Approaching the Dying and the Dead:
An Analysis of Contemporary, Lens-Based Artworks and the Potential for Ethical Intersubjectivity

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Abstract

Photographic, film and video representations of dying and dead subjects bring to light delicate balancing acts of agency involving representational perspective. In this thesis, I examine contemporary, lens-based artworks by Sarah Charlesworth, Eric Fischl (whose sculptural medium is an exception), Alejandro Gonzalez Innaritu, Gillian Wearing, Andres Serrano, Nan Goldin, AA Bronson and Jorge Zontal, as well as works by photojournalists Richard Drew and Theresa Frare, to show how they effectively convey facets of identity to dying and dead subjects. The voice, visuality, touch and embodiment (in particular, the body's weight and its materiality) are considered dimensions of intersubjectivity in order to explore how they foster access to the dying or the dead. My hypothesis is that, despite the avenues of intersubjective agency that appear to be foreclosed to the dying and the dead, the artists negotiate the following, significant challenges: how to bear witness to suffering without enacting visual mastery; how to grant a voice to or engage in dialogue with a silenced subject; how to touch the other without inflicting injury. Through the artists' divergent representational paradigms, the terms of intersubjectivity will be shown to equally involve the potential for reverence as well as for representational violence and it is upon this duality that the ethical concern hinges. The degrees of photographic transparency invoked by the artists alter the emergence of identity and the extent to which it reflects the perspective of the dying and the dead or, alternatively, becomes a framework of distortion. In terms of subject matter, the causes of death to the subjects represented, all of which are non-fictional, are AIDS-

related illness, falling from buildings and violence (sometimes self-inflicted).

Conceptually, I will be relying upon the phenomenological models of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the photographic theories of Roland Barthes, the feminist metaphors of Luce Irigaray, the subjectivity studies of Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell, the ethical proposals of Simon Wiesenthal and Emmanuel Levinas, and will turn to a variety of thinkers in feminist art history, film theory and cultural studies.

Aborder les personnes mourantes et les morts: une analyse de l'art contemporain basée sur des œuvres d'art dans lesquelles l'objectif de l'appareil photographique est mis en valeur et le potentiel pour l'intersubjectivité de l'éthique est examiné.

Résumé

La photographie, le film et l'art vidéo dans lesquels sont représentés des sujets de morts ou de personnes mourantes, révèlent un fragile agencement d'équilibrisme impliquant une perspective représentative. Dans ce mémoire, j'examine des œuvres d'art contemporain créées par des artistes qui utilisent l'objectif de l'appareil photo: Sarah Charlesworth, Eric Fischl (dont ses moyens d'expression sculpturale sont une exception), Alejandro Gonzalez Innaritu, Gillian Wearing, Andres Serrano, Nan Goldin, AA Bronson et Jorge Zontal, aussi bien que des œuvres par les photo journalistes Richard Drew et Theresa Frare, pour montrer comment ils réussissent à donner des facettes d'identité à leurs sujets: les morts et les personnes mourantes. La voix, la vue, le toucher et le corps (en particulier, le poids du corps et sa matérialité) sont considérées des dimensions d'intersubjectivité pour explorer comment ils facilitent l'accès aux morts et aux personnes mourantes. Malgré les avenues d'agencement d'intersubjectivité qui semblent exclure les personnes mourantes et les morts, je soutiens l'hypothèse que les artistes négocient des défis significatifs: comment témoigner de la souffrance sans promulguer une maîtrise visuelle; comment conférer une voix au sujet ou entretenir un dialogue avec le sujet qui garde le silence; comment toucher l'autre sans le faire souffrir. À travers les paradigmes représentatifs divergents des artistes, les teneurs d'intersubjectivité seront présentées de façon à impliquer également le potentiel pour le respect aussi bien que celui pour la violence représentative et c'est sur cette dualité que la responsabilité morale pivote. L'étendue de transparence photographique invoquée par les artistes modifie l'émergence d'identité et l'ampleur avec laquelle elle reflète la perspective des personnes mourantes et des morts ou, alternativement, devient un encadrement

de déformation. En ce qui concerne le contenu, les causes de décès des sujets représentés, tous étant de vraies personnes, sont les maladies liées au SIDA; la chute d'un édifice et la violence (souvent provoquée par soi-même). Pour compléter mes notions sur le sujet, je me fierai sur les modèles phénoménologiques de Maurice Merleau-Ponty, les théories sur la photographie de Roland Barthes, les métaphores féministes de Luce Irigaray, les études sur la subjectivité de Judith Butler et Drucilla Cornell, et j'aurai recours à une variété de penseurs en histoire de l'art féministe, la théorie du film et les études culturelles.

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INTRODUCTION

"Nothing that matters can happen to the dead, and nothing that happens to them can matter," writes novelist Michael Dibdin in his description of the procedures performed upon two corpses that he witnessed as a guest visitor to a pathologist's lesson.[1] The irony of his tone conveys his awareness that the dead are subject to a great deal of manipulation by the living: "Throughout their ordeal, both corpses radiate a total passivity, a massive indifference, like stuffed toys whose mutilated features and unstitched seams need cause no anguish."[2] In this thesis, I suggest that the proclivity of the dead to "endure" violence occurs not on   t a material level but also at a discursive level, through the various manners of representation to which they are subject. Indeed, as cultural theorist Elisabeth Bronfen argues, the dead, especially when feminine, are particularly subject to representational violence in works of art and in criticism, due to the "fictionalization" or aestheticization of the material experience of death and to the occlusion of biographic details, which de-individuate the dead.[3] Dibdin's and Bronfen's views are useful to introduce the novel ways in which some contemporary artists have shown their awareness of the vulnerability of the dying and the dead through representations that reinforce their on-going status as subjects. I propose that a number of artists, theorists, journalists and members of the public who either create or encounter representations of the dying and the dead demonstrate a profound concern for how to approach these subjects so that a second death is not caused by the terms of representation. The main objective of this thesis is to analyze the works of a select group of artists who have explored different

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[1] Michael Dibdin, "The Pathology Lesson," Granta 39 (1992): 97.
[2] Dibdin 97.
[3] Elisabeth Bronfen, "Violence of Representation – Representation of Violence," Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992) 39-55.

representational strategies that seek to affirm not only the identities of the dying and the dead from viewpoints that respect the vulnerability of their positions, but also to extend to them a degree of agency that demonstrates a critical awareness of the potential for mastery, objectification or distortion.

Three key terms need to be defined in order to understand the representational strategies that will be examined in this thesis: identity, agency and subjectivity. *Identity* involves a quality or is comprised of a set of qualities, attribute(s) or characteristic(s) that are considered important in specifying, individuating and defining the self. It is a notion that signifies singularity and distinction from others but also stems from and arises in response to identifications with others who share similar identity categories.[4] *Agency*, as Kath Woodward has succinctly argued, is "the degree of control which we ourselves can exert over who we are."[5] It is closely related to the development of identity, in that an agent is an individual who holds the capacity to assert her or his own point of view, in accordance with or in opposition to given values (normative or otherwise), with or against certain oppressions or prohibitions that ensue from socio-cultural, institutional, legal, economic or interpersonal practices. Agency could be viewed as the ability to name or claim identity from one's own perspective, the power to make (or re-make) oneself

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[4] Because identity has been linked with notions of sameness, unity, oneness, essence, implying origins, ontology, consistency or immutability rather than change, morphological certainty, solipsism, internal forces and foundations, it has been debated and occasionally criticized as working against the best interests of feminists, gay and lesbian theorists and theorists of race and ethnicity who explore this notion. See Diana Fuss's Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (New York: Routledge, 1989) for an analysis of this situation. For one of the most comprehensive articulations of a view against "substantive," "foundational," or "ontological" conceptions of identity, see Judith Butler's Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990). There is a significant amount of literature negotiating other ways of conceptualizing identity through multiplicity, heterogeneity, difference, fluidity or flux. On this stream the most widely recognized thinker is Luce Irigaray, who has influenced the thinking of Christine Battersby and Drucilla Cornell. For other analyses of the various pros and cons of these positions, see the diverse viewpoints of the contributors to Feminists Theorize the Political, Ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century Ed. Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia UP, 2001).
[5] Kath Woodward, Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Nation (London: Routlege-Open U, 2000) 6.

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visible and audible within a given social matrix – in short, the ability to self-represent, a

potential identified by certain paradigms of identity politics as particularly important

when the social matrix is exclusionary.[6] Finally, modern *subjectivity* is the psychic,

linguistic, social and institutional process of recognition and attribution that grants,

inaugurates or interpellates subject status. It underlines a decentering of the self and

should be seen as a process necessitating a temporal matrix, involving and influenced by

the recognition of people and regulatory institutions in addition to the confining and

confirming effects of culture and language, effects which should be understood as

preceding and exceeding the subject. If identity can be thought to be claimed, expressed

or projected by the subject, subjectivity, the process that produces the subject, should be

thought to *claim the subject*.

While it is relatively clear that the dead are lacking the agency necessary to claim

and assert an identity from their own perspective, the various ways in which certain

identities come to be imposed on them is worthy of closer consideration. The discursive

processes whereby subjectivity is conferred – processes made evident in and through

various scenes of representation – indicate a manner whereby specific identities can be

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[6] According to Woodward: "The subject, 'I' or 'we' in the identity equation, involves some element of choice, however limited. The concept of identity encompasses some notion of human agency; an idea that we have some control in constructing our own identities." 8. For views that affirm the potential for agency attendant in notions of identity, see Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing P, 1984); bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End P, 1992); Jo Spence, Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression (London: Routledge, 1995): David Wojnarowicz, Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration (New York: Vintage-Random, 1991); Russell Ferguson and others, ed. Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990). Judith Butler has theorized identity in relation to agency in a manner that makes the relationship complex. Butler's belief is that identity should not be thought as "voluntarist," i.e. as individuals merely "taking on a mask," but "a signifying practice" that always presupposes an existing field of regulatory social norms and relations. Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex' (New York: Routledge, 1993) 7 & Gender Trouble 145. For Butler, agency is not something one *has* or can deploy; it exists only in the limited potential for the subversions in relation to the confines of the social matrix which precede the subject – it occurs within the cracks, slippage and failed attempts made by the subject to negotiate the restrictive standards of imposed gender identifications.

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ascribed or attributed to the dead by the living. When considered in terms of the dead, the forcible qualities to the processes of subjectivity are put into relief: because the dead have little, if any, recourse to agency, they can neither recognize that the subjective process is occurring, nor can they attempt to qualify or counter its effects by asserting an identity from their own point of view. The dead can neither self-represent, nor experience the recognition of living others who see them, name them or address them, some of the ways in which subjectivity is inaugurated. Despite their physical absence from the scene of subjectivity and the social-temporal matrix through which it unfolds, the dead are still "called" by its effects through a multitude of representations and a myriad of systems from artwork to mass media, which run a range from reverence to insult and which may or may not reflect the perspective they would have chosen if alive. Despite death, the dead are still subject to the processes of subjectivity whereby they are particularly vulnerable to the various identities that the living may inflict upon them.

In this thesis, I will be examining the contemporary, lens-based works of Anglo-North-American artists and photojournalists Richard Drew, Sarah Charlesworth, Eric Fischl (whose sculptural medium is an exception), Alejandro Gonzalez Innaritu, Gillian Wearing, Andres Serrano, Nan Goldin, Theresa Frare, AA Bronson and Jorge Zontal to show how, despite their aesthetic differences, they effectively convey identity to dying and dead subjects in ways that illuminate the tenuous status of agency in relation to these subjects, revealing varying degrees of ethical responsibility to or exploitation of the vulnerability of the dying and the dead.

Conceptually, my perspective is informed by traditions of thought specific to Western Europe and North America, in particular, the phenomenological models of

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Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the feminist metaphors of Luce Irigaray, the subjectivity studies

of Judith Butler and the ethics of representation proposed by Drucilla Cornell. Butler and

Cornell are the most significant feminist theorists to address concepts of identity and

subjectivity through negotiations in which the body figures centrally and, especially in

the divergent emphasis each places upon agency, their work provides a meaningful

foundation that informs my study. If the dead are spectres of failed embodiment, the utter

aporia of agency or subjects hovering at the limits of (or even beyond) one's ability to

make contact with them, the work of Butler and Cornell, read against each other in a

complementary way, will offer excellent preconditions to identify the evidence of ethical

responsibility in representations of the dead: on one side, involving a recognition of how

the subjectivity of the dead is performatively, often painfully, "materialized" (Butler)[7]

and on the other side, with an ethical mandate to representational perspective involving a

non-violent approach to otherness in a way that also negotiates the materiality of sexual

difference (Cornell).[8] My goal is to be able to interpret artists' representations of the dead

in a way that addresses the perilous states in which the dead are positioned, while

simultaneously addressing the means artists have created to overcome the apparent

inaccessibility entailed by these positions in an ethical, i.e. non-violent or non-distorting,

manner.

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[7] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble; Bodies That Matter; Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (New York: Routledge, 1997); The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997). Butler's thinking is influenced by linguistic notions of the performative after Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and J.L. Austin as well as Lacanian psychoanalysis and the geneaological thinking of Foucault, after Nietschze.

[8] Drucilla Cornell, interview with Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka, "A Return to the Future." Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century, ed. Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia UP, 2001) 435-454; Beyond Accomodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law (Lantham: Rowman, 1999/1991); The Philosophy of the Limit (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Despite the fact that it is rarely considered in relation to the dead, access to agency in the fields of representation has been, I will argue, a highly productive issue in much contemporary, theoretical and critical writing on visual culture and will appear as a strong undercurrent motivating my inquiry into the paradigms through which the dead are represented.[9] The dying and the dead, when considered as subjects of representation, bring to light delicate balancing acts of agency in terms of representational perspective from which important ethical dimensions ensue: this is an area that has not, according to my research, yet been adequately or systematically addressed. Because agency in contemporary art-critical theory has been identified as the manifestation of the power to represent and to self-represent, it is often discussed in terms of the subject's access to the voice, visuality, touch and the performative capacity of the body. The voice, visuality, touch and embodiment (in particular, the body's weight and materiality) are therefore terms to which I will refer as the dimensions of intersubjectivity, all of which imply access to agency, in order to establish how these channels might foster or foreclose intersubjective engagements with the dying and the dead through representations. These four corners – the voice, visuality, touch and embodiment – will provide a foundation for the thesis and will structure the unfolding of each chapter, in which they will be investigated for their potential to function in various combinations and permutations. The goal is to define the specificity of each artist's approach to the dying or dead subject and how they raise important ethical considerations, which in turn will be investigated to

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[9] I understand the contemporary era to be the past forty years, based largely upon the shift identified in art history (especially by feminist art historians) from modernist conceptions of art and "the artist," and postmodern view of these notions (such that the artist and the notion of the subject is "decentered," a view evident in the work of Amelia Jones, especially in the first two chapters of her Body Art: Performing the Self (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998).

discover how each representational paradigm shapes the viewer's subsequent perception of the identity of the dying or the dead.

The Voice

Despite an awareness of the "semiotic subject,"[10] who should not be considered the originating producer of the story, but always to a certain extent produced by the language chosen to tell it, cultural theorists involved in identity politics, notably bell hooks, have claimed the voice to be an important vehicle to assert one's own point of view, especially to counter institutional oppression, master narratives and social silences. The voice has been related to the speaking self and the ability to tell a story from one's own perspective. It is viewed as an integral dimension of agency most needed by those who are denied the authority that informs self-representation. According to hooks: "It is that act of speech, of 'talking back' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject [. . .]."[11] In the face of the "decentered 'subject[s]'" of poststructuralism, Cornell asserts the importance of the voice for feminist conscious-raising groups of the nineteen-sixties and seventies because it fostered a sense of collectivity while simultaneously encouraging the telling of personal stories, both of which were politically effective in giving women "another recourse than that of muteness[,]" and therefore, breaking from the patriarchal domination that would separate women from each other.[12] The voice is the unique quality, personality or tonality that colours and grants singularity to the speaking self, according to Jean-Luc Nancy.[13] From

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[10] Kaja Silverman, "The Female Authorial Voice," The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988) 187-234; Keith Moxey, "Authorship," The Practice of Theory (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994) 55.

[11] hooks, "Marginality as Site of Resistance," Out There 342-343.

[12] Cornell, Beyond 5 &4.

[13] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Vox Clamans in Deserto," The Birth to Presence, trans. Nathalia King (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993) 234-247.

the phenomenological perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and from the feminine

écriture of Luce Irigaray, the speaking self has been considered an opportunity to engage

in dialogic relations, a move founded upon the view that distinguishes speech from

language because it emanates from an embodied self.[14] Without losing sight of Roland

Barthes's description of the way the "author function" has been put into question by a

shift in interest from the concept of the unique, originating voice of the author to the

discursive frameworks comprised of textuality, writing and readership,[15] what will be

more informative for this thesis are hooks's and Cornell's assertions that the voice must

be maintained for subjects whose ability to make themselves audible and visible from

their own point of view is at risk. The instances in which the inability to hear the

subject's story are put into relief arise in representations of the dying, those who, due to

illness, may be losing their voices and with them, the ability to self-represent, and the

dead, those whose voices have already been made silent. This thesis takes the position

that a consideration of the dying and the dead necessitates access to the voice, without

presuming it to be the guarantor or defining manifestation of identity but a means by

which identity is claimed and expressed (if not by the dying or dead subject, then by a

surrogate figure who speaks on their behalf) as well as a vehicle for dialogic

intersubjectivity.

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[14] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002); The Visible and the Invisible, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1968); Luce Irigaray, An Ethics of Sexual Difference, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993); This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985); The Way of Love, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluhacek (London: Continuum, 2002).
[15] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," Image, Music, Text, trans. Stephen Heath. (London: Fontana, 1977) 142-148.

Visuality

Visuality is an encompassing term under which I will distinguish, for now, one essential

variant, after Jacques Lacan's theory, which involves notions of the gaze and the look. In

The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (1964), Lacan established an

influential distinction between the eye and the gaze, both of which function by way of an

intersubjectivity whose shifting, bivalent degrees of agency – to see and to be seen – are

founded upon an arena in which the ability to assert an identity is simultaneously an

environment in which one's experience being visible may be degrading or alienating.

One of film theorist Kaja Silverman's many insights is that while the subject may take

recourse to the gaze and the look to confirm subjectivity, i.e. to present oneself as a

picture to be seen by others, the visual world also constructs and delimits subjectivity by

providing the defining images that, in the first place, would be socially recognizable: "[. .

.] the images within which the subject 'finds' itself always come to it from the outside."[16]

In terms concerned specifically with the agency that can be negotiated by representations

of race, ethnicity and femininity, cultural theorist Irit Rogoff writes of the bivalent stakes

in the intersubjective framework of visuality, which can involve confirmation as well as

derogation:

> The discussion of spectatorship in (rather than and) cultural difference concerns
> itself with the possible contexts for understanding and misunderstanding; for being
> understood and misunderstood; and for the visual erasures, excisions, reifications,
> and objectifications that exist throughout the locus of seeing and being seen.[17]

bell hooks asserts the positive productivity of "oppositional" looks in film, those

occurring when a person normally excluded from deploying her own representation (a

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[16] Silverman, Male Subjectivity at the Margins (New York: Routledge, 1992) 6; The Threshold of the
Visible World (New York: Routledge, 1996).
[17] Irit Rogoff, "Other's Others: Spectatorship and Difference," Vision in Context: Historical and
Contemporary Perspectives on Sight, ed. Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (London: Routledge, 1996) 187.

black female, for example) is shown to present an active face of resistance, which implies the power to *look back*, to arrest the looks of the imagined spectator and with it, his attendant oppression: "Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency."[18] The considerable literature on the gaze and the look shows these notions to be important to feminist film and photography theorists as well as to art historians, as they have been key areas in which the gendered qualities to the field of vision and representation may be uncovered.[19] In this study, which requires a minimal recognition that the dead can be seen but cannot actively take part in the dynamic made possible by the gaze, I view the power relations involved in the visual field to be of central importance.

Touch

A phenomenological variant of visuality that demonstrates a tendency toward the conflation of the senses can be introduced by mentioning its close relationship to touch; in particular, the way touch is invoked by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his theorization of the intersubjectivity fostered by the visible world, described in The Visible and the Invisible (1964). In his essay, "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," vision is described as a

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[18] hooks, Black Looks 116.

[19] Owing a great debt to Laura Mulvey's ground-breaking psychoanalytic-inspired analysis of the effects gender on power in the field of vision in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16.3 (1975): 6-18, and seen strongly in the work of Silverman, Male, Threshold, "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image," Camera Obscura 19 (1989): 54-85; Fuss, "Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look," Critical Inquiry 18 (1982): 713-737; Mary Anne Doane, "The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses in the 'Woman's Film' of the 1940's," The Female Body in Western Culture, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986) 152-174; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," October 39 (1986): 65-108; Berkeley Kaite, "The Gaze," Pornography and Difference (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1995) 67-87; hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," Black Looks 115-132; Margret Iverson, "What is a Photograph?" Art History 17: 3 (1994): 450-464; Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," October 78 (1996): 107-124. In her psychoanalytic study on Rembrandt's work, which is motivated by a concern for power in the field of vision, Mieke Bal notes, "[. . .] the relationship between looking and power, which pervades this culture where positions in visual art are quite gendered." Reading 'Rembrandt': Beyond the Word-Image Opposition (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 8.

type of carnal interconnectivity between self and other that reduces the separation

between the two by way of the enveloping "flesh" of the world, which presumes the

embodied immersion of both participants within it for exchanges to take place.[20] Because

I am addressing visual artwork, Merleau-Ponty's inscription of the sense of touch into the

visible is informative when interpreting the types of camera vision employed by some

photographers to make contact with their subjects that seems to be palpable. Also,

Merleau-Ponty's views help me describe the paradigm of certain photographers as an

event between subjects on both sides of the lens in which the camera-person's presence is

never elided, an effect whose ethical consequences will be explored.

While an interest in touch as a means of intersubjectivity could find its legacy in the

phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, it has been more recently explored in the writings of

Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray. These philosophers invoke tactile

metaphors in such a way that the distinction between the senses is reduced – so that

vision can be conceived as a form of contact and speaking as a form of touch, thereby

multiplying possibilities for intersubjectivity.[21] In his reading of Nancy's work regarding

the possibilities for intersubjectivity through the confluence of the senses, Derrida

precisely identifies the divergent forms this "contact" can take: *"Si deux regards viennent*

au contact, l'un de l'autre, on se demandera toujours s'ils se caressent ou s'ils se

donnent un coup – et où serait la différence."[22] Irigaray proposes, more specifically, a

sense of touch that is a subversive manner of intersubjectivity (between women, between

the mother and child as well as within the self) that, by asserting sexual difference and

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[20] Merleau-Ponty, The Visible, 130-155.

[21] Merleau-Ponty, The Visible; Jean-Luc Nancy, The Birth to Presence, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993); Jacques Derrida Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2000); Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together," This Sex 205-218; An Ethics; The Way.

[22] Derrida 12.

with recourse to emphatically-fleshy models, circumvents masculinist paradigms of representation in psychoanalysis and philosophic conceptions of knowledge predicated upon vision that imply the disembodied perspective of the subject.[23] After Irigaray, touch should be conceived as, not only a dimension of agency, but also, in its capacity to recognize sexual difference in a non-hierarchical way, a point of ethics.

Influenced by phenomenological models of visuality, the tendency to demonstrate the conflation of the senses as a means of intersubjectivity has been described as "the haptic" and explored by video and film theorists who have considered camera-looking to be a form of touch and the video screen as a type of electronic skin.[24] By implying a non-domineering approach by the photographer to the subject and by recognizing the potential for an imbalance of agency to exist between these two parties, haptic camera-looking diverges from photographic or filmic paradigms that have been critiqued as distancing, predatory,[25] or as forms of ideological, "phallic mastery."[26] Art historians Kathy O'Dell and Larys Frogier, for instance, attribute tactile qualities to the surfaces of photographs, in particular, those depicting bodies in a fleshy, sensual manner, as a solicitation to touch in which not only the photographer but also the viewer is granted a means of contact with

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[23] Irigaray, "The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," An Ethics 151-184; "When Our Lips Speak Together," This Sex; The Way.

[24] Laura U. Marks, The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema and the Senses (Durham: Duke UP, 2000); Christine Ross, "To Touch the Other: A Story of Corpo-Electronic Surfaces," Public 13 (1996) 48-61.

[25] Roland Barthes and Hal Foster have both mentioned photography in relation to predatory, hunting metaphors. In Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill, 1981), for example, Barthes notes the sensation of fear induced by the photographer holding the camera, whose, "finger, [is] what is linked to the trigger of the lens." 15. In "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," Foster discusses the senses of threat and capture that are inherent in the Lacanian gaze in relation to the art photography of Cindy Sherman and Andres Serrano.

[26] Linda Williams, "Corporealized Observers," Fugitive Images, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: 1995) 2-41.

the subject represented.[27] The interest in touch in the arts also reflects the influence of

psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, who has focused on skin as the boundary zone where

intersubjectivity is beckoned and becomes possible.[28] The idea that skin (either the

body's skin or the "skin" of the medium to represent it) may implore a response from the

viewer (i.e. a call from a vulnerable other whose boundaries are breaking down) has been

considered in relation to masochistic body art and the sculpture of Kiki Smith.[29] With

these views in mind and inspired by the aforementioned question posed by Derrida, touch

will be considered here a means of intersubjectivity implying a sense of proximity that,

due to the body's active involvement in the process, implies recourse to agency on behalf

of at least one participant as well as a significant, dual potential to be realized: the gentle

quality of a caress or the violence of a blow.

Embodiment

As the challenge of representing the dying and the dead makes manifest, there is no

subjectivity or intersubjectivity without embodiment, which leads to the last critical term

that will be discussed throughout the thesis. Although the voice, visuality and touch are

all embodied phenomena, I suggest that there are other, related dimensions of embodied

agency that should be addressed in relation to dying or dead subjects: that arising from

the body's weight, its potential for weight loss and/or destruction from a catastrophic

accident. The body's ineffable weight and a sense of its materiality are represented in the

artworks and images of this study as preconditions through which a continued

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[27] Kathy O'Dell, Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998); Larys Frogier, "La photographie de Nan Goldin est touchante," Parachute 86 (1997): 18-25

[28] See Ross and O'Dell, who both reference Didier Anzieu's The Skin Ego: A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Self (1989).

[29] O'Dell, Contract; Ross, "Body Noise," Kiki Smith. (Montréal: Montréal Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1996) 34-40.

intersubjectivity is negotiated through frameworks of transience, liminality or

contingency. The body's weight comes into view in subsequent chapters in two ways,

both of which centrally reveal the body's potential for mortality: when the body falls to a

certain death from a sky-scraper, as exemplified tragically by many of the victims of

September 11, 2001; and in the dramatic weight loss that often accompanies the late

stages of AIDS-related illness. When artists and photojournalists negotiate the potential

for the loss of the body by re-representing a sense of its weight and its materiality on

film, they demonstrate attempts to grasp, to arrest, to preserve or to honour the body's

transience. In order to address the dead, however, one cannot simply assert the weight or

the materiality of the body within a web of negations involving identity or subjectivity

and there are reasons for a critical approach.

It is not an oversight of feminist theory that the weight of the body, its materiality,

presence and matter are not commonly considered dimensions of agency. Many of these

concepts have been debated intensely in <u>Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of</u>

<u>'Sex'</u> (1993) by Judith Butler, for whom they pose particular problems. In her attempt to

make abject bodies "matter" (in the sense of more meaningful, more dynamic, and more

productive for future re-signification), Butler takes an anti-essentialist, anti-ontological

approach against substantive models of identity as a unity, ground or foundation.[30]

Butler's project is to expose how matter or the materiality of the body, the foundations to

which, she suggests, some feminists turn when seeking to theorize gender identity or

sexual difference, have already been densely coded by sexist signification and should

therefore not be uncritically appropriated as building blocks for feminist theory (even if

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[30] This is evident in Butler's <u>Bodies That Matter</u>, <u>Gender Trouble</u> and in her "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" <u>Feminists Theorize</u> 3-21.

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the goals are strategic), but better looked to as sites of feminist inquiry. The particular

usefulness of Butler's work here lies in her distinction between the materiality of the

body and the discursive, performative *process of materialization* by which subjectivity

and identity can be understood.[31] Butler's performative approach to subjectivity remains

important because of her theorization of the way discourse "materializes" subjectivity as

the manifestation of power relations circulating around the embodied subject.

Cornell's thought from her The Philosophy of the Limit (1992), alongside that of

Butler, is useful in this context because she approaches the absent, non-representable or

otherwise "unsayable" other as a *persistent materiality*, epitomized for her by the

feminine that has been excluded from systems of representation and metaphorized by her

as the dead – who resist representation, but nonetheless beckon as an ethical mandate.

Moreover, Cornell refers to "the remains" as a materiality that haunts systems of

representation (in a pointed allusion to the representational challenge posed by the

feminine and/or the dead) in a way that seeks their critical recovery.[32] Despite the

dramatic weight loss or the literal dematerialization that threatens the bodies of the dying

and the dead, the representations addressed in this thesis will be analyzed with a view of

the body's weight and materiality so that they always remain performative – that is,

enmeshed within social, cultural and historical frameworks that, in advance, structure

their intelligibility, in order not to lapse into a prediscursive, non-critical or primordial

conception of embodiment. I suggest that, ultimately, the elusive, ineffable weight of the

body and its materiality are negotiated in the representations as ambivalent sources of

agency for the dying, the dead and for those who mourn them.

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[31] Butler, "Introduction," Bodies 1-23.
[32] Cornell states that she is inspired by Jacques Derrida's work in Glas, "The Ethical Significance of the Chiffonier," Philosophy 62-90.

The forms of agency expressed by the voice, visuality, touch and embodiment have been frequently-explored vectors of self-articulation in art, theory and cultural politics in recent years. What emerges from these studies is their capacity for intersubjectivity – in other words, for the reciprocal experience of recognition, the affect-effect between self and other(s), which has been seen most often in studies involving the body.[33] Intersubjectivity can take many forms, involving speech, visuality, touch and/or the haptic so that dialogues are fostered between self and other, or it may be unidirectional and involve a solipsistic or monologic address or approach from one to another (in which case, only one subject's point of view is considered). Different types of intersubjectivity involve varying degrees of distance or proximity, both of which can entail domination and threat or, alternatively, altruism, accommodation, communion and mutuality. Because intersubjectivity can involve a respectful, non-threatening symmetry or the reduction of one party to the status of object suggests that its workings are deeply linked to the agency that is available to one, if not both, parties.

Therefore, in light of the extensive research into the possibilities for mutual recognition, for balanced viewpoints, for reciprocal touches and for dialogues, a study of the dead in representation brings to light the alternative potential for blockages and elisions that ensue from misrecognition or distortions within the voice, visuality, touch and/or embodiment (fields that are often overlapping). If the dead can only be seen, touched and spoken of but cannot return looks, touches or speech, how can one gain access to them in a manner that respects this imbalance of agency, so that their stories can somehow emerge? The different instances in representations in which avenues of

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[33] The art-historical literature exploring this is extensive, but for some examples, see: O'Dell, Contract; Jones, Body Art; Jane Blocker, What the Body Cost: Desire, History, and Performance (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004); Vision, ed. Brennan and Jay.

intersubjectivity that at first appear to be blocked are then opened up by the artists will

drive the investigations of each chapter, where the consequences of the inability to speak

the self, to re-turn looks, to touch or to feel the touch of others will be considered in

relation to the artists' demonstrations of how these, initially perceived as limit points,

become enabling points – opportunities to engage in novel forms of intersubjectivity.

Motivating these analyses will be the artists' recognition of the body's potential for

partial or complete dysfunction and the waning of agency that accompanies this demise.

The exact approach each artist takes with regard to the vulnerability of the dying or dead

subject brings to light ethical considerations, in which the artists' attempts to either

overcome or to exploit the imbalances of agency through their representations will be

addressed. A sustained analysis of how the representational predicament of the dying or

the dead involves a negotiation of agency, with a particular focus on the intersubjective

avenues of the voice, visuality, touch and/or embodiment and with a consideration for the

ethical implications of these artistic negotiations, has not, to the best of my knowledge,

been undertaken with regard to contemporary, lens-based art.[34]

Through the examination of artists' explorations of the voice, visuality, touch and

embodiment in representations of the dying and the dead, I will attempt to identify the

moments in which an incipient ethics of representation in visual art is required and to

identify the ways in which contemporary artists respond to the challenges involved in

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[34] Mieke Bal contributes a substantial study of Rembrandt's oeuvre from a theoretical perspective that explores aspects of agency at the level of the gaze and the voice. Using a unique methodology of combining psychoanalysis with semiotics, she discusses biblical representations of death that reveal the limits of painting media in tension with narrative. Reading "Rembrandt"; Elisabeth Bronfen offers a substantial study of mainly (but not exclusively) literary works and historical paintings that focuses on the connection of death and femininity from a psychoanalytic perspective (after Freud and Lacan): Over Her Dead Body; Susan Sontag offers a sustained, moral consideration of what the most appropriate function should be for photojournalistic images (as well as some art-historical images) of war that graphically depict the pain, suffering and deaths of others, in which she considers viewers' possible responses to them. Regarding the Pain of Others (New York: Picador-Farrar, 2003).

their chosen subject matter, exploring in particular the moments of sensitivity to the potential for representational violence. With these goals in mind, the following definition provided by Cornell will resonate throughout the thesis: "Again, by the ethical relation I mean to indicate the aspiration to a non-violent relationship to the Other, and to otherness more generally, that assumes responsibility to guard the Other against the appropriation that would deny her difference and singularity."[35] The appropriateness of Cornell's work to a study of representations of the dying and the dead in which ethics are a concern becomes evident in her descriptions of the responsibility of the living toward these subjects, highlighting not only their vulnerability at the material level, but also their vulnerability at a representational level, such that they are in need of a surrogate willing to perform the posthumous work of piecing together and protecting facets of their identity. Cornell's allegory of the *chiffonier,* the maternal, mourning figure who "pieces together the remains as an act of care[,]" will be important in the interpretation of the means of representation forged by artists and journalists for the dying and the dead that imply the careful responsibility toward those who may otherwise go forgotten or remain altogether excluded from the system – without losing sight of the elusive, often-inassimilable materiality of bodies.[36] If one views the dead as subjects who are the most defenceless to the violent effects of (mis)representation, Cornell's thinking positions one to better conceive of the artists acting as surrogates, mediators, care-takers or gatherers for the identities of the dead, as figures who heed the call to represent the dead carefully, in a way that doesn't exploit their lack of agency. Alternatively, if the ethical relation is not met, Cornell's thinking positions one to appreciate the consequences within the field

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[35] Cornell, Philosophy 60.
[36] Cornell, Philosophy 75-76.

of representation when the dead are further silenced or injured, like so much detritus scattered by the wind, left unrecoverable.

The Parameters of the Study

Rather than attempting a survey covering a broad spectrum of instances in which death has been represented in contemporary art, I have selected a particular group of artworks created almost exclusively since 1990, primarily in analog photography, video and film, that demonstrate a consistent focus on real, as opposed to fictional, subjects, generally represented individually rather than as groups or communities (although this distinction is frequently blurred in discursive ways that reflect cultural, ideological or political views) and done in a manner that emphasizes the body and the specific experiences it endures.[37] Although involving the body in every instance, the works under consideration differ from performance artworks where artists "try death on for size" by, for example, slipping into the role of the corpse.[38] What distinguishes the artworks in this study from other photographic works or performances by artists who consciously invoke artifice or theatricality, who may "fake" their own deaths, is the non-reversible quality to the represented individuals' experiences of AIDS-related illness, imminent death or those deaths to occurr subsequently to the artwork's creation. The artworks were chosen because they demonstrate recourse to dimensions of intersubjectivity with the dying and the dead by way of the voice, visuality, touch and embodiment manifested in various

[37] While two of the works under consideration utilize media that are not strictly analog (one involves digital video, the other in digital photography for journalism), because the artists have not exploited the capacity of the digital medium to be manipulated (aside from rudimentary editing), I consider them relatively unaltered images.

[38] A significant study of photographic images of death in contemporary Canadian art has been offered by Penny Cousineau-Levine, Faking Death: Canadian Art Photography and the Canadian Imagination (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2003). Her extensive selection is less literal and more allegoric than mine, as she considers instances in which photographic artists such as Janieta Eyre and Diana Thorneycroft act out their own deaths, as well as the nationalistic, geographic and psychological implications of images in which a doubling occurs, suggesting a divided or split-self.

combinations and with varying tensions between distance and proximity. The coherence of this selection revolves largely around the following two components: the way the artists exploit the immediacy and apparent transparency offered by photographic, film or video medium; and in the subject matter – the emphasis on the dying or dead subjects' bodies and their vulnerability as well as in their capacity for resilience and resistance. It is a focus on the dead as subjects rather than on death in an abstract, universal, poetic or metaphysical sense.[39]

In these pages, I seek to answer the following questions. What types of intersubjective contact does the representation make evident between the artist and the dying or dead subject? What type of intersubjective access does the representation provide to a viewer who wishes to gain awareness of the identity of the dying or dead subject? Inspired by research in art history and cultural studies that has interrogated and exposed the various power structures involved in the representational triumvirate (i.e. the subject-of-representation, the artist and the viewer) and the relationships that exist between these parties, I seek to draw closer attention to the terms of engagement forged by the artists with the dying or dead subjects during the making of the work and to analyze how the chosen representational paradigm materializes the subjectivity of the dying or dead in strikingly divergent ways, despite many initial similarities in the works' formal qualities. By "terms of engagement," I mean both the literal and metaphorical degrees of distance or proximity through which the artist situates herself or himself in relation to the bodies of the dying or dead subjects, considering not only the types of physical contact the photographer may have had but also its qualitative aspects at an

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[39] Although emerging from time to time will be the metaphysics of death that traces the photographic medium after Roland Barthes's theory in <u>Camera Lucida</u>.

emotional, interpersonal level as manifested by the work. By "representational paradigm," I refer to the artist's relationship with the myth of photographic transparency as well as the types of connotation evident in the work – effects that would allow the viewer to evaluate whether or not the relationship of the photographer to his or her subject met certain ethical criteria. In other words, I am concerned with the degree to which the artist makes clear his or her own involvement in the construction of the representation. The different degrees of photographic transparency that the artists make evident or attempt to hide are significant in the way they put into relief the tension between identity (and the ability of the dying or the dead to lay claim to it from their own perspective or the ability of a surrogate to do so on their behalf) and the discursive forces that materialize subjectivity, revealing processes that unfold through frameworks ranging from mastery to reverence. My hypothesis is that despite the many avenues of agency that are foreclosed to the dying and to the dead, identities are still attributed to them and subjectivity is still materialized by scenes of representation, in processes whereby these subjects are not only made visible but occasionally also touched by the camera work or engaged in dialogic, embodied relations.

Of particular interest will be the fine lines that distinguish one photographic paradigm as self-consciously transparent from one that is obfuscating, the results of which can be profoundly divergent from an ethical point of view. Without losing sight of the findings of feminist and queer art historians and cultural theorists of recent years, I seek to consider ethical dimensions and possibilities inherent in the (im)balances of agency the representations make apparent by turning to the work of Cornell, Simon Wiesenthal, Emmanuel Levinas and others. The purpose of this study is to offer neither

an ethics of representation nor a philosophy of ethics, but an art historical study

identifying the salient moments when ethical considerations arise in relation to the dying

and the dead, pointing to the ways in which artists have addressed ethical problems by, at

times, overcoming them and, at other times, by exacerbating them. My concern for ethics

in the artists' working methods and in the field of vision arises from a theoretical rather

than a legal perspective. As outlined by Larry Gross, John Katz and Jay Ruby in Image

Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film and Television (1988), a study

on the ethical challenges inherent in photographic and documentary film practices, there

is relatively little to draw upon from a legal point of view.[40] Gross, Katz and Ruby

comment on the paucity of legal precedents to guide a concerned photographer or film-

maker, who must rely only on sporadic private judgements made almost exclusively in

the United States on a case-by-case basis, revolving around the right-to-privacy law

which, they suggest, does not offer a systematic or substantive methodology from which

to guide professionals.[41] Nor do I intend to offer a guide for artists, but to advance an art

historical discourse that identifies some of the stakes that come into play in the

representations of the dying and the dead – those arising from their being subject to

various types of lens-based representation. Inspired by what Craig Owens has identified

as the feminist contribution to the critique of representations that characterizes

postmodernity, I am concerned not only with what the representation may "say about" the

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[40] Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby, eds., Image Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film, and Television (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 14.

[41] Gross, Katz and Ruby have identified the "right-to-privacy" law as enunciated in an "implicit" manner by Justice Louis Brandeis in 1928 in the Constitution as, "the right most valued by civilized men," but originally conceived in an article by Samuel Warren and Brandeis appearing in 1890 in the Harvard Law Review as a stance motivated to stop the "prying of the press into the social affairs" of Warren's wife. 7-8.

subject depicted, but also what the representation "does to" the dying and the dead.[42] My

attention to the ethical treatment of the subject within the frame reflects the urge

expressed by the editors of Image Ethics in their distinction, as follows: "But these

questions concern the responsibility of the image maker to the audience; what of the

subject whose life is exposed to public view or even, in the extreme case, whose life may

be threatened by the presence of the image maker?"[43] I wish to pursue this line of inquiry

to consider the implications of the photographer's work upon the dying and the dead. To

develop these questions, each chapter will systematically address the different terms of

intersubjectivity engaged by the artists in order to forge access to the dying and the dead

– the voice, visuality, touch and embodiment, which will be analyzed in terms of how

they shape the ethical potential of these representations.

The goal of the first chapter, "The 'Falling Man' of September 11, 2001: Discordant

Appeals for Ethics and Identity," is to analyze a photograph taken by photojournalist

Richard Drew of a man who fell to his death from one of the World Trade Center towers.

The key terms under analysis here are visuality (invoking the decidedly public

atmosphere of the spectacle) in conjunction with embodiment (in particular, the weight of

the body and its potential for dematerialization). Drew's compelling photograph,

haunting in its simultaneous beauty and horror, came to symbolize the various identities

that were affixed to the dozens, perhaps hundreds of people who fell to their deaths in the

attack, in ways that were striking in their disparity. The mass media and the viewing

public demonstrated a concern for an ethics of representation that will be shown to reveal

certain contingencies that, closely implicated by the medium involved, will be the focus

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[42] Craig Owens, "Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History, ed. Norma Broude (New York: Icon Editions, 1992) 496.
[43] Gross, Katz, and Ruby 17.

of this chapter. As foils to Drew's image – which will be qualified by the false sense of "analogical plenitude" that it conveys as a single photograph, offering a limited view of an event that in reality, involved time, movement and sound – a discussion will ensue of other representations of people falling to their deaths, namely: photographs by Sarah Charlesworth from 1980, Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's short film 9'11"01 (2003) and Eric Fischl's censored public sculpture Tumbling Woman (2002). This comparative analysis will reveal some vexing circumstances in which aesthetics corrupt the emergence of ethics, thereby testing the limit points of the capacity of each medium to convey its subject matter. Judith Butler's work in Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative (1997) helps one comprehend how the dead are vulnerable to linguistic deaths, because it is the living who hold the power to grant or withhold names (proper and descriptive) based upon disparate ideological, national or personal criteria. The situation of the "Falling Man" illustrates the parabolic directions that the posthumous materialization of subjectivity takes, a process that affects whether or not their "remains" will be honoured or repudiated. This case study will bring awareness to the predicament in which the dead are suspended and pulled in different directions, revealing the importance of recognizing the weight and materiality of the body as dimensions of agency whose effects implicate the identities of the dead as well as the mourning work of the living.

The terms of intersubjectivity under analysis in the second chapter, entitled "The Voice of Surrogacy," are the voice, visuality and touch. Hinting at the themes to be explored in this chapter is the sentiment of writer Justine Picardie when she describes the longing that consumed her while mourning her sister's untimely death: "[. . .] it seemed

impossible that my sister and I would ever be separated by silence, that our voices were contained only in our flesh and blood."[44] Explored in this chapter is the potential for the voice to be silenced by death but also, when invoked by a living surrogate, its potential to re-animate the dead from a position of emotional proximity. The discussion will unfold around a digital video projection by artist Gillian Wearing called Prelude (2000), which entails a triadic, intersubjective relationship that is unique within this study because it involves the artist and twin sisters, one living, the other dead. Prelude is a "dialogue" constructed by coupling a time-based image of a dead sister with the voice of the living sister narrating a story about her, so that the twins appear to be speaking together. The voice studies of theorists Mary Ann Doane and Kaja Silverman help to situate Wearing's work as part of the continuing legacy of non-synchronous sound used by feminist film and video makers to disrupt the traditions of dominant cinema. The symmetrical dialogism created between the two sisters by Wearing will be interpreted alongside a speaking-touching metaphor proposed by Irigaray. My proposal is that Wearing takes an ethical stance to representing the dead: rather risking representational violence by putting words into the mouth of the dead from a distanced position, she offers the role of narrator to the dead woman's still-living twin, who offers a more intimate perspective. Inspired by the ambivalent position described by Holocaust survivor Simon Wiesenthal in his autobiographical story The Sunflower (1969/1997), I introduce the notion of the surrogate, an ethical figure who must decide whether or not to speak on behalf of the dead. The significance of Wearing's work lies in her achievement (here invoking the tenets of Cornell's ethics of representation "to be seen *and* to be heard") of the possibility

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[44] Justine Picardie, "If I Dream I Have You," Granta 71 (2000): 166.

of speaking, not only *of* the dead (telling her story *for* her) but *with* her, surmounting a seemingly impossible challenge.

Chapter Three, "The (De)Formation of Identity," is a consideration of six works from Andres Serrano's photographic series <u>The Morgue</u> (1992). Close attention will be paid to two terms of intersubjectivity, namely the visuality of a Lacanian gaze coupled with different registers of touch, both of which, I will suggest, involve a wounding, unidirectional contact with the dead. The imbalance of agency apparent between the photographer and the corpses he represents will come under close scrutiny because the way he deploys the camera drastically alters the emergence of the dead's identity. The opacity of Serrano's working method will be discussed as a point of contrast to the other artists in the study to uncover a paradox: despite the physical proximity of his own position to the dead and his penetrating views of the corpses, he forges a gaping psychological distance that makes difficult a respectful view of them. While the emergence of an identity as it might reflect the point of view of the dead is precluded, another, criminalized identity is offered in its place, due to the photographic connotation of anonymity through which he frames his work (informed in large part by the institutional context in which the series is shot and by the fragmenting views of the corpses and their injuries). The cultural-historical resonance of his morgue subject matter will be considered to determine how it contributes to a distortion of the dead's identity and I suggest that Serrano's work draws upon and continues centuries-old practices of viewing "criminal" bodies. This is neither a moral judgement nor a call for censorship against Serrano's work, but an investigation into how the artist's approach toward his subjects disallows the ethical relation after Cornell's definition of it as, "the aspiration to

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a non-violent relationship to the Other."[45] Relating the "Falling Man" chapter with that on Serrano's work is the issue of anonymity raised by both of them in situations where the intense focus upon an individual, dead subject whose face and proper name remain obscured suggests a manner of faceless portraiture. The effects of anonymity compared with the effects of biographic specificity upon a view of the dead will, in both cases, be considered. I will question whether or not it is a point of respect or disrespect to withhold the proper name of the dead and point to the importance of how descriptive names also inaugurate subjectivity in various ways.

In Chapter Four, "The Ethics of Nan Goldin's Photographic Approach to the Dying," two series will be discussed in which Goldin represents friends who were dying of AIDS-related illness. What I attempt to demonstrate is how Goldin recognizes that the avenues of intersubjectivity that are being foreclosed to her dying friends involve the voice and the continued embodiment predicated upon the weight of the body. When AIDS-related illness and impending death make the reciprocity of dialogue or the chiasmus of touch more difficult, Goldin's photography recognizes this and attempts to compensate for her friends' waning agency with recourse to a phenomenological-haptic paradigm of visuality, in which the embodied presence of subjects on both sides of the lens is emphasized. Therefore, the third term of intersubjectivity to come under analysis in this chapter, the touching fostered by her camera vision, emanates from her position behind the lens. While Serrano's practice will be read as taking part in photographic opacity (because the viewer's knowledge of his involvement with the corpses and how he got access to them is occluded), Goldin's operational paradigm will be interpreted in terms of photographic transparency because her investments are revealed and result

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[45] Cornell, Philosophy 62.

largely from the autobiographical and biographical connotation she purposefully chooses. I consider Goldin's use of photography to be a system of representation that performs an ethical relation to her friends and attempt to demonstrate how she meets the criteria of Cornell's *chiffonier*, whose mourning work, in this case, protecting and conveying the identities of her dying friends in the context of the AIDS crisis, has not only ethical but also political significance.

The fifth and final chapter, "The Negotiation of Perspectives," addresses a photographic collaboration between two artists, Jorge Zontal and AA Bronson who, for a quarter of a century, were partners in the artistic collective General Idea until Zontal died of AIDS-related illness in 1994. The work in question is a triptych-panel entitled Jorge, February 3, 1994, a series of photographs taken by Bronson shortly before Zontal's death that represent him blind, undressed and skeletal due to the late stages of AIDS-related illness. The key dimensions of intersubjectivity to be analyzed here are visuality, in a unique manifestation of vision shared between the sighted camera-man and the blind subject and embodiment, focusing in particular on the way Zontal's emaciation signifies other, historical-social bodies who have similarly suffered. Because of the dynamic photographic exchange that takes place between the two friends, Jorge, February 3, 1994 will be read as an instance in which a dying man takes an active part directing his own self-representation, which is significant in the following ways: it blurs the lines between portraiture and self-portraiture; it points to dimensions of agency that emanate from the body's vulnerability without, however, lessening the manifestation of that vulnerability; and it confounds Barthes's conception of photography, from Camera Lucida (1981), as an inscription of death. A purposeful exposure of the ways illness transforms the body is at

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work in Jorge, February 3, 2003, but by the dignity Zontal claims for himself through his pose and through the cultural-political references it expresses, the display is held from becoming pure spectacle and on the contrary, demonstrates a powerful agency of its own that touches the viewer affectively.

Some of the provocative challenges to artists who represent the dying and the dead imply the following ethical considerations. How does one photographically approach a "body" which no longer holds any agency, a subject who appears mute, without access to the gaze and who has run out of the time required for the performative? What will be the consequences of the photographic paradigm on the emergence of an identity for the dying or the dead: will it reflect their perspective or will it be a distorted attribution more reflective of the investments of the artist? Do particular representational strategies allow reciprocity with the dead? Is the camera revealed to be a tool of capture or that which bestows a loving caress? I will inquire as to how the utilization of the photographic medium may give body, depth or even a sense of dynamism to subjects, despite that it has often been thought to reduce multidimensional subjects to a mere two dimensions by "mortifying," "embalming" or "archiving" those who come under the lens.[46] In light of Roland Barthes's views in Camera Lucida that photography enacts a manner of death for the sitter and that the temporal dimensions of photographs allude to death (in the way they make visible those who have already died while at once prefiguring their deaths), I will inquire whether the artists' recourse to this medium redoubles the death already appearing within the frame or, in a twist of Barthes's view, animates the dead subject by the photographic engagement.

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[46] On these three points of view, respectively, see André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," What is Cinema? Vol. I, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: U of California P, 1967) 9-16; Barthes, Camera; Allan Sekula, "The Body in the Archive," October 39 (1986) 3-64.

Something will always escape one's attempts to gain access to the dying and the dead, bringing attention to the various limit points that are engaged: their voices are no longer heard, their eyes cannot meet our desiring, inquisitive looks, they cannot feel the touch extended by the living, the weight of the body slips out of reach or the body's cohesion dematerializes. If one wishes to make contact with the dead or gain access to them, what will be the terms that define the approach: discursive, material, phenomenological or a combination of all three? The desire for continued access to the dead is expressed through the importance of the body these representations assert – bodies revealed to be the means through which artists initiate forms of intersubjectivity. Will the intersubjectivity occur through a framework of injury or adoration and will it be altruistic or self-serving? Further, how does the medium structure the relationship between the involved parties? Do the dead become further silenced, untouchable or wounded by incisive camera looks, or are non-domineering means of intersubjectivity fostered in representations? To what degree will the identities of the dying and the dead reflect their own perspectives and to what degree will they be distorted by the representational paradigm engaged by the artist? Some of the challenges the artists explore involve the following: how to represent those whose experiences of vulnerability could easily be exploited through pure visuality; how to give a voice and even engage in dialogue with someone who is silent; how to touch the other without inflicting injury; and how to bear witness to suffering without enacting a form of visual mastery.

End of Introduction.

CHAPTER ONE

The "Falling Man" of September 11, 2001: Discordant Appeals for Ethics and Identity

Are subjects exploited or valorized by the public display of the liminal moments captured by representations of their bodies falling to death? This chapter is an analysis of both a news photograph that came to be known as the "Falling Man"[1] and the mass media discourse of September 11th in which it is enmeshed to illustrate the discordant ethical appeals that are put into play by this and related representations. Rather than attempting to solve the problem of ethics that are brought forward by the photograph, I will examine the instances in which ethical concerns are evident as well as the contingencies upon which they are based, which will be revealed in the following principal areas: the tension between the experience of collective trauma and the spectacle; the capacity of the representational medium to convey the weight and the movement of the body; and the polarized meanings that are conveyed by the names affixed to the dead. A comparative analysis of representations of falling bodies makes evident some limit points involving each medium's capacity to convey information, the framing devices of connotation and exhibition context, and aesthetic considerations. This chapter is offered as a case study exploring how the "materialization" of subjectivity occurs for the dead through representations, a process that signals the importance of recognizing the body's weight and materiality (at moments when it falls to death as well as posthumously, when the bereaved seek to recover and honour the remains) and how it is implicated by the conflicting investments of the parties involved. Following the turbulence that ensued by the various names (both proper and descriptive) that were attributed to the "Falling Man"

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[1] Tom Junod, "The Falling Man," Esquire Sept. 2003: 180.

– creating identities on conflicting sides of honour and shame – I enquire, "What's in a name?" What will be brought into relief with representations of fatally falling bodies is a dynamic relationship between "linguistic agency" and the material agency of the weighted, falling body, both forms of agency that in death, are revealed to be highly ambivalent, if not double-edged swords.[2]

The Controversy

On September 12, 2001, Canada's national newspaper, Globe and Mail published a dramatic photograph of a man falling, head-first, to his death from one of the World Trade Center towers, accompanied by the subtitle, "Leap of desperation," on the fifth page of its news section [Fig. 1]. The photograph, by Associated Press photographer Richard Drew, was also published in New York Times and in dozens of other newspapers around the world. In that weekend's edition of Globe and Mail, letters to the Editor poured in complaining about the crassness of the image. People were upset at the paper's publication of an image showing a man about to die, and some found it a gross invasion of privacy. The graphic nature of the image was perceived as an exploitation of the dignity of the man, suggesting that viewing a photograph of the painful last moments of a man's life added further injury to the victims who suffered from the terrorist attacks. In response to these accusations, Drew claimed: "We record history. This was the history of that day. I didn't photograph his death. I photographed part of his life."[3] Drew's insistence that he captured the last moments of a man's life suggests the use of the photograph as an homage to the man, emphasizing the dignity and importance of those

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[2] Judith Butler, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (New York: Routledge, 1997) 2.
[3] Peter Cheney, "The Life and Death of Noberto Hernandez," Globe and Mail [Toronto] 22 Sept. 2001: F6-8.

final few seconds. That the photograph, as well as the television footage, captured such liminal moments between life and death became an issue that challenged the media – an issue that directly implicated the identities of those who are now dead. According to journalist Tom Junod, in his summary of the events:

> In the most photographed and videotaped day in the history of the world, the images of people jumping were the only images that became, by consensus, taboo – the only images from which Americans were proud to avert their eyes. All over the world, people saw the human stream debouch from the top of the North Tower, but here in the United States, we saw these images only until the networks decided not to allow such a harrowing view, out of respect for the families of those so publicly dying. At CNN, the footage was shown live, before people working in the newsroom knew what was happening; then, after what Walter Isaacson, who was then Chairman of the network's new bureau, calls "agonized discussions" with the "standards guy," it was shown only if people in it were blurred and unidentifiable; then it was not shown at all.[4]

The sensibilities of those who viewed the falling man in the photograph, a situation reflected in the disturbance conveyed by the real-time television footage, was due to the emotional proximity North Americans felt towards the situation. The image was too close to home as many people in North America personally knew someone who perished in the terrorist attacks on that day. Entire nations, the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia and others, were in mourning, in a state of shock and disbelief. The photograph caused a sense of shock because it clearly captured details of a day that previously would have been inconceivable, but simultaneously confirmed that these events had, indeed, occurred. The appropriate terminology to use to describe what they saw was unclear – media people couldn't decide if they were looking at people "publicly dying" or living the "last moments of a life." The discursive workings of the media became chaotic because, on this rare occasion, they could not name what they saw: neither could they

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[4] Junod 180.

decide if individuals should be correctly identified or remain anonymous, nor could they decide what the events themselves meant.

The public ambivalence toward the newspaper image and its publication seems to directly implicate the identity of the dead in a paradoxical way. On one hand, the "Falling Man" was anonymous, nameless and relatively faceless, so there was a sense that the photograph exploited the tragedy of individuals whose humanity and biographic specificity had been erased. On the other hand, Junod's research shows that the only way the networks could (at least for a short while) show the images, was if the identities of the individuals were obscured out of "respect for the families," if not for the dead themselves. The decision to either publicly represent these news events or to censor them suggests a concern for an ethics of representation, one which had not yet been codified, one that hinges upon the many factors to be explored in the following pages.

On September 22, 2001, <u>Globe and Mail</u> appeared to be directly responding to the apparent public need to qualify the anonymity of the figure, therefore appeasing the perceived sense that media outlets had exploited a man's death. They published a piece of investigative journalism entitled "The Life and Death of Noberto Hernandez," by Peter Cheney, who believed he had correctly identified the fallen man.[5] The story was clearly concerned with granting the figure in Drew's photograph not only a proper name, a personal history and a loving family context, humanizing the tragedy by paying respect to the dead, and possibly countering the perceived sense of injury caused by the public display of the photograph. When in New York doing his research, Cheney saw a poster created by a family seeking the whereabouts of Noberto Hernandez and recognized a striking similarity to the man in Drew's photograph, who was possibly Hispanic, tall,

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[5] Cheney F6-7.

with a goatee, and wearing a white chef's coat [Fig. 2]. Hernandez worked as a Pastry

Chef at Windows on the World, lived in Queens, and had never returned home from work

on the day of the terrorist attacks. Hernandez's brother Tino and sister Milagros spoke to

Cheney and gave a personal history of Hernandez's life and character, describing how

much they loved him. Therefore, Cheney's journalistic work functions in a way that

suggests the desire for an ethics of representation towards the dead, reflecting Drucilla

Cornell's allegory of the *chiffonier*, the figure who takes careful responsibility for the

non-violent recognition of the other, attempting to gather the remains in a manner that

seeks to, "guard the other against the appropriation that would deny [his] difference and

singularity."[6] Cheney's article creates a sense of singularity around the dead with

biographic particulars that situate him within a nexus of family ties and that portray him

as a unique and loved individual, in order to counter the unthinkable horror that appears

to be sedimented by a single photograph reproduced without qualification. The reader of

Cheney's article becomes personally engaged with the life of Hernandez so that their

view becomes less voyeuristic.

According to Cheney, although the physical remains of Noberto Hernandez were

found at the site and identified subsequently through DNA analysis, they were so badly

fragmented that it was impossible to confirm the exact manner of death. Yet Drew's

photograph seemed to confirm the precise circumstances under which Hernandez died

(and therefore, one may speculate, it may also have offered family members Milagros and

Tino Hernandez a sense of closure). It is as if Cheney's investigative work reconstructed

the last moments of Hernandez's life in a way that was not possible for his broken body.

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[6] Drucilla Cornell, "The Ethical Significance of the Chiffonier," The Philosophy of the Limit (New York: Routledge, 1992) 60.

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However, one of Hernandez's daughters refused to accept that the man in the photograph was her father and his wife refused even to look at the photograph (an important point I will address later in this chapter). Despite the opposing views of the family of the deceased, the way Cheney's story attempts to qualify the anonymity of the man in Drew's photograph demonstrates a desire for an ethical engagement, as if to repair the sense of representational violence enacted by the news media's display of the photograph.

From late September to mid-October, 2002, Drew's photograph as well as other iconic images from the New York disaster, were publicly displayed in Toronto in large, colour reproductions at the World Press Photo exhibition staged in the atrium of BCE Place, one of the high-rise banking towers in the city's financial centre. The prestigious, juried World Press Photo exhibit featured dozens of the top news photographs of world events, which were chosen by a panel of photographers and editors for their journalistic, artistic, political and humanistic merit. The exhibition of Drew's image in this public sphere brought about the same feelings of ambivalence as when it was first seen a year earlier as well as some new responses, but all suggesting an ethical concern towards the identity of the man.

Two articles appeared in Canada's other national newspaper, National Post, which both condemned the exhibition. On October 19, 2002, a story titled "Towering bad taste at BCE Place," singled out only the "horrific pictures of people swan-diving to their deaths from the flaming towers of the World Trade Centre" among the variety on display.[7] A few days later, a more extensive article entitled "BCE Place staff shaken by 9/11 photo exhibit" appeared, accompanied by a photograph of a woman inspecting the now infamous photo [Fig. 3]. The journalist quoted an irate law clerk named Sheena

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[7] Gillian Cosgrove, "Towering Bad Taste at BCE Place," National Post [Toronto] 19 Oct. 2002.

Arora, who worked in the offices of BCE Place and responded to Drew's image with, "Oh my God, that's disgusting. . . . That could be someone's father or brother, and they're exhibiting it as art? It's desperation, it's not art."[8] Perhaps the controversy didn't so much erupt as was courted by the perspective of National Post, a conservative national newspaper geared towards the demographic of individuals in the financial services sector, the very sector which was so hard hit by the terrorist attacks. What of the ethics of looking, to which only the living have access? The eyes of the man about to die could never return the look or even meet the eyes of the thousands who viewed the image of him in the newspapers on September 12, 2001. The momentary panoptic vision achieved by the "Falling Man," whose look surveilled all of Manhattan from his towering perspective, was cruelly turned back on him through the workings of the mass media.[9] On one hand, the image and its display would seem to place it clearly within the realm of the spectacle. On the other hand, because some viewers sensed there was a violation in looking at this photograph, I suggest that a more subtle situation was at play, involving an incipient ethical aspiration that will, however, be revealed to be coloured ideologically, inflected with nationalistic investments and the collective experience of trauma.

Spectacle or Ethical Concern?

Guy Debord's theory of the spectacle from his Society of the Spectacle (1967) describes a type of spectatorship in which the viewer is psychologically distanced from the image so that a passive acceptance of its content occurs. While Debord's text is largely about the workings of mass media and is therefore appropriate for the immediate context, his

[8] Joseph Brean, "BCE Place staff shaken by 9/11 photo exhibit," National Post 23 Oct. 2002: A12.
[9] Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1984) 206-213.

theory critiquing the commodification of society that transpires by its powerful effects is also relevant for art images because they too are viewed in the public sphere. After Debord, the spectacle is a public sphere predominated by images (which includes advertising, the press and forms of entertainment), a world experienced *as* an image or a steady stream of images whose main characteristics are unreality, superficiality and distance from the spectator. The spectacle has the effect of pacifying the viewer because its "content" bears little connection to the material, emotional or economic reality of those who view it or, just as importantly, to the reality which may have been the source for the image: "The concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a speculative universe."[10] Implicit in the workings of the spectacle is the sense of distance it imposes between viewer and viewed. This is due to the mediation of the images, which therefore necessitates perception through vision rather than, as the theory goes, the more direct access allowed by touch.[11] The spectacle is, therefore, "inaccessible" and disconnected from the viewer, who is not required to respond to the imagery but merely to accept it.[12] There is a seductive pleasure in the spectacle, which due to, "its fallacious paradise," is critiqued by Debord because it hides its function on behalf of those in power (deployed in the service of capitalism or politics).[13] The spectacle precludes any active viewer engagement that would be the precursor to an ethics of representation because it reduces the viewer, distanced by the unreality and superficiality of the images, to passivity and complacency. Debord describes the workings of the spectacle as "unilateral" in the way it

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[10] Guy Debord, <u>Society of the Spectacle</u> 1967 (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983): 19.
[11] Debord 18.
[12] Debord 12.
[13] Debord 20.

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imposes itself on the viewer and reduces her or him to the voyeur or consumer.[14] Of particular importance is his description of the spectacle as monologic, as "the opposite of dialogue" due to its self-referential, self-aggrandizing qualities, which seek complacence rather than engagement from the viewer.[15] The World Press Photo exhibition epitomized the spectacle: despite the engaged contemplation of a few visitors, the installation of the dozens of poster-size, coloured, news images, many of which depicted geographically-distanced conflicts and killings, ran at eye level all along the central concourse level of the office-tower, there to be passed and easily viewed by any pedestrian or ignored by workers strolling the corridors in conversation as so much visual noise. Only the images from the September 11, 2001 disaster proved to be the exception from the smooth functioning of spectacle.

In addition to the potential for the spectacular, there are other dimensions at play, involving processes of identification and dis-identifictation. The law-clerk's response of disgust points to how the initial traumatic event is re-staged and re-framed as a secondary experience of trauma, a situation that, according to cultural theorist Jeffrey Alexander, involves a "creation" or a "storytelling," which he describes as follows: "a complex and multivalent process that is contingent, highly contested, and sometimes highly polarizing."[16] According to this view, Alexander states: "When the trauma process enters the mass media, it gains opportunities and at the same time becomes subject to distinctive kinds of restrictions."[17] A mention of some of the other photographs displayed in the 2002 World Press Photo exhibition will clarify the cultural construction that framed this

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[14] Debord 24.
[15] Debord 18.
[16] Jeffrey Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity, ed. Jeffrey Alexander and others. (Berkeley: U of California P, 2004) 12.
[17] Alexander 18.

manner of looking as part of a nationally-specific, collective trauma rather than as reflecting the spectacle.

Among the many photographs grouped by theme and geography was a series taken by American photojournalist Tyler Hicks (working for the New York Times/Getty Images). These harrowing images documented the brutal capture and execution of a suspected Taliban fighter at the hands of the Northern Alliance, who became allies of the United States in their hunt for terrorists. The sequence of four photographs (only the first and last to be reproduced here) pictured a terrified man, dragged through a dirt road by his captors so that his pants tore from his body to expose a gunshot wound on his buttocks, interrogated, begging for his life, and then shot at point blank range by the men looming over him [Figs. 4 & 5]. With regards to the "moral imperatives" of the photojournalist, who was acting in accordance with the codes of his profession, the ethical use of these images is still relatively unclear if considered alongside three of the four basic criteria offered by Gross, Katz and Ruby in their study Image Ethics (1988), which revolve around the right to privacy of the individual in the image as well as whether or not consent was given to photograph and circulate the image, namely: "intrusion," "embarrassment," and "false light."[18] The fourth criterion to consider is "appropriation" (taking and using the photograph for purposes other than those stated by the photographer), which would appear not to apply to this situation because Hicks was clearly acting as a photojournalist and using the images for that particular purpose, not for commercial or personal use. Yet Hicks's photographs were explicit, even pornographic

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[18] Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby, eds., "Introduction," Image Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film and Television (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 3-33. With regards to "false light" being a consideration, the question would involve whether or not the man killed in the photograph really was a Taliban fighter – as stated by the photograph caption.

on two counts: in their content – the humiliating ordeal and death the man endured

without trial by court of law, publicized around the world; and in their graphic detail,

captured from a dominating, invasive position looming over the captive from a few feet

away.

