter is an expertise in this field mythology, Johan reasons, she may be acquainted with Ylja Birger, for whom the unresolved nature of Annie's murder lurks right under his attempt to keep up appearances, is electrified by the mere prospect of finding a possible lead. The Finnish-Norwegian woman who, according to Johan's account, merely gave him a ride out of town, may have crossed paths with the Lobber murderer. If so, she might be able to provide the missing pieces, not only in the Lobber case, but to Annie's untimely death. Annie, as everybody in town now acknowledges, was probably killed, because of her persistent—and maybe too successful-- attempt at

resolving the Lobber slaughtering. Enlivened by the prospect of resolving the matter, Birger enthusiastically joins Johan on his trip to Hofstaedter's city. Johan is of mixed feelings. Hard as he tries to cover up his real motive, he nevertheless gets sea-sick, drunk, and suffers insomnia. The journey holds many surprises, far from all of which dawn on Johan during the moment of their occurrence. Hofstaedter inhabits "a late 18th century block, weighty and impressive, untouched by the light and sea-blown classicism which had greeted (Johan and Birger) when they embarked " (369). "*In diesen heil'gen Hallen* " fills the rooms. Entering her apartment, Johan notices that it is as if rooted in another era :

> Everything in the place was old and impressive Johan reckoned it was not the professor's parents who had furnished the apartment, but more likely her grandparents They squeezed their way past a vast baroque cupboard in the hall, sabres and pistols hanging on the wall, paintings in heavy carved gilt frames of dark-green landscapes in which only a silvery white streak of a river or a foaming waterfall was distinguishable
>
> The professor herself, was a gruff woman with short dark hair, streaked with white like a badger's She was wearing a black and white cotton dress of modernistic design with a zip down the front, a kind of tent, the body underneath shapeless Johan thought she looked rather frightening and felt awkward in this magnificent, gloomy apartment
>
> She took them into a room which appeared to be a library There was a sagging sofa with greenish-grey cushions covered with dog hairs There was no sign of a dog. (370)

Hofstaedter inhabits an enormous corpus of knowledge, tradition, and art. Like her body, it is big and bulging, to some extent badly defined, but undeniably weighty and impressive. No live dog has to make its presence for this woman to be associated with a faithful, priestly guardianship of what is considered sacred. While Birger proceeds with the interview, Johan slides down

into the hairy cushions, observing the environment. His gaze wanders aimlessly, but stops as soon as he discovers that the professor wears sandals :

> She had small, well-formed feet and seemed to have worn sandals a lot, for she had no bunions and her toes were classically straight and close together Johan fell silent
>
> ..From somewhere behind him, perhaps from the blue and white jar on the floor by the tiled stove, came a strong scent of lemony spices and dried petals
>
> She got up They had to rise from the sofa Johan made another attempt, but got stuck with something worse than a lack of words His throat closed He couldn't get a word out and made a hissing sound when he tried to speak, as if he were very hoarse Professor Hofstaedter laughed (371-73)

Late at night, Johan returns to Hofstaedter's apartment. The fifty-nine year old woman, now barefoot, smoking and drinking vodka, has been expecting him. She is no one but the seductress from Johan's past. He cannot but find her old and rather disgusting :

> He disliked the discoloration of her teeth by tobacco, and they were longer than he remembered. The gums had receded upwards, and her eyelids sagged heavily into deep yellow folds She wants to frighten, he thought He went on counting in his head, for he felt he had been swept into a labyrinthine game in which he was confronted with stereotyped figures demanding passwords There sat the Witch with the lovely feet (373-74)

At the time of the pick-up Hofstaedter had been in the process of researching mythologies concerning matrilineal societies. The event taking place at that house in the forest, she now recounts, was a reunion among the students formerly attending Amalie Clink's School for Girls in Trondheim. The Silver Fox was Hofstaedter's brother. Johan is annoyed with her for wrapping him up in words, when all he want to know is...what cannot be known.

> " I haven't come here to listen to all this," said Johan
>
> She went on talking away, her speech academically articulate. Not for a moment was she going to let him get any closer to her, and yet there was an intimacy between them. It wasn't—I know what you think. But—I feel what you feel. Like one flayed body against each other
>
> " Have a drink, " she said almost with affection. " the night is long."

At the time of their first encounter, eighteen years ago, both Ylja and Johan were on a detour neither could have anticipated. Ylja had been let down by a prospective lover, John Larue, the man who was killed at the Lobber. Driven by frustrated desire she left the village motel at some ungodly early hour. Ylja's encounter with John Larue was coincidental. That Johan's father struck down a neighbor on that very night, and caused Johan to flee, was mere chance. Ylja and Johan, in other words were not exactly *meant* to meet. And yet, the encounter came to greatly influence the rest of the course of Johan's life.

> " Did you know John Larue was handsome ? " she said
>
> She was no longer bothering to have secrets There was a bloodstained shirt between them It was a lie, but it was powerful and would work In a way, it was a pity that was needed, he thought.
>
> " Christ, how I suffered in that guest house with its knotted rugs and wood carvings all round me. When I realized they'd gone after all The streams running wildly up there, flowing over the marshlands And she had him there *You'd like to think lust is just chemical whims and itching*, Jukka dear. *But as you know, it is worse than that* She was as infatuated with him as I was Though fatally "
>
> " you reminded me of the deer hunter who saw Artemis naked He saw her in the middle of the day, in bright sunlight She turned him into a deer But he was still a human being inside, with a memory and guilt Though mute "
>
> " How did he manage to turn himself back again ? "
>
> " He didn't manage "
>
> " He was butchered by his fellow huntsmen All they saw was a deer In those damp Germanic forest sagas we are brought up with, the hunter sees the appealing eyes But in the dazzling white sunlight down there, they saw nothing Only prey.
>
> " You like stories, " he said, " you play with them "
>
> " So do you "
>
> She was making coffee in an old-fashioned percolator as she talked about Artemis, though not in the way she had during the gray night Now she was lecturing him.
>
> " For a long time it was thought the famous statue of Artemis of Ephesus had a huge burden of breasts That she bore her attribute of motherliness to excess Round, bun like, and fruitful... " Ylja put a plate in front of him On it lay a slice of ham at least five millimeters thick. It was moist and pink and interspersed with white fat There were segments of meat with something translucent between them Water ? Aspic ? She had fried an egg so carefully that it had hardly solidified, the yolk shimmering like oil.
>
> " Do you know what it was ? "
>
> He closed his eyes to avoid looking at the egg.
>
> " The feast of Artemis of Ephesus was celebrated by the priests castrating young bulls before her altar. They tied the scrotums together into a wreath That's

> what she wears around her neck and on her chest. Jukka. The virgin mother. Not a pleasant acquaintance. " (385)
>
> He was sick of her stories. And yet he felt like telling her she was right. Profound desire is not chemical. The soul is not a transformation of the ego. (368)

Hofstaedter does not reveal any lead of relevance for the unraveling of neither the Lobber event nor of Annie's murder. But she does offer some insight into the strange turns taken in life, when desire, lust and willpower, stray far and apart from the story-lines on which they thrive. Mythological and narrative truth-production, Hofstaedter informs Johan, cannot be pulled in and made to serve a sheltering function, at one moment, only to be discharged—their content to be ignored—as soon as a brighter form of enlightenment flashes through their fissures. The fact that myths, and other stories, never cover and capture the entire truth of experience, does not make them superfluous in an age of information and sexual liberation. It merely makes them inhabitable. Within these loosely fitted frameworks, Hofstaedter indicates, we may succeed in learning to accept the workings of human desire and destructiveness. Johan, for his part, in as much as he agrees with the essence of her message, sticks to a steadier scientific course. Enabling him to keep his head above water level, it also puts him temporarily in a position to contemplate Hofstaedter's insight from above. Yet, forced by circumstances, he eventually comes to reconciliation with the fact that no omniscient and uninvolved stance is never actually feasible.

> He busied himself with forecasts. He was tracking the movements of water-laden clouds driven by the winds. They usually came from the west out of the misty or surging and sunny Atlantic and moved on an easterly course. But they could swing at an angle of ninety degrees. That kind of thing happened. Usually he knew if they were going to be difficult to judge, but there were some he got wrong from the beginning. They made him feel superfluous. Not powerless or inadequate with all his assembled data. But superfluous. Unnecessary. Then it rained on his face and he

wondered about it in a way that could not in any way be called scientific (342)

## 2.0 THE RECOVERY OF A FEMALE SELF, ANNIHILATED IN THE MATERNAL REALM

### Cardinal

The ways in which the above feminist contributions to a mode of better listening intersect is illustrated with great subtlety and conviction by the pain suffered and the words spoken by those on the margin of coming into being. Some of these individuals, in the process of gaining subjective grounding are tangentially or temporarily psychotic. Others much less so. Two authors of autobiographical works, tell eloquently and differently about the experience of moving back and forth between psychotic and non-psychotic states of experience. Marie Cardinal and Ann E. Kaplan both went into temporary exile, either by fate or by choice. The severing of the connection with their mother tongue and thereby their bodily indwelling constituted a significant turning point in their lives. The re-discovery of their selves took place during one type of "talking cure" or an other. For one thing, the subject may, as most psychoanalysts say, come into being via acquisition of language. For another, language acquisition is more of a physical, inter-relational, pre- and post-oedipal affair than most have so far suspected. The literary accounts below serve to illustrate the point, that no matter the number of models we choose to apply as

readers and culture critics, an excess of significance always eludes interpretation. The issues that matter the most, so it seems, come to expression in the interplay between what is on and in between the lines, in the tone of voice, the sensible and tactile qualities conveyed by the texture. Constituting no actual analysis of the works in question, the piece that follows is intended to enlarge the horizon within which we operate when trying to get clear on what cannot be said, why that is so, and by what means it makes itself known anyway.

The French writer Marie Cardinal suffered a psychotic breakdown in early adulthood. It took nine years of psychoanalytic treatment for her to recover her body, mind and emotions, and to finally feel *real*. In *The Words to Say It*, she gives a semi-autobiographical account of her talking-cure. Step by step, she guides the reader into and through what seems at first a truly dark and impenetrable territory. Eventually, the female protagonist—called Marie--learns to distinguish between inner and outer reality, to draw some sort of a line between fact and fiction, past and present, words and to what they refer. Several key factors contribute to Marie's breakdown in *The Words to Say It*. One is her mother's incomplete mourning over Maries's older sister. Clinging to her dead daughter, the mother is absorbed by death and loathing of life. Another key factor is the timing of Marie's conception. Born at the end of the divorce proceedings between her parents, she comes to represent, in her mother's mind, the undesirability of the female fate. Marie's father, an ardent womanizer has

left the family for greener pastures. In the eyes of his daughter he is an eternal charmer. He gives her a hint of what it entails to be a desired woman, but that is all. Thus the girl is stuck with her melancholic mother. Cardinal's work suggests some highly intriguing connections between body, mind, affection and the ability to make sense of one's life. As long as these aspects have as yet to be sorted out, no integration can take place, she shows. And thus, no space is available for any genuine reflection. Totally incapable of separating her self from what her mother desires. Marie the girl turns into what her mother unconsciously needs her to be. She realizes her mother's unspoken wish in a highly remarkable fashion. Reaching adolescence she begins to bleed and does not stop till her nine-year psychoanalytical treatment reaches an end. Thus *The Words to Say It* depicts a female self as emerging from an extraordinarily complicated mother-daughter relationship, in which the child is at the mercy of the omnipotent mother's inability to control her rage. In *Devotion and Disorder: A Story of Addiction, Obsession and Maternal Love*, published nearly a decade later, Cardinal turns the tables. She here writes from the point of view of a mother whose addicted daughter cannot but let life slip through her fingers. The previously all powerful mother figure, in charge of life, suddenly is powerless and with little impact on her daughter's desire to survive. Without stating it explicitly, Cardinal's work suggests, that we must strive to read our ontological struggles from both sides simultaneously : that of the symbiotically dependent daughter, whose life depends on her mother's anchoring in reality, and that of the anxious and over

protective mother whose right to exist, and whose female identity, is experienced as hinging on her ability to breathe life into her daughter. As if...the transfer to an other of the ability to love and desire is the prerequisite for the mother's detachment, for her own subjective being.

At the beginning of her analysis Marie describes herself as a woman whose desire to move, to express her self, to take action and to think, is close to nil : "She was looking at the place where memories are intact, frozen in the past,"she says (*WS* 134). "During this period, I passed my exams, plunging into sexual life as one dives into water believed to be cold. I didn't take the liberty to swim in it according to my fantasies"(46). Educated, married, with children, she has no idea where her fantasies would take her, if anywhere. She was fixated on the "absurdity of existence," as she puts it. Ultimately her paralysis turns into madness. The bleeding that began to take control of her life in adolescence picks up speed and intensity, to the point where it governs her life. "Apart from my blood there was only fear," as she puts it. "Nothing else, and I could no more speak of it than think about it"(32).

Marie first breaks down in her late teens when, during a concert, she develops a panic attach. Shocked out of her wits, she immediately seeks her mother's consolation. The breakdown, it seems, is one of her final, desperate attempts at breaking through the mother's frozen facade. Marie receives the consolation she begged for, and more. Her mother perceives her child's madness

as a welcome proof that the two of them have finally been united in suffering. Now they are equal and of one piece :

> In the warmth of her attention, this complicity, this intimacy which she offered me that night, I understood that she had conferred death upon me at my birth, that what she wanted me to give back to her was death, that the bond between us, a bond I had tried so hard to discover, was death. This filled me with horror. (42)

The event is emblematic for the dynamics between the two: Marie repeatedly asks her mother to reassure her of her right to live. Her mother persistently refuses her appeal. Watching her mother arrive home late in the evening, after a day full of charity work, Marie recollects :

> While she was alone in the light of the kitchen, I saw her drink her white wine and I wanted to be the wine, to do her some good, to make her happy, to attract her attention. I promised myself that I would find her a treasure. I never stopped hoping that one day I would find something to make her still more happy and beautiful, something which would take away this lack of understanding between us, my inability--I never knew why--to satisfy her completely. (68-86)

> If she was capable of bittersweet or sometimes even harsh reflections on the living and the dead, it was the dead who were always the object of her affectionate interest. There was a complicity between my mother and decay, a taste for death which she did not try to hide: her room was lined with photographs of dead people. When she laid flowers on the graves of the poor, she did it kindly, as when she gave me a candy or smoothed back a lock of hair which had slipped onto my face. She tried to kill me off, she failed to deliver the blow. She mustn't have another chance. (91-95)

If her mother is a monster, in Marie's eyes, it is not because she has devoted herself to death. It is because she did not follow through on her wish to abort the life in her she did not desire. Her failure in acting on, and acting out, her death wish resulted in the mother's passing it on to her off spring (141).

Contrary to her devout mother, Marie never develops a capacity for religious devotion or a taste for self-sacrifice. The Order, the Other, and the Law make little sense to her. What she wishes, first and foremost is to gain a sense of

being connected to life. In consequence she turns to compulsive vomiting. Her mother—feeling that her daughter has refused her "love"—forces her sacrifice down her daughter's throat (73). Desperately starved for affection, and incapable of attracting any, the daughter thus attracts her mother's attention by reducing the dynamics between the two of them to a matter of love versus hate, life versus death.

Having internalized her mother's death wish, Marie can barely be said to have developed any form of interior space, not to mention life. Not yet anyone, not even on the verge of coming into being, whether in terms of identifying with the mother or in terms of appropriating her father's ability to make a difference. Marie is, in various meanings of the word, unborn. Her sense of still existing within the boundaries of her mother's unconscious comes to expression in her reflections on the maternal body. "It seems to me," she says, "that the Thing took root in me permanently when I understood that we were to assassinate Algeria... For Algeria was my real mother"(88). The child's inability to distinguish between one type of containment and an other is outspoken. She insists that one maternal body or another hold her. And yet, her rage that no such thing takes place measures up to a full blown assassination. Her father country (patria) is submerged by maternal corporeality. Her mother tongue remains insignificant. From within this desert of fear and deprivation, Marie is sucked into her mother's depression. Understanding at a tender age that she was the fruit of a hostile relationship and by her mother perceived as forced labor she "suddenly grows

old"(53). What is happening, in fact, is that the girl-child, regardless of her emotional immaturity, begins to assume the role of the mother, while her mother regresses into more primitive forms of infancy.

Marie's childhood universe was predominantly female and yet, she was never granted the opportunity to develop as a female individual. Under the influence of her determined yet emotionally fluid mother, Marie eventually entirely loses her ability to even conceive of her father playing a role in her life. "Fortunately," she says, "because of the divorce and my mother's work, I didn't really have a family life" (90). "I knew nothing of the male universe," she continues. "For me, Father is an abstract word without meaning." And she elaborates :

> Since Father goes with Mother, and those two persons in my life are unconnected, far from one another ... I was on the mother planet, and, at regular but distant intervals, we would intersect the path of the father planet ... I know that I know nothing of the paternal side of men, if indeed there is one ... He had only the dimensions my mother had given him. My father is a complete stranger, never part of my life. (60-62)

Occasionally her biological father would make an impressive appearance. Dressed like a dandy he would treat his daughter like a "little lady," reminiscent of the way he behaved towards the numerous women of leisure he entertained at his house. Never part of her life when he was alive, Marie's father only comes to take part in her life story following his death. "That is where the solitude began," she says about her experience of his funeral :

> This man I didn't know, of whom I had seen so little. He was, without my wishing it, however, my only ally...Today I knew where the emptiness came from: I no longer had the certainty of pleasing someone no matter what I did, as well as having been deprived of tenderness. (59-60)

Regardless of his elusiveness Marie's father had given her a taste of what it means to feel desirable, to feel female, to be a subject. Many years later, beginning with her analysis, she realizes that even if her father had been portrayed as a traitor by Marie's mother, he was not the one to betray his daughter and put her life at risk. She begins to speak of her mother : " My mother had led me astray to such a point that I was no longer conscious of what she had done so profoundly and so well, nor did I understand," she says (67). Not till a decade of talk and tears has run into the river of time does her malstroem dry up. "Where I dreaded to discover terror, torture," she recollects, "I discovered a child's fear. " With the disappearance of the mortified child a new terrain opens up inside of and around her. She regains her health " her body, pleasure, the night, other people." She feels intoxicated by the flavor of life, discovers make up, perfume, dresses, jewelry (159).

However, her ecstasy is brief. The Thing, including the bleeding and the emotional terror makes its return. Feeling like a puppet, a marionette, a robot, or a doll—desiring no one and nothing--Marie is overwhelmed by a wish to die. Instead she gets drunk. Feeling 0 and 34 years old at one and the same time, the now middle aged woman is as if no where and no one. It is from *within* this emptiness, that she discovers her own violent rage. And it is *out* of the emptiness that her self finally emerges. "This sudden revelation of my violence is," she tells. "I think, the most important single moment in my psychoanalysis," she says. "It was the greatest nourishment for the Thing." And she elaborates :

> With the awareness of my violence there came at the same time an awareness of my vitality, gaiety, and generosity. I was almost complete (213)

> Hereafter, slowly, I was going to begin to discover my self. The treatment terminated when I felt capable of taking responsibility for my thoughts and actions, whatever they might be. (175)

Her growing sense of having an outline of her own breaks down the barriers she previously experienced in relation to the word. All of a sudden, and as if automatically, she starts writing a notebook, later to be transcribed into the semi-autobiographical novel. Her words flow. The "speaking-cure" has revived her. Granted, the establishment of a certain distance--thus difference-- was necessary. It enabled Marie to look at and reflect upon herself: To see herself as a human being, and to put a distance to others' desire to capture and constrain her forces of life. A sense of differentiation between herself and Marie as conceived of by her mother, and her self and Marie as experienced during childhood, had to evolve. This did not primarily come about as a result of the institution of the Name of the Father, i.e., of a strong sense of separation and difference means of difference. Rather, it emerged from Marie's discovery of the power of the forces within, and her ability to channel these differently. The presence of deadly rage inside of her, no longer equals death. It has come to be experienced, partly understood, and articulated as a force developed in response to an accumulation of non-differentiated experience. Thus, the Marie emerging from the analysis, is capable of moving with ease in the world of others, and as well, of moving others by means of her words.

Marie's coming to awareness of her hatred of her mother, and thus her interior other, brought about the recognition that her life had been governed by

an intense urge to kill. To kill the fear that drove her to disconnect from her environment, to kill herself for being too scared to live, to kill the femaleness which brought her together with her mother, to kill her mother's inability to love. Ultimately, it is about the wish to kill the woman who took her daughter's life at the very same time as she granted her a body. Marie's incessant bleeding spoke on behalf of a life that had suffered a soul murder. It also worked as a cry for a father who could have, should have, rescued his child from the fate of being brought into the world as a failed abortion.

## 2.1 THE DISCOVERY OF AFFECTION FOR A MOTHER TONGUE. BEHIND AN ALL CONSUMING INFATUATION WITH THE LAW **Kaplan**

Cardinal focuses, among other things, on the female subject's trouble associated with coming to inhabit a mother tongue, while also needing to separate her self from the maternal body. Alice Kaplan concentrates on the various ways in which other languages may provide temporary protection from what the subject cannot cope with when on home ground. The adoption of an other tongue creates a distance between one's self and one's wounds, she shows. The pain belonging to one's past, must eventually be faced up to. But working things through from within a second tongue enables one to do it from an off-angle.

Kaplan lost her father early in life, a fact to which she subscribes her obsession with French later in life. French was the language her father reserved for his secret knowledge, a knowledge which, in the end, might have cost his life. For Kaplan's part, her self-immersion in French initially serves the purpose of postponing the mourning she had to go through, following her father's death. Later it comes to work as a zone of transition; enabling her to move from a state of emotional paralysis, during which she clings to rules and regulations, to a state of greater flexibility, allowing her to belong to a number of worlds at one and the same time. Since she ends up making a living as a French teacher, French ultimately "saves" Kaplan's life. What may be one of the most remarkable things about Kaplan's journey is the slight discrepancy between her author-focus on the role played by her acquisition of a second language, and yet another Law, and the deep desire exhibited by the fictionalized Kaplan, to return to the maternal realm.

Alice Kaplan was born into a first-generation American middle class Jewish family in Minneapolis. Her father, a lawyer, had been part of the American prosecution team at the 1945 Nuremberg War Crimes trials. Kaplan grew up with the impression that he was connected to a world more significant than that of the females in the family, a world consisting of "important men in suits and uniforms," who dealt with good an evil itself (*French Lessons* 27). Her father never spoke of what he had witnessed. His alcoholism and his disregard for serious health problems spoke on his behalf, of feelings of guilt and

impotence. He dies at night, from a heart attack, on Kaplan's eight year's birthday. Having been informed of the state of affairs, Kaplan drifts off into sleep, dreaming that she is off to "Yew Nork." Her world has been turned upside down. The loss of her father who used to applaud her mastery of language, makes words seem useless, meaningless.

Kaplan's autobiography is introduced by a recollection of the thrill she got from parroting adult words as a three year old. Learning by heart sentences whose content was incomprehensible to her, and reciting them for her parents, she managed to trigger great applause, in particular from her dad. It made the otherwise serious, silent and somewhat troubled man laugh heartily. "What a miracle," Kaplan recollects. "I didn't even understand the sentence and it still worked!...I amused him, as if I were a grown up. All it took was saying grownup words"(4).