In his assertion that artistic values elevate the cinema from the potential for

obscenity inherent in the realism of documentary practices, André Bazin notes that when

certain violent events are captured and conveyed with too much realism, they become

linked, through the sexual subtext of baseness, rawness, availability and commonness,

with pornography. He notes that the overexposure of violent events dulls their power to

shock, "for it is not too long ago that killing stopped being a spectacle."[19] In this lack of

shock value, the effects of violent images are therefore debased in a way that recalls the

presence of overly explicit or non-aestheticized sex in the cinema. This is not a "moral"

argument for Bazin but an aesthetic challenge to the media that is inherently revealing: "I

once wrote, apropos of a notorious newsreel sequence showing officers of Chiang Kai-

shek's army executing 'Communist spies' in the streets of Shanghai, that the obscenity of

the image was of the same order as that of a pornographic film. An ontological

pornography."[20] What appears to be involved in the reproduction of Hicks's images,

sponsored as they were for use by the major news organizations in whose service he was

employed, is a lack of editorial neutrality identified by media theorist Jessica M. Fishman

as the "prestige papers' willingness to document non-American corpses. That is, a high

proportion of the corpse photos found in the prestige or elite press depict the 'other,' the

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[19] André Bazin, "Marginal Notes on Eroticism in the Cinema," What is Cinema? Vol. II, trans. Hugh Grey (Berkeley: U of California P, 1971) 173.
[20] Bazin 173.

foreigner."[21] Because no complaints were registered against the Afghanistan sequence,

the situation at the <u>World Press Photo</u> exhibition suggests the public's dulled senses to its

graphic nature, not for reasons associated with the Bazin's identification of the

"ontological pornography" of photo-journalism, but because of an ideological lack of

identification with the depicted "victim," whose distance from the Toronto viewers was

based on more than ethnic, religious and geographic otherness: he was immediately

identified as the enemy in the nationalistic war on terrorism. Regarding the effects of

trauma from September 11, 2001, which are read as relatively "simple" because, "both

the victim and the guilty were so immediately and unequivocally established in the public

mind," Neil Smelser writes, "[n]o traumatic story can be told without tracing these

themes of suffering and blame."[22]

That the lack of response to the graphic documentation of the murder of the

suspected Taliban fighter would appear to be due to the effects of cultural trauma is a

view that is also supported by Alexander's research, when he points out how the "nature

of the victim" is an important aspect in whether or not their representation will usher a

viewer's response.[23] That controversy erupted not as a reaction to the execution of the

Taliban fighter but to the image of the man falling from the World Trade Center towers is

an effect explained with recourse to Alexander's criteria of traumatic identification

between viewer and victim:

> To what extent do the members of the audience for trauma representations
> experience an identity with the immediately victimized group? [. . .] Only if the
> victims are represented in terms of valued qualities shared by the larger collective

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[21] Jessica M. Fishman, "News Norms and Emotions: Pictures of Pain and Metaphors of Distress," <u>Image Ethics in the Digital Age</u>, eds. Gross, Katz and Ruby (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003) 68.
[22] Neil J. Smelser, "Epilogue: September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma," <u>Cultural</u> 282.
[23] Alexander, <u>Cultural</u> 13.

identity will the audience be able to symbolically participate in the experience of the originating trauma.[24]

The identity of the "Falling Man" was nuanced by proximity in two ways: at the individual level, he could have been a relative or "someone's father" as Arora states; and at the collective level, by his anonymous, "everyman" status. Alexander qualifies "the nature of the victim" of cultural trauma by the following questions: "What group or persons was affected by the traumatizing pain? Were they particular individuals or groups or 'the people' in general?"[25] With respect to the status of the "Falling Man" in terms of either an individual or a collective identity, that he appeared to represent both functions, offered the viewer a means of identification at both the personal and the cultural level, heightening the potential for ethical engagement.

The law clerk Arora's outrage, I suggest, is an effect that was exacerbated by another dimension of proximity: that of the context and circumstances in which the World Press Photo images were viewed. BCE Place is a modern office tower complex housing many companies in the high finance sector, whose similarities to those once located within the World Trade Center towers would foster additional identifications. I question, undoubtedly, whether Arora's incipient ethics was *in itself* ethical as it appears to be ideological and nationalistic, based upon a "dualistic morality" that Smelser claims infuses the character of the trauma of September 11, 2001, in which ethnicity played a major role, clearly pitting "guiltless" Americans against Muslims and Arabs in a "process of demonization of the suspected perpetrators of the attack."[26] Arora's response is coloured by a sense of patriotic familiarity and should be read alongside Smesler's

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[24] Alexander 14.
[25] Alexander 13.
[26] Smelser 276, 273 & 269.

account of how the September 11, 2001 trauma worked in an oppositional fashion to delineate victims against perpetrators: "The identification of a hated out-group only served to strengthen the general feelings of collective solidarity in familiar ways."[27] The more graphic, brutal photographs documenting the step-by-step murder of the Taliban fighter did not provoke the same concern because his identity was sufficiently other, distanced by religion, motive, a sense of culpability, ethnicity and Third-World geography. Nonetheless, Arora's response indicates an unusual engagement with a potentially spectacular image through a sense of concern rather than seduction.

There is other evidence that points to the emotional engagement and appreciation of dozens of visitors like those who signed the guest book at the <u>World Press Photo</u> exhibition, who were almost completely in favour of the show. Enthusiastic comments such as these are read page after page:

> Fabulous exhibit! Sandra Jameson
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> These photos are excellent and need to be seen. Lorna Whitfield
>
> A must see – your heart soars and your heart falls; a truly human experience.
>
> Thankful for the experience. Audrey Cameron
>
> Please, Please – do more of World Press (Photography) exhibits – Powerful, important, alive – Irene Ungar
>
> Excellent! We all <u>need</u> to see this. Thanks – Alex.[28]

One particular message from the guest-book demonstrates with poetic sensitivity, how dramatic, conflicting emotions were experienced by members of the general public, who,

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[27] Smesler 269.

[28] Material provided by Lesley Sparks, Photostart.com, who organized the exhibit in Toronto and provided useful information for this research such as the National Post articles and a photocopy of the entire guest book.

like Brian Batrich in an entry dated October 15, 2002, recognized the paradoxes inherent

in the photograph on an aesthetic level and demonstrated an awareness of how the lure of

the spectacle functions against an ethical recognition of the event as traumatic:

> Richard Drew's images of people in their final moments
> of life are all at once ugly, beautiful, fearsome, awesome,
> terrible, and yet entrancing.
> The picture of the man falling to his death is both a
> travesty and a work of art. It shows that death
> has two sides, light, dark, up, down, black, white.
> Such is the duality of the human condition.

Batrich's remarks in the guest book suggest that the situation of the "Falling Man"

indicates a tragic literalization of the loss of transcendence and control in the public realm

– experienced equally by the falling figures captured on film as by the many visitors who

were deeply affected by what they saw. Ambivalence is thought by Smelser to be an

important characteristic of the trauma of September 11, 2001, revealing positive and

negative sides to the various sides to the catastrophe and its outcome, described as:

"simultaneously shocking and fascinating, depressing and exhilarating, grotesque and

beautiful, sullying and cleansing – and leaving the country feeling both bad and good

about itself."[29] Therefore, the potential for contradictions to unfold marks the ambivalent

form of trauma identified by Smelser as characterizing September 11, 2001 as well as the

binaristic interpretation of the photograph as conveying the simultaneously heavy,

embodied nature of "human condition" as well as its potential to soar.[30] The engaged

responses of the public here prove to be something more complex and sensitive than a

vulture-like feeding frenzy of exploitation or the narcosis associated with the visually

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[29] Smelser, Cultural 269.

[30] This binaristic interpretation of the image bears striking parallels to the binaristic thinking associated with Descartes's cogito and the legacy of the humanist subject whose implicitly gendered characteristics have been identified by Elisabeth Grosz in Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994).

commodified world of the spectacle. Despite the ideological investments exposed by an

understanding of the "Falling Man" photograph as part of a collectively experienced

trauma, the various public responses to the work, whose manifestations of resistance to

the spectacle are clear, ultimately demonstrate an ethical aspiration (if not necessarily

their achievement).

The "Beauty" of the Falling Figure: Context and Connotation

The ethical concern of the law clerk is also contingent upon another factor – the ability to

distinguish the institution (art or photojournalism) in whose service the photograph is

meant to function. Despite the fact that the enlargement, colour reproduction and display

of Drew's photograph in a public exhibition points to an art venue, it originally

functioned in the service of professional photojournalism, whose goal is to objectively

capture the news events in order to convey them to the public, not to censor them. In the

following pages, I will address and explain the importance of the connotative features and

exhibition context for Drew's photograph in comparison with the art photographs of

Sarah Charlesworth, whose similar subject matter reveals the fine lines that distinguish a

work's ability to elicit either an ethical or an aesthetic response from the viewer.

The arresting, uncanny beauty of Drew's image disarms the viewer. It looks like an

artwork or a fanciful product of Photoshop™ rather than a historical document. The

perfect symmetry of the two towers, which meet at the centre of the photograph as if

forming the spine of a book, are sliced by the man's torpedo-like form. This image,

among the dozen captured, was chosen by Drew and the editors for precisely these

aesthetic reasons: "That picture just jumped off the screen because of its verticality and

symmetry. It just had that look."[31] If an incipient concern for ethics is seen to emerge in

the controversy, it should be understood as inherently tied to the workings of the medium,

the context in which it is viewed and the ability of the viewer to be able to distinguish the

unspoken meanings that circulate around it – those to qualify an understanding of the

content within the image. This view is supported by Gross, Katz and Ruby, who state:

"systems of knowledge and epistemologies are attached to moral systems. Ethics are only

comprehensible in relation to other facets of a culture."[32] They provide an example of

how the context of viewing the social justice photographs of Lewis Hine documenting

child labour practices at the turn of the century, in a contemporaneous grainy newspaper

image or many years later, finely printed and framed for hanging in the Museum of

Modern Art, would influence not only the function of the images either as socially

edifying or as aesthetic objects, but also potentially affect the welfare of the subjects

represented by the images.[33] That falling figures are understood as subjects about to die in

the material sense, rather than being perceived merely as aesthetic, formal riddles, is a

moment when the ethical relation is provoked and proves to involve recognition of the

weight of the body at a significant, threshold state.

Barthes's studies of photography in Image – Music – Text (1977) have uncovered

the "paradox" within its workings, exposing the hidden cultural meanings that are

conveyed by a medium whose very naturalness would appear to require no further

analysis.[34] Barthes distinguishes two types of meaning that inform one's ability to make

sense of visual images: the denoted message, which is the informational content of the

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[31] Junod 179.
[32] Gross, Katz, and Ruby (1988) 18.
[33] Gross, Katz, and Ruby (1988) 19.
[34] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" and "The Rhetoric of the Image," Image – Music – Text 1980, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).

image (i.e. the scene depicted); and the connoted message, which is the style and cultural context through which the meaning of the image is conveyed and altered. If the denoted content is seemingly neutral and natural, the connotation (which includes cropping, framing, editorial selection and the text captions that accompany the image) is constructive, potentially ideological and rhetorical. Unlike drawings and paintings, whose style, even if realistic, is itself a form of connotation, the mechanical qualities of photography place it in a different realm as it appears to be "a message without a code," in other words, a purely denoted message that functions without the mediating, cultural screen caused by the human hand: "Certainly the image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect *analogon* and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph."[35] Nonetheless, what Barthes uncovers as the "analogical plenitude" of photography – "the special credibility of the photograph," based upon its special, mechanical connection to the referent, its seeming veracity and ability to deliver pure, unadulterated information, is in the end another form of connotation or cultural coding.[36] This is especially prevalent in press photography, which is founded upon its claims to be truthful and its apparent lack of artistic or other manipulative intervention, and Barthes describes this "paradox" as collusion between the denoted and the connoted messages.[37] Barthes shows the way in which the apparent "analogical plenitude" that appears to reside within the borders of the photograph actually emanates from the many external structuring elements by which the image is culturally coded (whether concealed or not).[38] Moreover, this pull between the "natural" and the cultural meaning of

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[35] Barthes, "Photographic" 17.
[36] Barthes, "Photographic" 18 & 21.
[37] Barthes "Photographic" 19.
[38] Barthes, "Photographic" and "Rhetoric"

photography, the tension between the "pure" information conveyed by the photograph and the connotative features that would frame it (especially the text captions and titles), is significant here and throughout this study in ways that bear upon an ethical relation between viewer and the image.

To deepen the understanding of how photographic connotation alters an ethical approach to representations of dying or dead subjects, I turn to other journalistic images of falling figures that have been displayed in a more clearly-circumscribed high-art context. The seductive allure to falling figures has been evident prior to the September 11, 2001 catastrophe. In 1979-80, American photo-based artist Sarah Charlesworth exhibited a series of appropriated newspaper photographs, all enlarged to a standard format of six by four feet, of people falling to their deaths from burning buildings. One such work, Unidentified Woman, Hotel Corona, Madrid shows a woman falling in front of a smoky high-rise [Fig. 6]. At the time, the work was a daring instance of the postmodern technique of appropriating an image from one context and exhibiting it in another context. With only slight (but very meaningful) alterations to the scale of the work, its title, its exhibition context or its attribution, the "new" work could be exhibited under the name of the appropriator, who claims authorship. The decontextualization of the work causes it to assume a different function, which was seen as a critical stance interrogating notions like artistic genius, authenticity and their implied masculinity, as well as exposing the seeming "naturalness" of the signifying frameworks through which meaning arises.[39] Like a photographic "ready-made," informed by conceptual art

[39] Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" and "Appropriating Appropriation," On the Museum's Ruins (Cambridge: MIT P, 1993); Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Playing in the Fields of the Image" and "Photography after Art Photography," Photography at the Dock (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991).

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practices of the seventies and playing upon the uncanniness that arises from the decontextualization of an object, strategic appropriation was later to become an important contribution to re-defining the place of photography within the high art world of the 1980s, as it questioned the categories to distinguish journalism from documentary from art practices.

The 1980s and 1990s, years in which Charlesworth's images from this series have been exhibited, are decades that show a concern for the power and politics of vision as well as identity in the field of vision. The other works in Charlesworth's series all follow an identical format to the one mentioned above – a black and white news photograph of a body falling from a building, blown up to movie-poster size and all uniformly yet emphatically "named" through anonymity as <u>Unidentified Man, Ankara, Turkey</u> (1980) or <u>Unidentified Woman, Genesee Hotel</u> (1980), qualified by only the name of the hotel from which they fell or, in some cases, the city. In this art-historical context, it is rather startling that an artist has publicly exhibited these "portraits" of death, remarkable in their many elisions, without heeding the privacy of the victim's family, without acknowledgement of the journalistic source for the image or the original photographer. As mentioned previously in relation to Gross, Katz and Ruby's work in <u>Image Ethics</u>, appropriation is one of the criteria to cause the use of a photograph to be considered unethical. While the self-conscious risk of "plaigarism" was part of the provocation of appropriation art, a concern for whether or not the dead were represented ethically, it appears, had not yet become a compelling issue.[40]

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[40] While there are a complex set of legal issues involving attribution that ensue and could be pursued and Gross, Katz and Ruby's <u>Image Ethics</u> (1988) is useful in this regard, I limit my discussion to how these effects involve the theoretical perception of the dead as subjects.

In order to address the significance of Charlesworth's alteration of the original news photograph at the level of the title and what this could mean for the subject of the representation, I return to Barthes's ideas, when he denaturalizes the implied relationship between the text and image to suggest that the text not only follows the image to reinforce its meaning, but also works retroactively to condition one's understanding of it: "Formerly, the image illustrated the text, (made it clearer); today, the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination."[41] Gross, Katz and Ruby support this view of the importance of the connotative message surrounding the photograph: "The meaning and significance attached to a visual image are a consequence of the label attached to it, the expectations associated with the context in which the image appears, and the assumptions made by audiences [. . .]."[42] Barthes exposes that despite any non-congruence of the text and the image, what is of particular significance is the *apparent* natural unification between the press photograph and its caption.[43]

In this context one can inquire whether the burden of representation falls more heavily upon the image or upon the text. Curator Susan Fisher Sterling reads the choices made by Charlesworth in terms of the practice of decontextualization, interrogating the limits of the media (both epistemic and ontological), much along the lines of Barthes's semiological analysis:

> By recasting images such as <u>Unidentified Woman, Hotel de Aragón, Madrid</u> (1980) or <u>Unidentified Man, Otani Hotel, Los Angeles</u> (1980) without their authoritative captions, the artist raises important questions about how much or how little a

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[41] Barthes, "Photographic" 26.
[42] Gross, Katz, and Ruby (1988) 18.
[43] Barthes, "Photographic" 26.

photograph can tell us, in this case, about life or death. [. . .] Suspended like the figure in this unresolved space, one is left to find meaning in the image alone.[44]

Sterling fails to note, however, the ethical implications of this aesthetic strategy for the dead, whose image is appropriated for artistic exploration. While this ethical dimension has not been taken up by any of the art historians who have contributed to a catalogue for a comprehensive touring retrospective of Charlesworth's work,[45] Barthes emphasizes that in relation to the text there is a responsibility held by the creator: "The text is indeed the creator's (and hence society's) right of inspection over the image; *anchorage is a control, bearing a responsibility* – in the face of the projective power of pictures – for the use of the message."[46] Has Charlesworth disengaged herself by hiding her own investments, thereby also withholding the potential for more to say or ask on behalf of the viewer – so that the image appears to become all denotative content (i.e. pure information) with little cultural content? Should one read Charlesworth's linguistic reticence strictly in terms of the new photo-conceptualism whose limits were being tested in the art world, or should one also be concerned with the subject within the image?

The apparently-generic term chosen by Charlesworth, <u>Unidentified Woman, Hotel Corona, Madrid</u> holds great significance: did Charlesworth make the choice to keep the proper name unknown; did the original journalists fail to ascertain it; or did the families of the deceased fail to identify them, suggesting that they were un-claimed, unwanted or un-mourned? I dwell upon the importance of Charlesworth's titles for this series because, despite their apparent neutrality, a meaning does indeed emerge that has consequences for

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[44] Susan Fisher Sterling, "In-Photography: The Art of Sarah Charlesworth," <u>Sarah Charlesworth, A Retrospective</u>, org. and curated, Louis Grachos and Susan Fisher Sterling (Santa Fe, NM: SITE Santa Fe, 1997-1999) 78.

[45] In addition to the previous quote, also by Fisher Sterling, this is the only reference to Charlesworth's falling figure series in the above exhibition catalogue.

[46] Barthes, "Rhetoric" 40, my emphasis.

the perception of the dead. By withholding the specificity of the proper name, Unidentified implicitly codes the identities of the falling figures as interchangeable, or worse, as worthless.[47] The "unidentified" cipher could be seen to grant privacy to respect the dead, imposing an objective distance between the artist and the image, or, alternately, to imply a blunt renunciation of responsibility. It may also be significant that there is no reference to the embodied experience of the fallen in the titles: the titles' public, geographic locations are almost archival in their seeming neutrality and exclude any mention of the fact that the women or men shown are *falling* to their deaths. By removing the qualifications granted by a news story that would at least partially situate the falling figure, does the elusive image-text combination become pure spectacle?

Charlesworth's work did not cause a controversy at the time of its initial exhibition and she has gone on to be a highly respected artist on the international scene. The work was also exhibited without fanfare in 1991 in The Interrupted Life, a group exhibition of artists who have represented the dead in their work, staged by the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. In that context, Charlesworth's work looks subdued, rather conservative, even dreamy in its aestheticization of the event, compared to the many more horrific and overtly politicized images of death, dismemberment and murder that were shown. Perhaps because the image was taken from an original source in journalism, Charlesworth was allowed to go unquestioned in terms of ethics. Charlesworth's Unidentified Woman, Hotel Corona, Madrid however, was displayed not for the purposes of transmitting world events as they happened, but for aesthetic-intellectual purposes. It becomes a question of the viewer's ability to read the "syntax" of

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[47] To remain nameless *is* a form of naming, an effect I explore at length in subsequent pages following the research of Judith Butler in Excitable Speech (1997).

the photographic language and the ability to correctly identify the context for the code, which appears to reside at the institutional level as much as within the image.[48]

While the aesthetic value of the work as art seems to lift the image of the falling figure out of the range of ethics as it concerns the identity of the dead, it also engages another set of issues that reveal some factors which suspend the falling body in a liminal position, as if at a threshold for perpetuity, never to arrive at the destination. Charlesworth's image simultaneously conveys a sense of weight and weightlessness, the burden of the body and a sense of its transcendence above the ground. The woman's stocking-clad legs and backside are exposed as her dress billows up above her torso to cover her head and facial features. The ballooning dress, coupled with the smoke (which further clouds any view of the woman's face) make the figure appear doll-like and unreal. The graininess of the enlargement adds to the mysterious beauty of the image, in which the dense black of the bottom half of the photograph gives way to lightness in the upper register, suggesting an underwater environment into which the woman's body has plunged but also implying that a strange buoyancy is lifting it. Charlesworth has emphasized her attraction to the momentary beauty of the figures that the power of photography has captured, as if they were floating or swimming in an ether-world apart from gravity.[49] The feeling that the figure is held up by a pool of water removes any urgency surrounding the woman's impending death. The aura of water, a medium that slows movement, not only erases the sense of speed that a falling figure would have, but also removes the sense of weight from her body. Fisher Sterling notes the way that the use of photography, in its ability to capture a still image of a body that in reality was in

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[48] Barthes, "Photographic" 28.
[49] Sarah Charlesworth, address, S.L. Simpson Gallery, Toronto, Nov. 1995.

motion, confuses (in fact *buffers*) the viewer's perception of its impending impact upon

the pavement: "Having made sure that the violence is only potential here – contradicted

by the stillness or arrested motion of the figure – Charlesworth also placed the viewer in

metaphysical limbo, somewhere between fascination and dread."[50] The woman actually

appears to be rising up, floating heavenward, as if to break the surface of the water.

However, it is a shallow grave. If Charlesworth's image of the falling woman did convey

a truer sense of the weight of the body (one that would more clearly indicate how the

weight propels the woman *downward* to her death), the image would certainly be horrific,

and perhaps then less intriguing but also less acceptable to art audiences.

The body weight that, figuratively speaking, burdens the female in Western culture

has been identified by the feminist thinking of Susan Bordo as due to a legacy of

masculinist philosophic thought and evident in contemporary commercial media, could

here be shown in a literal way to burden Charlesworth's falling woman, who was about to

meet her death.[51] The acknowledgement that Descartes's humanist subject is predicated

upon a founding separation between mind and body (such that the intellect or spirit are

conceived as transcendent while the body defined by its immanence) is a contribution of

Merleau-Ponty's <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u> (1945), but more pointedly, critiqued by

feminist philosophers starting with Simone de Beauvoir, who have uncovered how its

gender-based binarisms are demeaning to women, with whom bodily weight and its

associated, so-called burdens (i.e. the maternal, the biological, the "natural") are usually

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[50] Fisher Sterling 78.

[51] Susan Bordo, <u>Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body</u> (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993).

linked.[52] But this acknowledgement of the burdensome quality to body weight is also that

which could lead to a more ethical approach to representations of falling bodies. If the

work is viewed as a situation in which a real woman had bodily weight, one becomes

sensitized to the fact that the fall caused loss of life. This recognition would also

encourage the viewer to read the work as a document of a particular, embodied life, rather

than the instance of an anonymous, weightless figure, suspended by aesthetics, perhaps

transcending her fate. Feminist theories that qualify the weight of the body by bringing to

light implicit devaluations of femininity could also usher in the contingencies of the

physical world to Charlesworth's figure, those acting upon real bodies through gravity,

thereby piercing the viewer out of the stupor of the spectacle.

The traumatic awareness that bodies fell to their deaths en masse during the events

of September 11, 2001 provoked a controversy surrounding another work whose

representational status was clearly understood to reside within the realm of public art, in

which a sense of bodily weight and the realism with which it was conveyed emerged as

central to the debate. In September, 2002 American artist Eric Fishl's over-life-scale

bronze sculpture <u>Tumbling Woman</u> was installed at Rockefeller Center in New York and

after only one week was covered up with a tarpaulin and then removed due to the public

outcry against it. The woman's naked figure was depicted in a free-fall position and stood

a few feet above the ground so that her body, like those of the falling bodies in

Charlesworth's and in Drew's photographs, would have appeared perpetually suspended,

never to make contact with the pavement [Fig. 7]. Fischl's stated goal was neither

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[52] Simone de Beauvoir, <u>The Second Sex</u> (1949); Christine Battersby, <u>The Phenomenal Woman</u> (1998); Rosi Braidotti, <u>Nomadic Subjects</u> (1994); Susan Bordo, <u>Unbearable Weight</u> (1993); Judith Butler, <u>Gender Trouble</u> (1990) & <u>Bodies That Matter</u> (1993); Moira Gatens, <u>Imaginary Bodies</u> (1996); Elizabeth Grosz <u>Volatile Bodies</u> (1994) & <u>Space, Time & Perversion</u> (1996); Luce Irigaray, <u>Speculum of the Other Woman</u> (1985).

sensationalism nor a universalized statement, but a personal tribute to a close friend, who

worked on the 106th floor of one of the twin towers. He wanted to create a monument that

would allow mourners to grieve not by "sanitiz[ing]" the loss or aesthetizing and

covering up the brutal "narrative" of the day, but with "an appropriate expression for

tragedy" that, in his mind, would convey a sense of the reality of the victims'

experiences.[53] Fischl's aesthetic strategy was to attempt to re-represent the bodies in their

weight and presence, to counter what the terrorist attacks ultimately caused, which was

the disappearance and disintegration of the bodies of those who perished, whose remains

were never recovered. In an editorial written a year after his own memorial was censored,

Fischl took issue with proposals for monuments to be situated at the former base of the

towers not only because of their abstraction or conceptualism but more pointedly, for

their lack of figurative representation, which for him appears to be a problem in the way

it elides the embodied contingency of the dead:

> Maybe the finalists who designed the proposals were overwhelmed by the success
> of the Vietnam Memorial, or maybe their modernist sensibilities could not tolerate
> the messiness of what happened that day. Maybe it was because the bodies of most
> of the victims vanished in the destruction. [. . .] they are regrettably doing what the
> attack did to the people inside: making them disappear.[54]

The emphasis on a weighted sense of the uncontrollable body in the scene of

representation offers Fischl the means to recuperate the bodies of the dead that were

missing on two levels: in their ensuring absence from the material world; but also in the

manner of death that utterly fragmented the remains, so that even the corpse, a vehicle

through which grieving begins to occur, was denied. According to Fischl, "In a few brutal

seconds, the collapsing towers robbed us of family members, friends and fellow citizens.

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[53] Eric Fischl, letter, <u>New York Times</u> 19 Dec. 2003.
[54] Fischl.

We can't allow a memorial to do the same."[55] That Fischl, an artist best known since the early 1980s as a figurative painter, chose the three-dimensional sculptural medium to express his loss, by dialectically re-representing the body as a massive density, installed permanently (or so the plan was) in the prestigious public space of Rockefeller Centre, suggests an artistic response concerned with the fatal effects of the weight of the body as well as with its symbolic recovery as a cohesive morphology. In this regard, his aspiration reflects the politics of public art as much as the ethical role of the *chiffonier*, who carefully "gather[s] the remains" of the dead so they won't be excluded from systems of representation or forgotten as so much disbursed materiality that must remain "beyond."[56]

However, it is perplexing and ironic that the heightened realism accomplished by Fischl through the sculptural medium that, unlike press photography, bears no mechanical, causal relationship with its referent and could, by comparison, be considered *more* aestheticized. The graphic realism conveyed by the flailing limbs of Fischl's Tumbling Woman has been noted by critic David Rakoff to be excessive to some viewers who, "have interpreted this body twisting in freefall as a piece of grim, plastic photojournalism."[57] In this regard, Fischl's description of the contrasting reactions a viewer could have towards the piece is telling as they speak to the way his use of realism exaggerates as well as dulls the reality of the memorialized event: "One might see a moment of impact in a kind of way that implies brains splattering, a graphic moment there. [. . .] So somebody else looking at it might say, 'God, it reminds me of falling in a

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[55] Fischl.
[56] Cornell, "Ethical Significance of the Chiffonier," 75 & 63.
[57] Eric Fischl, interview with David Rakoff, "The Way We Life Now: 10-27-02: Questions for Eric Fischl; Post-9/11 Modernism," New York Times 27 Oct. 2002.

dream right before I wake up.'"[58] Along these lines, Fischl's work is close to the falling

figures one has thus far seen on a number of counts: the body is shown in the relatively

elusive moments before it makes contact with the ground – moments of suspended

animation that are compelling in their indeterminacy. These aspects appear to have

similarly motivated Fischl in the formal choices he made with Tumbling Woman, which

he describes as follows: "it feels like a dream in which somebody is floating. There's no

weight there that is sending this crushing, rippling current back through the body as it hits

a solid mass."[59] The hinge upon which the ethical recognition functions involves this

difficulty determining whether or not the body is floating or falling, an effect that is

specific to still media. It is also the threshold where the dual potential for beauty and

horror meet, involving the necessity of perceiving the weighted body in motion.

My point is that the choices made by Charlesworth and Fischl at the level of the

medium in which they worked (and the mandate driving their professional work) alters

the viewer's perception of the embodied experience of the figure made visible by the

image. The connotation of the image in one case devalued, but in another case heightened

the viewer's ability to appreciate the weight of the body and the perception of it as

falling, so that the imagined death of the subject was either not fully appreciated or it

became too real. It is curious that the overtly ethical response Fischl was trying to achieve

in his representation, predicated upon re-representing the vulnerability involved in the

weight of the body (whose potential for dematerialization he strives to acknowledge),

backfired when it was exhibited, despite the fact that the medium he chose, unlike

photography, had no ethical bearing upon the material reality of a particular dead

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[58] Fischl, interview.
[59] Fischl, interview.

individual, only upon the private memory of his dead friend, whose proper name was never publicized.

The Perception of Motion

One of the important contributions of journalist Tom Junod's research is the publication of the other eleven frames shot by Richard Drew on September 11, 2001, which follow the man's descent from over 100 stories downward [Fig. 8]. Viewing Drew's full sequence of photographs makes one aware of the urgency expressed by the body, seen in the varying chaotic positions assumed by him as he fell hundreds of feet, which are at times transcendent, free-floating and then linear, directional and otherwise dispersed, graceless and sprawling. These images present a black irony with regard to notions of transcendence conveyed by Descartes's philosophic model of the *cogito*, which, as critiqued by Luce Irigaray, involves disembodied, all-seeing vision as if in God's position, a thinking self free from the constraints of the earth, especially those of the body.[60] In a form of reversal, one can see that the transcendent *cogito* could perversely reflect the man's position, but only as a figure in a still photograph, untethered from the earth and the effects of physics. But because the body is always in motion, it never achieves the one, ideal, "fixed point" to grant the perspectival advantage that Descartes suggests is found within the workings of the mind and identified by Irigaray as impossible.[61] Junod describes the divergent postures of the man as variously capturing horizontal elements (prone and vulnerable to the body's dimensionality) and vertical elements (noble, like the greatest aspirations of architecture concretized by the towers to

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[60] Luce Irigaray, ". . . And If, Taking the Eye of a Man Recently Dead. . .," Speculum of the Other Woman 1975, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell, UP, 1985) 180-90.
[61] Irigaray 181.

touch the clouds), which involve metaphors for the limitations of the human, who is

subject to embodiment, immanence and a loss of dignity as well as the higher capacities

of the spirit:

> In Drew's famous photograph, his humanity is in accord with the lines of the
> building. In the rest of the sequence – the eleven out-takes – his humanity stands
> apart. He is not augmented by aesthetics, he is merely human, and his humanity,
> startled and in some cases horizontal, obliterates everything else in the frame.[62]

The way Junod suggests burdensome aspects of the body with his description of

"horizontal" limbs compared to the soaring quality to the "vertical" lines, return one to

the dualisms of mind and body identified and critiqued by feminist theorists like

Elizabeth Grosz, who points to the way the weighted aspects of the body are coded as

female and used to position the female as lacking the ability to "soar" (intellectually or

culturally).[63] The difficulties with understanding or approaching the body through

binaristic terms is due to their long history in philosophy and metaphysics originating

with the form/matter distinction of Aristotle and Plato and continuing in the mind/body

dualism of Descartes.[64] Junod's view is that this weighted, resistant quality of the body

has the power to startle the viewer out of complacency. This terrible irony presented by

the burdensome weight of the mortal body in the field of vision, if acknowledged, could

be a "resource" in a feminist ethics of spectatorship, in order to recognize the potential

for both male and female bodies to fatally succumb to falling in such catastrophic

moments.

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[62] Junod 180-181.

[63] Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Bodies," Volatile 3-24; "Bodies and Knowledges," Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies (New York: Routledge, 1995) 25-43.

[64] Drew Leder, The Absent Body (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception 1945, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002).

The fearlessness and courage implied by the head-first position in the famous, seventh frame of Richard Drew's sequence are qualities that allay some of the trauma of the other, panic-stricken positions. But this involves a paradox. Rather than capturing the sense of growing velocity of the falling body, the aesthetic qualities and symmetry of the seventh frame, when seen as an individual image out of the context offered by the sequence, creates a false sense of transcendence of the figure (much like Charlesworth's strangely-buoyant falling woman), as if he is floating from a heavenly vantage-point or suspended by a thread.[65] What is missing, of course, is the perception of movement that would convey the *direction* of the body so propelled to fall, enabling a more complete recognition of the embodied experience of this subject.

Barthes has made note of the emotions that can be conveyed by a sequence of photographs so that a narrative arises from the *movement* perceived within the "repetition and variation of the attitudes[,]" and makes note of its potential for comedy: "the comic requires movement."[66] Picking up this idea, I would like to draw attention to the movement that is required by photographic sequence to convey the tragic or the traumatic. Because motion has been stopped by the still, photographic image, the body is cut out of the space-time-gravity context of the world. Art historian Andrew Quick has compared Richard Drew's sequence of photographs of the "Falling Man" to Robert Longo's Untitled (1981) from his Men in the Cities series of over-life-size drawings of men and women, dressed in dishevelled business attire in similarly chaotic bodily poses, rendered in charcoal and graphite of a crispness that comes close to photo-realism.[67] The

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[65] The clerk at the copy-shop who photocopied this image called the figure "Spider Man."
[66] Barthes, "Photographic" 25.
[67] Andrew Quick, "The Artist as Director," Art, Lies and Videotape: Exposing Performance, ed. Adrian George (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2003) 88.

similarity Quick has identified between Longo's figures and Drew's "Falling Man" sequence revolves around the indeterminacy of "the body as a distorted form."[68] One questions whether Longo's figures are dancing, falling, convulsing, ecstatic or alternatively, "possibly in pain, anguish or even death itself."[69] That Longo's staged figures are completely decontextualized in their appearance against blank, white grounds (another manner of suspension) denies the viewer knowledge of the source of the body's chaos, which not only feeds into this uncanny indeterminacy, but also heightens the iconic power of the image. As Quick describes Longo's Untitled: "Here we witness the frozen image of a man apparently giving himself up to unseen and terrifying forces."[70] The effect of Longo's freeze-frame figures clearly arises out of the stillness of the body in the throes of motion – a motion prevented from unfolding, suggested by the sense of rushing wind rippling the man's clothing. This is precisely the effect partially "corrected" by viewing the full sequence of Drew's photographs of the "Falling Man" so that the seventh frame takes its proper place.

A phenomenological model can help one understand why the exhibition of only one frame of Drew's sequence of the "Falling Man," like the famous seventh, became so inflammatory. The singular image was removed from the situational context (of height, space, time and the motion of the weighted body) that would qualify the man as mortal and transform the image from one of potential fascination to that of an embodied event. While the Cartesian model of vision entails an encompassing perspective only when the body is elided, for Merleau-Ponty, perception involves a more grounded conception of the body, fostering a notion of subjectivity as open and receptive to the world in which it

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[68] Quick 88.
[69] Quick 88.
[70] Quick 88, my emphasis.

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is enmeshed and entangled. When seen through the entire series of photographs, the "Falling Man" is a subject entirely immanent to the world rather than transcendent from it. The perceiving subject is described by Merleau-Ponty as a centrifugal force field in relation to the world, "towards which we project ourselves," through sensory apperception, rather than a centripetal force, which would suggest that sense data information is taken up and interiorized by the subject.[71] Merleau-Ponty's body is always characterized and enlivened by motion, which makes perception a constantly-changing, relational event because of the body's situatedness in the world. Merleau-Ponty insists upon a view of the body in motion in relation to the various locations of the world: "The 'motion which generates space' [. . .] from a certain here towards a certain yonder."[72] Therefore, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the body's capacity for motion is useful to acknowledge the fatal trajectory of the bodies that fell to the ground on September 11, 2001 as well as the limits of the photographic medium to adequately convey this.

Film theorist Christian Metz identifies movement as the key feature to differentiate film from photography, which, he argues, offers the cinema its heightened sense of reality.[73] In particular, his phenomenological analysis of the capacity of film to convey movement points to the sense of weight elided by photography, in other words, film conveys the "corporeality of objects" so that "[f]reed from its setting, the object is 'substantiated.' Movement brings us volume, and volume suggests life."[74] Metz's thesis on the animating capacity of film is based not only upon the medium's inherent ability to convey movement, but also upon its temporal quality, unfolding in the present rather than

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[71] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology 450.
[72] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology 450-451.
[73] Christian Metz, "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinama, frans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford UP, 1974) 3-15.
[74] Metz, "Impression" 7.

conjuring the past, as photography does. In this argument, Metz is referring to Barthes's

findings in "The Rhetoric of the Image" (and developed further in <u>Camera Lucida</u>),

regarding the "temporal anteriority" of photography – in other words, the "space-time"

disjunction between the present conveyed by the "here-now" of the viewer with the

photograph and the past captured by the "having-been-there" of the scene depicted by the

photograph.[75] Metz takes up Barthes's observation of the "radical opposition"[76] between

photography and film that revolves around temporality because film, due to its

engagement with the present following from its ability to convey movement, achieves a

greater reality: "The movie spectator is absorbed, not by a 'has been there,' but by the

sense of 'There it is.'"[77] Metz's identification of motion as the contributing factor to the

cinema's heightened animation over photography is ironic when the medium is put to the

challenge of representing falling bodies, a case in which movement (and the implied

space-time-volume it conveys) is necessary to capture death. In any case, Merleau-

Ponty's acknowledgement of the body's relationship to the world, in addition to Metz's

focus on the phenomenological underpinnings of the film medium, qualify the false sense

of "analogical plenitude" offered by a single news photograph as a limited view of an

event that involved movement, the weight of the body, as well as sound.

If the sense of motion that film carries is essential to convey a sense of life, as Metz

argues, also "that films have the *appeal* of presence and proximity," the heightened

reality that it offers reaches its limit point when the motion conveyed is fatal, as in falling

bodies, so that the medium also holds an opposite capacity, not of appeal, but of shock.[78]

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[75] Barthes "Rhetoric" 44-45.
[76] Barthes "Rhetoric" 45.
[77] Metz, "Impression" 6.
[78] Metz "Impression" 5.

The heightened reality of the film, especially when the footage is "live," would therefore

hold a greater "projective power" to convey a traumatic event.[79] In this context, there

exists another representation of the falling bodies of September 11, 2001 that, in its use of

time-based media, is a provocative response to the ethical problems presented by attempts

to represent the events. In a remarkable short film made in response to the events,

Mexican director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu focuses one's attention on two, parallel

movements that came to define that day: the bodies falling from the towers and the

implosive fall of the towers themselves, the former represented visually, the latter aurally.

Innaritu's unique montage of documentary elements was made for a feature compilation

of short films entitled 11'09"01, produced by Alain Brigand, who commissioned eleven

different works (of nine minutes each) by international directors, to offer a global

perspective.[80]

Inarritu's film is, to be more precise, largely an anxiety-provoking sound

experience, for during his nine minutes he projects mostly blank film stock. While one

sees nothing but a dark screen, one's attention focuses on the various discordant, chaotic,

clipped sounds of emergency calls, radio broadcasts as well as cell phone recordings from

witnesses on the ground whose hysteria is punctuated by the distinctive thudding of

bodies hitting the pavement. These sounds soon give way to a full few minutes of

orchestral music at increasing volume to form an encompassing auditory shroud only to

give way to the sound of the towers collapsing, interwoven with Chiapas Indians chanting

healing prayers and an American radio host calling for retribution and revenge upon the

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[79] Metz, "On the Impression" 6.
[80] The cinematic release of 11'09"01 was November, 2003.

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terrorists.[81] Rather than offering a flow of light and a steady stream of visual pleasure, the cinema-goers' unusual experience of visual deprivation is interrupted by the intermittent glimpses of bodies falling from the towers, flashed on the darkened screen for only seconds at a time. What Inarritu achieves with the medium of film is emphasis on the traumatic realism of the falling bodies: they were projected only long enough to get a sense of their speed and motion, but not long enough that the viewer's look can ever rest comfortably in the consumptive relationship with the image as part of a spectacle. The flash effect is burned in the mind of the viewer which, in a phenomenological sense, becomes a retinal experience that lingers long enough for an imprint of recognition to take hold before it dissolves into darkness. The viewer waits, almost perilously in a state of suspension in the cinema's darkness, facing the screen while the normally desired image is withheld, only for the image to appear at an unpredictable moment, as a sliver of brightness in which moving bodies shoot like so many distant dark specks, appearing for an instant but never coming into focus.

That the image is offered only as a momentary "break" from the encompassing, anxious darkness inverts the structure of dominant cinema: normally, editing techniques are hidden and seamless use of montage is desired so that the projection of light dominates. Inarritu's inversion (where it is the passive, immobile viewer who is plunged into extended darkness), appears to be a metaphor for the speed with which the embodied presence of the falling bodies, engulfed by their materiality, disappeared from the world – like a flash of light that could neither be touched nor arrested. Another inversion is at play, in which the visual pleasure that usually unravels with the flow of film stock

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[81] The sound of bodies hitting the pavement was, according to witnesses, one of the most disturbing and haunting aspects of the tragedy of September 11, 2001, one that no photograph would capture.

becomes a nightmarish experience from which one seeks refuge and desires the darkness as a retreat from the horror of the image. Film critic Liam Lacey has noted how the film "ends with a quote, written in Arabic, asking if God's light blinds us or leads us[,]"[82] to which I would add, Innaritu uses the inverted lightness and darkness of the film stock to critique the notion of "insight" itself. Innaritu's suspension of visual pleasure and his insertion of brief but traumatic moments of emotional displeasure in its place is, I propose, the director's ethical response to the tragedy. He grants the viewer the real-time perception of the motion of the falling body (and therefore its weight) to "correct" the uncanny beauty, indeterminacy and potential suspension of the falling figures in still images. Innaritu's flashing of the falling bodies is not, however, offered long enough for them to become a hypnotic spectacle or to ever verge towards the dream-like qualities of still renditions of falling bodies (as Fischl acknowledges his sculpture does). Innaritu's searing moments remain traumatic – an effect achieved not only psychologically but also physiologically, perceptually embodying the jolting reflex associated with falling.[83]

And after Metz's observations regarding whether film or photography more completely satisfies the requirements of the Freudian fetish, these additional, inapprehensible dimensions of film (what he calls "orders of perception," involving time, movement and sound), which go beyond the two-dimensionality of the still photograph, are what distinguish the two media. According to Metz,

> Thus film disposes of five more orders of perception (two visual and three auditory) than does photography, all of the five challenging the powers of silence and

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[82] Liam Lacey, "Eleven takes on 9/11," <u>Globe and Mail</u> [Toronto] 14 Nov. 2003: R4.
[83] Viewers in the small, crowded cinema where I viewed the film in Toronto gasped audibly when the falling bodies flashed, twisted uncomfortably in their seats and generally made more "noise" than usual during this short.

immobility which belong to and define all photography, immersing film in a stream of temporality where nothing can be *kept*, nothing stopped.[84]

Metz describes some of the conditions of photography that qualify it as fetishistic and identifies stillness as a particular trait that distinguishes it from time-based, filmic images. According to Metz, the fetishistic quality of photographs, as object-fragments that *can* be held and touched, is greater than that of film, which, due to its projected quality as a series of transparent, moving images through which light passes, places it in the realm of the intangible. Metz writes about "the importance of immobility and silence to photographic authority" as bearing a strong relationship to the "objective aspects of death" and, more particularly, to the corpse (which is inherently still), but not, it appears, with a *transitional* figure (i.e. one that is alive but soon to die) like the falling body.[85] The notion that film, in animating the bodies on the screen or, in the words of Metz, "gives back to the dead a sense of life, a fragile semblance but one immediately strengthened by the wishful thinking of the viewer," is another filmic trope inverted by Innaritu's depiction of falling bodies, where motion necessarily leads to the perception of dying rather than to a sense of living.[86] In Innaritu's film, however, the painful realization that the medium ultimately cannot suspend disbelief (as can the workings of Freud's fetish) – break the victim's fall, keep their bodies intact or offer some sort of psychological, apotrapaic mechanism to ward off death – is made clear in Innaritu's film, where the falling bodies are depicted *as falling* and therefore can only be incorporated into the visual memory of the viewers, rather than offer a tangible memory.

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[84] Metz, "Photography and Fetish," The Critical Image, ed. Carol Squiers (Seattle: Bay P, 1990) 157.
[85] Metz, "Photography" 157.
[86] Metz, "Photography" 158.

Mieke Bal's discussion of a biblical drawing by Rembrandt van Rijn representing a dead woman, entitled <u>The Levite Finds His Wife in the Morning</u> (1655-6), as a "threshold figure" testing the limits of representation, is instructive because what Bal identifies as the representational challenge to this drawing involves time, movement and, I would add, sound – elements that are at once called for and foreclosed in the still (silent) medium that disallows the realization that the woman is "no longer able to speak."[87] If, as Bal suggests, death is considered a "punctual" rather than a "durative" event, it poses a challenge to a medium being put into tension with a body that is also becoming still. Bal points out how Rembrandt addressed this paradox by drawing lines around the woman's hand to suggest the life that is sputtering out of her body: she is dead yet strangely gesturing. According to Bal, Rembrandt has succeeded in creating "a dynamic aspect of death," so that, "[i]n order to represent her death, then, the drawing must let her move."[88] Bal's observations draw attention to how the expressive quality of drawings endow them with a flexibility not associated with other media like photography. That the "Falling Man" was a body *already in motion* would suggest that it required a durative medium like film to stress that its threshold position between life and death involves movement.

There is a contradiction emerging within Metz's view regarding how, on one hand, the movement offered by the film medium imparts a greater "corporeality" to objects, while on the other hand, projects light images that, although offering a heightened reality to the viewer, always remain beyond their grasp. Metz is aware of this inherent paradox (that the two-dimensional photograph can literally be touched, yet it doesn't offer the

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[87] Mieke Bal, "Dead Flesh, or the Smell of Painting," <u>Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations</u>, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (Massachusetts: Wesleyan UP, 1994) 367. I note that Bal invokes narrative theory to reference the foreclosure of language to the dead woman rather than the dimension of sound, which is my addition to her reading.
[88] Bal 369 & 367.

effect of reality enabled by the moving, projected film image, which cannot be touched) and explains the problem as the conflict between dimensions of tactility and motion.[89] When one is attempting to achieve an ethical recognition of the material experience of people falling to their deaths, as I suggest informs the concerns of Fischl's and Innaritu's works, the tension between the motion of the body and its materiality comes into play. This paradox is expressed by the two media used, one still and three-dimensional (sculpture), the other time-based (film) – media contrasted by Metz in a phenomenological analysis of the impression of reality in the cinema as follows: "Movement is insubstantial. We see it, but it cannot be touched [. . .]. Very often we experience the representation of objects as reproductions by implicit reference to tactility, the supreme arbiter of 'realty' – the 'real' being ineluctably confused with the tangible."[90] Despite this, Metz resolves the issue by claiming: "[b]ecause movement is never material but is *always* visual," the "reality" of the filmic impression is greater than other media.[91] While Metz's concern is for the extent to which the effect of reality is captured, which he claims rests on this "threshold of movement," my concern is for the threshold of materiality and the extent to which the media can accommodate it. In terms of sculpture, "where even the effigy possesses a high degree of materiality," Metz concedes that tactility rather than visuality remains the arbiter of reality.[92] While Fischl's sculptural work bears neither an indexical relation to its referent, nor the reality-giving dimension of movement, it appeared to offer a heightened materiality that ultimately conveyed the greatest sense of reality to spectators. Metz's observations regarding the tangible as an

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[89] Metz, "Impression."
[90] Metz, "Impression" 7.
[91] Metz, "Impression" 9.
[92] Metz, "Impression" 9.

occasionally false arbiter of reality is noteworthy because it brings the awareness of

mediation in general, as the dimension through which one will be forced to negotiate

access to the weight of the body. This comparative analysis of different representations of

falling bodies, exposing the different capacities of each medium and read through Metz's

explorations of how closely each comes to conveying "reality," is meant to elucidate the

effects of each medium upon the perception of the body's weight, rather than to present a

hierarchy.

The "Agency" of the Jump and the "Linguistic Vulnerability" to the Name

Aside from the aesthetic qualities of Drew's seventh frame from his September 11, 2001

sequence, what becomes highlighted, especially when seen in the context of the others, is

a quality that hit a nerve with the public. Only the image in the seventh frame implies a

sense of agency, perhaps even dignity in this act – a historically unprecedented response

to terrorism, piercing the viewer on an emotional level. The simple verticality of the

figure, head first, arms at his side and one leg bent gracefully as if in a reclining position,

implies the direction of personal will: resoluteness, calmness and lack of hesitation about

his choice to go down in the quickest, most direct way possible. Junod writes how these

elements, which are utterly contradictory in the face of such a calamity, were not lost by

viewers: "Some people who look at the picture see stoicism, willpower, a portrait of

resignation; others see something else – something discordant and therefore terrible:

freedom."[93] Heightening this (perhaps false) sense of agency is the image's place in

sequence among the other eleven frames. The difficult quality of the "freedom" seen in

the image brings one back to the fallacy of a disembodied conception of subjectivity

[93] Junod 177.

inherent in the humanist tradition, in which the implicitly-masculinist subject is, ideally, free from the burdens of the body. The sequence reveals at one moment the man's body in a state of chaos and shock with legs spread-eagle, arms outstretched and at other points, his body is turning, tumbling and twisting, with his jacket being ripped off from the force of the wind. While one frame suggests the grace of a man flying or even floating as if parachuting, another frame captures the man in a swan-dive. Perhaps the force of conviction suggested by the man's position in the seventh frame was selected because it describes the unthinkable reality outside the lens; it suggests that these were not figures *falling* from the towers, which implies an accident, but that they *jumped*. This implies a more horrific agency, one that was invoked only to choose between two dire inevitabilities, death by smoke inhalation or death by burning. According to Junod: "There is something almost rebellious in the man's posture, as though once faced with the inevitability of death, he decided to get on with it; as though he were a missile, a spear, bent on attaining his own end."[94] Junod's suggestion of weaponry to describe the figure's posture shows how the man's body becomes a metaphor for the terrorist acts against him as if he usurps the power of injury from the perpetrators, internalizing it, becoming his own agent of destruction. If one doesn't acknowledge the weight of the body, does one deny this figure the only agency he had left at his disposal? In the next pages, I tease out the implications of this agency because his identity was alternately honoured and blackened by it.

If agency implies an opportunity for the subject to make choices, should one consider (however perversely) the "choice" to jump an act of agency? Does this final act of will, heartbreaking in its desperation, grace the (now) dead with agency in his last

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[94] Judod 177.

moments, or grant him some final sense of power to lay claim to his own person? Could

the weight of the body be a resource that tragically, ironically, on the way to destroying

his body, giving in to its contingency to the earth's gravity, gives him one last moment of

transcendence, of autonomy, of "freedom?" Can the dying, then, demonstrate agency and

if so, need this be considered paradoxical?

The sliver of ambivalent agency that one witnesses with the "Falling Man" is, I

propose, his own silent agency predicated upon the weight of the body rather than upon

the force of speech acts that, as demonstrated in works by Judith Butler, would

materialize his subjectivity.[95] This juxtaposition puts into relief a limit point of

poststructuralist theory as well as how the flailing, falling body, one whose "speaking"

takes a path in which the blunt forces of embodiment must be recognized, suggests the

consideration of useful theoretical paradigms through which one can conceive of the

injurious qualities of discourse *along with* the fatally embodied trajectories endured by

some subjects. I seek to discover how his action has been interpreted in a manner that, on

one hand, materializes his subjectivity through the lens of heroism and on the other hand,

through the lens of shame, a distinction that revolves around the divergent conceptions, in

the minds of various figures in the public realm, of how he deployed the weight of his

body.

Junod's research brings attention to the large number of people who may have died

this way, a number that no newspaper or public institution wishes to confirm because it

affixes to the dead an unfathomable identity as agents during their unthinkable ordeal:

"And yet if one calls the New York Medical Examiner's Office to learn its own estimate

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[95] Judith Butler, <u>Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"</u> (New York: Routledge, 1993);
<u>Excitable</u>.

of how many people might have jumped, one does not get an answer but an admonition: 'We don't like to say they jumped. They didn't jump. Nobody jumped. They were forced out, or blown out.'"[96] Junod describes how the identities of the "jumpers" were reduced to a "lemming-like class" whose images were to be viewed only on uncensored "sites on the Internet underbelly."[97] This became a subversive spectacle due to what Junod believes to be the wrongful censorship of the images of falling bodies: "In a nation of voyeurs, the desire to face the most disturbing aspects of our most disturbing day was somehow ascribed to voyeurism, as though the jumpers' experience, instead of being central to the horror, was tangential to it, a sideshow best forgotten."[98] The sense of agency that nuanced their jumps tainted their identities by reading them as suicides, therefore disallowing the dead to be identified with proper names or even to be seen.

What I see as potentially a final manifestation of agency is also read as an act of vilification of the memory of the dead. It was the hint of suicide that pained the American public, which Junod's reading emphasises; this resolution made by the man to leave life his own way, in his own time, a "choice" forced by the knowledge of the other unthinkable choices. The identities of the dead who fell to their deaths hinges on this haunting notion of "agency" that traces the fine line between suicide and accident – an agency forced upon the subject (or perhaps *claimed* by him) with the weight of the body, an agency that offers a unique instance of how the bodily and the discursive are exposed to be utterly imbricated when considering bodies falling to death. Suicide (if you can call a choice made under such duress), is a sin in the view of many religions and at odds with the value Americans put on "the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and it

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[96] Junod 180.
[97] Junod 180.
[98] Junod 180.

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was this notion that couldn't be reconciled by the American public. If they were, indeed, "jumpers" then they, rather than the terrorists, caused their own deaths; the sense of agency suggests they were complicit with the terrorism (however unfathomable this view is), rather than being innocent victims. Junod's article brings forward this important qualification, which had so much bearing on the identity of the dead man and his article is an attempt to rectify this discomfort, to "honour" the fallen as a hero rather than a sinner.

Butler's views from Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (1997) are here useful to account for the painful effects of being named – effects to which the "Falling Man" also becomes "subject." Butler's elucidation of the dark side to being named alerts one to how maintaining the anonymity of a subject is a form of naming that does not necessarily lead to an ethical, i.e. non-violent, approach to the dead. As Butler shows, the process of naming is that which brings the subject into existence and, because she also inquires as to whether naming adds further injury to the subject, her work puts one in a position to explore what happens when one is "named" by remaining unclaimed, unidentified or wrongly named (a situation that will appear again, in another guise, in Chapter Three). In Excitable Speech, Butler discusses naming, speech acts and performatives from a perspective acknowledging the injurious effects that certain names cause, in order to demonstrate the agency that adheres to language: one becomes a subject through it (i.e. interpellation) but also becomes vulnerable to its effects, as hate speech makes evident. That Butler's thinking grants to discourse a certain weight (even body) will be shown to mirror the injurious weight of the material body that falls to death, a weight that, if interpreted as involving a jump rather than a fall, invoked an agency that proved inadmissible to certain factions of the public. This is a strange form of agency

because it is deadly from a material perspective as well as from a linguistic perspective: it

is a form capable of suppressing the identity affixed to the proper name.

According to Butler, "linguistic agency" can quickly descent into a "linguistic

vulnerability" when speech acts are turned against subjects, when the name one is called

is injurious:

> One is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious
> name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as
> well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility
> for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior
> purposes that animate that call.[99]

The dual potential that is involved in Butler's theory suggests how the "Falling Man"

becomes a "subject" through his anonymity – how his identity was structured in the

public field through the various names he was and wasn't called, which direct his identity

in widely disparate directions. With this in mind, do discursive practices bring the dead

subject into existence, materializing them linguistically, or do they have the lethal power

of mastery to subjugate the dead, which may be to injure them twice? Read against

Butler's work regarding "linguistic vulnerability," could the name "jumper" be

considered a form of hate speech, an injurious act of naming whose agency carries as

much lethal weight as the falling body? Here is where the tension between the materiality

of the body and the materialization of subjectivity most explicitly come into relief, at the

dire moment of the falling body. Using the painful situations of hate speech as her point

of departure, Butler's corporealization of language in <u>Excitable Speech</u> fleshes out a

particular vulnerability within the discursive field, so that language appears to act in such

a physical, "injurious" way that "speech wounds."[100] Significantly, it is a sense of trauma

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[99] Butler, <u>Excitable</u> 2.
[100] Butler <u>Excitable</u> 16 & 12.

that Butler ascribes to the painful process of naming, i.e.: "After all, to be named by another is traumatic."[101] In the media's concern for censoring the spectacle, perhaps they made the individuals themselves a spectacle, in disallowing them the individuation that a proper name (or at least a name chosen from their own perspective) would have granted them. Yet the proper name becomes another double-edged sword whose attribution, in the minds of various players in the discourse, suggests widely varying investments and desires.

How does the importance of the proper name come to bear on the affirmation of singularity or, as Butler suggests, set singularity into a state of ambivalence? Moreover, what difference would "identifying" the dead with proper names have made? According to Butler, the apparent goal of the proper name is the individuation of the subject (despite that this goal is never fully realized): "Whether the name is shared by others, the name, as a convention, has a generality and a historicity that is in no sense radically singular, even though it is understood to exercise the power of conferring singularity. At least, that is the general understanding of the *proper name*."[102] With regard to the dead, Butler's discussion of names is pertinent because it emphasizes the extent to which this "constituting power" of naming exists in an external relation to the "subject" who would be named, stating: "And one is dependent upon another for one's name."[103] That the effect of being named, the conferring of existence to a subject, is "inaugurative" rather than merely "descriptive,"[104] is exaggerated with the dead because they are never in the position to claim a name for themselves and are entirely vulnerable to the posthumous

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[101] Butler, Excitable 38.
[102] Butler, Excitable 29.
[103] Butler, Excitable 29.
[104] Butler, Excitable 33.

activity of naming done to them by others. Yet Butler's theory is significantly predicated upon an "intersubjective context" between the nominee and the addressee, whose valence of power shifts from linguistic agency to vulnerability and back again.[105] Because Butler's theory works under the assumption that the subjects are living, it demonstrates an oversight regarding dead subjects that allows one to perceive the utter imbalance of power that is involved in the naming of the dead, who would experience only "linguistic vulnerability," rather than any of the inaugurative benefits it entails.[106]

Following Peter Cheney's report in <u>Globe and Mail</u>, in which he attempts to identify the man in Drew's photograph, Junod pursued his own meeting with two other members of the Hernandez family who had originally refused the idea that the falling man in the photograph was a relation. Junod met with Hernandez's wife Eulogia and their daughter Catherine, both of whom continued to be plagued with the idea that Noberto was the man in Drew's photograph. Because of the publicity of the image, they have received letters from all over the world and offers of money. But these two members of the immediate family continue to refuse the suggestion that the falling man could be Eulogia's husband or Catherine's father because, read as an act of suicide, the photograph suggested to them that he had given up hope: "But he couldn't have jumped out a window, his family knows, because he *wouldn't* have jumped out a window: not Papi. He was trying to come home."[107] When she finally agreed to view Drew's photograph, Eulogia immediately stated: "That is not my husband. You see? Only I know Noberto."[108] Moreover, Eulogia despaired at the idea that he had given up hope, a view made clear in

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[105] Butler, <u>Excitable</u> 27.
[106] Butler, <u>Excitable</u> 30.
[107] Junod 198.
[108] Junod 198.

her request to Junod to "clear my husband's name,"[109] dissociating the identity of her

husband's name from the man in the photograph and therefore materializing the

subjectivity of the "Falling Man" through an act of repudiation, affixing an anonymous

identity to him. It appears that for religious reasons, Eulogia and Catherine Hernandez

were disturbed that the act of jumping would disgrace the memory of Noberto

Hernandez, suggesting the persistent idea that choice was somehow available to those on

the top floors of the north tower. According to Catherine: "They said my father was going

to hell because he jumped. [. . .] On the Internet. They said my father was taken to hell

with the devil. I don't know what I would have done if it was him."[110] Interpreting the

actions of the "Falling Man" as jumping and therefore involving some degree of choice

(i.e. a deployment of the weight of the body as an expression of agency) here works to

subjectify the dead in an injurious manner, attributing motives to the bodily movements

that can never be verified, so that the "dyadic" social relationship inherent in the naming

process when both parties are living becomes monologic when one party is dead.

The Hernandez family's refusal to consider the falling man in the photograph a

relation enacts enunciative agency by altogether renouncing the proper name of the

victim because of its association with the malicious "name" attributed to it by jumping,

suggesting the workings of trauma at the linguistic level. The appearance of the body

within the name (evoked by the term "jumper," which could also be read as the dragging

down of the name by the body) could be interpreted alongside Butler's description of the

way trauma is experienced as a process of repetition that involves the re-representation of

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[109] Junod 198.
[110] Junod 198.

the event.[111] That the trauma caused by the falling, dying bodies of the victims of

September 11, 2001 returns and reappears as the selective process of nominalism enacted

by the living family members, who deferred to the pernicious, public power of the name

"jumper" so that the proper, private name "Noberto" was withheld, puts into relief how

discursive structures that work to materialize subjectivity are thoroughly imbricated with

the materiality of the actual body, twisting its process in unforeseen ways. Much like the

chaotic movements of the falling body, the direction of the speech act is, after Butler's

view, "always in some way out of control."[112] Butler describes the directions taken by the

interpellative process as *a movement* that can only be arrested momentarily by the

sedimenting, fixative power of the name, and asks: "Is the 'name' perhaps one way in

which that arrest is performed?"[113] The powerful divergence involved in the names (both

proper and descriptive) used to describe the falling bodies of September 11, 2001

suggests the unmooring of any weight that seeks to anchor an identity purely through the

body without also considering the material effects of discourse upon it. This process is

mimicked by the representational structure of the photograph as that which arrests,

develops and transforms the movement of the body (and therefore the various identities

of) the "Falling Man," through a process that is both chemical and connotative. That the

uncontrollable path of speech acts that work for, but often turn against, their initial

purposes is ultimately much like the destructive weight of the body invoked by the

"Falling Man" in his final trajectory.

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[111] Butler, Excitable 26.
[112] Butler, Excitable 10 & 15.
[113] Butler, Excitable 36.

The Ethical Work of "Gathering the Remains"

In his attempt to act as a *chiffonier* for the man in Drew's photograph, journalist Tom Junod was rebuffed by the immediate family members, who were explicit in their desire to withhold positive identification of the "Falling Man" as a family member. Manifested here is an incipient concern for an ethics of representation, but from two divergent points of view, displaying conflicting investments. The situation exposes what perhaps can never be resolved in attempts to ethically approach representations of the dead; processes of subjectivity take place in extrinsic fields that proceed, exceed and outlive the dead. The dead are not only vulnerable to the effects of corporeal mortality, but also to certain linguistic deaths, in that it is always others who hold the agency to grant or withhold names based on familial (proper), descriptive, statistical, institutional and nationalistic criteria.

However, there remain ways in which the weight of the body can offer agency to the dead, through mourning figures, who are able to accomplish the ethical relationship inherent in the allegory of the *chiffonier*, who takes care to gather up the unspoken remains of the dead, negotiating precisely the materiality of the body that causes such dramatic resistance to linguistic articulation. The anonymity of the man was a motivating force for Junod's journalistic investigation. By the very lack of a proper name, the "Falling Man" becomes an opportunity to create a new type of national war hero to be commemorated and acknowledged on behalf of the dozens (or perhaps hundreds) of others who jumped to their deaths. Junod calls him "September 11th's Unknown Soldier," ascribing to him an emphatically-honourable identity that should be mourned by even

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those who were strangers to him.[114] The need to grant the man this identity, in fact to

"incarnate" an identity through specific ties with a human body, whose image circulated

around the world, qualifies rigidly-poststructuralist theories that seek to distance facets of

identity from direct links to material bodies. The international phenomenon of granting

the "Unknown Soldier" a proper burial and resting place, returning the remains of the

body back to a nation and family, memorialized on behalf of all those individuals whose

bodies were never recovered from various wars, is an indication of the importance of

body weight as a source for specific identities at the end of life rather than informing their

origins. That governments go to such great lengths to retrieve and to return, with much

ceremony, the remains of their war heroes, speaks as much to the institutional, national

workings of discourse, as to the importance of the physical matter of the body as bearing

a relationship to certain identities, which are positioned as simultaneously singular and

collective. Social rituals can certainly be read through the lens of discourse in ways that

may also respect the remains of the body that grounds discourse, at least when the

identities of the dead are concerned.

Junod's writing is all he can do to gather the broken pieces of the "Fallen Man"

together and "bury" him properly, to memorialize him, place him back within a familial

context and within the national context (recognized reverentially as a part of history) in

the same way soldiers' remains are brought home ceremoniously even decades after their

deaths: "One of the most famous photographs in human history became an unmarked

grave, and the man buried inside its frame – the Falling Man – became the Unknown

Soldier in a war whose end we have not yet seen."[115] It is not only being named but also

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[114] Junod 198.
[115] Junod 199.

remaining *name-less* that is a central tenet to subjectivity according to Butler, who asserts

the performative power of speech acts for recognition as well as for the failure to be

recognized: "The subject is called a name, but 'who' the subject is depends as much on

the names that he or she is never called: the possibilities for linguistic life are both

inaugurated and foreclosed through the name."[116] The interesting aspect of the name

granted by Junod to the man in the photograph, "Unknown Soldier," is that it is a type of

faceless portrait – evoking specificity and anonymity at the same time – and shows an

instance in which the pendant of anonymity becomes a badge of honour. This view is

substantiated by a reading through Butler's discussions of the resignifying potential of

hate speech to be turned against its initial injurious purposes.[117] Junod's use of the term

"Unknown Soldier" is a turn of convention, granting an identity by association with a

familiar legacy of other fallen, wounded, bodies, so that the *lack* of a proper name is

retained, in fact *claimed,* as a socially recognized descriptive name. In a gesture that

exposes the rhetoric spoken within the silence of media censorship, Junod's attempt at

naming the man in the photograph appropriates a form of slander to enact a

commemoration, bearing witness to those who might otherwise slip away unrecognized

within certain systems of representation. The return of the remains of the soldier, its

correct identification, or the surrogacy of the body of the "Unknown Soldier" on behalf of

all those whose remains couldn't be properly identified, is an important Western

ceremonial act to be considered in the ethical struggle to recognize the bodily bases for

the identities of dead subjects. It is also of central importance to the grieving and healing

of those living subjects who need to mark the loss in material ways and somehow make

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[116] Butler, Excitable 41.
[117] Butler, Excitable 100.

contact with the dead in a physical way, by going to a gravesite, for example, or taking part in a funeral as pallbearers.

On May 25, 2000, a photograph by Michael Spingler of Associated Press graced the front page of Globe and Mail to show eight soldiers wearing fatigues, who bear on their shoulders a coffin draped with a Canadian flag [Fig. 9]. The subtitle read "Honouring a Fallen Hero," and the story paid homage to Pte. David Carlson, a soldier who died in an air strike in France during the First World War, whose remains were recovered and returned to Canada, finally, 84 years later. The serious expressions on the men's faces who bear the casket on their shoulders is deeply moving, especially in light of the more recent national tragedy of four Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan due to "friendly fire" of American allies, whose bodies were brought back to Canada with similarly dignified media attention in April, 2002. The eight soldiers in the photograph act as mourning figures in Cornell's sense, to bear responsibility for the dead in a non-violent way, and this work should be read in a way that respects the discursive, ceremonial aspects of the gesture, as well as the weight of the body. Here, weight is not a burden to the continued performance of posthumous subjectivity, but its motivating agency.

The significance of human remains associated with the phenomena of the "Unknown Soldier" and the return of the remains of other military figures to valorize the dead raises the issue of masculinist recourse to the weight of the body, which is significant in relation to a dead, male soldier who would seem to be the paradigmatic image of "wounded masculinity" in the sense theorized by Kaja Silverman. This wounded masculinity is described in her reading of the unusual instances in mid-century Hollywood cinema where, due to the trauma of World War II, the male subject, whose

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psychic or physical wounds displace him from the "normative" trajectory of the American dream of economic ascendancy and domestic security, is represented as disempowered.[118] Yet the historical trauma that has been identified with the events of September 11, 2001 does not revolve around the complete castration (in the Lacanian, symbolic sense) of the post-World War II American male subject, such that he is represented as enfeebled. According to Smelser, there were both positive and negative effects to the trauma of September 11, 2001 for both male subjects and the nation that place it in a historically unprecedented category:

> The mourning focused on the innocent people killed in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, but even more on the policemen and firemen who lost their lives while carrying out rescue activities. This mourning was accompanied by a profound idolization of the latter, especially the New York Fire Department personnel, whose status as heroes soon became as firmly fixed as other military heroes in the nation's history.[119]

There are other dimensions to the deification of those who gave their lives in the line of duty that revolve around more direct access to the "persistent materiality" of the bodies of the dead made by the living, which could be viewed in light of Cornell's theory as an ethical "act of care."[120] There are those who approach and make contact with the dead in ways that involve neither linguistic agency, recourse to the gaze, the voice, nor even to touch.

On the six-month anniversary of the September 11th tragedy, <u>Globe and Mail</u> published an interview with Paul Bessler, a New York City fireman from a precinct that lost six men in the line of duty. Among the more than 100 funerals and memorials he attended was one that he described as particularly significant because of his close

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[118] Kaja Silverman, <u>Male Subjectivity at the Margins</u> (New York: Routledge, 1992).
[119] Smelser 266.
[120] Cornell, <u>Philosophy</u> 76.

friendship with the deceased, a young fireman named Michael Weinberg. It was also important because of the role he played at his funeral, which is described by journalist Peter Cheney as follows: "Bessler was one of Weinberg's pallbearers. As he helped to carry the wooden box toward the grave, he pictured his friend inside it, as if he was sleeping and being carried off to bed. 'We were brothers,' he says. 'And now, there he is, up on your shoulder. You're doing the only thing you can for him.'"[121] The simple act of bearing the weight of the dead on one's shoulder becomes an act of memorial to a "fallen soldier" or a "fallen hero," as those firemen and police officers who lost their lives in the line of duty were called. It is interesting to note the way in which the weight of the body, that (as the previously-mentioned feminist theorists have pointed out) so burdens female identity in the humanist legacy of philosophy, is turned to a source of masculinist honour within nationalistic, militaristic and interpersonal contexts. This particular "deification of heroes fallen in the rescue efforts," has, according to Smelser, uniquely flavoured the trauma of September 11, 2001 as an event lined with a positive side.[122] Carrying the coffin is the last embodied connection to the dead. It is a form of agency allowed to the dead *as dead* – that recognizes them on their terms and for a brief moment before they are committed to the ground, the dead exert a final form of agency upon the living. Here one witnesses the ethical relation as identified by Cornell (cited in the Introduction) involving a non-violent recognition of the other in their otherness, implicating the persistent tension between discursive materialization of subjectivity and the divergent identities that circulate around the materiality of the body.[123] While the dead remain unseen within the

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[121] Cheney, "Coming through the slaughter," Globe and Mail [Toronto] 9 Mar. 2002: F5.
[122] Smelser 169.
[123] Yet a twist becomes apparent with the phenomena of "The Unknown Soldier," one that provokes an ideological dimension to the sexual difference of the dead. If read alongside Cornell's invocation of the

closed coffin, and while the pallbearers respect the solemn silence of the tradition, they speak the name of the dead by bearing the weight of the remains.

Conclusion

If, through the workings of a photographic slice-of-life, one is unable to acknowledge the weight of the body and the force of gravity upon it, one relegates the fallen to an aesthetic sphere, where the embodied specificity of their experience and death goes unrecognized, unspoken or misinterpreted. The means of addressing the dead taken by the living is prone to faltering in ways that form and deform the identities of the dead; the dead are spoken of with names and words that are uncertain or even injurious. While representations of the dead present an unequal play of power so that they cannot refuse the spectacle that their image may offer and they cannot claim an identity from a perspective contrary to that presented by the representation, there nonetheless remains a degree of agency that can be attributed to the dead, involving the weight of the body in tension with the linguistic agency of certain names to materialize it. In the particularly challenging figure of the body falling to death, the weight of the body is interpreted through cultural frameworks in conflicting ways, materialized discursively so that the identity of the dead is created and re-created in unforeseen directions. Hopefully, this chapter has also brought to attention the important ethical attempts performed by the living in the process of materializing the subjectivity of the dead through the power of naming, although this can take dramatically inconsistent turns according to the

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maternal metaphor of the salvager who, in an ethical act of care, gathers the remains (the resistant materiality of the *female* body), the official glorification of the dead as national heroes, whose masculinity is unquestioned suggests a dark question that extends from Cornell's ethics: would the female in a similar situation receive such attention, or would she be left "beyond" the system as so much unguarded, scattered detritus?

investments of those who perform it. The allegory of the ethical, mourning figure who gathers the remains of the dead is personified by the work of the many journalists, artists and members of the general public under analysis in this chapter, who demonstrated a non-violent aspiration to the other, whose resistant materiality often exceeded the frames of the media through which it was represented.

End of Chapter One.

CHAPTER TWO

The Voice of Surrogacy in Gillian Wearing's Prelude

In this chapter, by taking into consideration the possibilities for the dead to be silenced or dominated by the terms involved in a visual, time-based representation, an ethical challenge will be explored involving whether or not the voice should be used to speak on behalf of the dead. With the acknowledgement that certain dimensions of agency are foreclosed to the dead, the important issue raised by feminist theorists of representational perspective comes into the foreground in a way that exposes certain challenges as well as possibilities inherent in the three intersubjective dimensions under analysis: the voice, visuality and touch. In the following discussion of a four-minute DVD projection entitled Prelude (2000) by British video artist Gillian Wearing, possibilities of the voice will be explored for their potential to achieve a non-dominating form of intersubjectivity with the dead through the terms of representation. As a posthumous tribute to a dead, alcoholic woman, Prelude pairs a short span of documentary footage of her with the voice of her still-living twin sister, who narrates the story of her sister's death and the grief she experiences due to it. In these pages, addressing a time-based artwork that involves voice-over narration, it will be important to take into account the specific ways in which a dead female subject becomes vulnerable to representational violence and I will point to the ways in which this representational challenge has been met by the artist. Although other art historians have discussed the subversion and intermingling of identities and voices that is a recurrent theme in Wearing's work, her approach has not been explored in

terms that address the ethical implications to arise when the subject of representation is

dead, from a point of view that takes into account sexual difference.[1]

The Unfolding of the Work

When Prelude begins, one sees the lively face of a young woman with short, spiky hair

and a cigarette cocked jauntily behind her ear, who wears a jacket with the sleeves turned

up and a series of beaded necklaces and bracelets [Figs.10-12]. Her entire aura, with a

slightly crooked nose and puffy circles under her eyes, suggests the rough-around-the-

edges life of the urban street. The woman laughs, looks right into the camera lens,

addresses someone off screen, tilts her head in a slightly dazed stupor, drinks from her

can of beer and engages the viewer with her range of facial expressions that alternate,

from one moment to the next, from melancholy to introversion, from wise-cracking

bravado to stillness. She conveys a charismatic, devil-may-care attitude that suddenly

turns to brooding contemplation: she exudes at once disdain as well as a wisdom that

seems beyond her years – causing one to question whether or not these shifts in

temperament are the effects of alcohol.

Prelude is grainy, black and white and its flow has been slowed down almost

imperceptibly but enough to induce a slightly-sluggish quality to the projection that

mimics the murky, laboured feeling of inebriation conveyed by the woman. These

elements lend the projection not only an archival, historical feel, but also a ghostly,

dream-like quality because of the way they are coupled with the woman's sporadic

changes of expression and the jerking movements of her head, leading one to sense that

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[1] Dan Cameron, "I'm Desparate: Gillian Wearing's Art of Transposed Identities," Parkett 70 (2004): 99-114; Russell Ferguson, "Prelude," Gillian Wearing: A Trilogy (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2002) 24-29; Michael Newman, "The Demotic Art of Gillian Wearing," Parachute 102 (2001): 84-101.

something is not quite "right." Nonetheless, her image is riveting and vaguely seductive by presenting such an animated personality to the viewer and its associated "visual pleasure" (although this is not without risks from a feminist perspective, as will be later explored).[2]

An informational plaque posted outside the viewing room informs the viewer that this is one of the London street drinkers that Wearing befriended in the course of her preliminary work compiling imagery for a much larger piece entitled Drunk (also a DVD projection, but displayed across three screens, involving over a dozen subjects and close to thirty minutes in duration). Also according to the plaque, Wearing specifically made individual footage of this woman because she was drawn to her character and fascinated by her "loud, humorous and outspoken manner, which was punctuated by occasional violent outbursts."[3] The dynamic life this drinker portrays seems too unruly for the quiet of the museum setting, but if this is an opinion initially held by the viewer, it is soon qualified by the progression of the work.

The audio component of a woman's voice soon envelops the viewer, telling a story about someone named "Lindsey." At first, it appears that the woman one sees is speaking. The disjointed effect of the slowed-down footage, in which it is difficult to distinguish if the trance-like state is the result of the manipulation of the medium or the apparent drunkenness of the woman, is heightened by the viewer's sudden realization that the movements of the woman's mouth don't correspond to the words one hears. This discordance startles the viewer into awareness that the woman one sees *is* Lindsey, who

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[2] In addition to Laura Mulvey's ground-breaking work of 1976, on the perils and pleasures of visual pleasure of the image of embodied femininity, see Amelia Jones, "Postfeminism, Feminist Pleasures, and Embodied Theories of Art," New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action, eds. Joanna Freuh, Arlene Raven, and Cassandra L. Langer (New York: Harper-Icon, 1993).

[3] Gillian Wearing cited in Ferguson, 25.

is the dead twin sister to the speaker one hears, who tells the story of her depressingly premature death in squalid circumstances.

The story is a recollection of Lindsey's sudden death due to cirrhosis of the liver. Policemen came to the speaker's door to let her know her beloved twin had died alone in a flat, which was left in a state of utter disarray. In a voice whose tenor is low and steady but emphatically pained, the speaker recounts how, when trying to elicit an emotional response from her mother on the phone by screaming, "Lin's dead! She's dead! She's dead!" she received little comfort. The mother of the twins was apparently unmoved by Lindsey's death and organized a perfunctory "ten-minute" funeral for her that was "so cold" that it caused the surviving twin even further sadness. The rest of the narration describes the journey of grief endured by the living twin (whose name one never discovers) since the funeral. She describes how doctors have given her anti-depressant medications to alleviate her bereavement and how friends have encouraged her to move away from her mourning, yet she states that she cannot recover from this loss and further, that she will "never, ever" forget her twin and, because of the acuteness of the separation, feels as though "half" of her own body has been torn away.

Representational Perspective

In Prelude, the central drama revolves around the following disjunction: that the subject one sees is not the same as the subject one hears, yet in many ways the two appear to be extensions of each other or, at least, deeply, emotionally contingent. Despite the fact that the subject represented visually is now dead and therefore holds only partial complicity in

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her representation,[4] I suggest that the voice speaking for her does not further silence the dead by enacting representational violence. Art historian Russell Ferguson has noted the similarity of <u>Prelude</u> to Wearing's use, in her previous works, of this "apparently documentary format [. . .] in which the protagonists lip-synch the words of others,"[5] namely, in the video <u>2 into 1</u> (1997), which involves the swapped perspectives of a mother and her two sons, whose personal opinions about each other are as jarring to the viewer as the effect of a little boy's voice emanating from the mouth of a middle-aged woman. Art historian Michael Newman notes that another one of Wearing's works, entitled <u>Confess All on Video</u> (1994), involves "lip-synching" as well as "concealment and a sense of intimacy," but emphasizes the traumatic aspects of the confessional stories.[6] In <u>Confess All on Video</u>, a series of adults wear Halloween masks on their faces while narrating, in disarmingly candid ways, their own painful experiences of humiliation or psychological abuse from acquaintances and family members and how this has a lasting impact on their outlooks. The disparity of the biographic specificity coupled with the anonymity in the "self-portraits" of <u>Confess All on Video</u> is repeated in <u>Prelude</u> as a form of identity concealment, in which one never learns the name or sees the face of the living, speaking twin. This shifting reality of appearances has been noted by Newman to occur specifically within the disjuncture between image and sound: "The viewer becomes the object of a contradictory address: addressed by the mask, and by the voice in <u>Confess</u>

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[4] Although the footage was taken with Lindsey's consent while she was alive, the piece <u>Prelude</u> was created after her death, according to Ferguson, 25.
[5] Ferguson 25.
[6] Newman 84.

<u>All</u>. . . ; and by the switching between the voices and faces of mothers and sons in <u>2 into</u> <u>1</u> [. . .]."[7]

In discussing Wearing's related video piece <u>Drunk</u> (1999), which was based upon the same series of footage from which Lindsey's image was culled, Newman suggests his concern for the work's proclivity to enact representational violence on the subjects, whose evident inebriation veers at times to pathos and addresses the precarious moral position taken by the artist recording and projecting images of street alcoholics by asking, "Is this not also aestheticization of degradation?"[8] Regarding the states of near-oblivion to characterize most of Wearing's subjects in the <u>Drunk</u> video, Newman notes how a dialogic dimension between viewer and viewed is shut down: "[. . .] we do not get the impression of a two-way exchange. The effect of a visual formality – pure, hieratic – new in Wearing's work, is to objectify the drinkers."[9] At one point in the <u>Drunk</u> video, one of the drinkers passes out and, in the way he lies defenseless, sprawled-out, horizontal, vulnerable and eventually (after a stream of urine discolours his trousers), immobile, he begins to resemble a corpse, exposed to but unaware of the fascinated/horrified looks of the viewer and the eye of the camera that consume the image of his lifeless figure. Despite his evident concern for representational perspective in his reading of <u>Drunk</u>, Newman never names this problem as an ethical one, nor, in his discussion of <u>Prelude</u>, does he extend his inquiry into representational mastery to the effects of the sound-track. This is an oversight, if one takes into consideration the findings of film theorists Kaja Silverman and Mary Anne Doane, who point to the neglect of sound in film as an object

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[7] Newman 90.
[8] Newman 95.
[9] Newman 96.

of investigation due to the overarching cultural predominance of the "visual over the audible,"[10] which implies the gendered imbalance involved in "scopophilia."[11]

In this regard, the way Russell Ferguson interprets Prelude, where he reads the charisma of Lindsey's image as a "powerful presence" into which the "sad, downtrodden voice we hear" of the "anonymous sister is in a way sublimated," suggests a similar focus on the visual by his ascription of more agency to the dead woman's image than to the living woman's voice.[12] The effects of both Newman's and Ferguson's readings, in echoing the legacy of emphasis on the visual over the audible, would be to neglect the implications of agency inherent in the living sister's voice to potentially overpower and distort a view of the dead in a type of *auditory* mastery. The ethical dimension inherent in Wearing's disjuncture between the voice and the image in Prelude is worthy of careful consideration. To make this point clearer, some evidence will briefly be provided to emphasize the importance of representational perspective – in particular, at the register of the voice which, as some feminist theorists point out, comes into relief when the subject of representation is a dead female.

When thought in terms of the dead, the clearest statement of how representational perspective becomes an ethical issue is Drucilla Cornell's proposal for a feminist theory of representation that emphasizes "the right to lay claim to your own person."[13] It is Cornell's specific call to understand representational perspective as an *ethical* problem

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[10] An effect noted by Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in Cinema," Narrative, Ideology, Apparatus: A Film Theory Reader, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) 339, citing Christian Metz. Also see Kaja Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988).
[11] Silverman, Acoustic 26.
[12] Ferguson 25.
[13] Drucilla Cornell, Interview with Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka, "A Return for the Future," Feminist Consequences: Theory for a New Century, ed. Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia UP, 2001) 439.

that becomes a productive starting point for approaching the dead because it emphasizes how agency is implicated in the ability to claim and to project identity from the first-person perspective, which is something the dead cannot do. Cornell's work also addresses some of the criticisms that have befallen identity politics and cultural studies (i.e. that identity is unchanging or self-actualizing) by taking into account the gendered perspective from which speech is spoken and stories are told without, however, reverting to an uncritical notion of pre-linguistic, unified selfhood that would ignore the contributions of Lacanian psychoanalysis.[14] In Beyond Accommodation (1991/1999), Cornell advances a feminist ethics of representation that acknowledges the usefulness of Lacan's theorization of gender while maintaining a resistance to the ways in which its rigid hierarchy is exclusionary to women. The lack of visibility and audibility of the feminine (and the abhorrence through which the maternal is positioned) is identified by Cornell within Lacan's work as a type of identity erasure that is in need of an ethical relation. A driving concern for (and a belief in) the subject's ability to self-represent is expressed by Cornell as follows: "that the condition in which the suffering of all women can be 'seen' and 'heard,' in all of our difference, is that in which the tyranny of established reality is disrupted."[15] The ability to be seen *and* to be heard are tenets of representation as well as dimensions of agency that, Cornell stresses, should be continually affirmed.[16] Cornell's emphasis on the visibility *and* the audibility of women is significant in keeping both dimensions of intersubjective agency in balanced perspective and is pertinent when interpreting artworks involving image and sound, in a

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[14] Drucilla Cornell, Beyond Accomodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law (Lantham: Rowman, 1991/1999).
[15] Cornell, Beyond 2.
[16] Cornell, "Writing the Mamafesta: The Dilemma of Postmodern Feminism," Beyond 1-20.

way that remains sensitive to the positions of all parties involved, from the artist to the critic to the subject of representation. Cornell's theory is useful for feminist art history and film theory because her notion of the aesthetic interrogates the parameters of representational perspective by way of accountability, made evident in her question: "what are the conditions of representability; *who represents whom to whom, when; and what relations of representation are possible?*"[17] Representations of the dead should therefore be seen as arising from perspectives not necessarily compatible with what they would have chosen while living or worse, that cause grave distortions or effacements of identity in ways that are gender-specific.

The urgency of the conundrum of representational perspective has been explored from a cultural studies perspective by Elspeth Probyn, who inquires after the "possibility of representation" in a manner similar to that expressed by Cornell and addresses "the task of speaking; of who speaks for whom, and why."[18] Here I wish to focus on how representational frameworks structure the ability to approach the dead and hear their stories and for this reason, the following opinions by Probyn are insightful. Probyn discusses what has become known as the Montreal massacre, when fourteen female engineering students were shot to death by a deranged, vocally-anti-feminist man at the École Polytechnique, Université à Montréal on December 6, 1989.[19] Probyn describes how she endured agonizing difficulties as a feminist on a number of levels: she watched in horror as newspaper media reproduced graphic images of the dead women and felt the

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[17] Cornell, Interview, italics mine, 439.

[18] Elspeth Probyn, "Technologizing the Self: A Future Anterior for Cultural Studies," Cultural Studies, ed. Larry Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992) 501.

[19] For ethical purposes, I will not mention his name, as it is well-enough known to Canadians, especially those concerned with violence against women. The repetition of his name allows a type of discursive resonance to his identity, the type his killing disallowed to the identities of the women, whose numbers are too many for their names to be recalled as household names.

pain of "responsibility" to speak about the killings because the killer made clear that his actions were hate crimes against feminists. Probyn felt compelled to speak on behalf of the dead women (to identify with them out of a sense of collective injustice), yet also uncomfortable and torn about this compulsion when their voices had been brutally silenced. Recognizing that her own continued access to agency was a position the dead no longer enjoyed, Probyn stated: "There was no way to avoid a sexed interpretation, there was no way of not speaking as a woman and as a feminist. Nevertheless, this spontaneous move to speak of and to a collectivity of woman was, in turn, represented as a speaking position founded upon the dead bodies of fourteen young women."[20] Probyn draws one's attention to the way that, when the dead are concerned, without the feminist imperative to carefully acknowledge representational perspective, speaking can turn sharply into a form of monologism or misrepresentation ensuing from the fact that the dead cannot voice an opinion in the discourse.

In the aforementioned analysis by Mieke Bal of a biblical drawing by Rembrandt depicting subject matter taken from the Book of Judges, in which the Levite finds his murdered wife the morning after she has been gang-raped, her mention of an important premise of narrative theory draws attention to what is at stake with representations in a still, silent medium, of an experience that fundamentally exceeds linguistic articulation from the first-person, present perspective: "Death is a challenge to representation, for it is a moment that nobody can describe, an event that nobody can escape, a process that nobody can narrate."[21] The theories of Cornell, Probyn and Bal bring one to a recognition that Prelude, comprised of the dimensions of time, sound and image, has at least two

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[20] Probyn 502.
[21] Mieke Bal, "Dead Flesh, or the Smell of Painting," Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (Massachusetts: Wesleyan UP, 1995) 367.

advantages over the silent stillness of drawings when it comes to narrating the story of the dead. The narration in <u>Prelude</u> should now be understood as clearly not entailing the agency inherent in articulating identity from the first-person perspective and therefore necessitates the feminist awareness that any attempt to speak for the dead must be done with a sense of responsibility, if it is to be undertaken at all.

My suggestion is that Wearing's gesture is an ethical act of stepping back to offer the scene of representation more fully to her subjects, so that in <u>Prelude</u>, unlike in <u>Drunk</u>, she does not magnify the potential of the video medium to visually master the subjects by reifying their vulnerability. After bell hooks' insight that there are ways of looking asserted by women in cinema that confirm black, female identity so that dominating forms of spectatorship are challenged, Lindsey's eyes look "back" at the viewer in a disarming manner that refuses a passive position and, in the active way she takes part in the gaze, arrests the viewer's look.[22] Wearing does not act as Lindsey's voice, but offers that role to the bereaved twin sister, so that she may speak about Lindsey in a way that qualifies any assumptions the viewer may bring to the image viewed without the narrative component. The fact that the living twin's story presumes neither disinterest nor objectivity situates <u>Prelude</u> within a tradition of feminist documentary practices that, as E. Ann Kaplan has argued, are characterized by their critique of claims made regarding the film medium's ability to convey realism, as well as their interrogation of the Barthian "author function."[23] Wearing demonstrates awareness that the narrative perspective she holds may take part in representational mastery if she assumes a non-self-critical,

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[22] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," <u>Black Looks: Race and Representation</u> (Boston: South End P, 1992) 116.

[23] E. Ann Kaplan, "Theories and Strategies of the Feminist Documentary," <u>New Challenges for Documentary</u>, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 78-102.

distanced or "objective" stance by presenting a sister's story told about the dead woman from a perspective that makes evident the speaker's personal investments and position in relation to the dead subject. Although Lindsey cannot, after Cornell's call to an ethics of representation, "lay claim to her own person," her twin sister takes on this responsibility in a manner that expresses the ethical aspiration, as defined by Cornell in the Introduction, that "assumes responsibility to guard the Other against the appropriation that would deny her difference and singularity."[24] Prelude is significant in its representation of the dead because Wearing, despite her formative role as artist, offers both the look and the voice to her subjects. The non-violent proximity expressed by the speaking twin fosters for the viewer a more dimensional understanding of Lindsey's identity.

The Ethical Predicament of the Surrogate

In Prelude, Wearing grants the living sister the vocal platform so that she may speak as a surrogate, thereby contributing to a view of the dead woman from a less domineering, less presumptive and less distanced representational perspective, one that also, in accordance with Cornell's allegory of the mourning figure, "gives her tribute to singularity."[25] The way Wearing structures the work, whereby a living subject speaks on behalf of a dead subject who no longer has access to the agency of the voice, will be interpreted in relation to the notion of the surrogate. Inspired by Simon Wiesenthal's book The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness (1976/1997), the surrogate functions in a similarly ethical fashion to Cornell's mourning figure, the

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[24] Cornell, "Ethical Significance of the Chiffonier," The Philosophy of the Limit (New York: Routledge, 1992) 60.
[25] Cornell, Philosophy 76.

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chiffonier but I define it as a figure confronted with a specific choice: whether to speak or not to speak on behalf of the dead, a choice founded upon a recognition of the vulnerability of the dead to representational violence. Conceived as an allegorical figure, the surrogate is informed by the possibilities Bal attributes to allegory to surmount representational challenges: "to consider allegory not necessarily as escapist but, more literally, as a way of potentially speaking *through* the discourse of others."[26]

Simon Wiesenthal (d. 2003) was a Holocaust survivor who later became one of the world's most significant Nazi-hunters and in his autobiographical story The Sunflower, he describes a compelling experience he had while interned at a concentration camp in Poland during the Second World War. There he was forcibly summoned to the deathbed of a young, German Nazi soldier who wanted to repent his war crimes against Jewish families by confessing to a Jewish person. He urgently wanted to receive forgiveness for killing innocent civilians before he died. This placed Wiesenthal in an impossible moral, religious and ethical predicament; he was caught between considering the apparently-sincere contrition and desire for repentance expressed by the pleading, dying Nazi and the need, as a persecuted Jew himself, to honour the dead, whose murders, he felt, should be recognized. In the end, Wiesenthal refuses to grant forgiveness on behalf of the dead, disengages his hand from the desperate grasp of the soldier, who he felt to be self-serving, and turns his back on the man in silence. But the event and his "choice" *not to speak* continued to haunt Wiesenthal for years and the purpose of the book was to create a cross-cultural and inter-faith forum in which this question of forgiveness could be considered from various perspectives. In The Sunflower, dozens of scholars, religious

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[26] Bal, "Enfolding Feminism," Feminist Consequences 327. The allegory of the surrogate, therefore is a doubling of "through": it is a figure acting as a medium to deliver a message, but also speaks "through" the wisdom of Wiesenthal, Cornell and Bal.

figures, ethicists and theologians offer their views as to what they would have or could have done if confronted with a similar situation.

What interests me about The Sunflower for the present study is less the idea of forgiveness than the more general question of an individual asked to speak on behalf of the dead, in Wiesenthal's case, on behalf of a much larger community of Jews murdered during the Holocaust. This position implies the opportunity to heed the call to ethical responsibility placed upon a living figure, a potential similar to that described by Cornell in "The Ethical Significance of Le Chiffonier" to gather and guard, in a non-violent way, the remains of the other, who would, without this work, remain excluded or "beyond" systems of representation.[27] While my conception of the surrogate is indebted to Cornell's allegory of the ethical, mourning figure, I use this term, inspired by Wiesenthal's story, to focus on the power of the voice and the predicament ensuing from it: the choice to speak or to remain silent on behalf of the dead, who are not present to speak for themselves.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Elizabeth Bronfen discusses the theory of the surrogate after Sigmund Freud's conception of it in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), as a replacement for the lost love object (the primordial one being the mother) and points to the role played by the surrogate in the repetitive work of the mourner, whose ambivalent subjectivity is haunted by the death drive. The way Bronfen draws attention to the dissimilarity of the surrogate from the original, lost (dead) love object reminds one that the surrogate is a figure positioned by proximity to the dead but never a substitute for the dead – only a stand-in: "Refining love objects as a trope for refinding the origin of unity and death is also an act of constructing representations that occlude the

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[27] Cornell, Philosophy 62.

real origin, just as any surrogate love object never fully satisfies because, though similar, it cannot be identical."[28] In other words, there will always remain a disjuncture between the original identity of the dead and that of the surrogate.

What most interests me in Wiesenthal's story as it relates to Prelude is the ethical dimension to the triadic relationship comprised of two living figures, who conceivably have access to the voice and the third, dead party (or community), who is (are) silent. In The Sunflower, this triad is comprised of Wiesenthal and the dying soldier who both have access to the voice, while the third party is the community of murdered Jews who are not present to voice an opinion. In Prelude, both Wearing and the living, speaking twin can be seen as having access to the vocal platform, while Lindsey can be conceived as the third party, the dead, who does not enjoy this dimension of agency from her own perspective. That these relationships make evident a radical asymmetry of agency is something acknowledged despairingly by Wiesenthal, who realizes that he is thought by the dying soldier to hold the "authorial" power of the voice to speak on behalf of murdered Jews. Another imbalance of agency surrounds Wiesenthal's position: despite the dying condition of the Nazi confined to his death bed, it was Wiesenthal who was more vulnerable, due to his incarceration: "One asks the other for help. But the other was himself helpless and able to do nothing for him."[29] It was the soldier who clearly had access to the "institutional" power that was denied the prisoner: the very act of summoning Wiesenthal to his death bed is an exercise in (or abuse of) power that could not be refused by a prisoner utterly disenfranchised from any sense of freedom. I

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[28] Elisabeth Bronfen, "Risky Resemblences: On Repetition, Mourning, and Representation," Death and Representation, ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) 105.

[29]Simon Wiesenthal, The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness, ed. Harry James Cargas and Bonny V. Fetterman (New York: Shocken, 1976/1997) 55.

highlight these inequalities of agency in relation to the voice to emphasize how an ethical relation should entail the recognition of the *a priori* asymmetries of power that confront the act of representation when the dead are involved.

Wiesenthal chose not to speak on behalf of the dead because he did not have their consent: "I had no power to forgive him in the name of other people."[30] Wiesenthal's agency lies in his decision to withhold the speech act of granting forgiveness – to remain silent as an act of resistance, an ethical recognition of the dead, who are foreclosed any such agency. For this reason, Wiesenthal's gesture reminds me of multi-media artist, writer and activist David Wojnarowicz's performance sewing his lips shut for the film Silence = Death (1990), in which he protests the lack of government funding directed at HIV and AIDS research or public awareness.[31] What initially appears to be a renunciation of the agency implied by one's own power to speak is a stance of resistance that, in fact, is an assertion of agency – by bringing to public attention the lack of agency of others, who have already died from AIDS-related illness due to institutional neglect and homophobia. While Wojnarowicz's performative act in Silence = Death is a political protest that, according to Kathy O'Dell, appears to function "monologically" as a self-willed act of masochism,[32] I suggest that it holds an ethical dimension of intersubjectivity and a dialogic potential similar to the surrogacy of silence described in The Sunflower by Wiesenthal, whose stance refusing to speak is a form of recognition of an entire community of dead who have suffered unnecessarily, whose voices, although for a different reason, have been silenced.

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[30] Wiesenthal 82.

[31] Rosa von Praunheim in collaboration with Phil Zwicker, Silence = Death (1990), videocassette, 60 minutes.

[32] As noted by Kathy O'Dell, Contract With the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998) 78.

Many of the intellectuals who offered their views in Wiesenthal's book condoned

Wiesenthal's silence. Smail Balić, a theological scholar on Muslim-Bosnian issues, felt

that a living subject is not in the position to speak for the dead: "Rectifying a misdeed is a

matter to be settled between the perpetrator and the victim. A third party has no proper

role other than mediator."[33] Although the contexts in which they write are dramatically

different, Balić's view that "No soul carries the burden of another[,]" would seem to run

counter to Cornell's assertion that the living are in the position where they must bear

responsibility to guard the remains of the dead.[34] Theologian and philosopher Abraham

Joshua Heschel shares the same view of Balić that the living cannot speak on behalf of

the dead when asked to forgive crimes committed against them: "No one can forgive

crimes committed against other people. It is therefore preposterous to assume that

anybody alive can extend forgiveness for the suffering of any one of the six million

people who perished."[35] At the heart of the ethical moment encapsulated by the

relationship in The Sunflower is the choice of whether or not to speak for the dead. The

relationship involved with the surrogate hinges upon the ethical awareness that not all

parties involved have access to the agency of the voice, the dimension of intersubjectivity

that underlines the ability to lay claim to identity from one's own point of view. While

Cornell's thinking points to the ethical necessity of "the right to lay claim to your own

person," Wiesenthal's story points to the ethical implications of taking on this

responsibility, a predicament that puts into relief the impossibility of ever achieving

complete correspondence between the perspectives of the living and the dead: this is

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[33] Smail Balić, Sunflower 111.

[34] Balić, Sunflower 110.

[35] Abraham Joshua Heschel, Sunflower 171.

something that can neither be presumed nor verified.[36] Both Cornell and Wiesenthal are also concerned with the ethical implications of forgetfulness upon the dead (a theme which here points to the significant area of Holocaust scholarship dealing with memory, trauma, memorial and mourning), as a form of identity erasure. In an interview in which he explained his life's work as a Nazi-hunter, Wiesenthal stated that it was the weight of the memory of the millions of Jews who died in the camps that motivated him, such that, in his mind, he could feel that he responded to their call by answering, "I didn't forget you."[37]

This situation, in which a need for surrogacy emerges is, I suggest, evident in the artistic relationship engaged in Prelude between the artist, a dead woman and a living sister. The discussion of The Sunflower is not to suggest qualitative parallels between the contexts in which the need for surrogacy arises, as the moral urgency addressed by Wiesenthal's book involves historical and political dimensions of premeditated anti-Semitism and genocide that are clearly not issues in Wearing's work. My position is that Wearing's work in Prelude demonstrates a case of an artistic representation in which a surrogate offers a voice to subjectify the dead so that they will neither be forgotten nor violently mastered in the scene or representation. What's interesting in Prelude and different from the relationship in The Sunflower (in which the two living figures inhabit the scene, while the dead are not "present" except as represented discursively, through the conversation of Wiesenthal and the dying soldier) is how the artist is relatively occluded from the scene of representation while the dead, Lindsey, "appears" rather forcibly in the form of a projected image. In attempts to let the subjects structure their

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[36] Cornell, Interview, 439 & 441.
[37] Simon Wiesenthal, interview, New York Times Magazine, 1964, cited in Globe and Mail [Toronto] 19 April 2003: A1.

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own representations, politicized documentary practices have often eschewed the dominating imposition of the voiceover narration from the film-maker's point of view. What is significant in <u>Prelude</u> is that, despite that the subject of Wearing's footage is now dead (and therefore unable to further structure her own representation from her own point of view), a surrogate of intense proximity in the form of a twin sister is granted the opportunity to speak *for* the subject one sees, a possibility fostered by the voice. What are the stakes involved with the conjoining of the voice of one subject with the image of another – especially when both subjects involved in the scene of representation are female? This is a situation made more complex with the consideration that only one of the represented subjects is living and the questions this situation raises will drive the discussion in the next pages.

The Break from Synchronous Sound

In <u>Prelude</u>, that a seemingly-impossible dialogism is created by the deployment of non-synchronous sound is an effect to be explored for its feminist disruption of the uses of the voice in dominant cinema. These views are inspired by film theoreticians Kaja Silverman and Mary Ann Doane, whose work exposing the heterogeneous dimensions of the medium will be shown to foster these possibilities. In <u>Prelude</u>, Wearing's disjunction between the woman *one sees* ("the subject of speech") and the woman *one hears* ("the speaking subject") is the most compelling gesture of Wearing's piece not only for the initial disorientation it causes with the viewer, but also for the way it breaks from dominant cinema's tradition of hiding the manipulation done to the medium, the way it,

in Silverman's words, "foreclose[s] upon the site of their own production."[38] In so doing, Wearing must be seen as critically exposing what Doane calls the "material heterogeneity of the medium[,]" which she identifies as the various, sensory elements comprising the dominant cinema that are brought together in such a way as to achieve a seamless unity.[39] This effect of bringing the heterogeneous elements of film together so that attention is drawn away from each element as a separate entity is described by Silverman as "suture" and characterized as holding ideological implications.[40] This presumption of unity, Doane shows, is analogous to the conception of the body as morphologically unified, which presumes the voice to be firmly anchored in it and emanating from it.[41] But the filmic medium is also seen to be a "phantasmic body" whose "senses work in tandem" and therefore, "acts as a pivot for certain cinematic practices of representation and authorizes and sustains a limited number of relationships between voice and image."[42] Synchronization of the sound with the image is the primary technical means of achieving this "phantasmic unity" of the various "bodies" conveyed by the film and these unities are unhinged by Wearing, who challenges the tenet that "the voice is not detachable from a body."[43] The break from synchronous sound (particularly dialogue) has been a device commonly used, for many reasons, by feminist film-makers and videographers as Silverman, Doane and video historian Christine Tamblyn point out, that by "abandoning any pretenses of objectivity," is important to documentary practices that seek to

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[38] Silverman, Acoustic 200.
[39] Doane 336.
[40] Silverman, Acoustic 10.
[41] Doane 337-348.
[42] Doane 336.
[43] Doane 337.

demonstrate a critical awareness of the non-transparency of the medium.[44] These theorists

show that these relationships are amenable to intervention and therefore, because

Wearing's disruptive gesture is one of editing could be seen as interrogating the apparent

morphological unity of the film "body."

This brings into the discussion another body metaphor that suggests a more holistic

relationship between the Wearing and her material, one that is compatible with a reading

as an ethical intervention rather than a manipulation that challenges strictly ideological

conventions. Tamblyn describes the relationship between the feminist video artist and her

material as a birth: "Editing *ipso facto* unravels the bond that linked the artist to her

material like an umbilical cord; her retrospective labor shapes the material she has

accumulated into a newly differentiated corpus."[45] This maternal metaphor is informative

for a consideration of Wearing's piece on one hand, for Tamblyn's view of the artist's

labor as shaping the material in a way that brings attention to the heterogeneity of the

medium (and the way the voice in film need not hold a unified relationship with the body

one sees) and on the other hand, for a view of the artist's work as a manner of *delivery*.

By granting the living twin the "authorial prerogative" of the voice to narrate the story,

Wearing acknowledges the delicate issue of representational perspective that arises in

relation to dead subjects and, rather than putting her own words into either sister's mouth,

steps back to let a surrogate figure speak for the dead subject.

Doane has outlined the two predominant types of voices that are deployed in

cinema, namely the "voice-off," which is a voice coming from an off-screen character

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[44] Silverman, Acoustic; Doane, "The Voice"; citation from Christine Tamblyn, "Significant Others: Social Documentary as Personal Portraiture in Woman's Video of the 1980s," Illuminating Video, ed. Dough Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture/BAVC, 1990) 405.
[45] Tamblyn 408.

whose presence is still presumed to co-exist within the space and time of the diegesis and the "voiceover," which is the "disembodied" voice, generally of male "authority" whose presence is removed from the spatio-temporal realm represented by the image. As both Doane and Silverman point out, the voiceover is most familiar as the *male* commentator in the history of documentary as well as in film noir or B-rate police thrillers, and it is one of the few instances where the voice is detached from the body, an effect, according to Silverman, "that works to align the male subject with potency, authoritative knowledge, and the law – in short, with the symbolic father."[46] The voiceover authority is extended even further due to its capacity for collusion with "the surveillance system" that functions at the visual *and* at the auditory registers, over those (specifically female) lesser mortals who must remain embodied, more visible and therefore, easier to master in this scopic economy.[47] According to Silverman, the condition that "the male subject finds his most ideal realization when he is heard but not seen," finds its corollary in the female presence in cinema as most often seen but not heard – not only is her "subjectivity" anchored within a body but, more precisely, presented *as* a body, a trope so prevalent that "to disembody the female voice in this way would be to challenge every conception by means of which we have previously known woman within Hollywood film."[48]

In light of this tradition, Wearing's gesture offers a feminist subversion in two ways: by exploiting asynchronous sound to disembody the female voice from its location within a specific body and by granting the disembodied, authorial, voiceover position to a female. As if to acknowledge the gendered legacy of disempowerment experienced by women in dominant cinema, as Laura Mulvey originally pointed out in 1975, as primarily

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[46] Silverman, Acoustic 163.
[47] Silverman, Acoustic 164.
[48] Silverman, Acoustic 164.

passive objects of the male gaze rather than active bearers of the "voyeuristic-scopophilic look," Wearing counters the unqualified access the viewer has to Lindsey as *only* image, as unadulterated, visual pleasure.[49] The disconcerting voiceover from the grieving sister's point of view startles and redirects the viewer's look, resisting the identity distortion that a silent, unqualified image of Lindsey may otherwise entail by offering some biographic specificity that offsets the simplistic, "to-be-looked-at-ness" identified by Mulvey as a quality that plagues the female in dominant cinema.[50]

After Doane's observation that "[t]here is always something uncanny about a voice which emanates from a source outside the frame," the pained, haunting quality of the voiceover in Prelude is a means used by Wearing to exploit the "marginal anxiety" connected to it, as if in pointed recognition that Lindsey is dead and no longer has access to the voice.[51] The way Wearing acknowledges and addresses the asymmetry of the relationship is, I will attempt to demonstrate toward the end of the chapter, a precondition for an ethical relation to ensue. Wearing uses the voice as an element that draws together the presence(s) and absence(s) that comprise the work as a balancing act: abutting the opacity of the viewer is Lindsey's presence as a flickering spectre on the wall, as if to counter her absence from the physical world, and engulfing the viewer is the living twin's simultaneous presence and absence as disembodied voice, creating a sonorous environment.

Mieke Bal's proposal of the allegory of the fold, as a means for navigating an ethical path for representations of the dead, could be useful here to conceive of how these

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[49] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," cited in Art in Theory: 1900-1990, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell P, 1990) 970.
[50] Mulvey 967.
[51] Doane 340.

elements of sound and image, despite Wearing's overt recognition of the heterogeneity of the medium, function together in a manner that solves some problems of representational perspective. Bal draws attention to the challenge of representational perspective by addressing the "double-bind" of "speaking *about* and speaking *for* others" and points out that representation, "hovering as it does on the edge between these two incommensurable yet inextricable meanings, remains a glib and troubled notion."[52] Bal, however, proposes a solution and according to her, the allegory of the fold allows a speaking *through* the other/object, so that, "[i]f taken seriously, the preposition 'through,' unlike 'for,' 'about,' or 'with,' precludes an unmodified return to the subject to the state before speaking."[53] In her analysis of Columbian sculptor Doris Salcedo's work, Bal proposes that the challenge of visually re-representing the victims of violence is overcome through the artist's emphasis on the temporal and tactile qualities of the sculptural objects, which enfolds the murdered subject within it without reifying the dead in an exploitative manner, without recourse to pure visuality. In other words, violence is enacted on the sculptural objects – namely, used pieces of domestic furniture – in their making rather than upon the image of the dead during the work's exhibition. Additionally, because of the innumerable, intricate details involved in the work, in which human hairs have been embedded individually into the surface of a wooden table, a very close look is required of the viewer, a look that takes time. According to Bal, the durative quality to the sculptures, literally "making time for the dead," offers a meditation enfolding the dead into the present so that they are not forgotten.[54] In other words, it is the slowed-down viewer engagement involved in the

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[52] Bal, "Enfolding" 327.
[53] Bal, "Enfolding" 327.
[54] Bal, "Enfolding" 340.

perception of sculptural objects that presents the allegory of the fold, i.e. the "through" that allows one to overcome the perspectival bind of representing the dead.

Although inspired by Bal's proposal that representational perspective becomes especially challenging when the subjects of representation are dead, I maintain, however, that there are some instances in art in which one can speak "for" or "about" the dead that are compatible with a contemplative, respectful representation, as demonstrated by Wearing's time-based work. Prelude involves a surrogate who speaks "for" the dead in a manner that readily exposes the constructed-quality of the work, thereby offering an indication of the representational perspective at hand as well as some of the investments of the speaker, all the while *enfolding* the viewer, who, by the temporal commitment required to experience the work, becomes immersed within its environment of image and sound.

The Projection of the Voice and Narcissism

There exists another dimension of vocal synchronization that has been ruptured by Wearing, one that further confuses the identification of voices: the personal, confessional story of the living twin resembles a type of "interior monologue" described by Doane as a voice that "displays what is inaccessible to the image, what exceeds the visible: the 'inner life' of the character."[55] The uncanny effect of the monologue in Prelude is due to the fact that, unlike traditional interior monologues where the voice and the body to which it belongs are "represented simultaneously," this "interior" monologue emanates from a distinct, off-screen subject and is *projected* onto the body of another, who, in the form of

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[55] Doane 341.

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a twin, becomes an embodied instance of the Freudian, psychic doubling or the split-self that epitomizes the narcissistic subject.

In an exhibition inspired by the surrealist tradition exploring the uncanny qualities of objects taken from art and life, artist-curator Mike Kelley writes, "The narcissistic personality projects its thoughts onto others; others are its double. The foreign self can be substituted for its own, by doubling, dividing and interchanging itself."[56] As noted by David Ross and Christine Tamblyn, Rosalind Krauss was the first theorist to interpret the work of video artists in relation to the Freudian concept of narcissism to explain how artists turn their attention to the self and use "the video monitor as a mirror."[57] Unlike the monologic quality Krauss attributes to the term narcissism, which traditionally holds negative connotations, I view the "narcissism" one witnesses in Prelude to hold the "intersubjective dynamic" that Amelia Jones attributes to it in her reading of body art of the 1970s, particularly that of Hannah Wilke as well as others, who have used their own bodies to interrogate the presumptions of female narcissism and to explore its capacity to initiate intersubjective reflections and relationships. According to Jones, "Narcissism, enacted through body art, turns the subject inexorably and paradoxically outward."[58] Similar to the effect of psychic splitting Kelley describes in the experience of the uncanny are Jones's views of narcissism as a form of "fragmentation of the subject" that can undermine "the normative subject of modernism."[59]

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[56] In an exhibition curated by Mike Kelley, he points out the uncanny effects of objects taken from art and life. "Playing With Dead Things," The Uncanny (Netherlands: Gemeentemuseum Arnhem - Sonsbeek, 1993) 25.

[57] Ross, "Introduction" 11; and citation by Tamblyn 406, both from Illuminating, referring to Krauss's "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," October 1 (1976).

[58] Amelia Jones, Body Art: Performing the Subject (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998) 48.

[59] Jones, Body 47.

Silverman views female narcissism as a failure to comply with the Oedipus complex, which she views as a cultural devaluation of women – in particular the mother, but also the importance of the female child's desirous attachment to her. In other words, in the refusal to project desires upon an (implicitly male) object choice, the female asserts her longing to remain attached to the mother.[60] While Silverman's views toward any destabilizing potential in female narcissism are coloured by a sense of melancholy and loss, they help clarify the living twin's position in Prelude as longing for a return to the unification with the idealized mother prohibited by the Oedipus complex. Yet the mother in the story of Prelude rejected Lindsey and ignored the surviving twin's grief over Lindsey's death, so the living twin's "de-idealized" desire through this loss of the mother is displaced and cathected as a form of narcissism onto the female surrogate – the twin, a mirror image of herself – to reveal a shocking, psychic shift: the living mother appears to be a less accessible and less desirable love object than the dead twin.[61]

Despite the fact that, in the form of the interior monologue projected outward, the living twin's identity appears narcissistically projected onto the other, I suggest that this does not reduce the other to the same, nor does it ignore the non-negotiable absence of the dead. If considered alongside Jean-Luc Nancy's view of the voice, one can understand how Lindsey's apparent "monologism" is actually intersubjective. Nancy conceives of the voice as desiring contact with the other (without, in advance, presuming the presence of the other), as a projection into the void, searching for an echo of its own being from the other.[62] There is a sense of incompleteness that characterizes Nancy's

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[60] Silverman, Acoustic 154.
[61] Silverman, Acoustic 156
[62] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Vox Clamans in Deserto," The Birth to Presence, trans. Brian Holmes and others (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993) 239.

voice that helps one understand the searching quality of the living twin's voice. Nancy metaphorizes the voice as a vibration of a solo heart, beating for the presence and confirmation that comes from the other: "It is like a dialectical movement that cannot achieve fulfillment, and that would remain a palpitation."[63] Nancy's projective voice is conceived as emanating from a solitary, "abandoned" self, desirous and searching for the (as yet absent) other and therefore, pertinent in interpreting Wearing's projection of the voice as a means to confront and counter the void created by Lindsey's death. The inaccessibility of the dead is respected in two ways that, while apparently emphasizing the loss of the dead, also seem to overcome it by putting the living twin in contact (however tenuous) with the dead: once in the phantasmic "presence" offered by the video image and a second time in the projected voice of the living twin, searching for an echo of her own being in the image but remaining unfulfilled because of Lindsey's death. The voice of the living twin and the image of the dead twin "confront" each other by the resonance of the voice that, after Nancy, opens the desirous self, who is insufficient in her solitude, onto the world.[64] In the living twin's story, Lindsey is claimed as an integral part of herself but also, in her grief, acknowledged as irrevocably inaccessible in her death.

Surrogacy or Ventriloquism?

Despite the fact that in Prelude, the voice of one subject is projected onto the image of another – a case, it would appear, of putting words into someone's mouth – an intersubjective relationship with the dead has been formed. How could an ethical dialogism be possible in a video work so clearly suggesting ventriloquism, especially,

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[63] Nancy 242.
[64] Nancy 243.

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after I have suggested, that the living twin speaks as a surrogate figure *for* the dead? Ventriloquism is the uncanny effect of throwing one's voice onto the wooden object/other, the dummy whose strings are pulled and made to perform. Ventriloquism alludes to a number of binaristic structures that are also, eventually, revealed to be contingencies at play in <u>Prelude</u>: muteness against the voice, the animate versus the inanimate, alive versus dead, as well as the surrogate, the alter-ego, the double or the split-personality – but to different ends than with the popular form of puppetry.

With regard to the act of speaking on behalf of a silenced other, it is significant that Kathy O'Dell has discussed a performance piece called <u>Talking about Similarity</u> (1976) by collaborators Marina Abramović and Ulay as a form of "ventriloquism."[65] In this work, after Ulay sewed his lips together with a needle and thread to effectively "silence" himself, Abramović answered, on his behalf, unscripted questions taken from a live audience that were addressed to her partner. Abramović took questions and provided answers until she felt that her perspective veered too far from his, at which time she ended the performance.[66] In keeping with the larger focus of her study, interpreting masochistic body art through the Lacanian-inspired notion of the mirror stage, O'Dell calls her reading of <u>Talking about Similarity</u> "vision-privileging,"[67] while here I am concerned primarily with the voice. According to O'Dell's reading, it is in Abramović's apparent pursuit of achieving a dyadic unification with Ulay that a "self-effacement" occurs, rather than in Ulay's more obvious self-silencing. The forms of willing

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[65] O'Dell 34.

[66] While the masochistic action of sewing one's own lips shut reminds one of David Wojnarowicz's dramatic enactment of <u>Silence = Death</u>, I discuss the Ulay/Abramové performance in relation to Wearing's work because of its similar format of ventriloquism, unlike Wojnarowicz's work, which I view as a form of ethical surrogacy of silence.

[67] O'Dell 98, although she does this by acknowledging that Lacan viewed the mirror stage as also encompassing sounds external to the child (although not words).

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renunciation of vocal agency implied by <u>Talking about Similarity</u> could be read alongside those involved in <u>Prelude</u>, although with some distinctions; by Wearing's relative occlusion as artist and by withholding the speaking twin's image, two forms of effacement are evident that ethically, I suggest, give the scene of representation over to Lindsey. The bereaved sister's relative effacement appears to be a gesture insisting that this meditation remain focused on Lindsey as a form of memorial tribute to her. O'Dell's reading of <u>Talking about Similarity</u>, exposing the limits of the confluence between any two identities (which are revealed as engaged in a push-pull tension negotiating degrees of intersubjective distance) is parallel to my understanding of Wearing's gesture in <u>Prelude</u>, in which the difference and distance of the dead is recognized without being further silenced. The confrontation of two separate (yet in their ongoing partnership, proximate) selves in <u>Talking about Similarity</u>, in which one holds the agency of the voice while the other is silent but spoken *for*, involves a paradigm similar to that seen in Wearing's work with the exception that, not only is the overt "collusion"[68] implied by Ulay and Abramović's work an obvious difference (in that both parties are clearly consensual), but also is the reversible nature of the performance. Ulay can always undo his lips to speak again, whereas, as Russell Ferguson states, "Lindsey has nothing but this <u>Prelude</u> to bequeath to the future."[69] Moreover, O'Dell's thesis regarding the consensual aspect of masochistic artworks, whose "proceedings" she describes as "contractual,"[70] heightens one's awareness of what is at stake ethically in <u>Prelude</u> in the posthumous use of Lindsey's image: before her death Lindsey offered Wearing her image, but neither was her voice nor her story captured from her own perspective. Yet without the

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[68] O'Dell 34.
[69] Ferguson 25.
[70] O'Dell 35.

"ventriloquism" of surrogacy, the dead would have no voice at all. In order to act as a speaking surrogate, it appears that for both Prelude and Talking about Similarity, there is a presumption that the identities and their intentions are closely aligned to begin with, in that the two could be assumed to engage, with little protest from either party, in this dyadic "collusion."[71] Because of the way Wearing has edited the piece, the voice of the living twin engages in an uncanny form of ventriloquism that, surprisingly, is less a dominating act of putting words in someone's mouth, than a *dialogic* surrogacy for the dead. In the next pages, I will explore the dialogic aspect of the surrogate's speaking.

The Lips of Two Sisters Speaking Together

The ethical significance of Wearing's gesture in Prelude revolves around the way sound meets with image, bringing into contact two identities, one living and the other dead (whose distinctness from each other is initially unclear, then becomes clarified only to become blurred once again) in a relationship especially fragile due to the asymmetrical distribution of agency implicit in a posthumous representation. In Wearing's joining of the aural and the visual, in addition to the critical, feminist exposure of the heterogeneity of the medium's elements, she also engages these elements into their own, balanced dialogue. The dialogism involved in this video encounter could be read through Luce Irigaray's proposal for "speaking-among-women[,]" in order to comprehend how a living surrogate speaking *for* the dead could achieve a non-dominating relationship with her.[72] Also described by Irigaray as *"parler femme,"* this metaphor of speaking-among women suggests the recognition of sexual difference through the body in a way that specifically

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[71] O'Dell, describing the working relationship between Ulay and Abramović, 34.
[72] Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993) 135.

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takes recourse to touch as a metaphor of speech. Irigaray's proposal of the two female

lips that speak together puts one in an advantageous position to approach Prelude as an

instance of a non-violent contact between two sisters, a form of speaking-touching

between two women, one dead and the other living. Mutuality and dialogue can therefore

be viewed as forms of touch that offer alternatives to overcome the "absence" of the

female other, allowing one to conceive of the dialogues that could be possible to

overcome the conditions of death that make touch a literal impossibility. Perhaps this

strategy could be seen as bridging the ontological-epistemological divide identified by

Bal that presents a challenge to critical, feminist strategies of representation.[73]

In "When Our Lips Speak Together," called by Diana Fuss, "that lyrical love

letter,"[74] Irigaray proposes a model of a female-specific discourse of mutuality between

two women (which should not be considered a proposal for *identity among women*),

based on the symmetry of the two female labial lips (which also double as the facial,

speaking lips) which touch one another, side by side or face to face, in a relation of

proximity rather than distance and symmetry rather than domination or hierarchy:

"Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound

endlessly, back and forth. [. . .] And how could one dominate the other?"[75] The potential

for proximity while respecting the sexual difference of the other, on one hand asserts

Irigaray's criticism of domination within hierarchical, subject-other relationships and, as

Cornell points out, involves a "dream of love" that, modeled upon a symmetrical

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[73] Bal, "Enfolding."
[74] Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (New York: Routledge, 1989) 60.
[75] Irigaray, This Sex 213.

"communion," has a strongly ethical component to it.[76] As Elizabeth Grosz points out,

like her model of the hands pressed together in prayer, the touching of the labial lips

offers a more symmetrical, embodied relationship than the chiasm offered by Merleau-

Ponty: "This other kind of touching, Irigaray suggests, cannot presume dominance of one

or the other hand, for it is a mutual and reciprocal touching."[77] Both Irigaray's outlook

and Cornell's reading of it have been noted by Judith Butler as follows: "In Irigaray's

most systematic reading of the history of ethical philosophy, Éthique de la difference

sexuelle, she argues that ethical relations ought to be based on relations of closeness,

proximity and intimacy that reconfigure conventional notions of reciprocity and

respect."[78] In her reading of Irigaray's positioning of the two syntaxes (the feminine and

the masculine) as contiguous rather than hierarchical, Fuss's observes that, "Like the

'two lips,' they 'touch upon' but never wholly absorb each other[,]"[79] such that one can

conceptualize the ethical relationship that could be achieved between parties that entail

other embodied differences, as perhaps, the living and the dead.

According to Irigaray, engagement between self and other is considered possible if

one can first get out of the solipsistic economy of speaking from the perspective of the

masculinist One, which assumes a gendered hierarchization among parties.[80] This

prevents communication with sexually-differentiated parties and difference *between* two

such parties (i.e. two women attempting to speak together) who are, in advance, excluded

from discursive structures. As Irigaray makes clear, not only must the subject be

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[76] Cornell, Philosophy 88. Cornell points out how Irigaray critiques Levinas's understanding of the ethical relationship as involving proximity but not necessarily the recognition, in a non-dominating way, of how the feminine could be approached.
[77] Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994) 105.
[78] Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter (New York: Routledge, 1993) 46 & 256.
[79] Fuss 63.
[80] Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985); An Ethics of Sexual Difference, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993); This Sex.

conceived as always involved in relationships with others, the relationship must be

subtended by an awareness of sexual difference, especially in a manner that does not

repeat limiting, disparaging positions towards women. Irigaray maintains that this

connection among women can occur despite the masculine inability to recognize this

possibility and it fosters a resistance to the predicament of those who cannot normally

turn to their fleshy resources to speak to each other due to masculinist paradigms that

would be blind to or appropriate those fleshy resources of the sexually-differentiated

body.[81] Butler comments on Irigaray's interest in speech as opening onto ethical

relations: "For Irigaray, the ethical relation will be represented by the question as an act

of speech, the open question, the one which does not claim to know in advance the one to

whom it is addressed . . .: 'Who are you?'"[82] As Butler points out, Irigaray has critiqued

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "masculinist monologism" which, although useful in his

recognition of interdependence of the self with the other, presumes not to significantly

differentiate the self from the other, even in advance of the encounter. As Butler

proposes, it is Irigaray's insistence that one doesn't know in advance who the other is that

allows the ethical relationship to arise, one, she posits, that is more clearly based upon an

interrogative relationship rather than a presumptive one.[83]

Touch, for Irigaray, is a more powerful means than vision for apprehending sexual

difference in a benign rather than domineering way. Vision for Irigaray still retains

negative associations with the transcendence of the Cartesian *cogito,* which is capable of

apprehending the other only in disembodied ways that would neglect the significant

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[81] Irigaray, This Sex 208.
[82] Butler, "Sexual Difference as a Question of Ethics," Bodies of Resistance: New Phenomenologies of Politics, Agency, and Culture, ed. Laura Doyle (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2001) 66-67.
[83] Butler, "Sexual" 67.

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knowledges that arise from the body and potentially reduce the other to an image as if

perceived in a linear, geometric field that can be mapped or reproduced by a

cartographer.[84] According to Silverman, "It may be because of its imbrication with the

visual that Irigaray shows herself willing to forgo subjectivity."[85] However, the model of

the two lips touching as a means of communication specifically available to women

opens onto unforeseen directions, that at once creates an image of the linguistic lips (of

discourse) as well as the female lips of sexual difference (therefore evocative of a body

materiality, however metaphorized), has been critiqued by some feminists, particularly in

North America, as essentialist. Fuss has offered an analysis of the various opinions for

and against Irigaray's proposals as well as her own defense of Irigaray's metaphoricity,

that she suggests would be better read in terms of metonymy and contiguity.[86]

Nonetheless, Irigary offers an apt figuration informing my desire to maintain the tension

between the specificity of the sexually-differentiated body and a discursive approach to it

that is compatible with an analysis of representational perspective. As Silverman states,

"it is not that Irigaray doesn't understand the discordant relation of existing language to

the body; it is, rather that she imagines it is possible to elaborate a new language which

would have a different relation to the body."[87] Irigaray suggests a convergence of

discursive, visual and tactile avenues through which women can make contact with each

other, through the confluence of many senses, as Irigaray states: "You touch me all over

at the same time. In all the senses."[88]

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[84] Irigaray, "The Eye of a Man Recently Dead," Speculum 180-190.
[85] Silverman, Acoustic 161.
[86] Fuss 55-72.
[87] Silverman, Acoustic 144.
[88] Irigaray, This Sex 209.

Irigaray's carnal speaking seeks dialogue with difference, rather than a masculinist monologue. In its phenomenological underpinnings, Irigaray's model of speaking, such that she circumvents the erasure of the feminine within the Lacanian order, holds implicit possibilities for communication with other figures of absence, such as the dead. With Irigaray's question, "How can I touch you if you're not there?" one might also inquire as to how to approach the dead, whose subjectivity is frequently and similarly "marked" by a form of absence.[89] When one party in the artist-subject equation is dead, and therefore vulnerable to domination or neglect, Irigaray's proposal for dialogue through this speaking-touching suggests means of surmounting the unequal division of sensory conduits for agency. Appealing for these purposes is not only Irigaray's proposal for a non-dominating proximity between two (female) parties, who are normatively so partitioned off from each other that they can't speak to each other, but her recourse to metaphors of tactility to overcome the absences of the feminine presumed by psychoanalytic discourse.

Further to Ferguson view of Prelude as "continuing the undercurrent of identity confusion that began with the initial impact of the overlapping image and voice,"[90] I see the apparent, symmetrical confrontation between Lindsey's image and her bereaved twin's voice as offering a dialogic *engagement* between identities, so that the differences that distinguish the two subjects in the representation (one woman is apparently all image and no voice, while the other woman is all voice and no image) are positioned in a complimentary way that, in the process, confuses the embodied absence/presence asymmetry which, in reality, would exist between the two sisters as dead and alive.

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[89] Irigaray, This Sex 205.
[90] Ferguson 25.

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Silverman's understanding of Irigaray's *parler femme* in terms of "simultaneity," as well as her observations that "Irigaray relies heavily upon binary opposition, itself a powerful form of symmetry," are instructive because they allow one to view the possibilities for an ethical approach to the dead in <u>Prelude</u>, despite that Wearing has structured the piece in a binaristic way as a confrontation between the visual and the vocal.[91] Irigaray's model allows one to interpret the structure of <u>Prelude</u> as a meeting between twin sisters whose lips appear to speak together (where identity and difference briefly converge but in the end, slip apart), offering a way of understanding the ethical contact that could be forged between living and dead in representations, where relations at the visual and auditory level involve finding a balance and imbrication between the absences and presences surrounding the parties who confront each other, even when one is acting as a surrogate, speaking for the other.

Silverman, however, ultimately finds Irigaray's proposals for *parler femme* problematic in relation to dominant cinema due to the way it potentially embeds the female voice back within the body, an effect, paradoxically, already symptomatic of cinema's tendency to silence woman *as the body* within a "subjectivity" predicated upon its specularity rather than upon its speech or story. Without recognition of how the voice is ultimately embedded in the living body and further, finding alternative modes of speaking, it becomes difficult to ethically acknowledge the silence in which the dead may otherwise be enshrouded as well as the ideological distortions that also may adhere to some forms of speaking "for" or "about" subjects, when representational perspective is not carefully negotiated. It is precisely within such instances of "jettisoning synchronization" as evident in Wearing's <u>Prelude</u>, in which voices are "multiplied and

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[91] Silverman, <u>Acoustic</u> 147-148.

mismatched" in order "to problematize their corporeal assignation," that subversion of

dominant cinema's tendency to confine the voice within a female body occurs.[92] Unlike

Silverman, however, I find no problems with reading Irigaray's metaphor of speaking

through the sexually-differentiated body in order to interpret a lens-and-time-based

artwork, as I don't see it as running the risk of "the castration of a previously anonymous

voice by returning it forcefully to the body."[93] Irigaray's views not only allow one to

better conceive of how Wearing's deployment of the living sister's disembodied voice

becomes an ethical means of touching the dead, but also of how the voice balances the

potentially exploitative specularity of Lindsey's image, a tendency Silverman finds in the

legacy of dominant cinema traditions, in which the woman's voice is silenced within a

body that is given entirely to be seen and not heard. While Lindsey's image faces the

viewer, the mournful sound of her sister's voice surrounds the viewer from an

indeterminate location and, after the way Irigaray layers the voice with the additional

sensory dimension of touch, suggests an additional means for the female voice to become

disembodied – *projected* as a touch.

The way the disembodied voice of Lindsey's living twin reaches out to touch

Lindsey's image is a means of contact that, in the process, enfolds the viewer within an

intersubjective drama predicated upon touch, the voice, visuality as well as time. The

vocal and visual intersubjective dimensions, as well as the agency associated with them,

put the two sisters into posthumous contact with each other so that their identities mingle

in a reciprocity that, moreover, bridges the temporal gap that separates them. Prelude is

also a work in which the viewer is enfolded within these sensory, intersubjective

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[92] Silverman, Acoustic 165.
[93] Silverman, Acoustic 171.

dimensions and is put into a position to receive the "carnal embrace" described by Irigaray as when the lips of two women speak together through speaking-touching. With this outlook, one can view the living twin's voice as offering a non-dominating dimension of intersubjectivity with the dead sister, qualifying but not denying the visuality of Lindsey, whose subjectivity would otherwise be reduced by way of her reification *as* image, i.e. "a subjectivity grounded in specularity."[94] In other words, the speaking that appears to exist between women offers a sense of agency to the dead, to counterbalance the seeming transparency of Lindsey's identity that would accompany a presentation of her unqualified image. This occurs in the face of social erasures (like that of the mother, who would not recognize her daughter even in death) and despite the silence of dead.

Conclusion

Without certain interventions, the dead could remain an inaccessible "beyond" as described by Drucilla Cornell: she who resists the terms of representation, she whose materialization through discursive, representational practices is nonetheless so desired by the bereaved. Gillian Wearing, acting as a dialogic mediator, structures the image and the voice in <u>Prelude</u> in a way that permits the identity of a woman silenced by death to resonate once again through a sisterly perspective. With recourse to feminist theories that express concern for representational perspective and to Luce Irigaray's metaphor of ethical speaking-touching, one becomes aware of the implications involved in the exclusion of woman from the scene of representation. The "disembodied voice" of the sister/surrogate heightens the visibility of the dead by allowing a means for their shared

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[94] Silverman, <u>Acoustic</u> 170.

story to be heard and, in a metaphorical sense, also touches Lindsey with this loving

deployment of words. The surrogacy that occurs in <u>Prelude</u> appears to be at first

paradoxical, as a form of cinematic ventriloquism, as the living "putting words into the

mouth of" the dead. Yet the momentary illusion of synchronization of the living sister's

voice projected onto the animated image of the dead sister then dissolves to reveal the

heterogeneity of medium and with it, the emergence of two identities, whose distinction

remains difficult to discern but whose proximity has been challenged by death. The break

from synchronization, however, does not further silence Lindsey, but qualifies her

identity via the resonance of the narrative, the contingency upon which the living,

grieving twin's identity still revolves. Moreover, the voice provides the means through

which the living sister engages in a form of intersubjectivity with the dead. Wearing, I

propose, ethically represents Lindsey, the dead woman, by offering the agency associated

with the vocal platform to her twin sister, who speaks *for* the dead – recognizing the

inability of Lindsey to speak from a first-person, present, perspective and, by addressing

her image with this form of projective contact, also speaks *with* her dialogically despite

her apparent silence.

End of Chapter Two.

CHAPTER THREE

Andres Serrano's <u>The Morgue</u> and the (De)Formation of Identity

When the subject of a photographic representation is dead, how does the work of the photographer construct or contort the identity of the dead in ways that disallow a view of her or his perspective? While Judith Butler demonstrates the extent to which the "formation" of identity categories is also simultaneously a "deformation," because it is always in tension with the forcible, normative processes of subjectivity, I suggest there are some representations that deform identity to such a degree that ethical concern is merited.[1] How does the context in which the dead subject is photographed predispose the dead to the effects of certain gazes and the attribution of an institutional identity rather than a biographic identity? What historical precedents exist for contemporary representations of the dead when they are depicted in a morgue context and how do the various lineages of subject matter, coupled with composition and photographic connotation (in particular, the choice of titles used to "name" the dead) situate the work so that specific meanings are ascribed? These are the concerns driving this chapter, in which an analysis will be undertaken of American artist Andres Serrano's <u>The Morgue</u> (1992), a series of almost three dozen large-scale (each four by five feet) cibachrome photographs of a diverse group of human corpses in an unspecified morgue. Despite the apparent documentary transparency through which Serrano represents the corpses, I wish to show how his photographic gaze contributes to a discourse of violence that has been linked to visuality, and how it precludes access to the identities of the dead from their own perspectives. This analysis will consider the ways in which two avenues of

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[1] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," <u>Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'</u> (New York: Routledge, 1993) 223-242.

intersubjective agency, namely the gaze and touch, remain blocked for Serrano's dead subjects in a manner that will differentiate his work from most of the other artworks under analysis in this thesis. I will discuss Serrano's representations of corpses as involving the work of de-individualizing and, to an extent, objectifying the dead. This will form a point of contrast to the next chapter on the work of Nan Goldin, whose photographs of dying and dead friends perform their individuation through the conscious attribution of biographic specificity. In terms of Serrano's working method, I will delve into the guise of anonymity through which he represents the corpses, which poses ethical problems because it emerges as a form of identity that ultimately brands the dead in specific ways.