Ensuing her father's death the adolescent Kaplan finds a father substitute in Mr.D, the father of a female class mate of hers and a true francophile. Mr. D is the owner of a big Minneapolis department store, an art collector and very knowledgeable of French language, culture and style. Once he asks Kaplan to serve as his translator, and she lives off the event for years : "I lived off that idea for a long time," she says, "that my French was better than Mr. D's and that I could be useful to him because of it "(63). Her subsequent adoption of French works as a means, she indicates, to re-experience life at the entry-point into language. It is a way of reconnecting with her deceased father, of becoming an

object of his desire and of becoming (like) him. Importantly, it is a means to return to a point in time before her recognition of sexual difference. "Learning French was connected to my father," she says. "Because French made me absent the way he was absent, and it made me an expert the way he was an expert. French was also a response to my adolescence, a discipline to cover up the changes in my body I wanted to hide "(203-4).

At boarding school in France, as an adolescent, she assumes the disciplinary regime of the institution with zest. French grammar comes to serve as her inner structure and an outer outline which, nevertheless eradicates her sexual nature :

> I wanted life to be the same every day, and mostly it was Pam and I went on a diet together, the " grand regime " We wrote down what we ate every day . I used the same note-book for food and conjugations I wrote " Force de volonte " (force of will) across my notebook, the way other girls wrote " Sussie loves Ralph " I grew thinner I ate French. I had come from a house where the patterns had broken down and the death that had broken them was not understood Now I loved the study hall and the marble floor because they made me feel hard and controlled and patterned, the harder I felt the more I felt the sorrowful world behind me grow dim and fake and powerless In my stomach was an almost constant moaning, as though I were hollowed out inside Before I got up in the morning I ran my hand over my hip bone, to feel my outlines (53)

Basing its pedagogical principles on those of the old Third Republic, Knowledge, at the school, is conceived of as a concrete body to be demonstrated and mastered :

> Memorization, copying, repeating, taking words down in dictation they are the practices I excelled in Don't be original, learn from ready-made reality ready-to-hand At home I was the worst in sports , here, miraculously, I was good It felt like my life had been given to me to start over French had saved me I was always watching and pretending, pretending and watching. (57, 92)

More than Kaplan's father's premature death fed into her later obsession with French. The language which had contained her father's secrets in life, also holds the key to his death. Immediately following his death, Kaplan goes through his drawers. She stumbles over a collection of documentary photographs, used as court evidence of the atrocities that had taken place in the concentration camps during the war. The little girl is spellbound. The adult Kaplan retrospectively makes a link between this overwhelming impression and her later fascination with intellectuals and their oftentimes darker human side. The political knowledge and human insight that her father had withheld from her, he nevertheless passed on in terms of personal experience. Bringing the photographs to primary school, determined to show them to her class mates, she recollects :

> I wanted to take all of them, especially the upsetting ones, where you could see the death right close up, the way flesh hung off the skeleton, the hip bones that looked like shelves. I believed in facts. I believed my friends had no right to live without knowing about these picture... None of them knew what I knew, I thought. I hated them for it... Evoking those pictures with my eight-year-old self-consciousness, the horror came back, the horror of being too young to live with this much horror, too young to have a dead father (197)

His absence, she suggests, created a force field within which steered her in a particular scholarly direction. "His image, silent and distant with headphones over his ears, a founding image for my own work." Pondering her incessant circling around intellectual men and their political crimes, their innocent or noble or charming surfaces and their shameful undersides, she asks : " What does it mean for a Jewish intellectual to work on fascism ? Is my role that of prosecutor or that of a spy ? What produces my energy for this kind of work ?

What is in it for me ? "(190). Kaplan writes her dissertation of French fascist intellectuals.

The trials of puberty she copes with by means of creating a substantial distance between her self and her environment. Repeatedly drifting off and fantasizing of being rescued by some male, she looses touch with those around her. "I didn't know what age I was. Chronologically I was twelve, but I corresponded more closely to ... age sixteen," she says. Emotionally arrested by her father's death, she feels like her body has leaped ahead of her, leaving the real Kaplan behind. Losing interest in her environment, in her friends, in learning anything at school. Kaplan repeatedly slides into a state of absent minded dreaminess. While others discuss matters of reality, Kaplan drifts off, fantasizing of "a man in a suit coming to rescue me from the schoolroom " (37) Eventually, her mother suggests that she leave her home town.

Kaplan departs, destination boarding school in Switzerland. And this is where she learns to replace the disorder, excessive fat, sexuality, and violence, associated with life, with grammatical correctness, skin and bone

> I had learned a whole new language, but it was a language for covering pain, not for expressing it felt safe and warm with my French family, protected from myself French provides a counter language to the "thudding " and " loud " American English which sounds whiny has no rhythm and associates lack of self control... When I spoke, I felt like I was outside my own body, listening to somebody else, and translating. I felt small and neat and the people around me looked messy (52-53)

In France she becomes involved with a French machismo, the incorporation of the myth of the Latin lover. Regardless of the fact that the two evidently have little in common, Kaplan pursues him persistently. She wants her

lover to pass on to her his full-blooded French-ness. Fantasizing about crawling into his skin and breathe his French-ness she aspires to achieve one thing in particular : André's body. André's rebuttal of her advances, explained as being due to her accent and lack of familiarity with French culture, does not discourage Kaplan, however. If prevented from accessing a French body by some human being's refusal to let her in, she may as well try her luck in a field in which passion—supposedly—plays no role (86-94). Kaplan becomes a student of literature and a disciple of De Man. A Freshman in 1971, during the height of the Vietnam years and the import of Eastern philosophy into American college life, Kaplan finds herself unresponsive to the encouragement to "be in the Now" :

> "I don't want to be here now ! " I told my roommate I hated the idea of living in the moment. (75)

Kaplan's disinclination to be fully present coincides perfectly with her choice of supervisor as well as her dissertation topic. Her aim was to demonstrate that French intellectuals were as prone as anyone to fascist longings and desire, something which made them no less human. "I was dying to show how screwed-up intellectuals could get about truth," she says, "crowds, wanting to be part of the Motherland, and following the voice of the leader" (161) De Man, her supervisor, incidentally was too busy propagating his theory of disinterestedness, to ever show much of an interest in Kaplan's work. Who would have suspected,

Kaplan asks, that De Man's elaborate theory and intellectual drive, were based on unresolved personal-political problems and issues of guilt.[1]

"Don't confuse any of this literary theory with your lives," De Man said. Kaplan was thrilled, and many others took him at his word (166). Representing reality was, according to De Man's deconstructive approach, a highly problematic endeavor. "Deconstructive insight," Kaplan relates, was about systematically charting the polarities and mapping the systems of oppositions in the language of a text. It was about tracing the most sensual and consequently most powerful. It was about finding and highlighting the instances where language breaks down. It was about practicing a disinterested close analysis, about focusing on rhetorical structures to the disadvantage of historical contexts. " All that talk about 'margins' [that became in vogue about fifteen years later]--we knew we were at the center of intellectual life," she states. She and her fellow De Man students were convinced that they were the carriers of a new way of reading, more advanced, thorough, and questioning than anything that had gone before. Reading came to be about "keeping person-ness away" (148-73).

When De Man was dying from cancer in 1984, he kept up appearances. Showing a "flawlessly brave" attitude, he took an interest in his illness similar to

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[1] After De Man's death it was discovered that he had written literary and political columns for a collaborationist Belgian newspaper during the war. Some of his writings were pro-Nazi. And one of his key lines were that if French Jewish novelists were sent to a Jewish colony, European literary life would not suffer. The revelation of De Man's collaboration encouraged Kaplan to reevaluate her work on fascist intellectuals. Her conclusion both in relation to her topic and her personal professional choice is that De Man's contention that life and literary theory should be kept apart is inconceivable. De Man himself was of Flemish origin, educated in Europe. He was deeply interested in the differences (and similarities) between the French and the German national character and he also showed great interest in autobiography. The genre, he claimed, proved the very points of deconstruction: the more one tries to confess, the more one lies (Kaplan 1993: 173).

the interest he took in texts. Calmly, cleverly, and as if his illness belonged to somebody else, he would dissect it (166). De Man too, of course, had taken refuge in a foreign world. He used his newly acquired tongue to sever the connection to this homeland and his youth. Kaplan was driven to, but in the end did not, repeat his mistake.

Reflecting for a moment, on her need to dwell in another language and to prepare the ground for working through her problems in her own tongue, Kaplan briefly refers to the German Anna O, the woman who coined the "talking cure." The case story of Anna O was, as may be recalled, the groundbreaking Breuer study which was to inspire a vast amount of related work by Freud (*Studies on Hysteria*). Breuer gave up on pursuing the issue any further. He even postponed the publication of the story for many years, something which led Freud to suspect that Anna's amorous interest in him was reciprocal. Nevertheless Breuer's work helped lay one of the corner stones for what was to become "psychoanalysis." It also introduced the unconscious in the sense it was to be used, and elaborated upon, in Freud's psychoanalytic writings. The story of Anna O introduces us to the earliest psychoanalytic method of treatment, that is "catharsis." Hypnosis, followed by a recollection of what had occurred to the individual in question appeared to clear the psyche of accumulated tension, to restore calm and to reinstate serenity, at least for a while. In hysteria affect evoked in response to a traumatizing event remains in an accumulated and suffocated state. The memory of the experience is cut off from consciousness,

which is not to say that it is "forgotten." Affectively the impression remains, a fact which comes to expression in terms of the production of *mnemic symbols*, symbols of suppressed memory (Freud and Breuer, *SH* 151). Mnemic symbols, due to their disconnection from any other conscious content, are surface manifestations, bodily manifestations, and more often than not incomprehensible. The cathartic method works, according to this theory, by bringing into consciousness the experience which caused hysteria in first place, and thereby enabling the individual to finally re-act, get rid of the affect associated with the long buried impression.

Anna O was twenty one at the onset of her illness, unusually intelligent, says Breuer, remarkably imaginative and exceptionally creative. She was, however, sexually strikingly immature and resistant to hypnotic suggestion (Freud and Breuer, *SH* 74). When her father, "of whom she was passionately fond," fell ill and died Anna O lost her grip on reality. One part of her personality continued living with her father. Another part managed to move on and look back at his death with sadness. Not surprisingly Anna O complained of feeling torn by the two selves. As time went by, she grew partially physically paralyzed, developed severe speech disturbances and, finally, became anorexic. Following a brief period of complete dumbness, Anna O's gift of speech returned. To everybody's surprise, the German woman spoke English. Breuer made the ingenious observation that getting Anna O to talk about the things from which she is ordinarily inhibited from dealing with restored calm and

reduced her symptoms. It seemed possible to short cut some of her defenses, in other words, as long as it could be done in an alien tongue. It worked, as Anna O jokingly commented, like a "chimney sweeping" (*SH* 77-78, 83). The more Anna O remembered, the more well balanced did she grow. What could not be recalled, Breuer told, had to be acted out. Thus, on the last day of her treatment, Anna O's father's sickroom is re-staged. At the mere sight, Anna O reproduces the hallucination which supposedly was at the root of her illness. Immediately afterwards, she was not only free of any symptoms, but also once again capable of speaking German (SH 95).

The similarities between Kaplan's story and that of Anna O are striking. In addition to the most obvious ones, such as losing a beloved father and seeking comfort in a foreign tongue, both pay scarce attention to their maternal origin. The loss of a father overshadows their ego, as Freud would phrase it, and the mother is reduced to a ghostlike peripheral presence. In Kaplan's case, her maternal origin exhibits a linguistic rigidity, to some extent serving as a defense against depression. "Mother still corrects my English grammar," Kaplan mentions. "She is against waste in language. Her sentences are short and blunt, yet ripe with innuendo and the promise that more is being said than meets the ear. Now I write in the staccato Midwestern style she has taught me" (*FF* 7). Her grandmother, on the other hand, has partly lost her mind. In consequence, she mixes Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, English. Kaplan, reminding her self that her grandmother has retained her capacity for distinguishing between one linguistic

mode and an other, nevertheless wonders about her own state of mind. Has she in fact never recovered from her need to take flight ? Did it become inscribed, laid down as a structure of her very being, by her meticulous and persistent attempt at getting another tongue to speak in her mouth? Kaplan's father, in particular his absence, greatly influenced her passionate investment in another language. Yet, the question remains, was Kaplan's efforts in effect driven by a need to get closer to home, that is to reconnect with a mother for whom her mother tongue has lost all meaning? Were Kaplan's endeavors about trying to replace a Father whose primary role was to make her feel like a woman. Or, were they rather about trying to get under his skin, so as to replace him as a partner, object of desire, and man of the world, in her mother's eyes ?

> The mode of each language was in place (Kaplan tells) The change from one language to another, from ritual to conversation, was all the communication she could produce Nanny had surfeit memories, but there was no connection between one memory and the next. "Il n'y avait pas de suite dans ses idées " Why does that sentence come to me in French, out of the blue ? No other sentence will do I wonder why I switch like that—why I suddenly need to think in French... French, for me, is not just an accomplishment It's a need I wonder if I could end up like her (13-14)
>
> Somewhere out there, somewhere else, is my father This, says Lacan, is the child's inauguration into language, the symbolic order and the law But it is mothers, traditionally, who teach language, who listen and correct, it is mothers who are the first to hear new words It is mothers who break or heal a child's tongue (91)

Kaplan's turn from the train of poststructuralist thinking is unraveled in an almost imperceptible fashion. Over time, a number of literary encounters greatly influence the otherwise post-structural mindset of Kaplan. Each and all of them are characterized by life getting in the way for a pure deconstructive approach. At boarding school she reads *The Great Gatsby* and finds herself crying as the story comes to an end. Identifying with Gatsby because, as she

says. "I had spent a whole year inventing a myth about my own rebirth and isolation." Gatsby reveals to her that she herself had not been able to see and say the most obvious about her life :

> I was afraid to go home. I was afraid of living alone in the big house with my mother who was sick and unhappy. I was dreading the charade of happiness I had learned a whole new language at boarding school but it was a language for covering pain, not expressing it. I could feel the things about Gatsby and his loneliness that I couldn't feel about myself I felt sorry for him and protective (58)

At university she is introduced to an entirely new way of approaching literature, a way of *entering*, not necessarily explaining, a poem. Ann Smock did not drop names, she says. She entered the poem she was teaching, interacted with it, let it leave an impression on her. Baffled by her discoveries, inside of literature, Ann Smock came forth with the suggestion that literature is essential to survival and impossible to understand. "Literature lies and tells the truth about lying," and, "Writing is the opposite of making something present " (75-76). Ann Smock shows Kaplan how to take literature both more and less seriously and also how to get a feel for what drives her own research.

Incapable of mourning her dead father—while in the company of her depressed mother—Kaplan split her world in two. One part contained the physical brutality and inhumane behavior which devoured her father from within. It was the world of revenge and destruction. But it was also the world of the flesh and of uncontrollable desire. Wishes from which Kaplan could never entirely distance her self. Her work with fascist intellectuals produced a bridge

over the gap—between brutality and passion—and somehow endowed murderous rage with redeeming qualities. The other, split off, part of her world, had to serve as a refuge from the bewildering business of adulthood, sexuality, and human emotion. It enabled Kaplan to feel pure and stream-lined and without needs. A necessity indeed, given the pain and resentment tearing her inside apart at the time. Eventually, her writing down the story her father never told enabled her to put herself in his shoes, to appropriate his secret, and thereby to make him come to life in her (own) words. The missing pieces of her own story thus fell into place. Resigning from trying to get another "patria" to adopt her, she returns to her mother country and tongue. She summarizes her course through life as such :

> No one asks the child what is going on, and the child sees, and listens, and engraves those memories and those people one after another in a private language. It is only later--maybe it's too late-- that the pain of those memories is brought forward to the present time of writing . . a commuted sentence . I know now that my passion for French helped me to put off what I needed to say, in English, to the people around me
>
> Why have I chosen to live in not-quite-my-own-language, in exile from myself, for so many years—why have I gone through school with a gag on, do I like not really being able to express myself? . . The fact that [in a foreign tongue] we don't have as many words is forcing us to say more The simplicity of our communication moves us, we're outside of cliche, free of easy eloquence, some deeper ideas and feelings make it through the mistakes and shine all the more through them
>
> Speaking a foreign language is, for me and my students, a chance for growth, for freedom, a liberation from the ugliness of our received ideas and mentalities
>
> I'm grateful to French . . for teaching me that there is more than one way to speak, for giving me a role, for being the home I've made from my own will and my own imagination. . .
>
> What would it have been like to rebel against a real father, instead of inventing an imaginary one ? (206-16)

Kaplan's tale shows that, in the end any tale, even her own, benefits from a deconstructive approach. Reading Kaplan along with and against the grain of her own train of explanation only adds further volume to her already layered

story. "It may be a book about how she worked to gratify her absent father," as a reviewer once put it, "but is one assuredly written in her mother tongue" (Sturrock, " Doing what doesn't come naturally "). Indeed, Kaplan demonstrates that, even if she strove hard to speak a language that would please her Father, she inadvertently ended up following in the steps of her maternal grandmother. That Kaplan's mixing and merging of linguistic competence did not lead to her losing her mind, is evident. She "got her act together," at last.

## The price to pay for immaculate conception. *BLACKWATER*

Foucault and Lacan conceptualize the ways in which the subject's body of desire comes into being. No matter the opaqueness of the connection between this socially produced "body," and the subject's more general affective state of being, "a body it is," persists Lacan. Foucault's theory in practice rules out the subject's capacity for experiencing genuinely authentic feelings of his own. Lacan's model excludes forms of desire and attachments, which are not driven by the a need for recognition as a sexed subject. The feminist theorists above, along with Cardinal and Kaplan, add some meat to this rather austere framework for embodied subjectivity. The acquisition of true subjectivity, in Minh-ha's words, hurts. It does not injure in the Lacanian sense, which predicts that the

subject cannot but come out on the other side of the mirror-stage, ontologically speaking, in a splintered shape. Change and the movement toward greater self assertion are physically, emotionally, and intellectually painful. Minh-ha claims, because they rupture the subject's habitual perception of things. And neither perception, conceptualization, or reflection take place in an imaginary body, or, in a body made up of signifiers. The recognition of one's less distorted self, not only creates discomfort Miller argues, it makes us react psychic-somatically in the most profound sense. As female subjects we may have been granted a great many bodies of desire, few of which ever made us feel as unsettled as when we now encounter our selves. Whether pain and embarrassment serve as sufficient indicators of untainted emotion, may be questionable, inserts Felman. But we know for sure that we are on the track of our secret story-line when we repeatedly get wound up in its loose ends, as they occur in the external. Our hidden story-line, it is worth while keeping in mind, has given shape not merely to our sexual desire, but also in particular to the kind of language we make use of to express our innermost psychic and somatic states of being.

In *Blackwater*, neither the Lobber event, nor Annie's case, are ever entirely put to rest. Birger and Johan's encounter with Hofstaedter did not throw much light on the matter. Spurred by the revival of his role as investigator, however, Birger persistently pursues the slightest clue. He is reminded of Annie's Memory Lane project. It had been her philosophy that individually

knitted together stories both depend on markers in the exterior, and leave their mark on the environment. Thus, no crime could be committed, she speculated, without the criminal leaving behind traces of a more or less material form. Her understanding of the ways in which things are interconnected had caused her sufficient trouble in the Blackwater community, for her to shelve her ideas. Yet, the early morning, when Annie sees her child embraced by the suspected killer, she begins to turn her memory lane philosophy into practice. Step by step, Annie moves ahead, picking up one possibly significant sign after an other, no matter its apparent lack of importance. In due time she actually gets on the track of the killer. The one thing she forgets to take into consideration, however, is the possibility that somebody else may be as determined at keeping the crime unresolved, as Annie is at clearing it up. While pursuing the murderer, Annie herself left numbers of traces behind. Birger embarks on the tedious work of following up on these. His persistence pays off. What he uncovers is that no one but Johan's mother, Gudrun, is Annie's murderess. Gudrun, like Ylja, is affiliated with the great Mothers of Nordic Mythology. Yet, she differs from Ylja in one particular aspect. Whereas Ylja's name places her in the company of the Goddesses of Mother nature in general, Gudrun's relates her to "Gudrun Sigurdsdottir." Gudrun Sigurdsdottir, as depicted in several Icelandic sagas, was driven by motherly love, not to protect human life, but rather to defend her own. The mythological Gudrun kills with cold blood, so as to save her family. So does the contemporary Gudrun. What the latter has not quite understood, is that time

has moved on. A pattern of behavior, that may have been honorable at her namesake's time is no longer so. Living in the past Gudrun inevitably severs her connection to the present.

Johan, of all people, ends up having to keep watch over Gudrun while they are waiting for her to get arrested. Time is running out for both. Finally, during these their last moments in "freedom," do mother and son begin to talk.

> [Gudrun] had seen her child threatened. So had Annie Raft. As soon as the two met, danger loomed...(419)
>
> "How could you have believed [I was the murderer]?" he whispered.
> "We didn't talk about it all that much. No one at home wanted to say it straight out. We were trying to help you."
> "I thought Torsten was fed up with me. I'm not even his son."
> "*What* did you say?"
> She was looking at him as if she had never really seen him before. Her eyes slid over his pullover and tight leather trousers. She snorted again, almost imperceptibly this time. But it was ridicule. He could see every shift in her expression.
> "Antelope trousers," she said. "Aren't they? Leather trousers. Made of South American antelope skin. Cost four thousand Kronor. Oh, so you thought you were Sami? Totally? I ought to have known. The way you carried on about our people's old sacrificial places and all that."
> "You have never been right down in the shit"...
> "We had to go to the privy to speak our language. When I went to school, they made you ashamed of being a Lapp, like having vermin or tuberculosis. And we didn't own any reindeer. Dad was a drunk. I can't stand the way people are now collecting the Sami songs and all that. Singing and singing. No ancient places of sacrifice. That isn't what we went around thinking about. But electricity! And patterned sweaters and a stainless-steel sink. Even your aunt Sakka dreamed Swedish dreams"...
> "Sakka did a complete about-face as best she could when she married Per Dorj. Borrowed a silver collar for the wedding. Got herself a Sami costume, though it wasn't real wool. Now she is on every single committee there is and Per is chair of the Sami village. But that doesn't make the sun turn."
> "I suppose they do the best they can," [Johan] said. "Hanging on. Like everyone living there...They try to live a life that somehow connects to the past. And most of them want to remember. Not everyone builds roads for the company. Not everyone is involved in turning this into the Area."
> "Yes, they are."
> She said it so quietly, he had to lean over toward her.
> "Yes everyone. You too. And Annie Raft, though she thought she was so much better than the rest of us. But all the same, she was involved in it."
> "Did you hate her."
> What a word. She didn't reply.
> But she does hate. I have never dared disturb my hatred. She touched on

hers, and that was enough. It had been sleeping so lightly

What shall we do with this hatred of ourselves—of devastation? What shall we do? It fills our mouths Rotten Bitter A taste we don't recognize An unfamiliar vomit...

" It's over, Johan A few hundred people The northern Sami language will probably remain for a while. Nostalgia, it's called, so I've learned That's all right for cultured people. Those who write and dance and carry on. But the reindeer owners drive their herds with scooters these days That's not actually Sami culture It's crude. It's Swedish. They search and dive with helicopters and move the creatures to summer grazing in long distance helicopters. They're living another life now. We're living another life. But we're alive. "

" You took part in rejecting the old life, " said Johan.