This reading will proceed from the claim that Serrano's working method does not heed the call of an ethics of representation after the views of Drucilla Cornell (outlined in the Introduction), involving the allegory of the *chiffonier*, the mourning figure who works to protect and gather the remains of the dead by taking a non-violent approach to otherness, who seeks to guard their singularity against (mis)appropriation or neglect.[2] Nor, I suggest, does Serrano's work follow the important, feminist mandate (outlined in Chapter Two), to consider the effects of representational perspective on the subjects represented, a tenet that becomes especially important when the subject is a dead female. Following Cornell's assertion regarding the responsibility to lay claim to one's own person from one's chosen perspective (an important paradigm for identity politics), an awareness comes into relief with a consideration of dead subjects that, without the intervention of a surrogate figure, this ability will remain an impossibility for the dead,

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[2] Drucilla Cornell, The Philosophy of the Limit (New York: Routledge, 1992) 62 & 63.

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who hold no inherent agency to do so.[3] The distorting effects of Serrano's photographic paradigm upon the emergence of identity for the dead subject in The Morgue will be the primary focus of the chapter, in which I ask: what perspective emerges in place of the one that might have been claimed by the dead? The layers of violence that adhere to Serrano's series, due to the incisive nature of his photographic gaze – focusing so closely upon bodies torn open by real violence, wounded by gun-shots, poisoned, carved-up with sharp instruments – will be explored equally in terms of his formal choices as well as for the ethical implications of these choices, to suggest how the dead can be posthumously wounded by camera work.

The following analysis of this body of work by Serrano, proceeding, I suggest, from an artistic working method predicated upon disidentification from the dead, may at first seem out of keeping with the overall theme of this thesis, which seeks to discern various means of achieving identifications with the dying and the dead by pushing the limits of intersubjectivity with them through recourse to the body in a palpable, phenomenological awareness of it. However, in seeking to make complex the notion of aesthetic distance, which at first appears to involve a predominant emphasis on visuality (with its incumbent tendency to visual mastery), I hope to demonstrate how a paradigm of proximity also comes into play in which intersubjectivity transpires at three significant levels – through touch, visuality and the physical proximity Serrano had with the corpses. These registers of intersubjectivity all significantly implicate identity and the ability of the viewer to perceive its emergence in ways that cause levels of distortion due to the institutional, historical, cultural and artistic perspectives that are invoked. Touch, visuality and

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[3] This view described in Cornell's Beyond Accomodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law (Lantham: Rowman, 1991/1999).

Serrano's proximity to the corpses will be addressed in an order reflecting the way the chapter has been structured into three parts, as follows.

First, touch is evoked by Serrano in the choice of subject matter, where hands and skin surfaces figure prominently. The sense of touch here is a metaphor for the viewer's ability to gain access to the identity of the dead from a perspective that respects their biographic specificity and the vulnerability of their position. It is also considered a means of intersubjective contact with the dead.

Second, in terms of the intersubjective dimension of visuality, the type of camera gaze chosen by Serrano will be interpreted as a wounding form of contact with the subject who becomes trapped within it. I seek to dismantle the various layers of representational violence enforced on Serrano's dead subjects such as (for example) those made evident by art historian Susan Douglas's reading of his work in terms of a "spectatorial practice," whose concern is with subjects on only one side of the frame, in which the material and personal experiences of the dead are viewed as "a mediated procedure for the observer."[4] My reading of Serrano's visual paradigm will also chart the specific implications for two dead, female subjects in particular works in which they do not have access to the important vector of agency that accompanies the gaze.

Third, the ethical implications of Serrano's contact with the corpses, which were at his fingertips when he photographed them, will be explored. I will consider the logistical access Serrano had to his subjects, and will consider proximity in physical terms but also at a more abstract, interpersonal level regarding the photographer's relationship to the dead and the degree to which he makes his investments toward his subjects known. I wonder to what degree the apparent anonymity that shrouds his dead subjects and the

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[4] Susan Douglas, "In Camera: Andres Serrano," Parachute 78 (1995): 19.

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environment in which they were photographed reflects a respect for their dignity or a choice geared to protect his own professional investments and therefore, causing ethical concern?

These three registers of intersubjectivity – the touch evoked by the depiction of hands and skin, visuality (that conveyed by the camera gaze, which is inscribed by a wounding sense of touch), and the underlying physical proximity Serrano had to the corpses – offer a framework for analysis through which the importance of ethical considerations and certain histories of representations become apparent. The following analysis will reveal that, within a photograph, while the solicitation of touch is conveyed by the play of hands, the cut-open flesh and the variegated skin surfaces of corpses, not all forms of proximity and access can be considered desirable or ethical.

Part One: The Criminalizing Touch

Before addressing the artworks, I wish to provide some information that is central to my argument, which other art historical accounts have failed to bring foreword. Quite simply, there are different types of morgues: those associated with hospitals and their departments of pathology to which the corpses resulting from non-suspicious deaths would be sent; and those associated with the city or state, to which any corpse requiring a forensic autopsy is sent. Deaths that are considered suspicious are those that occur within 24 hours of being admitted to hospital: overdose from narcotics, accidents (like drowning, fires or auto fatalities), violent deaths and suicides, suspected suicide or any accident whose cause is unclear.[5] If the titles of the works and the conditions of the

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[5] This and all the related information included in the next paragraph was provided by Christian Kiriakos, Coordinator, Decedent Affairs Office, Boston Medical Centre and Brendunt (Rocky) Tilgham, Mortuary

corpses are an accurate indication, the type of morgue in which Serrano worked is clearly

forensic, as the deaths all fall under the category of "suspicious," such as (for example):

Multiple Stabbing, Hacked to Death, Burnt to Death, Death by Asphyxiation, Death by

Drowning, Gun Murder, Death by Fire, Sleeping Pill Overdose, John Doe Baby, II and

Homicide Stabbing. None of the deaths in Serrano's series reflect illnesses like cancer,

diabetes, heart attacks, strokes or Alzheimer's, although, inexplicably, there is one AIDS-

related death.

Forensic morgues, called the Medical Examiner's Office in the United States or the

Office of the Coroner in Canada, exist under extremely tight security because of the

evidentiary status of the bodies. No street traffic whatsoever is allowed into these

buildings. Individual artists or art school groups are never allowed access to the bodies

for the purposes of study, sketching or other professional or educational purposes,

although morgue staff frequently field calls of this nature. Bullet-proof glass separates the

family members who come to identify the dead from the desk of the morgue supervisor

who greets them. Only police officers and authorized staff are allowed past the digitally-

locked doors of the foyer, which only open from the inside in a vault-like setting. In

short, contemporary morgues are intensely private spaces strictly delineated by state,

legal and medical access in which corpses are made visible only at regulated moments for

authorized professionals or to immediate family members under highly mediated,

guarded circumstances. Yet according to two sources, Serrano was given discreet

permission to photograph the corpses that came through the doors of a particular,

unidentified morgue by the pathologist in charge, under the understanding that the

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identities of the deceased would be kept hidden and that he would not touch the bodies

without gloves if they had not yet been examined.[6]

Despite this background, Douglas has not considered that Serrano's corpses are

already categorized when she reads the variety of deaths as a guessing game played by

the viewer, one that mimics the investigative work of the pathologist: "Was the death

natural or the result of misadventure?"[7] At first glance, the spectrum of corpses

represented in The Morgue series appears to reflect the indiscriminate power of death to

afflict the full range of society, and Serrano seems not to have chosen his subjects so

much as democratically photographed the range of humanity that entered a morgue

during a three-month period (according to one source, he photographed 95% of them).

They are in fact, a highly specific group, cloaked by the episteme of necessary forensic

analysis. It is precisely this uncertainty surrounding the bodies and the manner of deaths

that ties the corpses to the state's medical-judicial system in a manner that is crystal clear,

delineating the identities of the dead as suspect on a number of levels. It is this line of

inquiry into the difficulties perceiving the identity of the dead that I wish to pursue in the

next section, where a pair of related images will be discussed by way of the

intersubjective dimensions of touch, conveyed by an iconography of hands and skin

surfaces, which appear to offer the viewer a manner of access.

With Knifed to Death I, one sees the palm-side of an open, outstretched hand,

where each finger-tip has been sloppily stained with black ink. Here a fragment of the

body stands in for its entirety, functioning in a metonymic way [Fig. 13]. Knifed to Death

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[6] Robert Hobbs, "Andres Serrano: The Body Politic," Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993, curated by Patrick T. Murphy with essays by Robert Hobbs, Wendy Steiner and Marcia Tucker (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 1994) 42; Daniel Arasse, Andres Serrano: The Morgue, trans. Sheila Malovany Chevallier (Paris: Galerie Yvon Lambert, 1992).
[7] Douglas 17.

II offers a pendant view of the other hand, although positioned more elegantly, with the ring finger bent gently to meet the thumb [Fig. 14]. The titles of the works tell the viewer that, in addition to being a compliant subject, the deceased is a victim of violence. The deep cuts on the arm, from which blood flows so freshly it appears still to be wet, repeat the information of the title visually. While the body to which these hands are apparently connected and any other details of the individual's appearance are excluded from view, another identification has already taken place within the frame, thereby essentializing the individual in terms of the manner of death. The ink stains on the fingertips indicate that some manner of identification was made by police in finger-printing, which immediately codes the dead as a suspect in the crime. Yet this identity is spoken only out of the frame, within police archives, never to be revealed to the viewer, who cannot even be sure of the subject's gender. Moreover, this subject will be reduced to one or the other side of a dance of violence: the perpetrator or the victim. Either way, the unwashed hands result in the deceased's identity being blackened by the machinery of the criminal justice system.

That the hands of the dead would have felt nothing throughout any of these posthumous ordeals (being handled by the police, by the pathologist and by the artist) is a central fascination of the work. While the fingertips of the dead were touched by ink, guided by the hands of officers or morgue orderlies, touch was in the service of institutional rather than interpersonal or sensorial knowledge. The palm side of the hands and fingertips, second only to the lips in the number of sense receptors they contain, seem to implore the viewer's approach by the reaching, gesturing poses – lending a beckoning aura to the images, especially when viewed as pendants. Yet photographed separately and without a central body to unite them, these hands will never clasp each other to

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experience the reciprocal affect-effect conveyed by the sense of touch, as described by Merleau-Ponty in his essay "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," nor, in their fragmented singularity, will these hands experience the intersubjectivity of being clasped by another's hand.[8] Any sense of touch is here soiled by the wash of criminality, placing the dead out of the range of identification with the average viewer, who is a foreigner to mortal violence. The senselessness of the crime and that of the body are spoken simultaneously in this image, which hides the identity of the dead but also reifies it *as* an act of violence. While the hands may be present and the palms exposed as if offering paradigmatic surfaces for intersubjective contact (that fostered by touch as well as by hand-shakes, greetings and waving gestures),[9] a sense of access to the subjectivity of the dead (except as unfeeling and perhaps also untouchable) is blocked. The viewer cannot make contact with the dead from a perspective that is compatible with what might have been chosen by her or him while still alive, or offered by a friend or family member posthumously. That the identity of the dead remains "hidden" becomes a paradox made striking by the stamp of criminality that is offered in place.

Serrano gives prominence to the gaping, still-bleeding gashes on the arms that mark the victim ambivalently, as if by a stigmata – if one recalls that to be stigmatized is not only to be branded as a criminal but also to be divinely chosen. Serrano's photographic gesture draws close attention to a range of manipulations, whose embodied emissaries are both the hands and the eyes. In this regard, Serrano's focus bears mention alongside the

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[8] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," The Visible and the Invisible, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1968)130-155.

[9] These icons of intersubjectivity are noted by ethics philosopher Gary B. Madison in relation to Merleau-Ponty's "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," as holding an ethical potential for dialogism. "The Ethics and Politics of the Flesh," The Ethics of Postmodernity: Current Trends in Continental Thought Ed. Gary B. Madison and Marty Fairbairn (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999) 174-190.

science of anatomy, both in practice, as Michel Foucault shows,[10] and in art historical

representations of it, as a study by Mieke Bal demonstrates, which are both significant

because they suggest the convergence of visual mastery with a physical mastery over the

dead, affected through the work of professionally-trained hands cutting into the corpse of

the condemned criminal who is positioned in a polarized way on one side of the life-

death contrast. In her study of Rembrandt's painting, The Anatomy Lesson of Dr.

Nicolaes Tulp (1632), Bal suggests that different levels of mastery are performed by

figures who function as surrogate-tropes for the deity: the surgeon, who animates the

corpse by demonstrating the function of its constituent parts and stands in for the artist,

who, in his handling of paint, likewise holds a power of creation. Bal's reading centres

upon the compositional nexus formed by the meeting of various hands, both

living/functioning (of the surgeon) and dead/dissected (of the condemned criminal): "The

surgeon's left hand, making the gesture of understanding, of subtle grasping – the gesture

of holding and wielding the painter's brush, the knower's pen, or the surgeon's knife [. .

.]."[11] The various instruments held by knowing-learning male hands, both scientific and

artistic, used to delve into the workings of the criminal's lifeless hand (in order to extract

and convey knowledge), suggests the interchangability of tools of mastery from one

profession to the next and the similar concern for display shared by the respective

institutions to which they belong. Bal's interpretation of the scene highlights the extent to

which neither touch nor vision should necessarily be considered the preferred means of

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[10] In Michel Foucault's study of history of the science of pathological anatomy one perceives a doubling over of various forms of incision that is pertinent to the view Serrano offers of dead bodies cut up by weaponry: the incisive form of visuality upon which the tradition emerges is echoed mimetically by the literal cutting into the various tissues of the corpse by the anatomist. The Birth of the Clinic: The Archaeology of Medical Perception Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage-Random, 1994).
[11] Mieke Bal, Reading "Rembrandt" (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 343.

achieving contact with the dead if one is concerned with representational violence or

mastery – both means of perception are frequently imbricated in the control over the

passive, dead body.

Serrano's mirror images of the fingerprinted hands in The Morgue makes

contemporary the history linking the dead, criminal body via visuality to the science of

anatomy, a history that extends a century prior to Rembrandt's work, as medical art

historian Deanna Petherbridge suggests, by noting the laws that were introduced in the

sixteenth-century allowing the closely-linked guilds of barbers and surgeons to perform

dissections on the bodies of executed felons.[12] In fact, the apprehended or otherwise

incarcerated body crosses boundaries of representational genres, and photography

historian Allan Sekula notes that the institutional uses of photography in the nineteenth

century for the identification of criminals, the poor and the insane had its origins in "the

imperatives of medical and anatomical illustrations."[13] As Petherbridge demonstrates, the

visualization of the corpse was founded upon the moralizing alignment of the anatomized

body with the criminal who was, therefore, subject to the loss of bodily privacy and

dignity. During the rise of the institution of medicine in Europe from the sixteenth

through the eighteenth centuries, as Petherbridge also shows, the anatomy theatre became

a specialized site in which the bodies of condemned criminals were punished above and

beyond the capital punishment they already endured. The bodies were made visible in the

anatomy theatre to dozens of spectators, from professional guilds and from the general

public (the curious, gawking citizens). The corpses of the criminals were opened up and

"fed to the dogs" not only in the anatomy theatre, which at times resembled a circus

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[12] Deanna Petherbridge, "Art and Anatomy: The Meaning of Text and Image," The Quick and the Dead: Artists and Anatomy, with Ludmilla Jordanova (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997) 34.
[13] Allan Sekula "The Body and the Archive," October 39 (1986) 7.

sideshow attraction, but also through the work of representation by artists, who heightened the grotesque atmosphere of degradation to the body. Engravings by William Hogarth and many others became *momento-mori*, scenes of retribution for the crimes committed by the dead and reminders to the living not to follow suite, a view supported by the nooses that are depicted attached to their necks.[14] After Petherbridge's comment that, "[t]he anti-hero is hanged for murder and then suffers the supreme indignity of public dissection rather than Christian burial," to be anatomized was a trope of punishment linked specifically to the criminal body whereby the living are able to witness with satisfaction the damnation of souls right here on earth.[15]

That <u>Knifed to Death I</u> and <u>II</u>, like all of those works in <u>The Morgue</u> series, are titled by Serrano according to the manner of death rather than with the individual's proper name is significant because this "choice" to elide the individuals' family names in the service of protecting their identities alludes to yet another set of historical practices that reveal divergent tendencies surrounding the identification of the bodies of the dead. Situations involving whether or not biographic specificity or anonymity is more ethically desirable when representing the corpse can be addressed in relation to a Western, cultural legacy involving the treatment of suspected "criminal" bodies that is informative for Serrano's series. For this reason, a brief history will be provided to substantiate my claim that the "anonymity" through which Serrano frames his series actually fosters the attribution of a distinct identity to the dead. It is noteworthy that the functionality of contemporary morgues is entirely different from the notorious Parisian morgue of the nineteenth-century which, as described by cultural historian Bruno Bertherat, was

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[14] Ludmilla Jordanova, <u>Quick</u> 104
[15] Petherbridge, <u>Quick</u> 38.

modeled as an emphatically public theatre intended for the maximum visibility of the dead for the sole purpose of their identification.[16] Most often the dead were horribly disfigured victims of drowning dragged up from the Seine (suggesting criminal mishap or some other misadventure, most frequently suicide), the bodies of prostitutes or murder victims.[17] Much like the pointed "spectrum" of society found in Serrano's The Morgue, the corpses put on view in the Parisian morgue were explicitly coded with criminality to an equally degrading extent by the posthumous disregard for bodily privacy.

Further, the development of the morgue as an urban institution linked to that of the police and, in a greater context, to the aims of social *réglementation* (aimed, in particular, at the identification of prostitutes) reflected developing notions of identity in the latter part of the nineteenth century. According to Bertherat, because during this historical era, *"l'anonymat apparait comme une menace,"* the morgue functioned as an institution working along the lines of panopticism, described by Foucault as an institution of utter transparency whose goal was visual control by the exposure of bodies.[18] Rather than ascertaining the precise manner of death, which is the purpose of contemporary, forensic pathology, the Parisian morgue in the nineteenth century, open to citizens of all ages, seven days a week and free of admission, was in the service of ascertaining the biographic specificity of the body *itself,* by putting it on public display as if to contain the "criminal" element.

Therefore, the anonymity through which Serrano represents the corpses actually distorts a view of them by the subtextual criminal element that underlines all the corpses

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[16] Bruno Bertherat, "Autour de l'Oeuvre d'Andres Serrano: L'exposition du cadaver. Le cas de la morgue de Paris au XIXe Siècle," L'Image de la mort. Aux limites de la fiction L'exposition du cadavre (Montréal: Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal, 1995) 23-36.
[17] Bertherat 28.
[18] Bertherat 24.

due to the morgue context, an effect furthered by the theatre of visuality granted by the artworks themselves, which finds its historic precedent with the spectacle of the damned and the deformed offered by the Paris morgue. These historical elements lend a tainted status to Serrano's dead in The Morgue in advance of any "identification" ever having been made. The point is that Serrano tries to circumvent the interlinked issues of identity and anonymity, but in the end, cannot: the seemingly-respectful anonymity he grants his dead paints them clearly with a criminal identity.

These connections between the body of the criminal, the art and history of anatomy and the expectation of unproblematic visual display continues in the present context of digitization, invigorated by medical imaging technologies that allow unprecedented views of the corpse. Some critics and artists, however, have expressed concern that a consideration for the subjectivity of the dead in contemporary manifestations of the anatomized body is being neglected in the push for technological novelty and advancement. As Lisa Cartwright, a historian of medical imaging technologies, has shown in a discussion of The Visible Man (a project of the U.S. National Library of Medicine that went live on the Internet in 1994), the tendency to view the criminal body as one that, in death, continues to be more readily subject to fragmentation, excessive visuality and loss of bodily privacy than other citizens persists for the purpose of creating a digitized archive of a body uniquely viewed in hundreds of cross sections. The Visible Man made use of the donated body of Joseph Jernigan, a convicted murderer executed on death row in Texas, by cryogenically freezing the cadaver, sectioning it in various ways, comprehensively "segmenting" it into almost two thousand "planar units," digitally photographing each pass and then mounting the whole compendium of images from head

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to foot into a program through which the users may sift and scan at will with the click of the mouse.[19] The fragmentation of the corpse in The Visible Man, "its physical mass sliced into relatively equitable, almost arbitrary slabs, like a length of salami," is a radical departure from "book atlases [which] tend to focus on discrete body parts or systems."[20] This distinction is instructive in situating Serrano's photographic fragmentation of the corpse closer to the pre-digitized history of medical illustration and artist's anatomies of earlier eras, which viewed the body's parts using the naked eye (working from the outside in) in much larger fragments than those thousands of slivers allowed by digital imaging technologies coupled with cryogenics, MRI and CT scans.

Despite the different means of making the body visible, the implications of both Serrano's and the National Library of Medicine's fragmentation and exposure of the body of the dead could be considered parallel, after Cartwright's view (which runs close to mine), that the subjectivity of the dead has been violated: "The universal biomedical subject is thus a subject stripped of his rights to privacy and bodily integrity, even after death."[21] Despite Jernigan's willing donation of his body to science, Cartwright finds the revelation of his proper name and his biographic background problematic. These specifics were not revealed surrounding the cadaver of the Maryland housewife who, by donating her body to science, became The Visible Woman, the female counterpart to the digital archive: "The Visible Man occupies a different place in the public eye: he is imbued with a name, an identity, and a personal history — more specifically, a narrative of

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[19] Lisa Cartwright, "The Visible Man: The Male Criminal as Biomedical Norm," Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life, ed. Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert (New York: Routledge, 1997) 132. This archive was launched as part of the National Institute of Health, and samples of it can be viewed at: www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible_human.html
[20] Cartwright 132.
[21] Cartwright 136.

moral corruption in life and redemption after death."[22] According to Cartwright, the revelation of Jernigan's biographic identity presents an ideological and ethical problem specific to him as a dead *criminal* to which the privacy and rights associated with the full citizenship of The Visible Woman, whose anonymity was always maintained, was clearly not at risk.[23] The nexus of tension in which the viewer is placed, pulled between the displaced identity of the deceased and the impossibility of viewer identification with him (due to the unprecedented fragmentation of his body morphology), occurs in a manner parallel to Serrano's Knifed to Death I and II, though with this artistic series, the problem is reversed. In other words, the intimacy with the body offered by the various media through which it is viewed offers little indication of the identity of the dead from an interpersonal, biographic perspective and, for that reason, distorts identity through a criminalized, institutional context. Yet, as Cartwright shows, the revelation of biographic identity within similar contexts enacts its own set of violations.

The particular way Serrano has fragmented the body requires a moment of consideration in relation to the historical tendency to derive identity from, or attribute identity to, specific parts of the body. That the interest in the links between identity and the descriptive features of the face and head under the influences of phrenology and physiognomy (which were also related to eugenics and "flowered" in acts of social regulation actualized by photography) were eventually discredited does not alter the

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[22] Cartwright 126.

[23] A similar concern for the subjectivity of the dead, as well as that of family members or friends to him, informs a video and sound installation called Atlas of the Interior (1995) by Indonesian-Dutch artist Fiona Tan, in which the projection of the cross-sections of The Visible Man was coupled with the voice-over of the artist, whose questions pointedly address the individuation of the dead and the emotional, interpersonal effects of viewing this techno-anatomical dismemberment: "Who is he then? It is Joseph. [. . .] How would it feel to stand here now if you knew the man? If you loved the man?" Rudi Fuchs, and Timothy Druckrey, The Second: Time-Based Art from the Netherlands (Amsterdam: Netherlands Media Institute, 1996).

persistent tendency to read meaning into facial features in representations. It is precisely

the legacy of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century uses of phrenology and physiognomy

that has prompted art historian Paolo Fabrii to suggests that one look critically at

representations involving the face and, as an alternative, inquire as to what other areas of

the human body one could turn to if one wishes to perceive personality: "What does need

to be traced in, however, is a genealogy of human expression which (I) illustrates the way

contemporary morphology is a break *within* the history of physiognomy and (II) the

connection between artistic practice and the way we think about the 'visual' sign."[24]

However, in the context of a dead body, one arrives at a no-win situation if one closely

follows Fabrii's suggestion to look to other expressive parts of the body in order to read

expression. These views make it difficult to situate Serrano's radical fragmentation of the

bodies of the deceased (which makes visible the fingertips of the hand, spots where

"identity" is inscribed but not made accessible to the viewer), and instantly forces an

alternate view of the dead as criminal bodies, those whose institutional identity, then, is

more deeply carved. The "anonymous" status allowed by the focus on the hands in

Knifed to Death I and II becomes a point of degradation rather than a point of respect,

which, in light of Fabbri's suggestion, allows one to understand the problems that occur

when seeking "knowledge" of identity in areas other than the face – Serrano's

representations solve one set of problems while creating another.

The implications of the photographic medium used in Knifed to Death I and II

continue the theme of identity as it is "revealed" in other ways – those involving the

medium itself, that offer an illusion of access that ultimately remains blocked. Many have

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[24] Paolo Fabbri, "Deformities of the Face," Identity and Alterity: Figures of the Body 1895/1995 (Marsilio: La Biennale di Venezia, 1995) 27.

discussed one of the central paradigms of the photographic medium as it has traditionally

been known (i.e. before digitization) – the way it bears a direct relation to the referent it

captures.[25] A rhetorical claim that surpasses the more familiar assertion that the image

bears an indexical relation to the referent is the identity thesis offered by André Bazin

regarding the nature of photography – a famous, if almost outlandish ontological claim

that the photographic image bears an equivalent status to the object ("The photographic

image is the object itself. . .").[26] Although Bazin's point was to emphasize the viewer's

psychological investments in realism as a mode of representation that best offers the

living a connection with the dead, he uses the oft-repeated analogy of the fingerprint to

describe the particular ability of photography, due to its mechanical nature, to receive an

exact imprint of the reality it transcribes. Referencing the technical nature of the

photographic process, Rosalind Krauss takes up Bazin's thinking of the relationship

forged between photography and its referent to distinguish it from drawn or painted

images, as follows: "For photography is an imprint or transfer off the real; it is a

photochemically processed trace causally connected to that thing in the world to which it

refers in a manner parallel to that of fingerprints or footprints [. . .]."[27] Krauss deepens the

understanding of this relationship as a "physical" one evoking the proximate sense of

touch, and takes recourse to the concept of the "index" taken from linguistics to explain

[25] Andre Bazin, "Ontology of the Photographic Image," What is Cinema? Vol. I, trans. Hugh Gray
(Berkeley: U California P, 1967); Kendall Walton, "The Transparency of the Photographic Image," Critical
Inquiry 11 (1984): 246-277; Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill,
1981) 76.

[26] Bazin 14. In my use of the term analogue to describe Serrano's recourse to non-digitized photography, I
take heed of Barthes' distinction between the "analogical" relation between photography and its referent,
and the "analogical" relationship between signifier and sign that exists in linguistics, in which a slight
discontinuity is detected and perhaps better conveyed by the term, analogy. The distinction is one between
exactness and likeness. See Barthes's, "The Photographic Message," Image, Music, Text, trans. Stephen
Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 17; and Elements of Semiology, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith
(London: Jonathan Cape, 1967) 52.

[27] Rosalind Krauss, "Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," The Originality of the Avant-Garde and
Other Modernist Myths (Cambridge: MIT P, 1994) 110.

the way the photograph is simultaneously a sign pointing to a source outside the frame.[28]
That the causal connection identified between the photographic medium and its referent,
(i.e. its so-called "indexical" quality), evokes the sense of touch by way of the metaphor
of the fingerprint should be kept in mind in order to appreciate the layers of identity
suggested by Serrano's photographs.

The display of the index fingers in <u>Knifed to Death I</u> and <u>II</u> becomes ironic as it
points to an out-of-frame font of knowledge and suggests that the resolution of the puzzle
(i.e. the identity of the subject) is beyond the capacities of the medium to convey it and,
in fact, that the medium is better exploited for its ability to hide certain traces – to prevent
certain connections from being made. The identity of the deceased, at least that conveyed
by the fingerprints, appears to be extremely close to the viewer – magnified by the scale
of the hands, which dangle teasingly before the viewer's eyes, but reveal little except that
the dead is under suspicion for involvement in this deadly crime. Although the hands in
<u>Knifed to Death I</u> and <u>II</u> suggest a gesture calling for recognition, they point to
befuddlement rather than to definitive answers regarding the biographic identity of the
dead. This notion of the indexical quality to the medium, coupled with the offer to touch
embodied by the hand itself (a figure whose morphology, unlike that of <u>The Visible Man</u>,
remains relatively intact) are paradoxical, despite the way that the work appears to offer a
sense of resolution, the viewer is not offered significant access to the dead except an
awareness that violent behaviour occurred.

The redoubling of the forms of identity in Serrano's <u>Knifed to Death</u> pendants,
evident in the content as well as in the medium through which it is conveyed, situates his
work at the cusp of a historical moment in technology, one on the threshold of

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[28] Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part I," <u>Originality</u> 198.

digitization implicating the body and the means of representing it to affect not only the "identity" of the photographic medium (such that its claim to veracity would forever be called into question – heralding it's own "death") but also, in the advancement of DNA sequencing and its uses for forensic identification, another manner in which human identity is perceived.[29] Forensic DNA analysis, which makes unnecessary the body's intact morphology, makes fingerprinting and photographs appear less reliable than a sample transmitting the body's cells, fragments, fluids or its remains in providing evidence. For example, the feature film Gattaca (directed by Andrew Nichol, 1997) offers a comprehensive statement on the potential uses of DNA analysis to make obsolete the instrumental deployments of photography (for corporations to maintain security among staff and for police to perform detective work). Gattaca's vision maps out social implications of forms of identity (many of which have already been realized) in which they reside no longer in the face or the fingerprint but in bodily detritus, in the nails, hair, skin flakes, urine and blood which become the new effects of the subject that must be "policed." This seismic shift to digitization taking place in the 1990s, affecting imaging, communications and biotechnologies as they allow one to perceive identity and the sites in or around the body where it can be detected, has been noted by art historian Philippe Comar in a manner that mourns the loss of more direct, embodied forms of intersubjective contact:

> One last piece of news: the fingerprint has disappeared from our identity cards, and the photograph has given way to DNA. What has become of that opaque membrane which, smooth or wrinkled, was for mankind of yesterday the very real seal of

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[29] For discussions on the so-called "death" of photography, see Geoffrey Batchen, "Phantasm: Digital Imaging and the Death of Photography," Metamorphoses: Photography in the Electronic Age (New York: Aperture, 1994) 46-51; William Mitchell, The Re-Configured Eye: Visual Truth and the Post-Photographic Era (Cambridge: MIT P, 1992); Timothy Druckrey, ed., Electronic Culture: Technology and Visual Representation (New York: Aperture, 1996).

identity? [. . .] Reduced to an electronic rag behind a screen, a virtual image, our skin can now be played upon by others, can now be transposed into situations that bear no relation to lived experience.[30]

Therefore, with bioinformatics replacing the visual-textual police archive and the screen of the monitor replacing human skin, the lines of identity that are evoked by Serrano's Knifed to Death I and II offer the palpable-embodied-analogous forms of representation that now appear like nostalgic evocations of an already historicized technological era. What becomes frustrating in Serrano's work is that, despite his direct reference to various forms of identity (associated with the causal connection of the photographic medium to the referent as well as with the fingerprint, the unalterable sign of the body's uniqueness), he doesn't take advantage of the legacy of the touch or the "trace" evoked by either, nor any of the potential for non-violent approaches to otherness that different manners of tactile connections may entail. Despite how his representations appear to offer certain forms of contact with intimate variants of the identity of the dead, the promise remains blocked by the institutional framework.

Part Two: Visualizing the Dead Female by Way of the Wound

Among all the works in Serrano's series that appeased critics by the way he hid the identities of the dead, Jane Doe, Killed by Police is the "remarkable exception," in that the entire face of the woman is viewed in stark profile [Fig. 15].[31] This work is a closely-cropped, horizontal view of a woman's face, photographed at close range, within which

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[30] Philippe Comar, "The Body Beside Itself," Identity and Alterity: Figures of the Body (Marsilio: La Biennale di Venezia, 1995) 43.

[31] Another, more horrific exception to Serrano's covering the faces of the dead is the two-part Broken Bottle Murder that shows a head severed from its body at very close range, resting upside-down so that all the facial features are folded upon themselves like so many wrinkles of a Shar-Pei dog. The pendant shows the scalp of the individual ripped away from the head, appearing as a curved, smooth expanse of pink flesh, forlorn and abject in the way it is flung to the perimeter of the frame, entirely disconnected from the rest of the head. Ultraviolence is the term to best describe these works.

many distinguishing "features" of her countenance are exploited by Serrano, most notably its advanced stage of decay. Striking are the rings and blotches of peeling, discoloured skin, spotted markings similar to those found on an animal's hide, in shades of brown, beige and red, that transform her face into a mask of camouflage. According to Serrano, the woman was actually black and as the pathologist explained to him, in stages of decomposition, racial features become misleading.[32] Serrano has cropped the image at the chin, effectively beheading the woman in the visual register – separating the head from any sense of the body or clothing to create a monumental objectification. The matted, curly hair is blonde on the tips and darker at the roots but also discoloured by the caked blood that clings to it above her ear. In the darkened space directly above her ear one finds a gunshot wound, blackened around the edges and still glistening in the centre. Serrano must have chosen this profile perspective to heighten the visibility of this cavity, offering one of many important visual nodes to which the viewer's look is drawn. Her glazed, open eye appears still to be staring blankly at the ceiling but has, notably, sunk so deeply into its socket that the outer ridges of the underlying skeleton throw it into deep shadow. Compensating for the lack of expression on her face is the multi-coloured patterning of her skin and her unruly, blood soaked hair, which spills out of the frame.

An important aspect of Serrano's work that is also evident in <u>Knifed to Death I</u> and <u>II</u> is the premium he places on aesthetics or, in one curator's words, "the formal argument," which has, in many contexts, justified the works to the point that no further inquiry into the ethics of his visual revelations of dead subjects was necessary.[33] The superb technical skill with which he captures these close-range views is not a feat of

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[32] Andres Serrano, lecture, Kodak Lecture Series, Ryerson University, Toronto, 12 Mar. 2004.
[33] Wendy Steiner, "Introduction, Below Skin Deep," <u>Andres Serrano: Works</u> 11.

digital alteration but of deft handling of the analog medium, displayed to full benefit by the cibachrome developing-printing process, which is known for reproducing transparencies with exquisite detail and sumptuous colour at a large scale. Serrano's virtuosity in these works, and all the others in <u>The Morgue</u> series, is apparent in the jewel-like colours and subtle tonal variations and textures of skin (especially on the skin of drowning victims), the noble grace of some of the extremities (the hands and feet in particular), the art-historical references in the *chiaroscuro* modeling of flesh by golden light and the glorious "heroism"[34] forged by the monumental scale of the works. All these aesthetic effects have been noted to maintain the viewer in a tension-filled, largely seductive, relationship with the overall effect of the images, which is one of morbidity and fearful ruptures to the body's cohesion. Much of the interest in Serrano's work arises from his aesthetic exploration of the visual potential of the skin surfaces and the incident conveyed by them: the polychrome flesh, like so much stained fabric and the way it is punctuated by hairs, wounds, crevices and the body fluids oozing from wounds.

First, in contrast to other art-historians who have focused on the formal qualities of Serrano's work, I will analyze the gendered manifestations that are the result of his photographic paradigm and to consider the effects the works' titles have on the dead subjects, i.e. whether titling the work after the manner of death rather than with a proper name does a favour or a disservice to the dead. I will also explore the substantial effects of the visual paradigm that are evoked by the image (and how the camera gaze is itself a wounding manner of touch). Informing this discussion are the viewpoints of feminist theorists who speak to the heightened predisposition of dead, female subjects to suffer violent distortions of identity by the terms of representation.

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[34] Serrano's stated intention regarding the chosen monumental scale, <u>Andres Serrano: Works</u> 37.

That a representation of a dying or a dead subject could inflict posthumous violence

is an argument made by Elisabeth Bronfen, who discusses how artistic representations of

dead, female individuals, in addition to the art-historical discourses about them,

frequently ignore the material reality of the pain endured by the dying subject by reading

the works as an almost exclusive accomplishment of *the artist* facing "death in

general."[35] Bronfen makes clear why this would be important in artistic representations

when she highlights what the stakes are if the artist or critic occludes the biographic

specificity of the dead: the material, experiential reality of dying is ignored and the death,

therefore, is de-individualized.[36] Bronfen identifies the following ways in which this

violence of representation is enacted: by the subtle devaluation of the subject's

biographical specificity and her posthumous right to privacy and by ignoring the

interpersonal relationship between artist and that subject that motivated the works, both

of which work to augment the status of the artist and deflect attention away from the

experience of the subject of representation. Bronfen's study offers an important precedent

to demonstrate a concern for the actual, dying or dead subject behind the representation

and whether or not the historical, material and experiential specificity that would inform

an understanding of her identity is "effaced" by an art-historical apparatus that focuses

solely on the artist's rendition.[37] Bronfen asserts the importance of not "fictionalizing"

the personal and material specificity of a known individual and not allegorizing the death

as an opportunity for an artist to confront metaphysical or existential questions of "the

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[35] Elisabeth Bronfen discussing Jura Brüschweiler's essay in her, "Violence of Representation –
Representation of Violence," Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic (Manchester:
Manchester UP, 1992) 49.
[36] Bronfen 39-55.
[37] Bronfen 51.

absolute."[38] What advance misconceptions towards the dead or lingering, historical attitudes about morgues would set a stage so that Serrano's furtive engagement with the corpses in <u>The Morgue</u> remains unquestioned or even celebrated as a public service to offer a generalized (if aestheticized) look at the mysteries of death rather than specific, dead subjects?

Many of the previously-mentioned, formal elements situate Serrano's work in relation to the history of realism as it has developed in relation to the body in Western painting. That the works in <u>The Morgue</u> are artistic feats finding beauty in the macabre rather than works involving highly-restricted material circumstances is expressed by Douglas in her defence of Serrano's work: "Serrano's practice is, fundamentally, admittedly, an aestheticization of death."[39] Douglas's view offers an interpretation of Serrano's accomplishment along the criteria identified by Bronfen as a look at *death in general*. While Bronfen reads the representational tendency to subsume facets of the dead's individual identity under the preponderance of the general image of death as a negative effect, Douglas has, as mentioned, interpreted Serrano's approach to <u>The Morgue</u> in precisely these terms and, in fact, invokes Serrano's de-individualization of the corpse as a defence against critics' charges that this work is exploitative: "Serrano speaks of representation and then of social powers and cultural bodies rather than of individuals who are dead or alive. The deaths in question are embedded in, and licensed by, social systems of discourse and power, as such, they are merely texts [. . .]."[40] Comparing Serrano's work to Cindy Sherman's <u>Sex Pictures</u> (1992), a similarly large-scale series of colour photographs of uncanny, grotesquely-assembled doll-figures called

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[38] Bronfen 48.
[39] Douglas 14.
[40] Douglas 12.

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"photographed replicants," Douglas fails to take into account the ethical implications of the reality of the corpses in The Morgue, in favour of an exploration of the discourse of visuality: "Serrano's practice must be acknowledged, after all, as both productive and reproductive of postmodernism's s(t)imulations and seductions."[41] The corpses in Serrano's work are themselves, of course, not simulated but *real*. Douglas's view overlooks how Serrano's heavy investment in the analog medium is used to reproduce the corpses. The *frisson* of Serrano's work, unlike that of Sherman, is derived precisely from the fact that the corpses are real rather than an inventive assembly of mannequins in the studio. In my view, these corpses are neither dolls nor merely texts but the physical remains of subjects whose subjectivities, despite and perhaps *due to* their de-individualization, continue to be performed in ways that are significant and specific.

I return to some details of the aforementioned study made by Bronfen, who analyzes a body of works on paper by the Swiss artist Ferdinand Hodler, who, in 1914-15, painted and sketched the demise and death due to cancer of his lover and mistress Valentine Godé-Darel. In particular, Bronfen takes issue with the subtle devaluation of the subjectivity of the woman at the level of the proper name enacted by the art-historical texts in which the dying subject is referred to by the familiar "Valentine" rather than by her surname. Bronfen points out that in the text, Godé-Darel's historical specificity is altogether replaced with the "non-personal signifiers, 'femininity,' 'vulnerability,' 'mortality,'" which replace the "historical individual" with an essentialized diminution of her.[42] Bronfen considers the art-historical sleuth work of "uncovering" the biographic identity of Godé-Darel and posthumously making public her private relationship to Hodel

[41] Douglas 15.
[42] Bronfen 48.

(as mistress and mother of his illegitimate child) a violation of her privacy. Bronfen

brings to light a complex issue, for while numerous details identify Godé-Darel as a

particular individual, whose countenance, proper name, geographic location, personal

relationships, manner and date of death *are* revealed, what becomes challenging in the

context of Serrano's work is how to approach representations of figures who have also

died real deaths, but whose names, biographies, personal connections are *not* identified.

Does the work of occluding the proper name or other personal details of the

deceased work ethically to "protect" the identity of the dead, or conversely, does this

occlusion contort the identity of the deceased? This nominal identity can always take

divergent directions, as with the title Jane Doe, Killed by Police, for example, which will

leave her (at least as a work within this series) with the "identity" of the unknown

because her corpse was not identified with a proper name. Yet, as an unidentified corpse,

she is not the universal, democratic, familiar "everywoman," as was the effect of

anonymity with the "Falling Man," who in his "everyman" status, fostered viewer

identification: she is decidedly other. Not only does she remain criminalized but also, in

her lack of representation by surrogates or family members, she is *unclaimed* in a manner

that emphasizes disidentification; to claim her would be potentially to implicate oneself

in the crime because she was sought by police and apprehended in a stolen vehicle. Her

"Jane Doe" status reduces her to the realm of the unloved, the bodies that remain in the

morgue freezer for months – without a *chiffonier* figure to either gather the remains or to

advocate on her behalf, to clear her "name" from its criminal element. For the forensic

professionals working on her case to grant her an identity associated with a proper name,

to uncover her "true" self, her corpse in its "Jane Doe" status presents the sad cliché of

the eternal feminine as identified by Luce Irigaray and, before her, Simone de Beauvoir: universal yet a mystery to be solved by the men of science.[43]

The next set of issues I wish to address with regards to <u>Jane Doe: Killed by Police</u> could be described in terms relating visuality to the "burden of portraiture," a function that is exaggerated by a repressive use of the photographic medium, which holds a historic resonance, as well as by the gaze of the camera.[44] Despite the advanced state of decay evident on the face of <u>Jane Doe</u>, curator Daniel Arasse has referred to this work as a "portrait," an ironic term to refer to a figure with a generic "name" signifying nothing more than the fact of her anonymity.[45] Arasse is referring, of course, to the idea that by exposing her face, her identity *is* made visible.

Photographic historian Alan Sekula has outlined two streams of "instrumental" uses of photography that came into effect in the nineteenth century, both, he suggests, functioning in terms of portraiture, although in widely disparate ways, which he describes as "a double system: a system of representation capable of functioning both *honorifically* and *repressively*."[46] The use of photography to advance the increasing individualization of the rising petit-bourgeois class in order to better realize the "self" best describes the honorific uses of the medium. Sekula's study, however, is largely concerned with repressive uses of the medium, evident in institutional deployment of it as a tool of state "social regulation," informed by physiognomy and phrenology that sought to map facial, cranial and other features of the body as sources of statistical analysis, in order to evoke

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[43] Luce Irigaray, "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry," <u>Sepculum of the Other Woman</u>, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 13-129; Simone de Beauvoir, "Myth and Reality," <u>The Second Sex</u>, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage-Random, 1974) 285-297.
[44] I refer here to John Tagg, <u>The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories</u> (Houndsmill: MacMillan,1985).
[45] Arasse n.p.
[46] Sekula 6.

evidence of moral, intellectual or social degeneracy of the person as a *type* often

representative of a larger group. He shows how the repressive uses of the medium were

invoked with special vigour in the identification and codification of "the criminal body"

and this framework is instructive in understanding how the historic legacy of

photography's uses (especially when aimed at the head and face, as portraiture does)

constructs certain contemporary bodies as criminal. Sekula brings one's attention to how

phrenology and physiognomy contributed to the nineteenth-century construction of the

"criminal body" as an entity that was believed to be identified with scientific accuracy:

"In the almost exclusive emphasis on the head and face we can discover the idealist

secret lurking at the heart of these putatively materialist sciences."[47]

Both Sekula and Tagg have shown that, in the nineteenth-century, especially in

England where the new "sciences" of phrenology and physiognomy were being put to use

for social purposes, having one's face photographed for prison or asylum records enacted

a repression of the subject, who effectively became surveilled and archived by the

codifying machinery of institutions.[48] In other words, photography holds a proclivity to

be used in an instrumental way to advance institutional expectations about a person's

identity by projecting state imaginings onto the body, in particular onto the face, that are

then reified as evidentiary by the image itself. Calling it "the silence that silences,"

Sekula identifies the reductive imperatives of photography when used for criminal or

class "identification," as evicting the voice from the subject in favour of the visual

information gleaned from the facial image, so that the mug shot is made to speak on

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[47] Sekula 12.
[48] Tagg (1986); Sekula (1986).

behalf of the subject.[49] That the visual-textual machinations of the state were substituted for any verbal defences or "multiple biographies" that could be offered from the point of view of the subject so surveilled is also noted by Tagg.[50]

Because this study is concerned with an ethical means of representation for the dying and the dead and because the photographic image so readily lends itself to an essentialized view of the deceased, Sekula's and Tagg's sensitivity towards the reduced possibilities for the agency of the subject when photographed instrumentally is instructive in bringing awareness of the power of photography to silence and "arrest" the point of view of the subject, an effect that would become tautological with a corpse, the material remains of a subject already silent, still and often morphologically fragmented.[51] Under these circumstances, it becomes increasingly difficult to achieve an honorific image of the dead, due to their prior eviction from the agency of the voice or the ability to structure their own representations. If photography is aimed at the head or facial features of a dead subject when already surrounded by the institutional connotation that would, in advance, position the deceased as a "criminal body," then extra measures are needed if one wishes to represent the dead in a non-violent way, i.e. without automatically or unwittingly descending into a repressive representation.

The most striking aspect of <u>Jane Doe, Killed by Police</u> revolves around the woman's sightless eyes, whose submersion into her face emphasizes her bone structure making her appear Neanderthal or sub-human. Among all the works, <u>Jane Doe</u> is the only one in which a woman's eyes are visible, suggesting Serrano's attraction to this particular instance of sightlessness, the deformity of her *look*. This introduces a significant

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[49] Sekula 6.
[50] Tagg 11.
[51] Sekula 7.

discourse of power relations into Serrano's series, tied to visuality and best explained

with recourse to Jacques Lacan's theory of the gaze, from his <u>The Four Fundamental</u>

<u>Concepts of Psychoanalysis</u> (1964). Lacan suggests that certain power structures

involved in looking are inherently threatening and forge a separation between the self and

the other in the visual register that, if considered alongside the effects of the medium and

the connotative context of the representation, may affect a further mastery over subjects

already so subdued.[52] In fact, Lacan conceives of the gaze as closely aligned with the

function of visual representation as, upon entering this field, the subject is made into an

image and states significantly: "I am *photo-graphed*."[53] Many theorists remind one that

Lacan's theory of the gaze situates it as residing not within the subject but rather in the

world, as an environment that exceeds and pre-exists the subject, who in sight is thus

opaque, no longer simply the looker, but the looked-at.[54] This helps to define the

psychoanalytic notion of subjectivity as being constituted by the perception of another's,

imagined, outside point of view. In other words, subjectivity is prone to the splitting and

the reversal of positions between seer and seen, self and other, subject and object. The

downside to the agency inherent within Lacan's gaze, however, is that the subject can be

positioned as *caught* within this external field that has control over him, in which his own

sense of mastery of his surroundings is reduced because he is visible to others.

Through a Lacanian interpretive schema, film theoretician Kaja Silverman mentions

the ambivalent qualities of the "camera/gaze's functions" in relation to the performance

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[52] Jacques Lacan, <u>The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis</u>, trans. Alan Sheridan. ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London: Penguin, 1986).

[53] Lacan 106.

[54] Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," <u>The Art Bulletin</u> (June 1991): 174-208; Hal Foster, <u>The Return of the Real</u> (Cambridge: MIT P, 1996); Diana Fuss, "Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look," <u>Critical Inquiry</u> (1992): 713-737; Berkeley Kaite, <u>Pornography and Difference</u> (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995); Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," <u>Screen</u> (Autumn 1975): 6-18; Kaja Silverman, <u>Threshold of the Visible World</u> (New York: Routledge, 1996).

of subjectivity as fostering "its 'memorializing' and its 'mortifying' effects," which she

views as available for dismantling or, at least, interrogating by artists.[55] Silverman

attributes a great power to the gaze as that which confirms or denies one's sense of self as

an *image* to be seen and highlights the powerful implications of subjectivity residing in

visual representations: "The gaze is the 'unapprehensible' agency through which we are

socially ratified or negated as spectacle."[56] Silverman's insights into the linked potential

within psychoanalytic paradigms of visuality to take either direction, for identifications or

misidentifications, coupled with Sekula's distinction of two "poles of portrait practice,"

will offer a clarifying, if admittedly polarizing framework through which one can proceed

to a deeper analysis of the visual paradigm at work in Serrano's practice, which should

now be situated on the repressive, mortifying end of the spectrum.

The workings of Lacan's gaze are at play here in the sense that the dead subject in

Jane Doe, Killed by Police *cannot* access it to claim a look from her own perspective.

The disintegration of her eyes into the sockets makes impossible even the imagined

workings of the gaze where her eyes may once have looked out at the viewer from within

the frame. The cycle of violence becomes complete by the photographic representation

whose precision of focus mimetically echoes the gunshot wound clearly evident just

above her ear: the bloodied, black hole into which her identity is engulfed. Serrano's Jane

Doe, Killed by Police plays upon the agency of the gaze but only to emphasize the extent

to which she is lacking this, denied access to the intersubjectivity it fosters. As with

Knifed to Death I and II, this paradox is conveyed in a tautological way: just as Serrano

focused on the dead, senseless hands that could no longer feel the touch of the ink on its

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[55] Silverman 137.
[56] Silverman 133, quoting Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts 83.

fingertips, so with Jane Doe, Killed by Police, he focuses on the sunken eyes, frozen by the work of photography, but also "blind" in her mortality, unable to acknowledge the penetrating look of the viewer.

Many artists and theorists have pointed out how, despite the Lacanian gaze offering a sense of agency,[57] becoming caught within it and objectified by it is a particular affliction for *female* subjects. In her sightlessness, Jane Doe is excluded from any reciprocity the gaze may offer or any agency she may claim from manipulating her own look for imagined spectators, a situation exaggerated by her profile disposition, so that looks of the viewer only "hit the side of [her] face," functioning much like the assault of visibility that burdens female subjects, as Barbara Kruger points out in her photo-text montage from 1981 of the same name, in which one sees a profile of a sculpted female head, cropped at a similarly close range. About Kruger's work, art historian Kate Linker writes, "Thus, when Kruger collages the words 'Your gaze hits the size of my face' alongside the image of a stone female portrait head, she may be referring to the power of the gaze to arrest – literally petrify – its object (a tactic that Craig Owens has described as the 'Medusa effect.')"[58] The reference to Medusa is apt with regards to Jane Doe, Killed by Police because her untamed hair resembles the snakes that writhe on the head of the goddess, a figure that, due to her power within the gaze to turn to stone any man that looks her way, may at first appear to grant the image a layer of agency.

Yet, in a Freudian reading, Bronfen has pointed out how the Medusa figure is another paradigm that conflates woman with death, a figure that must be subdued by

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[57] Amelia Jones proposes that Marcel Duchamp's photographic self-portraits in drag are instances of postmodern gender performativity, she points to the way Duchamp's masquerade invokes Lacan's gaze as "identity-constituting." Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 133.
[58] Kate Linker, Love For Sale: The Words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger (New York: Abrams, 1990).

decapitation, an act that offsets her own castrating powers. The snakes on her head are excessively phallic symbols of manifold little penises whose castrating power reinforces that of Medusa's look. Bronfen points out how the Medusa myth ultimately reduces any deadly powers of woman attributed to the visual register, where she could emit deadly looks: "In precisely this conjunction of monstrous 'less than whole' and tropic replacement as 'excess,'" woman serves to demarcate a cultural system as well as marking its vanishing point, its moment of failure."[59] The Medusa myth is a tale well explained through psychoanalytic models that attribute castration anxiety to the sight of the female body, which becomes paradigmatic of the layered bereavements, threats, loss and lack that occur in the visual realm to undermine cohesive (male) subjectivity.

That <u>Jane Doe</u> is represented in profile and in a *recumbent* position doubly makes evident Serrano's repetition of the feminized, negative qualities of binaristic terms such as "passive" and "surveyed," the object so easily overtaken by the masterful power of the filmic gaze which, as Linker points out, has this tendency to position women as "static or "supine."[60] Yet in Serrano's instance the prey was an especially easy target, for she was already supine and still, making the petrifying work of the photographic medium superfluous. The reclining, dead figure is, according to Bronfen, an ancient image of vanquished masculinity, i.e. one in which the soldier killed in battle is *feminized* in a binary structure that is pertinent to the present discussion, where, not surprisingly, dead bodies are frequently represented in this recumbent format: "The dead body is the passive, horizontal position, cut down, fallen, while the survivor stands erect, imbued

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[59] Bronfen 70.
[60] Linker 62

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with a feeling of superiority."[61] Therefore, <u>Jane Doe, Killed by Police</u> functions as a

horrific image of the castrating woman, but one who has been cut down (an effect caused

also by the close range of the composition as well as the sense of decapitation arising

from the cropping of the photograph). She is mythologized, spectacularized and

ultimately disarmed of her arresting gaze (or fetish-object accoutrements that could

perform its function for her) – dismembered so the male viewer can remain

morphologically "whole" and so his looks can roam freely.

Perhaps Serrano felt he could expose the facial features of <u>Jane Doe</u> because, at this

stage of decomposition, they would no longer hold any roots to any "depths" of her

identity. The decaying skin surface, green, blue, yellow, red and brown, flaking off and

becoming unrecognizable, does not solicit the touch of the viewer but rebuffs it and

offers a repellent surface that functions to suggest an underlying corruption. According to

Bronfen, the historical association of femininity with moral decay traces a lineage back to

the Biblical figure of Eve, whose carnal deceptions are a foil for the disembodied purity

of the Virgin Mary:

> Woman is conceived as ornament, artifice or decoration, so that death as corruption,
> division or duplication presides in two opposed realms which are both associated
> with the feminine; firstly in weakness, vulnerability and corruptibility of the flesh,
> and secondly in the artificial clothes and signs that supplement the naked body of
> nature.[62]

The skin of <u>Jane Doe</u>, therefore, exists as a death mask and as such, offers an identity

layered with signification in which the age-old links between femininity, decay and

underlying moral corruption are revealed. Joan Rivière's notion of "womanliness as

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[61] Bronfen 65.
[62] Bronfen 68-69.

masquerade" takes on a sinister meaning here.[63] This subversive agency, whereby woman

exaggerates her femininity to disguise her underlying "masculine" intellectual power so

as not to threaten patriarchal order, accents the superficial in order to hide the underlying

strength of woman's "identity." The mottled, spotted skin creates an emblem of

pathological decay in which various rings also take on implicitly ideological overtones if

one takes into account how the lesions of Kaposi's sarcoma have been used to stigmatize

AIDS patients in contemporary times.[64] In the Enlightenment era, the dark facial spots of

syphilis that are read as visual evidence of an internal moral licentiousness are seen in

William Hogarth's <u>Marriage à la Mode</u> (1742), a satirical cycle of graphics. The horrific

mask that <u>Jane Doe</u> wears appears to be the only recourse to agency she has to disguise

herself, to shield herself from this unnatural exposure through the workings of Serrano's

look. Photographic historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau makes clear that giving one's

masqueraded self to be seen through access to the gaze, especially in a manner that plays

upon femininity, is no guarantee of self-authentification.[65] <u>Jane Doe</u>'s "masquerade" is

ultimately an entirely false agency as it is not put to the service of making herself an

image after *her own* devices but structured in advance by the masculinist,

heteronormative culture through which the image is read. If, as Bronfen notes in her

critical analysis of the cultural links between femininity and death, "feminine beauty and

decoration mask decay," then the repulsiveness of the decaying skin surface in <u>Jane Doe,</u>

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[63] Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," <u>Formations of Fantasy</u>, ed. Victor Burgin (New York: Routledge, 1986) 35-44.

[64] Katherine Park, "Kimberly Bergalis, AIDS and the Plague Metaphor," <u>Media Spectacles</u>, ed. Marjorie Garber, Jann Matlock, and Rebecca Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 1993) 239.

[65] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," <u>October</u> 39 (1986): 65-108.

Killed by Police serves only to unmask the misogyny of this trope that taints femininity in representation.[66]

Serrano's image of Jane Doe, therefore, is one that conflates her with her own death, as a visual reification of this apparently underlying corruption: the charade of her femininity is hidden and revealed at the same time by the process of biological decay brought to the surface to function as the mask it's supposed to conceal. Any beauty her skin may have conveyed in life is a veil that has been lifted by the photographic gaze. The superficial mask of sexual difference has turned fatal, for by confusing and concealing her biographic identity, it also offers a debased identity in its place. This is not to suggest that Serrano's photographs deliver the image of the woman through recourse to photographic transparency, but work to re-present the figure, after Paolo Fabrii's insight offered in relation to Serrano's The Morgue: "To portray is to distort ('to deliberately change something')."[67] While some critics have defended The Morgue against charges of exploitation by stating that he covered the faces of the dead, the instance in which he does represent the female face is noteworthy because it depicts such grotesque transformations as to make the dead, on one hand unrecognizable, but on the other hand more monstrous, which has cultural implications for the female to suggest not only biological deformities, but also moral degradation.

To offer a brief summary of the proposals that I have made so far, I suggest that by exposing the face of the dead, a face so badly decomposing that even the racial identity cannot be discerned, a form of anonymity that is inherently problematic is offered. On the one hand, Bronfen suggests that the visualization of the individual face of a dying woman

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[66] Bronfen 68.
[67] Fabrii 30.

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offers resistance to the art-historical tendency to "fictionalize" or universalize a particular death, which occurs when the artist looks "over her body" rather than into her face, the results of which would transform the dead into the more monumental "death itself."[68] On the other hand, Tagg's and Sekula's research point to reasons why a historical subject would want to avoid the burden of an institutional photographic "portrait." In Serrano's Jane Doe, Killed by Police, in place of biographic identity, a "mask" of decaying skin debases the subject by suggesting a universalizing, misogynistic trope of femininity's underlying link to death. While some contemporary theories of visuality suggest value in images of the face as holding the agency of eyes to re-turn masterful looks, the graphic representation of a dead face that in some ways suggests the genre of portraiture can offer another set of problems, layering identity with the burden of criminality – directed as much by the barrel of the gun as by a camera gaze positioned with such intensity toward the side of her face.

In the next pages, I will be exploring a trio of related works that show other, debilitating meanings for the subjectivity related to the female corpse that emerges in instances where the face has been covered up. I will inquire as to what other forms of identity come into play when the face is not shown? The following, three works also make manifest the consequences for a dead female who is subject to a violent, invasive type of camera gaze, in which the sense of touch permeates the visual paradigm and is evident, as in Knifed to Death I and II, on the skin surfaces and the position of the hands and arms, but in a different way.

Because the face of the corpse is entirely hidden in Rat Poison Suicide I [Fig. 16], it has been one of the works to lead critics to say that Serrano has shielded the identity of

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[68] Bronfen 49.

the dead from violation: "Found in the freezer after rigor mortis had set in, she is shown with her head covered to protect her identity and her arms raised in the air."[69] Due to the way in which Serrano fragments the figure and names the work after a severely-annotated version of the cause of death, he creates a comic-book awareness of the circumstances surrounding her death. The reduction of the multi-faceted qualities of the woman's subjectivity down to the information conveyed by the title of the work, a cipher of toxicity taken from a toe-tag or a forensic report, is repeated in the position assumed by her body in death. The position, with arms raised up stiffly and both hands clenched in fists, is emphasized by the dramatic, Caravaggesque lighting from a hidden source behind her head, which is draped with a sheet and entirely obscured by shadow. Serrano's strategic spot-lighting of her hands and arms, to the elimination of any descriptive sense of the gurney, the floor, the ceiling or the morgue's general background – as if the corpse exists only for his and the viewer's vision – forces a deformed view of her body to come under scrutiny. These elements of lighting and position contribute to a view of the body enacting a grotesque form of mimesis that reflects the substance that killed her. That the specific pathology of the dead is performed through the morphology of her body to circumscribe her identity along the lines of the lowly, disease-ridden pest becomes magnified according to a gendered framework when one takes into consideration Bronfen's assertion that "feminization of demonised flesh is the material representation of alterity, of Woman as an animal creature."[70]

The rat poison has transformed her body into a vermin-like creature in rigor mortis so that her hands, like claws rising from the body into the light, make evident the goose-

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[69] Hobbs 42.
[70] Bronfen 68.

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bumps on the skin of her left arm. This detail of the goose-bumps gives the body a

reactive life after death to transform the visual field into a drama of shock that is also

inscribed by touch. A visual pun is offered whereby the creeping sensation that arises is

less from the viewer's experience seeing a body in this condition than from the corpse

itself, which appears frightened or startled by being seen. By completely obscuring her

face and head, Serrano contrives a figure that is monstrous, a quality that plays upon a

history of what was considered to be anomalously-embodied femininity, which as Rosi

Braidotti points out, is closely linked with the definition of the pathological in the

biological sciences.[71] While there is a frozen quality to the corpse that is exaggerated by

its public display, like a curiosity under glass or stuffed, anatomical specimen unsheathed

for appraisal,[72] the goose-bumps on her skin are more powerful in *animating* the corpse,

as if it is recoiling in surprise or disgust from the viewer's look or the pathologist's touch.

If the textured quality to her skin, evoked by the goose-bumps, elicits the sense of touch,

it does so by suggesting that the viewer's look is a manner of contact that repels.

Perverse eroticism lingers in the sliver of white lace brassière that peeks from

behind the arms in Rat Poison Suicide I, to hint at a licentiousness that was common to

the Parisian morgue of the nineteenth-century, which Bertherat describes as an

environment of permissiveness in which some of the taboos toward the body that were

common to the era were loosened, especially those surrounding sexuality – enhanced by

the partial nakedness of some of the corpses.[73] According to Bertherat, an erotic

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[71] Rosi Braidotti, "Mothers, Monsters and Machines," Nomadic Subjects (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 75-94.

[72] For an anthology of ideas related to visual culture, display, the museum and the history of medicine as well as other areas, see Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen, ed., Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances (Seattle: Bay P, 1995). On eighteenth-century female wax cadavers for medical study that are displayed under glass, also see Bronfen, "Bodies on Display," Over Her 95-109.

[73] Bertherat 31.

fascination is present in much of the literature describing the female cadavers that weren't bloated by drowning or disfigured by suicide, and some accounts suggest that the morgue was an arena in which adolescents could obtain "une sorte d'éducation sexuelle perverse."[74] In light of the historical information provided by Bertherat, despite that in Rat Poison Suicide I, it is the artist and by extension the viewer who are voyeurs to this unauthorized spectacle, the sense of moral perversion is displaced onto her figure. The defensive position of her arms and fists, as if warding off the intrusive look of the viewer, suggests that her own visibility within the gaze is a form of assault. Despite this, agency is attributed to the corpse, due to (ironically) the clenched hands and the antagonistic crossing of the arms (as if putting up a fight), suggesting a posthumous defiance if not against her own demise, then against the terms of visuality to which she becomes subject in the photograph.

Because one is not provided information as to the personal, psychological, familial, physical or economic chain of events that led to this death, Rat Poison Suicide I remains as distanced from the concrete reality of the subject's former life as it is distanced from the viewer in the bizarre coincidences of pathology that have surfaced in the corpse's position. Sander Gilman identifies the way social stereotypes function along binaristic lines and has delineated the various forms of "pathology" that adhere to deviations from the norms of race, class, ethnicity, body morphology and health (particularly mental health), constructing attributions that stigmatize certain individuals in terms of a debased *morality*: "The very concept of pathology is a line drawn between the 'good' and the

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[74] Bertherat 31.

'bad.'"[75] Despite attributing few of the deaths in The Morgue to illness, a view of these

corpses as inherently pathological is quite strong, due to the various forms of linked

"depravity" that enshroud them – especially suicide and violent crime. According to

Gilman: "Of all the models of pathology, one of the most powerful is mental illness. [. . .]

Often associated with violence (including aggressive sexual acts), the mad are perceived

as the antithesis to the control and reason that define the self."[76] That the morgue context

puts all the corpses under suspicion compounds one form of pathology upon another in

this image (layering violence, sexuality and death by suicide) and makes them speak

through the body, coagulating pathology as the body's morphology so that the corpse,

despite being faceless, is made to perform its internal "pathologies" in a way that is

closely aligned to the (debunked) tenets of phrenology and physiognomy.

Rat Poison Suicide I forms part of a suite of three related works, where the other

two show different views of the same corpse. When seen as a whole, the trio offers an

unprecedented tour of a headless, violently-fragmented body and introduces a temporal

element because Serrano shows the corpse "before and after" the autopsy procedure. Rat

Poison Suicide II is an extremely close, horizontal view of the woman's foot cropped

from the ankle down to the tips of the toes [Fig. 17]. This club-like, fleshy mass, resting

upon an unzipped, fluid-speckled body bag suggests a ritual unveiling but also reminds

the viewer of the morgue context, lest one think this foot is a study taken from a live

model. The body bag detail also implicates the artist in the work of handling and

manipulating the corpse – because it has been unzipped *by* someone. There is little

definition towards the ankle and the heel area of the foot and, on closer inspection, the

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[75] Sander Gilman, Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985) 23.
[76] Gilman 23.

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ankle appears swollen, even bulbous, as if the body's fluid has shifted to settle there. Across the top of the foot there is a deep slash that does not bleed, but tautly, provocatively gapes open, as if lips about to speak.

The focus of <u>Rat Poison Suicide, II</u> is less the foot than the wound, which presents the focal point of the image, the flesh merely offering the canvas for its appearance like a streak to mar the skin's surface. Although the cut is dry (perhaps cleaned up by the pathologist), the location of the cut and Serrano's focus on it, much like the wounds on the wrists seen in <u>Knifed to Death I</u> and <u>II</u>, distinctly suggests the iconic wounds Christ endured from the Crucifixion, so often made visible in the history of Western painting. The unusual ocular fixation on the foot of the corpse recalls the novel, foreshortened perspective used by Andrea Mantegna in 1466 to represent the <u>Lamentation of the Dead Christ</u>, such that the viewer has the peculiar opportunity to view the soles of Christ's feet, whose wounds from the nails are displayed prominently. The classical treatment of the body in Mantegna's work (eliding any gruesome details that would distort the beauty and integrity of Christ's figure), as well as the humanism that inspired it, is not completely absent from Serrano's work. Perhaps the iconic resonance of the wounded, mortal body lingers but with <u>Rat Poison Suicide, II</u>, if one takes into consideration the apparent sex of the corpse, a less reverential and more injurious meaning emerges.

In light of art historian Jane Blocker's reading of body artist Hannah Wilke's <u>S.O.S. Scarification Object Series</u> (1974-82), where loop-shaped pieces of chewed gum were used to adorn the artist's naked body, its linkage of the orifices of the female body (namely, "mouth/labia/wound/scar") takes on somatic resonance indicating the pain often

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involved in the female's ability to express herself.[77] Following Blocker's insight that the wound and the mouth are painfully-associated vehicles of speaking on the female body, the foot of <u>Rat Poison Suicide II</u> offers a wounded means of intersubjectivity with the dead. In lieu of the dialogic possibilities that would be suggested by a facial mouth, which offers a means to speak about one's own pain, a cut is depicted that will never heal but remain permanently open, offering merely an in-road to violation by the viewer's look. The intensity of Serrano's focus on the wound suggests that the camera eye has also contributed to this incision, which in turn guides the look of the viewer to touch her only here, at this tender, vulnerable "opening." By the artist's cropping the foot so radically from the rest of the body, the only entry the viewer has to the subjectivity of the woman and to the material, biographic conditions that inform her present condition are *through* the wound. To recognize her is also to penetrate her painfully and visually, to open up her wounds – without reciprocity, without the possibility for her point of view to emerge. What perspective does the cut offer to the dead to express identity but the incidental, anecdotal injury that came to mark her, probably the result of her body's thrashing while the toxin took effect in her dying body? No other understanding of her identity is made possible except that she has been mortally wounded by rat poison.

When viewed sequentially, the suite of three images take on a narrative quality because <u>Rat Poison Suicide III</u> presents a view of the body after the post-mortem examination [Fig. 18]. This is made evident by the massive incision on the length of the woman's naked torso, from throat to genitals, brutally sewn closed to resemble the rungs of a ladder. Displayed from a lateral perspective between her truncated thighs, the

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[77] Jane Blocker, <u>What the Body Cost: Desire, History, and Performance</u> (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004) 41.