" Yes, I took part. From shame From compulsion. From a longing for something else as well. I was only human ; perhaps human first and foremost. Even a Lapp can long for electricity But you're a Sami In antelope trousers "

" You don't have to mock me, " he said. " I believed it " (428-29)

Gudrun was lying with her eyes closed. The tension had gone from her thin face, now smoothed and childish. He could well imagine the girl who had read magazines, studying the pink-complexioned women with their nair en boutfant and in rigid waves. Sakka had also told him how they had read about film stars and tried to resemble them. They had gone for Ava Gardner They had wet their hair with pilsner and rolled it tightly onto Grandmother's chamois-leather curlers. They had painted their mouths with a moistened red crayon.

Sakka had laughed at it all But [Gudrun], with her terrible gravity, was now lying on Annie Raft's sofa under a gray blanket, looking as if nothing had happened to her since then. (431)

# PART SEVEN

## Walking a tightrope, and tracing a private connection

Regardless of how one looks at it, what appeared to be a relatively simple issue in the opening pages of this thesis, has grown increasingly complex. One of the primary assumptions guiding the inquiry was, that the postmodern celebration of the general "schizo" cultural make-up is based on a shallow insight into human functioning. As a result, the encouragement coming from certain quarters of the field, that we all loosen up and become more playful, was received with great skepticism. No source of reference, drawn on in this thesis, classifies as hard science. Even human Ethology, as aptly demonstrated elsewhere by Donna Haraway, retrieves the kind of research results, which support the (hi)stories of evolution subscribed to by the scientists in charge. Nevertheless, the indications regarding human functioning, as arising from the field of psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sensory anthropology, human ethology, neurology and bio-socio-psychology, and—of course—literature, are here viewed as providing sufficient support for the argument that the postmodern stance is in need of some form of modification. If the contemporary "schizo" has difficulties reinventing himself, then this is partly so because he is generally incapable of engaging in acts of symbolization, but also and essentially because he falls short

in distinguishing between various *modes* of symbolization. The body-oriented play forms appear to meet at least two fundamental needs: they enable the contemporary child of the "crisis of representation" to get in touch with, and so some extent realize, layers of experience for which he finds no words. They provide him with the opportunity to discover and establish some sort of an interior-exterior connection, something which is grossly underestimated in our culture. Thus, they help him break free of the sense of suffocation caused by the current state of "unlimited" opportunities. On the other hand, bodily preoccupation may also be driven by a desperate need to *disconnect*. This may be where the pathologies of our age come across most strongly. In as much as it is a hazardous affair to try to evaluate this from the outside, a great deal of contemporary body preoccupation does seems driven by the fear of making far reaching connections. Thus, in many cases, as also illustrated by the body modification and mutilation overview, bodily play provides the subject with a means of hiding from the world, of anesthetizing him self, in other words, of undermining his sense of being. It is far from cut and dry *when* bodily preoccupation, whether of a playful or of an obsessive nature, reinforces mental disorder or rather provides the subject with a form of transitional zone and object. It is therefore not evident whether the contemporary turn towards the body is to be understood as a pattern of behavior in consequence of the flatness of our culture, or, as a reaction *against* this very condition. It has been suggested above that language works on the body in ways differing from those proposed by

post-structural thinkers. If that is the case, then language may serve to put the subject's shoulders back underneath his head. However, it takes a certain minimum degree of ontological certainty for the subject to be able to juggle language according to his needs.

What follows below fills in some of the blanks with which we are left. Arnold Modell puts forward the theory that the subject is neuro-psychologically wired to develop an inner *private self*. It is from within this space, Modell argues, that the subject processes psychic and somatic life experience and thus *creates* a deeply meaningful story-line out of his life. When without the opportunity to move inside this space, his relationship to his self remains remote. Christopher Bollas emphasizes the importance *of aesthetic self-immersion and expression*. Due to the unconscious nature of our strongest needs and desires, these are notoriously hard to access. Yet, unconscious content tends to manifest itself during aesthetic experience. Thus temporary self-immersion in an "aesthetic moment" may be both illuminating and transformative. Joyce McDougall, on the other hand, argues for the importance of learning to understand *proto-symbolic* means of expression. There are incidents, she says, of individuals who have no clue whatsoever—neither consciously nor unconsciously—of what they need, what kind of contact they would benefit from, what kind of aesthetic immersion they would enjoy. These individuals do not even suspect that they are missing out on anything. So totally out of touch with their inner life, they do not experience the kind of psychic-somatic

resonance Bollas is referring to. To expect them to follow their intuition is totally in vain. In most of these cases, the subject ignores his physical being to the extent that it takes on "a life of its own." More precisely, it comes to speak on behalf of the disassociated subject, usually through psychosomatic symptoms. Finally, Didier Anzieu introduces the *Skin Ego*. In some cases, he argues, not even protosymbolic "language" is a feasible means of a subject's authentic sense of being, or rather, of not being. Feeling that he has no inner space, and thus no depth, the subject gives expression for his personal state of affairs by letting the skin serve as the primary means of interaction. Two Ekman excerpts appear in this part. The intent of "Dog Days" is to emphasize that the threads of narrative tying us together as cultural beings, end up strangulating life in the making, when used either too purposefully or too carelessly. "Life as a rug of rags" elaborates on this very issue by adding an otherworldly dimension to the web of our culture.

## 1.0 EVEN AN IMPURE SELF REQUIRES PRIVACY TO COME CLEAN

### Modell

"There is only one motive by which human activity is initiated: the tendency to actualize oneself," states Arnold Modell in *The Private Self*. For life to be experienced as meaningful the individual must have the opportunity to self-

create values, interests, and to engage freely in imaginative acts. It is an urge as basic, and of no less significance, asserts Modell, than sexual desire *or* the need to relate to others. Self-actualization gives the individual a sense of continuity and of cohering in the face of an ever changing world. It thus works as the subject's prime means of holding his ground in the face of the threats to his self represented by a chaotic and unpredictable environment. What the individual strives to express is not so much an original self—Modell subscribes to no such notion—as it is the *nucleus of affective experience* of which his core is made up. Giving external expression *to* and leaving internal room *for* the processing of affective material make up two sides of the same coin. Pathology, in consequence, really is not so much an outcome of traumatic experience as it is a result of the fact that the event remains unprocessed (*Other Times, Other Realities* 78). When traumatized, the unassimilated memory remains alive. The subject may respond by trying to stop time at a point prior to the event, and thus remain emotionally anchored in a bygone historical moment. Or, he may expand the present so that it comes to make up an all-consuming, ever-lasting moment. In either case, psychic loss is denied, its implications ignored. In all likelihood by clinging to the "thingness" of the flow of events, the subject in question is prone to avoid making connections, to abstain from ever drawing any conclusions, and thus to never become involved with anyone or anything (*OTOR* 90).

Inspired by neo-natal research and object-relations theory, Modell suggests that individual growth and development require that the emerging self experience containment, continuity and coherence *and* the opportunity to take some self regulated "breaks." *Private time*. Modell argues, the experience of being alone and non-relating while in the company of others, is of fundamental importance for our processing of stimuli and thus for the evolution of a sense of self, even in adulthood (*OTOR* 86). The difficulties associated with obtaining this inner space may lie in the fact that the private self is both a psychic *and* a somatic phenomenon. Those who find themselves in chaotic, intrusive, or otherwise emotionally draining environments oftentimes lose their capacity to reflect, that is to think, reason and create. Feeling imprisoned by chaos, they survive psychically by creating an inner sanctuary in which alternative lives can be lived, a move which is not to be conceived of as regressive, but rather as an expression of resignation (*PS* 95). The subject who resigns to this solution walks a thin line : there is always the risk that "in closing oneself off from others, one may inadvertently close oneself off from oneself "(*PS* 96). Summarizing his thesis that the need for privacy is a universal need, Modell says:

> The fear that one's sense of identity can be destroyed in an instant is not felt only by schizophrenics. . .For some, their sense of a continuity of being is held hostage to the response of another person

Explaining how this is experienced by the subject, Modell refers to a female client of his :

> Her sense of self was not threatened when she was alone, but she always felt vulnerable in the presence of others, especially if they were strangers For anyone who experiences annihilation anxiety, who fears that his or her sense of self is disintegrating, the existence of the self is not a matter for philosophical debate The feeling that the self is becoming fragmented, transformed, or annihilated evokes the most terrible anxiety that

> anyone is likely to experience. The apprehension of a self that is continuous over time is thus not an illusion ... but something that is essential to our existence. (*PS* 12)

One does not have to be mad to be prone to fears of fragmentation and invasion. The only requirement, considering the conditions under which we currently live is that one is human.

The psychic and somatic continuity in experience claimed to be essential for the individual's finding life meaningful is the very continuity that a great deal of postmodern and post-structural thinkers write off. Thus Lacan's theory that the infant passing from the biological and psychotic domain into the field of the symbolic and subjective existence, is irreversibly cut off from any immediate sensory experience. But how is it possible to conceive of meaning-making as existing outside of biology, asks Modell ? The way we make sense of words and narratives must necessarily be a result of both biologic and social evolution. And narrative can only be one out of several ways of safeguarding the self (*PS* 189). Inspired by William James' pragmatism and Gerald Edelman's neurobiological research, Modell launches an alternative to social constructivism. His model is a biologically based epistemology, more specifically a biologically based constructivist view of multiple realities.

William James, contrary to Freud, conceived of the self not as a psychic structure but as an inner awareness of the ever-changing stream of consciousness. Consciousness, following this theory, consists in a selecting agency of the mind which directs the attention to what is of greatest interest for the individual in question. For James it remained an irresolvable paradox that through time a sense

of stability in identity is experienced, and yet, the subject's self-consciousness keeps changing. Self-consciousness derives its sense of coherence from within, and still, it thrives on interactions with the environment. The question which begs to be asked, is the following: How does this still-the-same and forever-changing mind recognize what is of interest to the subject? Edelman's research may hold something of a resolution. His theory suggests that perception is always based on pre-existing memory categories and thus is value laden. Value following his train of thought is a *border-crossing* concept, extending from the neurological workings of the brains to the domain of personal preferences, passions and meanings (*PS* 2, 200). Human beings' biological equipment predispose them to automatically strive for coherence and continuity. Thus acquisition of value and meaning, is intricately associated with the extent to which they achieve a sense of continuity. Hence, memory, perception, and affect are, according to the model Model is here putting together, "internal value-laden signals... essential for survival...There is a clear progression from value as an evolutionary property to affects and meaning in the psychological domain" (*PS* 177). Human life can in no way be considered an open narrative whose plot is to be determined by the trend of the day. The past, and in consequence the present, "cannot be reconstructed arbitrarily because it is rooted in ineradicable affective experiences" (*OTOR* 86). If a biologically based value theory holds greater promise for our understanding of the human need for continuity than does "a-nachronistic instinct theory," says Modell, it is partly because there is no way we

can possible conceive of our selves in terms of instincts and reflexes anymore. Any psychology of the self that aims at explaining not merely how we are constituted as subjects but also, and essentially, what motivates us to seek subjective existence must take into account motivations of a non-instinctual and non-sexual order.

Contesting post-structural theory, Edelman states in the introduction to *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*, that there never has been and never can be a solidly established demonstration of a mind without a body. Excluding the notion that mental activity can ever be "pure" he explores the ways in which biology, affect, self-awareness, symbolization, and personality formation are interconnected (1). Drawing on the fields of neurology, artificial intelligence, psychology, linguistics and pragmatism and psychoanalysis, Edelman constructs a neurobiological model of the mind, labeled *constrained constructivism*. The mind is made up of an intricate network, he claims, most but far from all of which pathways are interconnected. "A piece of brain tissue is an intricate network that responds to electrical and chemical signals in three-dimensional space and time," he explains. And he continues :

> Although the brain at one scale looks like a vast electrical network, at its most microscopic scale it is not connected or arranged like any other natural or man-made network. The brain is an example of a self-organizing system precise point- to-point wiring (like that in an electronic device) cannot occur. The variation is too great. The brains' capacity to create connections at a variety of levels are in many ways analogous to the skills of a computer. Still, what is special about brains, and what computers do not have, is evolutionary morphology. The chemical and electrical dynamics of the brain resemble the sound and light patterns and the movements and growth patterns of a jungle more than they do the activities of an electric company. There is no such thing as software involved in the operations of the brains, and the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that the morphology of the brain matters overwhelmingly. (*BA* 25-30)

Regardless of the fact that each and every individual is biologically predisposed to create a neurological network, no two brains ever work similarly. The environmental differences, during the individual's evolution, are bound to be too vast.

The self emerging from Edelman's model, is an evolutionary structure based on an accumulation of value laden memory systems, the most fundamental division being in the nervous system between *primary consciousness* and *higher consciousness* (*BA* 80-82). Edelman thus operates with two kinds of nervous systems organization, both of which are made up of neurons and whose cooperation serve to link physiological and psychological processes. Primary consciousness is concerned with appetite, sexual behavior, as well as with defensive patterns of behavior. Higher consciousness is concerned with sensory or motor reactions and it responds more instantly. The former constitutes a kind of *remembered present*. It involves the ability to create and conceive of a scene, but does not imply any sense of being an individual with a past, a present, and a future. "It is limited to a small memorial interval around a time chunk I call the present," explains Edelman. "It lacks an explicit notion or a concept of a personal self, and it does not afford the ability to model the past or the future as part of a correlated scene" (*BA* 177-22). It is individual, intentional, it enables us to distinguish between self and non-self and, finally, it is continuous and yet ever changing. Primary consciousness lays the ground for higher-order consciousness. The latter involves our ability to self-reflect, that is it involves a

sense of being a person, of having a past, a present and a future. It thus makes up the foundation for our being capable of symbolizing, that is of creating a socially constructed and accepted selfhood. It also enables us to anticipate future states of experience, that is to plan, and to learn from experience. It liberates us from the "tyranny of time" by opening for the construction of an imaginative, emotional and sensorial domain, within which we can experiment and evolve without losing touch with reality (*B.A.* 136-151). *Memory*, accordingly, is made up of a continuing re-transcription of experience, that is, an enhancement of previously established abilities to categorize. "In such a system, recall is not stereotypic," emphasizes Edelman :

> Under the influence of continually changing contexts, it changes, as the structure and dynamics of the neural populations involved in the original categorization also change. Recall involves the activation of some, but not necessarily all, of the previously facilitated portions of global mappings. ...in general [the responses] are likely to have been altered by ongoing behavior (*B.A.* 102)

Memory, consequently, is a continual procedural *re-categorization* process. Which is not to say that it is not capable of generalizing to some extent. Current perceptions, in all likelihood in themselves neutral, become meaningful by being associated with value laden schemes of the past, explains Edelman. It is not that memory leaves permanent traces that may later be revisited. The dynamic of the process remains stored, available and actively anticipating another modification. Stressing the importance of action, and thus *interaction* between the various systems, Edelman makes the point that to even think of a disembodied mind, that is, a disengaged stance is inconceivable. *Consciousness* emerges from a

special set of relationships between perception, concept formation, and memory. Each consciousness depends on its unique history and embodiment. "A human conscious self is constructed, somewhat paradoxically," he says, "by social interactions." Yet it has been "selected for during evolution to realize mainly the aims and satisfactions of each biological individual" (*BA* 139). Meaning thus "takes shape in terms of concepts that depend on categorizations based on value. It grows with the history of remembered body sensations and mental images" Edelman states. And he elaborates:

> Because of its linkage to value and to the concept of self, this system of meaning is almost never free of affect . it is charged with emotions [T]he range of human freedom is restricted by the inability of an individual to separate the consequences of thought and emotion. (*BA* 172)

With the introduction of Edelman's networking model, new light is thrown on the phenomenon of repetition compulsion. Freud, in his later work, never quite figured out how to explain why the phenomenon was so persistent. Lacan came up with even less of a resolution, in that he merely claimed that repetitive behavior is "repetition with a difference," thereby leaving it up to others to decide of what exactly this difference is constituted. Nevertheless, both thinkers conceived of a connection between *repetition* and *change*. Edelman's reentry concept, and his notion of memory as a re-transcription of experience enable us to understand why repetition may indeed break the ground for fundamental psychosomatic change. Freud, as mentioned, had been on to a similar train of thought, first with the publication of the "Project," and later, with his "Further Remarks on the Neuro-psychoses of Defense." In the former

he proposed that the mind works as an interactive system, evolving on the basis of internal and external interaction. Later he introduced the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*. Nachträglichkeit, often mis-translated as "deferred action," refers to a revision of traumatic or unassimilated memory as a result of subsequent experience. The implication is that the psychic apparatus does not layer incoming input in a straightforward, linear, and hierarchical manner. Its processing of stimuli is cyclical. Each time a new impression is perceived and processed, the accumulation of past experience is slightly altered. Experience can thus only be gradually appropriated and slowly "understood." Understanding, seen in this light, rarely associates "getting to the root of things." It refers to the ability to process and further integrate previous perceptions from a present point of view. Stimuli of a traumatizing impact at the time of the event, Freud suggests, are not subjected to processing until the psychic apparatus has grown sufficiently complex to make sense of it. Remarkably, Freud developed an answer to the riddle of repetition compulsion prior to his articulation of the problem. By the time he fully discovered its implications in the life of the subject, however, he was turning towards the structural and the topographical model of the mind, something which led him to "forget" about the dynamics between psyche and soma, as described at the turn of the century. The Freudian repressed has now found its return. It has resurfaced in terms of Edelman's model of the mind, better supported by scientific means than Freuds, and by Modell's application of his theory to cultural experience.

Edelman, in line with Freud's earlier theory argues that sensory activity is indispensable for any perceptual activity to take place. "The brain and the nervous system cannot be considered in isolation from states of the world and social interactions. But such states, both environmental and social, are indeterminate and open ended." *Perception* is "an active process in which behavioral action provides a continual test of new environments as well as a means of rehearsal for older mappings" (*BB* 224; *Neural Darwinism* 211). Edelman's view that motor and sensor activity play a major role in perception greatly influences our understanding of repetition compulsion, as it comes to expression in for instance habitual self-mutilators. In Freud repetition is considered a re-enactment of the subject's repressed, that is of what he himself refuses to "keep in mind." Unless it takes place during a transferential situation it constitutes a resistance to insight and thus to change. Edelman's theory enables us to see repetitive behavior as an active attempt, on behalf of the subject, of finding a way of processing what otherwise eludes perception. The physical and affective re-enactment, including the provocation of the counter-transferential response in the other, provides the subject with yet another opportunity to try to find a fitting category for the otherwise incomprehensible. Freud's Nachträglichkeit concept may thus be a universal feature of the human nervous system. Perception—according to Edelman but not to Freud--is a matter of re-finding categories already held in memory, or, of redefining the shape of the pre-existing ones (Modell, *OTOR* 61-64).

Whereas perceptual categorization is non conscious (responding to input from the exterior world), conceptual categorization requires both perceptual categorization and memory. Edelman suggests that concepts are formed in primary consciousness and thus *prior* to speech. The implication is that a distinction and interaction between self and non-self anticipates the infant's stepping into the symbolic (*BA* 126). Babies enter the world neither as clean slates nor in a state of fusion with their environment, he points out. "An infant already has conceptual categories that are not defined or originated by semantic means or criteria." Unlike elements of speech, concepts are neither conventional nor arbitrary, do not require linkage to a speech community to develop, and do not depend on sequential presentation. Conceptual categorizations are enormously heterogeneous and general, and they involve mixtures of relations concerning the real world, memories, and past behavior. The precondition for the world's ever acquiring any personal significance is that the subject arrives basically equipped to process incoming stimuli, that is, that he is capable of operating with categories and concepts before he has even heard of language. Language neither gives shape to preexisting concepts nor enable the latter to emerge. Meaning arises from the interaction of value-category memory with the combined activity of perceptual areas and speech areas (*BA* 130). Language does not provide the subject with categories of *meaning* or *value*. It enables him to discriminate and differentiate with greater subtlety. Speech acquisition requires primary consciousness. But that alone does not suffice, says

Edelman. If it did, brains would not function all that differently from computers. The latter suffer the shortcoming of being unable to distinguish between meaning and nonsense, or, between degrees of meaning-fullness. Computers' "embodiment is wrong," Edelman states, "it does not lead to consciousness" (*BA* 126).

Edelman shows how subjective value comes about. And Modell makes use of Edelman to support his theory that the organism needs time and space of its own to process incoming stimuli. How value comes to be experienced as such, was the question Freud could barely formulate. It does so via an ongoing and gradual "fitting" of continuing input and prior experience. It also remained obscure in the "Project" how the subject would ever learn to distinguish interest and affective attachment from somatic pleasure and unpleasure. The subject emerging from Modell's re-vision of Freud's repetition-compulsion prone subject is constantly working on sharpening his sense of the various aspects making up his self. It is a sense which has everything to do with learning how to be selective in relation to others, with learning how to seek the kind of environment within which he can resonate, create, come true.

## 1.1 LIFE IN BETWEEN THE LINES : THE GRAMMER OF THE SUBJECT'S BEING AS WRITTEN IN STYLE

### Bollas

In *Cracking Up* Christopher Bollas makes a plea for what he calls *unconscious freedom*. In contrast to unconscious imprisonment, unconscious freedom consists in "the necessary opposition between the part of us that finds truth by uniting disparate ideas ... and the part of us that finds the truth by breaking up those unities" (2). Traditionally, Bollas remarks, it has caused a great many theoretical difficulties to accept the possibility that subjectivity may rest on a variety of modes of experience and perception. Freud, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* suggests a method of interpreting primary processes that translates unconscious content into secondary process meaning. Jacques Lacan's "body in bits and pieces" illustrates the splitting and fragmentation which the subject must re-cover from symbolically, if ever he is to become someone. And Melanie Klein's "paranoid-schizoid position" describes the pre-subjective state of being as dominated by the sense of loss of unity and wholeness. The latter, she suggests must be grieved by means of symbolic substitution. All of these theories, Bollas argues, are driven by the wish to be able to explain phenomenologically--thus to unify--a subject whose imaginative and creative force in fact lies in its being an agglomeration of interrelated pieces. But the self is not, and cannot be, phenomenologically unified. The true self, he

asserts is not to be conceived of as an integrated phenomenon. It can only be thought of in terms of "dynamic sets of idiomatic dispositions that come into being through problematic encounters with the object world." Most endeavors to heal or cure the splitting of the subject merely reflects an inability, or unwillingness, to accept that this fragmentation is a fundamental fact with which we shall have to learn to live (*Being a Character* 49). Ironically, Lacan's claim that the subject is forever divided by his passage through the mirror-stage and into the symbolic is here viewed as an indication of the theorist's own inability to cope with irrationality and imperfection.

Contrary to classical psychoanalysis Bollas thus does not view the pre-verbal as a state to be surmounted. Pre-verbal and verbal modes of experience coexist, he argues, even into adulthood. Regardless of the subject's being unaware of this, the shadows from his pre-verbal past keep influencing his moods and perceptions, his ability to be introspective as well as his capacity for creative work in the present. His *unthought known* puts him in a particular frame of mind. It is a frame which eludes comprehension for the simple reasons that it originates in a time before speech. The unthought known reveals itself in the ways in which the individual relates to him self as an object within an intra-subjective space and the way in which he situates himself in relation to others within an inter-subjective space. How does he think and talk about him self, who comes to expression in his speech and in his patterns of behavior, how does he address the other, and what is the nature of this other? A pattern occurs when

taking into account not only how the individual in question speaks, but also the structure of his narratives, the position he assigns himself in these, as well as the role he occupies in the scenarios of his dreams. The self does not evolve along unconscious lines. It *is* unconsciousness (*BC* 51; *Shadow of the Object* 45). The subject's truth therefore, cannot be deciphered, as if it were all translatable into language. The only means for the subject to pursue any kind of deeper insight into his own inner life, as well as into the interior of others, is to allow himself to temporarily fall apart. When growing absorbed by the rhythm of unconscious interaction, his sense of being separate and unique is reinforced, and thus it breaks the path for his growing capable of "speaking from the heart."

Early Freudian theory and later ego-psychology aimed at rendering the unconscious conscious. However, conscious and unconscious communication reflects the work of different states of being, Bollas argues, analogical to various interpretations of a musical piece of work. It is a matter of form and aesthetics. Distinguishing between *unconscious ego* and *unconscious repressed* he explains that whereas the former manifests itself in unconscious *form*, the latter comes to expression via unconscious *content* (*SO* 8-13). Further distinguishing between an individual's personality, his self, and his condition, Bollas says that a subject's personality is made up of his "predisposition to a possible expression of his infinite nature" (*CI* 42).

All humans are in possession of an inborn urge to give form to their lived experience, a so called *form drive*, argues Bollas. This desire, on the part of the

ego, to give expression to its sense of living is missing in Freud's account of the unconscious. Yet, leaving one's mark and signature in the physical world is intimately associated with both an erotics of being and the ability to find life meaningful. In "Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis," Freud actually made it clear that he too perceived unconscious content to be conferred during a spoken exchange. The analyst, he said, should:

> turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ toward the transmitting unconscious of the patient. Just as the [telephone] receiver converts back into sound waves which were set up by sound waves, so the doctor's unconscious is able, from the derivatives of the unconscious which are communicated to him, to reconstruct that unconscious, which has determined the patient's free associations (Freud, "RPPP" 115-16, Bollas *CI* 10)

In other words, the analyst is to function as a receiver and a translator at one and the same time. Yet, even if he allowed for the possibility that the subject may be directly affected by external unmediated experience, Freud never thoroughly explained how this may come about. The little attention he did pay to the phenomenon centered around the analyst's picking up on the analysand's unconscious. Bollas uses Freud's position as a point of departure for a broader understanding of unconscious interaction. As an unconscious subject, he says, "I am still shaped by an other's effect upon me. My self is given form by the other," even if the effect of one person upon another is for the most part too idiosyncratic to be comprehended. To really communicate with another is not necessarily to understand each other. Rather, it is "to evoke each other, and in that moment, to be distorted by the laws of unconscious work" (*BC* 45). Unconscious communication goes as far as our being influenced by the

intimately known subject even when apart: "We feel an inner forming inside our self," says Bollas, "a restructuring of our inner world that is evoked by the name of the person we are then considering" (*BC* 56). The aesthetics, style, and gesturing of one subject thus resonate somatically in the other, and the other way around. By these means the subject reveals his *idiom* to others, the particularity and the density of his personality (*SO* 35). The idiom is a reworking of the Freudian id and an elaboration of Winnicott's true self. It refers to a separate sense pertaining to the aesthetics of life rather than the specific mental contents of one's existence (*CI* 42). Thus, the subject's slips of the tongue, the confusion he creates, and the smoke screens he spreads, may produce the kind of misunderstanding that *connects* him with others at the deepest level of his being. As a result, an intermediate zone comparable to Winnicott's "intermediate area of experiencing," or Freud's "playground" may emerge (*CI* 18). To get to know an other is to "be played by the evocative effect of the other's personality idiom, a correspondence between two unthought knowns" (*BC* 189). Unconscious communication enables two individuals to "fall into each other."

The idiom is inconceivable and inaccessible in pure form. From the very beginning of the child's life, het is subjected to a structuring in accordance with the unconscious of the child's parents':

> I believe each of us at birth is equipped with a unique idiom of psychic organization that constitutes the core of our self, and then in the subsequent first years of our life we become our parents' child, instructed by the implicate logic of their unconscious relational intelligence in the family's way of being . . . we become a complex theory for being a self that that toddler does not think about but acquires operationally . . . [Thus we learn the] grammar of our being' before we grasp the rules of language (*SO* 40–45)

Bollas' draws on Winnicott's understanding of the mother's holding, handling and stimulating the infant. Making up the child's very first universe, he says, she provides him with his first object relation, introduces him to the use of language, and structures the ways in which his needs and desire are frustrated or met. The earliest mother-infant interaction thus lays the cornerstone for our ego, later to be supplemented by that father-infant pattern of interaction. Even after having outgrown parental dependency the individual carries with him memories of being the mother's and father's object in his ego structure. Thus, states Bollas, " the way in which we position ourselves in space and in time may partly reflect how we were originally situated spatially and temporally in relation to our parents " (*SO* 40-45). Part of the reason for the long term impact of this early relationship lies in it's original transformative impact. The mother (at first) is the one who facilitates the child's move from total dependency into a relative degree of autonomy. Imprinted by this absolutely fundamental experience, Bollas argues, the individual is bound to keep seeking a similarly *transformative object* or experience later in life. Creative activity or aesthetic pleasure may create the space within which a transformation of this character can be experienced. The fusion of psyche and soma which the subject undergoes during an aesthetic moment is likely to bring back to life the experience of his first and foremost object-relation (*SO* 14-16). Transitional-object-seeking is therefore a common and yet endless memorial search for something in the future which resides in the past, that is for the subject's coming into being anew, and in the shape of his true

self. An *evocative moment* reminds him of part of his past by means of sound, a smell, or the like. Thus the subject under the best of circumstances oscillates between being played by the environment and playing it more actively. Different objects have different potential transformational effects on the self. Reading a book, watching a movie, listening to a piece of music bring individuals into different, particular psychic states, that is in so far they permit their selves to get lost in the object's particular texture. Objects somehow carry and contain part of the subject's experience. It is precisely because they "hold our projections that the structural feature of any one object becomes even more important, because we also put our self into a container that upon re-experiencing will process us according to its natural integrity," says Bollas (*BC* 4). This he uses as support for the argument that greater attention should be paid to the *object's nature and texture* than it is traditionally granted. Psycho-analysis could only benefit, he concludes, from the development of a philosophy of the object's integrity which will enable us to appreciate the psychic texture of the self (*BC* 5).

The original bond between mother and child, when of a healthy nature, lays down the ground rules for the subject's further development. When of a pathological character, however, the infant never acquires the ability to engage in creative endeavors of his own. Deprived and insecure, he restlessly waits for the (m)other to furnish his inner vacancy. Thus some subjects compulsively empty themselves, so as to evacuate an empty internal space, a receptacle for the mother's dreams, thoughts, that is, her unconscious. Others try to alleviate their

sense of insecurity by constantly surrounding themselves with soothing and comforting sound-scapes (like a mother's voice providing a sense of sheltering and coherency for the baby), sometimes made up of merely white noise. And yet others seek reunion with their existential origins by constantly repeating traumatic situations. On a larger scale, the faith in the transformative power of the *real* object comes to expression in extremist political movements based on the conviction that their ideology will effect a total environmental transformation and ultimately deliver mankind from its misery (*SO* 27).

In principle, learning to speak should provide the baby with a transitional object of longer lasting value. From around the time of the entry into language, Bollas argues, he theoretically speaking becomes capable of reaching out and interacting with the "human village." But, if failure occurs at this stage, and it often does, words seem useless to the child, or they may even be experienced as alien, intrusive, and dangerous. A great deal of the child's success at acquiring language evidently hinges on the mother's degree of adaptation. A mother who has herself adapted insufficiently to the conventions held by a given culture inevitably pass on to her offspring the perception that language is unreliable. And failure in representing the infant's internal moods into language, in all likelihood results in a schizoid character position, says Bollas. Hence, the subject's use of language is from the beginning dissociated from feeling. Only abstractions can be expressed by means of the word. True self states are manifested through the "language" of character (*SO* 37). An essential non-verbal means of storing the

unresolved story of one's life, whether the acquisition of language has failed or succeeded. Bollas argues, are moods. Moods store rather than represent former experience, he says. When entering a particular mood, we become a former self and thus establish a connection with the child self who suffered an unrepresentable experience earlier in life (*SO* 100-11). Preserved in the shape they emerged, these states of being are waiting for the day when they can be symbolized, understood, transformed or left behind (*SO* 5).

Trauma, following this train of thought, is not experienced as a turning point in life. Shock and intrusion freeze the psyche and arrests the subject's ability to make sense of the world. Figuring as an all consuming blind spot which must not matter, the traumatic event stops the passage of time and throws a surreal light over everything else that follows. Moods as understood in this context, serve as "existential registers of the moment of a breakdown between a child and his parents, and they partly indicate certain nondestructive forms of hate" (*BC* 66; *SO* 110-118). Intense hatred towards an other therefore does not necessarily indicate lack or loss of love. It is a way of maintaining an intense connection to the other. Obviously, not all moods serve similar purposes. Some are generative and further inner change. Others are conservative and stifling. A generative mood enables the subject to creatively transform his perception of him self and his outlook on life. It enables the subject to "move into himself" and enter into contact with his mute and unknown child-self. It opens up for the generation of some recognition of the previously unthought known. A

malevolent mood. in contrast, like sulking or moping, or maybe even getting depressed, keeps him frozen in a particular situation. Functionally speaking, it is aimed at some other, at taking revenge or at "setting the record straight."

Bollas ultimately aims at illuminating the ways in which the human subject "becomes the dream work of his own life" (*BC* 13). To create a dream of our own is the closest we get in adult life to reliving our first symbiotic relationship, the maternal environment, he says (*BC* 14). When dreaming we oscillate between different modes of involvement: an immersive mode, associated with early childhood, and a reflective mode, associated with subjective existence. We thus constantly seek out objects, he says, which

> disperse the objectifying self into elaborating subjectivities, where the many 'parts of the self' momentarily express discrete sexual urges, ideas, memories, and feelings, in unconscious actions, before condensing into a transcendental dialectic, occasioned by a force of dissemination that moves us to places beyond thinking (*BC* 17)

When moving through his world, whether by choice or obligation, the subject lives out his dream of his self. Each entry in his dream lexicon associates potential triggers of different affective states of being. Still it is never a matter of the subject's freely picking and choosing from among the selves. He feels called by objects associating his existential origins (*BC* 21-24).

> Choice of object is thus specific to a potential articulation of a self experience; naturally, when we select the other, the human object, as the medium for the releasing of our desire, we automatically choose the precise type of dialectical field in which mutual use is inevitable, and the play of subjectivities is given its character (*BC* 28)

Allowing oneself to fall into another or an aesthetic experience does not come equally easily to everyone. Individuals in possession of a rich and complex

life experience tend to automatically seek out objects that challenge and expand the self. Individuals whose inner world is barren tend to choose "safer," stereotypical and familiar objects which reflect and reinforce their preexisting inner desolation. For the playful individual it is exciting to be played by an object. For the emotionally arrested individual this is unsettling and anxiety provoking. Ultimately, states Bollas, the objective of engaging with an object is neither to make sense of the external world nor to endow it with meaning; it is to "negotiate with reality in order to gain experience of objects that release the self into being" (*BC* 42).

This is the very kind of playing which has come to cause such great difficulties for an increasing number of individuals in contemporary society. It is commonly assumed that the more psychically inept, the crazier the subject's appearance. However, this is not at all necessarily so, claims Bollas. In fact, a growing number of individuals today suffer from affect-less super normality. We may ask ourselves, why? Why at this point in time, where sex experimentation and identity change is actually hip, and taking contradictions to an extreme is by many considered a fuller way of living. Winnicott wrote that "it is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel like it is worth living." And he continued saying that people may lead overtly ordinary and apparently satisfactory lives and yet be schizoid or schizophrenic (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* 71-78; Bollas, *SO* 135). The psychotic is characterized by turning inward, toward the world of fantasy. The normopath, in contrast, is

recognizable by an excessive turning outwards, a focus on concrete objects and an exaggerated emphasis on conventional behavior. Escaping from dream life, subjective states of mind, imaginative living and playful aggressiveness, he seeks discharge in practicalities or intellectualization. " We could say," Bollas says, " that if the psychotic has 'gone off at the deep end,' the normotic has 'gone off' at the shallow end.'" Nothing sinks in, any potential emotional excitement is deflected and dispersed. Winnicott also suggested that some people have annihilated the creative element by developing an alternative mentality, one that aims at objectivity, and is characterized less by emotion than by reason. This mentality is not determined to represent the object, explains Bollas, but to echo the thing-ness inherent in material objects (*SO* 136). The individual, empty and deprived at heart, leads a life in an abundance of meaninglessness (*SO* 137). Returning to the issue of the subject's grammar of being as being laid down during the earliest relationship, Bollas explains: The normotic person originates in an environment in which the parent avoids responsiveness to the core of the child's self. Instead of being reflected by the parental figure the child is being deflected (*SO* 150-55). His imaginative potential is ignored, no potential space is provided, in which he can engage in a playful experimentation with boundaries and degree of interior-exterior interconnectedness. His means of defense is to develop and cling to a ritual of sorts. An empty structure thus replaces lack of creative structure and the infant's object world remains stark and

non-populated. Not even language provides a means of relief. What does the internal world of this individual look like?

> In my view, he incorporates rather than introjects, and excorporates rather than projects....Incorporation in and of itself is non-representational...The patient who incorporates takes in only sense presentations and keeps them at a non-representational level. (*SO* 153)

Two world wars and an outspoken taste for genocide have left fin de siècle man with a "serial" sense of self who can do nothing but drift through life in increasing anonymity, anticipating unpredictable catastrophes, and exposing himself to ever accumulating violence, states Bollas (*CI* 185). Genocide has in a way evolved into the quintessential 20th century crime. Thus the serial killer who strikes from out of the blue has come to stand as emblematic for the kind of danger feared by late modern individuals. If today we fear the serial killer it is because he represents execution without meaning or mercy. There is no possible saving our soul. "He is the perfect executioner for a population that has come to feel increasingly serial and meaningless," Bollas states (*CI* 220). Evil consists less in a particular urge or an internalized "bad" object, than in the internalization of a process of a certain structure. Distinguishing between emotional *death* and *murder*, Bollas elaborates : Emotional death occurs in response to a major psychic loss and is therefore experienced as somehow being meaningful. Killing, on the other hand, takes place when the individual is subject to a sudden, totally unpredictable emotional injury, of which he cannot possibly make any sense. The act occurs as if out of "nowhere" and breaks with all of the rules previously associated with the environment. Many serial killers were

themselves killed emotionally as children, he claims. Like most growing individuals, they suffered major psychic losses. However, the serial killer (to be) never developed the generative capacity for comforting himself, which children brought up under safer circumstances usually have in possession. The traumatized child, Bollas argues, is an individual who was killed in childhood. Unwillingly, but out of necessity, he identifies with his own premature death. His only means to transcend his own elimination is to put an other individual through the evil structure (*CH* 193). Thus,

> the serial killer—a killed self—seems to go on living by transforming other selves into similarly killed ones, establishing a companionship of the dead. . . In place of a once live self, a new being emerges, identified with the killing of what is good, the destruction of trust, love, and reparation. . . .
>
> The serial killer identifies with an evil self that emerges from the moral vacuum created by the murder of the true self, projectively identifying it with the victim, now rotting or decaying in some roadside byway or under a floorboard or in a pot brewing on the stove. The horror over the act—the deep shock and eventual grief—is "left" to the police, medical personnel, families, and worried parties to feel. (*CH* 189, 195)

Over and over the subject repeats the structure of his origin, ruled by a required order and succession of events, rather than by a pattern of internal and external relationships. The structure of evil is the killer's ground of being, his home-ground. Usually the subject proceeds according to the following procedure: Appearing harmless and helpful, he offers his future victim assistance, thereby triggering the victim's trust and creating a "potential space" between the two. Not a moment sooner than confidence has been established, and the victim finds himself dependent on the killer, the latter strikes. Caught totally off guard, the victim reacts with disbelief, confusion, and terror. The turn around is nothing less

but a catastrophe. Thus the killer subjects the victim to a process similar to the one he himself underwent as a child.

## Dog days. ***BLACKWATER***

> It was the dog days, in the compost, in the newspapers Something swelled and ran, the flies became intrusive. The newspapers reported murders and perverted sadists The arts pages stank of rotting flesh, as if from the fridge of a mass murderer
>
> Birger didn't read about it, but he dreamed of it at night. He was being chased, he saw someone cut to pieces before his eyes, and he was acting mentally ill to escape the same fate...
>
> He thought about that time, about the tent and the bodies He didn't usually do that.
>
> Nor had Annie At any rate, she hadn't talked about it All she said about [televised murder reports] was that she had seen the effects of murderous violence once only and that was quite enough. (345)

Annie was the one who discovered the slaughtered young people, but Birger had been called by the police to examine the bodies. Both had been forced to take a too close look at the effects of the crime, neither ever fully recovers. Annie's reaction is to deliberately disallow human violence to become the focus of her attention. Birger has greater difficulties drawing the line between what took place in the exterior, and what is haunting him in the interior. The stabbing of the couple afterall *did* take place within his life sphere, as it is delimited by the Blackwater community. Not yet having developed Annie's growing capacity for operating with different, separate, and yet overlapping layers of reality, Birger feels trapped. The media frenzy only amplifies the effect of the local crime. It

portrays a world in which everybody is in one and the same sinking boat. A flattened and simplified view of the world, admittedly, but nevertheless convincing as it is splashed out over the front pages.

Birger, the doctor, has been trained to keep death at a certain distance. He observes it, tries to prevent it, but he never actually made it as far as to learning to accept it. Annie's approach is of an altogether different sort. The accidental Starhill pregnancy of hers, makes Annie aware that the attempt at creating an entirely new life for her self has failed. When she finally gets moving she is heavily pregnant, and the climactic conditions are those of an ice age. Upon her return to the civilized world Annie's baby dies. With the loss of the daughter she never got to know, her stream of light-headed, illusory hopes for an alternative existence, comes to a halt. Hereafter, her hopes, dreams, and fears are of a more concrete nature, more real and closely connected with the actual body and world within which she lives. Birger is on call on the night of the delivery of the child. He finds it unsettling that Annie by no means reacts in an ordinary manner to the event. Yet, he is also moved by her determination to touch—and establish a connection with--the loss she has suffered. The fact that Annie gives birth to death, rather than to life, clearly comments on the forces at play at Starhill. Female vitality, it seems, could not survive the holy order's self-contained exclusiveness. When wound up in the story-line setting the rules of life in the commune, a story line which pays no respect to female vitality's need for space and mobility, the latter dies. When Annie initially decided to join the

commune, she was of the impression that faith and conviction corresponded to following one's impulsive passions, that movement and change equaled escape. With the death of her child, she begins to understand that faith may have to do with believing in larger connections, and movement to do with the ability to stay in the moment.

> He had seen a great many dead people over the years. And he had also seen relatives beside their dead. Some caressed them, but most observed a rigid decorum, sitting upright on a chair, waiting out the minutes—seldom a matter of more than minutes. A wake was just as unthinkable as breast feeding a child for years.
>
> Someone collapsing and weeping or screaming was unusual. Most people knew themselves, and if they sensed that they would not be able to bear it, they declined.
>
> Annie had sat with two fingers on the dead baby's cold skin. She had put the tips of her fingers where the chest sloped down toward the armpit. He had not understood why...
>
> The baby was not born, it came out. The umbilical cord had twisted tightly around its throat and strangled it...
>
> However wretched he had felt, there were words and sentences he always used...He remembered going in to see her an hour or so later. That is when she had asked to see the baby.
>
> He had been very uneasy, not the least because she had shown no emotion. She was pale and not really communicating, just making sure she had her own way. He hadn't been able to think of any way of refusing.
>
> The baby was female, a large well-formed fetus. She had never opened her eyes...
>
> His idea had been that she could glimpse the child through the door and decline in time if she couldn't bear it. But she had him push the bed right in and asked him to move it closer. Finally, she had put the forefinger and middle finger of her right hand on the cold, blue skin and held them there for a long spell. It looked like when two fingers are laid on the Bible to take an oath...
>
> He himself could not have borne to see Annie. But he had had to. And, he thought afterward, 'bear' is an empty word. Just a kind of exclamation. You bear it. You put two fingers on what has happened and feel it. (333)

Eighteen years later, on yet another dark and freezing night, the doctor and the school teacher cross paths in a sauna. Meeting in the dampness, the heat, and in the nude, the formality characteristic of their earlier interaction finally evaporate. The two return to Annie's where the ice is finally broken.

> "If you put a couple of logs on now, it'll burn for a while," he said. She had electric heat, but confessed she didn't want to be without the fire.
>
> "How do you manage for wood?"

" I buy it. I get help with the chopping, too. Björne Brandberg is my household gnome. "

" Is that since that time ? "

She nodded. Then he saw she was crying quietly and he was sure she had not cried over the dead child for a very long time. Perhaps not for years. It's thawing inside of us, he thought. In me, too. A whole lot of longing. " (287)

Björne Brandberg is one of Torsten's full bred sons, he is Gudrun's step child, and one of Johan's loathed half brothers. Working full time behind the wheel at the Torsten's feller-buncher at the time of Annie's escape from Starhill, he is the so called enemy who facilitates her return to the Blackwater community. Björne is by the villagers considered somewhat strange, if not outright mentally and emotionally arrested. In many ways his oddity consists in taking literally the male role as it has been prescribed by his father. Torsten and Björne's brothers are loud and sexist. Yet, their air of social and sexual superiority hardly ever adds up to more than hot air. Björne, however, never quite grasps that there is a reason for the discrepancy between their jargon and their actions. Meeting the requirements better than anyone, as far as he understands them, Björne eventually becomes a loser in the world of social reality. Expelled from the community, he leads a walled-in existence, silenced, and desensitized. At the time of his assisting Annie down the snowy slopes, he is merely a marginal figure. A few decades later, he has gone over the edge and become a hermit.

From the very beginning of her acquaintance with Björne, Annie sensed that he was slightly off. However, she never feared for her safety when around him. His lack of social skills, she assumed, had a great deal to do with his

isolation. An isolation arising from the fact that the family within which he was raised embraced values of a stale and unbalanced nature.

> As an eighteen-year-old, he had tried to rape a girl of his own age. She had been quite in a bad way. It was never reported, but it came out all the same. Torsten had settled the matter with the girl's father. It was said that he had helped out with a sum when the father was exchanging his old car for another one, thus enabling him to buy a heavy four-wheel-drive American vehicle.
>
> No one believed Björne had meant to rape the girl. He no doubt thought that was how it was done. Afterward he found himself isolated. The girls kept their distance and he was never again alone with any of them. (381)
>
> Annie had said there was something about the Brandberg sons, something lumpish and rank. No woman failed to notice it, she said, even when just passing them in the post office...
>
> Pekka was the most likely [to have committed the crime at the Lobber]. He had spent an incredible amount on drink—money he had earned on oil rigs. He had badly beaten up a rival...He had once managed to scrape together a home with leather furniture and stereo and had moved in with a very beautiful woman. She had thrown him out and he got none of the contents of the house. The reason was that he had been out sick and had been drinking heavily after an accident with a crane. A man had fallen from the platform and been killed. Pekka couldn't work after that.
>
> Björne was on disability pension. Annie had liked him. She said he was amusing to talk to. He had started living by himself after he had cleared a parcel of forest. He stayed. Annie had thought it was some kind of protest against modern times.
>
> For his part, Birger had never regarded these cabin loners as rebels. He thought they really belonged to the past and that their deprivation was primarily sexual. Their sexual signaling system was so primitive, it was taken as a joke.
>
> More often than might be imagined, it was possible for these loners and leftovers to put their misery into words. But as therapy, that was worthless. It never changed anything. (379-81)

About Björne 's decision to live alone, Annie had said:

> Björne has simply done an about-face in time and gone backward into the olden days, as he calls it. In the olden days people did such and such. In the olden days they thought, saw understood.
>
> But what they understood was how to live in their own time and the loner in the cabin doesn't understand that.
>
> Afore things was better'n they is now
>
> now you's worse off than you was then
>
> ...he too denies tuberculosis and incest and abuse and near-starvation and ignorance—he even denies aching joints, although his damp cabin gives them to him. (344)

Birger's following in the footprints left by Annie, during her attempt to track down the Lobber murderer, eventually leads him to Björne 's. Björne,

Annie had rightly assumed, was informed of Johan's whereabouts on the eve of the Lobber murderers. She also discovered that he had been hiding out, trying to cover up some of the traces left behind by Johan. Living deep into the forest. Annie had had to cross the Lobber on her way to see Björne. Thus, her last trip on earth takes her across the river of life and death once again. This time around it results in her entering the reign of the death. Her destination is interrupted halfway, however. As a result, she never reaches Björne.