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viewer's look starts at the vagina and is directed over the torso by the incision itself, which is crowned by the body bag covering her face. The work therefore completes the series by offering "closure" to the experiences of the corpse in the morgue, suturing (if not seamlessly) the body through a series of views to represent all her extremities with the exception of her head. The white bra from the first image has been removed and the body bag is opened to frame the corpse, which is at once shrouded and uncovered by Serrano's manipulation of the drapery. The white sheet is rolled up over her face and then parted at the sides to fall around the figure's back to suggest, in a hideous way, the veil of a bride. The foreshortened perspective here speaks directly to the position of the corpse of Mantegna's <u>Lamentation of the Dead Christ</u> but without any sense of classicism because the body only begins at the thighs and is then decapitated by the hooding of the body bag, so that the camera's focus is centralized on the vagina and, by way of the post-mortem scar, along a trajectory that "arrives" at the knot of fabric offered in place of the missing head – the literalization of a vanishing point.

Because the woman's face has been occluded in favour of a grossly-invasive view of her pubic region, the deceased is represented no longer as subject but as a spectacular, pathologized display of her sex. As such, she becomes another image in the historical legacy of masculinist representations of female genitalia, fragmented from the rest of the body and easily penetrated, in a way that closely recalls Gustave Courbet's <u>L'Origine du Monde</u> (1866) as well as Marcel Duchamp's <u>Étant données</u> (1946-66).[78] This view is supported by Susan Gubar's interpretation of René Magritte's surrealist painting <u>Le Viol</u> (1947), an equally literal defacing of a woman by her sexual parts, in which the breasts

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[78] On these two works, see Jones, <u>Postmodernism</u> 191-198; and Linda Nochlin, "The Origin Without an Original," <u>October</u> 37 (1986) 76-86.

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stand in for the eyes and the vagina replaces the mouth – a violent, fetishized

fragmentation not only of the female figure but also of her subjectivity, whereby the artist

"rapes the woman whose portrait he paints."[79] In its deadness, facelessness, "sawn off

legs" and "exposed pudendae," Serrano's anterior perspective in Rat Poison Suicide, III

resembles the medical illustrations of gravid uteruses from the eighteenth century

described by Petherbridge, such as those found in William Hunter's atlas drawn by Jan

van Riem.[80] While Petherbridge views the openness of the gravid uterus drawings as

representations of the "absent body" of the woman, I would argue that Serrano's Rat

Poison Suicide III presents an "all body" view of woman, not sliced open but sewn

closed. The emphasis on the sewn-up skin of the corpse (an unseemly seam), evokes

touch in a manner resembling Rat Poison Suicide II, because it structures the corpse by

an excessive vulnerability. While the painful-looking "incision-closure" appears to

confine the subjectivity of the woman to the bluntness of a body so that she is entrapped

by it, at the same time, Serrano's photographic approach exposes her in a disturbing way

– by prodding her and prying her open for view.

    The sense of indecency surrounding the view in Rat Poison Suicide, III cannot be

considered a clear case of pornographic display because of the rigidity of the closed

thighs and the tightly-clenched fists, which rest on the jutting hip bones and act as gate-

keepers of her own corpse. This aspect of the body, coupled with her sewn-up "insides,"

seem to refuse the camera's eye and suggest an attempt to ward off any approach, which

goes against the visual paradigms in commercial, print pornography in which the model

acknowledges and even beckons the viewer's approach by her gaze and the open position

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[79] Susan Gubar, "Representing Pornography: Feminism, Criticism, and Depictions of Female Violation."
Critical Inquiry XIII.4 (1987) 723.
[80] Petherbridge 84-86.

of her body.[81] Serrano's corpse doesn't appear to give herself to be seen, nor does she appear complicit in the excessive visuality of the photographic paradigm through which the viewer gains access to her. Judging from the flattened position of her arms, the rigor mortis has been broken and made compliant by the work of the morgue staff so that the arms now hug her sides. Yet the clenched fists are the loci where the dead's loss of agency appears to be resisted from beyond the grave, as if expressing posthumous anger that her best defences have been subdued. These hands, closed in gestures of guarded interiority and white-knuckled refusal (and, as such, different from the languid openness of the hands in Knifed to Death I and II), offer the corpse a singular degree of agency, which counters the clinical invasion of her corpse as well as the camera's visualization of its aftermath. The clenched fists offer some manner of embodied, intersubjective agency to the dead, as if she were aware of the trials her corpse endures, appearing to offset the silencing of the voice and lack of access to the gaze enacted by Serrano's draping of the face.

In terms of Fabrii's suggestion that one explore other areas of the body than the face to discover expressive possibilities, the suite of Rat Poison Suicide photographs do not, however, offer a solution to the ideological problems of turning to the face as an index for identity or personality and, in fact, exacerbate many problems linked to the legacy of phrenology as well as the artistic act of turning a woman into a body – one probed necessarily for forensic purposes but also violated unnecessarily for artistic ones. With respect to Serrano's Rat Poison Suicide suite, one might ask: what does it mean when it's "OK" to portray a dead woman from such objectifying points of view so that a wound on her foot or her vagina and sewn-up torso are offered explicitly to anchor the look of the

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[81] Kaite (1995).

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viewer, while her face must be kept hidden by the body bag? The deceased cannot be "protected" if the body is so aesthetically-exposed and unnaturally-contorted at the same time. It is a paradoxical move if considered in light of an aspiration to an ethics of representation and offers little defence for the assertion that by cloaking the faces of the figures, Serrano didn't violate the subjectivity of the dead with representational violence.

Part Three: The Ethics of Physical Proximity

The circumstances in which Serrano took these photographs, the ethics of his access to corpses, his handling of them and the necessity of "protecting" their identities has largely not been questioned in the art historical literature surrounding his work. In this light, at a material level, the sense of touch and proximity he had to the bodies is noteworthy because the overall effect of his work is psychological distance from the subjectivity of the corpses under the preponderance of an objectifying visuality.

In addition to the information provided at the beginning of this chapter, journalist Edward Conlon's description of the restrictive setting of the New York City morgue conveys the sense of the security involved and the extent to which the bodies are out of touch of immediate family members: "Behind the window are the steel doors of an elevator, which brings bodies up from the morgue below. The body is viewed like a museum exhibit, behind glass [. . .]."[82] As mentioned, viewing rooms are also outfitted with windows of bullet-proof glass through which the family members are permitted to view the deceased, whose body, covered right up to the chin with a sheet, is led out on a gurney from within the interior confines of the building by staff. Another common practice for presenting the deceased for positive identification involves the use of live

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[82] Edward Conlon, "To the Potter's Field," New Yorker 19 July 1993: 43.

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video feed projected on a monitor that connects the viewing room where the family members remain to another area within the morgue. This distance and mediation between the grieving family members and the deceased is also a logistical necessity for the staff who would have difficulty handling the grieving family members, whose emotions range from disbelief to hysteria, and who frequently want to touch or hold the corpse or talk to it from the viewing room as if it's still alive.[83] At hospital and forensic morgues, bodies are never left on tables at the end of the day. After the autopsy is performed they are wrapped in body bags or other plastic material and stored in rows of stainless-steel freezer units. Further, as Conlon points out, "Only the family is entitled to the autopsy report and medical records."[84] Family members are never, under any circumstances, allowed to touch or come into contact with the body of the deceased until it is released from the Medical Examiner's Office. Serrano, however, had intimate access to the corpses at a time when this privilege was denied to intimate family members.

According to the literature on <u>The Morgue</u>, Serrano did not interfere extensively with the bodies when he photographed them. He couldn't have, for this may have interfered with their evidentiary status and put the investigation in jeopardy. Robert Hobbs states that he was not allowed to touch corpses that had not yet undergone autopsy, but he could touch them provided that the autopsy had been completed and that he wore two pairs of gloves.[85] Daniel Arasse states that Serrano "barely" touched the corpses themselves but did manipulate drapery that shrouded the figures in various ways.[86] Yet Serrano *was* in close contact with the bodies, draping them, dramatically

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[83] As noted by Brendunt Tilgham, Massachusetts State Medical Examiner's Office, Boston.
[84] Conlon 43.
[85] Hobbs 42.
[86] Arasse n.p.

lighting them, unzipping them from body bags and perhaps manipulating them at a time

when family members were prohibited contact except through mediated forms of vision.

Although Serrano's contact was itself mediated by two sheathes of latex prophylactic as

well as the optical prosthesis that structured his look, both of these forms of mediation

offer a proximity to the dead that is potentially wounding to their subjectivity. Arising in

Serrano's working method is the historic legacy of visuality as a distancing means of

control over criminal bodies, after historian Bruno Bertherat's insight regarding the

Parisian morgue of the nineteenth-century that "Le verbe 'morguer' signifie regarder

avec hauteur. Première dérivation de sens, la morgue désigne l'endroit d'une prison où

les guichetiers dévisageaient les prisonniers avant de les écrouer."[87] Despite the fact that

Serrano was in intimate proximity with the bodies, able to "unveil" them, his contact with

the bodies was purely of a scopic nature, to advance his own professional interests. The

aforementioned use of two layers of latex gloves to "handle" the corpses, then, offers an

apt metaphor to speak to the emotionally-disengaged yet simultaneous physically

proximate operational paradigm evoked in The Morgue, in which Serrano's visual and

the tactile involvement with the corpses had dangerous results for the subjectivity of the

dead.

    If considered in light of the attention Bronfen draws to the violence of

representation that transforms the feminine subject into an aestheticized abstraction, that

Serrano's illicit access to the corpses, his elision of the material reality behind their

existence, informed and individuated by biographic circumstances, has been ignored by

all the literature surrounding The Morgue, results in a significant oversight. How

Serrano's furtive working method structures the representation has been noted by only

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[87] Bertherat 25.

one critic, Peter Schjeldahl, who shows concern for the dead as subjects, who are situated by their lack of agency. His comments suggest how Serrano's work making the dead visible not only reflects, but further, *constructs* a sense of degradation: "Be it added, on this score, that a posthumous vulnerability – circumstances of death mandating a coroner's opinion or just negligible social status – landed these deceased ones in a morgue whose security proved nonchalant."[88] The fact that individual voices were elided in The Morgue is also a concern. According to Judith Milstein Katz and John Stuart Katz, who draw attention to the position of subjects in documentary films, "voluntary and informed consent is required if the film-maker is to be considered as having acted ethically."[89] The Katzes point out that it is only when the subject is located in a public place that this ethical criterion becomes loosened (i.e. because the subject effectively becomes "public property"), which puts into relief Serrano's position in the highly-restricted confines of the morgue as clearly crossing a threshold, not only that of the public-private distinction, but also that of ethics. There is no question that the dead are silent, but were surrogates given the opportunity to voice opinions that would present a more dimensional view of the identity of the dead? Schjeldahl, the only critic to express pointed concern for how the treatment of the corpses inflicts violence on the subjectivity of the dead, points out how Serrano's surreptitious working method also has class implications: "Most of us probably can count on family and friends, when we retire from breathing, to keep us out of such slipshod facilities and thus off the walls of the Paula Cooper Gallery."[90] Contrary to some views, there are in fact many personal details

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[88] Peter Schjeldahl, "Art After Death," Village Voice 16 Feb. 1993: 91.
[89] John Stuart Katz, and Judith Milstein Katz, "Ethics and the Perception of Ethics in Autobiographical Film," Image Ethics eds. Gross, Katz, and Ruby (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 121.
[90] Schjeldahl 91.

revealed in the photographs (such as jawlines, eyes, lips, noses, profiles, tattoos and birthmarks), which would easily allow an immediate family member to identity their loved one if they stumbled across the photographs in a magazine or museum. Schjeldahl's point is that no surrogates for the dead were given the opportunity to authorize or refuse the work, leaving the dead entirely vulnerable to material and representational violence. Not only the dead but their families are reduced by the way the dead exist in an oppressive solitude whose anonymity becomes a source of violation rather than a protective shield.

Although Serrano's The Morgue is not presented as documentary work, he works in a manner that evokes a strong tension with the tradition because of his sense of unflinching reportage and the thoroughness of this project – documenting such a variety of corpses (which suggests an objective, indiscriminate vision). Yet the questions of accountability that usually arise in relation to documentary photography have not surfaced in relation to Serrano's work by the curatorial community. The editors of Image Ethics have noted that blurred ethical-moral boundaries are a particular pitfall of documentary practices (both photography and film). This form traditionally functions under the auspices that it will honour a commitment to veracity while simultaneously, some level of artistic merit, two commitments complicated by the lingering historical attitudes in Western culture towards the status of the artist and what is permissible by her or him: "Thus, the artist is often regarded as being somewhat outside the moral constraints which confine other people; having license to transform people into aesthetic objects without their knowledge and sometimes against their will."[91] According to documentary filmmaker Jon Ronson, the moral-ethical restrictions imposed on

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[91] Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby. Image Ethics (1988) 21.

documentary practice are precisely where artistic license is curtailed, "There is a fine line, in our world, between using our imagination and getting sued for libel. The truth is, I think artists have it easy."[92] Serrano's work resides dangerously within this tight-rope position and draws much of its compelling qualities from the way he plays upon expectations from both practices, without rigidly abiding to either. Perhaps because his work is displayed within a decidedly high art context that his working relationship to his "subjects" has never been questioned by the major institutional exhibition contexts in which they have been shown.[93] One must keep in mind that many of the aesthetic qualities celebrated about the way Serrano represents the corpses in The Morgue – the meditations on the expressive potential of various body parts and surfaces, views from oblique or intensely-close angles and the manipulation of body bags to achieve the effects of classical drapery – cannot entirely be read as evidence of unbridled artistic freedom but also as compositional necessities driven by fear of professional liability (if not his own, then that of the pathologist).

Perhaps the lack of writing about ethics in relation to Serrano's The Morgue is the result of art historians and critics hesitating to wade into a discourse that may touch upon censorship, a sensitive area in relation to Serrano's work due to the infamous controversy surrounding his Piss Christ (1987), a work publicly condemned by right-wing fundamentalist Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina and Reverend Wildmon, whose ire against Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe's work eventually led to funding being

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[92] Jon Ronson, "Ordinarily So," Frieze 36 (1997) 62.
[93] L'Image de la Mort: Aux Limites de la Fiction, L'Exposition du Cadavre. (Montréal, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal, 1994); Patrick Murphy and others, Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993 (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art and U of Pennsylvania, 1994); Piotr Piotrowski and Zdenka Badovinac, Andres Serrano (Ljubljana: Moderna Galeria, 1994); Val Williams and Greg Hobson, The Dead (Bradford, UK: National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, 1995).

rescinded from the National Endowment for the Arts. According to curator Lisa Phillips, who charted these events, "Neo-conservatives and evangelical fundamentalists preached a new morality under the guise of patriotism, declaring unpatriotic anyone who departed from their views. [. . .] a scapegoat was needed."[94] It is understandable that, in the wake of this historic legacy, art historians and critics would make a point of supporting the freedom of expression of artists, especially those involved in political, "oppositional" projects, as part of the larger discourse of liberalism that had to be supported in light of the socially-debilitating economic policies of the Reagan era, coupled with a concurrent cultural McCarthyism that looked for artists in their "witch hunt."[95] While the art community rallied behind Serrano and Mapplethorpe in the late 1980s, my question is: who is supporting the dead and protecting them against attack – not against their freedoms, but against representational violence?

According to the viewpoints of curator Slyvie Gilbert, because there exists a potential for ethics in curatorial practices to become "reactionary," "a new ideological observance," or, more bluntly, "neoconservative" justifications for certain views, she suggests that one abandon the concern for ethics and turn to a consideration of agency if one is concerned with the balance of responsibility and power inherent in the triadic curator/artist/public relationship: "In strict terms, ethics is defined as the morality of our actions while agency is the significance of our actions."[96] Gilbert's view of agency is quite divergent from mine (as I believe it is a hinge upon which ethics rests), as she appears to locate power in resultant meanings and the discourse of the living rather than

[94] Lisa Phillips, "Culture Under Siege," 1991 Biennial Exhibition (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1991) 16.
[95] Phillips 16.
[96] Sylvie Gilbert, "Just Say No," Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future, coord. Peter White (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1996) 231.

considering the possible results of unethical practices on dead subjects. I am disheartened by some conceptions of ethics in the art world as a personal, contingent framework that taints one's view rather than, as the Katzes propose, the desirable work of making visible one's investments in the filmic (or photographic) documentation of a scene, the avowal of the points at which the work of image-making altered and constructed the scene at hand. Some curators have engaged in preliminary discussions about the nature of ethics in curatorial practice, inquiring as to whom the ethical concern should be directed, what comprises ethics in the museum, and what place aesthetics would have in relation to a notion of ethics.[97] Some talks have centered on the many possible dynamics that arise between curators and artists, the public, the funding institutions, the "third world other" as well as the ideologies that come into play therein, but a mention of the dead, a "group" who certainly present a unique set of problems in representation, has rarely occurred. Ethics in photographic practices for example, should not be seen as that which corrupts one's vision, but guidelines in which one's professional investments are made transparent, without claiming universalism yet offering a framework that is transferable from one situation or subject to another (rather than, as Gilbert suggests, dependent upon investments couched within hidden agendas).

Maybe it is now appropriate, at over a decade's remove from these hotly-political issues, to analyze Serrano's work from an ethical perspective without fear of being labelled reactionary or conservative. It's not a question of censorship, and I never imply that Serrano should be denied the right to exhibit these works. It's a question of what effect his working method has on the resultant subjectivity of the dead, those who cannot

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[97] See essays by Lorne Falk, Jennifer Fisher, France Gascon, Sylvie Gilbert, Everlyn Nicodemus and Keith Wallace, Naming a Practice.

say no to his camera's look and a view of the identities of the dead other than through a lens of deformity. With Serrano's living subjects, he has described the consensual conditions in which he takes studio portraits of his sitters, offering them the choice of a payment of either US $200 or a print of his work and making sure each photographic subject has final approval on the title as well as full awareness of the context in which the image will be exhibited or published.[98] For example, for Denise Smith, Ex-Model and Crack Head (2003), an image included in his America (2004) compendium of one hundred photographs of iconic types, the title was approved by the sitter as a decisive statement reflecting and claiming her life history. My concern isn't with Serrano's artistic ambitions in The Morgue, but with the logistics through which they were realized and the ways in which his non-consensual engagement with the corpses transforms the dead's identity in the resultant image. Do they end up merely subject to mortality or decidedly criminal, therefore deserving the deaths and subsequent display they endure? Is Serrano's seemingly transparent camera gaze not, in fact, clouded with the filter of violence, muddying any approach the viewer may wish towards the dead? Little of Serrano or his investments are revealed, except for the aesthetics through which he structured the photographs. Serrano's identity remains hidden to a greater extent than the identities of the dead.

Without the voice of the surrogate who chooses to speak on behalf of the dead to qualify, to individuate or to refuse Serrano's images, the already-suffocated agency of the dead will remain that way. Who will function as this surrogate, considering that the pathologist, the institutional figure in whose charge the corpses were entrusted did not guard them according to the mandates of his profession? The art historian and the critic,

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[98] Andres Serrano, lecture, Toronto, 12 March, 2004, available for view at www.ryerson.ca.

if not also the museum curator, are certainly figures who possess the greatest professional

resources at our disposal to conduct this work and are clearly implicated in the ethical

call made by feminists, theorists and art historians who have already provided many tools

with which to proceed, having, in fact, created many of the discourses in which the

interrogation of agency and subjectivity in the field of vision have been shown to require

careful consideration.

Conclusion

While Serrano's photographs capture racial, gender or other incidental details that code

the corpses in individual ways, this occurs without conveying any means of access to

their perspective or to the biographic identity they might have claimed if alive. And, if

considered in relation to Allan Sekula's definition of the nineteenth-century institutional

technology of the archive as "an encyclopedic repository of exchangeable images,"[99] then

Serrano's series offers a spectrum of corpses categorized not by metrics chosen by the

individual or by surrogates acting on their behalf, but by his own choices as well as those

offered by an institutional system, so that they become generalized *types*, embodied

topologies of traumatic experiences, codified in terms of the results of violence rather

than its root causes. In creating a depersonalized, aesthetic "archive" of exchangeable

specimens defined by the surface detail or embodied incident manifested by the corpse,

The Morgue is amenable to the disengaged extraction of knowledge from bodies

scrutinized to satisfy curiosity, exhumed for display without consideration of the ethical

consequences for the dead or their families. Serrano's The Morgue, therefore, offers a

historical continuation of photography's repressive functioning, after Sekula's description

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[99] Sekula 17.

of it, in the institutional and impersonal context in which he works to capture various facets of dozens of different deaths abstractly, excluding most telling details as to the corpse's biographical individuation. If one is concerned with the possibilities for maintaining the posthumous individuation of the dead in representations, the use of photography to convey the identity of a corpse is prone to certain difficulties due to the inability of the corpse to emit signs of its own choosing.

The divergent implications of having one's face and name withheld present a perplexing ethical problem in light of the history of photographic portraiture, where to have one's facial features captured could either indicate a source of status or shame, depending upon the context. For example, do the representations of the hands seen in Knifed to Death I and II evade typifying the individual as criminal body by avoiding the persistent legacy of phrenology or physiognomy, or do they merely suggest the criminal element in another way? In Rat Poison Suicide I, II and III, does the avoidance of the display of the face reduce the dead woman to the spectacular signs of her pathology, seen in the curled rat claws that double as hands and therefore transform her into so much pestilence for extermination? Rather than, as in Knifed to Death I or II, the skin surfaces and hands elicit an approach from the viewer or an engagement to be touched, those in Rat Poison I and III eerily suggest that the dead body is reacting defensively to the looks of the camera and the viewer – as if experiencing a violent assault. Serrano's manner of "protecting" the identity of the dead in Rat Poison Suicide I, II and III creates a criminal, vulnerable or monstrous identity for the subject in much the same manner as occurs in Jane Doe, Killed by Police, which disallows the dead the emergence of identity from her own point of view as well as the perceived possibility for the intersubjective engagements

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involved in the terms of representation. The visuality that informs Serrano's artistic paradigm is effused with proximity, but of a wounding type, without any sense or reciprocity.

The effect Serrano's working method has to distort or occlude the identities of the dead, silencing them, even wounding the dead for a second time by exaggerating the effects of their injuries, has been my concern. The sightless eyes of the dead are excluded from the dynamic interchange made possible by the gaze. Expanses of punctured or discoloured skin – dead skin that can no longer feel the human touch – are recorded at close range by the camera's eye in a way that seems to rebuff any approach that isn't already a transmission of violence. Many universal, transcendental, religious and social themes arise from his work, but The Morgue does not grant access to or convey a sense of identity as it would reflect the dead from their own perspective.

End of Chapter Three.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Ethics of Nan Goldin's Photographic Approach to the Dying

This chapter will address a selection of works by American photographic artist Nan Goldin, in which she directs her camera, as an extension of love, toward two of her closest friends when they were dying of AIDS-related illness. In some ways, this chapter should be considered a pendant to the previous one discussing the work of Andres Serrano because both artists closely observe the conditions of mortally embodied others, and do so in ways that inscribe visuality with a sense of touch. The work of both artists makes evident that the emergence of the identity of the subject is contingent upon the chosen degrees of photographic transparency – to become a point of ethics. What will be productive to examine, however, are the points where Serrano's and Goldin's practices diverge, and to explore the unique areas where Goldin contributes to this discourse, in particular, in her concern for representational perspective, the potential for her dying friends' voices to be silenced and the agency associated with embodiment to be foreclosed. The goal here is to demonstrate how Goldin's practice evokes a sense of interconnectedness with her subjects in a benevolent manner that respects the vulnerability of the dying and demonstrates her engagement with recourse to the voice, visuality, touch and the weight and materiality of the body, despite her friends' waning agency in all of these areas.

In the previous chapter, I described how Serrano's The Morgue partakes of what Allan Sekula calls the "repressive" approach to photography, in which the subject's identity is categorized and constituted by an institutional imperative, rendered silent and, due to the fragmenting aspects of the medium, decontextualized from the biographic effects through

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which a sense of identity, from her or his own perspective, could have been conveyed.[1] My

assertion was that the compositional devices and connotative elements chosen by Serrano

in his series distort the identities of the dead: by the violence afflicted through the

framework of anonymity as well as through the actual manner of death, the corpses become

criminalized or monstrous. The sense of proximity Serrrano's photographs suggest is

deceptive because of its invasive quality: it is at once clinically incisive, in the optical

precision through which he focuses upon the specific details of the corpses, while

emotionally disengaged, in his topographical curiosity toward them, depicted like so many

pathological specimens compiled for an archive. In contrast to the "repressive" practice,

Sekula describes the other pole of photographic activity as "honorific" and seen largely in

the uses made of portraiture by the growing middle classes in the nineteenth-century in

their personal, domestic lives.[2] This honorific stream of photography, characterized by its

individuating function to augment or to memorialize the status of the sitter, offers an apt

term to introduce Goldin's work and to articulate her position in relation to that of Serrano.

In her interviews and statements (both written and spoken) that accompany published

compilations of her photographs as well as exhibitions of her work in slide-show formats,

Goldin expresses a clear desire to position her subjects through the lens of unadulterated

affection rather than through a curious or disengaged fascination: "It's about my love for

my friends [. . .]. Part of my worship of them involved photographing them. I wanted to

pay homage, to show them how beautiful they were."[3] This openly honorific framework

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[1] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," October 39 (1986) 6.
[2] John Tagg has described this vein of nineteenth-century portrait photography as "democratizing," and associates it with the social aspirations of the bourgeouise. "A Democracy of the Image," The Burden of Representation, (Houndmills, UK: MacMillan Education, 1986) 34-65.
[3] From Goldin, Nan. Die Andere Seite/The Other Side, Manchester: Cornerhouse, 1993, reprinted in Heron and Williams, ed. Illuminations 291 & 292.

conveyed by the acknowledgement of her own investments is one of the defining qualities

of Goldin's practice: it grants the viewer a precise understanding of where she stands in

relation to her subjects and how the representations of them are intended to function.

Rather than evaluating the relative success or failure of Goldin's avowed aspirations to

honour her subjects, I want to consider the ethical implications of her framework upon her

subjects. In this regard, Goldin's espoused motivation to honour in life and memorialize in

death her intimate friends is significant in relation to Drucilla Cornell's mourning figure,

the *chiffonier,* because it situates her photographic practice in ethical terms – Goldin herself

will be shown to function as the mourning figure who approaches otherness in a non-

violent fashion and performs the posthumous work of protecting and collecting the remains

of the dead, guarding the singularity of their identities "as an act of care."[4]

I would like to demonstrate the effects that a self-consciously transparent

photographic paradigm have upon dying subjects in representations, and to indicate the

areas in which it shows the aspiration to the ethical relationship (as defined by Cornell).

Goldin's implication of herself in her photography, accomplished by photographic

connotation, in particular the attribution of biographic details (her own and her subjects'),

is one point where the ethical relationship appears. While phenomenological and haptic

types of visuality have been briefly discussed by other scholars in relation to the diaristic,

narrative style of Goldin,[5] my concern is to focus on how this element heightens the

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[4] Drucilla Cornell, "The Ethical Significance of the Chiffonier," The Philosophy of the Limit (New York: Routledge, 1992) 76. Cornell's uniquely feminist metaphor for an ethical relation, one that takes into consideration the materiality of sexual difference, is derived from the following precedents. It is based on the nineteenth-century peripatetic rag-picker figure, after Walter Benjamin's description of the mournful underbelly hauting modernity, but feminized by a reading that conflates the caring (M)other figure of James Joyce in Finnegan's Wake with the allegorical mourning figure presented by Jacques Derrida in Glas.
[5] Larys Frogier, "La photographie de Nan Goldin est touchante," Parachute 86 (1997): 18-25; Louis Kaplan, "Photography and the Exposure of Community: Sharing Nan Goldin and Jean-Luc Nancy," Angelaki Journal of the Humanities 6.3 (2001): 7-30.

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understanding of her photographic method as espousing an ethics of representation towards the dying and the dead that not only inscribes touch within it but also a sense of the photographer's presence in the field of vision. This is important for understanding how Goldin's recourse to phenomenological, haptic visuality overcomes the blocked avenues of intersubjectivity experienced in relation to the dying. That there exist divergent possibilities for photographic proximity, which imply a range of touches (from gentle to wounding), is important when the subject of representation is experiencing the terminal stages of AIDS-related illness. With this in mind, I seek to explore how the photographer's contact with her subjects can respectfully individuate those suffering or diminish opportunities for the resonance of their identities.

The chapter is divided into two parts, each considering a different photographic series by Goldin, the first of her friend Cookie Mueller and the second of her friends Gotscho and Gilles Dussein. In the first part, I address the ways in which Goldin sets into play an ethical recognition of her friend Mueller's waning agency in terms of access to the voice. In the second part, Goldin's negotiation of intersubjectivity involves her subjects' embodiment in relation to her own and how she takes recourse to a camera vision, inscribed by touch, in order to make contact with her friends – to ethically recognize and to alleviate the suffering of the dying. Proceeding with an understanding that certain types of photographic connotation lead to a transparent practice (which, I suggest, is a foundation for an ethical approach to the dying in representation), with the Cookie Mueller series, I focus largely on external, discursive elements that inform the viewer's understanding of the image. In the Gotscho-Dussein series, I focus on elements of connotation that appear within the image itself, like the cultural resonance of body parts or the positions of bodies relative

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to each other. After Roland Barthes's insight that "the pose" of a figure in a photograph is never pure (i.e. denotative) information, but always endowed with a "historical grammar of iconographic connotation," Goldin's emphasis on hands, arms and touch will demonstrate a strong ethical dimension as well as a political stance regarding the AIDS crisis and how one can represent those who experience it directly.[6]

Part One: The *Cookie Mueller* Series as a Dyadic Engagement Founded upon Photographic Transparency

Nan Goldin has built a reputation on photographing her close friends and lovers in candid moments that reflect the interpersonal reality of their imbricated lives – that of the subject and that of the photographer. That Goldin chooses to make her friends the subject of her work was novel when she began her career in the late nineteen-seventies because, despite the documentary quality she achieves with her portraits, she never positions herself as a distanced, objective observer.[7] Also, as the photographic historians Larys Frogier and Louis Kaplan have noted in relation to Goldin's work, the sense of community and affiliation to her subjects resulting from her diaristic approach is one of its distinguishing traits, which they suggest diverges from the traditional stance of objectivity and reportage that characterizes dominant, documentary-type photography. Goldin's work captures the performance of her friends' identities in relation to hers in a complicit, mutually-engaged manner. She is as much a part of the lives of her subjects as they are of her life and her photography emphasizes the sense that interwoven, interpersonal histories are being

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[6] Barthes, "The Photographic Message," Image, Music, Text, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977) 22-23.

[7] Curator Elisabeth Sussman has made this point by contrasting Goldin's work with that of August Sander and that of Diane Arbus. "In/Of Her Time: Nan Goldin's Photographs," I'll Be Your Mirror (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997) 30.

preserved. This approach, according to feminist historians Liz Heron and Val Williams, blurs photographic genres: "Abandoning documentary photography's traditional stance as dispassionate observer, she explored her own drama, making a tangential autobiography [. . .]."[8] The fact that Goldin implicates her own presence in her work suggests that she is critical of the pitfall of documentary-style photography that operates under the auspices of an *illusionary* transparency which, by hiding the effects of the photographer's manipulation of the subject matter, may result in voyeurism, visual mastery, cultural appropriation, objectification or the spectacularization of the subject.[9] Goldin's transparent operational paradigm, I propose, holds significant ethical promise when facing dying or dead subjects; it is, in fact, the hinge upon which the emergence of the dying subject's perspective or at minimum, an important recognition of their vulnerability, revolves.

Goldin took many photographs of her friend Cookie Mueller, a vivacious New York actor and writer Goldin has called "the diva around which the family revolved," during a range of life experiences, from birthdays to funerals.[10] The photographs were taken over the course of thirteen years starting in 1976 at various settings, at nightclubs, bars and restaurants as well as at Mueller's homes in New York and Provincetown, Massachusetts, with friends and family members whose significance is reinforced by their reappearance over the course of many years: Goldin herself, Mueller's son Max, her girlfriend Sharon and husband Vittorio Scarpati, who, like Mueller, was to die of AIDS-related illnesses in

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[8] Liz Heron and Val Williams, ed., Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography From the 1850s to the Present, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996) 291.
[9] An essay deconstructing the transparency or naturalness of documentary photography (its claims to evidentiary status) is Abigail Solomon-Godeau's, "Who is Speaking Thus? Some Questions about Documentary Photography," Photography at the Dock (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991) 169-183.
[10] Nan Goldin, I'll Be Your Mirror (1989) documentary film seen at Musée d'art contemporain, Montréal, August, 2003.

1989.[11] Goldin's description of her photographic engagements with Mueller suggests that the ongoing intersubjectivity that transpired in them involved a deepening friendship, driven by a desire for emotional proximity: "Part of how we grew close was through me photographing her – the photos were intimate and then we were. I was outside her and taking her picture let me in."[12] During the course of Mueller's experience with AIDS-related illness, Goldin documented the transformation of her friend's physical and mental health in photographs that show her with a cane to help her walk, depressed and displaying a quiet, forlorn personality that was a dramatic departure from Goldin's earlier depictions of her.

In Cookie Laughing, NYC, 1985 (1985), a photograph that shows Mueller at the height of her vitality, Goldin's friend is depicted roaring with laughter, the epitome of vocalized robustness [Fig. 19]. Mueller's charisma is conveyed by her wide-open mouth, her eyes squinting shut, the tendons in her neck pulsing and by the way her extended hands – one placed on the wall, the other pressed against her chest as if to contain herself – gesticulate forcefully. Mueller's response to some hilarity that occurs outside the frame charges the photograph with dynamic energy. The viewer is led to imagine the sound of her voice as the smoky coarseness of a belly-laugh that might ring with the multitude of bangles jangling from her wrists. Not only is the work imbued with the sense of Mueller's physical presence but also, with the sense of her voice and her ability to use its volume to express herself in a sonorous way. The expanse of blank wall next to Mueller (broken only

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[11] This biographic information is provided by the titles of Goldin's photographs as well as by the text that Goldin wrote to introduce the memorial series honoring Mueller when it was compiled and published after Mueller's death in 1991 and is reproduced in I'll Be Your Mirror 256-273.
[12] Goldin, 256.

by a cord cutting diagonally across it) offers a clear, reflective surface that enhances the imagined resonance of Mueller's voice: it is an open ground fostering its acoustic echo.

The image of Mueller laughing should be contrasted with the subsequent, demure, introverted Cookie With her Cane, Provincetown, 1989 (1989), in which the same woman appears unsmiling, unspeaking and subdued, even downtrodden [Fig. 20]. Mueller here is thinner, paler and altogether smaller, her face more lined and her shoulders slightly hunched under the dark cardigan that hangs limply on them, as if a burden. Mueller looks down and away from the camera, with lips pursed as if in resignation. Because Mueller is seated in a corner under an opaque, stained-glass window, the scene is stifling and confining compared to the previous Cookie Laughing, NYC, 1985. Goldin's account of this stage in Mueller's life would explain these details, such as the cane and the despondent expression on her face, which are at odds with the extroverted personality captured by the earlier photograph: "While I was away in 1988, Cookie got sick. When I came back to see her in August, 1989 the effects of AIDS had robbed her of her voice."[13] The almost garish emphasis on the brilliant colours of the green banquette, the turquoise blue turtleneck Mueller wears and the stained-glass window, take on a specific meaning that convey none of the cheerful, candy-coloured aura of a festive occasion, but a sense of foreboding, as if the walls are closing in on her. This atmosphere of anxiety suggests a comparison with Vincent Van Gogh's painting The Night Café (1888), in which a similarly expressionistic use of a de-naturalized green palette within a bar setting convey a sense of alienation rather than conviviality. The striped, silk scarf in Mueller's hair and the many layers of beaded necklaces she wears convey a festivity that is instantly offset by her introverted facial expression, despite the way Goldin's camera flash lights up her blond hair like a halo.

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[13] Goldin 256.

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Rather than, as in Cookie laughing, NYC, 1985, being supported by the exuberance of her

own personality, Cookie with her cane, Provincetown, 1989 shows Mueller seated and even

belittled by the cane leaning against the wall, as if it too is "seated" with her, but from a

threatening, hostile position behind her back, at odds with Mueller, who turns away from it.

The representation of her friend's circumstances by these details – by the downcast

look, the grim expression and the sense of solitude conveyed by Mueller's corner position

in the bar, without indication of the company of friends other than Goldin herself –

constructs a work that is dyadic, although not, at first glance, clearly dialogic. I suggest that

Goldin's photography is a performative: a form of speech that, without the exchange of

words, offers a discursive recognition and explanation of Mueller's silence, not to trivialize

it but to grant it authority, making clear the oppressive effect that AIDS-related illness has

upon Mueller's outlook and mobility. A statement made by Goldin that characterizes this

stage of Mueller's experience with AIDS-related illness (which robbed her of her voice

and, it appears, much of her agency) makes clear the dialogism of this photograph, despite

that no words were exchanged: "[b]ut when I photographed her, she spoke to me, she was

as present as ever."[14] The photograph should be seen as a manifestation of Goldin's desire

to speak *to* her voiceless friend as well as to speak *for* her, to contribute to the ongoing

expression of Mueller's identity under these challenging circumstances. In Mueller's

continued collaboration with Goldin in this paradigm of friendship-unfolding-through-

photography, Cookie with her Cane, Provincetown, 1989 suggests that Goldin's work is

also a narration of Mueller's evident despair, done *with* her. Photography becomes for

Goldin a means of guarding the identities of those she saw as vulnerable, against the

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[14] Goldin 256.

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representational violence of exclusion, conferring to Mueller a degree of agency in an area where it was waning.

Could one still interpret Goldin's act of photographing her friend as an invasive act because Mueller turns away from the lens, as if desirous of being left alone during such a moment? How could such a photographic act as <u>Cookie with her cane, Provincetown, 1989</u>, in which one person focuses on another who does not return the look or appear to respond to this recognition (and in fact, appears to be turning away from this attention), be considered a form of approach that is ethical? This question can be answered by turning to the work of ethics philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, from his <u>Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other</u> (1998), where he theorizes that it is the altruistic approach of one in recognition of the other's suffering, without expectation of a response, that defines the ethical relationship. According to Levinas, it is the gesture of responding to the other's pain, a gesture demonstrating the "inter-human," that will transform suffering from its status as "useless" to an event that conveys the penultimate, ethical moment.[15] While Levinas views the phenomenology of pain to be useless, he asserts that it presents, nonetheless, an intersubjective opportunity for someone to respond to it, which certainly is not useless.[16] Further, Levinas describes the potential for suffering and mortality to be most clearly perceived on the face of the other and identifies this as the site in which the possibility of the other's death is most clearly inscribed.[17] After Levinas description of it, the face is a

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[15] Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering," <u>Entre Nous: Thinking-Of-the-Other</u>. Trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. (New York: Columbia UP, 1998/1991) 91-101.

[16] According to Levinas, part of what the "inter-human" represents is a relationship that would discount interpretations of suffering along the lines of theodicy, i.e. as divine or just retribution meted out by God's plan. Also according to Levinas, it is the ability to respond to and alleviate the useless suffering of the other that is the most important ethical implication arising from the advances of modern medicine (and its ability to alleviate pain).

[17] Technotheorist Kevin Robins has mentioned the moral imperative Levinas associates with the mortality inscribed in the face of the other as a significant qualification toward overly-utopic views regarding new

concept tightly-interwoven in a drama of recognition and response to the other.

Importantly, the face implies a direct relationship, a compulsion to approach the

"uniqueness" of the other, in which altruistic responsibility is inherent so as not to leave the

other to the ultimate solitude – death alone, without comfort.[18] Moreover, the face is an

opportunity for a direct, dyadic engagement, based upon the clear mandate of a primordial,

almost pre-rational, compulsion of one towards the other. While the face, according to

Levinas, is the very beginning of "intelligibility," it need not be dialogic (if dialogue

implies a mutual exchange and a degree of reciprocity). In fact, the ethical relationship for

Levinas, the altruistic recognition of and response to the vulnerability of the other, is

specifically *not* founded upon the expectation of reciprocity: "It is in the interhuman

perspective of *my* responsibility for the other, without concern for reciprocity, in my call

for his or her disinterested help, in the asymmetry of the relation of one to the other, that I

have tried to analyze the phenomenon of useless suffering."[19] Its fundamental *asymmetry* is

precisely the characteristic that qualifies the relationship as ethical – it remains a selfless

focus upon the other, especially in times of suffering.[20]

The dyadic quality that I have identified as specific to Goldin's intersubjective

engagement with Mueller in the Cookie Mueller series raises the issue of ethics in relation

to representational perspective in a way different from the approach taken by Gillian

Wearing in her treatment of Lindsey (described in Chapter Two) in Prelude, a work in

which the artist confers the vocal platform to a third-party, the sister/surrogate figure. For

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imaging technologies and the mass media at a global level, whereby distance is imposed between subjects by the screen, so that the transmission of information about geographically-distanced catastrophes leaves viewers unable to respond. "The Touch of the Unknown," Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision (London: Routledge, 1996) 27-28.

[18] Levinas, "Uniqueness," Entre Nous 189-196.
[19] Levinas 101.
[20] Levinas 100-101.

this reason, I take recourse to Levinas's views toward the potential of the dyad exemplified by the face-to-face relationship which, he admits, is idealistic because social situations usually involve more complex relationships and more parties than the dyad. According to Levinas, as soon as a third party enters the picture, distinctions between parties and judgements on behalf of others become necessary (i.e. Who is more in need of assistance: this one or the other?) and therefore, the need for philosophy, discourse, justice and civic-mindedness ensues.[21] My previous discussion of Simon Wiesenthal's ethical dilemma, exemplified by the triadic relationship in The Sunflower, between Wiesenthal, the dying SS soldier and the murdered Jews (on whose behalf Wiesenthal is being asked to speak) involves precisely the type of challenge – making judgments on behalf of third parties – that Levinas states would disrupt the unconditional ethical mandate inherent in the dyad. With Cookie with her cane, Provincetown, September, 1989, Goldin makes evident a dyadic, altruistic relationship where a direct focus on her subject is taken, an unconditional approach of one to the other, without judgments or choices between parties. Levinas's theory of the ethical potential of the "asymmetry of intersubjectivity," that inherent in the altruistic approach, helps explain how Goldin's intensive approach to her friend, to the exclusion of all other parties, to the extent that a sense of solitude is expressed, can be considered ethical, despite the apparent lack of response of Mueller, who receives this attention.[22] Goldin's negotiation of representational perspective in Cookie with her cane, Provincetown, September, 1989 is simple in its dyadism but complex in its asymmetry of agency, as it is founded upon the recognition of the suffering experienced by the other and a response to it, without the expectation of an overt response.

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[21] Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice and Love," Entre Nous 103-121.
[22] Levinas 104-107.

In another work from this period, <u>Sharon with Cookie on the bed, Provincetown,</u> <u>September, 1989</u> (1989), Mueller is seen on the edge of the bed she shares with her girlfriend at her summer home [Fig. 21]. Because Goldin includes the month, September, in the title of this work and by the text summary provided in the Introduction to the publication of the <u>Cookie Mueller</u> series, one is made aware that this photograph captures many layers of loss, experienced by a closely-knit group of subjects, positioned in front of the lens and behind it: "On September 14th her husband Vittorio Scarpati died from AIDS-related illness and after that Cookie kind of gave up. She died on November 10th in the hospice of the Cabrini Medical Center."[23] A sense of bereavement exudes in the image because both Mueller and Sharon appear sullen and introverted and do not speak or look at each other – nor do they meet Goldin's gaze. Each one looks, with downcast eyes, to different areas of the room as if divided by the grief felt toward Scarpati's death as well as toward Mueller's potential for death. Rather than offering a unifying field to bridge the ponderous, psychological separation between the two women, the deep plum expanse of patterned wallpaper reinforces it. The gap between them is exaggerated by the way the figures are off-center and seen slightly from above. Mueller, in particular, appears to be slipping out of the frame in the lower left corner, as if disappearing into darkness from the earthly reality inhabited by Goldin and Sharon. The distorted perspective cannot be explained entirely through the informality of the "snapshot" aesthetic so often associated with Goldin's style, and should be viewed as intentional.[24] Provided by the small, photo-portrait that hangs on the wall between Sharon and Mueller is an apex to crown the

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[23] Goldin 256.

[24] Both Frogier and Kaplan have discussed different aspects of the "snapshot" aesthetic, but Kaplan offers a more complex and compelling argument that rather than invoking the "indifference" that often accompanies the snapshot, Goldin's work evokes the emotional attachments that drive amateur manifestations of the snapshot. Kaplan 11.

pyramidal shape of the composition – a biographic element to temporalize the scene. This is a photograph of Mueller's wedding to Scarpati, which provides a glimpse to a joyful, ceremonious event from Mueller and Goldin's shared past. From Goldin's earlier work Cookie and Vittorio's wedding: the ring, NYC, 1986 [Fig. 22], one understands that Goldin was present at Mueller's wedding as friend and photographer, and therefore Goldin has embedded herself within the latter representation of her friend's life in a twofold manner. The inclusion of the wedding portrait within Sharon with Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September, 1989 is significant because by this gesture, Goldin projects her own photographic involvement into the present experience of mourning as well as into the wedding celebration of the past. The wedding portrait is also a testament to the persistence of Goldin's friendship – that she refuses to abandon Mueller during this difficult time of mourning and illness; it enacts an (auto)biographic imbrication of shared events, both historic and contemporary. It asserts Goldin's devotion over time, during all these life stages. The photographer, normally the invisible image-maker elided from the scene by the apparatus that separates viewer from viewed, becomes inscribed within it by including a visual echo of her own role as photographer.

If one recalls that for Levinas, the face epitomizes the ethical potential inherent in the opportunity to recognize the other's suffering, his thinking lends credence to my view that Goldin's representation of Mueller's suffering is not an invasive objectification of her but an altruistic, caring recognition. In light of the previous chapter's discussion of Serrano's Jane Doe, Killed by Police, the representation of the face of the recumbent, vulnerable figure, who is incapable of returning the look, demonstrates an instance of non-reciprocity between photographer and "cut-down," vulnerable subject in which the representational

paradigm enacts visual mastery. Here, I suggest that, despite the way Goldin hovers over

Mueller in both Cookie with her cane, Provincetown, 1989 and Sharon and Cookie on the

bed, Provincetown, September, 1989, she avoids a photographic annihilation of the figure

who is already oppressed by grief, the loss of her voice and illness. Rather than causing

further suffering, Goldin's photographic look at one who looks away is an attempt to

overcome the uselessness of pain by recognizing it and honoring its emotional,

interpersonal significance in a web of relationships that situate Mueller within a multi-

dimensional, biographic context. This creates a form of resistance to the waning agency

expressed by Mueller, so that her identity is not delineated solely by pain.

The complex temporality of the medium in Sharon and Cookie on the bed,

Provincetown, September, 1989 is invoked by referencing the past, the present and the

future, suggesting the "anterior future" of which Barthes speaks in Camera Lucida: the

impending death of the sitter is prefigured (if not encapsulated) by the photograph.[25]

Barthes also discusses the *noeme* of the photograph, the certainty of the sitter's existence in

the past, i.e. "that has been" or the apparent knowledge that the subject of the photograph

was once there.[26] That Goldin is acutely aware of her friend's declining health is suggested

by her use of the medium in this double way, after Barthes' thinking, to honour and capture

the memory of "that has been," her friend's life while she was still living, but also, in a

tragically-literal way, fearfully anticipating the loss of her friend to death. In its temporal

movements burdened by mourning, Goldin's composition alludes to the sense of death

inscribed in the ontology of the photograph as described by Barthes and is then,

simultaneously a memorial to Mueller and a haunting prophesy of the separation that will

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[25] Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill, 1981) 96.
[26] Barthes, Camera 80 & 96.

occur between them, an event that proved to be immanent. When read in light of Goldin's sequencing of events, the fleeting "present" captured by <u>Sharon with Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September, 1989</u> represents a state of liminality, a precursor to Mueller's actual death, which followed shortly thereafter and is depicted solemnly in <u>Cookie in her casket, NYC, November 15, 1989</u> (1989). With <u>Sharon with Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September, 1989</u>, Goldin honours Mueller's grieving state and Scarpati's death by bringing them together in one photograph and in so doing pays tribute to her own, accruing losses. This photographic paradigm positions Goldin as performing the allegory of mourning exemplified by the *chiffonier*.

Goldin's inscription of herself into the field of vision by including the wedding portrait in <u>Sharon and Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September, 1989</u> is a projection of her own investments toward the events, materializing Mueller's grief as the source of her own, subsequent mourning. Goldin's continued engagement with Mueller and her refusal to give up on her friend in times of vulnerability expresses a distinctly caring relationship. These two effects, the manifestation of care within the image as well as the suggestion of the photographer's embodied immanence, resonate with ethical potential, which I will explain by introducing the ideas of other scholars. In her description of curatorial ethics as "immanent," art theorist Jennifer Fisher's view implicates the embodied presence of the curator advancing towards the art object in a manner that helps clarify my understanding of Goldin's stated emotional proximity and apparent physical proximity to Mueller as a manifestation of her caring intentions.[27] Fisher offers a definition of curatorial ethics based

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[27] Jennifer Fisher, "Trick or Treat: Naming a Curatorial Ethics," <u>Naming a Practice</u>, coord. Peter White (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1996) 207-214. Also significant is Fisher's conception of curating along the lines of a medical or health professional compelled to an act of "healing" as would a homeopath, surgeon, or

on the etymology of the word "curate" and mentions how the Latin *curare* includes "to take care of."[28] Fisher makes complex this meaning of "to curate" with reference to Michel Foucault's proposal, described in his Technologies of the Self, for the care and transformation of the self and the uses to which one's attention, body or actions may be directed. Fisher's proposal for a curatorial ethics hinges not upon a disinterested or objective practice but upon one that is provisional, contingent and transparent, in other words: "a curatorial ethics immanent to practices of personal investment and commitment," one that "describes the relational aspects of one's practice [. . .]."[29] Elspeth Probyn also invokes Foucault's notion of technologizing the self but, like Fisher's thought, directed outwards, in order to outline the precedents for what she calls the "caring" aspect of gay identity politics of community, which holds direct relevance to Goldin's project of making visible the experiences of people suffering from AIDS: "Nowhere is the conditional present, the enunciative establishment of a web of interconnected possibilities, more needed than in speaking about, to, and with AIDS."[30] Goldin's photographic act could, therefore, be considered a demonstration of this care. Further, the caring relationships described by Fisher as part of curating and by Probyn as part of gay identity politics show parallels with Cornell's allegory of the ethical responsibility assumed by the *chiffonier* to care for the remains of the dead. Goldin's gestures in Sharon and Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September, 1989 demonstrate care for the living figures she faces directly and, in the reference to Scarpati, the dead she faces "indirectly."

therapist, 211. Fisher's allusion to therapeutic intervention is noteworthy alongside Levinas' description of useless suffering, an altruistic opportunity held out to modern medicine to alleviate pain, Entre Nous, 93.
[28] Fisher 210.
[29] Fisher 210.
[30] Elspeth Probyn, "Technologizing the Self: The Future Anterior for Cultural Studies," Cultural Studies Ed. Lawrence Grossberg (New York: Routledge, 1992) 508.

The significance of the photographer's immanence to the scene needs to be addressed

in terms more closely focused on documentary practices in photography and the notion of

transparency in order to establish its function as a point upon which the ethical relationship

revolves. Taking a sociological view towards lens-based media, film theorists John Stuart

Katz and Judith Milstein Katz explore the effects of photographic transparency upon the

achievement of an ethical filmmaking practice.[31] Offered by the Katzes are four-part

criteria that summarize what is generally considered to be an ethical engagement between

filmmaker and subject: the subject's full consent to being filmed; their acceptance of the

amount of personal information to be disclosed; that the filmmaker's motives are expressed

clearly to the subjects and maintained with integrity by the film-maker during the course of

production; and that the degree to which the filmmaker's construction or alteration of the

material is made readily apparent. The last tenet, the degree of openness that is displayed

by the filmmaker in the manipulation of the material (to clearly indicate *who* is

representing *whom*) is the area in which, the Katzes suggest, autobiographical approaches

can surpass non-autobiographical approaches in achieving an ethical relationship, and it is

this point that most clearly differentiates Goldin's practice from Serrano's.

The Katzes assert the importance of the admission of the constructed quality of

documentary-type films (whether autobiographical or not) as the first step in the realization

of any ethical "obligation," be it to the subjects represented, to the audience or to the

image-maker themselves.[32] The Katzes' assertion is that, in autobiographical filmmaking,

the tendency to make visible the investments, engagements and relationships of the

filmmaker to the subjects (who are often family members), allows the audience to better

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[31] John Stuart Katz, and Judith Milstein Katz, "Ethics and Perception of Ethics in Autobiographical Film," Image Ethics, ed. Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 119 – 134.
[32] Katzes 119-121.

decide whether or not the subjects depicted are being exploited: "Ironically, our own greater scrutiny, and the filmmaker's added visibility make autobiographical filmmakers and their films more transparent than most."[33] In short, the hinge upon which the ethical dimension in documentary filmmaking rests most clearly is in the distinction of transparency and forthrightness regarding the degree to which the material has been constructed.[34] According to the Katzes' definition of it, photographic transparency is the important dimension that allows the viewer to determine if the representation conveys an ethics of representation. Therefore, the framing devices that are consistently deployed by Goldin are significant in offering photographic *connotation* that, according to Barthes, provides the information to transform an understanding of the photograph from an image that appears (falsely) to be neutral and natural to a representation that is decidedly cultural and constructed.[35] Keeping in mind that a heightened sensitivity to representational perspective brings awareness of the vulnerability of certain subjects, in particular, the dying and the dead (those who may not be able to assert an identity from their own perspective), I am concerned with the effects of connotation evident in the photograph. With regard to Goldin's work, the connotative devices, such as her titles, the temporal nature of the portraits and the figures' poses, structure an understanding of the biographic specificity of the subject represented, so that the viewer may better piece together the visual information into a life story in which the photographer is also implicated.

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[33] Katzes 130. While the Katzes place a substantial onus on the film-maker to comply with the ethical standards of their profession, noteworthy is their emphasis on the audience's judgement of the work, which expresses the expectation that the viewer is also critically involved in the drama of responsibility upon which the ethics of documentary work revolves.

[34] Katzes 133.

[35] Barthes, "Photographic," 37. Barthes's essay is ultimately concerned with de-bunking the false distinction between any "pure" information could ever be discerned (denotative content) and the "chosen" cultural elements that might surround it. In other words, photographic "denotation" does not, in fact exist: it is always already coded as cultural connotation.

In the text that prefaces the publication of the Cookie Mueller series, Goldin makes

clear that she is speaking *for* Mueller with her representations Cookie with her cane,

Provincetown, 1989 and Sharon and Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September, 1989 –

that the photographs offer views of a friend when she is voiceless due to the effects of

AIDS-related illness. Goldin's titles and the running audio commentary used to narrate the

photographs when they are exhibited as slide-shows therefore perform a significant

function towards transparency. More precisely, they critically address a question posed by

photography historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau in relation to documentary-style

photography (which is, in turn, inspired by Barthes): "Who is speaking thus?"[36]

Dismantling the presumption of the author's transcendence from the text, Solomon-Godeau

advocates that the perspective suggested by any photographic image that purports

documentary status must be seen to acknowledge its own "author function," so that the

image doesn't devolve into a spectacle, distanced from circumstances of its making.

Solomon-Godeau points out how, in the discourse of documentary photography, there has

been a significant concern for disrupting the ideological implications of photography's

seeming naturalness, its self-generating qualities, in other words, its "mythic value of

transparency."[37] Larys Frogier's view is that the intimate, biographic details Goldin

provides to contextualize her works and to individuate her subjects show an awareness of

the Barthian "code," whereby photographic transparency is never assumed but must be

self-consciously asserted.[38] The transparency Goldin invokes, distinguished by its self-

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[36] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Who Is Speaking Thus? Some Questions on Documentary Photography," Photography at the Dock (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991) 182, referencing Barthes' essay, "Death of the Author," Image 142.
[37] Solomon-Godeau 180.
[38] Frogier 24. With this position he is referring to the work of Barthes's work in Camera Lucida. Frogier asserts that the "specific context" Goldin provides to frame all of her photographic subjects breaks down the critiques levied against her work as, at one extreme, an uncritical (i.e. non-transparent) documentary practice,

consciousness, should be considered a critical acknowledgement of the "mythic" status of photographic transparency by making clear *who* is speaking and *for whom*. In terms more specific to the representation of AIDS, the lack of representational transparency would mean yet another "silencing" of a person with AIDS like those that, according to cultural theorist and activist Simon Watney, have surfaced as "feats of ideological ventriloquism" in mainstream media during the late nineteen-eighties.[39] The clarity of representational perspective offered by Goldin through her narration circumvents the pitfall of unjustly putting words into Mueller's mouth or mastering someone already vulnerable, and instead transforms the image into an ethical gesture that seeks to recognize and to compensate for the lack of agency suggested by Mueller's voicelessness.

The sense of proximity toward bodies that characterizes both works, Cookie with her cane, Provincetown, 1989 and Sharon with Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September, 1989, could be the result of Goldin's actual, physical closeness to her subjects or a subsequent cropping of the images. Either way, the aesthetic of embodied proximity seen in the close-range perspective of the figures should be considered a connotative choice made by Goldin. It is a choice that, without the clear articulation of her professional agenda being interpersonal and motivated by care, could otherwise be interpreted as an intrusive deployment of the camera. As mentioned earlier, in Sharon with Cookie on the bed, the camera appears to hover in a domineering way above Sharon and Mueller and, because neither woman responds to the lens but seem to turn away dejectedly, the work could be interpreted as a diminution of the subjects. Yet, the domestic space of the bedroom situates

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or, at the other end of the spectrum, a straight belief in the magical, mythical powers of photography to reproduce presence.

[39] Simon Watney, "Photography and AIDS," The Critical Image, ed. Carol Squires (Seattle: Bay P, 1990) 183; "Infectious Desires," Policing Desire: Pornography AIDS and The Media (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987/1996) 22.

the work through intimacy, as this is a private room whose access is reserved. Additionally, the mention of the Provincetown location indicates the popular, sea-side village that is known to be an inclusive haven where artists and gays have, for decades, been celebrated in a community atmosphere. The central placement of the wedding photograph is the element that bridges the gap between all the figures in space and in time, offering a joyful narrative to offset the despondency that permeates the scene – but also to explain it. If the various details are meant to document a time of intense grief, they also imply a concern for Mueller, suggested by her reclining, restful position, settling into the comfort of the bed, the Provincetown location and by the family photograph of the deceased that hangs on the wall. Therefore, the photographic connotation points directly to the ethical potential of photographic transparency, which, in a manner particular to Goldin's work, revolves around the conscious display of emotional as well as physical proximity.

Another connotative dimension that situates Goldin's practice as avoiding the violence of representation is the way she photographs the important people in her life – in this case, Mueller – in a serial manner, thereby creating chronicles of lives that unfold over years, sometimes decades, so that the identities of her friends are represented as fluctuating and performative rather than essentialized. The narrative quality to the work is maximized by Goldin in the way she exhibits dozens of related subjects together on one wall, so that the personal history of any one subject is made complex through temporal links, parallels or breaks in the sequence perceived by the viewer, via contiguous movement.[40] According to Frogier, a wall covered with Goldin's work (which can easily encompass over one dozen different individuals in the expanse of years, even decades) produces a "discontinuité spatio-temporelle" that may challenge the potential sedimentation of identity conveyed by a

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[40] Frogier interprets this approach as a form of photographic "note-taking" for Goldin's intimate journal.

singular, portrait image.[41] Qualifying the subject as living a complex and vibrant life is also

a significant aesthetic strategy to disrupt essentializing views towards people with AIDS as

only dying or as those whose deaths are inevitable. This is an important tenet of ACT-UP

and other activists who are concerned with shifting awareness to the ongoing issues facing

HIV-positive people, so many of whom are asymptomatic and living productively.[42] These

aspects of temporality and contextualization, seen in Goldin's working method, can be read

as comprising an ethics of representation in that they present fuller, more multi-faceted

representations of individuals prone to the representational violence specific to the AIDS

era.

    A view that should be emerging is that Goldin's choices in the <u>Cookie Mueller</u> series

address a persistent concern within photographic theory (a concern that pre-dates the AIDS

crisis): for the photographer to make his or her presence known within the work in order to

avoid ideological pitfalls. This need for self-implication is, according to film and

photography theorist Rudolph Arnheim, needed in work that takes recourse to the snapshot

aesthetic which, he points out, achieves a certain invisibility despite the fact that it involves

an intervention on behalf of the photographer: "The photographer takes a hunter's pride in

capturing the spontaneity of life without leaving traces of his presence. [. . .] But the need

for such precaution and trickery highlights the congenital problem of photography:

inevitably the photographer is part of the situation he depicts."[43] The snapshot aesthetic to

which Arnheim refers involves the professional's contrived elision of his own presence and

evocation of a disinterest or disengagement from the scene. This should be distinguished

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[41] Frogier, 22.

[42] Andrew Sullivan expresses this view in, "Gay Life, Gay Death: The siege of a subculture," <u>The New Republic</u> 17 Dec. 1990: 19-25.

[43] Rudolph Arnheim, "On the Nature of Photography," <u>Critical Inquiry</u> 11 (1974): 151-152.

from the snapshot aesthetic common to the amateur, family photographer that more resembles Goldin's work which, as Louis Kaplan asserts, is not about aesthetic "indifference," but the result of love "where content is never arbitrary because it is always in direct relationship to, or in a state of emotional attachment with, the photographer."[44] Therefore, the degree to which the photographer performs his or her task through stealth manoeuvres, perhaps feigning innocence about the consequences, is directly related to the potential for ethical problems to arise: "[. . .] the more skilfully he hides and surprises, the more acute is the social problem he creates."[45] Arnheim's dramatization of the undercurrent of tension between ethics and the necessity of making manifest the artist's involvement in the image-making should be considered in light of the hushed discretion that shrouded Serrano's access to corpses in The Morgue, a series which similarly evokes this paradox of *disengaged proximity* that Arnheim identifies in relation to the professional's aesthetic (in which the trace of his own involvement is erased). For example, Serrano's professional virtuosity focuses all attention on the presence of the corpses in front of the lens, thereby drawing attention away from the extent to which his manipulation of the bodies may have been covered up. As I have attempted to demonstrate in the previous discussion of the many connotative details through which Goldin articulates her own relationship to her subjects, my conclusion is that the potential for duplicity is lessened with an aesthetic like Goldin's (akin to the snapshots of the amateur) in which familial ties are more palpable and vocal, making evident attachments that should be seen as both emotional *and* physical, therefore fostering a more obvious transparency of working method, displaying *engaged proximity*.

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[44] Kaplan 12.
[45] Arheim 153 & 152.

If, according to Cornell's proposal, part of the role of the *chiffonier* is to "guard the Other against the appropriation that would deny her difference or singularity," I contend that Goldin individuates the dying other through the connotative elements, as seen in the titles used in the Cookie Mueller series (and consistent with all her other work), in which the proper names of the subjects represented qualify them with biographic specificity, framed by a prior intimacy. By centering their identities in terms of intimacy so the viewer may access these subjects on a "first name basis," Goldin counters their positions as marginal in relation to dominant or normative social structures.[46] The dates and the locations in which they were photographed are also offered in the titles, thus creating a narrative that further situates the identities of her friends with a precise sense of geography and history. As Elisabeth Bronfen argues, the individuation of a subject through proper names and other biographic information offers a means to counter the violent effects of representations to which the dead (females in particular) are vulnerable, when a death is represented in a way that would disregard the material suffering involved in the experience as the accomplishment of the artist who faces "death in general," without acknowledging the specificity of the subject behind the representation.[47]

While Bronfen points out the particular vulnerability of females to representational violence, gender theorist Judith Halberstam demonstrates how, in historical representations

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[46] My understanding of social normativity is here derived from Judith Butler's frequent reference to the force of social "norms," theorized in the Introduction to Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex" (New York: Routledge, 1993) as the regulating matrix of social "intelligibility" in which those whose queer gender deviates from it will experience identity in terms of abjection or psychosis. Reflecting upon the intersecting influences of racism, embodiment and gender, Jim Perkinson also offers a definition of normativity as "whiteness, maleness, middle-classness, and heterosexuality," in "The Body of White Space," Revealing Male Bodies, ed. Nancy Tuana and others (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002) 174. Both views are pertinent in relation to Goldin's work depicting gay, bisexual, transgender or otherwise queer friends.

[47] Bronfen's view, from "Violence of Representation – Representation of Violence," Over Her Dead Body (1992), was outlined in the previous chapter in relation to Serrano's elision of the proper names of his morgue subjects in favour of titling the works by the manner of death.

of cultural bohemia, photographic connotation holds a proclivity to representational

violence when the subjects depicted are queer.[48] Because Goldin's work offers a sustained

look at the contemporary bohemia of queer and transgendered friends, Halberstam's view

is noteworthy. In her analysis of Brassai's 1930s photographs of Parisian *demi-monde*

lesbian bars such as *Le Monocle*, Halberstam states that it is Brassai's captions rather than

his aesthetic approach that do violence to his subjects. In these works, which were censored

out of his well-known <u>Paris by Night</u> dossier, both butch and femme revellers are labelled

by Braissai's captions through pathologizing terms, such as "inverts," "perverts" and

"women attempting unsuccessfully to be men," rather than reflecting the glamour and the

pleasures of dancing enjoyed by the women, the intimacy and freedom created by the

community-oriented space and the agency of self-display. Halberstam's reading exposes

the disjuncture between the dignified subjects one sees in the photographs, the self-assured

inhabitation of performative, queer identities and the "darkness" through which Brassai's

text captions subsequently position these same figures.[49] In addition to offering a historical

context against which one could contrast Goldin's representations of transgendered friends

immersed in urban nightlife, representations in which she (unlike Brassai) is not a voyeur

but a participant, Halberstam's discussion of the effects of Brassai's text captions puts into

relief the importance of Goldin's titles: these contemporary queer bodies are not labelled

categorically through the discourse of gender *failure* but individuated through an *a priori*

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[48] Judith Halberstam, lecture, "Ceremonies of Our Present: Photography and Queer History," University of Toronto, Remapping American Studies lecture series, Toronto, 29 Oct. 2004.

[49] Halberstam attributes part of this problem to Brassai's position in relation to his subjects, that of the voyeur rather than the participant, and suggests that he uses the camera as a weapon to shield *himself* from the queer "other" and the erotic and performative desires successfully asserted by them. This view fuels the argument that the prior relationship the photographer holds with the subjects (either as outsider or insider) can significantly alter the subsequent representation. It is this prior relationship that Goldin holds with her subjects, as member of the subcultural community she photographs that, according to Louis Kaplan, offers the means to disrupt dominant systems of representation that is the significant contribution of her work.

affection advanced by the familiar names and the photographic connotation that claims a position of respect.

The biographic specificity Goldin uses to title the works in the <u>Cookie Mueller</u> series is important because it resists the transformation of her friends' deaths into abstractions or universal moments which, in light of Bronfen's views, would enact a violence of representation. This thinking parallels that of art critic David Deitcher, who discusses the work of Goldin as well as other contemporary American artists in order to draw attention to the importance of "specificity" when representing AIDS deaths.[50] Deitcher asserts that one should distinguish the individuals represented as well as the cause of death in order to resist an abstract or universalized view of death that would offer only an existential reflection on mortality without any *political* awareness. He cautions that the representation of various AIDS deaths without the historic, cultural circumstances in which they occur could foster complacency, sentimentality or a view of AIDS deaths as inevitabilities rather than a stance of activism. Deitcher's point, reflecting the continued influence of Douglas Crimp's essay "Mourning and Militancy," is to elaborate the ambivalent undercurrent that informs the debate regarding how to best address AIDS deaths and what degrees of balance between anger, activism, aestheticism and memorial one should strive for.

However, this specificity, what I view as involving the connotative elements that contribute to an ethical approach to Goldin's subjects, has also been criticized by Deitcher, who finds that the diaristic quality that Goldin espouses plays upon the art-world's centuries-old legacy that mythologizes the (tragic) figures of bohemia, a legacy that feeds upon the notion of authenticity in order to advance commercial success. And, in light of the commercial success of Goldin's work, in which these serious issues become, in his mind,

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[50] David Deitcher, "Death and the Marketplace," <u>frieze</u> 29 (1996): 44.

inappropriately couched, Deitcher interprets Goldin's work as not adequately critical to avoid exploiting both her living and her dead subjects.[51] While Deitcher views the beauty and "glamour" of Goldin's works as at odds with the more politicized nature of the AIDS subject matter, the notion of beauty is a hotly-debated and subjective concept whose complexity merits a separate study (that exceeds the present context).[52] I point out, however, that Goldin does not just exhibit images of her friends at euphoric moments, but conveys the gamut of life experiences, making a point of representing despondency, disability and terminal illness in ways that (despite their beauty) demonstrate Goldin's staunch refusal to inoculate her own sensibility against the traumatic moments she witnesses. Goldin's entire photographic paradigm, centrally defined by a self-conscious transparency in which her own investments are consistently-articulated and shown to involve longevity, seriality and biographic specificity, would seem to be direct attempts by her to avoid precisely such objectification or exploitation of her friends. To not photograph or to *edit out* scenes of illness and death would be to perform an aestheticization that takes part in the normative social categorization of certain forms of embodiment and identity that her practice seeks explicitly to overturn. To remove a post-mortem photograph of Mueller when so many other (frankly trivial) aspects of Mueller's intimate life have been exhibited[53] would be to offer a frank judgement of the event of an AIDS death as taboo through its repression. It would be to refuse the call of ethics that, as Levinas points out,

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[51] Deitcher 45.

[52] Susan Perling-Hudson in "Beauty and the Status of Contemporary Criticism," October 104 (2003) and Chris Kraus in "Art Collection," Video Green: Los Angeles Art and The Triumph of Nothingness (New York: Semiotext/e, 2004) both offer useful, if divergent, summaries of their view of the contemporary discourse of beauty in relation to artwork conveying politicized content. Jane Blocker negotiates the legacy of Lessing's and Winckelmann's aesthetics in relation to contemporary body art as a continuing disparagement of the feminine and states: "Within aesthetics pain serves as a foil for beauty, as a repository of body loathing." What the Body Cost (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004) 16.

[53] For example, Goldin's photograph of Meuller urinating in the washroom of a popular nightclub entitled Cookie and Millie in the Girls' Room at the Mudd Club, New York City, 1979 (1979).

resides in the recognition of the other when she is suffering. In fact, it is Goldin's emphatic claims of her own honorific stance toward her subjects, her function embodying the allegory of the *chiffonier,* granting her friends privileged positions by her representational perspective and actions, situating them through an ongoing, emotional contingency, staking personal claims on them as loved in life and mourned in death, that guards the identities of her friends against such misappropriation or neglect.

To summarize the first part of this chapter, despite Mueller's lack of a voice as a means to express identity from her own perspective, Goldin's photographic engagement with her achieves a certain dialogism by showing the interwoven history they mutually share as well as a caring, altruistic proximity to her. Goldin speaks to her, for her and, to a certain extent, with her through the representation in a way that offers her friend biographic specificity and therefore evades the tendency to representational violence that is a particular concern for vulnerable subjects (especially those who, like Mueller, are both female and afflicted by AIDS-related illness). The various connotative elements chosen by Goldin offer the necessary preconditions for a transparent photographic practice that can foster a perception of the ethical treatment of subjects in the autobiographical genre. What was, hopefully, also emerging in the discussion of <u>Sharon and Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September, 1989,</u> is that these connotative elements frame the *embodied* relationships of Goldin to her subjects. A view by Frogier highlights how Goldin's practice individuates her friends by naming them and photographing them *as* bodies at close range, whereby each component contributes to the uniqueness of the subject: "[. . .] c'est avant tout un corps que ne perd jamais son nom propre, c'est-à-dire un corps que ne cesse de

devenir sujet."[54] The discussion of the proximity Goldin evokes in her work, both

emotional *and* physical, allows me to introduce the next part of the chapter, which deals

more closely with the embodied relationships Goldin depicts. The strong phenomenological

underpinnings evident in Goldin's work – not only in the recognition of bodies but also in

the implication of her own immanence toward them – are effects that contribute to the self-

implication of the photographer's presence necessary for an ethical, transparent

representational practice. It is with this hint of phenomenological immanence that I

introduce the next part of this chapter.

Part Two: Touching the Dying with Camera Vision

While the previous section largely involved discursive connotation that framed a reading of

Goldin's work as ethically-transparent, this section addresses the connotation found within

the photographic frame, emerging from Goldin's depictions of her friends' bodies, their

relative positions (to each other and to her) and various dimensions of touch. Goldin's work

explores a challenging set of circumstances that arise when subjects are dying, whereby the

intersubjectivity founded upon the agency of both parties (by way of visuality, the voice,

touch or the continued, relatively unimpeded embodiment of the subject), can no longer be

assumed. In the series representing her friends Gotscho and Gilles Dussein, a couple who

faced the AIDS-related illnesses and subsequent death of Dussein, Goldin's work

demonstrates the following important tenet: in representations of the dying, when the

waning of a subject's agency becomes apparent, it is challenging as well as ethically urgent

to recognize their vulnerability in ways that avoid dominating them. This mandate is

significant in the politicized context of AIDS representations, where the biographic

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[54] Frogier 24.

specificity and dignity of the subject is shown to be significant, after Simon Watney's

caution that gay people with HIV or AIDS-related illness not be essentialized in

representations in ideologically-pernicious ways, a tendency he shows to be prevalent in

the mass media.[55] Goldin, I suggest, represents the dying benevolently and respectfully, in

a manner that does not violate the vulnerability of the subject, thereby demonstrating an

approach that is critically and ethically aware. With recourse to the Merleau-Ponty's

phenomenological models of perceptual, intersubjective engagement and to the notion of

the haptic, I seek to demonstrate how Goldin's embodied immanence is inscribed within

the scene and how her recourse to the confluence of senses implied by her photographic

paradigm makes gentle contact with her subjects. The following series by Goldin suggests

that the process of death alters the potential for balanced intersubjectivity, an effect that

takes place through her recognition of the potential for the (a)symmetry of positions which,

according to the thinking of Levinas, is an ethical gesture. Part of Goldin's ethical gesture,

I suggest, involves a recognition of the importance of the body's weight and its materiality

for a subject facing AIDS-related death and this positions her as performing the *chiffonier's*

allegory of mourning.

Reciprocity and Intertwining

In the early nineteen-nineties, Goldin created a photographic series of two Parisian friends

who were lovers: Gilles Dussein, an art dealer and his boyfriend Gotscho, a body-builder.

While she photographed each man individually and as a couple, the story of the

relationship seems best told by one image, <u>Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992</u>

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[55] Watney, <u>Policing</u>. One of his findings points to the way "victimhood" is entirely ideologically positioned in terms of punishment, guilt and blame and dependent on the manner of infection – positioning heterosexuals who contract HIV as more innocent than gays, who are more "deserving."

(1992) [Fig. 23]. While this first work does not represent a dying subject, it is important by functioning within Goldin's temporal paradigm representing many facets of her friends' lives. The moment captured in this instance establishes the loving aura that holds political importance within a broader context of AIDS-related representations, suggesting that in both life *and* death the individual is loved and will, therefore, be subsequently mourned in death.

The large, richly-coloured cibachrome, Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992, shows the two men sitting on a table: Dussein facing the camera and Gotscho facing away toward an expansive set of windows through which grey daylight bathes the scene. Each man's head is tilted clockwise to the right to place a kiss on the other's neck, intertwining in a simultaneous and reciprocal act of affection. While the men turn their backs away from the outside world, they face each other, forming a tightly-interlocking nucleus. The apparent love that circulates between them is bonded through the complementarity of their bodies, directing the inward focus of this knot, where affection seems mirrored and reversible. Touching and being touched, bearing witness to each other, whispering in each other's ears: these are gestures that endow the image of their relationship with mutuality. The extremely tight cropping of the photograph (an effect common to much of Goldin's work) foregrounds the bodies with an almost airless proximity but also affords Goldin and (subsequently) the viewer entrance into an intimate moment that may otherwise appear exclusionary. Goldin's close viewpoint and the position of the men's bodies both contribute to a sense of intersubjectivity between subjects on both sides of the lens: the intimacy between Gotscho and Dussein seen within the frame is echoed by that of Goldin towards her friends. The classical symmetry of the men's bodies, moulding to each other's curves,

offers a sense of electrically-charged movement that is highlighted by the textured play of various surfaces: that of the natural light from the windows to create chiaroscuro effects on the muscles of each man's shoulders; the naked expanse of Gotscho's skin over his rippled musculature; the gentle draping of jersey fabrics, blue against brown; the bristle of adjacent heads with closely-cropped hair, blonde against brunette. Nor should one neglect the gloss of the photographic surface, which itself shifts depending upon the movement of the viewer's body. The criss-crossing of this variety of sensual effects appears, interestingly, mirrored in graphic form by the tattoo prominently displayed on Dussein's forearm: it depicts the symmetrical interlocking of five swords in diverging directions.

With recourse to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological models, in particular, his view that the potential for intersubjectivity is heightened by a confluence of the senses, one can better understand how Goldin uses photography to allude to the sense of vision as well as touch (at times interchangeably), as means to show and to take part in the interconnectivity possible between subjects. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of visuality, developed in Phenomenology of Perception (1945) and in The Visible and the Invisible (1962), breaks down the strict separation between the subject and the object and deepens an understanding of how an ethics of representation, in which the other is approached in a non-violent manner, could work in a photographic practice. Merleau-Ponty diverges from the notion of the disembodied, transcendental vision of Descartes's *cogito*, made clear by the following passage: "[. . .] he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he *is of it*."[56] As opposed to the ocularity and linearity-planarity associated with the apparatus theorists' reading of camera vision, Merleau-Ponty significantly

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[56] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1968) 134-135.

attempts to bring the *cogito* down to earth.[57] That the Merleau-Pontian subject is implicated

as an embodied presence by and within the world he surveys allows a model through which

to conceive of the cameraperson as a grounded density, rather than a god-like figure of

mastery. Merleau-Ponty's idea of "this strange adhesion of the seer and the visible,"[58]

which asserts the fleshy presence of the self as well as others within the same horizon of

vision, assists one in conceiving the ways in which Goldin projects herself into the picture

before her, claiming and implicating her own presence in the scene she confronts. In

Sharon and Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September, 1989, one is made aware of this

by Goldin's hovering position, wedged between her two friends and by the way she

references their related histories by the placement of the wedding portrait on the wall.

Goldin's insistence that her own presence is projected into the scene is perceptible in a

number of other ways, which will be explored in subsequent pages, but most consistently in

the close-range views of her friends' bodies, which offer the illusion of her own physical

proximity to her friends, a proximity redoubled by the articulated love that founds the

works.[59]

In a study that explores the complimentarity of Luce Irigaray's thinking with that of

Merleau-Ponty, Judith Butler emphasizes the ethical implications of the confluence of

senses that some of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological models encourage, conveyed

especially by his "purposely mixed metaphors" and predicated upon the ensuing

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[57] Merleau-Ponty, "The Cogito," Phenomonology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002) 429-475.

[58] Merleau-Ponty, Visible 139.

[59] As I have demonstrated in the discussion of Serrano's work, a close range perspective does not guarantee that the photographer's presence will be perceptible within the scene and can just as easily foster an elision of any trace of his presence. It is the transparency of working method and the palpable affection this seeks to articulate that makes the difference.

"entanglement" between subject and object/other.[60] The theory of perception demonstrated in Merleau-Ponty's essay, "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," suggests that one could understand vision itself as a kind of touch: "[. . .] there is even an inscription of the touching in the visible [. . .]" and vision as offering an inherently corporeal proximity between self and other.[61] One of the unique conceptions of Merleau-Ponty is the *chiasm*, a model of embodied, reciprocal intersubjectivity in which recognition of the other occurs through the multi-sensorial capacity of the body, in particular, through touch and vision but also, as Butler points out, through the gestural quality of speech, inflecting all of these relations with their potentially-dialogic quality. The intertwining of lovers' bodies captured by Goldin in <u>Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992</u> is remarkable in its formation of a human chiasm, an abutting of torsos and the overlapping of surfaces, a bridge that disrupts the boundaries between inside and outside, self and other, in a manner in which sensation is circuitous, involving effect and affect. The abyss that once divided the subject from the object it views in Descartes's figure of the *cogito* is reformulated by Merleau-Ponty to be a relational tissue, a "flesh" of the world, a horizon of perception shared by both parties, in which they are both immersed.[62] Although the allusion is certainly fitting, the "flesh" is a notion not to be confused with the literal flesh of the body, but considered an *environment* of connectivity. These notions of the chiasm and the flesh situate subjects in embodied relationships with each other, a move especially important when subjects are threatened by mortality, which will impose a distance between them, an ensuing lack of reciprocity and, ultimately, the radical confrontation of absence.

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[60] Judith Butler "Sexual Difference as a Question of Ethics: Alterities of the Flesh in Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty," <u>Bodies of Resistance: New Phenomenologies of Politics, Agency, and Culture</u>, ed. Laura Doyle (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2001) 60 & 65.
[61] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Visible</u> 143.
[62] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Visible</u> 139.

Because, for example, Merleau-Ponty describes vision as having a tactile quality (like the exploratory touch of a doctor "palpating" the flesh of another in a non-invasive way), one can better understand the way Goldin's photographic approach could be considered gentle and even a manner of caress.[63] Here, one perceives an opening toward love in Merleau-Ponty's tactile chiasm as an embodied caress within vision, an intersubjectivity which is permeable rather than oppositional, when he asserts the capacity of vision to function as a type of embrace, surrounding that which is perceived (as do arms the body of the lover): "The look, we said, envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things."[64] Substantiating this view is the reading of Goldin's work by Larys Frogier, who also finds Merleau-Ponty's idea of "la palpation par le regard" useful for interpreting her deployment of the camera towards her subjects – as a form of establishing and prolonging loving contact with them.[65] This is significant in articulating a model of vision that carries a sense of caring, non-invasive exploration rather than the piercing, epistemological curiosity of the clinical gaze that accompanies the pathological anatomy as described by Foucault and as seen in Serrano's The Morgue series.[66] I propose that Goldin's work calls for an alternative model of visuality to that conveyed by the predatory, potentially annihilating gaze of Lacan discussed in the last chapter, involving single-point perspective that arrests and, like water from oil, divides two subjects through an alienating confrontation. For example, Merleau-Ponty's theory of visuality as a carnal part of "the flesh" of the world is described by him as "synergy" and "relationship,"[67] and feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz describes

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[63] Merleau-Ponty, Visible 131.
[64] Merleau-Ponty, Visible 133.
[65] Frogier 18.
[66] See Michel Foucalt, Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972).
[67] Merleau-Ponty, Visible 142 & 145.

Merleau-Ponty's dynamic of intertwining as "folded back on itself," "torsion" and "criss-crossing."[68] These are terms that position one to appreciate the flows circulating in Goldin's work, charging it with an emotional intensity found in the light's many angles ricocheting off surfaces as well as the wrapping of the men's bodies into each other.

If, in Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992, Goldin's close camera range evokes proximity, her presence within the scene is also visualized in a more literal way by the obvious use of a flash that, in contrast to the natural light permeating the room from the opposite direction, lights up the central expanse of the skin on Gotscho's back and appears again in the sparkles on the china cup and saucer. Barthes, in terms more specific to the photographic medium than those offered by Merleau-Ponty but apparently influenced by his phenomenology, considers another direction of affect conveyed by rays of light. He describes the possibility for the photographer or viewer to be touched by the rays of light that would transmit the image, from the photographic referent in the direction of the viewer who perceives it. Barthes also conceives the reflection of light in a tangible way to suggest an embodied, specifically-maternal, connection between viewer and referent: "A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed."[69] Curator Elisabeth Sussman notes that the use of artificial light, even for scenes bathed with natural light, creates the "intensity" that is a defining characteristic of Goldin's works from this era, in which, "[s]he discovered her color in flashes of

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[68] Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994) 96 & 95. Grosz's interest in phenomenology is geared towards disrupting the stultifying codes of gender that would position bodies, in relation to each other.

[69] Barthes, Camera 81. Barthes's reference to the maternal body recalls the metaphor of intrauterine life used by Merleau-Ponty to describe the enveloping connectivity of the "flesh" in Visible, see p. 147.

electricity."[70] With regards to the aforementioned call made by Arnheim to see a trace of the photographer's presence left within the resultant photograph, in <u>Gilles embracing Gotscho, Paris, 1992</u>, it is evident that Goldin's projection of herself into the scene involves the residue of her simple, yet obvious, use of the flash.[71] Light rays moving in both directions, from the referent to the film emulsion and from the camera's flash onto the bodies captured on film, could be thought to form a tactile "flesh" that would connect Goldin to her subjects, whereby one could conceive of the photographic act as less one-directional and more chiasmic, a dynamic circuit of affect *and* effect. The sense of movement within the frame also offsets the projectile normally associated with the camera's look that would render static objects caught within it. The reciprocity that Merleau-Ponty envisions between the subject and his surroundings is based upon a model not of polar opposites, but fields that overlap in multiple horizons, presuming not only connectivity between subject and object, but a multi-sensorial continuum. This thinking assists one in appreciating the way Goldin realizes the potential for contact and exchange with the subjects in her work, seen in her emphasis on intertwining bodies, the play of various light sources, the non-dominating proximity and the skin surfaces, in which the boundaries between self and other are rather nebulous and animated by movement in many directions.

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[70] Elisabeth Sussmann, "In/Of Her Time: Nan Goldin's Photographs," <u>I'll Be Your Mirror</u>. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997, 31.

[71] On the other hand, Rosalind Krauss's notion of the photographic index, inspired by Roman Jackobson's theories, focuses one's attention on another photographic trace that is central to the definition of the medium: that left by the referent on the photographic emulsion. "Notes to the Index I," <u>The Originality of the Avant-Garde</u> (Cambridge: MIT P, 1994) 196-209.

Approaching the Waning Agency of the Dying

With a phenomenological model of vision established in relation to Goldin's work, I wish

to pursue the following questions. How does Goldin's photographic approach to the men's

embodiment become an instance of an ethics of representation? Further, how do certain

phenomenological relationships (between bodies depicted within the frame and between

the photographer and her subjects) *foster* an ethics of representation for the dying? The

delicate, tender intersubjectivity apparent in <u>Gilles embracing Gotscho, Paris, 1992</u> is, in

the next work, <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u> (1993) shown to be on the verge of being lost by the

effects of mortality. But Goldin's representation of this potential for a loss of touch is an

ethical gesture not only realized but also partially overcome by the deployment of her

camera.

A year after <u>Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992</u> was taken, the course of

AIDS-related illness had reduced Dussein's body to a skeletal form. Goldin photographed

him on his death bed and one of the most powerful documents of suffering (that of Dussein

and Goldin's in response to it) is a photograph of his arm, outstretched across a white

hospital sheet, entitled <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u> (1993) [Fig. 24]. His once healthy, muscled

arm is so thin that it appears like a lonely dirt road cutting across an expanse of snow

viewed from an aerial perspective, tracing a diagonal path with sharp turns where his joints

are. In relation to the previous robustness of Dussein's body, this image delineates a

transformation so dramatic that it suggests his incipient death. While the image documents

how light Dussein's body became, his arm appears also to be weighed down by the traces

of Goldin's sorrow (traces that become more evident when the series is viewed in its

entirety). The look of the camera seems to be all Dussein's arm (now frail as a twig) could

sustain, for the actual touch of a human hand would seem capable of crushing it. The continuous whiteness of the hospital sheet and the few folds they contain offer more depth, curvature and softness than the unforgiving contours of his almost fleshless arm resting upon them. The minimalism of the image is in contrast to much of Goldin's work at this time, characterized by the use of richly-saturated jewel tones and by her Baroque enjoyment of the flesh. The reduction of her colour palette in Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993 to a pallid, green-tinged shade of white against the arm's beige, paired with the geometric severity of the forms (where the arm breaks the expanse of sheets into two triangles), constitutes one of Goldin's most austere images, whose ascetic formal qualities offer a visual parallel to the dire subject matter.

The arm is here a body part standing in metonymically for an individual, yet it does not suggest an objectification of Dussein because the narrative dimensions of the series contextualizes it within the AIDS crisis and connects it to a clearly identified source. This body fragment represented by Goldin should be mentioned in the context of some of her close contemporaries, David Wojnarowicz and Kiki Smith, New York artists whose work also addresses AIDS and the frailty of the body and, notably, was included in an exhibition in which the curator Helaine Posner identifies "the striking preponderance of the body fragment as a highly charged metaphor for the psychological, social, political, and physical assaults on the individual."[72] While both Goldin and Serrano (in his aforementioned Knifed to Death I and II) offer photographs of the outstretched hands of the dying or dead in which the effect of fragmentation similarly produces a "faceless portrait," Goldin's rendition never suggests the violent dislocation of identity enacted by Serrano's ink-stained hands.

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[72] Helaine Posner, "Separation Anxiety," Corporal Politics (Cambridge: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1992) 22.

The difference is the result of connotation, such that Goldin's image represents a specific individual who is loved (by her and by Gotscho, as <u>Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992</u> makes clear), while Serrano's produces a corpse that, through its anonymity and situatedness within the forensic, institutional confines of the morgue, becomes criminalized. Despite Serrano's duo of hands not showing the face of the dead, the works invoke a historical discourse of repressive, nineteenth-century, instrumental uses of portraiture that, as Sekula shows, implicates photography's function in relation to the archive and constructs an institutional identity *for* the subject. Ensuing from Goldin's honorific framework – with recourse to connotative measures and a transparent practice – is the maintenance of the subject's specificity from a position of non-violent proximity. With these issues in mind, the dialectic that emerges by comparing Goldin's <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u> to Serrano's <u>Knifed to Death I</u> and <u>II</u> provokes this question: how can the alterity of the dying figure, expressed acutely by the apparent representational violence of the fragmented image of the body, be considered an ethical stance of photography – a medium that, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, holds the potential to essentialize, to dominate and to distort the identity of the subject? From a phenomenological perspective that takes into account the way embodiment is intersubjective, the next question to ensue from <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u> is: how does one make contact with the dying when possibilities for intersubjectivity are being constrained by mortality – when the other is dying and losing the ability to feel touch?

The placid and solitary thinness Goldin conveys in <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u> is in marked contrast to <u>Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992</u> and suggests neither reciprocity nor symmetry among the bodies that were assumed to be in close proximity to

Dussein at this time (that of Goldin and that of Gotscho). Despite this, I propose that Goldin's work is non-dominating, in a way that still maintains the ethical recognition of embodied difference. As explored in <u>Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992</u>, Merleau-Ponty's model of the chiasm helped to articulate the reciprocity that transpires between the bodies. While Merleau-Ponty conveys his model of the chiasm by a description of two hands touching each other to suggest reversibility in the sensible world – a movement that works in both directions – it should also be considered an experience that is subject to *interruption.*

At this juncture, a brief return to some views of Luce Irigaray first discussed in Chapter Two will clarify the terms of intersubjectivity that come into play in Goldin's <u>Gotscho-Gilles</u> series in which Goldin explores not only reciprocity but also symmetry and their potential, in terminal illness, to be interrupted, descending into phenomenological asymmetry. Irigaray has critiqued Merleau-Ponty's notions of the chiasm and the flesh as neither granting adequate awareness of sexual difference (in his appropriation of maternal models without actually discussing the female body), nor necessarily involving symmetry which, she asserts, is an important foundation for an ethical, intersubjective relationship.[73] Irigaray describes the character of Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic model, most clearly exemplified by the two hands touching each other, as "solipsistic" because it reflects two hands within the same body.[74] According to Irigaray, this suggests an imbalance of positions, because one hand can cover the other repressively or hierarchically.[75] To remind

[73] Luce Irigaray, "The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm,'" <u>An Ethics of Sexual Difference</u>, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993/1984) 151- 184.

[74] Irigaray, "Invisible" 157.

[75] Irigaray, "Invisible" 161. Grosz reiterates Irigaray's view of this "undesirable hierarchy" in "Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh," <u>Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World</u>, ed. Dorothea Olkowski and James Morley (New York: SUNY P, 1995) 157. And in <u>Volatile,</u> Grosz summarizes

the reader of a metaphor proposed by Irigaray for embodied intersubjectivity that functions in terms of symmetry, I recall the two lips "speaking- touching" together and, in more specific reference to Merleau-Ponty, she proposes the model of the hands touching, palm-to-palm as if in prayer. Both models, founded upon symmetry *and* reciprocity, she asserts, work to convey an ethical relationship motivated by tactile, loving proximity with embodied difference that is also able to circumvent the primacy of vision associated with masculinist paradigms of psychoanalysis and Cartesianism.[76] If by capturing a sense of carnal symmetry and reciprocity with Gotscho and Gilles embracing, Paris, 1992 Goldin demonstrates a concern for balance, in the later Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993 she suggests how it is being ruptured by the mortality of the other. The affect-effect suggested by the chiasmic clasp of the two hands no longer functions.

Goldin's Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993 presents a challenging moment whereby Irigaray's proposal for the ethical qualities of phenomenological symmetry do not at first seem possible due to the radical diminishment of Dussein's body and any sense of agency that would inhere to it. By this extreme emaciation, it appears that Dussein either may be too weak to recognize when someone might be touching him, or already dead. How can this seemingly one-sided relationship, in which all the agency appears to reside with the photographer, be considered ethical? Despite this sense of imbalance, it is, according to Levinas, the asymmetrical relation of two figures who confront each another, and the lack of reciprocity expected by the approaching agent, that founds the ethical relation which (as

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that because Merleau-Ponty's writings never explicitly addresses sexual difference, his work has been resisted by some feminists and notes Irigaray's critique of his "problematic" appropriation of the feminine metaphor of "invagination" to describe the folding over of the flesh in its reversibility. 100 &104.

[76] These two metaphors are elaborated by Irigaray, respectively, in, "When Our Lips Speak Together," This Sex Which is Not One (1977/85) and "The Invisible of the Flesh," An Ethics of Sexual Difference (1984/1993).

outlined previously) arises in awareness of the other's suffering. According to Levinas, "the supreme ethical principle" is most clearly expressed by the response of one to the useless suffering of the other in pain.[77] In fact, while the thinness of Dussein's arm at first appears to emphasize pathology, to invoke its binaristic framework as a way to represent the divergence of Dussein's present, dying condition from his previous health, I suggest that the isolation of Dussein's arm, stretched out starkly against the sheets, cut away from the rest of his body (and all the performative capacities its morphological cohesion may entail), offers an ethical recognition of his present vulnerability, his waning agency and the emotional suffering Goldin experiences because of it.

In order to interpret the seemingly contradictory way that Goldin approaches Dussein's body as a manifestation of her love, by creating an image of his arm that verges on the grotesque, it is useful to contrast Levinas's view of proximity with that of Irigaray. Levinas's conception of proximity in the ethical relationship is less precisely defined than that proposed by Irigaray, because (unlike her model of the two lips or two hands pressed together, touching) he inscribes distance within it, by the initial separation of the two parties, that must be overcome whether or not phenomenological symmetry occurs.[78] For this observation, I am indebted to the feminist inflection of Drucilla Cornell's thinking when she contrasts the work of Irigaray with that of Levinas to demonstrate how, without the recognition of the "phenomenological symmetry" proposed by Irigaray's various models, Levinas's proposal for "ethical asymmetry" is not possible.[79] Rather than placing the views of Levinas and Irigaray in opposition as Cornell does, I would like to take recourse to Irigaray's thinking alongside of that of Levinas in order to interpret Goldin's

[77] Levinas 95.
[78] Levinas 193-94.
[79] Cornell, Philosophy 85.

photographic gesture, to understand how the embodied difference of Dussein is recognized

and also overcome by Goldin's ethical stance of, in Levinas's words, "non-indifference of

one to another."[80] The subtlety proposed by Levinas's notion of proximity towards the

other (that maintains a recognition of his phenomenological difference, the "uniqueness" of

his being), is inscribed by an initial, tension-filled distance and the compulsion to overcome

it. This is useful for appreciating the objectifying distance necessary to perceive the

phenomenological dissimilarity between their two bodies and the advance Goldin makes

towards Dussein as ethical rather than pathologizing. The "non-indifference" could be seen

to arise in Goldin's recognition of Dussein's vulnerability, his inability to respond to her

recognition of him and the apparently radical asymmetry of their embodied positions. In

other words, Goldin's recognition of Dussein's embodied difference partakes of the ethical

symmetry proposed by Irigaray (although not the phenomenological symmetry she

advocates) while it simultaneously partakes of the phenomenological asymmetry proposed

by Levinas, that which founds the ethical approach of one to the other who suffers, an

approach that does not assume reciprocity.

Inscribed iconographically within the body part exemplified by Gilles' arm, Paris,

1993 is not only the association of the hand with touch but also, in the arm's (in)capacity to

gesture, the potential for an ethical relationship that implies two figures: one marked by

vulnerability, the other by the agency to alleviate it. To explain this, I refer to the

iconography that ethics philosopher Gary B. Madison attributes to Merleau-Ponty's model

of the two hands, seen in their *reaching* capacity, extended in "appeal to the other."[81] The

hand that gestures for the recognition of the other, by encapsulating a "call that one

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[80] Levinas 100.

[81] Gary B. Madison, "The Ethics and Politics of the Flesh," The Ethics of Postmodernity, ed. Gary B. Madison and Marty Fairbairn (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999) 180.

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desiring, embodied subjectivity makes to another," presents a serious ethical moment: does

one respond to this appeal and touch the other, lend him a hand by reaching to him or does

one turn away?[82]

In order to emphasize the significance of Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993 as Goldin's ethical

recognition of the waning agency of her dying friend, whose hand appears no longer able to

gesture, I return to the dilemma described in Chapter Two, that of Simon Wiesenthal as

described in The Sunflower, his autobiographical account of being summoned to the death

bed of a dying Nazi soldier who committed war crimes. I wish to highlight how the ethical

moment faced by Wiesenthal is symbolized iconically in his account of the meeting by a

gesturing hand: that of the soldier grasping for Wiesenthal's hand, pleading to him to

forgive his crimes against defenceless Jewish civilians. In the end, Wiesenthal's response is

to disengage his own hand from that of the soldier in revulsion and to remain silent – both

gestures that imply his refusal to grant forgiveness to the SS soldier on behalf of the

murdered Jews. However, bio-ethicist Erich H. Loewy argues that Wiesenthal demonstrates

an ethical response that is possibly greater than the verbal act of offering forgiveness. The

details of phenomenological proximity – that Wiesenthal allowed himself to be touched by

the SS officer and that he remained listening to him at the foot of the bed, putting his own

safety in great danger – are, according to Loewy, what constitute the recognition of the

officer's humanity (despite Wiesenthal's silence in terms of granting forgiveness and

despite the retraction of his hand): "By his behaviour Wiesenthal tacitly admits the SS man

back into human company from which such a person, must when truth strikes, feel himself

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[82] Madison 180.

permanently excluded."[83] While Dussein is, of course, not burdened by the guilt of horrendous war crimes, without Goldin's metaphorically extended hand (her presence as photographer-friend) and the loving comfort of his friends, he may remain positioned through the greater exclusions enacted by the social stigmatization of AIDS.[84] Like Wiesenthal to the dying SS officer, Goldin is situated in close physical proximity to a figure at his death-bed and is similarly presented with an ethical opportunity to make contact with him, to reinstate their shared humanity though touch and bearing witness. Goldin's photograph of Dussein's limp, emaciated hand suggests an ethical predicament involving notions of an appeal and a response: those, however, not enacted through words but gesturally, with her photographic act, which constitutes her reaching out to Dussein.

By prefacing Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993 with the analysis of Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992, I have hopefully set into relief how the plenitude of intersubjectivity that one witnesses in the earlier work is being threatened, and how Goldin's series offers an ethical recognition of this. Goldin's response to Dussein's experience of dying, suggested by the lifelessness of his arm, is to recognize that he cannot touch her or gesture toward her, yet her camera vision offers a non-violent gesture toward him to compensate for this waning agency. In the next few pages, I will explore how Goldin makes an attempt, by invoking a haptic photographic visuality, to overcome the phenomenological asymmetry presented by Dussein's diminished body.

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[83] Erich H. Loewy, The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness, Simon Wiesenthal, ed. Harry James Cargas and Bonny V. Fetterman (New York: Schocken, 1976/1997) 205.

[84] If one regards Douglas Crimp's "Accomodating Magic" as any indication of the atmosphere permeating the early nineteen-nineties, the stigma was still acute for gays. This essay highlighting the "us/them rhetoric" that positioned the gay experience of AIDS perniciously and therefore entirely different from the heterosexual experience of it. Media Spectacles, ed. Marjorie Garber, Jann Matlock and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 1993) 256.

Evoking a phenomenological model of perception presupposed by a confluence of senses, film theorist Laura U. Marks defines haptic visuality as follows: "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch. [. . .] Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze."[85] Despite the fact that the fragmentation of the body and the down-turned position of the palm in <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u> suggest a closing-off of the sense of touch and a fortressing of Dussein's subjectivity from that of the viewer, the expanse of skin exposed on his arm elicits a sense of touch via the haptic. In <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u>, due to its extended position across the sheets, which reduces the depth of field, as well as by the hairs that punctuate the skin's surface to texturize it, one's eye is led to sweep over the arm and diagonally across the expanse of the photograph. Its long and narrow shape, from one corner of the frame to the next, delineates the trajectory the eye should take. Further, Goldin's camera position is so proximate to the arm that, by extension, the breath of the viewer could be imagined to touch it if exhaled. Goldin presents a moment of calm contemplation of Dussein's condition from the distance of a mere few feet, as if to offer the viewer the opportunity to smell the starch in the hospital linens, to feel the temperature of the arm or take its pulse.

Despite the bracing formal qualities of Goldin's <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u>, the work demonstrates a benevolent, altruistic photographic approach to her dying friend and further, through a haptic deployment of the camera and a phenomenological engagement with the body it captures, offers the viewer a non-violent access to the subject. Goldin's approach

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[85] Laura U. Marks, <u>The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses</u> (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000) 162.

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could be contrasted with <u>Knifed to Death I</u> and <u>II</u>, in which Serrano depicts the palm-side

of the corpse's ink-stained hands so that the sense of tactile access to the dead is

encouraged but ultimately blocked, first by the artist's emphasis on the non-sensate quality

of the dangling hands (which were handled by many officials but remain unfeeling through

the process), and then by the over-determined visual sense that seems to penetrate the

corpse's bleeding arms through the wounds. At first glance, Goldin's aesthetic of reduction,

proximity and fragmentation in <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1992</u> shows a similarity to the style

taken by Serrano for <u>The Morgue</u>. In contrast to Serrano's approach, where the only

"access" the viewer is offered to the dead is through the wounds, the incisions, the

decaying pockets of skin that punctuate the corpses or through their orifices, similarly

probed by the camera's eye, Goldin's photographic approach does not wound the subject

under her scrutiny but suggests a transversal movement across his skin, tracing the incident

upon its surface, directed by the lines of its form. The different environmental contexts, the

morgue compared to the hospital, are also significant in reading the works; Goldin's

position in the hospital is that of a well-wishing friend, a visitor to the patient at his bed

side.

Taking into consideration Marks's contrast between the haptic and an optical use of

the camera whereby "[t]he effect of this surface density is to invite a kind of vision that

spreads out over the surface of the image instead of penetrating into depth[,]"[86] Goldin's

perspective, when compared to the camera vision of Serrano, circumvents the ideological

implications of mastery associated with more pointed, optical types of visuality, affecting

whether or not a vulnerable subject is approached in a gentle or an invasive way, a

dimension upon which the ethical relationship hinges. Further, the haptic presents a similar

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[86] Marks 137.

confluence of the senses that would endow it with the ethical potential that Butler attributes

to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological outlook, which holds potential for addressing the

asymmetry and solitude of subjects experiencing a death (conceivably, the solitude of the

dying figure as well as that of the person who witnesses it): "[. . .] Merleau-Ponty's

formulation is meant to overcome the isolation of the seeing and touching subject, and to

argue that the subject, through its sight and touch, is implicated in and by the very world it

explores [. . .]."[87] As a method of access, a phenomenological, haptic photographic

engagement could then be viewed as endowed with the ability to overcome the "isolation"

of the subject, which is a significant turn when approaching the mortality of a figure who,

like Dussein, appears no longer able to see, to speak or to feel the touch of those concerned

friends who approach him. In suggesting that Goldin's focus on the extended hand of her

friend is also iconically significant, I am inspired by Marks's proposal that Merleau-

Ponty's and Irigaray's similar recourse to models of touching hands are "mimetic" because

they perform, literally as well as iconically, what they represent.[88] In a mimetic fashion, the

hand suggests a subject's willingness to engage in intersubjective relationships while, in an

iconic fashion, offering a concrete sign of that desire. One can then consider Goldin's

photographic act as reaching out in a prosthetic manner to make a non-violent, touching

gesture with the vulnerable, isolated figure of Dussein, an effect produced iconically by the

hand she captures on film and mimetically by her haptic use of the camera. Setting the

stage for a heightened awareness of types of intersubjectivity in times when it is not

reciprocal – a situation experienced by those confronting the waning agency of a dying

friend – Goldin's work in <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u> proposes alternate methods of contact

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[87] Butler, "Sexual" 69.
[88] Marks 149.

that could be made with those who appear to be losing vehicles for intersubjectivity, in a way that doesn't exploit the imbalance of agency that characterizes this relationship.

While, in his study of Goldin's work, Frogier briefly asserts the productivity of using Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological model of visuality to show the dimensions of agency that can be exchanged *between* bodies,[89] my route has been rather different by showing how Goldin depicts those moments where exchange is becoming more difficult. In the next section, I address the ethical possibilities inherent in Goldin's photographic focus on dying subjects by emphasizing the body's weight and materiality and how this puts into relief the subsequent emotional losses that are directly implicated by it.

The (De)Materialization of the Body

The final work to be discussed from the Gotscho-Dussein series is Gotscho kissing Gilles, Paris, 1993 (1993) an image of Dussein on his death bed being kissed by his lover [Fig. 25]. The image shows the gaunt face of Dussein resting on pillows in the hospital room, kissed on the bridge of his nose by Gotshco, whose Herculean proportions serve to emphasize Dussein's thinness. It is impossible to tell whether Dussein's eyes are open or closed because, with the extreme weight loss, they have sunk deeply into the sockets. Any surrounding, personalizing details to decorate the room have been cropped out of the scene so that one focuses on the institutional quality of the metal bed frame, the glare of the florescent light and the standard-issue bed linens. Nonetheless, the freshness of the sheets, the orderly placement of the stacked pillows and the laundered quality of the tee-shirt worn by Dussein indicates the extent to which he is cared for. But, most of all, it is the presence of his lover Gotscho *within* the photograph that offers the aura of affection to the scene; the

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[89] Frogier 20.

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intimacy of Gotscho's body hovering over Dussein to kiss him creates a connection in which the two men's faces meet. The way Gotscho's lips are fused with the bridge of Dussein's nose offers a complimentary sequence of interlocking shapes, but in no sense evokes the reciprocity witnessed in the earlier <u>Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992</u>. The classically-balanced symmetry of the bodies in the earlier work is now lost. Gotscho's almost superhuman proportions as a body-builder become a terrible irony when confronted with Dussein's weight loss; all the weight of Gotscho's formidable body, which has enough strength for two men, appears unable to prevent Dussein's emaciation and departure from the world. In fact, Dussein's face and body appears stiff and unresponsive. Has he already died? Despite the revolving yin-yang balance seen in the image of the two men from a year earlier, Goldin now memorializes Dussein as a foil image to Gotscho, as a body disappearing in the face of Gotscho's enduring presence, as if to indicate the subsequent solitude Gotscho will likely experience as the bereft survivor, a situation prefigured by the kiss good-by.

The asymmetry of the two figures captures a sense of the material effects of AIDS-related illness on the body. The asymmetry is indicated in the composition through the size of the bodies as well as through their position in relation to each other. The representation of Gotscho's body as active – leaning over Dussein to plant the kiss benevolently – represents the loss of agency of Dussein, who, in corpse-like stiffness and recumbent passivity, is the recipient. Goldin's recognition of these embodied effects is, I propose, an ethical act that pushes the limits of representation to respect the AIDS-related transformations that alter the body of the dying as well as their access to the continued participation in intersubjectivity. Presently, I would like to address the ethical significance

of how Goldin's photograph addresses the diminishment of Dussein's body in terms of a

(de)materialization. Later, I will explore how the placement of the two bodies is (in

presenting an iconography of loving proximity) a contribution to the politics of AIDS

representations in a way that overcomes the social solitude of the AIDS patient.

To start, I remind the reader of Butler's theory (discussed in Chapter One, "The

Falling Man") of how subjectivity can be "materialized" by performatives in an injurious

manner, with the force of a blow.[90] With this in mind, Goldin's photographic series could

be seen to constitute a performative materialization of Dussein's subjectivity in a way that

helps overcome the abjection resulting from the normative socialization of AIDS at this

point in dominant American history.[91] The extreme thinness manifested by the body of

Dussein, whose cheek bones jut out like razor blades, chronicles the changes that have

reduced this once-robust man to a skeletal figure – a process that with AIDS-related illness

sadly occurs *before* death. What's interesting is the inverse process that Goldin's work

manifests, whereby the dying subject is subjectified by the photographic acts of the artist,

who discursively materializes his identity by acknowledging the dissolution of his body.

Further, Goldin's recognition of the thinness of Dussein, indicating a dematerialization of

the body approaching death, positions her as the *chiffonier*, the allegorical mourning figure

described by Cornell, who performs the work of gathering and guarding the "unassimilable

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[90] As Judith Butler describes in Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative (New York: Routledge, 1997), this is evident in hate speech, but also in laws passed for the United States military that prohibit the expression of homosexual identity.

[91] For historical description of the conservative, right wing, institutional repression of cultural expressions of the urgency of the AIDS crisis and the validity of making visible and audible personal experiences of it to counter the normative "silencing," see Lisa Phillips, "Culture Under Siege," 1991 Whitney Biennial Exhibition (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1991) 15-21; and David Wojnarowicz, "Living Close to the Knives," Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration (New York: Vintage-Random, 1991) 84-110.

materiality" of the dying and the dead, those who might otherwise be excluded from systems of representation, against (mis)appropriation.[92]

The materiality of the body that grounds the continued performance of Dussein's identity from the first-person perspective is shown in the course of Goldin's series to be especially tenuous. This positions the resultant photographs as an ethical act of care towards the dead, gently and respectfully recognizing and individuating the remains of the dying – that is, cherishing his image and the identity it conveys. In this regard, Goldin's series involves the limits of representation after Cornell's description of it as a precipice where one encounters a persistent, resistant materiality that is subject to being shut out of traditional representational systems but is experienced, nonetheless, as "the irreducible trace of radical otherness that remains in any given conceptual system."[93] Cornell advocates the reinscription of materiality into discursive structures in order to achieve ethical recognition of otherness. Her allegory of the mourning figure-*chiffonier* is her attempt to rectify the exclusion of the body of woman (figured as ineffable materiality) from philosophic and psychoanalytic systems of which and through which she speaks (i.e. pushing deconstruction to its limits). Because Cornell's definition of the ethical relation involves the necessity of heeding the responsibility to "care" for the identity of the (dead) other in a non-violent fashion, her allegory also presents an opportunity to address other "subtextual" bodies that are similarly subjected to exclusion – in particular, those AIDS bodies whose very materiality is at stake and for whom representational violence is also a serious issue. As with Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993 and Gotscho kissing Gilles, Paris, 1993, Goldin exposes the difficult process of making lasting contact with the ultimate "beyond"

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[92] Cornell, Philosophy 62.
[93] Cornell, Philosophy 68.

one's reach – the body of mortal illness, whose "foundation" is seen to be slipping away, the flesh that is at once immanent while also transient. Goldin's series forces the issue of how one is to recognize not only the discursive materialization of subjectivity but also how the embodied base that informs it comes acutely into view in the experience of AIDS-related illness and the challenge of ethically representing it.[94] After admitting, in Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993, that the contact with her friend is being interrupted by his mortality, the exploration in Gotscho kissing Gilles, Paris, 1993 unfolds as a negotiation of how to represent the impending loss, explicitly addressing the diminishing materiality of her friend's body.

In order to distinguish Goldin's approach from that of other artists who address the aspects of embodiment that are involved with representations of AIDS, a brief comparison of her work to that of the Cuban-American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres (d. 1996) will be fruitful here. Some major works of Gonzalez-Torres address the loss of loved ones due to the AIDS crisis, although his strategy is much different from Goldin's because he reflects upon these losses not by re-representing the bodies involved, but by representing the traces their bodies left behind, marking their absence. This is seen particularly in his city-wide installations of black and white photographs, enlarged to cover urban, commercial billboards in the early 1990s: one series depicting an empty, double bed with crumpled, un-made sheets; and, in another series, the open palm of an extended hand. For example, in the ten Untitled for Jeff billboards of 1992 that appeared in Washington, D.C., the extended

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[94] This view runs with, but admittedly also against Butler's important assertions in Gender Trouble (1990) and Bodies That Matter (1993), that one must never essentialize gendered identity, in other words, never conceive it as co-existent with or emanating from a notion of embodied substrata, nor to view it as a "surface" to be displayed as if arising from the "ground" of the sexed body. As an alternative to the limitations of identity she uncovers, of course, Butler proposes the alternative that one think of subjectivity as a discursive, performative materialization.

hand appears to elegaically, iconically suggest the waning ability to touch those who are

dying and the loss of embodied, sensorial access to the dead. The billboard series Untitled

(1991/1992), mounted in public spaces in New York City to commemorate his lover Ross,

alludes, by the imprint of bodies left on the empty bed, to the potential for disappearance

and the immediate effect it will have on the bereaved survivor. Another series of billboards

by Gonzales-Torres in the environs of New York City depicted footprints left in the sand,

suggesting, as curator Robert Storr notes, the human "residue" of "that has been," alluding

to the metaphor of the imprint or fingerprint frequently invoked in photographic

discourse.[95] Storr is referring to the artist's ability to exploit claims to veracity that have

been linked to the analog status of the medium – the trace of the referent. While both

Goldin and Gonzalez-Torres explore the threat of death as a meditation on the tension

between absence and presence, Goldin does this by emphatically re-representing the bodies

of those she loves in the variety of physical conditions they experience in a *recuperative*

manner, while Gonzalez-Torres repetitively plays out the haunting trauma of loss by

withholding the image of the body as it may be associated with a specific subject. The

espoused personal function served by Goldin's photographic practice expresses the

function of the *chiffonier* in terms of gathering the remains of the dead, but also suggests

her attempt to ward off the absence of death. This is expressed by Goldin in relation to her

work compiling the Cookie Mueller series as follows: "I put together this series of pictures

of Cookie from the 13 years I knew her in order to keep her with me."[96] Goldin's struggle

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[95] Robert Storr, "Setting Traps for the Mind and Heart," Art in America (Jan. 1996), whose second citation alludes to Roland Barthes's thinking in Camera Lucida (1981). Rosalind Krauss's essays, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism" and "Notes on the Index I" in Originality, have discussed the "fingerprint" effect on pages 110 and 203, respectively. André Bazin also mentions the fingerprint metaphor in relation to death and the preservation of life in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," What is Cinema? Vol. 1 Trans. Hugh Gray. (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1967)15.
[96] Goldin 256.

with absence is conveyed in a more literal way than Gonzalez-Torres's: the incessant precession of bodies photographed at close range in Goldin's work fleshes out the absences by tracing the contours those bodies once inhabited.

It could also be instructive to consider the ways in which Gonzalez-Torres has alluded to the disappearance of bodies during the AIDS crisis in more material terms, as seen in the installation Untitled (U.S.A. Today) (1990), which is comprised of a pile of commercially-produced, hard candy wrapped in red, silver and blue foil, laid out in the corner of a public museum space, free for the visitor to take away, thereby causing the pile to dwindle through the course of the exhibition [Fig. 26]. Art critic Suzanne Perling-Hudson describes the candy in these installations as functioning "as gifts" in a metaphor of displacement that "enacts the absence" in a material terms rather than discursively.[97] This movement of the candy pieces performed by the unforeseen trajectory taken by the gallery visitors beyond the walls of the museum becomes an allegory of loss that is directed outwards: it takes the "form" of dispersal or scattering. Gonzalez-Torres engages the visitor as an active agent in the performance of disappearance, rather than, as in Goldin's work, situating the viewer in a more passive position to witness to the reduction of the bodies of her friends. Weaving together the textuality of representation with the materiality that would elude it, Cornell has inquired: "What of the rest that has been pushed out of the system? To ask the question is already a kind of tribute to the forgotten Other, whose remains have been scattered."[98] With this question in mind, both Goldin and Gonzalez-Torres should be seen as similarly concerned with the negotiation of the seemingly impossible edges between the material and the discursive, between that which can be

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[97] Suzanne Perling Hudson, "Beauty and the Status of Contemporary Criticism," October 104 (2003) 124.
[98] Cornell, Philosophy 63.

touched and that which can be represented, and finding the best way of gathering or disseminating this "inassimilable materiality" of the dying and the dead for perpetuity. Goldin's recuperation of the bodies of her dying friends situates her as performing the "salvage" work of the *chiffonier*, gathering up these remains and bringing the traces together – literally, taking advantage of the trace of the referent that remains in the photograph.

However, in Goldin's mind, during the course of many years in which she lost many friends to AIDS, her goal proved contradictory, for instead of preserving her friends, the countless photographic representations of them index with precision the magnitude of her loss: "I used to think I couldn't lose anyone if I photographed them enough. [. . .] In fact, they show me how much I've lost."[99] In terms specific to the photographic medium, Goldin's inability points to the legacy of debates within photographic theory surrounding notions of indexicality, revolving around the irresolvable tension between the presence or absence of the referent and, as most famously articulated by Barthes, the way the medium prefigures and encapsulates death, but also wards it off by re-producing former presences.[100] Goldin's admitted inability to fully recuperate the dead with representations rings true to Cornell's observation that, despite the best attempts of the *chiffonier*, the materiality of otherness slips out of "representational schemes" and, to a certain extent, eludes one's grasp.[101]

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[99] Goldin, 256.
[100] Barthes, Camera.
[101] Cornell, Philosophy 75 & 70

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The Politics of Solitude

As suggested with <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u>, Goldin's photograph subjectifies Dussein by touching him with her camera vision as well as by her consistent deployment of photographic connotation, both of which are significant forms of recognition in the context of the AIDS crisis, within which Goldin's series must be situated. In relation to Watney's work deconstructing how mass media representations of people with AIDS, particularly evident in the late nineteen-eighties, position them as untouchable spectres of contagion – as social pariahs whose deaths will be experienced in solitude and go largely un-mourned – photographic work which depicts people with AIDS, both living and dying, *in loving* contexts is significant politically.[102] Specifically, Watney brings attention to media representations of AIDS in which patients are shown alone, at close range, yet psychologically remote as they suffer silently (as if resigned to their condition) in uncomfortable hospital gowns and beds, in rooms without personal belongings, often disfigured by emaciation or the "stigmata" of Kaposi's Sarcoma as orderlies, wearing face masks, cautiously clean while staying clear of any contact with the patient.[103] Not only does Goldin's photograph speak of a desire to touch the dying body of Dussein, but her focus on his fragile, extended arm suggests the continued importance that the person with AIDS be touched and be considered touchable during the course of his illness, thereby addressing and challenging significant tendencies of the mass media, as Watney has described, to depict the AIDS patient in a way that would only reinforce "the authority of the morbid."[104]

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[102] Watney, "Photography" 173-192.
[103] Watney, "Photography."
[104] Watney, "Photography" 173.

The insistent photographic connotation demonstrated in Goldin's work, seen in the

way she titles her works with the names of her friends, alludes to a discourse regarding

proper names that directly implicates identity politics and is particular to the gay activism

against the disappearance of whole communities due to the AIDS crisis.[105] This point has

been emphasized by Douglas Crimp, who cites Simon Watney's story in <u>Policing Desire:</u>

<u>Pornography, AIDS, and the Media</u> (1987) of attending the funeral of a gay man who died

of AIDS, whose father asked that his real name not be used or the disease specifically

mentioned: "And so the anonymity is complete."[106] As Crimp notes, this withholding of

names (that of the man and the disease) prevents important identification of individuals

with others in the community who are similarly affected as well as the dignification of the

death. As art historian Claudette Lauzon has pointed out by referencing James Young's

idea of "counter monuments," the process of naming is integrally tied to the dead in the

loving "memory work" of AIDS activism, seen most powerfully in the quilt project that

travelled the United States in the late nineteen-eighties, where the deceased are named, one

by one, by their friends and family[107] so that "the violence of silence and omission"

described by Crimp would be partially overcome.[108] That Dussein was kept company by

Goldin and Gotscho in the hospital room, and further, that his dying body is qualified by

her captions to individuate him and to situate the unfolding of events within a larger,

emphatically loving, family context works to continue making visible the experiences

caused by AIDS and the individuals who endure them. The losses Goldin attempts to

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[105] I state this without forgetting the ideas of Butler described in Chapter One in relation to "The Falling Man," regarding how proper names function in an ambivalent fashion, while conferring subjectivity, they don't necessarily confer "singularity," <u>Excitable</u> 29.
[106] Watney as cited by Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Melancholy," <u>Out There: Marginalization in Contemporary Cultures</u>, ed. Russell Ferguson (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990) 236.
[107] Claudette Lauzon, in a paper called "AIDS, Memory and Representation," presented at POP 3: R/Évolution Conference, Concordia University, Montréal, 20 Mar. 2004.
[108] Crimp 237.

magnify are both material (involving the weight and continued presence of the body) and discursive, therefore involving the crises of representation that have arisen in the AIDS era as articulated by Watney and Crimp as well as by Judith Butler, who brings attention to the political, social and *psychic* significance of the expression of love within representations specific to the crisis.

After Butler's observation that homosexuality is positioned through mourning and melancholy as the *a priori* prohibition against identification with homosexuality,[109] I ask the following questions. Within a politicized context, how does Goldin use photography to overcome this normative foreclosure of identification with homosexuality? What are the stakes therein? Butler's theory of the heterosexual disavowal of homosexuality uncovers a double-bind scenario that works to deny the possibility of homosexual love. This, she points out, makes all the more necessary the public displays of grief over the AIDS crisis, in order to grant homosexual love its rightful authority, for if homosexual love cannot be honoured and grieved, its original existence is denied and the loss disavowed. Although in less specific terms than what Crimp offers in his similarly Freudian-inspired view in "Mourning and Militancy" (that it remains politically significant to represent the signs of grief over those who die from AIDS-related causes without neglecting the equally important activist work that goes along with alleviating the repercussions of AIDS), both Butler's and Crimp's views show parallels that enlighten the present discussion. Goldin's unflinching representation of the emotional engagement with people affected by AIDS is resonant in light of both Crimp's and Butler's view that it is important to continue to represent grief and mourning within the cultural context of AIDS in order to prevent a

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[109] Butler, "Melancholy Gender /Refused Identification," The Psychic Life of Power (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997) 132-150.

descent into what Butler calls "disavowed grief" or the pathologization of queer identity.[110]

Goldin's acknowledgement that her investments are driven by love and friendship toward her subjects bears heavily upon whether or not those dying are individuated and mourned or made into a spectacle of inevitability, reflecting, as Watney points out, the right-wing ideological view of AIDS as "punishment" through an "admonitory" framework.[111] The importance of Goldin's Gotscho-Dussein series is the way she highlights the love that continues between the couple, encapsulated in the symbolic resonance of the kiss itself, an incontrovertible sign of the ongoing affection of Gotscho towards Dussein.

There are, of course, important compositional elements in Goldin's works Gotscho kissing Gilles, Paris, 1993 and Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993 (which will be discussed in turn), whose iconographic resonance also contribute to a reading of Dussein's death as one that will be mourned. Significant is the way in which Goldin's inclusion of Gotscho's attentive presence within the former scene recalls the history of Western religious paintings, namely the numerous Pietàs and Lamentations of the Italian and Northern Renaissances involving the dead Christ, whose corpse is not left to solitude but shown to be mourned by the inclusion of weeping, grieving figures.[112] In contrast to the Renaissance trope of representing mourning figures *within* the painting, Julia Kristeva points out how, in Hans Holbein the Younger's painting The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb (1522), "Holbein, on the contrary, leaves the corpse strangely alone," because the way Holbein frames the elongated, horizontal corpse of Christ mimes the constricting space of the sepulchre and leaves no room for other figures. For Kristeva, the exclusion of all mourning

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[110] Butler, Psychic 139.
[111] Watney, "Photography" 184 & 183.
[112] For this distinction regarding solitude, I am indebted to Julia Kristeva, "Holbein's Dead Christ," Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part One, ed. Michel Feher (New York: Zone, 1989) 238-269.

figures becomes a metaphor for the "severance" from intersubjectivity caused by death.[113]

Kristeva's description of Holbein's painting as "a composition in loneliness"[114] is

noteworthy for this study as a point of contrast, because it highlights the iconic significance

of Goldin's gesture in a contemporary context: it is politically resonant by *not* representing

the AIDS-afflicted person dying a lonely death.

Goldin's representation of a mourning figure within the scene, however, is not

entirely unique to contemporary times and it is worth mentioning the well-known media

controversy that erupted in 1992 when the Italian clothing manufacturer Benetton

circulated a hotly-debated print advertisement representing an AIDS activist dying while

surrounded by a loving family [Fig. 27]. The Christ-like appearance of the young, bearded

man was noted by many publications at the time of the advertisement's release in

magazines Vanity Fair and Vogue yet, despite the radical political implications of this

visual allusion, it was not the source of controversy. The controversy surrounding

Benetton's appropriation of a documentary photograph revolved around its

decontextualization and commercialization of an urgent social issue, which many critics

attributed to Benetton's failure to include any captions or text (aside from the company's

logo), to situate the viewer, to attribute authorship, to provide additional information that

would lead to political action and education, or to identify the subjects in the scene.[115] The

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[113] Kristeva 243 & 263.

[114] Kristeva, 243.

[115] Editorial, "More Controversy Please, We're Italian," The Economist 1 Feb. 1992: 70; Fred Bacher, "Fear and Clothing in L.A.," The Humanist (Sept./Oct. 1992): 45; Stuart Elliott, "When Products are Tied to Causes," New York Times 18 Apr. 1992: L33; Kim Foltz, "Igniting Debates Through Ads," New York Times 23 Feb. 1992: 6; Bernice Kanner, "Shock Value," New York 24 Aug. 1992: 26-28; Martha Moore, "Benetton ad tests hard side of reality," USA Today 14 Feb. 1992: 7B. According to Henry A. Giroux, Benetton's use of the documentary image ultimately evacuates the social content from the sign, neutralizing the image. The problem when attempting to represent "difference" in this manner is that abject identities are equalized through global commercial interests. "Consuming Social Change: The United Colors of Benetton," Disturbing Pleasures (New York: Routledge, 1994) 3-24.

display of the image with only the company logo to "anchor" the information is what

infuriated critics. The shift in an image's meaning, as one understands from Barthes's essay

"The Photographic Message," is closely related to whether or not connotative elements,

like titles or captions, are clearly presented to frame the information. The Benetton

controversy indicates the political urgency of this connotation in relation to the AIDS

crisis, if the reactions from the general public, activists and journalists are any indication.

For this study, the relation between the compositional particulars of Goldin's Gotscho

kissing Gilles, Paris, 1993 and the Benetton image are also noteworthy. The shift in context

enacted by the familiar Lamentation/Pietà iconography, whereby a liberal agenda (seen in

both Goldin's work and in the Benetton ad) appropriates the familiar signifiers of historical

Christian paintings to directly counter contemporary ideologies manifested by the Christian

Right, such as the "plague metaphor" described by media theorist Katherine Park,

ultimately shifts the meaning of AIDS deaths from instances of moral punishment to

tragedy.[116] Surprisingly, a deeper analysis of the terms of embodiment that are conveyed by

such a well circulated image as the Benetton ad has not been offered.[117] For this reason, I

move away from the Benetton controversy to take a closer look at the photograph

appropriated by Benetton, by comparing its compositional elements to those of Goldin's

works.

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[116] Katherine Park, "Kimberly Bergalis, AIDS, and the Plague Metaphor," Media 232 -253. Park, influenced by Susan Sontag's previous Illness as Metaphor (1978), discusses the relation of the Christian Right's cultural construction of the different population groups with AIDS along judgemental lines of culpability.

[117] Lynne Kirby offeres a theory that the Benetton ad should be read in the context of the Gulf War, as demonstrating a loathsome, ideological agenda to satisfy an American demand to see dead bodies, as a substitution of the dead body of the AIDS activist for those Iraqi corpses withheld from American TV screens. However, none of the views expressed by the mass media regarding the Benetton ad (neither on the left, the right, the elite or the populist) suggests this. Neither corpse nor context, from AIDS crisis to the Gulf War should be considered interchangeable and to make this mistake would be to perform a similar "consumption of repackaged death" that Kirby correctly points out is the source of criticism against the Benetton ad. See her, "Death and the Photographic Body," Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) 75.

The original documentary photograph of the dying man and his family was taken by photojournalist Theresa Frare and first published in black and white within an editorial context in the "Moments in Life" section of LIFE magazine in 1990.[118] It was accompanied by a brief caption to identify the dying man as 32-year-old Stafford, Ohio AIDS activist David Kirby and to describe his last words. The novelty of the image was the clear relationship it had to Renaissance paintings – seen, for example, in the way the father cradles the head of his son with his hands and presses his face so closely to it that they are almost fused. The meeting of the two faces, that of the mourner and that of the dying man, is also seen in Goldin's Gotscho kissing Gilles, Paris, 1993. This detail of the proximal placement of faces to express grief is apparent in Sandro Botticelli's Lamentation (1490s), where the kneeling figure of Mary Magdalene cradles the head of the dead Christ in a way similar to Frare's photograph [Fig. 28]. Aside from the radical dimension of a gay man taking the role of Christ (which I will not pursue in these pages), it is the presence of the loving family members who transform what Watney has called the absolute difference of the "AIDS victim," viewed through a framework of moral "retribution," into a figure whose death is mourned and dignified.[119] The outstretched arm of Christ's corpse, itself extended in a graceful arc across the Virgin's lap in Botticelli's Lamentation, immediately returns one to Goldin's depiction of the forlorn, extended arm of Dussein, the friend she reaches to touch with her photographic gesture in Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993.[120] The iconography here of the extended arm of the dying and the mourner who seeks to embrace it positions Goldin as the chiffonier, who Cornell describes in significantly maternal terms.

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[118] LIFE (November, 1990): 8-9.
[119] Watney, "Photography" 181.
[120] I thank Christine Ross for pointing out this compositional parallel as well as the maternal subtext that surrounds it.

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Although not visible in the photograph, Goldin plays an iconic role as the mourning mother who cares for the dead – by reaching to touch and to hold the body – although in a contemporary manner because her grief is performed through this act of photographic recognition and her embrace is through camera vision.

I return to the Frare-Benetton photograph, where the body of the dying is kept company and touched by the family figures who preside at the bedside, to point out its similarities to Goldin's <u>Gotscho kissing Gilles, Paris, 1993</u>, in which Gotscho's presence *within* the photograph offers the comforting component to a scene that otherwise may appear impersonal. Similarly, the close cropping of Frare's photograph emphasizes the proximity of the photographer to the event, heightening the immediacy of the scene and the presence of the bodies. However, the most striking aspect of Frare's photograph is the emphasis on embrace conveyed by so many hands touching and supporting the emaciated arms, head and body of Kirby. The many pairs of hands, those of the grieving father, the dark-clad figure on the left whose body remains hidden and the hands of Kirby himself, all converge at Kirby's chest. The theme of embrace is reiterated by the female figures on the right – Kirby's sister and niece, who hug each other intensely and weep while looking over the bed rail to Kirby. Kirby is positioned at the centre of this powerful nexus of touch, providing the focal point to funnel a circulation of grief within this contemporary Lamentation. The compositional elements, the physical contacts, the evocation of touch and a benevolent laying-on of hands in Frare's image, recall Renaissance paintings as well as Goldin's image in which Gotscho laments the death of his lover by kissing him on the death bed.

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There is significance in the domesticity of the Frare-Benetton scene, due partly to its

location in a hospice rather than a hospital as well as to the hanging, framed pictures that

decorate the walls of the room, the flowered sheets, the radio and stuffed animals that peek

behind the family figures in the background. These details show Frare's photograph, like

Goldin's work, contributing to the emergence of a contemporary genre of death-bed scenes

emphasizing concern and care to emerge in response to the AIDS crisis that functions to

qualify these deaths as taking place in loving, familial contexts, rather than as part of the

"demeaning category" of media representations, identified by Watney, that stigmatize the

patient by the sterility of the institutional settings.[121] In light of this death-bed "genre," the

view of cultural critic Thomas Lacquer is noteworthy because it is rather different than

mine as he sees it in terms of extinction, and reads a suite of post-mortem photographs by

David Wojnarowicz (who was an artist-friend of Goldin and someone she photographed) as

part of a political "discourse of pain":

> David Wojnarowicz's *Untitled (for Peter Hujar)* is at its most elemental a deathbed painting – the genre, now almost defunct, whose great exemplars are the paintings of the death of Christ, transformed in thousands of pictures into secular *memento mori*. Although these paintings assimilate death into culture – that is the point after all – the fact of death, its 'disagreeableness' to the 'sensitive person,' is never entirely lost.[122]

Kirby's father agreed to Benetton's use of the photograph because he believed that it would

promote an awareness of the necessity for those dying of AIDS to receive quality care,

such as could be provided by a hospice.[123] A similar context of care is asserted by Goldin

in the related work Gilles in his hospital bed, Paris, 1993, in which a charming, colourful

photograph of a child is shown adorning the walls of the room as if to contest the sense of

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[121] Watney, "Photography" 183.

[122] Thomas Laquer, "Clio Looks at Corporal Politics," Corporal Politics (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT List Visual Art Center, 1992) 15.

[123] William Kirby cited in Moore.

morbidity that might be associated with a death-bed scene [Fig. 29]. The removal of the

antiseptic, institutional quality of the hospital-room is no small change, for it takes the

discourse of illness out of the institution (and the segregation implied by it) and situates it

in a more humanistic sphere of comfort.[124] In terms that have bearing upon notions of

domesticity, Barthes describes the way bourgeois myth constructs the "unassimilable"

other by positioning him as the foil only against which dominant society may identify as "a

pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer

threatens the security of the home."[125] In a fascinating subversion of this notion of the

other, the Frare photograph and its original placement in <u>LIFE</u> magazine encapsulates the

very idea of home and family identifiable as the Middle America that comprises much of

the readership of the popular magazine as well as the Kirby family one sees in the image.

According to Louis Kaplan, Goldin's work combines a stance of AIDS-activism with open,

unbridled homage to her subjects, so that it blurs the heteronormative boundaries of

subject-other as well as a view of the nuclear family and what counts as community.

According to Kaplan, Goldin "delivers those for whom to be an 'I' is to be an other."[126]

With these views in mind, neither David Kirby nor Gilles Dussein could be considered to

be represented as the pathological, untouchable other, nor strictly the apparition of pain, but

as son and brother or friend and lover, surrounded by family members whose concern is

unbridled.

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[124] The historic legacy of this is evident in nineteenth-century developments confining both criminal and mentally-ill bodies as specimens, subject to normalizing categorization, scrutiny and control, as Michel Foucault has demonstrated in <u>Discipline and Punish</u> (1975), which, in the similar institutional reliance on the visual as a means of observation, holds parallels with early medical methods outlined in his <u>The Birth of the Clinic</u> (1973) from the eighteenth century.

[125] Barthes, "Myth Today," <u>Mythologies</u>, trans. Annette Lavers. (New York: Hill-Farrar, 1972) 152.

[126] Kaplan 24.

The tactile connections between the mourning and dying figures align Frare's and Goldin's work together in offering photographic performatives that counter derogatory media representations of dying AIDS patients. Through the compositional device of including mourning figures within the scene, the viewer better understands the deaths as tragic to those family members involved and further, after another insight of Kristeva, the viewer is offered mediating figures through which his or her own grief can be channeled. A means of identification is, therefore, fostered with the dying, overcoming what Butler describes as the prohibition against homosexuality that occurs when grief over an AIDS death is disavowed. While suggesting that neither Frare nor Goldin were directly influenced by Renaissance paintings, their similar choice of image is certainly due to the cultural connotation of the poses and iconic resonance of embodied proximity found in such works, although updated to demonstrate a contemporary political significance – in particular, that conveyed by loving touch.