Birger, in the company of Johan, picks up where Annie's trail was broken off. Arriving at the cabin, Johan sees Björne as if for the first time. His brother, in Johan's imagination never anything or anyone apart from the body-of-repressive fraternal flesh, suddenly strikes him as being peculiarly odd, different, out of step with reality. Björne has molded him self into a pre-given character, never carved out a space for himself. Having gone primitive, at a point in time where he had no other options left, Björne has turned it into a virtue. Even if Björne never realizes that his inner nature has been violated by the male role model, according to which he modeled him self, he nevertheless turns into a defender of the most primitive forms of nature.

> It was very quiet. He had expected to hear the clatter of game birds, taking off, perhaps even see a larger capercaillie cock flying between the trees with his heavy load of flesh.
>
> The sound of an ax broke the silence, the rhythm of someone chopping wood...
>
> Björne was singular. Johan had been quite young when he realized it. There was something dark about Björne. He followed the brothers, moved just like them. But he was shapeless. No one could say that Björne was like this or that—great talker, quick-witted, like Pekka, or competitive, like Per Ola, unafraid of pain. Björne was the one who followed them...
>
> Birger and Björne greeted each other, the worlds falling as they should...

" Did yer come across t'rea? Yes, Christ, there'll never be any forest there. Not many birds this year. Well, there's some, all right. But higher up. In t'thick forest. "

Previously Björne had given off an earthy smell, but now the smell had sickened. The smell of old man, Johan thought. He's old. Not yet fifty, but old.

Björne looked up. The colorless blue eyes appeared. Then his face closed up again, as if it had no features. He was shapeless. Heavy rather than fat.

" Sleeping all right ? " said Birger unexpectedly. Johan remembered that Björne had been his patient.

" Not so well, " said Björne. " Used to. But not 'tis hell you have to watch it. You might drop off for ever. " (405–406)

" It hurts sometimes, " said Johan.

" Tis why I haven't no woman, " said Björne. " Haven't even a cat. No one after me. "

It was growing dark outside. They would be sitting there getting nowhere with him. He would talk about things that made his strangeness and aloneness quite pleasing to his listener. But Björne was no oddball. Perhaps he's empty, Johan thought. Nothing but that inside him. He himself isn't there.

He had done it.

The event—ten, twenty savage knifings—came out of nothing. Out of the darkness that follows us. Perhaps he does not even remember it.

He was hiding himself. He wanted them to think he was an oddball. A harmless, kindly old man of the forest. As folk were in the olden days. Perhaps he believed it himself. But that was no use. He was the son of one of the few in the village who had done well for himself. There was work for him. There was money and machines. He had no need to be there. ( 408)

As people probably always had told Björne what he was thinking and what he had done. They had ordered him to fell the Area. Twenty years later, it was wrong to clear-fell like that. They let him do the wrong thing and then they told him so. (413)

(Birger) felt over him a little and listened to his heart. There was nothing wrong with it, he knew. His heart was pumping. The chest was being raised and lowered by his lungs. But Birger thought someone ought to touch him. (434)

## 1.2 THE BODY AS BATTLEGROUND AND TRANSITIONAL ZONE

### McDougall

> People with no clear representation of their own psychic space and their own identity tend to relate to others in ways that elude their psychic reality too, that is to say they tend to perceive only what accords with their preconceived notion of the other, and of the world in general, and to eliminate perceptions and observations that do not fit in with the existing idea.

says Joyce McDougall in *Plea for a Measure of Abnormality* (288). And she continues, "The need to be a separate individual may take precedence over the preservation of the corporeal self." The suggestion is that for many individuals, what is more urgently important than that of self-exploration is the issue of self-differentiation (*Many Faces of Eros* 40). When without a relatively firm conviction that he does differ from others, the subject cannot but feel that his being is constantly in jeopardy. The resulting uncertainty is of such a fundamental nature, claims McDougall, that it cannot possibly be articulated. Instead, it shows in the individual's relation to his body, structured according to the way in which he relates to him self and to others (*PMA* 426). For some it is not even an issue whether or not the body is considered acceptable and inhabitable. The more pressing question may be *whose* body they live in. If the subject himself is confused about the state of his habitat, so are others. Thus there is never enough of a continuity in the relationship between the one and the other, for the subject to come true. There *are* traces of life and indications of hope in these subjects' lives. But they tend to be overshadowed by the

individual's excessive dependency on others. "This idea—that somehow I don't exist for other people—affects me so deeply I'm almost unable to breathe," one of McDougall's analysands says, expressing the feeling that it is in the capacity of others to keep him alive, and thus in their power to determine his death (*Theaters of the Body* 123).

The individual for whom the certainty of existence always lies elsewhere, usually in some physical proof, tends to somatize, says McDougall. To suffer one ailment after another, may be his only way of creating certainty that he is alive. When cured or all alone, remarkably, he tends to sink into despair. There is thus no relief in having one's health restored in cases like these. "As for me," an analysand who has regained his physical health explains, "I'm more unhappy than ever before. My symptom, my real symptom, is that I don't know how to live" (*TB* 110). Neither to be confused with neurotics nor psychotics, the psychosomatic nevertheless has in common with the latter an outspoken inability to *experience*, *assert*, and *make use of* personal boundaries. He may be particularly apt at detecting others' affective states. But he remains incapable of containing and identifying his own feelings. By means of attitude, gestures, bodily behavior and words, however, he transfers his own affective experience to the other (*PMA* 256).

Freud speculated that emotions were most commonly transformed via neurosis. Neurotic fears, usually concerning the subject's adult right to sexual and narcissistic gratification, were expressed via substituting symptoms replacing

and punishing forbidden libidinal wishes. Hysteria, the development of physical symptoms carrying an unconscious symbolic meaning, is thus the manifestation of neurosis. It draws on Oedipal means of defense, is constructed through a chain of verbal associations, and thus it can be interpreted, made meaningful (*TOB* 20). What Freud's model tells us nothing about, is how to understand more general phenomena such as insomnia, constipation, extreme allergies, impotence and other non-symbolic ailments. Conditions of this nature are infrequently the result of unconscious anxieties originating in illegitimate libidinal desire, argues McDougall. Somatizing individuals thus differ significantly from Freud's neurotic. Any attempt at trying to conceptualize them similarly fosters nothing but further confusion (*PMA* 354). The fact that classical psychoanalysis does not enable us to derive meaning from unconscious processes, does not exclude that non-sensical communication may be of tremendous significance for the subject-to-be (*TB* 11). Neurotic repetition compulsion is a symbolic way of trying to resolve an infantile conflict and it may have more or less harmful consequences. Psychosomatic maladies, in contrast, combined with the individual's inability to pay attention to and take care of himself, often result in death. Psychosomatic phenomena are about "protecting one's right to exist," says McDougall. It is a survival strategy and a paradoxical one indeed: The individual is willing—and often ends up doing so—to pay with his life so as to survive emotionally (*TB* 30, 39, 54, 170).

In neurosis the symptom may serve as a buffer between mind and body ; a protective device developed by the psyche so as to avoid experiencing intense pain. The neurotic unconsciously notices and then denies the existence and significance of the phenomenon. In psychosomatics, the symptom reveals that the subject has regressed to an earlier and more primitive form of mind-body relationship. Any trace of affective memory has been destroyed (*TB* 27). Contrary to the neurotic, in summary, the " foreclosing " psychosomatic neither invents symbolic substitutes for the repressed, nor resigns to a hallucinatory world. His psyche is in a state of ultimate deprivation. And regardless of the multiple physical ailments he suffer, in addition to his general unhappiness, he rarely sees any connection between the two (*TB* 44). The fact is, he rarely makes any connections or draws any conclusions whatsoever in any respect. He acts as if his life depends on *not* associating any one thing with any other, on *not* understanding how one thing leads to an other. If he appears chameleon like and forever changing, it is because he is just that. His characters and attitudes are worn like borrowed, slightly off-sized pieces of clothing, soon to be replaced by better ones. Contrary to the hysteric, the psychosomatic is a master deceiver. Giving the impression of having resolved the oedipal conflict and being in the process of carrying on with an ordinary sex life, he nevertheless is deeply disturbed (*TB* 93). Maintaining a camouflage of pseudo normality, in order to neither feel nor reflect on his inner pain, he appears almost too normal. He is on par with Bollas' "normopath." The Oedipal battlefield, as it turns out, has

remained vacant. In the case of these individuals, the father's sex and presence seem to have played little role in the mother's life, McDougall observes. He is experienced to be unworthy of love as well as of any kind of esteem. The mother's image, in consequence, acquires enormous, life threatening proportions. "When there is not fantasy of the father's penis playing a libidinally and narcissistically enhancing rôle in the mother's life," McDougall explains, "the mental representation of the mother's sex becomes that of a limitless void." The fantasy of the mother's inner space represents psychic and somatic death and eternal bliss (*TB* 45).

The psychosomatic subject is thus bound to be driven by dreads that his bodily limits dissolve, that he be invaded and taken over by another. And yet he also dreams of ultimate co-existence with another being, as this implies symbiotic existence. Once again, as differing from the neurotic, whose bodily boundaries are clearly represented, the psychosomatic is worse off (*TB* 17). His anxieties, rooted as they are in his experience of the mother as all consuming, result in his developing an image of love relations as equating absorption (*MPE* xv-xvi). "Love leads to psychic death, that is, to the loss not only of my mental barriers against implosion from others but also of my body limits," as one of McDougall's patients states. "Nothing short of total indifference towards any loving attachments can assure my survival" (*TB* 37). So as to avoid the sticky dangers entailed in intercourse with the parental figures, the infant has detached himself prematurely from the maternal realm. His

transitional phase foreshortened, he cannot but develop a " shallow " self based on shaky ground. If he has an inner space at all, it is held sacred in the least productive sense of the term, that is, it remains vacant (*TB* 47).

Some psychoanalytic thinkers have tried to come up with a profile of a psychosomatic personality. A key concept in this regard is operatory thinking (as represented by de Mùzan, the Paris School) Operatory thinking is characterized by a "pragmatic and affect-less way of relating to both oneself and to other people, a form of relationship that appears to be largely delibidinized. " The individual "explains things away " without becoming emotionally involved. Parents die in brutal car crashes, lovers commit suicide, babies choke to death, great mishaps befall the subject. His reaction is to say that " life must go on, " that first and foremost, life is about pulling oneself together. Alexithymia is another key concept applied to psychosomatics. It refers to the fact that for some individuals emotions cannot be described. Due neither to their being unaware of their feelings, nor an inability to distinguish one emotion from another, they simply can find no words to describe these states. In effect, they may not be able to tell the difference between anxiety and depression, excitement and fatigue, anger and hunger. Operatory thinking and alexithymia are often assumed to capture the psychosomatic. Yet, the clinical picture far from supports this diagnosis, McDougall states :

> Originally I believed that in psychosomatic states the body was reacting to a psychological threat as though it were a physiological one; that there was a severe split between psyche and soma ; that this was largely due to our somatizing patients' unawareness of their emotional states in threatening situations , that the ideas

> associated with conflictual affect were not repressed as in the neuroses but immediately wiped from consciousness...
>
> However, further observation proved that psychosomatics in general were neither 'operatory thinkers' nor devoid of knowledge of their affective states. Instead, these individuals at certain moments in time, and under particular circumstances, behave like infants : unable to access language, their primary means to expressing emotional pain is somatic. The infant at this early stage of development has as yet to develop a clear representation if his body image. His own and the caretaker's body are experienced as a unit, regardless of the fact that he may indeed engage in some sort of object-relating. In adulthood a regression to this stage manifests itself in various ways Most strikingly, the subject appears uncertain of his own body boundaries, has doubts concerning his separateness from others and, when becoming intimately involved, he tends to react as if there were only one body available for the two individuals involved : one body for two, one sex for two, one mind for two, finally, one life for two. ..( *TB* 10, 36, 37 )

This *phantasy* results in an intense horror of *anything* potentially boundary dissolving. Paying the scarcest attention to his actual physical body, the subject may grow severely ill, without even noticing it. He is totally consumed by defending those boundaries that, supposedly, hold together his self. The numbing of his body serves as a reinforcement against any kind of "softening up" of his emotional boundaries, against any kind of experience of being alive. More concretely, the psychosomatic's attempt at steeling himself may find expression in all forms of physical damage and health problems, in which psychological factors play a key role. Among these forms occur accident-proneness, immunological disorders, addictions, heart problems, and so forth. Psychosomatics tend to react to almost *every* emotionally upsetting or exciting situation with somatic ailments (*TB* 19-21), the ineffectivity of which is demonstrated by the need to repeat the "cure" over and over again. Nevertheless, for the individual in question there is a strong unconscious need to preserve the illnesses. It serves to reassure the integrity of the bodily limits. As

long as the subject is capable of detecting some sort of a boundary, the underlying driving force of this dynamics, seems to be that *someone* must be contained (*TB* 21).

Somatic phenomena are essentially a primitive manner of trying to deal with psychotic anxieties, associated with preverbal longings experienced as being potentially life threatening (*TB* 55). During moments of intense stress, the psyche shortcuts the mental system and signals directly to the body, as it did in early infancy. The danger in question is thus never perceived, it instantly impresses the body, instead. In consequence, the individual may become dysfunctional at all kinds of boundary establishing levels. He may develop skin rashes, allergies, asthma, an intense urge to drain his body of any content whatsoever, or a persistent habit of holding back his breath. Or, he may happen to "over spill" terms of elevated blood pressure, quickened heart rate, and intensified perspiration. Finally, he is likely to develop serious problems associated with any kind of "taking in" and "letting go" such as sleeping, eating, and sexual activity.

Symptoms like the above may in some ways be said to speak for themselves. In so far as one acknowledges the links between mental and physical reality, they clearly indicate that the subject producing the symptoms are profoundly ill at ease. The subject's speech, on the other hand, is much less revealing. Almost totally deprived of affective content it conveys a message but gives no impression of the existence of a human being behind the words. Under

normal circumstances words are likely to function as suitable containers of feeling. They contain and channel affect, and thus prevent highly charged emotional experiences from seeking immediate discharge through physical symptoms, or action. However, in psychosomatics, language appears drained of emotional significance. Messages sent by the psyche do not pass through the symbolic chains of word-representations. Short-circuiting the associations of language they occur as " thing representations," thus provoking in the subject an urge to respond immediately and directly (*TB* 63-64). Language is used as an *act* rather than as a symbolic means of communicating ideas and affect. Talking becomes pseudo-normal anti-communicative measure, practiced for the purpose of passing on one's feelings to an other (*MFE* 76-78). What this subject makes use of is an archaic form of symbolism, a *protosymbolic* language. Allowing the body to " talk in the mind's place " the psyche is not exactly being bypassed. It is *being spoken* by bodily means (*TB* 30). *Protosymbolic* meaning, indicating a break down in the individual's capacity to associate symbolically, seems to underlie all psychosomatic phenomena, McDougall states. Protosymbolic language " uttered " by psychosomatic disorders makes up "dreams that never got dreamt." In consequence, they elude any ordinary form of interpretation (*TB* 102, 111).

## 1.3 TOUCHING SOMEONE DEEPLY BY WRAPPING HIM TIGHTLY : THE SKIN AS EXTENDED EGO

### Anzieu

Cutting through the confusion created by some of the contributions to the discussion concerning the role of verbal, non-verbal and somatic means of expressions in relation to subject-formation, Didier Anzieu simply says :

> The underlying epistemological problem could be stated as follows is truth visible, tangible, or audible? ( *The Skin Ego* 144)

His response to this highly unusual way of angling the issue is to say that it is made up of neither the one, the second, nor the third. It consists, he claims, in a life-long interplay between the three dimensions. *Thinking*, Anzieu hypothesizes, is as much an affair of the skin as of the brain. The ego he redefines as the *Skin Ego*, conceived of as an "envelope " containing though not insulating, the psyche and thus facilitating a filtered exchange of input and output. Self-reflection thus depends on the continuity *and* flexibility of the individual's Skin Ego. In so far as the subject rests securely in his own skin, and is capable of distinguishing between stimuli emerging from the inside and the outside, he is able to engage in genuine thinking and creative living. When suffering from a flawed Skin Ego, on the other hand, his intellectual energy is either consumed by a continuous rebuilding of boundaries or, it seeps out and leaves him high and drained. Traditional psycho-analytical theory conceives of phantasy as bridging and serving as an intermediary screen between the psyche

and the body, the interior and the exterior, one psyche and another. What the notion of the Skin Ego adds to this model is the conception of yet another boundary crossing phenomenon which, belonging to phantasy, nevertheless links psychic and somatic movements in the individual. It is structured during early infancy, says Anzieu, during the process of separating and differentiating from the mother. Its particular structure, never immediately accessible, manifests itself in terms of fantasies, dreams, everyday speech, gestures, postures, in disturbances of thought, and in somatic problems.

Going to great lengths to emphasize that no universally valid mapping of the Skin Ego is imaginable, Anzieu uses as illustration the difference between North-American and Inuit cultures. North-American culture is notoriously visual and non tactile, a genuine no-contact culture within which the child is taught to prematurely stand on his own feet and hold his ground. An adult acting as if oblivious to the no-contact social contract is considered primitive, rude or retarded. The Eskimo baby, in contrast, is carried on the mother's bare back for an extensive period of time. The close skin-to-skin connection during infancy seems to further the child's development of the kind of confidence required for him to survive during hostile environmental conditions, says Anzieu, to show altruism, and develop exceptional spatial and mechanical skills. The consistent bodily contact and the tight wrapping during the early stage of psychic disorganization, he suggests, seem to install in this individuals a basic trust in the environment that few Western babies ever develop (18). This case may

provide insufficient support for the argument that physical containment under *any* circumstance is beneficial for a disintegrating psyche. What they do indicate—and this is supported elsewhere—is that during moments of extreme psychic crisis the subject needs to be held, comforted, even confined. A case in point is severely psychotic subjects' reaction to the *pack* (111).

Originating in African tribal ritual and practiced by some contemporary American and French psychiatrists, the pack consists in wrapping up a psychotic patient in cool and damp sheets while keeping him company. Every single body part—except for the head—is wrapped tightly. The attending group of staff remains closely knit for a few hours, devoting themselves to keeping the subject company. Not only does the procedure have a substantial impact on the patient who reportedly feels like he is being "put back together," informs Anzieu, the entire team develops a special sense of bonding. Relief-envelopes, like the pack , massages, healing baths or encounter groups, thus give the individual a sense of having a Skin Ego, even if only temporarily.

The notion of "necessary " constraints, of course, sits uneasily with modern notions of autonomy, liberty, subjectivity. Beginning with modernity, we have conceived of freedom as excluding *any* kind of personal limitation. Still, the neurosis of the past rarely undercut people's ability to live. Current pathologies, on the other hand, affiliated with border-line disorders, psychosis, and schizophrenia, cause extensive ontological doubt. A content cannot exist without some relation to a container, as Anzieu puts it. The individual for whom

his separate existence is in doubt must have difficulties believing that he is alive. And one can neither perceive the outside world, nor trust one's inner, without believing in its reality. The individual whose sense of boundaries is blurred is prone to perceive himself as an invader, develop auto immune disorders, and to feel constantly haunted. For the subject to come into being, proclaims Anzieu , he *must* acquire a minimum degree of faith in his own being.

> To be oneself is first of all to have a skin of one's own and, secondly, to use it as a space in which one can experience sensations. To be an Ego is to feel one has the capacity to send out signals that are received by others ; is to feel unique ; is to be able to withdraw into oneself. (51-62)

If the individual is not permitted sufficient space in between one "face " of the Skin Ego and the other, he grows claustrophobic. His Ego is taken over and manipulated by the environment, or so it seems. And he cannot but lose his mind. The urgency of the emotional misery resulting from the contemporary pathological picture, in so far as we are to take it the least bit seriously, simply must lead to a re-institution of new sets of limits, Anzieu asserts. No matter the temptations presented by postmodern globalization, no matter the anxiety evoked by terms such as constraints, we have no other choice but to put in place some boundaries (89).

Elaborating on the similarities and differences among contemporary pathologies, Anzieu focuses on their common denominator: a flawed Skin Ego. Normally, the Skin Ego surrounds only part of the mental apparatus, he explains, its two surfaces allowing for a certain free interplay between the inner and the outer face. In *narcissistically disturbed* individuals, however, there

seems to be no space between the interior and the exterior. The surfaces stick together, allowing the individual no leeway to unfold. Feeling insecure, insufficient and uneasy in his own skin, he entirely depends on environmental reflections of his self. Phantasmatically stuck in the single body, originally shared with his mother, the subject's Skin Ego is too fragile for him to proceed with further separation and differentiation. He is trapped in a bewildering maze of discrepancies between the way he feels, the self-image he tries to sustain, and the reflections he receives from others. Never at home nor at ease anywhere, the narcissist is constantly trying to impress with a flashy surface, while his self has as yet to arise from the gravel.

*Borderliners* suffer a different fate, in that their Skin Ego is porous. "The Ego acquires its sense of temporal continuity *only* in so far as the Skin Ego constitutes itself as an envelope that is sufficiently flexible in its interactions with its environment and sufficiently "containing " of what then become its psychical contents," explains Anzieu (87). In border-line conditions the entire structure of the Skin Ego has suffered damage. The two faces of the Skin Ego not merely stick together, they have merged into one and the same in a twisted fashion similar to that of the Moebius strip. "Just as the outside becomes an inside which again becomes an outside, and so on," Anzieu elaborates, "the badly contained content becomes a container which contains badly " (125). Finding himself located neither inside nor outside his own body, the subject cannot ever determine where he is, what he feels, or who he is. Hence his great difficulties in distinguishing what

comes from his self, and what comes from others. A rudimentary envelope may exist, but it is punctured and provides neither continuity nor a sense of security. The subject functions and feels like a sieve : thoughts, memories, and affects cannot be preserved. They leak away and leave the individual behind empty handed and stranded in a forever deserted inner space (102). Unable to contain the affects that ordinarily make up a subject's existential core, emotions migrate from the center of the system towards the periphery where they are scattered and lost rather than represented and preserved. The subject suffers from an excruciating sense of emptiness, and yet, what he dreads the most is that his " hidden " supposedly deceased "self " may break into consciousness and undermine his already shallow sense of a self. Drowning in difficulties when trying to sort out his self from this blur of others, the border-liner often end up gluing himself to others, thereby trying to get under somebody else's skin, so as finally to get a taste of how it *feels* to be contained. Regardless of his parasitic pattern of behavior, however, the border liner is constantly on his guard and afraid that *others* may want to penetrate and invade him (24).

When the Skin Ego fails in its containing function, as extensively as in the case of border-liners, the psychical topography consists of a kernel without a shell. Seeing no other solution than wrapping himself in suffering, the subject may seek refuge in a surrogate shell consisting of physical pain or psychical anxiety. Or, he may seek compensation for his insufficiently supported and supportive Skin Ego in substitutes such as ritualized behavior or rigid exercising, literally—but not

psychically--speaking building an armature for his self (103). Hence, the signals of safety and danger in his case are inverted: familiarity, and in-dwelling, rather than associating protection, are suspected to hold grave danger. Strangeness and alienation, on the other hand, are experienced as holding great potential. Hence the border-liner's fascination by whatever is harmful to him. His "real self" is bound to emerge from a zone of mind-blowing excitement and fear. Or so he believes (107). Unable to protect himself, and magnetically attracted to neck-breaking opportunities, the subject easily lives in a hostile environment. He feels haunted, like he has been flayed alive, as if he has been left in a desert on his own, expected to survive raw and permanently exposed nerve ends. In effect of his great affective confusion the border-liner cannot but be motivated by avoidance of un-pleasure—sometimes adding up to avoidance of feeling all together--rather than by pursuit of pleasure. He lives in the here and now, does not possess the kind of mental disposition that enables him to learn from experience. The only security to be found, in this case, lies in social withdrawal and affect-ridden fantasizing. In *psychosis*, finally, especially in schizophrenia, there is absolutely no confidence in the body's natural functioning and mental functioning is dominated by anti-physiological reaction. "What is natural is experienced as artificial," writes Anzieu. "The living is treated as mechanical: what is good for life and in life is felt to represent mortal danger." Certain fundamental distinctions have as yet to be mastered, such as the distinction between waking and sleeping, dream and reality, animate and inanimate" (107).

Elaborating on McDougall's theory of psychosomatics, Anzieu distinguishes between two types of this disorder : *Barrier* personality types and the *Penetration of Boundary* type. The former tends to perceive any protective surface, membrane, shell, or skin, potentially and symbolically associated with bodily boundaries as an encumbrance. The subject sees himself as being walled in and isolated behind a thick and unforgiving defense. The Penetration of Boundary type generally distrusts his body's ability to provide sufficient protection. Functioning as a fragile and easily impressive envelope, it is experienced as inviting physical intrusion, and thus as calling for psychic injury. The extent of the damage done to the skin is always experienced as being proportionate to the depth of the psychical harm done (34). Penetration and violation are represented by various degrees of rupturing of the bodily surface (such as bleeding, cutting, and scratching), by different orifices and media (mouth, anus, vagina, doorway, x-rays, intersections of fluids and firmness ), or by various kinds of surface permeability (softness and fluffyness, transparency, deterioration) (31). Generally the function of the psychosomatic *symptom* is to split off the psychic from the physical, so that the subject may avoid total destruction. It is a defense against *any* kind of psychosomatic integration. Splitting ensures that at least one part of the self is out of danger. The price to pay, of course, is that the subject never develops a sense of "coming together." He ends up living as if in a void or a vacuum. "Falling into the inner void is a way of disappearing from possible prying eyes," Anzieu argues (133). It may

make up a last resort attempt at surviving, and in that sense serving as a surrogate for the containing which the psychical apparatus cannot provide. Still, as sheltering as it may seem, the void is made up of nothing but lack of affect, sensual numbness, and absence of love. Any kind of surface expression, emerging from this vacuous subject, whether consisting in body-modification, mutilation or enhancement is done in the hope that it may serve to protect the subject from drowning during social interaction. It works as a manifestation that there *is* a boundary, that there *is* a difference between the exterior and the interior, that the body *does* constitute somebody's castle, as opposed to a nobody's prison.

Psycho-analytic drive theory and object-relations theory both contribute to our understanding of the connection between the self's integration and his ability to express himself. Still, as pointed out by McDougall, both suffer the shortcoming of not taking into account the significance of less "meaningful" patterns of reaction. Freud, in his early writings, distinguished between drives for self-preservation and sexual drives. He later conceived of object libido as opposed to Ego-libido. And eventually he launched Eros as a force opposed to Thanatos. An *attachment drive* may beneficially be added to Freud's model as a variation of self-preservation, Anzieu suggests, echoing the human ethologists. And Winnicott's notion of transitional objects and phenomena may well be understood in terms of an *attachment effect*. Classical psychoanalysis, furthermore, focuses on orality as a primitive means of "incorporating" and

"expelling" the other, as well as of establishing the very earliest tentative boundary between the not-yet-self and the environment. However, as McDougall demonstrates, there are times where the most profound communication takes place as an immunological or neurological level of being. What must be added to the classical psycho-analytical framework, therefore, is the notion that some of our most basic acts of communication take place on the surface of our body, states Anzieu. We sometimes absorb the other, evaporate resentment, express disagreement by developing repulsive rashes, and so forth. The skin itself consists of multiple sense organs intimately connected with hearing, sight, smell, taste, balance and proprioception. It breathes and perspires, stimulates perspiration, circulation, digestion, excretion and reproduction (11). Yet, it also holds together the bodily fluids and wraps up the skeleton. It is at one and the same time permeable and impermeable, protective and exposing. It is the only sense organ covering the entire body, it contains several distinctive senses ( the sense of heat and cold, pain and pleasure, contact, pressure ), and , finally, "touch is the only one of the five external senses which possesses a reflexive structure....It is on the model of tactile reflexivity that the other sensory reflexivities (hearing oneself make sounds, smelling one's odor, looking at oneself in the mirror ), and subsequently the reflexivity of thinking, are constructed" (62). It is upon the skin that a first picture ( impression ) of reality is registered, Anzieu argues. Furthermore, "an individual's membership of a social group is shown by incisions, scarifications, skin-painting, tattooing, by his make-

up and hair-style, and by his clothes, which are another aspect of the same thing. The Skin Ego is the original parchment which preserves, like a palimpsest, the erased, scratched-out, written-over first outlines of an 'original' pre-verbal writing made up of traces upon the skin" (105).

Winnicott claimed that the integration of the ego in time and space depends on the mother's way of *holding* the infant, his personalization on her way of *handling* the child. The former refers to her tuning in and responding adequately to the baby's needs while also creating continuity in time, rhythm and reciprocity in mother-infant interaction, a flexible yet bounded space. The latter refers to her ability to make room for, respond to, and gradually frustrate baby's "spontaneous gestures" (26). But in addition to being fed and comforted the infant has a third experience, Anzieu argues, namely to be embraced by the mother, that is to be pressed against her body and enveloped by her voice, her smell and her bodily gestures. The very beginning of the infant's life is an experience of existing in *one skin for two beings*. The newborn baby appears physiologically programmed to anticipate such a containing envelope, he says. If no such sensory enveloping is offered by the holding environment, he will make use of almost anything else available. White noise, the presence of certain smells, the reoccurrence of specific objects may come to function as his "frame of reference" (113).

The first communication between the baby and the maternal and familial environment is a mirror, which is *both* tactile and acoustic. "To communicate is,

first of all, to become resonant with, to vibrate in harmony with the other." Anzieu states (52). The massage becomes the message. *Language acquisition* later in life, depends on the existence of such early pre-verbal communication—and differentiation. The early skin-interaction is not primarily about the satisfaction of vital needs such as feeding or sleeping (70). It is about pre-verbal and infra-linguistic communication, the foundation for subsequent linguistic exchange :

> The sound mirror and later the visual mirror only contribute to the structuring of the Self and subsequently of the Ego if the mother expresses to the child both something of herself and something of himself, as well as something which concerns the earliest psychical qualities experienced by the baby's emerging Self. The sound space is the first psychical space. (170)

The infant who perceives no recognition of himself in the mother's face, voice and gesture, gets depressed or goes into a frenzy. His body is incapable of experiencing pleasure or engaging in representational activity. It is emptied of affect and uninhabited. The meaning of life totally eludes him. Hence his ensuing chronic search for consumerist fulfillment and models of identification and his attraction to processes of initiation, often involving a transgression of bodily pain thresholds (205).

In so far as things between the mother and young child proceed less problematically, the double feedback system between the two, evolves into an *interface*, a skin imagined to belong to both mother and child with the mother occupying the outside and the child the inside. The interface transforms the psychical functioning into an increasingly flexible system and thereby allows for

the mother and child to gradually separate. During the succeeding stages of development the infant is to undergo the painful realization that the two of them do *not* share one and the same skin, a process which lays the ground for the phantasy of being flayed alive. During the process of overcoming this stage, the subject's Skin- Ego comes to provide a psychical envelope containing psychical contents. It thus enables him to interiorize the mothering environment, in terms of an inner world of thoughts, images, emotions (63). Slowly and gradually the infant learns to distinguish between his bodily surface and the other's, his interior, the exterior and the mother's interior. Provided the sailing is smooth he eventually perceives himself as a "container," that is, of having an inner psychic space of his own. His space for thought evolves as a consequence of the reciprocity of the mother-infant relationship. The mother, providing a background against which the child's wishes, desires and needs can *figure*, enables him to gradually separate his Skin (and emerging Self) from hers.

The process of separation is intimately associated with the subject's ability to master his bodily openings: The precondition for baby's feeling confidence in himself is his ability to control his orifices, that is to feel in charge of his bodily integrity. The *prohibition of touching* is fundamental in other respects than those associated with incest, Anzieu emphasizes. For the infant undergoing the transition from life in a containing, tactile envelope to the inter-sensorial space laying the ground for symbol formation it is crucial that a "space " remains open and frustrated while the ability to symbolize develops.

The subject must learn to distinguish between stimuli emerging the interior and the exterior, respectively, and he must acquire the ability to recognize his needs and desires for others, that is to represent them for the other (104).

The mother who clings to her baby, over-stimulates him, neglects his need for privacy, declines to take seriously the signals he emits, allows no space to emerge between the two and thus encapsulates the child's ego and suffocates his emerging sense of self. In response the child may develop childhood autism, breathing difficulties, or he may develop an additional muscular skin, as in schizophrenia. It may also lead to the child's setting up independent psychical frontiers : one for the internal space of external objects, another for the external space of internal objects and a third for the external world, thereby creating a vacuum-like psychic black hole in which every psychical object approaching the individual is swallowed up.

The individual who was never granted the opportunity to gradually separate his Skin Ego from that of the mother's, but was thrust into immediate independence, is the very subject who never recovers from the fear of being chopped up alive. Suffering from depersonalization he senses that his self is flowing away through holes in his container leading to his feeling perforated, drained, deserted (39). Ironically, this is the very subject who is prone in adulthood to develop severe dermathological disorders and a taste for sado-masochistic indulgence. The phantasy of the *flayed body* underlies perverse behavior, says Anzieu. It is a response to the experience that the Skin Ego is

already broken, as if torn apart. Hence, bodily mutilation, when practiced regularly, thus may express the individual's desire to eliminate—or at least to reverse—his dependency on others. The need to take such violent measures reflects a self suffering from an excessively vague and insufficient inner differentiation. Constantly oscillating between fear that he shall be abandoned and dread that he may be engulfed, the subject walks a thin line. The other is always inevitably perceived as being so distant that it is dizzying or so close up that it is suffocating. No distance is ever suitable (33).

Sadomasochists, Anzieu reports, in agreement with Stoller, often report an episode of physical injury early in life (41). The original masochist phantasy has pre-oedipal roots and consists in the mother and child symbiotically unified in one and the same skin. Every attempt on the subject's behalf at detaching himself is imagined to tear and rupture the tender membrane. Thus the phantasy of being torn apart and the idea that the price for the survival of the one is the death of the other. Intense and lasting pain disorganizes the psychical apparatus, threatens the psyche's integration with the body. Both effects the subject's capacity to desire and disturbs his thinking. When in great pain we say we "fall apart." And we do, at least in so far as our Skin- Ego is concerned. Interestingly, physical treatment in itself hardly ever brings instant relief to the agonized subject. Immersion in a soothing word bath, on the other hand, is more likely to reduce the physical suffering. Pain is isolating and therefore anxiety provoking.

What can be shared is not pain but the defense against it : "I suffer therefore I am." What relieves it is not anesthetics but human holding (201).

Pain is not the opposite or the reverse of pleasure. The relations between the two is asymmetrical. Satisfaction is an experience, but suffering is a trial. Anzieu concludes (200 ).

The subject coming into being, said Lacan, cannot but get fractured during his hazardous passage through the mirror-stage. The price to pay for breaking free of the maternal realm is that he must come to terms with the fact that he is forever "in pieces." The power of speech is that it enables the subject to substitute for a lost sense of unity by symbolic means. Thus, no matter how eloquent the subject grows, words--at the same time as they make up for the subject's flaws—never cease to remind him of his ontological splitting. Speech is the subject's means of reassuring himself that he is not in the process of sliding back into psychotic non-existence.

Anzieu's theory turns this Genesis upside down. The subject in the process of evolving, he claims, remains tormented by early infantile fears of physical and psychical annihilation, *unless* he is mirrored by the visual and acoustic environment. Mirroring helps him *integrate* various parts of his self, and it enables him to *differentiate* between layers of fiction and factuality. Mirroring, here understood as a containment of the subject *and* as a reflection of his interior, lays the ground for the acquisition of a meaningful language.

Contrary to the Lacanian mirroring myth, the development of speech does not require that the subject writes off pre-verbal existence. In fact, words and narratives, according to Anzieu's model, may serve as substitute mirrors (207). The spoken word, even more so the written word, has the power to function as a second skin (231). When the Lacanian subject writes himself into being, he does so at the price of an incorporated self. If Anzieu's subject lets his pen run freely, the outcome is an improved sense of psychosomatic integration.

## 1.4 A SELF CENTERED AROUND A FLEXIBLE LINE ?

Modell points to the importance of allowing some space for the self. Bollas emphasizes that the self at heart remains unrecognizable and must be approached as if in a dream. McDougall adds to this picture that there are individuals for whom even the capacity to dream has been lost. In these instances what remains of the self and comes to expression is the relationship and the degree of interaction between psyche and soma. Finally, Didier Anzieu suggests that the individual's sense of self is in fact nowhere else to be found than on the surface of the body.

Each thinker adds yet another twist to what it means to have a self, where it is located, how it comes to expression and, significantly, the importance of allowing this self—whatever its nature—some space for re-creation. As we seethrough the line of thinkers, notions such as "meaning," "sense," and "subjectivity" keep changing, growing in subtlety and complexity, and gaining in significance. This may be the very paradox : The less outspoken the subject in question is, the more fundamental does the truth about which he keeps quiet appear to be. Importantly, it is rarely a truth "merely" about individual experience, but almost always about the role of various forms of symbolization in the acquisition of a fully embodied, integrated and differentiated subjectivity. No Cartesian mind-body dualistic speculation remains possible when listening to these increasingly expressive, though decreasingly articulate, subjects. What

remains to be said has little to do with what these "languages" have to tell us, more to do with the nature of the context from which they have risen. The question to keep in mind is—even if it is not to be resolved here and now, the extent to which private and public languages rub off on each other. *Part Eight* briefly introduces a few perspectives on what has recently happened to our shared tongue, and some of the reasons why the dissolution of a common ground has caused the subject to turn toward matters of physicality.

**Life as a rug of rags,**
**made out of shredded dreams.**
***BLACKWATER***

Following Annie's death Mia, Johan, and Birger clear out her house. Birger is asking too many questions related to the Lobber case according to Mia's taste. She wants a cleared conscience and a sparkling slate to make up the foundation for *her* new life, the baby she is expecting with Johan. Mia knows, but does not want to know, that Johan is a murder suspect. Energetically she fills up a succession of garbage bags with the "rubbish" left behind by her mother, thus trying to eliminate all indications that her lover may be guilty. Birger finds it disturbing to witness Mia so swiftly imposing a new order on Annie's so called disorder. She is trying to create clarity where none is, he thinks angrily, trying to transform the unpredictability of life into an agenda of her own. Contrary to the

efficient Mia, neither Annie's dog nor Birger can figure out what to do. Both cannot but expect that Annie is to make her return. She does, but not until Birger is prepared to receive her in an unexpected form.

> Annie had once said that the only thing about her death that she was quite sure of was that she would leave a sizable amount of rubbish behind. She hadn't meant it literally—or had she? She must have been talking about modern Western people, or something of the kind. Birger couldn't remember. He was feeling great irritation and was aware that that always preceded an attack of pain.
>
> It often happened. He grew angry. He thought she had talked a lot of nonsense and said unnecessary things. Her joking—or was it joking?—then turned into irony. If it could be called that. It? What was it that was ironical? Anyhow, he couldn't stand it. It was impersonal. Came out of nowhere. He wanted to scream, which, of course, he didn't. But he often stood there with his mouth open...
>
> Saddie had displayed discreet delight when Birger had arrived and was now lying at his feet. He tried to talk to her, but when she looked up with her dim eyes and gave a subdued wag of her tail, he started to weep. Her nose was gray and white. He couldn't remember how old she was. (314)

> Johan came up from the cellar with a Black Forest cake and put it in the sun to thaw. When they started eating it, it occurred to Birger that it might be the cake left over from the funeral. Just how practical was Mia really?
>
> Mia was clearing up. Her face was sweaty, and she had gardening gloves on her hands. She was hurling rubbish from the shed into a black sack.
>
> "Why did you come here?" said Mia quite sharply.
>
> "You know why. I promised to look after [Annie's dog]."
>
> She had started sieving flour into a bowl.
>
> "Are you going to do some baking?" he said stupidly.
>
> "I'm sieving this to see if there are any weevils."
>
> He was suddenly unreasonably angry with her. Out with it all, he thought. Everything you've thought, all the criticism you've had to hold back—for you did respect her, after all—you can release by doing things now, cleaning and tidying up. Eliminating...
>
> Christ, how unpleasant the young can be! Christ how unpleasant and vile everything is! Living and struggling and then falling apart because of an anomaly in cell formation, or a bunch of bacteria, or shotgun pellets—or water!...
>
> Living and talking—and a whole lot of quasi-religious crap—and trying to hold on although all the time you know you're going under—no, being dissolved. Truly enjoined. That's loathsome. That's unendurably loathsome. But all the same, the worst of all is the vile way young people pretend not to notice. No, they simply don't know anything about it. They have everything in their grasp. They plan! and some never grow up. (322)

> Johan was looking at him and Birger sensed that he had noticed his anger. The gateau was melting and there were flies on it. Unplanned, he thought maliciously. Something not going the way it was supposed to after all.
>
> "Edith up above Westlund's, do you remember her?" said Birger.
>
> Johan nodded.

" She broke her leg in March last year and had to go to the hospital. In the summer her family came up to straighten everything out, for Edith would be coming home again. A large heap of rubbish lay just there where we usually park when we go up on the shoot...They had thrown away Edith's cloth strips she had cut up to make rag rugs. "

He fell silent and thought there had been at least twenty skeins of strips of cloth on that rubbish heap. It wouldn't have been possible to rescue them because it had rained a lot and by autumn they were half rotten. Anna Starr had been there and felt them. " You wonder what kind of people do things like that, throwing away ready-cut rags, " she had said, although she had known perfectly well it was the sons and daughters in law.... "Anyhow, there was Edith's hat on the very top of the rubbish mound. The one she used to wear when she was out chopping wood or taking up potatoes. It was a brown felt hat that looked like a pot and had two flowers made of the same felt material on the front. Do you remember it ? " .

It was November and I thought I'd see if there were any hares up there On my way down the path, I heard someone chopping wood. It was dusk. I walked past Edith's woodshed...That is when I saw her. She was inside and the flowers on that old hat bobbed every time she split the logs. " He fell silent.

" She was back then, " said Johan.

"...She had come back from the long-term ward, found her felt hat, and presumably quite a lot of other things on the rubbish heap, then had set about chopping wood for the winter. The way he had told the story to Johan, it was pointless.

He did talk away like that sometimes, without really knowing where it would lead. (316-17).

Not to know to where it is going to lead or, more precisely, not to *have* to know to what the trend is taking one, turns out to be to some advantage. If one's story-line is made up of a numerous pile of trends, as is the one trashed by Edith's daughter-in-law, one may as well resign from trying to straighten out each and everyone's destination. It is only by "cutting one's losses," and yet picking up where one left off, that a sense of orientation arises. Edith returned from the dead, and carried on with business as usual. Annie lost her belief in human goodness at the river Lobber. Still, at the loss of her child her faith in the generative powers of life was nevertheless restored. Step by step, Birger discovers a higher purpose of the inconsistencies in Annie's life, that is, her silence in certain respects, her casual use of words in other regards, her taking

them extraordinarily seriously in other situations. When viewed separately none of these habits make much sense. But when considered in a context and looked at as a whole, they contribute to a picture of Annie's particular way of keeping her head above water. Annie was neither scared of drowning nor of dissolving. She worried that one of the story-lines contributing to her life would come to an abrupt end, the way it happened at the Lobber, where not only two lives but also Annie's life, as she imagined it to be, was suddenly terminated. She worried that her balancing of life's contradictions, so hard to achieve, even more difficult to maintain without freezing them into a deadening form, would be interrupted. Thus, she never intended to leave behind the mess of life and get high and dry. Ultimately, Annie's notion of being at peace with herself involved a delicate relationship between inner and outer movement, her sense of being singular and yet being part of a larger whole, her appreciation of containment and yet her acknowledgment of her being at the mercy of the elements.

> On one of the first occasions they had been together, Birger had told Annie what had happened to him at the Sulky. He had also told what the consequences had been, that he had begun to be with Frances afterward in that way that had wrecked his marriage. She had listened without interrupting. After he had finished, she said:
>
> "I don't want to get near the other reality. Even if I could, I wouldn't want to provoke visions and altered states."
>
> He was very surprised. He had expected objections, but of another kind. She accepted his story and that almost disconcerted him. How could she keep a balance between incompatibilities in such an untroubled way?
>
> "I like this reality," she said. "Or the unreality. But I can't dismiss the other. The weave of reality is often loose—I can see through it. I've done that ever since I was a child, and it isn't a frightening experience, though perhaps it ought to be.
>
> "I don't belong here. The surroundings I have ended up in haven't been chosen. Anyhow, not by me. They make me feel affection for what is all around me. Even for human beings sometimes. But mostly for the landscape—and houses."
>
> "A little house like this," she said as they lay beside each other in the bed in that winter-night dark room. "It can fill me with great affection. It is so fragile and temporary. It might burn down in a couple of hours one night when thunder

rumbles over the mountain. But it keeps the fiercest cold out. ..And it keeps out the rain rattling on its metal roof, furiously on autumn nights. Wait till you hear it. "

That was how he found out that she also thought they would go on being together....Ordinarily she wasn't particularly open at all, although she talked a lot.

" We're not alone here, " she said. " This place houses a whole lot of creatures. They live here with us. Wasps, flies, silverfish, and mice ..The house had been almost a hundred and sixty years when I first came, and it will still be here after me if it doesn't burn down. " (306)

(Birger) thought about time, moment added to moment in a line that pushed Annie and her shattered chest and diaphragm farther and farther back, inward. The image flickered as if under a mesh. Not even shock and pain were immutable, they moved.