Conclusion

Goldin exposes the tenuous quality of the relationship between the self and other when threatened by mortality: her unflinching desire for proximity with the dying is coupled with the painful admission that she is losing them. Her photographic reflection is done in a way that refuses to neglect her friends' queerness, the AIDS-related context in which the story unfolds or the embodied supports for the continued performance of identity. Goldin presents herself in relation to the dying at varying distances and in various roles, such as: that of the surrogate (speaking for her friend when her voice has been silenced by illness), that of a friend-photographer making contact with the dying through a haptic use of the

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camera, and that of the *chiffonier* (gathering the remains of the dead with care). Goldin's

negotiations with representational perspective unfolds in the following ways: by taking a

direct, dyadic address to recognize the suffering and vulnerability of the other; by using her

photography to engage in dialogue with her friend and, in so doing, countering the

muteness of the subject (in <u>Cookie with her cane, Provincetown, 1989</u>); by recognizing the

distance wedged by impending mortality that separates two people to leave both in

solitude, but nonetheless attempting to overcome it by touching her friend with camera

vision (in <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u>); and by taking the role of the *chiffonier* to capture the

love that transpires between friends in health *and* in death – by photographically embracing

her subjects (in <u>Gotscho and Gilles embracing, Paris, 1992</u>, <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u> and

<u>Gotshco kissing Gilles, Paris, 1993</u>).

A phenomenological, haptic model of visuality, coupled with an acknowledgement of

the photographer's investments (both personal and physical) in the subject matter and the

biographic specificity afforded by her conscious use of connotation, exemplify the

transparency of Goldin's practice. This, I suggest, contributes to the ethical conditions

necessary for an approach to dead subjects that doesn't, in advance, master or wound their

already-docile bodies. In her attempt to individuate her subjects rather than depict them as

universal instances of death or its various typologies and, using a photographic vision that

demonstrates a loving touch, Goldin's photographic paradigm and her resultant

photographs of dying friends demonstrate an ethics of representation.

End of Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Negotiation of Perspectives in AA Bronson's and Jorge Zontal's
Jorge, February 3, 1994

From 1967 to 1994, AA Bronson, Jorge Zontal and Felix Partz comprised the Canadian

artist collective they called General Idea. As General Idea, the three members lived and

worked symbiotically together to create art and a unified, integrated identity until Zontal

and Partz died of AIDS-related illness in 1994. Shortly before Zontal died, he and

Bronson worked together to document Zontal's physical condition by taking a series of

black and white photographs of him undressed to his boxer shorts, a winter cap and

slippers, standing in the familiar surroundings of the Toronto apartment they shared with

Partz. Six years after Zontal's death, Bronson began to exhibit three of these images as a

triptych entitled Jorge, February 3, 1994 (1994-2000), in which the original black and

white photographs were sepia-tinted, then transferred onto mylar, each image enlarged to

six feet by three feet to span the walls of the different galleries where the piece was

shown, offering a panorama of viewpoints [Fig. 30].[1] The focus of this chapter will be

this memorial, (self)portrait collaboration.

   With Bronson holding the camera, Zontal presents his body in a way that doesn't

minimize, but in fact emphasizes the extent to which it is traumatized by the ravages of

AIDS-related illness. In these pages, the vulnerability that is brought foreword by the

display of Zontal's body will be considered to be as significant as the photographic

medium through which it is represented. The effects of Zontal's display of his own

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[1] AA Bronson, Negative Thoughts, org. Elizabeth Smith and Michael Rooks (Chicago: Museum of
Contemporary Art, 2001); Angst: Nayland Blake, Monica Bonvicini, AA Bronson, Anna Meyer, org.
Matthias Herrmann, Kraichtal: Ursula Blickle Stiftung, 2001; AA Bronson, Mirror Mirror, org. Bill Arning
(Cambridge: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2002).

embodied suffering, viewed through the monumental scale of the photographs, present possibilities for a negotiation of agency and intersubjectivity, which will be the central concerns of this discussion, the manifestation of which unfolds in the following three ways: first, by making evident a balance of perspectives between Zontal, who is blind from AIDS-related illness and Bronson, who is sighted, the work will demonstrate a dynamic collaboration whose implications are ethical, theoretical (involving the intersecting discourses of photography and visuality), interpersonal (involving the creation of a unique memorial) and political (involving the discourse of AIDS); second, Zontal's presentation of his own emaciated body will be shown to make connections in a somatic way with other subjects not visible within the image, in particular, Zontal's father, a survivor of Auschwitz, as well as the community of those who experience the AIDS crisis; and third, by the purposeful visibility granted to the dying body's vulnerability, the work will be shown to (almost paradoxically) resist the terms of visual mastery inherent in the photographic display while engaging the viewer in a tension-filled relationship that forces Zontal's difference to respectfully come into view, without devolving into spectacle. The chapter is structured into three parts to reflect the above, main, intersubjective relationships under consideration.

Two manners of surrogacy will be explored here that draw upon, but also differ from, the types addressed in previous chapters. With Jorge, February 3, 1994, the first type of surrogacy is visual: it is enacted by the photographer, Bronson, to see Zontal (a blind subject who stands before the camera) but also to see *for* him, to assist him in structuring his own look. The second surrogacy to be uncovered involves the entire morphology of Zontal's body, deployed in a somatic way so that it speaks, through its

suffering rather than linguistically, of other dying or dead bodies outside the photographic frame to form intergenerational, inter-community connections.

The delicate status of representational perspective, involved in the on-going concern for *who represents whom* is brought forward in a manner that is distinct from all other works in this study, in which it is the living who represent the dead (either directly or through the work of a surrogate): with Jorge, February 3, 1994, the dying subject is actively involved in the representation. The manner in which the (self)portrait Jorge, February 3, 1994 is made is remarkable because, by emphasizing the waning of Zontal's visual agency, it demonstrates how both parties (Zontal and Bronson) contribute to the structure of the representation (despite the fact that Zontal would never see the resultant photograph for himself). The work will be read as a renunciation of the photographic potential for visual mastery that is unique because it is achieved by invoking its terms. Zontal's active involvement in the representation ultimately confuses the terms of "dying" and the categorization of Jorge, February 3, 1994 as either portraiture and self-portraiture as well as the dual potential for "the camera/gaze's functions," to invoke what Kaja Silverman calls, "both its 'memorializing' and its 'mortifying' effects."[2]

Part One: Collaboration in the Field of Vision

Details in the three photographs included in Jorge, February 3, 1994 surrounding the emphatic display of Zontal's body and the signs of AIDS-related illness it manifests bring one's attention to the threat of mortality and therefore, a description of these details is

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[2] Kaja Silverman, Threshold of the Visual World (New York: Routledge, 1996) 137. While I refer to Silverman's discussion because she is inspired largely by the Lacanian gaze, in this study one will also encounter Roland Barthes's description of a related paradigm in which the photographic act performs a "mortification" of the sitter.

useful to establish a foundation for the subsequent discussions. Despite the unveiling of Zontal's body, with the exception of his boxer shorts, hat and slippers, there is no eroticism to him and his sagging, rumpled boxer shorts are clearly too large. His state of undress emphasizes his thinness and, in fact, his boxer shorts are so large for his frame that they appear like a skirt. Further, his knees seem to knock together and his ribs and collar bones create hollows and shadows that are concave – gullies rather than contours. The incongruity of a winter hat worn indoors suggests a man who needs additional warmth and the thick slippers suggest a minimal degree of softness for a body with so little padding or insulation left. Zontal's body appears bent awkwardly in a number of places: the pigeon-toed placement of his feet in the left image suggests uncertainty and a lack of stability. A catheter that has pierced his almost fleshless chest remains with the intravenous tube dangling from it, disconnected from a source of fluid or medication like a military badge on a decorated officer. Potted paper-whites, the flowers that appear during winter months to hint of the coming spring and notions of rebirth, peek from the window frame, poignantly alluding to the future season that may be denied to Zontal. Could they be a gift from a well-wisher to offer hope during his illness? These details mark his body as medically compromised – he is a morphological anomaly from his self in healthier times, a self whose face and body was well known to the public through the many triadic self portraits that were exhibited by General Idea.

This foregrounding of illness, embedded in the image to heighten the awareness of Zontal's suffering, should first be considered in light of how and why the work was created. In all the contexts in which <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> has been and still is

exhibited or published, the following information is provided by Bronson as an integral

component of the work:

> A week before Jorge died, he asked me to take these photographs. Jorge's father had been a survivor of Auschwitz, and he had the idea that he looked exactly as his father had on the day of his release. He wanted to document that similarity, that family similarity of genetics and of disaster. [. . .] Jorge was blind when I took these photographs. I had to act as his mirror in order that he could look 'normal'. 'Should my eyes be like this?' he asked. 'A little more open,' I replied, 'No, not quite that much.'[3]

This awareness of what transpired in the making of the work provides the necessary

connotative information to situate the photographic practice as self-consciously

transparent and therefore, offers a significant attempt at avoiding ideological distortions

and the potential for mastery inherent in documentary-type photography. I remind the

reader of the views of Abigail Solomon-Godeau, who suggests that extricating the

various sources of speech that are involved in documentary photography allows one to

better read the subjects within it and the historical, social and contextual circumstances

that produced it, to uncover "agendas both open and covert, personal and institutional."[4]

The text that Bronson offers to describe how the work came about therefore answers the

question posed by Solomon-Godeau (after Barthes): "Who is speaking thus?" Zontal and

Bronson's central acknowledgement of the "transactional" nature of the "photographic

act" situates their practice within the discourse of self-critical documentary practices

espoused by Solomon-Godeau, whose mandate is the clarity of all parties' involvement in

the production of the image, especially that of the photographer.[5] Bronson's text also

offers the first step in an implicitly-ethical paradigm, along the lines established in the

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[3] Bronson, Mirror 53.
[4] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Who is Speaking Thus? Some Questions about Documentary Photography," Photography at the Dock (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991) 182.
[5] Solomon-Godeau 176.

Goldin chapter, in terms of autobiographical practices in which the photographer or film-

maker makes evident his or her investments and the degree to which the material has

been manipulated, after the research of Judith Milstein Katz and John Stuart Katz.[6]

The above connotative background provided by Bronson's text also indicates the

two, following intersubjective relationships that will be addressed in the first two parts of

this chapter: the dialogic exchange unfolding in the field of vision between Zontal and

Bronson and the somatic use of Zontal's body to address his father's experience during

the Holocaust. Presently an analysis of the visual relationships between Zontal and

Bronson will be undertaken where I explore how the embodied signs of vulnerability and

the blindness caused by AIDS-related illness are magnified but also partially overcome

due to the collaborative nature of the work, where Bronson functions as visual surrogate

for Zontal.

The dialogue recounted by Bronson makes evident both his *and* Zontal's

representational perspectives, thereby demonstrating a concern for avoiding the

representational violence to which a blind man may be vulnerable and for overcoming it

through a paradigm of shared vision. Bronson's text shows the relationship between

photographer and his subject to be a collaborative, interdependent one, an exchange of

viewpoints that demonstrates *an appeal* and *a response*. To recall the transactional

quality of the pertinent dialogue that informs the work, I repeat Bronson's transcription of

it: "Jorge was blind when I took these photos. I had to act as his mirror in order that he

could look 'normal.' 'Should my eyes be like this?' he asked. 'A little more open,' I

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[6] John Stuart Katz, and Judith Milstein Katz, "Ethics and the Perception of Ethics in Autobiographical
Film," Image Ethics, eds. Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby (NY: Oxford UP, 1988) 119-134.

replied, 'No, not quite that much.'"[7] The triptych format is significant because it captures

the different directions that Zontal's eyes took after his request for assistance and in

accordance with Bronson's suggestions. These responses are evident in the different ways

Zontal's body and his eyes are positioned in the three, separate panels: on the left panel,

he faces the light of window but his eyes look to a spot up and over his left shoulder so

that his pupils roll back to unnaturally expose the whites of his eyes; in the middle panel,

his look is directed straight ahead in a stern manner that appears unnatural (because he

focuses on the wall rather than out the window); in the right panel, Bronson has moved

much closer to Zontal, whose upper body now fills the frame to show the stance assumed

by Zontal that, due to the slight tilt of his head, appears pensive and aware of the

camera's gaze. Because the work is comprised of all three panels, where Zontal's

difficulties finding the right look are *not* edited out, the collaborative process is

documented. The "success" shown by Zontal in the right panel can best be appreciated in

relation to the "mistakes" that precede it to the left. Bronson acts as Zontal's eyes, seeing

him and also seeing *for* him, helping Zontal position himself to better self-represent. Here

is the first type of surrogacy to be explored in this chapter, involving the agency of vision

that is shared by the artist behind the lens with the blind artist in front of it.

Zontal's emaciation, his partial nakedness, his blindness, the medical signs of

illness (the catheter) are signs of vulnerability that, due to their large-scale exposure,

would appear to foster an easy mastery of him within the gaze. How is the potential for

photographic mastery negotiated and complicated in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> in a manner

that, at times, appears contradictory: by a blind man exposing himself in a state of

vulnerability, purposefully giving himself to be seen and to be photographed? In the

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[7] Bronson, <u>Mirror</u> 53.

Serrano chapter, I explored the paradigm of distortion that occurs when a photographer takes pictures of the dead within a framework of anonymity, without recourse to a surrogate who can adjust a view of the dead's identity. The effects of representational violence are due partly to the overarching visual sense that informs Serrano's approach to the corpses, so that the agency of the gaze lies entirely on the side of the photographer and the dead can neither refuse nor return his look. A work entitled <u>Jane Doe, Killed by Police</u> was interpreted as displaying an instance of mastery over the dead, stemming largely from the sightlessness of the woman's eyes, sunken into hollowed-out sockets and embedded within decaying facial features that frame her look through pathology: she cannot claim a perspective of her own and her skin becomes merely a surface upon which the looks of the living can rest. Serrano's visual probing of the corpse becomes a metaphor for the way his camera work disallows the dead her own point of view and instead, creates a degraded identity for her. In contrast to Serrano's work, in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> the collaboration between Zontal and Bronson shows the possibility for an exchange of viewpoints, despite what appears to be the initial imbalance of agency within the gaze. If Zontal's vulnerability is foregrounded, it is a choice made by him, as one understands from Bronson's text.

In the Serrano chapter, I discussed the insight made by Kaja Silverman surrounding the double-sided, ambivalent agency inherent in Lacan's gaze to alternately "ratify" or "negate" the subject within it.[8] Within the discourse of photography, the look and action of the cameraman suggests parallels with the potency of Lacan's predatory gaze, which inaugurates intersubjectivity in a threatening way. The Bronson-Zontal work hovers on the fine line identified by Silverman, walking the tightrope between Zontal's subjectivity

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[8] Silverman 133.

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being at once "ratified" (because he is the initiator and instigator of the image) and potentially "negated" (due to the exposure of his own vulnerability) within the gaze. Although in Jorge, February 3, 1994 Zontal is entirely visible *and* appears vulnerable, it is within the camera's gaze that he also presents and claims his identity and the continued viability of it. Zontal situates his experience of blindness as an opportunity to collaborate with Bronson, thereby demonstrating that he is, literally, dependent upon the look of the other for assistance in the performance of identity. In so doing, the work renounces some of the alienation often associated with the Lacanian gaze while emphasizing the contingent intersubjectivity inaugurated by it, which involves the confirmation of the self due to the awareness of another's, outside point of view.

One should recall that, according to Bronson's text, it was Zontal that asked Bronson to take these photographs in order to document the vision he had of his embodied similarity to his father. This is significant in suggesting that Bronson does not entirely impose his own vision upon the resultant image but answers Zontal's request for direction. In Zontal's assumption of a position of complicity within the photographer-sitter dyad, Bronson becomes the facilitator for Zontal, who gives himself to be seen. Bronson's and Zontal's dynamic exchange blurs the boundaries surrounding the work's authorship. Is Jorge, February 3, 1994 a portrait or a self-portrait? The significance of this collaboration deepens when considered in relation to Roland Barthes's critique of the traditional disjuncture inherent between sitter and photographer in portrait photography, in which, by the "death" of the sitter that ensues from the engagement is an instance of mastery. The paradigm Barthes describes in Camera Lucida (1981) involves two perspectives, but only one (that of the photographer) that is apparent in the final portrait.

Barthes notes that the shifting and incongruity between the image the sitter intends and the image the photographer will ultimately capture involves a loss of the sitter's agency, transforming himself from subject into object, which metaphorically enacts an annihilation of the sitter: "I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death."[9] Barthes's critique is that this one-sided or domineering quality to portraiture, structuring and enforcing an image of the sitter, deadens or freezes the image into a mere likeness. In this light, Zontal's and Bronson's working method should be understood to be a departure from the potential that Barthes calls "this death in which his gesture will embalm me."[10] It is precisely this dichotomy identified by Barthes between imaged and image-maker, in which the emergence of the sitter's intended image is stifled by the view imposed by the photographer, that Bronson and Zontal stitch together by their open collaboration, involving appeal and response, self-direction and direction. The achievement of this sensitized relationship between photographer and subject is urgent when the subject is threatened with death in a literal way and need not experience a sense of annihilation by the photographic act. Blurring the lines of active-photographer and passive-sitter by which Barthes characterizes traditional portraiture, the transactional quality of <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> forecloses the enactment of a "micro death" of the sitter.

In addition to the text pendant that accompanies <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> describing the exchange that contributed to making the work, Bronson's admission of his own presence within the image can be detected by the camera flash that is shown reflected off a mirror surface behind Zontal in the left and right panels of the triptych. The admission

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[9] Roland Barthes, <u>Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography</u>, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill, 1981) 14.

[10] Barthes 14.

of the flash in the background – the visual "residue" of Bronson's involvement in the

making of the work – is another means of manifesting the two perspectives, thereby

resisting the tendency outlined by Barthes for the portrait to mortify the sitter. By the

obvious animation of the photographic act(s), the work is charged with life before the

viewer's eyes. Bronson ensures his own transparency as image-maker in these works not

by erasing his trace but by projecting his presence into the scene in a phenomenological

way to assert the co-habitation of photographer and subject within the field of vision. As

established in the Goldin chapter, Merleau-Ponty's views remind one that the

photographic practice is an event of fraternization between two individuals in which the

viewer's awareness of the camera-person's presence in the making of the photograph is

never entirely elided.[11] If Zontal's body is centrally implicated in the work, so too is

Bronson's by the visibility of the flash on the mirror. Further, the way that the glaring

flash shines just behind Zontal's face, seen in the left panel, emits a reflection out toward

the viewer – as if to compensate for the look that Zontal's eyes cannot project. As in the

Goldin chapter, similar details of phenomenological immanence here contribute to an

operational transparency that meets the ethical criteria set out by the Katzes, in which

Bronson's intentions and the degree to which he manipulates the material is known. The

openly acknowledged effects of Bronson's presence qualify the photographic practice as

transparent because it would not fall prey to critiques of false innocence or claims to

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[11] The implication of the seer within the seen/scene arises out of the carnal nature of vision that, according to Merleau-Ponty, is founded upon the grounded, embodied presence of *both* parties for its intersubjective quality to be made manifest. The Visible and the Invisible, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1968) 134.

evidentiary status that, as Solomon-Godeau describes, "effaces the marks of its making

(and the maker) at the click of a shutter."[12]

Based in a framework contrasting blindness with insight, art historian Mieke Bal

proposes a psychoanalytic methodology in order to dissolve critical tendencies that veer

towards the mastery of art objects. Significant for this context is her suggestion that

mastery is a form of blindness that, when renounced, allows a multi-perspectival view of

the subject's construction by the act of (self)representation: "But mastery is, as I have

argued, a narcissistic protection against the threat of contamination, whereas its

renunciation entails the acceptance of the two-sided constructedness of an image's

unity."[13] The trope of the male artist being endowed with a special, creative insight, a

mythology witnessed in and augmented by the history of self-portrait paintings (in

particular, those of Rembrandt) has been suggested by Bal to be a construct of artistic

identity that requires continued confirmation from an imagined, outside perspective.

Therefore, the display of Zontal's blindness simultaneously with Bronson's renunciation

of mastery by his collaborative approach to (self)portraiture evokes a complex

imbrication of the linked terms blindness/mastery and insight/renunciation that, as Bal

demonstrates, are more prone to existing in a dichotomous relationship. Zontal's agency

within his own (self)portrait initially appears to be reduced by his blindness, but it

actually puts into play a multi-perspectival approach to (self)portraiture in which his and

Bronson's renunciation of the terms of mastery foster this self-critical type of "insight"

espoused by Bal. The shared vision involved in Jorge, February 3, 1994 brings forward

the question of whether or not blindness suggests vulnerability and waning agency or an

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[12] Solomon-Godeau 180.

[13] Mieke Bal, "Blindness or Insight? Psychoanalysis and Visual Art," Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the Word-Image Opposition (Cambridge: Cambridge UP,1992) 289.

opportunity for dialogic intersubjectivity. Would this not also be a form of agency as a stance critical of masculinist views of autonomy as the norm and insight as yet another manifestation of power according to the lingering tenets of a humanist notion of the subject?

Further, the unseeing look of the blind man is photographed by Bronson, who acts as his "mirror," although *not* in a specular way, but, by assisting him, to reflect Zontal's chosen perspective. I refer to Luce Irigaray's conception of the speculum from <u>Speculum of the Other Woman</u> (1985), where she discusses the instrument that peers into the body of woman as a metaphor to critique the masculinist approach to visualising difference. This, according to Irigaray, is a paradox in which the female is not seen in terms of her specificity, but only in terms of what she "lacks" in relation to the male. In other words, specular vision would refer to the masculinist inability to perceive or conceive of sexual difference, so that all looks toward the "other," by focusing only on her "lack," become mirror reflections of the self whose "consequences" are, according to cultural theorist Berkley Kaite, "that the patriarchal subject cannot imagine otherness."[14] Considering these views, Bronson provides mirror vision to Zontal but does not look upon Zontal to confirm his own identity at the price of the other's difference, as if desirous of seeing only a reflection of himself back again. Bronson sees Zontal in his embodied difference and vulnerability, not only accepting these aspects but also helping Zontal to assert them by making these differences *more* visible.

The connection between Bronson and Zontal is made dynamic by its reciprocity: the manifestation of interdependence is inherent in their dialogue, and is seen in the resultant work in the three attempts to achieve the right look for Zontal. By reflecting two

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[14] Berkeley Kaite, <u>Pornography and Difference</u>. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) 5.

points of view in this manner, the exchange between Bronson and Zontal is a different means of contact than those analyzed in previous chapters because Bronson acts as a surrogate in the *field of vision* by helping Zontal to structure his own image outward for presentation, while retaining and respecting Zontal's intentions regarding how his image should appear. Bronson steps back as an image-maker to become more transparent and acts as the vehicle for Zontal's desire for self-representation. By acting as his "mirror," Bronson demonstrates a photographic exchange with a dying subject so that the representation is constructed by parties on either side of the lens that, by foregrounding Zontal's continued ability to "lay claim to his own person," would constitute an ethical act of representation after Drucilla Cornell's conception of it, where the responsibility to acknowledge representational perspective is taken.

In comparison to Goldin's Cookie Mueller series, where she demonstrates an approach to her vulnerable friend when she has lost her voice and the ability to fully self-represent, the Zontal-Bronson collaboration is similarly altruistic, but positions vision as the term through which the ability to self-represent is negotiated. As such, the exchange that takes place between Zontal and Bronson shows some of the tenets, described in previous chapters regarding surrogacy, which were inspired by Simon Wiesenthal's dilemma in The Sunflower. Bronson's conscious choice regarding whether or not to represent another, when the other in question lacks the agency to do so for himself, coupled with after the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas from Entre Nous (1998), establishes the Zontal-Bronson relationship as an ethical one. Bronson's text recounts a dialogue that, as mentioned, demonstrates *an appeal* (made by a vulnerable subject whose agency is waning) and *a response* (made by a friend in recognition of his

suffering) in a manner that suggests Levinas's paradigmatically ethical moment. For Levinas, the ethical opportunity is characterized by its lack of necessary symmetry or reciprocity and epitomized by the altruistic approach of one in recognition of the suffering of the other, *whether or not* the other has made an appeal and without expectation of a response. Goldin's work demonstrates precisely such an approach to the suffering friend that I characterized as dyadic but not explicitly dialogic: she approaches Mueller and the dying body of Gilles Dussein without an indication that either has made an appeal for her to do so.[15] In relation to the work of Goldin, where one witnesses the dyadic, loving photographic engagement between the photographer and an intimate friend who is dying, the Bronson-Zontal collaboration demonstrates a similarly-ethical responsibility of the photographer toward the dying friend. The difference is that in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> one also witnesses the response, not only in the verbal exchange indicated in the text provided by Bronson to explain the work, but within the artwork itself. Because the Bronson-Zontal collaboration shows a responsive dimension in the resultant photograph (in contrast to the way Levinas characterizes the ethical moment), the intersubjectivity is both dyadic and explicitly dialogic, to create an ethical moment involving reciprocity if not – due to Zontal's blindness – symmetry.

Before moving to the second part of the chapter, I wish to consider a final aspect of the visual intersubjectivity negotiated more on Bronson's side that involves a delicate balancing act between the emotional and physical aspects of distance and proximity. The unusual degree to which General Idea's relationship was collective is important to mention because it indicates what is at stake with the recognition of Zontal's impending

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[15] The dialogism of the <u>Cookie Mueller</u> series was implicit – by the way, according to Goldin, Mueller "spoke to" her by her participation in the photographic engagement, despite that no words were exchanged.

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death in Jorge, February 3, 1994. According to Bronson, "Felix and Jorge and I lived and worked together from 1969 until 1994. This communal life ended when Jorge died of AIDS on February 3, 1994. Felix followed shortly thereafter, on June 5, 1994."[16] Titling the work in honour of the day of Zontal's death signalled the end of life for Zontal as well as the end of a way of life for Bronson, whose triadic identity with General Idea was coming to an end. How is this impending loss faced and expressed by Bronson in Jorge, February 3, 1994? While General Idea had a "unified" identity, whereby they always presented themselves *together* in images, seen especially in their triadic brand of "self" portraiture,[17] in Jorge, February 3, 1994 the confrontation in the visual field unfolds with only two members of the group, Zontal and Bronson, who now *face each other* on either side of the lens. The affection and familiarity with which their relationship is already defined situates Bronson to Zontal as neither stranger nor voyeur, but intimate accomplice. Yet, for the first time in their twenty-five year history, Zontal and Bronson are positioned as distinct individuals, separated from each other by the threat of mortality and, to a certain extent, distanced because one appears without the other. While the work makes evident its collaborative process, creating a monument to the interdependence of perspectives, does it not also prefigure or *enact* an impending separation, the enforced, undesirable solitude that will afflict Bronson once Zontal has died, severing the plenitude of collectivity by which General Idea has come to define itself for twenty-five years? If the three panels of Jorge, February 3, 1994 represent Zontal struggling to find the right look, it also makes evident that Bronson is negotiating the distance that will allow Zontal

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[16] Bronson, Mirror 46.
[17] General Idea is well known for their parodic, "self"-representations in which they assumed many personas, for example, bad boys in bed in Baby Makes Three (1992); AZT clinicians in Playing Doctor (1992); gothic graduates in Nightschool (1989); and preening, fornicating poodles in Mondo Cane Kama Sutra (1983).

to best come into his view: he must be able to see Zontal through the camera while he is alive, but also adjust to the situation following his death when he won't have access to Zontal in the "real" world. How are these two "realities" negotiated with the work by Bronson in his relation to Zontal?

In his standing position, facing Bronson, despite the fact that he takes Bronson's direction for how to focus his own look, Zontal is momentarily an independent being. The wheel-chair forms his shadow, haunting the background, and the catheter tube dangles from his chest, attesting to his continued reliance upon the medical system. Bronson's camera flash, evident in the left and right panels, where a halo of light bounces off a reflective surface, attests to his involvement in the scene as does his text description. These "connections" are manifested but also partially denied by the sense of solitude that emanates from Jorge, February 3, 1994 because it is a work representing Zontal on his own, separate from the triple identity that comprised General Idea. Art historian Amelia Jones offers a pertinent insight regarding how illness and the threat of mortality complicate intersubjectivity: "the body/self-in-illness exacerbates both the isolation of the self and its profound dependence on the other (not to mention its coextensiveness with the body)."[18] On one hand, Zontal is positioned as solitary within the final images, cut away from the medical supports, from the wheelchair that would offer him greater mobility and to a certain extent, from Bronson, due to the experience of illness that wedges a sense of difference between them and, in fact, is the reason for their "opposition" on either side of the lens. While Bronson and Zontal confront each other at a

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[18] Amelia Jones, Body Art: Performing the Subject (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998) 193. This observation is made in her study of the Intra-Venus series of performative photographs made by the late Hannah Wilke, in which the artist negotiates her experience with cancer by graphically representing her own, naked body to show the medicalized traumas it endures.

distance, isolated to a degree, they remain connected by the exchange that binds them in the creation of the sequence, which is an enduring testimony to their interactive, interpersonal drama.

The physical distance that separates the partners (due to Zontal's illness and to their respective positions on either side of the lens) is put into tension with an emotionally-compelling proximity, symbolized by their mutual awareness that Zontal may soon die. How can this tension between distance and proximity be understood in terms of Bronson's view(s) of Zontal during the making of the work and during its subsequent exhibition? In his history of post-mortem photography, Jay Ruby makes the distinction between a post-mortem image, which is a representation of a dead individual generally reclining on a bed, sofa or in a casket and memorial images, which are representations made while the individual is still living and used for posthumous admiration.[19] This distinction qualifies Jorge, February 3, 1994 as a memorial image, one whose borders are blurred, however, because the photograph was taken at a time when Zontal was still living, although his death appeared near. The collaborative engagement evident in Jorge, February 3, 1994, where both artists honour Zontal's demise by documenting it, may suggest the "preparation for separation" identified by sociologists Ruth L. Fuller, Sally B. Geis and Julian Rush that is specific to the mourning experiences of the gay community, in which friends and lovers acknowledge the threat of an AIDS-related death by undertaking "grief work" in advance of it.[20] The work Bronson does after Zontal's death to tint the original black and white photographs with sepia tones, transferred onto the monumentally-enlarged mylar surface for exhibition, suggests the creation of a memorial.

[19] Jay Ruby, Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America (Cambridge: MIT P, 1995).
[20] Ruth L. Fuller, Sally B. Geis, and Julian Rush, "Lovers and Significant Others," Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow, ed. Kenneth L. Doka (New York: Lexington, 1989) 36.

The choice of sepia is telling in the sense of temporal distance it creates: not only does its warmth soften the harsh, photo-journalistic quality of the black and white, but also lends the decidedly nostalgic, antique feeling akin to heirloom photographs found in family albums. The sepia tones transform Jorge, February 3, 1994 from an urgently contemporary moment to one that shifts to the past by the evocation of memory work. The "nowness" of the moments captured – the dynamic photographic exchange between Zontal and Bronson, which takes place before the viewer's eyes in the rhythm of the work's three panels – is memorialized as a historic event. From a sociological and anthropological perspective, Ruby explains the paradoxical relationship that mourners have towards images of the deceased: "Mourners are always confronted with two, seemingly contradictory needs: to keep the memory of the deceased alive and at the same time, accept the reality of death and loss."[21] These points may assist in interpreting the ambivalent psychological functions Jorge, February 3, 1994 may assume for Bronson, by pointing to its dual pull: between honouring the life they shared together through animating this important (perhaps final) artistic exchange; and the memorial function Bronson asserts for the work, the posthumous recognition that the partnership is irrevocably lost. The tension between proximity and distance in Jorge, February 3, 1994 suggests that clearly defining the positions involved in this tenuous intersubjectivity is deeply challenging, for the illusion of contemporaneity dissolves with the awareness of the death of the photographed subject (who, by memorial, is situated in the past) and forces the emotional distance required for it to come into perspective.

In order to conceptualize the subtle inscription of proximity within distance that I suggest positions Bronson in relation to Zontal, recourse to the "aura" is useful,

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[21] Ruby 174.

especially after Walter Benjamin's definition of it as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be."[22] Benjamin's well known thesis is that the aura – the sacred, reverential quality surrounding a unique work of art – is what so readily erodes in "the age of mechanical reproduction," due to the commercial circulation of countless reproductions that bring a mass public into tangible intimacy with works that were previously inaccessible because of geographic or socio-economic barriers. The distance that is reduced between the audience and the artwork is not only physical but also emotional, due to the loss of the aura. In other words, the tendency for the artwork's auratic "cult value" to be reduced is directly related to its "exhibition value," its ability to be mechanically-reproduced, circulated and viewed a multitude of times within the public sphere.[23] What is pertinent to the present discussion is Benjamin's identification of the specific instances, evident in the history of portrait photography, in which the aura of a mechanically-reproduced image is stubbornly retained, by the emotional investments inherent in their use: "The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absence or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture."[24] Therefore, the projected love and desire inherent in the approach of the viewer of a portrait photograph, particularly when used for memorial purposes, would endow the image with the sacred quality of the "aura," now more precisely understood as the reverential, even necessary, psychological distance of the viewer towards the work (as an admission of loss) despite the proximate, even tangible physical relationship the mourner may have to the photograph as an object. In Jorge, February 3, 1994 both of these qualities are invoked simultaneously: the auratic,

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[22] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968) 222.
[23] Benjamin 224.
[24] Benjamin 226.

psychological distance necessary to posthumously view a memorial image of a loved one

and the exhibition value associated with mechanically-reproduced images, which lends

embodied proximity, here fostered by the scale and triplication of the panels, to re-

animate the lively exchange captured by the work.

Not only theoretical and sociological dimensions of distance are engaged by the

"aura" that surrounds Jorge, February 3, 1994, but also an ethical dimension. In her

proposal for the ethical potential of the mourning figure, Cornell, inspired by Jacques

Derrida's work in Glas, discusses a form of looking at the (M)other called the "auratic

gaze [. . .] that preserves her otherness by respecting her distance."[25] According to

Cornell, one of the aspects to qualify the auratic gaze as ethical is the way in which it

"defies the organization of looking as a form of mastery."[26] If Bronson's view of Zontal

entails the "auratic gaze," the work becomes a form of respect, an ethical

acknowledgement of the embodied differences (ensuing from terminal illness) that are

forcing the distance between them, without interpreting the work as Bronson pushing

Zontal out of sight or exposing Zontal's vulnerability to the public realm as a point of

exploitation. The gallery placement of Jorge, February 3, 1994 appears to enact a manner

of separation of Bronson from Zontal, who is taken out of the intimacy of the shared,

domestic environment and placed at this "necessary" distance – in the public eye – to

acknowledge his death and to mourn it. In order to commemorate the loss of

intersubjectivity that ensues from death, Bronson's auratic view of Zontal in Jorge,

February 3, 1994 positions the dead through a sense of respectful, reverential distance.

That Bronson and Zontal confront each other on either side of the lens is a technical

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[25] Drucilla Cornell, "The Ethical Significance of the Chiffonier," The Philosophy of the Limit (New York: Routledge, 1992) 77.
[26] Cornell 77.

necessity to allow the distance for the other to come into focus but is also symbolic of the eventual independence of the dying from the living, a painful recognition enacted by the making of the work and by its exhibition. It is not only the subjectivity of the dying figure one sees in the image (Zontal) that is materialized but also that of the photographer (Bronson), a subject whose work, via temporal shifts between the making of the portrait and its subsequent exhibition, becomes a memorial to the intersubjectivity the two enjoyed together as well as an honorific acknowledgement that the intersubjectivity has since been lost. Yet the auratic gaze inherent in Jorge, February 3, 1994 suggests the continued ability of Bronson to view his friend from a respectful distance, and that Bronson's experience of intersubjectivity with Zontal continues in the visual realm, despite Zontal's death.

Part Two: The Somatic Body of Surrogacy

By recalling part of the text offered by Bronson to accompany the exhibition of Jorge, February 3, 1994 I wish to remind the reader of the artists' intentions, as they suggest a dimension to Zontal's emaciation that inaugurates a new set of intersubjective relationships: "Jorge's father had been a survivor of Auschwitz, and he had the idea that he looked exactly as his father had on the day of his release. He wanted to document that similarity, that family similarity of genetics and of disaster."[27] The intention was to make Zontal's emaciated body resonate well outside the frame, to situate him within the contemporary community of those experiencing AIDS and to relate back in time to the Holocaust, another catastrophe of monumental proportions, by alluding to the bodily wasting and suffering of those who endured concentration camps in World War II.

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[27] Bronson, Mirror 53.

How, through the foregrounding of the emaciated body, is the viewer made aware of the Zontal's pain and suffering? The preponderance of details indicating Zontal's compromised health, seen especially in his skeletal body, conveys a deep sense of suffering. While there is comfort and warmth suggested by the hat, the slippers and the cushion on the wheelchair, this is also offset by the wheelchair's cold, clinical quality. The statement of February in the title of the work references the frigid, Canadian winter during which this scene takes place. This connotative detail is perhaps unnecessary because the chilling sensation of metal against exposed skin that is suggested by Zontal's hand grasping the stainless-steel pillars and by his overall bareness next to the wheelchair. Zontal's tight grasp on the fluted pillars for support indicates how perilous his stance is without the wheelchair. The decorative metal rings that encircle the top of the pillars also form a compositional echo with Zontal's rib cage and knuckles, where the bones jutting from under his skin fan out in a striated pattern. The way Zontal grabs the pillar in the left and central images forces his torso to curve outward in a painfully-bowed arch that attenuates the awkwardness of his posture. While the appearance of Zontal's limbs is echoed by the thinness and overall verticality of the pillars, their steely rectitude and perfect straightness also put into relief how crooked Zontal's limbs are. The wheelchair, anomalous within the domestic setting of barely middle-aged people and padded with a foam cushion, is a sign of frailty and, like the catheter that also indicates pain and medication, suggests the palliative care that seeks to alleviate it.

Jorge, February 3, 1994 produces a tension that I have also identified in Goldin's work as (de)materialization. This occurs when the artists' recognition of the weight loss of the body suffering from AIDS-related illness simultaneously becomes a discursive

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materialization of subjectivity. The intense scrutiny of Zontal's emaciation and the

suffering of his body suggest a different purpose than what is seen in Goldin's work,

Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993, where she evokes the reality of AIDS as a disease that radically

diminishes the weight of the body, wedging itself between the continued intersubjectivity

of friends and lovers. In this case, the materialization of subjectivity references other,

similarly emaciated bodies outside the frame, producing political and historical contexts

of many dimensions. In this part of the chapter, I would like to explore how Zontal's

purposeful deployment of his own body, in a manner that emphasizes its traumatized

condition, can be thought to materialize the subjectivities of suffering or dead figures

removed from him in space and time. I hope to demonstrate how Jorge, February 3, 1994

makes evident a somatic language of the body in pain, by speaking of the suffering of his

father as well as a multitude of dead others, in a manner that claims and asserts identity

from his own point of view, while simultaneously contextualizing himself within a larger

framework of history. While the Goldin demonstrates in the Gotscho-Dussein series her

concern for Dussein's weight loss and imminent death by acting as the *chiffonier*,

gathering and protecting the remains (of his materiality, of his identity), in Jorge,

February 3, 1994 it is the irrecoverable *loss* of weight from the body that is emphasized

to establish intersubjectivity between the dying (Zontal) the dead (his father), by directing

attention to the past rather than attempting to carry the dead into the future. Zontal gives a

historical and familial lineage to his own emaciation, claiming precedents through an

inter-generational link and showing the burdens of embodiment that can haunt

patrilineage.

The feminist work of Susan Bordo in Unbearable Weight (1993) should be addressed in light of the legacy of embodied suffering asserted through the father-to-son connection, because she seeks to deconstruct limiting, masculinist paradigms that would dissociate identity from the so-called burdens of the flesh. Here it is useful to recognize the fatal effects of these burdens. Zontal's intergenerational portrait claims the weight of the body as one of the foundations necessary for the continued performance of the subject. The dark paradox that unfolds surrounding the weight loss of AIDS-related illness is that it simultaneously renders him less embodied in his lightness and more embodied due to the restrictions it places upon his freedom and upon the expectation of his own "futurity."[28] Bordo demonstrates a desire to bring a recognition of the body's weight into contemporary theory as a response to such radically discursive interpretations such as Judith Butler's in Bodies That Matter, in which she describes as problematic the notions of identity that would situate it as embedded in or emanating from the body. According to Bordo, Butler considers the body "just a text whose meanings can be analyzed in abstraction from experience, history, material practice, and context."[29] It is against the abstractness of Butler's theory of performativity (as identified by Bordo) that one could read Zontal's appeal for recognition of his embodied difference through the emphasis on emaciation. In making resonant his own identity as linked to that of his father by asserting this weight loss, Zontal makes an embodied connection between communities separated by a multitude of differences, involving ethnicity, temporality,

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[28] Cultural theorist John Zuern has identified "futurity" as a "heteronormative and patriarchal" presumption common to both Merleau-Ponty's conception of temporality and to Lacan's "anticipatory" notion of the phallus. Zuern states that the unquestioned assumption of futurity poses problems for understanding the suffering of male bodies, in particular those facing "incapacity or absence" and "the foreclosure of the future," in other words, those facing disability and mortality. "The Future of the Phallus," Revealing Male Bodies, ed. Nancy Tuana and others. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002) 59 & 66 & 75.

[29] Susan Bordo, Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body (Berkeley: U California P, 1993) 292.

history, politics, gender and biomedical concerns. Zontal's stance in <u>Jorge, February 3,</u> <u>1994</u> presents a means of making contact with the dead so that a discursive invocation of them does not ignore the important weight of the body. Bridging one crisis to the next, from the present to the past, from AIDS to the Holocaust, against temporal, political and medical gaps that differentiate the persecuted and oppressed communities involved, is this evidence of suffering presented by Zontal's emaciated body.

To understand how Zontal deploys his suffering body as a form of surrogacy to speak to others disconnected from him by space and time – and to make their historical traumas visible in the present condition of his own body – it is useful to consider art historian Jane Blocker's theory of "somatic language," whereby the unrefined, uncensored rawness of the "literal" body forcefully speaks in a non-linguistic but nonetheless performative way that "integrates mind and body through performances of pain."[30] Blocker describes the pain that interests her as "that quotidian condition of embodiment that manifests itself in both trivial and catastrophic forms."[31] As a phenomenological condition by which the body is "constituted," Blocker distinguishes this pain from the transformative, transitive types involved in masochistic body art performances which, by taking the body as object, "does" pain to the self.[32] Kathy O'Dell's definition, in <u>Contract With the Skin</u> (1997), of the masochist's contractually negotiated choice to experience pain (made between body artist and partner or audience), helps one qualify Zontal's biomedical pain as a day-to-day, non-negotiable pain that does

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[30] Jane Blocker, <u>What the Body Cost: Desire, History, and Performance</u> (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004) 34.

[31] Blocker 34.

[32] The masochistic body art practices from which Blocker distinguishes her own study of the uses of pain is identified by her as from Kathy O'Dell, <u>Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s</u> (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998) 34.

not imply the agency associated with masochism. Blocker, on the other hand, describes

the "literal" pain that informs somatic language with recourse to Elaine Scarry's

influential work The Body in Pain (1985), where pain is considered a pre-linguistic

experience in which the body's potential for mortality and vulnerability becomes evident,

an effect that silences the subject due to the expressive failure of language to externalize

it. However, Blocker's theory diverges from Scarry's because she argues that pain "does

indeed have a voice, but one that textual language does not normally recognize."[33]

Blocker identifies the somatic language specific to body art practices in cases where pain

is manifested as a stance against the masculinist, Cartesian disparagement of the female

body that occurs in the aesthetic philosophy of the Enlightenment: "Somatic language

may be thought of as a malediction, a profanation of aesthetics and the ideal body it

proclaims. [. . .] it is taken up strategically as a means to make low, to offend."[34] In light

of Blocker's theory, the "malediction" of Zontal's body could be understood as

somatically expressing a state of pain that would be an affront to masculinist paradigms

regarding the ideal body (in which pain is transcended through aestheticization) and

subverts the view that it is only through language that one speaks coherently.

Because Jorge, February 3, 1994 is a view of the effects of illness on the body, it is

useful to consider Blocker's interpretation of Hannah Wilke's Intra-Venus (1992) series

of photographs, which she reads as graphically representing the artist's experience with

cancer in a somatic way. According to Blocker, Wilke exacerbates the visibility of the

body's suffering in illness to cause a confrontation that pits the artist's less-than-ideal,

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[33] Blocker 36.

[34] Blocker 35. Blocker identifies the writings of Gotthold Lessing and Johann Winckelmann on the Laocoön to exemplify this tradition, which posits that certain male bodies expressing pain remain nonetheless aesthetically pleasing.

traumatically medicalized body against inherited notions of female beauty that "dares us

to look, and to look away."[35] Blocker reads the somatic call made to the viewer in

Wilke's Intra-Venus series as best expressed by the "wrenching knot" of pain centered in

two photographs of the artist with her mouth wide open to expose her chemotherapy- and

radiation-scarred tongue, stuck out angrily as if "screaming" to disrupt the viewer's

ability to experience the work painlessly.[36] In contrast to Blocker's reading of Wilke's

somatic body, where she suggests that the open mouth is the "portal" through which pain

is funneled, I read Zontal's somatic expression to transpire not through a specific body

part (metonymically), but through the morphology of the larger body. Zontal's somatic

language is evident in the manifestation of suffering from a previous generation that is

expressed through the present "catastrophic" condition of his body: through its traumatic

form, but also through his body's position and the pose he assumes. For these reasons it is

important to keep the larger picture of his body in view.

To appreciate the ability of the body in illness to performatively address the

suffering of past generations, Amelia Jones's reading of photographic works by Hanna

Wilke is also instructive, in particular those to address her mother's breast cancer in

relation to her own cancer experience, which Jones reads through the "rhetoric of the

pose."[37] A pose is a stance chosen by a subject under the assumption that it will be seen

and recognized in a given social context.[38] Because Jones reads Wilke's negotiation of

Western ideals of female beauty as a critically self-referential body art, her approach is

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[35] Blocker 41.
[36] Blocker 41.
[37] Jones, Body 185-195.
[38] According to Silverman, the pose is form of mimicry in which the social recognition of "corporeal display" is heightened by the attention drawn to it by the photographic medium, which "freeze[s]" it for view. 203 & 202.

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compatible with Blocker's theory of somatic language as an affront to masculinist ideals

of the body. Additionally, Jones interprets the signification of the many poses

strategically enacted by Wilke to "unveil" not only the erotic desirability of her naked

body but also the restrictive, gendered codes of representation that would position it in

those terms.[39] Jones interprets Wilke's work as critically "narcissistic" because her

deployment of the body –as a means of self-reflection – simultaneously addresses larger

social constructs. Jones identifies the modernist "veiling" of the body of the male artist to

be necessitated by paradigms that predicate artistic "genius" upon the legacy of Cartesian

mind-body dualism to be, in representations and in criticism, a ruse that strives to keep

the male artist's body "hidden."[40] In his negotiation of (and challenge to) a sense of

disempowerment by strategically exposing his own body, Zontal's gesture (despite the

ambivalence through which it must be read) puts into question the assumption of

authority and potency associated with the disembodied, modernist, male artist-subject

identified by Jones, whose body must remain veiled for the rhetoric to function. These

views offer an advantageous way to address the inter-generational somatic language

Zontal performs through the "narcissism" of his body's unveiling and his assumed pose,

displayed to maximize its signs of illness and suffering, which should be understood

contextually as a departure from the legacy of Western aestheticization and idealization

of the (implicitly male) body.

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[39] With the phrase "rhetoric of the pose," Jones is referring to Craig Owens' "The Medusa Effect; or, The Spectacular Ruse" (1984) Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture, ed. Scott Bryson and others (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1992) 155. I appreciate how the reference to "rhetoric" brings one back to the connotative features of the photograph identified by Roland Barthes in his essay "The Rhetoric of the Image," Image, Music, Text, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).
[40] Jones, Body 62.

More pointedly in terms of the focus of this chapter, Jones interprets Wilke's "narcissism," evident in the artist's performative self-portraits, to be an ambivalent means of self-reflection that fosters *intersubjectivity*, in particular, in a manner capable of recognizing the (m)other's suffering in illness and expressing a fear of losing her. In the discussion of Wilke's work <u>Portrait of the Artist with Her Mother, Selma Butter</u> (1978-81), where Wilke pairs a photograph of herself as the "healthy," bare-breasted, beautiful daughter (although adorned with painful-looking metal objects like a fish-hook and a miniature gun) adjacent to a post-mastectomy photograph of her "harshly scarred mother," Jones states: " I see this juxtaposition on a deeper level as insisting upon the traumatic intersubjectivity of self and other (especially child and parent): the very intersubjectivity that makes a parent's death profoundly incomprehensible."[41] With <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u>, the "narcissistic" display of Zontal's body in illness performs a similar manner of intersubjectivity that would recognize the parent's suffering, without literally representing the parent in the work: what appears to be a self-portrait is also the reflection of the image of the parent. In even more forceful terms, Jones reads Wilke's <u>Intra-Venus</u> works that deal with her own cancerous body, made years after her mother has died of breast cancer, as a form of "incorporation" in which the intersubjective connection is created by the child narcissistically representing the self in illness: "The Intra-Venus series eerily and traumatically seems to substantiate Wilke's having literally incorporated her mother, illness and all, with Wilke's ravaged, cancerous body now taking place of Selma's."[42] If one considers Jones's view, one may better appreciate how Zontal's foregrounding of the illness of his own body forms a somatic language that embodies the

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[41] Jones, <u>Body</u> 188.
[42] Jones, <u>Body</u> 189.

father's previous suffering, thereby bridging the gap of time and absence. The memory of the dead parent arises in the child's own confrontation with death and is expressed in memorial terms through one photograph in which both generations are represented, through the presence of only the child, whose body speaks the historical "malediction" of the parent as a form of embodied surrogacy. As Jones's notion of "incorporation" helps one understand, despite that only Zontal's body is represented in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u>, the intersubjectivity that links the (dead) parent to the child (who faces death) occurs in a manner that foregrounds the shared experience of the body's pain: through somatic surrogacy, Zontal's body stands in for the missing body of the parent and incarnates a legacy of suffering experienced by it.

The (de)materialization of subjectivity is performed by the emaciated body of the dying subject (Zontal) by incorporating the traumatic, embodied experiences of communities of others who are not (literally) visible within the frame. In contrast to Kaja Silverman's view of wounded male subjectivity, identified by her in American, post-Second World War films in which the return home of the soldier is not depicted as a heroic event but as an emasculating experience of psychic and physical dysfunction, characterized by the "traumatically unassimilable nature of certain historical events," I would argue that the somatic deployment of Zontal's body, by incorporating the suffering of the parent and other community members who have endured crises, suggests his attempt to assimilate within the body and to express through the body these diverse historical traumas, psychically and physically.[43] Further, Judith Butler's theory of linguistic agency as conveying bodily effects (particularly injurious ones, holding the force of a "blow") is useful as a means to address the way the "encoded memory" of

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[43] Silverman, <u>Male Subjectivity at the Margins</u> (New York: Routledge, 1992) 52.

social trauma is spoken through the body in a discursive way by Zontal in <u>Jorge,</u>

<u>February 3, 1994</u>: the visibility of a skeletal body that points to the past may be

understood to also embody the AIDS crisis endured by the present community.[44] Also

insightful is Butler's description of the temporal dimension involved in the working

through of social trauma as fostering the possibilities for resistance or even for

resignification, expressed by her rhetorical question: "Can repetition be both the way that

trauma is repeated but also the way in which it breaks with the historicity it is in thrall?

What makes for a reverse citation in the scene of trauma [. . .]?"[45] Bridging and linking

one traumatic crisis to the next through time is the somatic body performing a type of

surrogacy that materializes the dead.

By showing that Zontal's countenance and embodied specificity is a manifestation

of an individual but also a reference to his father's experience and therefore, the historical

and political context(s) of the Holocaust as well as those contemporary communities

affected by AIDS, <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> engages two important functions related to

portraiture, as identified by Mieke Bal and John Tagg. On one hand, it evokes the

common understanding of the genre after Bal's description of it as "the token of

irreducible individuality."[46] On the other hand, it exploits another function of the genre,

exemplified by Tagg's insight (from a perspective inspired by Michel Foucault's

thinking), that portraiture is not just an individualistic technology but also reflects and

derives its meaning from larger, historical contexts: "The portrait is therefore a sign

whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social

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[44] Judith Butler, <u>Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative</u> (New York: Routledge, 1997) 36.
[45] Butler 37.
[46] Bal, <u>Reading</u> 262.

identity."[47] The references that occur in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> situate the work as self-consciously referencing both tenets of portraiture: it affirms individuality and embeds the individual's biographic-embodied specificity within a greater social context. By taking into account Blocker's theory of somatic language and Jones's view of narcissism, <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> is a work that, while it initially appears to be a self-portrait, incorporates a family history of suffering and, by addressing a historical and political context, intersubjectively opens out to acknowledge other bodies separated by space and time.

This view of the somatic surrogacy performed by Zontal, as a re-embodiment of the historical trauma endured by his father, is strengthened by taking into account the way lens-based media has been used to document the suffering of the surviving prisoners of concentration camps from World War II. Aside from the graphic emaciation of Zontal's body, what of its pose could rhetorically invoke the suffering his father experienced at Auschwitz? In my suggestion that Blocker's emphasis on specific, isolated zones of the somatic body doesn't fully address the issues at stake in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u>, I pointed to the need to take the greater disposition of the body into view. Here the notion of the pose becomes useful in relation to the medium through which it is represented. Yet how does the need to visualize a pose in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> differ from the body configurations seen in Goldin's work, in <u>Gotscho kissing Gilles, Paris, 1993</u>, for example, in which the physical proximity and company Gotscho provides as a mourning figure within the image is significant or, in <u>Gilles' arm, Paris, 1993</u>, where one sees a skeletal body that poignantly expresses suffering, but *as a fragment*? If the goal expressed by Zontal and Bronson is to document the "genetics of disaster" – the

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[47] John Tagg, <u>The Burden of Representation</u> (Houndmills, UK: MacMillan, 1986) 37.

similarity between Zontal's body suffering from AIDS and that of his father's body on the day of his release from Auschwitz – why not focus only on the disfigurement of the body, measured in terms solely of weight loss? Why the recourse to a format in which a pose, involving the entire body *and* the face, appears necessary?

In a study of the documentary films made by the Allies just after the liberation of the concentration camps, film theorist Nicolas Losson analyzes the various formal choices made by the filmmakers, such as the resistance to "artifice," oblique angles and complex editing which, he surmises, suggests a conscious exploitation of certain qualities of the medium in order to better position the films as visual evidence in international courts of law in case of German denial.[48] Losson states that "frontality as system of representation," seen especially in the footage of the surviving prisoners – whose emaciated, exhausted, bodies and faces are captured with brutal directness – was a formal means by which the facts of the camps would best emerge, and a moral imperative to "humanize" the prisoners whose "human singularity" was the feature the Nazis sought to eradicate.[49] Losson states: "It was cinema's honor at this time to have preserved the real by restoring these faces to humanity, thus rendering the most moving figures ever seen on film."[50] According to Losson, while the reality of the survivors' horrific experiences could never be entirely known by the filmmakers or the subsequent viewers of the films, the desire to recognize the suffering of the prisoners was partially achieved by the filmic paradigm of lingering, contemplative frontality, which created an "isomorphic relation" between the medium and the subjects, whose faces and bodies are shown with an unflinching, seemingly unmediated gaze of the camera, so that "truth" could be "seen in

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[48] Nicolas Losson, "Notes on the Images of the Camps," October 90 (1999): 1-8.
[49] Losson 4.
[50] Losson 7.

full face."[51] This view of the isomorphism between the frontality of the prisoner's bodies (a manner of pose) and the frontality of camera approach (itself, according to Losson, a "filmic attitude" or "posture")[52] is compatible with Silverman's description of the pose, after Craig Owens's insight, as "imitative of photography itself."[53] Therefore, a combination of Losson's and Silverman's views enable one to account for the rhetorical significance of Zontal's pose as referencing a history of others' suffering from the Holocaust, and how Jorge, February 3, 1994 exploits the photographic medium to accomplish this by standing in a face-frontal manner, to unveil his suffering body for potentially curious eyes without allowing himself to be exploited by the gesture. The humanizing capacity Losson attributes to frontality, seen in all three panels of Jorge, February 3, 1994 and echoed in Zontal's presentation of his face and body toward the camera, substantiate a view that there exist photographic means to graphically display vulnerability in a manner that maintains a sense of "honor" to the subjects so represented. The frontal direction of Zontal's emaciated body and face (which is represented as searching from one panel to the next for a look that is "true"), coupled with the pose he knowingly assumes will resonate its suffering particularities, heightens the viewer's appreciation of his experience in a way that never loses sight of his individuality *and* broadly contextualizes it by manifesting a body morphology similar to that endured historically by his father at Auschwitz but also presented in a way that alludes to the frontal paradigm chosen by the Allied documentary filmmakers to humanize such figures.

In view of this inter-generational, embodied intersubjectivity, one may consider the wilful display of the emaciated body of Zontal in Jorge, February 3, 1994 as a rhetorical,

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[51] Losson 3.
[52] Losson 3.
[53] Silverman Threshold 202.

somatic language that, by speaking to a patrilineage of suffering, offers a instance of surrogacy in which the identity of the dead becomes resonant through the condition and disposition of the whole body. Surrogacy, as I have defined it in Chapter Two, is the ethical choice to speak (or to refuse to speak) of or for the dead when they are not present to represent themselves. Here, surrogacy is achieved not by way of the agency of one or a few combined dimension(s) of intersubjectivity (the voice, visuality and/or touch), but in the visualization of the entire body whose mortality is at stake, representing the peril experienced by the dead through the trauma incorporated into the body of the surrogate. If Zontal's gesture to recognize those many victims of the past catastrophe of the Holocaust and the current AIDS crisis recalls the ethical predicament described by Simon Wiesenthal in The Sunflower, Zontal does so in a way in which this recognition of the identities of the dead is enacted somatically rather than vocally. While Wiesenthal's act of surrogacy for the dead involves a linguistic pronouncement (the choice to offer forgiveness to a dying SS officer for the war crimes he committed against murdered Jews), Zontal uses the visible suffering of his body's condition to perform an embodied legacy, presenting himself as the carnal medium through which his pain speaks of the suffering of the parent as well as that of his own community.

Part Three: The Affective Potential of the Formal Qualities

The intersubjective relationships to be analyzed in this section involve the viewer's relationship to the display of Zontal's body. In my claim that Bronson and Zontal's work Jorge, February 3, 1994 resists the terms of visual mastery often associated with photography, I suggest that they do this not only by its collaborative nature, but also by

important formal choices like the triptych format, the large scale, the details that frame

the display of Zontal's body as well as the upright pose assumed by him. What will

unfold in the next pages is a discussion of how the work demonstrates possibilities to

address and to overcome the vulnerability and the apparently waning agency of the dying

subject by invoking the spectacular terms of "exposure" (of embodied difference)

through which the work initially seems to function. As in the previous sections of the

chapter, I will continue to make evident the negotiation of distance and proximity

between the parties involved. While keeping in mind the tension-filled ways in which

Zontal claims a vulnerable identity in the field of vision without becoming entirely

subject to visual mastery, I seek to consider the potential for the viewer to be affected by

the work, for the positions to shift so that the viewer experiences vulnerability.

By the massive scale of Jorge, February 3, 1994 and by showing Zontal three times,

the expansive, multi-dimensional horizon makes difficult the visual mastery of him

because the entire image cannot be apprehended at a single glance. Not only will some

areas of the work always exceed the focus of the viewer but the three views also involve

separate sight lines to further complicate perception. Moreover, the sense of movement

and rhythm conveyed by the sequence challenge the essentialist sedimentation of a

subject's identity to which a single view is prone.[54] If the three panels are scanned from

left to right, an enlargement occurs by the jump in scale from the left and middle panels

to the one on the right, where Zontal suddenly appears at close range. The large scale of

the work as a whole and the dramatic aggrandizement of Zontal's body in the right panel

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[54] This idea is inspired by Victoria A.-T. Sancho's proposals regarding the work of African-American portrait photographer Dawoud Bey, whose collaborative, consensual approach to his subjects, coupled with the diptych or triptych format he uses to represent them, she suggests, contributes to a paradigm capable of disrupting racial stereotypes. "Respect and Representation: Dawoud Bey's Portraits of Individual Identity," Third Text 44 (1998): 55-68.

are significant in partially overcoming the reduction of Zontal's flesh caused by AIDS-related illness. If the viewer's look is encouraged to penetrate Zontal's domestic world, Zontal's three figures seem to colonize the gallery space, preside over it or, at least, cohabitate with the viewer in it. Rather than emphasizing the dwindling smallness of the body, as do Goldin's representations of Gilles Dussein, Jorge, February 3, 1994 enlarges Zontal's body by the work's heroic proportions.

The monumentality of Jorge, February 3, 1994, in which each panel is larger than an average adult who may view it, can be considered in terms of some historical precedents. It is a scale reserved for history paintings (in particular, for the death of heroes) of the grand European tradition espousing Enlightenment ideals of morality, nobility and dignity.[55] The size of the triptych is also significant in its anomalous relation to the history of portrait photography, which, according to Allan Sekula's description of its origins in the daguerreotype, involves the fetishistic qualities of preciousness and singularity. As a positive, unique image, a daguerreotype could not be easily reproduced and, by its encasement in metal, jewel-like frames, could be held in the hand.[56] The miniaturization of portraiture in the nineteenth-century was also commonly linked with the images of famous people as well as the wealthy that proliferated as *cartes de visite*, which became commodities to be collected, circulated and in terms of scale, put in one's pocket.[57] In contrast to this history, the monumentality of Zontal's portrait, in addition to its reproduction in triplicate, resist the quality of the fetish and disallow the work to be

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[55] The link between heroic, history painting and death is exemplified by Benjamin West's Death of General Wolfe (c. 1770), which, although depicting an event from "contemporary" history, was thought to exemplify, in a didactic manner a noble (even graceful), dignified manner of death for nationalistic, patriotic causes.
[56] Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," Artforum (Jan., 1975): 37-45.
[57] Tagg 35.

pocketed or otherwise easily circulated and commodified *as* a fetish.[58] If one agrees that

its scale would make the private purchase of the work for domestic display unlikely, the

viewer-image confrontation necessitated by <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> refuses intimacy

because one must greet Zontal in the authorized sphere of the art institution, as if

disallowing in advance the personal "use," appropriation or domination of Zontal's

countenance. Zontal's portrait must be confronted in the public event of exhibition

implicating, therefore, not only the body one sees in the image but also, that of the

spectator.

The three-quarter position assumed by Zontal in the right panel, where he achieves

the look that is the most comfortable of the three panels, is also significant as a means of

dignification. As Tagg points out, the three-quarter pose is resonant in the history of

portrait photography because was considered genteel and associated with the emergence

and aspirations of the middle classes in the nineteenth century, who looked to such details

as "cultivated asymmetries of aristocratic posture" to assert the social status of the

sitter.[59] That the three-quarter position was thought to convey refinement comes into

bolder relief when distinguished from the brutal frontality of institutional mug shots

being developed at that time. The repressive frontality of nineteenth-century, institutional

mug shots, which truncate the head from the body (as well as the identity of the prisoner

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[58] My understanding of commodity fetishism is here after Jean Baudrillard's definition of it, as a process whereby the "symbolic," affective meaning of an object, i.e. its "substance" is "eviscerated" and it exists through its circulation resting upon its sign value. "Fetishism and Ideology: The Semiological Reduction," <u>For the Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign,</u> trans. Charles Levin. (St. Louis: Telos, 1981/1970) 88 -101. My understanding of how a photograph could function in a fetishistic way (points that were mentioned in chapter one) is indebted to Christian Metz's Freudian-inspired insights from "Photography and Fetish," <u>The Critical Image</u>, ed. Carol Squires (Seattle: Bay P, 1990) 155-164. He notes the material relationship the possessor has with the photograph as an object.

[59] Tagg 36.

from the larger social, biographic context of the subject),[60] should be distinguished from

the honorific filmic paradigm of frontality identified by Losson, which seeks to reinscribe

individuality by making visible the faces of concentration camp survivors (without losing

sight of the bodies that support them) and importantly, maintains the contextualization of

the prisoners in the camp surroundings in which the footage was taken. According to

Losson, the intense camera scrutiny of the prisoners' faces draws the viewer into a closer,

humanizing relationship with them: "It is this contemplative register of the treatment of

the face that can also attract the spectator."[61] While the overall frontality through which

Zontal's emaciated body is presented humanizes him (after Losson's thinking), frontality

is a dimension not incompatible with an understanding of how the three-quarter pose also

dignifies Zontal by presenting his "contemplative" face to draw the viewer closer. The

framework of humanization and dignity that is the result of the self-respecting pose

asserted by Zontal (most clearly achieved in the right panel, where his eyes rest

"naturally" with a pensive look) is a framework that also fosters a respectful

contemplation of his suffering by the viewer. In the right-hand panel, where Zontal

achieves the "right" look, his contemplative face meets that of the appraising viewer with

an imposing stance that, despite his blindness, the almost complete unveiling of his body

and its emaciation, is utterly dignified.

In another gesture that complicates notions of agency and vulnerability, Zontal

asserts himself by standing upright and supporting himself by (however tenuously)

holding the pillar. Zontal's choice to be photographed standing rather than seated in the

wheelchair behind him subverts the status of passivity Barthes associates with the "sitter"

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[60] Sekula, "The Body in the Archive," October 39 (1986) 6.
[61] Losson 5.

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in his discussion of portrait photography, and is an effect that would be exaggerated by a normative understanding of "disability" conveyed by the wheelchair.[62] The agency of the body's standing position assumed by Zontal is politically significant in light of Douglas Crimp's caution that, despite the gay activism that has successfully contributed to the resignification of representations of living and dying in the context of HIV and AIDS (as Goldin's work demonstrates), "the dominant media still pictures us only as wasting deathbed victims."[63] Zontal and Bronson have made a series of photographs at a time when Zontal's agency is waning, but he is not shown on a death bed nor does he suffer from the negative connotations of fatality associated with the recumbent position, a pose that contributes to the potential for representational violence as Elisabeth Bronfen and Kate Linker point out (and as discussed in the Serrano chapter) because it is considered passive and feminized in a negative way, i.e. to be read as vanquished or cut down. The aforementioned weight loss, one of the most striking aspects of difference conveyed by Zontal's body, evokes the visual trope identified by Solomon-Godeau as "emaciation [. . .] or the pathos and helplessness of the 'afflicted,'"[64] and it should be considered in light of the homophobia surrounding the AIDS crisis that would signify it as virulent and pathological.[65] According to the background information provided by Bronson's text-pendant to the work, the emphasis on emaciation was a purposeful choice made by Zontal

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[62] For critical, theoretical challenges to a normative understanding of the disabled body as passive and lacking agency, see: Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, "Uncertain Thoughts on the Dis/abled Body," Vital Signs: Feminist Reconfigurations of the Bio/logical Body (Edinburgh UP, 1998); and Paul McIlvenny, "The Disabled Male Body 'Writes/Draws Back,'" Revealing Male Bodies, ed. Nancy Tuana and others. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002) 100-124.

[63] Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, ed. Russell Ferguson and others (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990) 243.

[64] Solomon-Godeau, 301.

[65] I use the term "pathological" in the critical sense after Sander Gilman's proposal in Difference and Pathology (1985), as reflecting social stereotypes and the desire to categorize along binaristic, moral imperatives. See Paula Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," Cultural Studies 1:3 (1987): 263-305.

for its potential to signify. The vulnerability of a person with AIDS-related illness to being dominated by the ideological functioning of photography, in conjunction with the agenda of mass media (according to Watney) to make people suffering from AIDS-related illness "monstrous" in representations, can become a form of retribution so that "he or she is stripped of all power and control over the actual complex meaning and dignity of an individual's life."[66] Watney's findings position the statement made in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> to be the critical assertion of Zontal's own representational agency, contextualizing the self within and against a set of knowing identifications.

While the work knowingly quotes the visual signs that have historically been invoked to make a spectacle out of people suffering from AIDS-related illness, it does so with various means of dignification in order to counter the actual diminution of the body and the potential distortions of identity that a person suffering from AIDS-related illness may encounter in representations. There is no "shrinking violet" syndrome here: neither shyness nor shame is conveyed by Zontal's pose as he gives himself to be seen. Zontal and Bronson suggest that *Zontal must be seen* and the work implores, as an imperative, the viewer to look. The aggrandizement of Zontal (due to the overall size of the work, his upright stance and his three-quarter position) speaks to the continuing political importance of the visibility of the experience of AIDS from a stance of resistance against the disappearance in representations of its so-called "victims" as well as against their actual deaths, the toll of which, the work suggests, should be considered personal as well as political.