He had had one experience of total stillness in his life. At the Sulky Hotel, time had stopped. But there was no more than an image left of that, the memory of a changeable and moving image, and it was turning gray as if from dirt
Then it occurred to him that the dead were in absolute stillness

That thought turned his life over. He was in the dirt She was where he wanted to be.

It's that simple, he thought.

These were not thoughts of suicide. On the contrary, they helped him to get going again. He trudged off to the health center. Annie was where he wanted to be. He didn't have to avoid thinking about her.

She was in stillness.

He thought about there being places—or moments—that are as good as still. .He liked standing by the open window at night, feeling the air against his face Quite a few of the things Annie had done seemed to be confronting stillness. She had known about it.

She stood on the steps listening to the rain in the aspens.

There was a point where the stillness and the busy restlessness of life merged together. He didn't think much more about it But he realized that he had a lot to do if the house was to be able to hold its own against time. (396)

# PART EIGHT

## The currency of common grounds

Most of the above reflections on the role of symbolization, whether of a verbal or a non-verbal nature, conceive of the aim of creative living in terms of a more fulfilling life. However, few thoughts are given to the nature of this improved standard of living. Of what does it consist ? In comparison with what is it more or less good ? Deleuze and Guattari quickly writes off the possible advantages of the subject's ability to operate within a hierarchical universe. Lingis gives some credits to the world of difference. He acknowledges, for instance, that it is by throwing his body into foreign waters that the subject's sense of self is awakened. Freud had little consolation to offer anyone. The object-relations theorists provide more hope. Thus Winnicott's very significant notion of transitional zones and objects, which may come in many different forms. Ultimately, the requirement for a good life, according to his theory is a cultural setting within which it is possible for the subject to explore his inner self, and share it with others. The feminist critics too, put forward the proposal that what is needed, for a better life to evolve, is a social territory within which degrees of difference may coexist and play off against each other.

What characterizes all these suggestions is most of all their relative vagueness concerning the nature of a "good life." The basic question concerns

the role of play and creativity, that is of culture, in the formation of the subject. That no subject comes into being independently of the social is evident. The ways in which social and private languages interact are much less clear cut and may have to remain so for another while to come. As regards the subject's needs to be able to situate himself within a more or less delimited zone. Charles Taylor and George Steiner bring a useful perspective on the matter. Elaine Scarry, finally, throws some light on the connection between the lack of ideological and ontological certainty, as described by Taylor and Steiner, and painful bodily preoccupation.

## 1.0 CUTTING THROUGH THE FOREST SO AS TO GET A SENSE OF WOOD

### Taylor

The consequence of the contemporary subject's inability to situate himself within a belief system, Charles Taylor says, is that he falls into spiritual meaninglessness (*Sources of the Self* 18). If previously he suffered a certain fear of condemnation, the postmodern individual is left with the dread of the annihilating power of meaninglessness. Bereft of horizons of meaning and value, nothing can possibly make a qualitative difference to him. Self-understanding, Taylor states, essentially incorporates the subject's seeing himself against a background of "strong evaluation." The latter consists in a background of

distinctions between things which are recognized as of unconditioned higher importance or worth, and things which lack this (*Human Agency and Language* 3). Thus, it is paramount for the subject's sense of human agency, claims Taylor, that he exists in a space of questions concerning strongly valued goods. Identity, simply stated, is what allows the subject to decide why certain things are important to him, while others are not :

> My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good or valuable, or, what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.
>
> *The disorientation and uncertainty about where one stands as a person seems to spill over into a loss of grip on one's stance in physical space.* (*SS* 27-28, emphasis added)

The human subject *needs* to inhabit a common space, consisting of moral values, so as to be able to clarify his place in this world. Another way of putting it is to say that he must be able to detect a connection between *his* life-world and the larger whole. It is through others' experience of anger, love, anxiety, that he grows capable of refining old forms of being and of innovating new ones.

Contrary to, among others, truth-conditional and post-structural theories of meaning, Taylor puts forward an *expressive-constitutive* train of thought. Language serves the dual function of giving expression for intangible, emotional states of being and of referring to consensual reality. The meanings and illocutionary forces activated in any speech act, he goes to great length to emphasize, are only what they are against the background of a whole language and way of life (*HAL* 11). Thus, one language is clarified by means of an other, as Wittgenstein suggested, to the effect that the shadowy areas of experience

gradually find representation and hence are increasingly "circumscribed" (*SS* 34). What follows is that we must resign from ever trying to find *an* answer to what we truly are. For we are constantly evolving and always in the process of becoming. What we may instead strive for with some success, is the development of "thick description," as conceptualized by Clifford Geertz. This, says Taylor, might enable us to give shape to particular volume and density of meaning related to particular cultural concepts.

Thus, the discovery of a good life may be less about the invention of an *other* life, more about getting a better grasp of the facets and depths of what is currently available (*Sources of the Self* 100-105). We need to make further inquiries into the interplay between our *perception* of a good life, our *conceptualization* of the self, the *narrative forms* by means of which we bring meaning to our life, and our understanding of what it entails to be a social animal.

What has happened with the arrival of the postmodern is that we have been forced to take a look at these links, that we have been compelled to explore where they appear to increase our sense of interconnectedness, and where they work as constraints. The recent loss of rooted certainty, as it goes, therefore represents the opportunity for an epistemic gain. It encourages us to approach the issue concerning our moral and ontological grounds from a less narrow minded point of view. By inciting us to develop a more manifold engagement with the

world, it helps us get off the risky route of being too determined to follow a predetermined course :

> What is lost from sight [when exhibiting too narrow sympathies] is that there may be genuine dilemmas [at stake], that following one good to the end may be catastrophic, not because it is not good, but because there are others which cannot be sacrificed without evil. . .
>
> Goods never occur in pure form. One can only argue convincingly about goods, which in some way impinge on people . . which they respond to but may be refusing to acknowledge (*SS* 503, 505)

Taylor defines meaning along the following lines: It is *for* a subject : *of* something, though by no means through symmetrical reference ; and things only have meaning in a field, that is *in relation to* the meanings of other things. There is no such thing as a single unrelated meaningful element. In consequence, changes in the other meanings populating the field result in changes in any given element. Common meanings, Taylor suggests, make up the basis of a community. Inter-subjective meaning provides people with a shared language by means of which they can talk about social reality and develop a mutual understanding of certain norms. The general sense that one belongs to a context within which certain actions, celebrations, rituals, and feelings are esteemed significant, this is what makes a community.

Taylor's emphasis on values as emerging from consensual reality clearly creates some obstacles for a reading of for instance the current somatization of our culture. It may be impossible to determine the extent to which the meaning of these gestures are in the process of being agreed upon by a larger whole, even more so to map the conjunctions between nominal and marginal forms of symbolization. But there is no doubt, as Taylor puts it, that

the turn towards the body, that is the attempt to create a physically located anchoring point for the subject's identity, is triggered primarily by a widespread sense of moral-ontological disorientation.

## 1.1 ARTS ARE FOR REAL

### Steiner

In *Real Presences*, subtitled *Is There Anything in What We Say?*, George Steiner makes an inquiry into the ways in which we experience the aesthetic in 20th century culture. Contrary to Taylor, who focuses on what we can commonly agree upon *saying*, Steiner's primary concern is the limits of language and the frontier between the conceptualization of rational-logical sorts and other modes of internal experience. We do not inhabit a moment in historical time in which we are short of words, says Steiner. Rather, we live in an age characterized by an overflow of commentary and a lack of original works of art. This discursive overloading has not exactly resulted in an improved ability to define life experience. Rather, the ego has been lost in babble. Thus the bulk of dissertations on Shakespeare, and works of a similar character says Steiner, make up nothing but "a gray morass " in which the humanities are in the process of being diluted and trivialized (35). What is worse, the eclipse of the humanities, in their primary sense and presence in contemporary culture, implies the decline of the humane (49). How did things go awry to the extent that we

ended up forgetting what it means to be human, and how are we going to reconstruct cultural conditions that allow us to return to being?

Sometime between 1870 and 1940, Steiner explains, in connection with the evolution of modernity, the covenant between word and world was broken (93). With modern hermeneutics signs began to circulate. Saussurean linguistics, for instance, placed language at the center of human phenomenology and then made this center a formality. This, says Steiner, has nothing to do with love. The structuralist and the post-structuralist gesture does not provide the space required for the interaction needed for a relationship between love and the word to evolve. Poststructuralism liberated language from its referentiality, in Rimbaud exemplified with the deconstruction of the first person singular. "Je est un autre." said Rimbaud, and the ego was no longer itself, no longer capable of integration. Psychic cohesion was with Rimbeaud and his followers, such as Lacan, pulverized, crystallized, and turned into pieces splintered by a centrifugal and temporary energy. In effect the subject lost the ability to speak. He came, instead, to be spoken. By separating the "I" from the author, these "Masters of Emptiness" separated the aesthetic from the ethical. Where, if anywhere, is a responsible response to be located in this game, asks Steiner? (99-101). Love cannot be projected into an unpeopled, or inhuman, void. The capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence :

> ...any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, that any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's

> presence. . . [T]he experience of aesthetic meaning in particular, that of literature, of the arts, of musical form, infers the necessary possibility of this 'real presence.' ( 3)

What we are facing today, from within the abyss of rhetorical self-reflection, is something more and other than merely the challenge of nailing down the word. The task ahead of us, Steiner says, is to relearn to be human (4). For deconstruction there can be no foundational speech-act, no saying immune from un-saying. There can be no determination of texts by contexts, because context itself is arrived at by verbal constructs. Deconstruction rules that the very concept of meaningfulness is theological or onto-theological. This approach makes it impossible to refute any proposition. Any judgment becomes as relevant and valid as any other (68). The deconstructive break with the postulate of the sacred is thus the break with any stable, potentially ascertainable meaning of meaning (119-132).

Theories of interpretation and criticism, often of a deconstructive flavor, are per definition after the fact descriptions, Steiner points out. Paradoxically, these attempts at dissecting the meaning formation in a given text, often commit the very error they are designed to overcome, ending up formalizing meaning. But a sentence always means more than can be captured by analytical means, always draws for its meaning on some extra textual metaphysical notion of value. The means to changing things is thus not criticism. It is to take a very close look at the interconnections at stake in our world, in other words, to read the world rather than its texts, or, to read its texts as expressions of entire life-worlds (71-81).

> . we shall not come home to the facts of our unhousedness, of our eviction from a central humanity in the face of the tidal provocations of political barbarism and technocratic servitude, if we do not redefine, if we do not reexperience, the life of meaning in the text, in music, in art. We must come to recognize, and the stress is on re-cognition, a meaningfulness which is that of a freedom of giving and of reception beyond the constraints of immanence...[We must look persistently] on the relations between language and the boundaries of language on the one hand, and the nature of aesthetic statement and experience on the other. ( 50)

How are we to distinguish the secondary (commentary) from the primary (creativity ), the parasitic from the immediate, then ? Critique in action, says Steiner, turns the past into a present presence. Redefining hermeneutics as "the enactment of answerable understanding, of active apprehension, " Steiner claims that the best readings of art make up works of art in their own right. Serious art, and productive art criticism, serve as a criticism of life. It embodies a concentrated, selective interaction between constraints of the observed and the boundless possibilities of the imagined (11).

The authentic experience of understanding, when the subject is addressed by another human being or by a poem, is one *of responding responsibility*. We are thus all answerable to the text, says Steiner, to the work of art, in a very specific sense, at once moral, spiritual, and psychological (8). Critical tact, answerability to poetic and artistic shaping, can be exemplified, not taught. *Interpretation is lived.* The critic par excellence acts and produces, via his own gesture, the potentialities of meanings at play. As a result, "originality is antithetical to novelty, " states Steiner (27). The role of literature, music, poetry, including a lived criticism—their form and their

sense, is to create referential inscapes (63). It is to help us inhabit a tentative space, the philological space of the expectant. It is to encourage our taking the risks of trust needed to open a door, explains Steiner. The work of art thus breaks the path for truth, rootedness, orientation, to come about, at the same time as it facilitates transcendence. Through form and content art challenges death. The possibility of a conjecture between word and world is here guaranteed by the immanence of the transcendent. Art, in effect, is the mouthpiece of meaning, the kind of intimately felt and overarching meaning which makes possible the subject's indwelling in the culture in which he lives. Ultimately, art embodies what we are all searching for, namely the understanding and realization of infinity, but which infinity? Chaos, too, is boundless and free, as Steiner points out (59).

The creative spirit reaches its utmost perfection in music, argues Steiner. Music consists of "time made organic." It is central to that of the meaning of man, of man's access to or abstention from metaphysical experience. Our capacities to compose and to respond to musical form and sense directly implicate the mystery of the human condition. "To ask 'what is music?' may well be one way of asking 'what is man?'" says Steiner, to develop a suitable category of speech, may well entail that one first lives it (6). The meanings of music and poetry are those of the human body. Both elicit echoes of sensibility which are visceral and tactile. The score played inside us reminds us of what is resistant, "of what must be kept inviolate in our psyche." Music "mingles the

incorporeal energy of reason with the body " (10, 19). The truths in musical experience are irreducible to pragmatic reckoning. Yet, the notion that there may be quantifiable, verifiable, correlations between rhythm, pitch on the one hand, and the quality of emotional response, on the other hand, cannot a priori, be rejected (79). Neither can the notion that silence may be saturated and active be written off (7). We cannot inquire into what lies beyond language, claims Steiner, except through music.

To speak, either to oneself or to another, is in the most naked, rigorous sense, to re-invent being and the world. Voiced truth is, ontologically and logically, true fiction, in Steiner's words (55-56). Language in general serves as a medium for the interplay between social constraints and personal invention, between artist, patron, public (168). Thus, if there is language and art it is because there is an "other," says Steiner. The very ideal of complete echo, of translucent reception is that of the messianic (138). A signal to the other carries with it an ethics, and this may provide the first step out of the late modern house of mirrors (141).

Art brings us directly in contact with the moral issues of our time. History, religion, metaphysics, originate in an initial act of trust, of confiding with the postulate of the divine. This institution of trust, that is the entry of man into the world of men, is that between the word and the world. Only in that light can there by a history of meaning which is, by exact counterpart, a meaning of history (89).

Art has no true impact, language makes little sense, Steiner says, unless the human subject is capable of trusting that both refer to and embody a higher meaning. This, of course, is the very form of faith Taylor claims the postmodern subject has lost. However, Taylor proposes as a solution that we turn the current chaos into our advantage by refining our tongue—so as to become aware what is worthwhile our affection and attention. Steiner, on the other hand suggests that we learn to keep quiet and to tune into the word and the world, so that both may guide us in our exploration of what it is necessary to talk about, and what is better left to quiet contemplation. Music, Steiner repeatedly states, tells us everything we need to know about the structure of human and cultural experience.

Music, as may be recalled, is a key theme in the Ekmanian undercurrent in this thesis. When formalized according to schemes of harmony and counterpoint, Ekman indicates, or, utilized for purposes of getting human beings to submit to a predetermined beat, it produces inflexible structures of experience, and thus, bars the flow of life from proceeding.

## 1.2 WAYS OF WORLD BREAKING

### Scarry

Choosing to explore neither what can and what cannot, nor what must and what should not be expressed by symbolic means. Elaine Scarry concentrates on the role of the body during periods of representational crises. In her work on social change she suggests that the introduction of intense physical pain into the social texture works as an attempt at reestablishing individual and social boundaries.

Pain brings about an absolute split between the subject's sense of his own reality and the reality of other persons, she says. It is silencing and it is blinding. And yet, to be in pain may constitute one of the most vibrant examples of having certainty (*The Body in Pain* 4, 54). Pain resists language, cannot be shared, and therefore remains truly individual. In fact, physical pain does not merely resist language, it actively destroys it, Scarry points out, by bringing about an immediate reversion to pre- or non-verbal states of experience. Having no referential content physical pain is neither *of* nor *for* anything or anyone ( 5 ).

Contrary to psychological pain which has a content, physical pain makes an exception from the fabric of psychic, somatic, and perceptual states, says Scarry, by being the only one without an object. The only other state of perception, as anomalous as pain, is the imagination. While pain is remarkable for being entirely devoid of objects, she says, the imagination "is remarkable for being the only state that is wholly its objects " (161-62). Thus, during periods of

general social uncertainty, the body comes to replace and represent the loss of trustworthy frameworks :

> [A]t particular moments when there is within society a crisis of belief—that is, when some central idea or ideology or cultural construct has ceased to elicit a population's belief, either because it is manifestly fictitious or because it has for some reason been divested of ordinary forms of substantiation—the sheer material factualness of the human body will be borrowed to lend that cultural construct the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty.' (14)
>
> [T]he body in its most intense presence becomes the substantiation of the most disembodied reality. (182-190)

In consequence, religious and ritualistic infliction of pain for example, are not to be considered as acts of bodily defiance. These gestures emphasize the reality and the significance of the body, Scarry maintains. They emphasize the body to the extent that the content of the world, as it is known at that very moment, can be canceled out and thus the path be cleared for the entry of an unworldly, contentless force (34 ). The breaking down and breaking free from the world of declining familiar values, therefore, serve as a means of subjective world-making. However, the individual not merely makes up a universe of his own, as many schizophrenics do, for instance. He opens up, lays the foundation, and creates the structure for other and larger forces of social life to come into being. To have a body, as Scarry says, is to be

> describable, creatable, alterable, and woundable. To have no body, to have only a voice, is to be none of these things It is to be the wounder but not oneself woundable, to be the creator or the one who alters but oneself neither creatable nor alterable. (206)

The body-modifying subject persistently insists on appropriating his body and thus to come alive and come true within the social. Still, how come that under circumstances of social doubt, the body is made to serve the dual purpose

of substituting for, and referring to, what is at the time experienced as a loss of ontological and ideological implications ? We are always surrounded by artifacts, Scarry says. Many of them are made in our own image, so as to provide a structure to our experience of the world as it is appears from within. Among the artifacts imitating the human body's capacity for expressing interior states of being are clothing (a translation of skin), pace makers (reproducing the heart), artificial intelligence (replicating the nervous system), printing presses and Xerox machines (making up for memory), and we may add words and narratives. Other artifacts supposedly express the human spirit. The latter, Scarry says, has been developed so as to assist, amplify, and alter, the felt-experience rather than merely populate the external world with mechanisms already dwelling in us (282-83). If the artifact cannot in itself express affective states of experience, it can at least provide a basic structure, that is a point of departure for the subject's apperception of his world :

> A material or verbal artifact is not an alive, sentient, percipient creature, and thus can neither itself experience discomfort nor recognize discomfort in others. But though it cannot be sentiently aware of pain, it is in the essential fact of itself the objectification of that awareness , itself incapable of the act of perceiving, its design, its structure, is the structure of a perception. (289)

When without this ability to give external shape to his interior experience, neither the subject's belief, his imagination, or his creativity can evolve, argues Scarry. During times of crisis and profound insecurity, as in the case of the "crisis of representation," the subject is unable to believe in the configurations furnishing the exterior. Thus, his body is made to serve as the state of being,

ordinarily projected on to an exterior form, and the surface and structure in the external, usually the site of projection for the affective state. Occupying both form and content, the body replaces an unreliable center of the subject's life world, with a center under the subject's control.

It is only when the body is comfortable, Scarry explains, when it is no longer an object of obsessive perception and concern, that the subject is likely to develop an awareness of other objects. It is only when his body no longer must provide ontological and ideological stability, that the subject acquires the capacity to take an interest in the external world. Thus, for the social to be perceived as real and dynamic, a universe offering the gift of life, the subject must first and foremost, have developed some sort of continuity in the structure of his experience of the world (39).

## Themes of desire. *BLACKWATER*

> They walked over what had first been called the Starhill area but now, after almost twenty years, was never called anything but the Area. The other clear-felled areas had gradually filled in. First with birch and rowan scrub. Then the pine plants came out of their tubes and fought their way up to the light.
>
> But the Area had not become forest. It was mossy and even had patches of berry scrub. In among the low birch thicket, here and there a spruce plant had survived, deformed by the snow, elk and storms. .
>
> A path had once run here. The path began to run when the grass bent over. Summer after summer. Soles and hoofs and the weight they carried repeated the action...
>
> A network of paths, walking veins, memory vessels—finer and finer out into the headlands of spruce forest towards the marshes and mountain heaths.
>
> Remembering right out into the stony scree. Not getting lost. Remembering with your feet. Not with a sick tumor called longing which reproduced images wildly and crudely and crookedly. No, foot memories, leg memories. The capercaillie's coarse

droppings—of pine needles, on pine needles—below a large pine top he had ripped with his beak.

The Anton Jonssa path. He herded horses for the village. And the horses thundered out the path, thumping it so that it came into existence and stayed firm. Everyone knew it...

In the olden days the Lapp took timber for his reindeer enclosure here. Barking dogs and soft calls. There, there. Peaked Lapp shoes pointing out the path. It was steeper then, up towards the stream...

The memory must also have time to lose itself slowly. Grass to rise. Grow again. New path. Behind the Lapp path, working backwards. Another new path, taking another winding curve. Strange to call it new when it is older, but memory renews. All the way back to the young forest.

Imagine a time when the forest responded to the foot: that is how young the earth was.

Leafy treetops. Birds. Fires. (403–404)

The treetops. The sleeping birds. Sparks between the trees. No more memory here, but a tumor, growing as fast as the destruction.

The Area has no paths. Here are the steep slopes and rubbish stones, log stacks, scrub. A network of roads out on the Area. A system of road networks running out to the cleared areas. Rubble after dynamiting along the roadside slopes. Shattered stony gravel. Dry root systems. Oil drums. Torsten has built the network of roads. Do you hate him for that?... Then you're lost in the cancer that is called longing.

Hate you. Know what you did, what you took part in. It was the haste, nothing else. The great haste. Everyone was in such a hurry, hurrying toward death. Paths run and disappear like roads, like forests. But it was fatal that it all went so quickly. Now you have only the presence and a hole of hunger.

Hate you. Bend over your reflection in the water and hate. (427)

# PART NINE

## Creative living in a field of broken connections ?

### Concluding remarks

As stated in the Introduction, the objective of this work was to make an inquiry into the recent psychosomatic turn within our culture. It was to throw light on some of the ways in which this phenomenon manifests itself, to explore the social and subjective needs served by it, and too suggest that it should not *necessarily* be viewed as an inward, self-centered and regressive response—understood in negative terms--to the current "crisis of representation." It was proposed, that the tendency among us to focus on bodily modes of expression, whether artistically, commercially, or, pathologically may be double edged : under certain circumstances a self-destructive effect, at other times a self-creative impact. The line between psycho-somatic maladies on the one hand, and bodily preoccupation as a form of living or an art form, on the other hand, has grown increasingly indeterminate. In consequence, it is high time that, as culture critics and members of this culture, we learn to better distinguish between the one or the other. In so far as this may be no straight forward matter, we must, at the very least, try to refine our skills for "understanding" what is being said in between the lines of incorporated needs and desires.

It was pointed out that some of the major proponents of postmodern culture tend to see the bodily turn in itself as an indication that the subject is finally in the process of regaining his senses, the latter referring to his sensual faculties. The "schizo," they claim, is the prime example of a liberated subject who is now capable of taking pleasure in a continuing re-making himself according to his libidinal desires. That these thinkers seem to base their conclusion on a too shallow ground, devoid of human compassion, was indicated by reference to the pain suffered by real life mentally disturbed subjects. Thus, mental fragmentation does not per se correspond to social and individual liberation. Neither does bodily preoccupation automatically disclose that the subject in question is capable of living creatively. In essence, it was proposed that the turn *away* from traditional modes of symbolization and *towards* the body must be understood as a reaction to the modern severing of the connection between the body and the mind, *and* as a reaction against the postmodern disruption of the connection between the word and the world. Bodily pre-occupation, as seen in this light, serves as the subject's means of reinstating a framework—thus a limit—for his being, of reinventing meta-physical containment, and of establishing a stable ground for inter-subjective interaction. His resignation from traditional use of linguistic means of interaction opens up a not yet structured zone of meaning production. It thus breaks the ground for the negotiation of a new and more adequate use of verbal communication.

The postmodern celebration of the breakdown of frameworks, so characteristic of our time, as a rule makes the claim that it has increased our opportunities for playful and creative living. Considering the mental state of the player with which they operate, this assertion has been put into doubt. What remained to be explored however, was the role played by creativity in our society, its relation to the bodily turn, and the extent to which it is a matter of fact that we have grown more playful.

Finally, due to the often non- or semi-verbal character of the subject of this thesis, it was said that this work had been structured with the hope of dialogue in mind. Its composition was motivated *not* by a need to convince anybody about the correctness of the train of thought here put forward, but rather by the wish that anyone interested in the subject would be able to pick up on a trend of thinking and further develop it. The reading of *Blackwater*, juxtaposed with the theoretical part of the work, if working according to intent, would set an example regarding how to open up a space for reflection, a kind of reflection of a neither entirely factual, nor theoretical, nor fictional nature, so urgently needed in our culture.

The work that followed moved from a light and relatively entertaining opening, through a theoretical assemblage illustrating the general implications of the dispute concerning the body-oriented postmodern player, to a rather more dense theoretical focus on the potentials and pitfalls represented by the "outer-

limit" interaction taking place on the surface of the body. Thus, for each leaf turned, the subject grew in complexity, and, hopefully, in significance.

During the opening chapters *Jameson* introduces the view that a depth perspective must be reintroduced into our culture so that we can once again learn to assess the world critically and assert ourselves meaningfully. Devoid of the opportunity to think in figure-ground terms we are left to schizophrenic disorientation and ontological homelessness. *Kristeva* adds to this stance that a re-appropriation of the word is easier said than done. If we find ourselves at seas in uncharted, soulless territories, she suggests, then that is due primarily to the fact that the Name of the Father has lost its function. The Law has come to be associated with a murderous thirst for power, as exemplified in the surge of genocides. The reinstitution of the Name of the Father, as making a positive *difference*, is only realistic in so far as we learn to acknowledge that we are all capable of producing and taking life. For the word to ever come to mean again, and to provide an ontologically speaking sheltering function, as Jameson proposes, some serious soul searching must take place. *Deleuze* and *Guattari*, as may have been said often enough, write off entirely the potentially positive function of the subject's operating within a universe of distinction. Any kind of continuous limit, they seem to say, makes up a limitation, thus a constraint for the libidinally driven "schizo." Adding a phenomenological perspective and some anthropological field experience to this theory, *Lingis* shows that the

body's--and thus the soul's--primary means of coming to life is the *transgression of boundaries*. The human subject's sense of existing, Lingis says, is based on his voluntary confrontations with death. The latter may take a variety of forms. But the opportunity to leave behind familiar paradigms of experience and plunge into the unknown, is of paramount importance. Thus, in agreement with Deleuze and Guattari, Lingis celebrates the increased mobility, so characteristic of postmodern society, but in his case for the reason that it enables the subject to explore a great number of extra-ordinary aspects of his being. Lingis' proposal relies on the assumption that the subject's senses are sharpened during states of life-or-death experience. And what else could the individual living in the contemporary chaos of emotional indifference and sensory anesthetization need ?

The fact is, *Massumi* adds, the contemporary environment is permeated by anxiety-producing stimuli to such an excessive degree, that the last thing in the world the subject is likely to do, is to pursue more of it elsewhere. Besides, the individual has by now been saturated by low-level fear to the extent that he no longer can tell the difference between simulated, engineered, and real existential horror. "To fear or not to fear" has replaced the ontological issue of being or not. Though not exactly on Lingis' terms. Massumi expresses some concern that the subject has lost his ability to distinguish between minor upheavals and major trauma. *Shapiro*, in contrast, brushes this off with a sweeping move. True, he says, the line between interior and exterior life has grown drastically blurred. True, he continues, the distinction between words and

vision has dissolved. In other words, our bodies now make up our "innermost being." And this being is directly imprinted by the fear circulating among us. The subject no longer *feels* it as such. He is being imprinted by it. He *is* it. Ontological certainty is here redefined in terms of bodily alertness. Both Massumi's and Shaviro's accounts of the current state of incorporeal affairs end on a rather gloomy note. Yet, there is no need for us to think in apocalyptic terms, says *Taussig*. What is happening in contemporary culture, in response to the crisis of representation, is that mimetic forms of understanding are emerging with increasing impact. The body-mutilator, artist, or preoccupied subject, carries out two procedures : he incorporates--hence exposes---the fissuring of the social fabric as it is experienced socially, and he exhibits how this break up is experienced individually. The unmediated nature of this process leads not necessarily to the exclusion of reflection, Taussig maintains. It makes evident in no ambiguous terms what the stakes are currently about.

Thus, there is little consensus among the thinkers above, as regards the key problem presented by postmodern conditions, for the subject-in-formation. The most significant difference between those who celebrate the postmodern playground, as opposed to those who regret it, arises from whether or not the individual thinker operates with a form of ensoulment. Hence, whenever the subject's loss of his soul is in question, the issue of containment automatically follows. Whether it goes under the label of meta-physical frameworks, bodily rootedness, or psycho-somatic integration, the essence is: no conception of

interiority, and that is of "deeper meaning," comes without a form of embodiment.

*Glass* argues that if there is anything the heroicized "schizo" does not have, then it is a firm sense of being emotionally and spiritually contained, whether by physical or meta-physical means. The practical implication of being bereft of boundaries, according to Glass, is that the subject's energy goes into frantic attempts at developing idiosyncratic systems of speech, ritual, and interaction, intended to serve as a center of orientation. There is neither time nor space left, externally or internally, for this subject to expand his horizon and experiment with his sensory register. What the clinically diagnosed disordered individual desires most of all, contrary to the postmodern "schizo," is a sense of belonging. He wants to be able to feel at home within the social, at ease within his own skin, capable of perceiving the opposite sex as other and yet not lethal to his sense of identity. He wishes for the fabric of his life to cohere and the story of his life to make sense. To be able to live like a liberated "schizo," a psychological make-up fundamentally different from that of the psychotic or schizophrenic is required.

Glass' argument, controversial as among postmodern enthusiasts, finds substantial support in various disciplines such as sensory anthropology, human ethology, and bio-psycho-social script theory. Thus *Ackerman*, *Classen* and *Howes* point out that for the subject to feel centered and capable of taking an

interest in the world, it is of tremendous importance that he be capable of situating himself in a familiar way in relation to sensory stimuli as arising from the environment. Sensory indwelling in a given culture evolves very slowly and via an interplay with the subject's psychic, physical and social development. It somehow constitutes the subject's extended body and self image. Thus, any too rapid shift in environmental stimulation is bound to evoke in the subject a sense of amputation. Hence his persistent attempt at restoring a familiar order in the exterior when on totally foreign ground.

*Bowlby* and *Eibl-Eibesfeldt's* work strongly supports the thesis put forward by sensory anthropology. The subject depends on receiving sensory and psychic stimulation, as much as he needs to be capable of regulating this input in accordance with a *rhythm* of his own, they argue. The development of a personal processing rhythm lays the ground for the subject's later ability to show curiosity in regards to his environment. *Tomkins* finally supplies the anthropologists' argument with a rather different kind of support, that is his 'Script Theory.' The human mechanism, he says, is motivated by affective investment. Nothing matters to the subject unless he is affectively interested. And affect is a physiological as much as a psychological and social matter. Based on experience, arising from environmental interaction, scripts evolve within the subject's information processing "system." The script creates certain sets of expectations and thus incites the subject to favor the development of certain coping skills over and against others. In this manner, the script tends to be self-

reinforcing. And for this very reason, the subject is incapable of coping adequately when the order with which he is familiar breaks down on almost all counts, physical, psychological, and social.

If, as is indicated above, the postmodern uprooted subject first and foremost is in need of the reestablishment of some sort of stability, where and how does *play* enter the picture? Traditionally conceived of as involving a breaking of the rules that govern the social *game*, it may be far from evident what purpose it is to serve in this day and age. *Freud*, when reaching a mature age, understood play, art and cultural production as serving the purpose of a balancing sheet. It kept in check the subject's instinctual urges and channeled libidinal energies in search of discharge into a socially beneficial direction. The younger Freud, however, speculated that the subject's interaction with the environment, in particular pleasurable interaction, served to encourage a re-categorization of prior experience. Thus, once a pleasurable neurological pathway and psychic connection had been laid down, it would be refined and expanded on by means of what *seems* like repetition.

This early theory supports what object-relations theorists were later to suggest, namely that the subject evolves via interaction with others, that he is driven by attachment needs rather than merely by sexual drives, and that play and cultural production function as large scale remakes of the mother-infant interaction during the transitional phase. *Winnicott*, for instance greatly

emphasizes the subject's recurrent need, no matter his developmental or biological age, to be able to share his innermost self with that of another, within a protected environment. This is not merely a prerequisite for wholesome living, argues *Milner*, it is a necessity unless we want to end up living under fascist like conditions. To play, thus, is to allow the subject to grow acquainted with a wide range of the shades of his personality. Paradoxically, everybody's recognition of their inner darkness, breaks the ground for the emergence of a more humane society. Yet again, *Alphonso* Lingis adds a twist to a relatively domesticated train of thought. To play, he says, is to create one's self according to one's unique potential as a human being of this world. To play is to go into ecstasy. To be ecstatic, to move beyond the outer limits of one's experiential register, is to live. Play breaks with all rules, brings about temporary madness, and in effect contributes to social cohesiveness. Hence, the social-individual dynamics of play, as represented by the elderly Freud, is turned upside down : It is necessary says Lingis that we move our inner stage (as in Freud) and our private attempts at playing out the dramas of our life (as in Milner) out into the exterior scene of the world. By doing so, and by clearly demarcating what we are doing, play comes to strengthen, rather than threaten, the social fabric.

In a footnote *Bateson* adds that for play to serve any experimental and exploratory function whatsoever, some sort of consensus must exist within the community in question, concerning the rules for play and serious talk respectively. No private play, on par with Wittgenstein's private languages.

makes much of a difference, neither for the subject in question nor for the context within which he lives. Introducing the notion of liminality *Turner* explains that the difference between fact and fiction need not be as consistent as Bateson appears to suggest. What is really important, Turner says, is that regulated intervals of the opportunity to go overboard exist. These occasions for the subject to loose his habitual identity help prepare for the re-invention of himself, which is necessary in so far as the community is to be sustained. A flexible social structure, as Turner makes us aware, efficiently holds together a diverse cultural fabric. Flexibility, significantly, is not to be confused with the postmodern lack of constraints.

Having reached the conclusion that play must currently be conceived of as being about the subject's development of his inner sense of self, via interaction with others, and within a delimited context, we moved on to look at some examples from the postmodern arena. As it turned out, to try to determine whether the particular play forms were of a self-destructive or a self-creative nature, was to ask the wrong kind of question. It became evident that all of these body-oriented play forms were toying intensively with boundaries. Sometimes coined in terms of the difference between immanence and transcendence, subjection and self-assertion, or, submission and domination, these forms of play suggested a widespread need for the contemporary subject to re-constitute the limits for his existence. The creative aspect of this endeavor lies in the fact that

the limits currently in the process of being drawn, differ in function and meaning *both* from the modern severing of the head from the body *and* from the postmodern putting the body in the mind's place. The contemporary frontier-searchers insist that limits are to serve a purpose similar to that of membranes : They must keep together and yet apart the differences of which the subject and the social exist: keep together and apart, and yet permit the one to seep into the other.

In this vein, Haraway suggests that the next few steps in the subject's rediscovery of his self, is for him to acknowledge that the world no longer consists primarily of fact and fiction. It consists of machines made in the image of man, and thus, of man turned machine. We have got to forget about any form of dualistic thinking, she claims, and to move on. What we must move towards is the second step in the process, namely situated thinking. Situated thinking, she states, makes it possible for the subject to let his understanding be guided by compassion rather than by intellectualization. Significantly, the acknowledgment that the new human being is only part human breaks, in Haraway's view, the ground for more humane forms of interaction.

*Stoller* and *Benjamin*, each in their own way, contest the notion that the use of an other human being or body part is about overcoming dualistic life philosophy. According to Stoller, so called perverse acts of behavior, during which the partner is treated as a prop, may serve the purpose of the subject's re-experiencing his entry into this world as a sexed subject. The pervert usually

emerges from families in dissolution. Thus, the rise of perverse and violent patterns of behavior in general, may have more to do with the increasing fatherlessness of our society, than it has to do with a growing acceptance of the fact that we are no longer merely human, as Haraway suggests. Jessica Benjamin, finally, contests Stoller's thesis that something fruitful may come out of the subject's ability to re-stage his fall and resurrection. Any kind of play with submission and domination, Benjamin claims, requires the life of the one or the other. No one, in particular not the subject submitting himself to painful stimulation, comes out of that game as a winner. These last three contributions, far from clarifying what makes up genuine, health-promoting play and creativity in this day and age, throw light on the different angles from which the issue must be evaluated.

It is commonly claimed that if the postmodern subject plays it hard these days, it is due to the repressive and totally inadequate modes of mis-representation passed down through the modern. Had more pertinent modes of verbal expression been available, the subject in all likelihood would have stuck to the word. This is where things usually grow rather muddled. For, we also often hear, that we have made it into an era in which it is feasible to use the word according to our needs and desires, in particular according to the latter. Thus, are the somatic turn of our culture a reaction against modern dualism, against postmodern all inclusiveness, or both ? How come not even post-structural

attempts at equipping the subject with the means of understanding and employing the word according to his own desire has paid better off ?

As it turns out, the post-structural endeavors at dissecting the word, and thus the world of meaning, as represented by *Foucault* and *Lacan*, have the unfortunate side effect of stranding the subject in a strangely dis-membered zone experience. The subject's desire comes into being via power-plays, claims Foucault, leaving it up to the reader to figure out where and how the individual may get an opportunity to put his foot down in this swirl of powerful undercurrents. The subject's desire comes into being during the transference, adds Lacan, making it clear that the embodied subject, as determined by biology, psychology, social and cultural circumstances has been written off. The subject according to the Lacanian model is as if spellbound by the transferential dynamics : repeating his quest for love and recognition over and over again, he never manages to break free from the judgment "above" and learn to listen to his own needs. In fact, the Lacanian subject does not really have any other needs than that of ontological affirmation. This in itself might suffice as an explanation for why the contemporary body-oriented subject has chosen to "go primitive" rather than settling in on the slippery slope of sliding , and psycho-somatically disconnecting, signifiers.

Having said this, we must still keep in mind that the post-structural failure at pointing towards ways in which the Cartesian decapitation of the subject could be resolved does not say much about whether or not it *is* possible to make use of

verbal representation in a manner that re-connects the broken connection. The anorexic "case study" illustrated parts of the blindness of poststructural thinking. Emaciated bodies and muted minds speak louder and more meaningfully than Foucault and Lacan could possibly conceive of. These subjects give shape to feelings and meanings of a highly ambiguous nature, thus they cannot either be reduced (structurally) or "grasped" (meaningfully).

*Merleau-Ponty* provides a frame of reference for "comprehending" these forms of interaction by introducing the notion of the flesh of the world. Sex is not merely about drives or an orientation towards the other (or the Other), Merleau-Ponty stipulates, and neither does the voice serve merely communicative purposes. Both serve as means for the individual to carve out a role, and to situate him or her self in relation to others *and* to the world of cultural meaning at large.

Feminist theory and criticism, as developed by *Minh-ha*, *Miller*, and *Felman*, further shows that there are several ways of making language *mean* in a less dogmatic and normative sense, that is, in a more personal, emotionally expressive and inter-subjective sense, than poststructuralism would have it. The trick is, as they agree, to abstain from trying to force through definitions, and to stop insisting on a perfect fit between form and content. It is in the slight discordance between the word and its meaning that a larger resonance may emerge, a resonance which reveals the forms of knowledge and sensation which

cannot be articulated by any straightforward means. Thus, bodily states of being may indeed find adequate expression in linguistic terms, may in fact come to be fully experienced for the first time by means of the use of words and narratives. Two cases in point are *Cardinal's* and *Kaplan's* autobiographical novels, both of which illustrate—though differently—the delicate balance between using words as a container for an emerging self on the one hand, and using it as a means of constraints in relation to one's emotional conflicts, on the other hand.

If the feminist critics above were to the point in their suggestion that we recycle conventional forms of verbal meaning production, and in the process adapt these to our needs as they emerge, would there be any need for anyone to go under the knife, physically and metaphorically speaking ?

The fact remains, the feminist modification of forms and conventions of language use apply merely to a subject who is in possession of some—even if the slightest and most distorted—ontological certainty. For the mentally ill, along with the subject who has gone truly postmodern, there is little redemption to be gained from experimenting with a more full-bodied speech. In cases like these, where the problem lies precisely in the subject's tremendous fear of psychosomatic integration, no such talk takes anyone far. The shattered subject may, or may not, depending on the severity of his state of being, be able to "find himself" by immersing himself in aesthetic experience, *Modell* suggests. Not exactly constituting a self-creative act, it nevertheless familiarizes the individual

with the nature of the "space" within which he is able to breathe and fantasize freely. Another way of putting this is to say that subjects of few words express the structure of their inner being very exactly by means of aesthetic preference. Elaborating on this *Bollas* introduces the notion of the 'grammar of our being.' Not only the character of the aesthetic space within which the subject chooses to immerse himself, but his particular *style* of placing himself in relation to others, including his dream space, narratives, and so forth, speak of the structure of his inner being. The subject for whom the word and other acts of symbolization no longer makes much sense, *displays* the nature and urgency of his inner conflicts and desire, simply by means of the style with which he enters a "space."

That not everybody is capable of picking up on the slight message concerning their inner needs, as it manifests itself in terms of aesthetic pleasure and style of being, is evident to *McDougall*. There are quite a few incidents, she tells, of people who are completely deaf and blind to any kind of affective accord as arising in their interior. Totally bereft of the means to mentally register *anything* of an emotional nature, feelings, ordinarily made subject to representation, here shortcuts the system of representation, and are expressed instead in terms of physical symptoms. The body comes to speak on behalf of the subject, about needs, urges, wishes, of which he has never been aware. So as to understand what these subjects are showing us, and so as to help them gain access to themselves, we must learn to comprehend proto-symbolic forms of language, McDougall argues. These forms come before the development of the

ability to represent and they occur prior to the subject's ability to string together narratives. In other words, they belong to a sphere of experience which is not "meaningful" per se. What emerges is a "language" from a subject lingering between life and death, and thus, regardless of its apparent meaninglessness, it is of incomparable significance.

Supplying McDougall's theory of body-language with an account of how some subjects may have to go to a further extreme, *Anzieu* introduces us to the notion of the 'Skin Ego.' Holding together the subject and making up the surface on which his identity is inscribed, his negotiations with the environment and his inner dramas played out, the skin is *the* most fundamental psycho-somatic limit in and of the subject. Whenever the individual feels at an ontological loss, unable to draw any distinctions, or haunted by inner fears, his Skin Ego is flawed. And the experience of living with a ruptured Skin Ego, says Anzieu, comes to its fullest expression in the subject's obsessive preoccupation with demarcating and reinforcing his physical boundaries, or, in his usually somewhat more bloody tendency to make a clear cut statement. By cutting and carving himself he not only signals to the world that his interior is leaking out. He also tries to gain control over a process over which he clearly has no control. The ruptured Skin Ego is experienced as being so unreliable that it—the subject's sole container—is perceived as an enemy of the most barbarian kind.

If this subject tends to leave us a bit at a loss, there is no need to despair. His gestures may be conceived of as representing one aspect on the scale of body-centered preoccupation, as introduced in the beginning of the thesis. Not only that, the entire repertoire of body-fixation may be seen as constituting a variety of attempts at re-establishing a social connection, that is at laying the ground for an other form of community than what is currently available. *Taylor* points out, for instance, that when confused about the nature of the web of values within which he lives, the subject is likely to grow profoundly disoriented, a state of affairs which is likely to manifest itself in terms of physical uncertainty and a need to regain a firmer grounding for one's standing. *Steiner*, emphasizing the importance of metaphysical containment to a greater extent, states that the role of art and creative endeavors, is to inform us of—and give concrete form to—the structure of our experience of matters concerning life and death in contemporary society. *Scarry* adds to this stance by conveying that any kind of profound social and ideological crisis is bound to trigger the subject's return to his body. Under circumstances like these, she says, the body itself, not works of art, comes to serve as form and content at one and the same time. Hence, Steiner's understanding of art as making tangible the structure of what is essentially intangible, when applied to bodily modification and related preoccupations, in the end, turns the latter into a form of contemporary art.

Needless to say, few issues have been *settled* in this work. Quite an extensive agenda, however, as regards further explorations to pursue has opened up. The conjunctions between various verbal and non-verbal forms of symbolization call for even more, and even more careful, explorations. How, for instance, do these forms of expression come about more concretely? How do they relate to, possibly draw on an rub off on, the social fabric in general? To what extent is it possible to say that the current re-transcription of boundaries is being successful? In what significant ways have they had an impact on our use of verbal means of interaction? Finally, though certainly not lastly : How is one to teach the possible potentials and pitfalls presented by a "reading" as the one above, to a wider audience of diverse orientation ?

In a piece of work like this thesis, in which an attempt has been made at holding together so many potentially red threads, it is never easy to judge whether the format has worked. Has it given a clear picture of the ways in which the issue of body-oriented subjectivity crystallizes into a great number of subtly interconnected parts, the further into the (t)issue one moves ? Or has it, rather, left the reader in a state of profuse confusion, with both hands full of woolly and halfway knotted trends ? It is fairly simple to pick and choose among the abundance of loose ends, and decide that one or another could--maybe should--have been further developed, but it is somewhat more complicated to decide exactly how the pieces should have been switched around so as to create a maybe more accessible texture. The result remains to be seen.

The last word goes to *Kerstin Ekman* who has provided an abundance of professional and personal inspiration :

> I walk here as Rosseau did in the woods of St.Germain, dazed by fantasies, scents, and visions of beauty. The point is, my visions are the opposite of the civilization I live in. I'm seeking an alternative. Per-Ola Brandberg isn't doing that as he drives his tractor. His visions are not in opposition to the society he lives in. Not even when he disturbs a hare or notices the cloud berries have started to ripen.
>
> Naturally, in time I feel more and more at home in what is alien, just as Per-Ola feels at home in the resources he is abusing. But it is my fantasies that make me feel at home, and they are reinforced by the wildness and the scents of the forest. Per-Ola benefits from roughly the same things. But he wouldn't call them wild. We are two children of our time and dependent on each other, at least I am on him. Without the felling, the village would be inhabited and I wouldn't be able to live alone here and to have my visions and fantasies. That would be going native and is something quite different. (343)

> The difference between the loner in his cabin and me is that I always go back to school on Monday morning. I know my attempts at finding an alternative are imperfect, and that my job is to teach schoolchildren to think. (344)

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