The formal qualities, the monumental scale and the exposure of Zontal's emaciated, partially-undressed body are nonetheless contradictory as, in some ways, they seem to

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[66] Simon Watney, "Photography and AIDS," <u>Critical Image</u> 183.

position Jorge, February 3, 1994 as a spectacular image that could be gawked at by viewers, render them speechless and dumbfounded, or worse, indifferent and unaffected by the display of suffering. To recall the description of the spectacle outlined in the first chapter, after Guy Debord's description of it in Society of the Spectacle (1967/1970), it is associated with negative effects of a commodity-oriented society, which pacifies viewers into a state of complacency as they experience streams of images in a purely visual way, dissociated from the reality behind them. The spectacle is characterized by its monologism, its experience by the viewer through distance (both emotional and physical) and by its disconnection from the realm of the tactile. In Jorge, February 3, 1994 the spectacle is evoked by its excessive visuality (due to the aforementioned elements as well as by the repetition inherent in the triplicate format, which implies that Zontal gives himself to be seen again and again). However, while invoking the terms of the spectacle and its potential for "easy" visual consumption, Jorge, February 3, 1994 simultaneously insists upon the reality of the scene by way of poignant, anxious details that surround the body. The chill of his partial nakedness, exaggerated by the hat and slippers, the loss of weight from his frame to the extent that his skeleton is clearly delineated, the pain of the catheter piercing his skin and the constant medication the device implies, the wheelchair, his knock-knees and twisted posture: these details, as well as all of those mentioned earlier, disallow the narcosis associated with the spectacle and, by touching the viewer emotionally, suggest additional means by which Zontal's display resists the terms of viewer mastery or the spectacle.

That these details convey various levels of discomfort, experienced psychically as well as physically (sensed in tactile ways) by Zontal and potentially by the viewer, brings

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me to the fact that Jorge, February 3, 1994 was included in a group exhibition of contemporary artworks entitled Angst and to the pertinent definition of this state provided by critic Steve Rogenstein: "Angst needles its way into one's subconscious, burying venomous pincers into delicate fleshy recesses, ensuring a nagging presence that lies just below the surface awaiting any sign of trouble, vulnerability, or weakness at which point it can re-emerge to infect one's waking hours."[67] According to Rogenstein, angst is a state of torment, a physical and psychic affliction that is well articulated by the generations of artists who experience HIV and AIDS. Rogenstein's allusion to the co-presence of vulnerable flesh and the prick of needles to characterize angst addresses the way such details in Jorge, February 3, 1994 function to disrupt the passive, distanced, even pleasurable experience associated with the spectacle.

How the anxiety conveyed by these details functions – in an emotional rather than an intellectual manner – can be explained more precisely with recourse a theory of Roland Barthes described in Camera Lucida. To introduce the concept, I make note of art historian Margaret Iverson's insight as to the overall uniqueness of Barthes's approach in Camera Lucida, which steers away from the technical, semiological, historical or sociological and is better characterized as a personal-phenomenological exploration: "But Barthes adds something conspicuously lacking in that tradition – affect."[68] Iverson's notation of Barthes's interest in the affect emanating from photographs helps direct attention to my interest in the viewer's experience of Jorge, February 3, 1994. In Barthes's discussion of the potential for a viewer's response to certain photographs, he suggests that peculiar details exist that take hold of one's attention subjectively. He calls

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[67] Steve Rogenstein, "Angst," Angst: Nayland Blake, Monica Bonvicini, AA Bronson, Anna Meyer, org. Matthias Herrmann. (Kraichtal: Ursula Blickle Stiftung, 2001) n.p.
[68] Margaret Iverson, "What is a Photograph?" Art History 17.3 (1994): 450.

a detail with this power the *punctum*; it is the sign of photographs endowed with the power to jolt the viewer from complacency, a detail that disrupts the fluidity of the composition or the viewer's conceit of cultural literacy when reading it. In any given photograph, there can be more than one of such detail and Barthes describes them in terms of a constellation in the image, which is "sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many points."[69] While the punctum functions to surprise the viewer, its complement is Barthes's theory of the *studium*, alternatively described as a "contract arrived at between creators and consumers," where the intention of the artist is readily perceived by the viewer through recognition of culturally familiar terms and which, therefore, holds less viewer interest.[70] Iverson's reading of Camera Lucida against Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis is instructive in drawing attention to the principles of trauma through which the punctum works. Her contrast between Barthes's two theories, the punctum and the studium, highlights the manner in which the punctum disrupts the sense, achieved by the viewer, of dominance or security that functions by way of the studium: "A key characteristic of our relation to the studium of a photograph is our confident self-possession: we are conscious and in control of our interest. [. . .] The sharpness of the punctum, on the other hand, cuts through the deliberate decorum of the pose and the prop and reactivates a trauma."[71] In short, the punctum offers a means to understand how the viewer is grasped, pinned or otherwise shaken from assuming a position of tranquil complacency toward or of mastery over the vulnerable subject within the photograph by specific, piercing details that jump from it.

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[69] Barthes, Camera 27.
[70] Barthes, Camera 28.
[71] Iverson 457 & 456.

I read all the visual signs of Zontal's suffering and pain, the details of his

traumatized embodiment (those conveyed through his body in addition to those conveyed

by the environmental details that frame it, like the heartbreaking paperwhites) to function

in the wounding manner of the punctum. According to Barthes, while these details of the

punctum are usually incidental or accidental rather than instrumental, they haunt the

memory and could be seen to affectively hurt the viewer. In Jorge, February 3, 1994 the

composition appears haphazard, even spontaneous, as if Zontal mustered the strength to

stand up from the wheelchair and rather than interrupting this moment by tidying up the

background environment, a detail like the wheelchair (that is not aesthetically-pleasing

due to the clutter it adds to the background) remains in the image in an off-handed way

that rings of the punctum: by offering stark evidence of Zontal's incapacity, it causes an

empathetic viewer to experience emotional pain. Noteworthy in relation to the way

Rogenstein defines angst, as something that "needles" the subconscious, is the way the

punctum functions to "wound" the viewer as with the "prick" of "punctuation," jumping

out from the frame with an agency that makes the viewer vulnerable to its affect. Before

leaving the affective sharpness of the details in Jorge, February 3, 1994, I wish to bring

attention the manner in which it engages the viewer intersubjectively when the traumatic

embodiment of the subject is put into the foreground of the photograph.

The pertinence of Iverson's Lacanian-inflected, traumatic view of the punctum is

revealed in light of the previously discussed traumas, both historical and contemporary,

that Zontal's body incorporates. A quote by Iverson clarifies the direction of affect taken

by the punctum through the field of vision and how the punctum makes dynamic a web of

connections within the gaze: "The punctum [. . .] reverses the direction of the lines of

sight and disorganizes the visual field, erupting into the network of signifiers that constitute 'reality.'"[72] Therefore, all the uneasy details identified in Jorge, February 3, 1994 relating to anxiety – those causing the viewer to wince reflexively – could also be seen as operating via the punctum to entangle the viewer in a sticky network of affect so that both looking at and turning away from Zontal become difficult. Iverson's understanding of the trauma conveyed by the punctum draws attention to the shifting positions of vulnerability, from the side of the exposed subject of the photograph to the side of the viewer confronted with his emaciated body. Iverson's understanding of the punctum as capable of transmitting trauma clarifies the way the traumatic experiences embodied by Zontal, and manifested in the various signs of suffering that surround him, also emanate affectively from him toward the viewer. The intersubjectivity between Zontal and the viewer involved in Jorge, February 3, 1994 is therefore an affair in which both parties experience the wounding effects of trauma.

Barthes's theory of the punctum offers substantiation to my proposal that, remarkably, while the large size and ready display of Zontal's body in Jorge, February 3, 1994 suggest tenets of the spectacle, whereby the viewer may consume the image in a disaffected manner, the anxious details (the wheelchair, the catheter, the bent posture of Zontal's skeletal body and the coldness conveyed by the scene) arrest the tendency to complacency and reverse the terms of mastery by bringing the viewer to a state of rapt attention in a way in which their own vulnerability is exposed. Would the humanizing paradigm of the photograph not also foster the viewer's consideration of her or his own embodiment as potentially subject to such transformations as Zontal endures?

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[72] Iverson 457.

Moreover, that the "reality" of the details in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> prohibit the work from functioning in a spectacular way is a view made clearer with consideration of the definition of "spectacular" made by art historian Jean-Paul Martinon in relation to performance art, which he characterizes by its sense of unreality as "something that is utterly remote from daily life and is sensational in the extreme."[73] According to Martinon, it is the spectacular qualities achieved by performance art that put the very truth of the event and the photographic image that documents it into question.[74] In contrast to Martinon's notion of the spectacular as something that appears fictional to the viewer, in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> it is the lack of any artifice that would buffer the viewer's sensibility that characterizes the work. In fact, the details in <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> confer, in a manner all too painfully clear, the domestic and medical realities of Bronson and Zontal's shared life to make difficult the dissociation that would characterize the view as a spectacle. Martinon's view of the constructed, theatrical qualities that would define performance art as spectacular help distinguish <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> in relation to that tradition because, although it is, to a certain extent, staged, it is not a performance whose terms can be reversed. Zontal and Bronson's work should be considered closer to the autobiographical uses of photography identified by Amelia Jones in relation to Hannah Wilke's <u>Intra-Venus</u> works of 1992, in which, by representing the experience of cancer by a critical and rhetorical posing of her body so

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[73] Jean-Paul Martinon, "Fact or Fiction?" <u>Art, Lies and Videotape: Exposing Performance</u>, ed. Adrian George (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2003) 26.

[74] Martinon illustrates his view of the spectacular with the masochistic works of Bob Flanagan, the Baroque, self-mutilation photographs of Catherine Opie from 2000, and Harry Shunk's event photograph <u>Yves Klein Leaping into the Void</u> (1960), among others.

that the lived, medical reality of its condition is magnified, the work is "performative" rather than a performance.[75]

To conclude this section, the formal qualities involved in the scale, triptych format and details offer assurances that the aspects of vulnerability that overwhelmingly code Zontal's body socially, politically and medically are not transformed into an easy opportunity for the viewer to engage in visual mastery over him. Further, the angst-ridden details prevent the emotional disengagement of the viewer that is associated with the spectacle. If the domestic environment and Zontal's state of undress pull the viewer closer with intimacy, the graphic exposure of Zontal's physical condition threatens it by wedging an uncomfortable distance between viewer and viewed. If the viewer's look would dominate a figure who is blind and whose eyes don't meet the look of the camera, Zontal's three images dominate the room. With the piercing effects of the punctum in mind as well as the unrelenting, triple-figuration of Zontal's body, which engulfs the viewer's look and from which there is little opportunity to "escape," Jorge, February 3, 1994 presents a structure within which it is the viewer who affectively comes under fire. Various degrees of proximity and distance are engaged simultaneously in a push-pull movement and a sliding scale of agency that is shared between subjects on both sides of the lens: one who gives himself to be seen and the viewer who focuses a view of him in which exploitation or annihilation is disallowed.

Conclusion

Jorge, February 3, 1994 evokes a state hovering somewhere between an authoritative stance of self-representation and the inability to do so independently, between living and

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[75] Jones, Body 185-193.

dying, distance and proximity, intersubjectivity and solitude. While both artists

acknowledge Zontal's impending death – the traumatized body suggests this as does

Bronson's text stating that the work was made a week before death actually occurred –

as if to confuse the notion of dying, Zontal stands, strips to his underclothes and assumes

a pose that, by invoking the body to speak somatically and by purposefully displaying his

body's emaciation, asserts an identity not only for himself but also for his father, in

addition to referencing the respective communities in which their traumatic experiences

must be contextualized. As mentioned, Ruby's definition of a memorial photograph as a

representation made while the subject was living that functions posthumously to animate

a subject for the bereaved, situates Jorge, February 3, 1994 as a memorial image. Yet

Jorge, February 3, 1994 diverges from the clarity of Ruby's designation because it seeks

to capture the enduring life that characterizes a late stage in AIDS-related illness (where

death appeared very near) as well as that life of the father who remarkably survived

imprisonment in a concentration camp, which itself is a near-death experience.[76]

If Zontal demonstrates agency by claiming an identity from his own point of

view, he achieves this perspective with the assistance of Bronson, who shares his vision.

The work has been considered dyadic *and* dialogic because an appeal and a response are

both demonstrated, between the one who suffers and the one who ethically recognizes

this suffering. This work is significant in terms of its transactional qualities, involving a

balance of perspectives between subjects on both sides of the lens, undertaken in order to

overcome the reduced agency of the vulnerable, dying subject who experiences blindness

from AIDS-related complications. The collaborative aspect of the work is the hinge upon

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[76] As so hauntingly described by Eli Weisel, "The Night," The Night Trilogy (New York: Hill-Farrar, 1972) 13-119.

which an ethical renunciation of mastery revolves. The collaborative potential of photographic portraiture is only possible, of course, when both parties involved are still *living*.

Nonetheless, while Zontal and Bronson's collaboration is significant by resisting the representational violence to which the dying and the dead are so often submitted, it is achieved through a framework in which pain, suffering and vulnerability are granted maximum visibility. Also, Zontal's presentation of his emaciated body engages in a discourse of somatic language that extends outside the boundaries of the frame through time and across generational and gender distinctions to recognize others' suffering. With recourse to significant aesthetic choices of scale, triptych format, body position and details that suggest the workings of Barthes's *punctum*, the viewer cannot be lulled into a complacent consumption of the image. What <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> demonstrates is the possibility for representing a radically vulnerable subject in a spectacular way while simultaneously undermining the spectacle by the traumatic details of the work. This gesture of inversion ultimately resists the terms of representational violence which would foreclose a sense of agency to issue from the body of the vulnerable subject one sees.

What <u>Jorge, February 3, 1994</u> makes complex is a tension between a sense of emotional proximity and physical distance, symbolizing the relationships between Bronson and Zontal that will be severed in death, but materialized and visualized in the terms of the artwork (in scale, public placement and display *as* spectacular images), in which a dangerous proclivity to visual mastery of the vulnerable subject represented within the image is exploited only to be renounced by the humanizing frontality and the dignification of his pose. The intersubjective dynamic between Zontal and Bronson, as

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well as that between Zontal and the viewer cannot be explained in terms of a single, simple paradigm involving one or the other of the following terms: attraction or repulsion, autonomy or interdependence, mastery or resistance, vulnerability or agency, blindness or insight, exposure or "veiling," because various degrees of these effects are interwoven simultaneously in a network of tensions that suggests that all subjects involved, including Zontal, the memory of his father, Bronson and the viewer, demonstrate contingent and shifting degrees of agency.

End of Chapter Five.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have been interested in exploring the means of access to the dying and the dead provided by (primarily) lens-based artworks, considering how they demonstrate an awareness that, although the experiences of dying and death cannot be easily represented or made accessible, possibilities to approach and to make contact with dying and dead subjects are made evident by artists in ways that recognize how their subjects' waning agency challenges intersubjectivity, and that bring to light ethical considerations.

While questions regarding the media have been addressed, the underlying concern has been intersubjectivity and the different types of relationships that are made possible through the artworks and their manner of exhibition. What I have sought to analyze are representations in which the dead's identities are put into the foreground, and how the concern for making identity resonant is negotiated with recourse to various intersubjective dimensions, namely, the voice, visuality, touch and embodiment. The double-bind in which the dead paradoxically "reside," where identity may or may not arise in accordance with their own perspective and the force of subjectivity predominates, is the moment of tension dramatized by the artists, writers and mourning subjects under consideration in this study, who seek to prod and provoke the representational boundaries – limit points or enabling points, depending on the circumstances – that would delimit the access to the dead. An analysis of the divergent forms these forces of subjectivity took and how they were implicated by the media, the working methods of the artists and the connotative content and context surrounding the work revealed whether opportunities for ethical relationships with the dying and the dead so depicted were fostered or foreclosed. I proceeded with the awareness that touch and visuality are both forms of contact that,

after Jacques Derrida's insight (noted in the Introduction) are forms of intersubjectivity bearing equal propensity to carry the violence of a blow or the tenderness of a caress. This study revealed that silence and speaking, depending upon the representational perspective or purpose, both entail consequences for the emergence of the identity of the dying or dead.

Falling, failing or radically fragmented bodies – in short, bodies at the precipice of continued "sustainability,"[1] bodies whose materiality is urgently at stake – suggest that it is important to recognize how the weight of embodiment is negotiated and produced discursively in representations without losing sight of how a literal sense of it is also expressed most profoundly in fatal circumstances. Inspired by Judith Butler's theories, the body's materiality has not been thought of as a primordial, pre-discursive or neutral substance, yet it was recognized as subject to affects that can cause fatality – in the physical sense implied by the disintegration of bodies caused by catastrophic accident or by the extreme wasting of the body that often accompanies the late stages of AIDS-related illness – and in the discursive sense of identity "death" implied by the representational distortions or elisions that may occur through socially or culturally created frameworks. Drucilla Cornell's allegory of the mourning figure, the *chiffonier*, in addition to Simon Wiesenthal's ethical predicament, have been useful in interpreting the gathering work performed by artists, journalists and mourners when they demonstrate the desire for the recognition of those who are not able to speak for themselves or to

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[1] This term is used by Rosi Braidotti in her Gilles Deleuze-inspired study exploring his suicide and possibilities for "How to Endure Intensity," in <u>Micropolitics of Media Culture: Reading the Rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari</u> Ed. Patricia Pisters and Catherine M. Lord (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2001) 177-201.

represent themselves: when they heed an ethical call to guard and perpetuate the identities of the dead.

The controversy surrounding the "Falling Man," discussed in Chapter One, demonstrated ways in which the subjectivity of the dying is materialized *for him*. The situation of the "Falling Man" illustrated the divergent directions that the materialization of subjectivity takes when the weight of the body is read as a source of agency (and therefore worthy of honour) or, in contrast, as a source of shame (and therefore relegated to anonymity, which proved to be another identity category). A comparative analysis of works by Richard Drew, Sarah Charlesworth, Eric Fischl and Alejandro Innaritu, all depicting similar subject matter, demonstrated how the medium through which the falling bodies were viewed had important effects on the ethical apperception of the embodied experiences of the dead – the viewer's ability to perceive their falls *as* falls rather than primarily aesthetic opportunities. Roland Barthes's semiological analysis of press photography helped one understand how the context in which photographs are seen and the connotation that frames them structure the understanding of events and expose the limits of the medium to convey meaning.

To recall some of the relationships established in Chapter Two, in which Gillian Wearing's DVD projection Prelude was discussed, the artist steps back to offer the vocal platform to a surrogate who will speak about and to the image of a dead woman named Lindsey: by pairing an image of the dead woman with the voice of her surviving twin, the two sisters appear to speak together. Luce Irigaray's touching-as-speaking metaphor of the two lips helped to explain the way the twin sisters (one dead but made visible, the other living but heard rather than seen) were able to commune with each other in a non-

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dominating, dialogic manner. The various sensory, phenomenal presences and absences involved in the non-synchronous pairing of the image and the voice, the living and the dead, the seen and the heard – meeting at the nexus point formed by the viewer's body – contributed to the structure of Prelude as "enfolding" the viewer. The occasion for posthumous intersubjectivity Wearing's work creates also revealed how the contingency of identity shared between two sisters continues, even after death.

In Chapter Three, at first glance Andres Serrano's The Morgue series of photographs appears to represent a spectrum of deaths, but upon closer inspection, the manners of death are inherently violent. Magnifying the actual violence experienced by the subjects before death is a dimension of aesthetic violence projected by the artist's camera vision upon those who have since become almost entirely defenseless. Various compositional elements contort the identities of the dead into annotated instances of violence, rendering the dead's subjectivity at times more wounded, silenced and sightless by the camera's eye than the original maladies that killed them. My aim was to suggest that the imbalanced dynamic of agency involved in Serrano's work is incompatible with an ethical, i.e. non-violent approach to the dead. With Serrano's representations of corpses, anchored by the titles and layered with a historical legacy tied to the visualization of criminal, dead or otherwise "deviant" bodies, one witnessed the emergence of other qualities, namely corruption, monstrosity and pathology in which the subject's gender was implicated. My view, which is contrary to that of some critics, is that the identities of the dead are not "protected" by anonymity, but debased as reifications of acts of violence. I was interested in how the artist's working method precludes an ethics of representation and suggested that one should be as concerned with

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the way the identities of the dead are "hidden" as with the way the artist hides *his own*

presence from the creation of the image, covering his tracks in a working method that

functions through covert, tactile manipulations and opacity. Most significantly, the

discursive effect of anonymity Serrano chooses to frame the corpses precludes a view of

their perspective – or at least a view that would approach their vulnerability in a

respectful manner – in favour of an aestheticizing perspective chosen by him.

As one saw in the Serrano chapter, the notion of proximity between photographer

and subject can become highly complex and tension-filled. The discussion of the

(auto)biographical photographs of Nan Goldin in Chapter Four demonstrated how the

photographer's embodied immanence to the scene conveys ethical potential, expressed by

her investments toward her subjects in a way that openly admits not only physical

proximity but also (in contrast to Serrano's approach) *emotional* proximity. Despite the

occasional similarities between the aesthetic of Serrano and that of Goldin, apparent in

their unflinching focus on bodies and body parts, what distinguishes the two practices are

the connotative frameworks through which proximity must be understood: with Serrano,

through an operational opacity that ultimately causes representational violence to his

subjects, distorting their identities in unforeseen directions; with Goldin, through an

operational transparency that would guard the identities of her friends against

representational violence, not only showing how one could ethically approach dying

subjects in times of suffering but also showing, through the resultant photographs, what

an ethics of representation could look like. The interest in Goldin's work was to explore

other types of camera vision to those discussed in the Serrano chapter, in particular, to

explore a gentle rather than a wounding approach to dying subjects (who are especially in

need of kid gloves within the scopic regime) in which her camera vision appears to embrace her subjects. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological, chiasmic model of intersubjectivity and the conflation of senses implied by it held the potential for understanding camera vision as a form of touch and for appreciating the way dialogism and sensorial reciprocity is subject to interruption by the waning of agency and deaths experienced by Goldin's friends. The haptic use of the camera by Goldin to approach and touch her friend Gilles Dussein when he is dying of AIDS and, if he could no longer make a gesture with his hand, recognizing this suffering and using her camera as a means of making contact with him, partially overcomes his solitude as well as her own. Recognizing the diminishing materiality of his body and the connotative resonance of body positions within the contemporary context of death-bed scenes (whose legacy is historical), Goldin's work contributes to the politics of representing AIDS through a framework of care and love.

Addressed in the fifth chapter were the ways in which Jorge Zontal and AA Bronson negotiate agency in a *collaborative* manner so that a number of intersubjective relationships are enacted, in particular, between a dying man and his friend as well as with other, less obvious parties. There is the acknowledgement that due to Zontal's blindness, his access to the gaze is partially blocked, but this limitation on visual reciprocity is overcome by their dialogic exchange. Because Bronson shares his vision with Zontal when he is blind in order to help him position himself in front of the camera (acting as a visual surrogate), he refuses the solipsism and mastery often associated with the position of cameraman. The work manifests a somatic deployment of Zontal's body, asserting its pain through emaciation, in order to make connections with other subjects,

outside the frame, that are both immediate and contemporary (referring to the communities ravaged by AIDS) and historical-familial (referencing those, including his own father, who survived Auschwitz).

The tension and resistance suggested by the assertion of Zontal's remaining life – while simultaneously magnifying the waning agency of his body – distinguishes the (self) portrait work Jorge, February 3, 1994 from Nan Goldin's series depicting Gilles Dussein, where her dying friend appears neither able to gesture for assistance nor to demonstrate a response to her photographic approach. However, the individuation through which Bronson frames Zontal's memorial image shows parallels with the connotative features utilized by Goldin in the service of an honorific framework. Both Bronson and Goldin deploy photography as a means to demonstrate a connection to the dying characterized by emotional *and* physical proximity, although Bronson exhibits the work in a manner that evokes the distance associated with the aura, as if to acknowledge the challenge to intersubjectivity that will result from Zontal's death. These push-pull movements toward and away from Zontal are due to the alternating intimacies and exposures involved in the work, which suggest possibilities for emotional proximity but simultaneously the enforcement of a "necessary" distance to appreciate Zontal's perilous embodiment, which works to partially foreclose an easy, unaffected approach. I read this tension between distance and proximity as an ethical acknowledgement and unblinking recognition of the severity of his illness and his potential to die and a dignification of him that takes into account his remaining life. As well as the personal possibilities created by Bronson's contemporary vision for memorial photography, there are political ones, such as creating

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an awareness of communities affected by AIDS and giving specific faces to these communities in order to humanize them.

With recourse to feminist and queer theory from art history and cultural studies, I have, at certain points, addressed how the genders of the dying or the dead subjects of representation are conveyed, and in some cases, constructed in terms of misogynistic or homophobic frameworks, indicating the potential for these viewpoints to inflict representational violence. While, on the whole, I did not explore the genders or gendered identifications of the artists, I here note that the artists whose work suggests the strongest aspirations to an ethical engagement with dying or dead subjects (through a framework acknowledging their vulnerability) are women (Wearing and Goldin) and gay men (Bronson and Zontal). This is perhaps significant in light of the contemporary experiences of artists, according to the insight of art historian Helaine Posner: "The war on the body and the experience of disconnection it engenders is most often revealed in the work of female and gay male artists. From perspectives outside the white male power structure they are in a painfully-privileged position to comment on and critique the politics of division, exclusion, and loss."[2] Because Cornell takes up the implications of sexual difference in her ethical allegory of the *chiffonier* – I suggest that it is significant that the way the artwork of Wearing, Goldin, Bronson and Zontal demonstrate a desire for non-dominating contact with the dying and the dead, because it may reflect a prior sensitivity to the needs of women and gays for an ethics of representation, based perhaps on their own lived experiences. This is an area of further, future research that could prove rewarding.

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[2] Helaine Posner, "Separation Anxiety," Corporal Politics (Cambridge: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1992) 22.

For now, I offer a few final remarks. When the deceased is an artist, other practical, logistical dimensions of materiality arise – that of the artist's surviving artwork – a "body" that is also subject to the violence of neglect, non-representation or destruction. In her concern for the posthumous careers of artists who have died of AIDS, art critic Chris Kraus makes a case for the important, if currently unacknowledged and under-financed work of the friends of dead artists who care for, archive, exhibit and manage the surviving artwork.[3] Kraus describes the unsung care-taking of these friends, whom she describes as "death mothers" and who act as informal executors of dead artists' estates, in much the same way Cornell describes the maternal, mourning work of the *chiffonier*, the salvage-figure who gathers the remains of the dead as an expression of an ethical relationship.[4] As this study, Kraus's, as well as others' reveal, this posthumous activity has come to characterize the era since AIDS in which the "afterlife" of artists becomes dependent upon those who perform this function. While I wish to extend Kraus's thought past a consideration for artists and their artworks, her identification of the importance of "posthumous lives" is the note upon which I wish to conclude, as this study has largely been concerned with the "afterlife" of dying and dead subjects: how identity is affixed, how subjectivity continues to be materialized through representations and the ethical shadows that characterize them. With this study, I have hoped to leave the reader with a provocation: the question as to whether or not the dying and the dead are out of touch or within one's reach, unspoken and silent or at the tip of one's tongue, hovering at (rather than haunting) the periphery of vision or engaging one's look, inciting continued discourse or the performance of identity by the careful work of surrogates.

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[3] Chris Kraus, <u>Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness</u> (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004).

[4] Kraus 67.

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40.6 x 50.8 cm
Photo: I'll Be Your Mirror

Chapter Five:

Fig. 30 AA Bronson and Jorge Zontal, Jorge, February 3, 1994 (1994-2000),
Black and white photographs, tinted with sepia and transferred to mylar,
Edition of 3, three parts, 184.2 x 92.0 cm each panel
Photo: AA Bronson and Bill Arning, Mirror Mirror, MIT LVAC

FIGURE 1
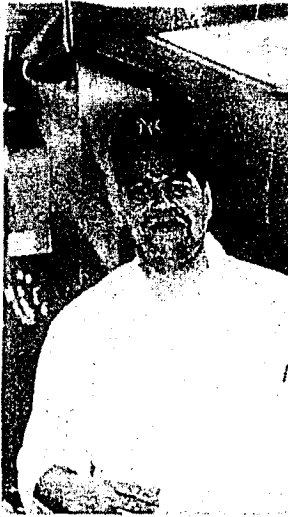
NORBERTO HERNANDEZ
D.O.B.: 03/09/59
Height: 6' 2"
Weight: 205 lbs
42 Yrs Old

Position: Pastry Chef
Window on the World (106th Floor)
World Trade Center Building #1
Any Info Please Call
(917) 507-5494 or (718) 689-0949
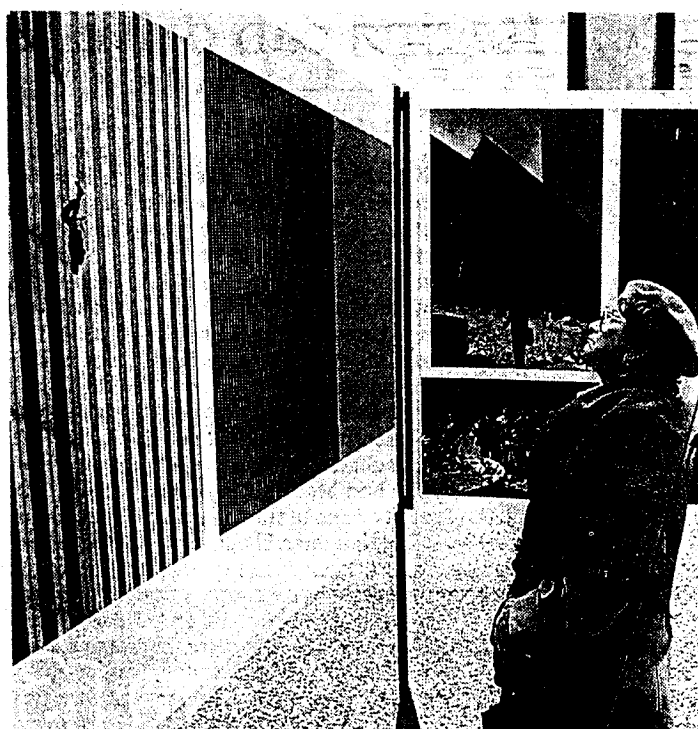
FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4

FIGURE 5

FIGURE 6
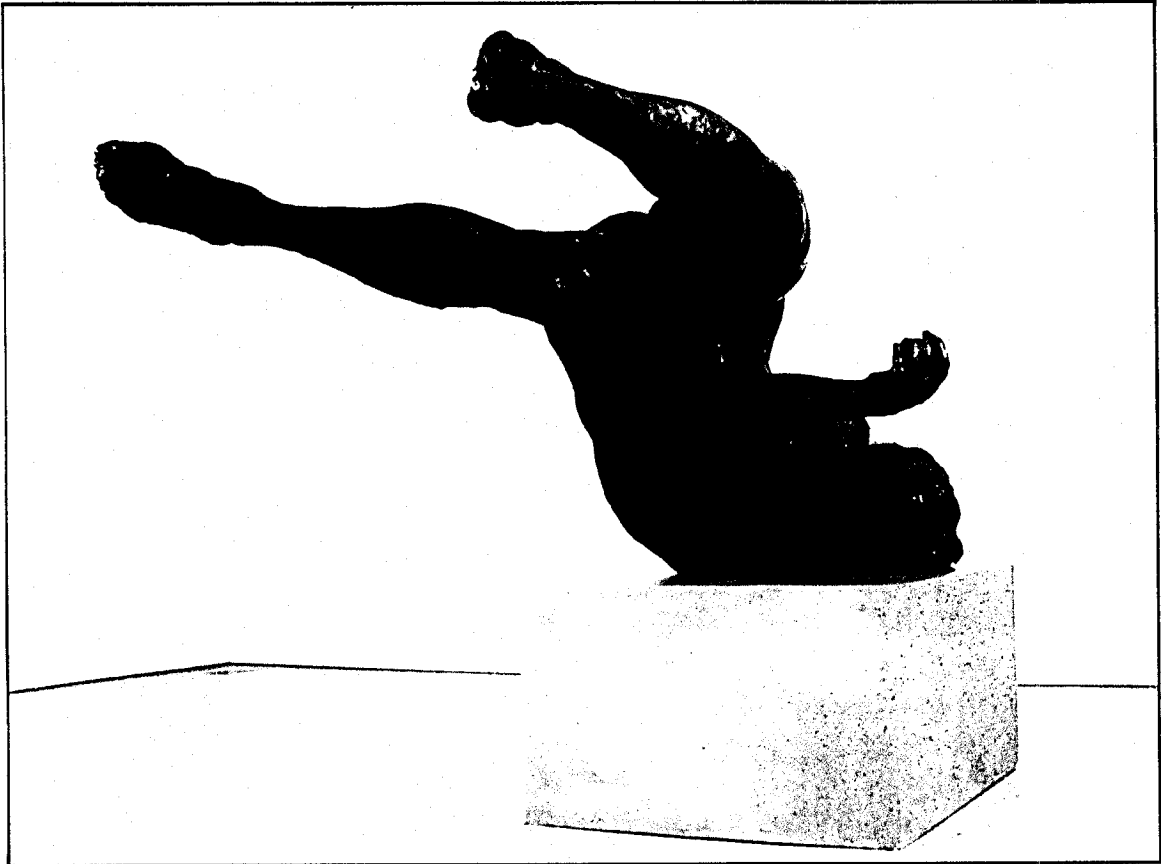
FIGURE 7
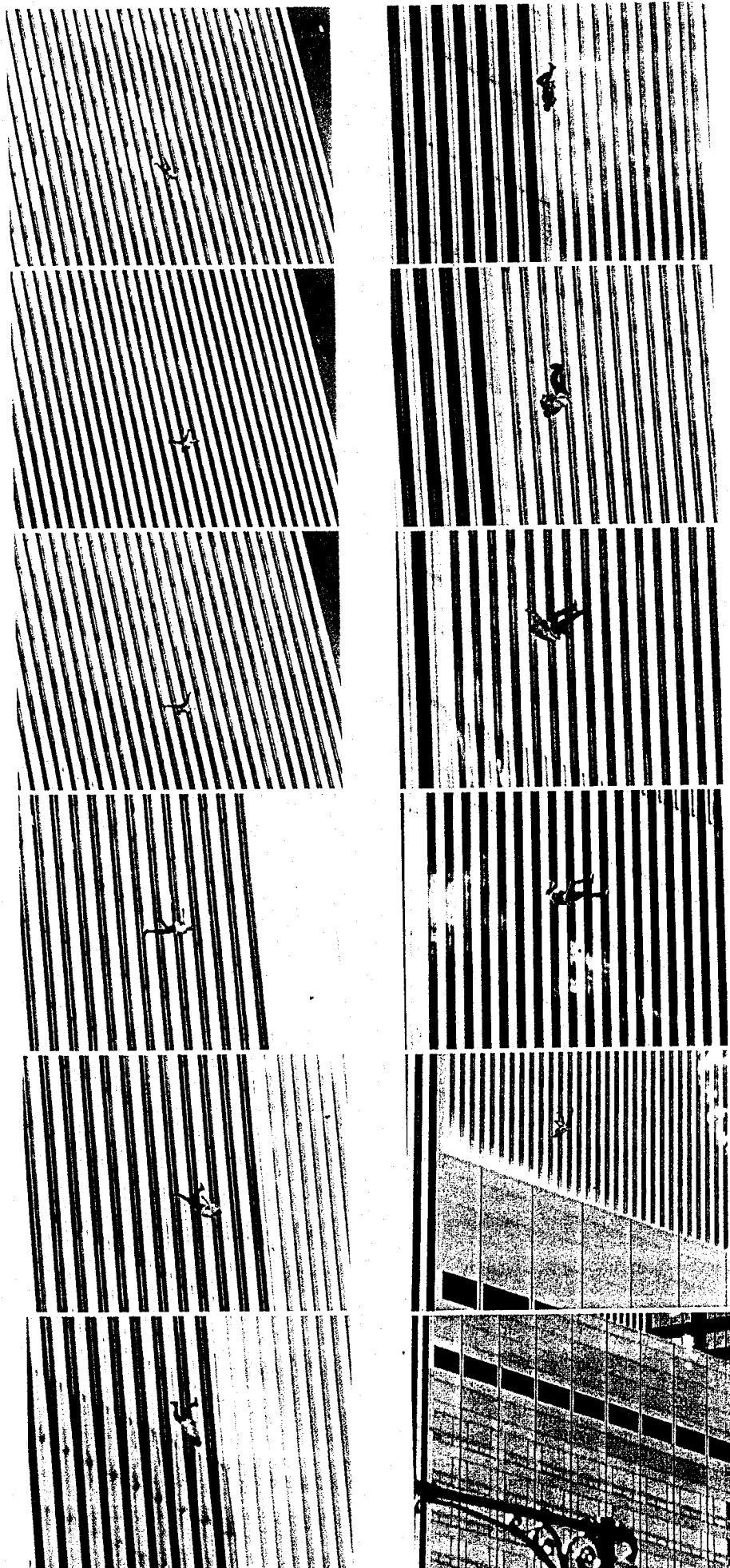
FIGURE 8
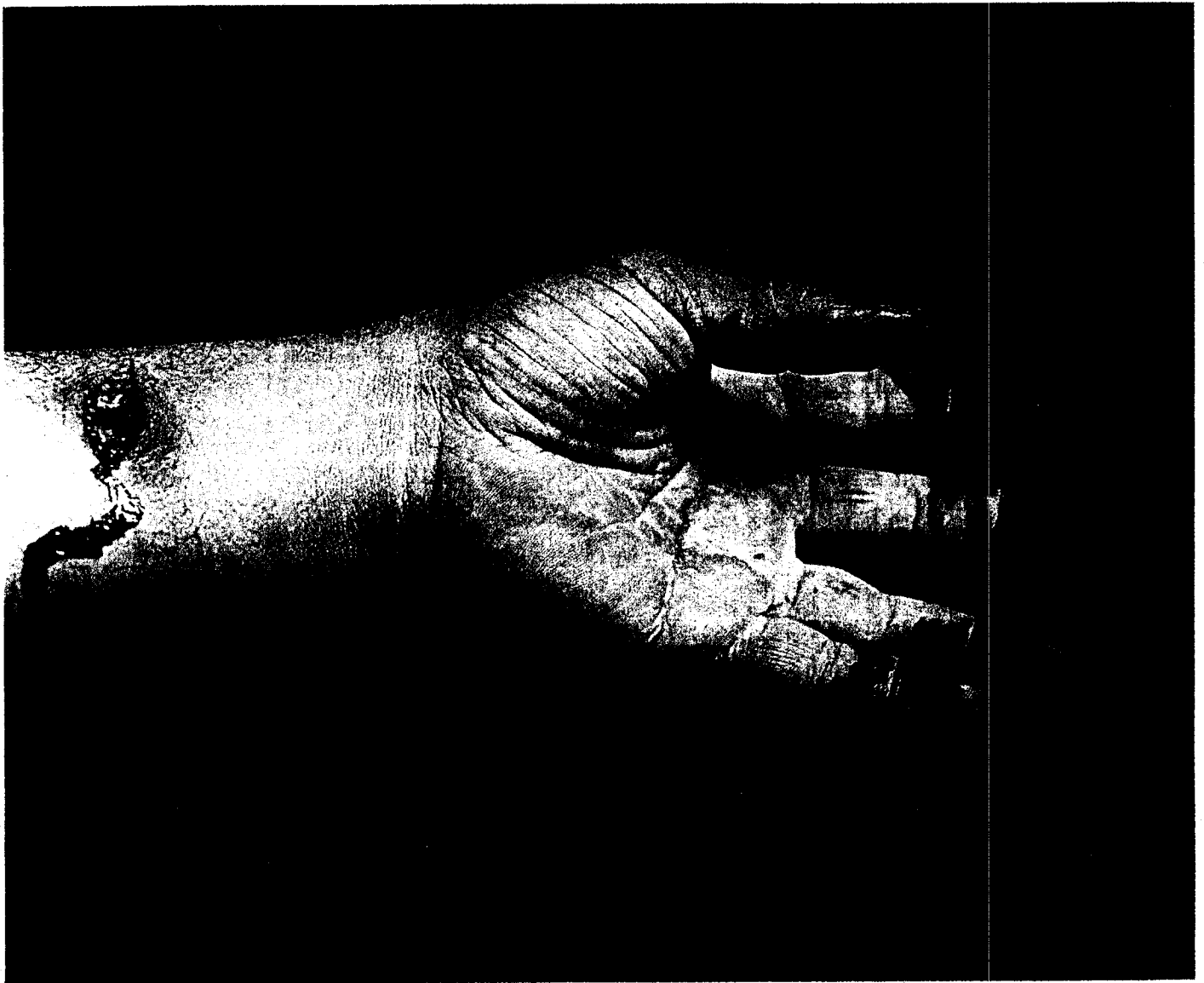
FIGURE 9

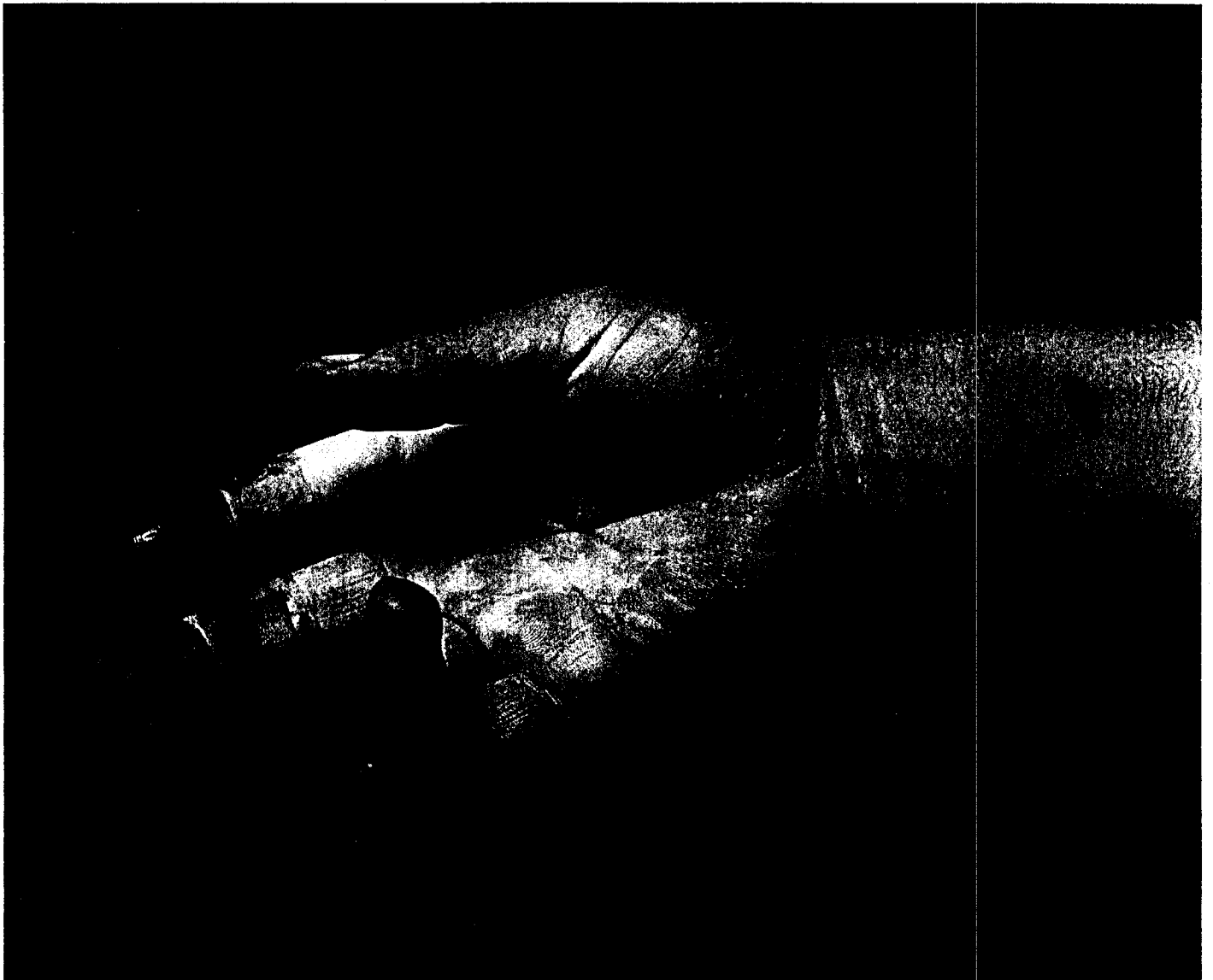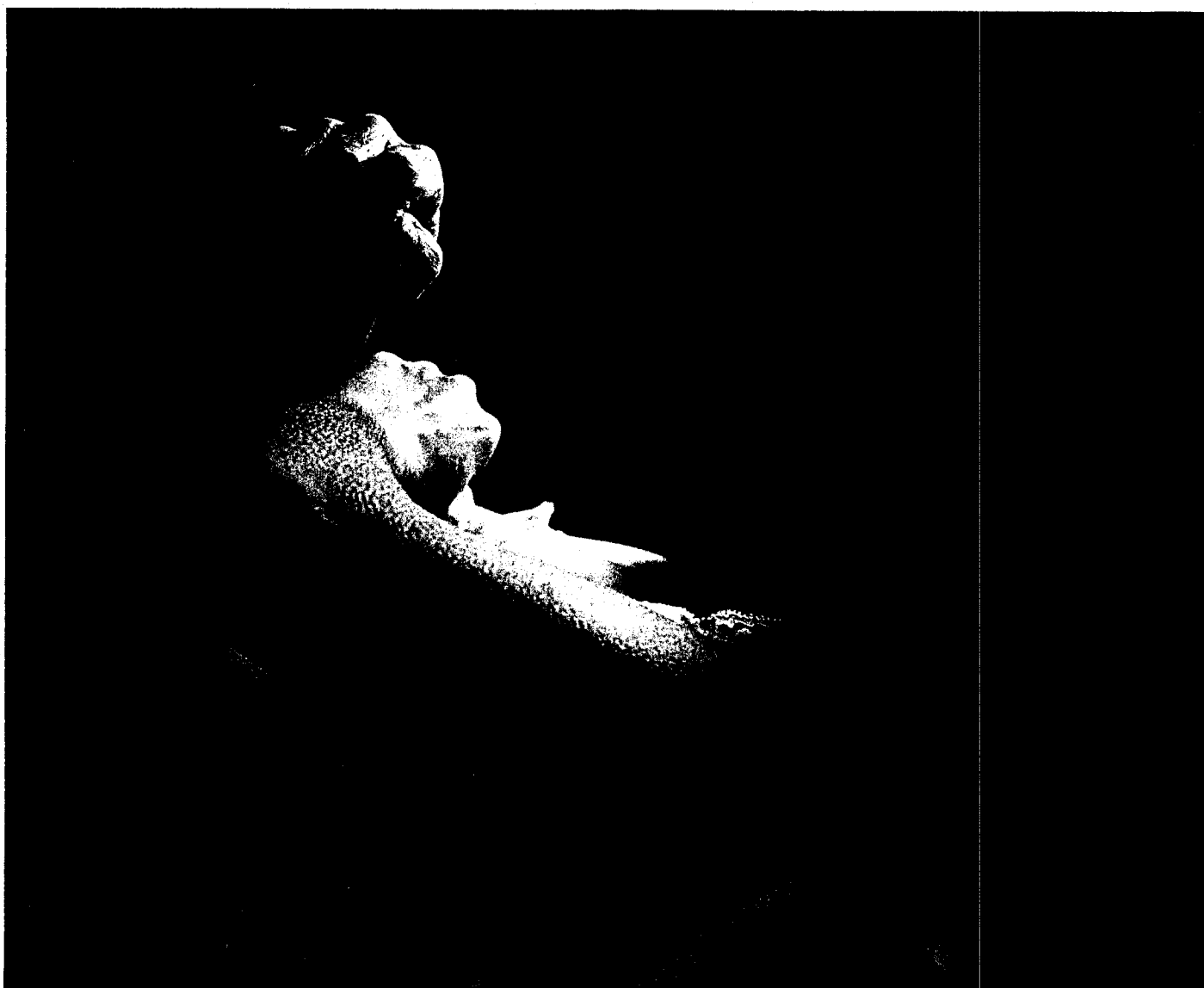FIGURE 10

FIGURE 11

FIGURE 12

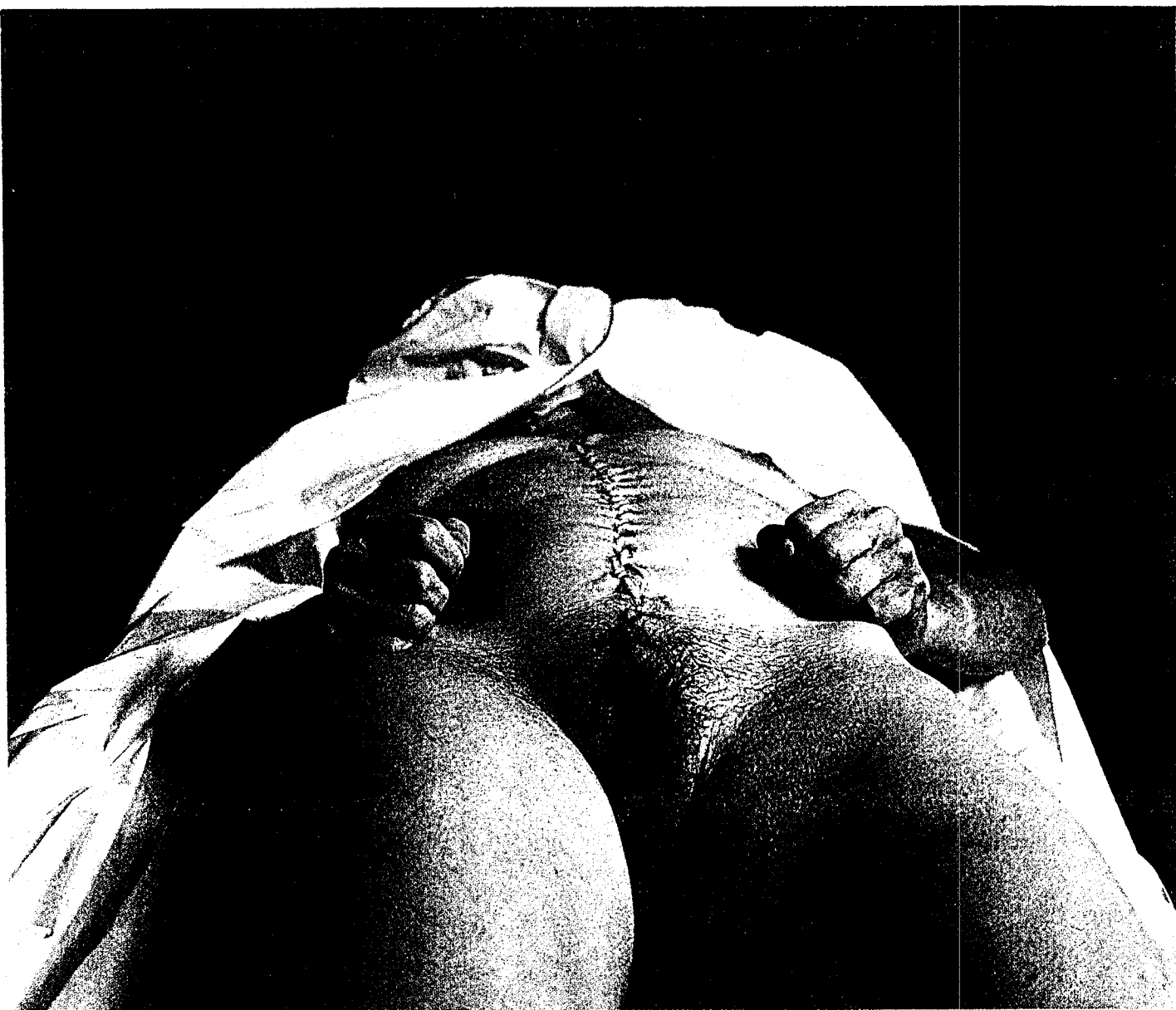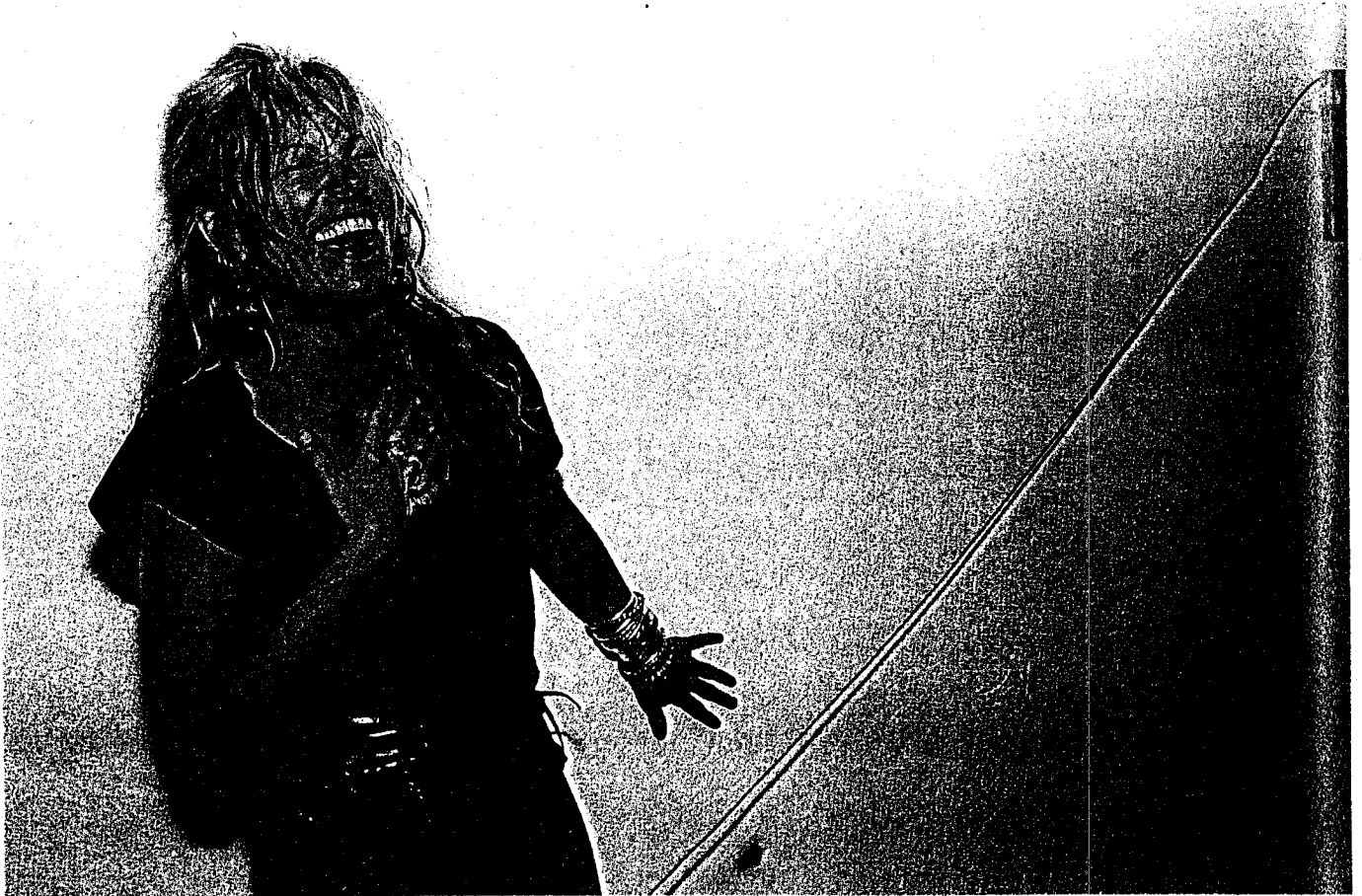FIGURE 13

FIGURE 14

FIGURE 15
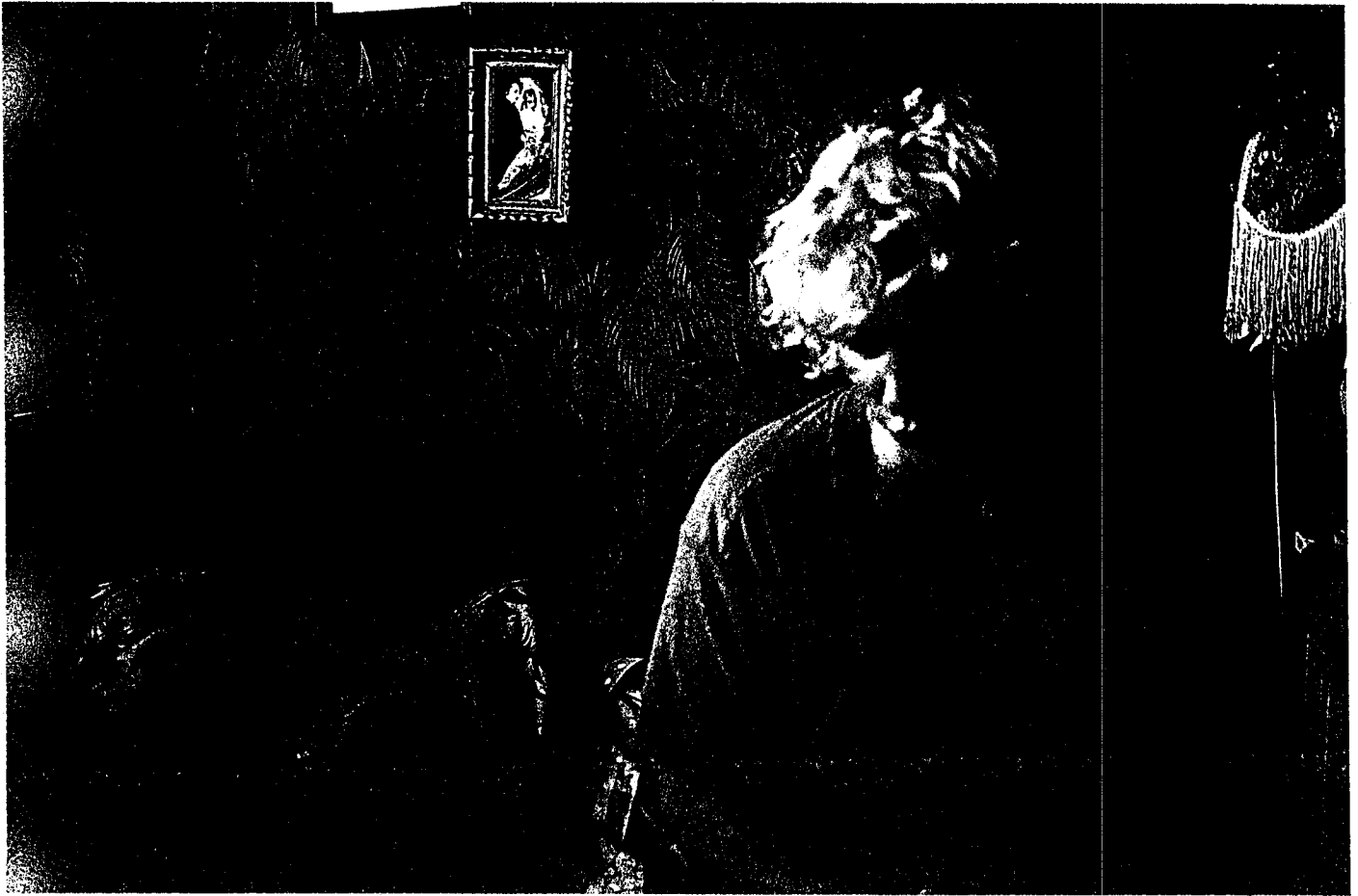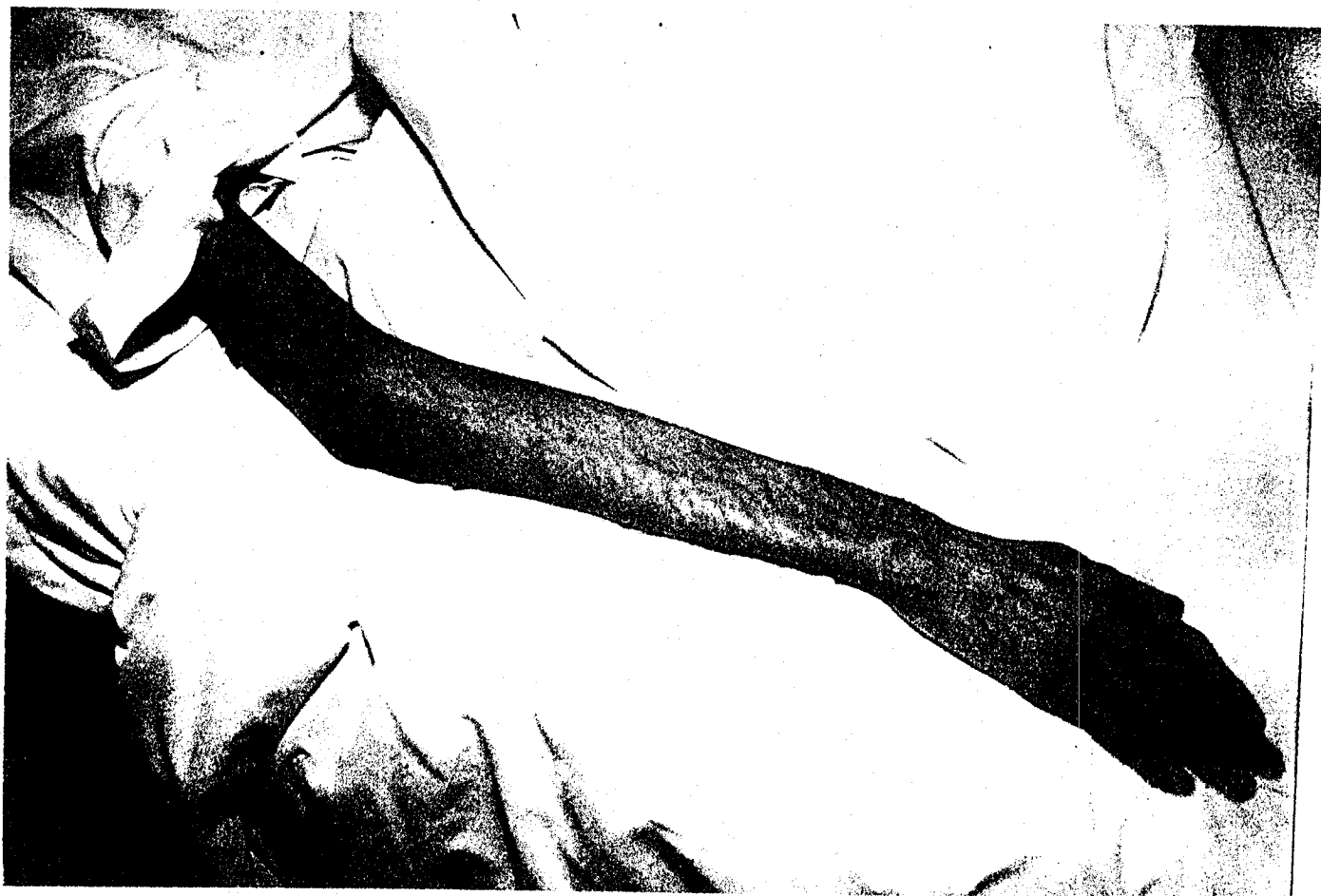
FIGURE 16

FIGURE 17

FIGURE 18

FIGURE 19

FIGURE 20

FIGURE 21

FIGURE 22

FIGURE 23

FIGURE 24

FIGURE 25

FIGURE 26

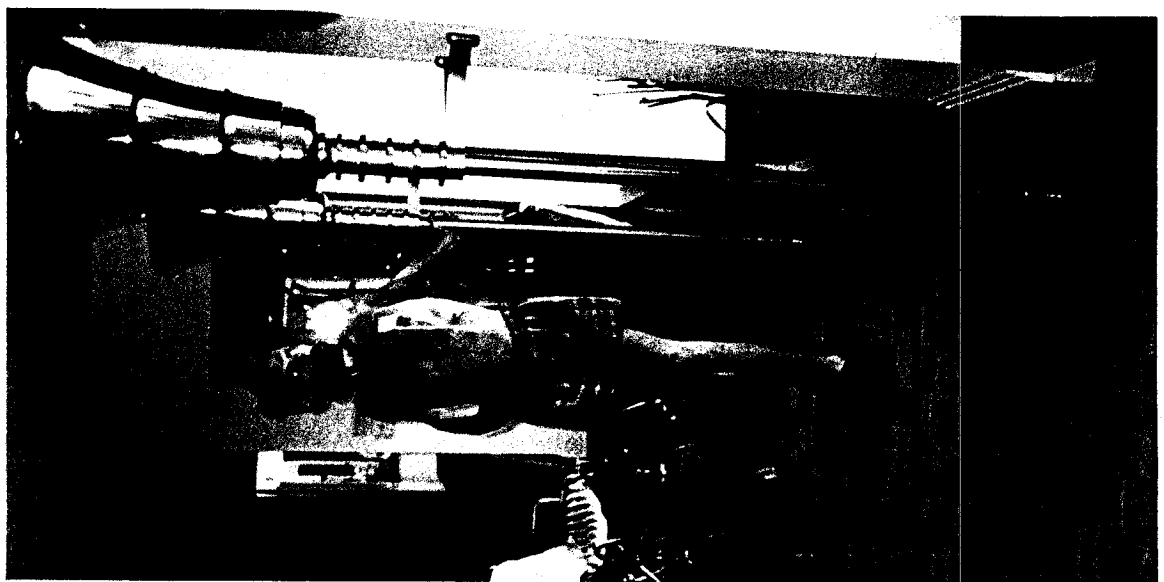UNITED COLOR
OF BENETTON

FIGURE 27
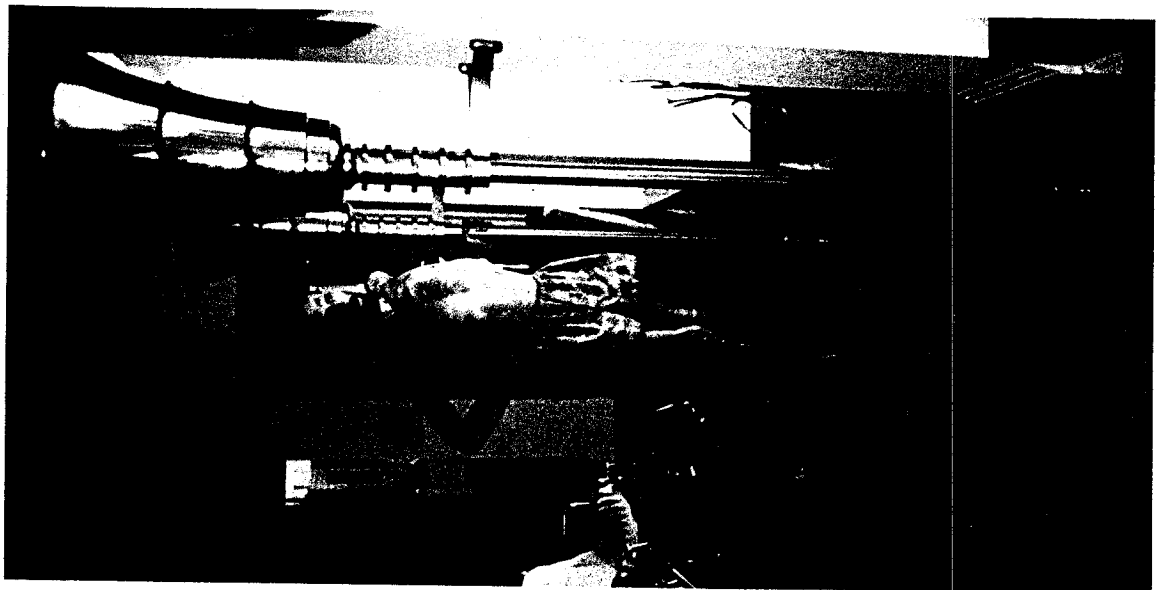
FIGURE 28

FIGURE 29

FIGURE 30

Dedication
to the memory of

Francis Manfred (Manny) and Dorothy Fitzpatrick
Trans-Canada Air, Flight 831
Ste. Therese, Québec, November 29, 1963

Edward (Ted) J. Hennessey, Jr.
of Belmont, Massachusetts
American Airlines Flight 11, New York, September 11, 2001

Leroy
Montréal, November 19, 1996